

II. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE TRACING PROBLEM.

A. The Problem of Tracing Allied Nationals

Tracing may be defined as the process of determining the location of persons whose present whereabouts, alive or dead, are being sought by their relatives, friends or governments.

Although the tracing of missing persons has been long recognized as a civil problem which has been handled by various national welfare agencies, its implications on an international scale received scant attention until the vast displacement of population during the recent war forced it on the Allied Governments. Even then its full import was only gradually realized.

During its first phase, the problem was viewed largely as a humanitarian one. The reunion of deported families, the return of children to their parents, and the re-establishment of contacts disrupted by years of occupation and war were viewed as a necessary prerequisite for any sound program of repatriation or resettlement. In a larger sense, social reconstruction could not be attempted in any major sense until the basic human relationships had been restored. At this time the problem of a tracing agency was largely to serve as a link for bringing interested persons into communication with each other. Complicated as that task was by difficulties of communication in a war torn society, its problems were essentially straightforward and simple. Once the interested parties have established contacts with each other, the problem is solved. This aspect of tracing although still of importance, has been reduced through repatriation on a large scale and through the gradual restoration of normal communication facilities.

It was only gradually that other aspects such as the re-establishment of legal processes, the settling of estates and inheritances, the determination of marital status,

the verification of claims for insurance and pensions, were recognised as having considerable importance.

It might be argued that those who have not returned might be assumed dead. This assumption, however, does not solve the humanitarian aspect of the problem, for many people refuse to accept any but definite evidence. Nor, of course, does it solve the legal aspects. Although many governments have modified their laws establishing the presumption of death, the process is of necessity a long and involved one. The identification of the dead and the presentation of legally acceptable evidence is consequently of great importance both to individuals and governments. These questions often depend for their solution on information which can be supplied by no other means than an effective international tracing service.

Consequently the full extent of the tracing problem did not present itself until the Allied Governments came to realise the thoroughness and brutality with which Fascist agencies extirpated their enemies. The problem of identifying the dead and establishing the fate of those who cannot be found alive has come to be the purpose in which many national governments, particularly those in Western Europe, are primarily interested in so far as persons missing in Germany are concerned. These long range political, legal, and social ramifications of the problem are of such magnitude as to necessitate a careful scrutiny and adjustment of the objectives of any agency attempting to solve the problem of missing persons. On this second phase of the problem, the actual search for individuals must be subordinated to the search for and exploitation of records and documents.

B. The Problem of Tracing German Nationals.

On its larger aspect, the problem of tracing missing persons cannot be limited to the tracing of displaced United Nations' nationals. The movement and casualties sustained by