

Blaine Harden

Notes of a Famine-Watcher

A reporter for The Post's foreign service describes what it feels like to walk amid thousands of desperate, dispossessed and dying Ethiopians.

"Mister Blaine, a woman, her baby died. You want to interview her?"

The questioner was my "minder," an employee of the Ethiopian Ministry of Information and National Guidance, an impresario of countless press tours of the highland feeding camps where starving Ethiopians are available to reporters.

We were at Korem, a camp of 45,000. More precisely, we were inside a long shed of corrugated tin, with a dirt floor and stone beds, that is the hospital at Korem. At one end of the shed lay hollow-eyed, stick-like people with pneumonia; at the other end, similarly wasted patients with hepatitis. In between, were wards for those with an infectious lice-borne ailment called relapsing fever and for old people too weak to move. The air in the hospital was sour with the smell of excrement. There was little noise but for coughing and the clink of bed pans against the stone beds. The mother whose baby had just died—10 minutes after it had been given an injection in the hospital—was waiting for me outside.

I went to Ethiopia late last year to get the particulars on the great famine, to put in words for this newspaper what millions were seeing on television at suppertime every night. A grieving mother with a newly dead child was precisely what I was after. So I followed my minder (and my translator) out the hepatitis end of the shed.

We found the mother, Sakarto, a girl of about 19, standing stiffly, tears running down her cheeks, beside a teen-age hospital worker who was holding a tiny body. The baby was wrapped in a gray blanket. For 15 minutes, as Sakarto wept and the hospital worker dutifully stood by with the baby in his arms, I interviewed her. How long had she walked to get to Korem? One and a half days. Where was her husband? Gone, resettled by the government 1,000 miles to the southwest. Did she expect to join him? No. Would she let me take her picture? Yes.

I was out of film and asked Sakarto to wait while I walked back to a Jeep, about a quarter

of a mile away, to reload my camera. I reloaded and had walked halfway to the hospital shed when I realized I had left my pen in the Jeep. I ran back after it and returned to find the mother standing unmoved in the equatorial highland sun. She waited, as if fearing punishment from me; a white foreigner whose face was hidden behind dark sunglasses, a baseball cap and a zoom lens. When I finished taking pictures and asking more questions, I turned away. I felt ashamed of my coldblooded interview with this woman who feared me, and I cried for a few minutes.

The point of telling this story is not to expiate my guilt for having been a ghoul, although there may be something to that, but rather to get at the jumble of confused emotions an American and newcomer to the Third World feels as a temporary voyeur amid tens of thousands of miserable and dispossessed human beings.

Most notably, there was emptiness. The distance between Sakarto and me, in language and culture, made our interview a charade. I believe she thought I was a doctor. I came no closer to her than if I had seen her on television. My feeling for Sakarto—like the feelings of millions of Americans who saw television pictures of suffering in Ethiopia—had less to do with her and her country's poverty than with me and my country's wealth.

At Korem, as at other large feeding (and dying) camps across Ethiopia, nearly everyone was visibly ill. Heads were shaved to get rid of lice. Arms were painted a shocking violet, with antiseptic dye, to kill scabies. Ninety percent of the people at Korem had some

kind of bronchial infection. Tuberculosis and leprosy, dysentery and gastroenteritis, eye infections and skin diseases were epidemic. Sakarto's fingertips were falling off.

I had grown up being squeamish at the prospect of using someone else's toothbrush. All this sickness in the camps scared me, and I was not alone in being scared.

Some reporters feared touching their notebooks if they accidentally dropped them on the dirt. No one ate or dared think about food in the camps. In hotels back in Addis Ababa, where Western famine-watchers—reporters, aid workers and visiting government officials—stayed, we dined together over discussions of the advisability of repeated shampoos to get germs out of our hair. We asked our hotel workers to launder our clothes after each trip to the camps. We warned each other to be careful: keep your fingers and your pens away from your mouth while in the camps. Remember, we told each other, a reporter from *Newsday* got a fever of 104 degrees after a

stay at Korem and had to be evacuated to Nairobi.

In places like Korem, all I managed to do was look at starving people. Interviews with them elicited responses that, after being processed by my government-paid translator, were bleached of any emotion. Unless they cried in front of me, I didn't have any idea what these curiously passive people were thinking or feeling, what they were afraid of, what sense of panic or shame the famine had forced upon them. In this vacuum, I wrote about what famine looks like: two-dimensional surface descriptions that painted victims, not human beings. Television pictures, really, without the immediacy of live video.

Only when children crowded around us during our guided tours did I, or most of the other Western famine watchers, have a chance to actually touch anyone in the feeding camps. The children had amazing recuperative power. With regular meals of rice porridge and a high-energy goop made of milk, butter oil and sugar, they metamorphosed in a couple of weeks from immobile skeletons to giggling kids.

At the feeding camps these kids ran to be near foreigners. They wanted to hold hands. Sometimes four or five of them would try to touch one of my hands, each attempting to claim a finger. When they had a finger, they would throw their heads back, look up at me and smile. Back in my hotel we had discussed this hand-holding at some length. The children don't use toilet paper, we had said. Their cute little hands carry all kinds of diseases. One representative of the U.S. Information Service said at lunch at the Addis Ababa Hilton that his wife thought anyone who feared touching the children was a jerk.

In the feeding camps, with children bobbing around my knees, begging to touch my hands, sometimes I would let them hold my fingers. Sometimes I would not.

PHOTO BY BLAINE HARDEN



Sakarto and a hospital worker, who holds her dead baby

U.S. Grain Falls From the Sky Over Ethiopia

By Blaine Harden

Washington Post Foreign Service

SHIL AFAF, Ethiopia—On this treeless, flat-topped spine of mountain, a gaggle of British soldiers and Polish flyers soaks up the highland sun. Stripped to their shorts, greased with tropical sun oil, they recline on imported lawn chairs.

Behind them and the two snow-white Polish helicopters in which they came are the local grain carriers: 200 or so young highland men, whispering among themselves in Amharic, eyes searching the sky.

Dribbling down one side of the mountain is a crowd of about 2,500 peasants—women holding their babies, old men holding their walking sticks, adolescents holding hands—who have climbed up here for a seven-hour picnic of free food, free doctoring and a peek at some half-naked foreigners and their noisy flying machines.

For three days last week, this 8,528-foot-high pinnacle of rock and desiccated dirt was what the men in the lawn chairs call the "D-Zed," the "drop zone," the place where U.S. wheat falls out of the sky.

If there can be a hopeful, lighter side to Ethiopia's famine, it occurs in places like Shil Afaf in a well-practiced ritual of airborne food distribution, dirt-floor medical care and, for the British and the Poles, an African version of "Beach Blanket Bingo."

Here in this tiny village in the roadless highlands of northern Shewa province, about 170 miles north of Addis Ababa, famine has not quite arrived. Rain has failed here for two years, not three, as in the highlands farther north in Welo and Tigray provinces.

In this pocket of subsistence farmers, there is still some seed grain that has not been eaten, still some oxen that have not been sold off or starved to death.

In Shil Afaf, the airdrop helps people who are hungry, but not starving, sick but not dying.

Debre Hasan, a rheumy-eyed old

woman from Shil Afaf, had been out wandering the highlands for three days, looking for food, when she heard that grain would come through the air to her home. She walked back and waited this week beside the D-Zed.

"I am happy and I am scared. I never saw an airplane landing," she said through a translator, pointing at the Polish helicopters.

The fat-bellied cargo planes that drop the grain, British Hercules and West German Transals, cannot land on this ¼-mile-long slice of mountain that juts up a half mile above a dried-up river bed. So the helicopters come out here first, arriving at 8 a.m. to deliver a load of people, including three members of the British Army's 47th Air Dispatch Squadron.

Before they settle into their lawn chairs, the soldiers lay out the drop zone with blue markers of nylon and unpack a field radio.

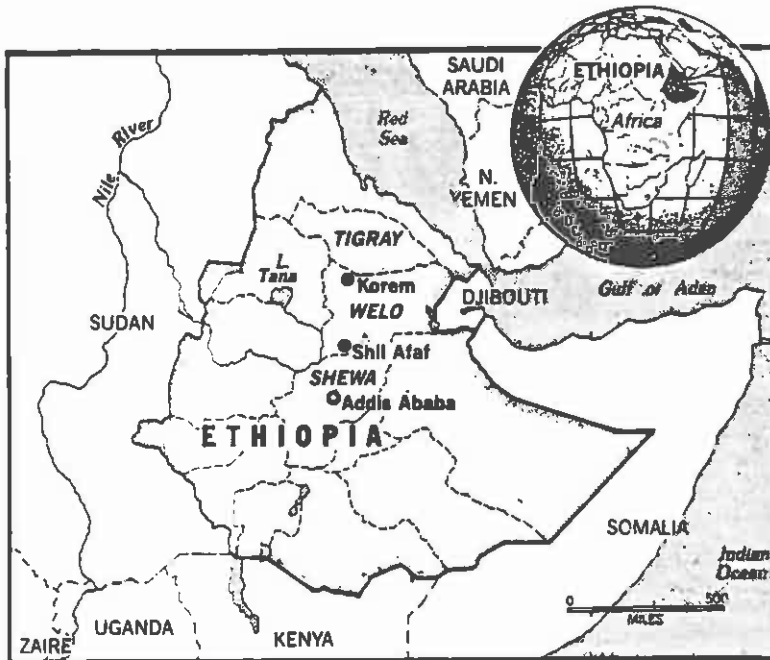
An hour later, a Hercules appears in the distance. It whooshes over the field first, sizing up the mountain top and circling back for the first drop.

With a silent, somewhat terrified local audience looking on, the Hercules passes at 130 miles an hour 15 feet above the ground. Inside the plane, two Royal Air Force crewmen push 2,200 pounds of grain over rollers out the open rear hatch. They wave.

Triple-wrapped in white plastic, 40 of the 55-pound bags hit the ground hard, tumbling end over end, with about five of them exploding in golden sprays of wheat.

The Hercules makes four such drops, a total of 18 tons, before heading back to pick up more grain in Addis Ababa. The plane makes four round trips daily. The German Transal, a smaller plane that has trouble finding this obscure village, makes two.

The airdrop, called Operation *Tesfa* (Amharic for "hope"), began Feb. 13. Designed to deliver large quantities of grain to mountainous areas, where the largest transport



BY BRAD WYE—THE WASHINGTON POST

Ethiopians Get Grain by Airdrop

AIRDROP. From A17

away from the clinic holding her father's hand, it was not clear that he would take her to a hospital or even if he knew what a hospital was.

At 3:15 p.m., after the last drop, the British and the Poles folded up their lawn chairs, pulled on their flight suits and fired up the helicopters.

As the machines lifted away from Shil Afaf, churning up a pall of dirt and ripped plastic bags, hundreds of highlanders sprinted for the drop zone and the scattered wheat. Everyone, children and old people alike, carried a sprig of a bristly mountain weed called *chifrig*.

Back in the days when it rained and crops grew, these weeds were used to sweep up spilled grain.

vehicle is a mule, the project is a joint operation of the governments of Ethiopia, Poland, Great Britain, West Germany, the United States, Italy and medical volunteers from the private French organization, Doctors Without Borders. The British this week dropped their 5 millionth pound of grain.

After the first load of bags strikes the ground, British Army radio specialist Peter Edgington sends up the score. "That's 80 percent recoverable," he tells the Hercules pilot, eyeballing the number of bags that did not burst.

"We call these things Nepal free-drops," explains Army Sgt. Bob Szafran, shirtless, working on his two-month tan. "We did this job in Nepal in 1973 and 1980. The free-drop is by far the cheapest and fastest way to deliver food. We could use parachutes, but it slows us down and would cost too much. You see, even when the bags break, nothing is wasted. The people come out when we're done and pick up the food, grain by grain."

Yelling, "tollo, tolo" (which means, roughly, "get the lead out"), Mengishu Wejebu, chief administrator for this district of Shewa, supervises the grain carriers as they collect intact bags between passes of the cargo planes. When the three-day operation is over, he will decide who gets how much food.

Off to the side of the drop zone, about 75 yards from the sun bathers' chairs, is the medical clinic, a hut of sticks and eucalyptus branches erected by locals since the helicopters landed.

In the hut, four nurses—one French, one Italian, two Polish—and one Polish doctor tend to the two lines, one of children, one of adults, that tail away from the hut several hundred people long.

"It is not so bad here," said Mercedes Fernandes, a French nurse who has spent four months among the malnourished and dying at Korem feeding center, about 200 miles north of here. "The babies are so big here. For me it is almost a holiday."

A holiday, though, only by comparison to the northern camps, where tens of thousands are near death.

The parade of patients here does not present the ravages of malnutrition. Only three babies out of 100 were severely underweight. Rather, it shows the appalling normality of illness in these highlands.

Among the 200 patients seen, most have parasites in their stomachs, eye infections and skin diseases. There was a suppurating sore on a 3-year-old's face; a woman with an umbilical hernia the size of a grapefruit; a girl with a large goiter; a man with elephantiasis of the legs, a child with her nose eaten away by a kind of tuberculosis that has disappeared in the developed world.

And there was Lababa Kbrete, 12, who had a bean in her ear. At least the bean had once been in her ear. Now the bean was gone, said nurse Fernandes. In its place, the nurse said, was an infection that would destroy Kbrete's ear unless she was taken to a hospital for

See AIRDROP, A19, Col. 1

THE WASHINGTON POST

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 1985

Ethiopia Ousts 52,500 From Famine Relief Site

Troops Burn Camp; Fears Raised for Weak, Sick Evacuees Now on Long Trek

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, April 30—This country's largest famine relief camp, with a population of 60,000 people—many sick and weakened by malnutrition—was burned and evacuated by force during the past three days, according to two senior western relief officials who visited the camp today.

These officials said that, beginning Sunday and ending today, Ethiopian Army troops herded more than 50,000 famine victims—including several thousand children under 5 years of age—out of Ibnet, a camp located in Ethiopia's central highlands, and then burned the grass huts in which the people had been living.

The camp, which on Saturday had been a general feeding, child nutrition and medical center run by four private relief agencies and the Ethiopian government, was by today a blackened plain, where a few stray cows wandered amid mounds of ashes and shards of broken pottery, according to the officials who flew to Ibnet this morning.

The officials said that from an airplane they saw thousands of people walking from Ibnet in long lines that snaked along dirt roads and dried river valleys. About one-third of them reportedly are heading east, through some of Ethiopia's roughest mountain terrain, to Welo and Tigray, the regions hit hardest last year

by drought. Those headed for Welo must walk three to six days; for Tigray, up to 14 days.

"These people are fairly undernourished and a lot of them were not fit to undertake this journey. A number of them will certainly die," said one of the relief officials.

According to both officials, who said they talked with representatives of the Ethiopian government and private relief workers at the camp, the evacuation was ordered by leaders of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, who under Ethiopia's Marxist system govern the Gondar region where Ibnet is located.

Beside the approximately 52,500 people who were sent away from Ibnet on foot, the relief officials said another 4,500 were flown west over the past four days in Soviet transport helicopters to resettlement areas in the fertile western end of Gondar near the Sudanese border. These people had volunteered for resettlement, the officials said.

"For the others, there was no opposition to the Army. They are a very incredibly docile people," one of the relief officials said.

The party's reason for clearing out the camp, the relief officials said they were told, was to allow the residents to take advantage of recent rains by returning to their homes and beginning to farm. Party officials reportedly said that evacuation of the camp would end overcrowding that could spread disease and that those leaving Ibnet were strong and able-bodied. The party officials also reportedly said that the evacuees had been given enough grain for their trip home and that they would find seed and farm implements in their own region.

Nurses working for Concern, an Irish relief organization that fed and cared for children of

See ETHIOPIA, A18, Col. 1

Ethiopia Clears 52,500 From Relief Camp in 3 Days

ETHIOPIA, From A1

Ibnet, disputed the party's account, the officials said. They said the nurses reported that hundreds of "very sick children" disappeared between Sunday and today. The nurses counted 17 bodies yesterday along the road leading east from the camp, one relief official said.

Specialists on the Ethiopian famine here in Addis Ababa, said that Welo region, the destination of many of the evacuees, remained an inhospitable area with little seed, limited supplies of farm instruments and almost no food—except in feeding centers like the camp the walkers were forced to leave.

"In one sense, the decision to move people out of the camp is a sound one. It is time to return some people to their homes. The crowding at Ibnet made people vulnerable to disease," one official said last night. "Where I fault them is the lack of preparation, the lack of humanity. To

come in and move so many people so fast is pretty ruthless."

Most relief officials interviewed for this story, who declined to be named for fear of being expelled from Ethiopia, have made frequent visits to Ibnet in the past four months, as the camp has swelled from 2,000 residents in January to 60,000 by the end of last week. It is only in the past month that Ibnet has become the largest famine-relief camp in Ethiopia.

Repeated efforts today to contact a spokesman for the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which oversees famine relief here, were unsuccessful.

The following account of the evacuation of Ibnet is based on separate interviews with the two officials who flew to the camp and spent the day there interviewing relief workers and government officials.

The decision of the Workers' Party was announced on Saturday at 3 p.m.

Relief workers were called to-

gether from Concern, World Vision, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Party officials announced they were going to close the camp, and that from Saturday no one in the camp from Welo or Tigray was to receive any food, water or medical care.

This order applied to many of the 5,000 children in Concern's intensive feeding program. Some of those children were severely malnourished and received up to six meals a day of high-protein porridge.

Army guards were posted to keep camp residents away from the five water wells and one 3,500-gallon water tank that Concern had built at Ibnet since January when famine victims started to arrive.

On Sunday, the Army, which has a base nearby, moved in and began ordering people to leave. Residents were told to carry what they could. As soon as they left their corn-stalk

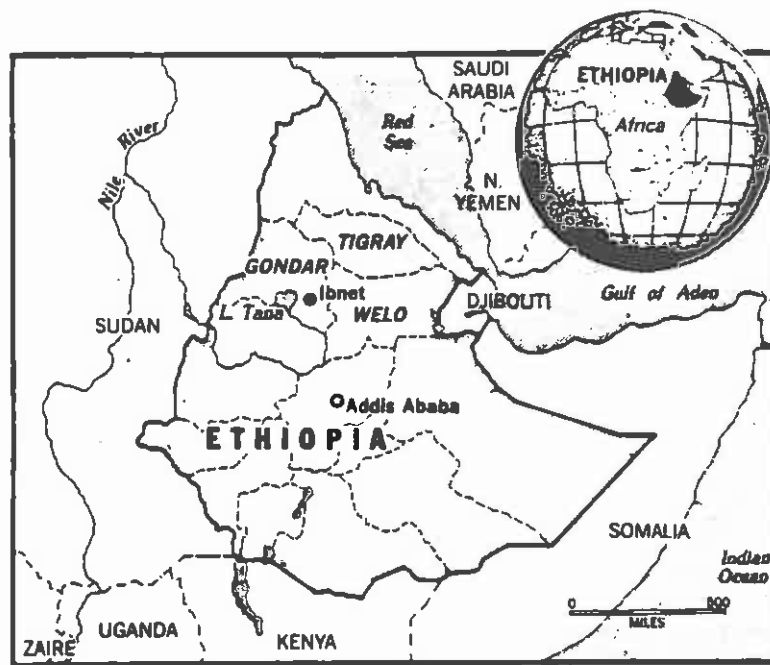
huts, soldiers set the shacks afire with torches.

Once the evacuation began, guards were posted on the road heading east to make sure that no one came back.

Yesterday, the soldiers came again and the camp was emptied of all but about 10,000 people. Evacuees from the surrounding Gondar region dispersed in many directions. Those from Welo and Tigray, about 37 percent of the camp's population, walked east up into the mountains.

Today, the rest of the camp was emptied, except for about 3,000 people who were incapable of walking.

The soldiers did not burn any of the \$80,000 worth of kitchens, feeding shelters, infirmaries or stores that had been erected during recent months to care for the people of Ibnet. After the evacuation, however, there were more buildings than the remaining residents and relief workers needed.



At Ibnet this morning, in a meeting with the senior staff from Concern, the two visiting relief officials from Addis Ababa were told that many of the famine victims out walking in the mountains did not

have enough clothing, food or reserves of strength for a long journey.

The relief officials said the Concern staff predicted that as many as half of the walkers could die.

THE WASHINGTON POST

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 1985

Ethiopia Allows Evacuees to Return to Camp

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, May 8—International relief workers at Ibnet, the highland feeding camp that Ethiopian soldiers burned and forcibly evacuated last week, today began taking back and feeding famine victims who had been ordered out of the camp and told to walk to their homes, several days away.

About 10,000 of the camp's original 60,000 residents are expected to walk back to Ibnet within the next couple of days. They will be registered by the Ethiopian

government, given medical care and will be allowed to rebuild the grass huts that torch-carrying soldiers burned to the ground during a three-day operation that provoked international outrage last week.

It was also learned that Congress-imposed restrictions on the use of U.S. aid here had been lifted, permitting some of the money to be used for projects defined as developmental rather than being narrowly limited to feeding programs.

The resettling of Ibnet marks a complete about-face by Ethiopia's Marxist military government. It had first reacted to a Washington Post story about the evacuation by

calling it a "fabrication," then issued a denial of "the alleged burning" of the camp.

But this week Ethiopia's leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, announced in a meeting with a senior U.N. relief official that he not approve of or agree with what happened at Ibnet.

Since Mengistu's meeting Monday with Kurt Jansson, the U.N. assistant secretary general for emergency operations in Ethiopia, the government here has gone out of its way to be agreeable.

"We have gone full circle," Jansson said today. "One has to recognize that having

See ETHIOPIA, A36, Col. 1

A36 THURSDAY, MAY 9, 1985 ...

Ethiopians Told to Return To Camp

ETHIOPIA, From A1

made this mistake—which was made at a local level—they have now taken very quick corrective action."

Tuesday night Dawit Wolde Giorgis, the top Ethiopian official for famine relief, who had first reacted to news accounts of Ibnet by angrily denying them, signed an agreement with an American relief organization called World Vision. The agreement encourages the evacuees to return to the camp until arrangements can be made for the "safest possible assisted passage to their village."

The agreement, Jansson said, allows famine victims to stay at Ibnet until the government, working with private relief agencies, can organize transportation, medical supplies, seeds, tools and food for their return to farms in the drought-ravaged central highlands. Jansson said the government has promised "a more orderly process of return that will be done professionally."

The evacuation of the camp, ordered by local leaders of the Workers Party of Ethiopia in Gondar region where the camp is located, was criticized by relief officials at the camp who said that tens of thousands of residents, many of them weakened by hunger, were sent from the camp without adequate food or clothing.

With the government's coopera-

tion now assured, the primary concern of relief officials here is finding the people who were forced out. Jansson said that about 10,000 are believed to have stayed within a three-hour walk of the camp.

The whereabouts of the rest—along with how many there are—is much less clear. Jansson said 2,000 have gone to the southern end of nearby Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile River. Another 5,000 to 6,000 are thought to have gone 50 miles away to camps along the Tekeze River in mountainous Welo Province, to the east of Ibnet. Up to 2,000 others have found their way to government feeding stations in Welo.

The number of people forced out of the camp first was estimated, by relief officials who ran Ibnet, to be about 52,000. Jansson said today, however, that a new count found that 32,000 to 38,000 were evacuated in three days.

International attention drawn to Ibnet appears to have pushed Mengistu into making a significant new commitment to using Ethiopian trucks to help unclog a transportation bottleneck that has tied up huge amounts of food at the country's ports.

More than 60 percent of the 332,000 tons of food delivered since January has not been distributed.

Mengistu and Jansson today flew to Aseb, Ethiopia's largest port, where about 100,000 tons of food is waiting for trucks.

A freak rain storm Sunday destroyed about 5,000 tons of the food, enough to feed about 50,000 people for a year on minimum rations. Unless the backlog of food is moved quickly, officials fear much more food will be spoiled.

At Aseb today, according to Jansson, Mengistu promised he would divert enough government-owned, nonmilitary trucks to almost triple the amount of food trucked from the port each day.

THE WASHINGTON POST

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1985

Famine's Fragile Survivors

Ethiopia's 150,000 Orphans Face Uncertain Future

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia—When the cows were all dead and the food was gone, Mohammed Nure Sirage, who is 12 years old and has jug ears, walked with his father to the famine camp at Bati.

They planned to spend a night and bring home grain for Mohammed's three younger brothers. But Mohammed's father never walked home. He complained of pain in his stomach and head; then he died.

His death made Mohammed and his brothers four of the estimated 150,000 children orphaned by Ethiopia's famine.

With this year's famine's death toll less than from last year's catastrophic numbers and with rain returning to much of the country, the crisis in Ethiopia is evolving away from the fight to keep people from dying to figuring out what to do with those who did

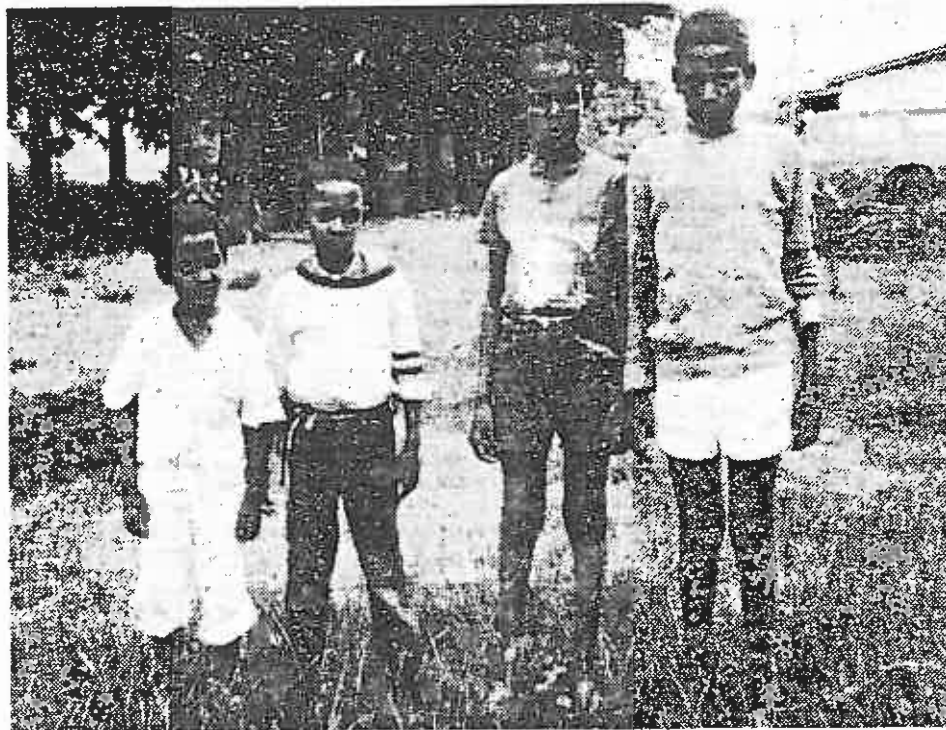
not die. The most fragile of these survivors are the orphans.

After his father died, Mohammed took the grain home himself in bags on his back, a day's walk in the roadless Ethiopian mountains. His mother had died three years earlier, just before drought set in. His pregnant stepmother had gone off to her home village to have her baby and never returned. His aunt, who helped take care of the family, died, too, before Mohammed made it home.

By himself, in a village where children and old people were dying of starvation and everyone was fleeing to feeding centers, Mohammed took care of his brothers, walking two days a week back and forth from Bati, making a fire and boiling grain in a big pot. After a month, he gave up and brought his brothers down to Bati.

The Sirage brothers all live now in a makeshift orphanage on the outskirts of

See ORPHANS, A31, Col. 1



BY BLAINE HARDEN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Mohammed Nure Sirage, right, and his brothers now live in an orphanage outside Addis Ababa.

Famine's Orphans Face Uncertain Future

ORPHANS, From A1

Addis Ababa. In an institution that until last year was a reeducation center for city prostitutes, they attend school, eat five meals a day and watch television on Thursday nights. Before the famine, they did not know television existed.

They are the lucky ones, an intact family, with Mohammed, the manchild elder brother, keeping watch. At the orphanage there are other children—survivors of Bati, the camp that mushroomed late last year to 30,000 persons, with a death rate of up to 130 a day—who have no idea where any of their relatives are, who cannot remember life before the feeding camp, who dream at night about how the famine and all the death they have seen is somehow their fault.

Degie (last name unknown), a nomad orphan who looks about 5 years old, steals razor blades, safety pins and slivers of soap and hides them in his pockets. He beats up other children and will not be embraced. He does not speak.

Hassan Ibrahim, 12, also a nomad orphan, says his father and mother are dead. Still, he says his parents would come visit him at the orphanage, except that they don't like him.

Waro Robi Hussien, 13, weighed 26.4 pounds and could not walk when she first arrived at the orphanage four months ago. At Bati she lived outside the camp's tents, eating a bowl of flour every other day. Now she weighs nearly 60 pounds and is quick to smile. She is a clinger, a holder of hands, a tireless hugger. Questions about her parents make her angry. She says her parents abandoned her when the famine started. She adds: "I don't care where they are."

In Ethiopia, as in much of Africa, kinship is the one reliable insurance policy peasants have against destitution. When kinship is lost, as it has been for famine orphans, many of whom do not know their family name and cannot recall the name of their home village, the only recourse is the government, the church (primarily the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) and private relief

agencies. None of them now is prepared to feed, educate, house and bring up 150,000 malnourished, sick, traumatized and, in many cases, crippled children.

"Whether we like it or not, whether we can handle it or not, we have so many needy children," says Mengisha Haile, head of the Ethiopian government's Department of Social Welfare. "Our decision, for the moment, is to take care of these children within Ethiopia. We don't give children up for outside adoption in any massive numbers."

The government has two strategies for dealing with orphans. The first is to search for an orphan's extended family. If any relatives can be found, Mengisha says the government will assist them with free food. This is being done at large feeding centers such as Mekelle in Welo region. There, as part of a government resettlement program that has moved about 450,000 peasants away from the drought-prone highlands to the southwest of Ethiopia, an attempt is being made to match up orphans with relatives about to be resettled.

Mengisha said, however, that the government is having limited success finding the relatives, especially of very young children who do not know who they are.

The second strategy is to build orphanages and expand existing ones. The government, poor in the best of years and severely squeezed by the cost of famine relief and the resettlement, has appealed to international donors for money.

The appeal for outside money to support government orphanages, however, seems headed for the same problems as the government's request for support for resettlement. Most western donors, with the United States taking the lead, have kept their money out of resettlement, criticizing it as ill-planned, motivated by a desire to depopulate the rebel-controlled north and, in some cases, not voluntary. Although they won't say so publicly, donors here worry how children would be brought up in orphanages

bankrolled by the West but run by the Marxist military government here.

If the government's showcase orphanage, the Revolutionary Ethiopia Children's Village, located on a barren plain about 120 miles south of Addis Ababa, is any indication of how the regime intends to raise famine orphans, western support for orphanages seems likely to be held up by ideology.

At the front gate of the orphanage, behind a painting of children holding flowers and smiling into the sun, is a large banner that says, in Amharic: "We growing children are determined to follow our communist father comrade Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam's method."

Built at the request of Mengistu, Ethiopia's military leader, for children of the country's war dead, the orphanage is spread out in five self-contained schools on a 23,000-acre site. It was paid for with a \$13 million grant from the Swedish government and \$1 million from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The campus-style schools and dormitories are distinctly western in appearance. In one of the schools, for 550 children ages 6 months to 7 years, there are kindergarten-like playrooms not unlike those in suburban Washington elementary schools. The walls and floors are painted in cheerful reds and yellows and decorated with children's crayon drawings of houses, ponies and trees. There are chests full of rubber ducks, Raggedy Ann dolls and plastic fish. In one classroom there is a dollhouse with paper people watching television.

The schools, dormitories and cafeterias, however, are festooned with signs and pictures one would not find in Fairfax or Montgomery counties. On nearly every wall there are pictures and paintings of Mengistu. Some of them, such as the one in a cafeteria for orphans under 7, are 10 feet tall. And there are slogans in English along the rose-trellised paths between buildings: "Today's students are tomorrow's socialism supporters," "Chil-

dren's Village is the expansion of communism" and "We shall combat all antisocialist tendencies."

Debebe Alemayehu, 13, whose father was killed five years ago fighting Eritrean rebels in Asmara in northern Ethiopia, was in the first group of war orphans to come to the Children's Village. Like most of the other children, he is not really an orphan. His mother is alive in Addis Ababa. But Debebe says she volunteered him to come to the orphanage to get a good education.

The boy attends school six hours a day and plays sports in the afternoon. Next year, when he turns 14, he will work afternoons in the fields that surround the orphanage. For three hours each Saturday morning, he attends political education class. In that class, he says he has learned that since the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia "everyone is educated, paid and working." Asked about the United States, he says he has been told that Ronald Reagan is like Ethiopia's former emperor, Haile Selassie, "an oppressor."

Meskerem Getachew, also 13, has been at the Children's Village one year. Her father died in the eastern desert town of Jijiga in 1980 fighting the Somalis and her mother volunteered Meskerem for the orphanage. She wants to be a doctor because "there are so many who are suffering." In her classes and on government television she has been learning about the international famine-relief effort.

"The Soviet Union and the East Germans give food," she says. "And African countries give medicine. No other country has helped."

Asked what she has heard about the United States, the largest food donor, she recalls hearing that Ethiopia and the United States fought a



DEGIE

... nomad orphan steals, won't speak

war recently and Ethiopia won. Since the revolution, she says, life has improved dramatically.

"Before, we did not have enough ammunition. Now we have enough to fight our enemies," Meskerem says. "We don't have to beg."

The Ethiopian government planned five years ago to build three or four large orphanages along the lines of the Children's Village, but did not do so for lack of money. According to the Department of Social Welfare, the plan now is to use international donations to build many smaller orphanages, each for about 500 children.

International relief organizations in Ethiopia will not comment publicly about the political training served up in the Children's Village or in the new orphanage outside Addis Ababa for children from Bati. Instead, they argue that it makes no sense to place orphans in institu-

tions where they will be cut off from the culture of their country.

"This government is very supportive of institutions. What we would like is some kind of foster parents program with famine victims who have lost children linking up with orphans," says Jerry Salolie, director here of the U.S. chapter of Save the Children.

"We are not all that keen on spending our money on buildings," Salolie says. "We would rather give money and assistance to foster parents and orphans living in the countryside to help them secure a better life that is not totally alien from the world they know."

The Ethiopian government says that while the foster-parent idea is new here, it may be adopted as a "supplemental strategy." The government is also countenancing a plan by Enku Kebede, an Ethiopian-born social worker from Boston, to build an orphanage near Addis Ababa that would house 150 to 500 children living as families in a cluster of small cottages.

As the government begins to clear out feeding camps, sending families back to their farms to resume their lives, the orphan problem is likely to become more acute. There won't be any place for them to live.

At the new orphanage on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, which was designed for 100 children but will soon swell to a population of 500, the teacher in charge, Alamayehu Habtemariam, says famine orphans are the most obedient children he has ever seen.

"Their primary need is to live," he says. "They are looking at us as father and mother. If we tell them to do something, they will do it immediately. They are afraid we will throw them out."

Special correspondent Diana Cushing contributed to this report.

THE WASHINGTON POST

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 1985

Nairobi Suburb Takes Up Arms

Robber Gangs Terrorize Native and Foreign Rich

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

KAREN, Kenya—This is how Anthony V. Church, master of Keepers, a horse farm in this suburb of Nairobi, gets ready for bed.

First, he steps outdoors to look in on the night watchman, making sure the man has his whistle, his horn, his shield, his bow and arrow, his *rungu* (a wooden staff designed to knock heads) and that he is awake. He then returns to his house, draws the curtains, switches on the exterior security spotlights and locks all the windows and doors, including two hallway doors separating his bedroom from the front door.

In his bedroom, he checks the battery level on his bedside shortwave radio, which he uses to communicate with a vigilante syndicate of 10

neighbors, all of whom have vowed, when a coded alarm is broadcast, to come running day or night with their guns loaded.

Finally, he removes his double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun from his gun safe, loads it and leans it against the wall beside his bed, just under the silent-alarm button that, when pressed, dispatches a truckload of *rungu*-swinging private guards to Keepers within five minutes. Leaning against the wall beside the shotgun is a steel-tipped Masai spear.

Still, Church, who last year emptied his shotgun into two knife-wielding robbers as they burst into his bedroom, complains that he is not sleeping soundly these days. And he is not alone.

One of Nairobi's periodic waves of gang robbery.
See NAIROBI, A22, Col. 1



BY BLAINE HARDEN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Anthony V. Church gets ready for bed in Karen.

Robber Gangs Turn Nairobi Suburb Into Armed Camp

NAIROBI, From A1

beries has created here in Karen in recent months. Break-ins by gangs of up to 30 young men, armed with *pangas* (a kind of machete), axes, crowbars and large stones, have become an almost nightly event. Typically, doors are battered open with stones in the middle of the night, a few gang members rush to the bedrooms and hold *pangas* to the throats of homeowners in night attire while their associates flee with stereo and video equipment.

In the past two weeks, these robberies have been tainted by what longtime Karen residents say is an unprecedented level of violence. On May 24, an 82-year-old man and his daughter were beaten severely by thieves in search of guns. Finley McNaughton remains in a Nairobi hospital with two broken arms.

Nine nights later, a British architect, his wife and a security guard were shot and killed by a gang member with a high-powered rifle. Five persons, including two robbers, have been killed in Karen in the past three months.

Gang robberies and suburban gunplay last week pushed Kenya's President Daniel arap Moi to order police to "bring this undesirable situation to an end." Police in Karen have beefed up patrols, a private security company here has ordered bulletproof vests for its guards, and Karen residents say that now, as never before, they fear the coming of night.

"It has gotten to such a pitch that it is very difficult to relax and sleep," says Church, 46, owner of a safari tour company in Nairobi. His house has been attacked five times

by *panga* gangs since 1982. "Every time there is a squeak in the house, one pops awake and reaches for the shotgun."

This horsy suburb of well-trimmed hedges, well-oiled English saddles and well-heeled expatriates, white Kenyans and black Kenyan government officials draws its name from the Danish Baroness Karen von Blixen. She lived here a half century ago and, under the pen name Isak Dinesen, painted idyllic word pictures of what then was a 6,000-acre highland coffee farm in the shadow of the Ngong Hills about 12 miles outside Nairobi.

"Up in this high air you breathed easily, drawing in a vital assurance and lightness of heart," the baroness wrote in her famous book, "Out

of Africa." "In the highlands you woke up in the morning and thought: Here I am, where I ought to be."

That, of course, was before the *panga* gangs. One 60-year-old woman who has been "done" by the gangs twice in the past 10 days, and who refuses to allow her name to be published for fear of a third, revenge attack, says she now wakes up in the morning in her Karen home exhausted from a long night's fretting.

"About an hour after dark, I am so afraid I can hardly swallow my food," says the woman, a British expatriate horse breeder who, with her husband, has lived for 26 years in East Africa. "I've got two guards, five dogs, a silent-alarm security button, sirens and flashing lights on the roof, but after a couple hours at night in this house, I get this panicky feeling I've got to get out."

Latter-day devotees of Isak Dinesen—whose book was just filmed here—have had to make their own adjustments to Karen's crime problem. For the film, a big-budget Universal Pictures production directed by Sydney Pollack and starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, security was extremely tight. The set was ringed with security patrols. A 5,000-volt electric fence was built around Anthony Church's farm, which boarded 160 horses and oxen used in the film.

The affluence and topography of Karen, with its rolling hills and sprawling estates, makes it a particularly attractive target for rob-

