

...al part of our report into Mercy Ships' work in Liberia

General with the blood of 10,000 people in his hands

...ht lies in the heart of
...rovia, at the foot of
...rive, a 15-mile-long
...highway.
...y-stricken community got its
...e it once had working traffic

Now Joshua has found God and is leading another battle in Liberia

...s the end of the road for many, with
...d violent muggings common.
...ame face-to-face with a former rebel
...possible for inducing hundreds of
...baric killing during Liberia's first
...-96.

...a Milton Blahyi is an
...d Light, helping
...dren he led into battle
...a long-term Mercy

...e. "There is not a single
...will not think of, or be
...y past. So I hope
...now and in the future
...e cannot help and
...has no place."

...own as General Butt
...into battle dressed
...at the head of a gang
...tt Naked Battalion.
...ur in the name is
...e fact that Blahyi and
...bed the depths of

...ar he confessed to
...nd Reconciliation
...t he and his soldiers
...ple.

...o sacrifices, which
...ded, "the killing of an
...nd plucking out the
...divided into pieces for

...had been part of his
...pal high priest.

...on was modelled on
...id South African
...has been taking
...victims as well as
...to create a full
...e carnage, to allow
...of the wounds of war.

...body cannot charge
...ists he is ready and
...willing to
...ke the most of his time
...at liberty
...itating those he's left
...deeply da

...three, who says he
...g the heat of battle in
...1996, is on
...a Mercy Ship
...lunteer, ordained
...minister and
...chologist Dr Lyn
...Westman.

...The aim is
...lling for former child
...soldiers and e
...reckons by the

(1997-2003) more than 15,000 children
were directly involved.

Dr Westman had arranged his
meeting with Blahyi in a
church hall inside a security compound
in Red Light.

Blahyi is a powerfully-built 38-year-
old who, my driver observed, had a

definite air of menace. But he came
across as articulate and genuinely
remorseful.

I asked if it was true about the
20,000 deaths.

"Yes, yes," he replied in a deep
Liberian brogue, a heavily accented
form of American English. "It is not

literally killing one, two, three . . .
20,000 people myself.

"It is inspiring, encouraging,
initiating young people into the
process, giving them the command.

"I strongly believe there is no way I'd
feel free by hiding from those things I
did. There are more than 500 guys who
wouldn't have fought if I did not force
them to fight.

"The damages that were caused, the
chaos that was caused would not have
happened . . . I believe I'm
responsible."

During the civil war, soldiers played
football with human skulls.

Blahyi continued, "I used to fight
naked, that was inspiration from my

tradition. The oracle I worshipped
insisted I went into battle naked. It
was a way to manifest the powers he
gave me.

"We believed that material was a
hindrance to spiritual defence from
bullets."

Blahyi said most of his fighters were
on drugs but those closest to him had
drunk human blood, which had an
intoxicating effect.

According to Dr Westman the
trauma suffered by ex-child soldiers —
many still with drug habits — is
profound.

"These children were often forced
to kill," she said. "But all were victims

By Euan Duguid

before becoming perpetrators and
had lost or become separated from their
families.

"They've experienced fear followed by
the anger of war — then capped by guilt
because of their actions."

That combination of emotions has
created an explosive cocktail, with former
fighters prone to extreme violence, often
sparked by minor problems.

One charity worker, who helps ex-child
soldiers, told me he and his staff had to
deal with a violent outburst from the group
after the project's power generator broke
down.

Dr Westman has been teaching a "whole
person" model of counselling, geared to

Ship's surgeons gave Esther a new life

"I SAW a pregnant
woman plead for her
life, but the rebels shot
her anyway."

This was Mark, a 22-
year-old Liberian security
guard who worked in his hotel
compound.

"From the dead body they
cut out the unborn child and
took it away."

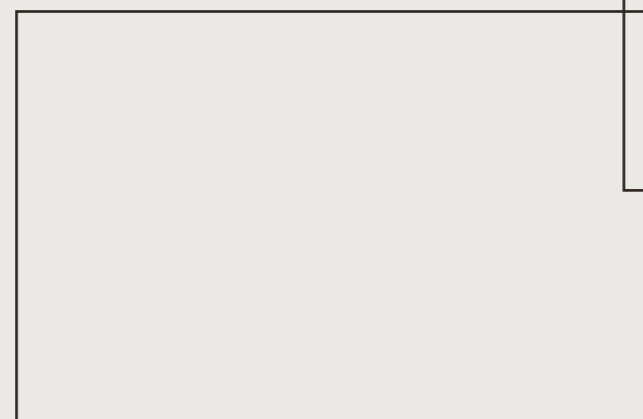
Cannibalism had been a
feature of Liberia's civil war,
so Mark gave me a long, sad
stare, as if to say, "You know
what happened next."

Mark had been hiding in a
ruined building in Monrovia.
The psychological impact of
what he saw down below on
the street that night was clear.

A nervous stutter which
sometimes stalled his words
had developed soon after
the atrocity.

"The war is over now," he
said. "We want a better life in
Liberia, that is why I work
nightshift here and go to
college during the day. I want
to become a doctor."

This was my snap-in-the face
moment in Liberia, just before



■ Marthlyn on a recent visit to the Mercy Africa. Inset picture shows her face before reconstructive surgery.

my driver picked me up early
one morning to take me to
Africa Mercy, when the
horrors of war suddenly
became reality.

Equally sobering was my
subsequent tour of the ward
on the hospital ship.

One little boy was in for skin
grafts because his mosquito
net had caught fire while he
was sleeping.

Another patient, in his 50s,

was in for reconstructive facial
surgery. He'd told staff a witch
doctor cut off his nose when
he was a child because of a
small abnormality. He'd faced
a life of ridicule.

Marthlyn Smith hadn't
known a normal life either, and
might never have, but for the
skill of the Africa Mercy
surgeons.

Marthlyn, from Bong
County, had been considered
an outcast from the age of one

because of noma, a potentially
fatal disease widespread
throughout West Africa, that
destroys the tissue of the
mouth and cheeks.

Before she was 11 the
disease had eaten her face
until her nose and mouth had
all but disappeared. It was last
year, when two Mercy Ships
staff spotted her at a local
market, that her
transformation began.

Surgeons rebuilt her face
and Marthlyn recently returned
to the Africa Mercy for
additional work to her nose.

Her mother, Comfort, said
nobody pointed and laughed
at her any more and she could
play with her friends,
something she'd never done.

Esther Dwey is also living
testament to the new lives
Mercy Ships bring.

During fighting in the

mid-1990s, Esther had run
from rebels, hiding in the bush
on the outskirts of Monrovia.

With a five-year-old son
and a two-year-old daughter,
the situation was terrifying
enough — but Esther was
expecting a third child and
went into labour while on
the run.

She said, "At the time of
delivery I began to experience
difficulty. The baby was too
high and could not come
down. It was in the heat of
war and there was no access
to hospital. The child died in
my womb."

Esther's husband, who was
later murdered by rebels, took
her to a man who had training
in first aid. He removed the
dead baby with scissors. The
operation was traumatic
enough — but it left Esther
with a punctured bladder.

Ravaged

For 10 years, Esther
endured incontinence and was
shunned as a result, making
the struggle to bring up
children in a ravaged land
near impossible.

But thanks to a bladder
repair procedure in 2005,
Esther was given a new life.

She's found a new husband
and had another child, whom
she calls, "Robert, my Mercy
Ships baby."

Esther recently became a
Mercy Ships counsellor,
offering support to Liberian



■ Esther shows the scars on her tummy. Right son, Robert, who she calls her Mercy Ship

women having similar
problems corrected by
Africa Mercy.

But just getting on board
can be a miraculous feat for
many. One surgeon told me
many patients can't read
and have to be given
appointments based
phases of the moon

During the
screening
this year
started
Zambia

been
reputed
exploded
in 1991 and was

in need of ortho
care. He'd ne
way throug
chaotic
network
pedic

like
desire to
become a
other than be
by bitterness, is
humbling.

But often desire alone is
not enough — especially
for those who need urgent
medical care.

It's the vital work of
Mercy Ships that really can
make the world of
difference.

■ Left — Our reporter
interviews former rebel
leader Joshua Milton Blahyi.
■ Below — A child soldier
like the many Joshua is
trying to rehabilitate.

physical, emotional, mental, social and
spiritual aspects of the person as well as
listening and caring.

Blahyi believes the programme is
helping create hope for a city plagued
by war.

He said, "It is hard, but with the training
it is getting easier. Before I was only using
prayers, now I am using other methods."

Blahyi claims he has saved 50 former
child soldiers from drugs and crime.

"They (Mercy Ships) have provided
training that has changed my life. They
have given me confidence, courage, a
new start.

"They have helped me work with
people, they have helped me accept some
of the things that I can't change.

"They have also helped me recognise
the things I can change and taught me
how to make a difference."

■ Mercy Ships rely on donations to fund
their work. If you'd like to donate write to
Susie Hope, Fundraising Manager
(Scotland), Mercy Ships UK,
PO Box 8777, Biggar ML12 9AA or log on
to www.mercyships.org.uk

■ Photos courtesy of Mercy Ships.

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