

DR. PAUL CARLSON

by

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Dr. Paul Carlson

His Prescription for Congo—and the World



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I STUDENT

Paul Earle Carlson was born on March 31, 1928, in Culver City, California, to Gust and Ruth Carlson. They survive him along with a sister, Mrs. Sharon Davenport, of Bellevue, Washington, and a brother, Dwight, of Orange, California. His father is a Swedish-immigrant machinist.

Paul was graduated from Alhambra High School in 1945, and then served a two-year hitch in the U. S. Navy until 1947. He attended North Park College, his denomination's school in Chicago, from February, 1948, to August, 1949, receiving an Associate of Arts degree at the summer commencement in August of 1949. He was active in student organizations, being president of Demenudi, a club for science students, and he worked on the staff of the 1949 Cupola, the student yearbook.

While he was at North Park he took a part-time job as an orderly in Swedish Covenant Hospital. There he first met Lois Lindblom from Menominee, Michigan, who was a student in that hospital's School of Nursing. She was a student there from 1947 to 1950, when they were married in Menominee on September 16, 1950, after she had completed her training. Wayne Paul was born to them March 16, 1955, and Lynette Ruth October 20, 1957.

After North Park, Paul majored in anthropology at Stanford University in California, earning a bachelor of arts

degree in 1951. The next year he continued working on a master's degree in that field.

From 1951 to 1956 he studied at George Washington medical school in Washington, D. C., receiving his medical degree. He then returned to California to take his internship and four-year surgical residency at Harbor General Hospital in Torrance, California, which he completed in June, 1961.

II MISSIONARY

A. "Operation Doctor"

Paul had had medical missions on his mind when he first met Lois back in Junior College. He had registered as a missionary volunteer with the World Missions department of the Evangelical Covenant Church, but no openings appeared for him.

In May, 1961, he wrote to the Christian Medical Society, an organization of Christian physicians and dentists with a program for "short-term" missionary service overseas, of which he was a member. They put him in touch with the Congo Protestant Relief Association which had been recently formed to bring medical and spiritual aid to the Congo following its gaining of independence. They had initiated an emergency program called "Operation Doctor" to help relieve the critical shortage which was left when five hundred doctors fled the country.

The agency's first request was for one year of service, but Dr. Carlson did not have enough funds to be away so long and didn't want to leave his family for that length of time either. The next request was for "four months or longer." After much thought and prayer, he and his wife decided that this was what they had been waiting for, so in July, 1961, he arrived in Leopoldville, Congo. There he was asked if he had a church preference, and at his request he was happy to

be assigned to the field of the Evangelical Covenant Church in the Ubangi province, located in the northwestern corner of the country.

On this five-month term in the Ubangi he operated at the state hospitals at Libenge and Bosobolo and at the mission hospitals of Tandala and Wasolo. There he won the hearts of the Congolese. After his return to the States in December, the Church of Christ in the Ubangi, at their annual conference, earnestly invited him to come back with his family to continue working among them. This was the first such call to be issued by this church. While in California he didn't forget the urgent medical needs of the Congo. He told one colleague over lunch: "If you could only see, you wouldn't be able to swallow your sandwich."

B. Mission Field

In California, Dr. Carlson took a position with a group of doctors in Redondo Beach and later in Rolling Hills Estates. He and his wife became charter members of the Rolling Hills Covenant Church¹ when it was organized, and he was its chairman when called to missionary service.

They were dedicated to missionary service on June 22, 1962, during the annual meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church in Seattle, Washington. The verse of Scripture they chose for their testimony was Joshua 1:16: "All that thou commandest we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go."

1. An offshoot of Lutheranism that originated in Sweden as a result of the Pietistic movement.

Dr. Carlson left in September of 1962 for Liverpool, England, where he studied tropical medicine. By Christmas his family joined him in Paris, where the next six months were spent in the study of French.¹ They arrived on the field in July of 1963 with a salary of \$3,230 a year, compared to his former salary of \$12,000 a year. But he was finally realizing his lifelong dream, and he was never happier. In July they began their study of Lingala, a trade language of the Congo, at the Karawa station, where he also worked at the hospital.

Shortly after his five-week stay at Wasolo under "Operation Doctor" in 1961, the missionaries found it necessary to leave the station unstaffed, so no permanent personnel was there until the arrival of the Carlsons in October, 1963.

The medical picture in the country was not bright for the young doctor. He was the only doctor for 100,000 potential patients. Prior to independence the hospital received \$500 a month for salaries and general maintenance plus the bulk of medicine needed. The number of beds at that time was only 25. In 1963, the hospital received only \$20 a month and one small box of drugs during the entire year, while the demand for hospital care increased so that the hospital had 80 beds and was shortly to add 20 more.

Because the hospital had not received government salaries for the Congolese nurses for two years, the patients had to pay for medicine and hospitalization. However, this amounted to only 1¢ a day, excluding antibiotics. Some couldn't pay, but

1. The Swedish Covenant Hospital News, Feb.-March, 1965, p. 2.

no one was refused. Dr. Carlson estimated that he ran the hospital on \$10 a day.

Sleeping sickness was on the increase. Yaws had reappeared since the departure of the Belgians, and whooping cough, tetanus, measles, and bacillary and amoebic dysentery were commonplace. All the children had malaria and most in the area had hookworm and a multitude of other parasites, besides suffering terribly from malnutrition.

It was not unusual to be awakened at two or three a.m. for an emergency, and he often worked until morning operating. When the light plant broke down he would finish by kerosene lamp and flashlight. There were no other doctors for hundreds of miles, and it was a full day's drive to the nearest mission station. He worked sixteen to eighteen hours a day. In a year he had rebuilt the hospital, had aspirin, penicillin, and other drugs brought in, and was treating a wide variety of diseases. His only interest in the rebel movement was that it might ruin his hospital.

Medications and supplies became increasingly difficult to procure as the pharmacies in Leopoldville and Stanleyville were emptied. He often went into debt personally to pay for supplies. However, he never complained about these problems. In fact, he was very optimistic. He had plans for establishing a central pharmacy to supply the mission hospitals in the Ubangi. He also wanted to establish a medical center for the whole Ubangi, which would offer better care and serve as a training center for

Congolese nurses, technologists, public health workers, and midwives. Another project of his was to get semi-annual medical conferences started in the Ubangi.

The Congolese soon developed a possessive attitude toward him and he became known everywhere as "Monganga Polo" (My Dr. Paul).

However, the Carlsons were not alone in their work. At the station also was a missionary nurse, Joann LeVahn, and at times Elsie Carlson. In May, 1964, a senior in Johns Hopkins Medical School (Baltimore), Philip Littleford, arrived at Wasolo on a study fellowship provided by Smith Kline and French Laboratories of Philadelphia. He planned to spend six months taking clinical training under Dr. Carlson. However, these plans were cut short by the rebel activity and he could only spend five weeks there.



Ward rounds at the Wasolo mission hospital. Left is nurse JoAnn (Jody) LeVahn JC '51 RE '56, Littleford, Carlson, and Etherington. (a visiting doctor).

III MARTYR

A. Capture

Early in September, 1964, Dr. Carlson took his family and mission nurse, Miss JoAnn LeVahn, across the Ubangi River to the Central African Republic. As they parted, an African nurse, Boniface Bomba, said, "We will take good care of Dr. Paul." Two weeks later he was killed when he tried to protest Dr. Carlson's capture by the rebels.

Dr. Carlson himself returned to his patients at Wasolo, proving his dedication to the task God had called him to. He thought he would be safe since the rebels so far had not bothered doctors, and presumed that he still would have time to get out if need be. This devotion to his patients--the conviction he couldn't leave these seriously ill people who needed him so desperately, the belief that God's work came before his own safety--cost him his life.¹ He later told a fellow prisoner, "I was able to save the lives of ten patients after returning to my hospital."

On September 10, rebels in the area first asked Dr. Carlson to come and see them, which he did, accompanied by some Congolese nurses and teachers. The rebels told him that he could stay at the hospital and continue his medical work, then they returned to the state post of Yakoma, some

1. There Was a Man, p. 18.

twenty-five miles north of Wasolo. Dr. Carlson could have left then, but he feared that the rebels would punish the people at the station if they saw that he had left.

All the missions in the Ubangi area had transceiver radios for broadcasting news and requests to other stations. During this time Dr. Carlson was keeping in touch with the evacuated missionaries in Bangui, Central African Republic. (He was the only missionary of his mission left behind the rebel lines). The rebels got the notion that he was broadcasting to Gemena, the capital of the province, asking for the Congolese army to come and capture them. On the night of September 18, the rebels came to Wasolo, ransacked the hospital, shot two nurses, Boniface Bomba and Constant Kokembe, and took Carlson to Yakoma, charging him with being an American spy. The next night they returned with him, looted his house, and sent him to Bondo, a town about a hundred miles east of Wasolo.

B. Stanleyville

On August 5 the Communist-backed Simbas (meaning "lions," in Swahili) of "President" Christophe Gbenye overpowered the thousand-man garrison of government soldiers at Stanleyville after two days of fighting. This city then became the capital of the "Congolese Peoples' Republic," the rebel-held territory in the Congo.

Dr. Carlson did not arrive in Stanleyville, 310 miles

southeast of Yakoma, until October 23. There he joined the 1,300 other foreigners being held hostage and used as pawns in the hope of gaining favorable cease-fire and political concessions.

During the period between his arrival and death, he was moved about from one place of confinement to another. He was frequently beaten and ridiculed by the crazed and fanatical Simbas, but his medical skill and Christian compassion could not be contained. He treated and bound up the wounds of fifty rebel soldiers one day, and often after returning from his beatings he would promptly go to the aid of an ill fellow-prisoner.

His execution as an American spy had been announced for Wednesday, November 18. On that day the rebels came to the prison and took Carlson, five American consular men, and two other young American men who worked at Stanleyville University, to the Lumumba¹ Monument for execution. At this monument daily executions of the educated population took place, until the surrounding area was caked with blood. However, after some beating, ridicule, and threats, "President" Gbenye announced that because of an appeal by Kenya's Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta, the execution had been postponed until the following Monday.

The next day, all the Americans and Belgians, 235 people, were brought to a four-story hotel, Résidence Victoria, and Carlson was placed on the top floor.

On Friday, everyone was piled into buses to be taken to Banalia (90 miles north of Stanleyville) for security purposes.

1. First premier of the independent Congo; erratic leftist; demagogue whom the rebels worshipped as a god.

Had this move been effective, a parachute drop on Stanleyville would have been pointless. The buses broke down eight miles out of the city, and eventually around midnight everyone was taken back to the hotel.

Monday, November 23, Dr. Carlson's execution was again postponed, pending "negotiations."

C. Death

On Tuesday, November 24, the hostages in the hotel were awakened early in the morning by the sound of U. S. Air Force C-130 Hercules transports buzzing the city. 383 Belgian paracommandos¹ had arrived from Ascension Island in the Atlantic, where they had been in readiness for a week for this operation. Excited Simbas then raced through the building telling everyone to get in line outside. Dr. Carlson was near the end of the group, with Rev. Charles Davis. As they ran together to catch up with the rest of the people they wondered what they were doing out there, and Paul suggested that perhaps they would be used as a shield for the rebels. As they came closer to their destination he added, "I don't know what today is going to be. I just have a feeling, I have a feeling that today one way or another this whole thing will be over."²

The silent column of marchers was ordered by "Colonel" Joseph Opepe to sit down in Avenue Sergeant Kitele,³ several blocks from Lumumba Square. As machine gun fire from the invading paratroopers drew nearer, he made a short speech trying

1. Life, Dec. 4, 1964, p. 39.
2. New York Herald Tribune, Dec. 24, 1964, p. 6.
3. Time, Dec. 4, 1964, p. 28.

to justify his conduct and attempting to gain the favor of his captives. Then a .50 caliber machine gun was leveled at the seated hostages, but the rebels could not get it to work. Then a terrific burst of Belgian gunfire tore the corner off a house at the end of the block, and a nervous rebel soldier began firing into the crowd with his Sten gun. This triggered the others into action. Radio Stanleyville had been screaming on the air for the last time: "Kill them all! Have no scruples!"

Many of the people played dead by lying in the street; others didn't have to. Dr. Carlson ran with several others to a nearby house. The first ones leaped over the porch wall and ran into the house. Carlson motioned Rev. Charles Davis to go ahead of him, which he did. Davis then turned to help him over, reaching for his hand, but at the same time a fleeing rebel came from behind and emptied his automatic rifle into him. He was hit five times in the chest, once in the head, and once in the leg.

Despite the pleas for his safe release sent by many sources--the U. S. state department, the United Nations, the Africa committee of the National Council of Churches, the leaders of African states, even foreign students in this country who put pressure on their governments, Dr. Carlson was dead.¹ It was to the Congolese he had come, to save and prolong Congolese lives and to relieve Congolese suffering and it was by Congolese hands he died.

Gene Bergman, who worked at Stanleyville University, saw Carlson fall and immediately went to him and got his New Testament out of his pocket.² Paul had requested that if he should

1. Covenant Companion, Dec. 4, 1964, p. 4.

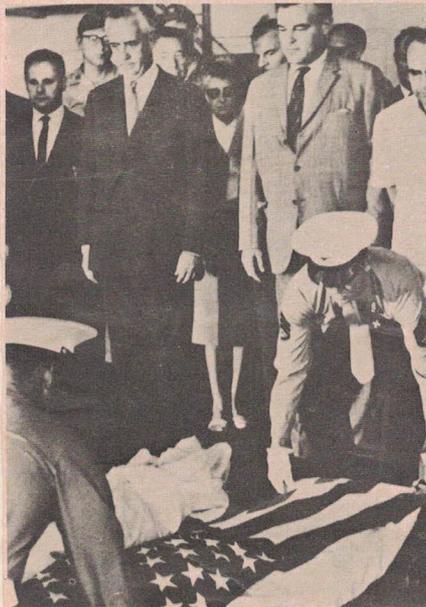
2. Congo Mission News, Oct.-Dec. 1964, p. 26.

die, his Testament be given to his wife. He had used it only the night before in a prayer meeting when he read the verses of II Timothy 4:17, 18 to his fellow captives. "But the Lord stood by me and lent me strength so that I might be his instrument in making the full proclamation of the Gospel for the whole pagan world to hear; and thus I was rescued out of the lion's (simba's) jaws. And the Lord will rescue me from every attempt to do me harm, and keep me safe until his heavenly reign begins."

D. Funeral

Following the Stanleyville massacre, Dr. Carlson's body was flown with the 60-odd other dead and the survivors to Leopoldville, the capital. There in a simple ceremony at an

U. S. MARINES DRAPE AMERICAN FLAG OVER BODY OF DR. PAUL CARLSON AFTER IT ARRIVES IN LEOPOLDVILLE NOVEMBER 24. STANDING AT ATTENTION ARE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR G. McMURTRIE GODLEY (LIGHT SUIT) AND BELGIAN ENVOY CHARLES KERCHOVE (DARK SUIT)



airport hangar the body was draped with the Stars and Stripes. Then, at the request of Mrs. Carlson, and the approval of the U. S. Embassy in Leopoldville, the body was flown to Gemena, the capital of the Ubangi province, and taken by truck to the mission station of Karawa for burial.

The 45-mile trip took three hours because of the bad roads. Along the way a man

cried out, "He saved my life!" People turned away, striking their heads with their fists, weeping, and moaning.

Burial took place Saturday afternoon, November 28, following the funeral at the Karawa Church of Christ in the Ubangi. Thirty whites and about 1,000 Congolese attended, filling the building and standing outside the windows and doors of the concrete-block structure. A party of missionaries in exile in the Central African Republic, including Mrs. Carlson and the children, flew from Bangui for the event.

A severe wooden casket lay on two benches at the front of the church. After the drums that called the people died away, the hymns commenced. Then came the messages of tribute and faith by people who had known the doctor. Mrs. Carlson told the congregation, "My husband, Paul, came here because he loved you. He saw the great medical need and wanted to serve, both medically and spiritually. Why his time was so short among you we do not know, but God knows." Each of us has a time to be called home by God; He has called my husband Paul. I leave his physical body here as a memorial and a reminder to you whom he served. I know he would have chosen to stay with you."

"May we all carry on the medical work and the spiritual ministry for our dear heavenly Father in the Congo," she continued. "Our family plans are still not clear, but this I know, that a part of my heart will remain here always."¹

Enoch Sakofio, director of the church's schools of the

1. Decision, Feb. 1965, p. 9.

area, said at the service, "Whoever shot Paul didn't kill him, he killed us!"

The president of the Ubangi church, Alenge Zacharie, preached the sermon, asking of the people, "On the day of resurrection for you, will you see the doctor?"

Another participant was Rev. Daniel Ericson, who accompanied Carlson's body from Leopoldville to Karawa. He gave first-hand reports from survivors of the massacre.

Notes found in Dr. Carlson's New Testament formed the basis of a talk about "a remarkable spiritual diary," given by Rev. Franklin Lindquist, field chairman of the missionary group. He later accompanied Mrs. Carlson and the children back to the States in January.

Mr. Limo, minister of the interior of Ubangi province, represented the central government at the services along with an honor guard of soldiers.

Following the service there only remained the procession to the Karawa cemetery, a mile away. There, after a prayer and the dropping of flowers into the grave by those who had known and loved the doctor, he was buried, and a simple wooden cross was left to mark his final resting place.

IV RETROSPECT

A. Character

Dr. Carlson was a mild-mannered, gentle person. However, he did not stand for mediocrity in medicine. He always saw beauty to be discovered and appreciated and he liked to make things attractive. Before his family went to Congo, he used to tell them about the beautiful scenery from the hilltop where their house was situated.

He had a high regard for the home. The children were his delight and he had great patience when dealing with them. Above all, he wanted them to know and love Christ.

He was very optimistic and always had many ideas of what could be done; his mind was always planning. He felt a person could do almost anything if he really put his mind to it, but he also had a strong "don't-cry-over-spilled-milk" philosophy.

Carlson admitted his faults and fears. In the only letter he wrote during the time of his captivity, he said, "I know that I am ready to meet my Lord, but I am only human and naturally I have fear."

He had a steadfast loyalty to his family, friends, and beliefs, and an unflinching pursuit of his goal. It was uncharacteristic that he died trying to hurdle a wall, for he had hurdled one barrier after another throughout his life.¹

1. There Was a Man, p. 74.

His ability to be cheerful and to help others in spite of the death sentence under which he lived during the last days of his imprisonment can't be explained simply as strength of character. His desire to live for Christ in a way that others could see Christ in him was his deepest desire and prayer.¹

He worked and moved freely among Roman Catholic missionaries and was accredited with interceding for the release of three priests who were in rebel hands.

B. Tributes

The hostages of Stanleyville attribute their safety to Dr. Carlson because he focused the world's attention on their plight. The announcement over Stanleyville radio by the rebel leader Gbenye that Dr. Carlson was to be executed as a spy became the instrument for saving hundreds of lives because it aroused Belgium and the United States to activity on behalf of their nationals threatened with extermination. A Belgian survivor said, "Everybody knew him. He was giving medical attention to those who needed it, including me, till the last moment. He was in our group and died on that square yesterday morning. By God, that man was brave. He knew he was under sentence of death, but he never thought of himself for a moment, always for other people who needed him."²

Also, with his death, the people in the Ubangi realized why the missionaries evacuated following independence in 1960

1. There Was a Man, p. 26.

2. Idem., p. 92.

and again in 1964 when the rebellion broke out. Before, they could not understand why those who had come to tell of God's power and love would leave when danger threatened.

At a meeting of the American Medical Association on December 1, 1964, Miami Beach, the following resolution was adopted:

WHEREAS, Paul Earle Carlson, M. D., gave his life in service to God and his fellow men; and
WHEREAS, Dr. Carlson exemplified the highest ideals of the profession of medicine; and
WHEREAS, Dr. Carlson's courage and dedication to his faith and his profession typified the attributes of the hundreds of medical missionaries serving in scores of nations around the world; now therefore be it
Resolved, That this House of Delegates of the American Medical Association pause for a moment of silent tribute to Dr. Carlson who, in his brief life, served his God and his fellow men with a selfless devotion that remains as an example for all men to follow.¹



Mrs. Paul Carlson views a model of the Carlson Tower at North Park.

A seven-story classroom tower in the two-million-dollar science-learning center under construction on the campus of his alma mater, North Park College in Chicago, will bear Dr. Carlson's name.².

But perhaps Dr. Carlson would be most pleased to know that Smith Kline & French Laboratories, who sent Philip Littleford to Wasolo, have pledged financial support to

1. There Was a Man, p. 45.
2. The North Parker, Winter 1964-65, p. 3.

re-establish operations at the Wasolo hospital. They have also indicated that they will restock the hospital's drug supply, and have pledged a grant of money for medical missions. Another offer of supplies has come from a pharmaceutical firm in Milan, Italy, International Holdings (Italy) Ltd.

Philip Littleford said in an interview with the Baltimore Sun: "Paul didn't die in vain. I think his primary dedication to God and Christ has something to say to everybody who wants to think about it."¹



Mrs. Paul E. Carlson kneels at the casket of her slain husband as her son assists. The burial took place at Karawa on Saturday, November 28.

1. There Was a Man, p. 43.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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