

A few months later, at Christmastime in 1960, J. King Gordon was in one of the most destitute parts of the Congo. In August, some 250 000 Baluba tribespeople fled from a tribal massacre in northern Kasai province, into the southern part of the province, which then seceded. The extra numbers caused widespread starvation. The UN organized an airlift of food into Bakwanga, capital of southern Kasai province where Ghanaian troops were based. At Christmas, there was an uneasy mixture of traditional cheer and gaunt tribulation, as he recalls.

"In the Ghana camp, Christmas Eve was celebrated on December 23—at least for 'A' Company, who had to work on Christmas Day. As we sat, the guests of Major Wright, the commanding officer, sipping our drinks before supper, we heard the sound of the music and saw the lights through the palm trees. The Land Rover finally appeared with four lanterns on top, bright red leaves and flowers decorating the hood, and Father Christmas with his snowy beard in the driver's seat. The carol singers were a dozen soldiers, swathed in surplices made of mosquito netting. They sang the traditional English carols and then Ghanaian carols marvellously reconstructed from some of the old missionary hymns to resemble Gregorian chants.

"Next morning, the first of the big planes arrived at 0700, circling and putting down on the sandy strip, with its load of beans and rice. Captain Nick Raffle had his crew at the field, and within 20 minutes the aircraft was unloaded and its cargo was on the road to the ONUC warehouse in the Forminière compound. There were five more aircraft that day—the day before Christmas.

"The distribution convoy was ready about 1100, the three five-ton lorries loaded and waiting in the courtyard of the government buildings, a former technical school. The composition of the convoy gave some idea of the combined effort to get food to about 100 000 starving refugees. You get used to speaking rather technically when you are in Bakwanga: 'starving' means starving, not just hungry. If you were to add in the hungry, you would have to double or treble the figure.

"There was the Red Cross truck carrying milk and tinned fish and dried fish. Its crew was made up of twenty Congolese youngsters from the Junior Red Cross. Then came the Ghanaian five-tonner, loaded with rice, beans and maize flour, in charge of Lieutenant Naysmith with a crew of Ghana soldiers stripped to the waist, their blue helmets gleaming in the fierce sun. The third truck was loaded with 10 drums of palm oil and some fish, and was driven by the Rev. Archie Graber, a veteran Protestant missionary. And a 'staff car' carried the Deputy Commissaire of Refugees, the UN Refugee Co-ordinator and his assistant, an International Red Cross representative, and two WHO [World Health Organization] doctors.

"The convoy drove west and north towards Lake Makumba, into the heart of the famine area—Tschimbomba, Katenda, Kabeya Kawanga. There was a dispensary at the first stopping-point, and a couple of hundred refugees. One of the doctors was seeing kwashiorkor for the first time: the starvation disease, the faded hair and scaly head, the puffy cheeks, the swollen legs and feet, usually with sores. The rest of us had seen it before; but you never get