

(BP)---FEATURES

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W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

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The Edge of War In Gaza: Unorganized Frustration

by Anne Nicholas
SBC Missionary To Gaza

GAZA (BP)--Being on the edge of war, but not actively involved in it, sometimes it seems that war is unorganized frustration.

It is being free to travel across the pre-1967 boundaries right into the heart of Israel, to Haifa, Eshkelon, Beersheba, and being stopped at every checkpoint and questioned about our Gaza car.

It's driving in slow traffic while everyone in the neighboring cars turns around to stare until we are out of sight.

It's having Israeli policemen break into our parked car to check for hand grenades and explosives. It is rushing out of the stores in mid-afternoon in order to get back into Gaza before dark.

Tonight, it is going to Tel Aviv, to the American school, to bring our daughter Carol home for a weekend, and coming back to Gaza to find the border closed. There are four of us--my two daughters, Joy and Carol, and a co-worker, Ann Dwyer.

"No, sorry, you can't go through," we are told. "No sorry, it's my orders; nobody goes on this road tonight."

We point out we are not Arabs; we are all Americans.

"No, sorry. No, sorry, sorry," we are told.

We decide to try the other road into Gaza from Beersheba. I don't know the way and it's getting dark now. I can't possibly get in before the roads get dangerous, but I try. The guns and big military equipment frighten Joy. She is crying on Carol's shoulder.

It's 30 kilometers farther and my gas supply is so low I don't dare waste any looking for the road,, for it's the Sabbath in Israel and nothing is open. After another 30 minutes we're driving all around the Gaza strip to approach it from the east.

"No, sorry. No, sorry, wait."

Wait a half hour for an army car to escort you through the danger area.

"I'm thinking about my husband at home wondering why we're so late. I beg them to let us go on through. We're less than 10 minutes from the hospital and home, but...."

"No, sorry, wait."

So we wait nearly an hour until a half-track finally arrives. The soldiers jump off for a few minutes of rest; then we get ready to go.

They test their automatic firing equipment before they start. Joy begins to cry again.

One soldier takes his place at the wheel. Another stands on top holding his submachine gun in firing position. A third mans the power spotlight with which he illuminates each side of the road in turn. Finally we are ready.

Slowly, slowly, we move along as the soldiers carefully scan the trees and buildings we pass. Behind us come three more civilian cars and then one more protecting military vehicle. And at last we're home. Two hours we've been skirting the border and arguing with guards.

Wherever we drive in Israel we see truckloads of young Jewish soldiers--boys of 18 or 20, young like my son--always with their guns ready. Tomorrow they'll be at the Suez Canal or the Golan Heights or dodging grenades in occupied Arab territory.

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Coming back across the line into our Arab world, our hearts bleed again for our young Arab friends. No guns, but also no jobs, no colleges, no futures. Only despair and frustration. For the war is more than killing; it's wishing always for normality and knowing it won't come.

And for us in Gaza, we who seem to live with our feet in Israel and our hearts in the Arab world, it's feeling the heartbreak of the young on both sides who bear the burden of a nearly unsolvable conflict.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Anne (Mrs. R. Edward) Nicholas is a Southern Baptist Missionary in Gaza where her husband is chaplain in the Baptist Hospital. She is the former Anne Youngblood of Clearwater, Fla.

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NATIONAL OFFICE
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
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February 20, 1970

**Missionary Tells Of First
Worship Service in War Area**

by John E. Mills
Southern Baptist Missionary Field Representative
For Western Africa

ONITSHA, Nigeria (BP)--In a church building without doors or windows, and with a big shell hole where there should have been a roof over our heads, 36 Nigerians joined me and Southern Baptist Missionary Russell L. Locke in the first worship service in the town of Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria since the Nigerian Civil War ended two weeks earlier.

The people sat on salvaged cement blocks, sang choruses in Ibo, listened to a brief sermon, and closed the service singing "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow."

At the close an old man spoke up: "It has been very hard, and it will be hard, but we are alive, and we are at home; so we thank God."

Questioned about his actions during the war, another man said: "We small people, we do not really know about such things; we only did what the big men told us to do."

He spoke, I am sure, for the masses of people who were caught up in the tragedy. Not many really know why their leaders led in an effort to secede. Very few are even trying to fix responsibility; they are simply thankful that the shooting has stopped, and they can go home.

Physical damage to buildings in Onitsha is extensive since the city was shelled heavily when federal Nigerian troops took it from the secessionists. Most buildings, except those in the southeast corner of the city, lost roofs, windows and doors, and there was in most cases damage to the walls as well.

Several thousand of the inhabitants who had fled during the fighting have now returned to the city and are living in the least damaged quarter. It was there that our service was held.

Food was scarce. Money issued by the rebel regime was worthless in the city, and needs were genuine. But the process of cutting back the bush which had grown in the city, cleaning the houses and clearing the debris of war had begun.

A few miles to the south of Onitsha the roads were open and people were free to move past the military checkpoints as they headed home.

Individuals and little groups moved along the roads, most of them walking, carrying small children and all of their earthly possessions. Some pushed crude carts made with wheels from bicycles, often without tires.

A few fortunate families rode in their own cars still bearing licenses of the former secessionist government, their possessions stacked inside and sometimes tied on top. Often there was a smile and a wave. They were going home!

Also south of Onitsha were some of the more fortunate people who had been able to remain in their homes during the entire war. Many of their houses were still camouflaged with palm branches to hide them from the airplanes.

Some of the people had even managed to plant their farms during the war. Now they had a little food for sale, though the prices were so high most of those who headed down the roads for home, could not afford to buy it.

Reports from the southern part of the former rebel-held area indicated that larger numbers of refugees who had fled their homes were returning.

Many were going back to villages that had been battlegrounds, where there is little left of what was home before the war. They may well be the greatest sufferers.

The Nigerian government indicated its willingness to help, and the Nigerian Red Cross undertook distribution of supplies and funds given by the Nigerian government and friends from abroad. The government feels very strongly that all relief efforts must be coordinated and directed by Nigerians themselves.

Hopefully, Southern Baptist missionaries who know the area may assist in these efforts in cooperation with the Red Cross. There can be no doubt that the war has caused widespread suffering and need. The task of rehabilitation will be long and costly.

The Nigerian Mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries), in an emergency session just a few days after the end of the war, took action to return some of the missionaries who formerly worked in these war-affected areas.

It remains to be seen just what the role of these missionaries will be how they can help in relief efforts, what can be done to repair church buildings and to begin worship services, and how fast they can meet the urgent needs.

But all the missionaries give thanks to God that the war itself is over, people can go home in Nigeria, and the great task of reconstruction can begin. Nigeria needs the prayers and financial support of Southern Baptists for the critical days ahead.

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Baptists May Now Build Hospital In Bukittinggi

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RICHMOND (BP)--The Indonesian Baptist Mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries) has acquired land and obtained a permit to build a hospital on the island of Sumatra.

Negotiations for the hospital and permission to build in Bukittinggi, an inland town in Western Sumatra, began in 1963. Officials in Bukittinggi were in favor of the hospital, though not thoroughly in sympathy with Southern Baptists' concepts of evangelization, according to R. Keith Parks, SBC Foreign Mission Board secretary for Southeast Asia.

The permit to build the hospital states that it must be an institution for healing and that patients may not be discriminated against because of race, religion or economic status.

Parks said that permission from the Indonesian government to build the hospital is concrete evidence that freedom of religion is one of the government's basic tenants.

The custom of land ownership by the Menangkabau, an ethnic group which maintains a strong hold on land, frustrated several attempts to buy property, Parks added. It is the custom of these people that land may not be sold without the permission of all members of the family, no matter how many or how widely scattered they may be.

Repeated attempts since 1963 by Southern Baptist missionaries to obtain land and permit to build a hospital failed, so in 1965 missionaries began operation of an outpatient clinic. Land and a permit have recently been secured for a 50-bed unit which will probably have to be built in stages because of lack of funds.

A surgeon is critically needed in Bukittinggi, Parks said. One who was already in Indonesia was assigned to Bukittinggi by the Foreign Mission Board, but he had to take an emergency leave of absence.

Parks also cited the need for nurses at the new hospital. Currently only Dr. Frank B. Owen, missionary now on furlough and general practitioner, and Miss Ruth Austin, a nurse also on furlough, are under appointment to maintain the entire hospital project.

Dr. Kathleen Jones, Southern Baptist physician who operates the Bukittinggi clinic, will soon have to return to the Baptist hospital in Kediri, Java, to replace other physicians who soon go on furlough. She is on loan to the Bukittinggi clinic from the Kediri hospital.

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