



CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1996-0072

Full Item Register Number [auto] **CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1996-0072**

ExRef: Document Series/Year/Number **CF/NYH/SEB/HST/1996-0072 ; CF/HST/INT/BAC-001/M**

Record Item Title

**Interview Strahinja Bacic by Dan Jacobs: Nigeria - Biafra ; Red Cross ; Supply ; Labouisse ; Airlifts ; Secretary-General I; Nigerian Mission to the UN;**

Date Created / on Item 7/29/1983 Date Registered 3/22/1996 Date Closed/Superceeded

Primary Contact  
Owner Location Strategic Information Section = 6090  
Home Location Strategic Information Section = 6090  
Current Location History Related Records =60909132

Fd1: Type: IN, OUT, INTERNAL?  
Fd2: Lang ?Sender Ref or Cross Ref CF/HST/INT/BAC-001/M  
F3: Format Form = 018 pp + 0 b

Container Record  
Container Record (Title)

N1: Numb of pages 16 N2: Doc Year 1996 N3: Doc Number 72

Full GCG Code Plan Number

Da1:Date Published Da2:Date Received 10/30/1989 Date 3 10/30/1989 Priority

If Doc Series?:

Record Type A02a Item Hist Corr - CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS

Electronic Details

No Document

DOS File Name

Alt Bar code = RAMP-TRIM Record Numb : **CF/RAI/USAA/DB01/HS/1996-0072**

Notes

= 18 pp + 0 b  
Archive Code Valid Date: 10/30/1989  
Ron Ockwell; Transport;Nigerian Ministry  
WU\_Staff:

Print Name of Person Submit Images

Signature of Person Submit

Number of images  
without cover

JOHN MANFREDI

John Manfredi

18

DOUBLE  
SIDED

Blank Page

Back of

Cover Sheet

ChronRef: CF/NYH/OSEB/HST/1996-072

File Subj: CF/HST/INT/BAC-001/M

8.8.83 ... 1536K

CF/RAI/USAA/DBO1/HST/1996-0072

CF/NYH/OSEB/HST/1996-072

Interview with Mr. S. Bacic

Conducted by Dan Jacobs in UNICEF Headquarters

29 July 1983

Jacobs: You were the chief of the Africa Section at Hqts of UNICEF from 1967 through 1970 during the Nigeria-Biafra situation. Do you remember how you first became concerned about Nigeria and Biafra?

Bacic: Well, obviously as in all other similar cases, one hears about what's happening. The Press started to write about these problems. We then had the first contact on this subject with the Red Cross, because for UNICEF it is always a question of how to go about it -- we had the idea that we could perhaps use the Red Cross. We understood that the ICRC was trying to solve this problem. We went with them to Lagos and discussed the first steps of cooperation in this direction.

Jacobs: That was November 1967?

Bacic: Yes 1967. One has to remember that at this time it looked, at least outside, that it was not a big emergency -- it did not have the dimensions it took later on. So we just had a meeting with them and agreed that there would be some transport of food to the children. I think it took some time to materialize but it was the very beginning of our action with them. I don't think we ever questioned seriously

afterwards whether we should continue this operation with ICRC or should we explore other avenues. In retrospect, many times we said we should not have done it at all.

Jacobs: You felt at times that ICRC was not accomplishing what it needed to?

Bacic: Well, yes...

Jacobs: It might have been better in retrospect not to have tied yourself so closely?

Bacic: Yes. They had their objectives, their approaches. As I say, when things didn't move, we felt stalled and blocked from all sides. Sometimes we felt we should have tried other approaches, but we were too deep.

Jacobs: Did you go this Lagos in December 1967 with Philip Zuger of the International Committee of the Red Cross?

Bacic: No. No.

Jacobs: You didn't go there? He negotiated some sort of agreement at the end of December 1967 which sounded as though it were going to be possible to start relief flights then. I thought you were with him but you were not.

Bacic: Yes, and we felt that since this did not materialize, we felt that

maybe we would have conducted negotiations in a different way.

Jacobs: Did you, during that period from November through July, when the starvation became quite grave, did you form any opinion as to what the problems were that were preventing relief from getting started?

Of course we were aware -- everybody was -- of what the problems were. It was a highly political problem -- there was a war and it was understandable that the government, federal government was not keen in letting outsiders help what they considered to be rebels, secessionists, etc. They were not encouraging that they be helped.

Jacobs: What kind of experience or reports did you get from the UNICEF representatives in Lagos about this?

Bacic: Well, since we are writing a history then this should probably not go on the record, I hope, except...

Jacobs: Well, these notes are in the archives that are being processed to become part of the historical record.

Bacic: Yeah, but...

Jacobs: I just remembered to...

Bacic: Well, I would like to say that they should not be printed somewhere or something like that because these are colleagues who are still alive. In twenty years when we are all gone or ten, or

whatever...During the whole period, our office in Lagos or the supervisor of that office, definitely minimized the problems of children in what was called Biafra and did not encourage our activities to help. It's understandable, he had to live in Lagos with the Federal government. Nobody expected him to be a protagonist in this thing. But one got the impression he was annoyed with this situation. Probably it made his life more difficult - he felt it might jeopardize UNICEF's position in Lagos. But I remember when I drafted, in Lagos, when Biafra fell (I was there with Mr. Labouisse and Mr. Sherry Moe), they were discussing some immediate measures, I took to the trouble to look into the files and imagined what could be an emergency action by UNICEF to be presented to the Board which was to meet in two months. And you know, there was no quote Biafra unquote file because the state didn't exist and ,it was very difficult to get statistics. But looking into the statistics available about Nigeria, I estimated the number of schools which Biafra should have at that time - health centres, etc.. (Incidentally, I missed the difference between schools existing and this estimate was 10%, a rather lucky stroke) and I came up with, as I say, not going into Biafra, not having information, sitting in that office, I think I estimated first action, \$3.5 million, \$4 million.. And, quickly done in haste, without any help from that office, and there is always a guideline - hoping that somebody would then prepare the food programme. And, the Director of the office that wrote to Charles Egger, we have the letter in the file: "Well, Sacha Bacic drafted a very sketchy proposal for possible presentation to me the Board", of course, "sketchy" working in Lagos without an office in Biafra, with no

statistics, we didn't know what has been damaged or not damaged. And he said, "But it's way out...too much. I think we could maybe spend \$250,000.00". It reflected a certain... So, finally the proposal went over \$7 million. I returned a month later. Again, worked alone in an office and nobody wanted to look at this submission. But, of course, later on the Board approved it and this operation was successful and we spent the whole money in three months. Then everybody was speaking of their programme. But, this is less important.

Jacobs: Should we go back chronologically to the time when the starvation became really grave in Biafra, which was about the beginning of July 1968, and can you recall that Summer when things didn't get moving for a couple of months so there was enormous public concern in Europe and North America putting great pressure on relief agencies, on governments, and also and most of all on the International Committee of the Red Cross which had been named to be the coordinator of relief. Can you remember much about the meetings you had and your efforts, with Mr. Heyward, to start getting food moving - things of that kind?

Bacic: Well, you said it now yourself.

Jacobs: That's what you were doing.

Bacic: That's what we were doing.

Jacobs: I just wanted to get it from yourself.

Bacic: And, really, it was a sense of terrible frustration. Big politics were played and some governments who made big statements about humanitaring goals of their governments, or spoke about the need to help the poor and the children and so on in the world for a, but at the same time didn't do anything to prevent it. There were thousands of children who were dying in Biafra who were could have been saved. There were so many moral crises in the war world after World War II, where because there was some access to information, embassies, in Lagos, and journalists, and people were flying to Biafra. And everybody knew that there was dying, mass dying, mass starvation, mass malnutrition of children, and at the same time, nobody did anything to help.

Jacobs: Can you recall whether you had any sense at the time, what was the problem. You were waiting for the Red Cross to act. Lindt had gone to Nigeria and then to Biafra. Mr. Labouisse was there at the same time in Lagos when Mr. Lindt was there. I'm not sure you were here in New York during the entire summer of July and August - you may have been away for part of that time?

Bacic: No, I was just here...

Jacobs: Can you recall what the problem was that the International Committee of the Red Cross delayed so long and took such a long time getting anything going?

Bacic: If I could put it in a nutshell. The difficulties they faced, - The



Red Cross - were obvious. I'm not surprised. The attitude of the Federal Government in Lagos was also in a way logical, if you want. Their main objective was to crush this rebellion. I don't think, frankly, that other governments would have acted differently. This is what I always stress because it's so easy to condemn, but look at what other governments have done, what are they doing today? And, you must suffer some casualties. You sacrifice certain things to achieve higher goals, etc. But then its the world who cannot accept such attitudes and has to do something, so there was this frustation. Personally, I came to the conclusion that we have to begin to act - create facts - and see then to get some approval, or rather to wait for approval and start then. I think that was a basic - and at least one colleague felt the same way, Mr. Heyward, with whom I worked very closely every day at that time.

Jacobs: Would you say that kind of "fact" was starting food on its way

Bacic: That's right, exactly.

Jacobs: Getting food into the area... What do you want to say what it was that when the time came that the food was arriving in Nigerian waters on a ship called the "Orient Exporter", the decison had to be what to do with this food - it was the end of August 1968 -- do you recall what happened?

Bacic: Well, we just did what I mentioned. You try to enter - its like a big building and you try twenty entrances and everywhere you go the door is closed so. So we said, let's try somplace close. And the

ship came, and I remember this vividly, Mr. Heyward called me. I've rarely seen him so frustrated! He said, "Well, now, what do we do?" Well, I looked at him, and said, "Why are you asking me?" - "Well, you are the Programme Officer and you are in-charge". So, I had a yellow pad and I just wrote with a pencil there at this point, "Lagos, so much food - 3,000 tons or something, and Sao Tome 1,800 tons." And he said, "Well, can we do that?" He wanted to really - he wanted to do it obviously. "Sure, it's our duty". We tried everything else and so on. And that's how we really began in Biafra without going through.

Jacobs: So you started serving as a channel for the United States Government donated foods to the church airlift into Biafra? That was the beginning...

Bacic: Yes, but I would not say that it was United States food - for any food...

Jacobs: That's where the food came from - the U.S. Government at the time might not have wanted to do that, but nonetheless, once it had begun, then they started doing it...

Bacic: Sure, but we didn't do it to solve their problem because what food we had at the time the ship was there and it would have acted the same way if some other food...

Jacobs: I think there was flour from Australia we were sending also...

Bacic: Yes.

Jacobs: I recall, though, that the International Committee of the Red Cross complained to Mr. Labouisse about your unloading food at Sao Tome for the church airlift?

Bacic: Sure, and Mr. Labouisse was not in New York when we took this decision and I don't know how he really felt about it. I know that he strongly felt about the children in Biafra, but you know, as Executive Director he has a different responsibilities than staff.

Jacobs: Well, that very month, during September he tried very hard to find better cargo planes for the two airlifts - he spent a lot of time trying to get governments to provide C-130s, do you recall that?

Bacic: Yes, yes. But that was not successful.

Jacobs: Do you recall that at the time the General Assembly began the Nigerian External Affairs Minister came here and complained rather bitterly about what UNICEF was doing at the time?

Bacic: Yes, he did...

Jacobs: What did the Secretary-General say about that?

Bacic: I can't remember really. But I would like to remind us of the very important contact which we had established with the Nigerian

government - probably one of the crucial or the crucial element for our ability to work after the collapse of Biafra. I went with Dr. Egger to the Mission of Biafra here. I can't remember if it was February '69, no, no, earlier. We went to see Mr. Clark...

Jacobs: Oh, you mean the Nigerian Mission? I think you said Biafra.

Bacic: No, no, sorry, sorry...

Jacobs: You went to the Nigerian Mission to the United Nations. January '68 you talked with Mr. Clark. He came here to Headquarters of UNICEF in July '68, so you and Dr. Egger had two meetings....

Bacic: No, then we had more! We told him what we are doing. So we kept him regularly (not regularly but every three or four months) informed on what we are doing.

Jacobs: Through the Nigerian Mission to the United Nations?

Bacic: The same. We flying our food and then he mentioned these planes - I remember one meeting I had with him, he mentioned in the same place ammunitions were being flown. I said, "We don't send the ammunition and if we didn't load the food, there would be more ammunition." So, it sort of reminds me...

Jacobs: The more food to be sent the less ammunition....

(laughter)

Bacic: The less ammunition!

Jacobs: It's not true, of course. They loved the ammunition first and then the food in any event but...

Bacic: I don't know but they also felt, whoever was sending these planes, it was also easier for them to justify this by saying that it is food for children, everybody had some interest this. And I think this was crucial to point out the cooperation after the collapse of "Biafra", because what happened, - you may remember, Mr. Labouisse nominated me as Acting Director...

Jacobs: Acting Director in Nigeria after the war was over?

Bacic: Yes. Yes. Mr. Larsen had some health problems, he went for a couple of months. And it was a very interesting thing that you saw all the relief workers who had been working in Biafra, being thrown out, not only from Biafra as Biafra but also from the Federal territory. Well, UNICEF had done the same thing, supporting the children in Biafra. Those people were humanitarian workers - There's no doubt of that. We were the only one being authorized to work. We worked closely with the Federal Government, Minister of Planning, etc., etc.. They gave us a house, they gave us warehouses. I got three warehouses! Port Harcourt, Enugu, some other warehouses, smaller warehouses. And there was nobody else in the first two months. Absolutely nobody else. UNICEF was in a way - not in terms of political

power or of military power but the Government of Biafra, we had food, we had trucks we had to repair them but we had drugs, medical equipment. We were the only source of...

Jacobs: Who were you dealing with in the Nigerian Government who was allowing you to...

Bacic: The Ministry of Planning. And with Mr. Clark who then was Special Advisor to General Gowon.

Jacobs: The same Clark who had been at the Nigerian Mission to the U.N.? He and Gowon were accepting of UNICEF's role?

Bacic: Yes, I think that Clark has played a very important role while being, of course, an eminent, important official of the Federal Government, has looked at the whole situation in a very broad context. He looked also at the image of Nigeria in the world and he didn't - at least in the discussion I've had with him, he never took a narrow view of these events: "Now we've won, now we're going to take revenge". On the contrary! "We have to build the nation." I think one cannot overestimate what he has contributed to this whole process.

Jacobs: That was B. Akparodi Clark.

Bacic: Yes.

Jacobs: Thank you.

Bacic: He was most recently an Ambassador of Nigeria to the United Nations in the late 70s or early 80s.

Bacic: Yes. Yes.

Jacobs: Could we go back earlier to the period during war -- were there any other major situations in which you were involved beyond those which we've just discussed -- involving the airlift or logistic supply or relations with the Nigerian Government or the International Committee of the Red Cross or the Secretary-General, or anything of that sort?

Bacic: Nothing I can add to...

Jacobs: You don't recall anything that's...

Bacic: I do, but since I happened to speak to you, having been present at that time, who has written a book on it and a lot of documents, I cannot and knowing that you will be making your contributions ...

Jacobs: I don't expect details, I just thought, for example, the Red Cross airlift was shot down June 1969, I wondered if that created a major problem for UNICEF at the time....Were you involved then? Or was it still being handled principally under the committee chaired by Fred Hamilton?

Bacic: No, the Committee didn't discuss those things...

Jacobs: They didn't discuss those things! You and Mr. Heyward were

principally the most concerned with these kinds of problems?

Bacic: Mr. Labouisse.

Jacobs: Mr. Labouisse, and Mr. Heyward and yourself?

Bacic: Yes, and I tried to assist him to...

Jacobs: What I would call the diplomatic level problems. Did you have any further ones during '69 do you recall? Before the war ended?

Bacic: Well, I don't recall any - how would I say - any very exceptional problems - money.

Jacobs: No involvement that caused you to go to Nigeria or... ?

Bacic: There was one very interesting and important major you know it is (of course, with hindsight) important. Well, we knew it was important but we never knew how very important it would prove to be. Mr. Heyward went to see the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, from Lagos, who was a Pakistani, a Brigadier, Khan was his name. I don't remember the full name - who was here in New York and it was a very brief meeting. I accompanied Mr. Heyward, and he was a very wise man and very cautious. And, with a few words which were more hints and allusions, he said to us that the end is near in Biafra. So, we listened to that and, of course, we did not ask, how does he know. He probably knew that the final offensive was coming and the Biafrans ran out of forces and probably also



determination and morale was getting lower. But he told us this was very important information. The second information was, we asked what should we provide. In addition to food which we were sending already. And he said, "If I were you I would make sure I had enough transport when the day comes. It was an extremely important information and Mr. Heyward instructed immediately that 30 Bedford trucks be ordered from the U.K. I cannot remember the date of this but you know...

Jacobs: It sounds as though it would have been December 1969. Collapse came or started on January 10th...

Bacic: No, it must have been earlier, before then. It must have been somewhere in the Fall, a couple of months earlier. Why I am saying this, because it takes some time to order trucks to get them. The trucks arrived one month or three weeks after they - oh, no, maybe six weeks - started to arrive, after the collapse of Biafra. Two months...

Jacobs: And they had to be shipped from Britain?

Bacic: Yeah, and they arrived. And I remember, we had a house where our staff lived. I put the trucks (I was already then in Lagos), I put them in the backyard of the UNICEF apartment house and hired some guards to watch them. First three arrived, then four and then another four, etc.. There was - they would take such trucks immediately. I wouldn't want to say who would take the trucks...

Jacobs: But they would disappear.

Bacic: They would disappear. We knew who would take them. These trucks, finally there were 30, were the backbone of our operation in Biafra - The Ex-Biafra - when we moved in. This gave us the advantage over everybody and abilities. I don't know what we would have done it. They transported the food. Huge trucks six ton, four ton, whatever. New trucks in perfect order. They transported the food. They transported the construction material for repairs of schools and for health centres. They made it possible this work-for-food action which we conducted. This one sentence from this man and Dick's quick reaction to it. I think if we had not had that transport, what could we have done with all that food? And how would we have transported that corrugated iron or steel, or whatever it was. How would we have transported the workers? Where would we have found such trucks? Then, we did, of course, other things, I remember: Plundering jeeps and volkswagen buses which were to go to India just took them away, diverted to Nigeria and so on. But nobody had 30 trucks in his programme and ready for transport. If we hadn't had these 30 trucks the whole operation wouldn't have spent the whole amount of 7 million in 3 months or 4 months. It would have taken many months, many years to spend that money.

Jacobs: Do you have any reflections on what lessons can be learned from this whole experience?

Bacic: Well, I would have to reflect on it but I did have many ideas at the time... But there was one operationsl conference. It was the first



because we give it to the Government and the government has no ability to distribute. In this particular case they may not even have had the political will to distribute. We did! We requisitioned a house in Enugu for our staff. We had to do these things.

Jacobs: How many staff did you have working at that time in the post-war period?

Bacic: Well, in Lagos, just three, that is incredible. But then we had a couple of people on the spot in...

Jacobs: You're excluding the drivers and people like.

Bacic: No, no, no, UNICEF staff. There were three professionals in Lagos

Jacobs: Ron Ockwell was brought in, he was one of those...

Bacic: Ron Ockwell, then Mutesip and Fred Gobbe and John Painter came for a month or two. It's a record in terms of how few people there were.

Jacobs: Do you have any other recollections or reflections that you want to get on the record?

Bacic: Well, I don't think I want to...I'm sorry we didn't have this discussion ten years ago

Jacobs: There was no History Project then.