



John Gatluak Manguet (1984-2016)

**Remembering a friend
by Bonifacio Taban**

“John Manguet was a heroic reporter and a leader. He was loved and embraced in his community,” says Nigel Ballard, Internews Director of Community Radio.

That is John’s epitaph.

John was killed in the late afternoon of July 11, 2016 by South Sudanese troops embarked on an orgy of killing, rape and harassment.

John was 32 years old.

I met John in 2012. He was a reporter for a community radio station in Bentiu, South Sudan. I was freelancing in the town, which is a center of the oil industry, for the Voice of America and for The Niles news-site (www.theniles.org).

Our beats brought us together. Often the only way to get our stories was to walk there – up to 12 kilometers. We had thus plenty of time to get to know each other.

During our hikes, John told me how much he loved working as a journalist, because he saw that as his way of bringing about a better life for his community and for South Sudanese society in general. He saw himself as a watchdog, one whose job it was to keep his town informed – via his radio broadcasts - about what its politicians were up to.

But watchdogs weren't (and aren't) popular – to put it mildly - with South Sudanese authorities. In mid-2016, they launched another crackdown on the media.

John was well aware of the risks of our profession. As he once put it to me: “Being a journalist in South Sudan is risking one's life.”

In June 2016, John and I went to Kampala, Uganda to sit our final exams in journalism. We returned to Juba on July 2.

Five days later, fighting broke out between the armed forces contesting for power in South Sudan. On July 8, the civil war spread, reaching even the premises of Juba's presidential palace.

John was riding a bus when the fighting caught up to him. He was stopped and detained by a militia, who kept him in detention on the following morning. He was rescued by colleagues, who subsequently took him to the Terrain Hotel, which they assumed was a safer location.

It wasn't for John. Nor was it for foreign aid workers, who were forced to watch South Sudanese troops kill him. Then it was the workers' turn to be raped and beaten.

Three days later, a friend of ours rang me with the news. I was speechless. The only sound from my end came from the drops of my tears that fell on my knees.

The soldiers accused of killing John, of raping the foreign aid workers and of assaulting others during their attack in the Terrain Hotel were finally put on trial.

The trial came and went. No verdict was ever been handed down. It is still supposedly waiting for a decision on it to be reached by the office of Salva Kiir, who is the president of South Sudan.

I mourn my friend John. I mourn my colleague John and his vision of South Sudan, a vision that he strove to realize through his journalism and through his exemplary work in his community.

I mourn that John's wife, Rebecca Chuol Ngundeng Terry, and their four children (including the baby born on the day after his death) will have to spend their lives without a loving husband and father.



Bonifacio Taban

Bonifacio works as a freelance correspondent for diverse publications in South Sudan. He has been part of The Niles project since May 2010. Born in 1981 in the village of Gakal in Unity State, Bonifacio graduated from the Kenyan Institute of Mass Communications in Nairobi. Coming from an oil-rich region near South Sudan's border with Sudan, Bonifacio has often dealt with external threats on his reporting. In April 2010 he was arrested and detained by Unity State security forces, but following local and international petitions on his behalf, he was released after 13 days. Bonifacio describes himself as "Unity State's most dedicated journalist."