

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1971)

Rubrik: Central Tracing Agency

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Central Tracing Agency

During 1971, the Central Tracing Agency received 47,198 requests and communications and sent out 50,779 letters. It opened 10,270 enquiries with National Red Cross Societies, ICRC delegations, the International Tracing Service at Arolsen and various other relevant bodies, and was able to close 10,454 files, 4,715 of them with positive results.

The principal tasks of the Central Tracing Agency consist in obtaining from the competent authorities any information available about their captives and enemy combatants found dead at the front ; registering such data in its card index ; informing the casualties' governments and families ; opening enquiries necessary where the information is lacking ; ensuring the transmission of messages between captives and their families and between civilians separated by the events ; issuing certificates of captivity, hospitalization or death ; and reuniting families in co-operation with National Societies.

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Europe : While the Central Tracing Agency, because of its copious records, continues to be asked to solve thousands of cases dating back to the Second World War, the events which have occurred in Europe since 1945 nevertheless lay upon it a task as complex as it is sensitive. There are countless European refugees scattered throughout the world and separated from their families, and again there are those who are still anxious to emigrate.

Middle East : In April 1971, the Central Tracing Agency received a duplicate of the card index compiled by the ICRC delegation in Israel from information received in the course of visits to places of detention and containing about 5,800 index cards for detainees. The card index, which month by month is increased as detainees are visited, transferred, released or expelled, is an invaluable working instrument for the Central Tracing Agency.

The Central Tracing Agency also enters on its card index messages from captive nationals of Arab countries, Israel or the occupied

territories, whether the messages are routed via Geneva or exchanged direct by ICRC delegations in the field. In 1971, there were 83,354 such messages exchanged by the delegations and about 10,000 sent through Geneva.

South East Asia : The Central Tracing Agency sent the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam several hundred messages for United States prisoners. Messages addressed to prisoners in the hands of the Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam were forwarded by the Agency through the proper channels.

In 1971, the Central Tracing Agency received, through the ICRC delegation in Saigon, 350 lists comprising the names of 5,918 prisoners in the Republic of Vietnam. The Agency immediately entered this additional information in its Vietnam card index, which by 31 December 1971 consisted of 49,099 index cards.

Indian sub-continent : The events which occurred in the Indian sub-continent, followed by the conflict which broke out there in December 1971, greatly increased the work of the Central Tracing Agency, which opened hundreds of enquiries with the National Societies of India and Pakistan. During the second half of 1971, it sent an expert successively to Dacca, New Delhi and Islamabad to advise the Red Cross Societies in the setting up of a national tracing service.

Africa : At the beginning of the year, the Central Tracing Agency received a few capture cards completed by Portuguese prisoners in the hands of the authorities in the Republic of Zaire. Some of the messages exchanged between prisoners and their relatives also went through Agency channels.

Latin America : The Central Tracing Agency kept up to date its general card index of political detainees in Latin America.

The International Tracing Service (Arolsen)

During 1971, the International Tracing Service (ITS), which has been run by the ICRC since 1955, received 127,872 enquiries (4,543 more than in the year before).

It is worth noting that there was a considerable shift in the number of requests as regards the different categories. For the first time, the