

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

The memories of Napoleon, a boy from the Southern Sudan

by Kwacakworo
[© Conradin Perner]

Readers who are in a position and who would like to contribute to the education of the so-called "ICRC-children" in general and to Napoleon's future education in particular may do so through "Conradin Perner, c/o Credit Swiss, CH-7270 Davos-Platz, Switzerland, Account Nr. 24626-00 ".

[Note : Thanks to this story, Napoleon has succeeded to complete his education. Other children are waiting to get a similar chance. A new account has been opened:
Graubündner Kantonalbank Davos,
CK 269.876.501 Rubrik "Sudanese children".]

Lokichokio, May / June 1992

Introduction

In the evening of May 28, 1992, almost exactly one year after they had reached Gorkuoo from Ethiopia, twelve thousand children left Nurus, a small Toposa-village in Southern Sudan, in direction of Lokichokio in North-Western Turkanaland. They were fleeing from the military forces of the Sudanese Government which had just captured Kapoeta (at the time one of the few remaining strongholds of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)), to the nearest borderpost in Kenya. Some of the children managed to walk the 45 km up to Lokichokio during one single night, others reached safety after two days only while some thousand of weak, disabled or war-wounded persons were rescued by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at Nagapal on the Sudanese/Kenyan border, given water and food and finally brought to Lokichokio. There, the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) directed the children and the other 10'000 refugees to an empty space at the outskirts of the village; but it was only after five days that the tired refugees received their first food.

The fate of these children is indeed a dramatic one: escaping the horrors or the consequences of the nine-years-old civil war, they had all walked incredibly long distances under extremely difficult circumstances, witnessing human suffering and death wherever they went: when reaching Lokichokio, all of them had covered a distance of at least 1200 kilometres on foot, one quarter of them even more than 1800 kilometres, - and Lokichokio will certainly not be the last station in the children's itinerary towards peace. Some of the children were as young as eight, others fourteen or fifteen, but they all came to have one thing in common: they were all so-called unaccompanied children (UC), children who had either lost their parents or at least the physical contact with them (most of the children would not know), or were children sent by relatives to a place far away from the war, a place where children could find safety, get food and receive some rudimentary schooling; they united in the refugee-camps put up by the UNHCR in Itang, Pinyudo and Dima in Ethiopia and stayed there until the war (this time the one in Ethiopia) forced them once more to flee.

This special category of unaccompanied children became of a general public interest, in particular after the fall of the Mengistu-regime in June 1991 when the children had to flee from Ethiopia back to the Sudan: ten thousand of them ran to Pochalla where they were settled in the small Anyuak village of Gorkuoo on the Akobo-river (which makes the border between Ethiopia and the Sudan). With the influx of journalists, there were a lot of speculations about the "true" function of the "boarding-schools" in which the children were staying: irritating was the fact that only boys but no girls were sleeping there (daughters of the teachers excepted), and the most convenient explanation found by journalists was that the school was in reality a military training-camp

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

for "future Sudanese rebels". The more the Sudanese Liberation- movement tried to deny the fact that the children were physically under their protection, the supervision and thus also under the ideological and spiritual influence of their representatives, the less people could believe them when they were explained that the movement's only aim with the children was to give them a proper education. The feeling that somebody *must* be hiding something prevailed and seemed to prevent journalist from taking a more sober and less biased view. When dissident SPLA-members later on stated that many of the children were in fact not "real" refugees but had been sent to Ethiopia by their parents, chiefs or military leaders, all the credibility of the children's "care-takers" seemed to have vanished; suspicion of a military abuse of the children almost grew to certainty.

At the time, anyway, nobody ask such simple questions as why it should be necessary to make such small children walk such long and dangerous distances just for getting military training, why such a thing would not have been easier inside the Sudan far away from the public eye (in Ethiopia, the boarding-schools were under the protection of the UNHCR and received help from the Swedish Rädde Barnen-Save the Children Fund) and why it should be useful to train children at such a young age before they possibly could be of any military use. Nobody asked let alone worried about all the other children who were already engaged in the army, performing quite publicly military duties inside the Sudan (for example along the road used by all journalists moving to Kapoeta), and none of the critics wondered why the Geneva Conventions should still accept that minors above fifteen are allowed to join military service. And nobody, of course, asked questions about education, enquired how Sudanese schools had functioned in the South before the present war (because of the long distances, boys had to live in boarding-schools, the girls of the place joining them during day-time) or thought about the fact that almost all Sudanese children shall be without any scholar education at the time when peace will have come. While all modern nations give highest priority to education, such concern apparently should not prevail in a country which is still in war. But education *is* a nation's future life, absolutely vital for its survival! And who would not hope that the war would give place to a time of peace, a time when other than just military qualities are required?!

Critics could rather have enquired about the children's origin and tribal identities and asked why most of the children belong to a certain tribal group (Bor, Kongor and Ler) and not to others: for as the future "elite" of Southern Sudanese is likely to be found amongst these children, other tribal groups will be handicapped right from the beginning on their way to the future and may never be able to harvest the fruits of their present suffering. Indeed, keeping one part of the country ignorant while educating the other one has been one of the most common political tactics used by the Anglo-Egyptian as well as by all following governments when trying to keep the non-educated, "stupid" part of the country under their control. *If* such were the intentions of the leaders of the SPLM, it would certainly be worse than any military training, for while the latter alternative ends with the civil war, the former will pave the way to the next one.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

One can wonder why the "unaccompanied children" gained such a popularity while other problems of the Southern Sudan (natural calamities, bombing and political events) did get little public attention. The answer may well be that the children served the interests of everybody, or, in more drastic terms, that *everybody could abuse them for the own goals*: in first hand naturally the Rebel-movement itself which wants the children to be a part of their own future political structure, but then especially all those fighting the SPLA (in particular the Islamic Government in the Northern Sudan) who could use the children as an easy and popular argument not only against the rebel-movement itself but even against those international agencies (like the ICRC) which were protecting them; the numerous journalists who invaded the children's place came mainly to make their own profit of hastily written papers and beautiful photos of human misery, quite disappointed once the children (at the end of 1991) became healthy and thus lost their attraction for the medias. Lastly, even the various help-organisations found the children to be a perfect argument for convincing hesitant sponsors for providing help; the suffering of common people is indeed less paying than the one of innocent children.

In all the discussions about the children, the children themselves seemed to be completely forgotten. It was as if they did only exist as useful tools in the hands of politicians and journalists - but not as human beings, fragile and lonely ones as they were. There was really not great effort made to *imagine* the suffering of those concerned by this particular part of recent Sudanese history, the *tragedy* through which the children had passed through; few were the visitors approaching the children with sympathy rather than with suspicion and futile questions.

In Gorkuoo (and later, when the children were moved by the SPLM to an area which was thought to be safer) the ICRC assisted the children with food and shelter-material, assuring their protection from any possible abuse by the army. Accused of "feeding future rebels", the ICRC found the only possibly valid argument: "for us", the Delegate General explained, *"these children are nothing but children, particularly vulnerable human beings in greatest need of our protection"*. Whoever knows the history of the children would certainly agree and hope that such philosophy will guide all those who will be in future care of the children.

The following *annex* to this short introduction contains the story of a young Sudanese boy when moving from the Sudan to the Ethiopian refugee-camps and back to his home. It should be understood as a small contribution to the discussion of the problem of the "unaccompanied children", a *document* which is only of a purely human interest; it is not meant as an "argument" for or against any of the above mentioned theories about the "real" reason for the existence of these minors. It is a single, an individual case, but certainly not exceptional. And it speaks for itself.

At the time of the recording, the boy has reached the age of nineteen. The moment where he ends his story as an "unaccompanied minor" appears to be a kind of "happy end". But since that moment, life has gone on, and so has the war. Napoelon's sufferings did not come to an end, well on the contrary: his

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

life as a young adult turned into a nightmare. But Napoleon passed through it and is now again living the life of a refugee - though this time in Kenya. His dream of getting a scholarship abroad seems more remote than ever.

Napoleon, the "hero" of the story, was lucky. He survived. He went to school and learned English. And because his mother's sister had happened to marry an important Doctor working in the Sudan, he could even manage to learn how to drive and got an (unpaid) job. And thanks to these very special circumstances (and last but not least because of his extremely pleasant character) he could return home and see his mother (but not his father who was absent: the "father" mentioned in the story is in fact just a "brother" to his real father). The minors presently in the refugee-camp in Lokichokio were less fortunate and are still far away from home. They can only hope that they will not have to wait as long as Napoleon did before returning home.

Indeed, compared to other children, Napoleon was lucky. He left his village because of the terror of the war, but he was not separated from his parents by bombing or other events - like many, probably most of the UC in Lokichokio. And the return by Napoleon to the Sudan and his village was somehow peaceful, not to be compared, in any case, to the horrible plight of the children presently in Lokichokio: those had not only to flee from the war-torn Sudan but had also were forced by the events to ran from Ethiopia back to the Sudan before walking 500 km to Narus and finally fleeing to Kenya, - without ever seeing any end to their suffering. But the story of Napoleon may help us to imagine the plight of others, of children as well as of all the adult refugees.

The story is related in the English of Napoleon, an English I tried to reproduce as literally as possible. The story moves like a film, fast, without much interruption. The reader may be tempted to go through the story in the same fast manner. He should not do so, should wait until the words grow from within, until they take space and become reality: for behind each word stands a whole landscape, of nature, of human life, of the damage done to both of them. Napoleon does not make his story a sentimental one, he just relates facts and moments, and then goes on in relating... There is not much more he can do, the present leaves little space for crying about the past. Napoleon knows that others had it worse. But he does not compare, and he does not complain. He leaves his story to the reader, without comment.

Kwacakworo

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

Seven Early Years in the Life of Napoleon



Memories from Napoleon Adok Gai Budice Jok,
a young boy from the Southern Sudan

Recalled to Kwacakworo,
in May 1992

© Conrađin Perner, Lokichokio 1992

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

Kwacakworo:

Napoleon, I would like you to recall the time when you left your village...

Napoleon:

Mmm, first of all, yes, I suppose it was - December, ya, in December. We were at home in our village since the town was full of fighting. Ah, we were almost staying like animals, completely naked, mmh, I was still so small, spend all my time in the village playing with my friends...

Kwacakworo:

Where is that town?

Napoleon:

In Yirol-village, ah, I was in that village which is six kilometers away from Yirol, Panikal. Ah, Panikal, yes, in Western Yirol. Mmm.

Eeh, there was no school and I was just looking after goats and all these things. Now completely forget about schooling, there was no school, no-where, everything was just messed up. The question of my family-life, mmh, you see my father is not educated, and then one of my... you see, nobody in my family is educated. I was the only one there, my older brother had gone to Khartoum... So I thought I have to go with all these people... I didn't know where this refugee-camp was, and I did not know about Ethiopia. Okay, so my father was in his village, he doesn't know also where all these people go. We just heard that they are going to a place where people eat free of charge, get to the school free of charge, with dressing free of charge, get medicine free of charge... Mmh, this was the way we were hearing that there is a refugee-camp in Ethiopia. Ah, we just heard it like that.

"I think I will better go there now", I told my father, but he said that he had got a lot of information that people were dying on the road with hunger and no water: "So you might die there. You cannot go, you are still too small to go", he said. So we slept two more days when the lady of our neighbour was leaving to that camp. Her husband had got killed during the fighting and now nobody was responsible for her anymore. So she just left. Mmm.

It was, yaah, after she had left, after one day... The next day I took off - with no information to anybody, not even to my father. I had liked to tell him that I had nothing to do in this village but better looked for a school, but he would have told me that they were not happy about my leaving. So I just took off without information. That day they forgot that I loved them!

Kwacakworo:

So you just left, without telling them?

Napoleon:

I did not want to tell them anything, because they were refusing what I wanted. Yaah. So I we-e-e-nt... It was the time when many people were walking along the road, it was the moving of so many, but those people did not move so fast, thinking it was only two days walking around our area...

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

I was running the whole day, but during the night I could not walk because of any ani-ani-animals in the bush, there are no houses there, I was just walking beside to the Nile. Mmm, beside of Shambe, ah, ah, ah, to the South of Shambe, I was just walking there... Because you don't go through Shambe - the boatmen can catch you there!

So I slept the night, or rather I, I, I climb up on a tree to see and then on another, a bigger tree where I could not crash, sitting on one branch, so I was sitting there but did not sleep the whole night, I am afraid, I say if I sleep something may come and pull me down (he laughs) or I will fall. So, anyway, I just go down in the early morning and start walking slowly, looking around. When looking I see the animals which I have only seen in the picture but never met alive, and I kept away. Mmm, then I saw some animals which were looking like... it was the animal I knew from the pictures, the wild animal like hyena. I saw the hyenas and I know that the hyena is eating some people, tired people. So I started to go very fast until the sun comes up at six o'clock and then I continued to run, the whole day...

Kwacakworo:

Where you alone?

Napoleon:

Yes, I was alone, I never met with people that day, but I said today I will meet with people, because people don't walk during daytime, they just sit under a tree because of all the planes that are moving. Mmm. As the government's planes are moving, they can see the exodus of people and can bomb. People don't move during daytime, they sit very close at one place, together under the trees.

So I was running the whole day up to about noon. I found people, just the end of the people. They were many thousands, all those from Southern Bhar.. from Northern, ah from Northern Bhar-el-Ghazal, mmmh, down to Rumbek and all these places. People were queuing, they were combined together, mmh, and they were all moving.

Kwacakworo:

What did you eat?

Napoleon:

That day I did not eat. I was just running, I had nothing, I had not even clothes to wear. So I just run. I came to these people. They were asking "How did you reach here? You went through all these animals" and what more... "I have no water you see", I said, "for a whole day I am without water, since I left this morning". And they gave me some water to drink. Then I asked for that woman, I knew her name, - she was called Auer. They said "you just go there you will find her ahead, there in the middle of the people." Mmm.

I go faster and faster to meet her. She was afraid to see me, asked "How do you come here now, is your father aware of this?" I told her "No, because they don't want me to come". She said "Why did you come then and leave your father with a few things and nobody to care for...". I tell them "No, I just want to go, at home we are

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

just sitting, even now there is bombing every day and even our calves are bombed, they don't, don't do anything because of this and there is no food, nobody is cultivating, no time for it, people are running and hiding because the plane is coming to bomb, that's why people are running and hiding. So I better go and stay with you and go where you are going - I will find food from those people." She said "Okay, you come there is no problem, you will be with my two children". Yeah, one of the children was still very small, she was carrying it, and the other one, the first-born, was also small. We hold our hands together, she is holding her boy's hand and then I hold his other hand and then we are moving.

At about six o'clock people start moving along the Nile - moving moving moving the whole night whole night and by the river; there we find a place which had been completely mined up by the governmental forces, there were mines - but at that time we don't know what is a mine, just blowing somebody off and then people start running and there is blood everywhere. We don't know the reality, we thought those people had been just bombed by bombs and we don't know that it was because of mines. After that people just ran like that, if you got wounded there is nobody to take you up, we just ran holding our hands tight each other like this... I hold the child, the hand of her child and she holds the hand of her child and we run together, we run this side we run this side...

Some people just got eeh small wounds or broke the leg or break the hand. If you broke your hand you were lucky you could just go, mmh, you are okay, just carrying your hand or somebody is just very brave, you, mmh, no-body is caring, everybody is running, running until you can get out of that place.

Kwacakworo:

Where was that place?

Napoleon:

That was even almost near to the Nile, as we had almost reached the Nile.

Kwacakworo:

Near Shambe or..?

Napoleon:

Yeah, no, we are - yes, to the South-North of Shambe, Shambe lies in the North, the South Shambe is this side, mmh, close to Bor, so we were close to the riverside. When we get to the riverside people sit there because they want to cross the Nile. It is many people and they all don't want to be cut off. There were small boats belonging to some people. You have to have something, everybody has to pay for these boat-people. There were ah too much ah ah about hundred of these canoes, but these people want money, mmh, they move secretly by night, not during daytime.

Mmm, so many people struggle at night in the Nile crossing and everyone and every person has to pay. There were thousands of people, even a child has to pay for crossing, and they don't let you into the canoe before you have paid. So this woman, she said "Now we don't have money, what shall we do?". Then she said "alright", she was having two blankets, and one man agreed to give her money, so she gave him one blanket, the blanket which had covered me and her son. Mmm. So we gave him one blanket and kept the other one for covering her and the small child.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So we get into the canoe and we spent twelve hours inside.. inside the canoe, aah, yes twelve hours, starting at six o'clock in the early evening and until six o'clock next morning In that canoe, in the boat crossing the Nile you can't even sit and then you feel that all your body is paining and then you don't feel anything and it is so cold and so many mosquitoes.

Mmmh, even her child that time when we crossed, her child fell sick also, because of mosq...bites of mosquito. You could not protect yourself, the mosquito then it is sitting everywhere, until you have crossed to the other side.

On the other side, we got to a place called Maar between Kongor and Manding, mmh, that place was called Maar. So we wait there, we spent two days, we used to have nothing to eat so she had to make use of her clothes for buying food. So more people came, some people get some eating food and some don't, nobody cares, people start to die of hunger. People who arrive start selling their things, clothes, bed sheets, padlocks, shoes, - they have to sell everything to the people staying there. And then some people never reached there, some young men and women, especially women and children, they could not make it to that place. Mmm.

Yeah, then we people, after the people had come across during about seven days, we start again to move from Maar. We went, were walking in direction of Kongor, and after five hours we reached Kongor. That time we were walking during daytime. Everybody sits down there in Kongor and cooks what you have and... And from Kongor at night we moved again to to Duk, mmh, Duk ah Duk Fadiet, and we reached Duk Fadiet at about 12 o'clock. We sleep there, spend there the night, and also the tribe called Nuer was so wild there, was fighting with the SPLA, so and was also fighting the Dinka. They wait for everybody who is not a Nuer, they fight them, the joined with the Arabs and make the "militia", mh, make the ambush...

Kwacakworo:

Was this the so-called Anyanya-Two?

Napoleon:

Yes, that were the Anyanya-Two. Mmh, we slept there, we slept there for three days and then, on the fourth day we were leaving. By night. That was more sure, for now everything got very close... We started from the bush at about one o'clock, and somebody gave us information that it would be very dangerous now. He said "I will take you, you people, for this place is remote and dangerous, when you go from this place to Akobo, you will you will you will be lucky if you will be still alive, you will have done very well. But I think you are going to be safe anyway, I am with you". He was a chief or what, we don't know anyway, and everybody paid him: "ten pounds, ten pounds, ten pounds", - that is a lot of money. So we gave him some clothes we give everything to his family and he has his guard also about seven persons with guns also. Some were in front and some were behind us, guarding us, the people were moving moving moving slowly slowly all night in one line and all quiet - no somebody was smoking no somebody vomiting oh or let the child cry if you let the child to make noise to cry you can be beaten by some other people. Or you can just be killed because you are going to cause a lot of problems, - so people are moving secretly.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

And then, when we were trying to come near to Waat so at night we fell in an ambush with the Militia after we were sitting down and everybody was quietly drinking water. People were told to sleep but don't remove your luggage. Sleep, we just sleep, feet remove your feet, put something on all luggage which is shining, so we just put our bags down. This woman was around she was covered with a blanket because she had her money in that blanket, yeah, she had not put the money in her bag. So she covered us with her blanket as we were sitting, it was a big blanket so we were just sitting and then I fell asleep... Mmh, that lady says she was awake, but everybody is sleeping, its past midnight, almost to become morning, around what, eh, three o'clock, when we just heard the firing off the guns from the other side in front of us, "purr-rrr-rr-rrr rrr", and people start to run, just leave your things and run. So this man said "Leave your things and run to the side of the North", - he was talking in Dinka language. "Leave your things and run to the side of the North...", - so everybody left his things and runs, and all this was planned by him that we should leave all our things, yeah. So we leave all things, we run and she went up and she hold me in her hand and she was wearing her blanket and we all run with her. We lost, we left the bag, we left everything, everybody lost everything, we were all squeezed, running about until five o'clock. Then people stopped and some other elder man who knew about things (actually there were some educated people amongst us) and knows the map and everything said "Now we don't run like this, if we run like this we are going to run into another problem. We just decide to do what? Now we lost everything, and we can't get back to go and collect it." Mmm, we are saying that now people are going to lose everything. We stop and we are waiting, waiting for them to show us the way we should follow, because now we had run away from the road, we had run into another direction, the road was half an hour away, it was behind us, we had left it already. The shooting had finished and the outcome of that fight was that in the morning five hundred persons were missing. There are people missing, especially amongst women and children, ah and someone to say "Now you see five hundred are missing and now what shall we do? And now if we are doing like this we are going to miss other people - so if you have something (to drink) just cool down and then let's see which side to go and then we start of." Some people just sit under the trees, sit group group group, track, track, they don't even follow. We move, we go back to the road ahead, we follow now the right way. Mmh, we go and we find the road...

Then we were alone, that man had gone, he was planning how to get those things, food and so. We were moving we were moving and we found him at... - yeah, we reached another village of the Nuer... So there was... you find the house is empty, nobody and no school no what, not even time to find the house. Well, houses we found but there were no people, mmh, it is all quiet, just nobody.

After that we walked the whole day, and some other day, walking for three days across villages, but there was nobody, no cat no animal we find. It was it was a fighting there or what, we don't know - everybody just walks. These three days no food at all, eeh we some people decide to eat some lea... take some leaves and cook and try to eat it, some people know the leaves which can be eaten and they show them to the people: "this we used to eat in our tribe, you can eat it, people". Se we eat some leaves even which I never have eaten before (he laughs), mmh, and we we we were moving.

So here after seven days some people were dying..

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

(With a sad voice:) Another old man was just to follow us with his children, he has three children, is an old man very old; he used to be next to us always if we have to move. We used to have some talk by night. "God helps us to do this do this..." he used to say, just after we sit down and now he could not even take he could not even, and his boys were still very small they could not carry him. Then he just said "Now I am feeling not to move anymore - I am completely incapable, I cannot move..." I said: "ok now, what can we do? But we cannot leave him alone with these children, he will die". But he replies "No, go, go, there is no problem for me..." The children refuse and say "We shall not leave you here while you are still alive, we stay with you until you die". Some people decide to carry him, after one hour he was dead. We had to leave him there.

Also, many people staying near to us, as you leave you can see them, they just refuse to go - they sit down and they say "I cannot manage anymore to walk like this".

Ok, we then come to a place where we get water to drink, but you have nothing to carry water with, - extra water for the journey for you, there is no bucket no what; so you just fill your stomach and go ahead. It was very difficult, people try to carry water but find that there is no way. And then it happened that there was water to drink and that another man told us that this was the last water, everybody should carry water.

This woman she had some nylon eh a nylon plastic sheet, she was carrying it, she used to put some food there, some "acida", something "manilla", the maize which has been cooked ready for eating, just like that. She said "Now the problem of water is too bad ah, it is better that..., even if we don't have food it is better to have water. If we have now food but no water, - this is very difficult, we better lose one, we better pour this food out..." The food was so small, so I took some in my hand and that small child of her was wearing a small pocket and I put some of the food there. I say "even if I can't keep it for a long time, I cannot leave the food while we are seeing it". Other people who had seen it just came and asked "Why? Don't pour it away, please give it to us, give it to us". So some people were just taking it, they took it.

And some people ask her "Why do you pour the food out now you don't even know where we are going". She said "okay, there is the problem of water and food, and it is better to have water and no food." She put water in her nylon and it had to be carried carefully, a small puncture and every-thing can leak out. She filled it with water and was carrying it herself, and she covered it with her blanket.

So people walk people walk people walk all day whole night, up to morning, and there was nothing no tree no what. They said "if the Arabs find us here or the Militia they can finish us for here there is nothing and you can-not run anywhere and we are many. So everybody keeps on walking even in the morning people still keep walking until nine o'clock, it was still cold a bit when we reached a place without any water, we were completely dry since we left yesterday, - and we continued walking...

Then she said "Now you take care, don't don't move around anymore, just stay in one place." We stay in one place quiet and wait for what we shall do. "Ah you we we don't go in front, in front we may meet with some people and problems can arise there, so we just move in the middle, we don't stay in front, we don't stay behind, we just keep in the middle!" We were just walking like that, up to nine o'clock when

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

people stopped and some people said that they are tired now: "No, I am not going on like that, take my things, I'll walk back, I don't have anything, I have to go back". Ah, some people start crying: "Water! water! water..! Nobody has got water? I am dying!". Nobody has water. The people just talk like that, nobody has water, they used to cry for water like that like that until eleven o'clock. It was so dangerous.

Most of the people now were asking for water, water, water... After twelve o'clock or so they just came to check people, asking you "Where is the water, where is the water?". If you don't give your water they want to fight you, and you don't have water also... So you can just you can just fall down, completely dry. At that time I don't know how is a dead body alike, but there, I see it fall and remaining for death. "This is a very dangerous time now we are even we are in trouble now, look at these people they are all dead..." the wo-man said. I asked "Eeh, no, how can these people be dead they were just talking now!?". She said "No, they are dead because of water - you see how the mouth is dry, so you just keep quiet and don't talk"... I tell her "okay, we have water here why don't we give them?", but she said "No, don't say this, if somebody hears you they will come and we shall be dead like those; and they will consume the water and still it will not be enough for them. This this one is for us, - don't don't try to make a mistake". So that woman warned me to keep off.

I saw lots of people die, I almost completely lost my morale, I ask myself "these people now are they dead or are they just sleeping and take a rest?" and I said "How is it that people who are dead are as if they were living?" The people in front were eating under a tree, but then we find them dead already, nobody is alive under the tree... Finally I ask why these people are dead there and they say that "these people are dead because they had no water". After that I need water even myself and say "Now I got a problem of water as well. Let me drink", but she replied "No you cannot drink here in the middle of the people." We, we we went out fifty meters from the road and we sit under a tree, we were just talking so she gave me water to drink a bit; I want to drink the whole of it, but she stopped me: "Eh no! no! no! don't take too much of this, the way is still..." "Okay okay", I said, and she gave to her son as well and he tried to do the same thing as me, and she told him "No, no, don't drink like this, we don't know what is in front of us, let's go and die somewhere but not now, I know we are going to die but not yet not yet..." I said "If we are going to die, why are we not going back?" "Ah no, now we are in a dangerous place", she said, and then she drank also, kept her head down and we go, go go. We find the same people, behind us are many, many more people, we go up to two o'clock and then we sit under a tree, and most of the people sit under one tree. So that tree could not cover many people so some people start moving again, telling us "Now we are not going to sit like this in the sun, we cannot sit somewhere where there is nothing".

Now the people were sitting under the tree and there is no water there and the the sun is still getting hot and it is about three o'clock. And it is also to get evening. She said "Let's walk until it becomes dark, if it is if it is night, eh, nobody will ask for water, it is cool then". It is cold then, actually, we don't have problems of water if it is cold. So she was telling us to move on. "Let's these people keep going", she said, and she told the people "if you sit too much you are going t.. you cannot get up and you cannot get down. Some few people, about three hundred were moving ahead, but most of them were behind, and some of them were sitting sleeping lying down.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So from there we start, we continue moving, but still we leave these people lying down, ah, we were moving, were following these three hundred people ahead of us. We walk, aah, we slept we slept somewhere nobody knows where we tried to sleep but we could not find sleep - this lady she tried to tell us "Don't, eh, if we now fall asleep... No we have to follow these people until we catch up with them; we shall sit where they will sit". Mmh, but most of the people were still behind. Then she told me "Don't worry, let's keep going on, let's keep following them". I said "Why? what about those people which we left behind lying down, why don't we wait for them. Then we can go, I am tired now". She said "You, there is no problem, they will come but don't talk about them now. These people will not have problems of water. The problem of water is, the problem of water was there when it was daytime, when it was hot - that's when we get water-problems. But now it is dark and like this we don't get these problems of water. We don't need to wait. Let's follow those people ahead of us!"

So we came, we came, we reach and we met those people. So we went until we met with those people ahead and we got another old man, at about 4 o'clock in the morning. That old man told us "Now let's keep moving". So we started to find some animals around us and this was very okay with the old man who said "well, last time we were in the desert and we found some animals, the water should be near somewhere. So let's keep on moving, we shall find water very soon". Ah, so we kept on moving, we just listened to him as he was talking to the other people ahead of us. We move, we move and even the people who were behind some of them had come but some were still behind and some and some were left there, ..sleeping down there. So I thought these people will reach us but I don't know whether they were already dead when they were lying there. I had not seen a dead body before.

So we reached at about 8 o'clock, we came to a place where there were so many birds under the trees, and we found a small pool without water. The water had dried up just two days ago. Then this old man told us "This is not the only water here, the animals cannot stay here for this water, there must be some more around, let's keep moving until we reach somewhere." And then we reached somewhere, at about nine thirty, we just reached a place with water in the green green grass, you see.

So we just had reached at a moment when nobody expected that we were going to get water anymore, we knew that we were going to die here because we did not know where we should go anymore. So we came to that place and we reached the water. Some people threw themselves straight-away into the water because since yesterday they had not got anything to drink. Even us we had only got a very small quantity, just what was in that small plastic sheet. But this was actually something, at least we had had this small plastic-sheet, at least some water though it was only very little.

When that lady reached with us there, I wanted to throw myself into the water, because I, I cannot even, I don't have even ah - how do you call it - I cannot even feel wet and it is the hot season. Mm. See, I came, we walked down, I went to the water, I tried to go into the water when this lady just slapped me and also clapped her small son. Then she told us "Don't go into this water this water now it is going to bring us death if you threw yourself inside like that". So I told her "okay but what what now I am very thirsty, let me go and take some water first and then we can talk". But she said "You just sit down here, I shall bring it".

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

Then she went and she brings water, but instead of giving it to us for drinking she just poured the water on our heads and into our faces, and then I even try to put my head like this (he laughs) in order to catch some drops of water running from my head. So I became annoyed and ask her "why do you pour it on us, just give us to drink!", and I try to grasp some with my hand and even her boy starts running back to the waterplace. And other people are starting to fight, and some people throw themselves into the water and remain lying there, drinking until their stomach is completely full of water, and then just remain lying inside there.

Now, this old man starts pulling out the people from the water, and now I understood that our woman is good because she is giving us water but just pouring it on our heads, because the man says that somebody who is near death because of thirst should not drink before there is water on his body. So this old man talking like that, saying "Don't allow them to drink, put water on their body and then let them drink". And then he poured water on our body, and once we were wet I tried to fetch water by my feet but she said "I bring you water" and she brought water, a little bit, and said "you drink". She gave first to me and then to her son, and we drink and we get a little bit okay but we were still thirsty because the whole day we hadn't got much water. But she would not allow us to drink more.

After we had stayed about thirty minutes, the rest of the people came out of the water but some people were still lying down inside. So that man said "Look, this is now the mistake we did, now why we let these people die by throwing themselves into the water?" Now as these people were already dead, I ask the woman "are these people really dead now?". "Yes", she answered, "and this is why I stopped you from running into the water, you would have been dead like those people now!". I asked "How can somebody die just because of drinking?" and she said "No, they have thrown themselves while still hot and they drank too much of water and also floated in the water until the whole stomach got filled up with water, so their body was full of water everywhere, and so they killed themselves..."

She continued saying "Have now a look at these people, about three hundred moved with us and now there are about fifty left in that pool!", just lying there. So this old man talked to some younger guys, telling them "Pull them out, move them, remove them from there, or just dr... eh take them out and put them upside down so they may vomit some water". Mmm. So they try to carry them upside down until they get three men alive but the rest - they were about fifty - did not get alive. There were also plenty of children, but these children don't count, counted were only those adult members of the families who were finished and dead.

This old man, he is the only man who has any knowledge of those things, everybody else is just too tired of thinking of what could happen, he is the only man with some ideas. So this man told us "Now we have lost our brothers, around fifty people, how, how are we going to get them back? From now on, we have to be careful and control the water". There was another tree with some fruits, and the fruits are like bark. The man said "You see now we have to make plans for the other people who are still behind, let's try to keep the rest of the people alive, let's keep them safe, at least we don't need any more people dying like those ones, let's wait for those people". This he told everybody.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So there is this tree with the fruits, so we have to fetch the fruits and break them up and then make a hole and use them as containers; the fruits were dry, it was the dry season actually. Then we put clean water in these fruits, during the whole night, and some people helped the man. Even I felt now healthier and felt free, I don't feel hunger anymore after having got water while before I had been so hungry and felt lazy because of hunger, for we had no real food since many days now, since we poured our food out because of water. So we cut off the fruits and opened them and put the water in. The man said "Now let's wait, if we see them coming far away let them come nearer and then if you see somebody...". It is the old man advising the people. Mmh. Then he continues saying "Let's let's wait if they come around and if they come near to you just go but don't give them any water to drink. Pour the water over their body, and if that person follows you you run away with your container to the place of water; and you come and get some more and pour the water on others. When you have poured water on them, their body will be wet and the water will cool his heart, and he will come and drink, and he cannot die because he drinks too much, in fact he will not drink too much because his body has already cooled down a bit.

So we saw the people coming, very far away, then we were waiting were waiting we were waiting, then it becomes dark, we wait and we see the people we have to... they just stand because that place is high a bit and that place is the only place with the trees and also the birds and the animals are around the animals are around. So the man told us that "this place is not very far from Akobo, Akobo is to the right and we are moving to the desert to the left." "Now you wait, everybody should be in standby we wait until they come." Even myself I took a small container and I wait; but the woman said "No, you are not going, you are not yet strong enough, you cannot run, if you pour the water in somebody's face he can just go and grab you and it will it will..." "Let me try", I said.

So I took my container like the rest of the people, all of them carry their container. When the people are about fifty feet away, they start running to them, saying "Oh here is water, yes water"; when those people hear it, they come running (he laughs), run to the people to get water. But then you start pouring them the water into the face so they get all wet, and then you run away as fast you can, and they follow you, until they get to the water in the grass.

Even this woman tried to do it like this, she poured all her water on the people. The rest of the people just start running after us, and we have to run another way because they are many and we were few. Then people reach the water and drink, but some people did not come, some people had died on the way, fifty of them, it was said.

What we didn't know was that this pool, this pool was just a few kilometers away from the river, that the river is just near, that river coming from Akobo going to the border. That river called Akobo leading to Pochalla. Yes, the Akobo-river, the border between Sudan and Ethiopia. The old man said "Now let's wait for those people still behind, those who have come are only one quarter of our number, but the majority of them has not reached yet." Later I asked that lady if everybody has reached, but she said "No, a lot of them are dead. Last time when you saw them under the tree, do you think they were alive? They were all dead. That's why I had told you not to sit under the tree. If you have no water, this is the time when you become lazy. Mmm. For water is part of your blood." She was just talking like this. When the

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

remaining people had all arrived, we talked to them, saying "Now let's continue". but they said "No, no, now we want to take a rest, we all take a rest, drink water and sit here. And there are animals here as well!." But the old man told them "Here, this place is close to the Arabs, this is the area of Akobo, these people can do anything and kill us. Mmh. Let's get out of here!". Some people refused, but our lady, she kept listening whenever the old man was talking, and she said "Now if this old man wants to move it is because he knows better than other people, it is because he has ideas from old men. Mmmh, let's keep on going with him." So this man moved straight-away with all his family and fifty to seventy people sitting around him and listening to his words. He said "Now I am moving, whoever wants to come with me can come. And those who want to take a rest now can follow later". Quite a big number finally followed the man. We were walking in his group. Now everybody had got containers to carry water, before we had had nothing as we had left everything at the place where we got shot. But the way was only five kilometers. All of us we carry water, and the lady is also carrying her baby.

So we arrive and we reach the river. Now he sent people who know how to swim, saying "let's try", and they went they went they went and they find the river so deep and so full. He asked "Now, what can we do? We have to cross, yes, we must cross, for on the other side of the river we should not have so many problems anymore". And he continued saying "Let's go, if we... if we... - let's try". Then we had these guys who knew how to swim and the old man went to the river with them and they collect that green ah the green grass grass who uses to move with the water. They collect them they collect them they collect them, mmh, on the other side and then he calls for a rope and about three poles of a tree. People make a rope out of grass and then they tie the poles like this, one, one, and one in the middle and one behind. Then they knot it to that grass which is moving with the water I don't know how to call it in English, ambatch, yes, that one with the flowers, and we load the grass on the poles, and then the man said "Now this one will save the people who are not swimming, first of all we start with the children and then we bring we bring the women, and finally we take the men who are not swimming!"

So people sit down for they have to wait for a long time. Only about fifty or sixty people know how to swim, most of the people don't swim, including all the women, they don't swim. I asked the lady "what are we going to do now?". She said "actually this old man has a good idea", and she called her children, even the one she weaned and which is still drinking milk and said "let's put all the children there". So we sit, they collect us and they push that thing up to the edge of the river, just close to the outside; you can just walk on foot, you now hold the child and there are about sixty children on it. I thought that it will get a puncture and we would fell down. Then my this lady just started to cry, saying "now these children they are going to die, so if this thing may break down they will all drown in the water!!" Then it went to the side and some people were swimming around it and pushing it, mmh, pushing it... We crossed and crossed until we have crossed to the other side, and then everybody became happy - "that one was very good". The woman who was with us laughed on the other side of the river as she saw me there with the other two children. Then the boat was pushed back and the women were brought. Our lady was on the next one. We said "let's wait for the other people from our group before we move ahead."

After we had crossed and half of the people had crossed, only men were left and a few women, - there were just more people coming when suddenly bombs were

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

falling in the middle of the people and blow everything off, there is something pouring in the middle of the people, Bu-rr-rr-rr-rr, and then you see the strong human beings crashed like something! We start running, then this ah this old man shouted "No, don't start running, everybody should sit down by the stream, if you can, you lie down!" This was a challenge from the forces in Akobo, Akobo was near and the government had been informed by some Nuer that refugees tried to cross the border, so they tried to shell us. So they knew that there were people moving there.

They bombed a lot of people and some trees on the river, they bombed even those who cannot swim, some managed to cross and some were carried away by the water. When you see this: there are some women on that side and their children on this side of the river!

So most of them just jump into the water and try to swim, and then they went with the water the water is just too fast. When we had split there had been about hundred people on that side, now you can't see anybody, - nothing at all, and we were a very big group. We see just a few people running, just in any direction. Eh, most of the people just run to any direction, where they could manage to go.

Then we wait, and then we say "Now we just try to move because there are only a few who will come down here. So we go. The woman said "Now we are going to eh that camp I think we may we may get some food or something like that, you just keep up your morale because don't think we are not getting food, now we are close to the food. After we have crossed the border we shall not have any big problems anymore." I said "okay, no problem with me".

We move, we move, we just get the camp about twenty kilometers, we just walk for about three hours down when we get to the camp; and it was close to the Akobo-town, we were following the Akobo-river, mmh, inside the land. And she was telling us "Now let's sit down here but don't try to move away, this place is near to Akobo, we might get shelled... Shelling like the one which happened before, but don't run just keep somewhere."

You see, the ah those Ethiopians came and see the people; they were quite a number of them, about fifty, but they were army. Then they asked "Where are you coming from and so?" But nobody amongst them was speaking English, only the officer but not very much, or what, I don't know. The rest they try to talk to them and people try to explain to them.

Then they went to their radio-room and bring all their food out from there about five bags only which they had because they were only a small number. They said "Here we don't have any road. Our big town is Gambela but there is no road, we are feeding here by air, and by the Anyuak people. He said "No", this old man said "No, ah if you can get food for us and we get somebody who knows the way, we can proceed on foot". They said "Yes, we know you are we know you are going to the refugee-camps. The Sudanese refugee-camp is in Acua". At that time, nobody called it "Itang", they called it "Acua", - I don't know the meaning of "Acua", that place". Mmmh, they called it Acua. They started telling the people "There are many Sudanese there in the place called Acua, and they are given food by UN High Commission for Refugees". And then they say "We have radioed them that we have quite a number of refugees coming from Sudan and we must do something. Now it is their

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

responsibility." Then they opened a barrel and started cooking, they cooked all the five bags in that barrel. Cook them and put some oil and some salt, and they start saying "There is only a small ration for everybody, you pass you pass you pass and you put the food in your hand not in your plate. Nobody should have a plate in his hand and you go - like that". We give our hand and then we move and you sit and eat yours and sleep and eat yours.

And we slept by the night. They said "Here you are safe, no problem, the Sudan cannot come and shoot you here, and we are here as well, no problem" and they add "you stay here tomorrow, we are expecting something, at least from the UN, to you people".

We slept up to early morning, six thirty or so, the place was cold and it was a change for us. There were a lot of mosquitoes also. Eh, at seven thirty we heard the plane, so most of us were running away, thinking that they were coming to bomb us, we had heard that these people used to come and bomb people on the way.

The plane moving around everybody ran away but they told us "Don't run away this is the plane which comes from the place of your people". But the people were too much they were too many, they cannot get the information of what happens. So most of them ran into the river, some of them were taken by the river, then the plane starting to make air dropping. We were sitting under a tree, that lady was always close to the old man from whom she got information. She told me Don't move don't move just stay here", and I replied "okay, no problem". The plane dropped them just near to the airstrip, bundles of bags, fifty bags, fifty bags, fifty bags, fifty bags were tied together, mmh, they were big big bundles and some fell very near to the office. Some bundles fell apart, then these Ethiopian men went and collected them and removed them with their people and they bring them under a tree and they plan to distribute to everybody. Mmh.

So we get our ration, two and a half bag three kilos for each one. So after we got our food we slept for one night. The next morning they find for us two guys from the post with the guns, and they tell us "These people will show you the road up to up to the place where you can expect attacks and eh the UN will wait for you there with trucks and will transport you to the place, mmh, the place they know". Then we move straight-away, we are going by the river by the river; we were going by the river then when we reached when we reached to another place of the Anyuak we sit and we drink water, we went we reached another place and we slept there. We cooked all our food, we ate all our food we don't economize because we thought that we will get some more ahead. Then we left that place, were walking during the whole night, were walking all day, were walking then, we go and sit under another tree at another place of the Anyuak, a place which is not so far from Acua.

Then we sit under a tree, we didn't sit since yesterday but now we walked again the whole night, then we sit under a tree. Ah, then I fell asleep and that lady, when the other people left she also got up and went. I was left down there with some people some people who were lying down. So I was sitting, I slept I slept, when I woke up I feel hungry, I see quite a few people have gone, most of them had left only a small number, not much, were still there. So I thought about what will happen to us. And I thought about the things which happened to us in the desert when the people were lying down and died after. Then I s... I say that now if we are left here now I am

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

going to die with these people, and this lady she has left! Now what did this lady think, she said that I was left ah she said I was left because she had thought I had already left. She thought I should be in front, not behind, so she thought that I was ahead of her. She went with her boy, this boy of her he does not know anything that boy of her, but I was older.

So I woke up and then I feel hunger, I could not even move, so I went to a place nearby, there was a very nice tukul in this area... in that village and I went there and....and found some children there. I asked them for food but they said "No, we we don't have no food, we ate already and now have no food". So I just went by the door and look inside. Then there is somebody coming out of the tukul, it was - I don't know if it was an Anyuak chief, but he talked to me asking "Where are you from?" and I say "I am from the Atwot tribe. He asks "Why did you come here?" and I tell him that we got some problem in our place there, and we have no food no nothing. I told him about that lady, "she was going with me but now she has gone ahead, now I am behind, I don't have food and I cannot walk if I am hungry like this". Then he said "Do you know where you want to go?" and I said "no, I don't know, eh they were telling us that there is a place called Acua ah I don't know but I want to go and see if I reach there." He said "Okay, but if you are so hungry, we shall first give you some food. I shall give you food but then you move straight-away from here, after you have eaten". I say "Yes, if I eat now, then I can move..." And then he gave me some very white flour, some type of "ogali", white white very white not like "ogali", it was so clean and so white, too white, "acida" we call it in Arabic, I did not know "kwan" (the Anyuak term for it), in my language it is "cwi". This is my first time to eat very clean food like this since the time I left my mother. Mmmh. So I eat nobody says a word. I eat, it is so strong food I eat, I eat, I eat, and everybody asks me "Where are you from and now why you have left and left your parents and why are you still so small" and "where are you going to?". Mmmh, I eat it with some meat, dry meat; they make it also like a soup, only thicker. Anyway, I ate, it was so good, I could not even finish it. I cannot eat because my stomach is paining, this is the first time to take food like this, we just take water and not too much food, not too much, one hand is enough. Eh...

When I got my stomach full the Anyuak man said "Now, you will follow them. They left just for a while ago, now you just follow them, just take of yourself and run, on the way there is no problem". And then he gives me some maize, maize which has been cooked, and he makes some packet like this. He tied three packets like this and gave it to me, saying "you carry this just in case". And then he woke up the other people who were still sleeping and we went. So we went walking walking walking walking walking alo.. walking along the way, and then we got lost we loose all all the way and then we come back to that place...

Then the Anyuak chief tells me "Now you just take off and run by yourself". And he gives me his small boy to go with me, he becomes my small friend, he is an Anyuak, so black.... He tells his guy "You go with him, you know the way", and to me, he says "You go with my boy. You run to find that lady. She can't be too far". It was a small boy, black, so black this Anyuak boy. We could not understand each other, I am just he is just running ahead and I am following him, he is carrying a small spear - a very small spear, and an-another black dog is following him. It was an Anyuak boy. So we are running we are running we are running, if I get tired he would wait for me, just sitting somewhere under somewhere there. He said he

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

knows the place or what, and he said "Drink" and then he gave me water to drink, and then we run we run we run until we reached these people.

After we reach ah oh, we reached there and met first with about ten men, about a dozen men who were quite behind the others. One man says "that lady thought you were ahead of her, now she does not know where you are. Why do you make a mess like this?". So I tell the boy that "Now I got these people." He asked "Do you know them?". I said "Yes, I know them, now I have no problem". So the boy went back. Then I run, I leave these men there, I just run ahead, up to the middle of the people, until I reached these that lady. The woman said "I thought you were ahead of the people and now you come from behind, now, if you would if you would have got a problem who could have solved it since nobody even knew that you were behind!" And it was actually true, for those people who had been left with me behind never came, they lost the road and didn't come. They came only two weeks later, after many of them had died because of hunger.

Next morning, we slept at another place, and the following morning at about eight thirty we reached a place called Aboga, it is in Ethiopia anyway and on the river. Yes.

We sit there and wait and we find there a road and there is a good building; it was the first time for me to see these yellow people of Ethiopians. I asked quickly "What are these people, are we now in Khartoum or what?". Someone answered "No! This here is a different country, this country is Ethiopia, and these are the people who take care of the refugees, give them medicines free of charge, food free of charge, you can go to school free of charge and get treatment free of charge." We wait up to three o'clock and then we get high energy biscuits, though only the children not for s... the rest; the big people, they didn't get. For them, they just distribute some maize and some oil and some cooking-material-sets, and then after two hours we get our ration which was cooked in the feeding centre. We went and ate the food and we came back to our tree because it was there under the tree we stayed, - all the town was filled up with people.

At four o'clock in the evening the trucks arrived, about thirty-five trucks, all empty. Then they started to arrange people, they take the first half and then they left, and the next morning they came back, at about eleven o'clock, and we got on the last convoy.

We went to the place, we entered there and got down, and they put us under a big tree. We find some people we know and they have already made their "tukuls" (huts) and they are in good dress. Then that lady said "Now we are going straight to the village".

We went and we got registered. I write my name straight-away, I write, I write and I write her name as my mo.. - because they always asked "what is your clan?" and "where is your mother?", so I just called that woman my mother, and after we got out they distributed for us everything - food, ah, salt, maize-flour, beans, oil, ah cooking-sets, buckets for water, jerrycan, an empty jerrycan, kattel for tea. We go to another tree, we survive, we get food in the morning and she makes tea for us. Then ah next day they call us, they come and they go and they distribute some uniform, "shorts, shorts" for children, mmh, and to the women they give a piece of cloth like "kanga"

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

for tying around their body; then after two days they bring some clothes and some few shoes, but not enough for all the people and they give them to us and we stay about one week mmh there...then they come and say "Is there anybody able to make a "tukul" for himself, in that case he should make it for there is nothing else". Mmh.

We make tukuls and we stay about another month there. They ask for children to go to school. That was in Acua, that Acua which is Itang. This name of Itang came somewhere out but I don't know, and that name of Itang became the name for refugee-camps or what. Then I ask "that place you say we can get a school, can you take us or should we go?" They said "No, you will be called", and the day they call me we go, me and her son. I went to Primary and I went to sit in Grade Two and the son is in Grade One. I was ba...bad, I could understand a little bit but not too much, a little bit, I can pronounce the letters, almost all letters I can; and some words I can write a bit, but other words I can't...

Then we try to cut some poles, one pole a day or one pole a week, if we get it we can take a "panga" and cut the pole, - until we get ourselves a small tukul. Afterwards eh Anyuaks some young guys come and work for us, if you ask them something they will bring it, and we exchange part of our ration for grass. They help us with poles and with grass and also with build-ing, - in fact they helped us a lot.

In Primary II we were around we were about six hundred. They gave us books from Primary I, and there were only 50 boys not too far from Primary III; so we were just told to sit down, we were about six hundred or so. We were sleeping in a compound, in three places, two hundred two hundred two hundred in each. We just lie down there, on one very big sheet and cover us with a blanket. Mmh. We just roll around you can sleep anywhere because we roll us in plastic-sheet, mmh, therefore if it is raining we just cover and we don't get wet.

So we were sitting there and going to school in the morning but no classroom for us, there were seven classrooms for us six hundred. Seven classrooms, each classroom taking, I don't know, about fifty, fifty, eh, actually in our class we have about fifty-seven, we were fifty-seven in our class. Some girls who are there, they don't sleep there in our compound, they used to go for cleaning in the villages, and in the morning they come, but the boys sleep there. So we used to go this time this time three months there to school, 85, 86... We were for example in Grade III in 86, so we go to Grade IV in 87.

While in school, we always reminded ourselves of our trip from home to this place. Some people told "Oh, you got big problems in Yirol since you have arrived here, your father has been shot dead..." People used to talk a lot about home.

Then they took us to another place, but whenever we got off we returned to Itang. We got free transport, you don't pay money. They had given us a card with your names and all your photo, something like an identity-card. Mmh, you just can show it to the police or to the bus-driver, and if there is space he just can take you along.

Then I could reach Grade Four but in our school the only higher grade was Grade Three. So those of UN decided to take the children to another place where they are higher grades.

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So we used to go to Itang and to return back to school. One day I said to the lady "Now we are living here but I don't know the position of my mother and my father, I must go and see them". But she said "No, not this road again. You know what would happen. I said "I learned the SPLA has captured a town called Boma and Pibor and Pochalla, all towns except Akobo... I think the road we were using nobody is using it anymore. But the way opened by the SPLA, I think it is better, I could move with somebody, mmh." The lady said "No. You try, but I don't want your mother to have any claims on me!" Then she said "Well, now you are big and you know what is going on there in the Sudan, there is still war there and people die easily. Now you understand a little bit, not like for two years ago when you were still very small. No problem, they can take you there and you will be responsible for yourself, you are not staying with me now anyway, you are staying there and go to school, you eat there and you sleep there, and you are taking shower there, - they are giving you clothes. No problem, if these people want to take you there, you can go, for now you can protect yourself. But be careful, and never forget the way we came...". I say "yes, I will try to go to Dima, perhaps there is somebody there I know from the Sudan". And I pack, and we wait for three days, then they put us in a lorry, we were about eighty, eighty-nine. They put us in a lorry and bring us to another Ethiopian town.

We moved a very long distance, three days of moving with the lorry, we went and slept there, they paid for the hotel where we sleep. We saw very large towns and then passed another town called Gambela and from Gambela we passed through Dembidolo and then passed Dima and finally came to a place called Mezak, - this side of Dima, this is why I know Dima. There, we found already some boys there, and some of them were from Yirol.

These boys said "Ah, we just came from home, but here it is good, if you find a place you can just go from here to Kapoeta and these places". I asked if there are Arabs there, but they reply "No, there is the SPLA, and you can just move and you can go home and then you can come back". I thought "yes, that would be good, to go home and then come back. I didn't see my parents for many many years, I can tell them all the story which happened to us. It is good if one can go like that". I also met with another boy who said "Your parents are very much annoyed that you left without information. People are starving to death there." I started to worry.

Yeah, I was alive, and now I wanted to go to school. I don't know what happened to those Ethiopians in that place Mezak, they were just sitting there doing nothing. So we were there for two months without school... So I decided to go to Dima, and I found it full with Sudanese, some from my tribe, some from so many tribes, it is there I saw some of these strange people like the Kichepo and the Toposa. Mmh.

Ah. I came to be with one of my relatives; he was called Malau, Malau Malek, I stayed there in his home. He was the storekeeper. So I was there. Malau told me "I just arrived from home, the people there have problems, no food, many people are starving and so many have died. Your parents think that you are not alive anymore, they think you are dead." Mmm. I said "But I am alive now. I want to go home and see them. But how will I reach there?" He said "No, you better continue with your school here. We can send a letter." I say "Ah, I am not going to Yirol forever, I just want to see my father and my mother, and then I come back and climb to another class".

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So I went up to Pakok. Pakok was an Anyuak place. Some Ethiopian vehicles used to come there selling... they used to buy gold in case there is gold there, and they used to buy a lot of other things there. They brought salt, and they exchanged it with gold, they came for gold there, at Pakok..

Because there was a lot of gold at Pakok, you could find a lot of SPLA-trucks going to Boma. So one day I told an assistant driver, a small young chap, that I wanted to go fast to Boma. So I asked him "My young friend, could I could I could I just go with you there to Boma?" He said "No. You will be arrested there if you don't have any letter. Are you from a refugee-camp? Do you have any letter? No, we don't take people." I said "okay, no problem." And we were talking, just talking, and I give him my T-shirt and he became very happy because of the T-shirt and I got on the truck. Ah! So I gave him something and he became my friend. He told me "When we reach Boma, don't stay on the truck, you just get down and you just stay around but don't stay on the truck, somebody may see you and ask."

The boy was making fire and cooked tea for the driver, I came and helped them, I just ah... "Where does this boy come from?", the driver asked, and the boy replied "Oh, this boy, he has become a new a new a new assistant-driver, he can help me and he can go along with us". So the driver said "Yes, this is good". He wanted to know my name and I told him, he was a Latuka, this guy, and I told him that I was an Atuot, yes, I said I was coming from there. "From where?", he asked and I told him that I am from Yirol. He said "I know one man from there, Dr. Achol Marial, he is in Kapoeta and working there with the relief-people". I asked "Is there relief in Kapoeta?". He said "Yes, but it is relief coming from Kenya to Kapoeta". I said "yes, I know Dr. Achol, but he is from Dinka tribe, not from my tribe, I am not really Dinka, I speak a different language". "Okay, do you have another name or what?" he asked, and I said yes and told him my name. And I tell him that "I want to go with you and I will be with you and I will see the way to Sudan". And he said "It is okay, you can come with me". There was nobody in the truck, it was covered and knotted, I could not see what was inside, ammunition or some-thing. Anyway, it was the army, was an army-truck, and its paint is green.

Then the truck drove us down, it takes us about five hours before we reach Boma. We had to cross a river and then we went three and a half hours ahead, and then we reached Boma. Everybody there had a gun, I saw even some small boys with a gun. I asked "How can I get such a gun, can they allow me to carry a gun?". He replied "Yes, you can go to the military training and so." There were some people who were there for training, I tried to speak to their boss, saying "Now I want to come and get military training". But they were angry and said "No! How did you come here? We don't need children like you here! Who brought you here, do you have any pass from SPLA-office saying that you are going to get training? We don't train somebody like you like that, how can you behave like this?!". He tried to harass me, he started to beat me and wanted to capture me and bring me to the police; so I ran away and went to hide in the lorry but he came after me. Then the Latuka driver talked to him, explaining "This boy came with me and he will return with me, he just just came from the refugee-camp there". He said "Now, you look, you take well care of him, now you look he wants to get military training in the army just for getting a gun!". I said "No, no, in fact I was only jo... joking... - I don't know if I would accept this". So he said "Okay".

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So we stayed there we waited for three hours, then then they came and collected me and put me on the top of that car. And then he starts driving back to Boma, but then I just get down behind. Then I just moved around the place, waiting for the time another truck would be moving to Kapoeta. I said to myself "I must, I must go to Kapoeta." I had left all my luggage on that truck, my blanket, my clothes, some plastic sheet like this. I just went on another truck. Then we moved, moved through a very long desert, it took as about seven hours, it was a very long way, I say "Now, where are we going?" and I even started thinking of going back. But if I go back I would have to go on foot. Would that be possible for me? I was thinking a lot. I had so many ideas, I was just thinking about things, me alone. Then I was thinking: what can I do now? Now they are driving me somewhere I don't know. Okay, let me try and see.

We traveled in direction of Magoth, but first we came to a place called Katangor, just where you get down from a hill and come to another hill called Katangor and there we got problems of tires and we spent the whole day there, sleeping. And then we moved by night.

We went we went and we reached we reach to another force, it was surrounded by shelters, wh..at, a lot of people there all with their guns. They said "This is Kapoeta". Then I went down.

We went to the hospital ah we arrived there, and then we passed the hospital and took a rest somewhere. The assistant driver was sick and he told me "now you will be assistant-driver, next to me, and he send me to collect firewood and to make tea. And if the driver asks he tells him that he wants to give me a hard training and to show me how to drive a car.

But my planning was, my planning was just to go out and away and to go that home, I don't know even how far that home was, I thought by the car it could be very near.

In the morning, somebody came and asked me my name. He said "You remind me of somebody, somebody I met in Itang. Is your name Adok?". I said "yes", and he said "There is somebody from your relatives here!". I said "No, I don't know him, who is this?". "He he is very big", he said, "he is working here with the SRRA". I asked "Who are those people?", (*he laughs*) for we were just hearing about SRRA but we don't know what it is. He explained: "There is a relief working inside Kapoeta, Torit and all these places. It is the one controlling this hospital". I asked "Who is that?" and he said "His name is Dr. Achol". I said "What about Dr. Carlo?" - because I knew Dr. Carlo, he had been in Ethiopia, Dr. Carlo Madut. He replied "Yes, he is in his house there, he has just come from Torit". So I said "Okay, I better see first Dr. Madut and will meet with Dr. Achol next".

I went to Dr. Madut. "How did you come here?", he asked, "Why did you leave the school? Do you want to become a soldier??!". "Yeah", I said, "I don't want to become a soldier - I want to go home.." Dr. Madut had heard that many had been called to come, they had been called for work in the Sudan. I stayed with him, slept one day, we went to talk to Dr. Achol, he explained to Dr. Achol. Told him that somebody from Yirol had come. "Which which guy?", Dr Achol asked. I say, I talk, I

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

know him also or in fact I don't know, but now I remember that he has taken my aunt as wife, that he is my father-in-law. Mmh.

So we stay and his wife comes and she knows quite a lot about me but me I know nothing because I don't even know how ah how close we are, what the connection is between them and me, and then I don't know all those stories but they know, they are big people and they know everything. I stayed with them for two days, sitting at home or moving around, taking some small books for reading them, they used to bring me small books which were easy for me to read even. Then I can go and move around in the hospital, I go with him, climb in his car. He was driving around with me sitting behind, and the town is full full of people.

His wife asked me how I had come there, and I tell her that I came by truck and I say that I want to go and see my parents. I want to go and see them only, I'll come back if possible, but she said "No, you stay a little. Now it is difficult there. I shall help you here." That was in 89, eh 1990, but I was doing nothing since 89. I was just sitting in the house, without books, I had left all and everything there, I had only a small bag with me.

So I saw some "Kawajas" (white people), coming from Kenya. I imagined they had come to save people, but I just looked at them, I could not get any details. I saw their convoy bringing food to the hospital. We used to go to the hospital every morning and at one o'clock we used to come back home - every day it was like that.

So I used to walk with Dr. Achol, I go and sit on the floor, I open the door for the patients, ah, like this every day for about one month and then we used to go to the operation theater where I used to sit also, covering my nose with that thing of the doctor. Mmh. When I was looking I don't feel good to see all this blood and I go out. I go out but I cannot eat (he laughs), mmh, I say to myself "This is very terrible. How can I eat now again? You put your hands in this blood, touching somebody too much like this." "And they declare this as work, this is the way they help people - okay, I don't want this."

So there used to come some patients and they have this driver of the ambulance. So I join this driver, tell him I have nothing to do, instead of sitting I better move somewhere and do something. Then he said "I am going to Lokichokio". I ask "Where is Lokichokio? Is it on the side of Khartoum or...?" "No", he replied, "it is in Kenya". "Where is Kenya?" "Kenya is just here across". I say "Okay, what time will we reach there?". He replies "Just after four hours we will be there".

So I sit with him in the front and the patients are lying in the back behind. So there is a drip and I have to look after the drip, if it is finished I can pull it off, and if it is leaking I can adjust it as I used to see it in the hospital when Dr. Achol was adjusting... So when we reach there, when we reach the town there is no light and all that. First we go to the ICRC compound, we put eh eh the patients to the hospital. In the hospital I saw so many people wounded. I asked "From where are all those people?" and he says they are all Sudanese". I go and talk to them, some speak Dinka and some speak other languages.

We used to come like this like this, we were doing some work with these people with the car and the driver used to show me things...

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

Since I knew this driver, I started to drive myself, I drive slowly slowly... This was the time I started to learn how to drive. I stay at home, but if Dr. Achol is not at home I get a chance and can drive... Until I know how to drive, I don't need to go to somewhere far. Like that. Until the day comes when we go to Bor and the driver is very tired and says "You drive slowly, I want to sleep for a while". So I drive slowly, slowly slowly, and if I get a river I have to wake him up. Mmh, and he says "okay, put in gear-1 and then we go". We continue like that, whenever I get a bad place I wake him up, ask him "Here, what can I do?", and he would reply "Put in gear-1 and go". Like that like that, until I do it by myself.

We did like that - every trip was on the 19th - and finally I became good in driving, faster or slower I can drive myself and go. My first trip was to Chukudum, I was very scared, I say "No, there are just too many people, I can make an accident", so it was difficult for me. Ah from Tembea Karafiu I say "No, I can't manage it - I cannot drive". But he says "You drive". If there is no driver in the house, they just call you, "You come and drive this car, let's go and get, let's go and get this, those people from the hospital". I say "I am not driving" but he says "Everybody has seen you driving". I say "No, I am just learning". Like this I continue, until there is a guy from World Vision called Dennis, I used to sit in his car, he is a good guy and was just neigh-bouring our office in Kapoeta. He told me everything about cars, you drive like this, you do that, then I could sit in front and then he just gave me the key and I could drive. One day I used... - he sent me down the road to Khor Machi, to Chukudum, 50 kilometers, and to Thiep and all these places.

So I think I hope I will become good and I know that I can drive now, only about the engine..., I don't know the engine. But then he shows me what to do when the fuel is finished when you get water in the filter, when you see a problem in the adjuster-pump - you can do it like this, and when you get a problem with the tire, you can repair it like this. So I just used to drive one of their vehicles, not as a full driver, but if there is nobody, I can help.

Ah, - in January 91 I talk to him, to Dr Achol. I say: "Now I want to go home, so what. Shall I go to Lokichokio and meet somebody from UN?" He replies that he doesn't know: "If you want to go home I can send a message... Where is your home?". I say "Yirol, ICRC or UN are flying there". Mmh. He asks "Where is your family?" I say "in Yirol" and he continues asking "When did you leave Yirol?" .So I tell him "I left Yirol in December 84, so since then I have never seen Yirol anymore..." "Since 1984 you haven't seen your parents?!" I say "Yes, I don't know how many years, too much ah so many years I have not been there". He says "Okay, no problem, I shall ask them to put you on that plane".

I went immediately to tell my friend Moses, I was so happy, told him "Now I am going home". I reach him, he says "okay", and he went and arranged my note from the SRRA; and Pierre Ohure sent the note and told me "Now you are going to go".

I had just a few things, a small bag of salt - Pierre gave it to me - and I have to carry some clothes for my mother for wearing in a second small bag.

Well, the next day, on a Monday, the plane going to Yirol was loaded. I could not believe that I am going to Yirol! I don't know the place, I tried to re-member and I

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

could remember the town as it was, but the way it was now, I don't know. They fly, I think we are about two and a half hours in the air. Then the plane landed.

I was seeing the place and the people, they became different in my eyes. I could not know anybody, did not recognize a single person. My parents are staying about six kilometers from Yirol this in February, 19...19..., 1991. I had left Yirol in 84, now it was 91, ya, it was February 1991...

I just see anybody playing there, saying "Eh, take me down there". Some people come and say "Ah, let us help you, let's go!". I say "Okay, take me, eh, take me to the ICRC-compound, I can know some people there and I can keep my things there and then I can go and look hou... for a house". Mmh, we went... and some people just stole the bag which was there with some cloth for my mother, they just took it, they stole my things... So we went to the ICRC-compound but found it empty - there was just one lady from the UN and she flew back with that plane, mmh, of UN. And I was left there.

So I stayed in the ICRC-compound and I found one of the workers there, somebody called Jan Juok, a Sudanese from the SRRA; he was a storekeeper there. I tell him "Okay, let me keep my things here, I want to go and check the place, it's now a long time since I have been here, this is my home-place".

I was happy moving, I moved to the... Yeah, I, I was remembering the place where our house is. I went, I went, but the place is all broken down, all it's burnt, I just saw the different grass getting up very high - and some trees. Mmh. Then I came to our compound, the place where our house used to be. I could not even see anything there, just the roo...just the ah, the ah the foun-dation which was still, which I can remember, which I can see now. But the fence or some other houses, - nothing, nothing there. Another thing I remem-ber where I was staying, the house of my uncle, our house and some other tukuls, there had been another tukul for some goats, and I remember a tree with mango.

It was this one, oh yeah, we ca... we reached there at about one o'clock and a half, one and a half quarter past ah quarter oh quarter past one, and the plane goes back almost at one forty-five.

I find one of the boys who knows my, knows where is my father, he goes with me to his home, I can put my things there, then he says "Now we can go. We are tired of waiting, we better go and see". We were about six kilometers away from home. They ran and go to inform my mother. That boy went to tell my mother that I have come, saying "Adok is ah.. he has come from where he went to last time, you were talking about him that he is dead but he is alive, I left him at home now." My mother could not believe that I had come back, she was saying to this guy "Don't lie to me, I don't want I don't want you.. don't lie to me now, you are a very very bad boy, you make me think about my son, and it is my last born, and I have already tried to forget him, you are very cruel with me!". And he says "But I am telling the truth, I am just talking the truth, he has just arrived now with that plane, he had taken that plane, you have seen that plane landing".

So they came, she was walking, my mo... actually she was walk... crossing to this side of the river, of the town of the village. I was just sitting on my feet and saw

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

her coming, but I could not know she would not know me anymore. She saw... she just comes and stands beside me, crying "You, where is he now, why are you lying like this, I knew you were lying, now where is my boy!?" Then she was told "He is sitting here, he is the one", and then she cried too loud, and she is very old, too old now but she she manages to lift me up and carries me like this and, crying, takes me around, and crying, me on her top. Now the people all arrive, asking "What has happened, what has happened?" and she explains "This is my last-born, he is now eighteen years old and I have never seen him since he left for a long time ago, I thought that he is dead, I don't think I have anymore my son, all in the bush, where is he coming from I don't know..." They thought I was a SPLA and would come with a captured military gun, mmh, someone coming with a gun but I just have a small bag and I go home.

They ask me "Are you where, where you, where are you now?" and I explain that "I was in a refugee-camp, and from there I left later". They ask me "Where is that lady now? We have thought eh we have heard that all of you have died that nobody reached there, that's a long time ago, we were even forgetting, we didn't even remember". So my mother asks me "Where is eh where are the other people?", but I don't tell her, I simply answer "they are there", even those who were dead while we were moving, I say "everybody is there, nobody is dead". My mother is still crying and more people hear it and come, and then we find some other people staying in that house and we send them to call my father.

Then my father came. He passed through the way to the cattle-camp and brings a very big bull, a red one, mmh, and they cut it. And the people run to our home in the morning and our neighbours make white stuff (beer), mmh, and they came in the morning; our place was full of people. There were a hundred people sitting around and the women were dancing. Other people thought "What happened, this party is in what favour?". They are told "No, his boy, his son has come home, he was staying there, mmh, they thought he is dead there, nobody thought that he is alive".

Then I say "No, I am alive and nothing bad, I am not dead but I should not die anyway, if God said I am not going to die that time it's not my time to die!". "But some people have died, and others were almost to die". And I relate to them some stories and everybody remains quiet and listens to the story of all what happened. They had thought that I had become a soldier and they thought that if of course if I am still alive I must be a soldier. "I saw SPLA around Boma while we were passing there and you can be given gun and become a soldier, but they don't want young children, they kick them out. They don't even allow them to enter and see". Mmh. "At that time, there was no security, I don't even know who is their enemy and who is their friend. So I explained to them the problems.

I had come on the eight of the month, and I stayed there in Pageri until the third of the next month - March. Then I asked for a plane but there was no plane coming around. I told my mother that I had come just for a few days to see her and because of that lady. "Now I had left my school because of this problem, and also I spent a whole year for coming here. Now I have seen you like this and my father I have no problem now I want to go back. The thing I brought for you, some salt and clothes, some guys have stolen it at the airstrip."

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

So we were waiting... and I was almost about to walk on foot again to Shambe and to take the boat from there to Bor. I sent a message to Dr Achol asking if there was a plane going around, so I could wait until one of the planes from Norwegian Church Aid (flown by Jim) reached. So we went there, Gum Ruben, the radio-operator from Kapoeta was also with me, he had gone to collect cattle for his marriage and to give the cows to his in-laws. So we were there and we knew each other. So we had to think together what to say to Jim, and we said "We are from SRRRA Kapoeta, we are from Kapoeta and we have some pass, some document here". He said "it is okay, if there is some space left, I can take you but not to Kapoeta but to Lokichokio". He had some journalists with him. I said "it is okay, I don't mind, even if it is Lokicho-kio". He asked "Do you have any place to sleep in Lokichokio?" I said "No, but there are so many places I can go without knowing somebody". He said "okay".. So we got two seats and then we fly to Lokichokio, from Yirol to Lokichokio it took us almost three hours, two hours and forty minutes. Then we went to the UN there was a new guy who gave us accommodation, we were already in the tent but left half past two the same day for Kapoeta.

So that one was all the story of my life. I don't tell you what happened after this, what later happened to me. If you were telling *that* story to some-one...

Kwacakworo:

Okay, but just tell me, finally, you were born in which year?

Napoleon:

I was born in 1980, eh, in 1973. I am now nineteen.

Kwacakworo:

So you were only eleven when you...

Napoleon:

Ah when I left there at the time I was eleven years old.

Kwacakworo:

And how did you feel to leave your parents for a second time, just like this...?

Napoleon:

When I saw them, I was feeling very happy, all my body... But then I did not want to stay there, I want to go to finish my schooling.

Kwacakworo:

Did you get any news from Yirol since then?

Napoleon:

Yes, sometimes I got news from people coming from Yirol, there was a nurse from the ICRC working there, and also from a Sudanese called Dak... Mmh. Sometimes Dak came by plane from Kapoeta and told me "I have seen your mother this afternoon", and I was happy to get information. My mother told him that I should go back to school whenever I got a chance, and I said "Now I am just helping to drive, because sitting and doing nothing is not good. You get lazy or you think that you are sick. But later I want to go back to school".

SEVEN EARLY YEARS IN THE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

I was planning to go back to Dima, actually it was when I came back from Yirol that I decided to go back to school, even though I knew I would not find all the other boys who were in my class and who have passed to higher classes; I can repeat my class no problem. But then Ethiopia became bad, and now as that thing happened and all the people are running again, if I had gone there I don't know if I would be dead now also, or what. I am driving now for World Vision, but I don't know if they will throw me to the refugees or what. Mmh, I have met so many problems in life before. Mmh. I don't know...