The Hospital at Uqhd

The *International Review* has already published several accounts of tasks undertaken in the Yemen by the ICRC. The following information concerns the hospital which has been set up in the desert.

It is now several months since the establishment of the field hospital at Uqhd in north-eastern Yemen, which is functioning effectively in spite at times of immense difficulties. In sending a medical team to aid the victims of a cruel civil war in this desolate region of the Yemen, the International Committee knew that its action was supplying an urgent need. It did not, however, imagine that the setting up of a modern field hospital would ever instil a new determination into the local population, namely the will to be healed. Men and women, who were accustomed to accepting suffering and death with resignation, are now arriving in their hundreds at Uqhd, drawn to the village with the red cross markings on white canvas.

The seven doctors and their assistants recruited by the Swiss Red Cross have in fact to deal with a veritable flood of patients. Needless to say they are being nearly swept off their feet. During the day they operate, give treatment, sound chests and bandage without a pause. Nearly every night they have to get up to receive one or more lorry loads of wounded and sick arriving from the fighting zones.

The most thorny problem is that of accommodating all these patients. Owing to lack of space, cases of contagious illness often
have to share the same tent with the war wounded. There are also many who have to lie on the ground itself.

However, in spite of the difficulties of supplying food and medicines, in spite of the shortage of tents and in spite of their fatigue, the members of the medical team led by Dr. Pidermann, who has replaced Dr. Schuster, fallen sick, are working with great devotion and find real satisfaction in their work as pioneers.

For those Yemenis who are seeing a doctor for the first time in their lives, any relief from suffering, each healing, is a matter for amazement. Their gratitude to the Red Cross doctors and nurses is most touching. A Bedouin woman, the victim of a bombing attack and from whom several shell fragments were extracted, never stopped clutching the hands of the nurse who was looking after her and kept on repeating through her pain: “Choukrane, choukrane!” (thank you! thank you!).

One night there arrived a young man of twenty, paralysed from chest to feet by a machine-gun bullet which had reached the spine. His case is desperate, but stretched out immobile on his camp bed, he finds the strength to smile at the doctors who, he believes, will succeed in healing him.

The speed with which the hospital’s pharmaceutical reserves are being depleted can be seen in this remarkable case. A Yemeni soldier suffering from bilharzia presented himself one morning to the polyclinic. To his great disappointment, he learnt that the appropriate medicine for his condition had run out. He left without saying a word, but returned the next day and to the surprise of the doctor he handed him a box of that particular medicine. Feverish, this man had covered more than sixty miles to fetch it from the small hospital of Najran, in Saudi Arabia.

A French journalist who had come to make a report on the hospital, spontaneously gave 500 grams of his own blood for a wounded man whose right leg had just been amputated.

These few following figures will give a fairly definite idea of the activity until December of the medical team delegated by the ICRC to Uqhd.
More than 800 sick have been treated at the polyclinic. Each of these receives a cardboard tag with a serial number, which enables the doctors immediately to identify those who return for a second or a third visit. This applies especially to those suffering from tuberculosis (an illness frequent in the Yemen) who present themselves twice a week to receive streptomycin injections.

The percentage of wounded does not exceed thirty per cent of the total number of patients. It is true that it was for the former above all that the ICRC hospital was intended, but the doctors soon realized that they could not accept some and refuse others. Both, in fact, are the direct or indirect victims of the conflict.

The number of patients hospitalized amounts to about 80, and men and women arrive daily to whom one had to say some time before, due to lack of space, to return one, two even three weeks later. This time they cannot be sent away again and they have been accommodated for better or for worse in native tents.

In spite of an interruption due to running out of medical oxygen, good use has been made so far of the "Clinobox". A dozen major operations have been performed in this miniature clinic, and there have been 16 cases of minor surgery. Figures given for the laboratory, itself also under canvas, mentions 350 analyses, whilst the X-ray apparatus was used 120 times.

The sand, which penetrates everywhere and constitutes one of the hospital's major problems, one day caused the X-ray machine to cease functioning. The system of switching from transistor to electronic setting had broken down. The medical mechanic and the hospital's wireless technicians then thought of replacing it purely and simply by a pocket torch battery. The X-ray apparatus is now working again as a result.

A case such as this, amongst dozens of others, illustrates the spirit of the Red Cross medical team, which, isolated as it is in the heart of the Arabian desert, has recourse to the most unexpected methods of improvisation in order not to disappoint a population which has placed all its hopes in it.

According to recent information, we would also mention that until now nearly 1500 wounded or sick have been cared for. Owing to a lack of additional beds, the number of hospitalized patients has scarcely increased recently, but is maintained at between 75 and 80,
which already exceeds the expected capacity. This obliges Red Cross personnel to sleep on the ground.

The "Clinobox," a veritable clinic in miniature, is made use of each day and 71 major operations under drugs have been carried out there. Figures recently sent to Geneva also mention 758 laboratory analyses and 195 X-rays.

One of the hospital's tasks is to train, within available means, native Yemeni male nurses. Three of these are at present following an elementary course, which will then enable them to propagate the essential rules of modern hygiene amongst their compatriots.

As has already been stated, most of the members of the medical team of Uqhd have been relieved. An aircraft of the Balair Company, chartered by the ICRC, left Geneva on January 25 for Najran via Jeddah. In addition to a considerable amount of equipment for the hospital, it carried seventeen persons, doctors and various assistants recruited by the Swiss Red Cross.

The return of the aircraft and the personnel relieved was arranged to take place on January 30. The new head doctor of the field hospital is Dr. Middendorp, who will be replaced in mid-February by Dr. de Puoz.

Mention should also be made of Mr. C. Ammann, head of the ICRC relief section, who visited Jeddah and Uqhd, in connection with supply and organization.

Medical teams

The two mobile teams, each consisting of a doctor and a nurse, returned to the hospital at Uqhd after having been in the interior of the Yemen.

Based on Walah in the fertile valley of Achoua, Dr. Müller treated 130 patients and sent about ten serious cases to the hospital. Dr. Piderman approached the fighting in the Jauf region. He gave treatment to more then 180 wounded and sick, about fifteen of whom are now at Uqhd. He took that opportunity of giving instruction and handing over medicines to the sole native male nurse, who, owing to the lack of a permanent doctor, is working in this area which is particularly exposed to bombing.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1} Plate.}\]
Mr. Rochat, the delegate of the ICRC, arriving at Washaa...

THE ICRC IN THE YEMEN

talking with Egyptian prisoners of war held in the fortress.

Photos Y. Debraine
Dr. Bartlett, of the medical team of the British Red Cross, giving treatment to the Yemeni population.

The delegates of the ICRC in the mountains of the Yemen.

Photos Y. Debraine
During the course of their mission, these two doctors were able to observe the very primitive sanitary conditions in which both civilians and military are living. The needs of the population are in fact so great that five hospitals, such as the one installed by the ICRC, would not be sufficient. That is to say that the action of assistance undertaken by the International Committee is but one lone furrow in fallow soil.

Three new mobile teams consisting of doctors and male nurses from the hospital recently went to the interior of the Yemen, at times close to the fighting zone, and gave treatment to all wounded and sick they met on their way.

Dr. Schuster, who has since returned to Switzerland for health reasons, traversed the Jauf region. Dr. Leuthold and Dr. Kuhl, for their part, carried out their mission of aid in the valley of Achoua.

In the western part of Royalist Yemen, the medical team composed of Dr. Bartlett and male nurse Plummer, generously placed at the ICRC’s disposal by the British Red Cross, is still at work in the neighbourhood of the Imam El Badr’s headquarters. Its task however had been too onerous and a new British doctor, Dr. Wilson Pepper, joined the team in January.

The problem of prisoners

Faithful to the spirit of the Conventions, as well as from the necessity of balancing its humanitarian action, the ICRC takes the greatest care to alleviate the conditions of prisoners of war, both Egyptian and Yemeni.

During the course of his mission in the Jauf region, Dr. Schuster distributed a considerable amount of relief to eleven Egyptian prisoners, held for the past seven months in a cave at Hagleh. This consisted of warm clothing, woollen slippers, blankets, vitamin flasks and cigarettes. Each prisoner was able in addition to write a letter for his family.

At Amleh, above the valley of Achoua, another twenty Egyptian prisoners were visited by Dr. Leuthold, who made a similar distribution and treated some of the sick.

1 Plate.
The problem of fourteen Egyptian prisoners of war held in Saudi Arabia at the Imam's request, was the subject of recent approaches by Mr. André Rochat, head of the ICRC mission, to the Saudi authorities. Audiences were accorded him, notably by King Saud and by the Prime Minister, Prince Faisal.

At Sanaa

At Sanaa, Republican capital of the Yemen, an important relief action has been undertaken on behalf of 800 war orphans. Assisted by the Yemeni Red Crescent, the two ICRC delegates, Mr. Charles de Blonay and Mr. Maurice Rouge, make a daily distribution to them of milk.

They are also concerning themselves with 148 children whose parents are fighting in the Royalist ranks and who are being held as hostages.

Mission of a Vice-President of the ICRC

Mr. Samuel Gonard, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross left Geneva on January 16, for the Middle East. He first visited Saudi Arabia and from there went to Uqhd in north Yemen to see the field hospital installed by the ICRC for the victims of the conflict in that country. His route took him to Sanaa, capital of the Arab Republic of the Yemen, where the ICRC is also represented by a delegation. During his journey Mr. Gonard was accompanied by Mr. Georg Hoffmann, delegate of the ICRC. We will be returning later to this important mission.