

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1976)

Rubrik: International Tracing Service

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INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

At the end of the Second World War, the allied military authorities had to cope with the problem of taking care of civilians in the territories they had liberated. This task was first entrusted to SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces), which began recording details of all displaced persons.

In May 1945, SHAEF, in co-operation with UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency), took steps to trace and gather all available documentation on the persons held in the concentration camps.

In July 1945, after SHAEF was dissolved, the Combined Displaced Persons Executive (CDPX) decided to set up a Central Records Office and a Central Tracing Bureau. Two months later this was taken over by UNRRA and in January 1946 was transferred to Arolsen, a small town near Cassel in the Federal Republic of Germany.

From January 1948, the Central Tracing Bureau took the title of International Tracing Service (ITS). Its administration was taken over, first, by the International Refugee Organization until the end of March 1951, and then by the Allied High Commission for Germany.

On 5 May 1955 the Allied High Commission was dissolved and under an international agreement the responsibility for administering the ITS was entrusted to the ICRC.

The main task of the ITS is to give, for humanitarian purposes, to those directly concerned, personal information that might be of use to them. Today it is the most important source of information concerning persons deported or displaced during the Second World War in Germany and German-occupied territories.

The International Tracing Service (ITS) at Arolsen, Federal Republic of Germany, received 162,854 requests, during 1976, from about fifty countries (as compared with 207,809 in 1975). The numbers remained high because requests by authors of works in memory of the victims of deportation required an exhaustive checking of lists of persons of the Jewish faith who were living in the territory of the present Federal Republic of Germany and in Berlin when the persecutions began.

The ITS supplied 185,882 replies, as follows:

| | |
|---|--------|
| – incarceration certificates | 31,562 |
| – residence certificates | 5,004 |
| – death certificates | 3,062 |
| – medical documents | 1,849 |
| – photocopies | 6,027 |
| – work certificates | 8,032 |
| – items of information for authors of works in memory of victims | 86,640 |
| – items of information for record offices or relating to publications | 5,256 |
| – legal authorities | 5,644 |
| – tracing requests | 8,012 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| – items of information of a historical or statistical nature | 1,027 |
| – miscellaneous | 23,767 |

Since its establishment in 1945, the ITS had received 4,235,526 requests and sent 5,792,855 replies as of the end of 1976.

During the year, 1,557,329 new reference cards were made out. At the end of the year, the central file, constituting both an alphabetical list and an index for every document, contained 43,370,304 cards.

As in previous years, the ITS in 1976 received a considerable number of new documents. As a measure of their respect for the humanitarian work of the ITS, numerous public services and private institutions sent such information spontaneously. The Central Commission for the study of Hitlerian crimes in Poland deserves special mention in this connection.

Study of these new documents provided useful information on various places of detention. The need to include it in the revised edition of the *catalogue of places of detention* again delayed publication of this work which is now expected to appear in 1977.

This new documentation has great humanitarian importance since it includes 194,569 names. It also has records of 12,062 detainees whose names are not known. From 1970 through 1976, the ITS obtained a total of 1,509,102 names.

The new documentation also made it possible to discover 2,912 previously unknown deaths in concentration camps. These were officially recorded by the special bureau of vital statistics at Arolsen. The number of deaths thus determined by the ITS has increased regularly during the past six years, as follows: 1971, 1,680; 1972, 1,722; 1973, 2,174; 1974, 2,459; 1975, 2,518; 1976, 2,912. As at 31 December 1976, the total amounted to 354,278. It is obvious that this must not be regarded as the total number of victims who died in concentration camps since most of the records of these camps were destroyed shortly before the camps were liberated by allied troops. It must also be made clear that a great number of deaths were never recorded, such as those in the extermination camps, where no records were kept, those which occurred shortly before or shortly after liberation or those of persons who were transferred to the concentration camps for execution.

III. DEPARTMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND LAW

REAFFIRMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITARIAN LAW

Diplomatic Conference

The third session of the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law applicable in Armed Conflicts¹ took place at Geneva from 21 April to 11 June 1976.

The Conference, whose fourth and final session was scheduled to take place from April to June 1977 at Geneva, was convened to discuss and adopt two *Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949*, drafts for which had been prepared by the ICRC from 1970-1973 with the assistance of Red Cross and government experts. These drafts contain 122 basic provisions intended to improve protection for the victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I) and non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II).

¹ Readers wishing to study in detail the work of the first three sessions of the Conference are referred to texts published in the issues of May 1974, July 1975 and September 1976 of *International Review of the Red Cross* (i.e. numbers 158, 172 and 186). Reprints have been made of these texts.

In its third session, the Committees² adopted 44 articles including the technical annex. Like the articles adopted at previous sessions, these are scheduled to be submitted to the plenary assembly of the Conference for final approval in 1977.

We refer below to some of the problems and the results obtained.

International armed conflicts

Results. — Part I of Protocol I containing general provisions relating to application of the law, and the major elements of Part II concerned with wounded, sick and shipwrecked persons, were adopted at the second session. At the third session, Committee II approved the remaining articles in Part II. This consisted especially of articles concerning medical transport and a new section, added to the original draft, entitled "Information on the Victims of a conflict and on Remains of Deceased" which supplemented the existing provisions in the Conventions relating to the dead and missing. The technical annex to Protocol I, a necessary addition to existing provisions concerning identification, recognition and marking of medical personnel, units and means of transport was also adopted by this Committee.

Of Part III, dealing with methods and means of combat and the status of prisoners of war, only four articles had been adopted at the second session. In the third session all the still pending articles relating to methods and means of combat were adopted. With regard to the status of prisoners of war, however, it was only possible to obtain a consensus on a single article aimed to provide minimum protection to all persons captured during hostilities. Despite long discussion it was impossible to obtain agreement on Article 42 entitled "New category of prisoners of war" which was designed to grant prisoner-of-war status to categories of combatants other than members of national armed forces and on a new article relating to the status of mercenaries.

The major elements of Part IV relating to the civilian population had been adopted at the second session by Committee III, with the exception of articles concerning civil defence, relief in favour of the civilian population, and treatment of persons in the power of a party to a conflict. Having devoted most of its time in the third session to the study of Article 42, Committee III was able to adopt only a single article, a short one covering the reuniting of dispersed families. It devoted several meetings however to two important articles, one on refugees and stateless persons and the other (Article 65) on the establishment of a list of fundamental guarantees for the benefit of all persons whatever their status.

In Part V (*Execution of the Conventions and of the Present Protocol*), Committee I had adopted five articles at the second

² Committee I, responsible for studying general provisions relating to the implementation of humanitarian law and scrutiny of its application; Committee II, dealing with the protection of civilian and military wounded, sick and shipwrecked persons and of medical personnel, units and means of transport; Committee III, concerned with protection of civilians and with methods and means of combat.