

RANGERS: Group ministers to needy in wartorn places

FROM PAGE 1

The Free Burma Rangers have operated in Burma for 20 years, providing "help, hope and love" to internally displaced people in conflict zones.

Allison recalled his first mission in Burma with Eubank. When they arrived, they learned the Burma Army had put out a contract on Eubank's head. Allison suggested they retreat for a week or so to regroup.

Eubank told him, "There's no better way to die than in the service of God. We're all going to die, so there is no better way to die."

The question, Allison said, is this: "Are we doing what we're supposed to be doing in the service of God?"

Allison went with Eubank into Burma then and on countless missions since — missions where the Rangers sometimes came under fire from the Burma Army.

A few years ago Eubank was asked to help out in Sudan, Africa, and then in Kurdistan, Syria and northern Iraq.

After the Kurds drove ISIS out of their territory in November 2016, Eubank prayed for guidance. An hour later he got a call from a Christian charity asking him to deliver 17 tons of food into Mosul.

Soon he, his family and some fellow Free Burma Rangers were headed to Mosul, where the Iraqi Army was trying to drive out ISIS and civilians were fleeing by the thousands.

The Rangers had two Land Cruisers and a truckload of food but none of the permits required to get through the numerous checkpoints. Nevertheless, guards let them through, including one who said, "You guys are Americans. I love Michael Jackson!"

As they approached Mosul, they saw plumes from explosions going up across the plain. They came to a line of rocks across the road and, not sure what to do, turned and drove toward an Iraqi flag, ISIS, positioned not far away, opened fire with .50-caliber guns and mortars, but Eubank's group made it to the Iraqi Army outpost safely.

"The Iraqis said, 'Who are you? Who sent you?'" Eubank said. "I said, 'God sent us.'"

As it turned out, the commanding general hated Americans — until three nights later when Eubank joined an Iraqi team to rescue some of their men pinned down by ISIS.

Eubank's participation impressed the Iraqi general, and the Iraqis' bravery impressed Eubank.

"The Iraqis were all willing to die for those three, and they were all cooks," he said.

Time and again he saw Iraqis risk their lives — and sometimes lose them — to rescue people of other tribes and faiths, whereas ISIS fighters killed their own people when they tried to flee.

"Jesus changed my heart to love Iraqis," Eubank said.

Eubank even viewed ISIS through the lens of Christianity, reflecting Jesus' command to love our enemies.

"I didn't hate ISIS. I prayed for their souls — till one day they killed this 3-year-old kid," he said.

Eubank had met an Iraqi family, chatted with them and prayed over them. They drove away on a tractor, only to hit an ISIS land mine, wounding the family and killing the girl.

"All of us were crying. We saw dead bodies every day. Nobody cries in combat," Eubank said.

He told a colleague, "We will hunt them down till they are all dead."

But he prayed that night and the next morning opened his Bible to this verse: "Vengeance is mine, said the Lord. I will repay."

"I said, 'Jesus, I reject vengeance. I give it up.' He lifted off my shoulders a burden I didn't even know I was carrying."

Meanwhile the action came thick and fast. A hand grenade detonated 4 yards away from Eubank but left him with only minor shrapnel wounds. He and an Iraqi soldier were sitting by a road in a supposedly safe area when an ISIS vehicle rounded the corner and its men opened fire as close as 2 yards away — Eubank saw the hatred in their faces — but missed.

The worst wound he sustained was a through-and-through gunshot through his forearm. He got it bandaged up and carried on.

Others weren't so fortunate.

"I lost 30 close friends in Mosul," Eubank said. "In one day I lost three guys who were close to me."

The Free Burma Rangers helped feed 50,000 people and carried countless people to the casualty collection point.

One of the most dramatic incidents came when they spotted some civilians huddled behind a wall amid 150 dead bodies.

At that moment, "a friend of mine called me and said, 'What can I do for you?' I said, 'Pray.' That's the power of the praying church," Eubank said.

He borrowed a tank from the Iraqis and called in smoke from the Americans. With two other Free Burma Rangers providing cover fire, "I said, 'Jesus, help me,'" and he dashed through ISIS fire to retrieve the girl.

The video went viral and played on news channels around the world.

In August, Eubank and his family returned to the States to visit supporters around the country. His plan is to return to Iraq this month, go to Burma for the 20th anniversary of the Free Burma Rangers in December, then back to Iraq and Syria.

After Eubank spoke, Allison tried to put his stories in perspective.

"That's the mission God has given David," Allison said. "We need to do what God has got for us."

He compared Eubank to his namesake in the Old Testament.



David Eubank, left, daughter Suu and son Peter pose with members of Dogwood Cross, from left, Billy Gunther, Sam Moore, Tim Higginbotham and Thomas Bessonette.

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From left are Zuhair, Eubank, the girl who carried the wire, the woman who was pulled to safety and an unidentified Free Burma Ranger volunteer.

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"David is like the David in the Bible. He talks to God," Allison said.

Eubank's story should inspire those who hear it to do better in their own field of endeavor, Allison said.

"I'm hoping that it empowers all of us to take one extra step, to say, 'I can,' not 'I can't.'"

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