

P R E F A C E

There were once over 16 000 000 Jews in the world. The largest Jewish population was in Europe, with 9 310 200 persons, followed by America, Africa, Australia and Asia. The best of European Jewry was killed during the twelve years of nazi rule in Germany. Some 6 000 000 were victims of super race brutalities in such notorious special "Institutions for Research on the Jewish Question" as Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen.

Over 150 concentration camps considered as main concentration camps were within the area of pre-Hitler Germany. Hundreds of additional labor camps, P. W.-camps and similar nazi installations were operated in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, France, Poland, the Baltic States and other European countries invaded by Adolf Hitler.

The beginning of this third Reich forced thousands of Jews out of Germany. Many left this volcano before it was too late and emigrated to new countries overseas and on the continent. Some joined their relatives abroad, others looked for any place where labor was available and persecution little known. Those people were safe who reached the USA, Australia, England, Canada and South America, but others who remained on the continent were recaptured by the nazis when the latter occupied most European countries.

Our brethren spent years in concentration camps, in hiding, living without any ration cards, changing their names and addresses because the Gestapo was constantly behind them. Many were thousands of miles from home — the Eastern Jews in camps in Germany, the German Jews in camps in the Slavic countries. Families were broken up, each member not knowing if the others were alive, and if so, where they were located.

On May 8th 1945, when the official surrender of Germany was declared, the Allied Forces not only had to render first aid, but efforts had to be made to bring families together again, to get mail through and to move people back to their homes, if their homes still existed. Into this picture, along with the armies, came the American Joint Distribution Committee.

The Eastern deportees, far from their homes, were assembled in Displaced Persons Camps which, with their barbed wire, barracks and guards, were hardly distinguishable from concentration camps. Army screening and Repatriation Teams, together with UNRRA field workers, attempted to distinguish between the legitimate victims of fascism and imposters, and to return all who desired to their original homes.

Meanwhile German Jews came out of hiding, returned from concentration camps, registered and reestablished themselves within their old communities. A premium came to be attached to being Jewish, and many collaborators and even non-German SS officers represented themselves as deported Allied nationals and Jews. Both the Army and UNRRA, therefore, in dealing with Jews, came to rely heavily on the AJDC, not only for the material aid it was providing, but for the distinctive abilities of their staff in distinguishing and dealing with the surviving Jews.

It was because of this almost hopeless mixup of Jews and non-Jews, and of Jews from different parts of Europe, together with the uncertainty of each as to the whereabouts of the rest of his family, and the eagerness of all to find out which of their family had survived, that the need for a Search and Tracing Office arose. Though there were almost no records on hand at the beginning, an effort had to be made to find out where each man's relatives had fled in their wanderings, and which of them remained alive. Only with such facts determined could those Jews in Europe know where there might be a home to which they could now travel, and only thus could those away from Europe re-establish communication with their family, and channel their aid and relief.

On May 8, 1945, when the official surrender of Germany was declared, the Allied Forces not only had to render first aid, but efforts had to be made to bring people back together again, to get mail through and to move people back to their homes, if their homes still existed. As the armies moved with the armies, came the American Joint Distribution Commission.

The Eastern Europeans, far from their homes, were assembled in Displaced Persons Camps which, with their barbed wire, barracks and guards, were hardly distinguishable from concentration camps. Army screening and Registration Teams, together with UNRRA field workers, attempted to distinguish between the legitimate victims of fascism and criminals, and to return all who desired to their original homes.

Many of the Eastern Europeans returned from concentration camps, internment and other places, and found themselves within their old communities. A particular problem was attached to being Jewish, and many collaborators and even some former SS officers represented themselves as deported Allied citizens and Jews. Both the Army and UNRRA, therefore, in dealing with these cases to rely heavily on the AJDC, not only for the information it was providing, but for the distinctive ability of its staff in distinguishing and dealing with the situation.

It was because of the stress upon the situation of Jews and non-Jews, and of Jews from different parts of Europe, together with the uncertainty of each as to the whereabouts of the rest of his family, and the eagerness of all to find out if their family had survived, that the need for a Family and Friends Office arose. Though there were almost no records at that time, beginning, an effort had to be made to find out where people's relatives had fled in their wanderings, and which of them were still alive. Only with such facts determined could those people know where there might be a home to which they could travel, and only thus could those away from Europe re-establish communication with their family, and channel their aid and efforts.