

CREATION OF THE ITS

In the middle of the war, in 1943, in London, the "Committee on Displaced Populations of the Allied Post-War Requirement Bureau" was studying the consequences of the enormous displacement of population caused by the war. The decision was taken to set up in the various countries of Europe, after their liberation, tracing bureaux whose job would be to find persons who had been deported or who had disappeared. From the next year, 1944, the allied military authorities had to face the problem of taking care of civilians in the territories that they progressively liberated. This task was first entrusted to SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces) which began recording all "displaced persons" (DPs): for each of these persons a personal index card was made out, known as the "DP 2" card, the details of which were later used to reply to tracing requests.

In March 1945, SHAEF, in collaboration with UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) undertook to seek and assemble all the documentation in existence on persons held in the concentration camps.

On 17 September 1945, under the terms of an agreement concluded with the Co-ordinating Committee of the Control Commission for Germany, UNRRA took charge of this activity, the main purpose of which was to seek the nationals of the countries belonging to the United Nations, whether military or civilian, who had disappeared in the course of the war, to collect and keep on file any documents relating to refugees and displaced persons, and to help in reuniting separated families.

In January 1946, the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau was established in Arolsen, a small town of 4,500 inhabitants near Cassel.

From January 1948, the Central Tracing Bureau took as its title the International Tracing Service (ITS). Its administration was taken over by the International Refugees Organization (IRO) until the end of March 1951, after which it was in the charge of the Allied High Commission for Germany.

On 5 May 1955 the Allied High Commission was dissolved, and responsibility for administering the ITS was entrusted to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva.

Under the ICRC, the ITS is run for humanitarian purposes, its task being to give to those directly concerned personal information that might be of use to them.

The growth of the activities of the ITS has been rapid since its inception in 1945. It has been particularly active in the field of the repatriation of prisoners of war and the exchange of civilian internees. From 1947 onwards, the ITS started to accumulate concentration camp files secured by the allied forces when the camps were liberated and retained for use by the International War Crime Tribunal.

Between 1946 and 1950, it obtained various documents, in particular those relating to forced labour. Subsequently, it acquired a large number of documents, consisting of the registration records of displaced persons.

The bulk of the ITS archives consists of documents as new documents are gathered. Thanks to the co-operation of such organizations as the "Glowa-Kowitz-Habsburg-Bertram-Hitlerowicz" in Poland, Warsaw; the "Central Commission for the Study of German War Criminals" in the Federal Republic of Germany; the "Verwaltung, Ludwigshafen, Central Office responsible for tracing war criminals, Ludwigshafen"; the Federal Archives of Koblenz; the "Dokumentationsstelle des Österreichischen Widerstandes, Wien"; (Archives of the Austrian Resistance, Vienna); the "Österreichische Lagergemeinschaften, Wien"; (the Austrian Association of Mauthausen, Vienna); the United Nations High Commission for Refugees; various National Red Cross Societies, etc.

The ITS records are divided into five sections:

1) Section for Concentration Camp Documents

This section is the most important, due both to the character and volume of the material it contains, consisting of all the documents from the concentration camps which the ITS was able to recover. Unfortunately, a considerable number of such records were destroyed at the time of liberation, often by the SS. Although the records of some camps, such as Buchenwald