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VI. Central Prisoners of War Agency

Contrary to expectations, the work of the Agency did not diminish very much during the year. Two main causes were the conflict in the Far East, and investigations for the German Red Cross (to verify or establish the last civilian address of some 56,000 former prisoners of war). The Agency also did a large amount of technical work in connexion with the repatriation of Greek children.

In most of the Agency's departments correspondence decreased, but research became increasingly difficult. From 1939 to 1945, the Agency was asked principally about prisoners whose address was known. Inquiries are now for persons—military and civilian—missing for several years; the longer the time from the Armistice, the more difficult tracing becomes.

The Agency handled 15,172 research cases in 1949, as against 16,355 (8,239 for the German Service alone) in 1950—an increase of 7.8 per cent.

In spite of the increase in volume and the greater complexity of work, the number of regular staff was reduced to 37.

The Agency Services will be dealt in three sections:

- (A) *German*;
- (B) *Italian*;
- (C) *Grouped Services* (including those for all other countries).

(A) — GERMAN SERVICE

Mail: Incoming 33,303 items (73% military cases);
Outgoing 48,407 items (65% military cases);

Index : Searches, internal	27,750
Searches for the Bavarian Red Cross	56,000
Records classified	43,750

Lists were received (1) of German military personnel who died in France, the United States, Norway, Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Greece ; (2) of prisoners interned or become civilian workers, amnestied, repatriated or deceased in Denmark, the Philippines, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and, according to returned fellow-prisoners, the Soviet Union.

As from January, when it was generally known that the Soviet Union had signed the new Conventions, numerous inquiries were received about prisoners thought to be in Russia and other East European countries.

Some hundred inquiries were sent each month by the Agency to the Alliance of Soviet Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Moscow, whenever it was thought that a positive result might be expected.

Prisoners in Yugoslavia were sent Civilian Message forms. It was soon found that these men could write direct to Germany.

Although no official information was given to the Agency by the competent Moscow office, the German Service persevered. Thousands of double cards (reply postcards) were sent to prisoners whose addresses were known. These messages reached their addressees, although all other correspondence was strictly prohibited. Some replies have reached Geneva.

Reply cards sent to prisoners who were presumed interned in Poland were returned to Geneva with the remark that all German citizens had been repatriated. This proved correct in about 40% of cases dealt with by the Agency.

Several hundred positive replies were received as a result of inquiries made in Yugoslavia—usually to say that the man in question had just been released, or else that he had been sentenced and was serving a given term as a war criminal.

Judging from numerous and moving expressions of gratitude from the repatriated and their relatives, the petitions, evidence for the defence, petitions for a reduction of sentence or for

release which the Service sent to the detaining authorities often achieved their object.

The Service dealt also with German civilians and "Volks-deutsche" held or detained, especially in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Documents of many kinds—defence evidence, petitions for the quashing of sentences, applications for the repatriation of children, entry permits, and so on—were forwarded. Here again, numerous agencies and relatives have reported success.

Inquiries for civilians missing in Poland and the Soviet Union were rarely successful. Many who had been posted missing meanwhile succeeded in returning to Germany on their own. Nevertheless, five years after the Armistice, families were still finding missing relatives through the Geneva Agency, working in co-operation with the German tracing offices in Hamburg and Munich.

(B) — ITALIAN SERVICE

The Italian Service received 8,145 mail items and sent out 4,487; it classified 36,480 cards and made 10,394 checks.

The work consisted mainly in the identification of military and civilian personnel, and was on the same lines as in the years 1948 and 1949, described in previous Reports. Tracing becomes increasingly difficult; some 50,000 to 60,000 cases still on hand give rise to very intricate problems.

(C) — GROUPED SERVICES

Under this heading, all the other Services are given, the principal dealing with nationals of the following countries:

(1) Austria; (2) Czechoslovakia; (3) France and the *Union française*; (4) Greece; (5) Hungary; (6) Yugoslavia; (7) Korea; (8) Netherlands; (9) Poland; (10) Rumania; (11) Soviet Union; (12) Spain, Portugal and Latin America.

Indexes for about thirty other countries, including the United States, Great Britain, the Dominions, etc., are still referred to daily.

Mail : Incoming : 23,131 items. Outgoing : 28,266. Files made out : 7,836. Inquiries concluded : 5,346 (2,041 positive results ; 3,305 negative).

The number of staff has been reduced to eleven.

(1) — *Austrian Service.*

This Service looked after Austrians enlisted in the German Army. Its work, similar to that of the German Service, included : Tracing through the German and French tracing bureaux, and the Yugoslav and Luxemburg Red Cross Societies—Inquiries about prisoners in Poland and Jugoslavia—Depositions of repatriated men about other prisoners—Transmission of messages to prisoners in the Soviet Union—War Graves Registration—Notification of deaths—Tracing of former prisoners who had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion.

(2) — *Czechoslovak Service.*

This Service undertook to search for Czechoslovak citizens who had enlisted in the Foreign Legion, and forwarded messages to and from relatives, through the Legion headquarters at Sidi Bel Abbès and Saigon.

Documents and photos from displaced persons or voluntary emigrants are sent to Czechoslovakia. Ordinary correspondence is sent back, as it is possible to write direct, by postcard.

(3) — *French Service.*

This deals with :

Enquiries to the French and German authorities about former prisoners of war not yet repatriated ;

Tracing through the German Office in Berlin and the Alliance, at Moscow, of men from Alsace-Lorraine, enlisted in the German army, and posted missing or presumed interned in the Soviet Union ;

Similar enquiries about members of the French Volunteer Legion which fought in Russia ;

Enquiries to the International Tracing Service at Arolsen (Germany), about deportees not repatriated ;

Enquiries to mayors or local Red Cross branches for news or addresses of civilians or former prisoners of war.

Many letters asked for news of members of the Expeditionary Corps in Indo-China who had been posted missing, or had given no news for several months. Normally, these letters would be referred to the appropriate French Ministries and to the French Red Cross at Paris or Saigon. Most correspondents, however, stated they were approaching the ICRC as a last resort. Enquiries were therefore sent in duplicate to the Delegate in Indo-China, who would either apply to a local organization or use other channels. Some positive replies received were communicated to relatives ; results did not, however, match the time and labour involved.

(4) — *Greek Service.*

Very many enquiries were received about persons, military and civilian, who, for various reasons, had left Greece during and after the civil war. Some 2,200 enquiries were made to « Democratic Greece » through the Greek Child Welfare Committee at Budapest ; these were duly acknowledged. Reply messages received were registered, as were more than a thousand family messages passing between the Balkan countries, Bulgaria especially. New information was filed in the index, faulty addresses were completed or rectified.

The technical work in connexion with repatriation of Greek children was also dealt with (see page 55).

(5) — *Hungarian Service.*

In comparison with past years, the number of mail items fell considerably ; they referred principally to personnel of the Honved, missing on the Eastern front, or interned in Yugoslavia.

Lists supplied by the Hungarian Relief Service at Munich, giving the names of several thousand Hungarians, military and civilian, who died in Germany, were registered.

(6) — *Jugoslav Service.*

This Service had much to do. Former prisoners of war who had emigrated or were in camps for displaced persons, and their relatives at home had lost all contact after the end of the War. Hundreds of enquiries also came in from Yugoslavia, Germany and Italy about Jugoslavs who had left their country before the War.

As in previous years, many certificates of captivity were issued.

(7) — *Korean Service.*

This Service was set up almost immediately after hostilities broke out. (See page 80.)

At the beginning of August, the ICRC Delegation in South Korea received the first "capture cards" for North Korean prisoners. Four days later, the first nominal rolls of prisoners taken by United Nations forces arrived; these lists were cabled to the Foreign Office at Pyongyang.

Towards the end of the month, the North Korean authorities cabled a list of their prisoners; a second and final list followed on September 15. These contained in all 110 names, and were communicated to the home Power on the day of reception.

This was the beginning of the Korean Service, to whose personnel a Korean translator was soon added.

The Delegation in South Korea received some nominal rolls; others were sent direct to the Agency by the detaining authorities. All were registered and the data inscribed on duplicate sets of index-cards; the names, written in Korean characters by the men, had been given English phonetic equivalents by the military authorities; for this reason, cards had to be made out in English and Korean.

A duplicate or photostat of each nominal roll was sent to the North Korean Embassy at Moscow, which agreed, by letter of September 28, 1950, to forward them to its Government.

By the end of 1950, 29,690 capture cards, filled in by the prisoners themselves, and 14,845 individual data on lists had been received. The names of 943 prisoners had been cabled to Pyongyang, and 13,902 sent on lists to the Moscow Embassy.

Inquiries received for members of United Nations forces posted missing were at first cabled to Pyongyang. From November 10, they were written on forms and sent to the North Korean Government, through the Moscow Embassy. To the end of the year, no reply had reached Geneva.

(8) — *Netherlands Service.*

The Dutch Red Cross supplied lists of deportees and workers missing in Germany, of men enlisted voluntarily or otherwise in the German Army—mostly posted missing on the Eastern front, or captured (or presumed captured) by the Soviet forces. At the request of the Dutch Bureau at The Hague, several thousand names were checked against the Agency index.

Inquiries made to the Indonesian Red Cross and the Committee's Delegation at Djakarta about Dutch citizens living in the Archipelago were in practically all cases successful.

(9) — *Polish Service.*

The Service dealt with the following :

Tracing Polish military personnel posted missing during the 1939 campaign ;

Tracing men enlisted in the Wehrmacht ;

Tracing former prisoners in Germany, many of whom had emigrated through the International Refugee Organization ;

Notification of deaths ;

Issue of captivity certificates ;

Tracing of Polish civilian and military deportees to Germany ;

Tracing of deportees to the Soviet Union after 1939 ;

Tracing of relatives living in areas attached to the Soviet Union in 1945 ;

Tracing of relatives in all parts of the world ;

Provision of certificates for former Polish internees in German concentration camps.

(10) — *Rumanian Service.*

This Service dealt with Rumanians enlisted in the German forces and posted missing, and civilians resident or presumed resident in areas attached to the Soviet Union.

Former Rumanian prisoners who had been taken by the German Army and, wanted certificates of captivity had unfortunately to be refused. They had mostly been interned in Stalag XVII A, and the Agency never received lists from this camp, all efforts to secure them having failed.

(11) — *Russian Service.*

The Russian Service dealt with an average of about fifty cases a month, all requiring close scrutiny and search in the index. Enquiries for civilians in the Soviet Union are made on forms written in Russian and sent to the last address known to the person enquiring. In about one third of the cases, contact has been made between relatives who had been without news of one another for several years.

(12) — *Spanish Service* (Spain, Portugal, Latin America).

This Service dealt with the following matters :

Tracing of Spaniards who had taken refuge in France during the Civil War ;

Enquiries to the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Moscow, for Spaniards removed to the Soviet Union during the Civil War, and of military personnel of the Blue Division ;

Requests to the International Refugee Organization, and transmission to next of kin of death certificates for Spaniards who died in German concentration camps ;

Exchange of messages between Spain, and Germany and Japan ;

Tracing of civilians in Latin America.

Grouped Nations.

Apart from the above specific Services, the Agency dealt with persons of other nationalities under the general heading

“Grouped Nations”. They vary in numbers ; some typical examples have been :

Search for Russian emigrants in all countries, at the request of relatives and fellow-countrymen, mostly in camps for Displaced Persons in Germany.

Attempts to trace Bulgarians presumed to have left their country during and after the War, and, at the request of relations living abroad, enquiries for Bulgarians still living in their home country.

The Service also dealt with Swiss nationals who served in the German Army or who had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. The IRO Tracing Service at Arolsen (Germany) provided numerous data about Swiss who had lived in Germany during the War : birth, marriage and death certificates, local census lists, etc. These papers were registered and sent to the Swiss Federal Political Department at Berne.

* * *

Such regular tasks apart, the Agency had a number of other technical responsibilities. They included the following :

CERTIFICATES OF CAPTIVITY

The number of certificates of captivity issued has greatly decreased since 1948, principally because of the number of former prisoners who emigrated from Germany, through IRO, in 1947 and 1948.

Certificates	1949	1950	1946-1950
Jugoslavs.	1,054	605	12,038
Poles	1,451	662	6,001
Others	169	51	220
Totals.	<u>2,674</u>	<u>1,318</u>	<u>18,259</u>

Several hundred certificates were made out during the year 1950 at the request of the Swiss Federal authorities, for pri-

soners of war who had escaped into Switzerland during the War, and civilians formerly interned there.

REPATRIATION OF GREEK CHILDREN ¹

The negotiations begun in the spring of 1949 to facilitate the repatriation of Greek children from Central and South-East Europe continued in 1950. It will be recalled that the International Red Cross (ICRC and League) was asked to take up this question by unanimous Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, adopted in November 1948, and repeated the following year.

The Agency saw to most of the technical work, as follows :

(a) Establishing of a General List of all children claimed :

January	1st list (Greek script)	. . . . .	3,763 names
February	2nd list (Greek script)	. . . . .	3,327 »
March	3rd list (Greek script)	. . . . .	1,994 »
April	3rd list (Roman script)	. . . . .	1,986 »
May	4th list (partly Greek)	. . . . .	439 »
October	5th list (partly Greek)	. . . . .	441 »

(b) Making out partial lists and individual files for all children, identified, for the use of International Red Cross representatives in Greece, and the Swedish Mission in Yugoslavia ;

(c) Checking of lists communicated by representatives of the International Red Cross and the Swedish Mission ;

(d) Checking and classifying individual cards, lists and original enquiries from the Greek Red Cross ;

(e) Correspondence in connection with the above ;

(f) Separation and marking of cards referring to children found in one of the receiving countries ;

(g) Translation and annotation of original enquiries in Greek ;

¹ See above, p. 43, and Annex, p. 89.

- (h) Indexing the five volumes of the General List in Greek script ;
- (i) Preparation and classifying of 10,283 pages of lists and documents sent for photostat ;
- (j) Transmission of the volumes made from the General List to the National Red Cross Societies of the countries interested.

The costs incurred were paid by the United Nations as follows :

	Sw. Fr.
Index and Archives (two clerical assistants) . . .	13,200.—
Typing	522,50
Translation	1,822,90
Head of Service	6,000.—
Photostat, salaries	3,083.10
Photostat, labour	495.—
Photostat, supplies	3,083.10
	<hr/>
	28,206.60

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Applications for ICRC Travel Documents are dealt with by ICRC Delegates, in agreement with the local authorities and the diplomatic or consular officials of the country of destination. This is particularly the case in France, Spain, the Near East, and elsewhere.

In other countries—Italy especially—the Agency issues the document and, when necessary, prolongs its validity, if the holder has not yet succeeded in starting for his new home.

As stated on page 41, the Committee's liaison office in Rome was closed on June 30, 1950. Since then, Travel Documents for persons unable to obtain them from the Italian authorities have been supplied direct from Geneva.

Each case is carefully checked against the General Index. Before a Document is issued, the following papers must be produced :

- (1) — The original or a photostat of the Entry Permit issued by the diplomatic or consular agent of the receiving country ;
- (2) — An attestation from the judicial or police authorities of the country of residence that the holder is of good character, and will not be hindered from leaving.

A record card is then made out in the applicant's name, with details of the evidence presented of *bonafides*, and the registration number of the document issued. These cards are filed alphabetically.

The Agency issued 526 Travel Documents in 1950, and prolonged 326.

PHOTOSTATS

The copying and transmission of voluminous lists would have been physically impossible, had it not been for the Photostat Service, installed in 1939. The figures given below for 1950, show the extent of the work still done, both for external use and for the Committee itself and its various departments. In 1950, photostats were made of 16,071 documents, as follows:

Presidency — Committee — General Affairs Division	187
Executive Division	662
Administrative Division	292
Finance	944
Medical — Pharmaceutical — War Invalids.	1,129
Relief	139
Agency.	2,186
Greek Children	10,283
Miscellaneous	249
	<hr/>
	16,071

Several thousand francs are saved yearly by having this work done on the premises instead of sending it outside.

INSTALLATIONS AND PREMISES

At the end of January, 1949, the indexes and archives of the Agency, assembled since the Armistice in the *Palais du Conseil Général*, in town, were transferred to headquarters at Pregny, just outside Geneva, and set up provisionally in military huts. A new Archives Building was completed in April, 1950. On August 28 began the transfer of the entire documentation and its reinstallation in the spacious and newly-equipped building. This work was completed four weeks later.

VISITORS

Each year, the Agency is visited by the representatives of many National Societies.

During 1950, M^{me} Vuksanovic, head of the Information Bureau of the Yugoslav Red Cross, spent two weeks in the different Services, studying the methods employed.

Visitors included : members of a Commission of the Swiss Lower Chamber ; a group of nurses from ten different countries ; a delegation of international legal experts ; groups of French and Belgian ex-servicemen ; pupils of the Geneva Social School ; ninety delegates of the Swiss Association of Women's Army Auxiliary Services ; some 2,000 French apprentices, led by their instructors ; Colonel Cuénoud and a delegation of the Swiss Army General Staff, who spent two days examining the Agency's filing system.

In addition, there were individual visitors from all over the world. Many found a heightened interest in looking up the actual record of their own captivity, or in discovering the names of friends or relatives in the prisoner of war files.