

IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL TRACING SERVICE FOR GERMANY

A. Tracing as a Military Operation (1939-1944)

With the opening of hostilities in 1939 the need for special arrangements for tracing prisoners of war and civilians who had been cut off from their relatives became apparent. In most countries this task was assumed by the various national Red Cross organizations with the International Red Cross Committee acting as intermediary between the belligerents.

The full extent of the problem of missing persons and the necessity of creating a central service for tracing their whereabouts became fully apparent only as the Allied armies liberated increasingly large areas of enemy occupied territory. Initially the problem was viewed as a military one, largely concerned with prisoners of war, for which the machinery for transmitting messages set up by the International Red Cross Committee under the Geneva Convention was adequate.

B. The Creation of the Central Tracing Service

1. The SHAEF Tracing Unit. As a result of the progress of the Allied armies in Germany early in 1945, an increasing number of enquiries for tracing United Nations Displaced Persons and relatives in Germany of United Nations nationals were received by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) for the handling of which no facilities existed. (SHAEF/G-5/DP/281613, 27 April 1945, Para. 1).<sup>✓</sup> To meet this need the Supreme Commander provided for the processing of such enquiries through normal military channels (Ibid., Para. 2). The service thus provided contained in embryo the essential features which characterized subsequent developments in that theater:

(1) SHAEF's assumption of the functions of a central agency for receiving enquiries from outside Germany and for distributing

A. Treaty as a Political Act

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them to appropriate channels (Ibid., Para 2);

(2) the delegation of the responsibility for field search to local Military Detachment Commanders who were authorized to use non-military personnel, (such as Red Cross, UNRRA, etc.) in conducting an investigation and to exploit available records of the local German authorities. (Ibid., Para 3 a, b.).

As the magnitude of the problem increased, the service was further crystallized by the organization of a SHAEF Tracing and Location Unit to establish and systematize a tracing procedure adequate for handling it. The procedure thus organized divided the function of the Unit into two distinct but closely related operations : (1) the collection of documents and records, and (2) the processing of enquiries for tracing individuals. The Unit was to collect nominal rolls of concentration camp inmates and Displaced Persons' Registration Cards (SHAEF 185/24, 24 May 1945, Para 2 A, B) forwarded to the Headquarters in accordance with military directives (SHAEF Administrative Memorandum No.39 - Revised 16 April 1945, Para. 31 (c), and SHAEF Signal S-85927, 23 April 1945) and to disseminate the information contained therein to the various national tracing bureaux. (SHAEF 185/24, 24 May 1945, Para 2B) The processing of enquiries provided for classification into priority categories screening against available nominal rolls and index of enquiries received. (Ibid., Para 3B), and dispatch for tracing either to appropriate military government officials or to the various national tracing bureaux. The system also provided for the maintenance of a Central Registry of non-repatriables by UNRRA and the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees (Ibid., Para. 2C) and for the use of standard enquiry and reply forms to facilitate the process (SHAEF/G-5/DF/2816/1, 28 May 1945).

Central Tracing Bureau (Ibid., Para. 5, etc.). The primary responsibility of the latter was "the processing of the handling of a national tracing bureau in each country to which all enquiries originating in that country will in the first instance



2. The CDPX Central Tracing Bureau. With the establishment of the Combined Displaced Persons Executive, G-5 Division, USFEP, representatives of the various elements of the Control Commission turned their attention to perfecting the tracing procedure as a permanent feature of military government in occupied Germany. Numerous proposals were made for the establishment of tracing agencies in the four zones, and for incorporating the SHAEF tracing unit as a section of the executive. Leadership in this project was undertaken by the British and the United States elements, both of which submitted proposals at a meeting held in Frankfurt-am-Main on 17 July 1945. The British proposal provided in general for the extension of their Missing Personnel Search Bureau of the P.W. Branch established as early as April 1945, to include Displaced Persons as well as prisoners of war<sup>6</sup>. (See below V, C, 1.). The American proposal was largely an extension of the tracing service already in operation under the direction of SHAEF<sup>7</sup>. The agreements reached during the summer of 1945 set forth "the general policy and the broad lines of a system whereby the fullest measure of decentralization would be used consonant with overall co-ordination by the Central Tracing Bureau in order to ensure the most efficient and economical organization". (GE-CDPX, 383, 7 (4.33), 18 August 1945, Para 3).

The proposal as outlined in the basic agreement (GE-CDPX, 383.7, 24 July 1945) provided for a Central Records Office and a Central Tracing Bureau (Ibid., Para. 1). The former was responsible for locating, safeguarding, analysing and determining the disposition of all records in Germany concerned with displaced persons. Records of interest to Allied governments were to be turned over to the National Tracing Bureaux concerned, and all others to be kept centrally for use by the Central Tracing Bureau (Ibid., Para. 2, c). The primary responsibility of the latter was "the promoting of the development of a National Tracing Bureau in each country to which all inquiries originating in that country will in the first instance



be directed." (Ibid., Para. 3a) its immediate functional operation was the sifting of enquiries received from the National Tracing Bureaux and passing on those judged suitable and those which could not be answered from the records in the Central Records Office to the appropriate zone. Provisions were made for handling enquiries concerning both displaced persons and ex-enemy nationals who are relatives of United Nations' nationals. (Ibid., Para 3b). As the system expanded it included also plans for tracing relatives of displaced persons at Assembly Centers in Germany (GE-CDPX, 383.7-4.31), 10 August 1945), plans for utilizing the facilities of radio and the press and proposals for conducting specialized search for the relatives of unaccompanied children. This proposal contained every essential feature of the Central Tracing Service later established by the Allied Control Authority as the recognized tracing agency for United Nations' nationals missing within Germany. It developed independently as a military operation under military supervision; it was, however, implemented from the beginning with UNRRA personnel, and for that reason was the basis upon which the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau was developed.

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(6). Proposals for the tracing of missing persons and for the operation of the Missing Personnel Search Bureau of the P.W. Branch, British Control Commission for Germany (British Element) submitted at a meeting held at C.D.P.X., Frankfurt, on 17 July 1945.

(7). Recommendations concerning the establishment of a Central Tracing Service for United Nations' Missing in Occupied Germany. Also: CDPX 383.7 (4.33), 15 July 1945.

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3. The UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau. The Combined Displaced Persons Executive, in view of its temporary nature, at no time envisaged its responsibility for developing and directing the tracing service as a permanent one. As early as 28 June 1945, officers of SHAEF, G-5(DP) and the U.S. Group Control Council (DP) had communicated to UNRRA officials their desire to turn over the tracing activity to UNRRA. (Letter to DP Division, UNRRA, ERO, 584/R/49, 29 June 1945, Para 1.). This had been included in United States' Recommendation Concerning the Establishment of a Central Tracing Service (Para. 4) and had been suggested on a somewhat more limited basis in the British proposals of 17 July (Para. 3). The basic CDPX Agreement therefore, included the provision that the executive would in due course hand over the responsibility to UNRRA by agreement with all interested organizations (GE-CDPX 383.7, 24 July 1945, Para. 4b).

The reasons underlying this decision were complicated. The four Occupying Powers were evidently unable to agree to charge one of themselves with the task of operating a Central Tracing Bureau and Records Office which would co-ordinate the activities in each zone of occupation and serve as their contact with national bureaux. It was therefore necessary for them to find an independent agency. The most suitable existing agency was, of course, the International Red Cross Committee, whose experience with prisoners of war was extensive, and who possessed a trained staff, and mechanical equipment. Because of its national character, however, this body was not acceptable to all of the four powers for political reasons. The most suitable alternative was UNRRA, the international character of which was satisfactory to all the powers, and which had already been working in close conjunction with SHAEF and CDPX in implementing their tracing program.

The willingness of the European Regional Office of UNRRA to undertake this means of fulfilling its recognized responsibility, was indicated early in July. At its Twenty-Third meeting on 5 July 1945, the Standing Technical Sub-



Committee on Displaced Persons for Europe apparently changed its views on the limitations of UNRRA's obligation for tracing as stated in Section 10(d) of the report it had approved during preliminary negotiations in the preceding year. (See above III B). The Committee "took note" (apparently without dissent) of a report on the SHAEF Tracing Unit which clearly contemplated UNRRA's acceptance of an operational function. On referring to the SHAEF Tracing Unit, the Report states:

"Since it has been contemplated from the early stages of this work that this would ultimately become one of the tasks of UNRRA, this Unit has been built up with UNRRA personnel. It is being developed by UNRRA, with the assistance of the military, and is probably destined to become a central displaced persons record bureau for Germany, for handling all enquiries, whether official or private, concerning persons who were displaced in that country".

The SHAEF Unit with which the Report dealt had grown up in response to an urgent military necessity. From the institution of the tracing service early in April it had been supervised by a representative of the UNRRA liaison staff. At the transfer of SHAEF from Versailles to Frankfurt, the UNRRA staff had increased to five, and requirements for a staff of twenty-one were submitted to the Chief Liaison Officer (Report to Chief UNRRA Liaison Officer, 26 June 1945). Proposals were made for expanding it adequately to meet the widening responsibility imposed by the military, stating detailed personnel requirements of an extensive nature; physical equipment including Watson Business Machines, duplicating equipment, and transport. (UNRRA, Central Records Office in Germany, Report No.6., 12 July 1945.) An initial reconnaissance for a suitable location of the bureau was also undertaken (UNRRA, Central Records Office, Report No.7., 16 July 1945.) It appeared, therefore, that UNRRA was preparing itself to undertake the

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full responsibility for tracing at the dissolution of CDEK on 1 October 1945.

During the months which followed, however, progress was painfully slow. Requirements for a strengthened staff and adequate equipment were constantly submitted (Central Records Office, Report No.7, 16 July 1945; Appraisal of the Condition of Health of the Central Tracing Bureau, 4 August 1945; Progress Bulletin of the Central Tracing Bureau, 27 August 1945.), but at no time did UNRRA provide adequate facilities for the task. On 26 June 1945 there were five members of the staff; to this number six were added 3 July, four from 4 July to 20 August, and eleven on 23 August. Although it had been clearly requested that a staff of 89 would be necessary before 1 October 1945 when UNRRA was to assume the entire responsibility for the operation, only 34 UNRRA employees were available at that time, assisted by six Class II employees and 18 displaced persons.

During the first three months of its operation, the same conditions prevailed. Space and equipment of all kinds were provided with reluctance, and staff additions fell far below requirements. During October 18 staff members were added, and during November 76. It was not until the transfer of the Bureau to Arolsen on 3 January 1946, that space, equipment, and staff were in any measure adequate to cope with the influx of work.

### C. The ACA/UNRRA Agreements

1. The ACA Proposal. With the institution of the Allied Control Authority as the responsible agent for Military Government in Germany, it became necessary to establish the Central Tracing Service on the widest possible basis. The essential problem was this: to provide co-ordination for tracing programs carried out by autonomous agencies operating independently under the complete jurisdiction of the four Zone Commanders and to establish a centralized channel within the framework of that organization through which contact could



be maintained with the various national tracing agencies. The proposals adopted by the four Occupying Powers as the Charter of the Central Tracing Service extended and expanded the implications of the CDFX Agreement reached by the Occupying Powers in July. It was submitted by the Working Group on the Central Tracing Service to the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons, was approved, and was forwarded to the Co-ordinating Committee of the Allied Control Authority for its consideration on 10 September 1945 (DPOW/M(45)3, 12 September 1945, Para 18). The Co-ordinating Committee approved the document as CORC/P(45)54 at its Eighth Meeting (CORC/M(45)8, 17 September 1945, Para. 105), and referred it to the PW & DP Directorate for implementation with instructions to open direct negotiations with UNRRA (DPOW/Misc/2, 21 September 1945, Para. 2(a-)).

At its Fourth Meeting, the PW & DP Directorate ordered that UNRRA should be asked to establish its bureau in the area of Hersfeld as soon as the Policy Board had carried out a reconnaissance and had determined the exact location. The target date for this operation was 15 October 1945 (DPOW/M(45) 4, 21 September 1945, Para. 33c).

Despite this injunction, the issuance of the invitation was delayed for a month. At the Third Meeting of the Central Tracing Policy Board (12 October 1945) in answer to charges of unnecessary delay, the UNRRA representative pointed out that no official invitation had been received. The Board consequently recorded with regret that, owing to a misunderstanding, the invitation had not yet been extended, and requested the Duty Secretary to extend it without delay. (DPOW/CTPB/M(45)3, October 1945). The official invitation for UNRRA to put its Central Tracing Bureau and associated Central Records Office at the Council's disposal, to be operated by UNRRA under policies and directives issued by the Central Tracing Policy Board as outlined in CORC/P(45)54, was despatched on 13 October, 1945.

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2. UNRRA's Acceptance. On the day following its arrival, the invitation was referred to the Personal Representative to the Director General, UNRRA, European Regional Office, by the Chief of Operations for Germany, for instructions, and the PW & DP Directorate was advised of this action.

In the light of subsequent developments, it is important to note that in recommending its acceptance, the Chief of Operations clearly pointed out that the implications of the proposal were considerable and that it would entail an extension of UNRRA's original intentions.

"The implications of such acceptance have yet to be worked out but it can immediately be said that there will be entailed a very considerable increase in expenditure by UNRRA both on account of personnel and equipment, but I suggest that this should constitute no obstacle to the assumption of this task which, in my opinion, eminently belongs to UNRRA".

After a considerable delay marked by increasing impatience on the part of the PW & DP Directorate and the Central Tracing Policy Board<sup>(8)</sup>, a further exchange of correspondence followed in response to which the Chief of Operations for Germany reiterated his opinion that the operation of a Central Tracing Bureau was definitely an UNRRA task and that the acceptance was dependent on the approval of the European Regional Office (OMGUS, 584/EK/100; 9 November 1945).

On 12 November 1945 the Personal Representative to the Director General, UNRRA, European Regional Office, replied:

- (1) That the official invitation had been delayed in transmission.
- (2) That the Chief of Operations for Germany is authorized to proceed and to carry out the task which the Allied Control Commission has asked UNRRA to undertake.

It is significant to point out that he acknowledged in particular the implications of the proposal and instructed the Chief of Operations for Germany to provide for its



implementation :

"You point out that this function will entail increased expenditure for both personnel and equipment. No doubt you will bear this in mind in submitting a revised budget for the UNRRA Central Headquarters for Germany or a supplementary budget to provide for the necessary expansion of the Tracing Bureau."

Following the receipt of his authorization to proceed, the Chief of Operations for Germany accepted the proposal as outlined in CORC/F(45)54 on three conditions:

- (a) That the German Civil Administration be ordered to afford the Tracing Service and in particular the Zonal Bureau all possible assistance; this includes the use of the German postal and police services.
- (b) That any tracing organization operating on behalf of the Germans be ordered to co-ordinate its activities with the United Nations Tracing Service and to afford the latter all the assistance in its power.
- (c) That the Central Tracing Bureau be given the right to inspect and advise on the method of operation in those Zonal Bureaux which are an UNRRA responsibility and staffed by UNRRA personnel.

(UNRRA Chief of Operations for Germany to the Duty Secretary, Allied Control Authority, Berlin, 16 November 1945.)

3. Confirmation of the Acceptance. After a further delay<sup>(9)</sup>, the Central Tracing Policy Board at its Eleventh Meeting on 6th December 1945 agreed (1) to consider the copy of the letter of the Chief of Operations for Germany as the official reply to the offer; (2) that the conditions set forth in the letter could be met; (3) to recommend to the FW & DP Directorate that it reply to the Chief of Operations that the operation of the Central Tracing Bureau and Records Office by UNRRA is now considered official. (DFOW/CTPB/M(45)11, 7 December 1945, Para. 7c).

The confirmation authorized by the Directorate (DFOW/M(45)11, 13 December 1945, Para. 87 (b).) contained clarifications concerning the implications of the agreement which are important for an understanding of its operation:

- (1) The first two conditions on which the acceptance was made could be met (DFOW/Misc/P(45)2, 14 January 1946, Para.2).

The report of the Committee on the  
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United States Investment Commission, Report to the Board of Directors, 1954.

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- (2) The third question was a matter of internal policy concerning UNRRA alone (Ibid., Para 3).
- (3) Necessary staff and equipment, the requirements of which should not be underestimated, were to be provided by UNRRA, (Ibid., Para. 5, 6, 7).
- (4) "In order to avoid all future misunderstandings concerning the power given to each, we permit ourselves to draw most particularly your attention to the fact that in conformity with the Charter of the Central Tracing Service, as defined by the Allied Control Authority in the abovementioned document, the Central Tracing Bureau in Germany is answerable to the ACA acting through the Directorate of P.W.'s and Displaced Persons and the CTFB." (Ibid., Para. 8).
- (5) "We also consider it useful to point out that it is the task of our Directorate and the CTFB to organize any liaisons judged necessary between the Central Tracing Service and any other organization in or outside Germany." (Ibid., para.10.)
- (6) "It remains, of course, understood that all these operations will only take place in close liaison with the Central Tracing Bureau, and its Director, who assists in a consultative capacity, at the meetings of the CTFB." (Ibid., Para. 11).

After four months of negotiation UNRRA, acting through its authorized representatives, had accepted the responsibility through which it could effectively discharge the obligations which the Administration assumed in its basic Agreement.

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(8). DPOW/M(45)7, 20 October 1945, Para. 54(a);  
DPOW/M(45)8, 30 October 1945, Para. 61(a); DPOW/CTFB/M(45)  
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(9). The original of the letter of acceptance was either lost in transmission or on receipt by the Duty Secretary of the PW & DP Div. ACA.

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(1) The first meeting on the subject of international relations was held in London, 1944.

(2) The second meeting was held in Washington, D.C., 1945.

(3) The third meeting was held in London, 1946. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.

(4) The fourth meeting was held in Washington, D.C., 1947. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.

(5) The fifth meeting was held in London, 1948. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.

(6) The sixth meeting was held in Washington, D.C., 1949. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.

(7) The seventh meeting was held in London, 1950. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.

(8) The eighth meeting was held in Washington, D.C., 1951. It was the first time that the United States and the United Kingdom met together to discuss international relations.