

# The work of the International Committee of "The Red Cross" during the Second World War

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only for our compatriots who remain in Switzerland, but also for those whose destiny it was to emigrate.

During the century that lies just behind us, Switzerland has developed and asserted herself more and more, whereas she was spared the horrors of the war and the wounds of internal troubles. However, while we are reviewing the past it is not possible to disregard the role played by our colonies abroad. Be it on a material or a moral plane, your qualities and your efforts, combined with the patriotism that inspires you, have contributed to the development of our country to the high regard in which it is being held. In the name of the Federal Council and of the Swiss people, I am sending to you this day our message of remembrance and of gratitude.

I am sending you wishes for the prosperity of our Swiss colonies disseminated throughout the entire world, and for the well-being of all their members. May they overcome, in all serenity, the difficulties which may confront them, and pursue with success the worthy mission with which they are entrusted.

Bern, August 1st, 1948.

(Signed) Max Petitpierre.

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#### SUCCESSFUL AUGUST CELEBRATION IN AUCKLAND.

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Auckland celebrated the August Anniversary with a very entertaining evening, held in the Commodore Lounge, Customs Street.

There were between fifty to sixty compatriots and friends present. Visitors were entertained by some of our own compatriots with items by Miss Weber, Mr. Moosberger (Recitations); Emil & George Bonny, Cello and Piano; Mr. Meier (Accordion); Mr. B. Gnadinger and Misses E. & D. Peyer (Songs). A Magician and also two films of Switzerland were very much appreciated by all.

A very enjoyable supper was served but it all ended too soon, as most people had to catch the last trams, buses and boats which leave the City at 11 p.m.

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#### THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF

#### "THE RED CROSS."

#### DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

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#### ... TO HELP ...

"The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot (army base) troops. Clothing, underwear and footwear shall be supplied to prisoners of war by the Detaining Power. The regular replacement and repair of such articles shall be ensured."

These two provisions, quoted from Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention, are in themselves sufficient to cover the material needs of the prisoners. Nothing more could be expected, in the treatment of enemies, than to place them on the same footing as the forces of the Detaining Power itself.

Yet the Convention goes further. It foresees two ways in which the prisoners may receive extra supplies, individually or collectively. Article 37 allows prisoners of war "to receive individually postal parcels containing foodstuffs and other articles intended for consumption, or clothing." Article 78, already quoted (which is almost word for word

repetition of Article 15 of the Hague Regulations of 1907) authorizes prisoners' aid societies "having as their object to serve as intermediaries for charitable purposes," to have relief supplies distributed in the camps. Combined with so many other regulations about accommodation, sports and games, and the spiritual and intellectual needs of the men, these provisions clearly show the desire of the legislators of 1907 and 1929 always to place the human being before the prisoner. Not only is his maintenance ensured, but he may receive, even in captivity, such aids to morale as are afforded by parcels from home and occasional gifts from welfare societies.

All this would be excellent, if total war did not often deprive Detaining Powers of the means, sometimes even of the desire, strictly to carry out its treaty obligations. As a matter of fact, it was noted that in certain countries regulations about food were never exactly observed, for one reason or another. The deficiency had to be made up by relief supplies. What should be merely welcome extras or temporary supplements soon became an essential part of the prisoners' rations.

From the outset, but especially in 1940 after the campaign in France, complaints reached Geneva in large numbers. The prisoners were suffering from shortage of food and clothing. The Conventions allowed anxious next-of-kin to make up postal parcels and thus provide their prisoners not merely with comforts from home, but with food to satisfy them for a few days, and with clothing to protect them from the cold. From France, dispatch was a simple matter; in the absence of any fighting zone, parcels could be sent direct, although restrictions made it increasingly difficult to make up adequate consignments. From overseas, it was a very difficult problem; conveyance through the front took a very long time. In their endeavours to find another route, people thought of Geneva. The International Committee began to receive numerous individual applications for help, both from prisoners of war and from their relatives. Numbers of these requests could be met, thanks to special donations for that purpose; but the Committee usually forwarded these applications to the next-of-kin, or to national welfare organizations, offering its services as intermediary. Consignments in kind and funds began to reach the Committee which made up parcels and forwarded them to the camps.

Despite their great value, individual parcels sent direct to the camps or through Geneva were not sufficient. The difficulty of making up such parcels and of shipping them grew steadily. The route they had to follow was often uncertain, and censorship always strict. Delays were endless, and there was much risk of loss or theft on the way. The number of prisoners now requiring constant help reached some millions. Parcels from home arriving after perhaps some three months, followed by a second some weeks later, and shared with so many comrades who would never get any help at all, were clearly inadequate. The men must be fed at once, and regularly.

A way had to be found of sending relief supplies on a larger scale, and of building up stocks on which to draw. The answer lay in Article 78 of the Convention which allows the action of relief societies "having for their object to serve as intermediaries for charitable purposes." What was the idea behind this Article which appeared for the first time in the Hague Regulations? It was then the expression of an extremely lofty conception of the Red Cross principle. Those who framed it had in mind, in the first place, the welfare societies of the Detaining Power, acting in behalf of enemy prisoners of war. So absolute an idea of charity has not often been translated into action. Apart from a few cases in which local Red Cross branches have supplied passing convoys of prisoners, only one or two occasions could be quoted on which relief was given on any appreciable scale to enemy nationals. Besides, to what section of the population could a Red Cross Society, anxious to undertake such relief work, turn for money and supplies sufficient to ensure, not momentary aid, but a large part of the essential provisioning of millions of enemy prisoners during several years?



In all belligerent countries, Red Cross Societies were absorbed by their primary duties; the Army Medical Service, and at home, work in hospitals, the care of convalescents and disabled. In so far as they could undertake any additional work in behalf of prisoners, their thoughts turned first to their own nationals in enemy hands, and to the help they could give them.

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#### VISCOUNT ALEXANDER

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#### VIEWS SWISS WATCH MASTERPIECES.

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**Toronto:** His Excellency, Viscount Alexander, Governor-General of Canada, and other high Canadian Government officials, were intrigued by the Swiss watch craftsmanship displayed at the Canadian International Trade Fair, which they opened officially on May 29th. The Fair, which closed June 12th, has attracted 24,000 buyers from all parts of the world.

In the Swiss Watch Pavilion, Viscount Alexander was given a personally conducted tour by Dr. Victor Nef, Swiss Minister to Canada, and Edgar Primault of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, president of the Swiss Watch Chamber of Commerce.

Among the Swiss watch masterpieces on display were a reproduction of the \$20,000 diamond-studded wrist watch given as a wedding gift to H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth of Great Britain by the people of Switzerland; the world's smallest watch (less than one-fourth inch square); the world's most complicated watch; a collection of rare and historic Swiss watches and timepieces, the oldest dating to 1580; official timing devices for the 1948 Olympic Games; and a full range of current Swiss watch styles.

A highlight of the pavilion was the display of Swiss watch "firsts," with timepieces on exhibit that showed the Swiss as pioneer creators of automatic watches, chronometers, waterproof watches, calendar watches, intricate watches and women's watches.

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#### IN 1947 OVER 1,500,000 VISITORS TO SWITZERLAND.

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The Federal Bureau of Statistics reports that 1,532,797 foreign visitors were welcomed by Switzerland's mountain and lakeside resorts during 1947. These guests, from over forty countries around the world, spent an average stay of nearly seven days in the Alpine republic.

U.S. visitors were evenly split between civilians and members of the armed forces on furlough under the popular Swiss and American Leave Action Plan. Total number of star-spangled fun-seekers was 169,782, making the U.S. Switzerland's fourth best travel customer last year. In the first place with 432,209 visitors, was Great Britain, including Ireland, followed by France with 285,601 guests and Belgium with 237,283 visitors.

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#### FIRST CONGRESS OF INTERNATIONAL UNION OF ARCHITECTS IN LAUSANNE.

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This charming "university city" on the shores of Lake Geneva plays host from June 28th to July 1st to the First Congress of the International Union of Architects. According to Jean Tschumi, President of the organization, lectures and discussion periods will be held mornings in the Lausanne University Hall on the following themes - "The Architect and Planning" - "The Architect and the Industrialization of Building" - "The Architect, State and Society."