

What for many of us is personal experience is often for the younger generation, in and outside the International Tracing Service (ITS), only so much history. But the employees of this institution, which was founded in London in 1943, see the effects of that history every day as they comb the ITS archives.

We have a duty to keep this history alive in order to ensure that now, more than 40 years on, the victims of National-Socialist persecution still obtain that to which they are entitled.

The ten member states of the International Commission for the International Tracing Service (IC/ITS) set the framework in which the ITS is to operate and see to it that this is properly adhered to. They thus guarantee that the work continues for the benefit of the former persecutees for whom the ITS was created to serve.

Under the Bonn Agreements of June 1955, between the Western Allies and the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Republic assumed responsibility for the finances of the International Tracing Service.

In an exchange of notes concerning the manner in which the work of the ITS would be continued, the governments also agreed in June 1955 that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, in view of its neutral, impartial and humanitarian character, would be entrusted with the direction and administration of the ITS.



The International Commission for the International Tracing Service gave the International Tracing Service the mandate of

- assembling
- classifying
- preserving
- and evaluating

personal records on former persecutees of the National-Socialist Regime. The following activities result from that mandate:

The ITS provides documentary proof of persecution for civilians who were incarcerated or sent into forced labour under the Third Reich because of their race, religion, ethnic origin, creed or political leanings. This proof is furnished in the form of certificates and excerpts from documents which are the only legal instruments with which claims for compensation or old-age pensions can be substantiated. We still receive 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries each year from about 35 countries. The substantiation is given to the former persecutees themselves, their assigns or the compensation or pension authorities.

The following categories of personal records are used by the International Tracing Service to provide substantiation:

- Documents concerning Germans and non-Germans held in concentration camps, labour camps or prisons.



- Documents concerning non-Germans sent into forced labour on the territory of the Third Reich during the Second World War.
- Documents concerning displaced non-Germans who were given assistance by United Nations relief organizations following the War.

With the extensive archives (comprising a total of 20 separate archive-units) and great variety of documents preserved at the International Tracing Service, a special filing system has had to be developed. Since the registration of people of many different nationalities, which began during the War and went on until the late 40s, was intended for use by people of many different nationalities, an alphabetic/phonetic index of names had to be set up. With this filing system, it is not possible to extract information on single groups of persecutees or according to camps or geographical area. But it ensures that any and all records which we have on a given person are readily available for consultation and evaluation by our specialists. The International Tracing Service thus represents a very singular archive since, unlike other archives, in addition to assembling, classifying and preserving documents, it also gives special training to its personnel in the evaluation of those documents. In accordance with the Service's mandate, the information is then given only to those directly concerned.

Arolsen, Summer 1986



Ch.-Cl. Biedermann
Director

