

Voluntary medical personnel

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V. VOLUNTARY MEDICAL PERSONNEL

The Red Cross was founded " to train in peace time a sufficient number of persons capable of giving the necessary treatment and care to the wounded and sick of the armed forces in time of war ".

So long as Governments maintain powerful armies, thus showing that they do not consider war to be impossible, it is the duty of the Red Cross to hold itself ready to carry out its work as an auxiliary to the Army Medical Services.

Everybody is aware today of the danger which threatens humanity. There is constant talk of new weapons or of the dangers which they may cause. In the event of a conflict, it is probable that few National Red Cross Societies would be able to meet the situation by their own means. The majority of them would be obliged, no doubt, to have recourse to the medical personnel and equipment of sister Societies. Newly formed Red Cross Societies should endeavour first of all to promote in their countries a attitude favourable to the respect of the application of the principles of the Geneva Conventions, which sometimes meet with opposition, owing to ignorance and traditional customs. Each National Society should therefore be prepared, i.e. it should train a sufficient number of voluntary medical personnel. To assist them, the International Conference of the Red Cross has entrusted the ICRC with the mission of assisting in the training and development of this personnel.

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In 1957 the ICRC seized every opportunity of studying these questions in conjunction with the League, National Red Cross Societies, Army Medical Services or other organisations.

In particular it published a study entitled "Nurses and the Geneva Conventions of 1949"¹; the document was published in French and English and the German translation is being prepared.

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During the year the training of medical personnel led to numerous visits abroad by the Head of the Medical Personnel and War Disablement Section, Miss A. Pfirter. In the German Democratic Republic she discussed the matter with the heads of the German Red Cross in Dresden, and then got in touch with the Red Cross of the German Federal Republic in Bonn, where she met numerous leading members.² Miss Pfirter then visited at Godesberg the Bundesschule Mehlen, of the German Red Cross, which trains voluntary medical personnel units.

In Rome, she visited the new professional nursing school of the Italian Red Cross and the headquarters of this Society.

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Miss Pfirter took part in the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross. On behalf of the ICRC, she submitted to the Medico-social Commission a report entitled "Nursing duties, organisation, enrolment and training of professional and auxiliary personnel for their duties in time of war".

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After the close of the Conference, Miss Pfirter, as the guest of the Indian Red Cross, visited hospitals, nursing schools and welfare and children centres throughout the country. She was present at first-aid exercises and had conversations with the heads of local branches of the Red Cross and the Army Medical Service. Thus she was able to discuss the question of the training of voluntary

¹ Mr. J.-P. Schoenholzer "Nurses and the Geneva Conventions of 1949", Geneva, 1957.

² In particular Frau Generaloberin von Oertzen, responsible for all Red Cross nursing schools in West Germany.

medical personnel for emergencies. She went to Lucknow, Calcutta (where she visited a camp of refugees from East Pakistan), Hyderabad, Narendranagar, Theri-Gahrwal Valley, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jullundur and New Delhi.

On her return journey she passed through Iraq, where she noted with appreciation the efforts of the Iraqi Red Crescent to train teams of auxiliary medical personnel. Her visit to Teheran having coincided with an earthquake in the Kermanshah district, she saw the efficient work of the first-aid teams of the Red Lion and Sun in the disaster area.

As this mission was not finished by December 31, 1957 the remaining details will be given in the next annual report.

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The International Committee was represented by Miss L. Odier, Member of the ICRC, at the 8th Probationer Course of the World Health Organisation, held in Geneva from May 6 to 15, 1957. Miss Odier and Miss Pfirter represented the ICRC at the 13th Meeting of the Nursing Advisory Committee of the League of Red Cross Societies, which took place from June 11 to 13, 1957.

Miss Pfirter also took part in the XIth Quadriennial Congress of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) held in Rome from May 27 to June 3. After the Congress Miss Densford, Member of the ICN and Miss Sher, of the same Organisation, visited Geneva to collect information on the activities of the International Committee. On this occasion, the representatives of the ICN and the ICRC discussed various questions concerning refugee nurses. The editress of the ICN Magazine, Miss Susan King-Hall, also visited the ICRC in July.

Numerous foreign and Swiss nurses also visited Geneva and were supplied by the ICRC with documents on the subjects in which they were interested.

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At the request of the French Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the ICRC organised in Geneva a study course for this Society's Nursing School instructors. The National Red

Cross Societies of Switzerland and Italy, both sent an instructor to this study course. During the course (July 6 to 20, 1957), the students visited the headquarters of the International Committee and attended lectures on the principles and fundamentals of the work of the ICRC, medical personnel in time of war, the Geneva Conventions, the war-disabled and the Central Prisoners of War Agency.
