

Clyde -
 Here is last Friday's
 statement. The top
 page was handed out
 and the second one only
 sent out. SCS

W. S. Schmitt

Nigeria - Attack on ICRC Planes

The United States has learned with deep regret of the attack by the Nigerian Air Force on one and possibly more transport aircraft carrying relief supplies into Biafra. The exact number of aircraft involved and the circumstances are not yet clear. We are urgently seeking details.

The United States has taken a clear position with regard to relief in the Nigerian civil war. We have drawn a sharp distinction between the political issues underlying the conflict and humanitarian relief to both sides. We have consistently avoided military and direct political involvement in the war. At the same time, however, we have played a leading role in the international effort to reduce suffering on both sides. The American people have contributed generously to this cause.

We have on a number of occasions urged Nigeria to take precautions which would avoid the dangers of action against relief operations. While recognizing the problem created by the intermingling of arms flights and relief flights, the United States Government deplores this attack.

This incident underlines the urgency of alternative relief arrangements for daylight flights and surface corridors. This has been the mission of Ambassador C. Clyde Ferguson, our Special Coordinator for relief, who has been working with both sides to this end.

AF/L

PRESS BRIEFING PAPER

June 6, 1969
AF/P

Nigeria - Attack on ICRC Planes (Additional Background)

ON BACKGROUND, to see this attack in perspective, the following factors must be borne in mind:

1. Arms flights and relief flights are intermingled. Both utilize the same major Biafran airstrip, both use similar flight patterns over Nigerian territory to reach it, and both operate only at night.

2. Thus, there is danger of confusion between the relief flights and the arms airlift, under conditions in which both the approaches and the Biafran airstrip are major military targets for Federal Nigeria. Any Nigerian attempt to intercept an arms flight runs the risk of hitting the relief planes.

3. We have long been conscious of these dangers. We have repeatedly urged both sides to reach agreement on daylight relief flights and surface corridors. This would not only increase the flow of relief supplies into Biafra but would avoid the present and extremely dangerous comingling of relief and arms flights which led to this tragic incident.