

6'1

The Gangster

6'0

How a twentysomething small-time hoodlum from Florida

5'9

Prince

5'8

may have become the most notorious murderer in Africa.

5'7

of Liberia

5'6

By Adam Higginbotham Photograph by James Macari

5'5

IT WAS DARK OUT EARLY THAT NIGHT, AND CLEAR. BUT FOR THE DEPUTIES OF THE ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE who worked the late shift in Patrol Sector Three, there was little to distinguish the evening of February 25, 1994, from any other in the crime-ridden western suburbs of Orlando, Florida. When the call came in from 1428 North Pine Hills Road, it was simply one of the dozens of armed robberies Deputy Cindy Turek heard called in on the radio every month. ¶ When she reached the scene, just after 8:30 P.M., Turek took statements from the two victims: 16-year-old Steven Klimkowski told her that three men had asked him for money and tried to jump him. Klimkowski had broken free and run, fetched his father, Robert, and the two of them had pursued the three stickup men—whom they later identified as Roy Belfast Jr., Daniel Dasque, and Philip Jackson. As they caught up with the trio, the 17-year-old Belfast pulled a gun—a small black Lorcin .380 automatic. According to witness statements, Belfast leveled the weapon first at Robert's head and then at Steven's, as Jackson—at 21 the oldest of the three alleged assailants—repeatedly yelled at Belfast to pull the trigger.



But the Klimkowskis escaped and called 911; Belfast, Dasque, and Jackson were apprehended within an hour. Almost everyone involved in the attempted robbery in Pine Hills would become a familiar face in Florida's criminal-justice system: Although the charges against Jackson from that night were eventually dropped, he was later convicted of drug possession; Dasque spent years in prison for cocaine dealing; and even Steven Klimkowski was recently convicted of aggravated assault. Turek—at 49 a 22-year veteran of the county sheriff's office—now recalls little about Belfast. He just went quietly; there was nothing remarkable about him, she says.

And yet after that night the life of the thug who'd flashed the gun on North Pine Hills Road would take a sudden turn, one that would make him infamous across an entire continent. Shortly after his arrest, Roy Belfast Jr. jumped bail and disappeared; it would be 12 years before the U.S. authorities found him again. When they did, he was using the name he was born with—Charles McArthur Emmanuel, a.k.a. Chuckie Taylor, the illegitimate son of Charles Ghankay Taylor, guerrilla leader, indicted war criminal, rumored cannibal, and former president of Liberia. And by then the things he'd done at the right hand of his father had made him one of the most feared and hated men in Africa.

On March 30, 2006, Emmanuel, five feet nine, heavily tattooed, and with a striking resemblance to Charles Taylor, was arrested at Miami International Airport by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials and indicted for passport fraud; he claimed his father's name was Smith. He's currently being detained in Miami, the first American in U.S. judicial history to be charged with crimes of torture committed in a foreign country. As the former commander of his father's Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), the petty criminal from central Florida stands accused of overseeing a paramilitary force of some 2,500 men that raped, murdered, and terrorized the population of Liberia for more than five years.



was born, on February 12, 1977. The boy's mother, Bernice Yolanda Emmanuel, was one of Taylor's many girlfriends at the time. Taylor was 29 years old, and although even he may not know how many children he has—or by how many different women—it seems possible that Charles Jr. was his first son.

Taylor had lived in the United States for five years and displayed little interest in studying or in working: "Charles has always been a gangster. He was not a role model to Chuckie," says James Lyon (not his real name), a fellow student who had first met the future warlord in Monrovia in the mid-sixties. Taylor spent his time playing the numbers and hanging out at the dog track in Boston; he drove an enormous Mercury Cougar and, according to Lyon, made money running a ring of thieves who stole eight-track-tape players from cars. Lyon put him up on his couch when he was on the run from a jealous boyfriend. Nevertheless, Taylor had ambitious plans for the future: "He always used to say he was going to launch a guerrilla war in Liberia," Lyon says.

In 1980, when Chuckie was 3, his father returned to the country of his birth. Having married the niece of one of Samuel Doe's co-

“Charles has always been a gangster,” a Taylor associate says. “He

THE PEOPLE OF LIBERIA HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT THEY ENJOY a unique and close connection with the people of the United States; Liberia was founded by U.S. citizens, its constitution was drafted at Harvard, and its flag is even copied from the Stars and Stripes.

But the relationship has been characterized by U.S. exploitation and neglect since 1821, when the swampy island that would become the nation's capital, Monrovia, was purchased only after an officer of the U.S. Navy held a pistol to the head of a local chief. After the barely literate Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe seized power in 1980—by disemboweling then-president William Tolbert in his bed at the executive mansion in Monrovia—the U.S. government was happy to overlook the staggering corruption and human-rights abuses of his regime in exchange for the benefits of a CIA station site, a convenient African base for U.S. aircraft, and a friendly vote at the UN. When plans were laid to destabilize Doe's government and, later, to form the profusion of heavily armed insurgent factions that would destroy the country, the plotting began among Liberian exiles in Rhode Island, Philadelphia, and Massachusetts.

CHARLES TAYLOR WAS IN HIS FINAL YEAR AS AN ECONOMICS STUDENT at Bentley College, outside Boston, when the son he called Charles Jr.

conspirators, the former street hustler was given a key cabinet position in the revolutionary government. Chuckie would barely see his father for another 10 years. Taylor fled Monrovia and returned to the United States in late 1983, pursued by accusations that he had embezzled more than \$900,000 from the Liberian government—which requested his extradition. In May 1984 he was arrested by federal marshals in Somerville, Massachusetts, and detained in the Plymouth County House of Correction. He enlisted former attorney general Ramsey Clark to represent him. After he'd spent 16 months in Plymouth, a federal court ruled that he be extradited, and Taylor escaped, reportedly sawing through a bar on a window and lowering himself down a rope of knotted bedsheets. He returned to West Africa, gathering military and financial support and spending years in and out of prison in Sierra Leone and Ghana before making his way to Libya. There he and a small group of fighters were trained as insurgents in the camps of Colonel Muammar Gadhafi's World Revolutionary Headquarters. On Christmas Eve 1989, Taylor finally did as he had promised and began a guerrilla war in Liberia.

Back in Boston, Bernice Emmanuel had met a Trinidadian man named Roy B. Belfast, and in 1983 or 1984 they were married. In 1987, the new family moved together to a middle-class housing develop-



UNDERCOVER DESPOT: Opposite, Charles Taylor takes shelter under an umbrella while attending his mother's funeral in Monrovia in July 2003. His son Chuckie stayed at Taylor Sr.'s house, White Flower, above, while in Liberia.

ment in Orlando, Florida, where Roy would later work part-time as a welder. He officially adopted Chuckie, and in 1990 the boy legally changed his name to Roy McArthur Belfast Jr.

THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR HAS BEEN OVER FOR FOUR YEARS NOW, and Charles Taylor, its principal architect, is imprisoned in The Hague, awaiting trial on war-crimes charges. But when I arrive in Monrovia, on a stifling night lashed by tropical rain, the Liberian capital remains in ruins. Many government-ministry buildings are bullet-riddled shells and open to the elements; there has been no electricity or running water in Monrovia since Taylor's militia, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), severely damaged the country's hydroelectric plant in 1990; cholera, typhoid, and malaria are widespread; the air carries a sour tang, not only from the choking traffic but also from the generators that provide power in the

was not a role model to Chuckie.”

private compounds maintained throughout the city for the privileged few. And although the country's most notorious despot and his son are locked in jail cells more than 4,000 miles apart, many Liberians remain terrified of them.

“Taylor may be in a cell, but he has big reaches,” Colonel Wolobah Zubah, acting director of Liberia's National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), tells me ominously, late one Friday afternoon. “He is still a dangerous man.”

Before I arrived in Liberia, I was repeatedly warned to be careful whom I spoke to about Chuckie Taylor and his father, and few people I meet here are prepared to discuss Chuckie. Charles Taylor still has many supporters in the country, and his associates and former members of his security services remain at large and are eager for what they did under Taylor's regime to remain unexplored.

John T. Richardson, Taylor's smooth-talking former national-security adviser and alleged mastermind of one of the most brutal NPFL offensives of the war, is now leader of a campaign to have the former president released from prison. Over tea at Monrovia's Royal Hotel, he assures me that Chuckie was little more than a misbehaving child: “The whole thing is political,” he says, “unfounded.”

There are two stories, infamous and unproven, everyone in Mon-

rovia will tell you about Chuckie: how in 2002 Chuckie allegedly had his driver beaten to death after the man ran over a dog, scratching Chuckie's brand-new Mercedes, and how early one morning, Chuckie killed the deputy director of the Liberian traffic police under mysterious circumstances, on the highway to Robertsfield Airport. But few of those who know the truth—about the torture, the atrocities, the disappearances—are willing to talk.

Even upstairs in his office at the NBI headquarters—a concrete hulk apparently without a single intact pane of glass in its many windows, where a silent functionary with a shaved head, red flip-flops, and a gruesome limp accompanies visitors down passageways lined with deserted rooms—Colonel Zubah is reluctant to go into detail. During Taylor's time, he says, the NBI—Liberia's equivalent of the FBI—never investigated anything Chuckie did. Zubah says that the prospect of contact with the commander of the Anti-Terrorist Unit frightened him witless. “Of course!” he insists. “Who wouldn't be afraid of Chuckie? Because you never knew—you never knew what you would end up like. Many who saw his face are not around today to say that they saw him.”

MICHAEL STANTON FIRST SAW CHUCKIE TAYLOR DURING THE DRY season of 1991, when Stanton was an 18-year-old NPFL fighter assigned to guard Charles Taylor's compound in Gbarnga, capital of the rebel-controlled state-within-a-state that its “president” liked to call Greater Liberia but many simply knew as Taylorland.

Now 34, Stanton has spent much of his adult life as part of Charles Taylor's militia: Pressed into service with the NPFL at 17, he later joined the paramilitary Special Security Unit (SSU) and eventually became an officer in the ATU. When I meet him in Monrovia, he asks that I conceal his identity. “Most of the ATU boys are here in town,” he says. “If you use my name, they might do something to me.”

When the president's son arrived in Gbarnga, for a visit that would last two or three months, he seemed to Stanton like any other 14-year-old: He was into hip-hop, dressed in Timberlands and baggy jeans, and wore sunglasses and a do-rag. “He was just an ordinary American boy that came to see his father,” Stanton says. “We all gave him respect. Each time he met you he greeted you like a friend. You know, he wanted to be in with the big guys.”

By that time, many of the big guys were already veterans of the first of the wars that would make Liberia synonymous with previously unimaginable acts of cruelty—soccer played with human heads, checkpoints made by stretching a man's intestines across a road, fighters betting on the sex of an unborn child and deciding the winner by slicing open the mother's womb with a bayonet,

others hacking out the hearts of their enemies and eating them to gain strength. Worse still, many of the big guys who did such things weren't really that big at all: As the NPFL swept through central Liberia in 1990, the fighters began recruiting children—some as young as 9—to join them, organizing them into “Small Boy Units” (SBU). Armed with AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, and submachine guns, and often high on marijuana, speed, cocaine, or a special brew of sugarcane juice and gunpowder, the SBU proved to be some of Taylor's most ferocious and merciless fighters.

And when Chuckie returned for a longer stay with his father, in 1992 or '93, he naturally sought out kids his own age; he found one in Zubin Wright (not his real name), an SBU commander in his early teens who had joined the NPFL at the age of 10 when his father was killed and become a favorite of Charles Taylor's. Chuckie began riding around Gbarnga in a jeep with Wright, who would introduce him to the troops. Slowly, Chuckie's behavior began to change. “Small-small,” Stanton explains in Liberian English, “gradually.” But one day Stanton noticed a singular development in the relationship between the president's son and the SBU commander: “Zubin,” he says, “was taking orders from him.”

AFTER EACH OF HIS VISITS TO GBARNGA, CHUCKIE WENT HOME TO Florida. The effect that this new experience in Africa had on him can only be guessed at, but the evidence of his criminal record is stark: His juvenile rap sheet begins with a single offense in 1990, when, at the age of 13, he is arrested for car theft, which is followed by a first assault-and-battery charge in 1992. In the second half of 1993, Chuckie was charged with no fewer than six separate offenses,

“He liked good times,” J. explains with an indulgent smile. A tall, skinny man now in his forties, J. was at Chuckie's side, on and off, for seven years—“He was a kid when I started with him. I brought him up,” he says. “He got a worse side—and he got some good sides, too.”

J. recalls that Junior had a terrible and unpredictable temper: “Sometimes when he got vexed, I thought he would make decisions he'd regret.”

In July 1997, following years of fighting that had left at least 200,000 dead, 700,000 refugees, and 1.4 million people internally displaced, Liberians went to the polls to vote for a new president. Charles Taylor won 75 percent of the vote in an independently monitored election; it's now generally accepted that most Liberians voted for Taylor because they knew that if he didn't win through the ballot box, he would simply return to the gun. On the day he assumed power, Taylor promised the nation, “I will not be a wicked president.” This, of course, was a lie; one of his first acts as head of state, in direct contravention of the Liberian constitution, was to establish a militia loyal only to him: the Anti-Terrorist Unit.

IN EVERY NATION WHOSE CITIZENS' LIVES HAVE BEEN TOUCHED by government terror, there's a place whose very name can make people shudder with fear—a black hole of torture and death. In Liberia, this place is known as Gbatata Base. The site of the ATU training camp lies in the thick jungle beside the highway leading toward Gbarnga, in an abandoned stone quarry in the former heart of Taylorland.

The Gbarnga road, unmaintained since the outbreak of war in 1989, is cratered with potholes and plagued by attacks by armed bandits. Ten years ago the 80-mile trip from Monrovia to Gbatata

“Many who saw his face are not around today to say that

including resisting arrest and aggravated assault. By the time of the attempted robbery in Orlando at the beginning of 1994, he was a career criminal in the making, a young man described in his final juvenile psychiatric report as suspected of having suicidal tendencies and abusing drugs and alcohol. Soon after this was written, Chuckie jumped bail and left the United States. When he failed to show up for trial in August 1994, a warrant was issued for his arrest, but the Orange County Sheriff's Office could find no trace of him. The case was closed in March 2005; as far as the Florida State's Attorney's Office was concerned, Roy M. Belfast Jr. had vanished, never to return.

With the disappearance from Florida of the welder's adopted son, Charles Taylor's boy was reborn with the rights and privileges due an African warlord's favorite child. Chuckie was enrolled in 1995 at an elite school in Ghana and later at the College of West Africa in Monrovia, but he didn't much like it: “He never had the time, the patience, to stay long in class,” says J., his personal bodyguard at the time, who shadowed “Junior” everywhere. Chuckie preferred to spend his time cruising the streets, or in the clubs of the combat-scarred capital, hanging out with the kids of other government ministers and wealthy businessmen, drinking champagne. Sometimes he'd stay in for days at a time, playing video games and watching movies on his big-screen TV. He was especially keen on S.W.A.T.-style action movies; every once in a while he'd keep J. and the other bodyguards up all night, acting out the process of “clearing” the house, room by room, at gunpoint.

took three hours; today it takes even longer. The front gates of the camp are long gone, the buildings crumbling and overgrown with vines. Women and young boys have returned to the quarry to scrape out a living. But even they have arrived only recently, fearful of Gbatata's reputation; it is said that when the ATU were here, anyone discovered near the base was arrested, and careless civilians would disappear, never to be seen again. In the town up the road, an old man playing checkers tells me that everyone knew what to do if his car broke down on the hill near the base: “You leave that car and run. If they arrest you and you go up there—if you come away you were lucky.”

He says no one here really knows what happened to the people they took away: “Who will talk?” he says angrily. “Nobody!”

And what about Chuckie Taylor?

“Chuckie Taylor,” he says, looking up from his game, “he was the commander. He was the main man.”

“See that house?” Michael Stanton asks as we walk across the overgrown parade ground toward a cinder-block building. “That was Chuckie's house.” Stanton spent a year here in 1999, learning to be an ATU man; when he arrived, he discovered that his new commander had changed a lot from the boy he remembered in Gbarnga. Chuckie had trained for months, bulking up and learning karate; he ran every morning carrying a kit bag filled with sand and spent entire days on the firing range, perfecting his skills. The men were terrified of him.

Chuckie had always wanted to oversee an elite paramilitary unit, like the Hollywood-movie SWAT teams that so fascinated him, and the ATU was organized according to his specifications. No expense was spared: The latest weapons were procured and South African mercenaries were hired to teach the recruits. And why a remote camp like this? “Because of this movie he watched,” Stanton says. “*Full Metal Jacket*. Training movie. So that is what he decided to do.”

The Kubrick-inspired ATU induction process was brutal. New recruits were beaten and forced to crawl over a mile down a gravel road to the quarry, where they lived outside for two weeks. They were given little to eat, and since it was the rainy season, they were soaking wet most of the time. Stanton says that of his group of 500 men, four died during the first month.

Once issued uniforms and equipment, the men, according to Stanton, were introduced to ATU discipline—subjected to ingeniously cruel punishments that ranged from pinching a man’s lips with pliers to “dragging”: Stripped naked, a man would be forced to lie on the asphalt parade ground while another sat on his chest; two men would then take hold of each of his feet and drag him 200 meters until the flesh was torn from his back, then salt would be poured into the wounds. Finally, the victim was thrown into a hole in the ground for three months—in an area of the Gbatala known as “Vietnam”; this treatment often proved fatal.

Stanton takes me out to what used to be the shooting range, near the swamp where “Vietnam” once was; he searches through the long grass, his digital camera swinging at his hip, his wraparound Ray-Bans in his hand. “Right here, there were different, different, different holes. Here and here,” he says. “One, two, three, four . . .”

they saw him,” a Liberian official says of Chuckie.

Stanton saw many men thrown into these pits and kept in the dark for months at a time. When I ask whether the ATU ever brought civilians to “Vietnam,” he insists that he never saw anything like that: This was a military base. All the prisoners were “ex-combatants.” This is an important distinction: In the civil war, 9-year-old boys were of military age, and in Taylorland, ex-combatants were whoever the ATU said they were—former rebels, political opponents, a man whose car broke down on the wrong stretch of road.

“Maybe at that time they were in civilian life,” says Stanton, “but they were still ex-combatants. Then they would be picked up and brought here and given some VIP treatment.”

CHUCKIE TAYLOR WAS JUST 20 YEARS OLD WHEN HIS FATHER became president of Liberia, and he found himself above the law, a gangster prince in a kleptocratic kingdom. Being commander of the ATU lent institutional weight and manpower to Junior’s gun-toting caprices, and he appeared to embrace the role with vigor; his bodyguard J. tells me how much Chuckie enjoyed getting dressed up in his ATU uniform, “like Schwarzenegger,” pulling on his flak jacket and strapping a Glock to his leg. Jacob Massaquoi, a Liberian dissident whose brother was executed in front of him by Samuel Doe’s men and who was himself shot and tortured by those of Charles Taylor, says that the difference between the two regimes was that Doe’s agents came under cover of darkness, while Chuckie and his goons would come for you in broad daylight. This sent a message, Massaquoi says:

“I can do anything—and nothing will happen to me.”

When he wasn’t in military uniform, Chuckie favored gold chains and the latest streetwear from the United States—Sean John and Phat Farm—and listened to dancehall reggae and gangster rap: Bujun Banton, Snoop, Tupac, and DMX. Driving around with his bodyguards, he played instrumental CDs and rapped along to them. And although his father showed signs that he wanted Junior to enter politics, according to J., Junior wasn’t interested in anything beyond the gangster lifestyle: “He likes material things—cars, clothes, music. He used to be a lavish person.”

Like his father, Chuckie proved adept at using Liberia’s natural resources to make himself rich, and in partnership with rumored Ukrainian mafia kingpin Leonid Minin, he ran a timber-export concession. Until Minin—a portly alleged cocaine addict from Odessa—was arrested near Milan in 2000, their company, Exotic Tropical and Timber Enterprises, enabled the president’s son to trade valuable Liberian hardwoods for cash and weapons, according to UN reports. It also allowed Chuckie to combine his love of action movies with his love of firearms: If a film featured a weapon he liked, Chuckie simply added it to the shopping list. Among the orders for hundreds of tons of arms shipped by Minin, UN investigators found notes about “special packages for Junior.” And when the new toys arrived, Chuckie would spend hours with them on the firing range at Gbatala. In 2000 he married Lynn Henderson in a ceremony in Monrovia; three months later she gave birth to a son, Charles Taylor III.

And yet the little warlord never felt at home in his fiefdom of theft and violence. Chuckie Taylor remained in touch with friends and relatives in America—frequently transferring money to individuals in

Florida. And J. says that over the years he realized that Chuckie desperately wanted to return to the United States but couldn’t because of something he’d done in the past: “He told me once that he was involved in some sort of heist, and if he had gone back he was going to serve some 20-to-25-year jail sentence.”

WHEN I FIRST MEET NATHANIEL KOAH, I FIND HIM WAITING IN THE dust beside the road in Paynesville, a sprawling township on the eastern edge of Monrovia. He carries a rolled umbrella and, despite the late-afternoon heat, wears a thick quilted-nylon jacket. He is suspicious and reluctant to talk. He will later tell me he is 43, though he looks much older. It’s been eight years since he was subjected to the “VIP treatment” at Gbatala.

Over the many hours that I spend talking to him about his experiences at the hands of Chuckie Taylor, he breaks down only once: when describing his journey from Monrovia to Gbatala. With his hands tied behind him so that his arms became paralyzed, he was thrown into the back of a pickup truck and covered with a tarpaulin by ATU guards. Unable to breathe, he began to struggle, and Taylor stopped the car to investigate. Chuckie had the guards pull back the cover. “We’re not yet ready to kill him,” Koah heard him say. “So remove the tarpaulin, let him receive air. When we reach the base, he will die.”

“You know the distance from here to Gbatala,” Koah tells me. “It’s 85 miles away. He put me in there in rope for three and a half hours.”

At the memory of the agonizing trip in the back of the pickup



truck—a journey he thought was the last he would ever take—Koah chokes into silence and cries quietly. But the details of what he tells me later are far worse.

Koah was arrested by government troops on July 26, 1999, near the border with Sierra Leone, where he employed 160 men working a diamond creek. Koah says he was stripped naked and handed over to ATU troops, who beat him, tortured him by dripping melted plastic onto his body, and delivered him to Chuckie Taylor's office at the executive mansion in Monrovia. On his desk Chuckie had a rock as big as a bar of soap. He accused Koah of having found a diamond of the same size, with which he was planning to fund political opposition to the Taylor regime; Chuckie wanted the diamond.

In the coming months, Koah was twice taken to see Charles Taylor himself, who told him he would free him if he told him where the diamond was; at one point Taylor offered both freedom and a suitcase filled with U.S. dollars in exchange for the stone. Each time, Koah explained that no such diamond existed. When he refused to change his story, Taylor simply turned him over to Junior.

“They burned him while he was still crying,” a witness says.

Koah's account of his experience at Gbatala is that he was immediately taken to “Vietnam,” where he was imprisoned with five other men in a five-foot-deep concrete-lined pit covered with metal bars. The men sat up to their armpits in filthy water, fenced in in pairs with barbed wire. Koah says that Chuckie would visit the base every two or three days, to personally oversee his torture. In Monrovia, he had been beaten—150 lashes, with a piece of wood until that broke, and then with a strip of rubber cut from a tire—until he passed out. Later he had been hung upside down over a bonfire. But at Gbatala the cruelty became more creative: A bucket of forest ants was poured over the heads of the men in the pit; they were forced to drink the water around them, which was filled with their own urine and feces; Koah's penis was tied with a rope, which the soldiers then pulled as hard as they could. In the second month of Koah's imprisonment, Chuckie watched and took photos while an ATU soldier sodomized Koah.

And then, according to Koah, there were the killings. One prisoner, accused of being a rebel, was simply shot in the head one morning by Chuckie, who pulled out his automatic and told Koah and the other men in the pit to duck; another inmate, named Richard Abu, was shot in the legs before being doused in gasoline and set on fire. “They burned him while he was still crying,” Koah tells me. “I was

CRIMINAL MIND: (From left) Charles Taylor during the civil war in July 1990. Posters proclaiming Taylor's innocence—he will be tried for war crimes in January of next year—in Monrovia. Taylor supporters during the 1997 election.

sitting there while they burned Richard Abu alive.”

It was nearly three months before Koah was finally released, in October 1999, as a result of a writ filed in Monrovia by Tiawan Gongloe, a human-rights lawyer who is now Liberia's solicitor general.

Before he was taken to the hearing, Koah was granted a final audience with Charles Taylor. There, Koah says, Taylor warned him that if he revealed anything of what he had seen at Gbatala, the government could not guarantee his safety. And then the president handed him two \$100 bills. “A man cannot go to court with empty pockets,” he said.

After his release, Koah gave a press conference about what had happened to him at Gbatala. Two nights later, armed men came to his house in Monrovia looking for him. He escaped the building, and when they came back later, they started shooting. Koah says that during the third visit, uniformed ATU men abducted his wife

and 15-year-old daughter and raped them at gunpoint. But by then Nathaniel Koah had fled the country. He would remain on the run for more than six years.

CHARLES TAYLOR'S RULE OVER LIBERIA FINALLY CAME TO AN END on August 11, 2003. With much of the country in the hands of the rebel group known as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and under pressure from the U.S. government, Taylor stepped down and was escorted by ATU personnel to Robertsfield Airport, where a plane took him into exile in Nigeria.

Chuckie did not wait for the bitter end: During the last week of July, word went around among the ATU boys at the executive mansion that the chief was leaving. Some heard that he'd gone to Nigeria, others that he was headed for South Africa. But on July 31—disregarding a UN travel ban—he was recorded traveling using Liberian passport No. 002858 on an Air France plane to Washington, D.C. Once in Washington, he changed planes and boarded a BWI flight to Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Much of what he did for the next two years is not clear. It's rumored that he visited the Philippines, where he apparently had a girlfriend, and Ukraine, where he had military contacts, and one former ATU

PHOTOGRAPHS: FROM LEFT: AFP/GETTY IMAGES; ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.



man says he saw him in the United States disguised as an Arab. But wherever he went, he rarely kept quiet for long: He repeatedly made phone calls to former associates and members of the ATU in Monrovia. One former ATU officer—now studying sociology at the University of Liberia—tells me that in 2005 one of Chuckie's old bodyguards came to his door in Paynesville with a cell phone and told him that the chief wanted to speak to him; he and Chuckie talked on the phone until the battery died. Chuckie told him the same thing he'd told the other ATU men: that they should stay together, get an education, and await his return. "Go to school and learn something," he said. "Tomorrow there will be another chance."

Even now, four years after he last drove up the highway to Robertsfield Airport, Chuckie Taylor remains a dangerous presence in Liberia. Many of the hundreds of former ATU fighters still in Monrovia are eager to silence those who might incriminate them. Nathaniel Koah

disturbing and dark—war and murder, bullets tearing the faces off babies. "I'm the real deal," he told Sheeran. "There's all these American thugs that rap about this and that, but they haven't lived the life and seen what I've seen." And he'd already thought of a couple of names for his crew: Alpha Tango Unit, or All Thugs United, he said. Either way, they'd be known by their initials: A.T.U.

At the beginning of March 2006, Chuckie explained to Sheeran that he was planning a trip to Nigeria and he'd have to change planes in London. Perhaps he could stop over for a few days and the two of them could get together in the studio and work on some mix tapes.

But in the time since his flight from Monrovia, Chuckie had not been forgotten. He'd been under scrutiny by an agent of the Arms and Strategic Technology Investigations Unit of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, in connection with Liberian arms trafficking. Between 2004 and 2006, the agent traveled throughout Europe and West Africa, conducted interviews in Liberia, and met Chuckie's mother and stepfather. By the time Taylor walked into the U.S. embassy in Port of Spain on March 15 and submitted a falsified application to renew his United States passport, he had already been under federal investigation for two years.

Two weeks later he returned to Florida aboard American Airlines Flight 1668 to Miami. And this time around, nobody was in any doubt about the true identity of Charles McArthur Emmanuel.

IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR, CHUCKIE TAYLOR ENTERED A PLEA OF not guilty on eight counts of torture committed in Liberia between 1999 and 2002; his trial is set to begin in Miami in January 2008. His lawyer, the Miami public defender Miguel Caridad, refuses to comment on the case, but the probability of a conviction seems high; prosecutors are, a source close to the investigation tells me, quietly confident. But in the unlikely event that he's acquitted, something else is in store for Junior.

"I was sitting there while they burned Richard Abu alive."

tells me that last year, days after he returned from exile, he spoke to investigators from the U.S. Department of Justice who were visiting Liberia to gather material for the indictment of Chuckie Taylor. Since then, he says, there have been three attempts on his life, including one in which armed men attacked the house he was staying in with automatic weapons and then burned it to the ground. He remains in fear for his life, and desperate to leave the country. He has asked U.S. authorities to help him get out; so far, he's heard nothing from them. "Maybe they think America is like heaven," he says bitterly. "Before you go to heaven you've got to die."

CHUCKIE TAYLOR'S LAST ATTEMPT AT REINVENTING HIMSELF WAS also his most audacious: During the final months of 2005, with his father in exile in Nigeria and plans for new elections under way in Monrovia, Junior was in Trinidad working on a future as a gangster rapper. In December of that year, Jethro Sheeran, a British musician who works under the name Alonestar, met Chuckie in Port of Spain and began recording with him at Eclipse Studios. Taylor was reticent at first about his background and wouldn't let anyone take his photograph. He had a gruff rapping style ("quite similar in tone to *The Game*," Sheeran says), and the lyrics he wrote were

Back in downtown Orlando, in the offices of the state attorney, is a case file bearing the name Roy Belfast Jr., which contains a thick wad of witness statements and arrest reports related to a long-dormant investigation. Right at the back of the file, behind the nolle prosequi order from 2005, which marks the case closed, are two sheets of paper torn from a yellow legal pad. On them, someone for whom charges of torture in a distant land are of little consequence compared with matters closer to home has recently made a series of notes about the defendant: "D. was in a small country in Africa," they read in part, "where his father was dictator. When his father was deposed he fled to Trinidad where he has been for three years."

In July of last year, Florida assistant state attorney Steven Foster refiled charges of attempted robbery against Roy M. Belfast Jr.; for allegedly waving an automatic pistol in the faces of Robert Klimkowski and his teenage son in 1994, Chuckie faces prosecution for three third-degree felonies and one secondary felony, which alone carries a maximum sentence of 15 years. If he manages to convince the federal jury in Miami that he's innocent of crimes committed in the streets and jungles of West Africa, those few moments in the dark on North Pine Hills Road may still ensure that the gangster prince of Liberia goes to jail for up to 30 years. ■