

THE

INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

I.T.S.

The tracing of Missing Persons.

SECTION I.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

I. BACKGROUND

The circumstances of the war and in particular the persecution of Jews and political opponents undertaken by the Nazi Regime had led, by the end of 1943, to a vast displacement of populations, in the course of which a great number of family members had become separated from one another and had lost touch. Within Germany itself large numbers of persons were unable to maintain contact with the outside world owing to their internment in concentration camps and prisons, and their relatives knew neither where they lived nor where they were being held. Thus, one of the problems considered during the latter part of 1943 by the Committee on Displaced Populations of the Allied Post-War Requirements Bureau in London was the establishment of machinery for tracing missing persons.

Already the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva had set up a massive card index system for the purpose of communications with prisoners-of-war, and to this card index a section had been added for displaced civilians. The working of the central card index of dispersed families was described by the ICRC in a document which came before the Committee on Displaced Populations early in 1944. The importance attached to this subject is indicated by the personal attention given to it by Sir George Rendel who submitted in February 1944 a number of comments to Mr. Hoehler of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which the latter on reflection believed to be "a few molehills being made into mountains". The representatives of the European

INTERNATIONAL TRADING SERVICE

I.T.S.

The Trading of Missing Persons.

SECTION I.

INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCTION

The circumstances of the war and in particular the prosecution of Jews and political opponents undertaken by the Axis powers had led, by the end of 1945, to a vast displacement of populations, in the course of which a great number of family members had become separated from one another and had lost touch. Within Germany itself large numbers of persons were unable to maintain contact with the outside world owing to their internment in concentration camps and prisons, and their relatives knew neither where they lived nor where they were being held. Thus, one of the problems considered during the latter part of 1945 by the Committee on Displaced Populations of the Allied Post-War Reparations Bureau in London was the establishment of machinery for tracing missing persons.

Already the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva had set up a massive card index system for the purpose of communication with prisoners-of-war, and to this card index a section had been added for displaced civilians. The working of the central card index of dispersed families was described by the ICRC in a document which came before the Committee on Displaced Populations early in 1946. The importance attached to this subject is indicated by the personal attention given to it by Sir George Rendel who submitted in February 1946 a number of proposals to Mr. Hoehner of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which the latter on reflection believed to be "a few solutions being made into a machine". The representatives of the European

Governments who were members of the Allied Repatriation Commission (an informal body meeting in London) and who possessed repatriation departments, also concerned themselves with the problem of tracing. In the United Kingdom the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Society was already operating a tracing bureau, and in addition had set up a Record Bureau for Displaced Persons at Bari at the request and with the approval of the Allied military authorities.

During the lifetime of the Allied Post-War Requirements Bureau, Major Eyre Carter of the Foreign Office Relief Department had been in charge of this subject, and under his guidance a tentative plan began to take shape which envisaged the creation of national tracing bureaux by the various European Governments, and the development of the tracing service already established by the ICRC. During March 1944 Mr. Hochler left London for America and took with him a request that Washington Headquarters should authorize the European Regional Office (ERO) to invite the ICRC and/or the National Red Cross Societies to participate in a world-wide network for tracing missing persons.

Mr. Hochler himself appears to have entertained hopes of some kind of direct operational cooperation between UNRRA and the ICRC, and he suggested either that the ICRC should be compensated by UNRRA for the performance of certain services, or that UNRRA staff should have access to the ICRC files. These proposals he put before the Director-General on April 12th 1944.

In London a meeting was called by Sir Herbert Emerson, of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICOR), with representatives of the ICRC, the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Societies (BROS) and UNRRA with regard to tracing missing persons and communication between Displaced Persons and their families. It was agreed at this meeting that UNRRA should submit a memorandum on the registration and tracing of Displaced Persons and the re-establishment of communication between them and their families. This memorandum was to be criticised by those present and others before being submitted to the National Government. It was also to be placed before the military authorities in order that it should be in line with military policy.

A few days later, the military authorities issued their final Directive

Government who were members of the Allied Registration Commission (an inter-
 national body meeting in London) and who possessed registration documents,
 also concerned themselves with the problem of trading. In the United Kingdom
 the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Society was
 already operating a trading bureau, and in addition had set up a bureau
 known for Displaced Persons at Paris at the request and with the approval
 of the Allied military authorities.

During the lifetime of the Allied Post-War Reconstruction Bureau,
 Major Eric Carter of the Foreign Office British Liaison Department had been in charge
 of this subject, and under his guidance a tentative plan began to take
 shape which envisaged the creation of national trading bureaux by the various
 European governments, and the development of the trading services already
 established by the ICRC. During March 1944 Mr. Hoehler left London
 for America and took with him a request that Washington Headquarters should
 authorize the American Regional Office (ARO) to invite the ICRC and/or the
 National Red Cross Societies to participate in a wide-area network for
 trading displaced persons.

Mr. Hoehler himself appears to have entertained hopes of some
 kind of direct operational cooperation between UNRRA and the ICRC, and he
 suggested that the ICRC should be organized by UNRRA for the
 performance of certain services, so that UNRRA staff should have access
 to the ICRC files. These proposals were put before the Director-General
 on April 12th 1944.

In London a meeting was called by Sir Herbert Jackson, of the
 Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR), with representatives of
 the ICRC, the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross
 Societies (BRCS) and UNRRA with regard to trading displaced persons and
 communication between Displaced Persons and their families. It was agreed
 at this meeting that UNRRA should send a memorandum on the registration
 and trading of Displaced Persons and the re-establishment of communication
 between them and their families. This memorandum was to be submitted by
 those present and others before being submitted to the National Government.
 It was also to be placed before the military authorities in order that
 it should be in line with military policy.

This document was eventually developed under the title:

"Communication between Displaced Persons and their families - Enquiries, Tracing and Registration of Missing Persons." It referred to the work of the ICRC and the ERCS and also the register kept by the Vatican authorities and by the Mission Catholique at Fribourg in Switzerland. The paper proposed the establishment in each Allied country of ^aNational Tracing Bureau along the lines of the ERCS Bureau in the U.K. The function of a Central Tracing Bureau was also described and it was suggested that this could easily be set up by expanding the existing ICRC Register at Geneva. This document came before the Standing Technical Sub-Committee on Displaced Persons at its 5th Meeting on 30th June 1944 and received its approval subject to certain minor amendments.

In the meantime, the military authorities in Europe were becoming concerned about the problem of "communications to, from and about civilians in liberated areas" and they produced in July 18th 1944 a draft directive on this subject which they brought before a meeting, comprising the interested ^{r/}Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) ^{ti/}Divisions and civilian agencies, for discussion. This SHAEF document envisaged a very similar system to that which was submitted by ERO to the Standing Technical Sub-Committee, and the ERO document was being brought into line with the final version of the SHAEF directive. ^{s)} The ICRC had been consulted at all stages and had unofficially approved the functions proposed for them as the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe and the agreements of the Governments in regard to the establishment of National Tracing Bureaux followed from their acceptance of the ERO paper laid before the Sub-Committee.

On September 3rd, 1944, ERO was able to send to the members of the Standing Technical Sub-Committee a copy of the document on "Communication between Displaced Persons and their families", as amended in the light of the comments of the military authorities. In this communication the delegate was asked formally to ascertain whether his Government was in general agreement with the memorandum and, in particular, whether it proposed to set up a National Tracing Bureau as suggested in paragraph 7 thereof. A few days later, the military authorities issued their final Directive

This document was eventually developed under the title
 "Communication between Displaced Persons and their Families - Registered"
 Working and Registration of Displaced Persons. It referred to the work of
 the ICND and the IRO and also the register kept by the various author-
 ities and by the Displaced Persons at various in Germany. The paper
 proposed the establishment of a central office at the National Training In-
 stitute along the lines of the IRO Bureau in the U.S. The function of a
 Central Training Bureau was also described and it was suggested that this
 could easily be set up by expanding the existing IRO Register at Geneva.
 This document came before the Standing Technical Sub-Committee on Displa-
 ced Persons at its 5th meeting on 10th June 1944 and received its approval
 subject to certain minor amendments.

In the meantime, the military authorities in Europe were becom-
 ing concerned about the problem of "concentration camps" and they proposed to July 1944 a draft
 directive on this subject which they brought before a meeting, consisting
 the interested European Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in-
 vited and civilian agencies, for discussion. This AEF document envi-
 saged a very similar system to that which was submitted by IRO to the Stan-
 ding Technical Sub-Committee, and the IRO document was being brought into
 line with the final version of the AEF directive. The ICND had been
 consulted by all stages and had unreservedly approved the functional proposal
 for them at the Central Training Bureau for Europe and the agreement of
 the Government in regard to the establishment of National Training Bureau
 followed from their acceptance of the IRO paper laid before the Sub-Com-
 mittee.

On September 2nd, 1944, IRO was able to send to the members of
 the Standing Technical Sub-Committee a copy of the document on German-
 ities between Displaced Persons and their families, as outlined in the light
 of the comments of the military authorities. In this communication the de-
 legate was asked formally to ascertain whether his Government was in gen-
 eral agreement with the recommendations, in particular, whether it proposed
 to set up a National Training Bureau as suggested in paragraph 7 thereof.
 A few days later, the military authorities forwarded their final directive

on Civilian Communications.

At that time ERO was engaged in developing memoranda embodying suggestions on the functions of National Tracing Bureaux. Copies of these documents were sent to the Apostolic delegate on September 15th with a request that the Vatican should be asked whether they desired to participate in the scheme and if so in what way. On the same day, Mr. Dudley Ward, on behalf of Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, formally invited the ICRC to undertake the role of Central Tracing Bureau for Europe.

The plans for National Tracing Bureaux and a Central Tracing Bureau for Europe were further elaborated in two papers entitled respectively "Suggestions Regarding the Functions of the National Tracing Bureaux and the Local Tracing Offices" and "Suggestions on Functions of the Central Tracing Bureau for Europe". These were sent both to the European Governments and to the Committee of the International Red Cross for the purpose of indicating the lines along which UNRRA, in agreement with the Standing Technical Sub-Committee, envisaged the development of the Tracing organization in Europe. It is noteworthy that this scheme did not provide for any kind of tracing bureau within Germany. The reason for this was that tracing at that time was envisaged in terms of marrying enquiries with registrations. If a National Tracing Bureau had no record of the whereabouts of a person enquired after, the enquiry would be sent to Geneva and an attempt made there to marry the enquiry against some record in their card index. If the person was believed to have been in Germany, reliance would be placed upon records that could be extracted from the DP.2 Registration Cards made out for each Displaced Person which, according to plan, were to be deposited centrally with SIEAF. As will be seen below, this limited conception of tracing had to be actively supplemented by actual search among German records and in Assembly Centres and other places in Germany while, at the same time, the DP.2 Cards proved entirely unworkable for any tracing or Central Record purposes. The National Tracing Bureau described in the above paper was modelled, broadly speaking, on the Tracing Bureau operated by the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Society.

On October 10th, 1944, the ICRC formally accepted UNRRA's invitation to cooperate in the work of tracing by becoming responsible for the

an Civilian Commission.

At that time the Commission was engaged in developing memoranda embodying suggestions on the functions of National Trading Bureaux. Copies of these memoranda were sent to the Economic Committee on September 1944 with a request that the National Council be asked whether they desired to participate in the scheme and if so in what way. On the same day, Mr. Jeffrey Ward, on behalf of Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, formally invited the E.C.C. to undertake the role of Central Trading Bureau for Europe.

The plans for National Trading Bureaux and a Central Trading Bureau for Europe were further elaborated in two papers entitled respectively

"Suggestions regarding the functions of the National Trading Bureaux and the local Trading Offices" and "Suggestions on functions of the Central Trading Bureau for Europe". These were sent both to the European Govern-

ments and to the Committee on the International Red Cross for the purpose of indicating the lines along which E.C.C. in agreement with the Economic

Technical Sub-Committee, envisaged the development of the Trading Organiza-

tions in Europe. It is noteworthy that this scheme did not provide for any kind of trading bureau within Germany. The reason for this was that no

steps had been taken in terms of carrying out enquiries with regard to the National Trading Bureau had no record of the whereabouts of a person employed after the enquiry would be sent to Germany and an attempt

made there to carry the enquiry against some records in their card index. If the person was believed to have been in Germany, references would be placed

upon records that could be extracted from the B.P.S. Registration Cards made out for each displaced person which, according to plan, were to be deposited centrally with E.C.C. As will be seen below, this limited conception

of trading had to be actively supplemented by several search agency German records and in Assembly Centers and other places in Germany while, at the same time, the B.P.S. Cards proved entirely unsuitable for any trading or cen-

tral record purposes. The National Trading Bureau described in the above paper was outlined, broadly speaking, as the Trading Bureau operated by the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Society.

On October 1944, the E.C.C. formally accepted E.C.C.'s invitation to cooperate in the work of setting up trading organizations for the

Central Tracing Bureau for Europe. This acceptance was also conveyed by cable to the ICRC London Delegation and referred to ERO on October 17th.

In regard to the National Tracing Bureaux, most European countries were at first very slow in informing UNRRA of their intentions. However, in November a memorandum on Communications between Displaced Persons and their Families agreed upon at the 5th Meeting of the Standing Technical Subcommittee on Displaced Persons for Europe was finally approved by the British Government, who recommended that the functions of a National Tracing Bureau as suggested, be carried out in Great Britain by the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Societies.

Subsequently, the French and Dutch Governments led the way in establishing their own National Tracing Bureau and in bringing it into operation within the framework proposed by UNRRA.

One question which was material to the subject of tracing, but not directly connected with it, was that of postal communication between Displaced Persons and their families. Obviously, if at the earliest possible moment arrangements could be made for Displaced Persons to communicate, even though very briefly, with their families, it would quickly remove large numbers of cases from the whole field of tracing. As far back as May 1944, UNRRA developed a proposal for a form postcard which could be sent by each Displaced Person to his or her relatives at home and which would simply indicate that he or she was alive and well. The matter was, however, frowned upon by SHAEF, and in the Directive on Communications to, from and about Civilians in Liberated Areas, of September 15th, no such scheme was envisaged while, on the other hand, it was expected that ordinary postal communications would be available fairly quickly subject to censorship regulations. Thus, for the time being, the field postcard was thrown out. However, the news came through in October that SHAEF was considering a simple form postcard for Displaced Persons, and it was learned during December that the Army had definitely settled on a one-way field postcard. The form postcard stated in English, French and Dutch: "I am well and safe"; "Will write as soon as possible"; "Expect to be home soon, do not write". They were subject to one hundred percent censorship and each Displaced Person was permitted to write one card only.

General meeting between the groups. This meeting was also covered by
 cable to the UNHCR London Liaison and referred to UNHCR on October 1964.

In regard to the National Training Program, most European countries
 were at first very slow in indicating their intentions. However,
 in November a memorandum on Germanization between displaced persons and
 their families agreed upon at the 2nd meeting of the Working Technical Sub-
 Committee on Displaced Persons for Europe was finally agreed by the Ger-
 man Government, who recommended that the formation of a National Training
 Bureau as suggested, be carried out in Great Britain by the Foreign Office.
 Home Department of the British had given assistance.

Subsequently, the French and Dutch Governments led the way in
 establishing their own National Training Bureaus and in bringing it into ex-
 ecution within the framework proposed by UNHCR.

The question which was central to the subject of training, but not
 directly connected with it, was that of general communication between Displa-
 ced Persons and their families. Obviously, it is the earliest possible co-
 ordination arrangements could be made for displaced persons to communicate, even
 though very tentatively, with their families, it would greatly remove many im-
 parts of stress from the whole field of training. As far back as 1954,
 UNHCR developed a proposal for a form postcard which could be sent by each
 displaced person to his or her relatives at home and which would simply
 indicate that he or she was alive and well. The matter was, however, pro-
 posed upon by UNHCR, and in the Executive on Communications to, from and about
 Displaced Persons in 1954, it was suggested that ordinary postal communications
 within, on the other hand, it was suggested that ordinary postal communications
 would be available fairly early subject to necessary regulations. This,
 for the time being, the field postcard was shown as, however, the more
 was through in October that UNHCR was considering a single form postcard
 for displaced persons, and it was agreed during the meeting that the form had
 definitely settled on a one-way field postcard. The form postcard would
 be in English, French and Dutch "I am well and safe"; "All well as soon as
 possible"; "Expect to be here soon, do not write"; "They were subject to one
 hundred percent censorship and even displaced person was forbidden to write
 one card only."