

CHILD SEARCH ACTIVITIES OF UNRRA

Under the aegis of UNRRA, Child Search activities comprised the search for unaccompanied Allied children (mainly in Germany), the documentation of these children, welfare investigation, negotiation with the Military Authorities for removal of the child from German institutions and homes, planning for the child's future, referral of the child for repatriation or resettlement. The tracing of relatives was conducted through correspondence by the Child Tracing Section of the Central Tracing Bureau of UNRRA. In order to bring this summary of the Child Search work under UNRRA into line with the present work of the Child Search Branch of the International Tracing Service, all activities which now fall under the Welfare, Eligibility, Resettlement, Repatriation, and Legal Divisions have been omitted from this report.

Child Search and Tracing Programmes

That children belonging to other nations were scattered throughout Germany was an established fact, but information as to their identity and their whereabouts had to be dug out from many sources. Unfortunately, some of the most important documents and records on children were destroyed either by the Nazis themselves or by the Occupying Forces.

In September 1945, an organized plan for the location and identification of United Nations' children living in German institutions and families was instituted by UNRRA in the British and U.S. Zones of Germany. Such a search programme was not possible in the French Zone since, under the terms of UNRRA's agreement with the French Government, all search and tracing activities were conducted by French Military Government personnel. The work fell into two categories - tracing for individual children who were asked for by name, and the general mass search for all Allied unaccompanied children. These two functions were carried by different branches of UNRRA who worked closely together.

Germany was the nodal point in the search for children but the clues extended out into adjacent countries. Austria, for example, was the destination for many children deported or evacuated from Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Regrettably, however, as yet the Occupying Powers did not appreciate the importance of centralising and preserving all relevant documents and records from the four Zones of Germany. Records with invaluable information were unwittingly destroyed or turned back to German sources.

The Child Search Teams carefully combed German institutions and, by this means, uncovered many United Nations' children. Most of the children thus located, however, were those who had been evacuated into Germany, were born in Germany or had been brought in forcibly with their families and later separated from them. The children who had been stolen from their families in their home countries under the Nazi programme of Germanisation accounted for the majority of unsolved cases. These children were known to be living in German families as German children and they could only be found by discovering and studying documents and records which might reveal the disposition

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made of these children during the Nazi regime.

The most effective way of achieving this end would have been to centralise the collection and analysis of documents and records affecting children. Unfortunately, however, there was no central clearing house and the problem was studied both in the Central Tracing Bureau and by the Zonal Bureaux, with a consequent lack of co-ordination and a resulting lack of efficiency which has never been completely compensated for. Important clues for locating children were often obtained from enquiries received from parents or relatives seeking individual children by name.

Until February 1947, the Central Tracing Bureau functioned as an important cog in the machinery set up for finding children and reuniting them with their families. All enquiries concerning lost children were received by the Child Tracing Section of the Central Tracing Bureau and routed by them to the Zones for tracing. This permitted the compilation of a central register on missing children. Upon locating an unaccompanied child, the Search teams made out a case history containing all available information on the child. A copy of this was, as a matter of routine, forwarded to the Child Tracing Section, who included the name in their index and initiated a search for parents or relatives on the basis of the information contained in the history. If positive replies were received, the information was relayed back to the appropriate Field office so that plans might be made for reunion with his relatives. Lists of the missing and located children were compiled and circulated within Germany and to all other interested countries and agencies. The Documents Intelligence Section of the Central Tracing Bureau gave invaluable assistance to the programme by searching for and analysing documentary evidence pertaining to children. Information obtained was transmitted to the Field so that clues might be followed up by the local workers.

With the reorganisation of the Central Tracing Bureau in February 1947, the Child Tracing Service underwent major changes. Individual tracing, including both incoming enquiries and the tracing of families of children located in Germany, was decentralised to the individual Zones. In the U.S. Zone, this function was carried by the U.S. Zone Tracing Bureau, in the British Zone jointly by UNRRA and the British Red Cross, and in the French Zone by the French Military Government Tracing Bureau.

It was unfortunate, to put it mildly, that the decentralization had to take place, since it necessitated the handling of enquiries by three tracing bureaux rather than one, greatly increased the work of the National Tracing Bureaux, and caused considerable confusion and loss of efficiency.

It was possible to continue centrally one of the most important functions of the Central Tracing Bureau, namely, the Documents Intelligence work, with a special section devoted to further exploration of documentary evidence on children. The Child Tracing Section of the Central Tracing Bureau continued to serve as a clearing and assembly point on all documents, records or lists coming from outside Germany and continued active search for information which would assist the field in locating children individually or in groups.

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It was anticipated, to put it mildly, that the decentralization had to take place, since it necessitated the handling of enquiries by three tracing bureaux rather than one, greatly increased the work of the National Tracing Bureau, and caused considerable confusion and loss of efficiency.

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The search for and analysis of documentary evidence within Germany, however, was the responsibility of each Zonal Tracing Bureau. The sources of evidence and information uncovered in the Zones were not always referred to the central office and many clues were lost and opportunities missed because of the lack of a systematic and central direction.

The Mass Tracing activities of the Central Tracing Bureau, of course, brought results which could not have been achieved in any other way. Radio broadcasts and the publication of names in newspapers and periodicals offered the only hope of identifying children on whom there was only scanty information. This service could not be decentralized and it continued to function centrally in conjunction with the residual unit of the Central Tracing Bureau.

Military Government Action affecting Unaccompanied Children.

From the beginning of the unaccompanied children's programme, it was thought desirable to have certain policies enunciated by the Allied Control Authority in Berlin. This would have ensured uniform treatment of unaccompanied children in the British, French, U.S. and U.S.S.R. Zones with regard to such basic issues as determination of nationality, guardianship and repatriation. For various reasons, such overall policies were not possible at quadripartite level, and the decisions on major problems were left to the individual Zones.

Action was taken by the Allied Control Authority with regard to the search for United Nations' children in the form of two search directives, one issued in January of 1946 and the other in March of 1946. These directives were mandatory on all four Zones and were implemented by each Zone in line with its own Military Government structure. The January directive required German officials to submit lists of identifying information on all United Nations' nationals, both adults and children, who had been and were still living in the German communities and who were not already registered in Displaced Persons Camps, and also calling in for examination all records and documents on Allied nationals who had been in Germany during the war. The March directive called specifically for information on unaccompanied children, being a supplement to the first directive. The purpose of this directive was to secure an inventory of non-German children in German institutions and German families. Had this second directive been implemented effectively in the British, French, U.S. and U.S.S.R. Zones, the result would have given UNRRA the first comprehensive picture of the number of United Nations' children to be accounted for in Germany. The returns from this directive were anticipated with eagerness by the Child Search workers, since other sources of information with regard to these children had been so incomplete and uncertain.

Unfortunately, however, neither of these directives yielded the expected result. This was due primarily to the gradual decrease in Military Government personnel and the consequent lack of supervision in checking the results

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Unfortunately, however, neither of these directives yielded the expected results. This was due primarily to the gradual decrease in Military Government personnel and the consequent lack of supervision in checking the results

of the directive. There was a rapid reinstatement of German jurisdiction over their Government offices and organizations. Some Kreise reported adequately and completely, others responded in a haphazard manner, or not at all. When this was drawn by UNRRA to the attention of Military Government authorities, they often cooperated by reiterating the instructions, but the machinery for carrying out checking and disciplinary action was practically non-existent. Added to this, there was confusion on the part of German officials and the directives were given various interpretations. Officials responsible for reporting and compiling these lists included both accompanied and unaccompanied children and also many illegitimate children of German girls and United Nations' fathers. This meant considerable screening of the lists before effective follow-up could be done by the Child Search workers.

The object of these directives was to make available information on the whereabouts of United Nations' children, so that investigations could be carried on by Child Search workers, with a view to identifying and repatriating these children. In the British Zone, the lists compiled by German officials were turned over regularly to the UNRRA Child Search staff for investigation. In the U.S. Zone, the lists resulting from the March directive had to be routed to the D.P. Division of OMGUS in Berlin. This did a great deal to retard the effective location of children in the U.S. Zone, since for a period of four or five months these lists were held in the D.P. Division and were not made available either to the Central Tracing Bureau for tracing or to the Child Search workers for investigation. These lists when finally received proved to be very inadequate, and, indeed, returns in all the Zones were very poor.

In the French Zone, the results of the March directive were turned over to the Tracing Bureau of the French Military Government, and responsibility for the investigation of these cases rested with the Military Government Search and Tracing Teams. The Division "Personnes Deplacées et Réfugiés" reported that some 5,000 children's names were submitted to them from German sources. Obviously, only a small percentage of this group could be unaccompanied or eligible, under the definition of United Nations' children, since the French Zone covered a comparatively small area and it was known that the number of unaccompanied children who had been placed in or evacuated to that part of Germany was very small.

The returns received by the Soviet authorities were not made available to the UNRRA services.

The January directive provided that, in addition to lists of Displaced Persons, German officials would be expected to turn over within a stipulated period of time various types of official records, such as birth and death certificates, employment records and health records. These came in exceedingly late, and with varying degrees of completeness. One source of information which would have proved extremely valuable in the location of hidden children was the German adoption records. These, however, were not specified as being one of the groups of records required. The local Child Search workers made it a point to review such records wherever they had access to them, but there was no centralized reporting of the adoptions which had been made during and after the war.

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In the French Zone, the results of the March directive were turned over to the Tracing Bureau of the French Military Government, and responsibility for the investigation of these cases rested with the Military Government Search and Tracing Teams. The Division "Personnes Disparues et Revenues" reported that some 2,000 children's names were included in their German sources. Obviously, only a small percentage of this group could be unaccompanied or eligible, under the definition of United Nations' children, since the French Zone covered a comparatively small area and it was known that the number of unaccompanied children who had been placed in or evacuated to that part of Germany was very small.

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Registration should have been extended to cover the unaccompanied children's group. Graves of children who died in Germany were sometimes discovered by the Child Search workers. It was, of course, just as important to establish the death of a child as it was to locate living children. Therefore, complete records on hospitalisation and deaths should also have been required under this Search directive.

UNRRA Recommendations

Out of UNRRA's two years' experience with the problem of unaccompanied children in Germany, emerged certain conclusions and recommendations which the successor agency had to consider when planning the continuation of the unaccompanied children's programme. These points may be summarised as follows :

- (1) The search for lost United Nations' children had to be continued but it was important that some goal should be set for the completion of this task and that there should be an evaluation of all the factors which would make this possible.
- (2) The search for records, lists and documentary evidence, leading to the discovery and identification of children and the analysis and dissemination of this material from a central point should be considered a priority in the continuation of the work.
- (3) Closely allied with the centralisation of documentary material, was the need for re-instating a centralised Child Tracing service to handle all unaccompanied children.
- (4) It was extremely important that the working relationships established in the past with National Governments, whose children were lost in Germany, should be maintained and that the policies formulated by them should be continued as a basis for carrying on this work.

It should be noted here that UNRRA omitted to make use of the most vital source of information for the possible location of United Nations children, the German Population Census, which was taken in 1946. Neither in the report nor in the recommendation does there appear any information suggesting that attempts were made either by UNRRA or Military authorities to utilise the German Census for this purpose. This omission was, in fact, largely responsible for the confused and incomplete stage at which the Child Search programme was left at the closure of UNRRA. It was also responsible for the fact that the I.R.O., successor of UNRRA, had to initiate a general search plan described in the third part of this report.

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Final Recommendations

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- (3) Closely allied with the centralization of documentary material, was the need for re- instituting a centralized Child Finding service to handle all unaccompanied children.
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