

# Central Prisoners of War Agency

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Beckh) visited six places of detention of which one was a modern "open" prison. The delegate spoke without witnesses with 42 detainees of his choice. The authorities paid careful attention to the delegate's comments and stated their willingness to receive him on the occasion of further visits.

## **REUNITING OF FAMILIES**

The purpose of this work (to which reference has often been made in previous annual reports) which was started after the Second World War is to reunite members of families dispersed by the war or its after-effects. It was continued by the ICRC in 1959 ; the principal beneficiaries were persons of German origin or "Volksdeutsche".

During the past year some 20,500 adults and children were able to join near relatives in European and oversea countries. This figure brings the number of persons thus reunited under the auspices of the Red Cross, up to the end of 1959, to 373,000.

Various National Red Cross Societies lend their active support to this action, which is being continued ; some of them deal with the practical side of the work and keep the International Committee informed of the results ; in other countries the work is done with the direct participation of the ICRC.

## **CENTRAL PRISONERS OF WAR AGENCY**

Although the general volume of mail (172,000 postal items received and despatched) was slightly lower than in the previous year and despite a notable drop in the number of enquiries opened, the work of the Central Agency was nevertheless considerable in 1959. Furthermore, the volume of work and the number of complicated cases increase as the years pass by since the Second World War.

However, the very nature of these tasks shows that the present title of the Agency no longer corresponds to the work actually performed and a new official title is therefore being considered.

## **Searches for military personnel**

The Agency continues to make searches, in all parts of the world, for military personnel who disappeared during the Second World War<sup>1</sup> or subsequent conflicts. It issues certificates of captivity to former prisoners of war who are unable to give proof of their captivity.

The Algerian conflict has led the Agency to open enquiries, which have met with no great success so far, concerning missing military personnel ; it transmits numerous and urgent requests for information to the FLN and when, under the auspices of the ICRC, prisoners are released by this body, it informs the families concerned of their forthcoming repatriation.

## **Civilian enquiries**

The Agency receives in addition thousands of requests for information concerning civilians who disappeared during or after conflicts. If no information is available in the Agency's vast card-indexes, enquiries are opened immediately.

The Central Agency also assists with the reuniting of dispersed families ; it deals with the exchange of messages between " protected persons ", civilian internees or political detainees when the ordinary postal channels cannot be used.

The Agency's work is not based solely on the Third Geneva Convention (relative to the treatment of prisoners of war) but also on the Fourth Geneva Convention (protection of civilian persons in time of war). In either case, it covers the post-war period and works in close co-operation with National Red Cross Societies and a great many public and private institutions. Thus, in 1959 the Agency dealt with 87,000 individual cases and opened over 18,000 enquiries on military personnel and civilians.

With regard to searches for foreign civilians who disappeared from 1935 to 1945 in Germany or territories occupied by the

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. the number of German military personnel missing on the East European front is estimated at 1,200,000, and the families of about 115,000 German prisoners are without news of them.

German forces, the Agency works in close contact with the International Tracing Service in Arolsen <sup>1</sup> of which the administration has been entrusted to the ICRC since 1955.

**German Section.** — This section received about 2,000 enquiries monthly and the volume of work was practically the same as for the previous year. The military personnel section pursued (frequently by applying to the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR) its efforts to obtain information concerning combatants missing on the East European front during the Second World War. However, the chances of achieving any positive results, fifteen years after the close of hostilities, are steadily decreasing. On the other hand it is nearly always possible to issue certificates of captivity at the request of former prisoners of war or their families even if captivity related to the 1914-1918 conflict.

The civilian section continued to forward family messages and to seek for missing persons. In 1959 it received more requests than in the previous year for certificates of internment or death concerning former detainees in national-socialist concentration camps.

Excellent results were obtained on numerous occasions, especially in establishing contacts between members of families dispersed for over twenty years all over the world. This section also contributed actively towards the reuniting of "Volksdeutsche" families <sup>2</sup>.

As in previous years this section kept in close and useful contact with the German Red Cross and other national institutions.

**British Section.** — In 1959 this section issued a great many certificates of captivity in behalf of Palestinians and Israelites of various origins. The applicants, enrolled in the British armed forces during the Second World War had in most cases been captured in Greece and Crete and later interned in special camps in Germany. The certificates issued by the Central Agency enabled them to claim compensation made available by the authorities of

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 34.

the German Federal Republic to the victims of the national-socialist regime.

Certificates of captivity were also issued to former British prisoners of war, in some instances those of the 1914-1918 War.

**Italian Section.** — As in former years this Section's work was mainly concerned with the identification of combatants, prisoners of war and civilian internees who died during the Second World War. From October 1959 the work increased considerably, the Italian Government having requested the Central Agency to search for the medical records of a great many military and civilian internees who were admitted to hospital during their captivity in Germany.

**Greek Section.** — Lists of combatants killed during the civil war in Greece were sent to the Greek Red Cross. These lists had been established and sent to Geneva by an association of Greek emigrants in East and Central Europe. The information contained in the lists was sent by the Greek Red Cross to the families concerned.

**USSR Section.** — The work of this section, in particular searches, continues to increase. The results of enquiries opened by means of "family message forms" were often most encouraging. The Soviet post offices gave valuable aid by forwarding correspondence when the recipient was no longer at the address indicated. An increase was noted in the exchange of news between persons who emigrated after the two world wars and their relatives in the USSR. It is only when no reply to a message form is forthcoming that the Agency asks the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR to open an enquiry.

The Alliance sent to the Central Agency several thousand enquiry forms concerning former prisoners of war in German hands or civilians forced to leave their homes during the German occupation. These enquiries were forwarded to the International Tracing Service in Arolsen and the results were notified regularly to the Alliance in Moscow.

In some other cases the Alliance lent its services to the Agency to obtain authority for aged persons to leave the USSR and to join near relatives, husbands, wives or children in other countries.

**French Section.** — Part of the work of this section is related to the Algerian conflict. Despite most urgent and repeated approaches the ICRC has not yet received a nominal list of French nationals captured by the ALN during the hostilities. The section nevertheless opened nearly 500 enquiries with the Red Crescent Societies of Algeria and Morocco but has only received about 100 replies, half of which were negative, i.e. it was stated that the information required was not available. As soon as the information had been recorded the enquirers were informed.

**Polish Section.** — The number of cases dealt with showed no decrease compared to the previous year ; 14,000 postal items were received and 15,400 despatched concerning 5,550 individual enquiries. Requests for news of Jews resident in Poland were more numerous. In reply to enquiries concerning missing Poles in the USSR, the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Moscow sent a number of notifications of deaths without mention of the dates or circumstances.

Since 1947 the Agency's card-indexes have enabled about 7,200 certificates of captivity to be issued concerning former Polish prisoners of war. In 1959, four out of five requests for these documents came from the United States.

**Stateless Persons Section.** — As in the previous year, this section mainly dealt with the emigration of stateless persons resident in Egypt. This work decreased during the summer but started up once more in December.

The emigrants were bound, in particular, for Brazil, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Emigration to these last two countries showed a considerable decrease, the period for the special facilities granted to refugees from the Middle East having come to an end. Some emigrants who had been refused an entry visa to the United States while they were engaged in the necessary formalities in France were able to acquire official status with the assistance of Jewish organisations, especially the United HIAS Service in Paris.

The section also opened a few enquiries and transmitted about 80 family messages mainly concerning persons resident in Israel

or the United Arab Republic ; 285 new cases were dealt with in 1959 and departures of 396 stateless families were placed on record.

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The other sections of the Central Agency continued their work on a variable but, on the whole, useful scale. As the nature of their work, described in our report for 1958, has not changed, it is not referred to here.

### **INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE (ITS) IN AROlsen**

Since 1955 <sup>1</sup> the ICRC has been entrusted with the administration of the International Tracing Service in Arolsen (German Federal Republic) which is the most important centre of information on persons deported, displaced or missing in Germany and the countries occupied by the German forces during the Second World War. The work of this Service was still considerable in 1959 although there was a slight decrease in the number of cases dealt with. It mainly consisted of supplying individual applicants and German administrative bodies with the documents required for the payment of compensation to victims of the national-socialist regime in accordance with the legislation in force in the Federal Republic.

In 1959 the ITS received 125,871 applications (154,581 in 1958) which included :

- 64,280 requests for certificates to obtain compensation ;
- 38,540 individual enquiries and requests for photostat copies of medical records ;
- 22,885 applications for death certificates ;
- 166 requests for information of a historical or statistical nature.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annual Reports for previous years.