

Tim Atiep Times

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Fergus's bit

Well, I returned safe and well, after three months and a moderately successful trip. As always in Sudan, nothing ever quite goes according to plan and I, unfortunately, was not able to spend any time in Ajiep. The reasons for this are detailed in the main body of this newsletter. However, the good news is that the school and the houses of the people of Ajiep were not burned down as they normally are during such raids. The government of Sudan, though mainly treading cautiously at the moment in order not to upset the Americans, are still capable of acts of desperate brutality. In February, the village of Akuem in Aweil East county, was bombed by an Antonov, during

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Eight weeks in Southern Sudan

I arrived in good order in Nairobi and after only ten days I was in Lokichogio. I had hoped to spend only a week in Nairobi, but I was slightly delayed whilst applying for my travel pass from the

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SRRA, the humanitarian wing of SPLM. Loki was very hot and uncomfortable and the UN base is probably one of the aid world's most boring and artificial places, but I was able to renew some friendships and catch up on the situation in Southern Sudan. My former workmates in SCF (now called SC-UK) had agreed to put me on their flight list and I was soon booked onto a UN flight to Rumbek. From Rumbek I travelled by Land-

cruiser with one of the UN Security Officers and two days later he dropped me off in Alek, a small town 12 miles north of Gogrial. I was to stay for two weeks in Alek, mainly because I was not able to go to Ajiep, which had not been given security clearance by UN Security.

I went to Gogrial town to pay my respects to the new County Commissioner, James Lual Deng Kuol, who I had first met in 1995, and found him in the middle of a County Congress under a large grove of mango trees. All the chiefs, administration officers and officials, anyone who was anybody in Gogrial County, was there and I was invited to attend. I had shown the Commissioner a photograph of my father, Tim Atiep, and it was quickly requisitioned and passed around the whole gathering, before finally being pinned to the front of the main table. The meeting

that day was really a progress report and planning session, and, of course, was conducted in *thok Muonyjiang*, the Dinka language, my understanding of which had diminished since last year. However, it was a pleasant re-introduction and I sat feeling very important next to the Commissioner!

Halfway through the day, there was a bit of activity and some notes were passed back and forth between the Commissioner and an SPLA Commander and the meeting was interrupted in order for the military personnel and the local police force to be ordered out to their posts around the southern and western sides of the town, as there was report of government militia activity along the road that comes from Wau, the government-controlled capital of Bahr el-Ghazal. Security was tightened up around the mangoes, but the Congress continued and I was given

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(Continued from page a food distribution and two children were killed. The Americans protested vigorously and the government assured them that it would not happen again. It was a technical error! On the same run, the village of Chelko, to the west was also bombed, but as there was no-one there to report it at the time, that incident was not included in the feeble apology that came from Khartoum. Only a few weeks later at Bieh in Upper Nile, a government helicopter gunship flew low over the crowds of people receiving food and launched a series of rockets which killed 17 people, many of whom were women and children. Again, the Americans protested and were given assurances that it would not happen again. In the Nuba Mountains, a ceasefire, arranged by the Americans and including external observers, is still holding, but in the oilfields war rages and people are forced from their homes.

(Continued from page 1) the opportunity to explain again the objectives of the Shading Tree (Tim Atiep). Sadly, I also learned about the raid on Ajiep, which was attacked by the Popular Defence Force, a government-backed militia, which, during the dry season, rides across country on horseback raiding, burning and looting and abducting women and children. Normally, they launch their raids in late January, but on this occasion, they attacked on Christmas Eve. The people of Ajiep had little warning and had to run for their lives into the bush without being able to pick up any of their belongings. Three children, a girl and two boys, were killed in the church, a fenced off area under a fig tree and several other

people were killed whilst running away. Some reports say that the children were deliberately killed, rather than being caught in cross-fire. The PDF looted the houses and the MSF compound and took whatever livestock, grain and medicines they could find, before heading back to Wau using captives as porters. Some of those captured were released and sent home, but a number of young boys and girls were kept and sent north as part of the booty.

Uncharacteristically, the PDF did not burn the houses, the MSF compound or the school. So, when I eventually made my way to Ajiep from Luonyaker, I found the school intact though deserted. In fact, Ajiep as a whole was almost deserted, because the peo-

ple themselves were not yet confident of their security and were staying in two other areas some 20 or so miles away, one to the north and the other to the south east. They were staying in small conical shelters made from branches and bundles of grass and relying on the support of friends or relatives, whilst waiting for food and blankets and relief items from the aid agencies. Yet this was already nearly two months after the event.

The school has 14 classrooms and latrines. The small office still has no roof, but materials have been found. The school has been well attended in the last year and is also being supported with schoolbooks and teacher training by other agencies. With the wet season now starting security will improve and life will return to relative normality.

What about the funds raised?

I caught up with Alfred Amet Kuol, the Executive chief and some of the community leaders at the end of February and we agreed that I would leave just under \$4000 with the Commissioner. Meanwhile, a committee was to be established in Ajiep, which would discuss with the community

how the money was to be used for the school and a plan would be presented to the Commissioner. He would then release the money in stages and only on the presentation of progress reports and documentation as to the use of the money. I decided not to disclose the full amount raised and

have returned with the balance, pending progress. I am confident that Commissioner James Lual, who has incidentally paid his membership fee for the Shading Tree (Tim Atiep), will supervise the work effectively and will ensure that the money is not misused. I will keep you all informed.