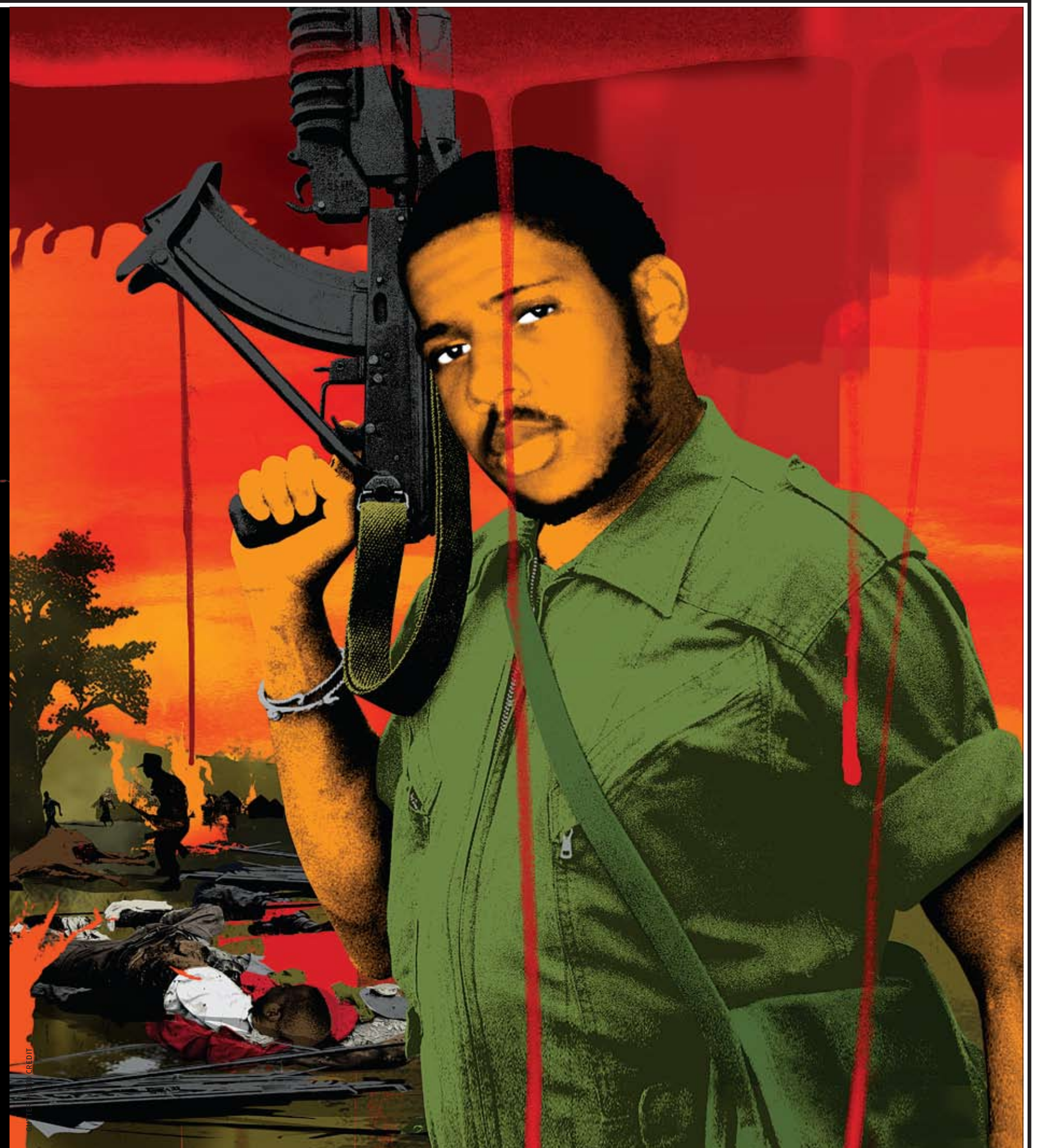


AMERICAN WARLORD



Chucky Taylor was an ordinary suburban teenager – until he went to live with his father, one of Africa’s most brutal dictators. How did a kid from Orlando end up as the first U.S. citizen on trial for torture abroad? By Johnny Dwyer

CHUCKY TAYLOR STOOD IN THE GARAGE OF A VILLA ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LIBERIA’S capital, gun in hand. Outside, crimson puddles of rain pocked the muddy red-clay road to Monrovia. By Chucky’s side was a spectral figure named Benjamin Yeaten, known as “50” to the legion of mercenaries and former child soldiers he and Chucky commanded. In front of the two men, bleeding and terrified, was a university student accused of aiding a rebel army that was working its way through the jungle toward the capital. • It was July 2002, and civil war had been rampaging through Liberia for 13 years, transforming one of Africa’s oldest democracies into a ghoulish landscape. Drugged-out militias manned checkpoints decorated with human intestines and severed heads. Small children were forced into battle by the thousands. Women were raped and turned into sex slaves known as “bush wives.” Enemies were disemboweled, cooked and cannibalized. All told, human rights groups estimate, more than 600,000 Liberians were murdered, raped, maimed or mutilated in the conflict.



In the midst of this reign of terror, Chucky was among the most feared men in the country. Only 25, he created and commanded the Anti-Terrorist Unit, the president's personal security force—a source of such pride that Chucky had the group's emblem, a crest of a hissing cobra and a scorpion, tattooed on his chest. In the scapular, he cut a terrifying figure, scattering crowds as he raced through traffic in a Land Cruiser with a license plate that read DEMON. When he appeared in public, he was almost always outfitted in black or camouflage fatigues, a well-built figure strapped with a 9-millimeter, a cigar in hand. His face—the dark eyes, the round cheeks, the neatly trimmed beard—was immediately familiar to Liberians who had endured the long civil war. Not only because of his menacing reputation but because of the man he so closely resembled: his father, Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, who had set the region ablaze with four devastating wars over the span of two decades.

As the son of the president, Chucky was among the most powerful leaders in his father's military. But standing in the villa outside Monrovia, brandishing his weapon over his prisoner, he was a long way from home. Only a decade earlier, Chucky had been an American teenager growing up in a modest, two-story brick house with his mother and stepfather in a parched subdivision of Orlando, a short drive from Disney World. He had come of age in a strip-mall landscape of payday loan shops and an endless parade of fast-food joints. He attended Evans High School, a squat structure with the motto "A Place of High Achievement." He loved hip-hop and spent countless hours in his bedroom rapping, spinning records, preparing for the day he would enter the studio and become an MC. Like most American teens, he knew almost nothing about Africa, let alone its brutal and divisive politics.

Now, standing in the villa outside Monrovia, Chucky leveled his gun at the helpless university student before him. He wanted information. His father's opponents were closing in on the capital, on the brink of overthrowing the government. Where were the rebels? Who was providing them weapons? Were the Americans involved? There was little to keep Chucky from extracting the information any way he wanted. After all, he was a U.S. citizen. His father was president of the country. No one could touch him. "Chucky was very much like the Hussein sons," says David Crane, the founding chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. "He was com-

First-time contributor JOHNNY DWYER spent two years reporting this story, traveling to Liberia, New England and Florida.

pletely above the law, protected by his father and his henchmen."

Chucky tried threatening the student with his gun. Then, as dawn approached, he and Yeaten began to torture the man. According to a 17-page federal indictment brought by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Miami, Yeaten, who is referred to as "co-conspirator B," burned the student with a hot iron and doused him with scalding water. Chucky shocked the victim's genitals repeatedly with an electrical device. It was the kind of interrogation that those closest to Chucky had seen him conduct many times before. "Chucky Taylor executed a lot of people," says retired Brig. Gen. John Tarnue, who served under Chucky in the Anti-Terrorist Unit. "In my presence he tortured people. He tied them. He called it *tabay*. Elbow to elbow. And twine went into the flesh. He sit there, cross his legs, and smoke cigars. He didn't touch them, but he gave them the order. He said, 'I want to see blood.'"

Today, as his father stands trial for war crimes at the U.N.'s court in The Hague, Chucky Taylor sits in the Federal Detention Center in Miami. On September 15th, he will face trial as the first civilian in American history to be charged with committing torture abroad. In phone calls and letters to me over the past two years, he has repeatedly denied the charges, implying that he is a victim of an American policy targeting his father. His conversations, like his letters, ramble, alternating between swaggering defiance and confused despair. At the very least, he suggests, he is a victim of a bizarre double standard, prosecuted by a U.S. government that itself has engaged in torture, in open defiance of the Geneva Conventions.

"Innocence is not my dilemma," he wrote in March 2007 in a letter that covered five handwritten pages torn from a yellow legal pad, punctuated with the occasional smiley face. "It is how do I prove my innocence, and not make this intelligence-gathering exercise for these cocksuckers in Washington—that's the challenge presented. . . . They say absolute power corrupts absolutely [but] there is no other government in the world that operates with [more] impunity than Washington, and those that operated with its covert support."



From America to Liberia

(1) For two decades, Charles Taylor was the most feared warlord in Africa. Taylor fled the U.S. after a 1984 arrest (2), leaving his son Chucky behind. "It destroyed our family," says Chucky's mother, Bernice (3), with Chucky and his then-wife, Lynn. In Liberia, Taylor's reign left 250,000 dead. Many of his troops, who sometimes wore masks to terrorize their enemies (4), were conscripted as children (5).

CHUCKY'S MOTHER, BERNICE EMMANUEL, first saw Charles Taylor in the mid-1970s in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, when he was an economics student at nearby Bentley College. "I met him through one of his neighbors," she recalls. "I was coming out of the building, and he asked for my number." She quickly fell for the handsome young man, the son of an

elite Liberian family. Taylor belonged to a close-knit community of expat students who had been sent to Boston to receive an American education. At the time, revolution was sweeping across Africa, and the Liberian students were agitating for a seismic change in their nation, from the rule of the traditional elite to political power for the tribal disenfranchised. Emmanuel and Taylor eventually moved into a cozy apartment together.



he was a black baby." They named their son Charles McArthur Emmanuel.

The couple never married, but they enjoyed several idyllic years in their Dorchester apartment. "We lived together for eight years," Emmanuel says. "I was considered his common-law wife."

During Chucky's first year, Emmanuel was the breadwinner, though Taylor juggled jobs at Sears and Mutual of Omaha. Chucky, Emmanuel says, "was the happiest baby." One day, around Chucky's first birthday, Taylor saw his son drinking from a baby bottle. He plucked it from his son's hands and threw it out the window. "You're too grown for bottles," he declared.

Despite moments of domesticity, Taylor led a separate life outside the home. He partied and protested with other Liberian activists living along the East Coast. In 1980, he traveled back to Liberia just in time for a coup by a small band of army officers. In a volatile political climate, Taylor quickly proved to be a canny opportunist: He mar-

ried the niece of a general, ingratiating himself with the new government. He called Emmanuel, asking her to move to Liberia, but she refused. "We weren't educated enough to know that Africa wasn't backward," she says.

From then on, Chucky's father became a transient presence in his childhood. Put in charge of the General Services Agency, Liberia's main procurement office, Taylor ran it as his own private kingdom. He proudly displayed his

he made room for a turntable, a mixer and a massive set of speakers. As he grew from a boy into a teenager, his light complexion darkened. He began to strongly resemble his father, who was drifting in and out of prisons in Ghana and Sierra Leone, and into Muammar el-Qaddafi's paramilitary training camps in Libya. In 1989, on Christmas Eve, Taylor re-emerged as a self-styled revolutionary leader, invading Liberia with a small band of guerrillas. A month later, Chucky went with his mother to the Orange County Clerk's Office and changed his name to that of his stepfather, becoming Roy Belfast Jr. "I was his father at the time," Chucky's stepfather says simply.

A few years later, right around Christmas, Chucky answered the phone at home. Now in his early teens, he was a quiet kid, awkward and shy. The man on the line asked to speak to his mother. Emmanuel wasn't home at the time, but before Chucky hung up, the stranger explained that he was the boy's father.

"My dad called," Chucky announced when Emmanuel returned home a short while later. "I didn't want to talk to him." Emmanuel was stunned. It had been so long since she had heard from Taylor, she couldn't understand what Chucky was telling her at first. "Who's your dad?" she asked, bewildered.

"Chucky was like the Hussein sons," says a former prosecutor. "Completely above the law."

TAYLOR BEGAN TO CALL frequently, eventually inviting the family to join him in Liberia. He seemed hurt by the separation and eager to reunite with his children. The next summer, Chucky traveled to Africa, where he, his mother and sister reconciled with Taylor after nearly a decade apart. The family arrived in Gbarnga, a small city in the Liberian bush outside Monrovia. From there, Taylor ruled over "Greater Liberia," the bush empire he had built over years of fighting in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Taylor arranged for Emmanuel and their daughter to stay at a separate residence, but insisted that Chucky stay with him.

At first, the boy from Orlando had trouble grasping that this imposing African warlord was his father. Taylor was surrounded by soldiers from his army, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, some of whom went into battle in a sort of macabre burlesque, often cross-dressing in wigs and women's under-

wear, wearing amulets believed to make them impervious to bullets. The child soldiers called Chucky's dad "Papay" – Liberian slang for "Father."

The country that Taylor was fighting to control was conceived in America on December 21st, 1816, at the Davis Hotel in Washington, D.C. A group of prominent judges, congressional leaders and clergymen had gathered to address what they saw as a growing problem: what to do with the increasing number of freed slaves. The group, which came to be called the American Colonization Society, engineered a novel solution: Send the free blacks back to Africa, in the hope that they would build their own country in the image of the new American republic. It became America's first experiment in nation building.

What followed remains an abject lesson in the perils of U.S. intervention. After securing a spit of land under the guns of an American naval escort, the settlers set about re-creating an almost exact replica of the society they had just left behind. The freed slaves quickly assumed the role of master, exploiting the new nation's wealth in rubber, timber and iron ore, and even selling the natives into slavery. After World War II, the U.S. began plying the small African nation with military aid and developing its infrastructure, even as Liberia's leaders became increasingly criminal in their disposition.

By the time Charles Taylor emerged from the bush in the early 1990s, he was able to take advantage of long-festering tribal animosities, building his empire from the ashes of civil war. Unencumbered by ideology, Taylor took whatever position served him best. To curry favor with tribal elders, he became a shaman. To win the sympathies of American religious leaders like Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson, he became a Baptist minister. As his troops closed in on Monrovia, he also briefly gained acceptance from the U.S. government, in the words of former ambassador to Ghana and the Ivory Coast Kenneth Brown, as the "lesser evil for the greater good."

"He was calm," recalls Brown, who slipped across the border of the Ivory Coast to meet Taylor in June 1990. "He was impressive. He had lived in the U.S. He looked like he was someone who was in control." Never mind that his bodyguards wore pearl necklaces and had painted nails – he seemed like the kind of warlord America could work with.

Chucky couldn't help but be impressed by his father's power and by the brutality of the civil war raging around him. After the reunion in Liberia, Chucky returned home changed. He was defiant; he began to drink, smoke pot and carry weapons, getting into confrontations with the police. In let-



The Sins of the Father

Like his father before him, Chucky Taylor fled the U.S. a fugitive from justice. After arriving in Liberia, Chucky (1) commanded his father's Anti-Terrorist Unit, with its insignia of a cobra and a scorpion (2). For five years, the ATU waged a campaign of terror, often beheading victims (3) and executing them in plain view (4). From the "Executive Mansion" of the ATU's training compound (5), Chucky allegedly tortured prisoners and oversaw brutal killings.

ters from prison, he dismisses the impact that exposure to Liberia's civil war had on him. "My story is a deep and complex one that encompasses different regions of this globe," he says. "My childhood is but a fraction of my makeup."

Lynn Henderson, Chucky's high school sweetheart, recalls him as "mean-looking" and "intimidating," even as a teenager. Around her, Chucky had a serious manner, and he rarely partied to excess. But with his friends, he became a different person. "He was a bad boy," she says. "But he was always nice to me. I was totally, totally in love with him."

At 16, Chucky was arrested for obstruction of justice after he interfered with an arrest of one of his friends, but no charges were filed. Then, on February 25th, 1994, Chucky and two accomplices attempted to mug another teenager. When the victim ran home, the crew followed. There, according to police, Chucky pointed a pistol in the face of the boy's father. "Shoot him!" one of his friends urged. The boys fled but were

soon arrested; Chucky was charged with four felonies. If convicted, he faced a minimum of three years in prison.

Following the arrest, a mental-health assessment suggested that Chucky had problems with drugs and alcohol, and noted his possible suicidal urges and his difficulty controlling his anger. His stepfather says that Chucky was "tough" but insists that he was a "normal kid." His mother chalks his behavior up to Chucky running with the wrong crowd. But one afternoon, Chucky did something that stunned his parents: He climbed into a bathtub and slit his wrist.

With her son facing years in jail, Emmanuel called Taylor in Liberia.

"I've had him until he's 17," she told Taylor. "Now it's your turn."

Emmanuel sent her son to live with Taylor. Like the founding fathers of the American Colonization Society, she saw a solution in Africa. And in 1994, as his father had a decade before him, Chucky Taylor fled the United States a fugitive from justice.

IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION over here," Chucky wrote to his girlfriend Henderson after his arrival. "All I can say is this: I'm in a place called Gbarnga, Bong County, Liberia, on the West African side of the continent. There are several warring factions in the country. It's a complex issue that needs a lot of research which I want you to do, because I want you to know what's going on over here, you look up L.I.B.E.R.I.A. and N.P.F.L. Leader Charles Ghankay Taylor my father it will shed light on what the fuck I'm going through."

By the time Chucky arrived, the civil war in Liberia had metastasized into a half-dozen warring ethnic factions, among whom Taylor's NPFL remained the most powerful. Chucky's father had also launched a war in neighboring Sierra Leone. The Revolutionary United Front, the rebel group in Sierra Leone that Taylor armed and traded diamonds with, soon became known for its signature act of terror: the amputation of



"You abide by our law," Chucky told his men. "Go above the law and the law will lay hand on you."

even my father could influence my independent thinking."

A few years into his exile, homesick and eager for companionship, Chucky invited Henderson to visit Liberia. She accepted, but when she landed in Monrovia in 1997, it was nothing like the fairy tale she had envisioned. "They had just gotten out of war," she recalls. "There was no electricity. No running water. You had to bathe out of a bucket. Even living with the president's son was never extravagant."

After eight years of fighting, Taylor had finally been elected president, sweeping into power with 75 percent of the vote. His campaign slogan was a bizarre mixture of honesty and thinly veiled threat: "He Killed My Ma, He Killed My Pa, But I Will Vote for Him." The Taylors moved to Monrovia, and Chucky began attending the College of West Africa, a sort of prep school in the capital. When he accompanied his father, Chucky donned traditional dress and adopted the distinct syntax of Liberian English. "Nobody would notice that he was an American," says Koisee Garmo, a cousin of Chucky's who attended school with him. "He was a very kind person. He was generous." Yet Chucky also held onto the gangsta swagger from his Orlando days, twisting his hair into cornrows, suiting up in Keplar, and moving nowhere without his

hands, arms and feet. What united both conflicts was Taylor's ambition to become the region's reigning power. "Everybody is scared of my father," Chucky wrote Henderson. "They say he wants to destabilize the whole of West Africa."

Chucky's reunion with his father was not always a happy one. Taylor enrolled Chucky in Accra Academy, an elite boarding school in Ghana. But before long, Chucky was arrested by authorities and expelled from school, reportedly for possessing drugs and weapons. Chucky explained the incident differently to Henderson. "Yea muthafuckers for no reason arrested me a locked my ass up for 5 days not knowing it was a plot to kill me for political reasons," he wrote. "When they set me free I bounced. I guess they thought I wanted to overthrow the country or something."

Taylor might have been a feared African warlord, but he didn't have any experience raising an American teenager. Father and son fought often; at one point Chucky took a razor blade to a photo of Taylor, slashing it repeatedly. "I'm firmly in control of my Destiny," Chucky insists in one letter from prison, sounding like any child determined to form a separate identity from his famous parent. "Not

walkie-talkie and pistol. Not long after Chucky enrolled in the College of West Africa, the principal asked him to leave.

Henderson celebrated her 18th birthday in Monrovia, and two years later she became pregnant with Chucky's child. In January 2000, the president hosted a lavish state wedding in Monrovia for the couple. "My people shall be your people," he told Henderson. The newlyweds flew off to Trinidad for their honeymoon and settled into a two-story oceanfront home in Monrovia. President Taylor helped out with expenses at first, but he expected his son to make his own living.

Initially, Chucky pursued the timber trade, but he didn't show much of a knack for business. Before long, though, the 23-year-old found something he wanted to pursue. "Security," says Garmo. "The protection and well-being of himself and his father." Despite their fractious relationship, Taylor and his son now found

Jackson Mulbah, a former conscript in the Anti-Terrorist Unit, remembers Chucky from the base. "He was the chief of staff," says Mulbah. "He was bad, I will tell you that." The ATU trainers were mercenaries from the Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ukraine and Libya – some had been recruited by Taylor from el-Qaddafi's camps in the mid-1980s. Like other former child soldiers, Mulbah was put through "Zero Week," a brutal hazing that combined intense physical training with starvation. Trainees were sometimes mowed down in live-fire exercises; others were burned alive during rope drills over flaming barrels of gasoline. Mulbah recites a grim list of a few of the conscripts who didn't survive the training: "Moses Sumo. Roland Garwein. Sengbe Mulbah."

When Chucky appeared on the base, Mulbah recalls, a commander would ring a bell and shout, "Movement, cease!" Chucky would then address

the recruits. "Gentlemen, this is training base," he warned. "When you come here, you abide by our own law. When you go above the law, the law will lay hand on you." Recruits were disciplined by being beaten as they carried massive logs. Mulbah received 25 lashes from his own best friend on Chucky's orders after failing to hit a bottle during target practice. At one point, he says, Taylor removed Chucky from the base "because of his wickedness."

CHUCKY SET UP THE training facility for the Anti-Terrorist Unit in Gbatala, a small town several hours outside of Monrovia in Bong County, which had served as a base of operations for his father during the long civil war that brought him to power. The facility, also known as Cobra Base, was among the most feared locations in Liberia. Today it sits vacant, slowly disintegrating as the jungle reclaims it. On a nearby hilltop stands the "College of Knowledge," a roofless, five-room cinder-block structure painted in a cartoonish camouflage pattern, which once served as a training center and interrogation facility. On a ridge below are a handful of similar buildings; on one, where Chucky slept when he stayed at the base, faded, hand-painted letters read EXECUTIVE MANSION. The site had been a gravel quarry, and several deep pits are dug into the rock. Conscripts once filed through the base for training, many of them illiterate teenagers who had served in Taylor's Small Boys Unit throughout their adolescence.

The Anti-Terrorist Unit soon became the best-equipped – and ultimately the most powerful – outfit in Taylor's security apparatus. In April 1999, a rebel group attacked the town of Voinjama, near the border with Guinea. As described in the federal indictment, Chucky traveled to a checkpoint near the site of the attack with members of the Anti-Terrorist Unit. Civilians fleeing the town streamed over the St. Paul River Bridge, deeper into Liberia. Chucky stopped a group passing through the checkpoint. He asked whether there were rebels among them. According to the indictment, he then "selected three persons from the group and summarily shot them in front of the others." The ATU detained several survivors and brought them to the base at Gbatala; by that time the prisoners had been pistol-whipped by Chucky and several ATU officers. The prisoners were then tossed into pits, which

NOEL QUIDU/GAMMA/VEVEEA (DECAPITATED HEAD)

CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (EXECUTION); CHRISTOPHER HERWIG (TRAINING CAMP)

were covered with iron bars and barbed wire, and subjected to a laundry list of torture, including being burned by cigarettes and having plastic melted on their genitals. At one point, according to the indictment, Chucky ordered the execution of a prisoner, but when an ATU officer raised his gun, Chucky instructed him to cut off the man's head instead. Several officers held the man down, forcing his head over a bucket. "The soldiers then severed [the victim's] head by cutting his throat from back to front as blood dripped into the bucket, while he screamed and begged for his life," the indictment states.

Some close to Chucky claim that he had little to do with the Anti-Terrorist Unit. "He was a military adviser," says Samuel Nimley, a former ATU commander. "As a military adviser, he could assume leadership of any unit." Nimley is especially dismissive of those accusing Chucky. "If you get bitten by a snake once," he says, "even if you see a worm, you will get frightened."

Yet many others insist that Chucky



Troubled Prince

Chucky enjoyed his status as the first son of Liberia (1), but his relationship with his father was strained. Once, in a fit of rage, Chucky took a razor to Taylor's picture (2). Still, his father threw a lavish state wedding for Chucky and Lynn (3), telling the bride, "My people shall be your people."



When Chucky's driver dented his car, he reportedly ordered the man beaten "till you see bones and shit."

directed the ATU. "He started doing the Anti-Terrorist Unit, and he was really proud of it," Henderson says. Tarnue, the general who served under Chucky, says he witnessed the president's son ordering executions at Gbatata. When he confronted Taylor about the abuses, however, the president refused to hear any criticism of his son. Ultimately, Chucky had Tarnue arrested and brought to the holding cell near Chucky's office behind the Executive Mansion. There, ATU officers tied Tarnue's arms behind his back, slammed a rifle butt into his eye, gouged his face with a bottle cap and yanked on his genitals with a rope.

Tarnue is no stranger to war atrocities. As a general in the NPFL, Taylor's fighting force, he trained an army notorious for murder, rape, torture and mutilation, though he denies any direct involvement in human rights violations. Today he works as a security guard in Baltimore and serves as a witness for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, recasting himself as a victim of the same human rights abuses the forces he commanded have been accused of. "Chucky, he knew that he was a U.S. citizen," Tarnue says. "But the atrocities that he committed were because his father was

the president. He feel that he become lawless. He became the commander of the ATU and had all the authoritative-ness to do anything to anybody. And the father couldn't do anything about it."

BEFORE LONG, CHUCKY'S ambition spilled over Liberia's borders. Following his father's lead, he began providing arms and personnel to Sierra Leone. He became involved in smuggling gems, a trade that drew all brands of international criminals to Liberia, including operatives for Al Qaeda. Chucky worked with Israeli arms dealer Leonid Minin and South African mercenary Fred Rindle to orchestrate diamond deals that would in turn fuel weapons purchases. His trade in "blood diamonds" earned him an honor also bestowed on his father: a travel ban issued by the U.N. Security Council.

In August 2000, Chucky's name turned up when Italian police stormed a hotel room outside Milan and found Minin passing the evening with four prostitutes and 58 grams of cocaine. Minin's personal effects included more than \$25,000 in cash, \$500,000 in diamonds and 1,500 pages of documents. Several faxes mentioned Chucky. One

detailed a "special package for JUNIOR" of 100 "units" (what Italian officials believed to be missiles). After Minin's arrest, according to documents seized by the Italian police, Chucky faxed a final message signed "Charles McArthur Taylor Junior" that read, "And from this day forward never in your life ever contact me again."

Chucky's personal life also began to suffer. His young wife had undergone the jarring transition from an American high school to being the wife of one of Liberia's most notorious warlords. She rarely ventured beyond the couple's oceanfront villa, where she cared for their young son. Although she insists that she had little inkling of the terror her husband inspired, their marriage started to fall apart. The president took notice and counseled Henderson to stand by Chucky. "The patient dog gets the biggest bone," he told her.

But Chucky's personality was taking on what Henderson calls a "Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde" turn. One day Chucky came home with his hand in a cast; Henderson believed he'd broken it punching someone. The deeper he became involved in the Anti-Terrorist Unit, the less she recognized the sweet, shy boy she'd known from Orlando. "One day he decided he

just didn't want to be in a relationship," Henderson says. "He couldn't deal with being a husband and a father." She filed for divorce in 2002 and returned to Orlando. Chucky rarely contacted his wife and child, and provided no support for his family.

In the years they were apart, Chucky's violence spun out of control, encompassing even those closest to him. On the streets of Monrovia, average Liberians still recite the enduring legend that Chucky murdered his own driver, a man named Isaac Gono, for hitting a dog and denting Chucky's BMW. One human rights report quotes Chucky as ordering his bodyguards to beat Gono "till you see his bones and shit." The Justice and Peace Coalition, another human rights group, received a letter from Gono's family indicating that he was beaten to death by ATU officers "allegedly acting upon the instructions of Charles Taylor Jr. on September 18th, 2002, at about 4 a.m." According to the report, the Liberian Ministry of Defense denied Chucky's involvement, attributing Gono's death to "manhandling" by two ATU officers.

George Wortuah, Gono's brother-in-law, lives on the outskirts of Monrovia, not far from Chucky's beachfront home. As Wortuah tells it, Gono had grown close to Chucky, a relationship that made the other officers jealous. "The bodyguards beat Isaac because of Chucky gave order to punish Isaac," he says in Liberian English. When the guards finished, they drove Gono's body to JFK Medical Center. Wortuah viewed the corpse there. The body was mutilated, Gono's clothes torn to shreds by the ferocity of the attack.

Soon afterward, Chucky summoned the family. "He apologized," Wortuah recalls. "He assured us he ordered his bodyguard to punish Isaac. He don't say you should beat him to kill him. That was mistake." At the meeting, Chucky gave the family \$1,000 in cash for Gono's two children. Eventually, Wortuah says, the family received \$16,000 to pay for the funeral and provide for the children. The money came directly from President Taylor.

Taylor may have tolerated and even encouraged the abuses Chucky carried out against helpless civilians and his enemies, but he couldn't stomach the senseless murder of an ATU officer. Soon after Gono's death, Taylor revoked Chucky's command. By this point, Taylor's regime was under siege. A rebel faction had beaten back his forces to Monrovia, and Taylor ineptly tried to tamp down the insurgency by ordering the ATU to arrest enemies of the state. In March 2003, the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Taylor on 17 counts of crimes against humanity [Cont. on 118]

[Cont. from 92] – including murder, rape and enslavement – making him the first African head of state to face such charges.

As his father's empire collapsed, Chucky reconnected with his estranged wife after a year of silence. Chucky's mother begged Henderson to help rein in his increasingly erratic behavior. "Even though he was a shitty father and a shitty husband, I didn't want him to die," Henderson says. "I felt like he was just going to kill himself." Henderson returned to Monrovia with her son and found Chucky wasted away. "He now had a heavy drug problem," she says. "I think it was cocaine." His father's indictment had left Chucky rattled and paranoid. "He was just not all there," she says. "He probably knew it was over." Though Chucky and his father had reconciled, Gono's death had driven a wedge between them. When Henderson asked Chucky about the incident, he refused to discuss it other than to say that he "absolutely did not do it."

As fighting outside the capital intensified, the mood at Taylor's mansion grew somber. Sitting with the president one day, Henderson began to sob quietly, saddened by the prospect of fleeing Liberia once more, never to return. When Taylor asked her what was wrong, she gave her father-in-law a hug, unable to explain her emotions. Taylor was taken aback. "He's not the type of guy used to getting hugs," Henderson says.

By that point, Chucky had retreated to his villa. One afternoon, Henderson recalls, an ATU officer ran to the door, frantically reporting that "the rebels had breached the city." Mortars sounded in the distance. Chucky rushed his wife and three-year-old son into the back seat of his truck and threw a Kevlar vest over them. Henderson was terrified.

"OK, we're going to die," she said.

"It's OK, Mama," her tiny son replied.

The ATU officer shattered the truck's rear window to give him a line of fire, and the group raced the short distance to the president's residence. When they arrived, they found President Taylor sitting calmly among several of the mothers of his other children. Chucky's father laughed at his son for overreacting.

At home, Henderson could do little to control Chucky's drug use. One day she opened the bathroom to discover Chucky with what she thought was cocaine. When she knocked the drugs out of his hands, he leapt on her, wrapping his hands around her neck. Summoned by Henderson's screams, Chucky's mother and his son rushed into the bathroom. Chucky had never laid a hand on Henderson before. Soon after, Henderson returned home to Orlando. "That's my son's last memory of his dad," she says. "Him strangling me."

IF CHUCKY HAD BOTTOMED out, so had the Taylor presidency. By the summer of 2003, a ferocious battle known locally as "World War III" engulfed Monrovia. The fighting was savage, even by Liberian standards. Desperate for intervention from the United States, citizens stacked the dead in front of the U.S. Embassy. World leaders united in their call for Taylor to resign. On July 18th, 2003, Chucky fled Liberia. The following month, his father stepped down and accepted exile in Calabar, Nigeria.

Chucky followed him there, and over the next several years his life took a nomadic turn. He ventured to South Africa, Libya, Paris and London. In 2005, he spent several weeks at a studio in Trinidad, recording 20 hip-hop tracks. "I grew up in the era of hip-hop," he says. "Obviously, my evolution has taken place at a rapid pace. It is a snapshot of my mind frame at that time." Federal agents confiscated a notebook of his lyrics, which included the lines "We ain't takin' no slack/Y'all try to tackle mine/Layin' bodies in stacks" and "Take this for free/

accountable," says Morton Sklar, executive director of the World Organization for Human Rights USA, a group that has filed two amicus briefs in Chucky's case. "The Bush administration is supporting human rights enforcement in a foreign country. But it's hard not to see the implications of this case: whether U.S. officials can and should be held similarly accountable."

The U.S. government, citing "security concerns," refuses to allow a face-to-face interview with Chucky. In his frequent letters and phone calls to me, however, Chucky criticizes everyone involved in his case: his public defenders (whom he wants to fire), the federal investigators ("No disrespect, but what experience do they have in Liberia?"), even the judge ("There's a great deal of political pressure on her. She's one of the youngest on the circuit. She's a female"). Chucky is a convert to Islam; he sprinkles his conversations with Arabic phrases and now goes by the name Hamza Abdul Aziz. He remains cagey about his father, whom he refers to alternately as "my father" or simply "Taylor." Chucky insists that he

question arises, am I a big fish in Liberia, and among panafricanists in the region, my response is, I'm a mere tad pole in a vast ocean, filled w/ sharks, scavengers, and whales, pounded by hurricanes."

The closest he gets to a direct statement on war crimes comes in an opinion he offers about a U.S. Marine accused of executing two prisoners of war during the battle of Fallujah. Chucky says he can empathize with the accused soldier: "I know that in conflict, men, particularly brave men, can see their actions blurred by circumstance." In simple terms, Chucky views himself as a victim, not a perpetrator. "The average human rights group thinks about the little man," he tells me. "Well, I am the little man."

Were it not for his arrest, Chucky would be nothing more than an asterisk on his father's legacy: the destruction of an entire country. Monrovia today remains a shell of a city. Only the wealthiest live with power or running water. Mountains of steaming trash tower over rusted tin shacks. U.N. peacekeepers man machine-gun nests along roadways with billboards reminding Liberians that RAPE IS A CRIME. The nation that Charles Taylor and his son left behind is like a drunk uncle who has finally dried out: broke, unemployed and prone to maudlin binges of self-destruction. Chucky's path in life has always mirrored that of his father, from beloved son to American fugitive to African warlord. Now the arc of their shared biography has terminated with their respective court dates: Charles Sr. at The Hague, Charles Jr. before a federal court in Miami. Their trials will seek to answer fundamental questions of guilt and innocence and to provide a measure of justice for the millions in Liberia and Sierra Leone whose lives have been destroyed by civil war. But Chucky's story also serves as a reminder of the way in which the pull of family can transmit violence across the generations like a virus, oblivious to national boundaries. One of the most tragic crimes a father can commit, in the end, lies in the lessons he imparts to his son.

Last November, as he awaited trial, Chucky wrote a letter to his own son. "Daddie has some things to take care of before you see him," it read. "Sorry for the times when you came to visit, I was not a better man, and father." **ES**

"The U.S. has no right to prosecute me," Chucky says. "In conflict, brave men can see their actions blurred."

Six feet under is where you gonna be."

In March 2006, when Nigerian authorities arrested Taylor to face extradition to The Hague, Chucky boarded a flight for Miami. He had just gotten a phoenix tattoo, a symbol of his hope to restart his life in America. But when he arrived, immigration agents met him at the plane and placed him under arrest. As they read Chucky his Miranda rights, he recited along.

The Justice Department, which had stood by while the Bush administration renounced the Geneva Conventions and authorized the use of torture on detainees in its War on Terror, was nonetheless eager to prosecute Chucky on charges of violating the Geneva Conventions. The normal procedure in such cases, to avoid the political expense of a trial, is either to ignore the offenses or to extradite those charged with torture back to the country where the abuses were committed. But officials in Immigration and Customs Enforcement made the case a priority, coordinating agents from the FBI to fly all over the world to gather evidence against Chucky. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

Human rights groups hailed his indictment as a milestone. "The Chucky Taylor case is a dramatic step forward in support of holding torturers criminally

should be extradited, and that any trial should take place in Monrovia. "I am a Liberian first and foremost," he says. "The U.S. has no right to prosecute me. If I am going to do a day under conviction, it should be in Liberia." All of his actions, he insists, fall within the Geneva Conventions. He holds out hope that the CIA's destruction of videotapes of its interrogations of Al Qaeda detainees will somehow unravel the government's case. His attorneys have requested access to the classified Department of Justice memo that approved the use of torture, and presented a side-by-side comparison between the acts Chucky is accused of and those committed by American agents in the War on Terror.

But Chucky makes few attempts to explain his own actions, and when he does, they come across as little more than incoherent ravings, with mangled metaphors and paraphrased shards from Clausewitz and *The 48 Laws of Power*. "Clearly this indictment is meant to smoke me out," he writes at one point. "For me to talk or to create a clearer picture, there is intense anger due to my declines, based upon there Several request, thru what is called queen for a day letter aka use of immunity, a five day debrief, before this indictment was ever pursued." He closes the letter: "Now the

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