

# Into and out of Africa

A past department head rejoins the Army and provides veterinary services with the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa

By Jim Floyd

Photographs courtesy of Jim Floyd



IDP (internally displaced persons) village in northern Uganda. To protect the rural populace from attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army, thousands of Ugandans were moved into these villages. Veterinary Civic Action Projects (VETCAPs) by the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa were conducted to improve the health of livestock in these villages after pacification allowed the people to resume animal herding as pastoralists.

*The Horn of Africa is home to some 51 million cattle, 58 million sheep, and 50 million goats making livestock activity a major contributor to the economy of countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Problems with animal diseases, inadequate veterinary service delivery systems, market access, and inappropriate policies, however, require solutions to ensure stable nations.*

**A**fter 30 years in the U.S. Army, beginning as an infantryman in the Regular Army in 1971 and ending as a Veterinary Corps officer in the Army Reserve in August 2001, I hung my uniform in the closet and concentrated on my fulltime position as head of the Department of Farm Animal Health & Resource Management at NC

State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Less than a month later, the World Trade Center attacks made continued military service a possibility, but it wasn't until 2008 that I put the uniform on again. On June 28 of that year, I was voluntarily recalled to active duty with the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) headquartered at

Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.

A retired reservist was needed because no active duty officer was available for this deployment. The Army is stretched pretty thin these days; in many cases there are just more missions than people. For the next six months, I served as a Veterinary Corps Colonel in support of veterinary projects in four East African

countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. It was my honor and privilege to wear the uniform on my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, once again in the company of soldiers. Like our NC State veterinary students, they are among America's best, hands down.

The mission of CJTF-HOA is to employ an indirect approach to counter violent extremism: conduct operations to strengthen partner nations and regional security capacity to enable long-term regional stability, prevent conflict and protect U.S. and Coalition Nation interests. The Task Force commander's vision is to build friendships, forge relationships, and create partnerships to enable African solutions to African challenges. The aim is—through combined joint forces—to improve security, increase stability, and strengthen sovereignty in the Horn of Africa and Eastern Africa region. In so doing, CJTF-HOA serves as a model for the integration of defense, diplomacy, and development efforts. Veterinary projects fit this plan extremely well, especially given the importance of livestock to the everyday lives of so many people in Africa.

The Task Force employs its forces, including Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines in projects across its east African combined joint operating area spanning 13 countries. It plans and conducts its missions in close cooperation with the U.S. Department of State, working through the U.S. embassies and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Planning typically requires no less than 120 to 180 days from project nomination until start of mission. The time is understandable when considering the detailed requirements for advanced coordination, securing funding, assigning

qualified personnel, making diplomatic arrangements, arranging response to adverse contingencies, and provision of security. In the planning phase usually at least one pre-deployment site survey is required whereby the mission commander and other personnel involved go to the proposed project location to ensure the mission can be successfully accomplished.

In CJTF-HOA I was assigned with Captain Amanda Christy, an exceptional active duty veterinarian, to a Civil Affairs Functional Specialty Team, which also included physicians, nurses, engineers, and others. Within four days of first arriving in Djibouti—a small desert country located between Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia on the Gulf of Aden—I travelled to the Tanga region of Tanzania to participate in a VETCAP. Army speak



**African veterinary students participated in some VETCAPs to gain experience and share the work load.**

for “Veterinary Civic Action Project.” Our task was to provide preventative veterinary medical care for livestock, primarily cattle, sheep, and goats in pastoral villages in this area along the “Swahili Coast” of the Indian Ocean. Eventually, I was able to participate in VETCAPS in two additional countries, Kenya and Uganda, along with another mission to train community animal health workers in Ethiopia.

The animal treatment protocols for the VETCAPs were coordinated well in advance with the partner nation's

veterinarians assigned to the government ministry regulating animal health affairs. Of primary concern in each of these countries are parasites, both internal and external. External parasites are important because not only do they have direct effects on livestock, such as blood loss and skin irritation, they often harbor infectious microorganisms that adversely affect their health. Diseases such as East Coast Fever spread by ticks and African Sleeping Sickness spread by Tsetse flies have dramatic impacts on animal growth and production, as well as being potentially fatal. Treatment for ticks involved dipping cattle in vats containing insecticide or applying “pour on” medications absorbed through the skin. In every country, our VETCAPs included treatment for internal nematode parasites as is commonly done in the U.S.

Depending on the partner nation, our VETCAPs sometimes included vaccinations for diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Contagious Caprine Pneumonia of goats and sheep, Newcastle Disease of poultry, and rabies in dogs. Because conditions vary from country to country, and even between regions within a country, we relied on partner na-

tion regulatory veterinarians to designate the conditions to target for treatment. Some of the diseases targeted for preventative measures are familiar to us in the United States, such as Blackleg caused by a Clostridium bacterium while others do not exist in our country. Many of the diseases of concern in Africa are classified as Foreign Animal Diseases in the U.S. Our federal and state departments of agriculture are greatly concerned that these diseases never enter our country, either accidentally or through malicious acts of bioterrorism. Having seen the



**Highway leading to southern Sudan from northern Uganda. Although the insurgency had been successfully countered, poor road conditions remained to impede commerce and development.**



**Uganda People's Defense Force soldier marks a treated cow. Host nation soldiers accompany U.S. soldiers on most VETCAP missions, providing security, crowd control and often the work itself.**



**In east Africa cattle represent wealth for pastoralists but handling facilities for them are unsophisticated and usually had to be constructed before VETCAP missions could be conducted.**

adverse effects of such diseases firsthand, for me this deployment underscored the importance for our government to keep them out. During this six-month deployment we also had the opportunity to treat a few clinical conditions, such as livestock with wounds or suffering obvious clinical effects of infections. We usually would have specific drugs for the local common infectious conditions and enough surgical instruments and wound treatments to provide some primary care.

Our VETCAP in northern Uganda was a highlight for several reasons. The Gulu district lies close to southern Sudan, and up until recently, was the scene of a terrific struggle between insurgents of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda. In an effort to protect the rural populace against the rebels in the LRA, the government had moved upward of a million rural citizens into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The LRA practiced child abductions to supply the insurgency with soldiers and sex slaves, as well as punishing local citizens with mutilations and amputations for cooperating with the government. A series of VETCAP missions were undertaken by CJTF-HOA in this area to provide health care for livestock owned by people in the IDP camps. As the area had become more pacified and the LRA pushed into the neighboring Sudan and

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the government was encouraging the populace to return to animal husbandry as a vocation.

During a series of three VETCAPs in northern Uganda separated by four to five months in 2008-2009, CJTF-HOA personnel treated thousands of cattle, goats, sheep, poultry, and dogs. Because of the economic importance of cattle,



**Immunizing dogs against rabies in Uganda. Improving human health through such preventative treatments was a mission goal as well as benefiting the health of the animals themselves. The plan for treatments was carefully coordinated with the host nation authorities well in advance of each mission. U.S. Soldiers on missions from CJTF-HOA wore uniforms in some countries but not in others, depending on the host nation's guidelines.**

they were a prime focus of our efforts. A subset of individually identified cattle at each camp had their weight gains measured in response to treatments. Weight was measured with a girth tape because it was impractical to transport a scale to these remote locations. In our September-October, 2008 VETCAP, we treated 23,903 cattle in 38 IDP camps, as well as thousands of other species. The mean cattle weight gain from the previous treatments was an impressive 47.9%. Because the cattle had received treatments for internal and external parasites and Sleeping Sickness, it was not possible to conclude if a particular treatment or the combination of treatments was responsible for this response. A main result was that the people clearly saw improvement in the health and performance of their cattle following the treatments. Our hope was that after the fourth and final VETCAP in spring 2009, they would see the value in such routine procedures and continue them. Because the VETCAPs were free of charge, it was of obvious concern that the people would be able to find the means to continue them on their own, or as collections of farmers pooling their resources.

Some years ago, it was discovered that cattle can serve as a reservoir host for one of the microorganisms causing Human African trypanosomiasis, *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense*. As an



**Captain Amanda Christy treats a wound. Animals with individual conditions were treated as time and materials allowed. Primary emphasis was always on preventative treatments such as internal and external parasite control and vaccinations.**



**Goats and sheep are extremely important to pastoralist herders such as the Maasai in Tanzania. Preventative treatments focused on parasite control in these animals, whose numbers varied significantly between mission sites.**



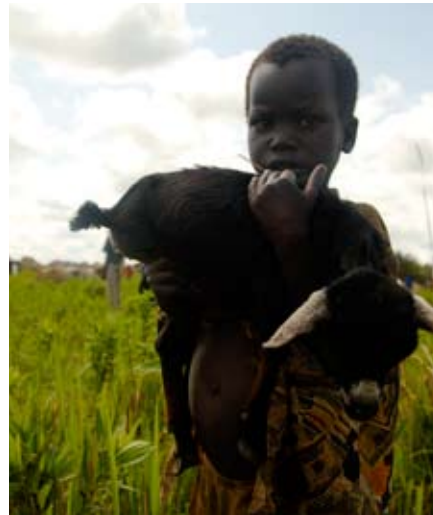
**Examination of individual animals was done as time allowed. This cow was lethargic and had a fever, which in this area of Tanzania was highly suggestive of a tick-borne blood parasite such as East Coast Fever.**

added benefit, our VETCAP in northern Uganda complemented an ongoing campaign to stop the spread of human Sleeping Sickness by reducing the presence of the causative microorganism in cattle. The human disease may cause as many as 100,000 human deaths annually, with symptoms mimicking AIDS.

My final mission on this deployment was to supervise the training of Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) in a remote area of southern Ethiopia. Formally trained veterinarians are very rare in this part of the world, so reasonably trained lay personnel are needed to provide routine preventative treatments and care for livestock. During a two-week period, we assisted Ethiopian trainers in this endeavor in an area where it is difficult to determine what diseases are occurring in a timely fashion. The Ethiopians were from the Benna ethnic minority, most of whom did not speak the primary national language, Amharic, which necessitated sequential translation in both lecture and hands-on lab sessions. The 24 trainees left with much more information than they had before the two-week training, but it was still little knowledge to fully prepare them for their future tasks. A future mission was planned to assess the success of their training.

In mid-December, I had completed

four missions in four countries in the Horn of Africa, and I returned to the U.S. After a few short days at Ft. Benning, Georgia, I found myself once again



**The entire village was often involved in bringing animals to treatments. Some were carried by children from nearby and others were herded miles to reach the site of the VETCAPs.**

a civilian. Future veterinary missions were planned by CJTF-HOA by veterinary personnel who replaced me and Captain Christy. It was gratifying to see how well recognized the veterinary missions were on the part of the commander and staff of the Task Force. Although few, if any, had any veterinary experiences, or for that matter any livestock expertise. It was clear to the Task Force leadership

that the people of east Africa value their livestock and appreciated our efforts on their behalf.

*“Ex Africa semper aliquid novi”*—Always something new out of Africa. My experience provided me a heightened awareness of the importance of the veterinary profession to our nation’s efforts to provide stability and security in potentially troubled parts of the world. It also gave me a deeper appreciation for the success of American animal agriculture and the indispensable role that veterinary medicine plays in that success.

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*This past June Dr. Floyd was again recalled to Army active duty with the Kentucky National Guard—Agricultural Development Team II in Afghanistan. Col. Floyd serves as the Team Veterinarian, working with host nation and coalition forces to promote healthy, productive livestock and sustainable animal agriculture in Afghanistan.*

