

Creation and Development
of the International Tracing Service

In order to get a better idea of the special nature of the International Tracing Service, it is good to recall how this institution originated and what activities it was destined to perform.

In the middle of the war, more precisely in 1943, the COMMITTEE ON DISPLACED POPULATIONS OF THE ALLIED POST-WAR REQUIREMENT BUREAU in London was concerned with the extensive displacement of populations caused by the war, and especially with the consequences of the persecution. It was decided to establish after the liberation, National Tracing Bureaux in different countries of Europe, with the aim of locating deported and missing persons. One year later the allied military authorities were confronted with the problem of registering the civilians living within the territories they had liberated. Accordingly the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces) gave orders to register all displaced persons (DP's). For each one of these displaced persons, an index card was filed, which has since become known under the designation "DP-2". These were later to serve the purpose of answering eventual tracing inquiries. In March 1945 the SHAEF established a tracing bureau whose task was to collect and preserve all data of persons incarcerated in concentration camps. The UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) which participated in this action supplied the personnel required. One month later, this organization, together with the SHAEF, was relocated from Versailles to Frankfurt on Main. One of the duties of the UNRRA was to care for displaced persons of the countries which were members of the UNITED NATIONS and to facilitate their return to their native countries, which they had been forced to leave during the war. Furthermore, the UNRRA was to assist displaced persons to find their families from whom they had become separated by the war.

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within the territories they had liberated. Accordingly the SHARP (Supernumerary Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces) gave orders to register displaced persons (D.P.s). For each one of these displaced persons, an identification card was filed, which has since become known under the designation "D.P. Card". These were later to serve the purpose of answering eventual

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Central Tracing Bureau which, based on an agreement with the ALLIED CONTROL COUNCIL FOR GERMANY, signed on 17th September 1945, were placed under the direction of the UNRRA. This agreement constituted the first official step to trace missing persons. It can be rightly considered the fundamental guiding principle for the work of the Central Tracing Bureau of the UNRRA. Its main aim was to trace citizens of countries which were members of the UNITED NATIONS, soldiers or civilians missing during the war, and to collect and preserve all documents concerning refugees and displaced persons in Germany, as well as to assist in bringing together families that had been separated.

At the beginning of January 1946 the Central Tracing Bureau was relocated to Arolsen. At first it may seem surprising that a relatively small, remote town in the district of Waldeck with a population at that time of 4.500 was chosen. But with respect to the zones of occupation, Arolsen was located centrally. The next largest town was Cassel which, however, had been destroyed up to 80% by air-raids. For different practical reasons Arolsen was preferred, as it had been spared from the war events and as, besides large barracks, the "New Castle" and various administration buildings were available. The UNRRA which had also been relocated to Arolsen moved into the "New Castle".

On 1st July the Central Tracing Bureau was taken over by the PCIRO (Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization) which came to the decision three months later to change the name of the Central Tracing Bureau into INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE - ITS - effective from 1st January 1948.

The International Refugee Organization (IRO) took over the direction of the ITS until the end of March 1951. Thereafter the ITS was taken over by the Allied High Commission for Germany (HICOG).

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On 5th May 1955, the period of occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany came to an end, and the Allied High Commission was dissolved. Based on the Convention of the Settlement of Matters Arising out of the War and the Occupation (as amended by Schedule IV to the Protocol on the Termination of the Occupational Regime in the Federal Republic of Germany signed at Paris on 23rd October 1954), the continuance of the activities of the International Tracing Service could be assured. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva was then entrusted with the direction and administration of the International Tracing Service. At the same time an agreement was signed constituting an International Commission for the International Tracing Service.

At the beginning of its activities the International Tracing Service dealt only with the reuniting of families. Only later was it called upon to establish Certificates of Incarceration. Moreover it was assigned the task to furnish proof of deaths that occurred in concentration camps. The first Certificate of Incarceration was issued in 1948. After the German indemnification law came into force in 1953, the number of applications for certificates increased continually and has remained more or less constant since 1954.

The majority of the death cases in the concentration camps were not officially registered during the war. As an exception, in some camps death-registers were kept; however, a large number of these death-registers were destroyed towards the end of the war. Since 1948 the urgent question concerning the certification of these death cases arose. This problem was solved on 1st September 1949 when the Special Registry Office ("Sonderstandesamt") was established at Arolsen. This Special Registry Office certifies the death cases appearing in the documentary material of the concentration camps. Until now - i. e. 31st December 1974 - 351.760 death cases concerning concentration camp prisoners have been registered by the Special Registry Office.

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