

HELP TO WAR VICTIMS IN NIGERIA

ICRC Relief work¹ continued throughout September in Nigeria and the secessionist province of Biafra, as can be seen from the following report issued at the end of that month.²

RELIEF FOR BIAFRA

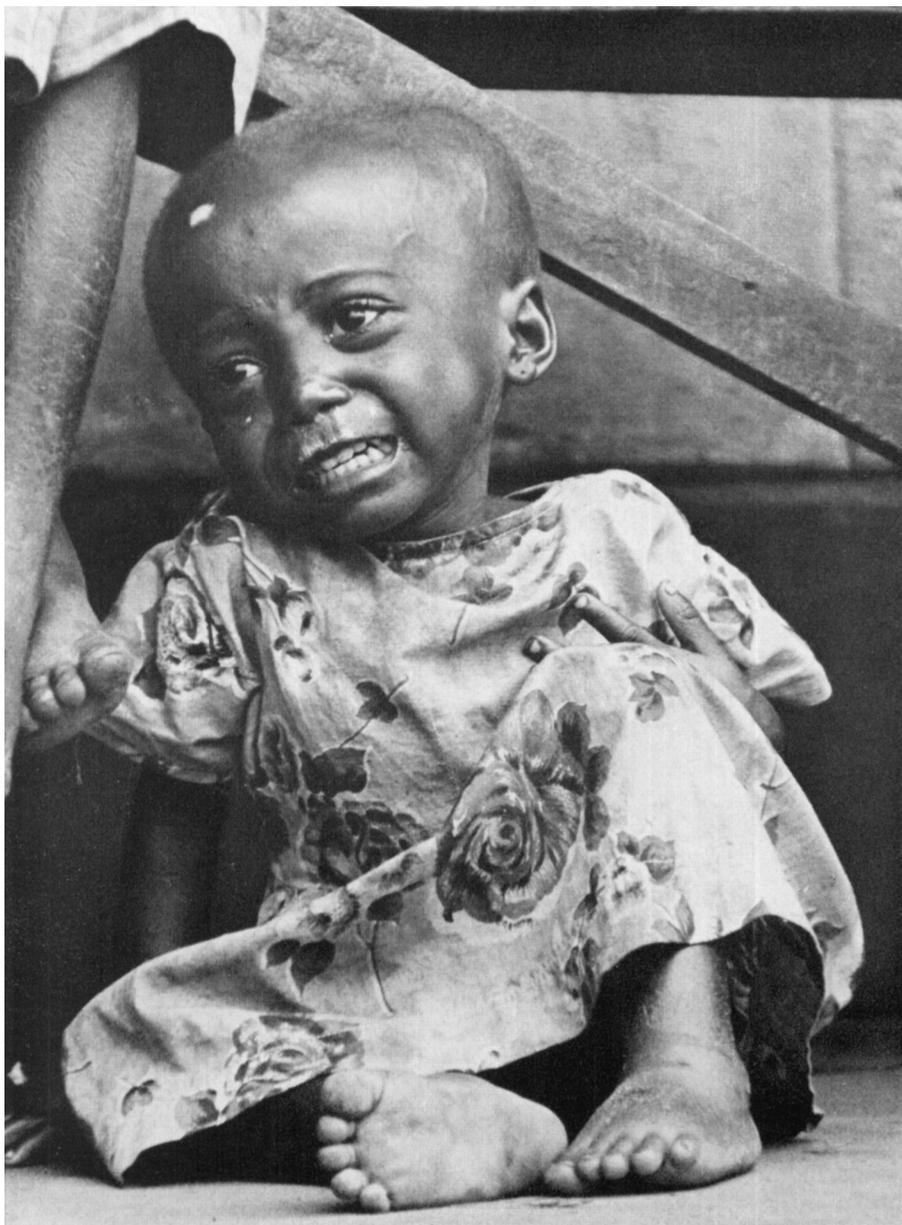
Famine is increasing daily in Biafra, as a result of the influx of refugees from Aba and other localities fallen into the hands of the Federal forces. It is estimated that thousands of persons are dying every day in Biafra, especially in the numerous refugee camps where there are many cases of Kwashiorkor, a disease due to a lack of proteins and malnutrition.

In July and August, the representations made by Mr. August Lindt, Commissioner General of the ICRC, and diplomatic efforts did not succeed in convincing the parties to the conflict to accept a land, water or air corridor in daylight. This has not prevented the International Committee of the Red Cross from pursuing concrete action. Throughout August, with the tacit permission of the Lagos authorities, a Swiss DC-6B aircraft of the Balair line, chartered by the ICRC, made 31 flights, carrying 231 tons of food, medicines, fuel etc... from Santa Isabel to Biafra, as well as medical, technical and administrative teams of the ICRC and National Red Cross Societies.

¹ See *International Review*, September 1968.

² *Plate*. — Biafran child in transit centre of the ICRC, near Umuahia. Refugees from conflict arriving at ICRC transit and feeding centre. An injured man being treated by ICRC doctor-delegate at Uturu Red Cross centre. Distribution of relief supplies to refugees.

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Photos CICR - Vaterlaus

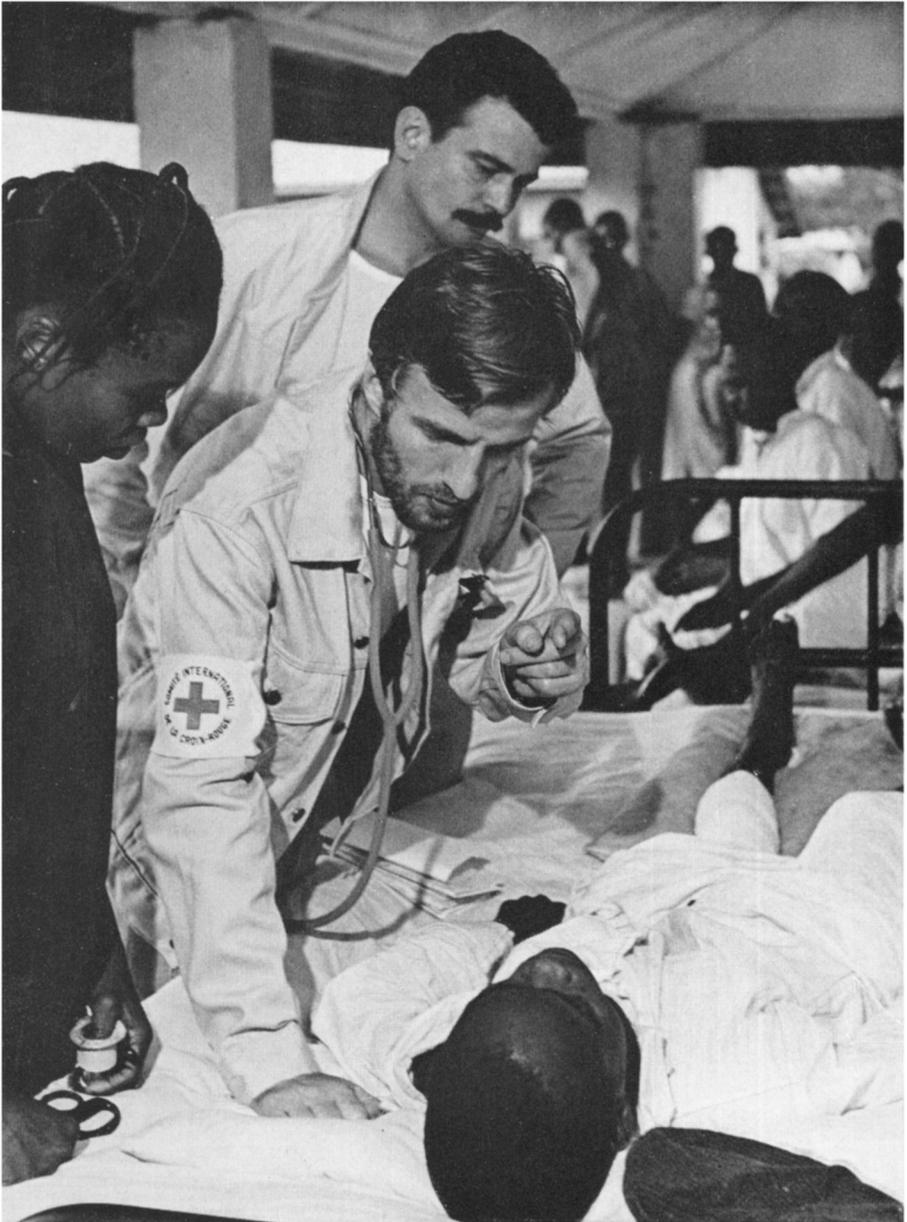
Biafran child in transit centre of the ICRC, near Umuahia.



Refugees from conflict...

... arriving at ICRC transit and feeding centre.





An injured man being treated by ICRC doctor-delegate
at Uturu Red Cross centre.



Distribution of relief supplies to refugees.

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By the end of August, the Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Finnish and Netherlands Red Cross each decided to place an aircraft at the disposal of the ICRC to transport food and medicines from Santa Isabel to Biafra. The ICRC thus had 6 aircraft available: one DC-6A, 3 DC-6B, one DC-7C and one Hercules C-130. The ICRC decided to mount Operation INALWA (International Airlift West Africa), for daylight flights for ten days with a possible extension of that period. An agreement to that effect was made between Mr. Lindt and General Gowon, Commander of the Nigerian Federal Army.

The following is the text of the joint communiqué released on 3 September in Lagos:

“ The head of the Federal Military Government and Commander in Chief of the armed forces received Mr. Lindt the ICRC-Coordinator of relief operations in Nigeria this morning to discuss ways of speeding up the delivery of relief supplies to people in the war affected areas. He was accompanied by the Swiss Ambassador to Nigeria Mr. Fritz Real. It was agreed as an emergency measure for the duration of ten days that the ICRC may move supplies from Fernando Poo direct to an airstrip in the Uli/Ihiala area in daylight, that is between 8 am and 5 pm, with effect from Thursday September 5, 1968. It was however recognised that such emergency relief flights will be inadequate in the face of the quantities of relief supplies required and that movement along water and land corridors is essential. The ICRC will therefore immediately use its influence and take steps to make it possible to move food and other relief supplies along the land corridor leading south from Enugu through Awgu and/or any other agreed corridors. Mr. Lindt assured the Commander in Chief that the ICRC will continue to cooperate with the Federal Government over the ICRC relief operations in Nigeria and explained that it was never their intention to bring in supplies into the country under armed escort as that would be contrary to the principles of the Red Cross ”.

However, the Lagos Government imposed the condition that the ICRC aircraft land at Uli, an airfield which the Biafrans also use for military purposes. This was refused by the latter, as the neutralization of Uli would prevent military supplying. The Biafra authorities offered the new airport of Obilagu, completed at the end of August. Further difficulties having arisen, the agreement proved to be inapplicable. The ICRC then decided to increase night flights. Six, seven and sometimes nine flights were carried

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out each night. Around September 12, however, as a result of the advance of Federal troops, the fighting came very close to the two airports of Uli and Obilagu. Mr. Karl Heinrich Jaggi, head of the ICRC delegation in Biafra, decided to cancel flights for the nights 14/15 and 15/16 September. Flights were resumed on September 16. Since the beginning of Operation INALWA on September 3, in spite of adverse weather conditions (rainy season), 75 flights had by the end of September transported 660 tons of relief and 97 passengers from Santa Isabel to Biafra. Consequently, there has been a substantial increase in the quantity of relief routed to the starving civilian population in Biafra. However, Mr. Jaggi considers that at least five times this amount is required to relieve famine. Only the opening of a land corridor would render such supplying possible.

Amongst the organizations which are supporting the ICRC's action, mention should be made of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which, since the beginning of the conflict has made available to the ICRC considerable amounts of foods and medicines, as well as given it much financial support. In addition, UNICEF loaded more than 5,000 tons of relief on board a steamship which sailed from the United States at the beginning of September for Lagos.

Other humanitarian organizations such as Caritas Internationalis, the World Council of Churches, carry relief to Biafra from the island of Sao Tomé; the French Red Cross does the same from Libreville.

RELIEF POSITION

Relief supplies stored in Federal territory amount at present to nearly 7,000 tons, of which 4,000 tons are in Lagos and 3,000 distributed in the forward depots at Benin-Agbor, Enugu and Calabar. An additional 9,000 tons have been promised in Lagos for the first fortnight in October. To transport this relief consignment from Lagos to the forward depots and to distribute it to the population, the ICRC delegation in Federal territory has at its disposal two DC-4 aircraft, one helicopter chartered by UNICEF, two coasters, each of 500 tons, operating between Lagos and Calabar, one freighter of 700 tons, 113 lorries and 87 other vehicles.

As regards the supplying of Biafran territory, the Committee has available 3,300 tons stored in depots at Santa Isabel, 500 additional tons are expected shortly and a further 1,800 tons have been promised for the first fortnight in October. In addition to the six aircraft based on Santa Isabel, the ICRC has lorries in Biafran territory for the transport and distribution of relief, as well as ambulances and light vehicles.

The ICRC is already actively seeking to obtain several thousands of tons of relief indispensable for the pursuit of its actions in Nigeria/Biafra.

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DELEGATIONS

In order to cope with the situation, the ICRC has recruited relief teams on both sides of the fighting line and established three operational bases: Lagos in Federal territory, Umuahia in Biafra and the airport of Santa Isabel on the Spanish island of Fernando Poo, as base of departure for the six Red Cross aircraft charged with carrying relief each night to the civilian population in the zone under Biafran control.

Thus, 240 persons, distributed in Red Cross teams are installed in Federal territory. These teams consist of doctors, welfare personnel and the necessary technical personnel for transport and distribution. There are, moreover, 85 persons also sub-divided into Red Cross teams already at work in Biafran territory. These teams comprise doctors, surgical personnel, nutrition specialists and personnel for distribution and transport. Further teams of nutritionists are expected from Sweden (Kwashiorkor teams). All this personnel works in close cooperation with the Nigerian Red Cross and also with the Biafran medical personnel.

At Santa Isabel, some 130 people, including 50 air transport technicians, organize and co-ordinate the routing of emergency relief by air to Biafran territory.

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EVACUATION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS FROM BIAFRA

In keeping with tradition, the ICRC is helping the foreign nationals who, in increasing numbers, are leaving the territory under Biafran control. In September the ICRC has organized the transport and removal of over five hundred foreigners to Santa Isabel on Fernando Poo and to Douala in the Cameroon.

Before mounting these operations at the request of the people wishing to be evacuated, the ICRC secured the agreement of the Biafran authorities and of the federal military government in Lagos, as flights would have to cross part of its territory. Moreover, the governments of the countries to which these people belonged had asked the Committee to assist them. Some of them were already the subject of enquiries by the Central Tracing Agency, Geneva.

From September 13, therefore, the ICRC aircraft were not returning empty. After carrying relief to Biafra, they evacuated 40 Indian and 106 British nationals from Biafra to Santa Isabel between September 13 and 18. On the night of 19-20 September, 18 women, 2 men and 61 children of British, French and German nationality, returning by a special Red Cross flight from Santa Isabel, landed in Switzerland, in transit, before proceeding to their own countries.

* * *

To summarize, although the agreement of September 3 could not be implemented, the ICRC was at least able from then on to increase its night flights with the six aircraft supplied by the Scandinavian Red Cross Societies. On almost every flight the aircraft were fired at and the courage of the crews must be acknowledged. For the return trip, the aircraft evacuated foreign civilians.

By the end of September the situation was the following: refugees to be assisted in territory overrun by Nigerian forces, 1 million; in Biafra 3 million; ICRC personnel in the field 500, including 150 in Biafra; food stocks 3,800 tons in Nigeria, 3,000 tons on Fernando Poo, 10,000 tons en route in 16 ships; relief distributed by the ICRC in September, 1,500 tons in Nigeria and 1,300 tons in Biafra; mercy flights to Biafra by ICRC aircraft since April, 193, 146 of which took place in September. These flights

were stepped up at the end of September: on the night of September 30-October 1, 103 tons of relief goods were flown into Biafra.

No relief mission since the second World War has been so difficult or such a strain on ICRC resources.

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After this factual report, we quote below from articles by Mr. François Mazure, of Agence France Press, who went to Biafra in September. He describes the absolute need for assistance and the many and dangerous jobs carried out under the sign of the Red Cross to provide that assistance by every possible means.

Red Cross Relief in Biafra.—For over an hour the ICRC Land Rover has been jolting its way along the soil of the track, through muddy holes, down steep inclines, up stiff gradients; slithering, stopping and setting off again, to the grinding of gears by the Biafran driver. The destination is the Nkporo refugee camp some 30 miles north-east of Umuahia, Biafra's present capital, and only 12 miles from the front. Sitting beside the driver, 38 year old ICRC delegate Roland Troillet watches the passing trees as the car toils on through the forest. He is a permanent delegate of the ICRC in Geneva and for the last three weeks has been managing the International Red Cross relief distribution programme in the Umuahia province, where 50,000-60,000 refugees are herded into 70 camps.

In the bumping Land Rover Roland Troillet examines his file: Nkporo, with three well set up refugee camps and eight dependent villages still badly organized. Biafran Red Cross estimate of population 7-8,000 in all. Figures float about in his head: one sack of stockfish (dried salted protein-rich fish) for 400 people for a week... and 25 sacks of it in the lorry behind. On the way back I could stop off at Okwoko camp and leave them five surplus bags... the milk will just about be enough...

The white Land Rover with the red cross on each door pulls into a village. It has to wait for the old lorry from the Biafran Red Cross which is following with the relief supplies and has fallen behind. The villagers thin and smiling come out of their little mud huts. The lorry catches up and the journey continues to Nkporo, some eight miles away. When the convoy arrives at Nkporo a whirling crowd of ragged squalling children submerge the Land Rover. These little refugees know the vehicle which came last week to bring them food. Clusters of tiny hands are outstretched

towards Troillet as soon as he opens the door. He makes his way to the camp manager who is waiting for him, a sheaf of papers in hand.

Twenty sacks of stockfish, 8 of powdered milk which look like bags of cement, and 14 sacks of salt are unloaded from the lorry. Signatures, rubber stamps, endorsements, reckoning up, palavers, receipts... the ball-point pen-pushing goes on among the headman, the delegate of the Biafran Red Cross and Troillet, who suppresses his impatience with difficulty. In the meantime, the wife of the headman has had two large pans of water boiled for the preparation of the milk. One part milk powder to ten parts water. A large cupful morning and evening for each refugee. Their blue plastic tumblers in hand, the youngsters queue up, fascinated by the steaming pans.

"How thin they are. Look at their legs. You'd think there were on stilts" exclaimed a young Scandinavian photographer accompanying the convoy. Troillet shrugs: "Wait till you see those who no longer have the strength to come to the distribution. Beside them this lot is big and fat. I'm not worrying about them. If you want to see the real problem in this country, follow me." The procession of Red Cross workers and newspaper reporters follows Troillet along a path through the undergrowth. Some 150 yards away from the road is a technical school, converted into a refugee centre. It consists of buildings forming a square around a central court, as can often be seen in Africa. The setting is normal for the region, but over the threshold is another, inhuman, world, the sight of which chills the blood. In each doorway and corner is a group of living skeletons, motionless, emaciated, their eyes blank, their skin ashen; the resurrection of the dead on the day of doom. It is an incredible scene. The visitors are dumbfounded. The photographers dare not take a photo. One of them finally does, but the click which breaks the silence is so loud that he is too embarrassed to repeat it.

Under a still legible notice over the entrance to the former handicrafts room, a young woman is sitting, clutching to her a small shapeless mass: it is her baby. She must at one time have been beautiful, to judge from her face which is not too marked. But her wrinkled, worn, dried out body is that of an old woman. She has not the strength to speak. Slowly she opens her arms to show her baby. Its little arms are as thin as chicken wings, grasping the horrible empty sack that was once a breast. Under the child's translucent skin, stretched like skin over a drum, all the bones of its body are clearly outlined. Its thighs are no thicker than an adult's thumb. A nurse in the group whispers "Nothing can be done to save the child, even if it were sent to the best hospital in Europe. But we'll save the mother. Let's see which ones we can

save ". In each building, each former classroom, where the blackboards still bear drawings which had illustrated the last lessons given so long ago when life was normal, are human wrecks, hundreds of them, just waiting for death.

In each room the arrival of the visitors causes a feeble stir of curiosity. In the gloom, skeletal silhouettes move in slow motion. The fleshless forms of women, children and old people rise with great effort from their litters, their eyes protruding, then drop exhausted. None of the visitors can meet the gaze of the children; none can bear the self-accusation it engenders. The stench, the horror and the heat are too much for some of the visitors. A female German reporter no longer able to contain her sobs goes outside repeating " My God—this is just like the concentration camps. Why does the world let this sort of thing happen? " A tall grey-haired protestant clergyman fresh from Europe and who arrived with the convoy stands motionless in the background, tears streaming down his lined cheeks.

The Red Cross team gets to work, selecting those who can be saved and are fit to be moved, dispensing warm milk and half a stockfish per person, " sufficient ", says Troillet, " to keep an adult alive for three days ". He makes sure with the headman that the 7,000 refugees at Nkporo will receive the vital minimum subsistence until the arrival of the next Red Cross lorry in a week's time. " It's a race against time; the lives of tens of thousands in my sector hang by a thread, the relief supplies we distribute: that thread must not be cut ".

We must move on. Three more camps have to be reached before nightfall. Outside, a man is digging graves, and there is already a long row of tell-tale oblong mounds where the grass is already growing, or the earth still fresh as on the sixteen graves of those who died in the last two days at the former technical school. The same distressing scenes are to be found in all the camps we visit. There are model camps which show what could be done if assistance in medical and food supplies and qualified personnel were adequate. At the Umu Okpara dispensary, about 5 miles north of Umuahia, a staff of twenty, nearly all Biafrans, including a dozen nurses, are taking care of 70 children found in the bush near the front. When brought in they were like skeletons, but they have improved daily and have now learnt to smile again. At Oboro, about 6 miles north west of Umuahia there are 124 orphans recovering from the starvation they were suffering from when found wandering in the bush. But for every camp operating well, there are ten which are a disaster. There are the camps which are far from the main roads, a serious handicap when war hinders communication. In these camps and those near the fighting areas the people lie in the mud

and often in the open. The relief teams are met by howling mobs seeking to get at the food, and often compelled to beat them off to save themselves from being overwhelmed and trampled underfoot, as has nearly happened to more than one ICRC delegate, including Mr. Troillet and his assistant.

The International Red Cross specialists in Biafra estimate that in the whole country, which is by now only about 60 miles in length and the same in breadth, there are at present from 3 to 4 million refugees, all of them Biafrans who have fled the Nigerian troops' constant advance since hostilities began. From 800,000 to a million are living in refugee camps and should, in theory, be receiving assistance from the Red Cross or the other two large humanitarian organizations in Biafra: Caritas and the World Council of Churches.

The remaining refugees, some 2 to 3 million, are living in the bush, in the neighbourhood of villages or roads. Their's is the worse plight. The death rate among them is not known, but the ever-present vultures in the sky, and the sickening smell of rotting corpses sometimes polluting the air for mile after mile in certain remote parts of the country, are eloquent testimony to what conditions must be like deep in the bush...

Red Cross Airlift to Biafra.—High in the sky, bringing hope to millions of starving people, the four-engined International Red Cross aircraft speeds through the African night towards Biafra. In its holds are the nine tons of food loaded at the Fernando Poo airport. The ICRC ground crew which took over Obi airfield on August 13 is ready to give the aircraft a quick turn-round. In the control tower, camouflaged against the background of the bush, Colden the Swede watches his instrument panel. Outside, indifferent to the rain squalls, the Norwegian Klevan, head of airfield operations, is waiting at the end of the runway, with his walkie-talkie. Behind him is a long line of trucks, lights off, with fifty yards between each as a precaution against attack from the air. They will take the cargo from the aircraft to the International Red Cross distribution centres in Biafra.

As on every single night since the airfield became operational on September 3, some twenty Scandinavians and Swiss, sent out by the ICRC, wait for the night's first plane to touch down. Not a light, not a sound, betrays the presence of the airfield. Anyone twenty yards away would not realize it was there. Suddenly, at a signal from the control tower, the landing strip springs to life like the stage of a huge theatre under the glare of the spotlights. People are running about; orders are given in various languages. As if by magic, hundreds of small flickering lights outline the

runway. Less than a minute later, the DC-6 looms out of the darkness with a deafening roar, its two white headlights piercing the curtain of rain. It touches down without even going the full length of the runway and comes to rest on the unloading area. The runway lights immediately go out and the airfield is once more dark and silent. "Any marauding Nigerian plane would have had less than two minutes to locate the airfield and attack," a Red Cross delegate pointed out.

Already two lorries have pulled up beside the aircraft and unloading has begun. Captain Pentti Palenius, and his co-pilot Vuppe Tuchinen, alight from the cockpit as calmly as if they had just touched down on a major international airport. This is the Finnish crew's eighth night landing in Biafra. "Yes, we're being shot at, but not yet hit," says the co-pilot imperturbably. Half-an-hour later the DC-6 has been unloaded and has taken off for the return flight to Fernando Poo. The runway was lit only for the take-off. Darkness and silence reign again at the Obi landing ground until the next aircraft comes. Throughout the night, the whole procedure is repeated several times. A little before dawn when the last plane has left, the ICRC ground staff snatches a few hours sleep in a tent or in the little town of Uturu.

One of the International Red Cross delegates, Jean Krille, has been sleeping under canvas by the landing ground since 13th August, to ensure the ICRC's presence round the clock. "The landing ground", he says, "is said to have been bombed over twenty times since it was constructed..."

...Tomorrow, Mr. Krille and his crew will be off to the relative safety of Umuahia after handing over to a Swedish-Norwegian team which arrived two days ago. One of the new team's jobs will be to ensure Biafran respect for the landing ground's neutrality. It was not without difficulty that Mr. Krille secured that respect. "When we arrived on the 13th of August", he said, "the place was teeming with Biafran soldiers. As the ICRC had that very morning signed an agreement with Colonel Ojukwu, guaranteeing the ground's neutrality, I had the soldiers evacuate the ground, but it was not easy. I twice had to send off a young lieutenant who wanted at all cost to set up his ack-ack guns beside my tent—for my protection he said!"

...The Red Cross representatives who sleep at the landing ground have dug trenches beside their tents. Roland With has not taken this precaution. "I haven't had time", he says, "I'm the handy man and always busy. Right now I have to look after the runway lights. There weren't any at first and we had to make them ourselves". He proudly displays his invention: rows of empty bottles. With wicks protruding from the necks, they look like Molotov cocktails. "I bought hundreds of these empty beer bottles at

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Uturu and filled them with petrol. We made the wicks from dressing gauze and elastic bandage scrounged from a medical team. Every evening they are placed around the perimeter of the runway and as soon as a plane's arrival is announced, a band of Biafran youngsters I recruited at Uturu and who now spend their nights around the edge of the runway, light the lamps with torches I made. So far none of the pilots has complained about my system and there hasn't been a single accident..."

Another International Red Cross team distributes relief supplies at the depots which were recently set up in the provincial capitals still in Biafran hands. It has 18 large lorries and hopes to increase this fleet to 50 by next week.

The ICRC has also sent surgical and medical teams to Biafra. Widen Matti, for instance, arrived yesterday evening with a 30-strong Swedish team...

He is 27 years old, a nurse, and worked in an anaesthesia team at St. Erik hospital in Stockholm. Red Cross volunteers in Biafra come from various countries: Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Yugoslavia, France, Denmark and Finland.

The Red Cross airfield manager, Ingolf Klevan, wants the Red Cross teams to continue as long as possible in this sector. "At the moment the front is 12 miles to the North-East and 23 to the East. At dawn we can often hear the Nigerian guns. If they take the airfield, we hope that our status as Red Cross delegates will protect us".