

International Tracing Service

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The office set up by the Agency in 1973 in Santiago, Chile (see page 26) continued its activities on a reduced scale, owing to the reduction in the number of persons in detention. The activities comprised: making lists of detainees to be visited, bringing these lists up to date after visits had been made, undertaking searches as a result of requests, deciding on the action to be taken to help detainees and their families to resolve their problems, and to enable families to be reunited in another country.

Consequences of former conflicts

Various sectors of the CTA responsible for dealing with cases arising out of the Second World War still maintain a steady activity. Those who fought in the conflict between 1939 and 1945, or their widows, have now reached or are about to reach retiring age. To obtain an increase in their old-age pension, or to be allowed to retire early, they often have to produce evidence of captivity, hospitalization or, in the case of widows, the death or disappearance of the spouse during the war.

This means that the Central Tracing Agency still receives thousands of applications of this kind, either directly from the persons concerned or from the authorities or the Red Cross

Society in their countries. The requests come mainly from countries which, due to the events of the war, usually enemy occupation, possess only scant documentation on those of their nationals, civilian or military, captured by enemy forces or deceased during hostilities.

The Polish Service of the CTA received 16,277 requests during 1977. With the aid of extra staff, the backlog of the previous year was overcome and 26,586 letters were sent out.

Though their volume of work was not as large as that of the Polish Service, the German, Italian, Yugoslav and Soviet Services saw no diminution of their activities in comparison with 1976.

The consequences of the Second World War affect others besides former prisoners. Many people forced by events to leave their homes during or immediately after the war are still trying to find out what happened to their families, and if possible to get in touch with them. Searches carried out in close collaboration with the National Societies and with the International Tracing Service in Arolsen (see below) enable the CTA to discover the whereabouts of some persons and thus start the process of reuniting members of a family.

Once again the Central Tracing Agency has fulfilled the numerous duties entrusted to it, thanks in part to the valuable help from National Red Cross Societies and from various organizations which give aid to refugees.

III. INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

The International Tracing Service (ITS) at Arolsen, in the Federal Republic of Germany, has been under the direction of the ICRC since 1955.

At the end of the Second World War, the Allied Powers decided to collect together at Arolsen all the documents relating to the concentration camps and displaced persons in Germany. Until 1954, the service was administered by the Allied High Commission for Germany.

In 1955, the Governments of France, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the United Kingdom and the United States asked the ICRC, as a neutral body, to take over the administration and management of the ITS. Agreements on the subject were signed and on the basis of these the ICRC has directed the institution for the last 22 years, and the Federal German Government has covered the cost of ITS activities. In 1977, the sum involved was 7,259,102 DM. The number of ITS staff was about 250.

Also in 1955, an International Commission for the International Tracing Service (ICITS) was constituted, composed of representatives of the four Governments already mentioned, and those of the Governments of Belgium, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, which had shown evidence of their interest in the ITS. The Commission reviews the work of the Service and meets periodically to make recommendations.

Nowadays, the word "tracing" is misleading. At the end of the war, the chief function of the ITS was to search, in Germany and in the countries that had been occupied by German troops, for persons who had been captured or displaced and to reunite separated families. Later, its activities changed and they now consist essentially in gathering, classifying, storing and using the documents relating to Germans and non-Germans who were held in the Nazi labour or concentration camps and to non-German persons displaced as a result of the war. The actual

tracing of missing persons now makes up no more than 8 per cent of the work of the ITS, which is in any case authorized to undertake searches only for non-German persons reported missing; the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany is responsible for tracing German nationals.

The aid provided by the ITS to the victims of Nazi persecution or to their families depends on documentary records in its archives. For example, in order to justify a request for compensation or a pension, applicants—the victims or their families—require a certificate from the ITS, confirming that the victim was in a concentration camp (for Germans and non-Germans), or was made to work as a non-German labourer during the war, or spent some time in a DP (refugee) camp immediately after the war (for non-Germans and Jews).

Certificates relating to the medical history of the victims may also be necessary. In addition, the families of victims who did not survive often may require a death certificate.

The certificates issued by the ITS under the heading of the International Committee of the Red Cross are recognized as official documents. In 1977, nationals of 45 countries applied to the ITS for help.

The Activities of the ITS in 1977

COLLECTING THE DOCUMENTS. — In 1977, the ITS, for technical reasons, reduced its searches for specialized documents. Such searches were carried out only in the Nuremberg State Archives during ten working days. Investigations carried out by correspondence with two institutions proved very useful, i.e. that with the Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce (Central Commission for the Study of Hitlerian Crimes in Poland), located in Warsaw, and that with the Archives of the Theresienstadt Memorial. These two institutions supplied the ITS with a total of 15,062 pages of copied documents.

Fruitful sources of information—provided the enquirer indicates the place where he worked and the sickness fund to

which he contributed—are still the local authorities and the hospitals. They supplied the ITS with 3,500 documents in 1977.

CLASSIFYING THE DOCUMENTS. — The ITS received a great number of documents (reproduced or copied) which had been found, sorted and retained for photocopying by various records offices and other bodies approached by the Tracing Service over the last four years.

Six persons were assigned to making an inventory of these papers and filing them, to allow them to be put to use. The work comprised classification in chronological and alphabetical order, recording of the names given, finding out the nationalities, determining the subject headings, making the number of photocopies necessary depending on various criteria, entering all useful information on index cards and insertion of reference cards in the master card-index, which contains 40 million cards.

The indexing section made out, in 1977, some 200,000 new reference cards, which were arranged in alphabetical order.

In addition, the ancillary card index (252,000 cards) and the urgent documents (41,785 cards)—altogether, 293,785 cards—were placed in order and filed in the master card-index.

MAKING USE OF THE DOCUMENTS. — During the year, the ITS sent 108,808 replies to requests received, including 24,818 certificates or reports of imprisonment, 21,324 replies in connection with commemorative books, 8,004 attestations of forced labour, 4,339 certificates or reports on periods spent in a DP camp.

Appointment of a New Director

At the end of the year, Mr. Albert de Cocatrix, Director of the ITS since 1970, retired. The ICRC appointed Mr. Philippe Züger to succeed him.