



The Devil Came on Horseback 2006/E

Please note that the review may act a spoiler for the film.

Synopsis of the film

The Devil Came on Horseback is the story of Brian Steidle – a former marine who became a patrol leader for the Joint Military Mission in Sudan. The film is told entirely from his perspective, in a documentary style. He explains his job was to monitor the ceasefire – an agreement which had been made to end the 20 year civil war between the North and South of Sudan. As he arrived in 2004, a new conflict had begun in Darfur which had already displaced more than a million people. The International Community were worried about the possibility the ceasefire could be broken by the tensions in Darfur. Brian explains how as part of the ceasefire, rebels in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) began fighting for some of what South Sudan was receiving in terms of money and power. The government immediately closed off Darfur and backed militias (*Janjaweed*) to attack and silence the African rebels.

Brian's patrol volunteered to go to Darfur and investigate the accusations of violations of the ceasefire agreement. He witnessed many acts of genocide, and he says that it was clear that the attacks were ethnically based. He tells the story of how his patrol was able to speak to members of the *Janjaweed* who revealed that their weapons were given to them by the Government with an order to kill Black Africans.

Brian talks about how frustrated he was at being unable to do anything to stop the atrocities. He took extensive photos detailing his experiences, and at one point he says he was so angry after seeing the devastation from a *Janjaweed* attack on a market at an IDP camp that he wished he had had a gun instead of a camera. In total he wrote 80 reports to the UN detailing what they had seen, and he found out on his return that they had only received four of them. Brian returns to the US after a new commander refuses to let them get involved, despite his patrol being able to predict where the *Janjaweed* would strike next.

In the US Brian tells his story to the media, despite the fear of recriminations from the US government and military. He found that not everyone was willing to listen.



When it was made and where

Brian made the documentary after the huge public response to his photos and his story. He was approached by the Save Darfur Coalition as a key spokesperson.

Issues to be aware of

From time to time the film does show pictures of dead bodies which may cause distress.

Key Themes

Speaking out

- Brian comes from a military background and his family are worried for him because of recriminations against him when he begins to tell his story, however Brian feels he should speak out whatever the personal cost
- Brian's photos served as proof which helped him convince sceptics who doubted the stories of atrocities in Darfur

Bystanders

- the leader of Brian's patrol will not allow them to stop the *Janjaweed* attacks, despite their ability to monitor and track where they will take place
- despite meeting with Brian, the US Government continues to not intervene
- at one particular lecture that Brian gives, he is criticised by a number of Sudanese Arabs who refuse to believe his story

Survivors

- there are a number of heartbreaking personal testimonies from Darfuri survivors about their experiences at the hands of the *Janjaweed*

You can use HMDT resources to find out more about:

[Mukesh Kapila](#), who as a head of the UN in Sudan in 2004, met with various governments around the world to bring the crisis in Darfur to their attention



[General Romeo Dallaire](#) who was monitoring the peace agreement in Rwanda in 1994 and refused to leave when the UN pulled his mission