

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JS-4  
Profile of a Missionary

P.O. Box 5113  
Nairobi, Kenya  
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The first white face that most Africans saw in Kenya belonged to a missionary. Mission schools have left a lasting mark on Kenya by educating all her African leaders. Among the first of the mission groups to begin work in Kenya was the African Inland Mission (AIM), founded by a young Philadelphian called Peter Scott who believed that the missions in Africa had concentrated too long on the coastal regions and should move inland. Scott started the first AIM station in Kenya in 1895 and although he died a year later wasted by fever, his mission had taken root and in the years that followed it spread to Tanganyika, Uganda, the Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa (later the Central African Republic), and the Sudan. Now the largest missionary organization in Kenya, the AIM is interdenominational, but over half of its missionaries are Baptists and its doctrine is firmly conservative. The object of the Mission as stated in

its constitution, is twofold. First, "Evangelization in Africa according to the divine commission, 'Go ye therefore and teach all nations!...', and second, 'The formation and establishment of local churches.'" The Mission stresses that each person must be saved personally by Christ or be punished eternally. One who is not in the fold must be prepared for this conversation:

"Have you met Him?...Have you seen Him?"

Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale and admirers



"Who?"

"The Lord!"

"Oh."

"I met Him on March 16, 1956 at three o'clock in the afternoon and received the gift of eternal salvation!"

Each of the AIM's 570 missionaries must be sponsored by a church in his (or her) country (Australia, Canada, England, and the United States) and must raise enough money during his leave to support himself during his next five year term in the field.

Paul Teasdale did not at all resemble my idea of a missionary. Six feet tall, he has the powerful shoulders and the quick, sure movement of a good wrestler. His direct gaze, open countenance, and ready laugh make you like him immediately. Paul is a second generation AIM missionary whose parents came to Kenya from Illinois in the 1920s. After several years with the Wakamba tribe, they moved to the main mission station at Kijabe near Nairobi where Paul was born in 1936. Life in Kenya offered all any boy could ask. Paul tracked and shot his first antelope by the time he was eight, could take apart and repair any car found in East Africa at twelve, and when he was fourteen installed Kijabe's entire electrical system with the help of two friends. The Mau Mau years matured Paul early. His ability to sneak faultless Kikuyu proved useful to the Security Forces and when

#### Paul changing a wheel bearing



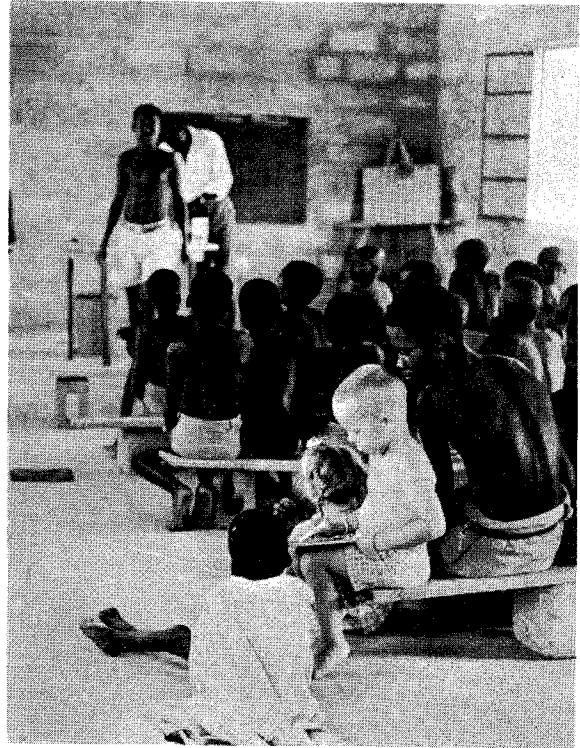
he was sixteen, he acted as a guide for their combat patrols in the tangled forests of the Aberdare Mountains. Paul was with the first detachment of Security Forces that arrived at Lari the night that Mau Mau terrorists burned and hacked 200 Kikuyu to death. He says he will never forget what he saw that night.

After graduating from the AIM's Rift Valley Academy, Paul went to Wheaton, a religious college in Illinois. He had little money, so

he worked as an auto mechanic during the school year and followed the wheat harvesting season into Canada in the summers. He wrestled for Wheaton and was good enough to become the team's assistant coach during his senior year,

After two years at Wheaton, Paul met Betty Lou Pierson, the attractive daughter of AIM missionaries in the Congo. A year later, he and Betty Lou were married.

The Teasdales are a well suited couple. Like her husband, Betty Lou was born on a remote mission station. Her father desperately wanted a boy and when she arrived decided to make the best of a bad situation by treating her as a son. Once he discovered that his daughter could keep up with and even outshoot him, her father took her with him everywhere. Betty Lou became his chauffeur, cook, interpreter, and part-time mechanic.



Teasdale children and friends at school

After college, Paul accepted a job teaching physics in a Denver high school. It was a good year; he liked his students and felt that they were learning from him, but every now and then he felt strangely restless and would take a weekend off alone in the mountains to hunt and think. Gradually, he began to feel the call to mission work: "The Lord told me that I had to go back to Africa."

Paul and Betty Lou had little difficulty meeting AIM requirements and three months after his decision, Paul received orders to go to Belgium for a year to learn French, before going to the Congo's Orientale Province. The Teasdales arrived in the midst of the Congo's post-independence anarchy and confusion. Three months later, the U.S. government advised all American missionaries to leave and the Teasdales joined the flow of refugees that streamed into East Africa. After giving Paul a brief rest, the AIM assigned him to the Kikuyu district of Kiambu, on the outskirts of Nairobi. He and his wife did not like Kiambu. They felt cramped by the crowded reserve and felt an antipathy to Kikuyu people common to many who lived in Kenya during Mau Mau. When Paul heard that a couple were needed in a new station in the Northern Province, he leapt at the chance to go.

In December 1961, Paul and Betty Lou arrived at Lokori, said to be the most isolated mission station in Kenya. It lies in a crook of the intermittent Kerio River, surrounded by the immense, unforgiving barrenness of South Turkana.

Recently, my wife, my child, and I flew up to Lokori for a week's visit with the Teasdales. We stepped out onto the sand airstrip carrying the cloudy coolness of Nairobi in our heads, and were bowled over by the furnace blast of heat that struck us. Fortunately, the effect is only momentary, and our systems adjusted quickly to the dry higher temperature. The flies, however, were a different matter. They crawl, arrogant and undisturbed, on the faces of the Turkana; they dive in squadrons onto your food the minute it is uncovered; and in the early morning you feel them creeping tentatively over your damp skin.



Across the river by cable car

Lokori consists of three buildings, which, instead of taming the landscape, somehow make it more desolate: an ugly green cube that houses Paul, Betty Lou, their two small children, and the American nurse in charge of the mission dispensary; an L-shaped dispensary which also serves as a school room and chapel; and the unfinished house that the Teasdales hope to move into soon. Half a mile from the mission there is a government famine camp that supports the Maskini (Swahili for "poor ones")-- Turkana made destitute by the drought and floods of 1960-1962. The remainder of Lokori's population consists of nomadic Turkana who have settled briefly by the river to pick the sweet orange berries that burst forth during the rains.

AIM's policy in starting a new station in a primitive area is first to provide medical facilities, then to build a school. When the medical aid has attracted prospective converts and the school has taught them to read the Scriptures, it is time to build a church.

Paul believes that the way to convert the Turkana is to provide them with an example of Christian living. He views them as pragmatists who will not accept an idea until they see it work. He holds daily and Sunday services (AIM missionaries do not have to be or-

dained) that are simple and lively; an opening prayer, a Scripture reading, cheerful hand-clapping hymns, and a final prayer. On Sunday Paul gives a brief sermon in Kiswahili which is translated into Turkana. The rest of Paul's time is spent supervising building projects, repairing equipment, and settling the countless minor shauris (disputes) among the Turkana. He must also keep an eye on the Maskini camp. Although the government has stationed an educated and pleasant Turkana in Lokori to distribute food to the Maskini and to control them, Paul has to take charge whenever any problem occurs.

What discourages Paul most about his job is that he must take charge so often. He wants the Turkana to become self-sufficient, to stop turning to him for the solution of every problem; yet, almost every time, it is easier for Paul to settle the difficulty himself than to persuade the Turkana to act on their own. He says that they prefer to think of themselves as his children.

The reluctance of some Turkana to help themselves can be staggering. During our visit, the Maskini were again at the point of starvation. The Asian owner of South Turkana's three dukas, to whom the government gave the contract for supplying grain to the famine camp, had sent his only truck to a distant goat sale instead of bringing the Maskini their food. When the grain finally arrived, two months late, the truck could not cross the rushing, rain-swollen river. I watched Paul laboriously string a cable across the river and nearly drown in the process, and then we went to the Maskini camp to enlist volunteers for the backbreaking job of loading the bags onto the cable and guiding them across the river. Although they desperately needed food and it would cost them nothing, not one of the Maskini volunteered. Only when Paul offered money did some of the other Turkana living around his mission agree to help him.

For all the annoyances and frustrations of their life in Turkana: the endless heat and its effect on morale and temper; the lack of equipment; the sameness of the canned food diet, varied only when Paul or Betty Lou can shoot an antelope; the constant, begging presence of the Turkana; the continual harassment of the African teacher pressing for more pay; and the inability of the three Kikuyu masons to build correctly without hourly supervision-- in spite of all these things, the Teasdales thrive in their work. Their deep faith sustains them in a situation that would be the despair of most couples. Yet Paul has no illusions about the progress of Christianity at Lokori since the station opened. Despite the success of the mission school and the growing number of patients at the dispensary, only two or three Turkana have professed an interest in baptism. Most do not dare risk the wrath of the tribal witchdoctors who have launched violent propaganda attacks against the Teasdales. Paul's church services are well attended, but it seemed to me that the Turkana came, not because of their curiosity to learn about Christianity, but because they respected Paul and because the singing and simple Bible passages entertained them.

The lack of conversions among the adult Turkana does not worry

Paul. If he can educate the Turkana children and give them some idea of their place in their new nation, then he thinks he will have achieved his goal at Lokori. He believes that a missionary should function as a moderating force around which Africans can peacefully congregate and begin to move into the Twentieth Century.

I respect Paul's realistic approach to his work in Lokori and the sacrifices he is making. However, when we talked more generally about Africans throughout Kenya, I noticed certain preconceptions which I consider outdated. Paul refers to Africans as "natives". He believes they have "a generic tendency toward alcoholic and sexual excess." He condemns the Kikuyu tribe as a whole and although, "an educated African is no different from you and me", in the same breath Paul also says, "you can never trust a Kikuyu, no matter how much schooling he has had." From what I've seen, these opinions do not apply to the new generation of Africans in Kenya. Many live in monogamous homes and are able to drink temperately. All abhor the use of the word "native". Paul understandably derives his anti-Kikuyu feelings from the Mau Mau period of his life. But while he still dwells on Kikuyu responsibility for the Emergency, most Kikuyus and other tribesmen are now thinking of a detribalized Kenya and trying to overcome their tribal differences. Unless Paul and other missionaries like him begin to understand and to adjust to the changes that are presently occurring in Kenya, they will no longer be tolerated here.

Sincerely,

  
John Spencer

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