

III. UNRRA PROPOSALS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL TRACING SYSTEM

From its inception, UNRRA accepted the tracing of missing persons as one of the legitimate and essential parts of its program.

The basis of authority upon which UNRRA accepted this responsibility rests on the inclusion of technical services necessary for maintaining records of displaced persons (1) within the framework of welfare services⁽²⁾ recognized as one of the essential services for the relief of victims of war⁽³⁾.

The necessity for carrying out a program of tracing as a most important phase of the welfare of victims of war was adopted by the Standing Technical Sub-Committee on Displaced Persons for Europe at its Fifth Meeting held on 30 June 1944. The Committee approved a Preliminary Report on Communication Between Displaced Persons and Their Families (TDP/E(44)18.) "as a basis for the Displaced Persons Division proceeding in consultation with the military authorities, the International Red Cross and the other agencies concerned, with the working out of a co-ordinated plan for enabling displaced persons to get in touch with their families and friends, and for dealing with enquiries from families and friends about displaced persons". (Minutes of the Fifth Meeting, Standing Technical Sub-Committee on Displaced Persons for Europe, 30 June 1944, Para. 5.).

Although this report recommended the use and extension of existing tracing machinery, such as provided by the International Red Cross Committee, Vatican authorities, and the Civil Affairs Branch of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (TDP/E(44) 18 (Revised) 22 August 1944, Sections 4(a), (b); 8; 9), it further recognized the necessity of supplementing their services. (Ibid., Section 6). For this purpose it proposed the creation of an international tracing service comprising National Tracing Bureaux, Local

Tracing Offices, and a Central Bureau for Europe. The national tracing bureaux were to be set up in each of the European United Nations to serve as a clearing house for all matters concerning the tracing of its own nationals (Ibid., Section 7; 10 (a).) (4) The local offices to be opened at the earliest possible moment in liberated territory, were proposed as feeders to and to work in close co-operation with their respective national bureaux. The Central Bureau for Europe was to serve as the connecting link between the various national bureaux and to direct the answering of enquiries which could not be dealt with otherwise. It is clearly implied in this report (Sections 3 (b), ii; 4 (a); 6; 7; 8) and definitely stated in a supplementary statement, Suggestions on Functions of the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe (U.N.c. 82, Section 1) "that the basic conception is that the headquarters office of the International Red Cross Committee should be invited to undertake the functions of the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe".

The part UNRRA was to play in this system was clearly limited to that of "an administrative link to get the scheme started"; it was proposed that it should not be "in any way responsible for operating it". Although it is clearly stated that "UNRRA would undertake the role of co-ordinator in respect of the displaced persons under its care"; it was in no way implied that the European Regional Office would assume responsibility for maintaining liaison between the National Tracing Bureaux or would dictate the policies or procedures of the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe.(5).

Despite UNRRA's clear acceptance of the tracing of missing persons as a legitimate and essential part of its program, there is no evidence that these suggestions were implemented. The Local Tracing Offices were never created, and there is little substantiation for the claim that the development of the National Tracing Bureaux, as now constituted, was stimulated by these proposals, (see below V, B). Negotiations were evidently

initiated with the International Red Cross Committee, but, whatever their results, its Headquarters Office did not assume the functions of the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe.

(1) "The supplies and services of which the Administration will seek to insure the provision fall under four heads :

2. Relief Services: such as health and welfare; assistance in caring for, and maintaining records of, persons found in any areas under the control of any of the United Nations who by reason of war have been displaced from their homes and, in agreement with the appropriate governments, military authorities or other agencies in securing their repatriation or return; and such technical services as may be necessary for these purposes." (Resolution I, Part II, Section 2.)

(2) "Within the framework of its total program the Administration should make specific provision for welfare services for victims of war" (Resolution 9, Section 4).

(3) "2..... The purposes and functions of the Administration shall be as follows: (a) To plan, coordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services." (Agreement for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Article I, Section 2(a)).

(4) UNRRA, Displaced Persons Branch, Communication Between Displaced Persons and Their Families, suggestions Regarding the Functions of the National Tracing Bureaux and the Local Tracing Offices, U.N.c. 83, Sections 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, contains suggestions for the functions of the proposed National Tracing Bureau. Sections 4, 5, 6 deal with the proposed Local Tracing Offices.

(5) For a statement of the policy of the Standing Technical Sub-Committee on the SHAEF Tracing Unit, see below C.

