

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