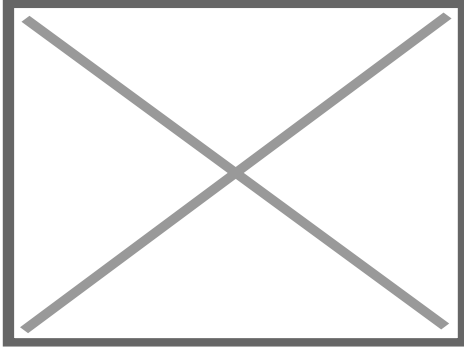
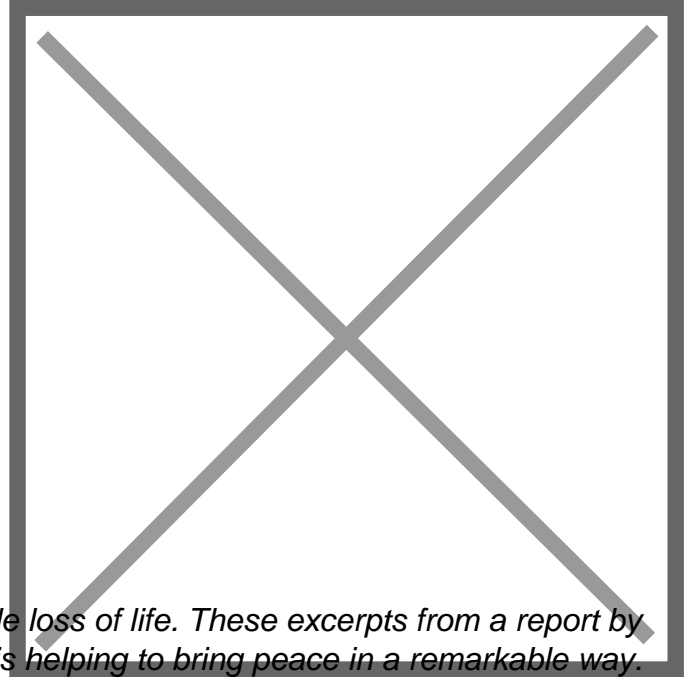


Exchanging bullets for Bibles



A tribesman swaps his gun for a Bible. [Photo courtesy of The Salvation Army's "All the World" magazine]



In rural Papua New Guinea tribal battles cause terrible loss of life. These excerpts from a report by Major James Cocker show how The Salvation Army is helping to bring peace in a remarkable way.

For the past two years, Captain Michael Hermuno has been sharing the gospel message with about 15 villages in the remote Okapa area of Papua New Guinea—villages that have been fighting against each other for more than 26 years. In Easter 2008 I visited the area and Michael and I started work on the idea of trading Bibles for weapons. I met some of the warlords, shared my personal testimony and encouraged them to try peace—the peace only Christ can give.

I was thrilled to be invited back in October 2009 to celebrate a formalized peace treaty that would change lives.

Over the 26-year conflict, hundreds of men from both tribes were murdered. Years ago, when the war first began, it was with bows and arrows but recent illegal activities had escalated the problem to guns and bullets.

This led the young mothers of the villages to begin a desperate practice of their own. In an effort to reduce the fighting forces for years to come, they chose to smother and kill male children at birth. It was a secret infanticide that was known only by the midwives and mothers involved.

Even as men from the villages were dying in their hundreds, the women were also burying dozens of male babies each year.

While the women grieved deeply for their newborns, they believed in their hearts that if their babies grew into young men, the pain upon their inevitable death would be even greater. This secret only came to light in the past year, when peace was finally being considered.

I flew into the peace ceremony on a helicopter owned and operated by New Tribes Mission Aviation. Accompanying me were Lt. Colonels Hans and Marja van Vliet (The Salvation Army's chief secretary and territorial secretary for women's ministries in Papua New Guinea respectively) as well as Divisional Commander Major David Temine.

As we flew over the last mountain pass we were greeted by a sight that will forever remain in my memory. Giant flags hung on bamboo poles were waving in the breeze. Never has a lump in my throat been quite as large as it was at the moment I saw the Army's red, yellow and blue flag wafting in the breeze beside the national and provincial flags.

About 2,000 people were waiting for us and as the helicopter landed you could already sense their excitement. They were a people anxious to have peace for the first time in many of their lives. Only a handful of individuals present had ever known peace.

The Peace Ceremony

We were escorted up a hill to a large field, to a bush-made grandstand where I was warmly and affectionately greeted by a number of people I knew from my previous trip. I was humbled that they remembered me. It was wonderful to be welcomed not as a stranger, but as an honored member of their tribes who was returning.

The ceremony started with a number of village elders providing speeches and welcome gifts, followed by a re-enactment of a key battle. The men of two villages stood facing each other—one side-armed with spears and shields and the other with their bows and arrows and guns. For about 10 minutes the guns were fired and the men re-enacted what had consumed their lives for so long.

This was to be their final battle and, while no one would be hurt, the men conducted themselves as if the battle were real. They were not acting out someone else's events from history, they were reliving their own involvement in battles that had gone before. Even the women's wailing was real as they remembered how much blood had been lost.

Two warring clan chiefs entered, turned to us on the platform and called us to come and stop the killing. We went down from the platform with only a Bible in our hands and watched as one-by-one the men asked for a Bible in exchange for a gun.

Repairing broken hearts

During the ceremony, a broken-hearted woman stood and came forward. She said it was the men's actions that had given them so much pain over the years, and because of their actions they saw no value in raising boys who would only take up arms and bring more destruction.

When the woman had finished, a young father came forward with his 8-year-old son, who was carrying a homemade rifle. The father pledged that his son would never be allowed to grow up in the

same way he had been raised, but that he would have the opportunity to know peace. He took the rifle and placed it on the ground in front of us, starting a pile that was to grow steadily as the hours passed.

A promise before God

In the Bible message, Lt. Colonel van Vliet told the villagers that laying down weapons and items used in sorcery was not enough. “You know what tribal warfare is all about,” he said. “Many relatives have died. Leaders, you are making the promise not only in front of us but also in front of God. You must change within your mind, heart and soul.”

He said the new chapter in their lives should be one of love and care for their neighbors. Then two live pigs were presented, one each to the warring tribes as tokens of appreciation for their peace efforts.

Eventually the pile of guns, bows and arrows, shields and sorcery bags was consumed in a large bonfire. Tribal leaders then announced that their annual allocation of government funds would be distributed to The Salvation Army, New Tribes Mission and Lutheran churches to help erect schools and health centers.

When it was all over, the other members of our team got back in the helicopter to fly the eight miles back over the mountains to where the Misapi Corps (church) and Health Centre is located. I chose to hike the three-and-a-half hours to Misapi with Captain Michael.

It’s amazing that this remote place has no government involvement, no police and no services, but The Salvation Army is there. I pray that the testimony of the officers and soldiers of Misapi Corps will continue to be the glue that holds the peace for years to come.

Major James Cocker is personnel secretary for

The Salvation Army’s Papua New Guinea Territory.

Papua New Guinea
By Karen Gleason

Papua New Guinea (PNG)—the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, the second-largest island in the world—is located 100 miles north of Australia between the Coral Sea and the South Pacific Ocean. The population is approximately 6 million, with Port Moresby, its largest city, home to about 300,000 persons. Official languages are Tok Pisin (a creole language, widely used and understood), English (spoken by 1–2 percent) and Hiri Motu (spoken by less than 2 percent). Some 860 indigenous languages are spoken in PNG—over one-tenth of the world’s total.

The *CIA World Factbook* notes: “The indigenous population of Papua New Guinea is one of the most heterogeneous in the world; PNG has several thousand separate communities, most with only a few hundred people; divided by language, customs, and tradition, some of these communities have engaged in low-scale tribal conflict with their neighbors for millennia; the advent of modern weapons and modern migrants into urban areas has greatly magnified the impact of this lawlessness.”

The Salvation Army in PNG

The Salvation Army officially commenced ministry in Papua New Guinea on Aug. 31, 1956, with the first meeting held on Sunday, Oct. 21, at the Royal Police Constabulary Barracks in Port Moresby. On July 4, 1994, after 38 years as part of the Australia Eastern Territory, PNG became an independent command and on Dec. 9, 2000, it was elevated to territory status. The current territorial commander is Commissioner Andrew Kalai.

Kalai is one of the speakers slated for this month's (March 22-28, 2010) "SpeakOut" online conference on advocacy and social justice. For more information, visit salvationarmy.org/speakout (also see story in *New Frontier*, Feb. 28, 2010).

Western Territorial Secretary for Program Lt. Colonel Eda Hokom—who served in PNG as training school principal—said: "[The Salvation Army] in the last 54 years has developed into a strong influential force impacting individual lives, communities and the entire country. In the last 10 years, The Salvation Army has doubled its soldiery and reached out into many new areas—particularly those areas affected by disasters. As the country has been devastated by tribal warfare, The Salvation Army has worked with various villages to resolve the conflicts through bringing the people to an understanding and a relationship with Christ, the supreme peacemaker."

Education is a major focus of The Salvation Army in PNG. Many corps have started elementary schools wherever there is room. At Lae, two young Salvationists are teaching nearly 200 five- to 16-year-old street kids in two rooms.

At a computer school in Kimbe, technology has been introduced into isolated areas. The Flexible Open Distance Education program allows both young and mature students, including officers, to complete their secondary education. In Port Moresby, the program also includes a Salvation Army driving school.

Funds from overseas sources helped develop primary health care services, including sanitation and hygiene workshops, construction of pit latrines, distribution of treated mosquito bed nets and village health volunteer training.

Projects in the rural areas helped provide safe drinking water through the installation of water tanks with catchment shelters, water wells with hand pumps, and simple gravity-fed water systems.

In March 2009, the territory was the global focus for World Day of Prayer.

According to the *2010 Salvation Army Year Book*, the territory has 224 officers (195 active, 29 retired), 54 corps, 78 outposts, 6,585 senior soldiers, 4,731 adherents, and 1,722 junior soldiers.

Lives changed through Christ

Reflecting on her time there, Hokom said: "I often saw lives changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. One young man, Atina, was remanded into Salvation Army custody after several petty crimes. Over the next few months he came to know the Lord—as did many of the boys at the remand center.

“I spent my first Christmas in Papua New Guinea at the chicken farm where Atina had been placed. On Christmas morning, all the boys received a brand new T-shirt, which for most of them was the first new clothing they had ever owned. Atina’s smile stretched across his entire face—not only was he a new person on the inside, he now had a new shirt to prove it. Although the next few years were difficult for Atina, he continued to be a good Salvationist, eventually married, and learned to play an instrument in The Salvation Army band.

“When I returned in 2006 to celebrate Papua New Guinea’s 50-year anniversary, Atina was a uniformed Salvationist, faithful soldier, bandsman, father of five children and a deeply committed Christian whose one desire was to know the Lord better. What a miracle—from a deeply troubled young man with little education or training, he became a solid Christian example of a man of God.”