

Jamie Buckingham

ON JANUARY 8, 1956, a band of Auca Indians, the fiercest of Ecuador's aborigines, fatally speared five American missionary pilots and left their punctured bodies along a jungle river. The news stunned the world.

Sensational publicity about the incident circled the globe, but, afterwards, most people forgot the whole thing. One of those who did not forget was Rachel Saint, sister of Nate Saint, one of the dead pilots.

Rachel, a member of the Wycliffe Bible Translators team, bravely set out to carry the Bible—"God's carving"—to the same men who murdered her brother. Gradually, over the

years, she was accepted by the Aucas and has not only reduced their tongue to writing, but has successfully translated most of the New Testament into the Auca language.

There was a meaningful ceremony not long ago on the banks of the same river where the five young men were martyred. Phil Saint, another brother of the famous family, came from his missionary post in Argentina and baptized some of the very men who had thrown the spears. The Word of God had done its work (read *Amazing Saints*, Logos 1972).

The Wycliffe Bible Translators are the visionary product of Cameron Townsend, who in 1917 sensed the need to translate the Bible into Indian

Fulfilling the Great

Translator and his India guide brave a raging river in Nepal.



languages. Townsend, now almost 77 years old and known affectionately as "Uncle Cam", left college as a 17 year old boy to take Spanish Bibles into Guatemala. While there he found that more than 200,000 of the people were Cakchiquel Indians who could not even write their own language, much less read Spanish. And they had no Bibles.

One day an Indian blurted out, "Why, if your God is so smart, hasn't he learned our language?"

Townsend took the challenge and for the next fifteen years, he lived with the primitive Cakchiquels in Central America, eating their food, master-

Author Buckingham has recently returned from an extended visit in the Amazon jungle where he is researching a new Logos book about the ministry of the jungle pilots that fly for the Wycliffe Bible Translators. He reports that there is a great sweeping move of the Holy Spirit among both Indians and missionaries.



JAARS plane takes off from a jungle river in Peru to return to the mission station, leaving behind two single girl translators.

Commission

ing their difficult language and gradually reducing it to written form. He slowly developed a simplified method for teaching any phonetically written language. In 1931, the Cakchiquels received the entire New Testament in their own tongue.

Townsend named his organization after the John Wycliffe who was condemned as a heretic in the 14th century for translating the Bible into the language of the people. Now the largest independent missionary outreach in the world, Wycliffe bases are located wherever there are primitive tribes whose language has never been translated. From these bases, more than 3,000 highly trained men and women, many with Ph.D. degrees, work toward translating the Bible into the languages and dialects of hundreds of Indian tribes. (Townsend himself has just returned from a third trip to Russia, where Wycliffe is preparing to send translators with official Russian approval to some of the primitive tribes in the Caucasus.

3,000 Tribes With No Bibles:

Every 11 days someone from the Wycliffe Bible Translators tramps back into a remote jungle village somewhere and begins translating the Bible into a new language group. Yet, there are said to be more than 3,000 tribes who still have never read the Gospel in their own language.

Most of these Indians live outside the main current of life, speaking their own dialect and living out their lives as their ancestors have done for centuries. Most of them practice witchcraft and black magic, take orders from the witch doctors, and live in constant fear of evil spirits—from sickly childhood to early death.

Each Wycliffe translator has had firsthand experience dealing with demons in the jungle. None doubt the existence or power of demon forces.

By bringing the Bible to these tribes in their own language, Wycliffe missionaries believe they can help bridge the centuries-wide chasm between darkness and light, between death and life.

Before they can translate the Bible, however, there is first—through signs and speech—a tribal language to master that few white men have ever heard before. After this comes the agonizing task of devising an alphabet, rules of grammar, and syntax; in short, a whole written language. Only when these endless knots have been painstakingly unraveled can the mammoth work of translation begin.

Over the years, Wycliffe has translated the Bible into more than 500 different languages, and are currently working in more than 450 tribes in all sections of the globe.

Although evangelical in theology, WBT personnel come from no single denomination. Some are hard core fundamentalists. Others are Pentecostals. An amazing number of charismatics have joined the organization in recent years, spurred on by the new move of the Holy Spirit. In fact, in recent months there is a move underway which could possibly lead to a joining of ranks among Wycliffe folks and many of the charismatics across the world.

Constant reports are coming back that many of the missionaries, and the Indians with whom they work, have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at various mission stations. Thrilling stories of miracles, healings, and other supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit are becoming a part of many Wycliffe testimonies.

No Salaried Jobs: The translators work as independent "faith" missionaries. They first solicit promises from persons or churches at home to send enough money through Wycliffe headquarters, in Santa Ana, California, to support them while on the mission field. There are no salaried positions, all are supported on a faith basis—from the stateside directors to the secretaries.

They are then put through strenuous linguistic training at the University of Oklahoma, where the Summer Institute of Linguistics (a part of the Wycliffe program) has its headquarters. This unique school teaches language analysis to those preparing to enter the translating ministry.

Next comes three months of rugged

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"survival tests" at a jungle training camp in Southern Mexico. Here both men and women must prove themselves able to make their own jungle huts using only bamboo and leaves, to make rafts and handle dugout canoes through raging rapids and crocodile-infested rivers; cope with wild animals and giant reptiles, and find their way on a thirty mile hike through unmarked jungle—living off the land.

Even though some of the persons are past fifty-years old when they enter the program, and others have infant children accompanying them, more than ninety-five per cent pass the rigorous test and are finally assigned to a foreign base. It is from these bases—in the Amazon jungle, New Guinea, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Africa, and many other areas—that the translators go out to work with the various tribes of the uttermost parts of the earth.

One of the exciting aspects in the

work is the involvement of short-term assistants in helping meet personnel needs. More than 300 retired and semi-retired people, teachers on sabbatical leave and young people right out of school, have given six months to three years of their time, relieving translators in jobs that do not require language skills. These include typists, bookkeepers, construction and maintenance men, medical personnel, and a host of others.

The translators method is simple. After a tribe is located, the translators move in with the Indians. Their first task after arriving in the village (often by dugout canoe on a river) is to either find an empty Indian hut where they can set up housekeeping with their family (yes, tiny children usually go with their parents into the jungle) or build one. Slowly and laboriously they learn the language, fashioning a phonetic alphabet as they go along. Then, using the Bible and a

few simple homespun stories as their text, they begin to teach the Indians how to read and write.

"A single book of the Bible may take years to translate satisfactorily," says Townsend.

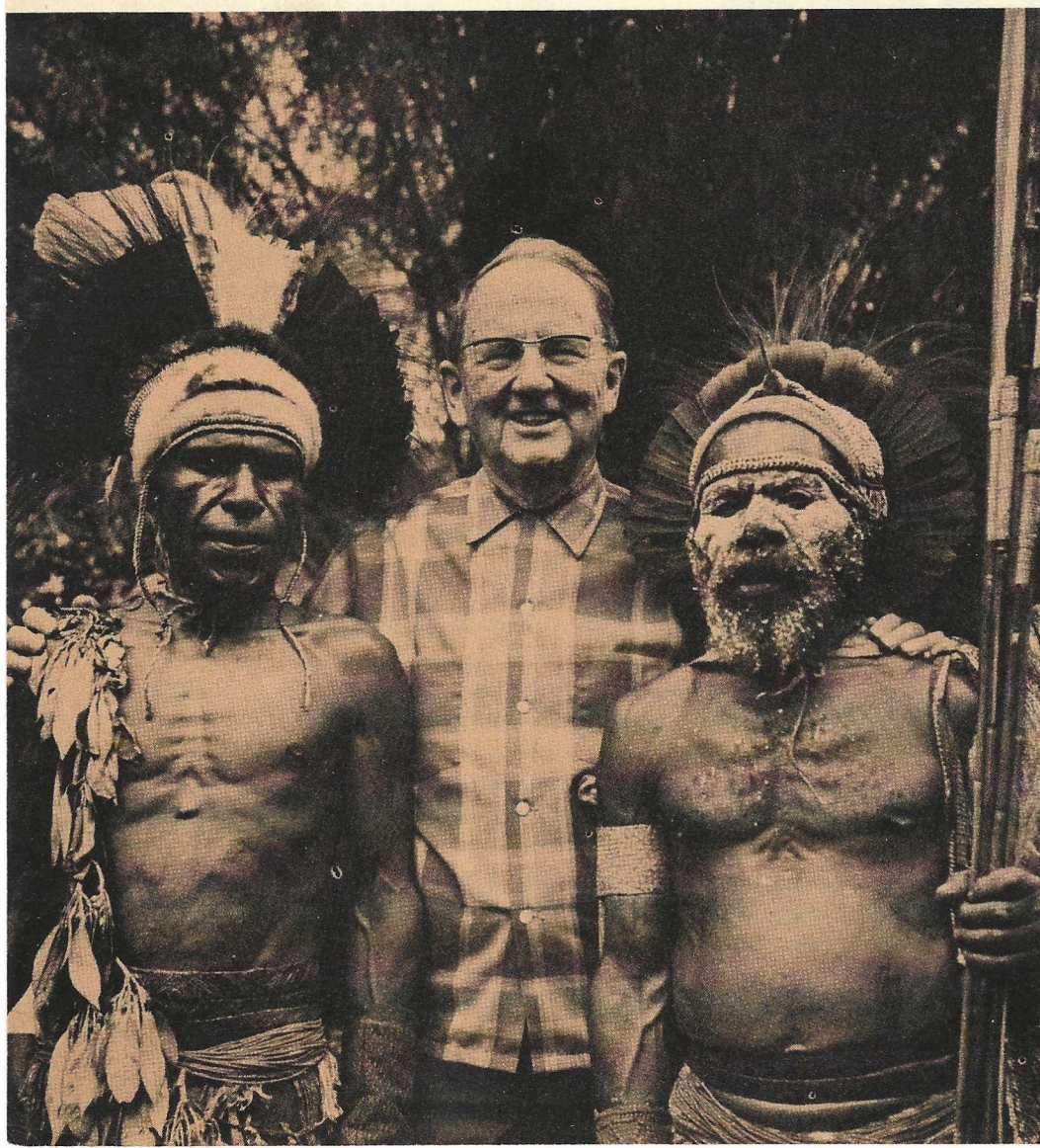
The translators stay in the tribe about three months at a time. They then return to the central base for an equal amount of time to work on their language translations. Here they work with consultants and linguist experts. They are also assisted by the huge linguistic computers at the University of Oklahoma. These computers break down the various dialects into phrases, sounds, genders, conjugations and various linguistic divisions. All this is returned to the jungle on IBM readout sheets.

Air Missionaries: A big part of the Wycliffe ministry is carried on by a supportive group known as the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS). Airplanes were first introduced into the jungle ministry at the close of World War II. In the summer of 1945, Townsend tried to get workers to three of the most remote tribes in northern Peru. They had to travel for weeks by canoe and raft, beat their way through almost impenetrable jungle, and detour around tribes noted for killing whitemen on sight.

This experience convinced him they needed a plane. Then, a year later, Townsend and his wife, Elaine, and their infant child were almost killed in the crash of a small plane piloted by an inexperienced Mexican. Townsend decided they not only needed planes, but they needed highly trained pilots as well. Following his recovery from the crash, he learned that the U.S. government had a surplus Grumman amphibian for sale for \$3,500 in Peru. He claimed it for the Lord.

Broke, as usual, but trusting God, Uncle Cam wrote three American businessmen asking them to help him pray in the funds. Two wrote back saying they were praying, but the third sent a telegram. Townsend's letter, he said, was a direct answer to a prayer he had already been praying. He was the owner of a department store in Santa Ana, California, and

Cameron Townsend forms friendship with Gahuku chiefs in New Guinea.



had been having labor problems. His employees had been threatening to strike. He asked God to divert the strike, promising to give him the money saved if he did. The Lord had just seen him through this crisis and the money saved was exactly \$3,500.

Today that fleet has grown to 40 planes, all given by donations from God's people. They include a helicopter, several twin-engine aircraft, and a fleet of helio-couriers used over the jungles. The helio is built especially for jungle flying. It can land and take off in 75 yards at a speed of 30 mph, yet carry up to six passengers and baggage to altitudes of 23,000 feet.

Although airplanes have not tamed the jungle, they have eased its grip. Before air travel, rivers were the only long-distance highways for man. Because of this, many tribes remained unknown and unreachable in the jungle's heart.

The airplane eliminates days, even weeks of dangerous jungle marches, through barely perceptible trails, or treacherous journeys through rapids and swamps. Tom Smoak, a former Air Force bomber pilot now serving as a jungle pilot in Colombia, estimates that one minute in the air is the equivalent of one hour on the ground.

Jungle Navigation: Flying an average of 40-50 hours a month, the JAARS pilots often must land on strips less than 400 feet long—with rivers, towering trees or high precipices on each end. Although the translators maintain a sophisticated radio network with the home mission base, air navigation is primarily by "dead reckoning," using jungle rivers (which often change their course overnight) as checkpoints. Many planes operate on floats, using the rivers as runways.

The airplane role in Wycliffe's objectives often begins with the location of an "unreachable" tribe deep within a jungle. Missionary pilots sometimes establish initial contact by mounting a loudspeaker on the plane's wing to convince tribesmen, through a variety of language attempts, that they are friendly.

The Mayoruna tribe in Peru, which

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for years was thought to be only a legend, was discovered by a pilot who "just happened" to be flying over an area previously considered uninhabited. After many attempts they finally convinced the Indians they were friendly and two single girls were able to hike through the jungle for the first contact. Now, much of the Bible has been translated into the Mayoruna language.

Although most of the translators are married, some of the most spectacular work has been done by single girls traveling in pairs who have gone into head-hunting tribes protected only by the grace of God.

The translators do more than act as linguists. They faithfully witness of their personal faith in Jesus Christ, show the new Christians how to set up self-supporting churches with native pastors, and promote the use of Scripture reading. Because of this, many of the tribes across the world have begun to experience the fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is sweeping through the churches of America.

The moving of God's Spirit is universal and not limited to just the churches and prayer groups in America. Wherever people are reading the

New Guinea Indians come back to the mission station to help their translator with the finer points of the language.



Pilot Tom Smoak, former Air Force bomber pilot miraculously saved from a burning death when his B-47 exploded over Little Rock Arkansas several years ago, now helps translator weigh his cargo before taking off to bring him back to civilization.

Bible and seeking more of God, the Holy Spirit is moving.

Commitment: The ministry of the Wycliffe Bible Translators has been to put the Word of God into the hands of every tribe in all the world. The task is far from completed, but because of their faithful witness, untold millions in the jungles of the world are now experiencing the fresh breath of God as he speaks out of his living Word, the Bible.

One translator-family has commit-

ted themselves to at least twenty years of living with a tiny Indian tribe in the Peruvian Andes—a tribe with less than 100 total population. It had been argued that these particular Indians could already understand Spanish and, consequently, all they needed was a Spanish Bible.

But the translator said, "True, they understand Spanish, but to reach their hearts you have to speak in their own language. The Bible is for the heart, not the mind; therefore we are giving our lives that their hearts may be redeemed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, in the heat of the jungle, fighting off poisonous snakes, battling stinging gnats, rolling drums of gasoline up river banks, or tightening bolts on an airplane engine, a missionary asks himself the question, "Why am I down here in the jungle when I could be preaching the Gospel in some air conditioned church in the States?"

Paul Bartholomew, tough, cocky aviation mechanic in Peru faced this dilemma. But one day, sweat dripping off his face as he unloaded heavy crates from an amphibious PBY Catalina to an Indian village on a muddy jungle river, he looked at the stenciled label on the box. It said, "THE BOOK OF ACTS, MACHIGUENGA TRANSLATION."

"Then I knew why I was there," Bart said. "I was fulfilling the great commission of Jesus to go and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth."

