

[OTHER PLACES]

On April 7, 1981, a jet supplied by World Airways departed Oakland for Mogadishu, Somalia, in the Horn of Africa. It carried a team of medical volunteers and a cargo of donated medical supplies — the Bay Area's initial response to an escalating refugee crisis.

At that time, perhaps half a million ethnic Somalis, mostly women and children, had fled from warfare and drought in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and had been settled in 37 refugee camps scattered throughout Somalia. The Bay Area medical team was sent by Maria Eitz's San Francisco-based Medical Volunteers International and was funded through the Emergency Relief Fund International. Both organizations are outgrowths of the 1979 Cambodian refugee project sponsored by the *Examiner*, KRON-TV, Humanitas International and various private donors.

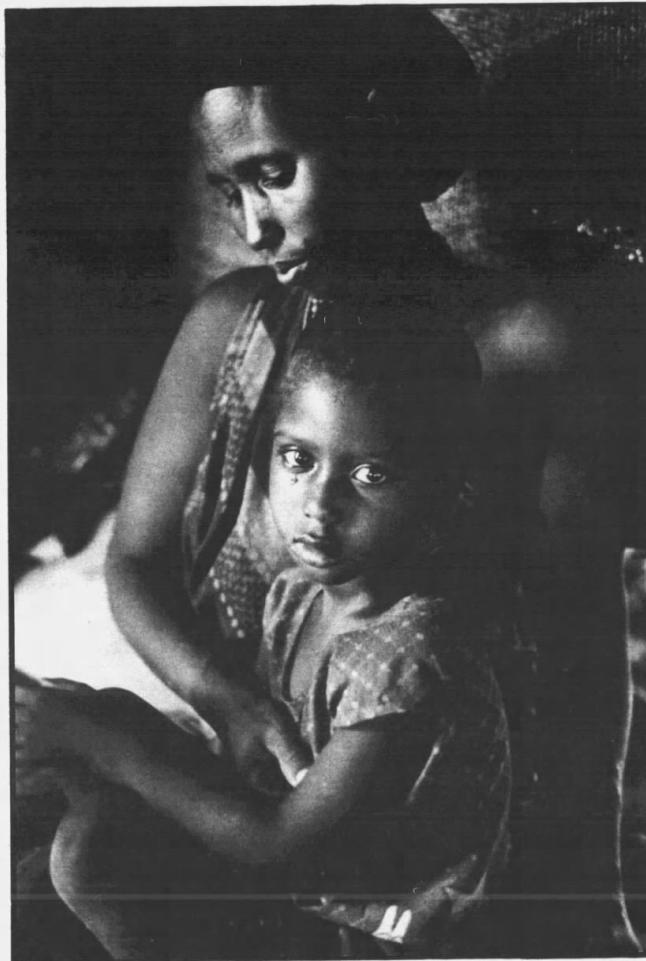
The Bay Area team assumed responsibility for a primitive wilderness camp of 15,000 to 20,000 Moslem nomads, many of whom had never seen a white face. The team lived in a compound in the middle of the Boo'co (pronounced Bo-o) camp, slept in tents and cooked on an open wood fire. During the 30-month project, which ended last month, scores of Bay Area volunteers, supported by hundreds of thousands of dollars in public and private contributions, established four clinics that treated some 2,000 patients each month for a wide variety of complaints, ranging from common colds to malaria and tuberculosis. They also ran supplementary feeding centers for malnourished children; trained 160 Somali nomads as community health workers and birth attendants; coordinated the area's first general immunization program; surveyed the camp for tuberculosis, and conducted a camp-wide health survey and public health education campaign.

These photographs give a sense of the place, the people and the project that thousands of Bay Area residents supported with time and money. An exhibit of photographs from the project, including those shown here, will be on view from October 18 to 28 in Wurster Hall at UC Berkeley. □

Continued

FAREWELL SOMALIA

Text and photography by David Heiden



Images of survival from a Bay Area-supported refugee camp in the war- and drought-ravaged Horn of Africa.

"I saw this child on a 'house-call.' He wasn't crying when I arrived, but after I examined him and found that he had pneumonia, I gave him a shot and the tears began to fall."

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"In April 1981, shortly after our first team arrived, a measles epidemic broke out. Among children less than five years old, perhaps one-third to a half died of measles or its complications. Similar tragic epidemics occurred in many of the other camps. The immunization of young children was therefore an urgent priority. In December 1981, we conducted the second round of immunization in Boo'co Camp."



"Most of the refugees had been nomads when they lived in the Ogaden. At least two-thirds knew no other existence. They lived a hard life, wandering with their flocks, but they were very proud and independent. When most of the flocks were killed by either drought or warfare, the majority of the men were left with nothing to do."



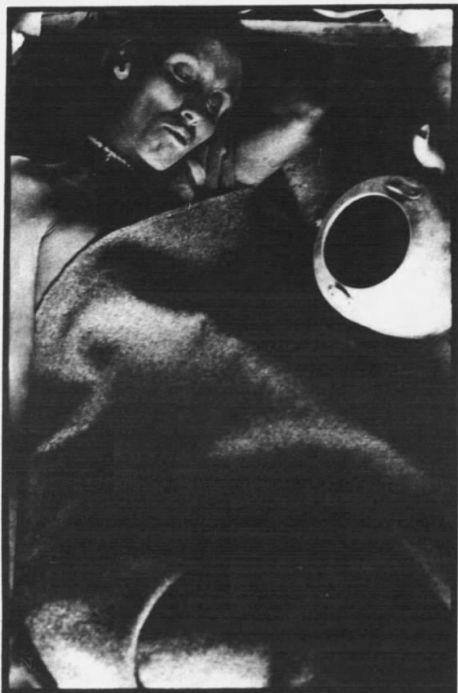
"On January 8, 1982, 102 camels were marched into Boo'co Camp. The next day all were slaughtered for food. The UN High Commission on Refugees had discovered a budgetary surplus in December, and the money had to be spent before the new year. The UN thus proposed buying camels and sending them to a meat-packing plant for slaughter and canning. This would have created badly needed jobs, and the food could have been used as needed. But the Somalis refused. They preferred their meat 'on the hoof.'"





"In this region of hot, dry savannah, dust accumulated rapidly every day. When this photograph was taken, the dust was about six inches deep and a truck had just passed by, raising a cloud. A few days later rain fell. The six inches of dust turned into two feet of mud, and our Land Rover got stuck — a not uncommon occurrence. We had to abandon the vehicle until the mud dried."

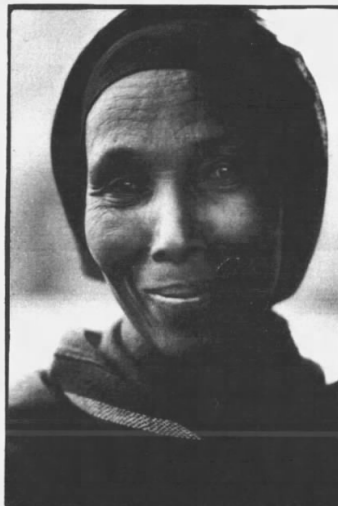
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"This woman died. I examined her several times, and could never figure out what was wrong. Maybe she had tuberculosis, but I doubt it. She didn't respond to TB medication. If she had been in a hospital in the U.S., with a good lab and an x-ray machine, we probably could have diagnosed her condition and saved her life."



"The refugees lived in dome-shaped huts called akals and cooked over open wood fires, so the children, like this boy, often got burned. He was only seven years old, but he looked me directly in the eye and carried himself like a man. Somali boys are given responsibility when still young: At five or six years of age, they start tending sheep and goats."



"Tuberculosis and malaria were the two most common serious diseases; we estimated that 1 to 2 percent of the entire camp suffered from active TB. Effective treatment usually takes a year, including three months of daily injections. But since nomads tend to travel, such treatment was almost impossible to administer. This woman, Faadumo, was recovering from TB."





"This boy brought me into the camp to see his mother. I discovered she had malaria, and gave her treatment. To Western eyes, his smile seems an odd reaction to her misery, but this scene was actually fairly typical. In America, the sick are segregated and when we visit hospitals we are usually serious. In Somalia, the sick and well stay together, and the young learn that illness and death are a natural part of the world. I think the sick also benefit from the proximity of children playing and other family members going about their daily activities."

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