



OPERATION HELP



Operation Help

Final Report

March 15, 1973

Photographs by
James C. Hicks & Ron Dizon
Peace Corps Volunteers

**Abe S. Ashcanase
7605 Range Road
Alexandria, Virginia 22306-2425**

April 11, 2005

It has come to my attention that the Peace Corps Afghanistan Food For Work Volunteers who participated in Operation Help in 1972 were not recognized for their important work in alleviating the suffering of those who were the victims of a multiyear famine and drought condition in the country. Now, during the 2005 Peace Corps Afghanistan Reunion in Las Vegas, Nevada, I want to take the opportunity to remedy this oversight and to recognize your contribution to what was designated as one of the ten most successful USAID projects in the world in 1972.

As a result of mounting and sustained international pressure to solve the humanitarian problem of starvation and disease in Afghanistan, the U.S. Ambassador, Robert Neumann, met with Zahir Shah, the King of Afghanistan, to discuss what measures could be taken to help the people. After the meeting the Ambassador appointed me, the Assistant Director for Management for the USAID Mission to Afghanistan, to assist the Afghan government in another effort to feed the people and relieve their pain and suffering. The project became known as Operation Help.

After five failed attempts to solve the problem, it had become a crisis that required exceptional action and people who cared. You stepped forward as a volunteer, and your leadership made a difference. Your energy, determination and resourcefulness merit commendation. Your presence motivated your Afghan colleagues to achieve high levels of performance.

Our tasks were of immense proportion and the obstacles were many. We were forced to base planning on broad assumptions since there were no real estimates of how many people needed help and their location was vaguely determined. What we did know was that people were dying of starvation and disease was rampant. Nobody knows how many died. Management and logistical activities were carried out under extreme circumstances. Most roads were undeveloped, distances were great, communications were inadequate, facilities were nonexistent, time elements were restrictive and we had to move over some of the most difficult terrain in the world.

Through your initiative, your dedication, and your selflessness we overcame the challenges and gave life and renewed hope to the long-suffering population. Your devotion to duty and your willingness to give of yourself reflects great credit on you as an individual and on the Peace Corps. Your actions reflect the best traditions of our country. You have earned the gratitude of many and can be proud of the standards of excellence you achieved.

A person, in their lifetime, is seldom given an opportunity to save even one life. In your case, with your commitment, compassion, and high sense of purpose you saved many thousands of lives.

Many years have passed and I still think warmly of having had the chance to serve with such an outstanding group of Peace Corps volunteers and great Americans. I offer my heartfelt thanks to you for helping to make Operation Help a success and for a job well done. We solved the problem and I am proud of your participation.

Sincerely,


Abe S. Ashcanase
Foreign Service Officer (Retired)



HIS MAJESTY MOHAMMED ZAHIR SHAH
KING OF AFGHANISTAN

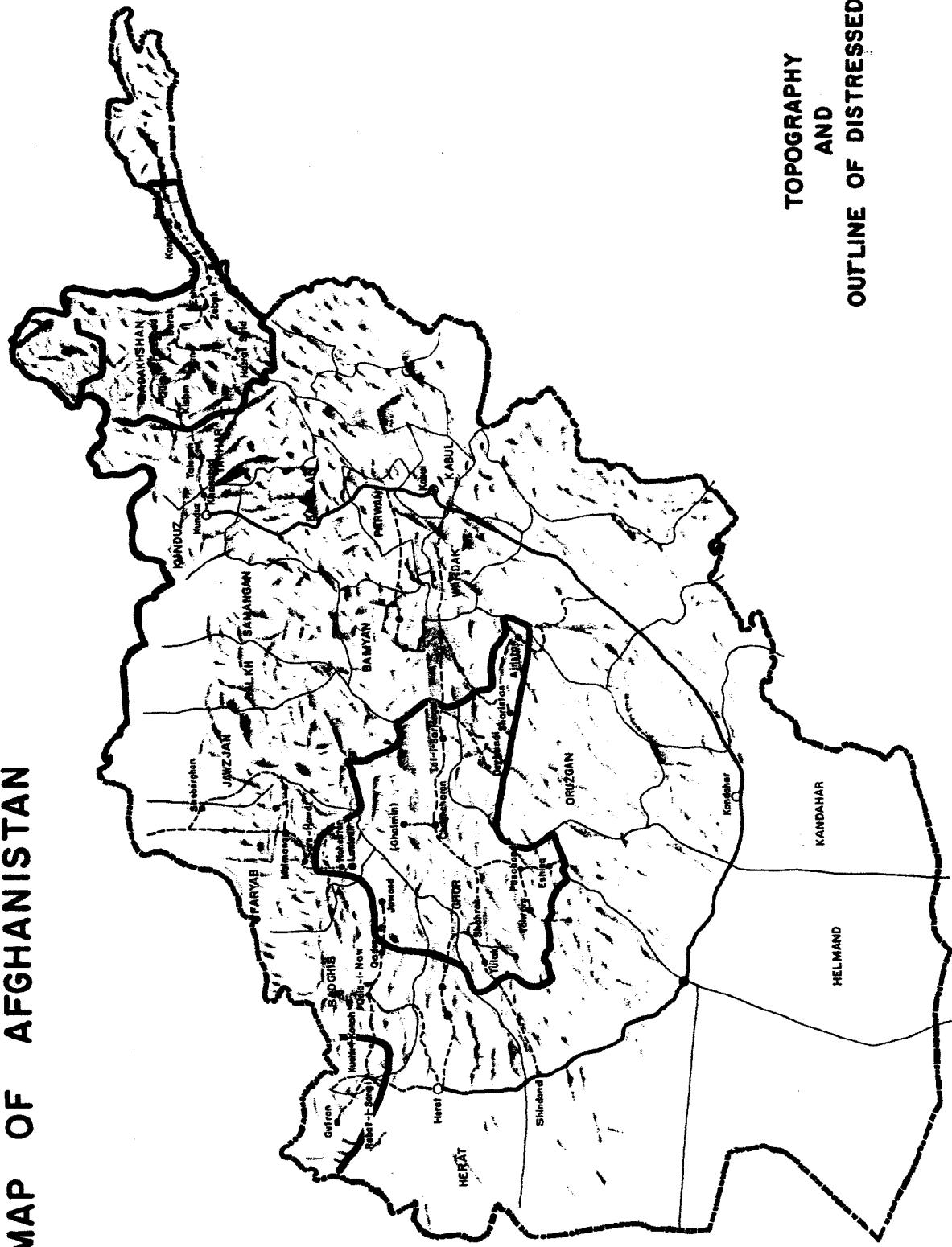


HER MAJESTY HOMAIRA
QUEEN OF AFGHANISTAN

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MAP OF AFGHANISTAN



TOPOGRAPHY
AND
OUTLINE OF DISTRESSED AREAS

"OPERATION HELP"

Life was "Operation Help's" concern and Operation Help gave people 235,064 of them renewed hope for survival.

The pastoral peoples of the nearly inaccessible mountain regions of Afghanistan were always proudly self-sufficient until an unprecedented two-year drought, followed by one of the worst winters in the country's history, left them hungry and destitute.

The stricken people, food gone, animals dead, with little or no seed to plant, mortgaged their future crops, or sold their land for food. In no case was the potential of the land fully realized. Many migrated to urban areas, where they thought there would be food and life would be easier. There they found themselves without useful skills and were forced to return to their homes to face further disease, starvation, and sometimes even death.

The mountainous terrain and marginal roads limited accessibility. Short distances, under these conditions, became long. Time was critical in both planning and operations because of the impending winter. In the Central areas, changes in weather could have made the needy people inaccessible until the late Spring. In Badakhshan, certain passes had already been closed by snowfall before the program started.

Despite the efforts of the Government and the international community the affected areas were unable to recover from the natural calamities.

But there was will and determination. The Government took the special measures necessary to meet the needs of the people. They gave the highest priority to "Operation Help," an unprecedented effort, and moved with speed and efficiency to solve the problem.

The result hope for survival to 235,064 people.



(Opposite) A scrap of mutton fat, found in the street, gave hope of another day of survival for this young man.



Another, less fortunate, pleaded for food and then collapsed from hunger. He was later given food and recovered.

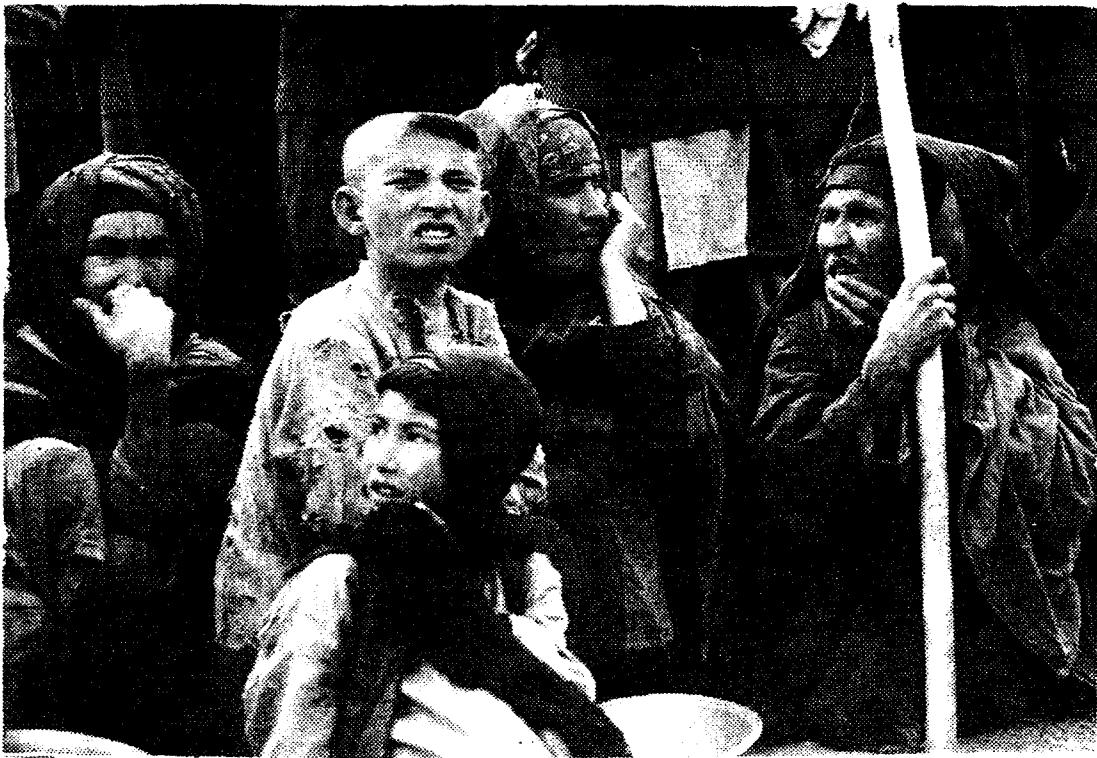






Need was written on the faces of these proud people. Everyone was affected. No one was immune.





Hunger, starvation, and disease held sway. Wives were widowed and children orphaned.





Men sought work in towns, but met frustrations and disappointments because they lacked city skills.





**Families left behind
struggled for survival and
awaited the return of their
men.**



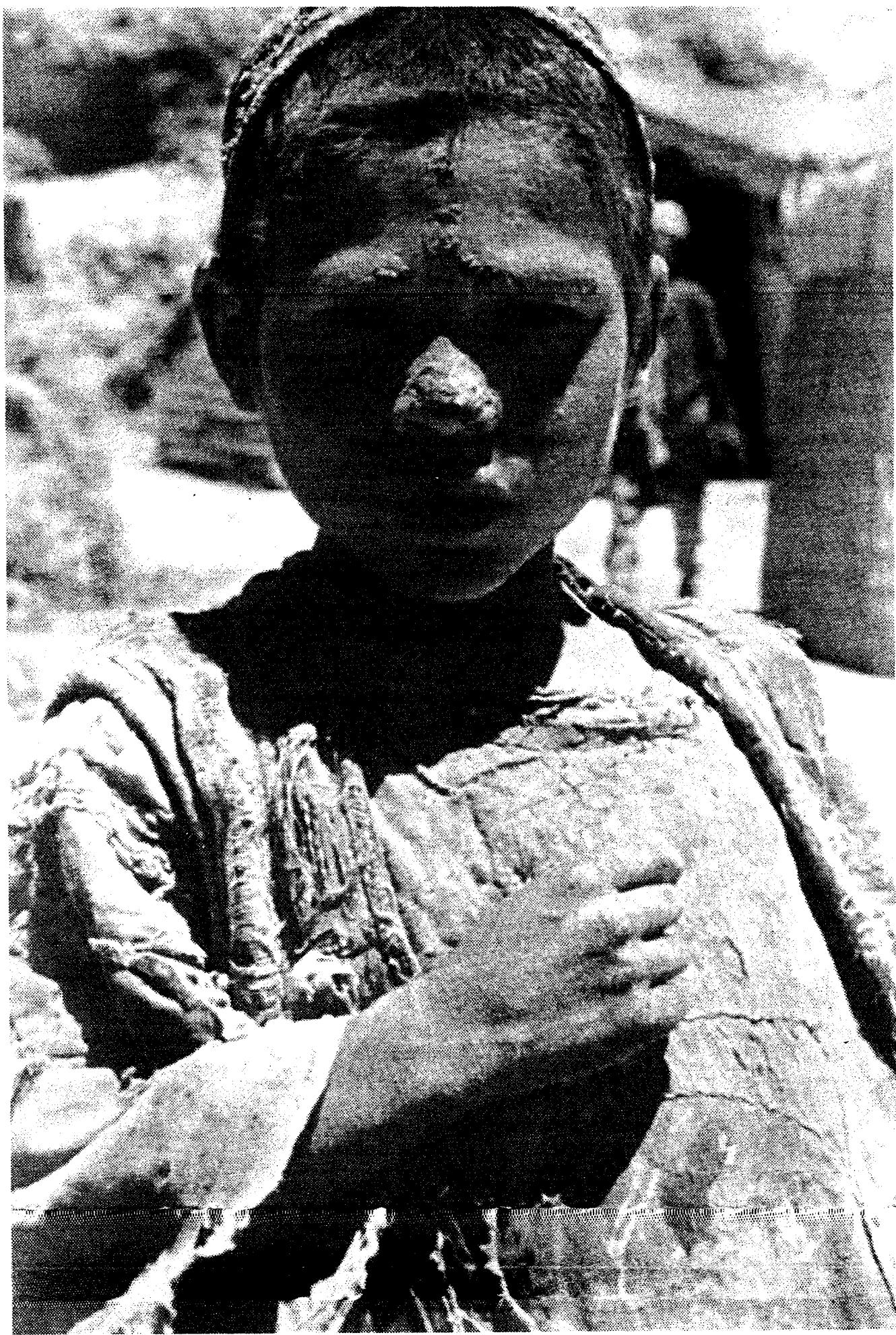


Shortages of seed, large scale sales of land and mortgaging of crops often forced families to move into towns in the quest for food. Success was negligible and some of the displaced families were forced to become cave dwellers.





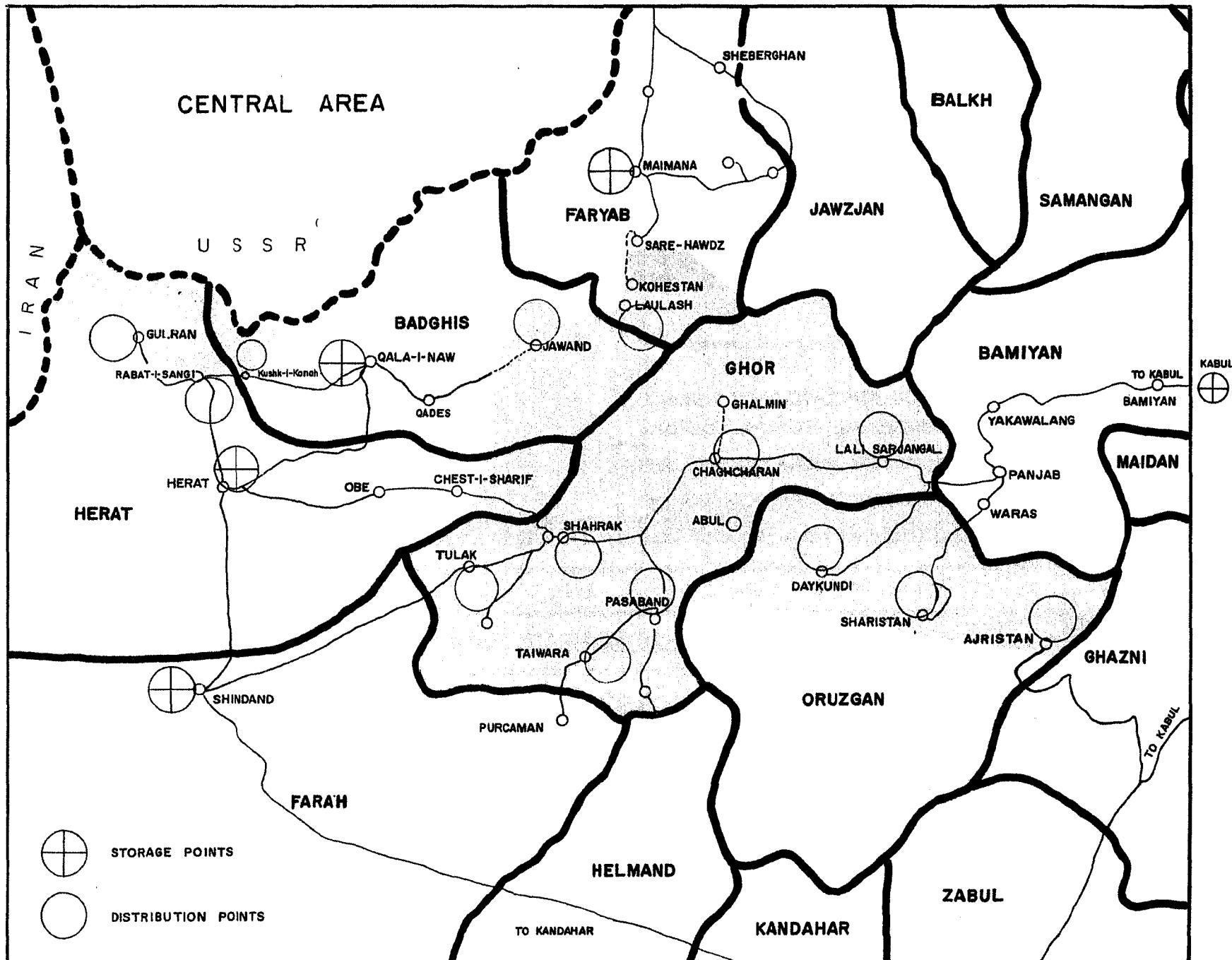
Their flocks decimated, the nomads especially suffered from hunger, malnutrition and disease.



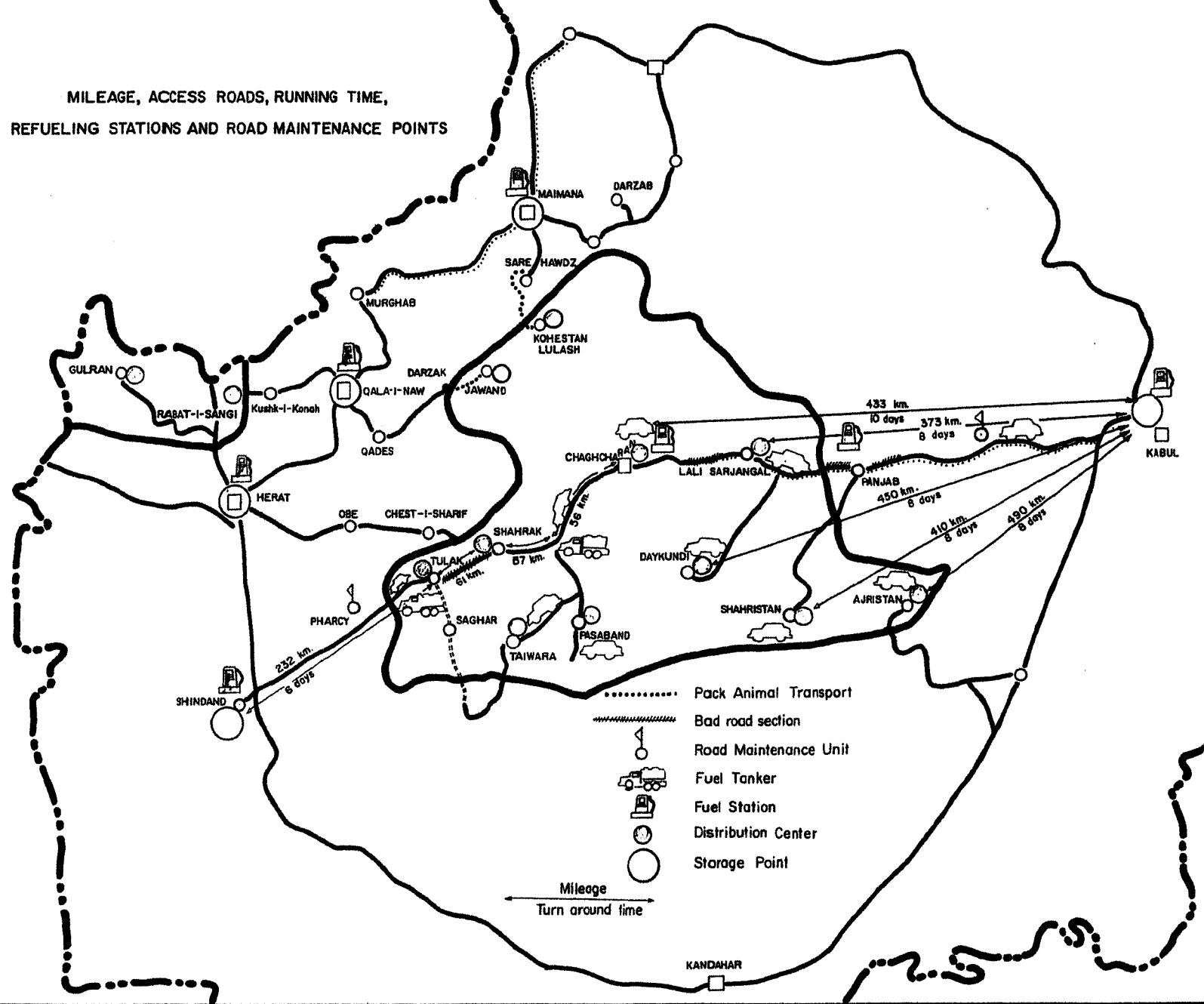


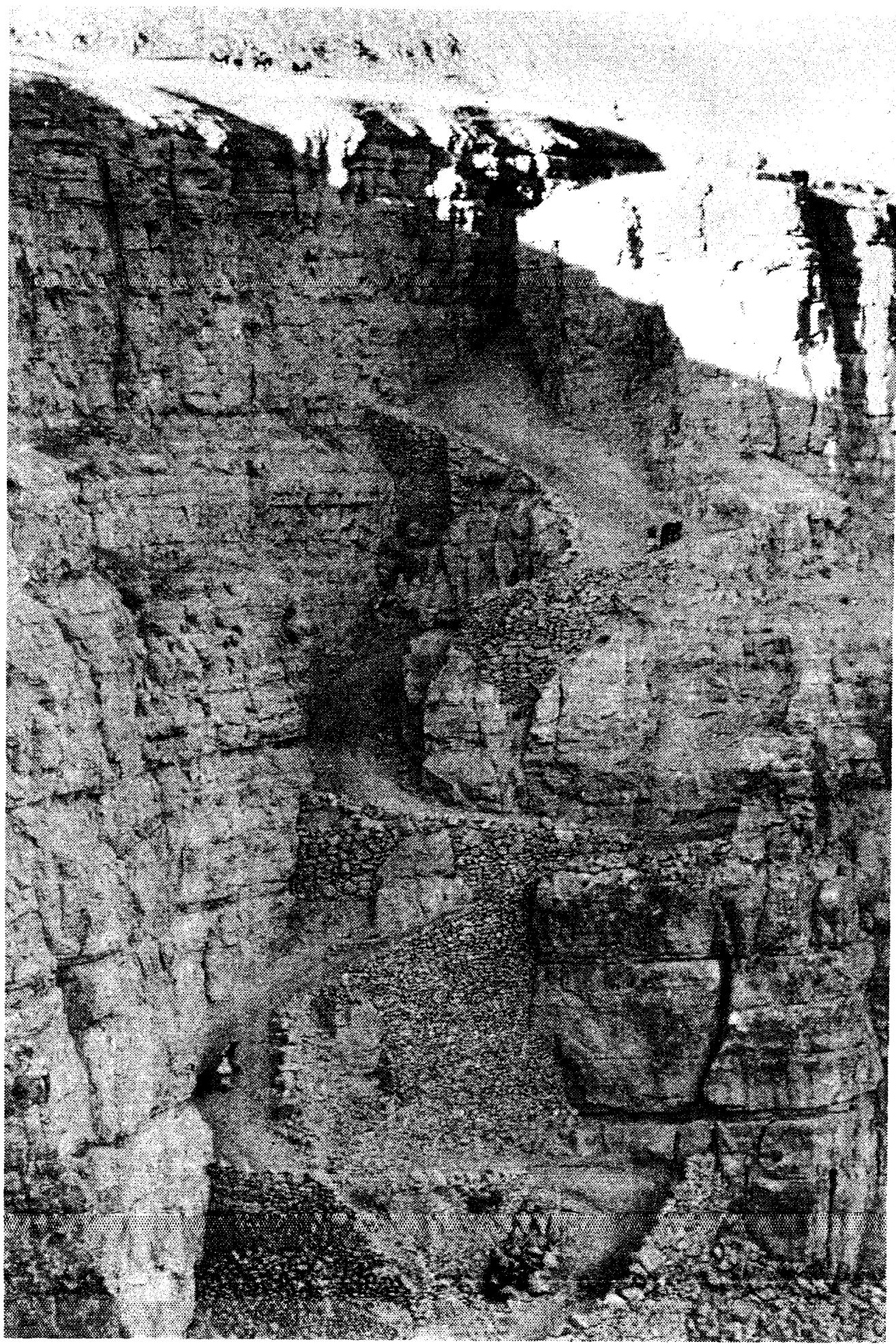
Bellies were swollen from hunger. Faces were puffed by edemas brought on by eating grasses. Skin diseases were prevalent. Low resistance levels throughout the area made the people more susceptible to many diseases. Medical care became as critical for life and hope as food.

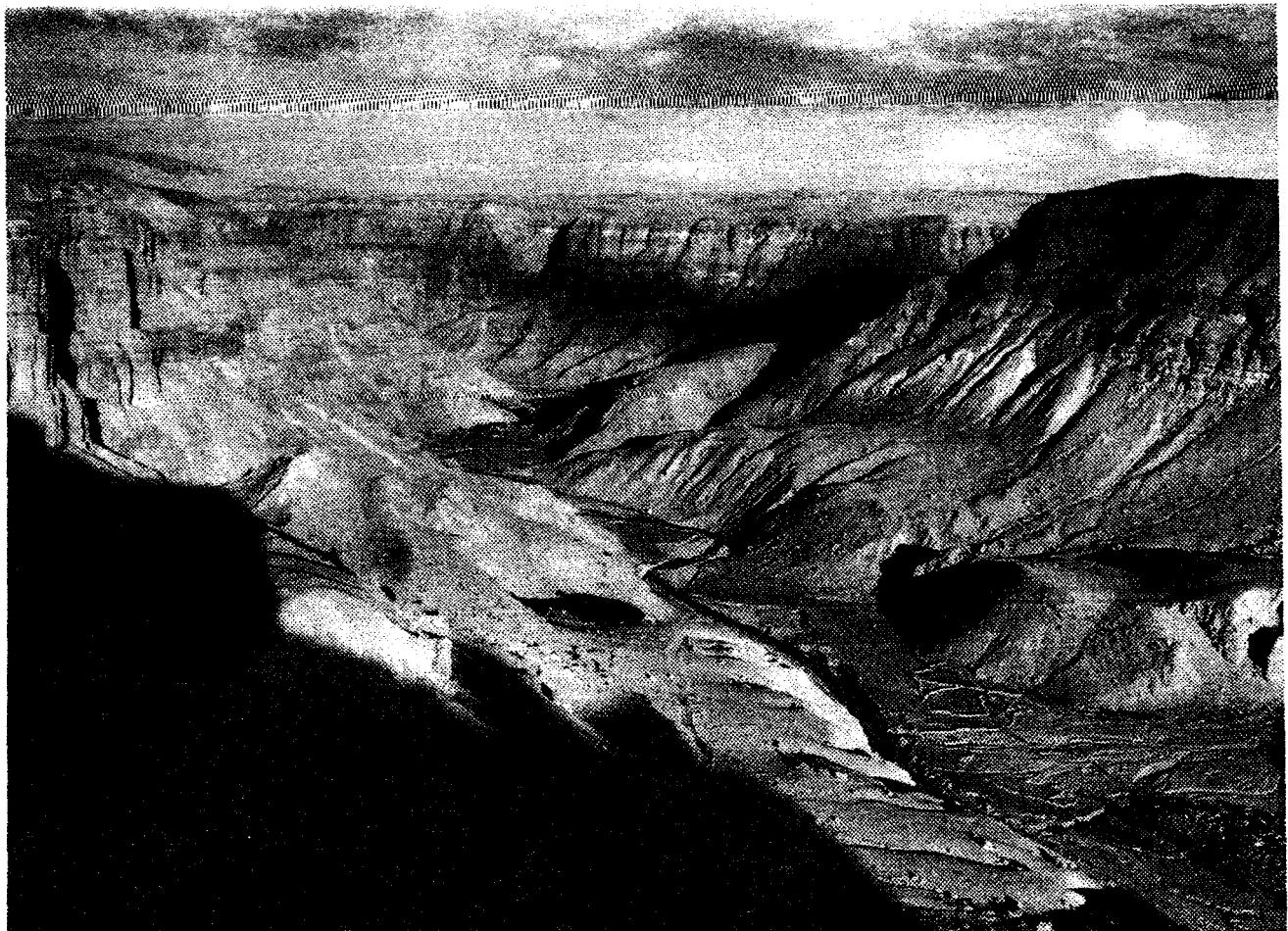
The Government moved with speed and efficiency to alleviate the pain and suffering of the people. They took a program, "Operation Help," to them. The Central highlands and a northwest portion of Afghanistan were found to be most heavily stricken. Plans were drawn, the needy identified, commodities moved into position, and materials distributed to 173,374 people in these areas before the snows fell and further access was denied.



MILEAGE, ACCESS ROADS, RUNNING TIME,
REFUELING STATIONS AND ROAD MAINTENANCE POINTS







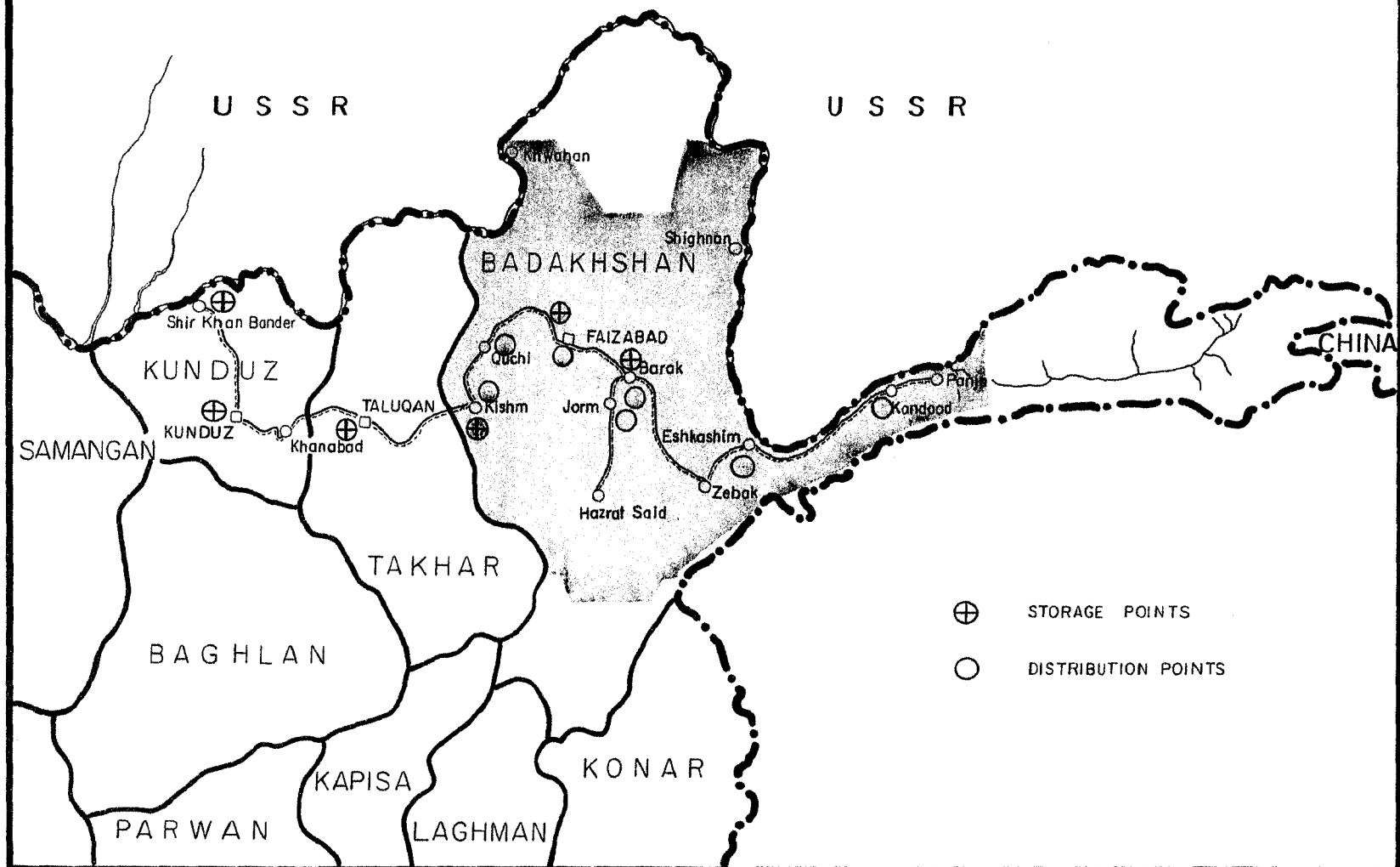
The delivery and distribution was carried out over some of the most difficult terrain in the world. Often areas were accessible only by pack animals. One of these places was Jawand, where it is said there have been only eleven non-Afghan visitors in the history of the country. "Operation Help" brought food over a path cut on the face of a mountain, the Darzak (opposite), which dropped at a precipitous angle for 3100 feet. From the bottom of the Darzak the movement continued over dangerous pack animal trails for about thirty kilometers (approximately 18 miles) to reach the village where food and commodities were distributed to 11,863 people.

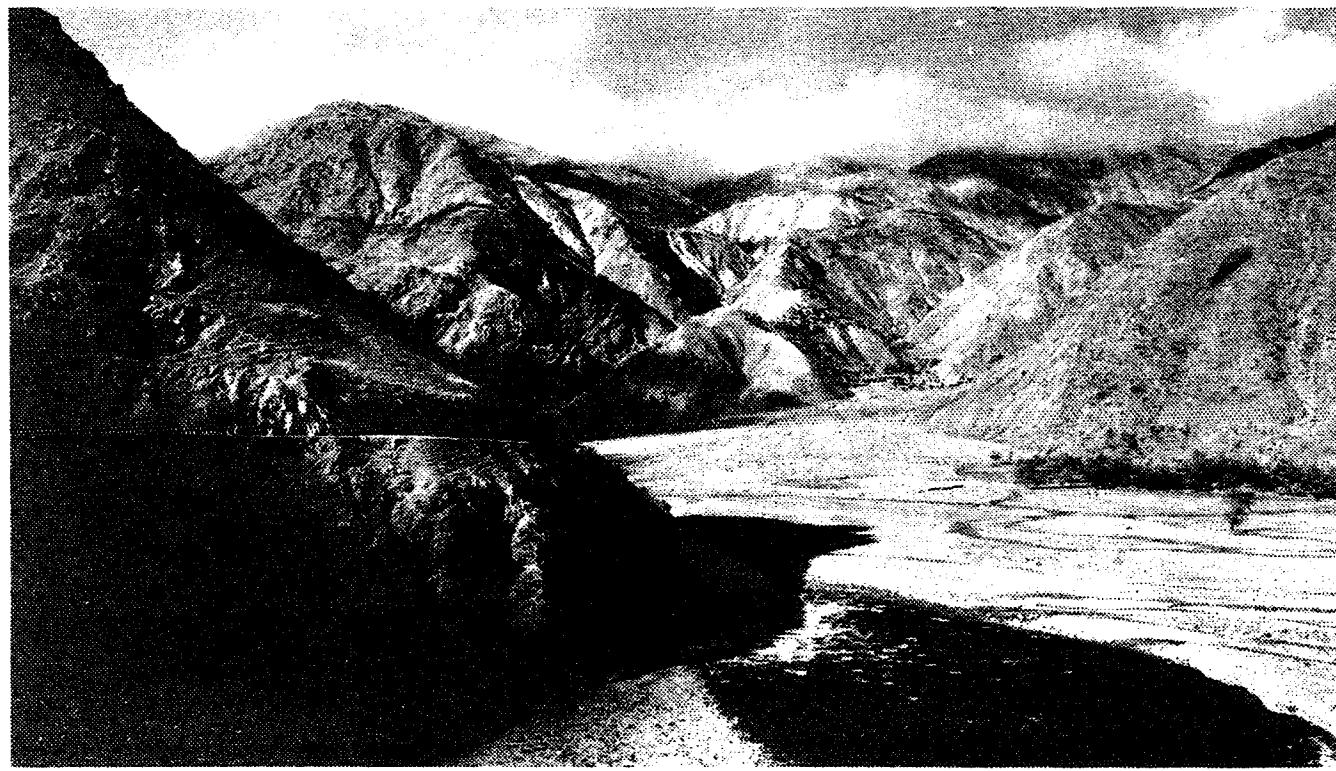


On this day 293 camels on the trail brought hope to the people in the village.

As the program developed, Badakhshan was identified as another area of need. Here "Operation Help" was limited in distributing only to the population that could reach the distribution centers. Certain passes had already been closed by snowfall before the program started. However, "Operation Help" still gave hope for survival to 61,690 persons in need.

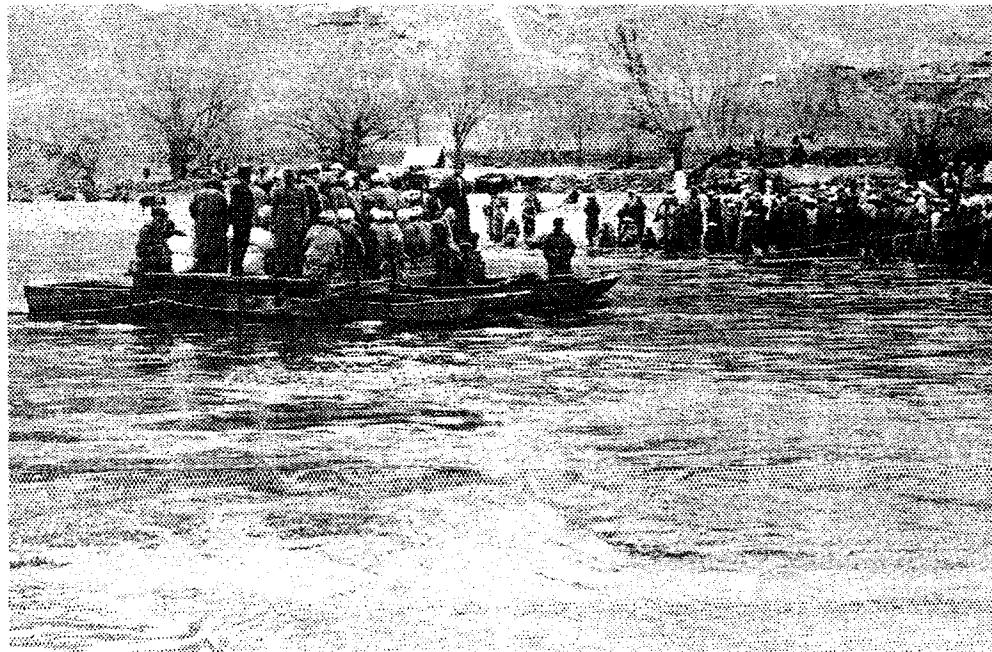
BADAKHSHAN AREA





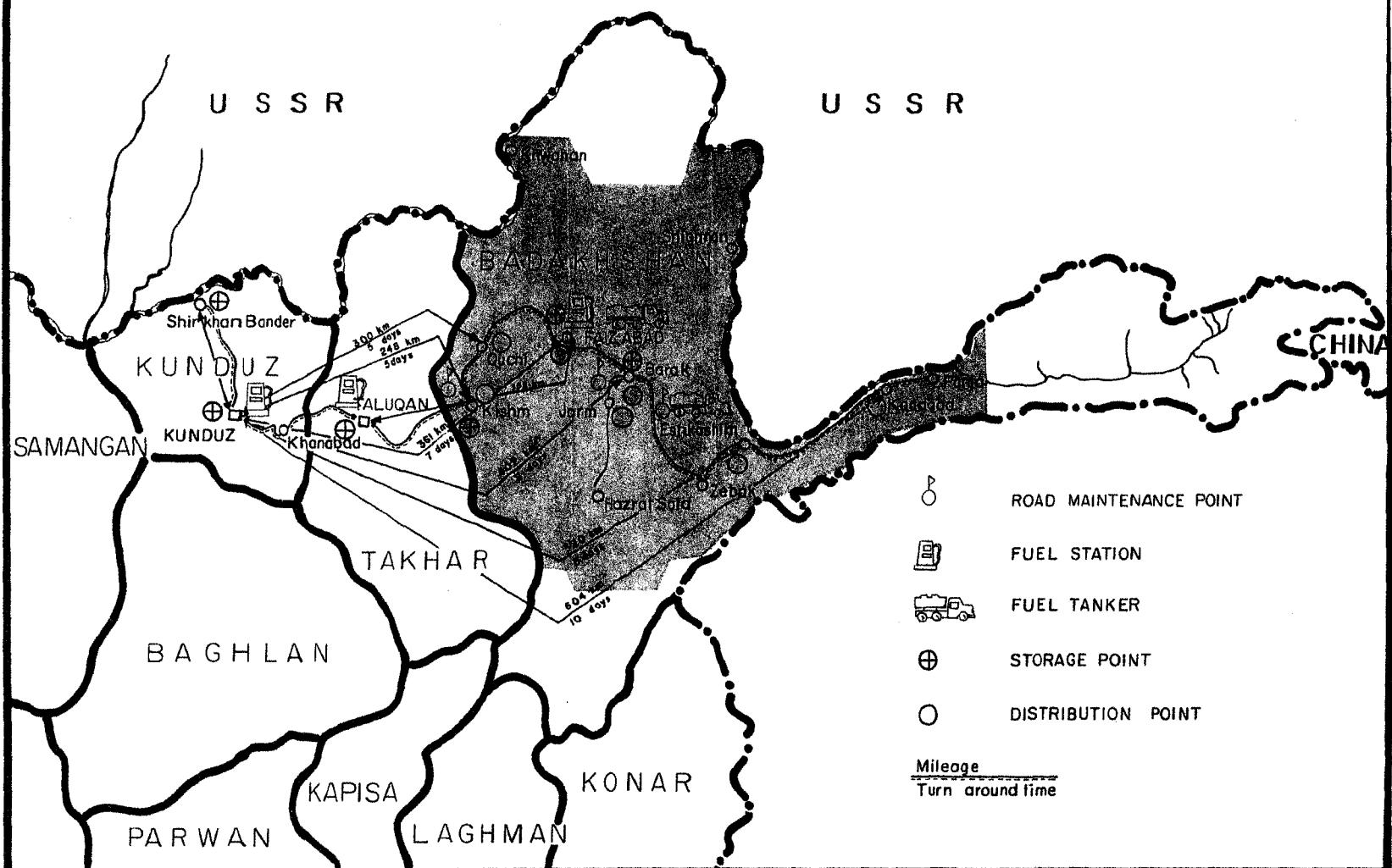
(Above) Access roads into the Badakhshan area are difficult. Problems were experienced in moving heavy loads over timber supported bridges spanning deep gorges, and oftentimes the roads were only unmarked river beds.

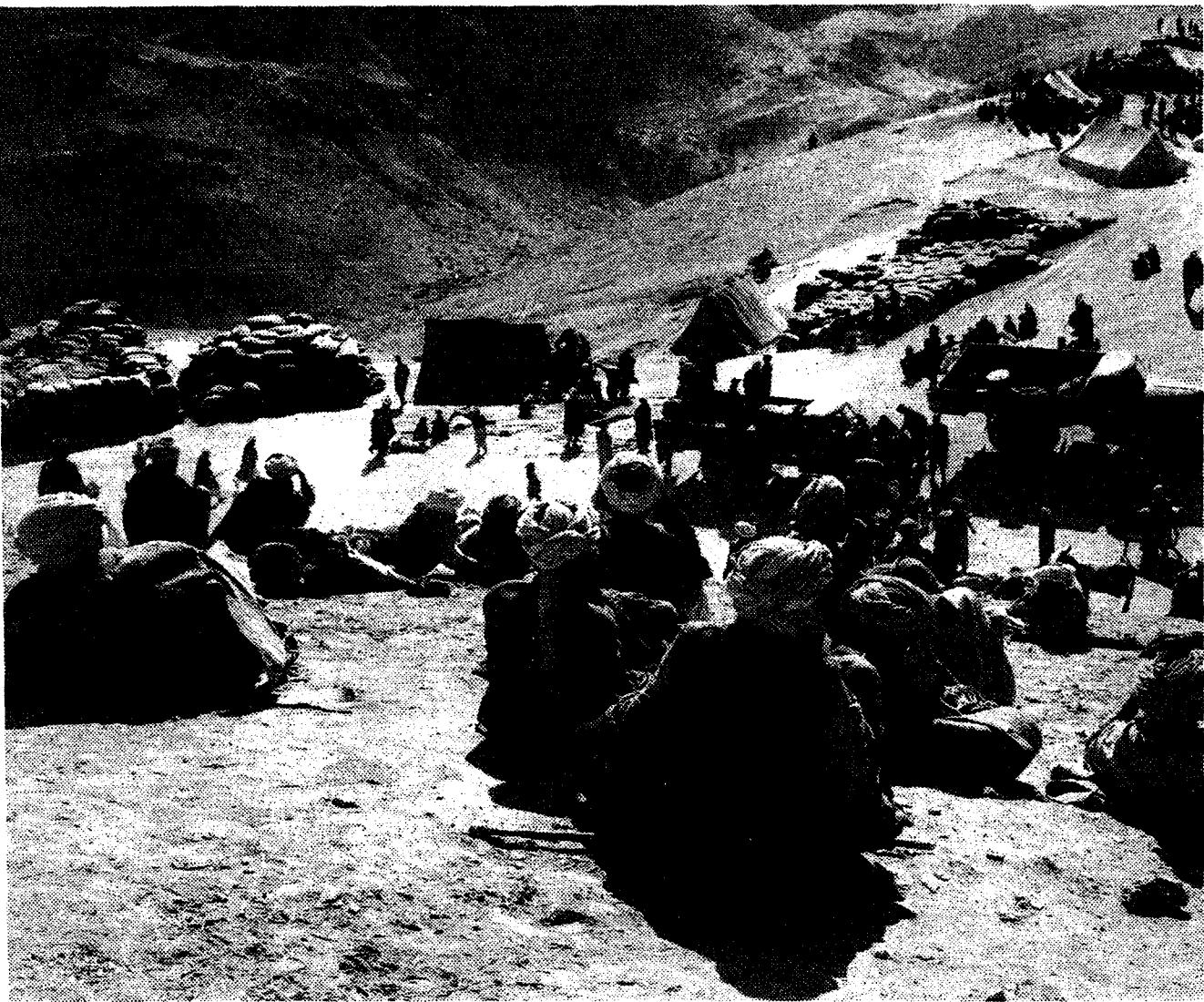
(Below) "Operation Help" went to the people. When approximately 25,000 persons from an isolated area were denied access to help by an inability to cross the river on an existing small skin raft, the Army of the Royal Government of Afghanistan installed and operated two pontoon crossings. There was will and determination to help the people.



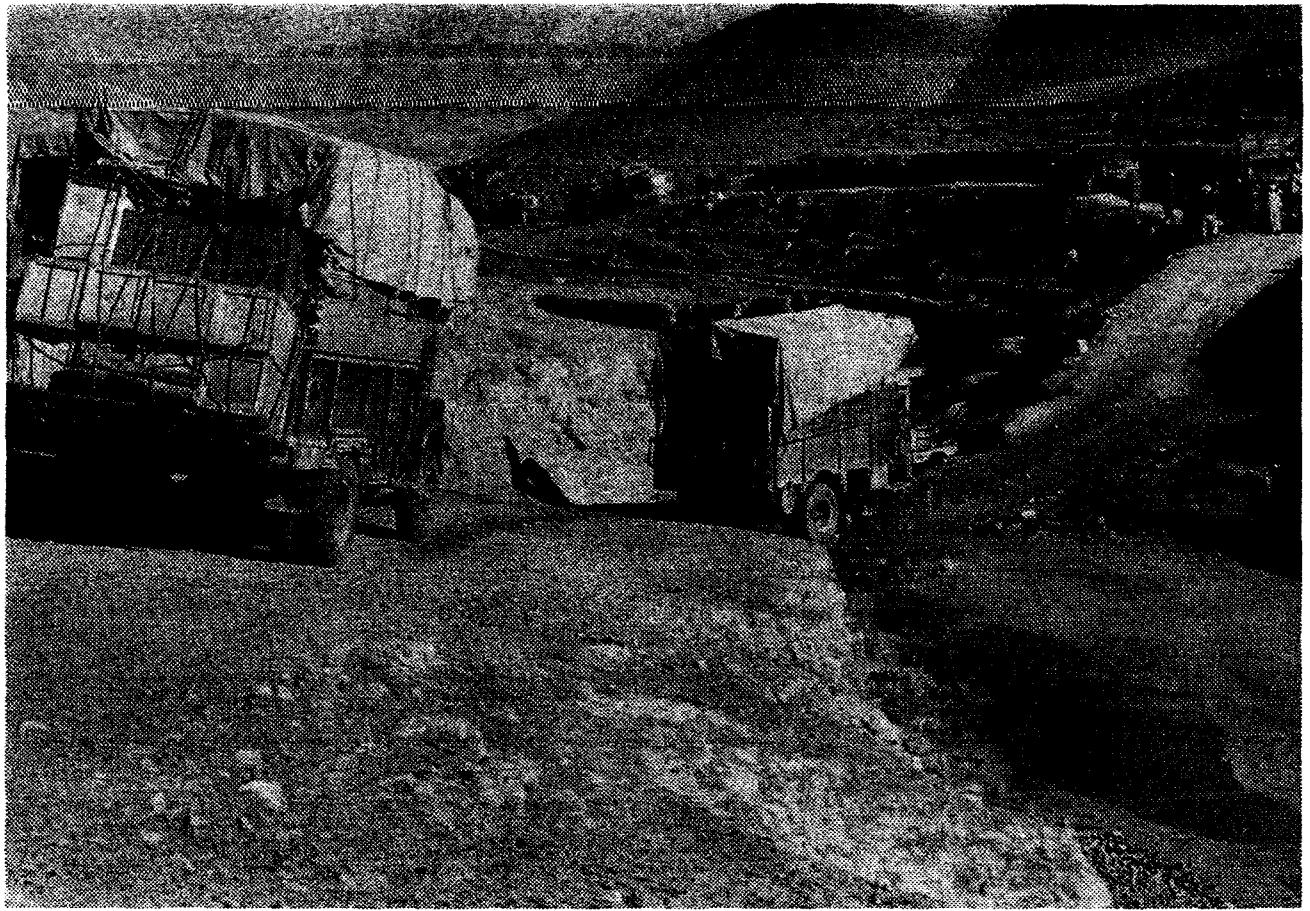
BADAKHSHAN AREA
MILEAGE, ACCESS ROADS, RUNNING TIME,
REFUELING STATIONS AND ROAD MAINTENANCE POINTS

83





Storage space was where you could find it. On the top of the Darzak it was out in the open.



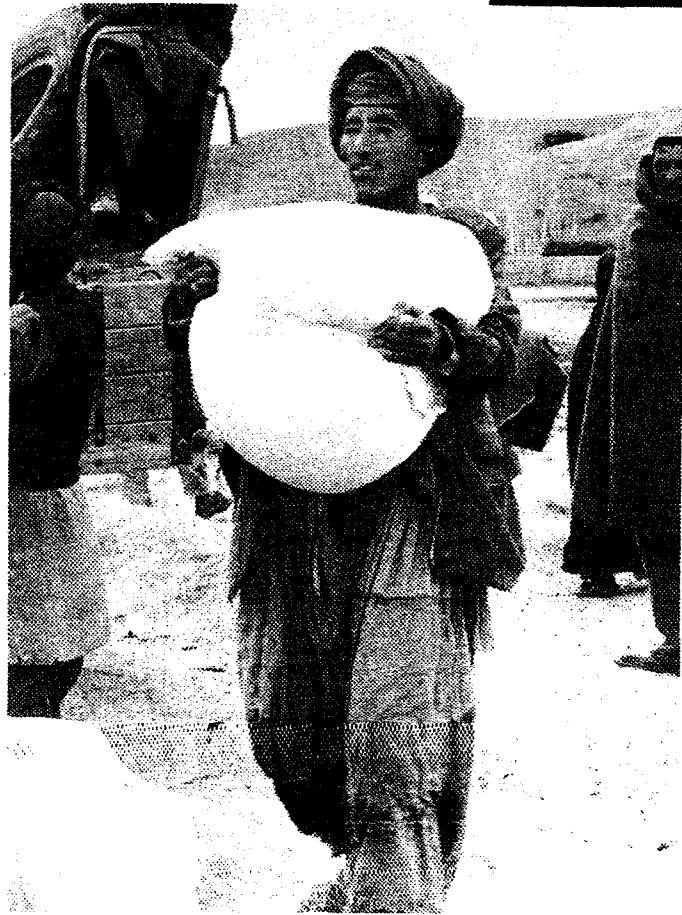
"Operation Help" was a joint Military-Civilian cooperative program. Soldiers and civilians worked shoulder to shoulder in Afghanistan's common effort to feed people. Breakdowns on narrow roads sometimes backed up loads of precious commodities for several miles. There were casualties, both civilian and military. The Army tank truck lies at the bottom of a steep embankment after a fall of several hundred feet from the perilous road above.





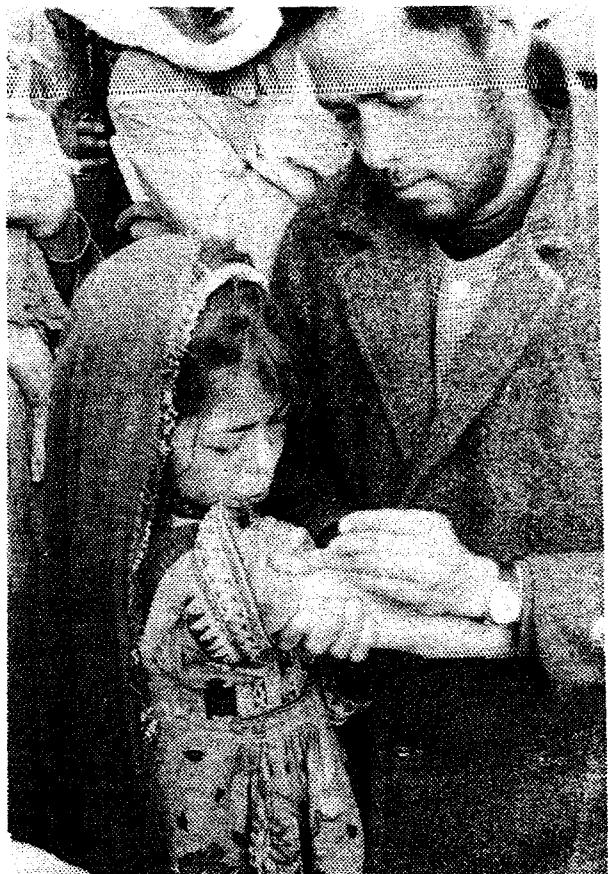
In a few places it was in permanent warehouses. At sub-distribution points it was almost always in the open. In most cases it was any kind of a building where the commodities could be protected.





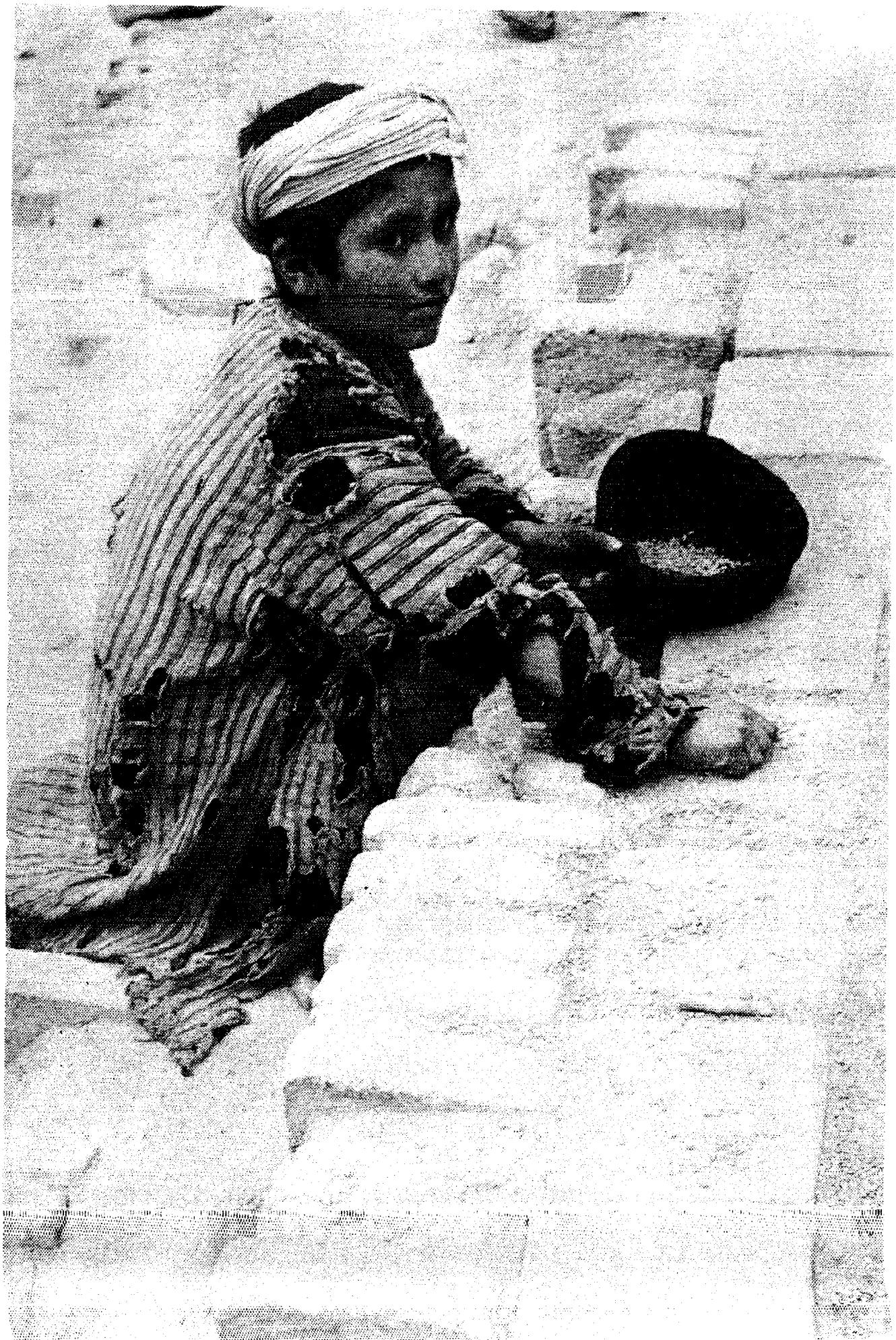
People who were able to work received their food against a future work commitment. The six-month ration was 90 kilograms for each adult and 45 kilograms for each child below 15.

All associated programs were coordinated as a part of "Operation Help." The medical component provided smallpox vaccinations for all beneficiaries. In many cases individuals were given special medical examinations and required medical attention. A six months' supply of multi-vitamins, vitamin C tablets, calcium tablets and other medicine supplements was also distributed.





.....98,104 blankets.....

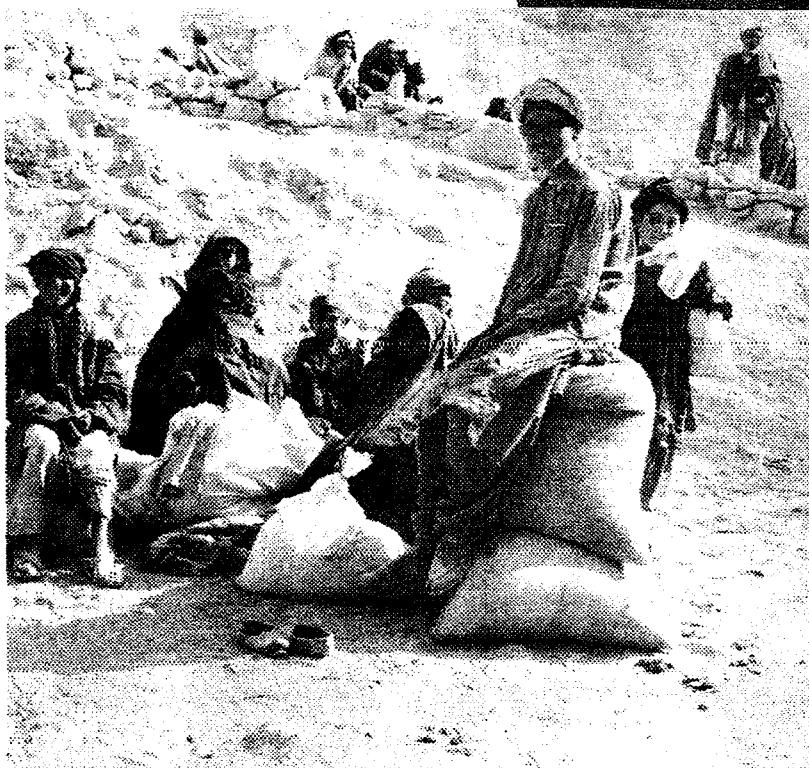




Those who were widowed, ill, aged, or unable to work received the same rations as a grant.



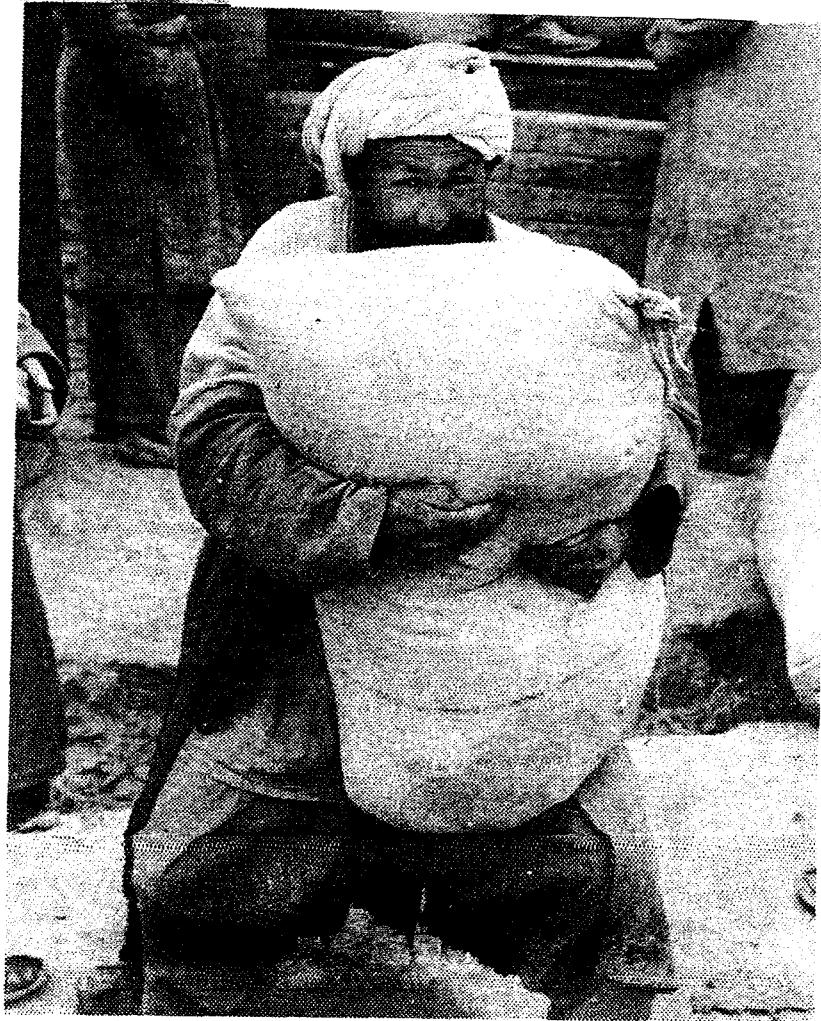
"Operation Help" distributed a total of 16,952 tons of wheat to 235,064 people.



(Opposite) So precious was the wheat that not a grain was wasted. This young man is combing the ground looking for the few spilled grains that may have fallen out of bags during the day's distribution.



Above all else the goal of "Operation Help" was to put food into the mouths of the hungry.





"Operation Help" went as close to the needy as possible. But the people were always required to move their commodities to some further point for storage and use. Some lost their pack animals as a result of the disaster, and had to carry supplies home in any way possible. Those more fortunate still had pack animals which they used and oftentimes shared with their neighbors.



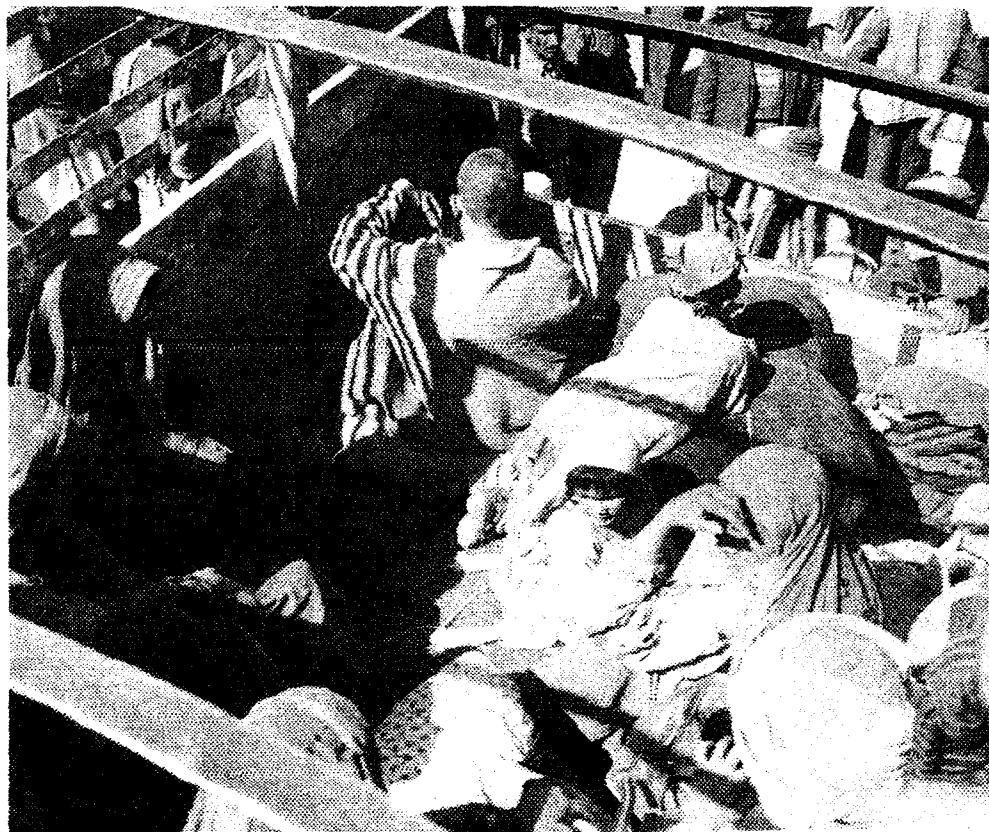




The Executive Staff spent considerable time in the field visiting distribution and sub-distribution points throughout the country. They walked, rode animals, jeeps, trucks and spent several days touring by helicopter.



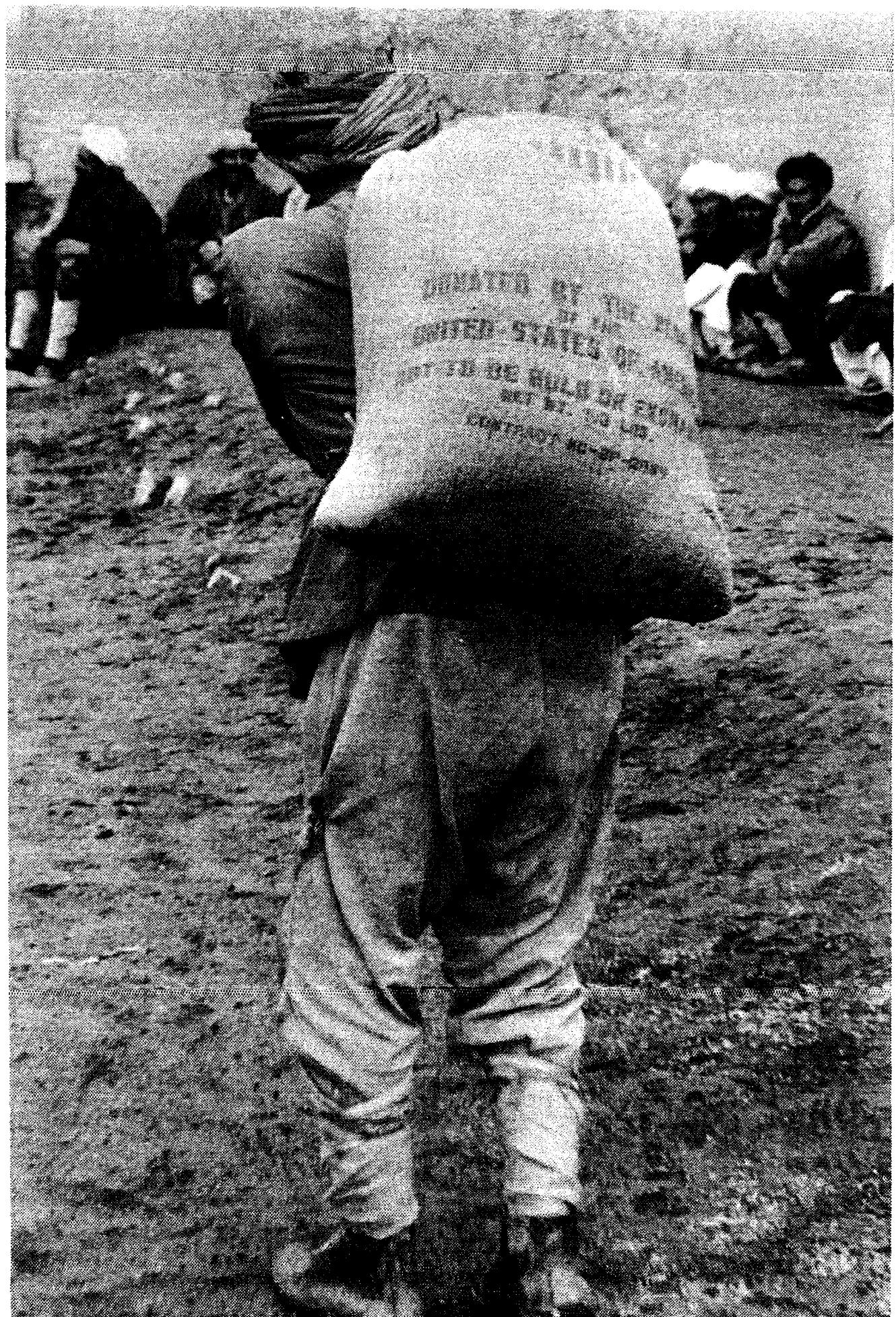
Entire families moved to cities in search of food and many lived in tents. "Operation Help" provided food and either returned them to their homes or relocated them where they might have a brighter future.





And it succeeded.

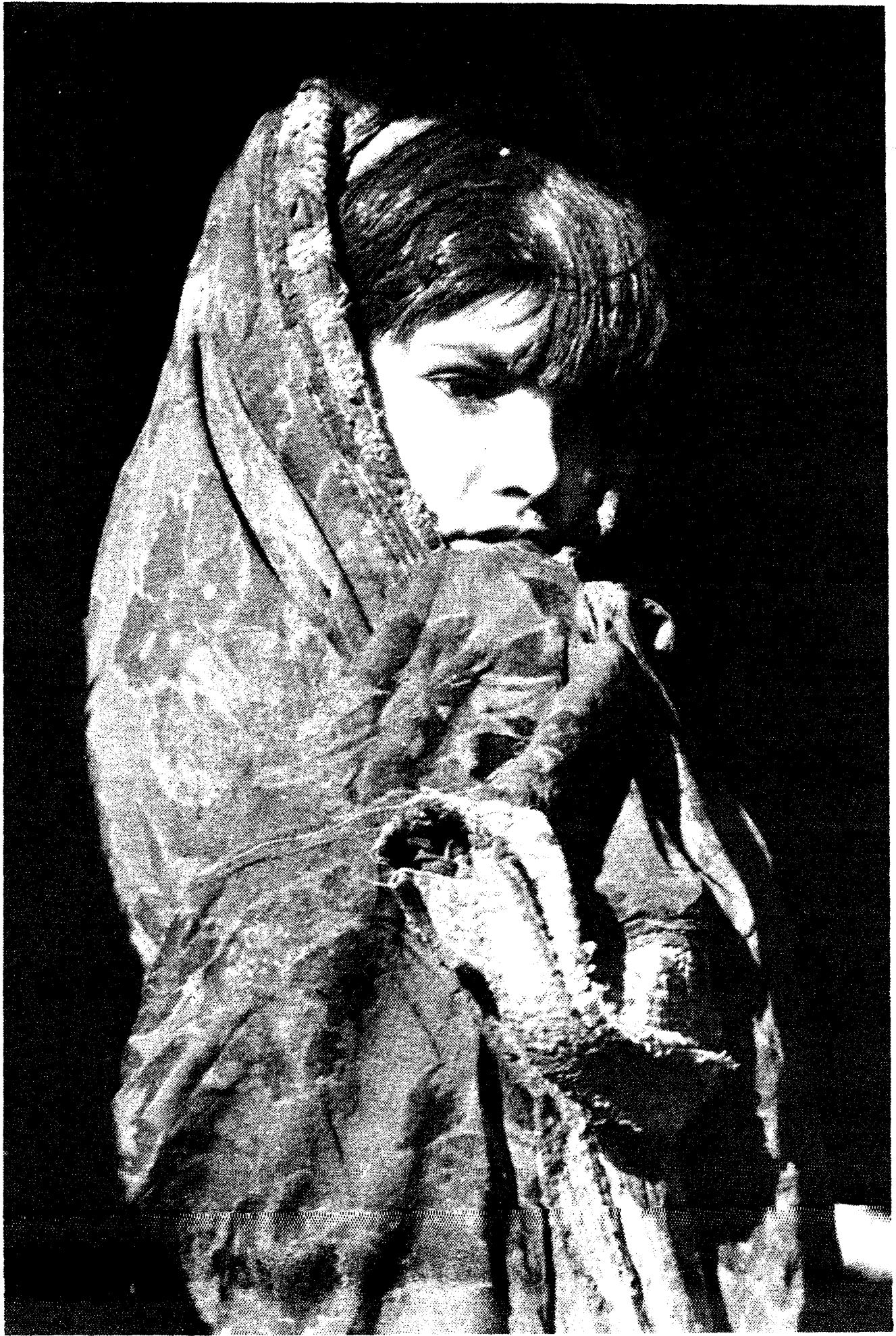






"Operation Help" gave hope for survival to 235,064 people.













Now the challenge remains to improve the quality of life.

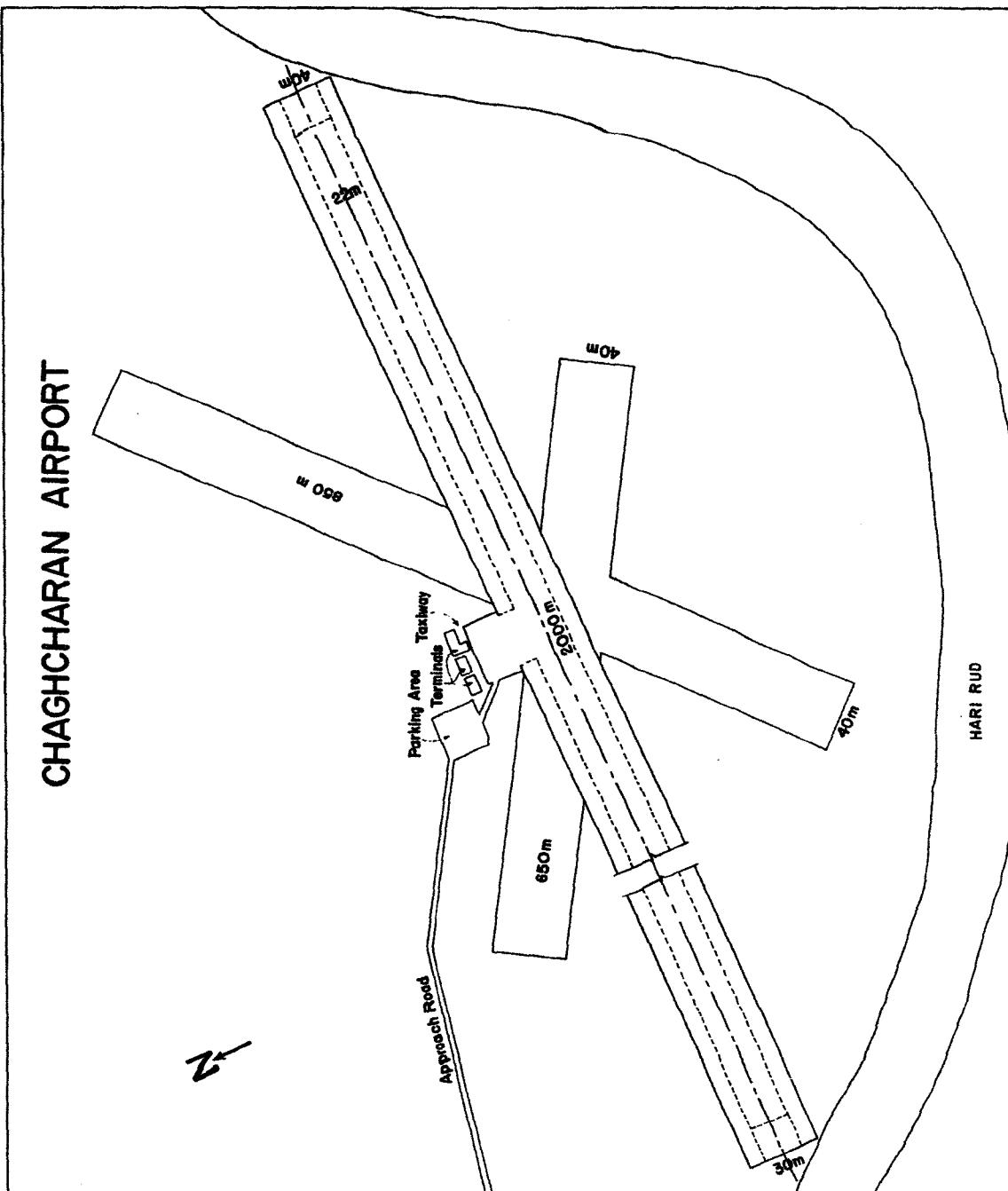
ANNEX A

CHAGHCHARAN



For many years Ghor Province has been completely isolated each winter and planes were unable to use the Chaghcharan airfield. The city of Chaghcharan was also without electricity. This year both conditions were changed with the assistance of "Operation Help."

CHAGHCHARAN AIRPORT



ANNEX B

DONORS

AFGHANISTAN DONORS

AFGHAN WOMEN VOLUNTEERS/WELFARE

Afs. 120,000 worth of commodities were distributed to refugees in Kabul from Chaghcharan.

AFGHAN NATIONAL BANK

Cash Contribution Afs 5,000,000

PRIVATE DONORS IN AFGHANISTAN

Cash Contribution Afs 3,681,267

AFGHAN WOOL INDUSTRIES

Blankets 600 each

ARIANA AFGHAN AIRLINES

Transport of Goods

KANDAHAR WOOL INDUSTRIES

Blankets 400 each

PLASTIC BOOT FACTORY

Shoes 1,200 pairs

RED CRESCENT SOCIETY

1 1/2 Ton Jeep Trucks 15 each

Loaned to Operation Help until termination of Badakhshan Program.

FOREIGN DONORS

AUSTRALIA

Wheat (CIF Karachi) 4,000 tons

DENMARK

Cash Contribution \$7,279.08

INDIA

Pharmaceuticals	Rs. 50,000
Acetylsalicylic Acid 0.30 gm.	100,000 tablets
Di-iodohydroxyquine	100,000 tablets
Isoniazid 300 mg.	20,000 tablets
Ferrous Sulfate	50,000 tablets
Flagyl 200 mg.	5,000 tablets
Trisulfapyrimidines	10,000 tablets
Vitamin C 100 mg.	20,000 tablets
Vitamins A & D	50,000 capsules
Tetracycline 250 mg.	10,000 capsules
Streptomycin Sulfate 1 gm.	5,000 vials
Benzathin Penicilline 600.000 units	1,000 vials
Elixir Piperazine Citrate 450 cc.	106 bottles

IRAN

Ghee	4.9 tons
Clothing	
Mens Shirts	500
Boys Shirts	500
Mens Socks	498
Boys Socks	500
Boys Shoes	261
Mens Shoes	421
Boys Shirts	499
Ladies Socks	1,000
Girls Socks	1,000
Ladies Shoes	340
Mens Shirts	500
Ladies Shirts	189
Girls Shirts	249
Mens Suits	438
Ladies Suits	50
Boys Suits	550
Mens Overcoats	506
Ladies Overcoats	480

Ghee and clothing include air and land transport to Afghanistan.

JAPAN

Cash Contribution \$20,000

NETHERLANDS

Ghee 32.5 tons

Milk Products 10 cases

The above donation includes air transport to Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN

Bata Plastic Shoes 49,920 pairs

Blankets 1,000 each

The above includes transportation costs via truck to Afghanistan.

POLAND

Pharmaceuticals

Paralux Powder 45% 684,000 gms.

Sulfadizine 0.50 gm. 500,000 tablets

Elenium (Chlorodiazepoxide) 5 mg. 15,500 tablets

Lubamycine (Erythermymceine) 100 mg. 17,440 capsules

Lubamycine (Ertheromycine) 10 mg. 20,800 tablets

Oxycort Spray (Oxytetracycline Hcl) 12,675 cans

Macaroni 19 tons

Blankets 200 each

SWITZERLAND

Pharmaceuticals

Supradine	100,000 capsules
Redoxon 500 mg.	108,000 tablets
Ferronicum	100,000 tablets
Intestopan	160,000 tablets

UNITED KINGDOM

Pharmaceutical Supplies - approximate value 10,000 Pounds Sterling (\$24,000)

Lerexan Cream 50 gms.	7,200 tubes
Ampoules Streptomycine sulfate 1 gm.	35,997 vials
Ampoules Pemadour - L. A. 2,400,000 units	4,996 vials
Vitamins A & D (A - 6000 U. and D-1000 U.)	405,000 capsules
Vitamins A & D (A - 4500 U. and D-450U.)	1,000,000 capsules
Vitamins A & D (B.P.C.)	300,000 capsules
Ascorbic Acid 100 mg.	2,500,000 tablets
Isoniazide 50 mg.	2,000,000 tablets
Chrisococline 250 mg.	200,000 tablets
Tetrachel 250 mg. (Tetracycline 250 mg.)	300,000 tablets
Multivitamins	4,000,000 tablets

UNITED STATES

Edible Oil	360 tons
Pharmaceutical Supplies - approximate value	\$14,000
Wheat	20,000 tons

U. S. S. R.

Blankets	9,900 each
Condensed Milk	990 kgs.
Flour	490,422 kgs.
Ghee	19,978 kgs.
Macaroni	20 tons
Powdered Milk	1 ton
Rice	49,840 kgs.
Soap	4 tons
Sugar	20,141 kgs.
Mens Suits	995 each
Leather Shoes	1,000 pairs
Overcoats	1,167 each
Rubber Footwear	10,020 pairs

WEST GERMANY

Blankets	3,715 each
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ASIA FOUNDATION

Cash Contribution Afs 200,000

CARE-MEDICO

Aspirin (Baby)	330,450 tablets
Ledernycina 300 mg. (Tetracycline)	10,800 tablets
Iron Syrup - one pint	23 bottles

COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF KABUL (SERVE)

Cash Contribution Afs 200,000

DANISH CHURCH COMMUNITY

Pharmaceutical Supplies \$5,000

RAJ TRADING CORP. OF JAPAN

30 Sets Electric Pumps \$4,140

STERLING PRODUCTS INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Tehran Branch

Papsamer (Cremalin)	13,000 tablets
Franol	20,000 tablets

England Branch

Aralen	25,000 tablets
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UNDP

Cash Contribution \$20,000

UNICEF

Blankets	10,740 each
CSM	540 tons
DDS Kits (pharmaceutical supplies)	200 each
Bulk Pharmaceuticals	\$30,000
K Mix 2	14 tons
Hospital equipment for 12 medical centers.	

ANNEX C

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>Afghanis</u>
Approved Budget	244,751,700
Less: Amount budgeted for commodities which have been donated	<u>158,560,500</u>
Adjusted Budget	86,191,200
<u>EXPENDITURES</u>	
Commodity Purchases	
Muslin Bags	5,608,125
Blankets	20,698,680
Footwear	<u>1,485,209</u>
	27,792,014
Transportation Expenses	
Commodities	5,486,870
Personnel	<u>2,880,249</u>
	8,367,119
Personal Services Costs	
Salaries	1,252,316
Travel Costs and Allowances	<u>2,217,672</u>
	3,469,988
Miscellaneous Expenses	
Leaflets	50,191
Office Supplies	642,232
Postage, Telephone & Telegraph	26,816
Food Logistics, Kabul Staff	107,948
Other Expenses	<u>4,344,483</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	44,800,791
<u>CURRENT ASSETS</u>	
Cash	3,718,595
Unremitted Balance from Ministry of Finance	37,671,814*
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>41,390,409</u>
ASSETS & EXPENDITURES	86,191,200

*Anticipated to pay for accrued transportation cost and operating expenditures of Operation Help staff.