

# Radiocommunications

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and assistance to the victims of war and natural disasters. Recent numbers of the *Review* thus contain very extensive and varied information on the relief operation which requires most considerable forces, accomplished and continuing to be accomplished today in Nigeria by the ICRC and institutions allied with it in this large-scale enterprise.

## 6. RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS

The year 1968 was a turning point in the history of the ICRC radio station HBC 88.

Brought into service on 22 December 1963, this radiocommunications centre operated with unsophisticated and inexpensive equipment designed for occasional use a few hours each day. It gave fully satisfactory service until the end of 1967, both from the point of view of utility to the ICRC, thanks in particular to daily connection with the Yemen, and from that of the experience the ICRC was able to acquire.

The situation changed on 11 December 1967 when contact was first made by ICRC headquarters in Geneva with the operating base at Santa Isabel on the island of Fernando Poo. During the first half of 1968, traffic doubled; but no one expected it to increase fivefold during the second half of the year.

The number of messages, which was 800 in 1967, jumped in 1968 to the impressive figure of 4,387 radiograms, representing some 330,000 words. Communication on this scale by official telecommunications services to the Yemen, Fernando Poo and Biafra, assuming they were operative, would have cost, at the ordinary rate, over a million Swiss francs. At the rate for urgent telegrams the cost would have been double that amount.

Faced with this soaring amount of communications, the ICRC had to reconsider the whole question of equipment and personnel for its radio station.

**Equipment.**—The amateur-type radio equipment which gave satisfaction for five years was not designed for continuous service.

It then became necessary to replace this equipment with a more professional type. This applied not only to the main station in Geneva but also to the out-stations in Nigeria-Biafra, with which 90% of the daily communications were exchanged.

**Personnel.**—In July 1968, the ICRC had to dispense with the part-time radio operators recruited from among amateur radio enthusiasts and had in their stead to employ professionals. The enormous increase in traffic, as exemplified by the 48 telegrams totalling 36,000 words on 12 November, required skill far above the average for the transmission and reception of morse code messages.

Professional radio-telegraphists becoming increasingly scarce, the ICRC had recourse to some of the Swiss merchant navy operators. The Société de Télégraphie sans Fil " RADIO SUISSE SA ", for its part, kindly made available to the International Committee, free of charge, an operator for HBC 88 from the end of August to mid-December 1968.

Thus, well equipped in men and material, the ICRC radio-communications network at the end of the year came up to the most demanding professional standards. In addition, the ICRC had taken steps to improve its out-stations and the training of its temporary personnel.

**Trial Broadcasts.**—In 1968, the radio-communications service transmitted 6 trial broadcasts on 7,210 kilocycles (41.60 m. band). This frequency had been allocated to the ICRC for broadcasting, in case of need, family news received by the Central Tracing Agency.

These broadcasts, which were satisfactorily received in 46 countries, produced 2,400 reports from several hundred correspondents, 202 of whom were awarded the Regular Listener's Certificate for having followed all six broadcasts.