

# Alpine climbing accidents

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## ROMANCE OF THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT.

More than 60 Governments and national Red Cross societies were represented at the 16th International Red Cross Conference, which opened recently in London.

That over three score countries took part in this great conference is impressive proof of the world-wide ramifications of the Red Cross, the flag of which has been aptly termed the world's "Banner of Mercy."

That flag unites the hearts of all nations in the service of humanity when suffering arises — as it inevitably must — from war. Red Cross societies have a history behind them of less than 100 years, yet in every war that has been waged since their inauguration the banner of mercy has floated amidst the strife, a symbol of healing and service respected — with the exception of a few regrettable instances — by friend and foe alike.

### A Boer War Memory.

The story of how the Red Cross came to be recognised as sacred ranks (says David England) as one of the most wonderful in the history of civilisation, and whole volumes could be written of stirring incidents in the record of the Red Cross in war. One of the finest, which General Ian Hamilton declared should be told to the world, took place during the Boer War.

The British forces under Sir George White were besieged in Ladysmith, ringed around with the commandoes and artillery of General Piet Joubert. The latter's six-inch guns, better known as Long Toms, commanded the beleaguered town, but before they were brought to bear on it, Piet Joubert agreed to let the besieged transfer their sick and wounded, women and children, into a no-man's-land between the forces. This was Intombi Camp, and there for four months the Red Cross lay unharmed between the two armies. Shells innumerable passed over it; yet not a shell, not a bullet, ever touched it. To the end, when Ladysmith was relieved, it remained a sanctuary.

Before such succour existed the most ghastly scenes were witnessed on the battlefields of the world, for the most part the wounded perishing in unutterable agony. It was the sight of the horrors of a conflict which ranks as one of the bloodiest in the history of warfare, that led to the first steps being taken to form companies of volunteers who would be ready to aid the sick and suffering in time of war.

### Its Foundation.

In 1859 Henry Dunant, a Swiss doctor, was travelling in Northern Italy, when he arrived at Solferino, scene of a terrible struggle between the Austrians and France allied to the northern part of Italy. The battle had raged throughout the whole of a stifling summer day, and at the close of it no fewer than 40,000 wounded lay on the field untended, a mere handful having been carried into barns and churches.

Appalled at the sight, Dunant hurried to the neighbouring town of Castiglione, where he was able to recruit a small party of helpers, Swiss, Belgians, and Swedes among them. But what could this handful do to care for tens of thousands of unhappy sufferers?

The tragedy burnt itself indelibly upon the mind of the Swiss doctor. He wrote a pamphlet vividly recounting the scenes he had witnessed at Solferino, and in it he outlined his suggested plan for volunteers training themselves in peace time ready to give their services in war time, and also on the occasion of such disasters as earthquakes, floods, epidemics, industrial accidents, and so on.

### How The Movement Spread.

The idea gained much ground in Dunant's city of Geneva, which is now famous as the home of the League of Nations, but which long before that honour was bestowed upon it, had acquired international celebrity because of its association with the Red Cross. A preliminary meeting was held, and then in 1864 representatives of 16 countries gathered, Britain being among them, to discuss the problem of tending the victims of war, and there the notable Convention of Geneva was agreed to by the countries present.

This tremendous advance in the history of the treatment of international suffering decreed the neutralisation of the medical services and of the sick and wounded in time of war. The Red Cross, a reversal of the arms of Switzerland, was chosen as an international symbol easy to recognise.

The movement quickly spread from country to country, and while at the close of the Great War only 32 countries were linked with it, there are now, as stated, over 60.

N.E.P.

## ALPINE CLIMBING ACCIDENTS.

Eighty-three climbing accidents were recorded in the Swiss, French, Italian, and Austrian Alps last year, as against 53 in 1936. They caused the deaths of 124 persons (there were 66 deaths in 1936), including 11 women and six guides.

Avalanches accounted for 49 deaths; 32 victims fell down rocks, 13 on snow and ice, eight fell in crevasses, seven were struck by falling stones, six were killed while collecting edelweiss, five died from exposure, and four during storms. As in previous years, a great number of accidents occurred during the ski-ing season. Winter climbing was responsible for 23 accidents involving the deaths of 48 persons, compared with 14 accidents and 16 deaths in 1936, and respectively 30 and 63 in 1935.

Since 1927, when winter climbing began to develop, 326 skiers have been killed in the Alps. The continuous increase in ski-ing accidents — or, more correctly, of winter climbing accidents — is due to various causes, among which avalanches are the chief; but many deaths are also due to imprudence, lack of experience of snow conditions, ignorance of snow dangers, and the fact that a great number of skiers, who never make any climb in summer, have no knowledge of the high Alps.

It would be wrong to conclude from the foregoing figures that mountaineering is particularly dangerous. Last year 78,500 tourists and guides visited the huts of the Swiss Alpine Club, and nearly 145,000 visited the huts of the French, Italian, and Austrian Alpine clubs. Another 20,000 odd started for their ascents either from mountain hotels or from Alpine resorts. The total number of climbers was 248,500 and the number of deaths 124, which represents about one in 2,000.

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