

**The original documents are located in Box 1, folder “"Flying Playpens" - Photocopies” of the Shirley Peck Barnes Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

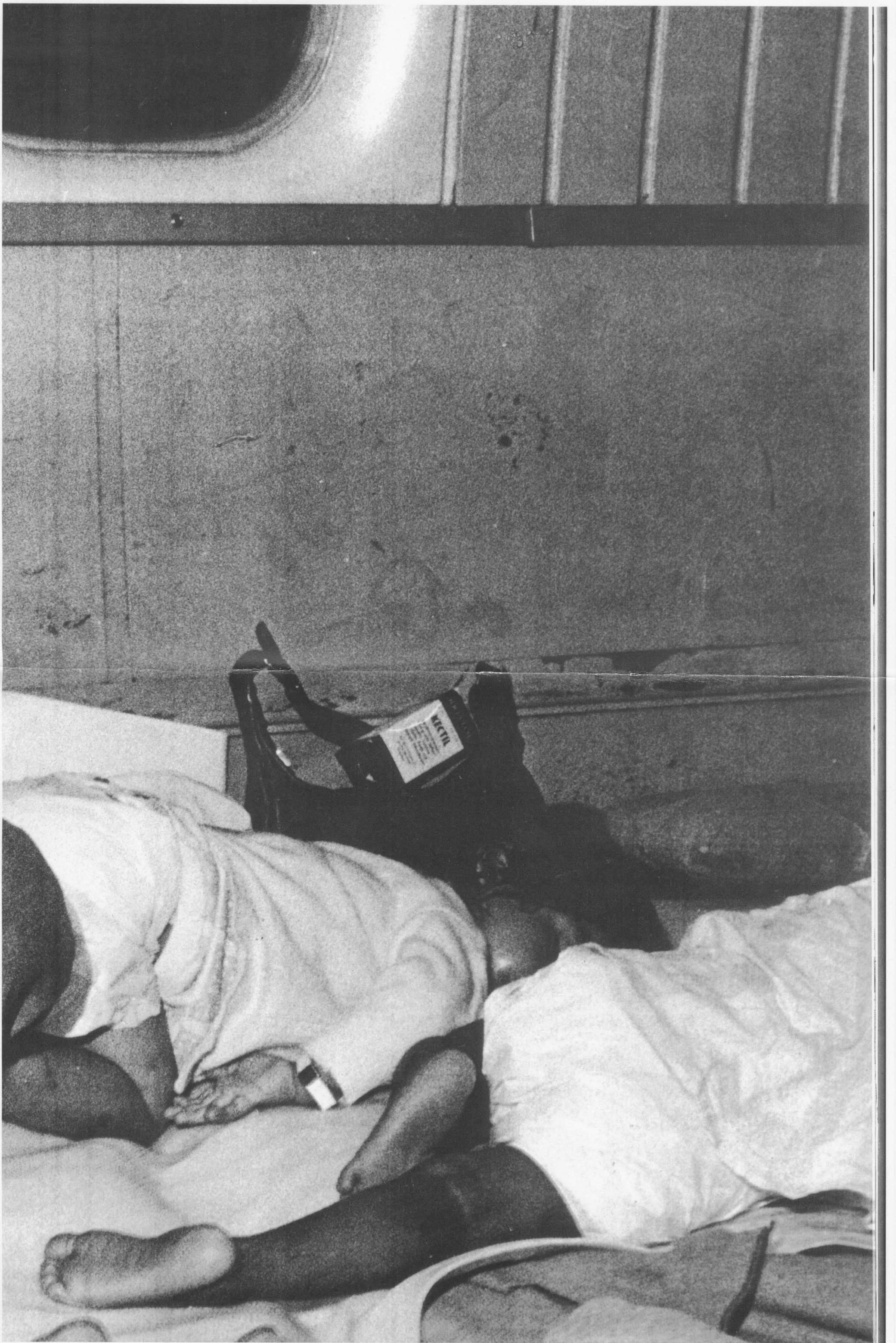
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minutes out of Saigon, World's controversial  
ved in Yokota, Japan to refuel before continuing across  
and, California. Daly (with hand still bandaged from  
1 Da Nang) helped unload two orphans considered too  
dehydrated to continue the flight. When healthier,  
ted to Oakland by wives of World crewmembers.  
most no sleep in two weeks, Daly met with reporters  
ght he was to become an American folk hero. He was  
ress as a "feisty, pistol-packing aerial wildcatter,"  
a throwback to those earlier Americans of animal spirits  
rying preposterous things . . ." His benevolent  
cratic red tape in the babylift venture was described  
ent of swashbuckling heroics which had disappeared  
lture in the 1940s." Thousands of letters, with  
id offers to help, poured into World offices from around  
2, the same day Daly's flying playpen arrived  
ational Airport, President Ford authorized a special  
airlift orphans out of South Vietnam.

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USAID had no time to come out and inspect the aircraft. No amount of assurance could change the minds of the officials of the Friends For All Children agency. Jan Wollett said:

They [U.S. and orphanage officials] seemed not to understand the way a cargo plane is set up with pallets and blankets and everything. It was perfectly safe. And we had doctors lined up, we had nurses, we had one adult for every 10 children and we could more than evacuate them in any emergency.

Discouragement overcame the World Airways crew. They felt trounced by a final low blow after having withstood hammering punches to the jaw. They sat around the airport, frustrated, spent. But Daly would not give up. He set about finding a new batch of orphans.

Daly called Mary Fisher, a nurse, whose husband was a pastor in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Saigon. He needed nurses and he needed babies; could

she help? It was the answer to Mary. She knew of six babies in the Seventh Day Adventist orphanage who had been adopted; they needed was transportation. Mary was looking for a way to get her own family to the States. She enlisted the help of her friend, Myrna Fisher, who was also a nurse. Myrna had her brood of four girls and two boys, ranging from two to fourteen months, appearing.

Then from out of nowhere, a young woman, one of the crew. "Are you flying to the States?" she wanted to know. Affirmative. "Do you have room for more?" Daly answered with a historic dispatch. "Hell, yes! Get them here." Daly and his wife, Sharon, were co-directors of the Children of Vietnam. It was 7:30. The door was knocked at their door. If they could in an hour, they could go, he told them. They took their orphanage twenty miles out.



USAID officials in Saigon called this stretched DC-8 jet converted into a flying playpen "antiquated and unsafe"; U.S. Embassy officials in Saigon considered Edward Daly's proposed orphan airlift "a hazard"; Red Cross officials refused any supplies. The first group of orphans scheduled to fly from collapsing Saigon was withdrawn from the flight by nervous orphanage directors only hours before departure time. (One of the war's saddest ironies was that many of those same orphans died several days later in the crash of a U.S. Air Force C-5 Galaxy after Operation Babylift won U.S. government approval.) Moments before planned takeoff, orphans from Tom and Sharon Clark's Friends of the Children of Vietnam orphanage arrived and boarded—without any official blessings, without anybody's permission. They traveled aboard this jet, stripped of its seats and overhead compartments. Cargo pallets had been locked together on the floor and padded with foam rubber, pillows and blankets bought shortly before takeoff on the black market. The flight was to touch the heart of the nation and galvanize Americans into action.

AP

nt back to the airfield to wait. Only five ad complete travel papers. Daly paid a fast port authorities. How much time would it t exit visas? Many weeks. "Then how much as it take?" he demanded. South Vietnamese arsh where bribery was involved. The officer e money but got on the phone and the ere duly delivered.

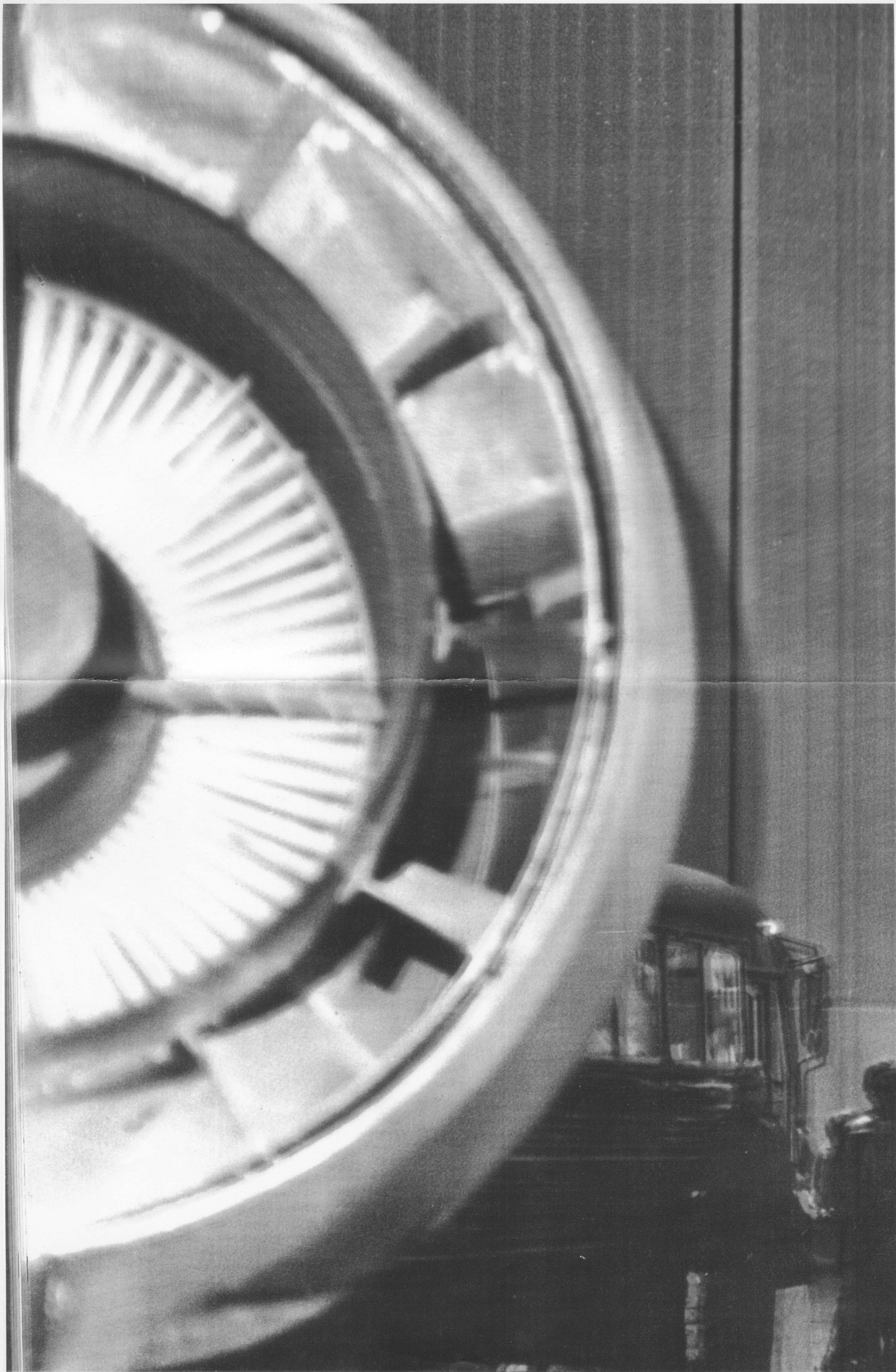
in readiness. But the trucks with the or- not arrive. It was 8:50 p.m. It had been a day. Darkness settled over the airport. a phone call for Daly. Another low blow. nam ordered him to leave. The airport had n full alert. All nonmilitary personnel had to prevent sabotage by infiltrators posing as rkers. It appeared the mission's fate was it true to the drama of Daly's life, the our was brightened by headlights heralding

minibuses packed with fifty-eight orphans, Dr. Hildebrand, the doctor in charge, another doctor and several nurses. The cargo had arrived. All systems were go!

Officials hurried the crowd into the plane without even checking names. But authority still wanted the final word. South Vietnamese Immigration officers boarded and in an overly-rigorous check began throwing people off. Jan told how they separated an eleven-year-old from his three-year-old brother. They threw two others off. They tried to throw off a mother who had boarded with her infant. Several times she was pushed out the door of the plane. Ken Healy said he saw them take her child away from her as she stood in the doorway, and he swore he would never know how that devoted woman later ended up hidden in the lavatory.

Immigration took almost an hour to complete its harassment. Then the doors closed. As they waited







At Oakland airport several hundred people awaited the orphans' arrival. None knew quite what to expect. But they were ready for any emergency, thanks to the adept coordination of Charlotte Behrendt, pictured at an Oakland airport press conference with her husband, Mel, center, and World vice president, David Mendelsohn. Charlotte, Daly's only child, had arranged the airlift with her father at the urging of an orphanage organizer who feared for the lives of Vietnamese youngsters if they should be captured by conquering forces.

Renouf said it was "like a giant playground." Disposition of the children went smoothly. Six babies went that very night to their new families in Sacramento. Bill and Christine Smart came to pick up their three. Four had to be hospitalized for treatment of pneumonia and malnutrition. Four and a half hours after their arrival—after a seven-thousand-mile flight, after having been inspected and checked out and unloaded and offloaded from half a dozen vehicles, and after having spent a lifetime with exploding bombs and fire and hunger and fear—four and a half hours after all that was behind them, the Golden Gate bridge a calm silhouette above them, the babies slept.

Daly's flying playpen captured the imagination of the media and the hearts of Americans. His act of

benevolent defiance touched off a groundswell of gratitude across the nation and motivated many to respond to the real need of South Vietnam. Letters poured into World Airways from the whole nation—from Middle Village, New York... from Indianapolis... from Los Angeles and Palm Beach... from Illinois and Montana... from chairmen of boards, West Pointers, clergy, teenagers. "You have our support," said a letter from New York. "Blood is marvelous," quipped a telegram from Rhode Island. The immediate responses written on April 2 and 3 indicated an intense desire to jump into the fray.

Hurrah for you! Can we be of any help? We are in our 60's, retired, and healthy.

—Yucaipa, California

I am 28, single, and can leave immediately.

—Burbank, California

I am a qualified weapons man and a qualified cargo man. I have three weeks vacation time coming which I will donate if you will let me help on the Vietnam express for the children.

—Gary, Illinois

On later orphan flights, several employees of airlines risked their jobs to volunteer their services. Some were found out by their companies and subsequently fired.

Along with the offers to help came plain old fashioned back-slapping, hand-pumping thanks. "It was a helluva nice thing you did for the refugees," wrote an account executive from E. F. Hutton. Many wrote as if they were toasting an old friend.

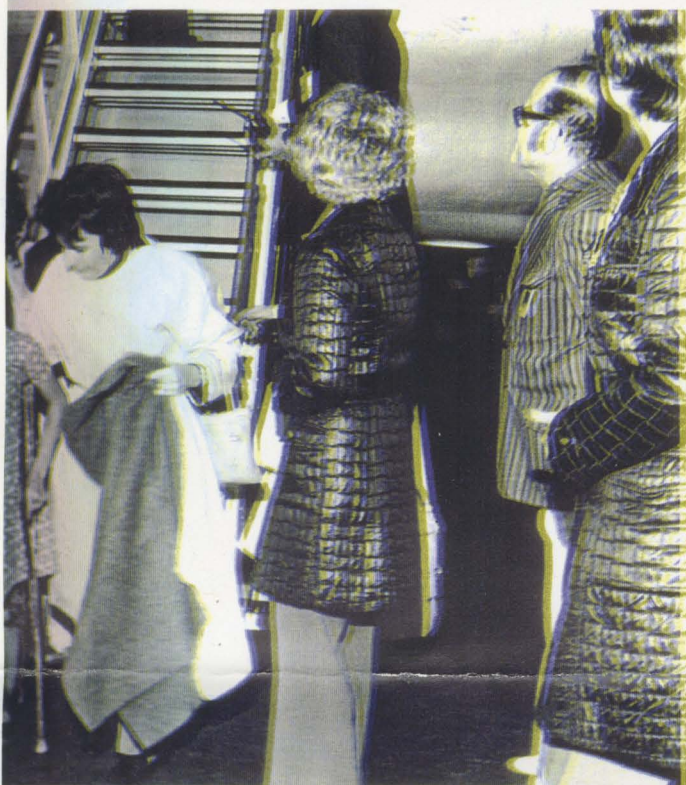
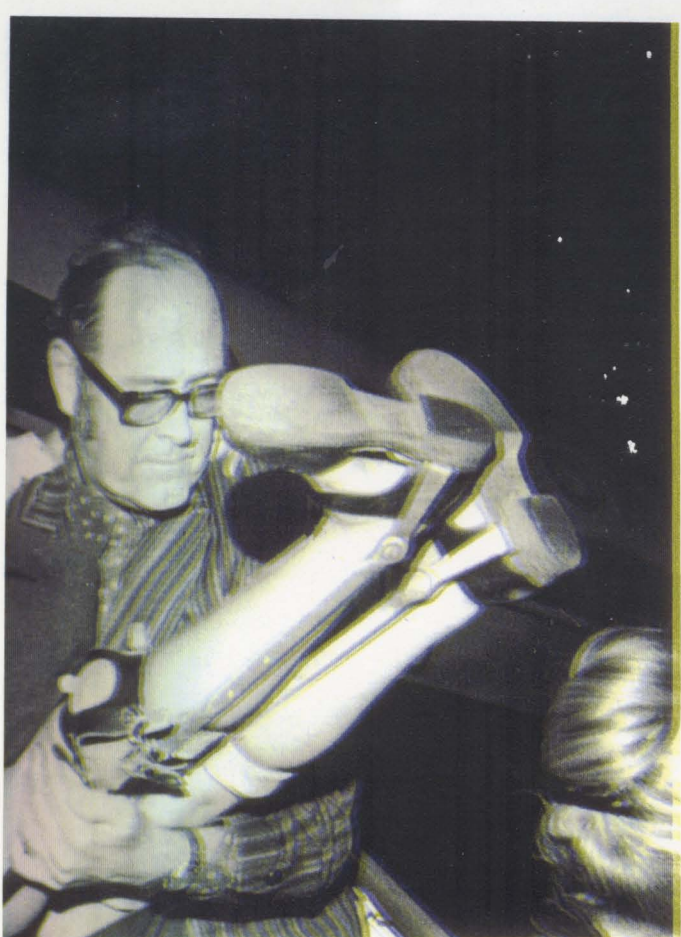
As for kid-saving and bureaucratic-busting—CONGRATULATIONS!

Today's gonna be a two-Gibson lunch—the first and second one's to you!

—Beverly Hills, California

All 195 pupils at Sisters of Saint Francis Immaculate Conception School in Omaha said "Congratulations!" and the principal dubbed Daly "The Very Greatest Child Rescuer." Another letter said "Thank you for what you did," but in a different way:







I express to you my sincere congratulations and my admiration for you personally. I bless you, Ed Daly, for your love of humanity, but most of all—your love for the children. The world needs more Ed Dalys. I will remember you in my daily Masses and prayers.

Henry J. Meade  
Chaplain, Major General, USAF  
Chief of Chaplains

words, "Whoever you are, Ed Daly, God bless you."—Buffalo, NY.

But Ford could not ignore the nation's mood, which poured into the White House, the State Department, and Capitol Hill from the moment the news came down in Oakland. Letters such as this one came to World with a copy to the White House:

I whole-heartedly approve of your actions to remove orphans and other children from South Vietnam during the last few days. . . . If only the government of the United States could cut the red tape and get those kids out to safety.

—San Jose, CA

That day night, April 2, an Agency for International Development administrator, Daniel Parker, announced Ford's authorization of a \$2 million special fund for orphans' fund to be used for airlifting two hundred orphans out of South Vietnam in the next few weeks. The package was named "Operation Babylift." In San Jose, California, many expressed a common sentiment about Daly's place in the decision:

I am confident that had you not taken the bold step you did in getting the 57 children out on their first flight that the United States Government would have ignored the situation.

We deeply need our heroes and there seem to be few of them today. You stand at the head of the list of modern American heroes in my mind. "A man is never so tall as when he stoops to help a child."



Also asked to meet the press at Oakland on April 2 were World pilots Bill Keating, left, and Ken Healy, right, and executive vice president Charles Patterson. For them and other World staff, Oakland meant the end of days and nights of unending pressure, preparations, anxiety—even laying their futures on the line.

What was being written by thousands in personal letters was voiced publicly by George Will in his April 7 column:

The U.S. government, and especially the Agency for International Development, is acting with a commendable sense of urgency. And the South Vietnamese authorities are showing no more than an understandable concern about regulating the departure of parentless children.

But everyone can do better—better for the frail children of the Indochina dust—if AID, and the rest of the U.S. government, is energized by the full power of the rolling waves of American concern.

There is a mandate struggling to register itself. Events in Vietnam have loosed the mighty river of American decency, a spontaneous flood of desire to put the government in the service of an unambiguously good cause, like helping the homeless, the tempest-tossed, the wretched refugee of Vietnam's teeming shores.

The Ford administration's gesture in organizing "Operation Babylift" was equaled by private citizens coordinating adoptions and other relief services. The



