

A SEASON OF MIGRATION IN THE EAST

~~PREFACE~~ ~~Foreward~~

Our party in Sudan consisted of five persons: four from INTERTECT and my companion, Rita. When we sit down to talk about our experiences, it's striking how differently each of us saw things.

As for me, most of my time I worked directly with the Sudanese government in a small village in Eastern Sudan called Shouak. Arabic was the common tongue, and most of my friends and fellow workers were Sudanese. After five and a half months in the country, my talk was sprinkled with Arabic phrases and I had come to know and love village life in the eastern desert.

Kent Hardin, one of my associates, was also based in Shouak but in the initial days spent most of his time working to the north in Kassala with the Sudanese refugee authorities and the refugees from the Ethiopian province of Eritrea. He too learned the Arabic ways of the Sudanese, but as the member of our group most closely associated with the Eritreans, his vocabulary was often sprinkled with the words (and mannerisms) of the Eritreans. More than any of us he came to love the bitter, tangy coffee made by the refugees and celebrated as a form of intercourse between associates and a prerequisite to any down-to-earth work.

Rita worked in Wad Kowli, a camp for Tigrayan refugees, approximately ^{ONE HUNDRED} 100 miles south of my base in Shouak. Her memories are essentially Tigrayan, the language, the customs of the refugees, their dress, their mannerisms, their food, and their longing to return to the mountains in time to grow a crop. Along with the refugees she watched the rainstorms slowly gathering over the mountains and wondered how good the rains would be when it was time to leave. She knows little of the Sudanese customs and culture and, like many of the refugees, developed something of a distrust for their Arabic keepers.

Ron was with us only a short time. His job was to discover problems in the camps relating to protection of the refugees from the Sudanese (at that time there were none). He dealt primarily with the expatriate relief staff in the Tigrayan camps and with the leaders of the refugees, trying to pin down rumors that some of the refugees had been forced into prostitution. He dealt mainly with the voluntary agencies, groups of people he was long familiar with, so his views were that of the outsider looking over the situation.

My brother, Chris, came out with only one assignment, to build roads. He had to fight the U.N. bureaucracy to get the funds, the political support, and the necessary signatures to begin. Then he had to round up the required machinery from Sudanese contractors to carry out the work. The people he dealt with were a special breed, Sudanese with one foot in Sudan and one foot in the modern technological world. To these people "can do" was a byword and, far from encountering the slow, plodding bureaucracy the rest of us dealt with daily, Chris found a team that was willing to push to make things happen.

My need to write about Sudan has been compelling. The project represents, as clearly as any, the work I do, the issues I confront and the beliefs I hold. Much of what happens during a typical relief operation is unknown or perhaps unclear to an outsider. What is seemingly straightforward is often very complex and relief approaches that are well publicized may be entirely inappropriate and

counterproductive. In many cases, my views and approaches to emergencies are radically different than those of the organizations I work with. Many people disagree with my views and have other perspectives that are just as "right" as my own. Many of the people depicted as devils in this story may, in others' eyes, be the true heroes of the operation. They are entitled to their opinions; I'll stick to mine.

~~Frederick C. Cuny~~

Mexico City & Istanbul 1986

"In war there are no best choices...
only least worst choices."

relief operation he was known as "ole leopard shoes". At the time, little did I realize that "ole leopard shoes" and I would become close partners in this god forsaken outpost along the Atbara River.

Omar and I headed back to Khartoum and reviewed the situation. It was depressing. The only two bright spots that I found were two people that I had met previously but only on a social basis. The first was Angela Berry, an attractive and perky blond nutritionist who had been hired by UNHCR to try and straighten out the feeding programs. I had met Angela on a visit to Thailand three years earlier and had been impressed with her openness and interest in the field. In the halls in Geneva, however, I heard that she was not trusted by the Branch Office and indeed she had collected her fair share of "enemies" in the house. It seemed she had a pension for going over superiors' heads when things did not work right; not just a little, but all the way to the top. If her refugees were not getting food, then by god she would go straight to the High Commissioner. I like that kind of person, so she was already starting off on my good list.

There were some question marks, however, about Angela. She accompanied Omar and me on our visit to Kassala and had participated in some of the discussions with the relief organizations there. It was obvious that Angela knew the basics, but when she talked I found that people were not listening to her. Not that they didn't like her, it was just that they wouldn't take information from her. For someone in her position, i.e., having to lay down health and nutrition standards and develop common practices and approaches to combating hunger in the camps, this could be a lethal flaw.

The second hopeful presence was that of Michael Day-Thompson. Mike and I had met briefly in Pakistan some years earlier. He was a logistics specialist, a former British SAS Officer who had his way of getting things done. Mike was a consultant to UNHCR and a true professional in every sense of the word. He had a reputation for working long and hard and I could tell by the tiredness in his eyes that this operation was no exception. The grandest thing about Mike, however, was that he never lost his humor. He could cuss down the "bloody buggers" for screwing it up and let forth against the Sudanese as well as any old colonialist. But, unlike me, the more he yelled at people, the more they seemed to love him.

Mike and Angela appeared to be the two spikes that were holding the railroad together. But looking at both of them I could tell that things were swiftly coming apart. Angela, who should have been tanned and healthy looking from all the time she was spending outdoors, was pale and thin and Mike was down at the eyelids. As for the rest of the people on the UNHCR Team, they were practically useless.

Our trip had underscored another factor in the operation. The distances that had to be covered were enormous. A trip from the UNHCR suboffice in Gedarif or from the COR regional headquarters in Showak to any of the refugee camps was a one-day trip. Going to Kassala as easy enough; the Khartoum-Port Sudan highway was paved, but even so it was a three hour trip. Getting to the other sites, however, was problematic. A major camp at Safawa, fifty miles east of Gedarif, was a four hour trip by land cruiser and many of the other settlements were likewise off the main roads and required a long, tiring journey to reach. Since the staff was small, they had become circuit riders and the process of spending four hours on the road, two hours in the camps and four hours back to home base meant that

everyone was dead tired. Worse, little could actually be accomplished in the short time they were in the camps. Complicating matters, no radios had been installed and no courier system had been established, so even the simplest communications had to be carried by hand. For all practical purposes, the chief relief officials had no command or control over the operation.

There was one final disturbing element that I had learned of during my trip. The head of the suboffice in Gedarif was an American named Peter Parr. Peter had become embroiled in the American operation to smuggle the Falashas out of the country and HCR questioned who he really reported to, UNHCR or the American Embassy. A gulf had developed between he and Nickolas Morris and it was obvious that neither one could stand the other. The people in COR were convinced that he was CIA. His tour, however, was about to end and Omar had talked the team leader of the International Rescue Committee into replacing Parr in January. Mike Menning and I met each other briefly during the trip. During the meeting, Omar mentioned that he was considering recommending to UNHCR that I be sent out as a consultant to help the suboffice in Gedarif. While I had been expecting this, it was the first time that the subject had breached openly and while Mike openly expressed his support for the idea, I could tell by his eyes that he was not sure whether he liked the proposition or not.

Back in Khartoum I was finally able to conduct a real workshop. On a Friday morning about twenty people assembled in the UNHCR conference room and we discussed at length the emergency in the East and what could be done about it. I laid out several precepts that were later to become the foundation of my work. Top priority was to establish a command and control system that would give the two senior relief officials in the field (Menning and Osmen) the ability to monitor and react to the localized emergencies as they were occurring. Point two was to consolidate the two offices to move the UNHCR so that better coordination could be affected between COR and UNHCR. The sixty mile distance between the two towns amounted to a major gulf in communications and understanding of what was happening and it left the whole operation adrift leaderless and confused.

Point three was to establish an effective method for ordering the necessary food and supplies so that they could be procured and delivered before the refugees arrived. Point four, which was to become one of the most controversial, was to establish a means of determining how many refugees were on their way so that adequate provisions could be pre-positioned before the refugees arrived. This would require establishing linkages with the liberation groups and collecting what amounted to intelligence data about what was happening on the other side.

The fifth point was to begin a program to control the death rates. This included providing clean water, controlling the measles outbreak and providing adequate food for women and children, those most likely to die in the famine situation.

As I outlined these and other points it was obvious that one person was taking avid notes and understood what I was saying. Karen Abu Zayed was the UNHCR liaison officer with COR. Karen was married to a Sudanese commissioner for higher education and had lived in the Sudan for over a decade. She knew and liked the Sudanese and was accepted into the highest councils of COR. She had become a defacto senior advisor to the commissioner and to his deputy, Hassan Atia. I was later to learn that,

more than anyone else, they respected her opinions and many in UNHCR not only resented how close she was to the commissioner but questioned whether or not she could be counted on to push UNHCR's policies when they were unpopular. In the coming months she and I were to become kindred spirits on many issues and she stands second only to Fadil among the people in Sudan for whom I have the highest regard.

At the end of my presentation, Karen came up and commented how I had been able to put everything together and concisely sum up a complex situation. Furthermore, she said she was impressed with the points that I had laid down and hoped that there was some way that I could return to help and put them into operation. At the time, I thought that this was just flattery but I was latter to learn that she was instrumental in getting the Commissioner to request that I be contracted to help COR in the East.

On the last day of the trip I finally had my chance to speak alone with Nickolas. He gave me forty-five minutes over breakfast before we left for the airport. He had not been able to attend the workshop the previous day so I quickly summarized my opinion of the situation and began to go over the points that I felt were critical. For every one that I suggested, he pointed out the reasons why it could not be done, almost always attributing it to politics. His negative reactions to everything were alarming. My proposals were not far-fetched and could be done. It simply took someone to take a stand and ram them through and no one was in a better position than Nickolas. He never said it outright but I could tell that he was frustrated. I also felt that he was a bit desperate. It was obvious he was overworked and I knew from previous experiences with UNHCR that he was getting damn little help or encouragement for his headquarters. Looking back I think he also felt a lot of pressure in being the UNHCR's in-house expert on emergency operations. Therefore, he had probably been fairly reluctant to ask for help when he still had the time. When I asked why there was so little food in the old camps he explained that things had been good until a late season haboub wiped out the standing crops that he had planned to use to feed the refugees in the old settlements. When this had happened, he suddenly found the emergency food supplies he had ordered had to feed two populations, doubling overnight the number of people that had to be supported with _____ food.

Before we could get too much further into our discussion it was time to go. At the airport there was a delay in the flight, so Nickolas and I went to the VIP lounge to wait along with the Deputy High Commissioner who was also returning to Geneva. Because the deputy was there, Ambassador El Ah_ __di, the Commissioner of Refugees, and Hassan Atia were present to see him off. Boldly, Omar walked directly to the Commissioner, pulled him aside and asked him if he would be interested in having me return on a three-month consultancy to work with Hassan Osman in the east. Omar and I had not talked about this in detail but we had discussed it conceptually throughout our trip. I never thought that Nickolas would agree, however. So, despite our talks, I never really expected it to happen. Omar, however, knew how to move. To my surprise, the Commissioner not only said yes, he was enthusiastic (Karen Abu Zayd's work, I suspect). Then, just as suddenly, Omar turned to Nickolas. "What do you think Nickolas, will you have him back?" Without hesitation, Nickolas said "Yes." You could have pushed me over with a feather!

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

On the flight back to Geneva, I thought long and hard about whether or not I really wanted this assignment. As we flew north over the vast Sudanese desert, I thought to myself, this is a land only a Texan could love. The vast empty wastelands, remote villages, the blowing sandstorms and the dry parched look of the landscape and the people, made me at once both hesitant and compelled to agree to the work. Looking back, I find it strange that I didn't think much about the refugees and where they came from. My one consuming thought was Sudan and how much I wanted to be a part of it.

My return to Geneva began the same way that my arrival in Khartoum had, with a telephone call from Tex Harris. I was staying with Phil Sargisson and we had hardly begun talking about the trip and my impressions when the phone rang. Tex was putting an airlift together to send out some necessary items. What did I think about the proposed inventory? We talked for about forty-five minutes with Phil coaching from the sidelines. Finally, Tex asked the question. Was UNHCR going to send me back out? I couldn't say. I knew that Phil was interested and would push for approval, but he had warned me that I still had many enemies inside the house, several powerful ones who were now directors. They would try to block the assignment. Phil told Tex that there were some "expected difficulties" and Tex got the message. Before he signed off, Tex said that he would start pushing for the contract from the American side. "Do you want me to call Smizer?" he asked.

I knew HCR well enough to know that while the tactic would work, it would create many more enemies and make my life difficult in the field. Therefore, I asked him to hold off until we could see which way the winds were blowing and how much progress Omar and Phil could make on their own.

The next several days can only be described as crazy. On one hand Omar wanted to introduce me to everyone and tell them how great our trip had been and how much the Sudanese wanted me to come back. Phil on the other hand, wanted to move cautiously. We envisioned a short-term consultancy of only a month or so, and then having me come back to Geneva to work on other projects, namely, establishing a long-term training program and developing systems to respond more quickly and professionally to emergencies, which we both agreed in the long run were far more important to UNHCR.

At the end of the second day it was quite obvious which way the winds were blowing. A gale force in-fact had developed designed to push me back across the Atlantic. One of the directors had absolutely vetoed any form of my participation in the operation. He had been in charge of the Somalia operation in 1980 when I had prepared a critical report on UNHCR's performance there and it was obvious he did not want me back in the neighborhood since he was now in charge of the UNHCR's African operations.

That evening there was a debriefing scheduled where Omar, Khan (the East African desk officer), Smizer and I were to brief the senior African team on what we had found during our field trip. It was an interesting lesson in how things work at UNHCR. Of the two principal desk officers, only one was present. Khan came with a list of all the negative things he had seen but with no answers about how to

resolve them. Omar came to the meeting but only stayed ten minutes and left. The Deputy High Commissioner never showed up. Thus, most of the debriefing fell to me, the outsider, who was supposed to be there only to listen. Before I started, however, it was clear from the way the meeting was going that everyone was attempting to make a scapegoat of Nickolas Morris. As each member of the trip ticked off the problems they had seen, someone would ask "and what did Nickolas do or say"? No one ever answered and everyone in the group sat there shaking their heads. The longer I sat there and watched this, the madder I got. When it came my turn to speak, I began by talking about how the blame for the poor performance of HCR could not be laid on one person, but should be attributed to the system, or rather the lack of a system, within the house. Clearly, I got my point across. It was obvious that they were a major part of the problem and not the hope for a solution. Kiss this trip good-by, I thought to myself as I walked out of the meeting.

By the next morning, my performance had gotten back to Phil. He too figured that was the end and so we spent the rest of the day talking about the training program. (He was so down that he rescinded my invitation to the UNHCR Christmas party which was to be held that night.) Omar, however, was not to be let down, he had a strategy and that old survivor new how to work the halls. He got the _____ to commit to paper an agreement that if the General Project Manager, Hassan Osman, would request my services, and if the Branch Office concurred, the mission could be approved by HCR. The director knew Hassan well and figured that he would never tolerate a foreigner in his camp. He said that he suspected that Hassan was a crook. The arrangement as it was, with UNHCR in Gedarif and no foreigners poking about Showak, was the best way to keep doing "business as usual". He had sadly misjudged Hassan's character and Omar's determination.

Back in Dallas, I went about business as usual and enjoyed the Christmas holidays, unaware of the storm that was brewing or whether or not I should be sent back to Sudan. Tex was convinced that this was the only thing that was going to save HCR and when he heard that my mission had been vetoed, he began putting the screws on. He began by calling the DHC and trying to convince him to override the director. As the pressures begin to build, Phil Sargisson called me and warned me that these could backfire. He and Omar had come up with another plan. Omar would return to Khartoum on New Years Day and would get the request that the director had committed to. Could I call Tex off and let the process at UNHCR work itself through.

Reluctantly, Tex agreed but by this time the whole RP apparatus had swung into full gear. Tex's airlift was underway and he decided to send UNHCR a message. The consignee for the cargo was not UNHCR, it was COR via the U.S. Embassy. A hint was also laid that the consignee could just as easily be INTERTECT, contracted directly to run the operation, bypassing UNHCR entirely. I did not find this out until the American Ambassador, Mr. Hurrin, told me about it several months later, but it made an impression (like a nuke) on the boys at HCR. Thus, in early January, when Omar's machinations produced the necessary official request for my presence, HCR could only find some contractual obstacles to try and derail the process.

These obstacles seemed liked haggling at the time and to the R.P. team seemed minor. Looking back

though, they were major problems and had the original concept of the mission gone through, the outcome would probably be far different. I wanted to take a team from my own staff to the field. I also wanted support from the U.S. Government by the presence of Don Krumm, Tex's assistant, in the embassy in Khartoum for the duration of my tour. And I wanted Phil Nieburg, a pediatrician with excellent public health and nutrition credentials to be seconded from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta to my staff in the field. From INTERTECT I wanted a five-person team: myself; our two guys in Madagascar, Kent Hardin and Ron Parker; Robin Biellik, a public health specialist; and a logistician to be selected when the team was approved. I also proposed that a pilot mechanic be assigned to the team so that we could take our plane and maintain it in the field.

The response from HCR was negative. They would only agree to me. The main reason, they claimed, was cost. Our salaries were too high and the overhead rate was enormous (the top person at INTERTECT makes a third of what a mid-level career officer at UNHCR makes and our overhead rate of 75% compares to an overhead rate of 800% if UNHCR's budget was figured at the same way that we figure ours). No staff, no me, I responded. I simply did not want to be put into the field without my own people and without professionals that I could trust and rely on. Tex and Phil, however, had other ideas. They felt that we should take the project at all cost. Furthermore, Phil argued that once I got over there I could justify more staff and since Ron and Kent were in the area, I could get them into Sudan and hire them on the spot. In the middle of the discussions, Robin who had been working with UNICEF, was shot in Uganda and had to be moved back to England where his spleen was removed. He was faced with a long recovery. With that news, I reluctantly agreed to go on my own, but only with a promise from Phil and Tex to support the hiring of Kent and Ron.

A stumbling block was over our plane. My brief trip had convinced me that the only way to operate was with a fleet of aircraft. I had made several inquiries at the Khartoum airport and it seems that there were only few commercial operators and they were charging an arm and a leg for every flight. I and several members of staff are pilots and the company has always had an airplane for just this type of project. We go for small, single-engine airplanes, usually Cessnas, modify the hell out of them and turn them into aircraft that can do just about anything except make bread. The plane we had at the time was a Cessna 182 that had been modified for a number of relief roles. We had modified the wings so that the aircraft could take-off and land in approximately two hundred feet. We had cut a fifteen inch hole in the bottom and installed a camera mount so that we could take pictures for damage assessment, mitigation studies and for mapping refugee camps. We had installed one of the most sophisticated navigation systems available for small aircraft so that we could position ourselves and navigate over unfamiliar terrain any place in the world. And for night emergencies, we had installed a flare system that would drop high intensity magnesium parachute flares and give us a chance to land in dark and unfamiliar terrain if such an event were necessary. In short, the ship was a real dream to fly and would do anything that I asked of it. The plane was the one thing that I refused to go without and I knew that HCR's promises to rent a plane for me, if I would leave mine at home, would never come about. This was the last obstacle, HCR first claiming the plane was too expensive and then saying that it would take

too long to ferry it over. It was Don Krumm who came up with the suggestion, "we got all these transports going over every week, why not simply take the plane's wings off and stick it in the back". Tex checked with the Air Force and they agreed to assign a C-141 to the next flight of supplies, designated "relief five". The size of the 141 would give us enough room to put the plane on board. Just get it up to McGuire Air Force Base Tex said, and bring along your own mechanic to disassemble it here and reassemble it over there.

With this issue removed the deal was sealed.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FLIGHT OUT

The Southern Cross standing bright with its arms outstretched lay steady-on, dead ahead of the cockpit of the C-141. To my left from the navigators perch, the first faint glow of the sunrise was beginning to appear on the horizon. It had been a great flight and the crew of Relief 5 had been friendly and a great bunch to fly with. As we drew closer to Khartoum the camaraderie that a well disciplined and professional flight deck enjoys, had gradually turned to a pensive silence as we neared our destination. I think that they were as sad as I to see the flight field. It had been easy for us to identify with each other once they learned that I too was a flyer. And I had enjoyed engaging in the practice of swapping lies as we first crossed the Atlantic and then flew into Sigonella, a NATO base where we overnights waiting permission to overfly Egypt. The crew could stay at Sigonella Inn, a hotel for NATO crews remaining overnight. They had figured a way to smuggle Craig, my mechanic, and Me into the Inn at Uncle Sam's expense. I was prepared to pay my fair share, but to them it was a challenge, and they managed to pull it off without a hitch.

After the details of the contract had been worked out, Tex and Phil were anxious to get me out to Sudan as quickly as possible. Tex decided to lay on the best briefing he could provide and at his own expense, flew to Dallas loaded down with papers, reports and cables for me to review. We spent two days together pouring over maps, developing contingency plans, tracking down resources in the U.S. and Europe, finding out about the availability of supplies should they be needed, and trying to put together the guts of a budget for the overall operation. Exhausted and hungry, we would usually leave my house at midnight and rush down to Culpeppers, my neighborhood barbecue joint. Tex, who is six foot eight, would wolf down two or three baskets of ribs and I would devour a steak, washing it down with Dr. Pepper. Returning to the house, we would spend the last couple of hours tinkering with the computer that I had purchased for the trip. Tex gave me a crash-course on how to use the system and I was madly trying to design both the command and control system and the software to be used for monitoring the influx of refugees. After three exhausting days and nights, I figured that I was as ready as I was ever going to be and packed my bags and headed up to McGuire Air Force Base where Craig had disassembled the plane and stored it safely aboard the C-141.

Both the computer and the influx monitoring software were two tools that I was anxious to test in field conditions. Portable micro-computers had only recently come onto the market. We had an older generation system in our office which we were very happy with but which by no means was portable and had only a small memory. During the previous summer, we at INTERTECT had helped to put together a refugee emergency assessment manual for the State Department. As part of the manual we came across the problem of how to evaluate and estimate how many people might come into a country when you cannot actually cross the border and conduct an assessment. Don Allegra, one of our medical personnel, had come up with the idea of developing models of typical families and comparing the model to the people coming across. This would give us an estimate of who was most affected and what condition they

were in. If certain groups, such as small children were missing, death rates could be expected to be very high and the numbers escaping could be expected to be fairly low. On the other-hand, if large numbers of severely malnourished children came across accompanied by both their parents, a mass exodus could be expected. In between there were various shades, which could also give an indication of what types of supplies and the quantities that would be needed.

The second part of the system called for modeling the flow by establishing populations at known locations across the border, their needs could be estimated and their movements plotted. Since reporters, some relief workers and many other people tend to cross at least a short way into crisis zones, we theorized that UNHCR personnel could interview these people on their return and get a fairly accurate estimate of movements and potential arrivals. In Sudan we were fortunate in having two fairly well respected relief organizations with which to work, REST and ERA. If they could provide even minimum data about movements of people on the other side, we could preposition supplies and save lives.

Both the hardware and the software were to prove extremely controversial. In Sudan where computers are very rare and, in the east, nonexistent, a mystique developed about what was inside the machine. Some of the Sudanese believed that we had some mysterious capability for monitoring everything that was going on and that we had secret codes that we could put into the machine that would tell us not only what was happening but also who was misbehaving. One of the UNHCR cynics once told me that the reason that I did not witness any major corruption was because that when the computer arrived the Sudanese were scared as to what we could monitor and so they laid low during the crucial period.

More controversial, however, was the remote detection system. I never attempted to hide the information from anyone and all the information we collected was available to anyone who asked. But to many people in UNHCR, it confirmed their fears that I was CIA. I explained the system to Nick and how it would work and his only comment was, "be careful, we do not want to be seen as collecting intelligence and as an American, you have got to watch it." He never brought the issue up again, but within weeks after my arrival, unknown to me, it was a major topic of discussion in Geneva. Nonetheless, the system worked, if only in a rudimentary way and I credit the system with helping me to advise Hassan on where to direct CARE, our logistics agency, on where to place the food, so that during the entire food crisis we never completely ran out in any camp (though it was awfully close, sometimes).

An hour out of Khartoum, the sky was a definite yellow and the bright orange corona of the sun was blanking out all the stars except the Southern Cross. What a great constellation! How often the Southern Cross has taken me out, while Polaris brings me home. Caught between the last seconds of night and the first minutes of dawn, we could make out the great curve of the Nile and as we crossed the third cataract, barely visible now, we put on the spoilers to begin our descent.

After the initial descent checklist was complete, the acting copilot, Captain Harry Bombardi (known to everyone in the Air Force as Boomer) turned in his seat and awkwardly told me that when his daughter had learned that he was flying relief supplies to the Ethiopian refugees, she had offered her favorite teddy bear for him to take and give to the refugee children to "make them happier". He had been touched but

had not been able to decide whether such a gift would be of any good or whether it would be laughed at by the relief workers. I have had mixed experiences with such gifts but the more I work in the field, I realize that simple toys for children can often bring a lot of enjoyment that one would not expect in harsh circumstances. I suggested to Boomer that if he wanted to get some of his buddies together and bring a load of toys out, I would make sure that they ended up in the right hands. Several years earlier, we had put toys in the supplemental feeding centers as a means of encouraging kids to beg their parents to take them back. It had proved successful and I figured, "what the hell", it would probably work here too. Besides I like to see people getting involved in these types of things and children who contribute their toys for something like this can learn a lot and sometimes begin to feel and understand something of what those their own age may be going through in another land. For the next several months, I would make contact with Air Force planes flying over Sudan and learn the progress of the toy lift that Boomer was organizing back in New Jersey.

At precisely 7:00, Relief Five began shooting the approach for runway one eight at Khartoum. As we let down over the city, the morning haze increased and visibility was less than a mile. As I was to learn, this was not unusual. A combination of dirt, sand and smog often obscured the airport and required that an instrument approach be used. While I had expected the haboubs, I was unprepared for the frequency that Khartoum was down to minimums.

Boomer maneuvered the giant 141 onto the cargo ramp and shut down the engines. I pulled out of the cockpit expecting to see Omar or some familiar face from HCR to greet me, handle the paperwork and to get the plane through customs. I was to be sorrily disappointed. Not only was there no one from UNHCR to meet me, it appeared that no preparation had been made to off-load the valuable cargo of medicines and pharmaceuticals that had been airlifted along with my plane.

As the door dropped down, three cars approached. The first person out was Don Krumm, who had arrived ten days earlier and had started setting up his monitoring operation at the embassy. It was good to see Don, we had worked together several times in the past and along with Phil Nieburg and Fred Gregory had dodged bullets and death threats in El Salvador. Don was to prove to be one of the most valuable persons in the entire relief operation, someone who would take decisions and push hard to support the operations in the field.

The second person up the ramp was the American Ambassador to Sudan, _____ Harran. The ambassador had come out to greet me personally and to welcome me to Sudan. He had heard stories from Don and Tex about this crazy Texan and he was anxious to see for himself "the plane within the plane" and to hear about the command and control system that we proposed to set up. The warm greeting was really appreciated, I knew I was going to need the help of the American embassy to put pressure on UNHCR and some of the voluntary agencies to move quickly. And I was sure that his being there was a signal of assurance that I could expect his help if I needed it. The problem was there was no one there from HCR, not even a driver to get the message.

After the pharmaceuticals and my plane had been unloaded, the Ambassador and Don headed back for the embassy, the Ambassador to get ready for a meeting with several key donors and Don, to call HCR

to find out why that had not come to pick up me or the pharmaceuticals.

Soon thereafter, Boomer and the crew came over to say their good-byes. As the engines began spooling up, I felt a peculiar loneliness sitting out there on the ramp, all alone with my plane in pieces around me, a million dollars worth of perishable medical supplies lying in the increasingly hot equatorial sun, and the big 141 slowly beginning to move away.

Don had directed Craig to the other end of the airfield to a place called Nile Safaris, an air taxi operation that had kindly agreed to allow us to use their hangar to reassemble our plane. The problem was it was more than a mile away. Craig was able to borrow a tug to pull the fuselage down but the wings and horizontal stabilizer would need to be carried individually on a truck and none appeared available. A British Airways crew agreed to allow us to use one of their container trailers which we could hook up to the tug but it would require that one person drive and the other stay back on the trailer to hold the wing in place. Since no one from HCR had arrived to claim the medicines, this meant that we would have to leave them for about thirty minutes. From the way that some of the Sudanese military were eyeing the cargo, I was not too sure that some of it would not walk away. We waited for three hours, constantly being hassled by customs officers who wanted to know what the hell the plane was doing there and gradually a small crowd gathered to watch the festivities. I was sure that the failure of UNHCR to send someone to meet me was their own way of sending a message, but their failure to come and get the pharmaceuticals was sheer incompetence.

The decision as to whether to go with my plane or stay with the medical supplies was answered when I noticed one of the military guys picking up the elevator and trying to walk off with it under his arm. If even one bolt was missing I could foresee being stuck for months on the ground and looking like a fool to HCR, who had not been too happy about the airplane in the first place. So quickly, Craig and I gathered up the parts, put them on the trailer and headed for Nile Safaris.

Once the plane was safely in the hangar and a guard posted over the various and sundry components, I borrowed a car from Nile Safaris and, without going through the niceties of customs or immigration, went straight to UNHCR where I jumped on the first duty officer that I found. The poor guy had no idea what was going on and all he knew was that a six foot-three Texan in an orange flight suit was cursing the hell out of him.

Great! The U.S. Ambassador and Don Krumm greet me personally, HCR boycotts my arrival and allows some very needed temperature-specific pharmaceuticals to deteriorate, and I explode on the first poor son-of-a-bitch I meet in the Branch Office. What a great way to start an operation!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SITUATION IN JANUARY 1985

In the three weeks since I had left there had been some dramatic changes and I quickly found that the brief assessment trip had only given me a superficial view of all the problems. The measles epidemic had now spread through the eastern region. I was shocked to find out that the Sudanese had not only continued the moves from Tukul Bab to Fau but had refused to warn or inoculate the Sudanese villagers and refugees in the old camp at Aburakam. Furthermore, access to the camps was still open and there was no doubt in my mind that lorry drivers and other Sudanese going in and out were helping to spread the epidemic far and wide. When I asked the GPM why he had not tried to isolate the disease around Kassala, he replied that it would limit his options in moving the refugees away from the border. In the coming months, this type of situation was to occur again and again. The GPM would often choose a course and it was not clear whether he was trying to serve the best needs of the refugees or was answering to a higher political dictate, one that fixed the refugees in one position or another.

The move from Tukul Bab had not been particularly pretty. Mohammed Habib, the COR man in-charge at Kassala, had been given orders to move the refugees and, by god, that was what he was going to do. As soon as the first of the new camps at Fau was erected, Mohammed hired approximately forty trucks and began moving people out. Incredibly, UNHCR did not send anyone to monitor the moves. The field officer in Kassala, whose primary responsibility was Wad Sharif, tried to cover the moves but did not have a vehicle. He was also pushed into service to do the paperwork for an airlift from Europe. With no one there to watch the situation, it soon got out of hand. Sometimes sixty and even up to eighty people were packed into trucks without shade or water and sent off in mid-morning on the three hundred mile trek. Because communications were bad in Fau as well as along the transit route, word was slow to get back to the Sub-office as to what was happening and it was not until several reporters came storming into Hassan Osman's office that I first learned of the cruelty of the move. With Hassan's permission, I went to Kassala to tell Mohammed to slow the moves down and to halve the number of people.

Thinking that an order from Hassan would do the trick, I returned to Gedarif where I suggested to Mike Menning that he send someone up to monitor the situation. He concurred and detailed another field officer to go up and keep watch on things. But again, no car was available for him to use. Three days later, on a trip to Fau, I watched in horror as a convoy arrived in 110 degree heat with twenty more trucks than had been previously contracted and people packed in so tight that several had suffered broken ribs during the move. Thirty people had died in transit. The relief workers who had been trying to keep up with the influx were in tears. Adequate food was not available for the new arrivals, the water purification system which took water from a nearby irrigation canal could not handle the demands so that most of the people were getting a combination of filth and pesticides as they drank.

The COR official in charge of the camps was furious. Why had not Showak and Kassala slowed down the moves as he had been requesting for the last three weeks? Every time he asked them to slow down

they increased the number of arrivals! He was on the verge of quitting, but as a good trouper, he had borne the frustrations of the relief agencies and had defended COR as best he could.

Enraged, I flew back to Showak, but Hassan was out. I scribbled a quick note to Mike Menning and then jumped into a truck and took off for Kassala to confront Mohammed Habib. Mohammed listened to me passively and promised to "look into the matter", but said that there would only be one more move and that would complete the closing of Tukul Bab the following day. When we asked how many people were left to be moved, he assured me that it was no more than about five hundred and the UNHCR field officer assigned to monitor the move, who had come in during our conversation, agreed. With fifty trucks, I was assured that the move would be humane and that they would try to leave at an early hour so that most of the journey could be carried out during the cooler hours of the morning. Since there was nothing more I could do, I returned to Showak but was determined to come back the next morning and personally watch what was going on.

Returning to Kassala was easier said than done. For the first time I was to encounter one of the most frustrating aspects of working in Sudan, refueling a vehicle or an airplane.

At that time all fuel supplies in Sudan were scarce. UNHCR, with the help of the American embassy, had been able to stockpile a fairly large quantity of both diesel and gasoline fuel at Showak for use by COR. The problem was that the fuel dump was under the personal supervision of Hassan Osman. Instead of just getting your car fueled each day, you had to prepare a request which specified exactly where you were going and how much fuel you would need, thus at the end of every day, every vehicle was almost empty and refueling the next day required a long and time consuming process. Often it would take an hour or more to get the necessary signature from Hassan or his deputy to get the fuel and by the time one arrived at the fuel dump it was fatur (Sudanese breakfast time, from 9:30 to 10:30). This meant that departures were often delayed until mid-day.

Such was the case for me the next morning. Hassan had left early that morning for Gedarif and his deputy _____, could not be found until breakfast. By the time I got the fuel I needed, the last convoy had not only departed Kassala, but was already well past Showak. (I would have flown my plane up, but my initial fuel supplies had run out and the resupply from Khartoum was a week late in arriving.)

When I finally got my fuel, I decided to go up to Tukul Bab and make sure that everyone had left the camp. In Kassala, I picked up an ICRC representative who had just come back from Tukul Bab. He was horrified. Far from being five hundred, the actual number moved the last day was approximately four thousand. Once again, the drivers had packed as many people as they could into each truck. A hitch had occurred, however. There were approximately fifty people in the hospital who were too sick to move. Mohammed had promised the medical agency there, Medicine Sans Frontieres, that he would send some special trucks to move the sick and incredibly, MSF had left behind only a couple of paramedics to look after the people. As you can imagine, the special trucks never came and the hospital patients were left with the two medical workers, who had no supplies and no vehicle to get back to town to report the situation. The ICRC man who had been coming out of Tigray had happened to stumble across them and had come into town to get help. He had quickly mobilized several medical teams from the agency's

station in Kassala to go out and take care of the people and had arranged to get the last of the patients transferred down to Fau. I later found out that the field officer who had been assigned to monitor the situation had spent the day at the airport watching the relief planes come in and out and I also learned that he had only been to the Tukul Bab camp twice in the time that he had been assigned to watch the moves.

Two things became evident from the move. First, I needed my own team, people that I could rely on in each crisis area. Second, I learned that the Kassala area would have to be watched with a special vengeance. I did not trust Mohammed and I could tell that there were other things amiss. I was not sure whether Mohammed was answering to the Governor of the province, Hassan Osman or the military.

The closing of the camp at Tukul Bab had been made possible due to a shift in the locus of the Tigrayan exodus. In 1984, the Tigrayans coming out had been led along a route that took them from western Tigray through Eritrea. The TPLF had been cooperating with the EPLF and, since no part of Tigray actually touched Sudan, this route was considered safer. By the end of September, however, there were growing tensions between Eritreans and Tigrayans and the waterholes which were so vital to the movement of the refugees had begun to dry up. Because of this, REST redirected the refugees along a new route farther south. This took them through a part of Gondar that the TPLF could control and brought them into Sudan at a place east-southeast of Gedarif. COR halted their move on the east bank of the Atbara River, eight kilometers inside the border at a place called Wad Kholi. (An earlier group had come out at a place farther north called Safawa, but only about seventy-five hundred refugees had arrived there when the move was shifted to Wad Kholi.)

The situation in Wad Kholi was horrifying. More than one thousand people were arriving each day and the only source of water was a stagnant pool in the riverbed of the Atbara. Wad Kholi was to become a situation of almost daily concern to me and in the next four months I was to give it over half my attention. Because of the committed team that we had there, both COR and voluntary agency people, the camp was to prove one of the most interesting and often one of the most rewarding.

Most of the problems I had seen in December were unchanged. The food situation was critical and I was not convinced that UNHCR had made the necessary requests for adequate supplies of food. My big concern was not so much that we couldn't get the food we needed, it was that with the other demands in the country, especially the massive needs of the Sudanese famine victims, that there would be endless port delays that could affect our ability to supply the refugees. Checking around I found that there were some supplies of food in the country; a large store at the grain elevator in Gedarif and a fairly large stockpile of CSM held by the cross-border operation which they could not move for lack of fuel. Nickolas had been trying to either purchase some of these foods or arrange for a swap -- their food now in return for ours when it arrived. Neither the Sudanese grain authorities nor the cross-border operation was willing to deal. At every camp the food situation was critical. During that period no one ever received a full ration nor an adequate mix of foods.

Even had the food been available, a logistics system was not in place to handle it. Trucks were not a problem, there was an adequate surplus at that time and we could rent what we needed. The problem

was simply a control system that organized and tracked the food from its arrival in Port Sudan or Kassala onward to the camps. The situation was extremely confused. We had three ports of entry, Port Sudan for the bulk food; Kassala where some food was airlifted; and sometimes the airport at Khartoum. Ostensively, COR was in charge of logistics, but it was clear that they did not have control and many of the private contractors routinely stole large amounts of supplies, even whole truckloads, and COR had no way of finding out who was doing it. Some shipments were recorded in tons, others were recorded by the number of sacks. All non-food items eventually ended up in the warehouse in Showak or in one of the sub-regional warehouses in Kassala or Gedarif. Record-keeping at each of these locations was chaotic and supplies that were critical were often lost in the paperwork (or lack thereof).

The airlift of supplies into Kassala was problematic. UNHCR found itself unable to move quickly on procurement and many of the larger relief organizations decided to quit waiting and organized a daily airlift of critically needed supplies to Kassala. The airport was one of the best in the country and could handle four-engine jets up to the size of 707s. The airlift presented me with two problems, the first and most practical was that despite the good runways, there were no adequate off-loading facilities, not even forklifts and no warehouse capacity for the supplies that were arriving. Furthermore, we did not have a good logistics man that could be assigned to the airlift, so almost a third of the materials that arrived could not be accounted for. These problems, however, could have been overcome either by sending adequate staff to Kassala or by redirecting the airlift to Port Sudan, which also had a good airstrip, better off-loading facilities and large amounts of space. Furthermore, we already had a logistics team in Port Sudan to handle the food coming in at the port.

The primary obstacle, however, proved to be the attitude of Nickolas towards the airlift. Nickolas believed that airlifts were a waste of money. For the most part, airlifts are usually more for show than for substance. Relief operations are often thought to require Berlin-style airlifts where cargo planes fly in food and medical supplies. In only a few cases, however, is there actually a real need to fly supplies. The supplies that are flown can usually be procured locally, and flying bulk food can rarely be justified when the cost of fuel and transport is added.

To illustrate how costly air transport can be, it takes approximately ten tons of fuel to fly ten tons of supplies on a C-130. In 1985 prices, the ten tons of fuel could purchase one truck with a ten ton capacity. Thus, for the same cost of shuttling one thousand tons of food over a five hundred mile round trip, you could create a supply fleet of over one hundred trucks, making a longer lasting contribution to the relief operation.

In the UNHCR Handbook, which of course Nickolas had prepared, there are strong recommendations against airlifts and Nickolas had taken a dogmatic position on the whole issue. True enough, much of the supplies that were coming in at Kassala could have been procured in the local market had there been the political will to do so. A particular case-in-point was vegetable oil. One of the three principal staples, along with grain and a source of protein, that is recommended for every relief diet. The Branch Office had learned that there were supplies that could be procured locally, but COR was reluctant to conclude the procurement for fear that it might cause shortages and higher prices for Sudanese. The discussions

never got beyond this point because the airlift delivered a substantial quantity of vegetable oil while the debate was in progress, taking the pressure off COR to procure locally.

I have become philosophical about airlifts. Because the technology is there and because a large number of countries have C-130s and air forces that are quite happy to use them, they will. Rather than try to fight them, I figure it is best to try and at least get the best possible cargoes on the planes. It also makes sense in the very early part of an operation when supplies may be available but hard to procure or round up, to go ahead and ship in supplies that you can be certain of. Flying in special high-protein foods that can be used in supplementary feeding programs or, in a pinch, can be used to provide energy and calories if any part of the diet is deficient, I think can be justified as air freight. Thus, if the donors want to blow their money, an adequate team should be assigned and plans laid to handle the arrival of the supplies.

Unfortunately, I appeared to be in the minority and the arrival of the supplies continued to be a fiasco.

Another critical situation at the time was fuel. The Neumeri regime had not been able to pay its fuel bills, and shortages and long lines existed everywhere. At one point, some of the relief organizations desperate for their own fuel stocks had requested that barrels of fuel be brought in on the airlift. COR, however, always managed to have enough supplies. The Americans had provided COR with some fuel for helping in the Falasha operation and since Hassan rigidly controlled the amount of fuel apportioned everyday, there were obviously some hidden stockpiles around COR. In fact, Hassan was something of a fuel baron in the area and I am sure that he traded fuel for political favors with agencies of the Sudanese Government.

The most disturbing aspect of the fuel situation was UNHCR's inability to get the fuel supplies it needed for the few vehicles that it had in-country. At every location in the east, UNHCR field officers were reduced to begging for fuel either from COR or from the voluntary agencies that had their own supplies. Since UNHCR has to influence agencies, rather than command them when its staff has to go around begging for fuel, it is obviously in no position to exert much influence over its counterparts. If Hassan Osman did not want to deal with any particular UNHCR field officer, he simply cut-off his fuel allocation for that day.

Another problem was raising its head; competition between relief agencies and squabbles over territory. I had not been in Showak for three days when the first of many inter-agency squabbles hit my desk. In Kassala, the Swiss Red Cross (not the ICRC or the League) had been working in Wad Sharife for several years. The Swiss regarded Wad Sharife as "their camp" and they had many strong personal and emotional ties to the Eritrean refugees. Earlier, the Swiss Red Cross had been closely associated with the ELF which only the year before had lost control of the liberation movement to the EPLF, a more Marxist oriented movement. In the early days, Wad Sharife had been an ELF camp, but with the new arrivals, the political make-up had shifted over to the EPLF. (Earlier that year there had been a shoot-out in the camp over political control of the camp committees). [NOTE: check this fact may have been Kassala instead of Wad Sharife]

This may have contributed to the reasons why the Swiss so tightly held on to their position as the principal relief group in the camp.

Whatever the emotional reasons logistically and staff-wise, the Swiss were simply not up to the job. Their original team had been designed to help a camp of about thirty-five hundred people. By January the estimated number was around eighty thousand. Several other relief organizations had arrived and were anxious to help out but the Swiss had successfully blocked assignment of any more agencies through the collaboration of Mohammed Habib. One organization in particular, a small American group called Lark which was formed by the American Refugee Committee, a small volag based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a small medical group called Lalamba, was anxious to get into the operation. Lark was based in Showak and had a good working relationship with Hassan Osman, but Hassan had declined to make the decision, feeling medical agencies and their assignments should be left up to Dr. Nabil, the COR's chief medical officer. For days the staff of Lark had been getting a run-around and were extremely frustrated. One of their doctors came to find out if there was anything that I could do. One thing that I will not tolerate is "territorial squabbles" while refugees are dying. On the spot, I told him to go ahead and move his team into Wad Sharife. I promised to clear it with Hassan and Dr. Nabil later. When I explained the situation to Nabil, he immediately concurred.

The Swiss were furious and complained first to Hassan, who referred them back to me and then to the Branch Office, where again they received no satisfaction. (They may have been more favorably received had they not gone on international television and complained about how UNHCR was killing people through its inefficiency.) We had sent a message to the villages that the time for squabbling was over and that COR would assign the work, not the agencies in the camps.

* * *

At about this time, a new group of refugees arrived which required attention. In Ethiopia, the government had accelerated a program designed to move people from the overcrowded famine zones to areas in the south where they could have more land and a better chance of producing crops, since in the south there is usually more rainfall. The relocation program, however, was harsh and there were many reports that people had been forcibly rounded up and moved by air to the relocation villages where they were unceremoniously dumped with no food or supplies. In early January, a group of approximately 2,000 [FACT CHECK] refugees crossed the border south of us and moved down Blue Nile to a place called Damazin. What was unusual about this group was that they were made up of many different Ethiopian ethnic and tribal groups. Some were Moslem, most were Christians, some were from Tigray, others from Eritrea and Wello. They all told horror stories of forced relocation and felt their only chance was to escape to Sudan and try to work their way north. They wanted help and food but did not want to stay in Sudan; they wanted to go back to Ethiopia. This caused a whole new set of political problems for UNHCR. As an international organization made up of member states, it must have the concurrence of the home country in order to participate formally in any type of repatriation. Nikolas was certain that the Ethiopians would not permit these people to go back. In fact, the refugees did not want any official negotiations on their behalf, since they had just escaped from the Ethiopian Government. Indecision about what to do with the people, where to keep them and how to deal with them politically led to a

stalemate which in turn delayed the sending of adequate supplies after their discovery in Damazin. It took several scolding articles in the press and a complaint by Cultural Survival, a small human rights organization in New York, before HCR finally moved into action for this half-starved group.

The refugees from Damazin were not the only persons thinking of going back. On my first trip to Wad Kholi, I learned that there were a group of twenty-eight single men who had requested repatriation. They had hoped that by coming to Sudan they would be able to find work and could earn some money to take back to Ethiopia when things got better. When they learned that they would not be permitted to work and could not leave the camp, they decided they were better off back in Tigray. Again, HCR was faced with the political question of how to move these men back. There was no question that they wanted to go voluntarily, but they wanted to go back to rebel-held territory. HCR knew that contacts with the Ethiopians would be fruitless for they would demand that the people be repatriated through Addis, putting them in government hands.

It is probably the supreme irony that the one organization in the world charged with voluntary repatriation is normally hamstrung by politics and is forced to turn its back on millions of people who with assistance would be willing to return to their homes. This would eliminate many political problems for the host countries and reduce a growing relief problem for the international community. I was only beginning to learn first-hand how absurd it is to put a UN agency in charge of voluntary repatriation.

The Falasha's situation was another one of those issues which hung in the air and seemed to be waiting for resolution. The evacuation of the Falashas had all but stopped when the exodus was exposed in the press. Scores of newsmen from the eastern U.S. papers descended on Sudan trying to get information about the Falashas, where they were being held, and what the American Embassy and/or UNHCR was going to do. There were several refugee camps for the Falashas. Two of these were Um Rakuba, south-southeast of Gedarif, and Tawawa which was located on the outskirts of Gedarif between the town and the airstrip. Most incoming Falashas were first sent to Um Rakuba and transferred to Tawawa where they were prepared for departure.

One day in Hassan's office I saw a budget for improvement of camp facilities in Um Rakuba. Since the construction of refugee camps was under my terms of reference, I was surprised that I hadn't seen any plans. I noticed that a large percentage of the funds were going to heavy equipment such as road graders, dump trucks, etc. Since the road to Doka, the town nearest Um Rakuba was reported to be in fairly good shape and the site at Um Rakuba was fairly flat, I could only conclude that the real purpose of the equipment was to build an airstrip. I sent one of my assistants down to check-out the situation and he reported back that some of the refugees had talked about an airstrip but no one would say exactly where it was. He also pointed out that Um Rakuba appeared to be "funny". There were really three camps in one. The first and largest, was virtually a village and had been built for refugees fleeing Ethiopia after the fall of the Haile Selassie. The camp was well developed and virtually self-sufficient. The refugees even had their own lands and tractors to work them.

The second camp was an extension of the first and it was this camp that we suspected held most of the Falashas. Most of the people in the first two camps were Oromos, a tribal group that has traditionally

ruled Ethiopia. There were no groups like REST or ERA to look after them at Um Rakuba but they seemed to be doing pretty well on their own.

The third camp was a new one. In January it consisted of several self-made shelters erected by the latest group of incoming refugees. What was funny about this group, however, was that they were all men, most between the ages of sixteen and thirty. They were reported to be a mixed bag of draft evaders, escaped political prisoners and persons seeking to immigrate to the West. Their numbers were small, but Hassan was anxious to get one of the relief agencies into the area to start building a new camp. The only agency he would consider, however, was a Swedish agency which was not yet in the country. I was later to learn this was because the Swedish personnel in the old camp were already helping with the Falasha operation.

Hassan kept hinting that he wanted me to go and report what was going on. I think that he felt a little left out since the embassy had been handling the Falashas' evacuation with the security forces and not directly with COR. I was concerned that there might be an incident, or worse some foul-up on the part of the Embassy that would compel the Israelis to fly in and try to evacuate the rest of the Falashas under cover of darkness. If that happened, it could affect the whole relief operation and the way the rest of the refugees were treated. So once again, I decided to expand my own reporting network so that I could keep an eye on what was going on. To do that, I developed some contacts, courtesy of my Ethiopian driver, and began identifying relief workers who shared my concerns and who would be loyal to me. Each had to have access to a vehicle (and later a radio) so that they could keep me informed. Later, I assigned Kent to help the Swedes build the new camp. This gave us an excuse to get down there every few weeks to monitor the situation and see what was going on.

* * *

Another group of refugees that was of some worry to us were the "self settled" refugees that had arrived years earlier and who had been able to move out of the camps and into the towns. There they found work and were able to assimilate into the surrounding communities. When the drought hit and jobs began to get scarce, the self-settled refugees were often the first to feel the pinch and it was feared that many would be coming back into the refugee camps. This was especially the case for those who had jobs in agriculture, for with failure of the crops they had no work and were forced back onto the relief rolls. Most of them returned to the older camps, the ones that were set-up after 1976. Because they were classified as "old" refugees, it was hard to focus the attention of the international community on their plight. Since the old camps already had some of the basic services and had COR personnel who were experienced and fairly well trained, I suggested to Hassan that we move some of the incoming refugees to new sections in the older camps. This way, some attention could be given to the old camps and we could use some of the emergency resources to take care of the self-settled that were coming back into the case load.

Hassan had already been considering the idea, so he quickly approved my recommendation. Within several weeks after my arrival we began moving refugees from Wad Sharife to the old camp at Girba and

soon after to the old camps of Kilo 28 and Um Gatgorn.

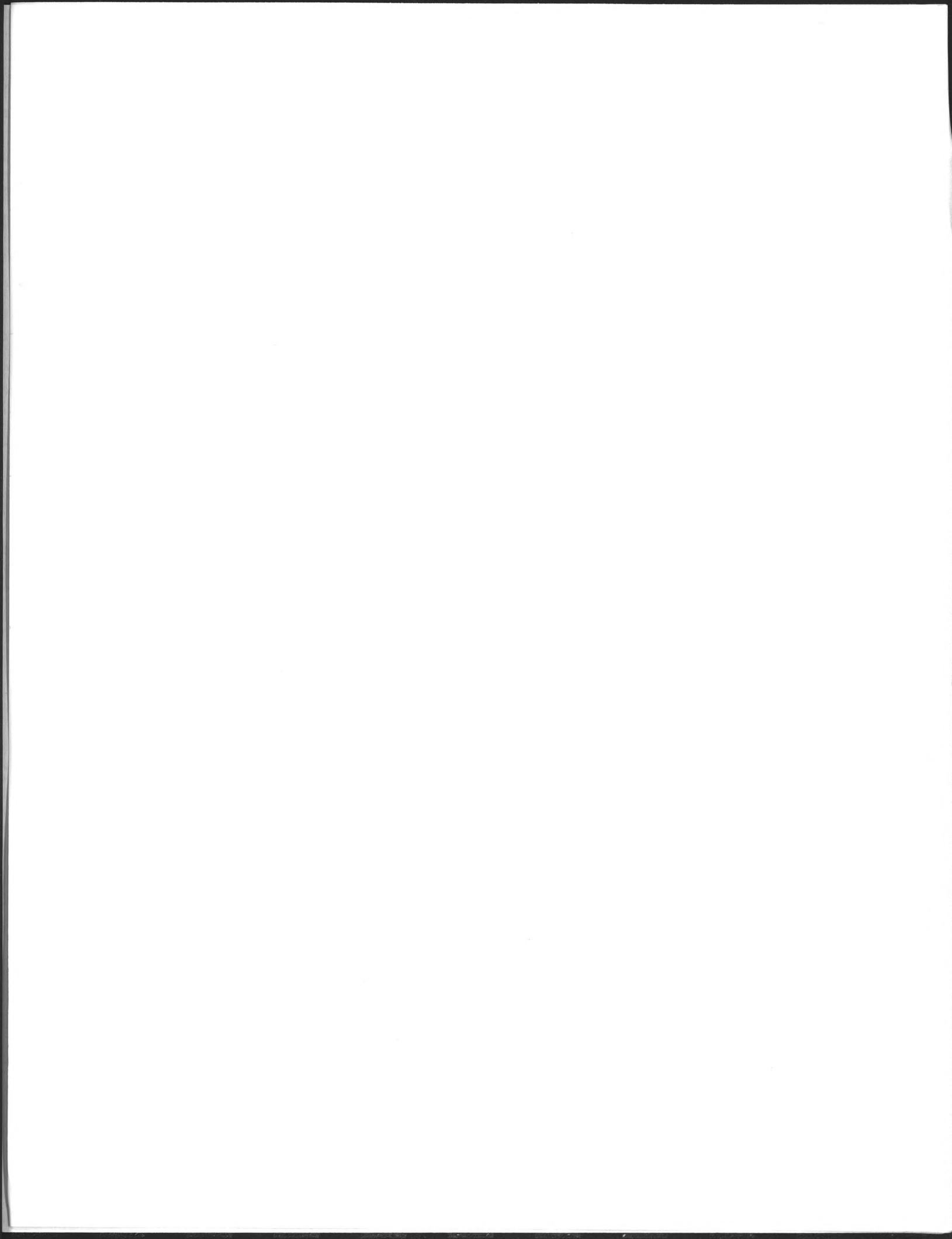
These moves resulted in a situation that later would cause many problems. When the refugees at Wad Sharife were rounded up to be moved to another camp, thousands of people would flee back to Kassala. We quickly realized that many of the "refugees" were malnourished and hungry people from Kassala who had come to the camp pretending to be refugees looking for food. Many were self-settled refugees but thousands more were Sudanese who were starving. Our old friend in the north, Mohammed Habib, soon realized that one way to reduce the number of refugees that he had to care for was to be ruthless in the way he rounded-up people for the transfers. The harsher he was the more people would flee back to Kassala. Thus, rather than improve the camp and the services to the refugees, Mohammed found that it was easier to simply keep the moves going at all costs and drive the people out. The situation finally reached a point where the military would enter the camp, cordon off an area, force the people out, burn what was left of their shelters and then truck the "captives" to one of the other camps. Despite numerous complaints to Hassan Osman, the situation continued and did not get more humane until a news crew from Minneapolis actually photographed the burning of the shelters and got one of the UNHCR personnel who was supposed to monitor the moves to admit that he knew nothing about what was happening. While the move's methodology became more humane, a precedent was set that became one of COR's main methods for controlling the influx into the camp. This approach was to backfire several months later.

* * *

An additional problem I was hit with the first few days after I had arrived was a question of protection. Several UNHCR people told me that one of the COR operatives, a man named Abu Rahil, was running several illegal operations in the camps that he controlled. One was supposedly a brothel where he forced young refugee women to work in return for food ration cards. The story went that when people complained, he had them arrested and beaten. When one of the husbands complained about what had happened to his wife, Abu Rahil had him killed.

These were old stories and had apparently been investigated by UNHCR but no conclusive evidence had been found. Now the same thing was rumored to be happening at Wad Kholi. HCR professed not to know about it, so once again I was determined to put my own sources into the camp to get a report. Protection of refugees is one of the main functions of UNHCR, yet in my experience I had learned that they were not particularly good at it. I was sure that in this particular situation where so much depended on COR, that it would be difficult for UNHCR to demand that anyone be removed.

After my first week, these were the problems that I had drawn up and put on the left-hand column of the operational balance sheet. On the other side I began to list the assets.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRINCIPAL ACTORS

Our theater of operations in the east stretched over a five hundred mile front, running from the southern part of the Red Sea Hills in the north, down to Damazin in the south. It stretched from the border of Ethiopia westward to the Fau Canal, approximately two hundred miles west. Inside this area, which encompassed approximately 35,000 square miles, were about fifty refugee camps, the three main COR bases and, initially, four airstrips, plus small COR warehouse facilities located at Kassala, Showak and Gedaref.

Our most important asset was the hard-surfaced road that ran between Khartoum and Port Sudan. The road paralleled the border, running due south until it reached Gedaref where it turned westward for Wad Medani and, further on, Khartoum. The importance of having an all-weather road running through the middle of our operations area can't be understated. It permitted us to keep relief supplies moving throughout the emergency and despite the fact that many of our camps were located far from the road, we could at least get supplies into close proximity and shuttle them across the impassable areas when we had to. Six months later, when the crisis in western Sudan came to a head, we could see how lucky we were in having that road, for in the west, they had to spend millions of dollars airlifting supplies into remote locations.

In January it was too early to tell whether or not organizations in the east were going to be an asset or a liability. The most important organization by far was COR. The Commissioner, Ambassador El Ahmadi, was headquartered in Khartoum. A senior government official who had once been the Ambassador to Libya, [NOTE: CHECK THIS FACT] he was a nice gentleman, and had served for a number of years as the steward of the refugees. He himself admitted however, that he was no planner and he left the details of emergency operations to his staff. The person who ran the office operationally was his assistant, Hassan Atyia. Hassan was an unknown; he was personally disliked by Hassan Osman (he continually pointed out that he was Atyia's senior in the government service) and many people in the administration felt that he wouldn't make tough decisions for fear of making the wrong one. I was later to find out, however, that when given a hard choice, and when given the responsibility to make the decision, he was quite courageous and I developed a tremendous respect for him and others in the Khartoum Headquarters.

In the east, Hassan Osman was the critical actor. As I mentioned earlier, Hassan had developed his own fiefdom and his power was unquestioned by anyone in the relief bureaucracy. I always think that Hassan was torn between his duty towards the refugees and his loyalty to his country and the power establishment. There was no question that Hassan was ambitious and to be assigned the task of caring for foreign refugees in one's own land is not the ideal position for one with ambitions.

In the east, Hassan relied on three principal assistants, one was _____, his deputy in Showak. _____ descended directly from the Prophet Mohammed and as such was well respected among the Muslim community. He was the person in charge of local procurement and contracting and because of

his ties to the merchant community exercised a great deal of power within COR.

In the north, Mohammed Habib was in charge. In the south _____ operated from Gedaref. He was one of my favorite. A middle-aged and portly man, he always had a smile and I felt he was genuinely concerned about the plight of the refugees under his command. One of his tasks was to ride herd on the UNHCR Sub-Office which was then located at Gedaref (known by the acronym SOG). His efforts at monitoring UNHCR's radio messages and interrogating Menning's Sudanese staff were somewhat comical, though I know it piqued Mike and he took his frustrations out on the poor radio operator who was the principal informant.

In each of the refugee camps there was an administrator who held the title of Program Manager. These were a mixed bag. Some were highly proficient, dedicated and hard-working, while others were lazy and unconcerned; about the usual make-up that you can find in any bureaucracy anywhere in the world. On the whole however, I found that the number of those who were hard-working and dedicated out-numbered the former class. My favorite was Osmon Meki, the camp administrator at Wad Kholi. Not only was he sharp and truly concerned about the refugees, he often would oppose decisions that he felt were unjust or unfair to the refugees and was not afraid of getting in his car and making a five hour journey to Showak to try and change Hassan Osman's mind about one issue or another. If he had not been in Wad Kholi, the place would have been a true holocaust and the outcome there would have been far different.

Many of the foreigners disliked their Sudanese counterparts, often found them hard to deal with, and considered them inefficient and sometimes worse. My own experiences were very different. Every time I ran a training session for the Sudanese, the class was overflowed and everywhere I went, they asked for more information and technical support. For years they had simply been neglected by UNHCR and other international relief organizations who wanted, for a variety of reasons, to have a weak COR. After almost 15 years in operation, they had not received adequate training in administration, personnel management or emergency operations. With only a very few exceptions, I found that they were willing students who took their jobs seriously and, after I had carefully explained a situation or given them the training that they had requested, I was only rarely disappointed in the performance of these field officers. Had the international community provided the resources for training and emergency preparedness for the Sudanese, the number of lives lost would have been far, far fewer.

The other principal agency in the relief operation was UNHCR. Despite my continuous criticism of that agency, I feel there is no other group with as much potential, if only they could get their act together. Over the years, the external and internal politics have gutted the organization and left the personnel unprepared to deal with emergency operations. They will argue that running emergency operations is not their mandate and indeed, international conventions have placed the burden squarely on the shoulders of the host country. This is a remnant from post-World War II refugee operations. Countries like West Germany felt obliged to assist the refugees because many of those coming into the country were from nearby countries and were relatives or people who had experienced similar problems. During the early days of the cold war, no western European country would deny its help and assistance to those fleeing from behind the Iron Curtain.

Unfortunately, this humane willingness to help one's fellow man does not always extend to refugee situations in the Third World. Countries that are extremely poor are not anxious to take on large numbers of their impoverished neighbors. They feel that international attention will focus on the refugees and not on their own economic development needs. Few countries relish the thought that the refugees might not go home and may become a Palestinian-like situation on their frontiers. Thus, the average host country in the third world would just as soon push the refugees back to where they came from than offer them sanctuary. UNHCR then, is often faced with an impossible duty; how to assist the refugees when they do not actually have the direct responsibility. Their task is to organize international assistance and to reduce the burden on the host country.

The situation in Sudan for UNHCR was far better than in most countries. The government had set up COR to handle refugees more than a decade earlier and official Sudanese policy permitted any refugee who sought asylum to come into the country. Their willingness to accept refugees had resulted in giving Sudan the largest refugee population in Africa. Almost everyone of its eight neighbors had dumped refugees into the Sudanese milieu.

By and large, the Sudanese had proved fairly adept at maintaining refugees once they had arrived provided that the numbers were fairly small. Thus, the role of UNHCR was primarily one of overseeing a staggering refugee maintenance effort and most of the personnel were chosen on the basis of their ability to monitor programs, not to plan or execute new ones.

Nickolas Morris headed the UNHCR Branch Office staff in Khartoum. He was assisted by a deputy, who at the time that I arrived was in the process of transferring to Tunisia. Overseeing the operation from Khartoum was a young desk officer and his assistant. Neither had previous emergency operations experience, but did about as well as could be expected under the circumstances. Despite my initial blow-up at one of them, they were always helpful to me and I could always rely on them to follow-up on anything that I asked. The problem was they were simply too far from the field and did not have the necessary systems to be effective.

The most important person in the office was Karen Abu-Zyed. As I have already mentioned, she was instrumental in explaining UNHCR's desires and positions to COR. When things became politically hot or touchy between the two organizations, Karen was always able to find a way to make things smoother and had it not been for her, I am sure that the situation could often have reached a point where the two organizations would have been throwing more than words at each other.

In the field, UNHCR was particularly weak. Mike Menning had replaced Peter Parr as the head of the Sub-Office in Gedaref. Mike had an assortment of international staff of mixed quality and dedication. A couple of them seemed to be on a holiday and spent more time studying the local populace than doing their assignments. Several others were simply totally ineffective and could not organize their way out of a fire. A few were very good. A Thai, named Sadang, was as steady as a rock and did a lot of things in Fau on his own initiative. Unfortunately, right in the middle of the operation, he went on home leave for two months!

Mike Menning was a strange bird. He was an experienced relief officer having worked on the

Kampuchean border for several years with the International Rescue Committee. He spoke a smattering of Arabic and was generally well liked by the Sudanese. I think his background was in English literature, but he had worked as a Peace Corps volunteer on water and sanitation projects in the Solomon Islands and had become a self-taught expert. He had parlayed this into a successful career as an administrator of small development and refugee programs. He was several years younger than me, very low-key and a damned hard worker, and probably the only person in the circumstances who could have put up with all the politics and bureaucratic bullshit that came out of the UN and COR systems combined.

In the early stages of the operation, I was impressed with Mike's ability to deal with his staff. Most were frustrated and knew they were not able to accomplish much without the resources that they were so desperately pleading for. Mike was like a father to them, patiently listening to their complaints and gently prodding them into action. Had he been able to deliver on any of the many things that he promised, I think that he would have kept their confidence. But, through no fault of his own, he was not, and after several months the staff was looking elsewhere for leadership.

In the early days, the brightest spot in the UNHCR's field staff was a young field officer assigned to Wad Kholi. Julian Murray had seen previous field duty in Indonesia and as Wad Kholi began to grow he was assigned there to help Osmond Meki. Julian was just the right person to send; he was quick on his feet, knew how to improvise, and did a fine balancing act with the provisions that he had. Often the food stocks on hand were down to less than half a day's supply, but through hook or crook, Julian always managed to come through, making sure that the refugees always had at least one meal a day. His only drawback was that since that he was so good, he was perceived by Mike Menning as a threat and I have no doubt that some of his cries of alarm were disregarded by Mike because he felt that Julian was receiving too much attention for his good work.

As I've pointed out before, a major operational problem for UNHCR was that the Sub-Office was situated in Gedaref while the seat of power in the east was the GPM's office in Showak. Before the crisis, this division had evidently not been too problematic. The Sub-Office primarily had a monitoring role and since communications and living conditions were far better in Gedaref, the head of SOG had always preferred to keep the office there. Once the emergency broke out, however, the geographical distance proved to be a major barrier to communications and coordination. Without radios, Menning would have to take a chance that the GPM would be in, or vice versa, and a one hour- twenty minute drive was needed to link-up and coordinate. After several weeks of this, enthusiasm for the trip died out and more often than not, important matters that should have been reviewed together were simply dropped. It was not until almost a month after I arrived that an effective communication net was set-up. Even then, the radios were problematic, for due to atmospheric interference and a "skip" in the radio beam, the two headquarters could only communicate with each other two or three hours each day. It was for this reason that I had insisted on bringing my airplane, for I envisioned that when a crisis occurred, I could grab the GPM, fly down to Gedaref, pick-up Mike, and then go directly to the scene so that the two leaders could make their decision jointly on the spot. (As it worked out, this rarely happened. Hassan was content to let me go down and act in his behalf and Mike could only find time two or three

times a week to actually accompany me on these trips.)

Overshadowing the two principal executing agencies was the U.S. Embassy. The principal person in charge of refugees was Jerry Weaver. I had met Jerry on my first trip and found him to be a complex person. Jerry had been in the Sudan for almost five years. He loved the country and had fallen into an easy companionship with friends in the merchant community, especially the Greek clique, who seemed to have their hand in everything in Sudan that could make money. Jerry loved to hunt and fancied himself as something of a poker player, and in the high stakes game in the east, he had put himself squarely on the opposite side of the table from Nickolas Morris. Jerry disliked relief workers and he especially disliked the UNHCR. In fact, I am not really sure what Jerry did like! He certainly did not like the cross-border operation and constantly belittled the humanitarian organizations as amateurs and bleeding hearts. He and Tex had several run-ins and since he perceived me as one of Tex's friends, it was obvious that he was very wary about me and my purpose for being in Sudan.

Jerry had dedicated himself to the Falasha situation, correctly determining that the U.S. was far more concerned about a small group of Ethiopian Jews than it was about hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans and Eritreans. So while the rest of the situation went to hell, he focused his attention on getting this small minority safely out of the country and left the rest to chance or, as it turned out, to Don Krumm.

Don was Tex's assistant at R.P. He is one of the finest men that I have ever worked with and is someone who is not afraid of standing up to the bureaucracy when the circumstances merit. Tex and his boss, Gene Dewey, Undersecretary of State for Refugee Affairs, had seen that with Jerry tied up with the Falashas that the far greater life-threatening situation on the eastern border was being ignored. So, as the emergency developed, it was decided that Don would be sent out to oversee the emergency program in the east.

Jerry was none too happy to have Don around. He probably saw it as a no-confidence vote on his work and since he saw that Don was one of Tex's men, it was obvious that they would not agree on things philosophically. Don more than proved his worth and without his assistance, things could not have been moved as far or as fast as they were in those early days of the emergency.

Don was also important in trying to build bridges between the Americans and UNHCR. By the time I arrived in January, the two organizations were not talking to each other and Jerry had actually hung-up once on Nickolas during a discussion on emergency needs. Nickolas was at his wits end regarding the Americans. He knew he needed their support in order to push things through the UN bureaucracy in Geneva, but with Jerry Weaver constantly blowing hot and cold on the emergency operation, promising things then not delivering, Nickolas knew that he was being targeted for the wrap. But Don was able to overcome this animosity and tried to demonstrate that the embassy was willing to be a partner rather than solely a critic. During the process, he showed diplomatic skills that few people in Sudan recognized at the time.

The other players in the relief operation were the international voluntary relief agencies, often referred to as Volags or PVO's. In the early days, there were only four or five working on the emergency program. Of these, the most important were IRC, one of the most experienced refugee agencies, and

the British Save the Children Fund (SCF). SCF is one of the oldest voluntary organizations around, but up until recently was considered to be one of the more paternalistic. In the last few years, it has recruited a number of highly skilled refugee workers including their medical director, John Seaman, and more recently their overall executive director, Mark Bowden. John and Mark are not only experienced famine workers, with experience dating back to Biafra in the late 1960's, they have also pursued a lifetime career of research on emergency operations and have developed and refined many of the techniques that are used today.

SCF was able to gear-up quickly and get people into the field and somehow attracted some highly motivated young medical teams who carried the load in the early days in Wad Kholi along with IRC, the YMCA and Medcins sans Frontieres (MSF). In the northern camps, however, we only had the Swiss Red Cross and some groups that had been assisting the older camps; groups such as the Sudanese Christian Council (SCC) and various small, volunteer groups that provided, here and there, a teacher or a nurse to work in a camp.

In the coming months we were able to attract a hodge-podge of different organizations. Several very experienced and professional relief workers arrived -- Community Aid Abroad (the Australian arm of Oxfam) sent a small team that was helpful. CONCERN Ireland, one of the most professional of all refugee relief organizations, sent a team midway through my tour to work in the Girba Lake camps that was a major help to all of us. SCF (U.S.) sent a team that took over one of the older camps where a new group of refugees had been transferred and they did a very credible job against formidable obstacles. Overall, however, the relief agencies were only as good as their personnel, and some of those that we expected a lot of, fell short of the mark because they were unable to get good staff on short notice.

This is one of the drawbacks of the international relief system. Voluntary agencies can only afford to keep a small professional staff on hand between operations and when an emergency breaks loose, they must rely on untrained, short-term volunteers who often have to re-learn well-known lessons for themselves before they become effective. In the early days, only a few of the staff had experience and so we ended up losing far more people than we should have to epidemics of measles and Cholera, food shortages and to a failure to address critical problems such as sanitation and water. Midway through my tour, however, people had begun to learn the lessons the hard way and new agencies arrived with professional staff who were quickly assigned to key positions. By the time I left in June, the operation had fallen into place and the voluntary agencies had risen to the occasion and were handling most of the problems with an expertise that even the most seasoned veterans would have been proud of.

CHAPTER SIX

FIRST STEPS

On January 22nd, I lifted my Cessna off the runway at Khartoum and headed east. Craig had reassembled the plane and UNHCR had been able to obtain a temporary operations permit from the Sudanese Aviation Authorities. I had come back from Showak to collect the plane and to meet up with Kent and Ron, who had arrived after a brief stay in Ethiopia. After my first two weeks in the field, I had received permission from Nicholas to bring them in, Kent for the duration of my tour and Ron for several weeks.

As we flew eastward, we followed the course of the Blue Nile for about fifty miles and then, when it turned south, continued east over the vast Sudanese desert. We were silent as we flew along. Looking down we could see the desert encroaching everywhere, small and large fields alike were covered with sand and even the edge of the mighty Rahad irrigation scheme seemed to be having difficulty in keeping back the desert. In the next four months, I constantly watched the sands shift southward and several times I picked out specific fields as a reference, only to see them completely covered by the end of my tour.

Our arrival in Showak was tumultuous, to say the least. Hassan had ordered a road grader to smooth out a strip at the edge of town. We approached the city from the west, flew low over the COR headquarters and gave them a buzz so that they would send someone out to pick us up. Instead, the whole town came. No one had ever seen an airplane close-up and as we landed, the town literally emptied and ran to the airstrip. By the time that the COR vehicles showed up, over five thousand people had gathered around the craft. This was a phenomena that was to be repeated many times, especially in the refugee camps and our little blue plane was to become a familiar sight to thousands of people. Back in Dallas almost a year later, I was eating in an Ethiopian restaurant when the waiter came up, began giggling and pointing to me. "I know you", he said, "you are the guy with the plane."

On the passenger's side of the plane I had painted Hassan Osman's name and on the tail I had painted the COR insignia. I wanted Hassan and his staff to feel that this was their plane and I think that Hassan was particularly moved when he came out to see the ship later that evening.

Things were off to a good start with Hassan. He had welcomed me warmly when I arrived with Omar the previous week and he told me that he was looking forward to our collaboration. He and the other staff members constantly gave us their warmest hospitality and there was rarely a night that went by when one or two of them did not drop by our quarters at the guest house to sit and talk or to share a drink of coffee, or araghe (the local Sudanese white lightning).

With Kent and Ron in tow, I met with Hassan to map out a strategy for the first few weeks. Since I had already prepared my balance sheet of problems and assets the first week, I used it to brief Hassan on what I had seen and to make sure that we both agreed on the problems that were facing us. Since I had only had a few brief days on both my previous trips to get detailed information about the camps, it was decided that the first step was to conduct a detailed survey at each site. Kent and I set off for the north to see Wad Sharife and what was left of Tukul Bab, while Ron was detailed to go to Wad Kholi

and the southern camps.

Several days later we convened in Showak. On every front the situation was still critical. By that time, Tukel Bab was closed but Wad Sharife had become even more problematic. It was expanding at an astounding rate, measles was wreaking havoc, large numbers of Sudanese were entering the camp and many people had registered two, three, four and even five times, throwing the planning for the camp out of whack. The biggest single problem seemed to be lack of water. There were only two wells in the entire camp and one was producing salty water.

Ron reported a real mess at Wad Kholi. It too was continuing to expand at a major rate and new arrivals were up to fifteen hundred or more a day. There was still no water other than from the polluted pond and death rates were high. Measles had reached the camp and children were dying by the score.

The Wad Kholi water situation was critical. I asked Hassan his intentions and he just seemed to shrug it off. He explained that there were political and psychological reasons for the government's hesitation to move the refugees across the Atbara River. He personally favored moving them to another site, preferably along the Fau Canal, or to another place with proven water resources, but, he shrugged, his hands were tied. A decision on the relocation of the refugees had to be made by the governor of the province or by the central government. As an interim measure, he favored sending several water experts to find if there was a source of water nearby or a good possibility that wells could be drilled to provide the necessary water. The American Embassy had already sent an American army engineer to Wad Kholi and he had reported that there was not a nearby source. However, Hassan wanted to make sure and requested another study of the situation. In the meantime, the refugees were dying like flies and none of the relief agencies were willing to invest in building permanent facilities for fear that they would lose them if the camp was moved immediately.

The three Fau camps were also developing into a problem. In the aftermath of the move from Tukel Bab, the people were in bad shape, but because there was an adequate water supply, and because IRC was one of the most experienced relief agencies, I was certain that the death rates would soon go down.

Faced with these problems, Kent, Ron and I drew up a set of priorities for our first few weeks. The first steps included getting control of Wad Sharife, getting water into Wad Kholi, finding some new sites where we could move the people from Wad Kholi and preparing a comprehensive program to lower the death rates in all the camps.

For Wad Sharife, our plan was fairly simple. There was plenty of land there appeared to be adequate underground water since the Gash River was close to the site and even though the surface was dry, there were adequate supplies of fresh water just below the surface. We proposed building two new camps at the edge of the existing camp, installing an adequate number of water pumps and then moving large numbers of the refugees from the old camp onto the new sites. During the move we could re-register and assign them to a specific, numbered location in the camp and give them new ration cards. In this way, we could fix the people in place, check on whether or not they were adequately registered and reduce the likelihood that they would double-register once they had been situated.

To carry out this plan, I detailed Kent to go to Kassala, work out the details with Mohammed Habib,

and set up the camp. We would backstop them from Showak and as soon as new relief agencies arrived, would assign them to the new sections. While the plan was simple and could have been carried out in several days, the COR office in Kassala never fully backed the plan and it was almost three months before we able to actually put it into operation.

Getting water into Wad Kholi also proved to be problematic. COR was determined to stall until the water survey had been completed. UNHCR kept waffling on hiring someone to carry out the survey, so when Don Krumm visited the field, I mentioned this to him and he immediately hired an old retired water engineer who had once been the chief water engineer at Gedaref. He produced a report which indicated that there was no likelihood of finding water anywhere within twenty kilometers of Wad Kholi. His recommendation was clear - move the camp.

Hassan agreed to go to the governor and try and find some new sites. In the meantime, his deputy, _____, met with the regional authorities to ask them to recommend some sites. At the same time, Don and I sat down with some topographic maps and found several places that we thought would be ideal. Basically, our plan was to try and concentrate the refugees around Kassala. This way, if we had to truck water, we could do it either from the Gash River pumps or from the nearby Kashim el-Girba Reservoir. Hoping against hope that the government would even consider the possibility of permitting us to set up a camp along the banks of the Girba Reservoir, we selected several sites on the eastern shore. But at this time we considered this to be a remote shot.

Controlling the death rates was going to be difficult. In most refugee and famine situations, the segments of the population most likely to die are small children under five years old and pregnant and lactating women. We refer to these as "vulnerable groups." The cornerstone of any refugee operation is establishing special programs to reduce deaths among the vulnerable. The first step is to insure that they get adequate, nutritious food. In the initial stages this means setting up a supplemental feeding program, which amounts to providing meals specially prepared for women and children. This insures that they get the extra protein and calorie rich food they need and compensates for the chance that adult males, who have a higher priority for survival in most cultures, might take a portion of the women and children's share of the general food ration.

Supplemental feeding programs can be extremely valuable because you can graft on a number of health surveillance activities. If the program is set up properly, it can not only save lives but, by monitoring the daily feeding charts that are kept for each child, it is possible to track down specific problems in the camp, such as food diversions, inadequate distribution of the food, food thefts, water and sanitation problems and a whole host of other day-to-day concerns. To do this however, the relief agency in charge has to keep complete and detailed records and there has to be a registration system that pinpoints where each family is living. We had to first convince the agencies to keep the records and second to convince COR to register the refugees at the place where they lived.

The other major elements of keeping refugees alive are clean water and controlling diarrhea. Water was a problem not only in Wad Khouli but in all the camps, but it was difficult for me to convince either COR or UNHCR that water was a top priority. While they all agreed that clean water was needed, they

scoffed at the idea that it needed to be pure. Because it took so long to get chlorine, the diarrhea and death rates remained high.

Diarrhea can be lethal to people who are severely malnourished. If a person is constantly passing everything he eats, there is little chance that even adequate food intake will have much benefit. Furthermore, most of the refugees were already in a severely dehydrated condition. With diarrhea they dehydrated even faster and sometimes a severe bout of diarrhea could lead to instant death.

The means of controlling diarrhea is startlingly simple. A solution of clean water, salt, sugar, and bicarbonate of soda can stop most cases of diarrhea in a matter of hours. This solution, known as "oral rehydration salts," or ORS, has proven an effective lifesaver around the world and is much safer to use for children, and less expensive, than anti-diarrheal pharmaceuticals. A key task therefore, was to form ORS teams who would go through the camps giving out the solution and help rehydrate people before they became cases for the medical teams to deal with. But without clean water, the effort would be wasted.

Now that we knew our priorities, the next step was to set up the systems that would enable us to carry out the overall program. The systems would include a command and control system so that the leaders in the field could monitor events and coordinate the response, a remote detection system which could tell us in advance how many refugees to expect and where to position supplies to meet their needs, a logistics system that would track food and non-food items from the time that they were procured to the time they given to the refugees, and finally, a health surveillance system that would monitor infectious diseases and pinpoint their sources.

The basics of the command and control system were fairly simple. The first step was to set up a radio net and to establish procedures so that everyday, at regular intervals, reports would be sent from the camps to Showak for review by the GPM and the senior staff. To ensure that the reports were monitored, we developed a standard reporting form, standard terminology and priority ratings, etc. so that each bit of information could be clarified or quantified as necessary.

To back up the communication system we installed our computer to analyze the information and to make statistical projections about needs and resources.

To make sure that we had the ability to respond to local crisis, an extensive program of airstrip construction was started. An airstrip was built at each of the major camps and small supplies of fuel were stockpiled at the more remote fields in case they were required. Since Showak was geographically in the center of the operational area, there was no place we couldn't reach within an hour and a half. That mobility proved to be extremely valuable more than once.

The remote detection system was fairly easy to set up. Following the model that Don Allegra had suggested, I used some of the statistical information that Angela Barry had developed during her nutrition studies and began modeling the situation in each camp. At the same time, I began collecting information about what was happening on the other side - where crop failures were reported, where heavy fighting had taken place and where the refugees seemed to be originating. From these models, as well as a number of reports that I received from people who had gone into both contested provinces, I soon learned

that there were a series of check-points which amounted to rest stops that were being used by REST and ERA as they brought people into Sudan. By interviewing incoming refugees and returning journalists, I was able to determine the number of check-points and how far each was from the border. Based on this, I constructed a mathematical model, like a network diagram, that told me roughly how many people were at each check-point and how long it would be before they arrived in Sudan.

The next step was to determine what shape they would be in when they arrived. I passed the word around Khartoum and at all the camps that anyone going across the border could help by taking along an arm circumference tape and doing a simple survey on the nutritional status of children at the checkpoints they visited. They could send the information out with REST or ERA personnel who regularly went back-and-forth across the border. It took about a month to set the system up, but by the middle of April, when the majority of new arrivals dropped off considerably, I had been able to fairly accurately determine not only how many people were coming and when they would arrive, but also what kind of shape they were in. Working quietly with CARE and the COR camp administrators, we were able to insure that adequate food and medical supplies were on hand when they arrived.

Setting up the logistics system was left to Michael Day- Thompson. Mike was good and to show his support, he voluntarily moved from his house in Gedaref to take up residence with Kent and me in the Shouak Hilton, otherwise known as the governor's guest house. He then went to work using a contingency planning formula that INTERTECT had developed and began putting together the nuts and bolts of the food logistics system. Things were going great when all of a sudden Mike had a fainting spell that scared the hell out of us. One afternoon he grabbed his head and simply keeled over. True, it was a 115 degrees that day and Mike, like Kent and I, was forced to walk around in Showak, since we didn't have a car. Mike is getting on in years, and this episode scared us so we insisted that he fly to Khartoum and, later, back to Geneva for a check-up. Temporarily, I pulled Kent off the Wad Sharife effort and had him work logistics until Mike returned.

Soon after, CARE was contracted to serve as the emergency logistics unit of COR. CARE personnel, who were highly experienced in food logistics moved into Showak and began setting up their operation. They had shifted some personnel from their successful logistics operation in Somalia to form the core of their unit and gradually began getting things into shape.

Health surveillance activities proved to be far more difficult to organize. Dr. Nabil, the person in charge, was simply overworked. He could not do everything and he received precious little help from the Ministry of Health, who was jealous of his position and of the resources that were being poured into the refugee program. His staff was made-up of Angela, as nutrition advisor, and an epidemiologist who had been contracted by HCR. The latter found it difficult to work with Dr. Nabil and vice-versa and he was not able to get the vital surveillance program into operation. Regionally, there appeared to be adequate resources available from the Ministry of Health, but because of the Ministry-COR struggle for control of the medical program, these resources were consistently denied.

In the field, the relief organizations, with few exceptions, refused to keep the daily records that were needed, begging off and saying that they were too busy. Angela was busy carrying out detailed nutrition

surveys, which proved to be extremely valuable, but they were time consuming and the information was rarely given to us in time to make decisions.

From the moment I agreed to work in Sudan, I had been requesting that the Center for Disease Control second Phil Nieburg to the staff in Shouak. UNHCR made the request and Don Krumm backed this with a strong plea from the U.S. Embassy. CDC however, was embroiled in internal politics. The director had a policy of rotating field assignments among the staff so that everyone would have a chance to work internationally. This meant that some of those assigned to the field were first timers. In the previous month, two CDC personnel had come through who had very little impact. Don and I continued to push hard for Phil, but it was simply not to be. The more we pushed, the madder CDC got and they finally told us that they would send who they damn well pleased. In the meantime, I had learned that Mike Menning was dating Phil's ex-wife. When I asked him how he felt about having Phil come out, he said that he didn't mind, but I could tell he was reticent. Given the problems we were having with CDC, it was better to simply take who they would send. In the end, the man they chose, Rick Steckety, proved to be extremely valuable.

Now that we knew our priorities, the systems we needed, and who was available that we could depend on, I decided to formalize our plans in a document that would set out where we going and how we intended to get there. This was to be the Operations Plan.

In my work, I've found that operation plans are extremely valuable. It lets everyone know the rules of the game and sets targets to work for. Kent and I worked up the outline for the plan, roughed out the general terms of reference and descriptions of the sub-programs and then presented them to the GPM in draft form. Hassan was very enthusiastic about the general contents of the program and gave us his wholehearted go-ahead.

The next day, I discussed the plan with Nickolas and one of the UNHCR directors, Homman-Herremberg, who were visiting the refugee camps. They were both very receptive to the idea and were impressed with the plan of action that we had laid down. Nicholas made some very helpful suggestions and additions.

Next, I reviewed the plan with Mike Menning. Mike listened passively as I outlined each of the steps, the problems that we faced, and the methods I proposed to tackle each one. Mike was non-committal. He basically said that it looked OK to him, but I felt then, and events were to prove, that he was opposed to the document. I think that he felt that it somehow amounted to a loss of autonomy for him and a loss of authority. In the coming weeks, even though he spent many hours working on various sections of the plan, and in fact did a yeoman's job preparing detailed schedules of activities for the plan, he never fully committed himself to using the plan or in supporting it once it was published.

Back in Geneva the Opsplan took on a life of its on. Herrenburg reported that we were in the process of preparing it and the High Commissioner, who was under tremendous pressure to explain to the donors what he was doing in Sudan, began sending telexes demanding that we send a finished copy to Geneva as soon as possible. I had never envisioned the plan as being a formal, detailed working document but rather a set of statements about what we intended to accomplish, the methodology that we were going to

use, and a listing the assignments of each of the major agencies and key staff. When it became obvious that HCR wanted something far more detailed, it was left to me to sit down and put it all together; something that was both time consuming and frustrating as I shall explain later.

The next step was to prepare a formal needs list of everything that would be necessary to get the camps into good shape. The first part of this was a general list for the overall operation. The second was a more specific list of things that would be needed in order to relocate the Tigryan refugees to new sites and build new camps for them. The two lists were extremely formidable; there were over a hundred items on both.

As soon as the lists were completed, I flew to Khartoum and reviewed them with the Branch Office. Nickolas and his new assistant, Pearce Garrety, scoffed. There was no way to get everything on the lists, they felt; we would just have to muddle through. I was depressed by their defeatist attitude and knew that these were the bare minimum necessary for the refugees to survive in the coming months.

Next I showed the list to Don. This was the first emergency where he had actually had an operational responsibility and was amazed by the amount of things that were needed. Most of all, he was concerned that UNHCR and COR did not have the manpower to implement the program, even if the resources could be procured. He agreed, however, to watch over the list and see to it that as many things as possible were ordered by COR and UNHCR in the coming weeks.

My discussions with UNHCR had convinced me that there would be a go-slow attitude in the Branch Office and if our refugees were going to make it, I was going to have to go out of channels to get things done. With the formal planning out of the way, I began planning ways in which I could informally insure that critical needs were met. Over the years, I have learned that in every relief operation you have to have a "back door" and this was to be no exception.

The foundations of my back door were based on developing a good working relationship with the refugee leadership, the relief organizations that represented the refugees in Khartoum, and the two main liberation fronts. Had I been a UNHCR employee, this would have been impossible, but since I had been contracted by HCR to work for COR, I felt I had a freer hand.

The second and most important part of my back door was strong support from the U.S. Government. No other donor had anywhere near the chance of operating as quickly as the Americans. No other government representatives regularly visited the refugee camps and none had an actual program that was geared to assist the agencies in the field. Because Don and I had such a good working relationship, I was determined to use this as a base to build on and I knew that if I got in trouble, I could count on Don for support. He and I agreed to contact each other regularly and he was extremely helpful in backstopping me from Khartoum. In essence, he was really the fourth member of the INTERTECT Team.

The third component of my back door was to set up a staff that was loyal to me. As a consultant, I was in no position to order people around; I could only advise, suggest and cajole people into action. Hassan and Mike on the other hand, could order people to do things by virtue of their position in the hierarchy. Thus, if I was to be able to work around the bureaucratic system and get people to take action in an emergency, I had to develop a staff that not only respected me, but would be loyal and support my

position in any discussion. Not that I wanted a group of yes-men; I preferred to have people who could think, especially who could think on the spot and under pressure, people whose instincts were good. These kind of people I could train, give them some basic tools and they could take care of most situations without me having to intervene personally. It took a while, but eventually I was able to develop a small cadre of intelligent and highly motivated UNHCR and COR staff who enabled us to ram through the balance of the emergency program when the crunch came several months later.

The final element of my back door was to set up an information system that would report, out of channels, anything unusual that was developing. I was not looking for statistics, gossip or the usual day-to-day operational data that was transmitted through the command and control system. Rather, I was looking for critical information, unusual events or things that did not seem quite right, which could be pieced together by me and my staff to get a feel for things that were happening before they became a crisis. To do this, I found a number of people who were located in key positions throughout the region, but who were not normally decision-makers. My little group of irregulars consisted of warehousemen, truck drivers, border guards, tractor drivers, interpreters and the many other people who volunteered to keep me informed of unusual developments. By the middle of February, an ant couldn't cross the border without me knowing about it within several hours. I should point out that none of these people ever asked for or received anything but a verbal thanks for their help, but I made a point of regularly contacting each one and personally thanking them for keeping their eyes and ears open. Each little tidbit was fed into my computer for future reference and periodically, I would sit down at night, go over the notes, and look for patterns to see what was developing along the border.

While my back door was under construction, I decided to test it out on our first crisis. At Wad Sharife we were down to half a day's supply of food (if one could believe the official number of people who had been registered). At the time, we didn't know when the next shipment of food would arrive at Port Sudan. Earlier, Nickolas had tried to borrow food from both the government and the cross-border operation. The Sudanese had said no but ERA had agreed on the proviso that UNHCR recognize their status in Sudan as the representatives of the Eritreans as a quid pro quo for the food. This Nickolas could not do, and COR also refused. With the negotiations seemingly at a dead end, I suggested to Nickolas that I have a go with ERA and I asked for a meeting with Paulos, the ERA coordinator in Khartoum.

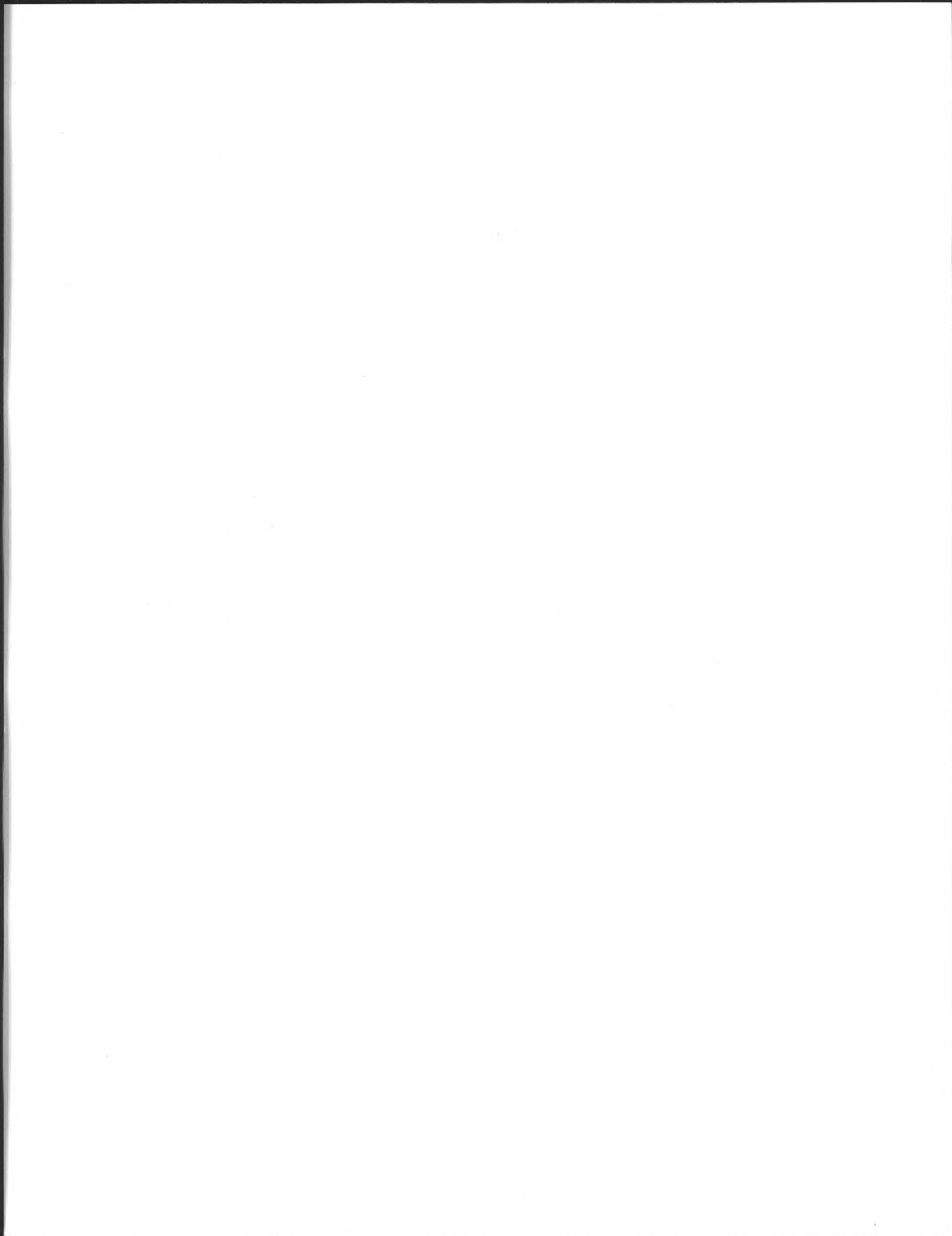
When he arrived I began by asking him, "Why won't you loan us the food? The refugees in Wad Sharife are Eritrean. Are you going to play politics and watch them die?"

I think Paulos was taken back by the directness of my question. He told me that ERA needed recognition.

"No," I said, "you need fuel. Are you willing to deal?"

Within five minutes, a handshake sealed the arrangements. Paulos agreed to turn several hundred tons of CSM over to the SCC and I, in turn, arranged for some fuel to be diverted to the cross-border warehouses in Port Sudan. For the next week, we had enough food to carry us through until the next ship arrived. Don later arranged for several hundred barrels of fuel to be sent back to COR to cover the amount that had been slipped out the back door. They arrived after the final departure of the Falashas

and everyone just figured that it was the remainder of the Falasha fuel supply. Little did they realize that we had played Hassan's own game and become fuel merchants.



CHAPTER SEVEN

FEBRUARY TO MID-MARCH: THE HONEYMOON PERIOD

Looking back, my first six weeks in Sudan are the most troubling. I had gone to Sudan determined not to arouse controversy and to win UNHCR's favor. I wanted this operation to be the basis for rebuilding bridges which had been damaged years earlier. Thus, I was prepared to play the game according to UNHCR's rules and be the perfect consultant, offering advice and staying in the shadows.

God knows I tried. I worked hard at trying to resolve the interpersonal conflicts that had hamstrung the operation. As a first step, I focused on the conflict between Nick and Omar. I assured both that fundamentally, each was respected by the other and I tried to find common grounds where they could work together. When they both appeared to support the same position, I was quick to compliment them. I was pleased when Omar said that he could feel a change in Nicholas's attitude towards him, and he began to drop his biting comments about Nick to the other UNHCR staff and, more importantly, to the voluntary agencies and the U.S. Embassy. I recommended to Nickolas that Omar be given specific tasks to carry out that built on Omar's talent for making friends. Reluctantly, Nickolas asked Omar to handle some of the relations with the voluntary agencies, a job at which he proved to be especially adept and helpful. At least initially, some of the tensions between the two begin to ease.

The second, more difficult, conflict I tried to resolve was the one between Nickolas and the American Embassy. Discussions with Jerry Weaver got nowhere; when I approached him about Nicholas, he simply grinned and said, "I'll get the bastard."

The root of their conflict was in the Falasha operation. Jerry blamed UNHCR for leaking news of the Falasha's departure to the press, a situation which jeopardized not only the evacuation, but also Jerry's life. Jerry characterized Nickolas to all who would listen as someone who had poor instincts and almost gloated about Nickolas' failure to get ahead of the emergency.

Nickolas' distrust for Jerry was also Falasha related. Jerry constantly gave Nickolas misleading information about the Falashas and the operation to get them out of Sudan. With a constant stream of disinformation coming from Jerry about the Falashas, it's no wonder that when the Embassy sent accurate intelligence about Tigrayans or Eritreans to the Branch Office, it had no credibility. Nickolas had no way of knowing what to believe from the Americans and what not to, and with word circulating around town that Jerry was out to get him, he tended to avoid any confrontation or collaboration. The problem was, we needed strong American support.

To get around this, Don and I decided that we would try to cut Jerry out of the loop. On all matters relating to non-Falasha refugees at least, Don would provide UNHCR with the straight scoop. Jerry could run around in the east all he wanted, but everything he said would be monitored and verified by Don. In this way, we were able to bring a degree of credibility back to the Embassy.

The next conflict that had to be resolved was between UNHCR and the voluntary agencies. At that point, most of the volag personnel were newcomers to relief operations and tended to identify UNHCR

as the primary actor, not COR. When anything went wrong, they were quick to blame Nickolas and other UNHCR staff for their inefficiency and lack of sensitivity to the refugees. In two camps, the critics had gone public and the bad press was causing a lot of problems. Not only were our coordination efforts affected at the local level but donors at the international level were becoming reluctant to give UNHCR the support it needed. I decided to blitz the camps and hold a series of meetings with the key personnel from each agency to try and explain the realities of the situation. At each meeting I told them to quit bitching, that the reason that they were being paid by UNHCR (most received more than half their funds from the High Commissioner) was that they were supposed to be able to improvise on the spot.

"Don't count on UNHCR for anything," I told them. "It's simply not coming."

If we were to survive, they were going to have to dig into their own pockets and into their own reservoir of knowledge and skills to make things happen. UNHCR was not much more than a sounding board at this stage and a convenient telex for them to communicate to the outside world.

If you don't expect anything," I told them, "you won't be disappointed. And if UNHCR does come through, you can be pleasantly surprised."

"We're all in this boat together," I reminded them, "and it won't help if the oarsmen keep yelling at the drummer rather than getting on with the rowing."

I also told them that if they continued to criticize either COR or UNHCR instead of stressing the need for resources to every reporter that they could collar, I would recommend to Hassan that they be reassigned to out-of-the-way camps and that more helpful agencies be put in their positions. By and large, I think the message got through and while UNHCR's stock never got very high in most of their books, at least they quit complaining publicly and were able to get on with the task without widening the gulf between HCR and the volags.

Disputes between volags operating in the same camp proved to be more problematic. At first, I tried to intervene and settle the conflicts. Most were rather petty and often involved romances and jealousies between personnel of the various agencies. In one or two instances where I tried to intervene, I got burned, so by and large, I just let matters work themselves out or let Mike handle them on his own. I also discovered something about myself. I'm not particularly good at compromise, always tending to choose the person or organization with the strongest argument (or with the position that most closely resembled that of my own!)

During this period, I set out to build strong relations with the GPM and his staff. I revelled in working with COR, especially with Hassan and the men in Showak. The work routine was easy, everyone was friendly and the frustrations, of which there were many, were fairly minor compared to what I've encountered in other countries.

The Sudanese were curious about this strange Texan who wore cowboy boots around in the camps, who flew his own airplane and who seemed to have an endless supply of Dr. Pepper. Word had circulated that the American Government had flown my plane to Sudan and that I had been greeted personally by the American Ambassador. They were all convinced that I had a direct line to Ronald Reagan and that if I thought a particular program should receive support, that it would. When I told

people that I was simply a consultant, they shook their heads knowingly and went right on believing that I had power which, in reality, I never commanded. Hassan was convinced by this time that I was his back door and when things did not come quickly down the UNHCR pipeline, he was not above playing his "Cuny card" with the Embassy.

At first I didn't realize how all this looked to the Sudanese and, more importantly, to UNHCR. I suppose I was naive and I was astounded one night when Mike Menning came into my room with a bottle of brandy, banged it down on the table and said, "who do you really work for and why are you here?"

We talked for about four hours. I told him about how I had been hired, but I don't suppose that fully allayed his suspicions about my role and my ties to the Americans.

One of the biggest problems that I have in my work is that people constantly suspect that I am associated with the CIA or other U.S. intelligence organizations. It's natural to suspect people working along contested frontiers to have a secret motive. Being an American and associated with an unusual, private consulting firm doesn't help. The suspicion that I and my staff are spooks is one which I try hard to dispell, but sometimes people believe that we "protesteth too much," and continue to believe that we are. In Sudan this reached ridiculous proportions. The color of my airplane was dark blue, the colors of the Dallas Cowboys, my favorite football team. The plane even had the Texas flag painted on the tail. Even so, many people in UNHCR believed that it was a spy plane and despite the fact that Sudanese, Ethiopian, and many people of other nationalities flew on the plane, photographed it, etc., I hear they still claim that the airplane was "out to jam the Ethiopian radars." (I doubt that they even had any in that area.)¹

Despite these suspicions, work continued. At the administrative level, we continued to formalize the OPSPLAN and prepared a working draft for the GPM and UNHCR. Due to my heavy work schedule, I worked on the draft at night. I set up the generator outside my room, hooked up the computer and banged away at the document. After about a week of drafting, I finally had the document in shape. A sandstorm was raging outside as I began to make a back-up diskette of the completed report. Despite the fact that we had taped bedsheets over the windows, sand still managed to filter through. Right in the middle of the back-up process, the computer suddenly arced and the screen went blank! Quickly I shut down the computer and began the process of trying to recover the data, but it was too late. Not only was the back-up disk lost, the master program disk had been destroyed. Cursing and bitching, I sat down at the desk and quickly scratched out notes about the report so I wouldn't forget it.

The next morning I flew into Khartoum to see if I could locate another word processing program. Unfortunately, computers were still new and no one had the same program that I was using. By chance, I discovered that my old friend, Giles Whitcomb, of UNDRO, had just brought a compatible computer to Sudan and had a number of software packages. "Try this one," Giles said. "This is a special word processing package that was selected by one of our computer experts after months of searching. It's easy

¹ Not that the dark color of the airplane did not cause other problems. In the 115 degree heat, the airplane became extremely hot on the ground and often the fuel would expand in the tanks and bubble over the top. After several weeks, I decided to paint the skin over the fuel tanks white so that we could reduce the likelihood that we would have a vaporlock in the fuel-lines.

to use and can handle anything.

I flew back to Showak and started over. If there is anything I hate doing, it's rewriting something I've already written once. I'm never sure what I mentioned in the first draft, so the process takes longer than the first time out. This time, however, I moved fairly quickly and in about three days, I was back up to about page 80. Just as I was completing the last page, the computer flashed a "disk-full error" message at the bottom of the screen. I looked into the reference manual to find out how to get out of the program and save the material, but after an hour of looking through the manual I had not found any reference to that message. One thing I did discover, however, was a note that said, "Never turn the machine off without first saving the material, if you do, you will lose everything."

I was beginning to get worried. I found several references in the manual about how to back up a document, but none of them worked and the disk-full error continued to flash.

Now I was getting desperate because in a few minutes my generator was going to run out of fuel. On top of that, another sandstorm was brewing up and even if I could get to the fuel dump, get the gasoline needed for the generator and get back in time, there was no way I could leave the generator outside in the sandstorm. In desperation, I tried a disk transfer command following the instructions in the manual. The minute I had punched the execute key I knew I had made a mistake. The screen went blank.

Back in Khartoum, I grabbed Giles and asked him what to do about it. "Oh, yes," he said, "we just received a note from our computer specialist who told us how to fix this particular problem. Somehow it was left out of the operator's manual."

Armed with the new instructions, I returned to Showak and once again began to work on the goddamn plan. By this time, I knew it by heart, but now the eloquence was lacking. As each page went onto the diskette, I printed a copy. By about page 40 I was once again back into the groove and decided to make a twenty-four hour marathon effort to finish the document. Finally, I reached page 89 and, quite proud of myself, sat down to print out the entire document from start to finish. Imagine my surprise when the print menu only indicated that I had 16 pages of text. Where the hell was the rest of it? Going back into the document, I couldn't find any of the text from page 72 back to page 1. Again, I tried all of the recover commands listed in the operator's manual, to no avail. Swearing a stream of oaths, I printed my last 16 pages and stapled them to the first 40 that I printed out.

I was determined to kill Giles at our next meeting and I wasn't the only one. It seems that he had given copies of the program to others in Khartoum and they too had run into the same problems. By chance, we all converged on his hotel room at once. Had the man been in, I am sure he would have been lynched, but he was out of town for several days, so instead, we took our frustrations out by burning the disks and operator's manual on the garbage dump behind the hotel.

Explanations about the failure of modern technology fell on deaf ears at UNHCR. The pressure was on the Branch Office to deliver an operations plan to get the High Commissioner off the hook with the donors. HCR wanted me to give them my notes and the two sections I had been able to turn in, but I was not about to turn over something half-baked at this point, there was too much riding on it. Instead, I requested that the next person coming from Geneva bring a new word processing program so that I

could get started yet again. This seemed simple enough since someone came down almost every day and compatible word processing programs were available throughout Europe. After three weeks, however, I still hadn't received the program. (It was not until Michael Day-Thompson came back from his check-up in Geneva that he brought it for me.)

By this time, the Operations Plan was becoming even more controversial. When the High Commissioner could not actually show it to the donors after having promised it for so long, he told Phil Sargisson to get down to Khartoum and help put it together. Phil came down expecting to whip it out overnight, but when he saw the extent of our operations and how much was involved, he realized that it would take a long time and that it was better for me to produce the first draft by myself. In the meantime, some friends at Save the Children (U.S.), loaned me their word processing program, and once again I sat down to crank it out. This time however, I was able to convince Nickolas to send one of the secretaries from the Branch Office to help with the typing.

As the preparation of the OPSPLAN continued to draw out, Nickolas became less enthusiastic about it. He began to worry that it was going to become a tool which would be used against him and against which his performance would be judged. Despite my assurances that this wasn't the case, he continued to avoid working with us on the draft. Sargisson was furious, he felt that Nickolas should be a major contributor, not a bystander. Unfortunately, Nickolas never overcame this reluctance and the effectiveness of the document as an instrument of control was severely lessened.

* * *

Back in the field, things were moving slowly. We still had not been able to build up an adequate staff and Kent and I spent a lot of time moving around trying to hold things together. Every day, a new crisis would develop in one place or another and we would rush to the scene to deal with it personally.

In late February, a peculiar incident occurred; one I was never sure what it was all about. Abu Rahil reported that a group of five thousand refugees had crossed the Atbara between Wad Kowli and Sefawa and had been stopped by the security forces. They were reportedly being held in a ravine and needed food and water. When I checked with the security forces, however, they said that they knew nothing about any refugees and the Border Police also reported that they knew nothing of anyone crossing other than the usual arrivals at Wad Kowli. That afternoon, I took off and flew over the area where the refugees were reported to be, but I couldn't find a trace of any group. For two days, Abu Rahil continued to report about the condition of the people, and that approximately twenty had died. He requested that we release some water tankers for the people.

Several times I tried to pinpoint exactly where the group was, but everytime I requested the information, I got different bearings. Finally, I tanked up the plane and flew a criss-cross pattern over the entire border area from Showak to Wad Kowli. Again there was no sign of anyone anywhere near their reported locations.

Mike Menning contacted Julian Murray in Wad Kowli and asked him to take a Land Cruiser up to the site and see if he could find anything. Julian and Osmon Mekke spent an afternoon wandering around

the gullies, but they too could find nothing. Finally, that night I found Abu Rahil at the COR guest house and asked him if he knew exactly where the people were. No, he reported, he had only heard about the group from security and had not actually seen them himself! No, he said, he could not give me the name of the security officer that had reported this, but he would check it out.

The refugees were never mentioned again. Exactly who they were or whether or not they ever existed is still a mystery. No large group meeting their description came in to Wad Kowli and I never figured out what was going on. Some people in HCR tended to put it down to an attempt by Abu Rahil to get his hands on a lot of relief supplies, but I suspect it was some sort of test to find out how we would react and how good our sources of information were.

* * *

My main work during this period was trying to secure sites for new camps to relieve the pressures at Wad Kowli and Wad Sherife. We had been narrowing down the choices and Hassan was now intent on getting the governor to select the sites and give us permission to begin the moves.

In mid-February, Hassan arranged for the Lieutenant-Governor and the Military Commander of the area fly down with us to Wad Kowli to see the condition of the refugees and why we so desperately needed to move them someplace else. The flight was memorable for two reasons. On the way down, Hassan and I pointed out the sites we wanted near the Girba reservoir. From the air it was easy to see that there were no nearby Sudanese villages and that the sites were ideal. While the Lieutenant-Governor didn't say anything, I knew that we had made a major impression on him and that we might get the sites.

The second event was that we were fired on by the Border Police as the plane approached Wad Kowli. I could see several tracers arching up towards us but I was flying at five thousand feet and they fell far below. I didn't mention this to my passengers for I didn't want to alarm them, but after we returned, word had already been flashed over the police radio that they had fired on an "Ethiopian plane." The governor, who knew exactly what had happened, was furious and ordered that hundreds of pictures be taken of my plane and distributed to all the border posts, the military and anyone else with a gun anywhere near my operating area. That made me feel a lot better, but for the next two months I continued to fly fairly high in and out of all the camps.

On our visit to the camp, the Lieutenant-Governor had been shocked by the condition of the refugees and had agreed to permit us to move the refugees to another location. He promised that a decision about the Girba Lake sites would be made within a week. Julian, who was desperate to relieve the overcrowding, requested permission to move some refugees to the old camp that had been set up at Sefawa several months earlier. The Lieutenant-Governor gave his permission to move 7,500 refugees, so Julian and several of the COR staff were detailed to go to Sefawa to find a site adjacent to the old camp.

On the way back from Wad Kowli on that same trip, Hassan and I noticed a large, long pool of water a mile north of Sefawa. I estimated it to be about three miles long and the water was clear, not the usual slimy green. Neither of us said anything, for we were afraid that if the Lieutenant Governor noted the

water he might suggest that we use this place as a campsite, rather than Girba. We preferred Girba because there was a more abundant supply of water and, more importantly, the sites were closer to an all-weather road so the camp could be supplied in the rainy season.

Several days later, I received an urgent radio message from Abu Rahil and Julian. They reported they had found a fantastic site with a large pool of clean water and a flat, gently sloping area that drained away from the river. They had measured the length of the pool and estimated that over a hundred thousand refugees could be accommodated at the site.

This gave me a cold sweat. After a lot of political maneuvering by Hassan plus pressure from the Americans, the governor had just notified us that we could move the refugees from Wad Kowli to the Girba Lake sites. All things considered, the site at Girba was far better than Sefawa and I was afraid that if word got out about the other site, the refugees would be stuck forty miles from the nearest hard-surfaced road.

I discussed the situation with Hassan and we agreed to try and downplay Julian's site but unfortunately we did not reckon with Julian and his enthusiasm or Abu Rahil and his desire to have another camp in his area of operation. Quickly, the word got back to the governor and he contacted Hassan to find out how many refugees the site could hold. He wanted Hassan to send a water engineer to estimate how much water there was and how long it would last. I could see our entire deal on the Girba sites flying out the window. With this in mind, I contacted the Oxfam water team that had just arrived and asked them to give me an "independent" estimate of the water there, but I made it clear that I did not want an estimate of more than ninety days supply for about twenty thousand people.

OXFAM delivered the report I wanted but of course the governor's own water engineers came up with a much higher estimate. After a lot of haggling, we finally agreed that a new camp at Sefawa would be built for thirty thousand people and the plans for major camps at Girba would continue. I am afraid I lost a lot of credibility with some of the Sudanese engineers by my insistence that the water at Sefawa was only minimal, when they could see that it would last much longer. Also, Julian couldn't understand our reluctance to move all the refugees to Sefawa.

The planning and construction of the new camp, which later became known as Sefawa II (or Kona Zeberma, after the Nigerian village nearby) proved to be slightly problematic and delayed the actions on the Girba Lake complex. Kent and I felt that the Sudanese could do the job of laying out the camp. We prepared some general conceptual drawings which were presented to Abu Rahil. Abu Rahil was enthusiastic about the plan and was anxious to build a camp that would be a model for the eastern region. He turned the planning over to one of his engineers and they began to lay out the camp.

In the meantime, several technicians from UNHCR's Specialist Support Unit had arrived in Sudan to "help out". One of them was a planner and he wanted to be in on the design and construction of the new camp, as well as the camps at Girba Lake. The problem was he was only planning to stay in the country for five days, three of which had already been spent in Khartoum! What he proposed was absurd. He wanted me to fly a team over the site and let them take some pictures which they would take back to Geneva and use for designing the camp. He promised they would send the plans down in the pouch the

following month!

Kent, who had already laid out two camps, could not stop laughing. We planned to have our own plans finished in two days and to have the camp occupied and finished long before the "specialists" could return the drawings to us. I sent a message to Khartoum telling them not to bother coming, that we had the situation well in hand. But I learned over the radio that the team had already left for Gedaref and was supposedly waiting for me at the airport. Had not I received the radio message? It had never been passed on to me from Gedaref.

In the meantime, I had promised several reporters from a Minneapolis T.V. station (WCCO) that they could accompany me on a trip to Fau to see how the food situation was. They had also asked Mike Menning to come along so that they could get pictures of a Minneapolis hometown boy tromping through the camps. I had been promising this trip for several days, but had bumped them off previous flights. I felt that this was probably the last chance that they would get to go to Fau with me and probably the last chance they would have to interview Mike.

I had another reason for wanting to take the film crew to Fau. They had been staying with me for about three weeks and I admired the way they filmed the situation and told our story. Their cameramen were extremely sensitive to the refugees, not shoving the lens right in their face as many reporters do. They had attended a number of meetings with me and had always been very polite, stayed in the background and did their work quietly, professionally. I spent long hours talking with their director, Mike Mirendorf, about the importance of accurate reporting and he had taken this to heart and was doing a magnificent job. Furthermore, they had been giving me a lot of accurate intelligence about what was going on the camps, information that I or other relief agency personnel could probably not have obtained. This was the only thing they had asked of me in three weeks and I felt I owed them something and wanted to help them out. Besides, Mike had promised that they would make copies of the video tapes for us to use as training films. They had hundreds of scenes of refugee camps, programs, etc., which we would be able to use. This kind of help is very rare and was a resource too valuable to lose.

The problem was what to do about Omar and his technicians. Looking at the sun, I calculated that we only had about three hours of light left. If we flew to Fau, we would have enough time and light for their shooting and could still get back to Showak before sunset. If I flew to Gedaref and picked up the technicians, however, we would make it to Sefawa just before sunset and the shadows would be too long for good aerial photography. Thus, I decided to bump Omar and his crew and take the WCCO team.

An hour later, we landed at Gedaref and I explained the situation to the technicians. Reluctantly they agreed to skip the flight, but said that they would go on to Showak and wait for me there, so at least we could talk about the plans. Mike and I then flew on to Fau with the WCCO team.

When we arrived at Fau something was wrong. There had been an incident of some kind, but neither the COR people nor the refugees would talk about it. Mike and I elected to stay and poke around to find out what was going on. In the end, it turned out to be something fairly minor, a case of someone who had been slighted and insulted, rather than anything serious. But the delay meant that we could only fly back as far as Gedaref, it was too dark to continue on to Showak.

We went into town where Mike agreed to let me use his car, but it was out of fuel. We searched for about three hours trying to find someone who could authorize taking some fuel from the COR supply, but to no avail. We tried to siphon gas out of several tanks, but there wasn't enough. Finally, a UNICEF water drilling rig drove into town looking for directions to Kassala. Since Showak was on the way, I hopped a ride on the rig, returning to Showak at eleven o'clock. By that time, Omar and his friends were long gone. They left a nasty note instructing me to mail the aerial photos to Geneva so they could complete the plans. Kent and I tore up the note and went back to work. In Khartoum the technicians ranted and raved to everyone who would listen about how Cuny and Menning found more time for the press than for them.

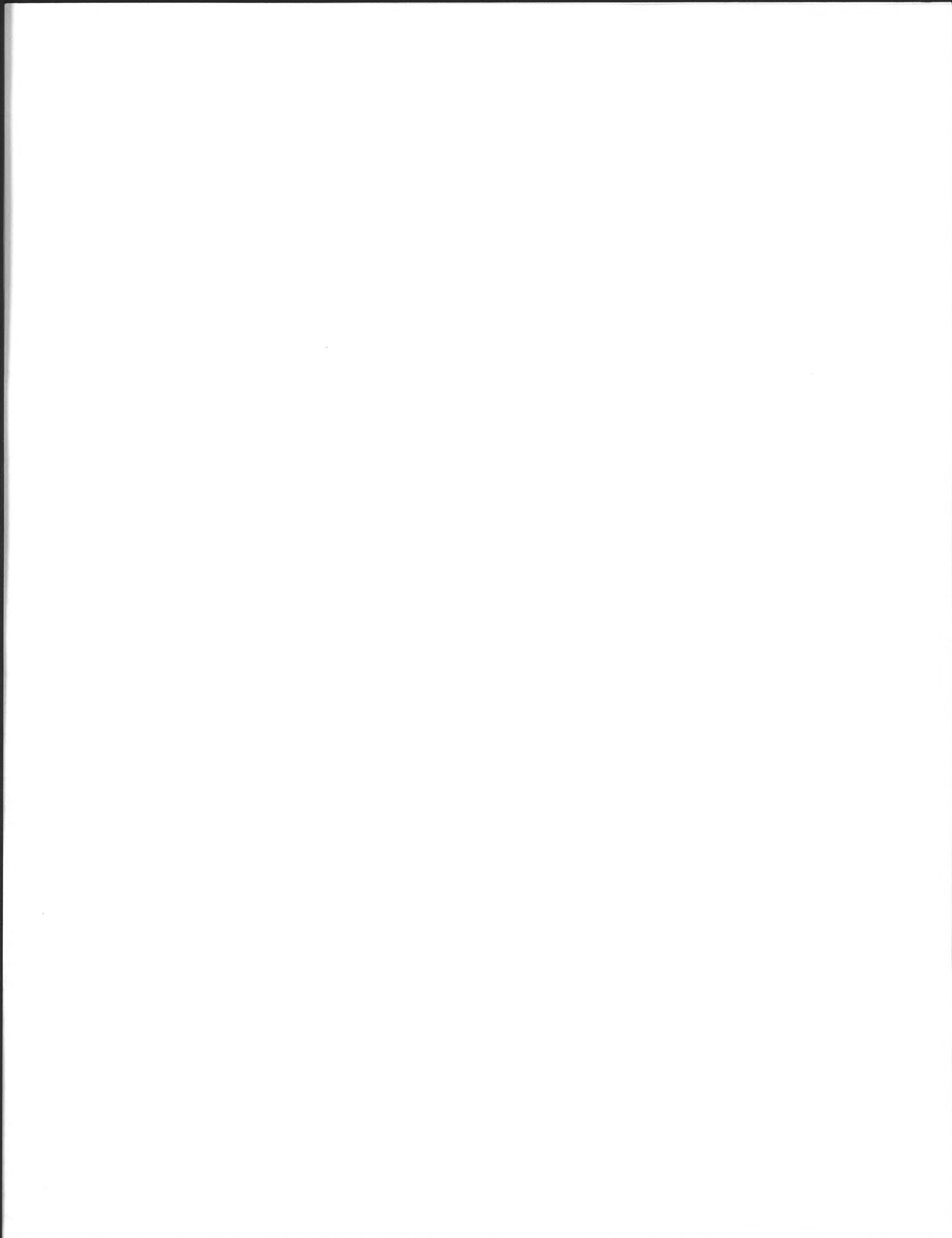
* * *

By the end of the week, Abu Rahil reported that the Sefawa site was nearing completion and that moves could begin the following Monday. At the same time, however, I received a radio message from Julian saying that the camp had been laid out in a grid rather than in the community units (small squares of tents) that we promised the refugee leaders. I was surprised because Abu Rahil had been so enthusiastic about our proposed layout of the camp, so I sent an engineer working with VSO down to the site to check it out. He reported back that it only appeared to be a grid, and that it did follow the layout that we had planned.

The following Monday, the moves got underway. Twenty trucks were assigned to move approximately eight hundred people a day. Unfortunately, a problem in the northern sector prevented me from going down and monitoring the initial move, but the next day, Julian reported that all was going well, except that the community units appeared to him to be too long and too narrow. That afternoon I overflowed the site at Sefawa on the way to Wad Kowli. Sure enough, instead of small squares of sixteen houses facing an inner courtyard, the tents had all been lined up in rectangles of twenty-four shelters facing the same direction.

To rectify the situation, I sent one of Kent's assistants down to Sefawa to show them how to reorganize the grids correctly. Three days later, I overflowed the site again and was astounded to see that the camp was still being built in the same way. When I checked with the engineer that had been sent down to straighten out the situation, he informed me that he had been pressed into building feeding centers and clinical facilities and hadn't personally supervised the reorganization. I reminded him of his first job, and told him to get to work. Four days later, I received another communication from Julian. There was still no major change. Though the squares had been reduced from twenty-four shelters to eighteen, they were still being lined up facing the same direction. By this time, I was pissed! I got in the plane, flew down and met with the COR site engineer and explained how I wanted the camp laid out. From then on we didn't have any major problems.

Despite the initial construction hassles, Sefawa was a good prototype for the camps that we were to build later. The refugees coming out of Tigray usually came out in groups from the same village. At Wad Kowli, Julian and Osmon Mekke had learned that one of the best ways of helping the refugees to



cope was to assign them to sections in the camp according to their village of origin. That way, if more people came out later, they could easily be reunited with their family and friends. We decided that this same organizational scheme would be used for the construction and organization of Sefawa and it worked very well. Whole villages were moved together and assigned to the section that corresponded to their village. If more refugees were expected later, we would leave space in the section so that the new arrivals would have a place to live in the "village". SCF (U.K.), the medical and feeding agency assigned to Sefawa, built feeding centers in each of the sections so that each village had its own health and feeding station. These had an added advantage; if the people returned home, the refugee health workers who had gained experience in primary health care and in nutrition planning could go back with them.

While the moves went fairly smooth (Julian and Osmon made sure that there was no repeat of the Fau transport mess), the operation proved to be a drain on our limited resources. As long as Sefawa was being built and the majority of COR's trucks were assigned to the move, we could make little progress on the more important Girba complex.

* * *

Once the Girba sites had been approved, Kent and I made a detailed reevaluation of everything that would be needed for the moves and the construction of the camps. Our initial estimates of costs for Sefawa had been fairly accurate and we felt the earlier estimates that we had presented to UNHCR for Girba were still on target. We had to get some action quick if we were to be able to complete moves before the rainy season began and isolated Wad Kowli.

In the meantime, the governor began to have second thoughts about the Girba camps. He made several visits to Showak to talk with Hassan to see if there was another alternative and it is to Hassan's credit that he kept him on track. As the delays continued, I began to feel that the sites might be slipping away and when the Governor sent word that we were to halt the moves from Wad Kowli, even to Sefawa, my worries increased.

In Wad Kowli the situation had not improved. Even though we were moving eight hundred people a day, the camp was still growing. The rate of influx ranged between a thousand and fifteen hundred per day and the water situation was still critical. Julian placed a stake in the pool and watched the water mark slowly slip down the pole. Each day his pleas for action got more and more desperate. At the same time, the death rates were climbing at an astounding rate. Some days more than 120 people died and in one week a thousand burials were registered at the cemetery. Roseanne Murphy, the medical coordinator at Wad Kowli and Chris Saunders, the feeding program coordinator, made a special trip to Showak to complain that it didn't do any good to feed or treat the people if they were going to die from dehydration and bad water. Finally, on March 15, I received a desperate radio message from Julian. Water was down to three day's supply. There had been a sudden drop in the water, probably caused by people trying to hoard what was left.

All that month, I had been trying to arrange for UNHCR to send water trucks to Wad Kowli. Flying

over the river, I had spotted several pools where clean water could be picked up in tank trucks, treated with chlorine and pumped into rubber tanks positioned throughout the camp. Water tankering is very expensive, but in a situation like Wad Kowli, it was the only option left. With the rate of influx of new arrivals, it would take several months to empty the camp.

UNHCR had been waffling on the tanker situation, claiming that it was too expensive. They feared that once the tankers were in place, it might reduce the pressure on COR to move the refugees. For a week, I had been sending Julian's urgent messages on to SOG urging immediate action. COR was willing to contract the tankers, but since the cost was going to be several hundred thousand dollars, they did not want to make the decision without UNHCR's concurrence. When Julian's "three day" message came in, I flew to Khartoum to press for a decision. Nickolas was out of the office and I was informed that the decision had to come from Geneva. Since it was a Friday, God only knew how long that would take.

While I was pressing Pierce Garety, the Deputy Representative, to take some initiative and make the decision himself, yet another alarming report arrived about the death rates. This was from Rick Stekady, the CDC nutritionist. He had been trying to organize oral rehydration programs in the camp. He reported an incredible jump in the death rate. One hundred fifty people had died that day and he attributed this to diarrhea and dehydration. Still, Garety refused to authorize COR to contract the trucks. This thing will work itself out, he advised, just wait.

Wait. It seemed that was all I was doing lately and the refugees were still dying. For some weeks I had been troubled that I still hadn't been able to convince HCR of the urgency and necessity of some of the more critical measures we needed to take. While I wanted to try to play by their rules and not make unnecessary waves, I was beginning to feel pretty miserable about the whole situation.

At midday I had lunch in the Acropole Hotel with Don Krumm. He could sense I wasn't in a good mood and after a long silence he laid it on me. "A lot of people expected some action when you got here," he said. "When is it going to happen?"

Late that afternoon, I flew back to Showak to report to Hassan. I think he realized that he had made a mistake turning the decision back over to UNHCR. He had surrendered some of his own authority and hadn't gotten the results that he wanted.

The following day, I went down to the radio shack to listen to Julian's morning report. He informed Menning that that morning, 135 deaths had been registered and that a sanitarian had declared that water found in shallow wells dug in the river bed were so polluted that even boiling it wouldn't help. Some of the refugees were walking to a pond two miles away to fetch brackish water, but there had already been several deaths attributed to that source.

Several minutes later, Osmon Mekke sent his morning report to Hassan. It too was gloomy and added that food supplies, building materials and other vital necessities were almost exhausted. That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

I got on the radio and asked Kent to send Luigi La Fonte down to Showak immediately. Luigi was a "fix it man" who worked with Jerry Weaver. I knew that Luigi had a reputation for getting things

done, he knew the ins and outs of the markets in Khartoum and his family seemed to have their hands into everything. I also knew that Luigi had a direct link to the American Embassy. Luigi arrived in Showak about three hours later. I explained that I was making the decision to set up a water tanker operation for Wad Kowli and if UNHCR wouldn't pay for it, I was sure that the American Embassy would. I also asked him to send a message to Don telling him what was going on and asking that he commit half a million dollars to operations in the East so I could cut through some of the red tape.

Luigi sent the message and then he and I flew to Wad Kowli to see what was needed. We checked population figures, estimated how much water was required, how many water tanks needed to be installed in the camp and then took off again, flying up and down the river looking for ponds where water tankers could fill up.

We returned to Showak after dark. Luigi grasped my hand after we got out of the plane and said, "you know they're going to shit back at HCR when they find out what we're doing."

"We?" I said.

He just grinned. "What the hell, all they can do is shoot us!"

The next day, Don flew to Showak. I was just preparing to leave when I saw his plane approaching. As the twin turned its engines off, Don bounded out and immediately asked what help we needed. For an hour and a half, we stood on the runway and planned the operation. In the dirt, we made a complete list of things that were needed, not only for the water trucks at Wad Kowli, but for getting the Girba operation back on track. Don never once worried about formalities, concerned instead that we get on with the business of saving lives. As we stood there and worked, hundreds of people from Showak, attracted by the sight of another airplane, gathered around, fascinated as the two Khawajas scribbled in the dirt the plans for moving the relief operation off dead center. We agreed that Kent and I would prepare a detailed list of what we needed and the Embassy would push UNHCR to order them on the spot. If HCR did not take action immediately, the embassy would make the purchase and deduct the amount from the American contribution to UNHCR. If they continued to go slow, they would soon be left in the dust. In essence, the Americans were threatening to go bilateral, the thought of which we were sure would terrify UNHCR and prod them into action.

The message of the airport meeting was clear to everyone. I had opened the back door. Waiting time was over!

CHAPTER EIGHT

GETTIN' STRAIGHT

For the first time since my arrival in Sudan, I felt that the operation was on the right track, controversial though the methods might be. My decision to contract the water trucks had raised a howl in Khartoum and I was called in by UNHCR for "discussions." I held off on the trip until Luigi was on site in Wad Kowli setting up the tanker operation. He moved fast, locating the tankers we needed, identifying clean water sites and getting pumps set up to load the tankers. One glitch occurred when we discovered that we needed some longer hoses for the trucks with connectors compatible with the trucks' valves. They were not available in the east, but Luigi's friends in Khartoum managed to locate some firehoses in Khartoum that would do the trick. He radioed and asked if I could fly to Khartoum, pick up the hoses and bring them to him the next day. I agreed and flew to Khartoum that night. That's the way I like to operate: identify the problem, find someone who knows where the resources are to fix it and get on with the job. Why the hell couldn't the Branch Office have someone like Luigi on their permanent staff?

I received a cool reception in Khartoum from the folks at UNHCR. I could tell the senior staff were annoyed, but some of the junior staff seemed to have been sparked by the action and as I walked down the halls, several passed me a thumbs up.

Pierce Garety called me into his office for the "official" dressing down. He said he was worried about Geneva's reaction and reminded me that I was only a consultant. It was clear that he had felt that I had overstepped the line by ordering tankers on my own initiative and he said so in no uncertain terms. Nonetheless, I stood by the decision and HCR was forced to go along with it. We were never again to work on quite the same footing.

The next day, I was back in Showak going over details of the line haul with Kent and Hassan when who should arrive but Jerry Weaver. I had only seen Jerry in Showak once before and it was something to watch. He usually arrived in a cloud of dust and would storm into Hassan's office and interrupt whatever meeting was in progress. After sitting down to talk, he would order up cokes from the ice chest in the back of his Jeep.

Hassan didn't trust Jerry any farther than he could throw him and at 250 pounds, that was probably not very far. However, he tolerated Jerry and always listened to what he had to say. The first time I had seen Jerry in Showak, he had come in with some alarmist reports about the water situation in one of the old camps. We had transferred some engineers over to the camp to check out the situation but Jerry's information turned out to be a false alarm.

This visit by Jerry was to be one of his more bizarre performances. Jerry wanted to talk about what was needed at the Girba sites. "What you need", he said "is to lay the camp out in a grid. You cannot allow refugees to cook for themselves, so you should set up soup kitchens to feed everyone. You also need to install army-like latrines and teach the people how to use them."

He went on like this for half an hour, listing the heavy equipment needs that were required and the masses of tents and warehouse facilities that were necessary. He summed up by saying, "the truth of the

matter is, these kind of capabilities are not in Sudan. You need bulldozers and other heavy equipment." Then he made a proposal which astounded me. He offered to provide a battalion of U.S. military engineers to erect the camps.

I almost dropped my teeth! Not only was his vision of the refugee camp more like a stalag than a human settlement, there was no way I could see that the Sudanese would request an American military contingent to come to such a sensitive area to build the camps.

Satisfied with himself, Jerry turned to me and said, "what do you think?"

"That's about the dumbest thing I ever heard!", I said. "You don't know a thing about camp planning and there is no way that the Sudanese will ever approve an invasion of U.S. Marines."

I could tell he was not happy with my remarks and that I had probably moved up on his bad list to a place alongside Nickolas Morris. Jerry then turned to Hassan and said that he should consider the idea, all that was necessary was to convince the Commissioner to ask the American Ambassador and the military would arrive within a month.

After Jerry left, I tried to figure what he was up to. I couldn't believe that if the Americans were really interested in some sort of military involvement, that Don would not have discussed it with me. Don, Tex and I had had long discussions about the use of American military personnel in the operation. While the Defense Department was quite willing to send one or two technicians to help install water systems, set up radios or do technical chores, they were certainly not in any position politically or militarily to send a large contingent into the deserts of Sudan for an assignment of several months or more. Sure enough, when I checked with Don, he knew nothing about it and was as astounded as I was about Jerry's offer to Hassan. For his part, Hassan never gave the incident another thought and remarked later that he felt Jerry was out of his mind.

My relations with Jerry had been deteriorating ever since mid-February when he had arranged a trip for the American Ambassador to Wad Koli. The airstrip that we had constructed would only handle STOL planes such as mine and one or two others in the country. Since I knew the airstrip as well as the camp, Don insisted that the Ambassador fly with me and that his entourage go on another plane. I enjoyed taking the Ambassador out and having the opportunity to talk to him about the situation.

When we landed, we were met at the airport, not by Julian or by Osmon, but by Jerry Weaver. Jerry had arrived two days earlier, spent some time learning about the situation and becoming an instant expert. He guided the Ambassador through the camp, explaining all the details (half of them wrong) as if he, not Osmon Mekke, were the administrator of the camp. Osmon, Julian and I were pushed aside so as not to interfere with Jerry's tour. While we were standing there, they told me about a bizarre incident that had occurred the previous day. Two nights earlier, Jerry and several of his cronies had gone hunting antelope near the camp. Great sportsman they, using spotlights to stun the antelope while they blasted away at them with high powered rifles.

I was shocked. The method of hunting was repulsive enough, but I couldn't believe that an American refugee officer would be so insensitive as to be shooting anywhere near a border, at night, where refugees fleeing from war were huddled down. There may have been little chance that a stray would have hit

anyone, but even so, the symbolism of it stunk. To make the story worse, Jerry had strapped the antelope to the hood of his car and had proceeded to drive through the camp, where thousands were starving. That afternoon, I wrote a report to Mike Menning and asked if he was going to file a complaint. After all, UNHCR is charged with protection of refugees and it seemed like this clearly fell under their mandate. Mike said he would take it under advisement.

Several days later I checked to see if the report had been filed by Nickolas. Nickolas said he needed confirmation. I had asked three witnesses to describe what they had seen and heard and I knew that Nickolas had the three reports somewhere on his desk. However, it turned out that he was reluctant to pass these on to the Ambassador because he didn't want another confrontation with Jerry. The protection function was being ignored for politics!

I explained the situation to Don, and he summarized it in a telex to Tex and Gene Dewey but somewhere along the line the matter seemed to die. Within several weeks, however, the whole issue would be a mute point.

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About this time, the Fau camps began to become problematic again. Rick Stekady drove up to see me with an epidemiological profile of the situation. The death rates, which we all assumed would be dropping rapidly once people got settled, were still alarmingly high in all the camps and, in Fau III, had risen dramatically. Rick attributed some of this to measles, which still hadn't burned out, but he had also noted that there were problems in the distribution of the basic ration. It seemed that the staff at Fau III were only distributing rations twice a month instead of every 10 days as instructed. Furthermore, if there was a shortage of any of the commodities, rather than distribute smaller amounts, the entire commodity was held until everyone could receive a full ration.

In relief operations it is important that food be distributed frequently. Food rations are usually calculated on the basis of the minimum amount of food necessary to keep people alive. Therefore, any shortage, even on a temporary basis, can cause hunger. When this happens, the next time the people receive food, they over-eat the first few days and at the end of the ration period, they are out of food. People who are severely malnourished can only go one or two days without food, if it goes longer than that, their health can be seriously threatened. To counter this, frequent food distributions are required. The usual period is 10 days. This way, if people over-eat, the longest they will be without food is one or two days. If the distribution cycle is once every two weeks or longer, there is a danger that people will end up with no food for periods of 4, 5, and even 6 days before the next distribution and many of the malnourished will die during that period.

Another concern is insuring that people receive a balanced diet at every meal. Since the variety of foods is limited, they are usually chosen so that they compliment each other and help provide all the nutritional elements for recovery. If grain is distributed without oil, the full value of the grain cannot be achieved and the target caloric intake levels cannot be attained. Among severely malnourished people this can quickly create health problems.

At Rick's request, I flew down to Fau to check on the situation. The COR staff in Fau were among the best we had and I was sure that at least one of the problems we were having could be resolved. Sure enough, it turned out that the food distribution team had decided that it was easier to make bi-monthly rather than 10-day distributions. They argued that they didn't have enough personnel to do the distributions quickly and handle all the recordkeeping. They would go back to 10-day distributions if we could send more personnel. I knew that getting the extra personnel would be difficult and suggested they hire refugee workers instead. The project manager agreed but insisted that he would need authorization from Hassan, since it was Sudanese policy that any paid workers be Sudanese, not refugees.

After the distribution discussions, the PM told me that he felt that the death rates were high because the relief agency in charge of Fau was only doing a marginal job. Several weeks earlier, we had received a complaint from REST that refugees were being turned away from the clinic because the staff was overworked. REST had asked if they could send some of their dressers (paramedics) to work with the agency, but they were refused because their own Ethiopian workers were Oromos brought in from other camps. REST wanted to replace Oromos with Tigrayans, but the agency refused, pointing out that the Oromos were already well trained and better qualified than the Tigrayan dressers. Dr. Nabil and I had proposed a compromise; that some of the duties, such as oral rehydration and some of the public health activities, could be taken over by REST. This would free some of the agency staff to work in the clinic thus maintaining longer hours in the clinics and supplemental feeding centers. The agency had agreed, but the PM informed me that the compromise had still not been put into effect.

I walked over to the medical facilities to talk to the doctor in charge. When we met, I was appalled by his appearance. He looked drawn and haggard and was obviously ready to move on. I pointed out the problems and Rick's concern over the death rates. He nodded in agreement but could not come up with any suggestions about what to do. It was obvious that he was just too worn out and was almost beyond caring. Staff burn-out is not unusual, but in Wad Kowli and other camps, staff were still enthusiastic and coping well despite overwhelming problems and a constant influx of new refugees.

Back in Showak, Rick and I discussed what could be done about the Faus. He recommended expanding the nutrition intervention program and passed this recommendation on to Dr. Nabil and to Angela. She went up to Fau to spend a week and try and iron out the wrinkles in the feeding programs. In the meantime, Hassan sent word down to Aziz, the Fau PM, to return to the 10-day ration schedule but told him to hold off hiring refugees, promising instead to send new Sudanese workers. I had no idea where these people were going to come from but I didn't argue, hoping that this would break a deadlock over the hiring of new workers in all the camps.

The following day I got together with Don in Khartoum to kick around an idea. Since the relief agencies were having difficulty in staffing up, I suggested that we start a program for REST and ERA to train "barefoot doctors" along lines used in China so that refugees could take care of their fellow refugees as the "first line of defense" in the camps. An added advantage would be that when they returned to their villages, there would be a staff of trained paramedics who could accompany the people during the journey and continue to provide basic health services once they were back.

Don said that Tex had already made a similar proposal and funds were being set aside to begin the training but UNHCR was opposed to the program and had refused to allow medical teams receiving funds from UNHCR to participate. This meant that the entire operation would have to be funded by another donor, probably the United States. To do this we would have to get one of the American agencies to agree to the training and work out an arrangement for the U.S. to provide funding instead of UNHCR. The logical agency was IRC, since they were operating both at Wad Kowli and at the Fau. Don proposed that one of the Fau camps be designated as the training base and that we bring professionals from the United States to recruit and train the paramedics. I was worried about IRC; their relations with REST in Fau were not good and I had discovered that Mike Menning, a former IRC staffer, had a distrust of REST that amounted to an obsession. I preferred instead to approach SCF, but since they were a British organization, Don felt that it would be hard to get funding for them from the U.S. Nevertheless, we began working quietly to try and set up the training program and I even suggested that the Chinese be contracted to help out.

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When I returned to Showak, I found a note from Hassan asking me to come by his house. Hassan wanted to discuss the possibility of repatriating a large group of Tigrayans. Almost five hundred people had indicated that they wanted to return from Wad Kowli and several hundred others in Fau II and III had requested transportation back to the border so they could go home. Hassan and Mike had discussed this problem before and had agreed that anyone who wanted to go back would be given permission to leave the camps. Before leaving, they would be encouraged to wait until they received their rations so that they could take food with them. It was hoped that REST would provide additional services for the people enroute, but once the people left, they were on their own. Hassan took full responsibility for ensuring that the return was voluntary, thereby relieving UNHCR of any political difficulties.

This arrangement worked fine for small groups of single men who wanted to return, but now that a large number of families wanted to go, whether or not there would be adequate provisions for the people along the way was a growing concern. Hassan was particularly concerned that people might leave Sudan only to get half way then have to turn around and come back. We calculated that most people had at least a month's journey, much of it over very rugged, mountainous terrain and therefore, they would be unable to carry adequate provisions for the whole family, especially if they were taking any belongings with them. A few people had brought their donkeys out of Tigray but there were not enough to carry the necessary food for all those who wanted to return. Hassan wanted me to look into the problem and see if I could come up with any recommendations.

The next morning, I flew down to Wad Kowli to discuss the situation with Julian, Osmon Mekke and the REST leaders. Julian had carried out a survey to determine the growing seasons in each of the areas where people had come from and when it would be necessary for them to plant their fields. He had been warning UNHCR for weeks that large numbers of refugees would be leaving if it rained in Ethiopia. Most of the people in UNHCR scoffed at the idea. They didn't believe that the people would return

because they didn't believe there were adequate seeds on the other side and felt that the war would keep them in Sudan. There is a mindset in the relief community that it is rare for refugees to return home; once they've made a decision to leave, it is always assumed that few are willing to go back unless the situation changes dramatically. Because of this history, I didn't believe that the decision makers in HCR were prepared for what was about to happen. HCR ignored Julian's request for instructions and when I queried Mike Menning, he told me that "plans were being made." Julian confided his worries and said that it was important that we have supplies of seeds, tools, and food available when the people were ready to go. He calculated that many would start leaving in late March or early April. The REST leaders added their opinion that large groups of single males would return, but insisted that REST would prefer that people stay in Sudan, since it would be difficult to feed people in Tigray given the problems of the cross-border operation and the scarcity of food.

That evening, I wrote a long memorandum to Nickolas summing up my worries about the situation and urging UNHCR to develop a plan for helping returnees. I pointed out that there had been several cases in recent UNHCR history where people had taken the initiative locally to get refugees back into their home countries without the concurrence of the country of origin. I pointed out that sometimes a flow of people home created a de facto situation that governments were often forced to accept. I also argued that in any case, the people appeared to be ready to go home with or without assistance and that we needed to give them support as an humanitarian gesture.

The response from Nickolas was that UNHCR was "working on a plan" and that voluntary repatriation was not in my brief. I was told to stick to operational issues.

I was preparing to respond to Nickolas's memo when a more serious incident occurred on the border. Hassan and I had been in Wad Sharife with a delegation of Ambassadors from the OAU when Hassan was summoned to the radio. REST had informed Osmon Mekke in Wad Kowli that they intended to bring a large group of refugees, approximately five thousand, across the border that night. The people were reported to be in very serious shape and had been out of food and water for two days. REST had taken the extraordinary step of informing Osmon in advance because the people were in such desperate condition that they wanted to insure that adequate food and medical supplies were on hand to meet them.

Hassan was astounded by the number. We had been graphing the influx of refugees at Showak and the trend had been definitely rising upward daily, but on no day had the number exceeded two thousand. Five thousand made Hassan very apprehensive and he was sure that he should check with higher authorities before moving food and supplies into position. So, he ordered Osmon Mekke to close the border.

This was a dangerous and impulsive action on Hassan's part, but illustrated the amount of power that this mid-level, civil servant had acquired. I had several immediate concerns. Denying the incoming refugees access to food and medical care amounted to a death warrant for hundreds of children. Second, it set a precedent that, if unchallenged, might enable Hassan and other officials to take policy matters into their own hands and reverse the national policy of allowing all refugees to enter the country. I was concerned that many officials in the eastern region would support Hassan's decision and make it difficult

for the government to overturn it.

At the same time, I knew that the reaction to Hassan's action from UNHCR and from the U.S. Government would be severe. It would lead to a major outcry from all the donors and I could see a situation arising where there would be pressure not only to reverse Hassan's decision but to punish him or possibly even have him removed. He was far too good an administrator for us to lose at this critical stage, so my problem boiled down to how to reopen the border without creating a crisis where Hassan would be forced to take a stand.

I was relieved when Hassan said he wanted to stay on in Kassala and consult with the Governor. This gave me a chance to fly down to Wad Kowli to check the situation first hand. On the way down, I decided on my course of action. If Osmon Mekke supported reopening of the border, I would fly him back to Showak to make the argument. It would be far better if a Sudanese argued the case than me or another foreigner. In the meantime, I sent a message to Frances Kavanagh, the acting UNHCR field officer (Julian had taken several days off and was out of the camp) instructing her not to report the incident to UNHCR until I had a chance to come down and see the situation first hand.

To my relief, Osmon Mekke fully supported admitting the refugees. In fact, he had taken a personal risk by allowing the relief agencies to take food and medical supplies to the border, something that could have cost him his job. The border near Wad Kowli is not really definite and, of course, the relief agencies had gone into Ethiopian territory to give what first aid they could.

Osmon agreed to return with me to Showak and argue with Hassan to let the people in. Frances reported that she could not inform the Branch Office since they had lost radio contact with both Gedaref and Khartoum for several days. She was willing to give me an additional eight hours to resolve the situation before driving to Gedaref to tell Mike.

Back in Showak, I waited impatiently outside Hassan's office while Osmon and he discussed the situation. Abu Rahil was in Showak for a meeting of the senior field staff and he and Osmon discussed the matter briefly before Osmon met Hassan. With Abu Rahil's support, Osmon was able to carry the day and an hour before sunset he came out with the news that Hassan had reconsidered and was willing to admit the people.

The incident died as quickly as it had started. At HCR, however, there were repercussions regarding the way that I had handled it. Nickolas was pleased that a confrontation had been avoided and complimented me on taking quick action. Others, however, were not so happy, Mike in particular. He felt that I should have asked him to handle the situation since this fell under UNHCR's protection mandate, and that HCR should have been given an opportunity to react to Hassan's actions. He and several others felt that I was usurping their role once again and the old questions of turf, authority, and ultimately, power continued to undermine the working relationship I had with HCR.

* * *

The last day of that week found me back in Khartoum once more, this time to attend a meeting engineered by Jerry Weaver. After our encounter in Showak, Jerry had returned to Khartoum and told

the Ambassador that UNHCR and COR could not get their act together to build the camps at Girba. Jerry had arranged the meeting to discredit everyone; Don, me, and especially Nickolas. He had prepared his own list of things that needed to be done and wanted to point out that UNHCR did not have the resources nor access to the equipment necessary to build the camps. By this time, he knew Don's role in the "airport plan" and had drawn up his own plan, I suppose to show that we hadn't thought of everything. The ultimate insult however, was that rather than going directly to COR's or UNHCR's offices, Jerry had asked the UNDP Resident Representative to "preside" over the meeting (in the ResRep's offices). If Nickolas concurred, it would be an admission that he did not have the full status of a senior UN official and was somehow "subserviant" to UNDP. I was surprised when Nickolas concurred to both the meeting and the location.

Don and I had gotten together the night before and our strategy for the meeting was to turn the tables on Jerry. If he was prepared to promise things, we would give him a list that he could sink his teeth into. All that night we made detailed estimates of what we needed to build the water system and the roads for the tankers that would be needed in the interim.

The meeting proved to be one of the more interesting encounters of my tour. Jerry opened the meeting politely but firmly, stating his concerns about the need to move people from Wad Kowli as soon as possible. He had developed estimates of what a crash relocation program would entail assuming, of course, that we had never thought of the issues before.

As soon as he finished, Don and I brought out our own estimates of the situation and proceeded to show that not only did we have accurate plans and detailed needs lists, but we had already begun trying to locate the various equipment and resources that would be required. Then we dropped our biggest package on the table, all the high cost items were laid flat out on the table for the Americans to pick up. The most important of these items was a truck mounted water pump that, according to an army engineer who had worked in Sudan earlier, was available "off the shelf" and could be flown within twenty-four hours from Germany or Diego-Garcia. I was skeptical about whether or not these pumps would be released to us since they were so expensive but we had called Jerry's bluff and he was forced to promise that the Embassy would get them for us. In addition, we requested several drilling rigs to improve the permanent water supply for several camps and, of course, the heavy equipment to build the roads.

At that point, the meeting should have ended, but Ambassador Horan let the discussion wander onto the subject of the cross-border operation. I commented that this was the best way to stem the flow of refugees; if we could get more food across the border, fewer people would come out. Jerry responded with the argument that he was well known for, that the people running the cross-border operation were amateurs and that they were being "lead on" by REST and ERA. He quoted several statistics that he claimed to have developed about the tonnages available and the food situation on the other side. These were old arguments and anyone who worked on the border knew they were not well thought out.

Nickolas rose to the challenge. I sat in my chair and listened in admiration as he slowly and methodically demolished Jerry's arguments. Like a skilled lawyer, piling facts on top of each other, Nickolas detailed the history of the relief operation, recalled statistics showing that the outflow of

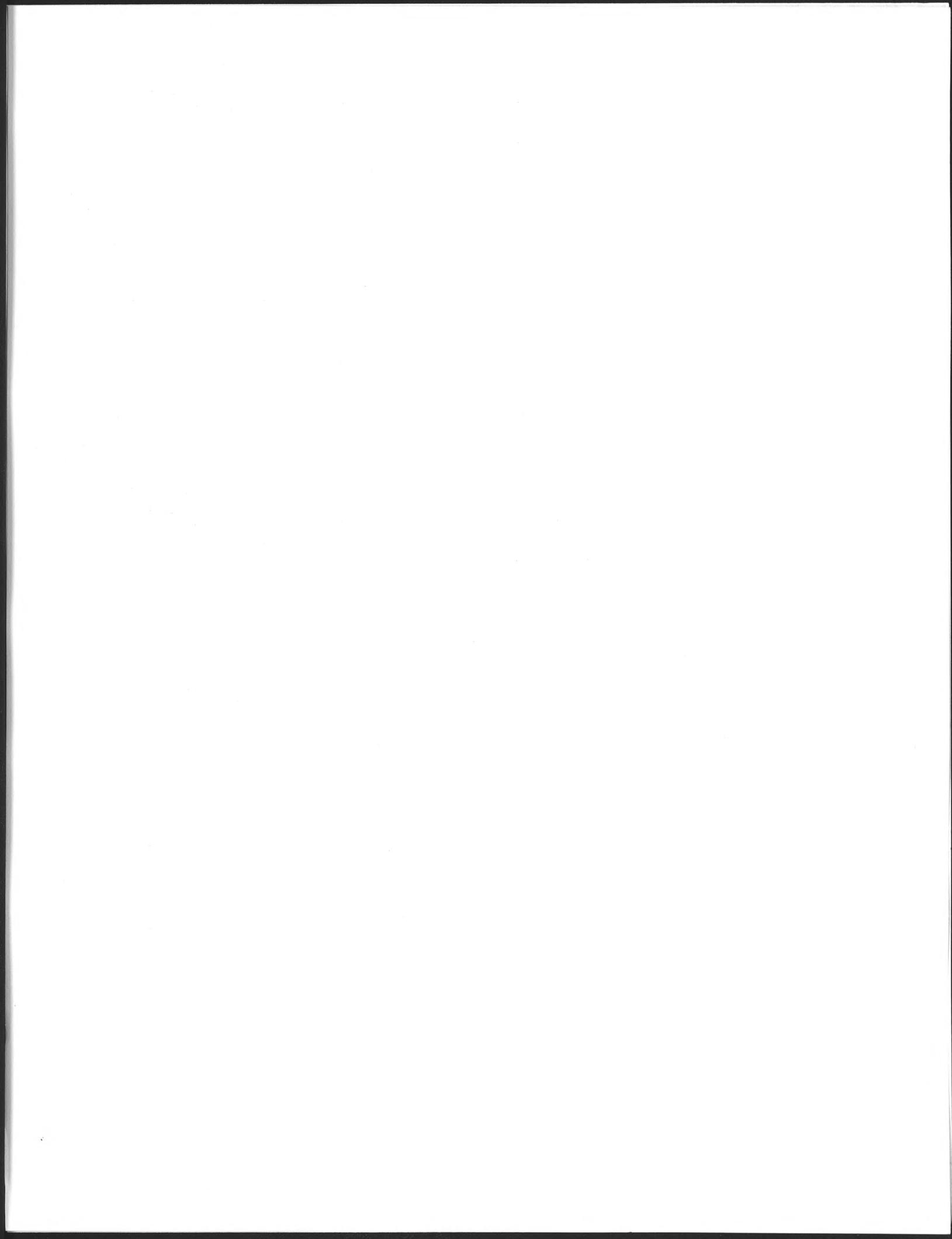
refugees was directly proportional to the amount of food available on the other side. He linked food availability in Ethiopia to the cross-border operation, and described the overall situation with a clarity that I have not seen in an off-the-cuff presentation in many years. Looking back, it seemed as if Nickolas talked for about an hour, but in fact his whole argument was concluded in under ten minutes. The facts were there and Jerry's position had been utterly and totally destroyed.

What happened next was even more surprising. Ambassador Horan seemed to have been hearing these arguments for the first time and said that the information made a lot of sense. He suggested that we get a small working group together to see how we could expand the level of assistance across the border.

This of course put Nickolas on the spot. While he favored helping, UNHCR could not be directly involved for political reasons. As the meeting broke up, the Ambassador asked Nickolas if I could be assigned to liaise with the Embassy on behalf of COR. Nickolas agreed, but pointed out that in no way should it be construed that I would be representing UNHCR; I would be there solely in my capacity as an expert on relief operations and as an advisor to COR. Nickolas reemphasized the point to me in private and said that I could go to the meetings on the condition that I keep him informed on each one and if political difficulties arose he would have to ask me to stop. This seemed reasonable and it was on this basis that I became involved in the cross-border discussions.

As the meeting broke up, the UNDP ResRep, Arthur Holcomb whom I had known previously from a disaster preparedness program in Fiji, asked if he could talk to me for a few minutes. He had been impressed with the way that we had planned the Fiji project and asked about the possibility of me or another INTERTECT consultant helping him to develop a plan for water resource development around the refugee camps. He had access to some funds that had been pledged for economic development assistance to villages around refugee camps. He proposed installing water systems in these villages in such a way that they would employ large numbers of Sudanese reducing the likelihood that they would enter the camps posing as refugees to look for food. He asked if I could brainstorm some ideas, put them on paper, and possibly help develop a program that UNDP could carry out in conjunction with UNHCR. I agreed to help him with this and hurried over to HCR to discuss it with Nickolas, who I thought would be very pleased. I was surprised however, at the cold reception that the idea got. Looking back, Nickolas may have still been smarting from the slight he had received at having to attend the meeting under Arthur's chairmanship and he may have seen this as another attempt by UNDP to "horn in" on the refugee field. In any case, he treated the suggestions of my helping UNDP with indifference, but indicated that I could go ahead in the discussions.

I was later to learn that this, as well as later proposals to help neighboring Sudanese, were interpreted by HCR as an attempt by me to "use my position with UNHCR" to obtain more work. I was just beginning to learn about the pettiness of the people in UNHCR.



CHAPTER NINE

BUSH AND THE FALL OF NIMEIRI

The arrival of American Vice-President George Bush in mid-March was an important mark in the emergency operation in the east because of the events that occurred around that time. It also marked the mid-point of my tour and was the major turning point in my relations with the Branch Office. After Bush's visit and the subsequent fall of Nimeiri's government, many events occurred which were to change our overall operation's strategies.

Many position changes occurred. UNHCR finally began to get some top notch field officers into the region and a solid field team began to form. COR also recruited new staff and there were several important changes in the senior staff at Showak, including the temporary assignment of Hamid el Fadil as the deputy GPM. (El Tarife had been given extended leave to attend a course in England.) Half a dozen fresh relief agencies also appeared on the scene which enabled us to widen our operations. We also spread some of the expertise around by promoting or transferring some of the better workers and putting them in charge of other camps.

The political situation in March was confused and unsettling. There was a lot of unrest in the cities, demonstrations against Shariya and Nimeiri and demonstrations for food for Sudanese were becoming common place. Many people smelled a coup in the air and it seemed to those of us on the border that it was only a matter of time.

In Showak there was a slowdown in the pace of work. Some of it was due to staff burn-out; we had all been moving at an exacting pace for several months, but there was also a sense that the changes in the air might mean a new policy and directions from a new government.

The question of the remaining Falashas lurked in the background. My contacts in the camps where the Falashas were living told me that rumors were ripe that they would soon be taken out of Sudan. Hassan had become closed-lipped about the Falashas and appeared to be nervous, as if he too knew that something was up.

In the northern sector a far bigger problem was developing. Large numbers of Sudanese continued moving into Wad Sharife. It was easy to spot them when walking through the camp. Most wore much nicer clothes than the refugees and they were decidedly more plump. After food distributions, hundreds of people would take the rations that they had received, line-up at the bus stop and wait for the buses back to Kassala.

COR had continued moving people from Wad Sherife to the old camps as a deterrent, but they were now full and the moves had come to a halt. Thus, thousands of Sudanese had flocked into Wad Sharife and registered. This put the camp population well over one hundred thousand. (Given the ease which people were able to register several times, the official count was well over one hundred and forty thousand.) This was creating special problems. Not only was it difficult for UNHCR to supply the people, it also made the governor cautious about opening any more refugee camps.

In early March, I decided to develop a plan for aiding the Sudanese and taking some of the political

pressures off COR. I proposed a program that would provide food to the hungry in Kassala along with a package of medical and small income generating projects. In the rural areas, I proposed that UNHCR carry out several counter-drought projects and pay the people in grain. This would be a temporary move designed to halt the flow of people into the camps and to set up a relief system that could be taken over by other relief agencies within several months.

I presented a written proposal to Hassan, who endorsed it enthusiastically. He asked me to explain the program to the governor who could make a formal request to UNHCR. So that Nickolas would know what I was doing, I sent him a copy asking for his comments. In the meantime, I discussed the program with several voluntary agencies I hoped would implement the program using food procured by UNHCR until the Sudanese, WFP, or other relief agencies could take over the project.

Nickolas read the proposal without comment and said that he would show it to the High Commissioner the following week when he was in Geneva for briefings. I also showed a copy of the proposal to Karen Abu Zayd, who was ecstatic about it. She felt this was exactly what was needed; it addressed the problem where it was occurring -- in the villages and in Kassala. So sure was I that UNHCR would see the wisdom of the program and how it could stop the need for the ruthless transporting of refugees, I began to work out detailed contractual arrangements between COR, UNHCR and the voluntary agencies. When Nickolas returned the following week, I was stunned to learn that the High Commissioner had vetoed the entire idea. Nickolas said that the "old man" was concerned that funds were running low and that HCR should concentrate strictly on the problems of refugees. If this was not a refugee problem, I didn't know what was!

I took the idea to AID and asked if there was any possibility that they could do the program. The Food for Peace Officer at the AID mission indicated that their top priority was the situation in western Sudan, but if CARE wanted to handle the distribution system in Kassala or in any of the villages, they might be able to provide some food. I then talked with CARE's food logistics coordinator, K.K. Kumar, who said that he would look into it. Several weeks later, CARE agreed to provide some food, but not in Kassala, and instead of using some of the innovative techniques that I had proposed, they wanted to distribute grains gratis. Their actions had no effect on the influx of refugees into Wad Sharife or the other camps and set the stage for a major problem for COR when they opened the Girba camps a month later.

* * *

On other fronts, things were fairly quiet. The moves were continuing from Wad Kowli to Sefawa and initially things there looked pretty good. Julian had laid a good foundation for the next moves from Wad Kowli and we were beginning the detailed planning for the first move to Girba Lake.

The Fau camps continued to be a problem. The death rates there were still high and despite our interventions, nothing seemed to bring them down. Rick Stekady had just begun a major overhaul of the feeding program there in conjunction with Angela and was pushing for more intensive feeding and a better outreach system to identify patients. In the midst of their work, I suddenly received a letter from

Rick stating that his request for an extension to stay on in Sudan had been denied by CDC and that he was being recalled to the United States. It seemed that CDC wanted Rick to attend a conference on immunization! I couldn't believe it. We had fought hard to get CDC to send someone who was qualified to work with us. I had not been particularly happy when they sent Rick instead of Phil Neiburg, but he had proved exceedingly capable and well up to the task. To suddenly pull him out to go to a conference seemed to be the height of insensitivity. Rick had been told that someone would be coming out to replace him but only for thirty days. It was apparent that CDC was intent on rotating staff at the expense of program continuity.

I flew into town to catch Rick, but only managed to see him for about twenty minutes in the Acropole Hotel just before he left. He did write a very detailed summary on the situation in all the camps and gave me a very helpful brief on what actions should be taken in the next several weeks. I was really sad to see Rick leave, we had not worked together closely, but in our few meetings, I came to admire his way of working, his conciseness and ability to get to the point and especially the easy way he persuaded the relief agencies to follow his suggestions. He was undoubtedly one of the most valuable persons in the field at that time and his leaving left a void in our surveillance program that was never filled during the remainder of my stay.

* * *

One of the reasons why I had not been able to spend much time with Rick before he left was that an unusual opportunity had developed. In my box at the Acropole Hotel, there was a note from Paulos Giorgis, the ERA coordinator in Khartoum. He asked for a meeting as soon as possible. As I was reading the note, his assistant, Gabremicael Mengistu, caught up with me in the hotel and urged me to meet with Paulos immediately .

Gayle Smith, an American who was working closely with the cross-border operations had told me several weeks before that the Eritreans had become extremely alarmed over the high death rates, not only in the refugee camps, but more importantly, in the famine zones in northern Ethiopia. She said that the leadership of the EPLF was being pushed into a position where there was a possibility that they would negotiate with the Ethiopian Government, something which heretofore had only been a remote possibility.

This is what Paulos wanted to discuss. He knew that Bush would be arriving soon and he suspected that I had contacts that could pass a message directly to the Vice President. Would the Americans be willing to serve as mediator between the EPLF and the Ethiopian government? The EPLF would be willing to talk on a wide-range of issues, including the possibility of a temporary ceasefire so that food could be provided to Eritreans in the remote areas and, more importantly, a ceasefire in place to discuss ways in which the primary issues between the two warring factions could be resolved. Would I pass this message on to knowledgeable persons in the Bush entourage?

I explained that the only contacts I had were through people like Tex Harris, though I did have one contact back in the States that was close to the National Security Council. I suggested that he try another route, namely going to Nickolas Morris and asking him to pass that message through U.N. channels.

Paulos refused, saying that he did not trust UNHCR and he preferred to have direct contact with the Americans (Gabremicael told me that since it was the U.N. that ceded Eritrea to Ethiopia in 1960, the leadership of the liberation front mistrusted any U.N. body. More to the point, since UNHCR had not been willing to recognize ERA or advocate their participation in the refugee camps, they preferred not to deal with them.)

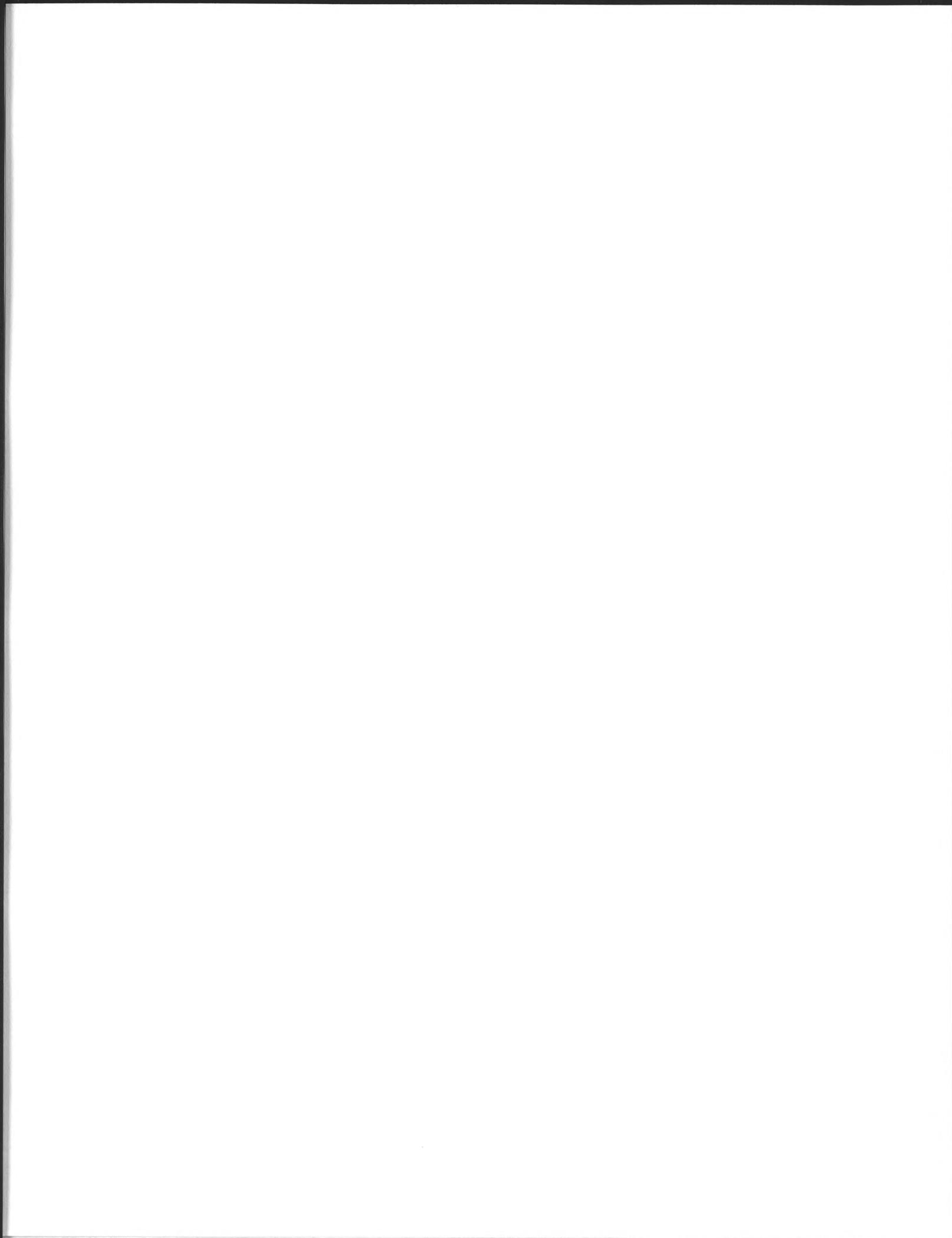
I was both surprised and pleased that Paulos had asked me to help. It showed that I had gained the trust of ERA and I was anxious to be as helpful as possible. I quickly drafted a letter to my friend in Washington laying out what Paulos had proposed and began preparing a memorandum for Tex who was due to return to Sudan with the Bush visit. While I was drafting my notes to Tex, Phil Sargisson, who had returned to Khartoum to help us complete the revisions to the Operations Plan, came by. I told him about my meeting with Paulos. Phil was nervous about the whole thing. "This is work for the Representative", he said, "not a consultant."

I told him that Paulos refused to deal with UNHCR or for that matter anyone within the U.N. If that was the case, Phil said, it was best to drop it or to let Paulos contact the U.S. through another avenue. I told Phil that I was sure that other agencies and other contacts were being used but that it was important that the Americans hear the same thing from as many sources as possible. I reminded Phil that a similar thing had occurred in Sudan in the early 70's, when people from the relief agencies brought about the ceasefire that led to the reunification of the country after a long civil war. Neither the established diplomatic channels or the U.N. had worked. Phil reluctantly concurred that I go ahead, but cautioned that if Nickolas found out about it, it might lead to problems for me down the line. Nevertheless, I drafted a letter to Tex (who was coming out as a part of the Bush team) and gave it to Don Krumm. In it, I outlined my discussions with Paulos and asked him to arrange a meeting.

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As Bush's visit grew near, I was determined to push harder for the swifter completion of the Girba Lake sites. Kent and Farouk el-Fil, the COR surveyor, had moved up to the areas that Abu Rahil had staked out and had begun laying out the sites. Several of the new voluntary agencies had moved into the area and had begun erecting facilities. From time-to-time, however, Hassan would reallocate key personnel or equipment to other sites which slowed the preparations. Most important, I could not get Hassan to commit heavy equipment, such as road graders, that were necessary to prepare the roads for the moves or to begin work on the tanker roads.

Another concern that I had was cooking fuel for Girba. At some of the camps, we had been able to procure charcoal from local sources, but the governor wanted us to find another source since the charcoal was produced illegally by villagers who sneaked into the remaining forests (and sometimes even went into the reforestation projects) to chop the wood. At Wad Kowli and at two of the Fau camps, the refugees cut down nearby trees in spite of protests from the villagers. To stop the deforestation, I had begun a search for alternative fuels. An ILO energy specialist had suggested using the waste material from a nearby sugar mill but when we burned brickettes made from the material, the bottom of the pots and pans



were quickly covered with a sticky black resin which we felt would make the refugees reluctant to burn the fuel.

One Saturday I received a message from Chris Thorne. Chris was one of the people who Omar had arranged to come in to help out in the Branch Office and he was nominally in charge of operations in the eastern region. Chris had discovered that the government was clearing large tracks of land in southern Sudan and was simply burning the wood after it had been cut. He had talked with the forestry people and had learned that they would be willing to start a charcoal making project and ship the charcoal to the refugee camps at fairly low cost. Would Hassan and I talk to these people if he sent them out? We immediately cabled Khartoum and told them to come ahead.

Our meeting was short and to the point, they could provide the charcoal, but with the transportation costs the price would be slightly higher than that of our local suppliers. The only advantage was that since this wood was going to be cut anyway, we would not be contributing to the deforestation that was occurring in the Eastern Region. Hassan told them that if they could guarantee a price of between six and eight Sudanese pounds per bag (i.e., \$3-4 for a 45 kilo bag) he would authorize the procurement. They shook hands on the deal and the charcoal team departed.

I felt that we had made a fairly good deal, for I knew that not only was the price fair, later in the rainy season, when it was more difficult to move, the price of charcoal from local suppliers would go up to twelve and even fifteen pounds per bag. We not only had a steady supply, we could get enough to stockpile adequate supplies in each of the camps for the rainy season. Much to my surprise, however, neither Mike Menning nor the senior staff at the Branch Office supported the decision and they urged the Commissioner in Khartoum to overrule Hassan. Chris Thorne stuck with the proposal and he and I became strong voices urging the Commissioner to sign the contract. My part in the whole episode was very small but the whole issue became a major blow-up in the Branch Office and lead to a confrontation between Pierce Garrety and Chris. I was never sure whether the charcoal contract itself was the cause of the problem or a symptom of other disagreements, but in the end it lead to Pierce demanding that Chris be transferred out of Sudan. When that happened, it polarized the office staff. Many in the field felt that we had lost someone who would push hard for action in the Branch Office and since Chris had helped many of the people with their personal problems, his removal represented the loss of a friend to many of us.

Even though it was eventually signed, the charcoal contract seemed to develop a life of its own. Later, I was surprised to learn that Hassan, who had initially approved the project, began to ridicule the purchase after it was signed by Hassan Aytia. More surprising, I learned that Hassan told several people that he had never wanted to endorse the project, that it had been Chris and myself acting on our own who had pushed the deal through!

* * *

Things were starting to pick up again as the time for Bush's arrival drew near. The government of Sudan wanted to put on their best show for Bush and that included "cleaning up" the refugee camps. I have

always been opposed to trying to make camps look better than they actually are. I think it is important that visitors see the situation for what it really is and I was put off by COR's insistence that we spend a lot of time and money making Wad Sharife look good. Some of our heavy equipment, especially a road grader, was diverted from far more important duties in the south to Kassala so that a road could be made out to the refugee camp.²

Hassan was anxious to use Bush's visit to line up support for some of his ideas and improve the COR position in the east. He sat down with some of his senior staff and drafted a long letter to Bush which he asked me to polish up and retype on the word processor. It was an excellent letter and one which they had obviously put a lot of time and effort into, so instead of doing it on my computer, I elected to take it to Khartoum and have it done up nicely on the UNHCR word processor by one of the professional secretaries. I explained the importance of the letter to one of the senior staff and asked if HCR would make a good clean copy and get it back to Hassan immediately. I was assured that it would be done. Unfortunately, despite checking four different times, the letter was not typed until Bush arrived. When I realized that Hassan would not have the letter, I had a friend from another agency type the letter and gave it to one of the senior UNHCR staff accompanying Bush from Khartoum to Kassala. He promised to deliver the letter to Hassan but I found out later that the letter was read to the Commissioner in route and he gave it to Bush directly so that it appeared to be from him and not from Hassan. Hassan was extremely upset that he did not have the letter to present and was furious when he found out what the HCR and COR Khartoum staff had done to him.

I missed most of the fanfare of Bush's visit because I was working on the final revisions to the OpsPlan. Phil, Omar, Mike Menning and I set up shop in a Khartoum hotel for one more marathon session to get the final draft out and back to Geneva. It was always good to see Phil and I relied upon him to give me feedback on my work as it was seen from Geneva. Phil indicated that things were going fairly well and in general I was receiving support throughout the house. He was anxious, however, for me to not extend my stay much longer, feeling that things were going too well and that once the Operations Plan had been finalized, the project could take care of itself. He indicated that there were still rumors that I was an American agent and he gave me a warning that many of my actions on the border were drawing criticism from the "Ethiopian lobby" in Geneva. Most important, he cautioned me to stop collecting information about new arrivals before they came in and to be especially careful in dealing with any of the cross-border issues. I explained that it was my policy to make these activities as public as possible so that I couldn't be accused of collecting secret information and told him of the successes we had had because of advance information. Nonetheless, he warned that Antoine Noel was using this as a way of discrediting my work.

We discussed the problem long into the night. I couldn't believe that the work that Kent and I had been doing would not speak for itself and I was reluctant to agree to leave with the job only partially

² At one point, it was suggested that Bush could fly to the refugee camp in a helicopter and I was approached regarding a suitable landing site. I suggested a field that I thought would be particularly appropriate, but the secret service turned it down when they found out that it was the defecation zone!

complete. Phil agreed to talk to Nickolas to find out how he was feeling about my consultancy and whether or not he wanted me to stay on. Surprisingly, Mike Menning had made it very clear that he hoped that I would stay until the 1st of June. Since my contract was up in a week, some decisions had to be made quickly.

The next day, Philip met with Nickolas who enthusiastically requested that I stay on for an additional six weeks. He was especially anxious that the Girba Lake sites be completed and the moves from Wad Kowli get underway before I left. He also made it clear that he was happy with the work that Kent had done and said he was open to several more INTERTECT consultants working on a short-term basis to complete several other high priority projects, especially road construction and the development of some new sites along the Fau canal.

With this in mind, Philip reluctantly concurred to my extending for an additional six weeks, but once again urged me to consider limiting it to only two or three, so that we could get on with planning the training program in Geneva.

The impending arrival of Bush brought the return of my old buddy, Tex. He had come out as part of the advance team for Bush's trip and the first that I knew that he was there was when I returned to my quarters in Showak and found several cases of Diet Dr. Pepper on my desk. Tex was always one of the most welcome people in the field because he looked after his friends. The night before he left Washington, he sent his wife Jeannie and their kids out to the supermarkets to buy up all the Dr. Peppers they could find so that he could haul them over in a C-130. At six foot-seven, Tex is even taller than I and the sight of this massive human struggling out of a land cruiser loaded down with cases of Dr. Pepper astounded the Sudanese as much for the fact that I commanded such a cache of goodies as the giant that delivered them.

As glad as I was to see Tex, it presaged the end of Don Krumm's tour in Sudan. I was terribly sad to see Don go. As long as he was there, I had an active partner in pushing things in the east and I knew that his leaving would create a tremendous hole in the operation. How big a hole, I couldn't begin to imagine.

Officially, Don was to be replaced by Bob Gersony, another old friend with whom I had worked off and on for about ten years. Bob's terms of reference, however, were different. He was to be primarily reporting on the situation and monitoring the cross-border operations. Though Bob was not highly experienced in refugee operations, I more or less looked forward to having him in the Embassy, for I knew that he had a direct line to RP and he would provide a way around Jerry Weaver and his machinations.

Because both Tex and I were busy during the day, we could only get together late at night. During the course of Bush's visit, we had several marathon working sessions in his hotel room going over project needs and the political and military situation in Ethiopia and Sudan. Tex was extremely worried about the cross-border operation. Several things had been proposed but it seemed that no one could pull them off. While Don had been extremely effective working with the refugees in Sudan, he had not been able to find additional support, nor convince the embassy to push harder, for increased aid to the rebel-held

areas. Tex hinted that several things were in the air (most of which I already knew about from my Tigrayan and Eritrean sources) and he was hopeful that Bob Gersony would be able to get the Ambassador to endorse a bigger cross-border effort.

As I mentioned, I knew of most of these proposals and was concerned that plans were being made in Washington without an understanding of the situation on the ground. One set of plans called for the development of some settlements in Wolkite, a region where the Tigrayans could safely move which would be much closer to the border and easier to supply. I had suggested a string of settlements that could also serve as way stations for the cross-border operation. The problem was the military situation was changing and I felt that it was important that the embassy get more accurate information from new arrivals before proceeding any further. It was clear from Tex, however, that they thought that Bob could handle the situation and did not need any assistance from me. My warnings that the embassy's information sources were not very accurate fell on deaf ears.

Somewhere during these discussions I received a call from Paulos of ERA who asked for an immediate meeting. It turned out that several of the cross-border people had been able to have a meeting with some of Bush's aides to talk about support for cross-border (score one for Tex and me!). They had been promised that there was "a good likelihood" of increased American food aid and logistics support. After months of having the door slammed in their face, this sudden turnabout had caught them off guard and their first reaction was one of extreme suspicion. Paulos had been told that CARE would be asked to be the consignee for an additional forty-five thousand tons of food and that Mercy Corps, a small Seattle-based relief organization, would be provided with trucks to assist ERA and REST in shipping the food supplies into the famine zones. Paulos knew very little about CARE and wanted my opinion about whether or not he could trust the Americans and especially wanted to know if CARE would cooperate or would try to co-opt the existing food supply operation. Paulo asked if I would meet with Phillip Johnson, the Executive Director of CARE travelling with Bush, to discuss the overall situation and try and learn his intentions.

Several hours later, several other people closely associated with cross-border programs asked if I would make the same call on behalf of the Tigrayans.

I was surprised to hear that CARE was even interested in the cross-border operation, since they had a fairly large program in the government-controlled areas of Ethiopia and to support cross-border would surely put it in jeopardy. At the same time, CARE was the consignee and handler of all UNHCR foods and a growing share of the food destined for the Sudanese. Because of this, I was skeptical that Johnson and CARE were really interested in getting involved in a politically sensitive program that handled only a very small amount of food in relation to the overall programs that they had in the region. Nonetheless, I called Johnson and requested a meeting.

At our meeting, I was very surprised that Phil talked so positively about CARE's potential role. He indicated that he felt that it would be possible to work in both cross-border as well as CARE's other programs. If it became an issue in Ethiopia, he said that the situation dictated that CARE provide food for the cross-border operation as a priority. I explained the importance of the program from the

perspective of our refugee operations and pointed out that when food went into Ethiopia, less people came out. I assured him that almost everyone on the border supported increased food deliveries from Sudan and that while the U.N. agencies could not come out openly and endorse such a move, it would certainly be welcomed from an operational standpoint.

Johnson agreed to give the matter serious consideration and promised to bring up the issues that I had mentioned at a CARE Board meeting the following week. However, he said that he would insist that the U.S. Government make several concessions and, most importantly, he wanted the Sudanese to give him a letter stating that they approved CARE's involvement in the cross-border operation and that to conduct these operations would not be illegal under Sudanese law. I was certain that the Nimeiri government could be persuaded to provide such a letter but I was uncertain as to how much longer Nimeiri would be in power. I think that Johnson also sensed that there were political changes in the wind and this is why he was asking for these guarantees.

I promised Johnson that I would discuss the possibility of a letter from the Sudanese side with COR and if it appeared likely that it could be arranged that I would get back in touch before he left for New York. This didn't answer the problem completely, since he still wanted some guarantees from the Americans, so I agreed to try to set-up a meeting with the American Ambassador, Phil, Nickolas and myself. Since Johnson would be leaving in three days with Bush, I had to somehow get the meeting set up with a very busy Ambassador who was shepherding both Bush and President Nimeiri around the country. Even Tex was unable to get to the Ambassador to ask for the meeting. For a while it looked like I was going to be stumped.

As the last possible day for an appointment dawned, I was called back to Showak to deal with some minor emergency on the border. As I taxied out, an idea hit me. Bush's plane had just taken off with the Ambassador on board for a quick day trip to western Sudan. As soon as I was airborne, I switched my radio over to the Air Force 2 frequency and contacted the pilot. Would he ask the Ambassador if Fred Cuny, Nicholas Morris and Phil Johnson could have a meeting with him later that afternoon. I am not sure whether the Ambassador was more surprised by the request or the way in which it was arranged but in any case he agreed to the appointment.

Unfortunately, the events on the border kept me in Showak until it was too late to take off and make the meeting with the Ambassador. Johnson, however, did have the meeting³ and while I am not sure what was discussed, I feel certain that he came away convinced that the risks to CARE were too high. In any case, he left the country without telling anyone what his recommendation to his board would be.

The next day I was back in Khartoum. I wanted to brief Nickolas on what had been happening and to report on the incident on the border. Nickolas was noncommittal as I told him about CARE's plans and about the sudden turnabout of American interest in supplying more aid to Eritrea and Tigray. I told him that the American Embassy would be holding a series of meetings with the cross-border people to determine the total needs in anticipation that the Americans would give CARE the food and Mercy Corps

³ Nicholas declines to go for practical reasons.

the trucks needed to transport it. I asked Nickolas if he wanted me to attend the meetings. Nickolas agreed that I should attend but only as an observer and should not participate in any of the discussions. Should anyone ask who I represented, I should clearly state that I was acting on my own behalf and was there in the role of an international relief expert, not as a UNHCR contractor. I made it clear to Nickolas that if he felt I shouldn't go to the meetings that I would stay away, but he felt that it was important that we know what was being planned as it might affect our operations and our ability to work with CARE since they were a major part of our own supply operation.

* * *

The following day I shuttled back to the Eastern Region to pick up some VIPs and show them around the refugee camps. Normally, this was a task that I hated. It took me away from more important work and I was certain that most of the people I flew around had no bearing or impact whatsoever on the relief operations. But this group I was anxious to see and to show them what was happening. The party consisted of Tex, Eugene Dewey, the Deputy Undersecretary of State in charge of RP, and Stan Stenitsus, an old relief hand who was advising the United Nations Emergency Operations Office for Africa on relief aid to the Sudanese. I was particularly anxious to show Tex and Gene what was going on and especially point out the new camp sites at Girba, along with the many improvements that we had made in Wad Kowli and in Sefawa.

I flew the plane to Fau, where I picked them up for the grand tour. Unlike most visitors, who are only day-trippers, they were prepared to stay for three days and we had a good itinerary laid out. For the next couple of days we flew around the area and I introduced them to the folks that I thought could give them the best impression about what was happening in the east. Bob Gersony caught up with us by car and each night that they were in the field we spent under the stars critiquing the program and planning more assistance. Unfortunately, there were not many beds in Showak and we ended up with Tex on a table, Bob on a string of chairs and Gene sleeping on a pile of towels on the remnants of a broken down bedstead.

The afternoon that they departed was a bit sad, for this was going to be Tex's last mission with the Refugee Bureau. Prior to his arrival in Sudan he had learned that he was being appointed to the staff of Chester Crocker to work on South Africa and he would no longer be working directly with us. In Tex's brief stay at R.P. he had made a substantial impact, helping to organize systems, conceptualize what types of preparedness activities should be undertaken, and perhaps most important, pushing UNHCR to get their house in order. While I was sure that Gene and Don Krumm would continue to fight for the same measures, Tex had always been a strong ally and someone that people found hard to say no to. We were all going to miss him.

* * *

The next ten days are something of a blurr; so much happened that it is hard to remember the sequence of events. As soon as Air Force 2's wheels were in the wells, political trouble began for Nimeiri. Every

day there were demonstrations demanding substantial reform, repeal of Shariya, and towards the end, the resignation or removal of Nimeiri himself.

In Showak tension pervaded everything. People could sense that change was in the air and more and more they were talking openly about the possibility of a coup. At the same time, my contacts in the Falasha camps began telling me about rumors that they would soon be leaving. I flew to Um Rakuba and found that the airstrip had recently been graded and that a tent had been set up at the edge of the airfield. At Tawawa, the camp nearest the airport at Gedaref, the villagers told me that several Khawajas (white men) had been seen on the airstrip at night. I concluded that either the Americans or the Israelis were about to make a move.

One evening I went over to talk to Mike Menning to see if I could find out what he knew about a potential Falasha evacuation. Mike professed not to know anything but promised to send a message to Nickolas to keep him informed in case something should happen. I was not sure that the urgency of the situation would be conveyed by Mike so the next day I flew to Khartoum to meet with Nickolas, but when I arrived, he was out of the office. Since I had some time to kill, I went back over to the Acropole where I ran into Bob Gersony. He informed me that that afternoon there was a meeting of the principal agencies involved in cross-border to discuss food and transport needs for the next six months. Would I like to attend? I agreed, and after lunch I went to the USAID offices (which were located in the same building complex as UNHCR) to listen to the presentations.

The transport agencies knew precisely what they needed and how much additional aid they could handle without being overloaded. I was impressed with how realistic they were in their estimates, but the message was a bit ominous. It appeared that they were already working close to capacity and that massive amounts of food or vehicles couldn't be handled by so few agencies. It was not so much a question of resources as it was managerial capacity and the ability of the roads to handle the increased traffic. If they were having problems at the shipping end, I could imagine the problems that the agencies inside must be having distributing the food under clandestine conditions.

While the picture was clear, it was evident that AID was not happy with what they were hearing. They were receiving instructions to prepare to ship large amounts of food and they wanted to move it. As I listened in amazement, several AID staffers suggested that thousands of trucks be hired in Sudan, loaded with food and then, in what sounded like an operation out of the days of the Oklahoma Sooners, would stampede across the border giving out food as they went. Bob and I looked at each other and rolled our eyes. He scribbled a note, "The Dunkirk approach!"

I could see that the meeting was getting nowhere and that it was going to take a long time before anyone could iron out a scheme that would work, given the realities of both the logistics system, the terrain and the limited capacity of the agencies involved. Therefore, I got up and quietly headed for the door. Just as I reached for the handle, the door opened and there stood Pierce Garety. Pierce looked dumb-founded when he saw me. I thought that he knew I would be at the meeting, since I had cleared it with Nickolas several days earlier and I figured that he was just surprised to see me in town, not at the meeting itself. I later learned that he had not been briefed and reported to UNHCR that I had become

intimately involved with the cross-border operation. From what I can tell, no one ever corrected this impression and the thought that I was violating UNHCR's position in Sudan was to become one of the major criticisms of my consultancy. As it turned out, this was the one and only cross-border meeting that I attended because several days later, CARE announced that it was not going to become involved in the cross-border operation, deflating the hopes that there would be major increases in food supplies during the critical period that lay before us. While I continued to discuss cross-border support with numerous people individually, from my point of view, the whole thing became a dead issue with CARE's announcement. Pressure within the AID mission for speeding delivery of the trucks to REST via Mercy Corps also died a long, slow death.

Why did CARE withdraw so suddenly and totally after first appearing to be so positive? And why did the Americans suddenly switch tactics from supporting cross-border wholeheartedly to reducing the promised levels of assistance, and delaying that aid for many months?

The answer probably had something to do with the lack of a comprehensive policy towards Sudan and Ethiopia. For months there had been disagreement between various factions in the Reagan Administration as to what role relief aid should play in their political approach to the region. It may have been that one faction gained an upper hand and dictated that the cross-border support be reduced. For its part, CARE may have decided that the risks were too high. Their programs in both Ethiopia and Sudan were reaching far greater numbers of people and were done at no risk to their personnel, prestige or ability to operate. CARE was receiving high marks from everyone about their operations in Ethiopia and had recently completed a very successful relief operation for UNHCR in Somalia. Many of the personnel from Somalia and Ethiopia had been assigned to Sudan and it looked like another major success was just around the corner. Given these considerations, CARE may have decided that they did not want, and certainly didn't need, the risks that a cross-border operation could bring.

After Bush left Sudan, he attended a donor's meeting in Geneva. It was reported that the Ethiopian delegation made it clear that if the Americans directly increased their cross-border support, it would jeopardize the on-going, American-sponsored, relief operation inside Ethiopia. At the same time the Ethiopians left open the possibility that relief aid could be taken across the lines from government controlled areas in quantities larger than could be safely transported by the small, poorly organized cross-border groups.⁴ These considerations may have caused the Americans to be pragmatic and back off.

And another consideration may have been that the Americans were contemplating other activities in the area, one of which was the Falasha evacuation.

* * *

It has been reported by the New York Times that while Bush was in Khartoum he met with Jerry

⁴ The Ethiopians stood by their word and soon permitted Catholic Relief Services and other groups to send thousands of tons of food across the lines. I was later involved in evaluating the program.

Weaver, the Ambassador and the CIA station chief. By this time there were only a small number of Falashas left in Sudan. With the mounting political instability, it appeared that it was now or never for getting the Falashas out of the country, and a secret CIA evacuation was authorized.

In the early morning hours of March ____, the day of the cross-border meeting, I heard a knock on my door at the hotel. One of my observers reported that the Falashas had been moved from the camp near Gedaref to the Gedaref airport. I tried to call Nickolas from the hotel but his phone line was dead. I borrowed a car and drove over to his house but there was no answer when I knocked at the door, so I assumed that he was still out. I went back to the hotel, gathered my belongings and went to the airport. I filed a flight plan to the east and awaited for dawn to take off.

A few days earlier, I had been approached in Khartoum by a person with a note from an old friend whom I had met in Israel many years earlier. The message said that the Americans were probably going to attempt to move the Falashas out soon. With the memory of Dessert 1 and other messed up American operations in mind, my friend was concerned that if anything went wrong there should be someone around who could cool things off until a backup plan could be activated.

I didn't particularly like getting involved in all this spookery, especially with the problems I already had with my image in UNHCR. I had only one interest in the Falasha operation; if it was going to happen I wanted it to come off without any incidents. If there was any trouble, I was sure that the backlash would affect the whole refugee program, not just a handful of remaining Falashas. For this reason, I had expanded my network of observers and told them to keep a close watch on the Falasha camps and the airstrips nearby.

I wanted to get back as quickly as possible in case there was some major problem. The flight controllers at Khartoum Airport knew that something was going on. They had cleared a flight of four planes which had been out of radio contact for several hours. Whether or not they knew what was happening remains to be seen, but when I told them that I was flying to Gedaref, they winked and said "there is a lot of activity there this morning". I was off the ground the minute that the sun peeked over the horizon but an hour into the flight it was obvious that the transports had already taken off. I saw what must have been the last one scooting beneath me, heading north and by the time I reached Gedaref there was nothing to be seen. Relieved that there had been no major incidents, I turned north to Showak.

* * *

The evacuation of the Falashas may have been the straw that broke the camel's back as far as the Nimeiri regime was concerned. In the following days, anti-Nimeiri demonstrations became more widespread and vehement. As it became obvious that dissatisfaction with the government was spreading, the COR people began to hesitate even more in making decisions affecting our program. This lack of decision-making in both Khartoum and Showak prompted Nickolas to visit the field, to talk to the senior staff of HCR and COR. Nickolas felt that Nimeiri was a survivor and that he would weather these protests as he had weathered those before. Nimeiri had announced that he was going to visit the United States to seek increased aid. Nickolas reasoned that he would not leave the country in the midst of such a crisis unless

he was sure that he would be able to return. Kent and I were not so sure, for we felt that the mood in Showak was a far better indicator of things to come than Nimeiri's past adeptness at surviving coup attempts.

April 6 dawned hot and clear. Nimeiri had been in the United States for three or four days. In Khartoum, street demonstrations and riots had occurred every day of his absence. One particular demonstration had become vicious and a number of relief agencies' cars had been burned. On hearing this, Nimeiri decided to cut his trip short and return to Sudan. At Fatour (Sudanese breakfast hour) I remarked to Hassan that it was now or never if a coup was to take place. Hassan and the others had been expecting something and Hassan's radio was tuned to the news. At ten o'clock, it was announced that the army "had taken the palace".

Revolution watching is something I've become accustomed to in my work. Few revolutions turn out the way that the plotters intend and often the revolutionaries are more inept and blood-thirsty than those they have overthrown. Showak went wild celebrating Nimeiri's fall. I was surprised to see one of our quiet and friendly clerks leading one of the demonstrations, which looked for a while as if it could turn nasty. In the end however, the only disquieting information was that one of my favorite policemen was notified that he would be arrested, since he reported to Security which the new government disbanded. In Sudanese style, however, he was advised several hours in advance so that he could get his affairs in order before his fellow policemen came to make the actual arrest.

While the celebrations were going on, Hamid el Fadil, the acting Deputy GPM, and I sat down and composed a number of radio messages to all camp administrators and relief agencies letting them know that they should remain in place and continue to do business as usual but to maintain a low profile for the next few days. We also instructed the administrators to closely monitor food distribution and rations in case there should be any disruption in the flow of supplies in the aftermath of the coup. Hassan immediately contacted COR headquarters in Khartoum to find out if there would be any major policy shifts in the refugee program and if there would be any problems regarding continued participation of the voluntary agencies working in the east. In what seemed to be an extraordinarily short period of time, Hassan informed me that I could tell the voluntary agencies that they were still welcome. I was never sure whether Hassan had been informed of this in advance or if COR had been able to make the contacts necessary in Khartoum with the new government. It is also possible that Hassan simply made this up based on his understanding of the Sudanese psyche. In any case, I was happy to let everyone know not to worry.

CHAPTER TEN

NIGHT MOVES

The term refugee camp often conjures up an image of a sterile looking camp with tents neatly laid out in a grid and people standing in long lines at soup kitchens waiting for food. While that is too often the case, with proper planning it doesn't have to be. The term "camp" is a misnomer. Any time that you have thousands of people living in a small, circumscribed area, in reality you have a settlement that needs everything that a city does, including water, roads, housing, sanitation services, garbage collection, etc. The primary difference is that the refugees are usually not permitted to work. They are a captive audience, living in an extremely dense human settlement.

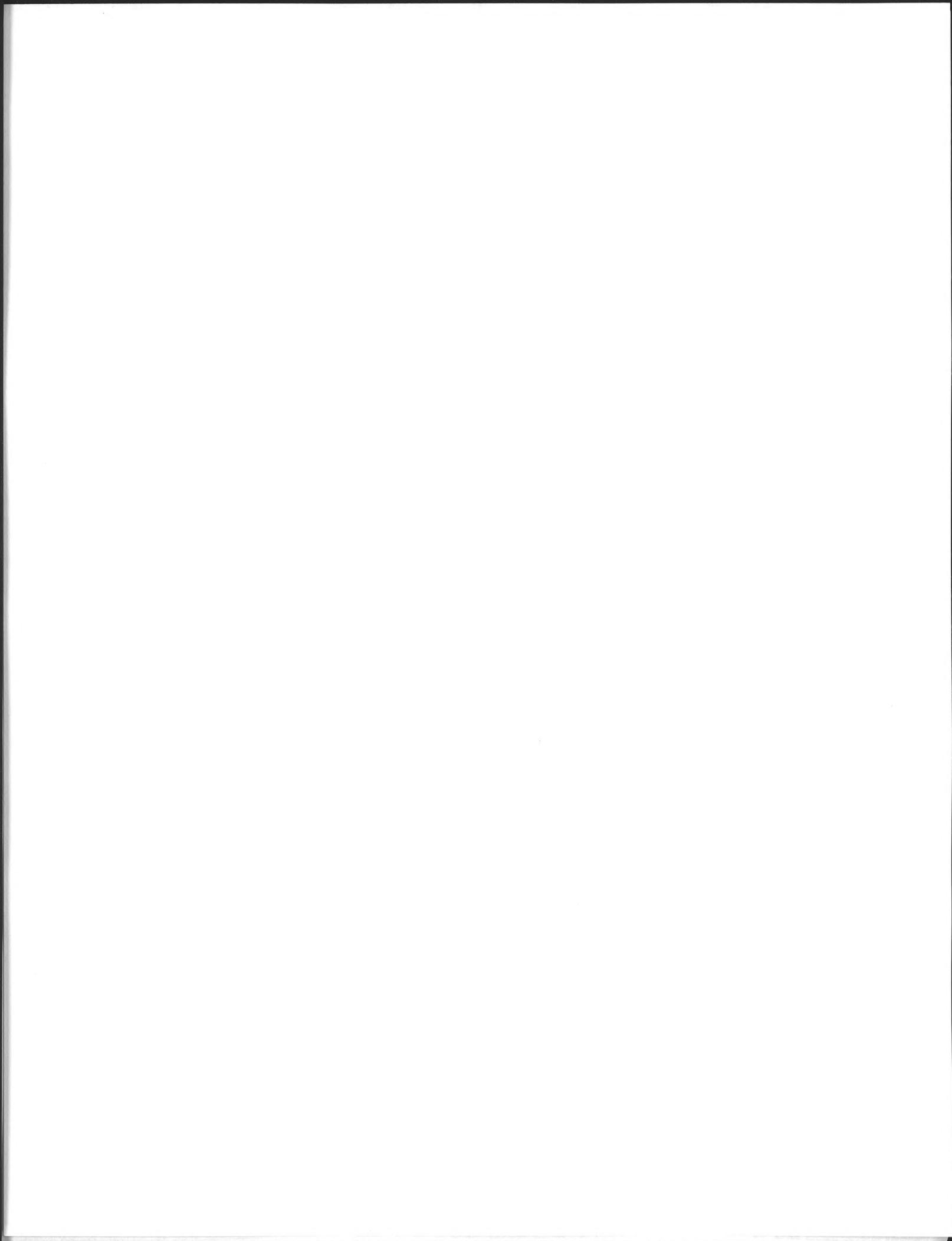
A tremendous level of planning is required to reduce the adverse effects of overcrowding and to prevent the spread of disease, while at the same permitting relief workers to move quickly throughout the camp to isolate problems as soon as they arise. The first thing that planners must do is select a good site. It must be fairly flat but have enough slope so that rainwater can drain quickly. There must be sufficient area for shelters, some private space for each family (perhaps to plant small gardens), as well as space for community activities.

It is important that the site be located near a good supply of water. A complete water system, with distribution points close enough to the shelters so that the people don't have to walk great distances is one of the first considerations. Since they will have to carry the water for drinking, cooking, bathing and washing, if water is too far away, people will carry less increasing the likelihood that personal hygiene will deteriorate. There must also be an adequate number of water faucets or taps, so that people will not have to stand in line for hours.

If access roads are not hard-surfaced, they must often be improved, or even paved, to assure access during all types of weather. Within the camp, adequate roads must be designed and built as well as parking areas for vehicles, paths for people and emergency access routes and firebreaks in case of fires.

Shelters must also be erected before refugees arrive. These are often tents, but structures made of locally available materials, supplemented if necessary with imported or commercial materials, are highly desirable. If the materials are durable and in good condition, they may be reusable by the refugees if and when they go back to their homes. When we at INTERTECT build refugee camps, we group the shelters into small clusters known as "community units" so that each family or extended family can be near their friends and neighbors. The clusters are then arranged into small blocks of houses that generally correspond to the people's village. The blocks, in turn, are organized into sectors of approximately five thousand people and four sectors usually make up a camp of approximately twenty thousand folks.

In laying out the shelters it is important to leave room for adequate sanitary facilities. Latrines are always problematic in refugee camps. Westerners seem to think that people who have never had latrines can get by without them, so normally defecation zones are left at the edge of the camps or rudimentary pit latrines are installed around the perimeter. The problem is, when you have twenty thousand people or more living in a settlement, the camp area is quite large and people who have diarrhea (as most do



initially) are not going to walk half a mile to the defecation zone. Thus, you end up with mounds of feces throughout the camp. This is one of the reasons why disease rates are so high, especially in tropical areas. There are some very good solutions to the sanitation problem but unfortunately, it is always a hassle getting the relief agencies to devote time and money to the sanitation problem.

Other physical facilities that need to be built include feeding centers, warehouses, administrative facilities, hospitals, out-patient dispensaries and housing for agency staff. All must be built before the refugees arrive.

Supplies of food, gasoline, household goods, grinding mills for grains, cooking fuel (such as charcoal) and stockpiles of various commodities and medicines for unforeseen contingencies, etc. must be procured, delivered and stored until the people move in. A camp of twenty thousand people will consume eleven tons of food per day; a camp of one hundred thousand people will consume fifty-five tons of food per day.

The Girba Lake complex was designed to hold a total of one hundred and eighty thousand people in a complex of three camps each with three sub-camps of approximately twenty thousand people. To build a camp this size required a land area of twenty five square kilometers and a source of water that could supply three million, six hundred thousand liters of water per day. The site, located on the east bank of the Girba reservoir, was approximately forty miles north of Showak. In February, Hassan had received tentative permission to build Phase I of the complex, three sub-camps for twenty thousand refugees each. Before the coup, planning had been moving slowly but surely. Hassal assigned Farouk el Fil, the chief surveyor, to work with Kent to lay out the camps. He was a tall, stout man and a true Sudanese gentleman. He loved working in the field and after talking with Kent, he moved his base camp to the site, worked out a method to rapidly mark each facility and shelter, and made some very helpful suggestions regarding modifications to the design.

For two weeks el Fil worked hard, surveying the area and laying out the camp. As the reference point for starting the layout of each camp, he used a circle drawn on the ground by Abu Rahil and (we thought) Hassan.

About a day before the survey work was completed, we ran into a major snag. A representative of the Health Ministry visited the site and when he saw the location of the camps, ordered that the work be stopped! He claimed that the authorization order for the camps had specified that the camps be three kilometers from the water's edge. The reason for this was supposedly to keep fecal material from draining into the reservoir (which was the source of drinking water for many surrounding villages) and to keep the refugees from bathing in the lake causing further contamination.

I had known about the Health Ministry's concerns but I thought that these had been alleviated when a number of sanitation experts reported that it would be virtually impossible for a lake that large to be contaminated by the refugees. It was pointed out that many villagers already bathed in the lake and that a number of far more dangerous sources of contamination flowed into it during the rainy season. Nonetheless, we had agreed to move the camp back approximately a kilometer from the water. The problem was that the man with whom we had made the agreement had gone to England and his assistant

only had a written memorandum which said that the camps should be three kilometers away and he was determined to hold us to it.

There had always been a struggle between COR and the Ministry of Health for control of health programs in the refugee camps, and by and large, COR had always won out. For some reason, however, Hassan was afraid to buck the issue. It may have been that he was uncertain in the aftermath of the coup where the power lay and didn't want to create waves, or he may have been under instructions from higher up to follow the instructions of the Health Ministry. In any case, much to my surprise, he agreed to move the camps!

When I heard the news, I went to Hassan and urged him to reconsider. To lay out the camps again would delay the whole operation by at least another ten days and since the water supply in Wad Kowli was still critical with more refugees expected, I did not feel that we could wait. Furthermore, the rainy season was coming. Many of the voluntary agencies assigned to Girba had already started construction of their facilities at the first site, and Concern had already erected one of their feeding centers and a reception area for the refugees.

Hassan decided that he would move two of the three camps back but only one kilometer. This way, we could still use half of the area that el Fil had already laid out, reducing the amount of surveying and cutting the time. El Fil then went to work on the new section.

Four days later our friend from the Health Ministry revisited the site. Taking a map, he drove to the water's edge and marked the kilometers off as he drove back to the new boundary. The next day the order came down to move the camp back another kilometer! I was furious. I had been told that the flip-flop arrangement had been approved by the Health Ministry, but it turned out that Hassan had not consulted them! I drove to Gedaref and talked for several hours with Dr. Nabil, the acting regional coordinator of the Ministry and urged him to reconsider. Dr. Nabil, however, felt under a tremendous amount of pressure to follow the instructions specified in the memorandum and he refused to overturn the order.

That night I had a meeting with our planning staff and told them that arguing was hopeless and we had to move the damn camps once again. Kent was delegated with the task of informing el Fil. I was sure he was going to throw his hands up in disgust and tell us if we wanted to re-stake the camps, we could do it ourselves. Much to my relief, Kent reported back that el Fil had simply shaken his head and then said "You can rely on el Fil. We will work as quickly as possible so you can move your refugees on schedule".

The main problem with moving the camp farther back was that it created the one problem we had hoped to overcome by putting the camp next to the lake, i.e., water supply. The new sites were approximately twenty meters higher than the level of the lake. This meant that to provide water to the camp, we would not only have to pump it out of the lake and up twenty meters, we would also have to pump it three kilometers to the camp plus an additional kilometer across the camp. This meant that a costly and complex water pumping system would have to be designed, purchased, imported and installed at a cost at hundreds of thousands of dollars. When we learned that we would have to move the camps,

we had briefly considered changing the site altogether but in reality, there were simply no other good sites anywhere within the region. Furthermore, we now had five relief agencies that had already set up shop near Girba and were bringing in supplies.

The history of the water system at Girba is almost a book in itself. Our original plan had been to install a series of truck-mounted military pumps arranged in stages. The first truck would pump water directly from the lake up through hoses to another truck at a higher elevation which in turn would pump it into a reservoir made of metal "Quick Tanks" erected by OXFAM's water engineers. This was to be a temporary system to get us through the rainy season after which we planned to build a more permanent system drawing water from the lake or deep wells.

We got the idea for the military pumps from a U.S. Army water specialist sent to Sudan in the early days of the emergency. He left a catalog of military equipment and told us that the pumps were available "off the shelf" and could be supplied on a temporary basis if we requested them through the Embassy. When we made the request, however, it had to go through "channels" and by the time the request had been transmitted from our field office to the Branch Office in Khartoum, rewritten by telex and sent to Geneva; rewritten and sent in telex form to Washington and then analyzed by another group of non-technical aid workers, our intent and meaning were entirely lost. Somewhere along the line, the concept of a temporary system was lost and instead, a Mickey Mouse system of German pumps, Italian pipes, Swedish couplings, British hoses and tanks, and God knows how many other national contributions, was pieced together and sent out to us, part by part, over the next three months. After two weeks of trying to make it clear to Geneva exactly what we wanted, Kent and I realized that the situation was out of control and that we had better start planning for an interim water delivery system using. So once again, I got in contact with Mr. Reliable, Luigi la Fonte.

Luigi flew out to the site with me and took a look around. He had no doubts that he could provide the tankers but he was worried about driving the trucks from the lake to the camp once the rainy season began. Instead of using his big tankers, which were tractor-trailer rigs, he suggested that we use smaller, lighter tankers that wouldn't tear up the road. Since the distances were short, we figured that approximately fifteen tankers could shuttle back and forth around the clock and keep all the distribution tanks supplied, at least for Phase I. The problem was, we had to build an all-weather road since the soils in the area were the same black gumbo soils that we have back in east Texas. For those who never had the pleasure, this type of earth has a very high clay content and, when wet, becomes so soft that when you walk on it, you sink in over your ankles. When it rains, if you aren't on a hard surfaced road, you don't move. Thus, while everyone else was busy struggling with trying to figure out how to get the committee-designed water system to work, Luigi and I knew what one of our top priorities was to build a tanker road that would permit the tankers to service the camps throughout the rainy season just around the corner.

Even after Hassan made the final decision about the location of the camps, things continued to move slowly. It appeared that Hassan was still afraid that the Military or others in the new government would suddenly review the refugee situation in the East and halt the relocation. For this reason, I felt it was

imperative to continue to push for the move so that the authorities would be presented with a fait accompli.

One of the activities that we needed to complete was the planning of the actual transfer of the people from Wad Kowli and the sequence of movement. As in the move to Sefawa, people would be moved and settled into the new camp according to their village and arrangements had to be made to keep the proper order. On the sending end, Osmon Mekke and Jean-Michael Goudstikker, Julian Murray's replacement, were in charge of making the departure preparations. On the receiving end, Mark Frohardt, one of the outstanding new field officers UNHCR had finally managed to send out, and _____, his Sudanese counterpart, were in charge of making arrangements for receiving the refugees. Julian, who now was a "regional coordinator", assumed the role of move coordinator and handled most of the operational planning. Throughout this period, Hassan remained aloof and wouldn't participate in any of the discussions nor make any of the basic decisions that were needed. To try and force Hassan's involvement, I asked Julian to arrange a series of meetings in the COR guest house to plan the moves. I wanted to bring all the agencies together so that an overall plan could be developed, written down and disseminated. I felt that Hassan wouldn't want to be left out and would attend.

The first meeting went off without a hitch and our plans became more defined and elaborate. But, Hassan still ignored our work and even though he knew about the meeting, he didn't attend, nor in fact, did anyone from the COR Showak office. The following week there was still no apparent interest on Hassan's part and as construction at Girba was now advancing swiftly, I was concerned that Hassan might change his mind on some critical issue at the last moment. The next meeting was scheduled for the Friday two weeks before the move was to begin. Once again, I planned to hold it at the guest house, but this time, I timed the meeting at the hour Hassan normally came visiting on Fridays.

That afternoon, approximately thirty people were assembled in the dining room of the guest house. By this time the plans were quite well advanced and we were really getting down to the details of the move. In the midst of our discussions, right on time, Hassan walked in. I could instantly tell that he was dismayed that so many foreigners were meeting to discuss the moves without the presence of any Sudanese other than Osmon. That was the message I was wanted to get across; either he participated or he would lose control. If there is one thing that Hassan did not want, it was to be seen as a bystander in the overall operation. Thus, on the following Monday, Hassan called a meeting of all the agencies involved in the move and presented "his" plan.

Hassan's plan was virtually identical to ours as far as the move was concerned but with one fundamental difference. Hassan wanted to bring the refugees up an unpaved, back road to the new camp; a move designed to keep them out of sight of the Sudanese.

There were two reasons why we had hoped to avoid the back route. First was the question of safety. The back roads would require three river crossings. Even though the rivers were dry at the moment, the trucks going up and down the banks loaded with refugees could roll over. The second reason was basically a matter of health. Thirty to fifty trucks in convoy kick up a tremendous amount of dust and people who are already severely dehydrated cannot endure a lot of dust-induced coughing. I was afraid

that some people would die and wanted to take the more humane approach of giving people at least half the ride on a smooth, paved road.

Hassan however, was adamant. He wanted to keep the refugees out of sight. I suppose he felt that the situation was too sensitive for hungry Sudanese villagers to see more refugees being moved around the country, a reminder that refugees, at least in the East, received more attention than the Sudanese. But since we planned to move the people at night and early in the morning, and to enter and leave the road from fairly discrete points, I could not find Hassan's arguments overly persuasive. Before making an issue of the matter, however, I decided to drive the route myself to see how dangerous the road might be. When I learned that one of the trucks we planned to use in the move would be returning from a supply run to Wad Kowli, I decided to fly down and ride back along Hassan's proposed route.

On the flight down I discovered that the whole issue was mute. One of the rivers that the convoys would have to cross, the Setit, was flowing. I returned to Showak and informed Hassan that the river was up and we would have to move the refugees on the tarmac road. Hassan acted extremely put out that nature had foiled his plans but grudgingly gave the authorization for the route as originally proposed.

It was right after this that Hassan dropped a bomb on the entire relocation plan. In our morning meeting he announced that he intended to move refugees from Wad Sherife, the Eritrean camp, into the northernmost site in the Girba complex! The reason, he said, was to keep up the pressure on self-settled refugees and Sudanese to leave Wad Sherife. It was the same old argument that they had been using for months. Instead of addressing the problem with better registration, good camp planning and assistance to people in Kassala, they were going to continue to try and scare the people away by threatening to relocate them a hundred kilometers away.

This presented us with a major problem. The agencies that had signed up to work in Girba, all wanted to work with Tigrayans. This was because many had programs inside Tigray and felt that if the refugees returned, they would be able to continue their work. If Hassan wanted to put Eritreans into Girba, it meant finding other relief agencies to work at that site. I was also concerned about mixing Tigrayans and Eritreans in the same complex. The previous week there had been a battle between the EPLF and TPLF in Ethiopia and relations between ERA and REST were tense.

At Girba there were three sub-camps, designated Girba North, Central and South. Originally, we had asked three agencies to each take responsibility for a sub-camp. The League of Red Cross Societies was to take the north camp, Concern-Ireland the central, and Medecins san Frontieres the southernmost site. Despite the fact that these were all good agencies, I could see that they were understaffed and would have trouble handling an entire camp by themselves. Furthermore, none of the agencies really had the technical capability of running a camp; each had particular specialties that were important but none was completely well rounded. Only the League had any real chance of building a staff that could handle a whole camp and already, the other agencies were looking for help from new groups that were beginning

to arrive.⁵

Realizing that we were going to be stretched thin in Girba even if Hassan's plan to move the Eritreans was dropped, I tried to convince both COR and UNHCR that instead of assigning one camp to an agency that each be assigned a technical or service role in all three camps and that several of the small agencies that had just arrived be assigned to the complex to work with the other three. Specifically, I proposed that Concern take on responsibilities for all supplemental feeding, that Medecin san Frontieres take on responsibilities for all curative medicine and that two smaller agencies, Christian Outreach and Community Aid Abroad, help with out-patient services, general camp administration and sanitation.

When Hassan announced that he intended to move the Eritreans into Girba North, I was alarmed because it not only prevented us from diversifying the service coverage of the agencies, it forced us to build two sets of health and feeding services, one for the Eritreans and one for the Tigrayans (because of cultural differences. This would double our costs and lock the agencies into the one-agency, one-camp proposal.

During this period, the government had authorized construction of two more small camps along the Fau canal, two hundred miles away. One of the camps would be built and maintained by the Swiss Disaster Unit until a voluntary agency could be found to take over and operate the camp. This left one additional camp unspoken for. If we could get the Girba agencies to agree to diversify and serve the whole complex, we could transfer the League to the one if the new Fau camps and thereby cover all of bases.

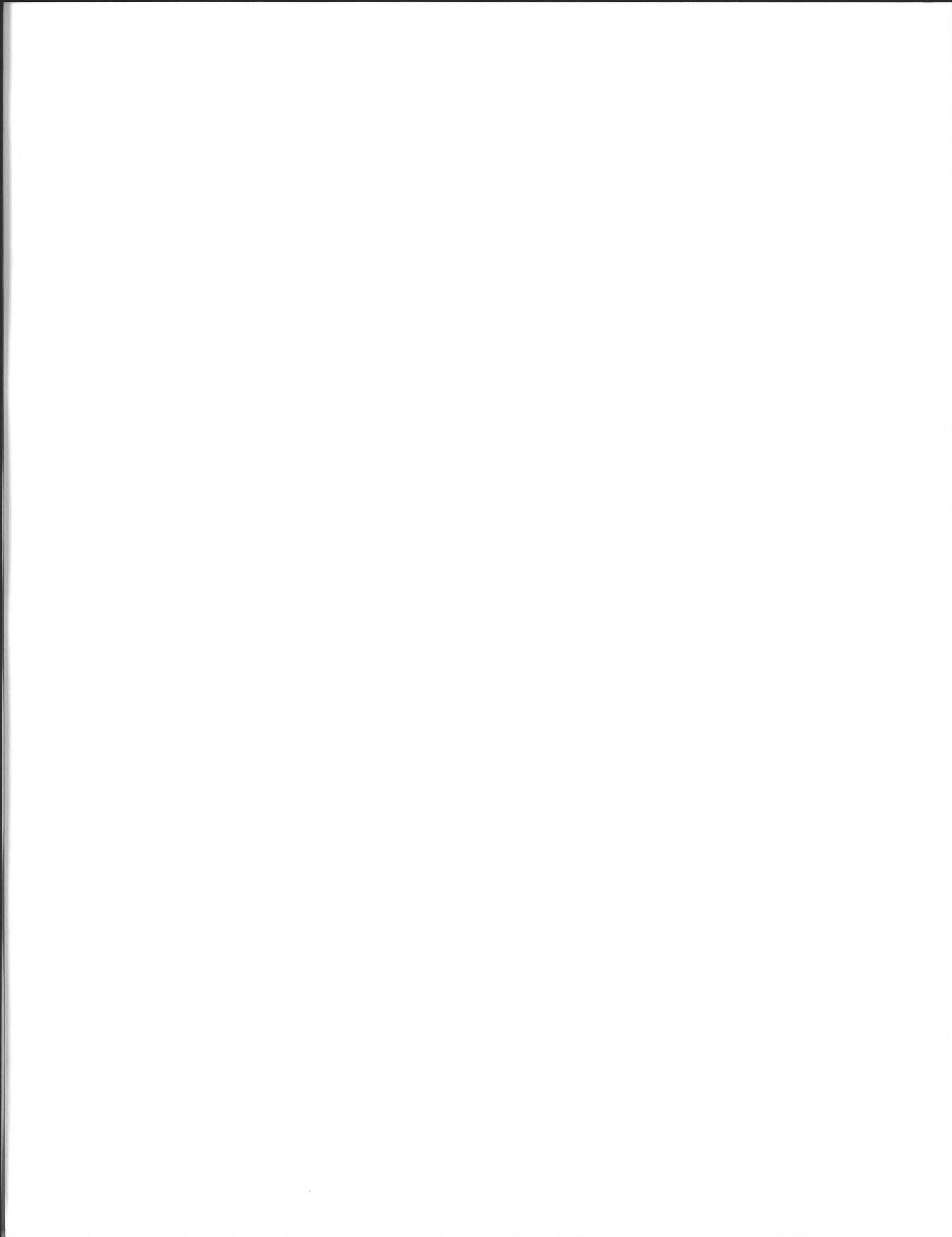
Therefore, I suggested to Hassan that if he was determined to move refugees from Wad Sherife, that he move them to Fau. This area was far enough away from Wad Sherife that it would have the impact that Hassan wanted. I was sure that moving people from Wad Sherife to Wad Kowli was not far enough to have any major disincentive effect on the influx to Wad Sherife.⁶ Since the League was the only agency that wanted to work with the Eritreans, the Fau move appeared to make a lot of sense. At lot of sense to everyone however, but Hassan. He refused to hear any more about our plans and ordered that we speed up the move from Wad Sherife.

The following morning I sent Kent to Wad Sherife to oversee the planning for the departures because I certainly didn't want Mohammed Habib conducting the moves without supervision. Kent tried unsuccessfully to convince the UNHCR field staff in Kassala of the need for detailed planning and about the most that he could get them to do was to look over the Wad Kowli plans for ideas. To insure at least some order in the operation, I asked Mark Frohardt to make sure that the trucks and reception facilities were in good shape, a task which he carried out with aplomb and enthusiasm. In the meantime, I kept lobbying Hassan to try and change his mind.

Why Hassan decided to make this move when it made no fiscal or operational sense is still a question

⁵ Vertical vs. horizontal

⁶ After the Eritreans were moved to Girba, it was learned that they simply rented buses and returned to Wad Sherife in time to collect their rations then returned to Girba.



I have not been able to answer. Hassan had introduced me to the new military governor of the region several days after the coup and he and I became close enough over the next several months that I could ask if he knew why Hassan had acted as he did. He said that Hassan had never discussed it with him. I asked several other key officials in the area if they had asked Hassan to "thin out" Wad Sherife. All replied that refugee matters still lay in Hassan's hands. I can't believe that the central government was overly concerned about the operation either. Some people may have been sophisticated enough to worry that if we moved the Eritreans inland to Fau that they might not go home as readily. Since Eritrean refugees have almost no history of returning, that concern would have made some sense. However, the issue never came up in any of the discussions nor, as far as I know, was it ever expressed by anyone within in the Sudanese Government.

As best as I can figure, I think it was just a matter of pique on Hassan's part. He was trying to show his authority and his ability to control the situation. If that was the case, he lost points rather than gained them and his obstinance eventually lead to the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars, a tremendous loss of respect in the eyes of the relief agencies and, as events were later to prove, it caused a delay in moving people from Wad Kowli that was to become critical within six weeks.

* * *

While the debate about who to move continued, the Girba Central Camp was nearing completion. I had quietly ordered Kent and the relief agencies to focus most of their efforts on the central camp so that we could begin moving the Tigrayans immediately. I was concerned that we were running out of time as the rainy season approached.

It takes a lot of effort to move people safely over two hundred fifty miles of rough and treacherous roads. Obtaining the trucks and fuel was the easiest part. The rest of the system took weeks of planning and preparations. This is how it worked:

Each morning a notice was placed in the camp naming the village to be moved. Refugee leaders were told how many trucks would be available and how many positions there would be on the trucks. The leaders in turn, would call forth those who were ready to move, usually summoning families, extended families and groups of neighbors. The people came to the outpatient facility where they received a medical check to insure that they could make the journey without undue stress. Next, they were moved into a complex we called the "departure lounge." There they were fed a light meal and were given plenty of clean water to drink along with oral rehydration solution. Since the meal was given early in the afternoon, people had time to digest the meal and take a quick trip to the defecation area. Several hours before departure time, the vehicles assigned to the convoy were inspected to make sure that their lights and brakes were working and that they had plenty of fuel.

At the appointed time, families were loaded into the trucks, given one more check to make sure that everyone was present and healthy enough to make the trip. A leader was appointed on each truck and given the refugee's papers. He was also given a supply of oral rehydration solution for people to drink enroute as well as several boxes of a Japanese-made ritz crackers (known locally as "kamikaze crackers").

The ORS was to keep people from dehydrating on the trip and the crackers were to keep them from vomiting.

Once the trucks were loaded, they were marshalled into a column at the edge of camp. When all the trucks were lined up they were joined by the convoy escort who not only provided security but also ensured that speed of the convoy was reasonable.

Half way through the trip, the convoy would stop at a transit center in Showak. There the refugees got out of the trucks and had a chance to stretch and go to the latrine. They were given a light meal of tea, crackers and biscuits and then allowed to sleep for several hours before the trucks left again for the final leg of the trip.

At dawn, the refugees re-boarded the trucks and were driven north to Khashm El-Girba, then east across the Girba Dam, then on into the camp complex. At the receiving end in Girba, preparations were just as detailed. The trucks were met as each came in and the refugees were given a check to make sure that everyone was o.k. Then they were given a quick meal. Next they were registered and underwent more detailed medical screening. Upon completion of the screening they were taken by camp workers directly to the site where they would be assigned a shelter.

All the moves took place at night. The reason was simple -- temperatures during the day were just too hot and the refugees in such bad shape that we felt many would dehydrate and die along the way if we moved during the day. The night was cooler, the truck drivers would be forced to slow down, there would probably be less dust and most important, there would be no danger of collision from oncoming vehicles, since no one drove at night in Sudan except along the highway and that traffic was minimal.

By April 17, all of our preparations were complete and the first Phase of the Girba Central camp was ready to receive refugees. All that remained for us to do was assemble the first group of refugees and to make a trial run. Therefore, we put together a mini-convoy of five trucks and two hundred refugees that would become the first of our workers in Girba. To make sure that everything went well and to view the problems that would face us in the coming days firsthand, I flew down to Wad Kowli to accompany the refugees on this initial move.

I arrived at Wad Kowli about four in the afternoon and went with Osmon Mekke to the departure lounge to check on the screening and feeding of the refugees. There I saw the people with their pitifully few belongings sitting in lines on the ground guarding their place and possessions while their children played in the courtyard. A few of the REST workers were moving among the refugees assuring them that there would be better housing and support in Girba but I could tell from the frightened faces that many people were not completely convinced.

At sunset, the trucks arrived and were quickly checked. Our team of Swiss mechanics checked the lights, the fuel levels, and the brakes. One of Osmon Mekke's assistants filled out the paperwork and then sent the trucks to the departure lounge where they were aligned and made ready for boarding.

Osmon then invited me to a quick meal at his compound and we talked at length about how the move should progress and how quickly we could empty the camp. Osmon was hopeful that we would be able to hire some additional trucks, bringing the total to approximately fifty trucks a night and empty the camp

in about four weeks. He reported that many of the refugees seemed restless and, indeed, as we ate we could hear a group of people chanting mournfully around a camp fire. Osmon felt certain that many of the people were not sure about the move and he said that the refugee leaders had been talking to him about the possibility that many of the families might decide to return to Tigray.

After we ate, I paid a few courtesy calls on REST and the various relief organizations involved in the move and then rejoined Osmon for a tour around the camp about 9:30. As we skirted the outer perimeter of the camp, we came upon a group of families who had their belongings on their back and seemed to be trying to sneak out of the camp. Osmon asked them to stop. They immediately froze, crouched down and covered their heads and faces. Unfortunately, Osmon could not speak Tigrayan, so while he skirted off to try to find an interpreter, I stayed with the refugees.

After a few minutes, one of the men stood up and said something to me in Tigrayan. When it was obvious that I couldn't understand, he spoke to the rest of the group, who stood up and then suddenly dispersed in twenty different directions. By the time that Osmon returned, they had all disappeared.

I asked Osmond what he made of the whole situation and he replied that he thought the people were trying to sneak into Gedaref to look for work. I was not convinced, and for the next several days I began wondering whether or not our moves to Girba were spurring large numbers of people to begin thinking about returning to their homes rather than moving farther away.

At about 10:00 Osmon and I returned to the departure lounge where the people had started loading. Two of our extremely capable nurses, Martha and _____, from the International Rescue Committee, were working with REST and one the COR staffers to supervise the loading. While the people were still afraid, once the move began they all seemed anxious to get it over with and the trucks were quickly loaded. The documents were handed to the team leaders and one by one, the trucks moved out to the point of departure on the other side of the river. By 10:30 all seemed in order and, after shaking hands with Osmon, I climbed up into the cabin of the last truck.

The plan called for all of the trucks to depart at exactly 10:45 and to maintain a constant speed of 45 kph until we hit the hard surfaced road approximately 3 hours later. I chose to ride in the last truck because I wanted to see how much dust the convoy would kick up and to judge whether or not an "accordion action" might occur in a longer convoy. (When a convoy accords, the trucks at the rear race to keep up.)

We had only been underway for about five minutes when suddenly the convoy stopped on the other side of Wad Kowli village, the small Sudanese settlement near the camp. I got out and walked up to the lead vehicle to see what had happened. The driver informed me that a refugee woman had stopped him and asked to be put on the convoy. It seemed that because she was nine months pregnant, the screening team had told her that she could not go until her baby was born. Since her husband was already at the site helping to erect tents, she wanted to be with him when her baby arrived. The Sudanese drivers did not want to admit the woman, but I could see that she was determined and was afraid that she might try to walk there on her own if we didn't take her. I told her to take my place in the cab and I climbed in the back with the refugees. With that settled, the convoy got started once again.

I will never forget the ride from Wad Kowli to Showak. For four hours, the convoy made its way slowly through the Sudanese countryside. It was a moonless night, but the stars were incredibly bright and I could make out the form of the landscape as we wound northward. The temperature had dropped to about 80 degrees, but the movement of the trucks made things even cooler and after about an hour, I cuddled up in the tail of a blanket with one of the refugees and spent my time stargazing. It seems like I counted thousands of shooting stars. The southern constellations were all clearly visible and throughout the night I kept my orientation by observing the Southern Cross, which hovered constantly over the back of the truck. Dust was not a problem, because to see better, the trucks had strung out at a decent interval. The drivers were as allergic to eating dust as me and they kept the convoy moving at a reasonable speed.

We traversed a dozen villages that night, each with its own smells and sounds. A few dogs came out to chase us and once in the night I caught a glimpse of a small wildcat, perhaps a cheetah, watching us stoically from the side of the road.

At about 2:00 AM a perceptible drop in the temperature indicated that we were approaching the Showak forest and about twenty minutes later we arrived at the hard-surfaced road. As we turned onto the highway, the refugees sat bolt upright in the truck. The ride was so smooth. Never in their lives had they ever dreamed of such a thing! The women squealed with delight, while the men oohed and ahed. One of the refugees told me that it was like flying on a magic carpet. One lady, laughing away, told me that it was the most exciting thing that she had ever done in her whole life. I couldn't help but smile.

After fifteen minutes on the magic carpet, the trucks arrived at Showak. We turned off the road and were quickly and expertly marshaled into the transit center where the refugees were helped out of the trucks, taken to the rest area and given some warm tea and biscuits. Then, after warming up, they crawled under their blankets and slept for the rest of the night.

As the refugees were bedding down, I walked among them with some of the transit center staff and a REST representative, asking how they were doing and asking if they had been cold on the trip, if the motion had made anyone sick and generally, how they felt about the move. I was pleased that everyone seemed to be making out okay. There had been only a few cases of vomiting and by and large everyone liked traveling at night. Things couldn't be going better.

I spent about an hour talking with the Lalamba staff, revising some details about the layover, checking on some problems that they had with some of the drivers. Then, after another cup of tea, I took the opportunity to grab a few z's in the back of Mark Frohardt's Landcruiser. Mark had driven down from Girba to join the convoy on its final leg from Showak into his camp.

At 5:30 the refugees were awakened, given another cup of hot tea, permitted to take one last latrine break and then quickly loaded back onto the trucks. At 6:15 the convoy again departed for the last two hours of the journey; up to Girba town, then across the Girba Dam and finally down the east side of the reservoir to the central camp.

As the trucks reentered the highway, the refugees quickly fell back to sleep and I watched silently as

the sun began to come up in the east.

At Showak we had been joined by COR's new transport officer. Abdul Ayum was one of the best people that COR had and after he was assigned to the job, he had taken part in the meticulous planning of the operation. No one was as determined as he that we handle the moves without losing a single life. He had planned to make the entire journey with me, but a last minute obligation meant that he had to join us at Showak. As the convoy moved briskly along the highway, I think he felt tremendous pride at how well things were going and suddenly moved from the convoy escort's position at the rear of the convoy, up to the front to lead us into Girba.

I was glad that he was so proud of the operation, for he had worked hard on planning the convoy and I knew that he wanted to lead the first one into camp. However, no sooner had he made his move and passed us, than the truck I was riding, the last one in the convoy, suddenly coasted to a stop on the side of the road. Since Abdul Ayum was at the head of the convoy, he had no way of knowing that we had dropped out of formation.

Checking with the driver, I was incredulous to learn that we were out of fuel. Following standard procedure the refueling crew in Wad Kowli had estimated the amount of fuel that each truck should consume and had only given each truck enough to make it to the camp. It turned out that our truck burned more than the others!

Just as we were all having a good laugh at the situation and that our predicament was unknown to the rest of the convoy, or the escort, our pregnant passenger announced that her time had come. One of the refugees turned to me and said "do something, doctor". I pointed out that I was not a doctor and was not particularly skilled in the matters of bringing more refugees into the world. Our driver began trying to flag someone down to take the woman back to the transit center where the medics could help her, but while we were groping for what to do, the woman simply laid down in the main cabin of the truck and proceeded to have the baby all by herself. One of the men on the truck produced a knife, heated it over a fire (which they had started to cook tea) then cut and cauterized the umbilical cord. While someone helped the woman deliver the placenta, I offered my T-shirt to help stem the bleeding and the driver found some rags to clean up the cabin. A few minutes later a group of doctors passing by from one of the relief organizations spotted us, stopped, and took over her medical care. A few minutes later another car full of relief workers stopped to pick me up and took me back to Showak where I reported the truck's predicament and decided to call it a day. That afternoon, Mark reported that the last truck had safely arrived in Girba and in his log he officially noted that Convoy 001 had departed Wad Kowli with 205 refugees and had arrived with 206.

Over the next month we were to move approximately 25,000 people from Wad Kowli to the Girba site, with convoys often approaching 45 trucks. All the moves were made at night, with relief workers, Sudanese staff, drivers, mechanics, the people at the transit center and the REST coordinators, all working around the clock to make sure that the moves were done safely and with the least possible stress to the refugees. Abdul Ayum worked tirelessly, checking the drivers, making sure that the vehicles were adequately serviced and repaired, making spot checks on the safety of the vehicles, waiting at different

locations to check the speed of the convoy, meeting with Sudanese villagers to hear their complaints and to allay any fears they might have of having thousands of refugees moving through their communities. Many nights, Abdul Ayum and I would stand at the edge of the transit center, waiting for the long, winding rows of lights which indicated that the convoy had reached the highway and then stood there as they snaked back-and-forth for miles, counting, one-by-one, to make sure that all the trucks were with the convoy.

I don't think anyone who ever saw one of our convoys approaching at night will ever forget the sight. You could see them out on the desert twenty miles away and in the starkness of the desert night, their weaving lights were both eerie and reassuring. As they hit the road, everyone in the transit center was compelled to stop and watch and even the few cars and trucks on the highway that late at night would usually stop and pull off to the side to watch in awe as the convoy approached. And, oh yes, we only lost one person in the entire move and that, from a freak accident.

Within a few days, the operation began to gear up in earnest and by the end of the week, we were moving about two thousand people a night. While on the sending and transport end, things were moving smoothly, the pace of construction in Girba could not keep up and several times we had to halt for a day or two while refugees were processed and settled into the new camp. By this time, the north camp was nearing completion and Hassan was beginning to push harder to start moving from Wad Sherife. I had been pushing just as hard to convince Hassan to change his mind and permit us to put Tigrayans in the northern camp. I still had a tentative agreement from the League to switch to Fau and the people in Girba central felt sure that they could handle an additional caseload of refugees in the northern camp. Hassan was still adamant, however, that the northern site be reserved for Eritreans.

In the middle of all this, Hassan announced that he was planning to take six weeks leave of absence! I had known for some time that Hassan had been planning to take a few weeks off but I was surprised at the length of time that he was now contemplating. There was no question that he needed a break; he had been suffering headaches and backaches for months which the medical staff diagnosed as psychosomatic, a result of the strain he was under. Ever since the coup, he had been under additional pressures, not knowing for sure whether or not the decisions he was making would be acceptable to the new government and I think he wanted a chance to let things simmer down politically and see where he stood. Still, I was surprised that he would be willing to be gone so long, since his number two, El Tarife, was still on leave and it meant that el Fadil, who was only the acting deputy, would assume the role of GPM in his absence. On a personal level, I was very happy that Fadil would be taking over. In the month that Fadil had been in Showak, I had come to admire him as a hard worker, as a conscientious and dedicated program officer and most importantly, someone we that could rely on to make decisions. Kent had been the first in our group to recognize what a great worker Fadil was. They had worked closely planning projects for both Wad Sherife and Girba and Kent knew instinctively who was a good worker and who was not. Sure enough, in the first few weeks that we had worked together, Fadil and I developed a good working relationship and there was no one in the organization whom I respected more or thought could do a better job in Hassan's absence.

Before Hassan's departure, we wanted to have one meeting in Khartoum with the Commissioner to review all the pending issues and make sure that everything was set. Afterwards, Hassan planned to spend a week in the west with his family and then return to Showak to pick up his children and then leave for Cairo. On April 19, I flew Hassan to Khartoum for our meeting with the Commissioner and the senior Branch Office staff.

The meeting turned out to be a disaster. Hassan suddenly decided to veto a number of the things which the Branch Office and I had assumed would be approved in the meeting. Two of the most important were stockpiling cholera supplies at Wad Kowli and accepting an offer of the Swiss Disaster Unit to build a bridge across the Atbara at Wad Kowli to connect the camp, which was on the eastern side of the river, with the road and staff quarters on the western side.

Hassan argued that stockpiling cholera supplies would only alarm the general public and if cholera were to break out, he felt that we could quickly move to counter it once it was confirmed. In regards to the bridge, Hassan said that he didn't want it built there because "it would make it too easy for the refugees to get into Sudan". I think he also felt that any sign of growing permanency might worry the government and cause them to delay the moves. On this last point, I was aware of the risks but at the same time, I felt that the bridge was needed in case we could not complete the moves and people were stuck in Wad Kowli through the rainy season. If we couldn't get across the river with food and supplies, many lives could be threatened.

Hassan had long been pushing for a bridge at Showak to serve the older camps in that area and he hinted that he would permit the bridge at Wad Kowli if UNHCR would find someone to build a Bailey Bridge⁷ at Showak first. We argued that a number of engineers had looked at the Showak crossing and said that it was not economically feasible, but to no avail. No bridge at Showak, no bridge at Wad Kowli.

Another issue that raised his pique was the question of heavy equipment to initiate work on the roads in Wad Kowli, Girba, and Wad Sherife. Several light rains in the area had convinced me that we needed to start working on internal, and especially tanker, roads immediately. A contract with a German construction company had been pending at UNHCR for months with no action and several times, deals that Michael Day-Thompson had been able to put together with local contractors to loan us the equipment had all fallen through or been vetoed by Hassan. Time was running out and since it was now clear that we would be forced to use tankers through the rainy season at Girba, I knew that we had to get concurrence on road construction immediately. The problem was that Hassan was trying to force UNHCR to buy him the equipment and provide staff and training so that he would have a permanent road crew. In fact, HCR had ordered several road graders. (This was the only type of road equipment that COR was familiar with and the graders themselves could not actually build a road, only keep it smooth). But not only was the equipment too expensive, it would take months to arrive -- long after the rainy season began.

⁷ A Bailey Bridge is a prefabricated military bridge, sometimes supported on pontoon.s

After several rounds of arguing for a brilliant deal worked out by Michael with the local Catapiller dealer, Hassan issued a final denial. The only way that roads could be built, he said, was with COR equipment.

I had missed the final part of the meeting due to another commitment and when I returned to UNHCR, Karen Abu Zayd was just coming in and she was fuming over Hassan's vetoes. The Swiss Disaster Unit, which had been standing by to sign the bridge agreement, were about to be told that the deal was off. Karen and Nickolas were resigned that Hassan's decrees were final, but I urged them to give me 48 hours to try and work things out and convince COR to accept our proposals. I knew that I was playing a dangerous game. Up until then, I still enjoyed Hassan's confidence and close friendship, and to challenge him directly on these points, especially after he had gone on vacation, would be to bring about a breach which would probably be irreparable. Nonetheless, that night I began working out a strategy and outlining arguments to take directly to Commissioner al Ahmedi.

The next morning, I met briefly with Karen to go over my strategy and sought her advise on how best to approach the Commissioner. She suggested that the best way was to meet with Hassan Attiya first, win him over and then the three of us would meet with and try and convince the Commissioner. She reasoned that there was safety in numbers.

All that morning, I presented my arguments to Hassan Attiya. Laying them out as logically as I could, I told him what the needs were, what our priorities were for the next few months and what could happen if we didn't act now. Going all the way, I built my case around the need to reserve all three of the Girba Lake sites for Tigrayans and transfer the Eritreans and the League to Fau. Hassan was receptive and agreed to take our side. He and Karen felt that we could convince the Commissioner to accept one or more of our ideas but not all of them and he asked what was the most important thing to push for. I quickly decided that the most important, though the most controversial, was to keep the Girba complex all Tigrayan. He agreed, and that afternoon we met for several hours with Commissioner al Ahmedi to lay out our plans.

The Commissioner agreed in principle to our proposals but he was unwilling to make a final decision until he heard from Fadil. If Fadil concurred, he would permit the Eritreans to be transferred to Fau. On the matter of the bridge, he agreed to prepare a letter authorizing the Swiss to build the bridge. Karen, who had anticipated that he might do this, had prepared the letter and whipped it out and got his signature on the spot. As for cholera and the roads, they would have to wait.

The next morning I flew back to Showak where I handed the bridge authorization letter to Willie Strub, the head of the Swiss Disaster Team. He was ecstatic and surprised, since he had learned that the bridge offer had originally been rejected. Then he quickly left Showak to stop the head of the bridge construction team from returning to Switzerland.

Next I met with Fadil and laid out the recommendations I had presented to the Commissioner and Hassan Attiya being careful to point out Hassan Osmon's objections to each. Fadil listened intently to my arguments, then asked for half an hour to think them over. Thirty minutes later I returned and he gave me a "thumbs up". It made sense, he said. He had reviewed the files to find out if there were any

political reasons why Hassan would insist on moving Eritreans to Girba and could find none. He immediately composed a radio message to el Ahmedi concurring that Girba north be reserved for Tigrayans.

With this information, I contacted Mark Frohardt and told him to prepare the League for a move to Fau. Kent and Abdul Ayum began working out the departure arrangements at Wad Sherife and a German construction team moved onto the Fau IV site to begin setting up the water system so we could begin the moves there in two weeks. In the meantime, we increased the number of trucks on the convoys from Wad Kowli to Girba Central and transferred some of the equipment working in Girba South to the north site to speed up construction there. Within days we planned to begin taking several thousand refugees per day. Fadil and I calculated that once the north site was ready, we could empty Wad Kowli in two weeks.

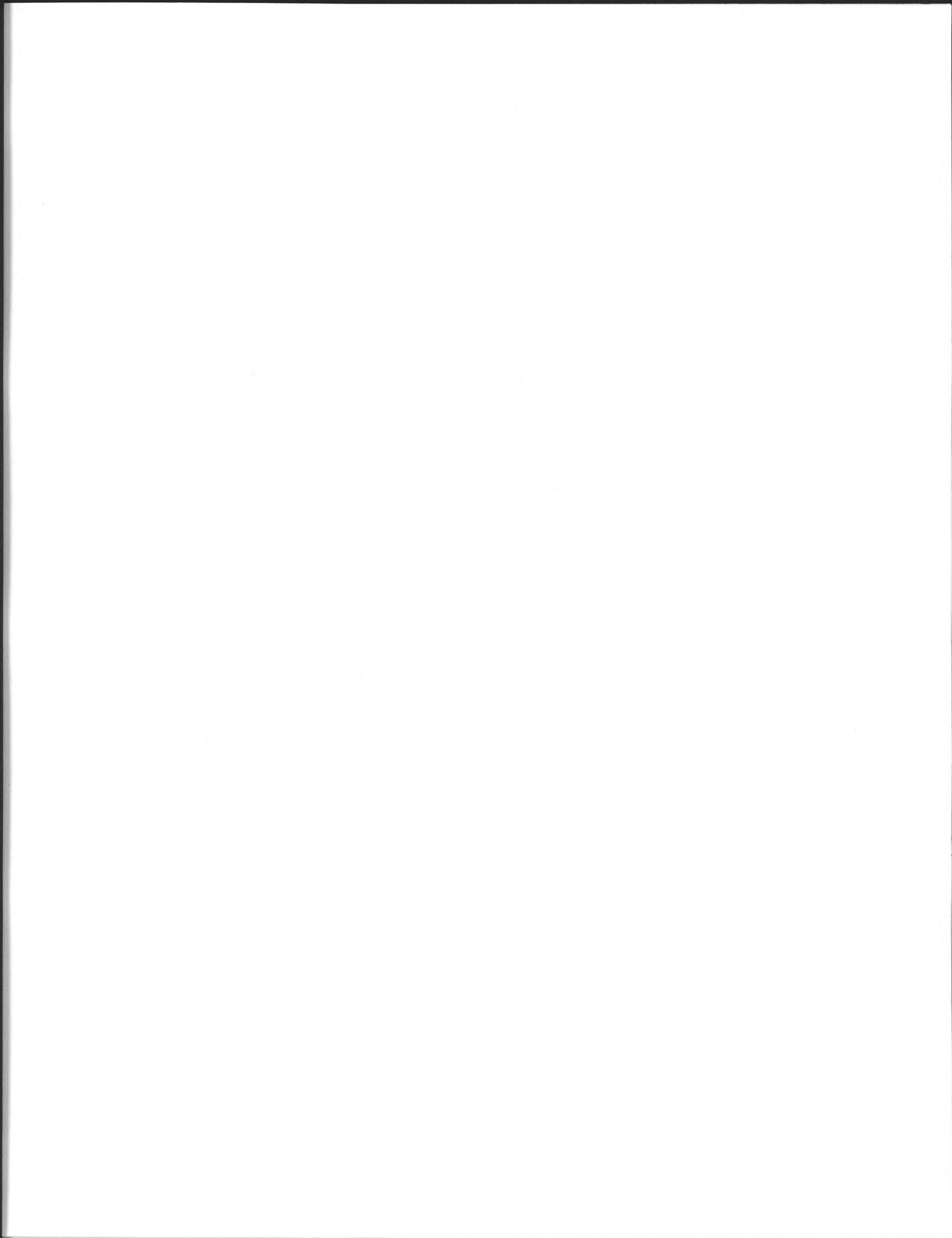
Things were moving along briskly with only several days to go before our first move of Tigrayans to the northern site, when Hassan returned to Showak. He checked into the office, where Fadil proudly told him of our decisions about the move. Hassan listened in quiet silence and then summoned me for an impromptu conference. He was furious! He knew instinctively who was responsible for countermanding his plans. He was so furious he could barely speak English. He demanded that by 8:00 o'clock the next morning, I present a detailed, written operations plan for moving Eritreans into Girba North.

I returned to my office and spent the night composing a detailed set of recommendations but, rather than write an operations plan, I carefully laid out all the arguments for and against the moves that he had mandated. I wanted on record, in writing, the specific reasons why such a move was illogical and I built the strongest possible case I could for sending the Eritreans to Fau. I took full responsibility for changing his plans and tried to divert any criticism away from Fadil. Most important, I pointed out that if he persisted in sending people from Wad Sherife to Girba North, it would be the end of our moves in all quarters, since we did not have the necessary relief agencies to operate the Fau camps. I pointed out that the rainy season was upon us and we had to make some hard decisions quick.

The next morning I presented my briefing paper and recommendations to Hassan. Once again, he was livid. He reminded me that I was only a consultant, and not a decision-maker and told me that his position was fixed. "I don't have to be rational, he said, "I am Sudanese". Fadil sat quietly at the table listening to the discussion. Finally the point came where I took responsibility for the decisions. At that point, Fadil quietly said something to Hassan in Arabic and then turned to me and said, "I told him that the decision was mine and that you had done your job properly. You made your recommendations based on what you thought would be best for both the refugees and Sudan and that is what you are contracted to do. I also told him that both Commissioner al Ahmedi and I supported your recommendations based on our own considerations. You should not try and take the responsibility, it is not yours."

Hassan then rose from the table and said, "the matter is not to be discussed further. I have made my decision. I know you both will implement it and I know that you will plan the operation well." With this, he shook our hands and left.

As he left the room I knew that our working relationship was still intact but that the close friendship that we had enjoyed was gone forever. I felt miserable at the loss of this friendship for it meant a lot to me, but I was also aware that a much closer and deeper friendship had been cemented that morning and it marked the beginning of one of the most exciting six-week periods of my life.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

EL FADIL

Hamid el Fadil was born in a small village southeast of Khartoum. He entered government administrative service shortly after graduating from college and after working with the provincial services as a planner, he joined COR and soon became the administrator of an old refugee camp called Es Suki.

Within COR he was very highly regarded, not only as a skilled administrator, but also as someone for whom it was good to work. It was said that he was honest and fair with his staff and he was regarded by many as a person who had a good future within the agency.

When I first learned that Fadil was going to become the Acting Deputy GPM, I heard a few groans from the people at UNHCR. Most of the complaints were the usual unsubstantiated gripes that khawajas (white folks) make about the Sudanese, such as, "he permits things to disappear from the warehouse", or "he is too closely linked to contractors", etc. But the one which worried me most was a comment made by one of the top people in the Branch Office who said, "Fadil is no friend of the refugees".

I was a bit concerned over the negative comments and over coffee one morning I asked Karen Abu Zayd what she thought of Fadil. Her impressions were far more positive and she attributed most of the negative comments to the fact that Fadil always stood his ground and showed no deference to Europeans.

As I mentioned earlier, Kent Hardin was the first of our group to really get to know Fadil. They had worked closely on the minutia of camp planning, logistics, etc., and Kent quickly developed a high regard for Fadil's abilities. Fadil and I officed in the same building and I soon found that he and I were usually the only ones working late at night. Our friendship was still superficial, but I quickly gained respect for his commitment and devotion to work. He was not a man who would ask others to do what he wouldn't and he often carried far more than his fair share of the workload.

In the week immediately before the coup, Fadil and I had several occasions to work fairly close. We had been working with Hassan to acquire the Fau IV and V sites and made several trips together to view problems in the camps. Fadil quickly learned how to use my airplane to his advantage, something that no one else in the east had mastered and he found that being able to go out to a camp and solve a problem personally met with his own style of work. When the coup occurred, it was Fadil who kept things moving in Showak. While Hassan ran off to consult with the political authorities and the new military leaders, Fadil kept communications open to the camps, reassured the foreign workers that they would be safe and continued to handle the paperwork that kept the food and supplies moving during that confusing period.

In the week prior to Hassan's departure, Fadil and I had become even closer. In a confidential memorandum to Nickolas Morris, I wrote that I was looking forward to working with Fadil once that Hassan was gone, for I felt that Fadil was someone who would make decisions based on pragmatic and operational considerations and not so much on politics.

Fadil's first week as Acting GPM was one of the craziest weeks of the entire relief operation and it gave me an idea about the type of man that I was working with. The night that Hassan returned to

Showak, Barbara Hendrie, an American working with REST, came to visit me via the nightly convoy from Wad Kowli to Girba. She reported that she had heard that the border had been closed to a new group of refugees that were planning to cross from Ethiopia into Sudan. I asked Fadil if this was true, was the border closed? He seemed uncomfortable when I asked, but assured me that the border was still open.

The next day I sent a radio message to Jean-Michele Goudstikker, the UNHCR Field Officer in Wad Kowli, and asked if he had any news. He informed me that there had been no entries from Tigray that day, but he did not know of any official word that the border was closed.

The next day I was back in Khartoum to pick up some supplies and was just leaving when I encountered Jean-Michele at the airport. He was all excited because a couple of things had happened which he had been unable to communicate to UNHCR or to Showak. It seems that while the border was still open, the camp had been closed to new arrivals. This had precipitated two separate crises. The first concerned approximately three thousand refugees in the last of the Tigrayan transit centers who were in bad shape waiting to come across the border and enter Wad Kowli. They were reported to be in very bad condition and denying them access to the camp could mean that many would die. A second problem, and one that was far more ominous, was that a group of about 500 refugees had entered the camp on the back of some of the trucks returning from the cross-border food supply operation. The group was made up predominantly of young men and women, many of whom had reportedly been dressed in western clothes and who barely showed the strain of the trip. Osmon Mekke had looked over the group and decided that there was something funny about them and had contacted Fadil for instructions. Fadil had decided that the group did not qualify as refugees (even though they had reportedly asked for political asylum) and ordered that they be driven back across the border.

Forced return, or refoulement, of asylum seekers is the one thing that can provoke reaction on the part of UNHCR. International protocols have specified procedures for interviewing anyone asking for political asylum and that fact that Fadil had sent people back was certain to bring an outcry, not only from HCR, but also from every major embassy in Sudan and especially the American Government. I knew that unless we acted quickly the situation could be blown far out of proportion and a major international incident might develop.

I flew back to Showak immediately and went to talk to Fadil. Why, I asked, had he closed Wad Kowli?

Fadil chose his words carefully; it was obvious that he had been expecting some sort of response.

"We've closed the camp for administrative reasons", he said. "We'll reopen it as soon as the situation becomes clearer".

When I asked him what he meant by the "situation", he told me that he was not sure whether the people coming into Sudan were refugees or whether they were famine victims. He also said that the group of "funny refugees" on the trucks appeared to be young people looking for work in Sudan and therefore they didn't qualify as refugees.

From the meeting I got the feeling that the decision to close the border was not a general plan of COR,

nor the government, to test the response of the relief community, but rather a plan of Hassan's which he was having his lieutenant carry out. Earlier that week, the total number of refugees that had asked to go back to Tigray was placed at thirty-five hundred and it was learned that a number had already gone back. It was possible that he wasn't sure what to do. Certainly the Sudanese wouldn't want to have Wad Kowli become a terminus for people coming and going and he was probably uncertain about what political course the new government would be taking.

I quickly checked with all my contacts along the border, including the Deputy Military Governor, but could find no one who seemed to know what was going on. It was clear from my talks with the Commissioner's office in Khartoum that as far as they knew, there had been no change in national policy. It had to be a wildcard decision by Hassan.

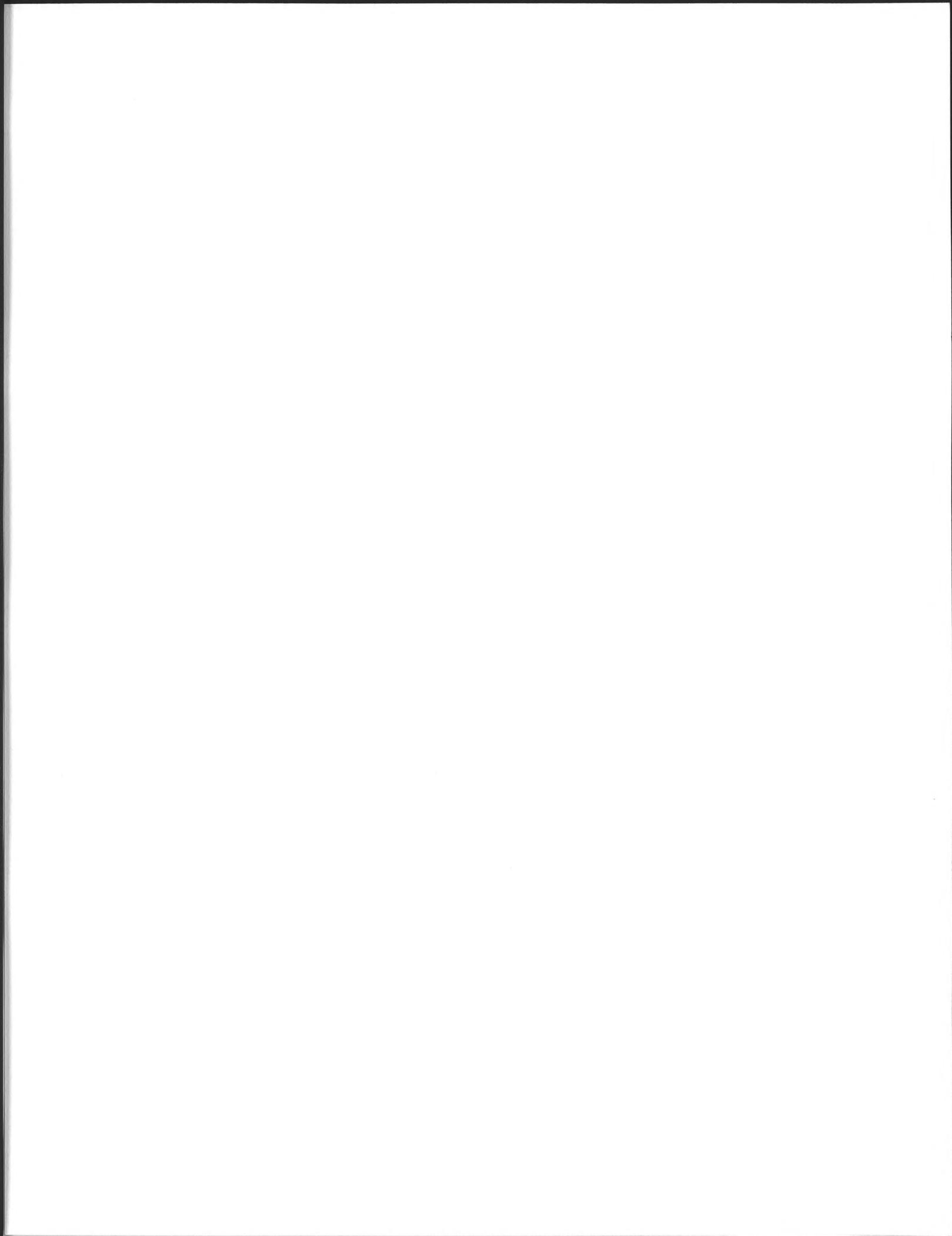
I notified the Sub-Office in Gedaref of the situation and Fadil's position. Mike Menning had left for Geneva several days earlier and the acting head of the Sub-Office was the Khartoum Desk Officer for the East, Ernesto Rodriguez. Ernesto was inexperienced and did not seem to know what he should do, so I decided to take matters into my own hands and try to control the situation before it developed into a major problem.

Julian Murray happened to be in Showak that afternoon. I quickly briefed him on the situation and said that I wanted somebody from UNHCR to be present while I tried to convince Fadil to change his mind. Next, we met with Fadil and asked if he would be willing to go with us to Wad Kowli to interview some of the refugees personally to determine if they qualified as refugees. If they did, would he reverse his decision? He quickly agreed and an hour later the three of us took off.

We were met at the airstrip by Osmon Mekke who told us that a group of approximately one thousand refugees had come to Wad Kowli but were being held one kilometer from the camp pending a decision from Showak on whether or not they could enter. Over tea in Osmon's compound, Julian and I reviewed the issues with Fadil and the other COR staff. I laid out the historical basis under which the refugees had been admitted and pointed out that Sudan had never wavered from an open door policy for all those who sought asylum from war or political oppression. I pointed out that for several years, refugees from Ethiopia and Tigray had been accepted under a blanket policy that stated that famine in Ethiopia was a result not only of drought and crop failure but also political activities and warfare aimed at forcing the refugees to flee from their homeland.

Then Julian took over and he was magnificent! He reviewed the status of refugees under international law and pointed out that individual determination of cases was usually abrogated during times of mass migration. He reviewed the terms of reference of COR, the terms under which UNHCR provided money to the Sudanese Government and discussed the implications of refoulement.

Fadil then replied, laying out his position and principal concerns; the Government of Sudan continued to welcome all those who were true political or war refugees, but that famine victims could only be considered illegal immigrants and that responsibility for feeding famine victims lay with the Government of Ethiopia or with the cross-border operation. He also pointed out that with so many people now wanting to return to Tigray, it indicated that they were not true refugees. The situation has changed, he



said, and the people should be encouraged to go back, not to come into Sudan for temporary food and medical care.

Once all of our positions had been stated and noted for the record, Fadil suggested that we go and interview the refugees. This presented a problem, however, for no one on the UNHCR or COR staff spoke Tigrayan. Thus, we had to use Berhe, the head of the REST team in Wad Kowli as our interpreter. Berhe had come into Osmon's compound during our discussions and had listened in the last part of the debate, so he was familiar with the position of everyone in the group. Thus, when we drove out to Kilo 1 to talk with the refugees, I was sure that he would know the right things to say and, sure enough, I was correct.

Once we arrived at the shelter, Fadil and Berhe walked among the refugees asking why they had come. The response was uniform, "they bombed my village". For all we knew, Berhe could have been making time with the women and then telling us what we needed to hear to get the people classified as refugees. In any case, Fadil was either convinced that they met the legal definition of refugees or knew that without his own interpreter, he could not get a straight answer. Whatever the reasons, he agreed to permit the remaining refugees on the other side to come across and "temporarily" reopen the camp.

This still left the question of the "students," as they were now being called, who had been sent back across the border. The situation had become a bit more complex in the interim. It turned out that several Europeans who had been accompanying the refugees, had gotten off the trucks and attempted to stay in the camp. The Europeans had permits to leave Sudan at Kassala and could only reenter legally at the same place. Since these people were known to work with the medical teams of the TPLF, something funny seemed to be going on and the Sudanese authorities had arrested them until their status became more clear. During the previous week COR had received reports that there was heavy fighting on the other side and that Ethiopian forces had taken a number of TPLF positions. It was believed that the headquarters of the TPLF was on the run. It suddenly appeared that the "students" were probably TPLF workers being evacuated. This made their status as refugees a lot less clearer, so I suggested that we send word that they could wait under "house arrest" at the border while we sought instructions from Khartoum. Fadil and Osmon found the suggestion to be to their liking, so we returned to Osmon's compound for another round of tea and cokes and then returned to Showak.

On the way back, Fadil and I discussed the events and his decisions. Afterwards he said to me, "you know I was really dreading this confrontation with you and Julian. I want you to know that I am really happy with the way that Julian handled the whole situation. He was very courteous to me and I admire the fact that he stood his ground even though I disagree with him on the issues. Please let him know that our working relationship has not been compromised by his devotion to his duty."

Never in my work has anyone, from any culture been so magnanimous in a situation which was both embarrassing and tense. At that moment my admiration for Fadil was sealed.

After landing at Showak and tying down the plane we decided to head to the Green Valley Star, our local restaurant for a bite to eat. On the way over, however, we were stopped by Chris Atencio, one of the Lalamba staff who normally operated the transit center. Chris was in an uproar over events that had

transpired in Wad el-Hileau.

Wad el-Hileau was the refugee camp operated by Abu Rahil. For several months, the camp had been relatively quiet and Abu Rahil himself had been very cooperative and helpful in many situations, especially the construction of Sefawa. He and I were on rather good working terms and I had found that if I consulted with him before taking any actions in his area he was usually very cooperative. For several weeks, however, we had been hearing strange stories emanating from Wad el-Hileau about discontent in the camp and at one of the monthly interagency emergency meetings Abu Rahil stood up before the entire group and pleaded for agencies to come forward with money to build a church and a mosque so that the people in the camp would have a place to worship. At the time the request sounded rather far fetched. If there was anyone in Sudan who probably cared less about refugees' religious concerns it was Abu Rahil, so most of us quickly forgot about the matter.

When Chris Atensio caught up to us, he was breathless. He had been driving hard for about an hour to try and get to COR to report what had happened in the camp.

"Abu Rahil has kicked all of the refugees out of Wad el-Hileau," he said.

Fadil was dumbfounded. "He couldn't do that. He doesn't have authorization to take that kind of action on his own behalf and there is no reason why he would do such a thing."

Chris replied that trouble had been building in the camp for several days. A number of refugees were protesting the fact that full rations were not being distributed and the night before, a large number had demonstrated in front of Abu Rahil's office. He had responded by having the leaders of the demonstration arrested by the police. The next morning more refugees approached his office and staged another demonstration. Several openly accused Abu Rahil of stealing the rations and selling them on the market. Chris then told how the army had swept into the crowd, rounded up the refugees and took them away from town in trucks. Several hours later the army had entered the camp and rounded up large numbers of people and taken them off too. No one seemed to know where they were going, but Chris said that many of the refugees feared that those who were taken away were being driven back to the border to be sent home.

The incident was extremely bazaar. I knew Abu Rahil well enough to know that he must have known that he couldn't get away with this. If any harm came to any of the refugees, the outcry would be tremendous. I also knew that once the press got wind of this that our whole operation would come under a tremendous attack and that Fadil would end up taking the blame. Therefore, we had to move quickly to find out what the situation was and get things back to normal as quickly as possible.

Fadil and I conferred briefly. He immediately agreed to set off to Wad el-Hileau to conduct his own investigation of what was happening. I offered to fly him there but he decided instead to send a message to Abu Rahil to meet him on the other side of the river and drive him to the camp. His strategy was twofold; if Abu Rahil was up to something, he certainly would not come personally to meet Fadil at the river's edge which was almost a one hour drive from the camp. If he did, he would have to immediately break off whatever he was doing. If he didn't come, we would know something was up and Fadil and

I would fly over, land on the road and he would take personal charge.

At the same time, Fadil asked me to notify UNHCR of the incident and to tell Julian Murray or one of the other protection officers assigned to the border to get over there and start collecting information about what was going on. Rodriguez was still the acting head of SOG and he was already enroute to Showak to talk about the incident at Wad Kowli and what we had resolved during our visit. I asked Chris to join us in my quarters so that he could tell Rodriguez what had happened. It also kept Chris from spreading the word about the incident until we could determine for ourselves what the situation was.

Abu Rahil didn't respond to the radio message for over two hours and by that time it was too late for us to fly to Wad el-Hileau since they didn't have an airstrip and I would have to land on the road in the dark. Fadil decided to go ahead and go on his own and arranged for someone from one of the voluntary agencies to meet him on the other side of the river. (As I mentioned, the Setit River had begun flowing several days earlier, an indication that there were heavy rains in Ethiopia. The Setit joined the Atbara approximately three miles south of Showak and cut off Wad el-Hileau and several of the older camps on the eastern shore of the two rivers. The Atbara itself was still not flowing.)

For the next six hours I anxiously awaited Fadil's return to find out what had happened. In the meantime, Rodriguez and the assistant head of the Sub-office, Stephan Lahaussen arrived to discuss the Wad Kowli situation. I brought them up to date on what had happened in Wad el-Hileau as far as we knew and asked them to stay on. Finally, at about 10:30, Fadil returned. He reported the situation was extremely confusing and that he had not been able to ascertain the truth. It was clear that large numbers of refugees had disappeared from the camp, but Abu Rahil was saying that it was a spontaneous evacuation and return to Ethiopia resulting from religious dissension on the camp. He claimed that Christians and Moslems had been fighting among each other and that's why he called the army in. When they arrived, large groups of people decided that they no longer wished to stay in the camp and would be better off returning to Ethiopia. He pleaded for assistance to help these refugees and denied that any military trucks had been used to take people back to the border.

Fadil had checked with the border stations and they reported that no refugees had actually been seen nor had any army trucks. This sent a real chill up my spine, for I feared that the people had been taken out into the desert and dumped off, or even worse, shot. Rodriguez and Stephan quickly returned to Gedaref to file a report with the Branch Office.

In the meantime, I decided to check with my contacts in the military to find out what had happened. I drove up to the base at Kashm el-Girba and paid a call on the commanding officer. I asked him if he could tell me what movements of refugees had been authorized by his command during the day. He reported that Abu Rahil had asked for a number of trucks to be placed at his disposal and to move some supplies and several groups of refugees to another camp. He assured me that no armed soldiers had been assigned to Abu Rahil, only truck drivers and their assistants. He confirmed this by showing me the radio log of the authorization orders.

Next I checked with my network of observers to see what they could tell me. Surprisingly, one of my contacts reported that a truckload of refugees had crossed the Girba dam late the previous evening in

army trucks going west! Since most movements of refugees across the dam were eastbound, and always in nonmilitary vehicles supplied by UNHCR, this fact was particularly puzzling and most certainly had something to do with the events at Wad el-Hileau.

The next morning, Fadil and I met briefly with several of the staff members from Lalumba who had actually witnessed the operation. They reported that after Fadil's visit, a large number of the refugees had returned. They claimed that the army had taken them out into the desert and dropped them off at different points. Most of the refugees had decided to sit and wait to see what happened. Several hours later, the trucks came back and began picking people up, returning most of them to Wad el-Hileau. A large number of people, however, were still missing and it was unsure whether or not they had simply not been found or whether something more drastic had happened to them. Most of the people who were missing were those who had been active in the protest and, altogether, several hundred were still unaccounted for.

Once again, I contacted my network of observers and asked if anybody else had noted refugee movements in military trucks. Several hours later, I received a message from an observer in Kassala. He reported that an army truck carrying a large number of what appeared to be refugees had passed through Kassala apparently headed for Wad Sharife! I immediately got on the radio and passed this message on to Rodriguez at the Sub-office and asked if he had any reports of movements to Wad Sherife. He hadn't. Then, to my astonishment, I learned that he had been instructed by the Branch Office not to do anything else and to hold off on any further investigation until such time that the Branch Office could send a protection officer out to the camp.

I couldn't believe it. Here again was a major question of protection and HCR was taking a "go slow" posture. Rodriguez should have had someone in the camp at daybreak but instead they were going to wait for what would at least be another 24 hours to get some action. Since the situation was still very unclear and lives were possibly at stake, I was anxious to know what HCR intended to do.

Rodriguez was as frustrated as I but he had clear orders not to intervene. I suggested sending Julian up to the area since he had already been covering several protection issues and I had been impressed by the job that he did the day before in Wad Kowli. Rodriguez promised to contact the Branch Office and get back to me but when he called several minutes later, the answer was a definite no, the matter would be handled by someone from the Branch Office in due course.

I tried to reach the Branch Office directly to argue the issue but couldn't make contact due to the midday skip of the radio wave. I decided, therefore, to try and force the issue with HCR personally by flying to Khartoum to talk directly to Nicholas. Before I left, however, I stopped to warn Fadil what a serious situation we were facing. Fadil agreed that it was serious and assured me that he would continue to follow up. He had asked Abu Rahil for a detailed written report and explanation. He was convinced that something afoot was afoot but he didn't know how to get control of the situation other than by continuing to demonstrate to Abu Rahil that he was concerned and wasn't believing his line. He agreed that it was important to report to the Branch Office and also COR Khartoum on the situation and prepare for an investigation. I was a little dismayed, however, that the tone he appeared to be taking was one

of trying to understand Abu Rahil's viewpoint and he appeared not to give too much credibility to the reports of Lalamba staff. He obviously felt that there must be an explanation for Abu Rahil's behavior.

I was in Khartoum by mid-afternoon and went immediately to the Branch Office to report what was going on and to see what they planned to do. Pierce Garety told me that they hadn't even yet decided who to send out to investigate the matter and when that person should leave.

This was almost too much to take. My first thought was that they must know more about this than they were letting on and simply weren't keeping me informed. Maybe there were even other protection questions involved or in some unknown way perhaps this was linked to the Falasha situation. Rather than raise a stink at the time, I decided to quietly probe the office staff and find out what they knew. My talks with the secretaries, radio operators, etc. all seemed to point to the fact that HCR was preoccupied with other matters and didn't consider this to be a major problem. One person informed me that when the issue had been raised, one of the senior staff had indicated it could wait until Nicholas and the Commissioner made their upcoming tour of the camps four days from then.

Late in the afternoon I encountered Pierce Garety in the hallway of the Acropole Hotel where he was living. He told me that after my visit, several of the senior staff had decided that the issue was more serious than they had thought and that they would be sending someone out in several days. The problem, he said, was that everyone was too busy to attend to the matter immediately, coming as it had on top of the refoulement and the closing of Wad Kowli. Whatever we do, he said, let's keep this out of the press.

Now I was really upset. Not only was HCR doing nothing about a potentially life threatening situation, they were starting to lay the ground work to try to cover it up. I too hoped that the incident wouldn't be blown way out of proportion, but I wasn't about to stand aside and let the whole issue be swept under the rug until UNHCR decided to get its butt in gear.

As luck would have it, the next person I bumped into was Paul Vallely, the Africa correspondent for The Times of London. He had gotten wind of the situation at Wad Kowli and wanted to know if I had anything to say.

Earlier that day I had learned that across the border, the Ethiopian army had raided a large refugee camp at Ibnath and had forcibly evacuated the camp, even going so far as to burn many of the shelters and taking people away in trucks. The story had been the lead story on all the international news services including the BBC and the countries that were providing relief aid to Ethiopia had raised a major outcry.

I suggested to Paul that he might want to ask someone from UNHCR how the events in Wad el-Hileau paralleled those in Ibnath.

About an hour later, Pierce Garety caught up to me at the dining room at the Acropole. "The press is on to the story", he said.

"What did you tell them?", I asked.

"Just that we're looking into the matter and have no comment at this time", he said. "Whatever you do, don't tell them anything else. We're going to send someone out tomorrow to try and get the facts."

This was exactly what I had hoped for. With the threat of world opinion standing over them, the

Branch Office had been spurred to act. I later learned that Paul had rented a car and was driving out the next morning to find out what was going on.

The next morning, I offered to fly the person HCR had selected to investigate the Wad el-Hileau situation out to the camp, but to my astonishment, learned that they still hadn't settled on the appropriate candidate. Disgusted, I decided to fly back to Showak to help Fadil put the pieces back together. Ironically, I later learned that after the Branch Office had finally selected Nicholas Von Praag, a bright young HCR field officer, to do the investigation, it turned out there were no cars available for him to make the trip. When they tried to rent one, they learned that the last one had been rented by Paul Valley, so as it turned out, the press got to the camp before anyone from UNHCR.

Paul did a good job of reporting the story, reporting the facts and not sensationalizing any of the events. Luckily for us, the events at Ibnath overshadowed his story and kept world attention from focusing on Wad el-Hileau. This gave us the time we needed to rectify the situation and get things back on track. The threat of more attention from the press however, forced HCR to keep pressing for more information.

It took us several more days to finally determine what had happened and even now all the events are still not clear. Apparently, there had been protests over the food ration and Abu Rahil tried to discourage them by having several of the leaders arrested. This only provoked more protests, and he began to get worried and tried to have the protesters removed. As an after-thought, he must have realized that the families of the protesters were still in the camp, so he ordered the army to go in, round those people up and move them out too. When it was clear that the whole operation was being observed by the Lalamba medical team, and that he had been caught red-handed, he had to modify his actions. He couldn't silence the foreigners very well, so he had to concoct a story about how people were trying to leave voluntarily and hope that HCR and COR Showak would believe him. Evidently the people who had been put in the trucks had been taken out to the desert and told that they should leave the country and not come back. Many had been told that they would be shot if they tried to return to the camp. When Abu Rahil realized that few of the people had gone any further and could be brought back in to point an accusing finger at him, he decided to round them up and transfer them to another camp. The ideal place to hide the "evidence" was in Wad Sherife and he must have worked an arrangement with Mohammed Habib to accept them. (This accounted for the sighting of refugees moving westward across the Girba dam.) Since the camp at Wad Sharife was still in a state of flux with Sudanese, Eritreans and anyone else who wanted food moving in and out at will, it was not a bad choice.

When Nicholas Von Praag arrived, he put the major parts of the puzzle together and eventually UNHCR issued a formal protest. A team was established to try and find the people in Wad Sherife and reunite them with their families and friends in Wad el-Hileau. All the background issues of the situation, however, remained obscured. Abu Rahil continued to claim that the whole thing was a result of fighting among the different religious groups and that there was nothing to the claims about insufficient rations being distributed. On COR's part, the follow-up to the situation was never really very adequate and I was disappointed that Fadil continued to give any credence at all to Abu Rahil's story. To Fadil's credit,

however, he worked hard to reunify the families that had been separated and to establish better controls over Wad el-Hileau and reign in Abu Rahil. I continued to press Fadil to at least get a good report on what had happened so that we could brief Hassan Osman when he returned and Fadil agreed. Weeks later, when he had completed collecting all the information he could, he told me privately that there was something "fishy" about Abu Rahil's account of the affair.

Other than the incomprehensible response of HCR, the one thing that will always stand out in my mind was not so much the incident itself, but the way in which Fadil ultimately ended it. Three weeks after it had happened, Fadil was chairing the monthly interagency Emergency Meeting. By that time, all the agencies knew the general facts about the incident and there had been a lot of speculation about what had happened to the people who had disappeared and what COR was going to do about Abu Rahil. No official reprimand had been issued from COR Khartoum and many of the voluntary agencies were rightly concerned about what would happen if the same thing occurred in their camps (even though the chances of that happening anywhere but Wad Sherife were very low). To my astonishment, in the middle of the meeting, Fadil instructed Abu Rahil to stand up and explain in his own words what had happened. Abu Rahil was shocked but followed his instructions and got up to tell his side of the story. When he finished, he might have assumed that was it, but then Fadil turned to the group and offered them the chance to question Abu Rahil directly. Several of the agency representatives did exactly that and the questions were far from soft. Abu Rahil faltered on many of his answers but did respond to each of the questions. The whole process lasted for almost an hour. It was clear to everyone there that while Abu Rahil had not received an official reprimand, he had lost a lot of credibility, not only with the voluntary agencies but also with his COR fellows. In Sudanese society, to have to defend oneself in front of foreigners is probably worse than any reprimand that he could have received and from then on, Abu Rahil's stature and ability to influence other COR camp managers was greatly reduced. In his quiet way Fadil had managed to defuse a major issue and, by opening the matter to public debate and scrutiny, had managed to win the admiration and confidence of everyone in the east.

All the above events; the closing of the border, the refoulement at Wad Kowli, and the incident at Wad el-Hileau had all happened in the first few days of Fadil's administration. So far things weren't going too well and Fadil was taking the heat for all the adverse effects of Hassan's "testing" of UNHCR as well as the unpredictable event at Wad el-Hileau. Predictably, the Commissioner of Refugees was under a lot of pressure to call Fadil in to Khartoum for a dressing down and sure enough, on the Monday following the Wad el-Hileau incident, he received instructions to report to the Commissioner. HCR also instructed me to attend the meeting and, though I agreed, it was not something that I was looking forward to.

At the meeting, Fadil was asked to explain why he had sent the people back from Wad Kowli. He gave his explanation and took full responsibility for the decision, though, at heart, I knew that he had been put up to the matter by Hassan Osman. Nicholas, refusing to address Fadil directly, delivered a strong protest to COR and expressed the concerns of the UN High Commissioner. He demanded that all the project managers of COR be instructed on the government's policy of granting blanket right of

admission to all refugees and that COR personnel be reminded of their duties under the international refugee protocols. In particular, he was concerned that no future incidents of refoulement be carried out or even discussed without prior consultation with UNHCR and, by inference, without notifying the Commissioner of Refugees in Khartoum. In short, he insisted that the Commissioner reel-in his independent staff on the border.

Except for his apparent rudeness to Fadil, which he had to do under the circumstances, I was impressed with Nicholas' forcefulness and his way of making his points with the Commissioner. For his part, the Commissioner was very apologetic about the whole series of incidents and promised to take immediate actions to see that they didn't occur again. Fadil, who of course was the target of all this, listened politely and didn't argue with either Nicholas or the Commissioner and accepted the reprimands stoically. At the end of the meeting he politely asked to see the protection protocols and asked that a statement be drafted to all the COR field staff to further explain their roles and responsibilities.

As I mentioned, the whole meeting was rather awkward for me. I felt ashamed at having to watch Fadil be castigated, but as I sat there and watched him listen to the proceedings, I realized that he was simply taking all this as the course of events and was prepared to go on with his work. Towards the end of the meeting, the Commissioner said that he was willing to do anything in his power to demonstrate to the international community that the Sudanese still welcomed the refugees and that they were prepared to offer them the best assistance possible under the circumstances. Unnoticed, Fadil picked up a piece of paper, scribbled a note, folded it up and passed it to me. It said, "Now's the time to push for the roads".

I realized immediately that Fadil had seen a way that we could put the Commissioner in a position to undertake many of the projects which had been languishing and waiting for COR's approval. As we walked out of the meeting, Fadil and I held a quick caucus in the hallway. "What should we push for?," I asked.

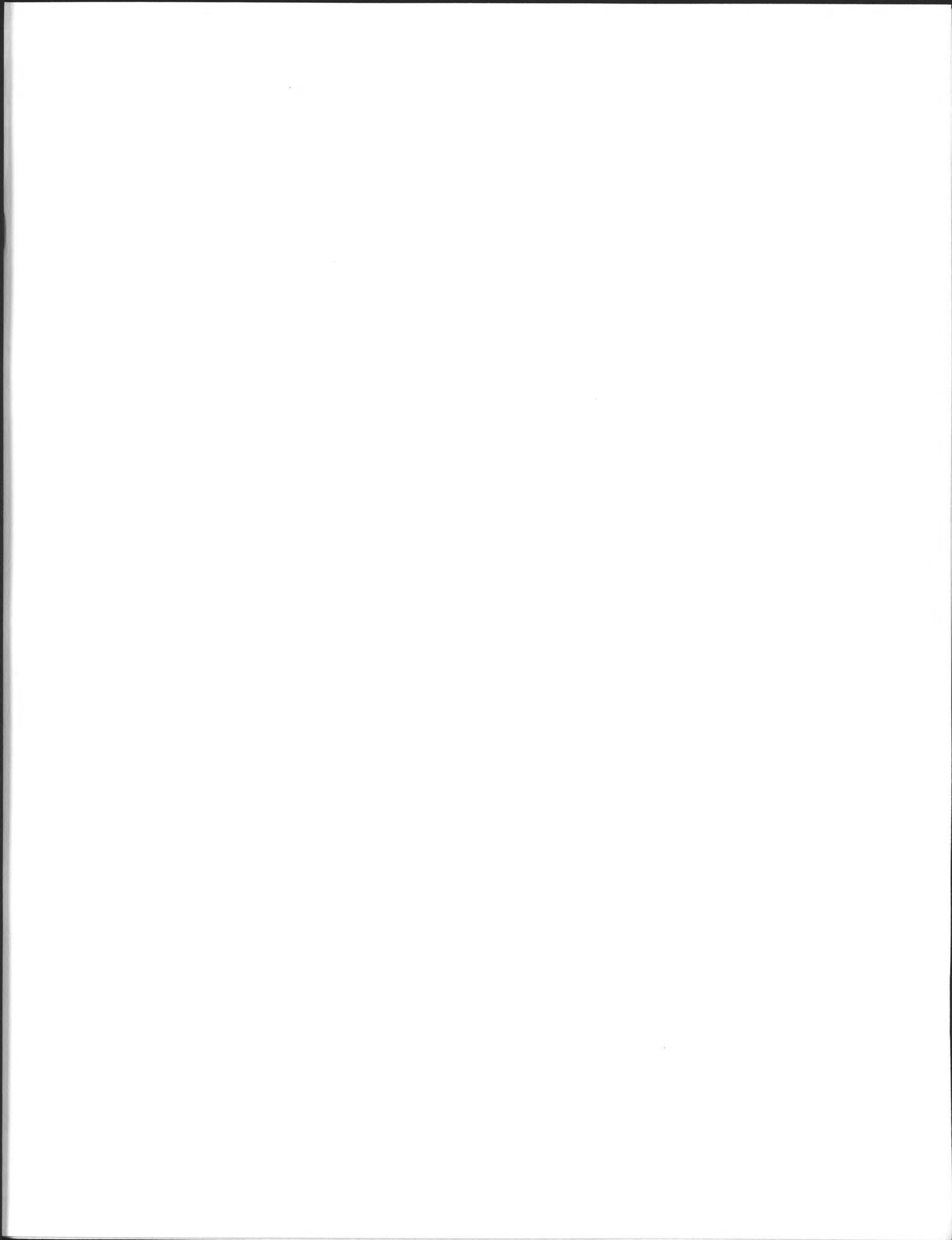
"Go for the roads and the Cholera preparations" he advised.

"This will put us in direct conflict with Hassan" I said. "Are you willing to take the heat?"

He smiled. "It's always hot in Sudan".

We stopped by the office of Karen Abu Zayd and asked to have another meeting with the Commissioner the following day. She informed us that the Commissioner would be leaving, that he had been asked by the new government to visit Libya and begin talks with Mammur Qaddafi on improving relations between Libya and Sudan. Hassan Attiya would be in charge.

The idea of going to Hassan Attiya to push for projects vetoed by Hassan Osman was not a welcome prospect. First, I wasn't sure how much power he would have to make decisions and he was not considered a strong decision maker. Furthermore, if the projects were approved and Hassan Osman returned, he would be furious and probably try and go over Hassan Attiya's head and have the orders rescinded. Thus, any projects we attempted to carry out would have to be completed within 45 days, the time we estimated that Hassan Osman would be absent from the field. If we miscalculated and Hassan returned early, Fadil was likely to lose his job, I would certainly lose my contract, and relations between



Hassan Osman and Hassan Attiya would be made worse than before. I decided, therefore, that I would push initially for the most controversial projects on my own -- that I would talk with Hassan, present the information, and see if I could get him to make a decision and overrule Hassan Osman's vetoes. The projects I picked were the ones that Fadil had suggested, the roads and the cholera preparations. All night, I carefully prepared my arguments and carefully outlined the costs and the time that each program would have to be started.

The next morning at nine o'clock, I met with Hassan and Karen and carefully presented each of the programs. I explained the urgency to complete the projects before the rains started and the need to take an immediate decision. At the end of each project, I pointed out Hassan Osman's objections and his stated reasons for not going ahead with it. To make sure that I wasn't putting words into Hassan's mouth, I quoted from minutes of meetings and from memos that Hassan himself had sent to me or to UNHCR explaining his reasons for not proceeding with the projects. After three hours of presentation and discussion, the decisions were clearly in the hands of Hassan Attiya. For a moment, he leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling. I knew that he was fully aware of the implications of what his decisions could mean and I expected him to say "come back later and I'll let you know what I decide". After a moment, however, he lowered his gaze and turned directly at Karen and me. "Let's do it", he said. "It's the right thing to do".

Karen and I stood up and then Karen, caught out of character, went over and gave him a big hug. Hassan Attiya had risen to the occasion and the lives that we saved in the next few months are in no small measure owed to the courage he took to make those decisions.

* * *

In Showak the next day Fadil and I met to go over what was needed to begin the roads project. I was concerned that we didn't have an engineer who could supervise the work and, more importantly, finalize proposals to the various donors to get the money lined up to begin hiring the construction teams. Fadil concurred that there was probably no one in the operation or in COR who could handle the job adequately and asked if I could bring in someone from INTERTECT to do the job. I told him that I was sure that HCR would require that we find a European engineer but that if they couldn't get someone soon I would bring out the best engineer I knew, my brother Chris.

Towards the end of our meeting, Fadil paused for a moment and said, "we have a lot of work to do, don't we?"

I started reeling things off the top of my mind that I knew needed to be done quickly. As I paused to think of some others, Fadil looked at me and said that we needed to draw up a master list of everything that needed to be done between then and the beginning of the rainy season. He asked if I could work up the list and bring it to him first thing in the morning.

I could sense that Fadil was getting ready to make the decisions that we had been waiting for. I went to the radio shack and sent messages to Kent, Julian Murray, Mark Frohardt, the Oxfam water team and the CARE logistics officers to all put together priority lists of projects that needed action decisions

immediately. Then I returned to my quarters to begin pouring over my own list of projects and priorities from our charts in the Operations Plan. Kent arrived several hours later with the information from the field officers and from CARE and Oxfam. We worked through the night putting the master list together.

Early the next morning, I went to Fadil's office and sat down with the list. It was organized into three categories -- high, medium and low priority. The list was astounding. Some of the projects that needed to be completed immediately included construction of approximately 50 kilometers of road; installation of water systems in several camps; improving logistics facilities; erecting camp warehouses; construction of new feeding centers; completing the moves from Wad Kowli to Girba Lake. There were dozens of camp upgrading projects, stock-piling of certain types of medicines and vaccines, completing establishment of the cold chain -- literally scores of critical activities that hadn't yet been completed. Many of the projects were underway and simply needed someone to push them along faster or to make a decision about who was in charge or who was going to pay for a certain part of the project. A substantial number, however, were new activities, programs or projects that had not yet been contracted and for several, it was even unclear where the money would come from to pay for the work. There were ninety-seven specific activities or projects that were classified as critical and needed to be completed before the beginning of the rainy season. Not a small number on the list were activities that Hassan had personally vetoed time and time again. In all, we were facing almost half a million dollars worth of new obligations.

As Fadil and I reviewed each item, he marked a number beside each. As we went through the list, I was surprised that nothing was being deleted. He was arranging them into a logical sequence and grouping them in some sort of order.

At the end of the session, Fadil leaned back. He was quiet for a minute and then summoned his orderly and asked if I wanted some tea. While we were waiting for the tea to be prepared, he continued to make notes on the list and to draw lines and brackets between different items. Finally the tea was brought in and we drank it together in silence. When he finished, he put the glass down on his desk, pushed his chair back and stood up.

"We've got 40 days before the rainy season comes," he said. "If we're going to do all of this, we'll need an implementation plan. Let's make it."

This was a consultant's dream, an opportunity to work with somebody who would make decisions, who would organize what had to be done into a workable plan and who was prepared to carry it out. I literally ran back to my office and began banging out revisions to the original Operations Plan, upgrading it where I could and making checklists of the things we would need. I tried to tie as much together by piggy-backing efforts in different sectors. By noon I had the revised plan ready and presented it to Fadil. He took a quick look at it and said, "let's do it".

For the relief operation in the east, this marked the final phase of the crisis. Up to this point, while we had been able to do a lot, it had been done based on individual fights for each separate item and constantly having to explain ourselves on each action. There had always been a problem of getting things

in equilibrium between the donors, UNHCR and COR, but without the backing of the leadership in Showak, things went too slow. Now, for the first time, it would be different.

In June, as I was packing up to leave Sudan, I found the original copy of the list that Fadil and I had gone over that momentous morning. On June 5, the day that the first rains really hit, 94 of the 97 items had been completed. What makes that achievement even more remarkable is the fact that two of the biggest crises, which would take up almost 50% of our time during the last half of the period, hadn't even been considered when we drew up the list. Furthermore, the last four weeks of our crash program occurred during the Islamic holy days of Ramadan, a time in which very little activity of any kind ever takes place.

CHAPTER 13

LIFE IN SHOWAK

Despite the incredible level of activity over the next six weeks, I'll always remember that period as the nicest of all the time I spent in Sudan. While I still made regular trips to Khartoum, the vast majority of my time was spent in Showak and the camps. A daily routine developed that was both active and pleasant and because we had a good team now in the field, both Fadil and I could delegate more of the decisions to others.

Spending more time in Showak was a pleasure, for I got to know my Sudanese counterparts even better and developed new friendships as well as strengthening those that already existed.

Our daily routine was pleasant and I only wish that other work situations could be as easy. Kent and I were living in the government guest house at the edge of Showak. Next door was the house of El Tarife and next to it was the residence for the senior COR temporary staff. Fadil lived there as did Abdul Ayum, our transport officer, the head of the mechanics' shop and our senior warehouseman.

The room that Kent and I occupied was in the back of the guest house and things were generally quiet. It was a fairly large room and Kent and one of our earlier roommates, Michael Day-Thompson, had rearranged the furniture so that we had three separate areas and a bit of privacy. Kent occupied one, I occupied the other and the outer room was used as combination guest room and night office.

Years earlier, someone had installed an air conditioner in the room but when we arrived, the thing had rusted solid and seemed to be hopeless. While we had an overhead fan, the room was still unbearably hot. The roof of the building was metal and during the day it seemed to cook the inside like an oven.

I hadn't reckoned with Kent's distaste for heat and the fact that he was a very practical mechanical engineer. Within a week after arriving, Kent had managed to find someone who knew air conditioning systems and the two of them began working on the unit. One day, after coming back from a long, hot drive to one of the camps, I was startled to open the door and be met by a blast of cold air. Somehow Kent had managed to piece the cooler back together and make it work. For the duration of our tour, our air conditioning system was the best kept secret in all of eastern Sudan. We even managed to improve the insulation so that on the days when electricity was sporadic we were able to at least retain some of the cool air for several hours before we had to open the windows.

The guest house had a number of other residents. In a room in the same wing as ours lived Ben Van der Kaa, a Dutch engineer from the ILO(International Labor Organization) who was developing employment projects for refugees in the older settlements. Ben had been working in the area for several years and had been promised a number of luxuries, including a prefab house which had still not arrived. His project had suffered numerous delays so he spent a lot of time improving his quarters and trying to make life as comfortable for himself as he could. One of the things that he had been able to do was build a small distillery and he was able to bottle some rather first class spirits and some wonderful Bouganvillia flower wine.

In the other wing was a room shared by five guys. Three of them were Swiss mechanics who were

assigned to the vehicle workshop to help maintain COR's fleet of vehicles. Bob and Allan, the other two, were a couple of crazy Englishmen who had been sent out to help set up some pre-fab housing that was being donated to COR and UNHCR to use as offices and residential quarters for the sub-office when it moved to Showak. However, the pre-fabs didn't arrive when they did, so for the first few months they were always available to lend a hand and their practical construction experience gave us quite a bit of help in several pinches. The Swiss mechanics were also great guys and were never adverse to going out in the middle of the night to work on a vehicle that had broken down somewhere.

A maid and a cook were assigned to the guest house but one look at the way he prepared our food and noting the holes that appeared in our clothes after being washed by the maid, we decided a change was in order. Generally, we took our clothes to the market laundry and ate our evening meals at one of the two local restaurants: the Truck Stop or the Green Valley Star. While the conditions at both eating establishments would have appalled a New York City restaurant inspector, the food was fairly good and we all developed a liking for various Sudanese dishes. The proprietors of the restaurants enjoyed having us come around and were always very nice and helpful in selecting our evening meals. Not a few times did people from COR who were passing by or eating at the same place silently pick up our tab as a gesture of friendship, something which always amazed me since they made so little money and we ate so much, especially as a group.

During the period when Fadil was in command, the daily routine was fixed, efficient, and pleasant. Kent's alarm would go off at about 5:30 and he would get up to take a shower, turning on his radio so we could catch the BBC Africa news. Since I was a late worker and a late riser, I would usually languish in bed until everyone else had a shower and the morning news was complete before taking my own bath. Getting water for the shower was a ridiculous routine. Throughout most of our period at Showak, water was only supplied to our section of town late at night. The groundskeeper at the guest house was charged with keeping the flowers watered so when water came, he would turn on all the outside hoses to sprinkle the lawn and flower beds. Unfortunately, when he did this, there was not enough pressure to put water into the overhead tank for the showers and the toilets, so, every night Kent would get up and take one of the hoses, put it in the tank and turn all the other water off. Then, regular as clockwork, right after Kent went to bed, the groundskeeper would come back, find the hose in the water tank, pull it out and turn all the other hoses back on to start watering the lawn again. Kent would hear the water going off, get back up, sneak back outside, turn all the water off and put the hose back in the tank. He would then go find the groundskeeper and tell him not to take the hose out until the tank was full. It was always a toss up whether or not the groundskeeper would comply, for he was always afraid that the water pressure would be cut off and the flower beds would dry up. This routine took place for almost five months -- to the point where everyone else began to think how crazy it was and became resigned to just let it go. But Kent was determined and therefore, every morning we all had water. He probably should have taught us a lesson and let it go a couple of days so that we would participate in the exercise, but he seemed to be having so much fun, we just decided to let him handle it.

After showering, the whole group would usually go outside to the garden, sit in the morning sun and

have a cup of coffee. Kent developed a taste for the bitter Eritrean coffee and he usually shared a cup with the groundskeeper while the rest of us had Nescafe instant. The BBC overseas news usually came on at 6:00 and we would listen to that, making catcalls any time that they said something about Sudan.

At 6:30 Kent and I headed to the office to do basic paperwork, check the mail and prepare outgoing radio messages for transmission. A nice Dutch water engineer, named Gene Lunaberg, shared the office with us and he usually gave us a briefing on the water situation in all the camps. He had a great sense of humor and always had a joke or some great story to tell about one of the relief agencies and some misfortune that had hit them the previous day.

At 9:00 the summary of incoming radio messages was complete and laid on my desk by the radio operator. I would go through the list, making notes of things that were urgent and top priority and put together a summary of my recommendations to present to Fadil.

At 9:45 all the staff assembled for the Sudanese ritual of fatour, the morning breakfast. Many of my European counterparts hated fatour and felt that it was a waste of time and typical of the Sudanese penchant for avoiding work. Kent and I, however, had become resigned to it; in fact, I got to where I looked forward to these morning meetings.

The ritual was pleasant enough. We assembled near the kitchen and everyone sat in a long line having tea. There were places that were reserved for different people according to the COR hierarchy and my chair was next to that of Fadil. We would all talk while the meal was being laid out. It was a tradition that no business was discussed so the talk usually turned to discussions of politics, someone's latest vacation, a funny thing that happened to someone in the office staff or women.

As soon as the kitchen staff had laid out the food, which usually consisted of about a dozen or so different dishes, we all stood around the table, breaking pieces of bread and using them to scoop the food from the dishes. Because breakfast was so late, we were all ravenously hungry and it didn't take but a few minutes to consume everything on the table. Afterwards, we washed our hands again and then sat down to await chai (tea).

Sudanese tea could more properly be termed a cup of sugar with tea added. It's almost always served in a small, clear glass on a saucer rather than in a cup and is incredibly sweet. The tea is strong, however, and the flavor does come through and I found that after a few days, I not only could stand tea so sweet, I even liked it.

By 10:15 fatour was over for the senior staff and we returned to our offices. For the next 45 minutes Fadil and I would meet and go over the list of priorities that I had gleaned from the radio messages and compared it with his list of actions that needed to be concluded that day. We would then review our master plan and focus on the things that we felt needed to be dealt with immediately and the things that had to be started that day. I referred to this period as "decision hour" because during the time that Fadil was there, we never left a decision unmade.

At the end of the hour, Fadil would determine what things he wanted me to work on and which things we needed to handle together. Often as not, we divided the work so that in-house staff work would be handled by he or Kent and the on-site problems by me. Usually, I was assigned to fly to the trouble spot

and see what I could do. If an especially critical matter called for Fadil's personal intervention, he and I would fly together to the camp to deal it. Thus, at 11:00, I would usually be headed to the airport to crank the 182 and begin a trip. Due the speed of the airplane, as well as the central location of Showak, there were not too many places that I couldn't reach within an hour and a half and be back again to the office by 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon.

On returning to Showak, I would go to the office and brief Fadil on my activities. We would go over anything that needed to be resolved the next day and then split up to finish our individual paperwork.

Between 5:00 and 6:00 in the evening, the afternoon radio messages arrived. Usually there was nothing urgent, just routine status reports describing events of the day, amounts of food on hand, etc., but it required that again Fadil and I go through the messages to make sure that everything was okay before we left the office at around 6:30.

Fadil usually took his evening meal with the other COR staffers at their guest house so I would head over to the Green Valley Star, which was about 200 yards from the office or take a Land Cruiser over to the truck stop to join the other guys from the "khawaja" guest house.

The evening meal would last about an hour and a half, everybody eating, swapping stories about the day's events and finishing off with a Coke from one of the shops across the street from the restaurant. Sometimes soccer games would be held in the main street and we would make a point of watching the local guys play a team from another village.

Depending on my workload, as well as whether or not electricity was available to run the lights, I would either return to the office or head back to the guest house to work there.

At about 10:00, most of the guys in the guest house would gather out in the garden for about a half hour worth of star gazing. The stars in Sudan were incredibly bright. We could clearly see many of the southern constellations and in the early days of my assignment, a nova appeared in the southern sky for about three weeks. The brightness and clarity of the desert stars are something that never ceases to delight me and these evening sessions were always wonderful and very relaxing.

In mid-April we were privileged to watch a total eclipse of the moon. Rita, who had just arrived in Sudan, told me that she had met an astronomer who was coming to Sudan to observe the eclipse, but I had forgotten about it. Then one night, as I was returning from the Green Valley Star, one of my companions remarked how beautiful Showak looked in the light of the full moon. I slowed down to look at the moon and noticed that a small chunk seemed to be missing from the bottom. Since we had been watching the moon several nights earlier, I knew that it should have been full by now. Then I recalled that this was the night the eclipse was to take place.

As I drove into the guest house compound, several of the guys were already out in the garden watching the moon with binoculars. I pulled up a chair and joined them. I can only describe the next few hours as one of the most magnificent events I have ever witnessed in the heavens. Gradually the shadow of the earth began climbing upward on the moon's surface. The night was crystal clear and as the shadow moved upward, stars which had not been visible before began to pop out from behind the glow of the moon's surface. With binoculars, we could even see the earth's shadow moving across the moon's

craters. As it approached the top, a small ray of sunlight illuminated the surface and made it appear as if the moon had an ice cap on its northern pole. Instead of blacking out the moon's surface, a faint reddish glow seemed to emanate from the darkened portion of the moon, almost as if an invisible hand were holding a giant flashlight behind it and illuminating the surface with an eerie glow. Then, a few minutes later, the shadow covered up even the polar cap and left just a bright, extremely thin rim around the entire surface.

Just at the instant when the entire moon seemed to go black, it appeared as if long, gray, sandy tentacles were reaching over the adobe wall of our compound. We stared for a moment wondering what it was when suddenly it hit us; an haboub was coming! Within a minute, a raging dust storm had forced us to gather our stuff and scurry inside the shelter of the guest house.

For the next two hours we battled the storm, trying to keep the windows closed and the sand out. Fighting an haboub was always a losing proposition. The sand grains were so small and the dust particles so fine that, despite all our precautions, the wind was able to blow them through the many layers of shutters and muslin that we had placed over the windows.

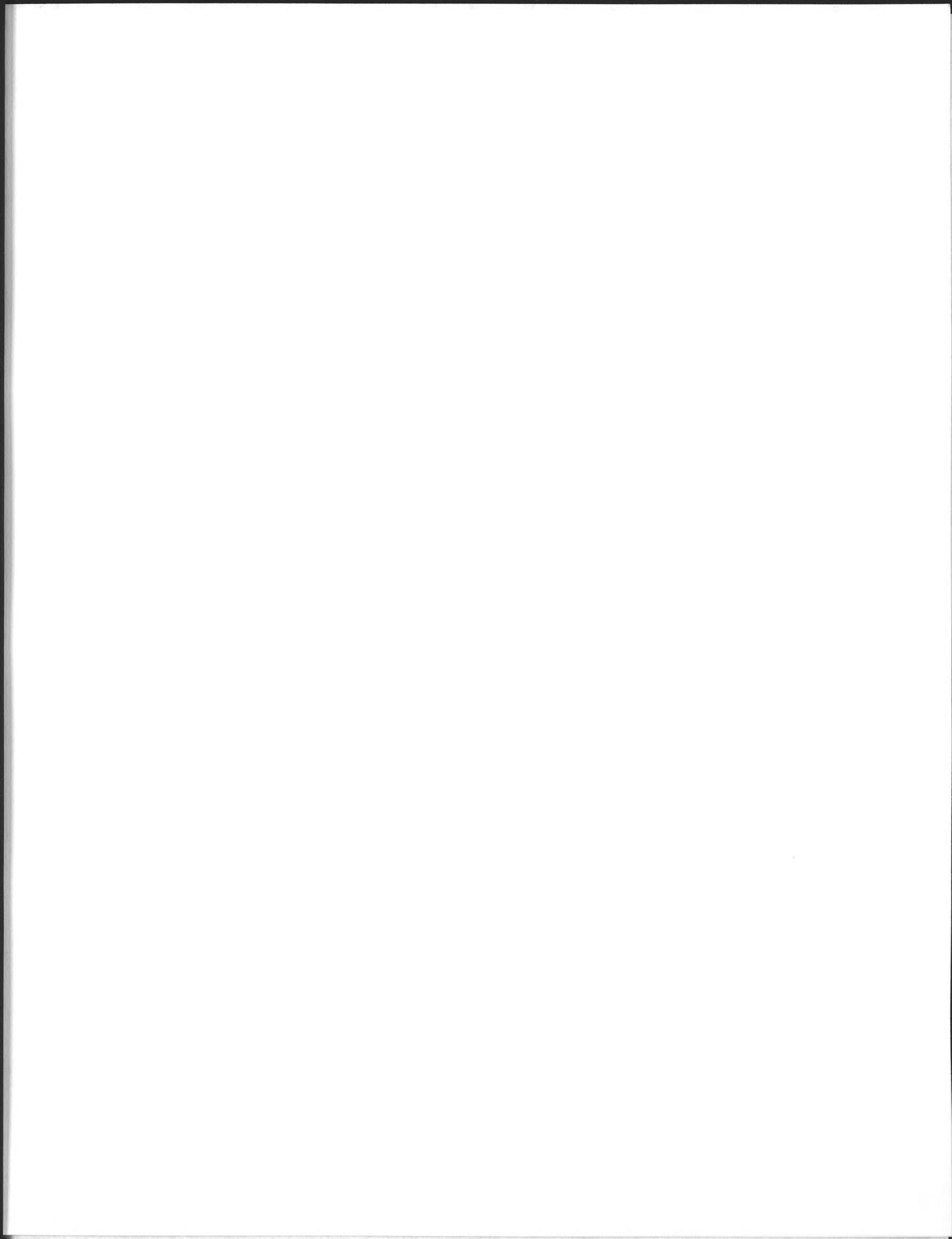
That night, a convoy of refugees had been scheduled to arrive at the transit center and I knew that they must be suffering from the onslaught of the sandstorm, so, at about 2:00 in the morning, I reluctantly left the shelter of the house and drove to the center to wait for the refugees' arrival.

About half an hour later, the first trucks arrived. The people were shaken but otherwise in good shape. Several of the refugees commented about the eclipse and wanted to know if the haboub was caused by the eclipse. I assured them that it was just a coincidence and urged them to take shelter in the tents and behind the trucks so that they could weather the storm in better condition.

Just as the last of the trucks arrived, the storm quit as suddenly as it had started. I immediately looked up and, sure enough, the moon was beginning to reappear. Certain that I had lost my credibility as an astrologer with the refugees, I headed back to the guest house to get some sleep.

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A description of my life in Showak would not be complete without some mention of what it was like to fly in the Eastern Region. When I first arrived, many of the days were hazy and visibility was restricted. There was one period in February and March when at least some portion of every flight was carried out in an haboub. At first I was quite wary of these sandstorms where visibility could be absolutely nil. But the more I flew in the area, the more comfortable I got with entering the storms and finding my way. As long as I knew exactly where I was when I encountered the storm, I could make time and distance calculations and fairly accurately get to my destination. As I have mentioned earlier, it was easy to navigate in the east and if I got lost all I had to do was point the airplane eastward until I found the road, the railroad or one of the rivers, fly up or down the landmark until I spotted something I recognized and then turn on course until I got home. The 182 had plenty of range. I was never really in a position where I was hurting for fuel and if I had entered the haboub after I left someplace like Khartoum, I always knew I could turn around and go back to where it was clear. After mid-April, when the first of



the rains began to come, the number of haboubs dropped substantially and the skies became crystal clear. I was amazed at how far I could see, sometimes 100 miles or more.

I loved to fly down the Atbara from Showak to Wad Kowli. The Nigerian villages were always fun to fly over and I loved to compare them to the nearby Sudanese villages often just across the river. Sometimes I would fly low along my course and watch the people and animals on the ground. In the early part of my tour, small groups of nomads were moving up and down the river beds looking for pools to water their camels. I could often see them setting up camp and pitching their tents. In early April, after the Setit River had begun to flow, I could tell how hard it was raining in Ethiopia by looking at how muddy the water was. As the river filled, small gardens along the river banks began to flourish as the people began to water their gardens and grow vegetables.

I often flew to Wad Khowli late in the evening, landing just before dusk so that I could spend the night. The approach to Wad Kowli were always both eerie and in a way beautiful. If the evening was clear, I could see the camp from 40 miles away. The smoke from thousands of cooking fires would hang over the site and a combination of the fires and the setting sunlight shining off of the yellow straw mats would give the camp an eerie glow.

As I approached Wad Kowli, I could look across the border and there, approximately 40 kilometers away, I could see the glow of other campfires. These were the people who were inching their way down towards Wad Kowli escaping from the famine in Ethiopia. The sight of that camp 40 miles away never ceased to give me a shiver, for I could guess what misery the people were experiencing in and how difficult it must be for them to be making the journey.

As I approached Wad Kowli, I would usually buzz the camp to signal them to come out to the airport and pick me up. Later, after Rita arrived, I would buzz her tukel to let her know that I was coming and to save some food and make a place for me to sleep.

I often cut these night approaches fairly close and not a few times did I arrive after dark. I could always spot Wad Kowli by the smoke and the fires, but finding the airport at night was something else because the black earth made it very difficult to find. Early on, I arranged a system with Jean-Michel Goudstikker. When I buzzed the camp he would drive two land rovers to the airstrip and park one at each end of the runway. He would check the wind on the ground and point the headlights of the two vehicles into the wind. That way, I could tell which way the wind was blowing and I would have the two sets of tail lights to line up on for my approach. The system worked well enough but luckily no passengers had to suffer the anxieties that I did on each of those approaches.

The arrival of my airplane was always a big event no matter where I went. Thousands of refugees would stream out of the camp to come and watch the landing and would sit and stare at the airplane for hours until I returned. As I would taxi out for a takeoff, they would line the runway, take off their head bands and wave them in the air and cheer as I took off. Thank God I never had an accident. It would have been terribly embarrassing in front of all of those people.

The attention that the airplane got was not all welcome. Children loved to run up to touch the airplane and I was always afraid that they would swing on one of the control surfaces and damage it beyond

repair. Some of the kids also liked to run across the runway in front of the airplane on landing or takeoff to see if they could beat it and on a couple of occasions, I came close to chopping a couple of them up. At each camp, I organized a couple of refugee elders to come to the camp as airport guards and carry big sticks to chase the kids away from the runway as I landed and took off. This system proved fairly good and, after a couple of weeks, at least the running back and forth across the strip ceased. The only other problem I had was keeping baboons and other wildlife from getting on the strips I was approaching at night. If I turned the lights on, they would look at the light, become mesmerized by its brilliance and freeze on the runway. The only way to get them off was to turn the lights off, give them a low buzz and send them scurrying.

In March and April, as the rivers began to fill, thousands of camels that had been moved southward towards water in Damazin, began to be moved back up towards Kassala and Port Sudan. A camel has a distinctive look from the air, a long, round oval body, a small head and the long neck bobbing back and forth give them a unique and sometimes silly look when viewed from directly above. Looking down on thousands of camels trekking northward every day was a rare pleasure and all of my passengers enjoyed flying low over them and watching them move.

One of the most exciting things that I witnessed from the air was the return of the Atbara River in early June. From the air, the river bed seemed to slowly fill with blue and it was like watching a long vein slowly fill with blood. Flying low over the leading edge of water, however, you could see that it was moving fairly rapidly, not quite a flash flood, but a small wall of water that moved faster than a person could run. It slowly covered everything in its path. As with the Setit, as soon as the water returned, within a few days gardens along the banks had begun to sprout up.

Altogether, I flew approximately 125 different relief missions in the time that I was in the east. My log book shows that I carried almost 200 passengers including governors, deputy governors, ambassadors, a future deputy high commissioner, one general, two police officials, and dozens of relief workers, engineers and health workers. Hassan Osmond only flew with me 6 times, not counting trips that we made to Khartoum. Fadil flew 17 times and of all the COR persons, was the only one who knew how to effectively use the airplane and enjoyed travelling in it. Mike Menning flew 22 times and while we were airborne I taught him to fly so that if anything happened to me he would be able to handle the aircraft.

I also estimate that during the time I carried about 6 tons of cargo, not a whole lot in terms of weight, but significant when you realize that it included critical parts for water systems, vaccines and other medicines, and other high priority equipment. The airplane was used not only for personal transportation, but also for aerial photography (the only way we could get a real count of the number of shelters and the number of families living in the camps); for monitoring the water situation at Wad Kowli; for identifying new sites for refugee camps; for warning when the rising river would cut Wad Kowli off from the western bank and therefore relief supplies; for evacuating critically ill personnel; and for showing numerous donors the extent of the situation that we were facing in the east. All in all, I think that the airplane more than paid for itself in the short time that it operated. The total cost of the airplane

to UNHCR came to under \$15,000. Had we rented an airplane from Nile Safaris or any of the other charter operators for the same amount of flight time and missions, it would have cost over \$175,000. Why more relief agencies won't use small planes in emergencies I'll never know.

* * *

No description of my time in Sudan would be complete without a picture of the Acropole Hotel. The Acropole was an old hotel located in two buildings that sit catty-corner from each other in downtown Sudan. The hotel is owned by a family of Greek immigrants, George and Tenacities _____. The Acropole is one of those places that's right out of a Graham Green novel. The only way you can find the hotel is to look for a small brass plaque on the side of a nondescript building on a dirt street off one of the main drags in the central business district. From the entrance, stairs lead up to the second floor where the hotel office is located. George or Tenacities always man the office which, in those days, was a small madhouse. The Acropole had a friend in the telephone company and somehow they always had the only operable telex and telephone system in the entire country. When everybody else was down, you could bet that the Acropole would be able to get a message out to anyplace in the world. Thus, there were always half a score of relief agency personnel standing in line to use the telex and usually George's sister was busy helping to prepare the messages and the tapes to run through the machine. Quite a few of the relief agencies also used the Acropole as their message drop and a large number even kept their post office box there in the lobby.

Going on up to the next floor, one found the dining room, communal bath and showers and about ten of the guest rooms opening out directly onto the dining room and sitting area. Because of the arrangement there was absolutely no privacy and many of the hornier relief agency staff found their romantic escapades severely curtailed until they could find a room in the Acropole's annex across the street.

All meals were served family style in the Acropole's dining room. The food was bland, but many of the relief agency people found it a welcome change from the Sudanese diet. The food was served by two giant Sudanese Nubian waiters who wore dirty gelabias and turbans which I don't think they ever changed. They knew just enough words in various European languages to get a rough estimate of what you really wanted, but more often than not you took whatever they served.

The Acropole was more of an institution than a hotel. It really was the heart and soul of the relief operation in Khartoum. At breakfast and dinner, you could spot almost everyone who was in town and more work was done there than was ever accomplished in the Branch Office or the Red Cross offices.

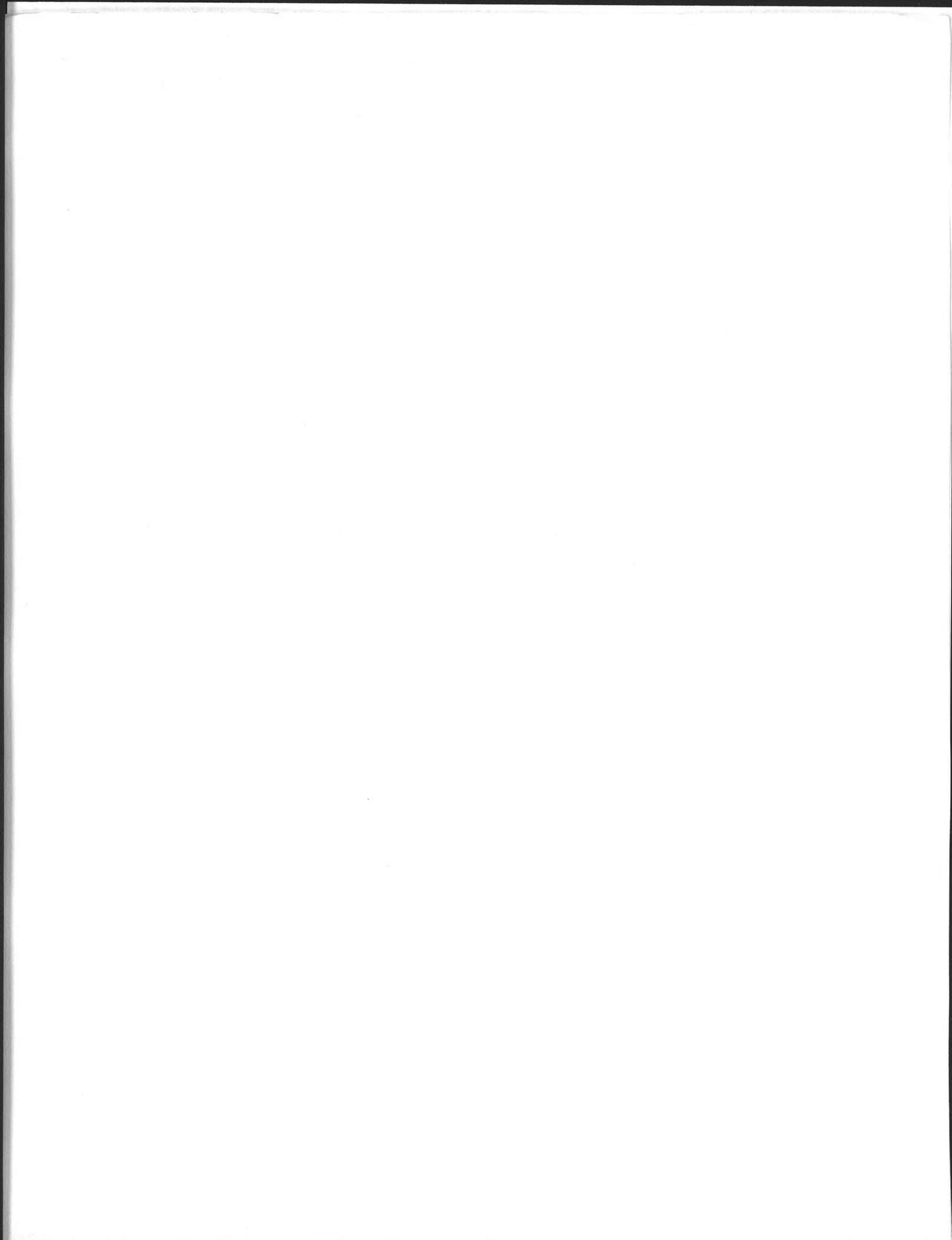
Dining room conversation was always a cacophony of different languages and dialects accompanied by the pervasive blare of Sudanese television's English news service in the evening.

When I arrived in Khartoum, Don Krumm had already taken a room in the main building of the Acropole. Since it was one of the larger rooms and had two beds, he offered to share the room so that we could both save on expenses. At first I was reluctant to do it for I knew that the people at HCR might object to me staying with someone from the embassy. But, since rooms were short in Khartoum at the

time and the only other alternative was either the Meridian or Hilton hotels which were prohibitively expensive, Nicholas approved the arrangement. Thus, I established a base in Khartoum in Room 22 at the Acropole for about \$10 per day. After Don left, I continued to hold the room because it was such a good address for when I was in Khartoum.

George and Tenastities proved to be good friends. They were not only excellent innkeepers but had an inside track on how to get things done throughout the city. In almost every city in Africa, some minority group seems to be at the top of the business pyramid. In many countries in east Africa it's the Indian community, in some it's the Chinese. In Sudan it was the Greek community, a small but very influential group that controlled or greatly influenced many of the businesses and markets in the country. If no one else could get a part, the guys at the Acropole would be a good bet for finding someone who could find whatever you needed. I think the folks at the Acropole really enjoyed the excitement and it was far better to deal with lots of relief agency people who were doing something meaningful than have to help old ladies sort out their tours to the game parks and trips to the pyramids. Much to their credit, the guys at the Acropole never took advantage of any of the relief agencies. Their prices remained steady throughout the operation and they treated everyone with equal respect and fairness.

Several months after I left Sudan and relations with UNHCR were at an all time low, one of the criticisms that was hurled at me was that I had stayed at the Acropole Hotel and associated with "undesirable elements and secret agents". Evidently someone failed to point out that Pierce Garety, the Deputy Representative and at least a dozen other top HCR personnel, stayed there during the same period.



Chapter 14

THE RETURN

For almost a month we had been watching the gathering rainstorms forming over the mountains inside Ethiopia. I had noticed the first thunderheads billowing on the eastern horizon on a late afternoon flight back from Khartoum in mid-March. At first, the storms had only been visible from the air but by the first of April, the storms were much bigger and could clearly be seen daily from Wad Kowli, Sefawa and, at times, even from Showak. When the Setit River began to flow, it was a clear indication that the belg rains had returned to the highlands of Ethiopia.

As the storms grew in both intensity and duration, we could sense a growing mood of restlessness among the refugees and soon, there were reports that small groups were beginning to trek homeward from Wad Kowli. Soon the refugee leaders began asking if HCR or COR were willing to provide assistance to those who wanted to go home.

On one of my trips to Wad Kowli, Jean-Michel Goudstikker complained that despite numerous requests to both the Sub- and Branch Offices for clarification of UNHCR's policy regarding assisting returnees, he had yet to receive an answer. He believed large numbers of refugees were planning to leave and asked if I would follow-up on his requests and see if a policy decision had been made.

On checking with the Branch Office, I was told curtly that repatriation was none of my business. This was strictly a UNHCR matter and that I should confine myself to operational, not political issues. I pointed out that supplying returning refugees was an operational concern, since we would have to provide food and possibly other support to insure that they could make it home. I reminded the Branch Office that each returning family would need more than three week's supply of food and, if they left without receiving that amount, they might be forced to turn around and come back. Given the current mood of the Sudanese and the uncertainty about future refugee policies under the new government, we might have a situation on our hands that could affect the entire program. Most important, it could make it difficult for other arrivals to gain admission. I also pointed out that since the amount of food each returnee would need for the journey would be more than they could carry, we might need to make some arrangements to give food to REST so that they could preposition it along the route.

Despite these arguments, I was again told that I shouldn't concern myself with the situation. They assured me that HCR was developing a "confidential" plan to assist returnees.

On April 22, Fadil chaired the monthly Emergency Meeting. A number of the agencies working in Wad Kowli and Sefawa asked Fadil to explain COR's position on assistance to returnees. Fadil replied that neither a policy or program of assistance had yet been worked out, but that those refugees who wished to leave would certainly be helped as much as possible.

Marian Roche, the Field Officer at Fau, reported that she and REST had conducted a survey of the refugees at Fau and found that almost 60% indicated that when the time was right, they would be leaving. She asked if COR would provide trucks to help the refugees get from Fau back to the border. Fadil replied that he didn't have any specific instructions regarding transport but was certain that trucks could

be made available to those who wanted to go. I was a bit perplexed by her question; she enjoyed the confidence of the Branch Office and often knew of policy changes even before Mike Menning. Surely, if anyone would know about UNHCR's secret plan, it would be Marian.

After the meeting, Assafa Namu, the REST coordinator in Gedaref and his assistant, _____, asked if they could have a private meeting with el Fadil and myself. Asafa was a tall, thin veteran of many treks between Gedaref and Tigray. He was known to most relief agencies as sharp and quick but also as a bit brusque and demanding. In particular, he was not liked by Mike Menning and others in SOG.

Fadil and I met with the REST delegation in the GPM's office in Showak. The meeting got off to a rocky start when Fadil, still smarting from his reprimand several days earlier for sending refugees back, took the opportunity to question REST about why refugees continued to come out while so many were already beginning to trickle back. Fadil said that he was sure that most of the refugees were really famine victims and not true refugees. Why, he demanded, couldn't the cross-border operation be beefed up so that the people could be fed inside Tigray?

After some additional posturing by Fadil, I stepped in to bring the discussion down to the issue at hand. I pointed out to Fadil that the cross-border operation was trying to get more trucks so they could send more food across and that one of the main obstacles had been the completion of the road between Wad Kowli and the highlands which would give the trucks year long access. I pointed out that Hassan had quietly tried to find a way to provide a road grader to REST so that they could complete the grading of about sixteen kilometers of road just on the other side of Wad Kowli, but that he hadn't been successful.

I also pointed out the difficulties that REST and ERA had been having in obtaining more trucks and supplies from USAID. I brought him up to date on the problems REST had experienced with CARE blowing hot and cold and how all the attempts to increase the cross-border operation's effectiveness had roved relatively fruitless.

Apparently, Fadil had never been briefed on any of these details by Hassan or the Commissioner. At least knowing that efforts were underway to try and get food in from Sudan made him seem more relaxed and, at that point, we got down to business.

Assafa explained that the reason for the meeting was to find out what COR planned to do regarding large scale departures of refugees back to Tigray. Specifically, would the people be helped with food or other supplies and, most importantly, would people who wanted to go from the Fau camps be provided transport back to the border?

Fadil responded by asking what REST itself planned to do to help the people going back. Assafa explained that REST's policy was to try and discourage people from returning. The situation was still too critical at home, as evidenced by the continued flow of refugees out of Tigray. REST was concerned that there was not only not enough food, but the current military action, as well as the lack of draught animals, would cause hardships for families trying to go back.

To reduce the number of returnees to a manageable size, they had proposed a program of limited assistance designed to reduce both the number of returnees as well as promote the idea that only adult males should go back. The men would rehabilitate the farms and make sure that everything was okay

before the rest of their families repatriated. REST would guarantee food, water and support on the return journey and, where possible, draught animals to work the farms to men who returned alone. If, however, the men returned with dependents, they could only expect limited help along the way and nothing when they arrived.

Each family that returned had to sign a card which specified that they understood these conditions. To underscore his point, Asafa showed us a copy of the card that REST was using.

As Fadil and I looked at the cards, we glanced at each other. We both knew the gravity of what Asafa was saying. It was clear that the situation inside Tigray was still extremely grave, but the people were still determined to go back. REST's actions were a desperate move. Because they couldn't convince people to stay in Sudan, they were losing control in the camps. They needed help but they weren't sure what kind of help they needed. We guessed they were trying to define their options and that meant first finding out what they could expect from the Sudanese.

Fadil and I were both convinced that the people were going to go back home no matter what REST, COR or anyone else did. With people watching the rain clouds forming over their homeland daily, the yearning to leave was strong. All they had in life was their land and they feared that this might be their last chance to reclaim it and rebuild their lives. If REST took the position of discouraging people from returning, they would be losing faith with the people, their leadership would be questioned and it was likely that their influence and ability to provide leadership, as well as material aid, would be substantially weakened.

As the meeting ended Asafa asked if I would draw up some suggestions. He said that they believed that with my experience, I could come up with a plan. He felt that UNHCR and COR were foundering and didn't know what to do. He was certain that if I could make some suggestions, it would get Khartoum started in time to help the returnees.

Fadil assured REST that at least he would do everything in his power to help those returning leave Sudan with as much food as they could carry and would provide all the medical attention possible to ensure that they were healthy enough to make the return journey. Exactly what the program of assistance would be, and how much food we could provide, wasn't yet clear, but he assured Asafa that he would rather give refugees enough food to go home than try and feed the people through the rainy season in Sudan.

After the meeting, Fadil and I talked for several hours. If Marian's remarks had bothered me, the conversation with Asafa really had me worried. Why would REST be coming to us for ideas if Khartoum was working with them on a secret plan? Asafa would be the first to know about it since he would be responsible for putting it into operation.

I went over my notes on repatriation, step-by-step, with Fadil. I briefed him on Hassan's February decision to allow people to go back and how we had encouraged people to wait until ration distribution day so that they could take their full ration when they left. I pointed out that the early returnees had all been single men who were in good shape and who stood a good chance of making the trip without undue hardship. We reviewed the reports from Osmon Mekke that the recent returnees included women and

children; before they left, family and friends in the camp contributed some of their rations so that the departing families would have enough for the trek.

Ironically, it appeared that the biggest problem for returnees was that a single refugee could not carry enough food alone for the journey, which was sometimes as long as five weeks. The more people who went, the more food and the better the nutritional mix. Still, it would be difficult for any of the returnees to reach their destinations. Large amounts of food had to be pre-positioned along the way. The question was, did REST have the capability to provide food on the other side of the border? The cross-border trucks were already insufficient to supply the famine victims and had to make long journeys to get the food deep into Tigray. Clearly, if large numbers of people were to go home, they would need some sort of logistical support from the Sudanese side in order to make it safely.

Fadil and I summarized that there were four questions that had to be considered. First, was the situation inside Tigray such that people should be encouraged to return? Second, would the refugees return, even if they knew the situation was bad? Third, would support for the first returnees encourage others to return and trigger a mass exodus that would overwhelm the relief system inside Tigray? Finally, what were the true intentions of UNHCR and the Sudanese government?

For weeks we had been hearing news from the TPLF and EPLF that fighting had intensified along the border. One day we had even seen Ethiopian jets attacking rebel positions near Humera and had subsequently learned from the Sudanese army, that a major battle was taking place around the town. The arrival of the "student" refugees the previous week was now seen as further evidence that the TPLF was, at least temporarily, in retreat and it was questionable whether or not they could provide cover and security for large groups of returnees.

On the other hand, we were convinced that large numbers of people were going to go whether or not they were assisted. Every afternoon, large groups of refugees would gather on the hills outside the camps to watch the storms build inside Ethiopia. Every day, larger groups were leaving and we were sure that REST's policy of supporting only returning men was doomed to fail. Peasant farming is very labor intensive and when it's time to plant and cultivate a field, everyone in the family is needed. With the loss of so many draught animals in the famine, it was even more imperative that the women and children go back with the men. Furthermore, we were sure that few men would be willing to leave their women in the camps. The supply of food and water was still too marginal and there had already been too many instances of rape by Sudanese shiftas (roving thieves) and soldiers in the camps.

We were also convinced that the refugees knew more about the situation at home than we did. After all, refugees were arriving everyday bringing fresh news. While the fighting might be bad, it was still basically a guerilla war, which meant that fighting was isolated and sporadic even though the battles might be fairly large. Furthermore, despite all the reports of fighting, we hadn't seen many casualties. Even the new refugees coming from areas where fighting was reported were hard pressed to describe actual bombing attacks against the civilian population. Most of the fighting seemed to be in the northern parts of Tigray and along the Eritrean frontier. We theorized that if the refugees returned along the same, more southerly routes that they had followed coming out, even large groups would be fairly safe

from aerial attack.

My biggest concern was the last question. I suspected that the Sudanese would want to do everything they could to encourage the refugees to leave; HCR would want to do everything it could to hold the people there. Could these two positions be reconciled or were they set on a collision course?

Over the years, UNHCR has developed the position that repatriation will only be supported if (1) it is totally voluntary, (2) that there is a comprehensive, tripartite agreement between the host country, the country of origin, and the UNHCR setting out the rules of repatriation, and (3) if the host country permits the High Commissioner to verify that people are not harmed by the country of origin after they return to their homes.

Earlier that spring, the High Commissioner had reiterated these principles at a meeting in _____ and therein "lay the rub". Since the UNHCR is a part of the United Nations, and since the UN is a club of nations, nations have to agree on repatriation terms. Since the Tigrayans were in conflict with their government, there was little chance that the Ethiopians would agree to repatriation unless the people were handed over to the government in Addis. This, of course, was out of the question; many of the people would probably be arrested as guerilla sympathizers and many others would be forced to resettle in other parts of the Ethiopia, one of the main reasons so many people were supporting the TPLF. Moreover, since the territory where they would be returning was held by the rebels and was still under attack, it couldn't be considered safe and HCR would not be able to verify people's status after their return journey.

This left us with two options. One was to simply turn a blind eye on the returnees and let them go back quietly, hoping that Ethiopia wouldn't notice or try to interfere. We could hope that if we didn't do anything to visibly provoke Ethiopia and publicly deny that repatriation was even taking place, most of the refugees could get back unmolested.

The other option was to make the repatriation as visible as possible. In reality, it would be very difficult to hide the movement of thousands of returnees -- they would be easy to spot (and attack) from the air. I reasoned that if we supported the return publicly, making it highly visible and playing up the difficult conditions and hardships facing the people; with the whole world watching, Ethiopia wouldn't risk it's public image -- that of a country struggling against famine by bombing helpless civilians returning to plant a crop. Furthermore, repatriation worked to their advantage; if large numbers of people returned, it would take a lot of the sting out of the criticism that they were using famine as a weapon of war.

Our biggest unknown was what position the Sudanese government would take towards refugees who tried to return but found they couldn't make it and came back to Sudan. Fadil was uncertain whether or not the new government would be just as welcoming the second time if they came back again. He was sure that there would be a lot of sentiment not to allow them to re-enter the country. Numerous officials had publicly come out against the "to-and-fro flow" of "famine victims" in the east and we were concerned that they were laying the groundwork for reducing the number of entries. Given the previous week's events, I was still not sure that closing the border wasn't high on the government's agenda.

By the end of our discussions, Fadil and I were convinced that it would be up to us to set the course for the repatriation. He supported Asafa's suggestion that I recommend some actions to get things moving. Before doing that, however, he suggested that we talk to the refugee ourselves to gauge the depth of their desire to leave.

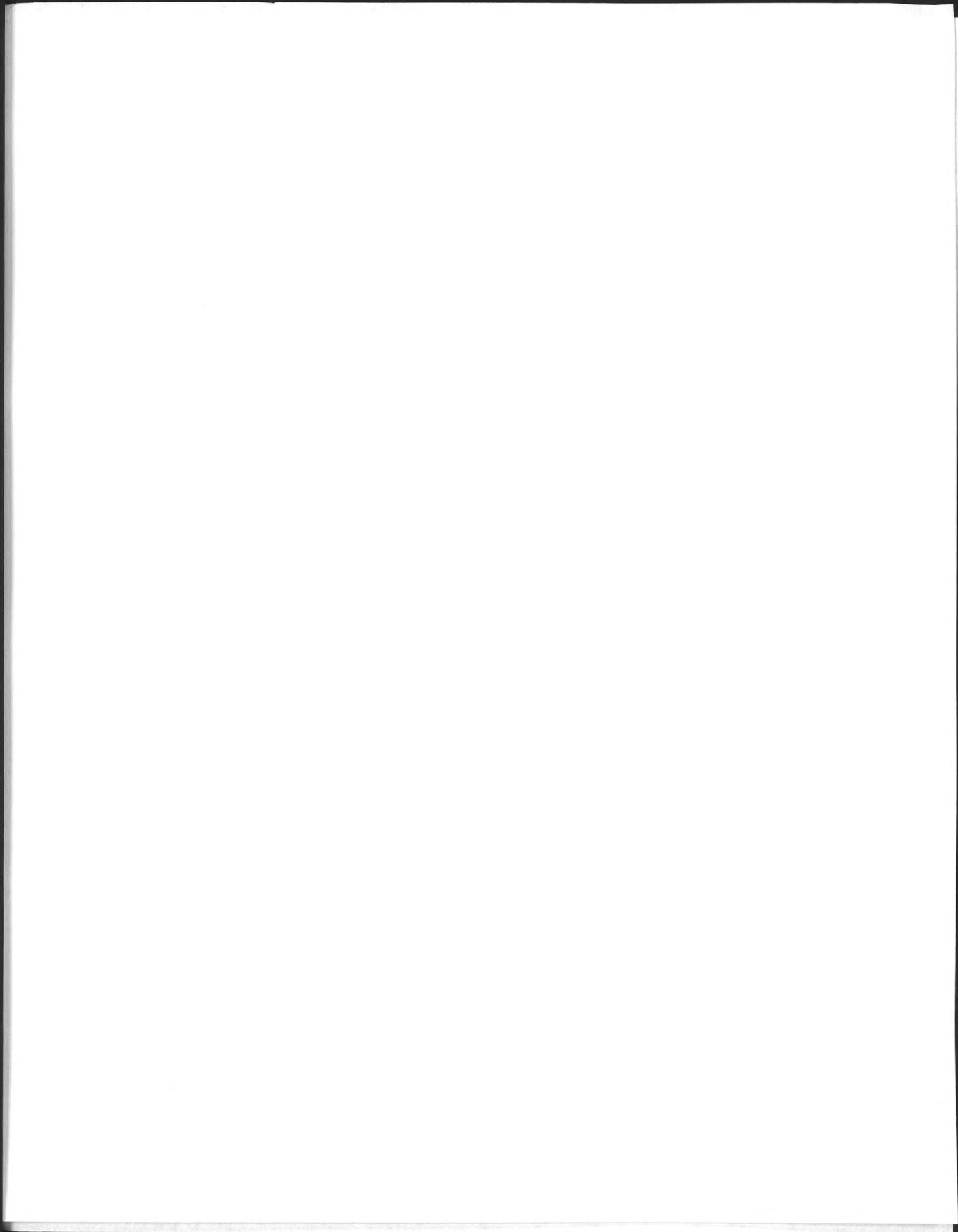
The next day I flew to Sefawa, Wad Kowli and Fau to interview some of the refugees who said they wanted to return. My concern was to find out what was motivating the people and to make clear in my own mind that they knew the risks. My talks with the refugees convinced me that not only were they aware of their chances, they were determined to make the trip with or without assistance. And most planned to take their families, despite REST's opposition. Most of the refugees expressed the concern that if they didn't go back soon, they would lose their lands and contact with family and friends still inside. All said that they felt they could survive -- the rains appeared to be good -- and they had enough friends and families back in their villages to help them through the most difficult period.

Talking to the refugees was a true eye-opener. I was not only convinced that they were going to try, I was convinced that most of them would make it. The people were very realistic about their chances, and seemed to know far more than I had suspected about the situation and their chances for survival. This was definitely not a case of lemmings throwing themselves off a cliff. These people were survivors and the time had come for them to go back.

I reported my findings to Fadil that afternoon. By the end of our discussions, we had agreed on the key point, the basis on which all our subsequent actions was based; that was, that the refugees were bound to leave regardless of the situation in Tigray or whether or not they received help from anyone, REST included. Since we recognized that as a given, it was imperative that plans be developed to provide as much support as possible to the families. Fadil was now sure that we should draw up suggestions for a comprehensive assistance program.

Over the next few days I worked on a plan that would help the returnees and at least give them a fighting chance to make it once they got home. The plan consisted of seven specific activities, all of which could be carried out with resources that we already had on hand or in the pipeline. It only required redefining the basis on which we distributed food and certain goods. The key elements of the plan were:

1. To provide the returnees with enough food to make the entire journey.
2. To provide them clothing, blankets and sandals on a priority basis; in other words, put them in the front of the line so they could receive the goods before they left.
3. To provide immediate immunizations for those who would be leaving, especially cholera shots for those going to, or passing through, areas where cholera was present.
4. To train health workers from each of the villages in first aid techniques and to provide them with medical kits so that they could accompany the returnees and provide medical care en-route (and at home).
5. To provide a starter kit of hoes, yokes and other agricultural tools to help them once they were home.



6. To provide seeds to make sure they had something to plant.
7. To set up a special team to screen the returnees and advise those who were not physically fit not to go.

The first part of the plan was relatively easy to put together. The volags with clothing and blankets had already decided to give them to returnees first and it wouldn't take much urging to get the medical agencies to set up the screening program. Fadil had already identified several actions that COR could take to give the returnees some immediate assistance. A special registration system would be set up so that anyone leaving family members behind would be able to locate them when it was time to send for them to come back. COR would use some of its internal funds to try and purchase sandals so that women and children walking back would have an easier time of it. Agencies with shoes to give out would be instructed to do so as soon as possible. Finally, Fadil instructed all the project managers and UNHCR field officers to help REST conduct a survey to find out exactly how many people wanted to repatriate from Sefawa and from the Fau camps.

Transporting the people from Fau and Sefawa back to the border was another concern. I thought that would be the easiest to deal with. Since it was obvious that Sudan wouldn't want the people wandering all over the countryside, COR would provide the necessary trucks. After all, since we had moved them away from the border in the first place, we had an obligation to take them back. The only problem that I could see was where the trucks come from. We already had fifty trucks, all of the COR fleet plus twenty or so rented souk lorries, moving people to Girba but since most of the refugees were not repatriating, it was still important to move them to camps that could be reached during the rainy season.

I checked with Abdul Ayum, our move boss. He had an innovative idea. The Bedford trucks that belonged to COR had a much greater range than the souk lorries. By transferring all the souk lorries to moving people from Wad Sherife to Girba, a round trip distance of only 200 kms., all the Bedford trucks could be assigned to a "round robin" journey: First the trucks would leave Wad Kowli with refugees for Girba. After dropping the refugees there, they would return to Showak for fuel, then drive on to Fau, arriving there in mid-afternoon. There they would take on returnees and drive back to Wad Kowli. By assigning two drivers to each truck, we could operate the vehicles around the clock and keep all the moves within schedule. We even calculated that the additional cost in fuel would only be 25% more than the normal round trip run between Wad Kowli and Girba.

With the transport plans worked out, only two issues still remained: food for the refugees and transporting it inward. There was no question that we would have to provide at least a portion of the food. What wasn't certain was how much food was needed and where it would come from. We weren't sure how much REST could take out of the pipeline and position along the way; would the entire burden fall to us and, if so, could COR and UNHCR be persuaded to supply the food from our stockpiles.

Second, was the question of transporting the food. If we gave them the food, how could the people carry it home or, alternatively, if we gave it to REST, how could they transport it to the checkpoints for the returnees?

My proposed solutions to these questions proved to be the most controversial issues of my time in

Sudan. The hottest proposal revolved around giving food to the returnees. I proposed giving each of the returning families a total ration equivalent to the amount they would consume had they stayed in Sudan through the rainy season. I argued that we could justify providing that amount by redefining the basis for distributing rations. We would issue each family a two-month, "rainy season allotment" rather than distributing the usual ten-day increments. In other words, we would give the people their rations then instead of later. I expected, of course, that once the people received the food, they would turn it over to REST which would then arrange to transport it to distribution points along the way. How they would do that was still unresolved.

Finally, the draft plan was complete. Fadil reviewed it carefully. At last, he approved it and urged me to work fast to convince Khartoum to accept it. I knew that the Branch Office would oppose many of the food issues but I felt that the others were acceptable and that we could work through the others with a couple of good hard work sessions. Thus, with plan in hand, I set out for Khartoum.

It was several hours before I could get to see Nicholas and give him the plan and a covering memo explaining the reasons for my recommendations. When I finally got in to see him, he was just heading out of the office. He quickly scanned over the plan without commenting and said he would read it in more detail and get back to me later. Because he was obviously busy with something else, I concealed my disappointment and returned to the Acropole for lunch. There I ran into Mark Bowden, field operations coordinator for Save the Children U.K.; Andrew Timmson, SCF's Field Director; Nickolas Winder, the Oxfam field director; and Fred Gregory, my consultant friend working with Mercy Corps on cross-border operations.

The group wanted to talk about the events of the previous week, especially the rumor that the border was going to be closed, and the implications of the events at Wad el-Hileau. I assured them that both of those crises were over and the one we were now facing was the repatriation of the Tigrayans. Mark asked about COR's position: what kind of assistance would they be willing to offer and what kind of help was needed from the voluntary agencies?

I told them about the Seven Point Plan and suggested that SCF could help with the screening program. Then I asked if SCF or any of the other volags present could provide the seeds and agricultural implements.

Gregory was the first to point out that we faced major transport problems. He was intimately familiar with REST's transport capability since Mercy Corps was the agency that was providing trucks and truck maintenance for REST. "With the trucks they have now, they won't be able to move large amounts of food without cutting into the supply operations deep inside," he said.

"What about animals?," I asked. "Would the voluntary agencies purchase pack animals for the returnees so that they could carry the food?"

The previous evening, I had made some calculations on how many animals might be required and what the preliminary costs would be. There appeared to be several options, but many more obstacles. Two animals could be used, donkeys and camels. While theoretically either animal could carry enough food for the journey for one family, the real problem was that neither Sudanese camels nor Sudanese donkeys

were suitable for the high, mountainous plateaus of Tigray. The first part of the journey would be made on relatively flat land and if the animals were in good shape and well watered, they should be able to make it. But approximately 200 kilometers inland, lay an escarpment, a sheer mountain cliff that rose from the desert to a height of over 2500 meters. While the donkeys could make it up the escarpment, it was doubtful if camels could, and once on top, it was not clear whether or not they could adjust to the cold, thin air.

The camels could be tanked-up with water at Wad Kowli and could make it to the escarpment without difficulty but it was uncertain if there was enough water en-route for the donkeys. There were no accurate reports yet about how much water had been left by the recent rains.

Due to the uncertainties, I had not made any proposals for using animals to carry the food and wanted to get some second opinions from the volags before making any recommendations to HCR or COR. Also, officially, UNHCR could do nothing to help people once they crossed the border and even a recommendation to use pack animals in an internal memorandum would be seen as provocative by the Ethiopians if it were made public.

Fred had been on the border with me several days earlier and had seen the large camel herds that were migrating along the Atbara. These camels, which had survived the drought in the lush, southern zone, were in good condition, robust and well-suited for our purposes. He said that the plan, while problematic, looked like something REST could pull off and suggested that I meet immediately with Abodi to explain it. Even though meeting with REST was frowned on by HCR, I decided to see Abodi and get his reactions before presenting it formally to HCR. Therefore, late in the afternoon, I went out to their offices near the airport.

Abodi had been told by Assafa that I would be developing plans and recommendations and he was anxious to hear what I had come up with. We discussed the overall plan in detail, going over each point and its pros and cons. He listened intently and at the end of my presentation, he commented that this was exactly what they were looking for. While REST still preferred that only men return, if the level of assistance I proposed could be provided, they would do their best to help families as well. His principal concern, like everyone else, was how to transport the food. I told him that I was considering using pack animals, but that I still wasn't convinced that it was feasible, nor had I figured out how they could be purchased. Abodi suggested that the voluntary agencies might be willing to buy the animals, but I replied that given the cost of camels (at that time about \$40 per head) it was unlikely that they would be able to buy very many.

Abodi then came up with a suggestion that I felt was worth considering. He pointed out Sudanese camels were not really suited to the high, mountainous terrain of the Tigrayan highlands; they were better suited for use on the lower, hotter flatland between the border and the first escarpment. If we could provide enough camels to "shuttle" food for the returnees from the border to the base of the escarpment, REST workers could carry the food to the top by hand and then load donkeys or camels acclimated to the highlands to carry the food from there to the villages. In other words, we would develop a three-stage shuttle operation.

Another factor in favor of this system was that since the people would be consuming food along the way, the amount of food that they would need to carry up the escarpment would be less once they got there. Therefore, Rest would have been able to make the shuttle work on their end without too much trouble.

Sitting down with my calculator, I estimated that it would take approximately 1,200 camels on our end to support the shuttle operation. If we could get 2,000 camels we could even provide enough haulage capacity to send in some extra grain to support the people once they were back in their villages.

After reviewing the proposals and looking over a map of the route, I sat back to let it all sink in. Abodi was silent for several minutes. Finally he stood up. "This is what we've been waiting for," he said. "With careful planning, I think we can make it work."

"What about the quantities of food," I asked. "Do you have enough in your own stockpiles to support the people, or do we need to provide the food from Wad Kowli's stocks?"

"We have a lot of food in our warehouse in Gedaref that we aren't able to move now because we don't have the trucks," Abodi said. "But we're going to need that food on the inside and the trucks that AID and Mercy Corps have been promising should be here soon. If they're not, we won't be able to move any food before the rainy season comes."

"How many more people will be coming out of Tigray?", I asked. "How much food do we need to keep in store at Wad Kowli?"

"I don't know for sure," he said. "But I don't think there will be many more. Now that the rains are coming, people are staying to try and plant their crops and the returnees are telling them that conditions are very poor in Sudan and that's discouraging many people from leaving. But it all depends on the fighting. If the attacks pick up, thousands more might flee."

I made a note to myself to check with Fred Gregory on the status of the trucks, the roads and the fuel supplies inside Tigray as I stood up and shook hands with Abodi. As we walked to the door, Abodi put his one arm around me and said, "Thank you for this. You are a good friend of the people of Tigray."

"It's only just beginning," I said. "We still have to convince a lot of people."

"Do you think that the U.S. Embassy will approve or back the plan?" Abadi asked.

"It's not the Americans I'm worried about," I said. "It's UNHCR."

I assumed that USAID, which was still proclaiming to support the cross-border operation, would be an ally in pressuring HCR to at least turn their back and allow the project to be carried out with the help of the volags. After all, they were trying to find ways of getting more food into Tigray, and this was a way of at least reducing the amount that they would have to ship before the rains came. Furthermore, if the system worked, it could possibly even provide a small scale, alternate delivery system and could be used to send in things like seeds and small farm implements, reducing the workload of the trucks and speeding overall agricultural recovery.

My assumption that we would receive American support, however, proved to be dead wrong.

* * *

After leaving Abodi, I returned to the Acropole where I met Fred Gregory and told him about Abodi's idea. Fred generally supported the plan, pointing out the advantages of using camels in the shuttle. With water now in the Setit and rains just on the other side of the border, camels would be even better than donkeys or trucks since, once they were tanked up, they would not be competing with the refugees for water in the early parts of the trip and, better than trucks, they could accompany the refugees on the hidden trails.

My next stop that evening was to present the plan to Bob Gersony. Since I was certain that UNHCR would not provide the camels, and might even be opposed to providing seeds and farm tools, I felt that the Americans would be one resource that we could turn to quickly to get the needed help, if HCR balked.

In the month or so since Bob had been in Sudan, he had shown very little interest in the operations in the East and he hadn't even made a trip out to the border since he first arrived (before the coup). Ole' "Snake Eyes" had become a Khartoum commando. Several times on my trips into Khartoum, I had met with Bob over dinner to bring him up to date on what was happening in the east and to brief him on the various things that we needed from the U.S. government. From what I could tell, however, Bob hadn't really pushed any of the things that we had been asking for and since his mission was really to report on the situation in northern Ethiopia, I didn't really expect too much help (nor, in fact, did I really need too much at that point.) By then, everything was going well and now that Fadil was in command, things were running swiftly and smoothly.

Earlier in the month, Bob and I had talked briefly about the events at Wad Kowli and Wad el-Hileau. While I was convinced that these were isolated incidents, I wanted to keep Bob informed so that if the Sudanese closed the border or started making it rough on refugees, the American Embassy could weigh-in heavily to "correct" the situation. (I also wanted to make it clear that, in my opinion the closing of the border was not Fadil's doing, that he had been put up to it by Hassan Osmon. If there was going to be an official protest or action taken, I wanted to make sure that Fadil wouldn't get burned and turned out of office.)

Now I turned to Bob for some support in convincing HCR to support the Seven Point program and to convince USAID to give the voluntary agencies the financial and material support they would need. That night, I went to Bob's room at the Acropole and briefed him on the proposals. At first he appeared to be supportive and most of the questions he asked were on technicalities. Even when we discussed pack animals, he only seemed concerned that the costs of buying the animals might be too much for the voluntary agencies and that AID might have to provide the money. We both knew for certain that none of the money was going to come from HCR.

At the end of our meeting, Bob said that he would discuss the proposals with AID and the Embassy and get back to me, but generally, he thought they were workable. He stressed, however, that this was not a commitment, he simply wanted to look at the options a bit closer before making a decision. ~~Later~~ that night, I found Fred Gregory and Pierce Garety having a drink in the lounge at the Acropole. Pierce

said that he hadn't yet been briefed by Nicholas on my proposals but that Fred had mentioned that I was considering using camels to transport their food home. I was surprised that Nicholas hadn't briefed him on the plan, so I gave him a copy and proceeded to go through the points one by one. I then told him about my meeting with Abodi and Abodi's positive reaction. The trick now, I said, was to get a voluntary agency interested in the program and find a way that HCR and COR could stand aside without getting directly involved.

Pierce was worried. "We're getting into a lot of gray areas," he said, "I'm not sure how Geneva'll read this."

We all agreed that it was imperative to get a volag involved as soon as possible and that before we went any further, Fred should verify whether or not REST had enough food supplies on their own or if UNHCR/COR foods would be needed. He also agreed to find out if there were trucks at the other end and what their carrying capacities were.

At that point, Nick Winder and Mark Bowden came in. They had been checking on the possibility of providing trucks for inland food transport but felt that once the rains started, the trucks would be trapped inside Tigray. They asked how REST had reacted to the suggestion of using pack animals. I told them that Abodi had said that this appeared to be something they could carry out. After explaining how the proposed shuttle system would work, I asked if their organizations would consider support and both agreed to think it over and get back in touch with me as soon as possible.

As they left, Nick Winder told me that one of his counterparts from Oxfam-America, Debbie _____ had recommended to her board that they support voluntary repatriation with a grant, technical assistance and some seeds and materials. Several weeks earlier, Debbie _____, who was looking for projects in the east, had asked me for recommendations. I had suggested that she consider assisting returnees, but when she had approached UNHCR about the matter, they had told her that there was no need. When I learned that, I invited her to Showak to discuss the matter and she came out the next day. I explained the problems we were having in getting support for returnees and asked if there was any way that she could help. She agreed to go and talk to the refugees and, if she was convinced that the returnee program was as urgent as I said, she would recommend that OXFAM-America fund some activities.

Debbie had arrived in time to see one of the first groups of men returning from Wad Kowli. She had watched silently as the men hitched up their packs at sunset and moved silently back towards the border. Debbie radioed back that she would start moving on the matter immediately.

Nick said that John Dennis, an agricultural development specialist, would be arriving in Khartoum in several days to begin developing the program for returnees. He also said that since both Oxfam and SCF had been providing heavy doses of assistance to the Tigrayans and had not had much success in accounting for their donations, he felt it would be difficult to obtain more money for any kind of support inside Ethiopia. Oxfam-America appeared to be our best chance.

The next morning, I received a call from the acting head of the Sub-Office in Gedaref, Ernesto Rodriguez. The previous night, another large group, possibly as many as 750 men, had slipped out of the camp and returned to Tigray. He was concerned that most had left only with minimal supplies.

Berhe, the REST coordinator in Wad Kowli, had told Jean-Michel Goudstikker that he now estimated that as many as 20,000 more might leave soon. Ernesto urged me to push Nicholas to announce the HCR policy so that the field officers would know how to react. He also informed me that the preliminary results of the survey that REST and COR had carried out in Fau showed that almost half of the people wanted to return. Discussions with the leaders indicated that if trucks weren't provided, the refugees would walk back to the border, a distance of almost 200 miles. The field officer in Fau, Marian Rouche, was convinced the refugees weren't bluffing, they would indeed take to the roads if trucks weren't sent.

* * *

The next morning, I went to the Branch Office to discuss the returnee plan with Nicholas but was told that he had to leave on a trip to the West and wouldn't be back for several days.

On the way out of the office, I ran into Karen Abu Zayd who asked what was up. When I told her about the Seven Point plan, she invited me to return to her office at COR and discuss the matter over coffee. There, for about two hours, we went through the plan and I briefed her on the pack animal scheme. After I finished, I told her that I had been told that HCR was developing a plan of their own but that it was confidential. At this point she shook her head in bewilderment.

"What's this plan they're talking about?" she said. "I've been at every meeting that Nicholas has had with either the Commissioner or with Hassan Attiya and never once has there been any discussion of a repatriation plan. The last time it was discussed was back in March and the only thing that was said was that if people wanted to go, they should go back after they collected their weekly ration."

"Do you think that Nicholas is talking with anyone else in the government?" I asked. "Could he be dealing directly with the Military Council?"

"I doubt it," Karen said. "I'm sure that I would have been informed. Maybe he's got something going with Mike Menning."

"I doubt that," I said. "Menning's been out of the field for two weeks and is not due to return to Gedaref for another couple of days. And I'm pretty sure that he's not cooking anything up with Pierce."

For several minutes we tried to figure out what Nicholas might have been alluding to. Finally I said, "either they're lying to us or they're concocting something in Geneva. In either case, it's a bad situation."

"Look, Fred, this matter is very important to the Sudanese," Karen said. "I can't advise you on this, but I hope that you'll keep working on it."

"Well, if we have to, I guess we can play our American card," I said, referring to my hopes that the American Embassy would start pushing Nicholas to make a commitment to support the returnees.

After agreeing to keep in touch on the matter, I left for the airport and flew back to Showak.

For the next several days, in-between other duties, I continued to explore ways in which we might be able to assist the returnees. The biggest concern were rations for people during the journey and seeds for the people to plant once they got home. As luck would have it, two things occurred that enabled us to meet both needs simultaneously.

While I had been in Khartoum presenting my plan, Fadil had been busy checking the files to see what, if any, actions Hassan Osman might have considered or authorized. He found a memorandum relating to discussions that he had held with Julian Murray and Osmon Mekke in early February when the first returnees had requested assistance. There was a copy of a radio message that indicated that Osmon had suggested providing fifty days worth of food to the returnees and Hassan had agreed. Fadil asked if I knew what the fifty-day figure had been based on. Since I had not been involved in returnee discussions at that time, I decided to check with Julian Murray. Julian replied that he thought the decision had been fifteen days of rations, not fifty; somehow in the radio transmission, fifteen had been translated as 50. Whatever the intention, the fifty day figure had been used not only in the request from Osmon Mekke, but also in the instructions back to him. Thus, it was on record that Hassan Osman had authorized that level of assistance.

When I explained the situation to Fadil, he simply shrugged and said, "If that's the figure on record, I guess we'll have to use it." Then he gave me a conspiratorial grin.

The second thing that happened was that in a radio conversation with Jean-Michel, I learned that a truckload of natural sorghum from Thailand had arrived at Wad Kowli. A thunderbolt struck, the natural Thai sorghum. Of course! Earlier in the year, when food supplies were almost nil, a private contractor had offered to supply UNHCR with several thousand tons of Thai sorghum. The UNHCR procurement section was inclined to reject the offer, since they were in the process of placing much larger orders from other suppliers. Don Krumm and I had discussed the matter and decided that the Thai sorghum would be a good backup, just in case there were any screw-ups in the procurement system. Even though the sorghum was more costly, we had urged UNHCR procurement to go ahead buy the grain.

Most of the other sorghum that we received was produced from hybrids. While the grains were good food, they were nothing more than food. Natural grains, however, not only provided food, they could be used as seeds. Thus, a plan began to take shape. We would provide the refugees with 50 days worth of grains which would provide enough food for the journey and a surplus that could be planted if nothing else was available in the area. If there were seeds in the village, the excess grains would help the family see its way through the first weeks back in the village or could be sold or traded to supplement their food needs.

In the coming month, this was to be the most controversial aspect of the returnee program. Only a few people ever figured out why we gave such a large ration to the returnees.

* * *

On Sunday, April __, a short but intense rain hit Wad Kowli. The next night 1,500 people left the camp. Among these were almost 350 women and children, most the families of the men who had left earlier. It was clear that the main return was now underway.

When Fadil got the word that the first large exodus had taken place and that another one was planned for the following day, he asked me to fly him down to Wad Kowli so that he could see, first-hand, the conditions under which the refugees were leaving and talk to the people to find out how they expected

to survive during their trip. We flew to the camp and spent the afternoon watching the refugees preparing to depart.

The refugees were assembling in a large group approximately a kilometer outside Wad Kowli on the road back to Tigray. There the refugee leaders formed the groups according to villages and clans. Once each group had been organized, the men left to go to the warehouse to pick up the food rations for their journey home.

In the meantime, the women and children were led a short distance up the hill to a station where several piles of relief goods were being distributed. Most of the stuff was worthless -- clothes that had been donated from Europe through Save the Children Fund. We had hesitated to distribute the clothing earlier because it was of such poor quality and because the sizes and styles were hardly appropriate for small, rural Ethiopians. UNHCR had promised to provide cloth to the refugees so that they could make new clothes in the camp, but somehow, through typical bureaucratic ineptitude, the cloth never arrived. As the women and children passed through the piles of clothing, they collected a strange hodge-podge of ski jackets, women's clothing, high-heeled shoes, heavy wool blankets and other assorted goodies, which I'm sure they only carried for a few dozen kilometers before discarding alongside the road.

As soon as the men rejoined the women, they formed a long line and waited beside the road until about 4:30 in the afternoon. Then, when the temperatures began to fall, they stood up, collected their few belongings and, on a silent command from the leader, began the long march home.

Fadil was very moved by the sight. He was also worried that the people would not be able to make it all the way, since we were still issuing the normal 10-day ration. His talks with the REST leaders in the camp had convinced him of the need to provide more food, so on the way back from Wad Kowli, he asked me to keep urging Khartoum to support our plans.

The next day, I received a report from Tessa Williams, the UNHCR Field Officer at Sefawa, reporting that the refugee leaders had held a meeting with SCF, the volag operating the feeding centers in the camps, and had asked that the refugees helping SCF be rotated so that others would have a chance to earn some money before they returned to Tigray. SCF had refused, saying that they didn't have enough time to train new workers and that rotation would be very disruptive at this crucial time in the operation.

The news that the refugees wanted money, however, indicated that they were certain that they weren't going to get assistance from COR and the refusal of SCF to rotate the workers seemed to indicate that the organization had made a decision not to do anything that would help people to return.

For the next several days, we continued to monitor the comings and goings from Wad Kowli. I instructed the workers at the reception centers to be especially alert to spot returnees coming back with any of the new incoming refugees. But so far, there were no signs of anyone changing their minds and turning around.

* * *

On April __, I set out for Khartoum to get Nicholas' reaction to the Plan and to pick up my brother, Chris, who was arriving to manage the road construction project. As I was departing, I received a radio

message from Gedaref, asking me to stop by and pick up a passenger with an urgent message for the Branch Office. My passenger turned out to be a cute, blond SCF nurse named Kimberly, who was on her way back to Khartoum to report on a tense situation at Sefawa. According to her, the previous day, none of the regular Tigrayan workers who ran the supplementary feeding centers, the warehouses, the food distribution programs or the medical out-reach programs had reported for work. In their place, a completely new group of people had shown up for work. When SCF asked what had happened to the other workers, they were told that they were all going back to Tigray and, therefore, didn't need the work. The ones who had shown up were the new workers, according to the REST coordinator in the camps.

SCF was furious. Earlier, the REST proposal to rotate workers had been rejected by both SCF and the COR camp administrator on the grounds that rotating the workers would be very disruptive. Since it took several months to train a worker properly, SCF feared that such a rapid changeover would endanger the quality of the programs and since the morbidity and mortality rates were still unacceptably high, they felt a change at that time would be putting too many people at risk.

It appeared as if REST had handed SCF a fait accompli. SCF attempted to locate some of the old workers and bring them back but when they saw the SCF personnel approaching, they ran off. Eventually, one of the nurses managed to find one her health workers alone in a secluded place. The worker said that if she was seen talking to anyone from SCF or COR that she would be "disciplined" by REST. She also said that there were several workers who had tried to come back to work but they had been "arrested" and were being held in the REST compound. The nurse had attempted to enter the REST compound to verify whether or not anyone was being held, but when she tried to get in, she was blocked by several of the REST staff.

As Kimberly told her story, I silently cursed. I couldn't believe that REST would be so stupid as to pull a trick like this just as we were trying to work out the returnee aid package. I knew that once Mike Menning found out, he would overreact. In fact, he told me later that he was convinced that REST was "preparing to push UNHCR and COR out of the camps and start a general takeover". My theory was that this was a desperation move to try and find some way of getting assistance to people who would be returning. It also indicated that REST was probably trying to reestablish a leadership role on the returnee question. Now that it was evident that the people were determined to leave, REST had to show some forcefulness in trying to get them help. It also seemed to be an indication that returnees were about to start leaving the other camps. (Up to this time only people from Wad Kowli had returned.)

Whatever the case, I knew that I had to begin a damage control effort. I started by asking Kimberly to be very careful when she discussed the matter with the Branch Office and to describe only those things which could actually be verified by SCF or COR personnel. Anything that was a rumor should be omitted. I also asked her to be very even-handed and to give me some time to try and arrange a meeting with Abodi and his staff in Khartoum so that they could be given a chance to explain the situation or to take remedial action.

As luck would have it, the Branch Office was closed and no one had made arrangements to see her

until the next morning. She did manage to locate Pierce Garety at the Acropole and give him a quick briefing. But Pierce was concerned about some problems in the South and when I offered to look into it and to try and solve the situation peacefully, he readily agreed.

That afternoon, I arranged for a meeting between Kimberly and Andrew Timpson, the representative for SCF, and Abodi and several of his key staff members in the lobby of the Acropole. Kimberly quietly told her story in a gentle but firm manner. As I had requested, she stuck to the facts, which in themselves were strong enough. At the end of her presentation, Andrew expressed his concern and demanded to know what REST was up to.

Abodi professed not to know anything about the incident. He said that he couldn't believe that anyone had been threatened or detained in the REST compound. If any of the REST people had done anything like this, it was on their own initiative and was certainly not the policy of REST.

As soon as both sides had a chance to state their position, I intervened to try and stop the discussion from moving any farther. Now that both positions were on the table, we had to start moving to resolve them, not to continue to argue about whether or not one side or the other was correct in their interpretation of the events. I turned to Abodi and in a very stern tone told him that I expected the situation to be corrected immediately. I assured him that I personally believed that the action had not planned by the REST leadership and that I assumed that it was taken on local initiative by the REST people in the camp. Even so, the incident would require a thorough investigation, either by myself, or by someone high on Fadil's staff, by the following Wednesday. No matter what the situation now, I expected it to be corrected by that date; if it wasn't, I would personally recommend to the GPM and the Commissioner that REST be withdrawn from the camp. I suggested that Abodi might want to send Assafa to the camp before my arrival to take any corrective measures that were necessary.

Abodi immediately said that he would send his personal assistant and one of his top advisors, an English volunteer named Rosie Burbeck, to the camp to investigate on his behalf and to tell the original SCF workers to get back to their jobs.

After the meeting broke up, I pulled Abodi aside and told him that it was very important that the situation be resolved quickly since the package of aid for returnees was not yet worked out. I reminded him how crucial REST's presence in the camps would be in the next few months and that an incident like this would be blown out of proportion by REST's enemies and could result in severe operating restrictions on the organization.

Abodi again assured me that he didn't know what it was all about but that he would take care of the situation immediately.

As soon as the meeting was over, I reported to Pierce Garety and told him what had happened. He seemed pleased that something was being done to defuse the situation. He agreed that before HCR took any further actions, they would wait to see if the workers reported back to their jobs.

With that crisis on hold, at least for a few days, I returned to my room in the Acropole to begin preparing for my meeting the next morning with Nicholas about the returnee assistance package. As I reached the lobby of the annex, I ran into Fred Gregory.

"We've got a problem", he said. "Bob Gersony is trying to kill any help for to returnees".

"Why, I thought he was with us?"

"I don't know," said Gregory, "but he's making this a big issue. The Embassy is leaning hard on UNHCR and the volags that were thinking about giving them aid".

"That's crazy", I said. "Helping the returnees benefits everyone. It helps the refugees, it lowers the pressures on Sudan and it indirectly supports AID's cross-border efforts. In fact, they may be the biggest benefactors, especially if it's carried out publicly".

"I know that", said Fred. "But this thing is taking a very negative personal bent. Gersony's even hinted to some of the volags that the reason you're so committed to helping the refugees go home is because you haven't been able to control the death rates at Wad Kowli".

"How would he know", I thought. "He never comes to the border".

What ever was going on, I knew that some powerful opposition was being lined up and I thought I better have it out with Bob as soon as I could. But first, however, I had to complete my notes for my meeting with Nicholas and then meet Chris at the airport.

It was great to see Chris again and I was very excited about having him join me on the project. If there was anyone I could trust to get the roads project underway, I knew it would be him. He was young and enthusiastic and we had worked together on several projects in other countries, but this would be the first big operational program we had worked on jointly.

After a tumultuous greeting at the airport, Chris and I had a late dinner together. We caught up on family affairs, and then discussed the road project in great detail. We left the restaurant around midnight and returned to our hotel, tired but glad to see each other again.

In our room, we had just settled down to enjoy some chocolate chip cookies that our Mom had sent over with Chris when there was a knock on the door. It was Bob Gersony and he asked if he could come in and talk about the returnee program.

For the next two hours, Bob and I matched wits over whether or not the returnees should be assisted. Bob began by stating his frank opposition to the returnee program and laid out his concerns. They centered around intelligence reports from the other side that the situation there was still chaotic. His sources were saying that the famine was still raging in Tigray and Eritrea and that many people were still dying. Furthermore, the security situation was believed to be in shambles. The TPLF was reported to have experienced several major setbacks and an Ethiopian offensive was underway. The cross-border operation was not moving much food even though the roads were still open. And REST's infrastructure to help people in the liberated areas was in much disarray. Given this state of affairs, Bob said the feeling in the Embassy was that the refugees should be discouraged from going home. In fact, he felt that drastic steps were in order to try and prevent the refugees from leaving.

I replied that I thought his analysis of the situation was far from accurate. My reports, from the refugees who were coming in, indicated that fighting was still sporadic, that the so-called Ethiopian offensive was nothing more than a new series of attacks on the same positions that they had been parrying with for months. While it was true that the TPLF had suffered some reverses, they had also made

several spectacular gains. My discussions with the refugee leaders had indicated that most of the people who were returning were going to areas that were not threatened, at least immediately. And the people were convinced that if they moved at night they would be relatively safe from air attack. Since they would be using the same route they used to come into Sudan, they knew the way and knew where the checkpoints were located.

It was true that REST might not be able to provide adequate assistance to the people on their return. This, I argued, was a reason why we should support the return and give the people sufficient rations to enable them to make it.

Bob replied that the information he had on the rains indicated that they were still not very strong. Even if the people did make it back in good shape, if the rains failed, there would be only a slim chance of growing sufficient crops to survive the next year.

I replied that I wasn't sure who his weatherman was, but from where we were on the border, it was plain to see that the rains in the mountains were heavy. Water was already flowing in the Setit and even on the Sudanese plains, there had been strong, early rain.

Bob then said that he thought that REST might be misleading the people into thinking that conditions were suitable for their return.

That comment was telling. It was obvious that the Embassy had no real accurate information about what was happening on the border. I explained that REST had originally been opposed to repatriation and had tried to prevent the return. It was a measure of the people's determination that they were going to leave despite REST's opposition. I told him that REST was now in the process of trying to catch up and show some leadership after originally trying to discourage people from going. I described the waiver that returning families had to sign and pointed out that this hadn't made any noticeable difference.

I told Bob that the situation appeared to be following the traditional pattern that people in the highlands used as a means of coping with droughts. When a drought became severe, people moved from the highlands down to the river valleys where there was more water. If the drought came to the valleys, the next year they would move farther down towards the lower level grasslands to the west and south, congregating in the lowlands along the river banks and finally selling off their cattle in order to survive.

If the drought continued a third year, the people migrated again, this time to the cities in search of jobs. Only now, the routes to the cities were closed due to the war, so instead of going to Addis, they had come to Sudan.

Historically, the farmers seemed to instinctively know when rains in the highlands were of sufficient strength to enable them to go back to their farms. In the drought of the early 70's; when the first rains came, only a few people returned to the mountains, and sure enough, the rains ended early. The next year when the rains were heavier, they knew it was right to go back.

What we were seeing was a part of that cycle. When it had started to rain, the farmers watched the clouds intently, then seemed to sense that it was time to return. They feared that if they didn't go now, they would never have the chance to go back. The instinct to go was strong and there was nothing we could, or should, do to prevent it.

Bob then expressed his major concern, that the cross-border operation was too fragile and couldn't even support the people who were already there. Should thousands more be added to the already overburdened logistic system, it might collapse.

Finally, he attacked the workability of the pack-animal scheme. "There are not enough camels," he asserted. "And you would need tens of thousands of them."

I explained how we could shuttle them back and forth and how REST would manage the operation on top of the plateau, but I could tell that he wasn't convinced.

"You could always get AID to live up to their promises and give REST the trucks," I quipped.

He smiled. "Don't think I haven't been thinking of that," he said, "but we're not likely to get anything more for at least another four weeks."

At the end of our marathon debate, it was clear that we had not come any closer to an agreement. "Let me ask you this," he said. "If you were in my shoes, how would you keep the refugees in Sudan? What creative things would you do to encourage people to stay or prevent them from leaving?"

"Bob, you don't seem to get the picture," I said. "The refugees are determined to go home. I've talked to them, I've seen them moving at night and there is nothing we could do short of rounding them up and putting them in a prison camp that would keep them from leaving. If you move them farther away from the border, they'll just have farther to walk. But be assured they will walk. They walked hundreds of kilometers to get here and now that they're stronger, they're certainly not afraid of walking back in."

"But they'll die by the hundreds if they go."

"They may," I said, "if we don't help them. But remember this, Bob, the first principle in relief work is that the people always know what's best. They know the risks far better than we do. They're the ones that have walked the trail, not us. They're the ones that have withstood the bombing, not us. And they're the ones who know what's left behind, what food is buried, what seeds are available, what oxen might still be alive. They get daily reports from the people coming in and they're very intelligent people and born survivors. If they want to repatriate, they have the right to go and we can't second guess them. All we can do is try and help them get home as best as possible. Frankly, I'm not as worried about them getting home as I am about them surviving once they get there. My main concern is to make sure that they have the seeds and tools to plant and cultivate a crop."

"Fred, this is the first thing that you and I have ever really differed on in ten years of working in relief operations," Bob said. "In a way, I hope you win."

"It's not a question of winning or loosing, it's doing what's right. If I were these people, I'm not sure that I'd make the trip under the circumstances, but then I don't have as much to lose. I also don't have the information they have nor the endurance and stamina that they have. But I can understand their reluctance to want to stay in Sudan any longer than they have to. They're highland people, living in unfamiliar, low, hot terrain and I know that they must be pining away for their own land. That feeling is probably the overwhelming motivation and I can respect that. And if they wanna go home, I'm willing to give 'em a one-way ticket."

Fred, I'm going to have to fight you on this."

I smiled. "Bob, I wouldn't expect any less."

With that, he got up, took a couple of chocolate chip cookies and left.

"Bro, are you in the thick of it!," said Chris. "How do you always manage to find the swamps with the biggest alligators in 'em?"

"Beats me."

"Is it like this every night?"

"No," I joked, "this is quieter than usual." With that, we turned out the lights and went to sleep.

* * *

The next morning, I went to the Branch Office to meet with Nicholas and, finally, discuss the seven point plan. Nicholas summoned Pierce into his office. First I brought them up to date on what had happened the previous day in regards to the Sefawa situation. They both agreed that I should continue to handle it in a low key manner. However, they were concerned about the reports of the woman being held forcibly by the REST staff and had issued a set of instructions to Tessa, the field officer, to investigate further and report to them directly.

Throughout the meeting, we skirted the repatriation issue. Several times, I led the conversation into the area by asserting that the actions in Sefawa were a warning that people were preparing to go home. But in each case Nicholas and Pierce feinted my thrusts and the conversation seemed to go nowhere.

Finally, we got down to the main subject. Nicholas closed the door then began slowly and deliberately. My plan was not acceptable, he said. It put UNHCR in an untenable position. Since no deal had been made with Ethiopia regarding returnees, UNHCR must not be seen to be assisting people who were returning. If refugees wanted to return, HCR wouldn't stop them, but they wouldn't help them. As for my suggestions regarding the use of pack animals to help the refugees carry their food back, Nicholas stated that UNHCR could not permit any type of action that might be interpreted as supporting cross-border feeding.

Nicholas," I said, trying to argue the point, "we have a responsibility to help those people get back. They've been in our care for several months and it shouldn't end the minute they express a desire to go home.

We're working on a plan now," said Nicholas. "Stick strictly to the operational issues and leave political matters like this up to us.

With that the meeting was over. I started to get up to leave when he said, "And no more meetings with Abodi".

"If we don't meet with REST," I said, "we're not going to know what they're up to. REST may not be the best group in town but they're the only one we've got and if there's any hope of helping people on the other side, it's going to be through REST."

"It's too political," he said. "You've got to back off."

"Nicholas, they're going to move the first time it rains. They're already trickling out at the rate of hundreds. If they get half way back and find they can't make it and turn around and head back to Sudan,

we could have a major incident on the border," I said.

"This has to be done by the rules, Fred," Nicholas said.

"You're wrong, Nicholas. This has to be done with imagination," I said as I walked out of his office.

"Remember, you are a UNHCR contractor," he said.

"And a COR employee," I reminded him. "My first obligation is to give the Sudanese the best advice I can."

After the meeting, Pierce and I walked out. In the hallway, he paused before his door and said, "Fred, you've got to get off this voluntary repatriation thing. It's getting too hot for us to handle here."

"Pierce," I said, "the Sudanese want to help the people and they're going to do it. Furthermore, the people need the help. I know there are limits to what HCR can do, but it seems to me that my position is ideal. As a COR employee, I can do the planning and advise Fadil and HCR is off the hook."

"Off the hook, hell!" he said. "UNHCR's number one donor is putting a hell of a lot of pressure on us to tell you to back off. They are threatening to go directly to the High Commissioner. If you continue, you're going to be putting HCR in a hell of a position."

"What I want to know is, who's pushing? Is this coming from the Ambassador, from RP in Washington or is it simply Bob Gersony?"

"It's Frank Moss. He's been over twice to complain to Nicholas and once that I know of to Hassan Attiya."

"Well," I chuckled, "that ought to surprise all those folks in Geneva who keep saying that I'm CIA." To myself I thought, 'perhaps they think I'm a Kurtz.'

* * *

Next I went to see Karen Abu Zayd. I wanted to introduce Chris to Hasaan Attiya and to get him started on the road project. Karen was not her usual jovial self. She looked very grave and serious. "What's up," I said.

"Frank Moss has just been here leaning on Hassan to try and get you off the project. He and Bob Gersony are really tightening the screws to prevent us from helping the returnees. They claim it's an absolute holocaust on the other side and that to send them back would be akin to genocide."

"I wonder where they're getting their information," I said. "Neither one of them has been to the border in two months."

"I don't know," she said. "Their arguments seem real persuasive. Maybe we should reconsider."

"Karen, don't go soft on me now," I said. "I need your help. The refugees are going home and we're going to help them."

Karen banged her hands down on her knees, "I don't know, Fred. Damn it, I just don't know! How can we be sure? Suppose it is as bad as they say. It's an awfully big risk."

"It's their risk, Karen. They're making the choice. They have the right to make that choice and we can't stand in the way."

"But suppose we're wrong," she said. It would be unconscionable to send the people back knowing

that they might die."

"Karen, they could die here. We haven't been so good at getting them food and supplies and almost nine thousand have died under our care. I can't believe that the risks are any worse on the other side. Besides, that's not the issue. The point is, they want to go, they're going to go, and if we try and stop them, we'll have to put them in concentration camps. Do you want to see the Sudanese do that?"

"What about this camel thing?" she said. "It sounded good at first but Bob is ridiculing it."

"He's ridiculing it because he's opposed to it. For some reason, they don't want this thing to come off. But believe me, the people can carry the food they need. The pack animals are just gravy. Remember, the Vietnamese moved thousands of tons of war supplies, material and food down the Ho Chi Mhin Trail on backpacks and bicycles. If we put our minds on solving the logistics situation, something can be worked out. Besides, I've got Fred Gregory working on the truck angle and checking to see how much food they have en-route. It may be that we don't need as much food as we had thought."

"What are the people going to have when they get back?" she said. "If they don't have enough seeds to plant, it's all for naught. They'll just go home and die."

"I think I've got that angle covered," I said. "It looks like Oxfam-America is willing to provide some help with tools and possibly seeds."

"That just adds to the logistics situation," she said. "If we don't have enough animals or trucks to move the food, how in the hell are we going to move agricultural implements and seeds?"

"We'll worry about the food first and the rest later. Once we get a system set up, we can always build on it. But we've got to get COR's acquiescence in getting some form of return program set up. If we can't get the basics going, we'll never get the rest."

She banged her fist on the desk once again, "Damn it, Fred, damn it to hell, I just don't know."

"Karen, trust me," I said. "We're going to pull this off."

"Fred, before you were just pushing against UNHCR's bureaucracy, now you're fighting the US government as well."

"Seems like unfair odds to me," I smiled. "With one Texan against them, they ought to get more help."

Karen just smiled and shook her head. "Let's go talk to Hassan. I'm not making any promises, but if he agrees, at least I'll have some basis for trying to give you some support."

Before we could meet with Hassan, Abodi and one of his assistants walked in and asked if they too could meet with Hassan. Since we were all going to be talking about repatriation, I suggested we go in together.

After introducing Chris to Hassan, we all sat down to get to the main issue, repatriation, and what could be done to help the returnees. Abodi presented his arguments as to why COR should support the repatriation program. He confessed that REST had underestimated the desire of the refugees to return and now was trying to retake the lead. REST was being forced into a position of supporting the people even though they personally felt that it would be best if the majority of refugees would stay in Sudan a while longer.

Karen passed me a note. "See, even they think it's dangerous for the people to go back."

"Can they survive?" asked Hassan.

"We are a strong people," said Abodi. "Some will die, but the majority will survive... barely."

"Will they be bombed on the way home?" asked Hassan.

"The rumors of our demise are greatly exaggerated," smiled Abodi. "The TPLF lives."

Hassan spread out his hands. "We shall do what we can." With that, he dismissed the REST delegation and asked for Karen and me to stay.

"I think we should help them," Hassan said at last. "But we have to keep a low profile. From now on I don't think Fred should be seen leading the effort. From now on only those who need to know should be involved. I've received Fadil's recommendations this morning by courier and I agree, we need to follow Fred's Seven-Point plan. As far as the pack animals are concerned, this should take top priority. But we cannot expect help from UNHCR and COR does not have the money to buy the animals."

"What about the people at Fau?" I inquired. "We need to start planning and organizing a series of convoys to take them back to Wad Kowli."

"I've been told by UNHCR that we are not allowed to use any of the trucks that they've donated to us."

Karen was furious. "What do you mean we can't use them?" she said. "They were donated to COR. They're your trucks."

Hassan said, "They have markings that say they were donated by UNHCR with the UNHCR logo painted on the side. HCR doesn't want any trucks carrying refugees back to the border that have UNHCR markings of any kind."

"What arrogance!", said Karen. "A gift is a gift."

"We can take care of that," I said. "All we need is some brown paint."

"No," Hassan said, "we've got to play by their rules. If we use those trucks they may cut off some of the funding for the refugees who stay."

"I doubt that," I said. "You're in the catbird seat. They need you more than you need them. You're in a position to do some hard bargaining."

"Whoa," said Karen. "Let's not make this worse than it already is. If we're going to do this, we've got to play as much as possible by HCR rules. Hassan, do we have the money to rent the trucks that we need?"

"We'll try to find it," said Hassan. "It won't be easy and it will be very costly, but I think we can come up with the money. If we have to, we can get the army to help out. I'll start checking on this."

"I want to set up a planning group," I said. "We're going to need all the help we can get from sympathetic volags and key personnel within the system."

Karen suggested that the planners meet at her house rather than at the Acropole or at COR. The less attention that was drawn to the meetings, the better off we would be.

We adjourned the meeting and as we walked out, Hassan said, "This is risky business for you, Fred."

You know that don't you?"

"I know, but inside I feel it's right."

"So do I," said Hassan. "So do I."

I spent the remainder of the day at Karen's house discussing how we might line up support for the refugees once they got home. Karen was an immense help, making contacts with ICRC and several of the private agencies who were working on the other side of the border, finding out what they had to offer and learning as much as we could about the situation that we were sending the people back into.

In the afternoon, I left the house and went to find Fred Gregory. He reported that AID had put out instructions to everyone who was receiving money from the US government, either directly or indirectly, that if they helped in the return program they risked losing all their funding for other projects. HCR was putting out the same message. This meant that none of the volags who received money from either the US or UNHCR would be willing to help. More specifically, since Mercy Corps was totally dependent on AID for funding, Fred was now out of the picture as a straw boss in the project.

That evening, I met with John Dennis, the OXFAM-America officer who had been sent by Debbie to help with the repatriation. Since Oxfam-America never takes US government money, they couldn't be bullied by the embassy and John was totally committed to the project. It was clear from the beginning that he had more enthusiasm than money, but he was willing to put everything they had, about \$50,000, into purchasing seeds and tools. He also agreed to see what he could do about providing camels and donkeys.

Then the conversation changed to the type of seeds that we would be sending across. He had been able to locate a source where he could purchase some of the first, high-quality, drought resistant strains of sorghum and wanted to know if we should buy those or try for something else. Since the price was much higher, it was a hard decision to make, but I felt that since the numbers of people going back were small, we ought to go ahead and try the better varieties. This way they would have a much better chance.

"Supposing the people get hungry. Will they eat the seeds?" he inquired.

"It's possible," I said. "Is there anything about the high yield varieties that would make them dangerous to eat?"

He assured me there wasn't. It was just that it would be a costly meal.

Ever so subtly, I breached the question that was secretly uppermost in my mind. "The grains that we're distributing now in Wad Kowli," I said, "come from Thailand. They're natural, unmilled grains. Could the people plant them and expect to get some crops?"

"Yes," he said. "Unground grains are nothing but seeds. If the people plant them, they might get a good crop, but it depends on how well the seeds can adjust to the different altitudes and climates of the Tigrayan highlands."

"But they would get something, is that correct?"

"Yes," he said. "They would probably get at least a 50% yield and maybe more. But again it depends on the weather and how resistant the seeds are to whatever pests exist on the other side."

The gamble that Don Krumm and I had taken several months earlier appeared to be paying off. We

were now in a position to provide effective aid. The best package would be Oxfam seeds and our food but until John's supplies arrived, with our 50 day ration, we could distribute a commodity that people could both "eat and plant". Now we had a fallback.

My final stop that night was to see Will Day, the head of the SCF team in the East. I wanted to see if SCF was willing to buck the tide of agencies buckling under US pressure.

Will is six foot six, red-headed and exudes a quiet air of self-confidence and competence. Though not a doctor, he headed the medical teams and was well respected for his knowledge of health programs and supplementary feeding. He had worked in Uganda prior to coming to Sudan where he had known Bob Gersony and I had gathered from the way they talked about each other, that they were very good friends. If I could gain his support, I was sure that some of the other volags might come into line.

I talked with Will for about half an hour but I could see that it was to no avail. His mind was set dead against helping the people. His argument was simple... they would be better off in Sudan than returning to the famine back in Ethiopia. Furthermore, being from SCF, he was upset about the events in Sefawa and skeptical about REST's ability to help the refugees during their transit. He also said that the only people likely to go were from those from Wad Kowli, not those in Sefawa or Fau. He felt sure that REST was bluffing and that the refugees wouldn't walk the additional distance to the border. Besides, he said, Bob Gersony had told him that most of the men returning were going to join the TPLF and were not going back to farm.

I was especially surprised to hear him, of all people, say that he thought the refugees wouldn't walk out of Sefawa. Surely he must know that a big migration was building up. I was also surprised about the comments that the people returning were going to join the TPLF. Either Bob was simply blowing smoke or the information these guys were getting was really off the wall.

The next morning, Chris and I flew back to the East with Kimberly in tow. I liked Kimberly, she had a lot of spunk and despite being upset with REST, she was one person who could see my point of view regarding the return. She promised to keep her ears open and to keep me informed about what was happening to work out the problems between REST and SCF at Sefawa.

The next morning with Chris and Kimberly on board, I flew back to the East. We stopped at Gedaref to introduce Chris to Mike Menning and to pick up his car.⁸ I told Mike about my meeting with Nicholas and his instructions to me to lay off the returnee program. I advised him that whatever HCR was planning to do, they had better do it quick, because I didn't think the refugees were going to wait much longer.

On arriving back in Showak, I met with Fadil and gave him a complete report on all the events that

⁸ As it turned out, Mike had assigned Chris's car to someone else. Chris was about to despair when he learned that a Japanese journalist had brought a Pajero into the country as a donation from his newspaper's readers. Chris immediately introduced himself to the journalist and asked for a ride back to Khartoum. On the way, he convinced the journalist how important the road project was and described how little assistance he had been getting from HCR (after all, he had only been there for two days!). By the time they reached Khartoum, the journalist was incensed over the lack of support for the roads project and when he went to the Branch Office, he instructed the staff to give Chris the car. Thus, my little brother ended up with the only air-conditioned, AM-FM stereo tape-deck playing, modern 4-wheel drive vehicle in the entire operation, something for which he was never entirely forgiven by any of the regulars.

had taken place during my trip to Khartoum. Fadil was surprised at HCR's reaction to our plan as but was pleased with the actions of Hassan Attiya. He knew that the Sudanese would cautiously assist the refugees since they, more than anyone else, wanted the Tigrayans to go home.

"What can we do about this ration business?," he asked. "Do you think we can go ahead and give the people the full fifty-day ration like we had planned if we don't get pack animals or trucks?"

"We do know that REST is going to get some trucks in about three or four weeks. One thing that we can do is give the people their ration and then let them turn it over to REST to hold in camp until they get the trucks. Once they have the trucks, they can try and catch up with the people enroute. We could also ask REST to transfer as much food as they can to the intermediate stations just before and after the escarpment. That way people could carry the food with them for the first two weeks, then use the stockpiled rations at the intermediate points. By that time, the REST trucks with the additional food should be able to catch up to the main column and distribute food at the other end. The people will still only be carrying about two weeks worth of supplies and the balance of their food can be sent to them at the other end."

Fadil agreed that, under the circumstances, that was the best idea and he immediately sent a message to Gedaref to tell the REST coordinators to come to Showak so he could discuss the plans with them.

SOG reported back that the REST people were in Sefawa trying to resolve the problems there with the workers, so we sent a message to Mansur, the COR camp administrator, to ask Assafa to come through Showak when they were finished, to tell us what had been resolved in the camp and to discuss repatriation.

Late that night, Assafa and Rosie met with Fadil and I at the guest house. Assafa reported that everything should be back to normal in the camp. He claimed that SCF's accusations were much exaggerated, that the reason that the people hadn't reported for work was that they had spontaneously decided to give those who would be leaving a chance to work with SCF to earn some money to take back to Tigray. He said that he had held a camp meeting and told all the original workers to report to their jobs and he was sure that now the matter was resolved. Tensions between REST and SCF were still high but he was sure that in the coming days everything would be resolved amicably.

After Assafa's report, he and Fadil went to the COR offices to talk about logistics arrangements for the fifty-day ration. Fadil told Assafa that he was going to tell Osman Mekke to distribute the Thai natural grain sorghum at Wad Kowli to the returnees and, as soon as REST could set up a place adjacent to the camp to store the grain, an "administrative procedure" would be developed so that the food could be turned over to REST for transport to Tigray. Assafa said that he would start building a compound. He said the decision was very timely because the refugee leaders at Sefawa had informed him they wanted to leave the following week. Was it possible, Assafa inquired, for COR to say when the trucks would be available to take the refugees back to the border?

"At the present time, my instructions are not to provide trucks for the returnees," said Fadil. "We are trying to convince HCR to change its mind or to find the money to rent them ourselves, but for the moment no trucks can be given."

"Then my people will walk", said Tessfa. "An additional 30 kilometers is only a days walk for the people.

Fadil asked him to wait for several more days to see if we could change HCR's mind. But Assafa indicated that the people were getting restless and he wasn't sure how much longer he could hold the leaders back.

Later, Fadil and I discussed what we should do about the trucks. He was as convinced as I that the refugees at Sefawa would not wait for trucks to leave and he was concerned that Sudan would be blamed if anything happened to the refugees while they walked back to the border. More than that, he was concerned about the refugees at Fau; if they decided to walk, it would be almost 200 miles in the intense heat and the refugees would be unsafe on the roads at night and could be attacked by shiftas (bandits) as they approached the border. It would be much better from the Sudanese point of view if the refugees could be trucked back.

We've simply got to make Khartoum understand how serious this is Fadil said. If HCR won't provide the trucks, we'll have to get the money from the Government.

We parted that night knowing that we were both getting increasingly frustrated with banging our heads against an insensitive and misinformed group in the capital.

* * *

For the next few days, I was consumed by the normal routine of work at Showak. At the same time, I was keeping an eye on events in Sefawa to see if the incident with the workers had been resolved. Tessa's reports indicated it hadn't. She and Mansur reported that several people from REST had come to the camp and had told the old workers to return to their jobs. A few had gone back, but the majority had stayed away. I decided to wait a couple more days, then flew down to view the situation myself.

After landing at the airport, I went to the SCF compound and asked to see Kimberly. She and several of the other people gave me a quick rundown on events. After she had returned, she had gone straight to the camp coordinator for REST, _____, and had told him that some of the people from the Khartoum office would be there shortly to talk to him. Sure enough, that afternoon, Assafa and Rosie had arrived and the REST staff had gone into a big pow-wow that lasted most of the afternoon. The next morning, REST called a camp meeting to tell the workers to go back. Very few people had shown up at the meeting, however, and though a few people had come back, the immediate results were discouraging.

The next day, Christine, one of the SCF doctors, had spotted her former assistant in a crowd. She had gone to the woman, taken her aside, and asked her why she wouldn't come back to work. The assistant was very flustered and obviously didn't want to be seen talking to anyone from SCF. They quickly ducked into a nearby tukel, and the woman told Christine that if she went back she might be beaten. It wasn't clear whether she would be beaten by someone with REST or by other refugees who wanted her job. In any case, it appeared that the workers were still being intimidated and not permitted to return to work.

Next, I went to see Tessa. She confirmed that only a few token workers had returned to their jobs. The feeding programs were in a shambles and efforts by Mansur, the COR administrator, to get the other workers to come back had not been successful. She said that when Assafa had told the old workers to go back to their jobs, it was obvious that there were many arguments between he and the audience and that they had been unhappy about his instructions.

Tessa's interpretation of the situation was that the pressure for the exchange of workers came from the village elders and that REST had been trying to respond to their demands by sanctioning the original turnover. Now REST was going up against the elders in trying to reverse the situation and were not being very successful. Furthermore, the REST coordinator in the camp, _____, had become very uncooperative, even after Assafa's visit, and he had personally been insulting to her and members of the COR staff.

When I reported to Fadil that there had been no significant change, he located Assafa and Rosie and told them to come to Showak to discuss the situation. When they came in, he lowered the boom. Either they get Sefawa whipped into shape and put the original workers back on the job or REST would be out of the camp. They had 24 hours to move.

The REST delegates assured us that they would do everything they could to rectify the situation and again tried to assure us that none of this was planned. "It must be something that they are doing on their own," said Assafa.

"If that's the case," Fadil said, "change your camp staff. If any one of the old workers are harmed, I'll have everyone from REST arrested."

Assafa explained that this was planned by the village elders as a means of helping their people earn money for the return. Never, they said, had there been any discussion at REST of rotating staff to help distribute the benefits among the people.

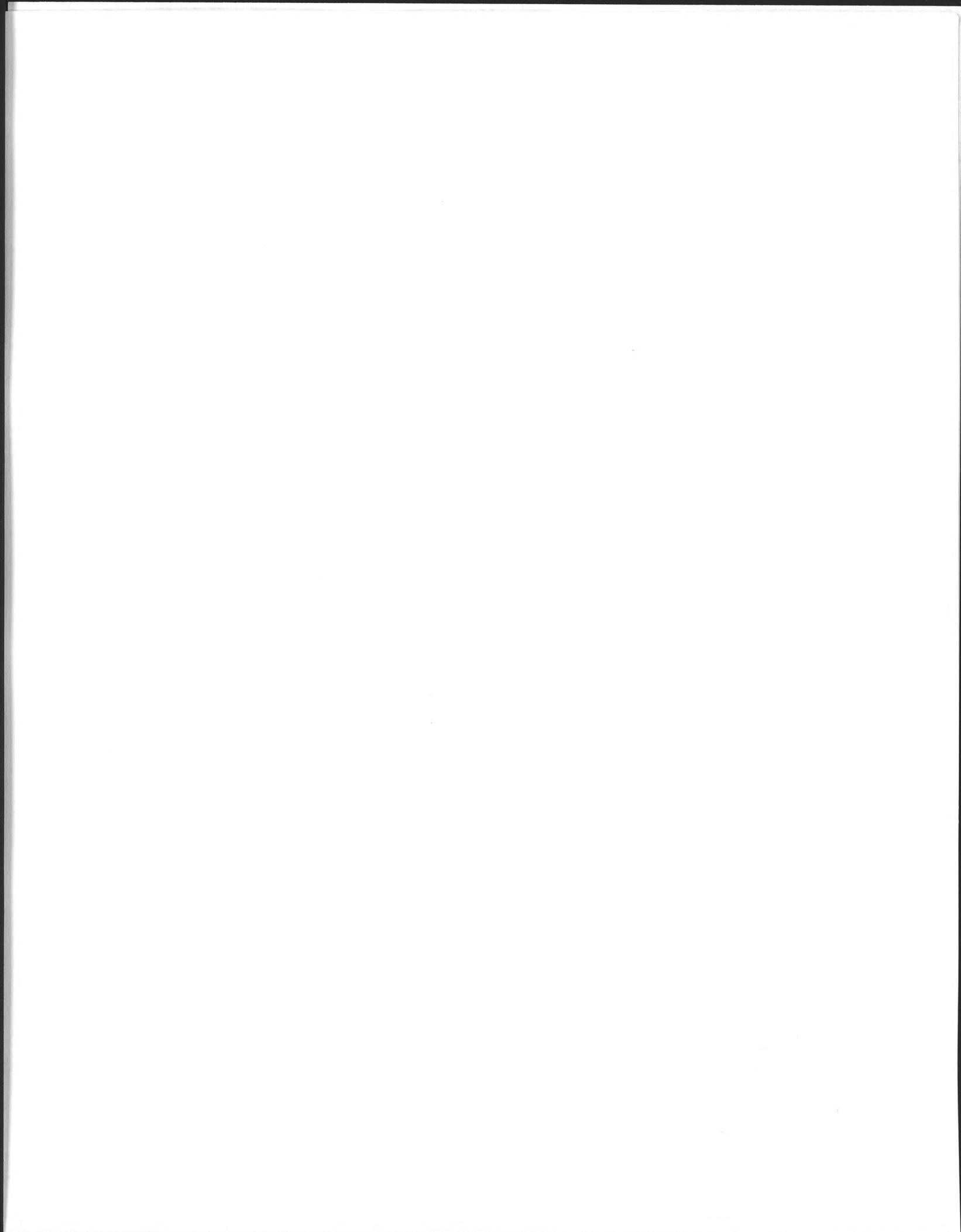
After the REST delegation left, Fadil asked me to fly down to Sefawa the next day to see what happened. If things hadn't improved by 5:00 in the afternoon, he was prepared to move against REST.

The following day, I flew to the camp with Tesfa, my Eritrean driver. He spoke Tigrayian as well as English and had served as my interpreter for several months.

We were met by Tessa Williams. Assafa was already in camp, meeting with the REST staff. At 1:00, accompanied by Christine and several of the SCF workers, we converged on the REST compound to find out what they planned to do. Mansur was already there. He informed us that REST had called a series of camp meetings, at 2:00 PM in the old camp, and at 4:30 in the new camp. At these meetings, Assafa would call the elders to the front and tell them to send the original workers back.

With everyone present, I asked each side to tell me what had happened since Assafa's last visit. SCF started out. They had prepared a list of specific, detailed complaints but when it was clear that most of them had occurred before Assafa's previous visit, I cut them off and limited them to describing events of the past two days.

The chief spokesmen for SCF were _____, the head of the medical team, and Christine. Christine was especially articulate and gave a center-by-center report on disruptions in the feeding program caused



by the continued failure of workers to return to their jobs. Dr. _____, was especially indignant over the fact that REST had broken the previous agreement and he felt that REST had "betrayed" the understanding worked out earlier.

Assafa replied that he had done as instructed, and had informed the refugees to go back to work. He said that the reason the old workers failed to report was because they were preparing to leave for Tigray and they needed time to get prepared.

The discussion was going nowhere and I could see that the lines were drawn and that we would have to find some compromise. For the moment however, I wasn't sure what it was going to be.

At 2:00, we drove to the supplementary feeding center in the old camp located in the rugged river bottoms. Thousands of people had packed into the small, low-roofed rakuba and the heat was stifling and oppressive. Assafa tried to address the meeting but the crowd was unruly and people began shoving and pushing to try and hear him. Those in the front began complaining that they were being pushed and pretty soon the shouting was so loud no one could hear anyone think, much less talk. I could tell the crowd was hostile and the heat and pressure from all the pushing was raising the level of agitation.

Mansur could also sense that things weren't going well and he suggested to Assafa that we try and move the meeting outdoors. He agreed and started to try and go out the side of the building. But that was the wrong move to make. Suddenly, a large number of people surrounded Assafa, Mansur and myself and began shoving us into the center of the crowd. As long as we appeared to be trying to go out the side, they thought we were leaving and I could sense that the crowd wouldn't take that. Quickly, I signaled to Tesfa, my driver, to run to the car and grab a bullhorn. When he returned, he tossed it to me over the heads of the crowd and I quickly gave it to Assafa so that he could tell the crowd to reassemble outside. I suggested that instead of trying to go out the side door, that we take the longer route and push our way to the front. This would give the people more assurance that we weren't trying to duck out and they would follow us to a better meeting area.

The tactic worked and after several minutes we had reassembled the multitudes at the base of a small hill. Assafa, Mansur and my driver all stood on top of Tessa's car and took turns addressing the crowd, Tesfa translating messages that I sent in from the sidelines. Tessa and I watched from the side and could tell the crowd didn't like the message that they were getting. Assafa reasoned with them for perhaps 45 minutes, to no avail. Every time he reached a controversial point, the people would click their tongues loudly or shout him down.

As the afternoon wore on, the only thing we had going for us was the fact that it was 110 degrees in the shade and gradually the crowd was beginning to lose its interest standing out in the sun. The edges of the mob were beginning to get jagged and the crowd was beginning to thin out. I could tell the people weren't satisfied with what they were hearing but at least the hostility and the angry mood had subsided. The discussions had reached the point where they were hearing the same thing over and over and though they didn't like the message, it was evident that there was nothing they could do about it.

At 4:00, the three men climbed off the Land Rover and hopped inside. The driver started the car and gradually pulled away. For a moment I held my breath, hoping that no one would start throwing stones

or try to turn the car over. But, as I had felt, the hostility had subsided and the car was permitted to pass without a problem. So much for the smaller camp. Now we faced the big test, the community meeting at Sefawa II.

By the time we reached the big camp, I had decided to change our tactics. To begin with, I told REST to hold the meeting in the open. Next, I instructed the staff to draw a circle with a fifty foot radius in the dirt around a pick-up truck. When the first refugees arrived, they were asked to sit down so that those behind could see. This way, we prevented the shoving and we kept more of the people seated and, therefore, less animated. It also put the shouters at the back of the crowd, moving them away from the speaker and forcing them yell over people's heads and not directly into their ears. Now, all the advantages were the speaker's.

While this meeting was less raucous, it was clear that the message was still unpopular. My driver, who was standing beside me, translated the running dialogue and commentaries from the crowd. It was clear that more people wanted a chance to earn money and many of the workers who had reported for work among the new group didn't like the fact that the opportunity to earn some cash was going to be denied them. Finally Assafa laid down the law. If the original workers didn't return, they would not be eligible for any form of assistance from REST. He had a list, he told them, of the workers who had to come back and he would check the next day to make sure they were on the job. If SCF didn't have adequate staff when the people left to go home, it was their own fault, he said in an obvious snipe at the agency.

When my driver translated this last comment, I turned to the head of the SCF team and said, "Now's the time for a compromise. Can you hire any of those new workers and start a program to train them so that when the returnees leave you won't get caught short handed?"

"You mean if they leave," he said.

I glared at him. "No, I mean when they leave."

The message sank in and reluctantly he agreed to let replacement workers work alongside the old workers. When the old workers left, the new ones would start drawing their pay.

With the concession in hand, I motioned to Mansur to bring (the SCF man) Dr. _____ up onto the truck bed so he could announce the compromise. Mansur and Assafa literally dragged him over the side of the pickup and Tesfa quickly jumped up to translate. As soon as (the SCF man) announced his decision, a cheer went up from the crowd and thousands of tongues began clicking. Assafa, a born politician if ever there was one, saw this as an opportunity to make some pro-REST speeches and he began a long, poetic recitation of the accomplishments of REST, the TPLF and how they would overcome the Ethiopian army. The crowd loved it and soon everything was friendly.

Next, Mansur, speaking in Tigrayan, told the people how COR would do everything they could to help them as they prepared to return. Those who wished to remain, he said, were welcome to stay as long as they wanted and the Sudanese would provide them a safe home until they were ready to leave. Once again, the crowd clucked its approval.

Tessa and I were turning to walk away when Assafa and Mansur began signaling me to join them on the back of the pickup. I was reluctant at first but some of the people in the crowd began urging me on,

so I clamored over tail gate and up beside Assafa. "The people want to hear something from you," he said. "They know who worked out the compromise with SCF, the man with the blue wings, and they all admire you. Please say something."

Though I felt awkward, I knew that the moment called for something poetic so I launched into a brief dissertation about the equality of man as seen from the air. I described how, when looking down from the airplane, it was impossible to tell who was Tigrayan and who was Sudanese; from the air everyone looked alike. This, I told the crowd, must be the same view that God has and that because we all look alike from the air, the differences that separate us can only be seen from the ground. I told the people that from the air, I had seen the rains in Ethiopia and that I knew that soon it would be time for them to go. I told them that we knew many people wanted to stay and that those who did were welcome. Those who wanted to go would be helped as best we could. COR would help, I said, but I reminded them that there was only so much aid to go around. For this reason, those staying should help their fellow villagers who were leaving and share what they could. The most important gift was to advise them wisely on whether or not they could make the trip. I asked the parents to think about their children; could they withstand the long walk? If the children were small, did the women have the strength to carry the children all the way back to the village?

"Think wisely of all these things," I said, "and then, if you go, Godspeed."

I don't know if the speech really meant anything to the Tigrayans but they clucked appreciatively. When I got down, Tessa jokingly punched me in the ribs and said, "That even brought tears to my eyes."

The next day, Tessa reported that almost all the workers had returned to their jobs, several of them coming hand in hand with the workers who would be trained to replace them. By that afternoon, I was able to report to Fadil that, at least on the surface, everything was back to normal at Sefawa.

"What do you think REST was up to?" he asked. "Do you think this thing was planned at the camp level or by the higher ups?"

I answered that I wasn't sure but whoever had planned it must have certainly gotten the hell scared out of them when Fadil and I came down so hard.

We were both chuckling to ourselves and congratulating ourselves on being such tough asses when one of Fadil's orderlies came in. The previous night, he had found a calendar diary, presumably left by someone at a meeting with Fadil. Did we know who it belonged to?

He handed me the book and when I opened the first page I could see that it belonged to Rosie Burbeck, the English advisor to REST. I promised the orderly to return it to her and was about to put it in my briefcase when Fadil and I suddenly looked at each other. "I wonder what she has to say about the incident. Do you think we ought to look?" We both giggled and I started thumbing through the entries. Sure enough, an entry dated April 2nd outlined a plan of action discussed at a meeting of the REST committee in Gedaref. It suggested that refugee workers in Sefawa be rotated using "disciplinary measures" if the current workers resisted. We had our answer.

"Never trust a Khawaja woman with blue eyes," said Fadil. "It'll get you in trouble every time."

* * *

The number of people leaving Wad Kowli continued to remain high and by now almost nine thousand returnees had left the camp. New arrivals were still trickling in but the numbers were starting to drop and with the relocations continuing to Girba, the camp was now down to less than half its original size.

On April ____, Assafa came with word that the leaders in Fau were demanding trucks to go back to the border. He reported that fifteen thousand people had signed up to repatriate. If the trucks weren't present in a week, the first group would begin walking out. He also said that the events of the previous week in Sefawa had made the leaders there more determined than ever to leave and that a walk out was eminent.

I asked if he had communicated this to the Sub-office.

"Constantly," he said. "But the Sub-office appears unable to act and are still waiting for instructions from Khartoum."

He informed me that REST had raised some money to rent a water truck to accompany the refugees and supply them with water during the walk. Would it be possible for us to provide some onion tanks so that he could set up water points along the road?

After the previous episode, I wasn't sure whether or not they were trying to force our hand, but instinctively I felt that this was truly a plea for help and not a provocation. If REST was indeed renting a truck, a walkout must be very close.

I discussed the situation with Fadil. He replied that we couldn't spare the water tanks at the time but that if the refugees did start walking, he would also send a water truck to ensure that the people had enough water until a more organized evacuation could be arranged. We both agreed that it was time to start making arrangements to rent trucks to carry people on short notice. He instructed me to return to Khartoum and find out from Hassan Attiya exactly how much money we could have for truck rental. We needed to know so that we could begin developing a transport plan.

The next day I flew back to Khartoum through a blinding sandstorm. By the time I arrived, it was late in the afternoon and the Branch Office was almost deserted. Only Nicholas and a few secretaries were still working. Madeline, Nicholas's personal secretary, told me he was busy finishing up some reports to Geneva and it would be a few minutes before he could see me. I decided to stand up and take a stroll down the hall to stretch my legs after the long flight and was just nearing the end of the hallway when one of the secretaries caught up to me. This secretary was one of my favorites. She was always very polite and courteous and several times had done me special favors when I needed something in a hurry. In return, she had always been one of the first that I shared my chocolate chip cookies with and it was something of a joke between us about our respective sweet teeth.

"Fred, you wouldn't believe the things that they are saying about you here".

"Who?", I inquired.

"Those people from the American Embassy. They are trying to get you fired. They're accusing you of all sorts of things".

"How is the Branch Office reacting?", I asked.

"I don't know, but Mr. Morris has just sent a telegram to Geneva telling them about the controversy".

I laughed, "That ought to confuse them", I said. "Noel and the Ethiopian lobby are always claiming that I'm a spy and now the American Embassy is trying to get me fired!

Several minutes later Nicholas called me into his office. He began the conversation by asking what was happening in the east. I filled him in on all the events of the past week and told him that Fadil and I were convinced that the refugees were going to walk from Sefawa and possibly Fau sometime in the next few days. I informed him that Fadil was trying to convince Hassan Attiya to authorize us to use trucks to take the people back to the border and that we hoped that if COR asked UNHCR for permission to draw the funds, that he would agree to it.

On his desk were radio messages from Marian and Tessa alerting the Branch Office to possible walkouts. These were being interpreted by Menning as an attempt by REST to force HCR to provide trucks. What was my opinion?

Nicholas listened intently to my answer, but I could tell that he was tired of my arguing with him. At the end, he again stated the official position of UNHCR that no resources of the UN, nor any of those provided by HCR to COR, such as trucks marked with any form of UNHCR insignia, could be used to assist the returnees.

"They won't walk out," he assured me. "It's one thing to go from Wad Kowli, which is right next to the border; quite another to go from Sefawa or from Fau.

I reminded him that he had once proposed to walk the refugees from Wad Kowli to Sefawa when we didn't have enough trucks to relocate the refugees in February. He had argued at the time that another 30 kilometers meant nothing to refugees who had walked for two months to get out in the first place.

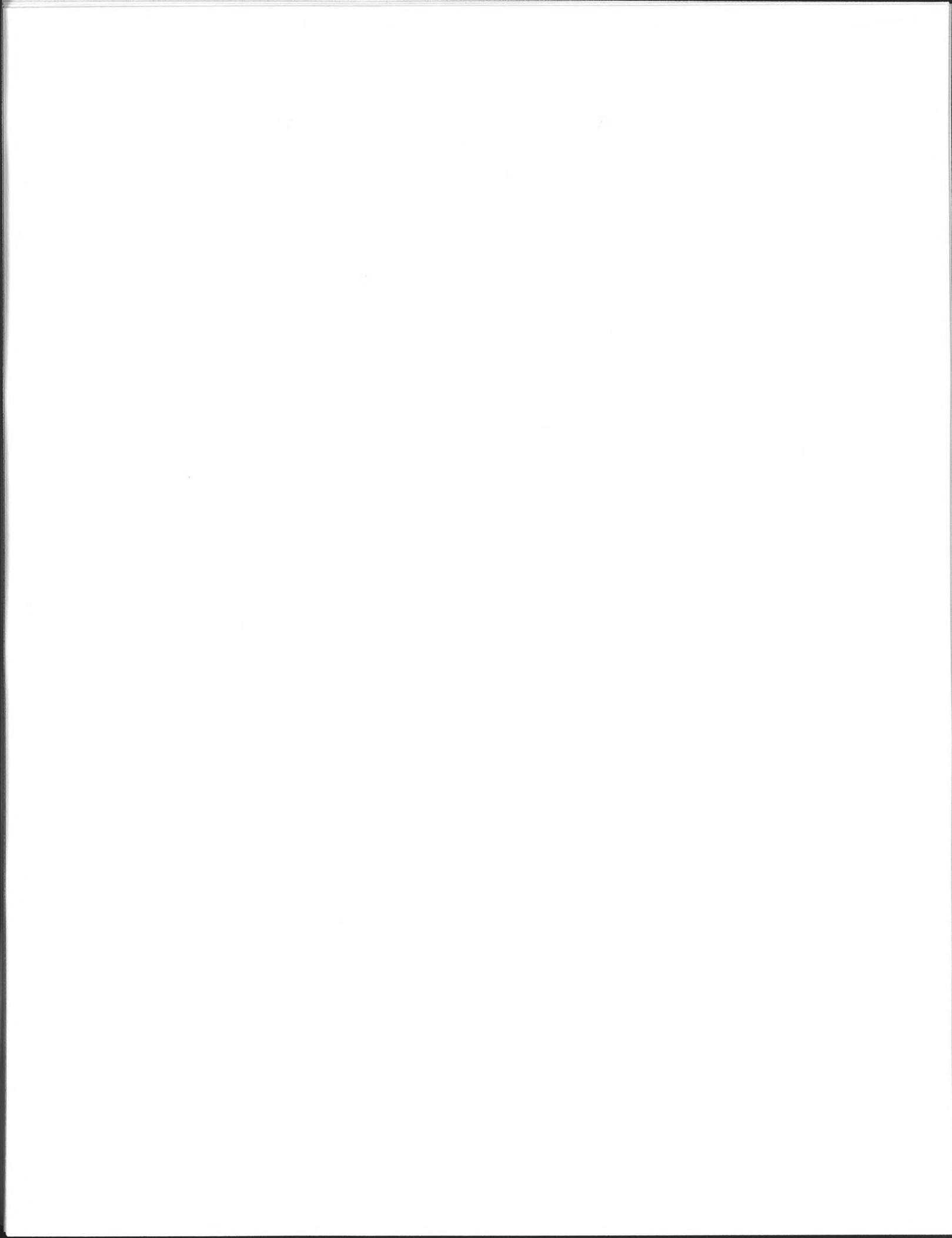
I also pointed out that if we provided trucks we might be able to prevent a mass exodus that could spark a "mob effect" where people who didn't really want to go would be caught up in the emotion of a walkout and join the others when they left. By providing trucks, we could control the exodus and people who really wanted to stay could use the excuse of waiting for the next day's trucks while they thought about the situation and made up their minds.

Nicholas disagreed with that assessment, saying if we provided trucks, it would appear that HCR was sanctioning the move and would encourage more people to leave.

As the discussions continued, I detected a slight change in Nicholas' attitude. I noticed that he was not using the same arguments that he had the week before. In particular, he was no longer parroting the Embassy's line about how REST was encouraging the people to leave and how bad the situation was on the other side. Sensing that there might be some hope, I asked if Geneva was setting the policy on the returnees or the BO. He claimed that it was the Branch Office with concurrence and support of Geneva.

I realized that this was some sort of final discussion on the matter so I took the time to develop and present my arguments as clearly and concisely as I could. In addition to my usual arguments on behalf of supporting repatriation, I tried to place the issue in a historical context.

First, the Tigrayans were not true refugees in the classic sense. They were famine victims who happened to be caught up in a war. As famine victims, they were following the traditional patterns all



famine victims follow. When there's no food, they migrate. I began to describe what we knew about droughts and famines in Ethiopia. I told him the pattern of migration we were seeing was almost identical to that observed in the famines of the fifties and early seventies. During the famine of the early 70's, many of the Tigrayans had moved down into the lower valleys where they were assisted by the relief agencies. The only difference now was that in our case, REST had directed the migration and brought them to Sudan, probably to try and draw the world's attention to what was happening in Tigray and attempt to bring international pressure to bear on the Ethiopians to permit an increase the flow of supplies across the border.

Next, I pointed out all the sociological and economic reasons why the refugees would want to return. If they didn't go now, the chances were they would lose their land to those who remained behind. They were farmers and they needed to farm.

I pointed out that as farmers, they could "read" the conditions. They knew, by feel, the moisture in the humidity and could tell if the rains were good or not. If they decided the rains were good, we ought to trust their instincts. I reminded Nicholas, who had been a navigator in the Australian Navy, how the Polynesians could read the sea and tell when they were near an island and how the Australian aborigines could smell water underground. Somehow, local people always knew the patterns of nature better than us.

I repeated in the 70's, summer "bhelg" rains had come after the relief program had been running for almost two years. The relief officials expected the people to return to the highlands but only a handful did because they sensed that the rains wouldn't last. Sure enough, the rains were light and ended early. The next year when the rains started, the people immediately began to return to their farms in the highlands. In short, the people just knew when the time was right. But now, instead of being in lowland areas of Ethiopia, the people were inside Sudan. Before, there were no obstacles to prevent their return. Now the obstacles were the additional distance between the people and the border and the reluctance of the relief agencies on whom they had become dependent, to assist them. I reminded him that it was us that had put the additional distance barrier up when we had moved them to the interior camps.

Finally, I pointed out that they had the right to go. While that right might not have been specifically spelled out in international law, certainly there was nothing short of Stalinist tactics that we could do to stop them.

After a pause, I capped it off. In reality, all of what I had just said was not important. The thing that mattered most was simply the fact that they were going to go. It was a fait accompli; they had made their decision, many had already gone and now the others were preparing to leave. They had said fye on their leaders and fye on UNHCR. If we wouldn't help them, so be it. They were still going. Die they might, but they would go.

The meeting continued over drinks at Nicholas' house. Nicholas' wife, Sue, sat at one side, listening, but didn't say a word. Several times I looked over to try and gauge her reaction but she stared at the floor impassionately and showed no sign of taking sides with any of the arguments. Eventually she got up and went into the kitchen to prepare the meal and, wanting to take a break, Nicholas went in to say

a few things to her. A few minutes later, he came out, sat down on the divan and took a long breath. "If it means anything to you," he said, "Sue agrees with you."

'Great!', I thought, 'that's all I need'.

"What about you Nicholas, where do you stand"?

"I don't think they will walk," he said. "Maybe a few more from Wad Kowli, but that should be the end of it and I suspect that many of those who are leaving will probably return when they see how bad it is on the other side. If they come back, we may have some real problems on our hands".

"Then I want it in writing, Nicholas", I said. "We've got to have the official position of HCR so that we know what to tell REST and the refugees when they ask".

"I'll draft a memo tonight," he said. "You can take it back with you in the morning".

Since it was obvious that the mood in the house was tense, I decided that I should return to the hotel to eat alone. Before I left, however, I decided to ask Nicholas if he intended to extend my contract which was due to expire soon. Several weeks earlier, he had asked me to extend Kent for an additional three months to supervise the construction at Girba and several of the other new sites. Kent had agreed but since he had been gone from the States for over a year, he asked for two weeks leave. I had agreed with Kent to cover for him the two weeks that he was gone. I had mentioned this to Nicholas at the time, but he had not given me any indication of whether or not he wanted me to stay. This time he was emphatic.

"Absolutely not," he said. "You've become too controversial."

I was expecting that answer. "Getting rid of me isn't going to change a thing. The refugees are going to leave, Nicholas."

"Not if we don't supply them with trucks," he said defiantly.

I just shook my head, gave him a smile, then nodded to Sue and took my leave.

That night I went back to the hotel to try to decide what to do. The returnees had become almost an obsession with me. My other work was important but the repatriation issue had come to symbolize all the things that are wrong in international relief: humanitarian organizations serving the needs of governments and donors, not the people; foreign white men trying to decide what was best for poor black men; and, worst of all, condescension and arrogance on the part of the relief agencies -- the full embodiment of the "we know what's best for you" syndrome.

I could also see that I had put myself in a position where anything that went wrong in the operation would be blamed on me. I didn't mind the risk, but I knew that precious little credit was about to be given for any of the positive accomplishments. The only thing that would be remembered would be my position on the repatriation.

I suddenly realized that I was hungry and I decided to go out to eat. On the way out, I bumped into Fred Gregory and a woman who had been a good friend throughout my stay in Sudan. The three of us decided to go to my favorite Korean restaurant out near the airport. There, Fred informed me that he had made a key discovery. REST didn't have any food in the Gedaref warehouse. A substantial amount was due to arrive in about a week, but everything that was on hand had been shipped across the border several weeks earlier. The stockpiles of food that the boys from the Embassy had been telling everyone

that REST had on hand were only on paper, not in the bag. He also said that he had learned that REST had tried to stop one of the convoys that was already inside Ethiopia and re-route it to the returnees trail, but they had not been able to contact them in time.

This meant that now it was up to us to provide the necessary food for the first groups of returnees. I scribbled a quick message to send to Fadil with the courier the next morning, alerting him to what was happening.

Then I decided to do something totally irrational and something to get my mind off of things for a while. I whispered to the lady that we should sneak into the swimming pool at the Palace and go skinny-dipping. A good friend of mine once told me that the best way to deal with pressure is to "get naked and wet". Much to my surprise, the lady agreed and an hour later we were cavorting around in the Palace pool, having managed to slip by the guards. To do this was to risk a terrible fate. Under Shariya, we could lose our lives -- or worse, my balls.

Later that night, back in my room, I decided the best thing to do was to resign and before going to sleep, I drafted my resignation.

* * *

I was later than usual in getting up the next morning and it wasn't until about 9:30 that I managed to get over to the Branch Office. The place was in more of a turmoil than I had ever seen it. People were actually moving around in an animated manner. I knew that something must be up.

Nicholas was sitting at his desk looking distraught and dejected. Before I could say anything, he blurted out, "They walked out. Just like you said, they walked out."

"Where?" I asked.

"Sefawa. Tessa says almost half the camp left yesterday and more are planning to go this afternoon." Then he looked up. "You need to get out there as soon as possible and organize facilities and reception services at Wad Kowli."

For a moment I considered tossing my resignation on the table but instead, I put it back in my pocket and turned to leave.

"Just be sure you don't use any trucks with UNHCR markings," he called over my shoulder as I walked out, "and don't take them near the border."

It was mid-afternoon. The sun was still high and the temperature was around 115 degrees as I flew down the road between Sefawa and Wad Kowli. By this time, the long line of exodus had broken into many scattered groups of people. The refugees, unused to long walks after being in the camps for several months, had been unable to maintain route discipline and many of the weaker and less physically fit refugees had fallen far behind the column leaders. To escape the relentless heat, many had taken shade under the few trees alongside the road and, from the air, the sheltering refugees resembled islands of people with trees growing in the middle. On down the road, I could see an onion tank with hundreds of people gathered around waiting to get a drink of water. I wondered whether the tank had been pilfered or if Jean-Michele had it sent out. Either way it made no difference; the water was welcomed by the

refugees.

Farther down the road, I spotted a long column of people. This was the main body of the returnees and it was moving along at a surprisingly rapid clip. Chugging out to meet it was a bright red tanker; REST must have rented it, I theorized.

Several miles outside of Wad Kowli were the advance elements of the refugee column. Several strong men, one carrying a child and two accompanied by young boys were striding out and making good time. The determination of these people was evident, even from the air, and as I flew over, they waved and shook their walking sticks in a silent salute.

As I approached Wad Kowli, I could tell that already the superb Wad Kowli staff was making preparations to receive the returnees. Shelter materials were quickly being stacked at a place where a temporary feeding and screening center could be set up and it was evident that IRC and MSF were moving supplies down to the road so they could assist the people.

On landing, Jean-Michel and Osman Mekke quickly drove out to meet me. He brought me up to date on his actions (which included sending the onion tank and keeping it full). Several minutes earlier he had also dispatched two trucks to help gather up some of the less fit refugees who had fallen by the roadside. "Don't tell Nicholas," he grinned, "they're the ones with the UNHCR markings."

"Looks like souk lorries to me," I smiled. Good ole' Jean-Michel; you could always rely on him in a pinch. Damn the regulations, he would do what was right.

We all hopped in Jean's famous red jeep (famous because it wouldn't ever start and was always breaking down) and headed to meet the refugees on the road. As we approached the advance column, which was still chugging along at a brisk rate, everything looked okay. But other than the first, few, fast-striding walkers, no large groups had yet reached or passed through any of the local villages. I remembered when flying over the first significant-sized group that it was just about to reach the first big village on the route. If trouble was going to start, this was where it was going to happen. I suggested to Jean-Michel that we meet the people and drive through the village ahead of them as if we were escorting them to Wad Kowli. That way, the villagers might get the impression that this was a government move and our presence might discourage them from hassling the returnees or doing anything provocative, like throwing stones or attacking stragglers.

What happened next really surprised me, and it's something I'll never forget. As the refugees marched through the village, the Sudanese stopped what they were doing and lined the road. When it was obvious that they were marching back to Tigray, the Sudanese began to clap and encourage the people on. At first I was afraid that it might be some form of jeering, but as I watched, it was obvious that the Sudanese were showing respect for the returnees and were demonstrating that they admired their courage. It was a poignant moment and one in which I realized that the brotherhood of the poor recognizes no international boundaries.

Once it was clear that the returnees would have no trouble getting through the village, Jean turned the jeep around and we headed back along the column to see what state the people were in. Ten or fifteen miles further up the road we encountered the first groups of exhausted walkers. Some people with

blistered and bleeding feet had fallen behind the others and scattered groups of people were sitting alongside the road. Most of the groups that were resting were families and it was obvious that when the women and younger children couldn't keep up, the men had slowed the pace and to make it easier and, eventually, had decided to stop.

At one cluster of people, I spotted Tedros, one of the REST "guides", one of the men who led people down the trail from Ethiopia into Sudan. Now he was leading them back. I asked him how many people had left Sefawa. He wasn't sure. Originally, he said, they had planned for only 5,000 to go but when the first group began to leave, thousands more had suddenly joined the group. What had started off as an orderly departure had soon turned into a mob exodus. When it was obvious that large numbers of people were going, everyone else decided that they wanted to go too. He said he was worried because provisions had been made for only 5,000 people, broken up into groups of 1,500, once they crossed the border. Now that there were almost 20,000 people on the road, he wasn't sure how REST would be able to feed them enroute on the other side.

I asked him how many people were out of shape and how many might return to Sefawa. He laughed and said that most of them were out of shape but he was sure that, after the first day or so, everyone would get their walking legs back and they would be able to move along without too much trouble. I suggested that perhaps a process of "natural division" might be taking place and that groups of around 1,500 might evolve according to the peoples ability to maintain the pace.

"Even so," he said, "food will be a problem on the other side."

While I had been talking with Tedros, Jean-Michel had been talking with some of the people through Berhe, the REST coordinator at Wad Kowli. Jean had been trying to interview everyone he could about the exodus. He was asking why people were leaving, were they going voluntarily and did they know what lay ahead for them in Tigray? He was also very concerned about finding out if any of the families had left anyone behind. From these interviews, and many more that he conducted over the next few days, he confirmed what we had forecast. It was clear that people knew the hardships they faced, the hazards of the war and the probable lack of food along the way. Even so, they all said that they were determined to return while there was still a chance to plant a crop for the next year. Most knew that REST would not be able to help them all. One old woman said, "We've survived droughts before REST, we'll survive droughts long after REST has gone away."

Further down the road, our party came across several pregnant women sitting beside the road with small children who were crying. It was obvious that they had tried to walk too fast and were now exhausted. They told Jean-Michel that they would spend the night where they were and then continue the next morning. Jean-Michel didn't like the idea of the women alone on the road so he offered to take the women and their children to Wad Kowli where they could rest with the others before setting out again. They accepted and, with that, we turned around and headed back.

Back at the camp, Jean-Michel conferred with Osmon Mekke. They decided to cancel the convoy of refugees to Girba that night and, instead, sent the trucks out to pick up women and children who looked like they couldn't make it to Wad Kowli that night. They not only wanted to make sure that the women

and children didn't spend the night alone in Shifta territory but were also concerned that the children wouldn't have enough food since the refugees had planned to get as far as the border the first day where REST planned to feed them.

"Don't tell Khartoum we used the trucks," Jean-Michel said. "They'll run my ass up the flag pole if they find out."

"I didn't see a thing," I said. Then I added, "I'd have done the same thing."

The staff spent the rest of the night taking care of the refugees, preparing meals for the incoming groups and going out to round up stragglers and bring them into camp. The medical and feeding teams performed a herculean task, checking over all of the people as they came in, sorting them out according to their ability to proceed the next morning, and making sure that all the children were properly bedded down and cared for. I suggested to Osmon Mekke that we send a truck up to Sefawa to collect some of the abandoned tents and bring them down to Wad Kowli so we could use them as temporary shelters in case it rained. I also wanted to set up a "departure camp" several kilometers down the road so that those who needed to stay behind for several days and get their strength up could stay there until they were strong enough to walk. Osmon agreed and sent two trucks with a request to Mansur for the tents.

"How far outside Wad Kowli do you think we ought to set up the new camp?", Osmon asked.

"How about up at _____ (the army check post at the border.)"

Osmon felt that the army might not permit the refugees to get that close to their camp and we might have a problem with obtaining permission for the relief workers to go to the border and assist the refugees since that was a very sensitive area. For the time being, the question of the satellite camp remained in abeyance.

At midnight, I took a stroll with Jean-Michel, Osmon and Rita along the road from Wad Kowli towards the temporary feeding center a kilometer outside the camp. Almost 20,000 people lay sprawled on the roadside, huddled under their thin blankets and tattered shawls. There were hundreds of small cooking fires and families gathered around the flames for warmth. Here and there people prepared tea to buttress their bodies against the cool, damp night air. Occasionally a baby would cry briefly before being given their mothers breast and where people were talking, it was in a subdued, almost whispering manner. At one point, around a small bend in the road, protected from view only marginally by a fallen log, a man and woman made love haltingly under the cover of a battered sheet and her discarded dress. She couldn't suppress a giggle as we walked by, but none of the hundreds of people around seemed to notice, or even care. It was a poignant reminder that life goes on, even in the roughest of circumstances, and that hardship, famine, even impending death, only heighten one's sense of life. The most basic of all pleasures becomes even more important, not only as a sign of love but as commitment to the bond that exists between human beings. Somehow, together, we endure.

Early the next morning, I flew back to Showak to brief Fadil on the situation. He immediately decided that he should fly down to personally see the situation and talk to the returnees. Thus, after a quick refueling and a quick bite to eat, we were on our way.

As we flew down the river, we dropped down over Sefawa to take a look at the camp there. Our view

from the air confirmed that almost half the camp had been abandoned. Hundreds of tents had been struck and thousands more were obviously unoccupied. Something else caught our eye as we flew over. There were dozens of large groups of people, sometimes several hundred or more, meeting throughout the camp and piles of belongings lay stacked on the ground next to them. It was obvious that many more were preparing to leave.

After landing at Wad Kowli, Fadil and I were driven directly to the provisional shelter and feeding station at Kilo 1, as the new campsite was already being called. The REST guides were already forming people into small groups, checking their feet and then sending them down the road towards the border. Earlier, SCF had received large bundles of used clothing and blankets from donors in the United Kingdom. Until now, they had withheld the clothing since there wasn't enough for all. Now they had decided to give the clothes to the returnees. Several hundred yards from Kilo 1, a distribution center had been set up and the people were lining up to select clothing or a blanket to take with them. Downstream from the clothing piles, the people were a funny sight as they set out for the border. Women in bright dresses from the 60's were trooping gaily past. Many of the women had chosen heavy woolen coats, no doubt for the highland cold, and many of the men had selected heavy fur-lined flight jackets. In the hot Sudanese sun, it seemed so out of place. Of course, they were carrying all they possibly could. Strapped on their backs were as much of their rations as they could carry. In addition, many were wearing pots and pans on their head. You couldn't help but laugh and at the same time feel sad about the whole situation.

Fadil wanted to know how many kilos of food the people were able to carry. I had estimated each family was carrying about a two weeks supply since everyone in the family was carrying some part of the load.

"What about the rest?", Fadil asked, referring to the remainder of the fifty-day ration. Osmon told him that, for appearances sake, each family was given the ration individually. Then they took the food several hundred yards down the road where they turned it over to REST for storage until it could be trucked into Ethiopia.

Fadil wanted to go and watch the procedure. We soon discovered that cutting open the bags of grain, dividing the contents into the proper portion for each family and putting the grain into small, flimsy sacks for the people to carry not only delayed the departures but also resulted in some degree of food loss in the sorting out process.

"Don't bother trying to portion it out," Fadil said. "Just calculate what the people need and turn it all over to REST. They need all they can get out on the road. If we start breaking into the bags, it's just going to mean more food is spoiled and lost."

Then he turned to Berhe, "How long before you can get trucks?", Fadil inquired.

Berhe said he didn't know for sure, but he thought it would be at least three or four days. The only truck they had been able to get was the water tanker and it was rented and couldn't go across the border.

He said that REST was hoping that several ICRC trucks would be available soon when they returned from one of the cross-border missions, but he hadn't received any updates as to when they would be

available.

On the way back to Showak, Fadil asked if I would check with the volags to see if they would be willing to purchase a souk lorry or two to help REST carry the food across the border. (Several of the agencies in Wad Kowli did offer to help but were overruled by their offices in Khartoum or Gedaref, so no vehicles were purchased. The Embassy and UNHCR were still hugging tight to the fiscal reigns.)

In mid-afternoon, I established radio contact with Khartoum. I pleaded with Nicholas to come down to the border and view the situation personally but he informed me that he was still tied up and couldn't get away. As a compromise, he said he was sending Pierce Garety and Barry Rigby and they would soon be landing at the Gedaref airport. He also said that Mike Menning would be accompanying the two.

Mike had only been back in Sudan for several weeks. I had seen him when he returned from Geneva and had given him a full briefing on the situation. Instead of returning immediately to the field, however, he stayed in Khartoum to finish some reports and only visited Gedaref briefly during the time he had been back. We had met briefly during his brief trip to the East and he had displayed a new, cold attitude towards me. When we talked of the returnees, his position seemed to indicate that he had adopted the Embassy's line on the situation. Instead of the friendly exchange that we usually had, he appeared to be openly hostile. Thus, when Nicholas said that Mike would be coming out, I welcomed the chance to show him the situation, not only to try to win him over to my position, but also to reestablish the friendly working relationship that we had maintained up to that point.

I picked up my three passengers at Gedaref about 4:00 in the afternoon and flew first to Sefawa. We arrived over the camp just as the next stream of refugees took to the road. From the air it was an impressive sight. Thousands of people, walking three abreast, were carrying their meager belongings. It was too early for the column to string out and they appeared even more determined than those I had seen from the air the day before.

On landing, we were met by Mansur and Tessa. I could tell that Tessa felt awkward and didn't know how to deal with the people from the Branch Office nor her immediate superior, Mike Menning. Tessa was not one of the "regular" field officers. She was an executive secretary who had volunteered to come from Geneva to help in the emergency and had asked to be assigned to the Branch Office and later SOG. When UNHCR had trouble finding qualified field officers, or even volunteers, to work in the camps, Tessa had cheerfully offered to give it a go. Despite a rocky start, she had risen to the occasion and had performed magnificently under all circumstances. She appeared worried that her handling of the situation hadn't been correct.

On the side of the road, Mike stopped several groups of refugees and questioned them about their reasons for leaving. Though the answers were the same as we had been given earlier, Mike drew different conclusions. He said he was convinced that REST was not telling people about the hardships they faced! I was astounded. How could he get that interpretation? Mike was hearing only what he wanted to hear and discarding the rest. Any hopes that I had of winning an ally in the struggle against the Branch Office were dashed.

Soon, we flew on to Wad Kowli, sweeping low along the road to watch the refugees making progress.

Only an hour and a half out of camp, the column was breaking down and groups of stragglers were beginning to form. The leaders of the column were moving quickly and already they had progressed almost fifteen kilometers. Several kilometers further on, I could see the REST tanker moving into position to supply water and first aid to the people at the first of the temporary checkpoints that they had established. Behind them I could see four, brown Bedfords moving up to join the tanker so that any women or children who needed help could be picked up and brought into Wad Kowli. Knowing the trucks could be recognized from the air, I quickly turned the plane and headed out over the river hoping Pierce and Mike hadn't seen the trucks at the same time that I had.

We arrived at Wad Kowli just after an earlier group of returnees from Sefawa arrived. They were joining about 4,000 people from the first day's departure who had remained at Wad Kowli. They were planning to leave the next day when the women and children had rested sufficiently to continue the journey. Once more, Mike and the others walked among the refugees with interpreters, asking questions and examining the people. Occasionally they would run into a relief worker scurrying among the people distributing food, bandages or sandals and would stop them to ask their opinions regarding the return.

At sunset we were hosted to a quick meal by Jean-Michel with food provided by Luigi LaFonti. Since HCR had once again screwed up the Field Officer's food allocation, Jean was reduced to begging from the agencies and the contractors in order to eat. Pierce and Mike launched the inevitable debate and tried to outline UNHCR's position to Jean-Michel and Osmon. Jean-Michel, however, was weary and would have none of it. He not only told them that they were wrong, he suddenly admitted to sending the trucks out to pick up the people, almost daring HCR to fire him for taking a humanitarian action. Before anyone could reprimand him, however, Barry cut in and said that Jean-Michel had done the right thing. For the first time, the attitude of the people in the Branch Office had begun to change.

We finished the meal in silence and then Pierce, Barry and I walked down to Kilo 1. The scene was a repeat of the night before but with slightly fewer people. Barry was visibly moved and several times I pointed to people that I knew among the group and told their personal stories. At one point, I talked about one farmer and his drive to return and pointed out that he had lost his entire family to the measles epidemic in Sudan. At this point Pierce became contentious and started talking to me about the legal principles involved and why UNHCR just couldn't help. I was in no mood to hear about legal principles and jumped right back. But before the discussion got out of hand, Barry intervened and calmed things down. He promised to take a concise summary of all points of view back to Khartoum and try to get Nicholas to agree to commit more resources to helping the returnees. Pierce finally agreed and, with resignation in his voice, told me he would tell Jean-Michel to continue to send the trucks out until suitable alternative transportation could be arranged.

The next morning, Fadil and I met with the senior COR staff in the east. We had finally received authorization from COR Khartoum to contract forty souk lorries to carry the people from Sefawa, and later Fau, to Wad Kowli so that they could repatriate. Abdul Ayub, our "move boss", had already begun working up the plans for a night transfer from Fau with a rest stop near Gedaref. Several of our transport coordinators and convoy escorts were going to be transferred from the Girba operations to make

the arrangements and set up a rest stop. COR decided to do this without discussions with UNHCR. Fadil and Hassan had decided that UNHCR would be opposed at any rate, but Fadil, following my advice, had agreed that no more trucks with HCR markings would be involved once the souk lorries had been hired. This way, the Branch Office could pretend not to know what was going on. We also instructed that no one from the press was to be permitted in the camps where the departures were occurring until after the people were well on their way into Ethiopia. If anyone inquired, we would tell them the truth but no one would be allowed to interview the refugees nor photograph them during their departure. While we wanted to make the repatriation generally known, I didn't want announcements of the departures made until they were already on the trail (and thus harder to detect from the air by the Ethiopian Air Force.)

The first group of souk lorries were contracted that morning and by 3 o'clock, twenty had arrived at Fau III to begin loading refugees. As Fadil and I were going to the plane to fly to Fau to supervise the first loading, we received a radio message from SOG requesting that we stop in Gedaref to pick up Barry and Pierce. They wanted to witness the first departures and verify that no UNHCR trucks were being used. Fadil was miffed that they wanted to come along, but, at my urging, he agreed to pick them up. As it turned out, it was a fortuitous decision.

The scene at Fau was very different from what we had observed the two previous days at Sefawa. The twenty trucks were lined up in front of the camp. Approximately forty people had taken a position beside each truck and were waiting to board. Friends and well-wishers formed a group behind the returnees and the REST guides moved quickly down the row preparing lists of people and checking to make sure that everyone in each family who was planning to leave was present and accounted for. Belongings were sorted into small, compact bundles for travelling. Each family had already received their food and blankets for the night's journey. At the end of the column, REST workers were announcing the departures for the next day and discussing with the COR officials how many trucks would be available.

Comparing the situation to Sefawa, one of our predictions was confirmed. By using trucks for the departure, not only was the number of people controlled but the "herd instinct" that had swept over Sefawa was being avoided. Because only a limited number of people could board the trucks at one time, those people who were not really ready to go had the opportunity to delay making the choice until a later time. I was sure that many who might otherwise join the herd would decide to stay. Thus, by sending trucks to help people go we were actually giving many a chance to remain.

Just as the first trucks were about ready to roll, an extraordinary incident occurred. Frank Moss, the refugee officer from the American Embassy, drove up in his jeep. He skidded to a halt beside the column of trucks, bounded out of the vehicle and in a huffing, booming voice yelled, "I demand that this cease immediately!" He spotted Asir, the camp administrator, and began yelling.

"I order you to stop this immediately. Commissioner Ahmedi has given me his personal assurances that there would be no assistance to returnees."

Asir said politely, "Sir, this is a COR matter. You have no authority here."

Moss physically pushed him aside and strode up to Fadil. "I said I demand that this stop. You have

no authority to conduct this move."

Fadil was controlled and maintained his calm. "This is not a matter for you to decide," he said. "This is a matter between the refugees and the Sudanese. The Tigrayans have asked to go home and we are helping them. We do not need your permission to do anything."

Moss, undeterred, went on in his foghorn voice, "I demand that this stop now. I will see personally to it that you lose your job over this. You are not authorized to make this move. I demand that it stop."

Fadil ignored Moss and turned his back and started to walk away. Unbelievably, Moss reached out and grabbed Fadil by the shoulder. "Don't these people know that they are going back to a holocaust? Has REST told them that the TPLF is totally defeated on the battle field, that they have no ability to help the people once they cross the border? Our intelligence reports say that they'll be bombed all along the way."

That Fadil maintained his cool under the circumstances is a tribute to his character. Calmly, he drew himself up and looked Moss straight in the eye, "It is their decision," he said. "They know the risks better than you. They wish to go and we are obligated to help."

Suddenly Frank spotted me several yards away. "You!", he shouted. "What do you think about this?"

"Frank, you people are off the wall and you're way out of line."

"Do you know that REST held a party last night to try and get people to agree to return? They're even offering to pay people if they'll go back."

This was the wildest thing I had heard yet. "Frank, the people always hold a party when people leave. They're celebrating going home, not recruiting more volunteers. REST also told the people that they can't expect help from anyone, not even REST, if they leave. People are having to sign a statement saying that they understand they'll not get any help."

"But there's no rain on the other side. How will they survive?", he said.

"Frank, I don't know where you people get your information or who is doing the analysis, but it's dead wrong. We sit in Wad Kowli every day and watch the rain on the other side. It's already raining here a month early. The Setit is full of very muddy water. The refugees coming out are talking of flooding in many areas and already some of the cross-border trucks are getting stuck. As for the war, wars come and go but people need to plant.

"But it's dangerous."

"It may be dangerous, but it was dangerous for them to come out. And as far as the TPLF being totally destroyed, if that was the case, the guides would have been withdrawn and not sent to help escort the people back. You better hire some new spooks. The ones you've got ain't worth a shit!"

Moss stood there for a moment with his mouth open, rolling his eyes and looking for someone to support him in the crowd. Finally he spotted Barry.

"You're from the U.N.," he said. "Tell them to stop."

Barry just shook his head, "You're making a fool of yourself, Frank. Quit while you're ahead," he said.

With that, Fadil nodded to Assiz who then turned to the convoy escorts and gave them the signal to start their engines. As the first trucks roared into life, the refugees lining the sides of the roads let out a cheer and began clucking their tongues. The din was tremendous and it drowned out the engines as they shifted into first gear and began to roll. As the trucks passed by, the returnees and the crowd alike waved both hands in salute and, within a matter of minutes, the returnees were on their way.

Moss strode back to his car. When he reached it, he turned and yelled, "I'll see that you all regret this."

As we walked back to the plane, I said to Fadil, "I can't believe what just happened. I'm very embarrassed, both as an American and as a guest in your country. I've never seen anyone so impolite. I just don't know what to say. I'm sure his behavior doesn't represent the Embassy and, believe me, most Americans are not so crude."

Fadil just shook his head, "That young man is very rude," he said. "Someone should teach him a lesson."

On the flight back, Barry and Pierce couldn't contain their anger. They too apologized to Fadil and described their embarrassment over the whole situation. Pierce said that as soon as he got back to Gedaref he would take a car and drive straight back to Khartoum to report the incident.

Later, when we were alone, I asked Fadil if Commissioner Ahmedi had ever given any instructions to Hassan Osman or to Hassan Attiya about not moving the refugees. Fadil said that he had personally discussed the matter with both Ahmedi and Hassan Attiya and at no time had they ever said that the refugees should not be moved. It was clear that Moss was overstepping his bounds.

The first move from Fau came off without a hitch. The trucks departed the camp at sunset and drove for three and a half hours till they reached the rest stop outside Gedaref. There the people were provided tea and biscuits and given several hours to rest and relieve themselves. At around 1:00 A.M., the trucks left for Sefawa, leaving the paved highway just past Gedaref and taking the dirt road eastward. At Sefawa, the passengers were given another brief rest, some water and some protein biscuits then continued on to Wad Kowli, arriving there around 8:00 A.M.

When they reached Kilo 1, the returnees dismounted and were shepherded through a screening process to ensure that everyone was capable of making the walk. Women with small children were encouraged to consider staying longer and anyone who was reluctant to continue was allowed to stay at a section of the camp that had been earmarked especially for those who had changed their minds. Only a few made that choice, however, and the rest quickly gathered their belongings, assembled into groups and sat down to wait until departure time.

At 3:00 P.M., the first small group headed down the road for the border and by sunset everyone had gone. The exodus was orderly and, since they were moving at night when it was cool and because darkness forced them to go slow, I was sure that most of the people would have an easier journey than those who had left from Sefawa.

Every two or three days, REST sent a runner to Wad Kowli to report to Berhe on the returnees condition. I anxiously poured over each report to see how the people were doing. There was no adverse

news. The first Sefawa group reported large numbers of stragglers but no major problems. The people from Fau and later groups from Sefawa who were trucked to the border appeared to have an easier go of it and less problems were experienced.

The departures continued at a steady rate for the next three and a half weeks. Our fear that they would run out of food was averted when, after two weeks, REST was able to procure two or three trucks and send them in with the grain that we had provided from the Wad Kowli stockpiles.

Suddenly, just as quickly as the controversy had flared up, it began to die down. A week after the big walkout from Sefawa, Nicholas Morris, accompanied by Karen Abu Zayd, visited the east for a tour of the camps. Nicholas watched as returnees from Fau arrived by truck and were discharged at Kilo 1. By then, all parts of the operation were running very efficiently and within a matter of hours, the refugees were on their way across the border. That night, over dinner at Jean-Michel's compound, Nicholas mused on why we were stopping at Kilo 1 and not going closer to the border. "Why not," he said, "take them closer? Say maybe six or eight kilometers out?" Without hesitating, Jean-Michel and Osmon quickly agreed and I've often wondered if Nicholas ever knew that Kilo 8 was, in fact, the border!

The next morning as we departed to leave, Nicholas gave his formal blessing to the entire repatriation operation. He reported that he was pleased with what he had seen and the way it was being handled; especially the screening at Kilo 1. He particularly liked the way in which the refugees were given their departure packets (small supplies of bandages and oral rehydration tablets as well as vitamin pills for the children).

As relieved as I was by Nicholas' belated approval of the returnee support activities, I was saddened that it had come so late. None of the services that we were providing the returnees were any different from those I had proposed in my plan a month earlier. Had we acted then, things would have been so much smoother and UNHCR would have gained a lot of credit. As it was, Nicholas made the right decision, but as usual, too late to have any impact. He was blessing a fait accompli and the price of late action to the prestige of HCR's senior staff had been high. Everyone from Mike Menning up had lost credibility and most important, especially in a field operation, command presence. From that point on, many of the UNHCR field staff would check with me before carrying out directives from Khartoum or Gedaref. This was unhealthy and I discouraged it as much as possible, but by then the damage had been done and only a change of personnel could rectify the situation.

As Nicholas was leaving, he said he still didn't understand why we were supplying returnees with 50 days worth of food. By now he was convinced that REST could supply food from their own stocks. I said that until we were sure that REST's food was in place, we had to keep up the ration. He disagreed but realized that there was little he could do about it, for Fadil and Hassan Attiya had made it clear that they would continue to give the 50 days ration to make sure that the refugees could reach home.

By now, Fadil and I had learned that REST was indeed moving food into position for the returnees. They had been able to get a message to some of the cross-border food trucks to divert to the checkpoints along the returnee's route. We knew that within a matter of days, the trucks would reach the first of the checkpoints. We also knew that the trucks were carrying hybrid sorghum from the US. Since hybrids

cannot reproduce, continuing to provide large quantities of the natural Thai sorghum, which could be used as seeds, remained a major concern. The more we could provide, the more farmers that would have at least something that they could plant.

On May 10, I received a message from REST that the first trucks diverted from the cross-border operation had reached the checkpoints. I immediately informed Fadil and asked if he wanted to continue the 50-day ration. He agreed to continue to do it until he was ordered to stop by the Commissioner's office in Khartoum. Since we suspected that the American Embassy probably knew as soon as we did that other food was in place, we were sure that we would soon receive orders to reduce the rations to a 10-day level.

About this time, the Oxfam-America returnee assistance program began to come on line. John Dennis had been working feverishly to try and obtain top quality seeds to give to the returnees. He had finally located a source and had managed to bring several tons to the East. We discussed at some length how the seeds should be handled. I proposed that they be turned over to REST for transport and distribution on the inside. John, however, had been advised against giving any further assistance directly to REST. He wanted to give the seeds directly to the returnees. Several others advised him against this. We all felt that the refugees just couldn't carry anything more. They were already burdened with food for the journey plus the belongings that they had accumulated in Sudan. John's orders were clear, however, the seeds were to be packed in individual bags and given to each family as they crossed the border. In addition, Oxfam wanted to provide a small quantity of tools.

In John's defense, he tried valiantly to obtain large numbers of donkeys to help the returnees carry the food, seeds and tools back to Ethiopia. But given the shortness of time, the lack of resources and especially a shortage of people to help him, John was only able to buy a few, scrawny donkeys to donate.

John began distributing the seeds and tools at Fau II as the last of the refugees boarded the trucks. Helpers handed out the seeds packed in sturdy, woven, plastic bags and gave each family their allotted tools. When the trucks arrived at Kilo 8, the new departure site set up after Nicholas' visit, the refugees dismounted and began to prepare for their walk. As our staff watched in dismay, the refugees began untying the carefully packaged seeds and emptied them on the ground. Then they stuffed their belongings into the empty bags, hefted them onto their backs and took off. When the drivers checked the trucks to make sure that everything was off, they found the Oxfam tools. The few donkeys John was able to purchase had been driven to the border and were quickly taken by the first returnees that passed.

Rita had been working departures at Kilo 8 and she quickly told Jean-Michel to get me on the radio and tell me what was happening. In the meantime, she and one of the other IRC workers went to the REST compound and told Berhe that the seeds were too valuable to be abandoned and dumped on the ground. He agreed to find a piece of plastic to lay on the ground so people who wanted to discard their seeds and keep the bags could do so. In the meantime, I contacted John and told him what was happening. He said that all the seeds had already been put in the smaller bags and he would have to continue distributing the same way. Since he had already thrown away the original bags, I contacted the CARE office in Port Sudan and asked if they could locate several thousand grain sacks and ship them

down. When the sacks arrived, we sent them to Wad Kowli where a group of refugees spent an afternoon shoveling the abandoned seeds into the bags. Resealed, they were then turned over to REST for transport into Tigray. They declined to take the tools because they were too poorly made, so the hoes were given to the refugees staying in Fau.

As soon as we knew that the Oxfam seeds were on their way across the border, Fadil decided to cut the rations back to the normal ten day supply. These were still generously overestimated and distributors were told to make sure that all the sacks were brimming to the top.

With the rations down to a politically acceptable level, all opposition to the repatriation program ended and the operation continued on into May without further controversy. Somewhat behind the times, several major news organizations published stories condemning the return. Newsweek was particularly hostile, saying that we were permitting people to go back to certain death. Several newspapers attacked me (indirectly) and the Sudanese administration (directly) for "fostering a false attitude of hope."

Fadil and I were amused by the stories since not one of the reporters had been to the border or interviewed the returnees nor any of our staff. The pictures that news magazines used showing the refugees "going home" were, in reality, pictures of people coming into Sudan, not going out. We could only assume that the stories had been planted earlier by the embassy in an attempt to put pressure on us to stop the moves. We knew that they were getting their information from the small, gossipy, circle of "Khartoum Kamandos" who somehow never seemed to manage to get to the field.

Before the moves ended, 54,800 people left Sudan to return to their homes. Twenty-five thousand of these walked out of Sefawa, the remainder were taken to the border in rented trucks. The trucking operation proved my point, that is, that many people took advantages of the delays resulting from the truck schedules and decided to stay. In the three Fau camps, 37,000 people had originally said that they would return to Tigray but, in the end, only 18,000 made the trip. When the last convoy left it was only half full.

* * *

Alone in my thoughts, I have tried to work out why it was that the American Embassy fought to keep the refugees from leaving. The most charitable answer would be that they were truly concerned about the situation on the other side, that they believed that the military situation was indeed as bad as they proclaimed; the food situation even worse. One can lay this on faulty intelligence, overreaction and misinterpretation by amateurs acting on partial information. Even so, I could never understand why none of them ever came to the border to see what we were seeing and to hear what we were hearing from the refugees and REST.

A second possibility is that the U.S. feared that large numbers of people going back might attract attention to the entire humanitarian effort on the border and somehow draw the Ethiopians into a situation where they had to respond militarily, sealing off the border to new arrivals.

It could also be argued that a return outside the framework of a formal agreement between Ethiopia, Sudan and UNHCR would be undercutting long established practices and principles guiding repatriation.

If the refugees flaunted the return without going through the "good offices" of UNHCR, could not HCR's role be weakened in the future? While that might have been a consideration, I don't think that anyone but UNHCR worried about it. Governments, as well as refugees, are pragmatic; they do what suits them best at a particular point in time. Humanitarian principles are nice but are only really used when governments or other groups find it expedient.

Nicholas Morris argued that UNHCR could not be seen to be helping a return outside of its legal mandate, and that I could understand. But I could also argue that the refugees were going home outside the mandate anyway, that COR was not constrained by such an agreement nor were the voluntary agencies. Why then couldn't they be called on to assist instead of being threatened by UNHCR and the embassy?

Many Tigrayans argued that this was simply another means of the United States trying to control events on the border. The TPLF and REST were still smarting from the abrupt withdrawal of the American offer to aid the cross-border operation immediately after the Bush visit. They were also losing faith with American promises to provide more trucks and support. The cynics within REST interpreted the American position as a fit of pique that Tigrayans, not Americans, were controlling events.

There is another possibility; one which is even more disturbing. From the time the first large scale departures began, my border monitors had been reporting hearing large, propeller-driven airplanes crossing the border at night. On April 16th, as the sun was beginning to rise, one of my monitors reported spotting a large, four-engine airplane coming across the border from Ethiopia at low altitude and heading northwest. From his description, I was sure the plane was a C-130 or similar plane. He said the airplane appeared to be black and it was running without any lights, unusual for that early in the morning. It was some distance away and he could see no markings, but it was obvious that someone was up to something clandestine in the area. On April 22, another monitor fifteen miles to the south made the same report. Again, a four-engine airplane coming out of Ethiopia just as the sun was beginning to rise.

What was going on is anybody's guess. The most obvious thought was that the Americans or some other superpower were collecting intelligence on operations inside Ethiopia. C-130s equipped with electronic devices, infrared sensors and mapping devices are used throughout the world for intelligence gathering. Perhaps some special missions were being flown.

C-130s are also used for dropping supplies. Could it have been that an air drop of arms was underway? Possibly, but unlikely at least as far as the Americans were concerned. The U.S. hadn't shown an inclination to help either the Eritreans or the Tigrayans since both were avid Marxists. Provide humanitarian help, yes, but to provide arms, highly unlikely.

A third possibility was that another Falasha evacuation was underway, this time from deep inside Ethiopia itself. This we'll never know about for it is unlikely that the Americans could have pulled it off and if it was the Israelis, who do have C-130s, they will never tell.

Months later, after I returned to the United States, I talked to Don Krumm at length about why State had been so opposed to helping the return. He said it all originated with the embassy and he had been

surprised at the cables coming from Khartoum and their position on the returnee matter, especially since he had briefed Bob on the returnee issue as early as February. From the beginning it was the consensus of the Bureau that the people would indeed go back whether or not they were assisted.

So what then was the answer? My own personal opinion is that there was something happening on the border that the Americans didn't want to attract attention to. The humanitarian concerns happened to be an easy cover. Whatever the situation was, the people in the embassy worked hard to sow disinformation and stop our operation. As it was, they didn't stop anything and in the process they did a hell of a lot of damage to the operation and caused a lot of distrust between Nicholas, Pierce and me. All of us were simply pawns in their game.

* * *

There is one final, amusing anecdote that I should relate. I had flown down to Sefawa to check on the trucks for the first transport of returnees from that camp the day after Frank Moss put in his infamous appearance at Fau Three. Just as the refugees were loaded and ready to go, who should drive up but ole Foghorn himself. "You," he bellowed (again!) "Organizing another convoy of returnees, huh?"

Before the trucks rolled out, I invited Frank to interview as many in the group as he wanted to determine why they were leaving. I suggested he use his own interpreter to make sure that he got the complete picture. For about half an hour, he wandered among the trucks questioning the people as they mounted up. Finally he came to me and said (in a much calmer manner), "I'm convinced. It is voluntary. I just can't believe that these people would take the risks. Why do you think they're doing it?"

I repeated all the reasons that I knew, and added that I believed if they couldn't go back to their mountains and farm, psychologically, they would probably die a slow death as refugees in a strange, desert land.

Whether or not Frank ever agreed with that assessment, I'll never know, but he suddenly changed the subject and asked, "Do you know where I can get any gas around here? I'm almost out."

I informed him that the only place where fuel supplies were certain was COR and that if he wanted fuel he would have to drive to Showak. After getting directions, he set off. What I didn't tell him, of course, was that in order to get fuel he would have to negotiate the famous Showak fuel allocation system which would require obtaining a chit from Fadil!

As luck would have it, Fadil came to pick me up at the airstrip that night. I told him that all the departures had gone well from Sefawa and then concluded by telling him that I had seen Frank Moss again. "And guess what," I said, "he's out of petrol!"

The grin on Fadil's face can't be described.

That night, I took great delight in informing Moss about the fuel allocation procedures and suggested that he might want to go early to Fadil's quarters to arrange for a chit. I guess eating crow was too much for him, because he never showed up at Fadil's. His driver must have begged fuel from everyone in the Volag community and somehow he got enough to get him out the next morning without paying a call to

the COR offices.

CHAPTER 15

MAD MAY

The month of May seems like a blur and it's hard for me to recall all the individual events that occurred during the period. We were now three weeks into our crash program to complete the priority activities before the rains came in June. By now we had a "crackerjack" staff in all the key field posts and the operation was beginning to function like a well oiled machine. My role was to keep injecting ideas and advice so that gradually, all the moving parts were lubricated.

My three priorities were completing the move to Girba from Wad Kowli so that we could close the camp; completing all the various road projects, especially construction of the tanker roads; and building up adequate supplies of food in the more remote camps that were likely to be isolated in the rainy season.

The move from Wad Kowli haunted me daily. With all the souk lorries available in the area tied up moving returnees back to Wad Kowli, this left only the two dozen COR Bedfords to complete the move from Wad Kowli to Girba. Thus, I was forced to do two things: push hard to try to empty the camp, while, at the same time, building up a stockpile of food and other supplies in case something happened and we were not able to close it before June 1st. We were now down to 15,000 refugees in Wad Kowli, not counting the returnees, and if we could keep the transport rate steady for the remainder of the month, we could just make it.

After some initial haggling with UNHCR over the selection of contractors, Chris' road projects had finally gotten underway. Initially the German Embassy had offered to pay for the construction of roads provided that a German contracting firm be selected to do the work. However, every time we approached the contractors, they claimed that they were too busy to get involved and that we would have to wait until their equipment was released from a road project in the west. Hassan, of course, had tried to force UNHCR to buy him the machinery to build the roads, but he never fully understood what was involved and what types of equipment would be needed. All he wanted was a couple of road graders when, in fact, we needed dozers, scrapers, front-end loaders and many trucks.

Chris had arrived full of enthusiasm to get on with the job. When it was obvious that the German contractors were not ready, he immediately sought out another contractor and started negotiations. At first HCR waffled, trying to decide how much of a commitment they really wanted to make. But finally, with Chris orchestrating a prod from Hassan Attiya, and winning Barry and Pierce over to his arguments, HCR prepared to conclude an agreement. Then, suddenly, Chris learned that USAID wanted to hire the contractor he had selected to build and improve roads in the West for the food supply operation there. The contractor needed a guarantee that UNHCR was serious or he would divert his equipment within 24 hours.

Chris had to move fast. He knew that if we didn't get the equipment, the whole project would be off. The Germans couldn't be ready to work until the end of May and even then, they would only agree to build one of the small roads up in one of the drier, sandy areas that was far less critical than down in the gumbo soils around Girba Lake, Sefawa and Wad Kowli. Chris spent the day huddling with Barry and

Pierce trying to work out an agreement. Finally, at the eleventh hour, Barry suggested that Chris sign the deal on behalf of HCR. Of course as a consultant it wouldn't be binding but the contractor wouldn't know that and it would give them time work out the arrangements with the headquarters in Geneva. Thus, the whole project began on Chris' signature.

Once the equipment was secure, Chris had to put together a team. SCF(UK), fearing that nothing would be done about roads, had imported their own small fleet of road equipment and had begun improving the roads and grounds around the hospitals, feeding centers and staff quarters in the camps where they worked. The man they hired to supervise the job was a Scotsman, late a sergeant major of the Royal Engineers. John Parks, known to all as "Wadi John", was a moderately tall man built like a bulldog who knew how to get things done. A construction manager by profession, he had an instinct for the engineering that was needed and had already begun the practical organization of a large labor force to quarry rocks and gravel for the operation. Thus, he was the first man for Chris to see in the field.

Chris will probably never forget his arrival at Wad Kowli. He had just driven up and gotten out of his car when he heard a shout go up from a nearby section and saw hundreds of refugees running away from a large fire. Within minutes, a large section of the camp was burning and his introduction to Wadi John came as he joined him in organizing a brigade to beat out the flames and to tear down houses in the firestorm's path to deprive it of fuel. After this, the two hit it off famously, the young engineer working with the veteran construction manager, and I think they both benefitted from each other's ideas and enthusiasm. By May 1st the road projects were well underway with heavy equipment rolling in from Khartoum at a steady pace.

* * *

The stockpiling of food in the camps was also going well. Several months earlier, some portable canvas warehouses had arrived and been erected by two supervisors from the supplier's firm. When we had first seen the warehouses, Kent and I were unimpressed. We had recommended that another brand and design be chosen, one which had an excellent anchoring system and spring dampeners that we felt would reduce the risk of damage and tearing in high winds. The model that we wanted, however, was not immediately available and the UNHCR procurement office had decided rather than wait a couple of weeks for the manufacturer to produce the desired quantity, they would shoot for speed and take an alternative model which they were assured would meet our needs.

The model that they had bought was far inferior to the one that we had specified. The poles were too flimsy, there didn't appear to be a very good skirt at the base, and worst of all, the anchoring system consisted of several straight, 3/4" iron rebars hammered into the ground. Kent and I tried to convince the manufacturer's reps to at least put the anchors in concrete footings but they assured us that the anchors were sufficient and that the structures would "stand up to an 80 mph wind".

The first week in May, we had our first test of these 80 mph structures. Late one afternoon, a localized thunderstorm brewed up over Fau and within a matter of minutes, two of the three warehouses were completely destroyed. That night another storm wiped out one of the warehouses at Girba Central

and by the end of the week the main warehouse at Sefawa and another at Fau 2 were also gone. The only bright spot was a report from Um Rakuba which said that their warehouse had successfully withstood a strong storm but only because they had taken it upon themselves to anchor the structure in concrete.

Julian Murray was assigned the task of trying to come up with a strategy to replace the warehouses. He considered several options including setting up several hundred plastic tents and using them to store the supplies but this was impractical because it would be difficult to control the stocks with such an arrangement. Kent went down to Um Rakuba and looked at the concrete footings that the Swedes had developed and came back and reported that he thought this would do the trick. He then developed a plan to retrofit concrete footings to the warehouses that were still standing and prepared to order the cement and reinforcing rods that would be needed.

Luckily, we lost very little food when the warehouses were destroyed. The food was in bags and it was quickly distributed so that it could be consumed before spoiling. A couple of the warehouses had been nearly empty when they were struck, so in those, there was even less loss.

(We later ran into a snag in trying to retrofit the warehouses with anchorage. When Hassan returned from his trip, he was extremely upset that the warehouses had blown over in the first place and was determined that they should be replaced with metal buildings. Therefore, he refused to authorize the purchase of cement and rebar to anchor the new warehouses that were just arriving.

"If UNHCR wants the refugees to have food, they will give me metal buildings as I requested," he insisted.

We got around this by getting one of the voluntary agencies to buy the necessary materials and Kent and one of the Swedish engineers quietly went around and made sure that all the buildings were properly anchored.)

* * *

As things began to spin up into a more frantic pace, projects began to take on a momentum of their own and, finally, people began anticipating what was needed and doing it before they were asked. Throughout the period, we got precious little help from the Sub-office. Mike Menning was in the process of moving his base from Gedaref to Showak and seemed to be more interested in administrative details than getting out to the field to supervise projects. His attitude towards me was now completely sour and he began issuing the staff instructions not to let me in on decisions that were "of internal UNHCR concern" which, by his standards, were just about everything to do with the operation. The move backfired on Mike, for it made him look petty in the eyes of his subordinates.

At the same time, Mike was trying to impose his idea of administrative control over his people and he changed from the easy going style he had used with such success earlier to a more autocratic, "play-it-by-the-rules" type of leadership. It was not the style for the moment, especially since people were now used to doing things on their own. Now that they knew what to do operationally, they wanted the flexibility to get on with the job. Imposition of rules, regulations and more paperwork did not suit

the mindset of the staff.

A particularly damaging blow to Mike's prestige occurred when he ordered Angela Barry, our popular nutritionist, to return a bed which Mike's assistants had loaned to her to use until some local furniture makers could build her one. The furniture that she had been loaned had been in one of the prefab houses set up in the new Sub-office compound at Showak. The bed was in a room which Mike had decided to use as an office and had been broken down and placed in another room where it was obviously in the way. Angela had moved to Showak the previous month. Despite being in poor health, she had agreed to make the move so she could be closer to COR and the camps in our northern sector. Since moving to Showak, she had been sleeping on the floor and the offer of the bed had been a kind gesture. Menning, however, insisted that the furniture had to stay with the pre-fabs and ordered her to bring them back immediately. Angela tried to argue the point but got nowhere and ended up frustrated and in tears. That afternoon we hauled the furniture back over to Menning's office and dutifully stacked it in the corner. That move on Mike's part, as well as his attempts to have his girlfriend made the chief medical coordinator, lost him all the rest of the points that he had earned the previous four months.

* * *

On May 14, Fadil convened a meeting of the senior staff to discuss the repatriation of the refugees at Damazin. If you'll remember, the Damazin group consisted of approximately 1500 refugees who had escaped from Ethiopia after having been forcibly relocated from their homes in Gondar and Tigray. For the past four months, they had been living at a small camp at Damazin while UNHCR tried to figure out how to deal with them. The Tigrayans among them had been informed of the repatriations from Wad Kowli and they had petitioned the Branch Office for trucks to move back to the border so they too could leave. Originally, the Branch Office had refused, but recently, there had been a change of policy in Khartoum and it was decided to send the trucks to take them to Wad Kowli. (It was felt that their numbers could be hidden among the other returnees.)

Fadil instructed Abdul Ayum to organize the transport of the first group of refugees back to Wad Kowli and the following day twelve trucks were sent to Damazin to pick up the first of the returnees. We calculated that only three moves would be needed to move them all to Wad Kowli.

The following day dawned clear and fairly cool. It promised to be one of the most beautiful days of my stay in Sudan. At 9:00, the normal radio traffic came in from the camps. I reviewed the messages and didn't notice anything unusual. Skimming down the last of the incoming reports, I noted that Jean-Michel had included in the medical statistics a note that doctors had reported a number of cases of severe diarrhea. For the previous three or four weeks, large numbers of people had been coming down with a diarrhea that was almost uncontrollable. The normal treatment of oral hydration salts and improving the quality of water had seemed to reduce the number of cases, but often, the people who were struck were laid up much longer than usual. Indeed, a number of the relief workers themselves had come down with the "heavy trots" and there was spreading concern among the relief agencies over the alarmingly high rate of staff who were becoming sick. Because of this mounting problem, I failed to take

note of the code word that had been flashed to me. For the term "severe diarrhea" was one of the acronyms that had been chosen by the medical staff for reporting suspected cases of cholera!

Cholera had been reported in Ethiopia as early as January and had been confirmed in the DP camp at Ibnath approximately 200 kilometers east of the border in Gondar. Specialists from the Centers for Disease Control had been tracking its progress and we had always been concerned that the disease might be brought into the camps by the refugees. I had argued early on that we ought to set up a program with REST so that they could keep us abreast of where the disease was reported and alert us to any refugees that might be carrying cholera. This suggestion had been overruled by the Branch Office for political reasons (fear that any training of REST would be seen as "provocative" by the Ethiopians). Therefore, we had to rely on reports coming out of Addis and to try to estimate the progress of the disease based on what we knew about the movement of refugees inside. This should not have been a problem, but several weeks earlier I had been ordered by the Branch Office to shut down my remote detection efforts because the critics in Geneva were claiming that the computer modeling was a cover for intelligence gathering on behalf of the American government! Thus, at a critical point when we needed information from the other side, we were left blind.

The cholera threat was very real, though at the time, I had tended to downplay it. All my previous experience had shown that cholera was almost always overestimated and over-reported, so I was not overly concerned. I had tried several times to get more detailed information on the cholera situation in Ethiopia but neither CDC nor UNHCR was able to provide much accurate information. Therefore, I had to rely on the good graces and diagnostic capabilities of the U.S. Embassy and REST to inform us that cholera might be among incoming refugees.

The Sudanese were terrified that the refugees might bring cholera into the country. The measles epidemic of the previous months had reached the Sudanese population and had caused as much misery there as it had among the refugees. Previous experience had shown that it could be deadly in the villages and given the poor sanitation and the communal eating habits of the Sudanese, cholera could cut a swath of death through Sudan faster than any efforts could be made to mobilize cholera control measures.

COR and UNHCR were both concerned that if cholera presented in the camps, the government might be forced to close the borders in response to public opinion. In turn, the government was concerned that if the international community learned that cholera was present in Sudan, it could affect not only aid and foreign travel but would also make it difficult to market the agricultural exports that the country produced.

For all the above reasons, it had been decided several months earlier that a series of code words would be used to describe cholera and that until it was actually confirmed, it would be referred to as "severe diarrhea", "acute gastroenteritis" or "type C diarrhea". However, because we had a bout with another form of diarrhea in progress, when the code word was sent over the radio, I was slow to pick it up.

After fatour, Fadil and I sat down to review the day's work schedule. He had been asked by Ismail Ibrahim to come to Gedaref to review some budget requests. After that, we planned to fly down to Wad Kowli to check on the refugees coming in from Damazin and to talk to Osmon Mekke and Jean-Michel

to calculate how many more convoys would be necessary to complete the moves to Girba. Once the trucks were released from the Damazin moves, we planned to make one big push to complete the evacuation of Wad Kowli in five days. I remember that Fadil remarked how well things had been going and we congratulated ourselves on being able to complete all the transfers from Wad Kowli and Damazin without interrupting our ninety point construction program.

Our flight to Gedaref was very pleasant. The weather was incredibly clear and to our left, we could see deep into Ethiopia and the beginnings of the highlands. Due to scattered rains the previous few days, the countryside was taking on a green tint as grass began to emerge from the hard ground and the trees in the Showak forest had begun to bud. I told Fadil how much I loved Sudan, that to me there was nothing finer than having the privilege to fly with him over the east.

"You are becoming too Sudanese, my friend," Fadil said.

I laughed. "I wish I could do this forever, but unfortunately I'll soon have to leave."

Fadil pushed me on the shoulder. "We're never going to let you go," he laughed, "you're too valuable."

"Let's see if Hasaan agrees when he gets back," I grinned. We both laughed.

As we landed the plane, I noticed that Dr. Nabil had come out to meet us. That was unusual. Normally the Sub-office just sent one of their drivers. As I taxied to the parking area, Nabil jumped from the car and began to approach the plane.

"I'm glad you finally arrived," he said to Fadil. "I've tried to keep this quiet as long as I could, but I'm afraid that the Ministry of Health is getting wind of the situation."

Fadil and I looked bewildered. "What are you talking about?" asked Fadil.

"The acute diarrhea," responded Dr. Nabil. "Didn't you get our message? We have a suspected case of cholera at Wad Kowli. Jason Weisenthal, the CDC doctor, is bringing in a stool sample now so that it can be tested in a lab in Khartoum for confirmation."

As we sped into town in Dr. Nabil's vehicle, Fadil and I began to discuss the damage control program. Dr. Nabil informed us that he had already ordered Wad Kowli to be quarantined and that all movements into or out of Wad Kowli be curtailed immediately. He also informed us that all actions and movements between camps, even by the foreign staff, would be subject to approval by the MOH or designated medical officers. I asked Fadil what he thought we should do about the refugees from Damazin. Dr. Nabil immediately interjected, saying that no one could enter Wad Kowli or have any contact with the people inside and this included those from Damazin. I suggested then that we take the refugees directly to the border, but again Dr. Nabil objected saying that he could not be responsible for allowing refugees who might have been contaminated by cholera to go back to Ethiopia. It was in violation of international agreements and before he could authorize a continuation of the convoy beyond Wad Kowli, he would have to have instructions from his ministry in Khartoum.

On arriving at Gedaref, we were met by Jason. He was a CDC cholera specialist who had arrived in Sudan several weeks earlier to help prepare a cholera control program. He had been working with the staff in each of the camps to teach them how to spot cholera and how to take stool samples from

suspected cases so that a diagnosis could be made. He had also been helping Dr. Nabil develop protocols for the response, should cholera break out in any of the camps.

He informed us that he had spent the morning at Wad Kowli checking the patient that was suspected of having the disease. In his opinion, it appeared unlikely that it was cholera but he was concerned enough about the possibility that he recommended sending the stools on to Khartoum. He asked if I could fly the stools there, but since there were several medical people going to Khartoum that afternoon on a scheduled Nile Safaris' flight, I could see little need for me to make a special trip. Rather, I preferred to stay in Gedaref to work with Fadil to develop plans for cholera control and to make sure that all the other camps were well prepared. Thus, while Fadil and Dr. Nabil worked to develop the medical response, I began contacting the engineering staff and telling them to double and redouble their efforts to improve the water system, purify the drinking water and maintain control over the defecation areas to provide environmental protection against the disease. I also contacted Abdul Ayum and told him to cancel the convoy from Wad Kowli to Girba that evening and to try and intercept the Damazin convoy and redirect it to another nearby camp until we could get permission to release the people to cross the border.

I was just preparing to leave the radio shack when Jean- Michel reported from Wad Kowli that the Damazin group had reached the camp. What were our instructions?

I conferred quickly with Fadil and we decided that another satellite camp should be set up several kilometers from Wad Kowli as a holding area for the Damazin refugees. Several days earlier, we had sent a number of tents from Sefawa to Wad Kowli to replace some of the shelters that had been destroyed in a wind storm. As it turned out, the tents had not been needed since evacuations had progressed faster than expected and the tents were still in storage. Thus it was fairly easy and quick to erect several hundred tents to temporarily house the Damazin refugees. Jean-Michel had already contacted one of the feeding agencies and, for the interim, they would be able to provide some hot meals from one of the supplementary feeding centers until rations could be distributed to the "Damaziners" and they could begin cooking on their own. When I asked Jean-Michel who would be in charge of the new camp, he informed me that the best candidate he could think of was Rita. Since the departure center would be closed until the ban against moving refugees out of Wad Kowli was lifted, she had the time and he felt that even in the short time that she had been there, she had learned enough to run the camp.

Despite the fact that the total population at Wad Kowli had been shrinking, the physical size of the camp kept expanding and now, in addition to the main camp, we had the smaller satellite camps at Kilo 1 for incoming refugees, Kilo 8 for departing refugees and now Kilo 2 for the Damazin group!

As it turned out, the first lab tests were inconclusive and the laboratory in Khartoum reported that they couldn't confirm the presence of cholera. Dr. Nabil, however, had an instinct that the tests were wrong or that somehow the broth containing the stool samples had been improperly prepared. Late that afternoon he had received a message from Girba that they also had a suspected case of cholera and were sending several specimens to Khartoum. Thus, Dr. Nabil ordered that the quarantine orders stand. As it turned out, his suspicions were correct, for the next day, the second specimen sent to the lab gave

positive confirmation, cholera was indeed present.

The subsequent efforts to control cholera in the east merit a book in themselves. Everyone performed magnificently and many people, I think, will come to regard the work done there as a textbook example of the way in which successful epidemiological work, coupled with determined care and emphasis on environmental control, can be combined to successfully fight an epidemic and bring it under control. Unfortunately, our control efforts were limited to the refugee camps and not expanded into the Sudanese villages. This choice was political, made by the Ministry of Health in Khartoum, and despite repeated offers by the medical teams, the Sudanese elected to try and control cholera in their villages without our help and, unfortunately, failed miserably. Throughout the month, we successfully battled the disease, first at Wad Kowli then at Girba and finally in the older camps, especially at Um Gargur and Kilo 26. At only one of the camps, Um Gargur, did the situation ever get out of hand and as soon as it became obvious that the local medical staff was overworked, experienced staff from Wad Kowli, as well as newly arrived medical volunteers, were sent to the site to assist the SCF (U.S.) efforts.

My role in the cholera operation was fairly limited. I worked closely with Kent and the engineering and planning staff to try and improve water supplies and to decontaminate the affected water tanks as soon as they could be identified by epidemiologic surveillance. Our biggest failure was our inability to convince either UNHCR or COR to make an investment in installing workable latrines in the camps. Thus, people continued to defecate on the ground and with the increasing frequency of the rains, the contaminated sewage often flowed back into the camps. In the most embarrassing situation, the main hospital at Wad Kowli was inundated by the runoff from the defecation fields during a rain storm at the height of the cholera epidemic!

My principle worry about cholera was that the quarantine halted all moves to and from Wad Kowli. We had been only five convoys away from closing the camp and now we had more groups to worry about in new populations all around the site. Another concern was that we expected that the Atbura River would start flowing in just a few weeks and that contaminated runoff from the camp would drain into the river infecting all the Sudanese villages, as well as five refugee camps downstream. Thus, I urged Fadil to try to get the Ministry of Health to lift the quarantine so we could move the refugees to Girba and fight the epidemic there. As for the Damazin refugees, I argued that since they hadn't come into contact yet with the refugees at Wad Kowli, we should permit them to go ahead and return to Ethiopia. Fadil agreed to the strategy but Dr. Nabil would have none of it and, for the next several days, he was determined to hold out.

* * *

Fadil and I worked long after sunset that first day to establish the quarantine and to ensure that the Damazin refugees were bedded down and fed. While we were working, a storm brewed up to the north of Gedaref and since I was unsure whether or not rain had fallen on the airport at Showak, I decided to drive back to Showak to spend the night. Kent had driven up to the northern sector to check on water purification efforts at Girba and at Wad Sharife, so I had the air-conditioned room all to myself and I was

soon fast asleep.

At about 2:30 a.m. there was a soft knock on my door. I opened it to see two young men dressed in flight suits. "Can we come in?" they said softly. I opened the door and they slipped in stealthily. The two looked around to make sure I was alone. Finally one of them said, "We have a major problem. X said that you might be able to help us out". I was surprised at the mention of X'. He was an old friend but someone that I hadn't seen for many years. Years earlier, in a desperate situation, he had saved my life and he was one of those people for whom I would do just about anything. Still I was bewildered.

"How can I help?," I inquired.

"Come with us," they instructed. "You can see for yourself."

We went outside where a very small, four-wheel drive vehicle awaited. I got on and we immediately hurried off down the road towards Gedaref. Several kilometers on the south side of the Showak forest, we turned off and headed up a dirt track for another 15 or 20 minutes. Suddenly, looming out of the dark, I spotted a large, four-engine airplane sitting in the desert completely blacked out. A temporary scaffolding had been erected and mechanics were working on one of the engines from which the cowling had been removed. As we drove up to the airplane, we were greeted by two flight officers wearing insignia that identified them as the pilots. As I got out, they shook my hand and thanked me for coming. "I'm still not sure how I can help," I said. "What's going on?"

The two pilots motioned for me to follow them and, as we walked around the other side of the transport, I was astonished to see a Cessna 182, similar to mine, parked to the side of the makeshift runway carved out of the desert. What was very noticeable was that fact that the propeller was very bent.

Another man joined us who I assumed was the pilot of the Cessna. "I taxied into a hole," he said. "The propeller is bent but I think the engine is okay. If I can get another prop I can fly it out of here."

"That's why we need you," said one of the transport pilots. "You've got the only propeller around here that fits the plane. We can't leave this plane here in the desert. If it's found, it will blow our entire operation and could mean that a lot of innocent people could get hurt, especially the people who have been helping us here. Would you consider trading us your propeller?"

I informed him that he couldn't have found a worse time to be needing a prop. With cholera breaking out, I was sure that my plane would be needed more than ever to transport people and supplies around the area.

The pilots informed me that they would make sure that a replacement prop was sent to Khartoum within a week and that no effort would be spared to make sure that I was flying again as soon as possible. "You have X's word on it," he said.

I knew that X was as good as his word, but I also knew the logistical difficulties that he faced. Even so, my debt to X was great and I felt that I had no other choice. "Give me some tools," I said. "I'll need a screwdriver and some spanners. If you can spare a mechanic, send him along as well as an oil pan so there'll be no trace of oil on the ground at Gedaref when we pull the prop off."

They had already loosened the bolts so it only took a few minutes to remove the bent propeller and we were soon off in the little jeep to Gedaref to swap props.

By the time we returned to the desert strip, the first faint light of sunrise was showing in the east. While the mechanics hastily affixed my propeller to the waiting 182, the mechanics' scaffolding was disassembled and quickly stowed inside the transport. Next, the little mini-jeep drove up the ramp and disappeared into the hold. Seconds after the mechanics working on the 182 had finished attaching the propeller, they too collected their belongings and disappeared into the transport. Before I could ask how I would get back to Showak, a local vehicle appeared and the crew chief of the transport indicated that it would take me back. As I climbed in, both airplanes began their engine run ups and by the time our car had reached the track leading back to the highway, the 182 had started its takeoff run and was soon airborne. A few seconds later we heard a roar as the transport revved its engines and then it too ran down the runway and lumbered into the air. Within a matter of minutes, only an enormous dust cloud kicked up by the transport during its takeoff gave any indication that anything had taken place there in the desert.

I regret that I'll never be able to tell the full story of this incident and explain what was going on. Readers should be assured that there are no clues in any of the earlier parts of this narrative. Furthermore, it was none of the people that you would normally suspect. It was not the U.S. Air Force, the CIA or the Israelis. And what they were doing there is something that's beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

With the coming of the morning, I was faced with a major problem, how to explain a bent propeller on the front of my airplane and, more importantly, how to get airborne again as soon as possible. I decided that the best thing to do was simply to tell people that it was I who had taxied into the hole and to try to start locating a propeller in Sudan. After a suitable delay, I drove back to Gedaref, went to the radio shack and sent a message to Chris telling him that I'd damaged the propeller and to start looking for a replacement. "I want to back in the air in 24 hours," I told him. I also informed him that I would be sending a driver with the damaged prop so that he could show it to the mechanics to get the specifications. I instructed him to look up Zaki, the owner of the Sudanese company that did the maintenance on our airplane, and see if he could locate a replacement. Zaki had his hand in just about every kind of activity that occurred around the airport including, I suspect, a number of the black market activities and if anyone could get their hands on a propeller, I was sure it was him. At this point I'll let Chris tell the story of how he obtained, within my 24 hour mandate, the prop I needed.

CHRIS TO DICTATE

With the closing of Wad Kowli and the quarantine of the other camps, it became imperative that we complete the stockpiling of food and medical supplies in all the camps and complete the preparations so that the more isolated camps could ride out the rainy season without undue stress. Wad Kowli was still a major concern, not only because of the conditions there and the number of satellite camps, but because

of its geographic position on the opposite side of the Atbara River. Once the river began to flow and rise, the camp would be cut off.

The Swiss bridge building crew finally arrived in early May and began to erect the suspension bridge across the Atbara. Wadi John was not convinced that the bridge would be up in time so he began modifying several vehicles so they could cross the river before it got too high. He also began construction of a cable guided raft to use as a ferry. At the same time, the Oxfam water team accelerated their efforts to install a filtered intake in the riverbed so that water could be pumped directly into the camp once the river started flowing.

Since our truck fleet was no longer being used to transport refugees, we directed the trucks to Port Sudan to load up with as much food as possible and bring it down to the camps so that we could build up the stockpiles. For the next two weeks, the trucks moved at a frenzied pace but by the first of June, almost all the stockpiling had been completed, even though some of the food sacks had been stacked out in the open pending the arrival of new or replacement warehouses. Each afternoon Fadil and I reviewed the tasks completed and, one by one, scratched the finished items from our checklist.

On May 29, Fadil and I were finally able to convince Dr. Nabil and the Ministry of Health to permit the remaining returnees to leave for Tigray. We immediately contacted Abdul Ayum and instructed him to begin organizing the final convoys to move any remaining refugees who wanted to leave the Fau camps. After that, he was to direct all the trucks to the last movement of the refugees from Damazin. After that, we hoped to convince the Ministry of Health to allow us to resume the moves from Wad Kowli. The next day, Abdul Ayum informed us that he would not be able to begin the actual moves until June 2 because most of the souk lorries that we had used before had returned to Khartoum and it would take a couple days to round them up and bring them back again to the east. Fadil and I held our breath and hoped that the rains, which up to now had only been sporadic on the Sudanese side, would continue to remain light so that the roads to Wad Kowli and the border would remain open.

On the afternoon of June 1, the water returned to the Atbara. A swiftly moving, but shallow, stream of water reached Wad Kowli at _____ in the afternoon. The river had begun to refill on the exact date predicted by the people who lived along the riverbanks. By the following morning, the entire river bed was under water, though for the time being, the stream was still fordable and most of the vehicles could still scurry back and forth across the river if they stayed on the solid, rocky areas. Wadi John and the Oxfam engineers took readings and began reporting regularly on how rapidly the river was rising. From their reports it was obvious that we still had at least another 24 hours before only the high-bed vehicles would be able to cross. Jean-Michel recommended that the relief agencies move their two-wheel drive vehicles back to the west bank and told Wadi John to prepare to get the raft ferry operational since the bridge was not completed.

The rising water presented several immediate dilemmas. The roadwork inside the camp had not been completed and the few rains which had fallen gave an indication of how soupy the place would get when the prolonged heavy rains began. The road equipment Wadi John had at his command could still cross the river without too much difficulty but there was a risk that if they continued to work on the other side,

a surge of high water could trap the machinery on the other side for the duration of the rainy season. Thus, every hour that they were on the other side posed a great risk that they could be lost to us for months.

An additional concern was the fact that the airstrip was on the east bank of the river. We had planned to improve the airstrip by grading and compacting it, then putting some light gravel on the surface to make it an all-weather airstrip but, as we got closer to completely evacuating the camp, it was decided that the road to Sefawa was more important. Wadi John sent a message asking for instructions. Should he divert the road equipment to build the airstrip or continue to improve the interior roadways and the grounds immediately adjacent to the feeding centers, hospitals and warehouses? Reluctantly, I concluded that he should continue to work on the in-camp facilities and then withdraw the equipment. We had adequate stockpiles of food to meet any immediate contingencies and I would soon be leaving the country and probably taking the plane with me. I had recently learned that UNHCR was planning to acquire the services of a helicopter for the rainy season, which would permit access to the camp without requiring an airstrip. It was unlikely that anyone else would be flying into the strip immediately.

By late afternoon on June 2, the water had risen so that the maximum depth was 2 1/2 feet. Furthermore, the current was getting stronger so that now, only the larger Bedford trucks could still ford the river. When one of the relief workers who was attempting to wade across slipped and was swept several hundred yards down stream, we realized that the camp would soon be isolated.

At about 5:00 that afternoon, the first souk lorries of the convoy bringing the refugees from Fau arrived at the river. The truck driver took one look at the current and decided that it was too risky to cross. The other drivers followed suit but finally one of the last arriving drivers decided to try it. As everyone watched, the lorry entered the river and attempted to cross. After going only a few yards into the water, it was obvious that the engine mount was too low and that the lorry couldn't get across without ruining the motor.

Gradually, the remainder of the convoy arrived at the river bank and the returnees began dismounting. Immediately, four or five men, loaded with their belongings, attempted to cross the river but immediately lost their footing. It was obvious that people on foot could no longer make it across safely.

From the opposite bank, Nicholas Von Praag, who had temporarily replaced Jean-Michel that afternoon, saw the dilemma. Concerned that women and children might try to cross the swift moving stream, he immediately told Osmon Mekke that he would not object if the three Bedford trucks which were then on the eastern bank (which had UNHCR markings) were sent across the river to act as a ferry to help move the returnees and their belongings across the river. Osmon rounded up the drivers and soon the three Bedfords were serving as a ferry across the stream.

Nick sent a message to me at Showak telling me that, at most, we had another day to complete all the moves back across the river. The water was continuing to rise and he estimated it would only be a matter of time before even the Bedfords couldn't cross safely. Fadil immediately told Abdul Ayum to send every available truck to Fau and Damazin to complete the move the next day.

The following morning dawned clear but humid and I could feel that by the end of the day there would

be heavy rains. That morning, Bob Gersony had arrived to accompany me on an inspection tour of Sefawa and Wad Kowli with trips to Fau the following day. After a brief stop to talk with Tessa and Mansur in Sefawa, we took off for Wad Kowli. As we approached the camps, storm clouds were building everywhere and the first light sprinkles of rain splashed the windscreen as we set down on the airstrip and taxied to the tie-down area. By the time we had secured the plane, the rain had begun to come down in sheets and we made it back to the camp administrative office only by using four-wheel drive and low gear. The vehicle that had come to get us at the airstrip was Jean-Michel's famous red Toyota. He had decided to leave it on the eastern shore so that there would be one vehicle all the staff could share to get to the border and the outlying camps. By now the only vehicles getting across the river were the Bedford trucks and Wadi John's road equipment.

I conferred briefly with Nick about the stockpiles and then went to see how well they were protected from the rain. Everything seemed to be in order and, with the exception of the mud and the difficulty of moving around the camp, it looked as if our preparedness goals had all been met. Nick was a bit worried about the remaining returnees who were due to arrive at the river within the hour. He pulled me aside out of earshot from Bob Gersony and confessed to using the trucks with HCR markings. I assured him that it didn't bother me and I doubted that it would be of much concern to Gersony. In fact, I complimented him for taking the initiative to ensure people's safety during the river crossing.

"It was the right thing to do," he said, "and I'd damn well do it again under any circumstances."

Nick was enthusiastic and sharp, but prior to this he had approached the operations a bit stiffly. He was being used by the B.O. to fill in where needed and was viewed by many in the east as a Khartoum dandy, but I knew he longed for a permanent field assignment. Now he had proven his mettle and I was proud of the young man for acting on his principles. He had learned that sometimes rules and regulations have to be broken and some of the realities of working in the field. If only some of the other career UNHCR staff could get the same exposure, maybe the organization would function differently and a bit more realistically.

The rains continued until well into the night and it was obvious that there was no chance of leaving that night and, probably, not through most of the next day. Nick arranged for Bob to stay at the UNHCR compound while I went to Rita's. That night we had a friendly dinner, though not up to the usual good quality of food since Luigi's contract had ended the week before and he had pulled his equipment and, more importantly, his refrigerator out of the camp.

This was Bob's first trip to the east since his visit almost two months earlier. I had been prepared to try to argue many of the differences that still separated us on the returnees, but decided that since the moves were now over, there was no point in discussing it further. The conversations at dinner proved to be very pleasant. Nick was full of enthusiasm for the work he had been doing the last few days and he now understood far more clearly the issues that were involved. He was anxious to discuss his "revelations" and to tell me how much his views had changed in the brief time that he had been in the field. I couldn't have been happier with the discussion because through his enthusiasm Bob Gersony was articulately given a view of the situation as seen by a field worker. I couldn't have made the arguments

better and I think that Bob was impressed, if not totally persuaded, by Nick's enthusiastic, new perspectives.

The following morning was overcast and cool, and in the distance, storms continued in all quadrants. I spent most of the day hoping that it wouldn't rain again so that we could get out. Luckily, it didn't rain again and by 2:00 P.M. it had dried sufficiently that Wadi John could move one of his heavier road pieces up to the airstrip. A storm was definitely headed our way so I asked him to drive a tractor up and down the runway to pack a narrow trail down the center. When John asked how long the strip should be, I told him about 250 to 300 feet. He said that he could make it longer but I was watching the storm clouds and from the blowing winds and the nearby thunder, I knew that we only had about five minutes before the storm arrived. I told Bob and another passenger to get into the back seat of the plane and then, with help of about ten refugees, we pushed the plane out across the mud until we came to the edge of the hardened area. John had just completed his last run when the rain began and I quickly jumped into the plane, started the engine, added full take off flaps and added the power.

As the engine spooled up, I held the brakes until I could feel the thrust from the engine beginning to drag the plane through the mud. As soon as I felt the tires slip, I released the brakes, pulled back on the stick to get the weight off the nosewheel and rapidly accelerated down the narrow, compacted lane. In an incredibly short distance, the airplane became unstuck and virtually leapt into the air as the first strong gusts of the impending storm swept across the runway. In the gusty conditions, the aircraft soared straight up and at a thousand feet I rolled the plane to the left and headed northwest away from the storm. The rain was driving down hard and I could see those on the ground rushing for cover or trying to get back into the Cruiser. In the camp I could see the wind gusts blowing straw and thatch off the refugee's makeshift shelters and bits of plastic that had been used to patch the tukels from previous rains, ripped loose, blew through the air and wrapped around nearby trees. As the rain became more and more intense, it became more difficult to see Wad Kowli and my last vision of the camp was a yellow, muddy blur doused by sheets of rain. Little did I realize that this would be my last view of the camp which had so occupied my attention for the last five months.

CHAPTER 16

FINAL DAYS

By the end of May, the strain of the previous months, especially the intensive six week campaign to get everything in order before the rainy season, was all beginning to take its toll on the staff. Even though morale was high, especially in those camps where preparedness for cholera had paid off, we could still feel that everyone needed an emotional release from the frantic pace we had been keeping. Furthermore, many of the initial staff were beginning to end their tours and return home and their impending departures cast a melancholy aura over many of the staff compounds. Recognizing that we needed to put some good humor back into the operation and provide an uplifting bon voyage for our battle hardened veterans, Kent and I decided to stage the Great Khawaja Camel Races.

We announced the races in early April and set the date for June 1. Anxious to do everything properly, we appointed a Rules Committee (Kent and myself plus Jean-Michel; Lars Dalgren, one of the Swedish engineers in Um Rakuba; and Serge Manicourt, a doctor from Medesins Sans Frontiers). The plan was for each of the refugee camps to field a team or two to compete against the other camps for the honor of being the best camel jocks on the eastern border. All the teams would converge on the appointed date at the Showak airport. Two series of events were planned, mens singles and mixed doubles. Borrowing on my Texas background, I decided rather than have a flat out race, we would add a bit of "rodeo" to the event and make it a barrel race. In other words, the riders would run down to the end of the airstrip, circle a barrel and get back. In the mixed doubles, a male contestant would ride the camel down to the barrels, get it to kneel down, change riders and then the female member of the team would bring it back to the start/finish line.

When the word went out about the races, reactions ranged from mildly amused to wholehearted skepticism. However, a few stalwarts such as Jean-Michel, the Swedish Disaster Team and the French doctors of MSF and LICROSS took the challenge to heart and began finding local nomads to train them so they could bring home the bacon (so to speak). When it became obvious that the lure of watching their fellow workers try to ride camels and make total asses of themselves, was not enough to guarantee widespread participation, I took the additional step of offering to provide a completely verboten commodity: beer! This seemed to get everyone's attention and as June 1st drew near, more and more people began saying that they would show up. In fact, the numbers continued to swell so rapidly that Kent and I soon realized that we would actually have to deliver on our promise of beer! Worse than that, we would have to start training in order to at least make a good show during the races.

I discussed the contest with our Sudanese counterparts and they were enthusiastic about helping to set it up. El Tayeb, our rolly-poly clerk, was especially enthusiastic and offered to help locate the camels. As it turned out, he contacted the big man in the village, Ahmed Sallieh, Showak's leading merchant, a man who had his hand in everything. Ahmed promised to deliver five good, strong, racing camels, with attendants, as well as one additional mounted rider who could intercept runaway camels or round up strays in case one of the riders fell off. He was extolling the racing prowess of the camels he was

offering us, when we told him that we were really looking for some animals that were not too fast and, in fact, inclined to a "gentler stride". He looked confused for a moment, then smiled and said, "Ah, now I know what you are doing."

Part of our deal with Ahmed was that he provide one English- speaking camel expert to teach Kent and me to not only ride the camel but to race properly, get it to kneel and rise on command and most important, according to Ahmed, to curse it properly.

So much for the camels, now we had to find the beer. As early as two weeks before, I began contacting my ole black marketeer friend, Zaki, to find out if he could locate some suds. I also contacted a friend among the Marine guards at the Embassy to find out if he could provide some booze, or at least get some flown in on one of the C-141s that flew in the Embassy's supplies. We knew the Marines had beer at their compound and I was assured that getting a few extra cases slipped over to me would be no problem. Alas, it was not to be, for about a week before I was to pick up my supply, my contact was reprimanded for helping someone else obtain a few cans. Thus, any chance of getting a few cases from the Marines went down the tubes.

Zaki, on the other hand, was far more promising. He knew a pilot who regularly flew in and out of Ethiopia smuggling booze as well as other commodities. He was sure that he could get his hands on several dozen cases of Melati, a Ethiopian beer and reputed to be one of the finest African brews.

* * *

As the contest date neared, Kent and I became more anxious that we not make total fools of ourselves. The word was out that Jean-Michel and Lars Dalgren & Co. were practicing like mad every day. With some resignation, we finally went to Ahmed and asked him to bring the camels and instructors early so that we could learn the ropes. On the 28th of May, Ahmed brought two camels to the guest house and Kent and I enthusiastically mounted up. (Kent named his "Sopwith".) Except for the awkward way the beasts rose from the ground -- lifting first their rear legs, then their fore legs and then straightening up with a rapid jump -- all appeared to be under control. Following the instructor's lead, we nudged the camels and gave them the rein. Rather than leaping out with a burst of speed, the camels merely started to plod along, not even getting up to so much as a good trot. Kent and I, ever anxious to get on with the task at hand, and wanting feel how fast these four-footed water carriers could actually go, began trying to spur them on. Giving them a gentle kick in the flanks seemed to do no good, nor did loosening the reins and yelling "giddyap". Frustrated at our inability to coax any speed out of the animals, Kent and I continued to rock, sway, kick and scream at the beasts, all to no avail. We had been told by our instructor that to get them to go, we simply had to tap the camels on the neck with quirt, but once again, this too produced no satisfactory results and the stupid animals continued to plod along at a less than pulse quickening rate.

By this time, Kent and I were frustrated to no end and laughing hysterically. Finally, Kent reached down with the quirt and slapped the camel across the rump. That got results! The camel seemed to leave the ground with all four feet at the same time and then took off at a full gallop. Somewhere between

leaving the ground and stretching out to go into overdrive, Kent and the camel parted company and, quicker than you could blink, he landed forearm first on the hard desert. Even from where I was, some 50 feet away, I could hear the crack of Kent's wrist and, despite a bit of unassuming bravado and rolling over on his side to assume the posture of a picnicker resting on his elbow, I knew that Kent would not be a member of the INTERTECT camel racing team when the big day arrived.

Sure enough, when Kent got up, felt his arm and moved his fingers he realized that he had either a bad break or a terrible sprain. One of the Sudanese drove him over to the Lalamba clinic in Showak where they suggested that he go to Khartoum to have it X-rayed. Since I had to go in to get the beer anyway, we decided to fly in that evening.

On arrival in Khartoum, we went to the Acropole and asked Thenastities to recommend a doctor. He said the best guy around was Dr. _____, a "well known" orthopedic specialist. Little did we know how well known and for what reasons.

The good doctor saw Kent immediately, took the X-rays and pronounced the obvious: a fracture of the wrist at the forearm. Nothing too serious, it would mend within a few weeks but would require a cast and, of course, no further exposure to the risks of camel racing.

After seeing the doctor, all that Kent, who hates being given sympathy or pity, wanted to do was to go back to the hotel, go to bed and avoid running into anyone who might ask how he broke his arm. On the other hand, I sort of envied him. What a way to start a conversation.

"How did you break your arm, sir?"

"Well, there I was, racing camels in Sudan."

I ask you, can you think of a better opener for picking up women? Kent, however, was in no mood to see the humor of it.

Back at the hotel, we decided that then was a good time for Kent to begin his leave. He had wanted to return to Texas to spend a few days with his family and to catch up on some personal business. Since he had been gone for almost a year, he was due several weeks vacation. Nicholas had agreed that he should return and continue supervising construction of Girba and improvement of other camps for another three months. Since Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, was reaching its peak and the rainy season was about to begin, things were slowing down anyway and with a broken arm there wasn't too much physical work he could do.

While we were discussing Kent's plans, Thenastides walked in and asked how the wrist was doing. Kent showed him the cast and told him how pleased he was with the doctor.

"There's no one who knows more about arms, wrists and hands than Doctor _____," said Thenastides. "By the way, did you know he's the doctor who amputates the hands of thieves convicted under Shariya?"

* * *

Beyond losing Kent as a racing partner, I soon found that I had another problem. Zaki was unable to find a source for the beer. He had tried everyone, including the gate keeper at the British Airways

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses and income. The text suggests that a systematic approach to record-keeping is essential for identifying trends and making informed decisions.

In addition to record-keeping, the document highlights the need for regular audits. Audits help to verify the accuracy of the records and identify any discrepancies or errors. It is noted that audits should be conducted at regular intervals and by an independent party to ensure objectivity. The text also mentions that audits can provide valuable insights into the financial health of the organization and help to prevent fraud.

Another key aspect discussed is the importance of transparency. All financial transactions should be clearly documented and accessible to relevant stakeholders. This helps to build trust and ensures that everyone involved in the organization has a clear understanding of the financial situation. The text also notes that transparency is crucial for compliance with regulatory requirements and for maintaining the reputation of the organization.

Finally, the document stresses the importance of staying up-to-date with the latest financial regulations and standards. The financial landscape is constantly evolving, and organizations must adapt to these changes to remain compliant. This may involve investing in training and resources to ensure that the financial team is well-versed in the latest requirements. The text concludes by stating that a proactive approach to financial management is essential for long-term success.

in-bond supply depot. Nobody would provide so much as a spare bottle. I was beginning to worry that not only was I not going to be able to field a team, but that I would lose face (and friends) if I didn't return with the promised goods.

We continued our search throughout the night and as the day of the races dawned, we were still no closer to success than we had been the day before. Finally, at 10:00 a.m., Zaki called and said that he had located a source. "How much?", I asked.

"It's outrageous," said Zaki, "\$10.00 a can!"

My heart sank. "That's impossible," I said. "A hundred cans will cost me \$1,000."

"Supply is limited and demand is high," said Zaki. "If we had had more time, perhaps we could find someone else."

I was resigned to failure and was debating whether I should pack up and fly out of the country or return to face my outraged companions when Zaki said, "Why don't you substitute cognac and Scotch? They're cheap and we can get plenty."

"If beer is \$10.00 a can, a bottle of Scotch is probably a fortune!"

"On the contrary," said Zaki, "it's one of the most smuggled items in all Sudan. There's even an oversupply now. You could pick up whiskey for about \$5.00 a bottle, mix it with Cokes and that should provide everyone with at least a couple of good, strong drinks."

Since I was in no position to argue, we immediately struck a deal and Zaki contacted the supplier who agreed to surreptitiously deliver ten cases of whiskey to my plane by 1:00 that afternoon. With the deal sealed, I ran back to the Acropole to bid goodbye to Kent and pick up Barb Hendrie, who wanted to compete as a representative of "the cross-border team". As I was leaving the hotel, Thenastides reached under his desk and handed me a package.

"You can't have camel races without a trophy," he said. "Please take this as a gift from all of us here at the Acropole."

I opened the box and inside was a beautiful, hand-carved, wooden camel. "For the winner," he said.

"Our first endorsement," I laughed. "From now on the races will be known as the Acropole Open."

* * *

As I arrived back at Showak, the first of the contestants had begun to arrive and by the time I had pushed my plane into the parking area and off the runway, several hundred people had gathered. Jean-Michel and I quickly organized a team to move empty fuel barrels down to the opposite end of the runway and line them up to form the turn points. Next, I searched the crowd for someone with a stopwatch. Since Mark Frohardt had the only watch with a second hand sweep, he became the official timer. "Where's the beer? Where's the beer?" yelled the crowd. I just smiled and yelled, "You'll have to wait. No drinking before racing."

"That's wrong!," yelled one. "If we don't drink before, we'll never race."

Right on time, at 3:00, Ahmed arrived with the camels. They were magnificently decked out in

saddles and blankets and a couple had bells and jingles which added to the noise and heightened the excitement as they drew nearer. Some distance behind, came a lone rider on a beast that was a good two feet taller than the camels that Ahmed was bringing. When it was obvious that the crowd could see him, the rider on the lone camel spurred his mount forward and he glided smoothly and swiftly up to the Race Committee. He conversed a few minutes with Fadil, then tapped the camel gently on the legs and the camel knelt for the rider to slide off. He continued talking with Fadil for a few minutes and then suddenly turned to the west and spat upon the ground.

"What's the problem?" I asked. Fadil laughed, "He heard there were camel races here and he came from across the river to compete. He didn't realize that he would be racing against Khawajas and he says it would be a disgrace to win against such rabble."

I laughed, "Tell him I completely agree. No Sudanese should be forced to lower himself to racing against such infidels like us. But tell him we can use his help. He can rescue any poor soul who loses control."

Ahmed and Fadil talked with him for a few moments and then turned to me. "He agrees," Ahmed said, "but for every one that he saves, he wants ten Sudanese pounds."

I laughed. "The old mercenary! Tell him that if he does the job, we'll give him a bottle of whiskey when the day is over."

"He agrees," said Ahmed. And the stalwart Sudanese racer and I shook hands on the bargain.

Ahmed suggested that to get the camels accustomed to the crowd, that we give some of the spectators rides on the camels first. This proved to be a very wise decision and for the next 30 minutes, the camels knelt down, picked up a rider or two and then were gently led past the cheering throngs halfway down to the barrels and back again. Everyone who wanted a ride got a chance and, even though the camels were being led, it was obvious that everyone was having fun.

Finally the moment of truth arrived and we could delay the spectacle no longer. I turned to the crowd and called for the first volunteers to come forward. What a sight! One of the French doctors came dressed in flowing robes, a la Lawrence of Arabia. Charlie _____, one of the Lalumba volunteers, strode up wearing aviator's flight goggles! The others were various assortments of hats, robes, etc. and one by one they all mounted up. Once the camels had risen, we lined them up five abreast, gave the racers their last instructions and then, just before they took off, instructed them that whatever they did, to be sure not to slap the camels across the flanks. Ahmed wisely checked to make sure that no one had a camel quite like the one that had gotten Kent into so much trouble. Then he gave me a thumbs up; I dropped my hat and the racers were off.

It was a sight to see! All the great "experts" did everything wrong. They tried to ride the camels like a horse; kicking, flapping the reins, and shifting their weight just as Kent and I had done trying to get our camels to move. At first, the camels plodded along showing their usual slow, desert-crossing gait. Then, all of a sudden, someone must have stumbled over the trick and tapped one of the beasts in the right place, for suddenly, amidst gales of laughter, one of the camels started off at a hearty trot. One-by-one, the other camels followed the lead and soon we had a full fledged race with five brave, if

foolhardy, Khawajas hanging on for dear life.

As the camels reached the barrels, the first crisis of the race occurred. Several of the riders couldn't figure out how to slow the animals down and get them to turn. Thus, three of the riders continued to go north while the other two swung around and headed back. A roar of laughter went up from the crowd as the frustrated riders tried all manner of maneuvers to get the animals to stop and turn around. Finally someone figured out how to do it and before the riders had gone too far, all five were headed back in our direction.

The last camel in the caravan suddenly decided that he wanted to be first and he leapt into high gear. In just a blink, he not only caught up with the others, but soon was in the lead. This triggered the camels at the back of the pack to try and catch up with the front runner and instantly, all five were at a full gallop. Suddenly, the second crisis was upon us. As they neared the finish line, it was obvious that no one was really certain about how to stop the animals now that they were moving in high gear. Charlie, our begoggled contestant, decided that discretion was the better part of valor and began to look for a nice place to land. Just as he began to slide off the camel, for some unknown reason, his mount just decided to stop and Charlie made it to the ground a bit faster than he had planned but without breaking any bones.

Alan _____ was not so lucky. His camel was the one at the back that had decided to be first and had been speeding towards the front. As he reached the midway point of the group, he suddenly slowed to an uneven trot and Alan, who had been shifting his weight to try and keep up with the faster gait, suddenly found himself high in the air with no camel underneath. He hit the ground in a cloud of dust and rolled for five or six feet before coming to a rest sitting on his rump. The Sudanese from Showak who had lined the far side of the runway fell to their knees in laughter and started pounding their fists in the dust. Never in their lives had they seen such a funny sight!

All the other camels miraculously stopped at the finish line and the three remaining riders were permitted to dismount without further embarrassment. "Three minutes fifty-seven seconds," yelled Mark. "The first winner is Lars Dalgren of the Swedish Team."

I turned to the crowd, half anticipating that no one else would be foolish enough to come forward after witnessing the first debacle, but much to my pleasure and great surprise, dozens of hands went up when I asked who the next contestants would be.

The next seven races continued in the same spirit as the first. The second and third races went off without a hitch. No one fell off and none of the camels got out of control. The crowd loved to watch the riders trying to get their mounts to run and roared with laughter every time someone came back to the finish line hanging on to the hump and not the reins.

The fourth race provided some additional humor when one of the SCF coordinators lost control of his mount and began to head across the desert towards the area used as a rest station during the night moves from Wad Kowli to Girba. The rider, fearing that all was out of control, prepared to leap. We could see him on the horizon and those of us who knew the area could see that he was about to jump off in the defecation zone!

"Don't jump! Don't jump!" we yelled, but to no avail. He tossed his leg over the camel's hump and

slid down the side. The momentum was too great for him to keep his balance and he immediately fell forward and rolled in the dust. As we doubled over with laughter, we could see him get up, take a look at what he had rolled in, and then, with a sharp shrug of his arms, we could see him shake the filth from his body. You could almost hear him yell "yuck!" as he shook and shuddered.

After the sixth heat, the women began to complain that they weren't being allowed to race. They demanded equal time and equal treatment. So reluctantly, we gave them the reins during the next couple of races. This not only provided us with some additional laughs, but eventually produced the fastest speed and the overall winner, Barb Hendrie.

One of the funnier events occurred when Lori _____, an SCF(US) nurse, asked to ride. She came up to me and said that she really wanted to try it but was afraid that she might fall off. Did I think it was safe?

"Look, Lori, when you get on the camel, the one thing to remember is just hang-on to the saddle. All the saddles are secure and no matter what happens, they're not going to fall off. They may sway back and forth and feel like they're going to slip, but they're really tied on tightly. If things get out of control, just drop the reins and hold on to the saddle. Usually, the camel will stop and, if he doesn't, our outrider will catch up with you and bring him under control. Just remember, whatever you do, don't let go of the saddle."

Of course, you can imagine what happened. Lori took off, turned at the barrel and then the camel got away from her. She did exactly what we said, she held on to the saddle. But as luck would have it, the one saddle that came loose in the entire day was the one that she was holding onto. At least when she let go of the reins, the camel slowed down, but we could clearly see that the saddle was slowly tipping over and by the time Lori crossed the finish line, she was holding on for dear life, completely upside down -- but still in the saddle.

After the seventh race, it was time to begin the mixed doubles. These proved to be the most popular of all. Everyone divided into pairs; then, the distaff side headed down to the barrels to await their male counterparts whose job it was to race down to the barrels and then persuade their mounts to kneel so that the women could switch places with them.

Racing down to the barrels proved to be the easy part for the men but getting the camels to kneel was something else. Each rider had a different technique, ranging from begging the animal to cursing it, trying to trip it, or haul it down with the reins. One enterprising team even tried to leave the animal standing while the first rider jumped off and the second tried to mount it by standing on the barrel. The method didn't work and the poor woman ended up holding onto the hump and hanging off the side all the way back to the finish line!

Rita raced with Adrian Cros, the former French paratrooper who was the UNHCR coordinator in Kassala. An experienced camel rider, he managed to get the animal to the barrel and make it kneel; then he dismounted and helped Rita onto the saddle. Once there, however, Rita couldn't figure out how to make the damned thing go, so Adrian ended up grabbing the halter and pulling it all the way back to the finish line as if it were a reluctant donkey. As a result of these odd tactics, they won their heat.

Despite a good showing by Rita and Adrian, the winning team was once again led by Barb Hendrie. She and Juliet Hazeldon managed to cross the finish line a "record" twenty seconds ahead of all the other teams.

I had become so engrossed in trying to keep the events moving that I hadn't had a chance to race myself. Finally, in keeping with the spirit of the afternoon, I turned the Master of Ceremonies job over to Mark and joined one of the UNHCR secretaries for a team race. We did okay but not good enough. I only came in second in my heat and not good enough to make even the top five. No matter, my "form" was good and I managed to impress the crowd by getting the camel to do exactly what I wanted, including kneeling down and taking a bow at the end of the race.

With the completion of my heat, the contest was officially over and the crowd adjourned to the CARE tree nursery where a full picnic had been prepared for us by the CARE logistics unit. On the way over, the whiskey was broken out and Ahmed announced that he had iced down several cases of Coke and soft drinks for all the contestants. Several of the Sudanese stayed to help me move the barrels back to the fuel dump and then they too headed for the party. I hopped in the airplane to taxi it back to the tie-down area. Rita climbed in to taxi with me. As we maneuvered the plane towards the end of the runway, we noticed that one of the guards who stayed at the airstrip to watch the plane for me had come out to watch us taxi the ship into position. For four and a half months he had watched every day as I flew in and out of Showak, always looking as if he were wondering what it was like. Rita and I looked at each other and winked. Then she opened the door and motioned for the old man to come and climb into the airplane. Immediately he threw down his staff and raced to the plane, clamored in and sat down in the rear seat. With his eyes wide open and a silly, toothless grin on his face, I added the power and 44TX leaped down the runway and into the air. I felt exuberant. As the plane raced skyward I couldn't help thinking what a great bunch of people it had been my privilege to work with in the field. As soon as I had gained some altitude, I pushed the nose down, gained some speed then pulled back into a slow victory roll over the town of Showak.

If anything, the picnic and barbecue in the grove proved to be as big a success as the camel races themselves. CARE outdid themselves and there was plenty of food and drink for everyone. By 9:00 music was playing loudly and everyone was dancing, singing and having a great time. I stood off to the side of the crowd talking quietly with Rita and Chris, surveying the action and thinking how sad it was that I would soon be leaving and returning to the U.S. Slowly I began to realize that there was someone surveying the scene from the opposite corner of the grove, someone whom I hadn't seen for some time. I immediately stood up and walked straight across the grounds to greet him.

Hassan Osman stood, slightly self-consciously, at the edge of the grove wearing a turban, his long jelabia and, of course, his leopard shoes. "Hassan," I exclaimed, putting out my hands to embrace him, "come and join the party! There's still plenty of food and drink," I said, emphasizing the word drink, since I knew that Hassan appreciated whiskey as much as anyone there.

"I would have come to the races if I had been invited," said Hassan, acting as if he were deeply wounded.

"Hassan, we didn't know you were back in town. We weren't expecting you for another week," I said.

"Well, from what people have been telling me, I think it's a good thing I came back early. We have much to talk about. I'll see you in the morning."

* * *

Early the next morning I went to my office and began preparing for a long briefing with Hassan. At one point, I noticed that I didn't have the latest status report on the roads so I went next door to ask Fadil if I could borrow his copy. I was surprised to see that he was packing his papers.

"Where are you going?" I inquired.

"I'm taking some leave," Fadil said. "I'm due several weeks now so I'm going to Khartoum to see Hassan Attiya and then on to my village for several weeks."

I knew immediately what was happening. Fadil was being exiled by Hassan for taking initiative and doing the projects that Hassan had disapproved of.

"This is crazy. Hassan can't afford to lose you now."

"It's time for my leave and I'm ready for a vacation," Fadil said.

"I know what Hassan's doing. Let me go and talk to him."

"No," said Fadil, "I really am due some leave and I would like to take it now."

I knew that Fadil would not want me meddle further, for in the end, he was still loyal to Hassan. For me to intervene would embarrass him and since, naturally, I would lose, it would only make the situation worse, especially in the eyes of Fadil's fellow workers. Sadly, I shook hands with Fadil and told him I would see him soon in Khartoum.

I strode across the courtyard into Hassan's office loaded with papers for the briefing. Hassan, however, was not in a mood to listen to me. He simply said, "It looks like you've been up to some tricks while I've been gone."

"Hassan," I said, "every one of those projects was vital. If you look around, you'll find that we have the best relief operation in all of Sudan. The food is stockpiled, the warehouses are erected, almost all the refugees are moved and if heavy rains don't come for a few more days, we may be able to close Wad Kowli. I am glad you're back, because only you can convince the Ministry of Health to let us complete the evacuation from Wad Kowli to Girba. Everything is running smoothly and in a few days we'll even have most of the roads complete."

The mention of roads brought Hassan bolt upright. "These roads," he said, "were not needed. I would never have authorized their construction. You have wasted my money and kept me from getting the road graders."

I pointed out that the road graders he wanted had just arrived and were in the maintenance shed being prepared to start work. I also pointed out that the road construction funds came from a German grant and could not be used to buy equipment, only services. So the money wasn't wasted, it was being used as intended.

"It is not a good project and I will not support it," he said.

"Hassan, we have a contract with the construction company."

"You may have a contract with a construction company, but I didn't sign it and I will not authorize any of my staff to provide fuel for the machines."

"Hassan," I said, "the contractor has a contract. There is a clause in it that says that we must pay for the machinery for a certain number of days, whether it moves or not. The agreement calls for us to supply fuel; if you don't, the machines can't move but we still have to pay for them."

"I will not authorize anyone to use my fuel for these machines," said Hassan.

"Then we have nothing more to talk about this morning, Hassan," I said. "I will be in my office when you are ready to hear the rest of the briefing." With that, I stood up and left the room.

As I walked across the compound, I bumped into Mike Menning who had just arrived to pay his respects to Hassan. "How did it go?" Mike asked snidely.

"Hassan's refusing to fuel the road equipment", I replied.

"Well I never thought it was a very good project myself," said Mike.

"I don't care if you like it or not, but you better be prepared to tell the Germans why they are paying \$15,000 a day for heavy equipment and it's sitting on half completed tanker roads. You also better be prepared to answer the High Commissioner when he finds out that there's not going to be any water supply to Girba because the stupid UNHCR pump system didn't get operational and there were no tanker roads so that water could be transported up to the camp. Have a nice day, Mike."

Actually, I had anticipated something like this and had quietly told Mark Frohardt, Jean-Michel and Fazley, who had replaced Tessa at Sefawa, to squirrel away several dozen barrels of diesel at each of their camp sites so that in case of some shortage or emergency we could keep the machinery running until the supplies could be replenished. I sent a messenger to each telling them about Hassan's action and asking them to make sure that the equipment continued to work but out of sight from COR. In the meantime, I left it up to Mike to work out some sort of arrangement with Hassan.

For the next three days, we all continued to try to convince Hassan to release fuel for the road equipment. On other issues that separated us, Hassan and I managed to work out agreements but, obviously, the roads had become a point of honor with Hassan and he was not about to back down.

The roads would probably never have been completed except for the tenacity of Chris. As soon as he learned of Hassan's decision to withhold fuel, he immediately drove to Showak to confer with me. I told him the matter was in Mike Menning's hands but Chris was skeptical that Mike would really be much help. He knew of Mike's deepening resentment of me and felt that he would probably use this as a means of embarrassing me and reestablishing some rapport with Hassan. Still, he agreed to wait until our reserve allocations of fuel were almost consumed before taking the matter into his own hands. Almost hourly, he checked in to find out if there had been any change but I was unable to give him any positive sign that Hassan was reconsidering. In the meantime, I had been trying to get Hassan Attiya to override Hassan's order, but his daughter had been bitten by a dog and he had taken several days off to be with her while she recovered.

As the fourth day began, Chris received reports that the machinery at Girba would be out of fuel by noon. The machinery on the other sites could probably continue another day or so because heavy rains had slowed the work and reduced fuel consumption. Girba, however, was our biggest concern because the most expensive equipment was on that site and swift completion of the five mile tanker road there was our most critical project.

Chris had finally had it with waiting for Mike and Hassan to change their minds. At 9:00 he walked into Hassan's office and asked to talk to him. Mike was there conferring about other matters, but Hassan reluctantly agreed to hear Chris out. For the next thirty minutes Chris told Hassan about the road work, the importance of completing the project, especially at Girba, and the consequences, under the contract, should the equipment not continue to move. During the meeting the COR engineer, Karar, came into the meeting and listened. Karar had always been in favor of the project and had helped Chris get the contract together and select the appropriate equipment in Khartoum. It was lucky that Karar was at the meeting.

When Chris completed his explanations, he leaned back in his chair and waited for Hassan to react. Hassan politely explained to Chris why he opposed the project. He said that the use of all the specialized equipment was a waste of money, that the entire project could be done with road graders. He had wanted the Germans to give him more road graders but instead, they were wasting their money renting bulldozers, scrapers, tippers, and front-end loaders.

It was clear that Hassan couldn't understand the need for the other machines; before, anytime COR wanted a road, they simply borrowed a grader. Now that so many new camps had been built, there were not enough graders to borrow. Thus it seemed logical to him that COR should acquire some graders of its own so that they could build the necessary roads.

"I'm not opposed to the roads," said Hassan, "only to the way in which they're being built. If the equipment is appropriate, like a grader, I will give it fuel. For the rest, I will give nothing. Now, we must continue with our other meeting. Please excuse us."

With that dismissal, Chris left the office and came back across the courtyard to my offices. I could tell by his look of dejection that the meeting hadn't gone well. "I just can't make him see," said Chris. "He just doesn't seem to understand how important this is."

While we were commiserating, Karar came in and sat down beside Chris. "Well," he said, "it looks like you've won."

"What are you talking about?" said Chris. "Hassan turned the project down. He won't give me any fuel."

That's not what I heard," said Karar. "He said that he would give fuel to any equipment that was appropriate. I think that's a signal that he's prepared to give fuel to all the equipment. He just wants to make sure that it's really needed."

Chris looked at Karar and shook his head. "No, I'm sure that that's not correct."

"No, my friend, you do not understand the Sudanese. I'm sure he meant that we could go ahead with the work."

Momentarily, Chris brightened up. "I'm going to go back over and ask him," he said. And with that he hurriedly strode back across the courtyard into Hassan's office. This time he was gone about three minutes and once again he left the office disappointed and shaking his head.

"I asked him what he meant and if he would give us fuel for some of the equipment, but Karar was wrong. He said he wasn't going to give fuel for any road work."

All three of us sat there in silence for a few minutes looking down at the floor, occasionally glancing out the window at a passing pedestrian or jeep as it entered the COR compound. Then, suddenly, Chris jumped up.

"Damn it! He's just got to understand. I'm going to go in there and talk to him until he agrees." With that, he strode once again briskly across the compound and into Hassan's office. Karar followed him a second later. This time he was gone for almost an hour. I stood by the window watching for Chris to come out, convinced that once again he would be walking out slower than when he went in. Then, much to my surprise, Chris and Karar came striding back with a jaunty bounce to their steps. Chris sat down, let out a big sigh and then smiled. "Hassan's agreed to come out to Girba to inspect the project. If he likes what he sees, he'll give us enough fuel to continue."

"Will they have enough fuel to be operating when they get there?" I inquired.

"He says he'll authorize enough fuel for them to go until tomorrow night."

"Keep your fingers crossed," I said.

"Don't worry, we'll snow him," said Chris. "Remember what you always told me; you can tell the men from the boys by the size of the toys."

"And the noise," I added. We both laughed as I slapped Chris on the shoulder and gave him a big hug of appreciation.

* * *

The following day dawned clear and hot and by 9:00 shimmering heat waves rising from the ground distorted any vision farther than 100 meters away. At mid-morning, a small convoy of COR vehicles set out from Showak for Hassan's inspection trip to Girba. In the middle of the convoy was Hassan, riding in his sedan car as if it were a presidential limo. I could tell as we left that this was meant to be a show of force and a demonstration that "Hassan Osman was back in town."

As senior advisor, I rode in the car with Hassan. He chatted gaily away with the driver and one of the other Sudanese staff in Arabic, only occasionally lapsing into English to let me in on a joke's punchline. For the most part, my mind was elsewhere, for I knew that I would be leaving soon and I was trying to concentrate on what still needed to be finished. I was also trying to develop a mind-set for waging the last few battles with Hassan. This morning would be a test: if the road project continued, I could still wage a few more last-ditch stands before leaving. If he didn't approve the roads, I would have to look for an alternative way to accomplish the remaining tasks.

Even before the tents of the Girba complex came into view, we could see the dust being kicked up by the road machinery and, as we got closer, the giant, yellow, crawling monsters seemed to be scurrying

everywhere. The size of the scrapers and the D7 Cats dwarfed even the road graders that were scurrying about like giant mantises. In the mirror, I could see Hassan's eyes widening as he realized the scope of the project was far bigger than he had anticipated.

We were met immediately by Chris. He invited Hassan to ride in his car and then took him on a tour of the whole program. At the gravel site by the lake, we watched as front-end loaders filled the tipper trucks, then followed the tippers to where the huge scrapers were spreading dirt to raise the road level. Next, the graders shaped the roadbed then they were followed by heavy, vibrating rollers that compacted the earth. The tippers then spread their gravel over the surface and the rollers packed it into the roadbed.

Between Girba North and Girba Central, the giant scrapers were scooping up earth to deposit on the roads, carving a large depression into the ground which would be used as a reservoir during the rainy season. As the scrapers moved into the depression, they moved forward until the load from the partially filled hopper and the resistance of the clay bogged them down. At that point, one of the large bulldozers moved in behind, raised its blade and shoved the scraper along until its hopper was completely full. Hassan asked to stop and he watched, completely fascinated, for about 20 minutes as the scrapers methodically filled their holds. Chris was right; Hassan was fascinated by the huge, roaring, melange of movement and Chris, seizing the moment, signaled for one of the operators to stop and asked Hassan to climb into the cab. The operator explained how the scraper worked and let Hassan play with the controls for a few seconds, then put the machine in gear and lurched forward. Hassan was obviously thrilled and Chris gave me a wink. We were sure that the battle was won.

After Hassan's tour, we all retired to the camp administrator's compound for tea. The setting was more formal than it had ever been before. Hassan sat in a large chair, flanked on one side by Mike Menning and me on the other, with various COR staffers standing behind. Hassan turned to Mark Frohardt and asked him to bring the leaders of each of the volags to the compound. While we waited for them to arrive, we sipped tea and listened to Hassan tell about his time in Cairo. Finally everyone was present and Hassan motioned for silence.

"I am very pleased with what I see. It is obvious that everyone has been working hard and that the camps are progressing well." Then he turned to Chris and motioned for him to come and stand at his side. "I am especially pleased," he said, "with the road work. It is very important and must go forward as quickly as possible." Then he grasped Chris' hand and said, "It is not often that I change my mind, but this young man has convinced me of the importance of this project. It has my permission to continue. We will provide the fuel as required."

During Hassan's talk, it was obvious that he had forgotten Chris' name and as we walked out the door he turned to one of his aides and whispered, "What is that young man's name?"

"Chris Cuny," replied the aide.

Hassan pondered a moment. "Is he any relation to Fred?"

* * *

That night, Bob Gersony, who was still on his tour of the east, returned to Showak to meet with Mike

and Hassan. By now the word was out that I was in the dog house and that Hassan could hardly wait for me to leave. Bob dropped by my quarters before he went to see Hassan and told me that he had been very impressed with the way things were moving in all the camps. He had been to Girba several hours after Hassan's visit and he too had been impressed with the scope of the work there as well as the way all systems throughout the east were functioning.

Several days earlier, a delegation from "We Are the World", the Anglo-American effort of entertainers to raise funds for relief in Africa, had visited the camps as part of a tour to decide where they should allocate a part of the money that had been raised from the worldwide series of concerts. We had carefully prepared a "wish list" of items that still needed funding, including installation of latrines and improved shelters. But when we presented the list, they declined to provide any money. The reason? Our operation was the best they had seen! We were asking for money to fine-tune our operation while others, especially in western Sudan and inside Ethiopia, were still trying to get their act together. Nick Van Praag, who was traveling with the delegation, said that Harry Belafonte, the American singer who was leader of the delegation, had summarized their decision and reasons for not giving us any money.

"You have several months' supplies stockpiled in all your camps; others are crying out for food. You have the best logistics system we've seen; others are begging for trucks. While you're reorganizing your camps, others are scrounging for shelter. While you have worries about purifying water, others are trying to find water. While you are trying to figure out how to allocate doctors, others are looking for medical aid. While you are improving your supplementary feeding programs, others are begging for food to feed children."

Sometimes it takes an outsider to tell you exactly how good your situation is and word of Belafonte's comments spread quickly through the agencies. It gave us all a feeling of pride and, of course, it helped us to realize how far we had come in the last few months.

Bob had been present as the word spread and was aware of the spirit in the camps and I think he too was recognizing the accomplishments that we had made. Still, he indicated that he was concerned about the beginning of the rainy season and some of the operational problems that we were likely to have. Then he asked if it was true that I still planned to leave at the end of the following week. I assured him that these were indeed my plans.

"Don't you think you should stay?" he asked. "It could be that we're entering a critical phase. The operation needs someone who knows how to wheel and deal. Most important, it needs someone who will stand up to Hassan."

I told Bob that Kent would be staying and that I was sure that he could carry on quite well. My role was finished; everything was in place and as soon as Kent returned, I would be taking off.

Following our meeting, Bob and Mike met with Hassan for several hours. I'm not sure what the conversation entailed, but several hours later, Bob came over to one of the UNHCR guest houses where I was playing poker with some of the VSOs and the prefab construction team. I was about to deliver a coup de grace, for I held a full house of aces and eights (the "dead man's hand"), when Bob said, "I've convinced Hassan that you should stay."

I was so stunned that I didn't call the play. "Who asked you to intervene?" I said. "I have no intention of staying. I've got other projects on line and my work here is finished."

"I thought you wanted to stay. I was just trying to be helpful."

We went outside and "discussed" the matter fully. I made it clear that I had no desire to stay. After working with Fadil, going back to work with Hassan would be too exasperating. Furthermore, I was upset that Hassan was attempting to exile Fadil after all he had done. Furthermore, I pointed out that I had known when I pushed the big projects that Hassan disfavored that it was a one-off shot; once I crossed Hassan, there was no turning back. Hassan might agree to American pressure for me to stay on but he would never be happy with my presence. I could see a whole series of running battles, only widening the chasm and destroying whatever friendship remained between us. For all of these reasons, the time had come for me to leave.

I think Bob was surprised at how angry I was that he had been meddling in the matter. In fact, I was furious (and not a little too surprised after all the opposition that he had put up to the returnee program). I stalked out of the HCR compound and walked back to my quarters.

The next morning, Hassan left early on an inspection tour of several of the other camps and left word that he was going to pay a courtesy call on the military governor of the region. He wasn't expected back until late in the afternoon. I spent the morning in Showak going over the project lists, trying to decide which ones to push and which ones to leave for Kent. I decided that my final, all out effort should be for resumption of the moves from Wad Kowli. I radioed Jean-Michel for an up-to-date count of the people still there; he reported that approximately 11,000 people still remained. (There had been no new arrivals and nor any departures for several weeks.) Checking with Abdul Ayum, I concluded that the remainder of the refugees could be moved in five days with an all out effort employing fifty trucks. If this could be done, Wad Kowli could be officially closed and only a skeleton crew left in place to receive any further refugees arriving from Ethiopia.

As I went through the master list of projects that Fadil and I had prepared in early April, I realized what we, all of us in the east, had accomplished. Of ninety-four projects or activities that we had listed, ninety were completed and the two unfinished tasks were closing Wad Kowli and installing the water system at Girba. The only other major concern was the installation of latrines in the camps, but by now, this was a lost cause for we had never been able to overcome the reluctance of UNHCR to invest in adequate sanitation at any of the camps. Even with cholera epidemic, the BO hesitated to move.

I decided that if we could complete the move from Wad Kowli, my work would be finished and I could leave knowing that whatever future crises lay ahead, they could be handled adequately by the new staff that was now in place. One formidable obstacle remained: the Ministry of Health. The regional health authorities still opposed the move on the grounds that there was a danger of spreading cholera despite the fact that the disease was now widespread in the Sudanese villages but well under control in all the refugee camps. I felt that I could argue that it wouldn't make any difference to move the refugees, that there was little danger of refugees infecting villagers and, if we timed the moves right, we could probably move the refugees nonstop since the rains had reduced afternoon temperatures and made daylight moves

possible.

Late in the afternoon, I went to find Dr. Nabil to win him over to my side. The previous weekend, I had been a guest at his house and felt that I had established a greater rapport and understanding with him. Sure enough, Dr. Nabil heard me out and when I was finished said that he would agree to talk to Hassan and recommend that the moves be continued and, he added with a wink, "I won't tell Hassan that you've talked to me."

I returned to my quarters about 8:30 that night and had just sat down to write some notes on my meeting with Dr. Nabil when there was a knock at the door. It was Hassan. As he entered the room, he noticed the work on my desk and said, "Don't you ever quit?" Then he chuckled, "I always thought the sun would help keep you under control."

"We Texans love the heat," I said, "even as much as the Sudanese."

"Next time I'll ask for someone from Scandinavia," he said. We both laughed, knowing that he was referring to the unfortunate death of the head of the Swedish well drilling team who had died of heat stroke his first day in Sudan.

Hassan was silent for a moment and then he said, "I understand that you are leaving soon. Why is this so?"

I told him that my time was up, that my contract would end in three days and I would be leaving at that time.

"No," he said, "you can't go. You are needed here. Your work is not complete."

I looked directly at Hassan and said, "Hassan, I thought you wanted me to leave."

"No, no," he said, "we disagree over many things but I realize now that you are valuable. I want you to stay."

"Kent is staying," I said. "He can carry out my work."

"No, no, I want you to stay and finish your work."

"What would I do?," I asked. "All the main operations are now complete."

"We can meet tomorrow on this and I can give you some assignments."

"Hassan," I asked, "do you really want me to stay?"

"Yes, yes, I want you to stay."

"Then let us discuss it tomorrow," I said. "Give me some time to think about it."

After Hassan left, I leaned back in my bed and chuckled.

"Wait until the Branch Office hears that Hassan's asked me to stay! I bet that'll send cold shivers up their spines."

The next morning I attended a brief meeting with Hassan and Mike. Hassan had prepared a list of activities that he wanted me to complete. While many of them were important, they were not the kind of thing that I was suited for; accounting, inventory control, establishing financial management systems: things that would drive a person like me absolutely up the wall! I suspected that Mike Menning had a hand in developing the list, feeling that it would be a good way to make sure that I wouldn't accept Hassan's offer and if I did, at least bring me under control and push me away from the action side of the

operation. As soon as Hassan had finished his list, I informed him that I appreciated his offer to stay but that I needed a day to think it over. I pointed out that I wanted to discuss the matter with Rita and my home office, and that to do that I would have to go to Khartoum. Hassan agreed and said that he would await my answer. As I left the office, Hassan walked out behind me and took my arm. "I really do want you to stay," he said. "Please think it over carefully. There is still much work to be done."

I was about to say that the most important thing remaining was the move to Girba when Dr. Nabil drove up. I thought wiser of the matter and instead went to my office to prepare for my departure and anxiously await the outcome of Dr. Nabil's meeting with Hassan.

About an hour later, Dr. Nabil came out of Hassan's office. In keeping with his usual practice, he went straight to his car to leave. I walked out, sat on the porch and watched him prepare to drive off. When no one was looking, he turned in my direction and gave me a thumbs up. The Wad Kowli move was back on.

* * *

The trip to Khartoum was anticlimactic. Rita and I took advantage of a kind offer from the Khartoum for all relief workers to spend three days free at the hotel. We enjoyed swimming in the pool and meeting many of the other relief workers who were outward bound now that their tours were up. Most of our closest friends were rotating to new assignments and I realized that, while there were new acquaintances to be made, the newcomers were a different breed of cat and my wheeling and dealing style would not be as suited to their more methodical administrative demeanor. I paid a courtesy call on Nicholas and watched him flinch when I told him that Hassan had asked me to stay on for another three months. Before he could say anything, I told him that I had already decided not to accept.

"Hassan blows hot and cold," said Nicholas accurately, if not graciously.

"Don't worry, Nicholas," I said, "I'll soon be on my way."

That night I checked in with my office and told them my departure plans and checked to make sure that Kent was back on his way so that I could leave as soon as he was back in the country. They told me he was scheduled to arrive in two days. At that point, I finalized my plans to leave and set the date.

The last three days of Ramadan were about to begin when I returned to Showak. In my absence, one convoy of refugees from Wad Kowli had already taken place and another was scheduled for that night. Abdul Ayum had reported that the drivers refused to work over the final days of Ramadan, so the remaining moves would have to wait until after the post-Ramadan feast, which traditionally marks the end of the period, was over. I briefly considered asking Abdul Ayum to find Christian drivers to make the move but thought better of it for fear that it might insult his sensitivities. After all, the country was still officially in the grips of Shariya, and in Khartoum, even the international airport shut down during the sunset hours in homage to the Ramadan tradition.

Hassan had already left his office by the time I returned to Showak. There was an invitation at my quarters to join him at a party commemorating his return from vacation. I sat down at my desk and wrote out a brief note thanking Hassan for his confidence in me but declining his invitation to stay on.

With that in hand, I went to his party and as the crowd began to leave, I pulled Hassan aside and told him of my decision, handing him the note and grasping his hands warmly. Hassan looked at the note, folded it and put it in his jelobia, then without a word went to join several others in a card game of Hearts.

* * *

The next three days were filled with paperwork and accounting as I tried to put everything in order before I left. There were a couple of parties for other departing staff and I made the rounds to say goodbye personally to the ones who had contributed so much during the hardest and darkest days.

Two nights before my departure, the four HCR field officers whom I had relied on the most, hosted me to a quiet meal in the guest house. Mark Frohardt, Julian Murray, Jean-Michel Goudstikker and Nicholas Von Praag, who collectively had been referred to as Cuny's "Four Horsemen" (of the Apocalypse), came to say their goodbyes in private. It was a nice farewell and during the meal we began recalling some of the many wacky incidents that had occurred during the operation. At one point I laughed and said, "You know, we ought to put together a Trivial Pursuit game for the East. No one would ever guess the answers."

"No one would ever believe the answers," joked Julian.

For the next hour we played our own version and Julian began to write many of the questions and answers down on a piece of scratch paper. "Let's make this our last project," he said. "What a great way to record everything that's happened."

As the meeting was about to break up, Mark tapped a spoon on his glass and stood up. "No speeches," I said.

"No speeches, just a little something to remember us by." With that, Mark pulled out a small box and handed it to me. Inside was a pair of size 12 yellow and black leopard-skin shoes. In one was a note, "You are always trying to fill Hassan's shoes, you may as well have them." I roared with laughter and someone produced a bottle and we toasted each other for the last time.

* * *

My last full working day at Showak was the first day after Ramadan. That night the moves from Wad Kowli were scheduled to begin again and, with luck, in three more moves the camp would be emptied. I spent much of the day checking preparations for the transfer and holding short, brief meetings with Hassan and other staff to finish up last minute paperwork. I received word before breakfast that Kent was in Khartoum, but due to lack of transport, would wait for me to brief him there before my departure. At Fatour, our first in over a month, Hassan announced that there would be a farewell party for me that night, so I sent a messenger to Rita to join me in Showak.

Late in the afternoon, I made my final operational flight when I flew down to Um Rakuba to make a final check on the water system there and to pick up a specimen from a patient who was suspected of having cholera. Amy, Mike's stunning multi-national secretary, accompanied me on the trip since I had

been promising her a ride for several months. It was a beautiful afternoon with storm clouds over Ethiopia billowing thousands of feet into the air and small puffy cumulus clouds about a mile above us giving the ground dark shading, not unlike a patchwork quilt. As we passed over the Showak forest, I could see that leaves were budding on all the trees and they would soon provide a dense, lush overcoat. Green grasses were sprouting everywhere and in many of the fields, the first signs of emerging sorghum were beginning to show. Vehicles moving down the roads kicked up a much smaller plume of dust since the particles had more moisture and previous rains had made it easier for passing cars to compact rather than scatter the dirt on the surface. The herds of migratory camels that we had watched with such fascination in April and May were now long gone and only a few small herds could be spotted. As we approached Doka, the city nearest Um Rakuba, I could spot wild flowers growing in the fields and along the road.

At Um Rakuba, I learned that the suspected Cholera case had already turned out to be a false alarm, that a local doctor had diagnosed it simply as a case of bad diarrhea. With my other business completed, I said goodbye to the camp staff and flew back to the north.

A week earlier, I had flown to Um Rakuba with Mike Menning to pick up Fernando Bena, the HCR field Officer, and then had flown to the border to search for a small encampment of refugees who were being detained and held at the border. We had been unable to locate the camp at first and had followed several rivers right up to the foot of the Ethiopian foothills. As the ground rose a few hundred feet from the flat Sudanese plains, the ground had become emerald green with forests and trees and lush vegetation along the banks of the _____ river. By the time we located the campsite, the refugees had already been moved. Because the area was so beautiful, I had wanted to follow the river northward to the Atbura and then follow it back to Showak but since Fernando needed to return to Um Rakuba, I hadn't been able to fly home that way. Now, since I still had some daylight, I decided to go exploring. Flying only a few hundred feet above the ground, I headed eastward until I came to the river and then turned north following a slow lazy course along the river back towards home. I knew that I was going to miss flying in the Sudan and this last flight over the eastern landscape was a good way to leave the area I had come to love so much. As I approached Sefawa, I opened the throttle and gave the staff compound a high speed, low level buzz, pulling up into a steep climb and rocking my wings in farewell.

Further down the river, I dropped low again and glided past the Nigerian villages and the few remaining camps of the Beniamer nomads. Only two weeks earlier, much of the area I was flying over had been dry but now the river was completely full and all vehicular traffic across the Atbara had ceased a week earlier. The depth of the water at Wad Kowli was reported to be about six feet. Had it not been for the bridge which was now open, the camp would have been completely isolated.

As I reached Showak, I gave the guest house the traditional buzz, letting them know I was back and signaling them to send a car to the airport to pick me up. Then I circled the town to take a few pictures in the setting sunlight. When I saw a car approaching the runway, I turned into the pattern and landed for the last time at the little strip we had carved out of the desert.

I was surprised and pleased to see that the person who had come to pick me up was none other than

Fadil. It turned out that he had come back to Showak to collect some of his things before going on leave. He had heard that I was leaving and he came to say goodbye and invite me to stop by his village to meet his family before I left Sudan. I asked if he was going to be staying for the farewell party that Hassan was giving me that night, but he said that he couldn't stay since the car that was taking him to his village was leaving within the hour. When we arrived at the guest house, we shook hands and embraced and I promised to try and see him at his village before I left. With that, he turned and drove away. As I watched his car disappear down the street, I felt deeply privileged that I had been able to work with such a man.

My farewell party that night was rather tame compared to the camel races two weeks earlier and the small but enthusiastic farewell I had been given by the "four horsemen". In Sudanese tradition, the COR staff had slaughtered a lamb and prepared a small feast. The preparations were obviously hasty and the crowd was small but warm. Jean-Michel had driven Rita up and several other Wad Kowli vets were there.

The party was held down in the CARE nursery. Hassan had arranged for a small stage to be brought in and had several chairs arranged in a formal line abreast of each other. In front of us, he arranged a large circle of chairs and everyone who came simply picked up a plate of food and sat down in the circle. Conversations were thus limited and there was not much spontaneity in the proceedings. Hassan was wearing his jellabia and his leopard shoes and was sitting in the middle chair on the stage presiding over the events.

Rita signaled for me to come over and talk to her. She reminded me that my own leopard shoes were in the car. While Hassan was talking, I quietly slipped away, returned to the car and exchanged my cowboy boots for the bright yellow and black slippers. Then I rejoined Hassan on the stage, sitting down immediately to his left. It didn't take long for everyone to notice that I was wearing shoes identical to Hassan's. As soon as I had their attention, I began to mimic his moves. If he crossed his legs, I would do the same. If he stretched his feet out, I would follow suite. For the next half hour I quietly parodied my boss and I could tell that the crowd loved it. Hassan never figured out what was going on or even noticed the snickers that the Khawajas tried desperately to contain.

Finally Hassan got up and stiffly thanked me for all the assistance during the emergency. His words were short and formal but it was more than I had expected in the first place and I was glad to end everything on a friendly though somewhat formal note.

After Hassan had presented some gifts from the COR staff, Julian Murray stepped forward and handed me an envelope. Inside were over 150 trivia questions that he had assembled about the operation. This, along with my leopard shoes, are my favorite souvenirs from Sudan.

Before the party could shed its formality, as most did once the speeches were over, it began to sprinkle. Since I had been facing north on the stage, I hadn't noticed the gathering storm clouds that were building behind me. As I looked up into the gathering darkness, I could see powerful lightning flashes streaking all across the southern sky. It was obvious that we were in for a major blow.

In a few minutes the light sprinkle had increased to a gusting downpour. The party broke and ran for

the vehicles in an effort to get out of the river bottoms before the rains got too heavy and turned the roads to mush.

It took us an hour to negotiate the three kilometers back to the guest house. No sooner had we reached the top of the hill when the heavens opened up and the hardest downpour I've ever seen inundated the countryside. In five places, it was completely impossible to cross what only hours earlier had been a small gully. Several cars that had tried were already turned sideways in the stream and had been abandoned. When we finally reached our own quarters, water was blowing in the windows and everything inside was soaked.

The rains continued throughout the night, never letting up for even a moment. Finally, at about six-thirty in the morning, they tapered off to a drizzle and then quit.

Daylight revealed the extent of the damage. The normally dry desert appeared to be a massive lake with low, flat islands at the few places where the earth rose above the water. Even those islands offered no chance of passage; wet, the black, gumbo soil was soft and sticky and couldn't support any weight.

Several vehicles that had tried to move during the night were bogged down, most up to their hub caps. Several of the occupants of a nearby guesthouse had obviously tried to leave the compound on foot, but judging from the mud holes in the road, they hadn't gotten very far and must have turned around only a few meters from their door. Since it was obvious that we were going nowhere anytime soon, I made a cup of coffee, turned on the radio and sat back to wait for things to dry up.

At mid-morning my radio operator came over to give me a report. The storm had struck Wad Kowli an hour before it hit us and so the moves had been canceled since the trucks couldn't negotiate the road. In fact, it appeared that many of them would be stuck at Wad Kowli for the duration of the rainy season.

The news from Sefawa was no better. As the rains struck that camp, several vehicles had attempted to leave the staff compound to make it to the camp a kilometer away. None of the vehicles had gone more than about 50 feet and were now hopelessly mired in the mud. The staff was hoping to use some of the road construction equipment to free them from the muck. At Girba, things were going okay. The main tanker road had been completed in time and proved to be solid enough for the first tankers to go out about mid-morning. No problems had been experienced with the road itself, but one bad situation had developed. The road had acted as a dam and, in places, small lakes extending about 60 meters behind the dam had formed. The culverts that we had ordered had not yet arrived. Several hundred tents had been inundated and their occupants forced to flee to the shelter of the empty warehouses for the night. No one had been injured in the evacuation but a number of belongings had obviously been lost. Mark was seeking permission to cut across the road to drain some of the water, which I quickly gave hoping that we could get the culverts to him one way or another within the next couple days.

Inside Showak, there had also been considerable rain damage. The radio mast used by UNHCR had blown over and some of the roofing from the prefab houses as well as the porch on Mike's bungalow had been blown away. Several COR buildings were also damaged, though none seriously. Several vehicles had been swamped trying to ford small streams on their way to and from the staff quarters during the

night.

All in all, our losses were fairly minor, but the heavy rains were a sure sign that the rainy season had finally begun in earnest and I knew that evacuating Wad Kowli was no longer possible and that the refugees who remained would be there until the rains quit in September. We had been only three days from completing the moves but gratefully everything was in place so they could endure the isolation without undue strain and with plenty of supplies.

My immediate concern was getting my airplane off the ground so that I could head back to Khartoum. As the day wore on and the hot sun began to bake the ground, a thin, dry crust began to form over the ground. By noon it was possible to walk about (if you were prepared to occasionally sink in up to your ankles). I calculated that by 4:00PM the surface would be hard enough to tow the airplane up to the paved highway and take off from there. I selected a few strong friends, picked up some ropes and headed for the airport, telling Rita to gather up our belongings and take them over to the Showak intersection and wait for me there.

It took us about 45 minutes to move the airplane up to the road and by the time we got there, I was covered with mud from head to toe. As soon as the plane was on the road, I waited for the traffic to clear and then took off. I flew several kilometers up to the intersection, then landed on the road again. Several of the COR staffers and one of the local policemen stopped traffic on the highway so that I could land safely and taxi off the road. My driver brought Rita up to the plane and helped us load. Then, one by one, all the COR staffers came up and shook hands and said farewell.

As I climbed into the plane, one of my former housemates, Alan from prefab construction crew, asked me, "Are you going to do it?" I just smiled. He was referring to a boast that I had made that I could roll my plane's wheels on the corrugated roof of Mike Menning's bungalow. At one of our nightly poker games, I had promised to do it before I left and now the moment of truth had come. In fact, I had been convinced that it was really too dangerous a stunt to try since the radio masts and the attendant guy wires posed a real hazard to the approaches to the roof. Now the radio mast was down and everyone was waiting to see if I would do it.

I fired up the Cessna, signaled the road crews to stop the traffic, taxied the plane out onto to road and added power. Despite our full fuel load and the heavy baggage that we were carrying, the plane lept up into the air and soared skyward. At 500 feet, I leveled off and made a wide final circle over Showak. Over the COR compound, I noticed that dozens of workers had come out to watch the plane fly over for the final time and I dipped my wings in salute to my friends below. As I came into the wind, I spotted the UNHCR compound at the edge of town. I looked at Rita, grinned, set the propeller, added a slight bit of power and began a long shallow dive towards Menning's house.

EPILOGUE

Despite my intention to leave Sudan immediately, we remained in the country for an additional three weeks. When Stan Steneosis, an advisor to the U.N. Office of Emergency Operations in Africa, learned that my contract with UNHCR was over, he asked me to make a tour of western Sudan and the famine relief operations that were just beginning there. He was especially interested in my opinions of the food situation and the forward logistics problems. He was hoping that I would stay on as an advisor to that operation. In reality, I wasn't that anxious to get involved, but when Herman, the HCR program officer for the West asked me to go out and have a look at the camps for Chadian refugees, I promised to fly out on the Air Bridge (the daily C-130 and C-160 food flights). Thus, Rita and I hopped a ride on a German Transall and flew to Nyala.

The trip was interesting and enjoyable but I could tell from the little that I had seen that the operation was poorly conceived and understaffed. Some of the field staff had some good ideas for improvements but they were a long way from Khartoum and AID had decided that it would run the operation and call the shots. The voices from the field were being shouted down. I did have some operational suggestions that I thought were important, so I spent a few days after my trip preparing a report for Winston Pratley, the OEOA Coordinator in Sudan.

The gist of my recommendations were that a Sudanese organization should be established and trained to run the operation and that all the logistics should be placed under Sudanese control. While OEOA and a few people in the State Department supported the idea, AID was strongly against it. They continued to believe that the Sudanese were inefficient and lazy and couldn't be trusted with such a massive undertaking. My experience had shown just the opposite, however, and when it was obvious that they weren't interested in helping the Sudanese develop capabilities to deal with what were essentially Sudanese problems, I decided that I really didn't want any part of what they were concocting. A mind-set among the AID workers had already developed and they certainly didn't want an outsider coming in, criticizing things and turning the operation around. There was already talk of bringing in helicopters and more planes and I could see the cost of the operation escalating completely out of control.

Soon after I arrived back in Khartoum, I received an offer from a Sudanese company to buy my airplane. They had been looking for a long-range, single-engine plane to support some of their far flung aerial crop spraying operations and they felt that my airplane would fill the bill. At first I hadn't been too interested but suddenly they had made an offer that was difficult to refuse. The only question was how to work a deal that would be an advantage to all of us and find a way they could make the payments in dollars. This took another two weeks to work out. In the meantime, Rita and I amused ourselves by taking short trips in the plane around the country, the most notable being a flight down the Nile to ancient Meroe to see the pyramids and archeological ruins. This proved to be my last flight in Sudan and my last flight in N344TX, for the next day, the deal was consummated and Rita and I left two days later.

* * *

Despite a few minor ruffles, the operation in the east continued to go well after I left. The water system at Girba was not completed during the rainy season. In fact much to our surprise, we learned that the Sudanese water authority had made a decision to drain Girba Lake altogether to remove silt from the area around the intakes for the power generators. This was a routine undertaking which had been planned for several years but no one had bothered to tell us when we were selecting the sites for the camp! As it turned out, the depressions that we had carved into the ground with the road scrapers provided enough temporary water storage until a larger reservoir could be constructed by the engineers. Once the lake was refilled, the pumping system was installed as planned though it took several more months to bring it on line.

The moves from Wad Kowli were not completed until January 1986. By the end of June, all new arrivals had ceased. There were adequate stockpiles of food and medical supplies on hand however, and the camp made it through the rainy season without any special problems. After the rains, it was decided to move the remainder of the people to Sefawa. The bridge erected by the Swiss Disaster Unit proved to be a major success and it opened up not only access to the refugee camp, but also became a major crossing point for villagers on the eastern side of the Atbara River. Hassan's fears that it would become a major crossing point that would encourage more refugees to come into Sudan proved to be ill-founded.

Commissioner El Ahmadi was appointed as the new ambassador to Libya in early June 1985. Before leaving, he recommended that Hassan Attiya be appointed the new Commissioner of Refugees, a recommendation which was followed by the government.

I never saw Fadil again. Other commitments in Khartoum prevented me from getting to his village and, as I had greatly overstayed my time -- and other projects back in Texas were calling, I had to leave without properly saying goodbye or meeting his family.

Fadil was rescued by Commissioner Attiya from Hassan's attempted purge and made Assistant Commissioner of Refugees, a post which he has served with distinction ever since.

As of this writing, Hassan Osman remains at Showak as General Project Manager. He had hoped for another assignment in the new government but neither the provisional government nor the new democratic government elected in 1986 seemed to be willing to find a place for him.

In February 1986, an additional 40,000 Tigrayans asked to be returned to the border so they could voluntarily repatriate. This time the operation was carried out without opposition from UNHCR and the people returned home assisted to a large degree by the voluntary agencies and REST.

With the return of so many Tigrayans, it was decided that those who were remaining should be consolidated at Sefawa and by May, many of those who we had moved to Girba the previous year had been returned to the southern camp. This opened the central camp to expanded movements of refugees

from Wad Sherife, so by May 1986 the entire Girba complex (renamed Shagarab)¹ was entirely Eritrean.

The 54,000 refugees who returned to Tigray in 1985 had, as expected, a hard journey home. The deaths that occurred along the way were not so much from starvation as from cholera, for the returnees marched straight into the epidemic that was raging in Gondar and lower Tigray. Even so, the vast majority did make it back. REST was able to get the Oxfam seeds to many of the farmers and the majority, especially those who returned to Shire [FACT CHECK] province, managed to plant a crop and harvest it in the fall. It is not known how many of the returnees planted the natural Thai sorghum grains that we provided, but reports from agricultural observers in the areas where the first groups went noted that crops on their farms were far better than had been anticipated.

In December 1985, Catholic Relief Services contracted INTERTECT to carry out an assessment of food needs in Ethiopia for 1986. The project permitted me to travel in the areas of Eritrea and Tigray held by the Ethiopian government. We leased a small plane and flew over much of the territory from whence our refugees had come. The ruggedness of the steep terrain and high mountains filled me with tremendous admiration for the people of those provinces and the hardships they must have endured during their exodus to and from Sudan. I could see now why it took so long for the journey. I could also tell that even after good rains, the hardships that they had suffered were not over.

The civil war in both provinces continues and shows no signs of letting up. Far from being destroyed, the TPLF today is stronger than ever, though the bombing campaign has concentrated more on Eritrea than on Tigray. Anyone,

For his "outstanding service" in Sudan, Nicholas Morris was promoted to the rank of D1 and reassigned to Geneva.

Mike Menning was eventually given a permanent contract with UNHCR and continued to stay in Sudan as the head of the sub office for the next year.

Despite the Sudanese antipathy towards Frank Moss, he too remained in Sudan until the Spring of 1986. At that point, the influence of Libyan strong man, Mohmmar Kadafi, began to be felt in the new Sudanese government. After an employee was shot, the US Embassy ordered the evacuation of all Americans and Frank Moss made a typical ass out of himself trying to force everyone to leave. UNHCR bowed to the Embassy's demands and evacuated all Americans except Mike Menning.

Kent remained in Sudan for another three months and helped through the rainy season, though in fact there was very little that he could do other than monitor the existing systems and check to ensure that all the supplies were properly protected against the rains. After he returned from Sudan, we seconded him to work with the University of Wisconsin to develop a training program for UNHCR staff.

The "four horsemen" split soon after I left. Julian Murray took a desk job in Khartoum, then left UNHCR to become the Emergency Operations Officer for World University Service of Canada, a small

¹ The camp was renamed because truck drivers constantly demanded extra money for delivering supplies, claiming that they estimated the delivery costs for a trip to Kashim El-Birba town, not the camp which was an additional 30 kilometers was, however, who is familiar with the terrain in northern Ethiopia, knows that a guerilla war there could take generations to stamp out. If the famine and epidemics of 1984 and 1985 didn't do it, sporadic bombing by the Ethiopian Air Force won't do it either. Somewhere along the line, however, both sides are going to have to reconsider their objectives and what they can win and bring a halt to the senseless deaths of so many innocent people.

Canadian PVO that does a lot of work with HCR, then later went to work for CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency.

Mark Frohardt was evacuated with the other Americans and later picked up a short-term consultancy with HCR in Somalia.

Pierce Garety was also evacuated with the Americans and after a brief stay in Geneva, was promoted to head the UNHCR Branch Office in the Philippines.

Tesafa, my multi-language refugee driver, fell in love with a refugee in Wad Sharife and the two emigrated illegally to England in December of 1985.

Jean-Michel Goudstikker remained in Sudan for another year and is still working for UNHCR as a consultant at this writing.

Poul Hartling, the High Commissioner for Refugees, was not re-elected for another term. In 1985, the US orchestrated a campaign to have him removed and replaced with someone who was more adept at emergency operations. The campaign was quite bloody. At one point, the Americans threatened to request an audit of UNHCR and many of Hartling's top aides. Surprisingly, my old nemesis, Antoine Noel saw the handwriting on the wall and switched allegiances to the American candidate. By helping to line up the African block to support Jean Pierre Hoeke, he emerged more powerful than ever.

Jerry Weaver was brought back to Washington to receive a medal for helping the Falashas escape to Israel. Jerry couldn't resist tooting his own horn and began talking to the press, playing up his role in the evacuation. This enraged not only the State Department, which wanted to keep the details secret, but also the Israelis, so for several months Jerry was given a series of "donkey work" assignments in Washington before finally being transferred out of the Bureau.

The experience of the Falashas in Israel to date has not been a happy one. Few have been absorbed into the mainstream of the country. A large number have committed suicide and many have tried to find ways to return to Ethiopia. Many feel discriminated against because they are black and, indeed, many of the conservative rabbis still refuse to recognize them as Jews. A "compromise" was proposed which subjected the Falashas to the indignity of having to take instruction in order to become "recognized" Jews. Dozens of different nationalities have passed through the Israel's refugee absorption process and have been quickly assimilated into the mainstream of Israeli life, but few of the Falashas have completed the process, many haven't yet learned Hebrew and a surprisingly large number are still unemployed.

I still follow events in Sudan with a keen eye and any time someone returns from the country, I immediately call for news of friends still there. Even today, I can't fly over a desert without thinking back to those hot, cloudless days of January through March as I scurried along the border trying to get things in order.

And sometimes, on warm summer nights in the west Texas desert, I'll walk to a road under a starry sky and watch as a distant truck moves down the highway, staring at the lights and remembering a time when hundreds of lights snaked across the dark horizon carrying a frightened and pitiful humanity towards a temporary home in an unfamiliar land. And sometimes, just sometimes, the wind plays tricks on my ears and I can almost hear the chants of the refugees around the campfires as they sought counsel

from the elders and prepared for the long journey home.