

**Kerubino Kuanyin**  
**An Oscillating**  
**Legacy between the National**  
**Dream**  
**and**  
**Multiple Camps of Loyalty**

By Dengdit Ayok

We have witnessed a few days ago, a great and vital national commemoration, the Martyrs' Day. The importance of this tribute lies in the fact that we pause, as people of South Sudan, to look back at our long, heroic and historical journey. And as we retreat on Martyrs' Day to contemplate the march, we see a torrent of blood that had been shed in the liberation struggle for the sake of freedom, so that we may become liberated; set free and independent in a country we all love; and we therefore feel our greatness as a people; and become greatly overwhelmed with gratitude for our martyrs, for the countless sacrifices they had made and profoundly appreciate them.

And as we appreciate them, we become cognizant of an absolute patriotic truth; that they are the reason for our existence and the existence of our country, and that they shall and will always remain the reason behind her existence in this generation and the generations to come; in this fine land, from which a human jungle has sprouted against the enemies and usurping invaders.

It is in the context of this memorial, that one thought of writing about one of the founders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA), to honestly say about him the facts that have become rare due to advancement of time, and the silence of people on mentioning them, or mentioning them in a quick way without dwelling on them during national occasions, especially amongst his colleagues and comrades who knew him, became close to him and worked with him.

As one write about him, it does not mean that one would want to claim that he knows everything about him, and one would not be able to say everything about him. But one would say a little about what he knows about him.

For the sensitivity of some facts, one shall not say them in a rash or in an offensive manner, but in a rather responsible fashion, with the aim of documenting part of his history, because history is history, and it should be written as a remembrance for him, so as to document his autobiography with all its details: be they positive or negative aspects.

## **1. Birth and Upbringing**

Kerubino Kuanyin Bol was born in 1948, one year after the famous Juba Conference, in a simple Dinka Twic family in Bahr El-Ghazal province, in a small village called Payuwai in Adiang, an administrative area under the chieftaincy of Chief Cyer Rehan; one the great leaders and historical icons of Twic Mayardit and South Sudan at large. He was one of the chiefs who have had the privilege of attending Juba Conference in 1947.

Payuwai ever since until today is a rural and pastoral area where people are engaged in farming and raring cattle. Education in it was a rare thing at the time, and therefore the exact date and month of Kuanyin's birth is not known, during the last years of Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule in the Sudan.

Kuanyin belongs to "Pabol" clan in Adiang, one of the Twic Dinka sub-sections, with Wunrok as his administrative center, an area that also brings all the sons and daughters of Adiang Cyerdit together as their capital town.

Kerubino grew up in his early years in Twic looking after his family sheep, goats and cattle as a little boy like many of his peers. His full name before he acquired the European-Italian name from the Roman Catholic Church is: Kuanyin Bol Deng. And while he was ostensibly committed to Catholicism,

he acquired a church name for himself, thus his name became Kerubino Kuanyin Bol Deng. His father, Bol Deng, died while he was at a very young age, and so he was taken care of by his uncle Ayuel Deng, who later sent him to school.

## **2. School and educational background**

Kerubino was enrolled in one of many Catholic missionary schools in Bahr El-Ghazal province at Mayen-Abun. He successfully completed his primary/elementary school, and passed on to intermediate school in Gogrial. Those days were days of anxiety for many bright and promising young people of his caliber, who feared what the future might hold for them.

Sudan then was about to become the first independent state in Africa, which meant for southern Sudan that a short time was left for the imposition of Arab-Islamic culture on its people, and on the entire Sudanese people, to be culturally integrated into Arab-Islamic identity and culture against their diverse indigenous Sudanese and African identity and cultures. So, southern Sudan had to start preparing for resistance.

## **3. Joining the Anya-Nya National Army**

After many years of pursuing his education, Kerubino abandoned his school and went to join the southern Sudanese revolutionaries who mutinied against Khartoum in August 1955 in Torit town, to fight for an independent

southern Sudan. He joined the Anya-Nya National Army in 1964, after the Khartoum government made a decision to short down all schools in the south. He received military training and became a brave soldier and a valiant fighter in the ranks and files of the Anya-Nya National Army.

After the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), the political wing of the Anya-Nya, under the leadership of Joseph Lagu Yanga, signed the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement with the government of Sudan, in March 1972, under the leadership of President Jaafar Mohamed Nimeiri, Kerubino was absorbed into the Sudanese Army, with many of his Anya-Nya colleagues and comrades, in accordance with the provisions of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement.

#### **4. Kerubino's personality**

Kerubino Kuanyin Bol was a handsome, tall and slim young man. He was not as dark in color as many southern Sudanese in his area. His skin color was mixed between black and brown. He had a thick hair. As a young man, he walked in pride, egotism and strength of his youthfulness. He was very satisfied of himself, and he hated insult and humiliation. If he was insulted and humiliated, the offender would be met with strength, power and glory that did not accept bending.

So, his arm was strengthened, and he emerged out amongst his peers as a young man who hated humiliation, indignity and extremely strong, in Mayen-Abun, Wunrok Adiang, Gogrial and Kuajok. Just as he hated humiliation in his everyday social life, he also abhorred humiliation and injustice by Khartoum governments in the north against his people in the

south later, so he fought valiantly to liberate his people from Jallaba domination.

When he joined the Anya-Nya National Army and received military training in his early youthful life, he was a brilliant, flamboyant southern Sudanese soldier, who was happy with being a soldier who could pull a gun trigger. He was always ready to hit someone who insulted him or his relatives or friends with his hand. But when he became a soldier with his finger on a gun trigger, he did not hesitate to shoot at those who insulted, angered him, or violated his orders. He nicknamed himself (Ma'ngok), and he became famous by this name amongst the SPLA soldiers, especially amongst the Red Army, who loved him very much and admired him the most.

The true meaning of this nickname was taking pride in himself and his nature as a strong and tough soldier. This name is driven from the word (Ngok) in Dinka language, and ngok is a fish (catfish) with three sharp spines: two on its sides and one on its back, which is extremely painful to stab. The meaning of this nickname for Kerubino was that if he stabs a person, the pain of his stab remains extremely excruciating.

He was a soldier and a warrior who was not afraid to enter battles and feared no one, and he played his role as a fighter in the wars that were waged by southern Sudanese to restore their dignity and liberate their homeland from the tyranny of central governments in the north. Kerubino emerged and outshined in the war as a kind of a man who was needed in that era, by the testimony of many at the time. He loved the people and the land of southern Sudan so dearly. He had never discriminated or distinguished between southern Sudanese on tribal and ethnic or regional basis. He was for fairness, unity of southern Sudanese and waging the war of liberation against the north.

One of the things he is remembered for today, is firing the first bullet on May 16, 1983 against the enemy, an act which sparked the second Sudanese revolution, marking the second round of civil war in the Republic of Sudan, in the underdeveloped southern region and the rest of the marginalized Sudanese areas like Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile (Ingessana) and Darfur.

## **5. The clandestine movement and the revolution in 1980**

In a radio interview, that was conducted with him after he escaped the prison in 1992 while in Uganda, under the protection of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Kerubino recounted that he was the true founder of the political movement that led the revolution, which was later known as SPLM/SPLA.

Looking at his statement critically, one suppose that his statement came out in such a way because there was a great debate within the Movement, between the intellectuals and the soldiers whose educational level did not go beyond the intermediate and secondary school; which led to arguments, sophism and fallacies within the SPLM/SPLA between those who did not had a chance to acquire advanced education, and those who had a chance to obtain academic degrees; and who became elites, theorists and thinkers, about who is the true founder of the SPLM/SPLA with his ideas, theses, and diplomatic relations with the regional and external world by the educated elites.

Kerubino considered himself as a true founder of the Movement and its army, by the virtue of being the first man to shoot at the enemy in Bor and continued fighting; and beside this, his involvement in the clandestine movement with his fellow officers in the Sudanese Army for the birth of a

new political movement to lead the war of liberation. Strange enough, the argument over who is the true founder of the SPLM/SPLA continued then until today.

Kerubino went on in his radio interview to say that they have had an underground movement since 1980, and that he went to Malakal town in the same year to meet with his fellow officers in the Sudanese army, namely: Salva Kiir Mayardit, Francis Ngor Makiech, Ajuong Makuer, William Nyuon Bany, Arok Thon Arok and others. They held secret meetings, in which they discussed about the revolution and founding a new political movement that would lead the war to separate southern Sudan by the force of arms from the north. Separation of the south from the rest of the Sudan had always been a national dream of many southern nationalists and leaders, such as Aggrey Jaden Ladu, Joseph Kuol Amoum, Joseph Lagu Yanga, Joseph Oduho, Both Diu, Akuot Atem de Mayen, Samuel Gai Tut, Gordon Muortat Mayen, the Southern Front Party and Liberal Party amongst others.

The idea was conceived in their minds and they took action at that time, as a backlash and repercussion to the political situation that was developing negatively and worsening in Sudan, especially after President Jaafar Mohammed Nimeiri's statement that the Addis Ababa Agreement was "neither a Holy Bible nor a Holy Qur'an". This made the political options then for the south very limited, something that the southern Sudanese considered as a violation of the peace agreement signed in Addis Ababa, and as a conspiracy for aborting the realization of their national dream, an independent state in southern Sudan.

In the meeting, they proposed Elia Duang Arop as the leader of the new movement, a well-educated man who was educated in Britain, and returned



to Sudan and worked in the first Southern Sudan Regional Government, and had the required skills and abilities to lead the new political movement.

Kerubino's utterances are consistent with those of his widow, Nyandeng Chol Dut, who was recently interviewed during the commemoration of Martyrs' Day, in which she recalled the start of the revolution in Bor in 1983, and the subsequent events which then led to the war of liberation, in May this year, and the secrets meetings that were held in Malakal.

According to Nyandeng Chol, William Nyuon suggested in that same meeting another person, Dr. Manyang (his second name not mentioned) a Nuer, to lead the new movement, while Arok Thon Arok suggested Dr. John Garang de Mabior, who was sent to study in the United States of America at the time, to lead the new political movement.

Kerubino went to Khartoum to meet Elia Duang Arop in 1982 at the Hilton Hotel, and gave him a full explanation about their plan as soldiers to start a revolution, and offered him the idea of being its political leader. Duang Arop commended the idea and the plan, but he was sick and he told Kerubino that he was going to go to Britain for treatment, and if he returns to Sudan in good health; he will lead the new movement, but Elia Duang Arop returned to Sudan in a coffin, and he was buried in Wau in 1982.

After the demise of Elia Duang, the attention of the Sudanese army officers and members of the underground movement turned to John Garang as an alternate leader of their movement. Kerubino had met Dr. John Garang, who had returned to Sudan at that time in Khartoum.

After comparison, one found that the details narrated by Kerubino's widow Nyandeng Chol Dut in her TV interview, and Kerubino's statements in his radio interview consistent with the details that the writer and historian Arop Madut Arop recounts in his book.

When John Garang arrived in Bor town in May 1983, Kerubino welcomed him in the outskirts of Bor as a leader of the revolution with these gentle words:

“Garang, the son of my mother, have you come? Take over the command from here, now. Chagai, my work is finished: give me something to drink and celebrate the start of revolution. Chagai Atem, I said my work is finished here. Let the wise man, Garang of my mother assume the responsibility. Chagai, where is your AK47? Garang will show us how to shoot the enemy”.

Arop Madut Arop, *Sudan’s Painful Road to Peace*, [p.51]

## **6. Commander of Malual-Chat Garrison in Bor**

Kerubino was promoted in the Anya-Nya army, as well as in the Sudanese army, after the absorption process till he reached the rank of Major. He was also transferred to many areas in southern Sudan, where he finally settled in Bor town and became the commander of (105) battalion that was stationed in Malual-Chat area, south of Bor town. The battalion (105) and (104) became later the nucleus of the SPLA and was known as Jamus and Muor-muor.

Kuanyin had already reached the rank of Major in the Sudanese army by the time he was in Bor, and a member of the underground movement that was organizing, mobilizing and preparing to lead the war again against Khartoum. The military force in Bor was deployed in three areas within the town: Malual-Chat in the south, the airport to the east, and Langbar to the north.

On May 16, 1983, Kerubino shot the commander of the military force coming from Juba to arrest him as part of the government's arrangements to quell the rebellion that occurred in the ranks and file of the army due to delay of salaries, according to the government accounts, in a battle that broke out early in the morning that day, until ten in the morning. That commander who came from Juba to arrest Kuanyin, was the first to fall in that war which took place in the garrison of (105) battalion, with the first bullet fired at him by Major Kerubino Kuanyin Bol personally, and that was the beginning of the revolution that the SPLM/SPLA led later for twenty-two years.

Colonel John Garang, a member of the underground movement and a high-ranking officer in the Sudanese army, was present in the town in Langbar residential area when the war broke out in Bor, after he arrived in Bor from Khartoum via Juba. At ten o'clock in the morning, Major Kerubino was hit by bullets, sustaining serious wounds, and he was straightaway evacuated to receive treatment outside the town somewhere close to the River Nile. Kerubino suffered consecutive fits of coma after being transported out of the town.

The battle continued shortly after he was taken out of the town, but the forces he was commanding withdrew from the town. Kerubino did like the withdrawal of his colleagues from the battle. He wanted Bor captured and brought under their control. He was not sure of his survival as he was suffering from consecutive bouts of coma, according to his wife's testimonies, so he recommended to his wife Nyandeng Chol Dut that she should tie his body to a heavy object and throw it into the River Nile, if he died of his wounds, for he did want his body to be used as a sign of defeat by Jallaba. But he did not die despite the suffering and fainting spells.

John Garang accompanied by a number of his soldiers and his family, left Bor town and headed towards the east to Kongoor. And from there to the Sudanese-Ethiopian border, where he was flown by the Ethiopian authorities in a helicopter to Addis Ababa, after the members of the clandestine movement – the National Action Movement – who were still in Khartoum, informed the Ethiopian Embassy in Khartoum about him and his whereabouts, as recounted by two writers and historians: Arop Madut Arop and Edward Lino Abyei in their books.

## **7. Accusation, arrest and detention**

Soldiers had arrived in Ethiopia from Akobo in the year 1975 under the command of Lieutenant Vincent Kuany Latjor, a Nuer, and Corporal James Kur Bol Alangjok and Thaan Nyabil (the duos: James Bol Kur and Thaan Nyabil) are from Collo. Bernard Bakam, from Anyuak, and Joseph Mubarak from the Nuba Mountains, after their rebellion which took place in Akobo that year, and which was later on known as Anya-Nya (II). They founded military training camps in the village of Bilpam inside Ethiopia.

After the fighting that took place in Bor and the withdrawal of the military force that fought there, John Garang arrived in Ethiopia. At that time, the two high-ranking officials who formerly held ministerial positions in Joseph Lagu's regional government, and members of the ten-year underground movement that had been formed during the autonomous period in southern Sudan, Samuel Gai Tut and Akuot Atem de Mayen had arrived in Ethiopia before the outbreak of the revolution in Bor shortly. They apparently knew what was going to happen.

Instead of joining the Anya-Nya (II) forces that Lieutenant Vincent Kuany had led to Ethiopia since 1975, with their support and assistance, they established a separate camp in Bukteng village. Samuel Gai Tut thought that he had always had great efforts in forming the second Anya-Nya movement during the ten-year peace period, and that he would automatically become the head of the political wing of the Anya-Nya (II) movement upon his arrival in Ethiopia with Akuot Atem de Mayen and William Abdallah Chuol as members of his leadership, according to Arop Madut Arop. Therefore, he approached Gordon Kong, commander of the Anya Nya (II) forces in Bilpam, to reach an agreement with him to be the president, but Gordon Kong refused to be a soldier who received orders from the politicians. Gai Tut's and Akuot Atem's supporters who poured into Bukteng village were predominantly Nuer.

Akuot Atem de Mayen installed himself as the chairman of the new movement and appointed Samuel Gai Tut as his deputy, while Colonel John Garang was appointed as chief of staff of the army, and this was the beginning of the division between the revolutionaries into groups including the (Bilpam group) later led by Vincent Kuany and the (Bukteng group) led by Akuot Atem and Samuel Gai Tut, and the (Adura village group) led by John Garang. This split led to a deadly power struggle, which later ended with the assassination of both Samuel Gai Tut and Akuot Atem de Mayen.

The disagreement was also ideological in nature, as Garang wanted a new united, democratic, secular and Marxist-Leninist Sudan, that is based on communist theories of historical materialism and dialectics, which is a philosophy of reaching the truth by discovering the contradictions contained in the opponent's reasoning, and by overcoming them; while Samuel Gai Tut, Akuot Atem and others were separatists, who wanted to fight for the separation of southern Sudan as an independent state in the region and Africa.

After the arrival of Kerubino Kuanyin and William Nyuon Bany Machar to Ethiopia, they learned that Akuot Atem had appointed himself as head of their new movement and appointed Gai Tut as his deputy; they became enraged and waged a war against them, which resulted into the assassination of Samuel Gai Tut and Akuot Atem in 1984.

John Garang remained the Chairman of the SPLM and Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA, and Kerubino Kuanyin as Deputy of the SPLM Chairman and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA, while William Nyuon Bany Machar became the Chief of Staff of the SPLA, Salva Kiir as Deputy Chief of Staff for Security Operations, and Arok Thon Arok as Deputy Chief of Staff for Administrative and Logistical Affairs, and others. Captain Salva Kiir Mayardit arrived in Ethiopia together with Lieutenant Colonel Francis Ngor Makiech after their rebellion and their attempt to control Malakal town in 1983, while William Nyuon the commander of (104) battalion led a revolt in Ayod.

In 1986, after the overthrow of President Gaafar Mohamed Nimieri, Sudanese peace efforts continue, and another attempt to bring peace took place, this time at one of the former emperor Haile Selassie's old residences at Koka Dam in Ethiopia. Along with Awad El Karim Mohamed, Secretary-General of the National Alliance of the Sudan, Kerubino countersigned the declaration as "Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA and Deputy Chairman of the SPLM provisional Executive Committee".

In 1987, Kerubino Kuanyin led the SPLA forces northwards, commissioned by Colonel Dr. John Garang, and succeeded in achieving glorious military victories and seizing a series of towns in southern Blue Nile, including Kurmuk, Gisan and other areas. He had reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel at the time as Deputy SPLM Chairman and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA. The SPLM/A at that time was internally simmering and dissatisfied with the way John Garang was managing its internal affairs.

There were no regular meetings of the leadership. Skeptical incidents took place such as internal anger over the killing of Benjamin Bol Akok and complaints from people who come from Bahr El-Ghazal region that they had been marginalized by the leader of the movement, John Garang. They had alleged that John Garang was favoring his own people from Bor by appointing them into key positions in the Movement, in addition to many other charges, allegations, accusations and claims.

Kerubino was the main speaker on the marginalization issues of the sons of Bahr El-Ghazal within the movement, and he delivered a speech to the army in Blue Nile in which he spoke about this issue. It was said that his successive defeats of government forces in Blue Nile made him aspire to seize the leadership of the SPLM and its army by overthrowing Colonel John Garang, which was believed to be a plot against Garang.

He was therefore deceived by inviting him from the war front to the leadership meeting in Ethiopia, so he left the battlefield and went to Ethiopia. When he arrived there, he was arrested and thrown into prison on the orders of the Chairman and Commander-in-Chief John Garang. He spent six uncomfortable years in the roving guerrilla prison from (1987 – 1992).

Here the observers can notice that Lieutenant Colonel Kerubino Kuanyin Bol withdrew, shifted and transferred his military subordination and political loyalty from John Garang for the first time to himself, for he was ambitious to become a military and political leader of the SPLM/A, due to being unhappy with the liberation policies within the SPLM.

## **8. Escaping and joining the dissidents**

The splinter of the SPLA Chief of Staff, Commander William Nyuon Bany Machar, from the SPLM/A at the end of 1992, provided peace for the political detainees John Garang ordered to be imprisoned a chance to escape. The schism of Commander William Nyuon Bany was a golden opportunity for Lieutenant Colonel Kerubinho Kuanyin Bol, Martin Majier Gai, Kawac Makuei Mayar, Joseph Malath Lueth, Arok Thon Arok, Amon Mon Wantok, Martin Makur Aleyou, and all the political prisoners to escape. The detention center was opened on the orders of William Nyuon, and all the political detainees, including Kerubino, escaped.

Kuanyin Bol and Nyuon Bany were close friends, united by their love for themselves, for being brave soldiers with boldness, valor and a common military temperament. They lived in the same neighborhood and were only separated by a wall separating their houses. They had often spent time together in Itang, wearing military uniforms, under heavy security guard, armed with all kinds of weapons that the SPLM/A had obtained in the 1980s.

After his prolonged arbitrary detention, Kerubino escaped with a number of former SPLA commanders from southern Sudan to Uganda in late 1992, where they were recognized as refugees. From there they made their way to Kenya, where they joined a breakaway faction from the SPLA, formed in August 1991, and led by the former SPLA Commander, Riek Machar Teny Dhurguon, a political movement which was later called the Southern Sudan Independence Movement and its military wing, the Southern Sudan Independence Army, (SSIM/SSIA).

Here the observer can also notice that Lieutenant Colonel Kerubino Kuanyin gave up his loyalty to himself and his previous idea of becoming a military and political leader, leading a political movement and its army, and offered his loyalty to another leader who broke away from John Garang. This here is to be considered as a shift or swinging and fluctuation in ideas between



continuing the fighting for the achievement of the national dream, and relocation of political and military loyalty camps by the late Commander Kerubino Kuanyin Bol.

## **9. Gogrial, the main stronghold**

After his oscillation between the idea of becoming a leader and joining the dissidents in Kenya, Lieutenant Colonel Kerubino Kuanyin returned to southern Sudan, and began to recruit the sons of Bahr El-Ghazal into the ranks of his SPLM/SPLA faction. He was still using the name: Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army [SPLM/SPLA], because he considered himself as its true founder and leader. He was its Chairman and an overall Commander of its forces. His friend and colleague Faustino Atem Gualdit, a former soldier in the paratroopers army unit during President Jaafar Nimeiri's era, was his deputy, and other officers such as Mecham Atem, Madut Cyer Rehan, Machar Bol Yai and many others who were with him.

But the majority of Bahr El-Ghazal's sons in Gogrial, Aweil and Tonj refused to join him because they saw him as a renegade and a defector fighting against the SPLM/A, led by John Garang and Salva Kiir. The people of Bahr El-Ghazal adhered to their loyalty to John Garang and his leadership, and on this basis, they fought against Kerubino in Abyei, Mabior Angui and other areas in Twic Mayardit: Mayen-Abun, Turalei, Abyin Dau, Wunrok Adiang and Gogrial town, which Kerubino took as his headquarters of his political leadership; and a military base from which he launched his successive military offensives in the SPLA controlled areas under John Garang around Gogrial from (1993 - 1997).

The Sudanese government dealt with Kerubino as a friendly force, because he belonged to Riek Machar, but he had had differences with Riek Machar and fell out with him in 1994. Riek Machar dismissed him from his rebel forces, so he re-allied with the Sudanese government separately from Riek Machar's camp.

Here the observer can also notice that Commander Kerubino Kuanyin became an independent commander of his forces after his disagreement with Riek Machar, and became loyal to the National Islamic Front (NIF) Government in Khartoum, and here he shifted the camp of loyalty from Machar to Khartoum directly. He had reached the rank of Major General after his alliance with the Sudanese government. There was power struggle between him and Riek Machar.

When Major General Kerubino learned in Gogrial that the civil leaders, the chiefs who represented the native civil authority in Gogrial, Twic, Abyei, Aweil and Tonj, unanimously agreed to boycott him on the basis that he was allied with the Arabs whom John Garang and Salva Kiir were fighting against, and that they had prevented the youth from joining him, he implemented three dangerous policies: The first one was compulsory recruitment for the people of Bahr El-Ghazal into his army and movement. The second one was the declaration of "scorched-earth policy" in the region. And the third one was starvation policy to starve the citizens in the northern parts of Bahr El-Ghazal, especially in Gogrial region, which includes Apuk, Kuac, Aguok, Awan Chan Nyal, Awan Moun Ring, and Twic Mayardit to coerce them to join him.

His three policies were relatively successful, and he was joined by many of those who were arrested by his forces in the villages and forcibly recruited, and some SPLA soldiers who committed crimes in the areas that were under the control of the SPLA led by John Garang, joined Kerubino's forces in Gogrial to escape punishment.

Many youth had joined him during the five years (1993 - 1997) in the areas of Gogrial: Twic, Awan, Apuk, Aguok and Kuac. Fierce wars were fought in the area, in which thousands of citizens died, and those who survived were subjected to severe coercion to join him or get displaced. Kerubino soon became a striking force in the area and a threat to the presence of the SPLA around Gogrial. The “scorched-earth policy”, “forced conscription” and “starvation policy” continued by plundering the citizens' possessions: cows, sheep, goats, corns and other crops that the citizens depend on in their livelihood and survival.

Many citizens in the villages around Gogrial at that time resorted to a trick of digging the ground and hide their corns therein, in order to preserve it from looting by Kerubino’s army and for the fulfillment of their needs for food; because storing it in homes did not help, but the new joiners who joined Kerubino’s camp as a result of duress, repression and defeat, divulged this secret amongst his army; so his soldiers went out in big numbers and plundered corns and sorghums that the citizens had hidden in the ground, and carried it to Gogrial town. This was done in all villages around Gogrial.

In the end, the three policies resulted into overwhelming and deadly military confrontations between the Garang’s SPLA and Kerubino's forces, which had habitually gone out from Gogrial town in successive waves, to launch military attacks against the citizens. It also resulted into death of hundreds of citizens, and occurrence of a considerable chaos within the SPLA under the command of John Garang, as the soldiers who were under punishment for insubordination to their commanders’ orders fled and joined the forces of Kerubino in Gogrial. These policies also caused social and economic instability in the region and consequently caused lack of production and economic depletion and exhaustion of citizens' resources, which eventually caused famine in the region, and caused the death of 600,000 citizens in Bahr El-Ghazal in 1998.

Since the war that Kerubino was leading was full of bitterness against John Garang, his leadership and his supporters, Kerubino's soldiers had been frequently going out from Gogrial town shooting at the citizens, and saying in Dinka language: (lak Bor), and the meaning of this phrase comes in the imperative form: (Go to Bor). And its indication is that those citizens, after their refusal to support Kerubino as their leader; and adhering to their support and loyalty to John Garang, had to go to Bor, the place Kerubino and his soldiers thought as Garang's hometown. In other words, they were telling the citizens: Leave Bahr El-Ghazal and go to John Garang in Bor, because you are convinced of his leadership.

One personally witnessed part of these atrocities and violations for two years (1994-1995) at a very young age then. This was before I left Gogrial for Wau and to Khartoum in August 1996. One still remember how we used to flee from "Kot Nhom" village in Apuk Giir Thiik to "Abiem Mayar Mareng" in Tonj, and then return after days, if there was relative security in the area.

After leaving Wau town with my mother in August 1996 for Khartoum, my father, Ayok Deng Agor Wol, a veterinarian by profession and a Second Lieutenant in the SPLA under the commandship of John Garang, was captured in an ambush in Ajiep village by Kerubino's forces and was taken to Gogrial town, where Kerubino joyfully welcomed him, for they were classmates in school when they were young. Major General Kerubino Kuanyin immediately appointed him as his political advisor because he was very good in politics. He accompanied him to Khartoum in January 1997.

While my father was in Gogrial, he was kept under strict surveillance; because Kerubino knew that he would return to the SPLM/SPLA if he was not closely watched. Then he asked him to accompany him to Khartoum in 1997 to negotiate the Khartoum Peace Agreement (KPA). In January 1998, my father fought fiercely in the battle for Wau, and Major General Kerubino

and his forces left him in the battle fighting the Mujahideen and the Popular Defense Forces in Ishlak neighborhood in the center of the town until they almost captured him during the battle, but he narrowly managed to withdraw. Many of his soldiers died. And through that historic battle, my father returned to the SPLM/SPLA after three years of captivity by Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol.

## **10. The Khartoum Peace Agreement, April 1997**

After their differences in 1994, Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol and Riek Machar Teny signed a political charter under which they made a political alliance with the Sudanese government in April 1996. They were the two factions that signed on behalf of all the other renegades and rebel factions. In that charter, the parties agreed to end the civil war in southern Sudan, conduct a referendum, after achieving comprehensive peace in the south, at the end of a transitional period, to define the political destiny of the people of southern Sudan through “the Right of Self-determination”. On April 21, 1997, this charter was incorporated into the Khartoum Peace Agreement (KPA) which Riek Machar and Kerubino Kuanyin signed with the Sudanese government on the same day.

Major General Kerubin Kuanyin Bol signed as the Chairman of SPLM and Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA (Bahr El-Ghazal Group), as the government used to call it in its mass media. Among the former SPLA commanders who signed the Khartoum Peace Agreement were, Riek Machar and Arok Thon Arok, the SPLM Chairman (Bor Group) according to government mass media, and Kawac Makuei Mayar, while Lam Akol Ajawin’s faction signed the

Fashoda Peace Agreement in the same year. Kawac Makuei Mayar was an ally to Kerubino, but he was based in his hometown of Aweil.

Riek Machar and Kerubino Kuanyin were the two who had forces in the field and fought fiercely against the SPLM/A led by Garang. In 1997, Kerubino transferred his forces to Marial Baai, a village close to Wau, after he was defeated in a fierce battle by the Garang's SPLA, in which his forces fought alongside the government forces in Gogrial.

## **11. The capturing of Wau town, January 1998**

The year 1997 had gone down in the SPLM/SPLA history, under the leadership and commandship of John Garang, as a year of overwhelming military victories against the Sudan government's army in all their barracks. The SPLA had begun to take control of many areas, beginning from Kaju-keji, Kaya, Morobo, Mundri, Yei, Kubri-Bo in Equatoria; in addition to Terekeka, Tali, Yirol, Rumbek, Tonj and Gogrial, except Wau town. After the SPLA captured Gogrial, which was Kerubino's headquarters, his forces fled to Marial Baai, a village nearby Wau.

Since Khartoum government was not serious in the implementation of the Khartoum Peace Agreement, it had signed in 1997, Kerubino had two options: either to continue his alliance with the National Islamic Front Government in Khartoum against his own will, or return to the SPLM/SPLA under John Garang's leadership. Wau was the next target for the SPLA campaigns that began in Kaju-keji after controlling Rumbek, Tonj and Gogrial.

Wau is the second largest of the three cities in southern Sudan, and its estimated population was (120,000) at the end of 1997. It was caught up in panic after the SPLA seized in May 1997 three towns in the northwest on the road leading to Wau, namely: Tonj (sixty miles only to the southeast of Wau), Rumbek and Yirol. This campaign continued from a major military offensive launched by the SPLA in March 1997, near the Sudanese-Ugandan borders in which Yei was captured, with thousands of government soldiers also captured, and a number of the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels who were fighting a proxy war against the SPLA in Equatoria, known as (Tong Tong) killed.

The government forces had gone to Tonj from Wau to fight the SPLA after the liberation of Rumbek in April 1997, to obstructive and frustrate the SPLA's aggression and prevent it from entering Wau, so the people in Wau thought at the time that the government forces were too huge and could not be defeated, but the SPLA defeated them. Panic and terror spread across Wau city after the government troops were defeated in Tonj.

In those battles, the SPLA used multiple-barrel rocket launchers, the (BM) that launches their missiles on trucks. After those fierce battles, the government soldiers returned to Wau on foot from Tonj, with their feet badly swollen and full of bruises, and with great weariness and fatigue that was beyond description. News of Tonj conquest by the SPLA shook every corner of Wau town, so the northern officers and merchants began to send their families to Khartoum by air.

In May 1997, Major General Kerubino Kuanyin fought the SPLA forces in Gogrial, a hundred kilometers northeast of Wau, and succeeded in preventing the SPLA from seizing Marial Baai village, which he had taken over and used as his headquarters and his army barrack. Many Wau residents said at the time that the fighting was close enough to Wau, as

those in Wau could hear the banging of bombs and the sound of heavy gunfire inside the town. They also heard that hundreds of Dinka soldiers from both sides had been killed.

“Kerubino definitely did a favor to the government by preventing the SPLA from capturing Wau. Kerubino defended the Arabs by killing his people”, one citizen stated in his own opinion on the war fought in Gogrial. Nevertheless, in May 1997 the SPLA succeeded in capturing Wunrok, to the northeast of Gogrial. Wunrok had been one of the strongholds of Major General Kerubino Kuanyin until then. Gogrial was the place where he seized the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plane and held its crew hostage in late 1996.

In mid-January 1998, President Omar al-Bashir appointed Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol as Vice Chairman of the Coordination Council for the Southern States and Minister of Local Government and Public Security in Southern Sudan. It was believed that Al-Bashir offered the position to Kerubino because of his rivalry with Riek Machar over leadership in southern Sudan. Kerubino had then disagreed with the composition of the proposed regional government by Riek Machar. He argued then that there was no fairness in the composition of southern Sudan government led by Riek Machar. Machar had assumed the presidency of the Coordination Council for the Southern States in accordance with the provisions of the Khartoum Peace Agreement.

During that period in the year 1997, elections had taken place in southern Sudan, in accordance with the provisions of the Khartoum Peace Agreement, in which Kerubino Kuanyin’s faction competed for the position of Governor of Western Bahr El-Ghazal State. The candidate for the post of governor of Western Bahr El-Ghazal was Charles Julu, who belongs to Fertit ethnic group in the state. Julu won the elections and became the governor



of Western Bahr El-Ghazal State in Wau, succeeding Ali Tamim Fartak, the National Islamic Front Governor. Kerubino's intention in nominating Charles Julu as his governor in Wau was winning the Fertit ethnic group to his side. He indeed succeeded in winning them.

Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol continued the process of mobilizing the citizens in Wau to stand by him, because he was intending to capture Wau town, after he had contacted John Garang at the end of 1997 and explained to him his plan to return to the SPLM/SPLA with Wau under his control, so that he could return to the SPLM/SPLA with the euphoria of military victory by capturing and controlling one of the three major towns in southern Sudan. Great idea!

Garang agreed and promised to support him. And it was according to this policy that large numbers of SPLA soldiers went to Marial Baai village near Wau, and joined the camp of Major General Kerubino Kuanyin. Seeing that big number of the SPLA soldiers from Garang's main SPLA going to Marial Baai and joining Kerubino, the First Vice President of the Republic, As-Zubair Mohamed Saleh, went and received them. They were called al-aideen meaning "the returnees" by the government. He addressed them and delivered to them a very emotional speech in which he warmly welcomed them and talked to them about the importance of achieving peace in Sudan, without knowing that this was a joint plan by Kerubino and Garang to lead the war and capture Wau.

In January 1998, the forces of Major General Kerubino, supported by the forces the government had called "the returnees", launched an attack on Wau in which the government forces were quickly crushed and dislodged. Kerubino forces temporarily took control of the town, but his army was engaged in plundering and prowling the spoils in the town as soon as they dislodged the government's army. This gave the enemy an opportunity to

regroup and reorganize and launch a counterattack, which resulted into the retake of Wau town by the government's army with many SPLA soldiers killed as they were engaged in plundering and rewarding themselves with possessions, thus Kerubino's plan to capture Wau failed.

Here, the observer can also notice that Major General Kerubino Kuanyin shifted his camp of loyalty from the Sudanese government, turning against it, and quickly returned to the SPLM/SPLA, which he fought in the years of his fall out with John Garang. This is a military and political tale of a giant soldier who had been switching sides during the war of liberation without accurate calculations, which ended in a sad way when "the magic turned against the magician" according to the Arabic parable, as we shall see in the end of the story.

## **12. The Return to SPLM and fire exchange in Nairobi, October 1998**

After the failure of his plan that was aimed at capturing Wau, in January 1998, Major General Kerubino Kuanyin left (Marial Baai) and arrived in (Yienth Kuel) in Gogrial, and he then left for the Kenyan capital Nairobi, after spending a period of time in Gogrial. The decision to go to Nairobi was made by John Garang with the aim of attaching him to the headquarters rather than being given a top field appointment to lead battles in Bahr El-Ghazal region. He stayed in the headquarters in Nairobi for a period of time. This gave him an opportunity to spend time with his wives and children who had been in Nairobi since 1992, but he was later accused of plotting to assassinate the SPLM Chairman John Garang. This is also another U-turn of many U-turns of Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol.

### **13. Leaving Nairobi for Mankien**

There was an exchange of fire in Nairobi between the supporters of Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol and the supporters of Dr. John Garang de Mabior in October 1998. The Muthangari Police Station in Nairobi witnessed the shooting incident, which resulted into the death of one person. This caused a great media storm in both Nairobi and Khartoum at the time. When the dust of the media storm subsided, Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol left Nairobi city in a special jet for Mankien in western Nuer land in Unity State, where he was received with great hospitality by Major General Paulino Matip Nhial, a commander of the South Sudan United Army, a pro-government militia.

It is worth noting here, that Kerubino Kuanyin and Paulino Matip had two special kinds of relationships. The first one is social, that is Matip's marriage to Kerubino's cousin, and the second is political, that is their opposition to John Garang. But Kerubino had made a mistake then. His political and military calculations were not accurate. That was a big mistake. He quickly returned to the den of the opponents who he had fought in the battle for Wau, causing loss of life in the ranks of the government troops.

### **14. The last battle**

In September 1999, a fierce battle took place in Mankien village after disagreements and wrangles between the two commanders, Peter Gadet Yak and Paulino Matip Nhial. Gadet planned to overthrow Paulino Matip and

take over the commandership of the army that Matip was commanding. The fighting ensued between the forces loyal to Matip and the forces loyal to Peter Gadet, in which scores of soldiers and officers from both sides were killed. In the battle, Kerubino fought alongside Paulino Matip, and the battle ended with the capturing of Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol by Commander Peter Gadet Yak, who immediately joined the SPLA forces under the command of John Garang, after the battle of his defection from Matip's camp.

According to some accounts that were widely circulated at the time claimed that Major General Kerubino Kuanyin had not been captured, but had surrendered himself to Peter Gadet after he witnessed a terrible death of soldiers who were fighting to rescue him. However, it was hard to believe those accounts and stories; because Kerubino, as a soldier and a fierce fighter, does not accept defeat and does not give up in battles.

After Peter Gadet captured Major General Kerubino, he sent a message to the SPLM leadership headquarters in Nairobi, so the headquarters shared the message with senior officers, some of them were from Twic, the same area where Kerubino hails. They expressed their deep annoyance towards him because of his frequent swinging between the two camps of conflict. The message came back to Gadet telling him to act, so he executed and eliminated Kerubino. It appeared then that the ambitions and interests of the leaders within the SPLM sometimes required physical elimination with direct or indirect support by the leaders as part of what is known as settling of political differences.

Peter Gadet then became a striking force in the area for the SPLA, and he led many military operations for the SPLA under the commandership of John Garang. He hindered oil drilling process in Bentiu and in other oil production areas in Upper Nile province.

According to the stories and accounts that were circulated at that time, Kerubino Kuanyin, was killed in a very brutal manner. He was cut into pieces while he was tied and still alive with an axe in one story, and was slaughtered in another story, on September 10, 1999, aged fifty-one. He was executed with full knowledge of the SPLM political leadership and its army.

The reason for chopping Major General Kerubino Kuanyin with an axe when he was killed by Peter Gadet Yak, was the wide spread believe that he was equipped with a supernatural magic power that does not allow bullets to kill him, regardless of their size. And here it appears that the late leader and commander Kerubino Kuanyin Bol was a character with a lot of myths and strange rumors circulated around him until his demise. No one could confirm the authenticity of such beliefs, rumors, chitchats and gossips.

According to the other accounts and narratives which were also circulated following his death, it was said that Peter Gadet had ordered his execution by a fire squad, but he did not die, and no traces of bullets were seen on his body after he was shot. One of the worst things that happened after his execution was that his body was not buried. It was left in an open air until it discomposed. His bones remained in the spot where he fell in Mankien for a period of time, until his relatives went there and collected his bones and buried them in his hometown, Wunrok Adiang.

In conclusion, it can be said that Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol Deng is a victim of the complexities of politics of liberation in southern Sudan within the SPLM leadership on one hand, and he was also a victim of his rapid political and military shifting without accurate calculations on the other hand. He therefore, fell in the battle as a general who had been swinging between the struggle for the achievement of the national dream for South Sudan; that is an independent and sovereign state (his dream was

fulfilled in July 2011), and multiple political camps of loyalty and several military relocations during the liberation war.

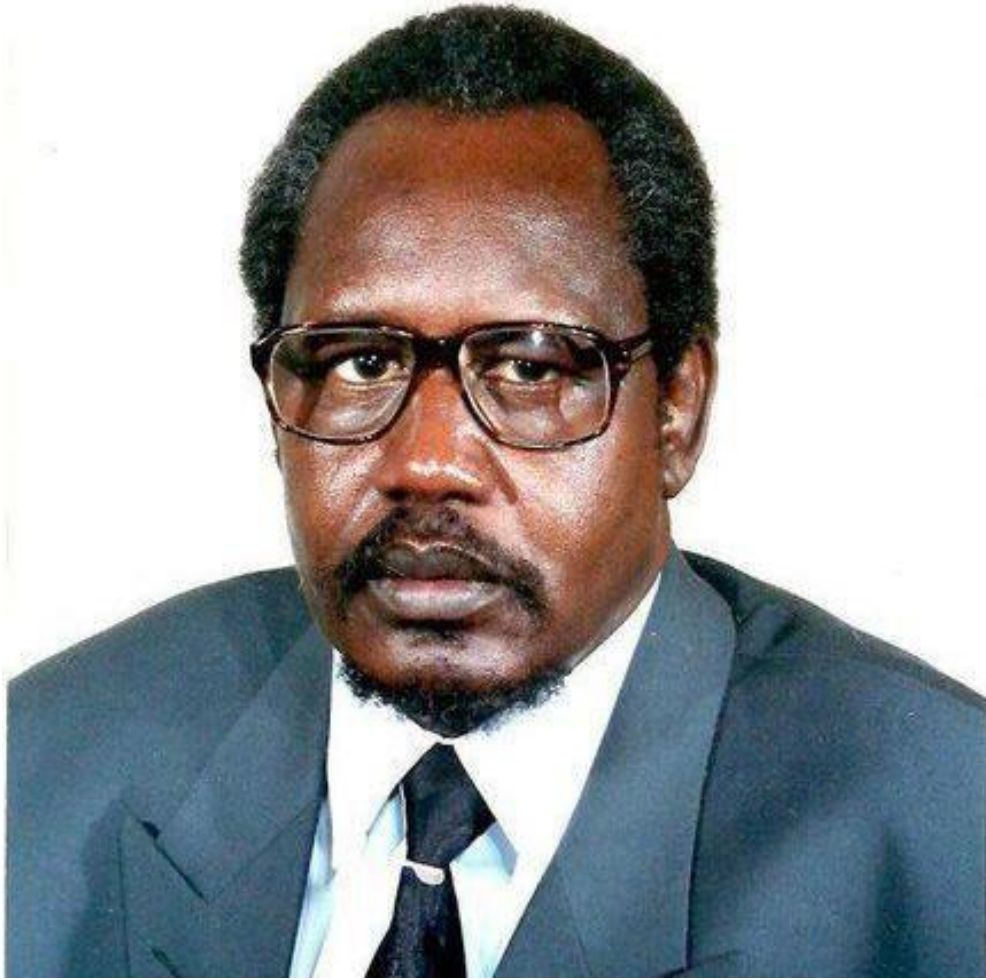
One therefore sees that history preserves and recalls his legacy and memory as a hero in the war of liberation, but he was oscillating between two things: fighting for the realization of the national dream on one hand, and multiple military camps and several political loyalties on the other hand. On the other hand, one also sees that his nature of swapping and switching sides politically and militarily and the existence of multiple political loyalties, which resulted into too much swinging between the two camps of conflict in the Sudan; were “the straw that broke the camel's back” according to the famous Arabic parable, as his efforts were scattered and shattered between the two camps, and in the end, his life ended tragically.

This is how the valiant soldier and the hero of the liberation struggle, who was politically engaged in preparing a clandestine movement to lead the revolution, and who fired the first shot of the revolution that later ended with the declaration of an independent state, died. May God the Almighty continue to rest his precious soul in peace in the land with the good ones and the ancestors; as we collectively commemorate our martyrs, and may his memory and legacy continue to live on in his children, his grandchildren and in the people of South Sudan.

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8. A TV interview with Kerubino's widow Nyandeng Chol Dut during the 16 May 2020 marking the 37 years anniversary of SPLM/A foundation. The interview was conducted by Journalist Mading Ngor Akec. In the interview, Nyandeng Chol recalls the start of the revolution in Bor on May 16, 1983.
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10. The author as a witness to many parts of the events mentioned in this article in mid-1990s.



**Kerubino Kuanyin Bol Deng, in his late forties**





**Kerubino in a military area**



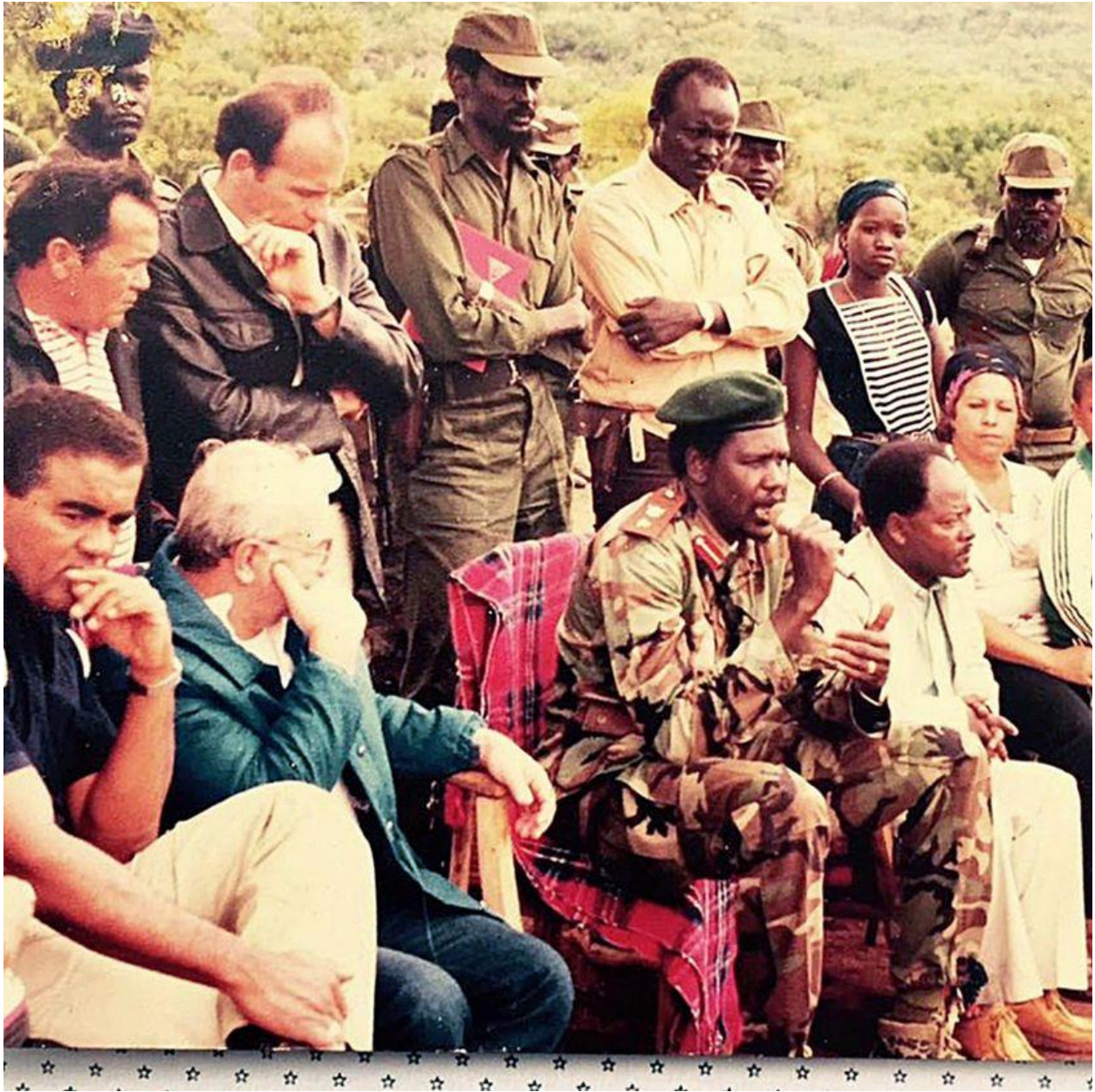
**From left to Chagai Atem, William Nyuon Bany, John Garang de Mabior, Kerubino Kuanyin Bol and Salva Kiir Mayardit, at the Sudanese-Ethiopian borders.**



By Atem Yaak Atem on the 6th/Agust/1984 at Teda Sudan-Ethiopia bourder  
to left is capt. Chagai Atem Biar , Comander Karbino Kwanyin Bol and Comander Salva Kiir Mayardit



Major General Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, in full military uniform in Gogrial where he seized the ICRC plane and held its staff hostage 1996



**Lieutenant Colonel Kerubino Kuanyin delivering a speech somewhere (probably in Ethiopia) in the early years of the SPLM/SPLA**