

Lokichokio, 27th March 1992

"The Reward of Life is Death...."

**A personal memory of the events around March the 8th, 1992
in Pochalla/Gorkuoo on the Sudanese-Ethiopian border**

by Kwacakworo.

Background:

The ICRC's presence in Pochalla dates back to June 13, 1991, when a large number of refugees poured into the small Anyuak village on the Akobo-river. The first arrivals were the so-called "unaccompanied children" (UC) who had lived for several years in a refugee-camp for Southern Sudanese in Pinyudo in Ethiopia under the care of the UNHCR.

Initially, these children were meant to settle in Pochalla, but when their number grew up to 10,000 and when some other 100,000 people from the refugee-camp in Ethiopia followed them, they were sent to a nearby, empty Anyuak-village called Gorkuoo.

The ICRC had two sub-delegations in the area of the Anyuak-tribe, one in Pochalla itself and the other one inside the children's place at Gorkuoo, both being situated directly on the river Akobo and thus only a few meters from the borderline between the Sudan and Ethiopia. In view of what happened later, it should be mentioned that the SPLA initially had opposed the idea of settling near the border and rather would have preferred a place more inside the village, but the fact that water can only be found near the river and that it seemed unlikely that Ethiopia could ever agree to let its territory be used for any attack on Pochalla let the ICRC to establish itself on the shores of the river. As it happened, the attackers of March 8, 1991, came indeed from the Ethiopian side; it is doubtful, however, that any other place in Pochalla actually would have been safer than the chosen site: the rockets and bullets sent to the army headquarters and the village had to pass over - not through - our compound. Moreover, one could always hope that the ICRC would be respected by any attacking group, its presence in Pochalla being well-known to the Sudanese Government and (perhaps even better) to Ethiopian military forces. As a matter of fact, the ICRC-compound was not shot at and it certainly was no target of the aggressors, - up to the moment when we attempted to leave the place. The surprise shown by the attackers when facing the ICRC-representatives was probably not due to ignorance but rather to the fact that they met with two girls, one from Ireland and one from India, and three Kenyans but not with any Swiss nor "true" delegate.

It has been generally acknowledged that the presence of the ICRC in Pochalla and Gorkuoo has helped refugees and unaccompanied minors to survive in an area where they could not find any food and from where they could not move

anywhere before the beginning of the dry season (January 1992). Large quantities of food were flown in by plane or airdropped, and considerable medical presence saved the lives of many children and adults. Though the first two months were highly critical, the refugees finally received enough food and medical care to gain some physical strength. Because of the refugees' satisfactory physical condition, the ICRC could was in a position to convince the people to return to a more self-sufficient existence, either in their home-places or somewhere in Anyuak-country itself.

In order to prepare this return to a life without help from the outside, several teams (ICRC, SRRA and representatives of refugees) were sent to the home-area to see if a return would be acceptable in regard to the ecological and military situation; different surveys along the roads leading to these home-areas concentrated on the availability of water which was understood to be the pre-condition of any movement through completely dry regions. At the same time, suitable places for settling refugees which could not (or would be reluctant to) return home were searched for and visited in different regions of Anyuakland, and thanks to the cooperation of Anyuak chiefs, a suitable site could be found at Bur Akoi on the Oboth-river, where refugees would be able to plant and to find water, meat, fish, shelter-material and relative security.

As the security situation all over Southern Sudan was unstable and as it was extremely difficult for the refugees to make a decision where to go, the first movements of refugees could not take place before January. Those willing to leave Pochalla were given a so-called "basic-item-kit" (containers for water, a blanket etc) and promised to be given a so-called "rehabilitation kit" (a hoe and seeds) at the place of their final destination.

At that time, almost all the people were heading for Kapoeta, taking the road following the Akobo-river. ICRC provided them with water on the way, mainly on the dry stretches between Boma and Magoth near Kapoeta.

In March, only people heading for Bor and Akobo were still present in Pochalla, besides all those willing to resettle temporarily in Anyuakland at Bur Akoi.

For military reasons, the people heading for Bor (via Pibor) could not leave Pochalla, and when they were ready to move the ICRC had to review its capacities of assistance and advised the people to take the long roads via Boma and Kapoeta. If the ICRC was not in a position to guarantee the supply of water for the people wishing to move to Bor via Pibor, it was because of the SPLA/SRRA's decision to move the 10,000 children out of Gorkuoo and to make them walk to Narus.

As the ICRC was to assure the protection of these unaccompanied children, it got the tremendous task of assisting the children along their way to Kapoeta and Narus, i.e. to provide them with food, drinking water, medical care, and finally transport of the weak, disabled or sick ones.

About 250 of the children were left behind in Pochalla, together with some other 500 disabled or sick people. Fifty of them were brought by car to Kapoeta, while the

remaining ones were still waiting for medical evacuation at the moment when the military attack occurred.

The Days Before The Attack On Pochalla

During a long time, Pochalla-area seemed to be a very safe area: military attacks from the Ethiopian side of the border by Sudanese troops were unlikely for evident political reasons, and from a military viewpoint other places seemed to be of a more strategic importance for any attacker. In December 1991, however, a first attack took place; it was conducted by the GPLM (Gambela People's Liberation Movement) apparently in revenge for various events which had happened during the stay of the SPLA in Ethiopia as well as during the time of their departure to Pochalla. The attackers belonged to the Anyuak tribe and were driven out of the area by the SPLA. In January, a small group of Ethiopians (apparently from Tigray) was intercepted before they could reach Pochalla; it was said afterwards that they had come for "peace-talks", an explanation nobody could really believe; more likely, they had come in preparation of a future attack on Pochalla. News that the Americans had put pressure on the Ethiopian government not to allow the Northern Sudanese troops to move through their territory had assured the SPLA that Pochalla was not to be attacked from Ethiopia and thus still a safe place. Nobody could of course imagine that the Ethiopians themselves could actively interfere in the problem between Northern and Southern Sudanese. In consequence, there was no sign of much of nervousness nor of any special military preparation, except perhaps the fact that the son of the Anyuak king sent most members of his father's family out of Pochalla and back to their village.

The Commander of Pochalla (Malony Akaw) and the SRRA were still most concerned by the future of the remaining refugees, and so was the ICRC. The big problem of these days was to inform the remaining refugees that they could not move into the direction of Pibor but should take the Kapoeta-way.

The arrival of our veterinary officer, Sangeeta Koenig, and prospects of vaccinating Murle-cattle brought great relief to everybody, for the vaccination of these cattle would certainly increase the security of the region and of those moving through it. On March 4, Sangeeta Koenig, Anne Cronin (the Irish nurse) and myself left for Murle-country, vaccinating cattle on the 5th at Okelo and on the 6th in the region of Akalbati. It was there we were informed that people could not hope to get assistance when moving to Pibor and that Thomas Zeindl (delegate) and William Abelson (field-doctor) should return immediately to Lokichokio, bringing along all sensitive material from Gorkuoo. On March 6, the team was back in Pochalla, and TZ and WA left the following day with the radio and other material. On March 7, we started to close our compound at Gorkuoo where a permanent presence -after the departure of the children - was not of an absolute importance anymore (even though some 200 sick children were still staying in the camp where they were receiving medical care). The food which was left inside the ware-house was transported by our truck to Pochalla in view of future transport to Bur Akoi. On the 8th, this transfer

of food was still going on but got interrupted by the fighting at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

On the 7th, we erected a wall around the radio-room in the compound of Pochalla; it consisted out of a good number of cement bags which made 1m thick and 70cm high wall. This wall became of greatest importance during the attack as it provided excellent protection to the delegates and the other people in the compound, giving them a feeling of considerable safety.

Preparations for an attack on Pochalla were made as a preventive measure: besides of the mentioned "bunker", food and water was kept ready in case the events should force people to leave all at a sudden. It was imagined that the road to the Oboth-river and then to Boma would be the most suitable one, but alternatives were also imagined just in case the Oboth-river would be closed. King Agada of Otalo village assured the delegate on March the 8th that his village would be ready to receive us in case of any urgency and that he would protect us in case of any problem. In the morning of the attack, Sangeeta and myself had gone to the Anyuak villages of Ajwara and Otalo for vaccinating cattle and discussing with the kings of these villages.

The fact that normal activities continued to take place (and this even outside of Pochalla) clearly shows that there was no fear of any attack let alone any sign of panic, neither in Pochalla nor inside the ICRC delegation. Life was absolutely normal indeed and even more joyful as usual, as Sangeeta had brought a lot of enthusiasm to the delegates because of the success of her Murle-cattle-vaccination-campaign. Indeed, our truck was supposed to move back to Akalbati on the 9th in order to bring rehabilitation-kits for the Murle living in the area. Furthermore, we expected the first large convoy coming from Loki on the 10th, those trucks expected to transport all the remaining 200 UC of Gorkuoo, the amputees and other disabled people to Kapoeta.

On that day, the closure of our compound at Gorkuoo was supposed to be completed. All our attention would then focus on the new site of Bur Akoi on the Oboth-river where the refugees were expected to settle.

March 8, 1992

As mentioned before, I had accompanied Sangeeta to Ajwara and Otalo for vaccinating cattle and for meeting the kings of both places. At noon, we went back to Pochalla from where I proceeded to Gorkuoo; there I found Maker M. Manyiel from the SRRA supervising the transfer of the remaining durra to Pochalla. I started to load some furniture from our tukuls in the compound into my Landcruiser, a lot of chairs, one table and my beddings; only two of my metallic suitcases, lamps and some other items were still in my tukul. But the office and kitchen was still fully furnished.

At 3.30 pm, I left Gorkuoo all alone in direction of Pochalla. When approaching the "town", I found people running towards the Akobo-river, some of

them almost running into my car. Other people ran in the opposite direction. Then I heard heavy shooting on the other (Ethiopian) side of the Akobo-river. In high speed I continued in the direction of our compound, worrying for a moment if I should really cross the open space of the airstrip.

But I reached the compound safely. Aler, our mechanic, driver and sanitation-specialist came running to my car and shouted "Anne, Anne, she is in the shower ..!!!". Bullets started to fly over our heads. Aler went to call Anne out of the shower, while all the other people in the compound had already assembled in the radio-room; Sangeeta, the two wives of Aler, Lagos, our radio-operator and all our children. As the shooting became more and more intense, I tried to call Lokichokio; it was a Sunday and there was no response. Calling any other station hearing us, Nairobi finally replied... Luckily, Georges Comminos, our head of operations, happened to be there. I informed him about the attack, suggesting that this could well be the decisive one. From that moment on, the radios both in Nairobi and in Lokichokio were on standby during 24 hours.

From 4.00 pm onwards, the shooting was really intense, bullets flying in hundreds over our compound, some of them crossing the veranda. Anne had quickly joined the people lying inside the radio-room while Sangeeta, myself and the Kenyan driver Kimani were sitting outside, behind the cement bags, in an uncomfortable position. The battle waged up and down the river, on the Ethiopian side of the border; sometimes the fighting was directly in front of us, sometimes it moved further upstreams; and sometimes there were intervals which made us hope that the aggressors would not succeed in capturing Pochalla. During one of these intervals, I even went to have a shower, though just to return under a shower of bullets...

All our watchmen were absent, except Onyongo, an Anyuak. In the beginning he was completely drunk, but thanks to the noise of the bullets he soon regained his senses. While everybody was lying somewhere or hiding behind a tree or so, Onyongo stalked proudly around the compound with a stick in his hand, insulting the aggressors in a rather obscene way. He told us that he would defend one side of our compound and ordered Aler to go and defend the other side... And as Aler refused and the Kenyan driver started to quarrel because of his red cap Onyongo had put on, Onyongo said that he would henceforth only talk to Kwacakworo, the only one understanding (Anyuak)... Onyongoe moved about as if there were no bullets cutting the air above us in slices, as if we were mistaken in our fear for our lives and as if he was there to illustrate the complete absurdity of this or any other war. It was in vain we tried to bring him to reason, and we always thought that he would fall; but while we were there, he didn't, and when the night fell we lost him out of sight; we don't know what happened to him.

Whenever there were some intervals of silence or at least of a more distant sound of fighting, our radio-operator, Aler and Arop Dhel Kony also used to leave the "bunker" to check the compound; when the war approached, we had to call them back using very strong words. Once, Aler returned saying his home (near to the compound) was completely destroyed by a rocket; luckily, his wife and her sister were at the time already lying inside our radio-room.

At one moment, Sangeeta (or was it Anne?) suggested that we should move away, but I argued that there couldn't be any safer place at the moment than this bunker: "if they want to kill us", I argued, "they will at least not do it by mistake, and I do not see any reason why they should do it on purpose"... I added that we could perhaps move in the middle of the night, if there was some opportunity then. Sangeeta said that she felt "quite safe" and even started reading a book : "I want to finish it" she said, but couldn't as the night fell fast. From six o'clock onwards, the fighting turned into a huge firework, long lines of colours shooting through the sky, some of them very close to our place behind the bags. Just for having a subject of conversation, Sangeeta and me started commenting on the beauty of these colourful lines, but Anne did not appreciate and returned inside the radio-room: "at least, I don't want to see it", she said. It was obvious that the enemy approached, and sometimes after seven o'clock Onyongo came to tell me that there were some people in the river talking a language which he could not understand (and which therefore was neither Anyuak, Dinka, Nuer or Arabic).

Aler went to listen and returned and explained that it was Tigrean-language (he had an Ethiopian wife and had worked a long time in Tigray). The atmosphere became more tense now, especially as there was now also some natural lightening in the sky which gave the impression of explosions, the thunder roaring behind it sounding like violent movements of war-machinery. Later we learned that there were at least 4 tanks and 6 canons with the attacking forces, besides of all the heavy machine-guns, but at that moment, we did not think much, remained silent, a bit confused by the noise of thunder, explosions and the rain which suddenly started to mix with the dust of cement on our ski. It rained only for a short while.

We had another radio-contact and asked Nairobi to prepare already for an emergency-flight to Pochalla for the following day; the intensity and the duration of the fight suggested that there would be a lot of dead or wounded persons. Immediate action after the fight could certainly save a lot of lives.

Someone informed us that the SPLA had captured two of the enemy forces (they were not Arabs), prisoners who at present are still with the Commander of Pochalla, Malony Akaw; one is said to be an officer and one of the two was wounded.

The tracks of the bullets and mortars made the night even blacker then it was under the heavy clouds. It was a strange atmosphere behind our wall of cement, under the lightening and the fire, and though it is impossible to know the feelings of all individuals assembled there, there was no panic whatsoever; our female delegates were silently listening to the noise or looking at the course of the bullets, exactly as our brave Kenyan drivers and all our Sudanese friends. I felt sorry for the children, tried to push away the imagination about their continuous suffering since the time they had left their family and had fled to Ethiopia; definitely their suffering had no end. I also wondered about the fate of the sick children we had left in Gorkuoo, and about all our friends in the region. Onyongo appeared a last time in order to fetch water from the kitchen, saying that "a fighter needs water"... Then someone got the idea of sending somebody to the SPLA-Commander to get information about the present military situation and to ask him what we should do; I don't know who went, and I don't know who came back with the answer. There was,

in any case, suddenly an officer appearing at our bunker; I did not know him at his voice (it was too dark to see him), but it was someone speaking an excellent English, and someone extremely calm.

The SPLA and SRRA had previously assured the delegates that they would be informed whenever there was urgency to evacuate the place. In reply, I guess that they were then told that the ICRC actually did not like to evacuate a place before there was really a risk for their life, and that it was the very mandate of the ICRC to be present in conflictual areas and to help the war-wounded or others in danger of life. But such arguments usually did not hold when the war actually approached, the authority showing always great concern for the safety of their foreign guests. If the SPLA at Pochalla did not alert us before hand, it was probably because they were not used to and prepared for defeat but quite sure of their victory; moreover, every day at Pochalla was in any case a day a of potential danger of war. After all, the ICRC was present in Pochalla not merely because the refugees and children were in need of food and medical care but also because they needed to be protected from any attacker; it was hoped that the Red Cross would be respected by all sides and would keep any aggressor away. Though circumstances made it impossible to help the wounded persons on the spot, the presence of the ICRC in the area made it possible to evacuate a good number (about 50) of war-wounded people from the region and to bring them to our hospital at Lopiding. A certain number of children and amputees could also be brought out of the place.

It was at about 8 p.m. when the mentioned officer came to the compound and informed us about the situation: "Now, there is a moment of silence. The enemy is here, just here in the river. You must leave now. Run to your cars, jump in and drive off as fast as you can!" There was no time for discussion nor any preparation. It was probably because of the voice of this officer, clear and calm without any nervousness and because there was this sudden silence all over the place, that I decided : "Okay, let's go. There was just no time for any hesitation. We all ran to our cars, as fast as we could, for while walking we of course exposed ourselves to eventual bullets. We had three Toyota-Landcruisers and one truck. The vet. Landcruiser of Sangeeta was behind the Landcruiser "of Aler", and "my" Landcruiser was directly on the bank of river, near my tukul. I was on my way to my car (the only one with a radio!) and actually already near to it when that voice of the unknown officer told me in a whispering tune: "No! Not that! This is impossible! The enemy is just three meters away the car. You can't take it. Leave it and take that other one". Again the authority in his voice made me to accept his orders and to return to the car "of Aler" which was on the compound-road; it was already full of our children and the two women of Aler. I sat down on the driver's seat when I saw that Sangeeta's car behind me had switched the parking-lights on. As silently as I could, I "shouted" at them to switch off the lights, - but they did not understand. I went back to my car when Aler appeared; seeing me, he said "Ok, I shall try to bring your car out anyway. I shall just try it..." I had no chance to say anything nor to retain him, for he had already gone, sneaking to the riverbank and into

the car... How would he make it? Why did he take such a risk? I had parked in such a way that it was actually impossible to drive directly away. But Aler suddenly started the motor and turned in an unbelievable speed around the tukuls and then off and away! I made a similar start and tried to follow Aler's car, out of the compound and out into the dark... But as Aler had not put on the lights and as it was too dark to see the road at that high speed, I was forced to put on the lights. That was the final signal for the attackers to shoot at me, hundreds of bullets and rocket flew all over the place, all around my car. The attackers had been alerted by Aler's car and when I reached the open space they were all ready... The airstrip was suddenly lit up by the stream of bullets and grenades; they passed so near that we could not make out if we were hit or not. Sometimes, it seemed that we were hit but nobody knew if it was because of a rocket or just because of some obstacle on the way. Once I could distinguish a metallic noise just above my head This was the time to put my head down, on the knees of Arop who sat beside me; my foot pressed the accelerator down and made the car jumping like an angry donkey. Of course, I could not see what happened behind my seat, but later on I learned that there was some fighting between the children and the women, the latter desperately trying to lie under the children whom they pushed away... It took us only some seconds to cross the airstrip (300 metres), and though we felt the terrible speed of our car, it seemed endless. Fortunately, that invisible army in the riverbed trying to hunt us down had no time for really aiming, they were just emptying whatever they had in their guns, bazookas and mortars. Still under the bombardment of automatic fire, we reached the other side of the airstrip. There, our car almost overturned as I had driven right on one of those small hills near the village. Now I had to rise up my head and to try to bring the car back on its wheels... Somehow I managed, and somehow - by miracle - we did not fall into one of the many bomb-shelters bordering that side of the airstrip. When we were about to overturn, some of the children cried, but the noise of the gunfire covered everything. I looked for Aler and saw the lights of his breaks, already quite far away from me. But at least I knew now where the road was; I changed my direction and followed Aler's car, as fast as I could... Now, I became more conscious again of what happened around me, but found myself alive in the middle of a black nightmare, full of shelling and fire, of terrible fears for the safety of those left behind and for all those running towards the river Oboth... The horror started, there was no bunker anymore for frightening thoughts and sad feelings of despair: I felt that we were moving moving through a nightmare without limits towards a reality without issue. As if I was blind, I drove through masses of people running towards the river, most of them carrying children and luggage, some of them trying to keep their flocks of goats together. Driving slowly, I hoped to see the light of the car of Sangeeta, Anne and the three Kenyan drivers. Somebody in the car had told me that their car was following, but nobody came. The further we went into the night, the bigger grew the certainty that those left behind could impossibly have had the same unbelievable chance than we had. If it was really true that they had followed me, then the car had certainly been hit... I was scared of what may have happened, and immediately started to ask myself what I could have done better. Should I have taken Sangeeta and Anne in my car and left the Kenyan drivers in the other one? But besides of the fact that it may have been better to die together, there was certainly no obvious advantage to sit in my car. Aler had probably been the best man to drive away the girls, but he was the one to save the other car. There had not

been any time to think about such problems, all had gone so fast. And then I thought how ashamed I would have felt if I had driven away with our delegates alone, leaving Kenyans and Sudanese behind. Thus transporting the darkest of all thoughts, I continued to follow Aler's car through the masses of refugees... There were thousands of them, more I possibly ever saw in Pochalla. And people had pretended that nobody was left in Pochalla!

I told Aler that we would stop as soon as we would find a suitable place. Arop insisted that we should return to Pochalla to look after our people there, but the brave Aler rejected, pointing at the sky still lightened by fire. We continued without saying a single word. Everything was covered by human beings, adults, children, goats and cattle, it was like driving through a man sea. We reached the Oboth-river and crossed it in a hurry, under great difficulties because of all the people in the water. On the other side of the river we could feel in safety, but as we stopped, refugees tried to enter the car. Aler was threatened and became suddenly very nervous, urging me to move on immediately. We continued our way through the masses of refugees, for minutes which seemed like hours. Finally, after 20km or so, we found the road empty of people and decided to stop. But as soon as we had stopped, people appeared out of the bush and came like bees on us. One of them was a war-wounded carried by two soldiers, and there were also two or three amputees. We took these people into our car, discovering later that the two soldiers had also entered the car. We stopped and told the soldiers to go out, and they accepted without even trying to appeal to our feelings, apparently happy enough to see their friend leaving for safety. At that moment, I could make a radio-contact and inform Lokichokio and Nairobi about what had happened to us, and what perhaps had happened to those staying behind in Pochalla. Then, we continued, silently as before. A number of children and adults were moving along, hanging on the racket of the car; after a while, I decided to stop and told Aler to throw all the chairs and tables (which were still in the car since the time of my departure from Gorkuoo) out of the car and to let the people climb in. Then we continued to drive through the empty night, silent, lonely and sad.

We had no water with us (and of course no food either), and the next waterpoint was 120 km away from the Oboth-river... When, after some 50km, the car refused to move, a new catastrophe seemed to lie ahead: without water, we would never make it to the Raprap-river where we could find water... Luckily, Aler is an excellent mechanic. He checked the motor and discovered a huge hole in the radiator. A bullet had crossed the motor and found its way out through the radiator. It seemed hopeless, and all new attempts to start the car failed miserably. But Aler cut some cloth and put it into the hole. Relief was tremendous when the car decided to move again, and though we had to stop from time to time to refit the cloth, we finally reached the Khor Raprap, "the river of stones". It was already past midnight. We lie down on the ground without any cover. I thought I would not be able to find some sleep, but then I slept like a stone, up to one hour before dawn.

March 9, 1992, at Khor Raprap

In the early morning our nightmare finished: at the radio, we could hear the voices of Sangeeta and Anne. So they had not moved and were safe. They seemed to be unharmed and in a positive mood; I was sure that the worst was now over. Perhaps they could even be useful to the war-wounded? Speculations were now allowed, and it was possible to hope.

One thing was sure: Pochalla had been taken by the foreign forces. By some strange coincidence, the invading troops used a frequency which could be heard on our normal ICRC-frequency. They spoke in Tigrayan or Amharic, languages which of course none of us would have understood if Aler had not brought along his Ethiopian wife (and her sister): this is how we could understand the conversation of those involved in the attack on Pochalla. We got all types of information, learned for example the name of the commander (Makonen), the arrival of airplanes, the removal of our waterpumps to the military camp, the need of sparetires, the number of cars sent as reinforcement from Gambela (including information about the load such as ammunition, artillery, soldiers, rations etc.) and the confiscation of civil cars at Gambela sent to Pochalla for transporting the goods we had left in our warehouse... We even heard information about the stationing of 2 jet-fighters at Gambela, the arrival of Sudanese troops at Dembidolo in Ethiopia or the urgent need for alcoholic drinks at Pochalla... It was strange and somehow frightening to listen to all this foreign talk which had become for us a language of war; it was thrilling and yet not of a direct interest. Through our own channels we learned of the arrival of a Sudanese helicopter, discussions between Sangeeta and those military persons, - and finally of the transfer of our people to Khartoum.

At Khor Raprap, we were waiting for Isabel Schneider, the nurse, and John Maine, the Irish relief-delegate. We had planned to move back in direction of Pochalla in order to fetch war-wounded people from there, but before they even reached Khor Raprap, an SPLA-truck brought 37 war-wounded persons from Pochalla; when our team reached, the war-wounded were put on our truck and transported to Boma-hospital and from there to our hospital in Lokichokio; one of the wounded did not survive the transport.

After..

I spent another day at Khor Raprap. Isabel and John were expected to return in order to fetch more wounded persons, but when they reached it seemed too dangerous to move back northwards: we had got information that the foreign army had crossed the Oboth-river and was already moving southwards, "cleaning the whole area". We decided to return to Boma, our trucks transporting a great number of children and amputees.

Aler had succeeded in repairing the car with the perforated radiator to such an extent that it could be driven not only up to Boma but even up to Lokichokio. We

reached Boma in the afternoon and met there with other ICRC-delegates. There we learned that Sangeeta, Anne and the Kenyan drivers were well in Khartoum, accused of having entered the Sudan without a visa... But that story is told by themselves.

For me, the incident in Pochalla ended with my arrival in Boma. I think I was lucky to be forced to concentrate immediately on another big problem: the movement of the 12'000 unaccompanied children (UC) from Pakok to Narus. There was no time left for thinking about the past, the future appeared to be almost as thrilling.

Yet, the problem of all the refugees was left behind, along the roads leading to Po-Okelo and Pibor, to Akobo and to Pakok and Boma. At the moment, we could not do anything for them, but at least we could provide some help to the SRRRA which returned to the area South of Pochalla and returned several times with more war-wounded people and children. From Boma, the war-wounded, the sick and disabled were transported by us to Kapoeta or to Lokichokio.

Epilogue...

Out of the 220 children who had been waiting for transport to Kapoeta because they were sick or too weak for walking, 24 children remained in Pochalla after the attack; all the others had fled. These children were, according to information from Khartoum "found in cages" (in fact they probably hid themselves in a tukul) and brought to Khartoum. 18 of them were visited by the Sudanese Red Crescent, the other ones apparently not belonging to this group of children.

The attack on Pochalla had come as a surprise, and it took some time until we understood the reason behind it: apparently, the attack was basically organized for getting hold of the 10'000 children "of Gorkuoo". One can imagine (and understand) the perplexity and the fury of the Sudanese Government when they "discovered" that Gorkuoo was already empty, that they had come too late... Only this fury explains the reaction of the Government in Khartoum when accusing the ICRC of all possible "crimes", the worst and the most absurd being that the ICRC is "recruiting children for the SPLA". Fortunately, the great majority of the children survived, and hopefully one of them will write their history without distorting the truth.

PS. Note that the ICRC headquarters in Nairobi had been informed about the movement of troops towards Pochalla; that is why they ordered the delegate Thomas Zeindl and the medical doctor Ben in such an absolute tune to leave Pochalla immediately. But why then leave the nurse and the veterinary officer, both girls, behind (and me as well?). It had been easy to send us for a while to Boma...

Between Boma and Kapoeta, five children died: one was eaten by a crocodile, four were shot dead by Toposas at Magoth.

The officer who had told us to leave was in fact our radio-operator Lagos (who had transformed himself into an officer...). He was killed. A few of our watchmen died of thirst while trying to reach Khor Raprap.

