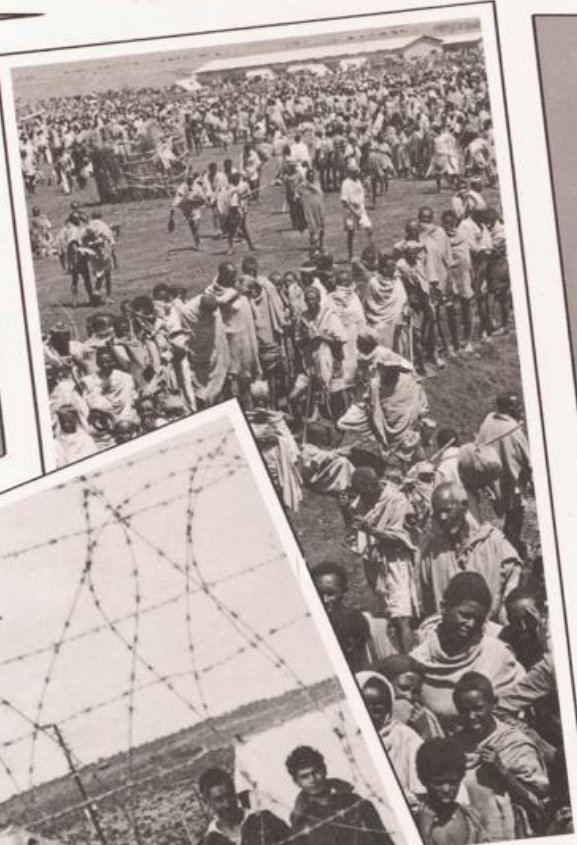


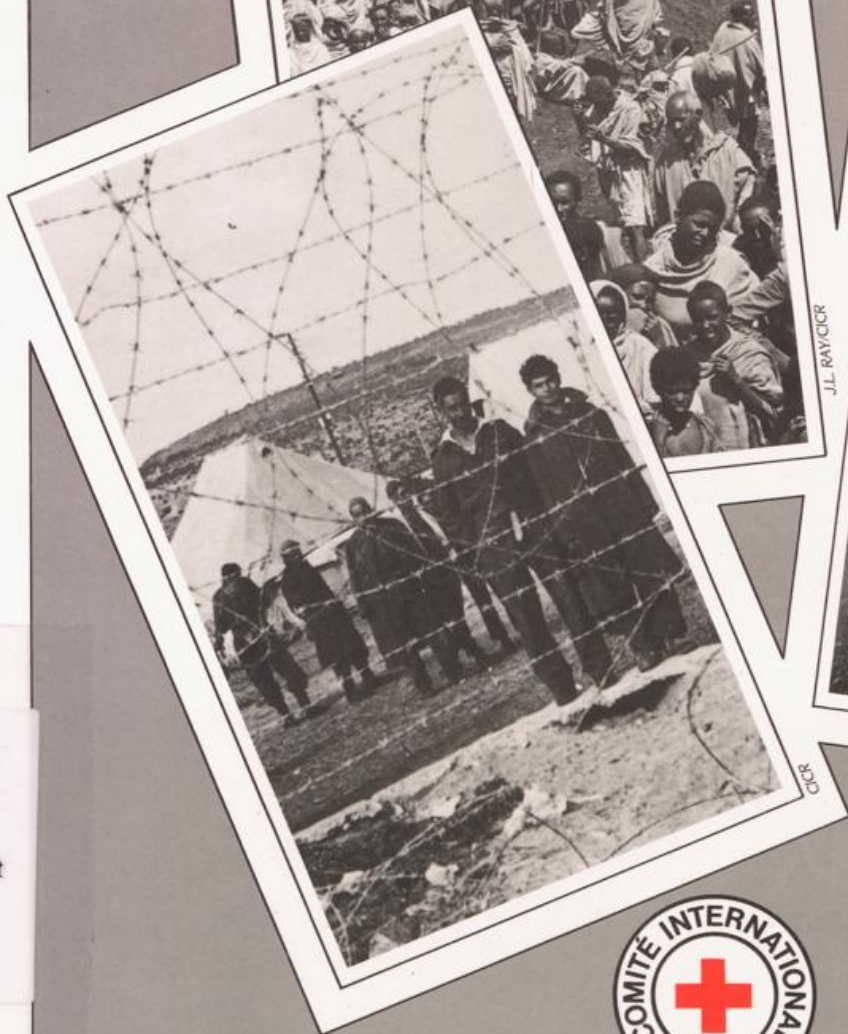
# CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY OF THE ICRC



J.L. RAY/CICR



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# INTRODUCTION



**B**ased in the Swiss city of Geneva, the Central Tracing Agency is an integral part of the International Committee of the Red Cross, recognised by all the states signatories to the 1949 Geneva Conventions as a neutral humanitarian intermediary in times of international conflict, civil war and internal disturbances.

The story of the Central Tracing Agency, or C.T.A. as it is known, is one of innovation, initiative and dedication stretching back to the year 1870. Then a small group of Swiss humanitarians demonstrated during the Franco-Prussian war that a tracing bureau on neutral territory is indispensable in times of conflict, when the victims are not only the hungry, the sick and the wounded – but those held prisoner by the enemy, under detention or separated from their relatives in the turmoil that is still part of everyday life for millions of people today.

Under various names, it has played a unique role in bringing moral comfort to those cut off from their families and loved ones. The millions of prisoners taken during the two World Wars, and in more recent conflicts, will remember the comfort brought by Red Cross messages from their families; the relatives themselves will recall the relief they felt when they heard through the Agency from their husbands, wives or children.

Since the Second World War, the Tracing Agency has continued to adapt its functions, under the right of humanitarian initiative accorded to the International Committee of the Red Cross by the Geneva Conventions, so that today its concerns stretch far beyond the maintenance of family ties between prisoners of war and their relatives.

In many areas of the world, the C.T.A. is working to bring together or re-establish contact between families separated as a result of internal upheaval in their own country, be they people forced to flee for their lives across frontiers in Asia or Africa, or the individuals in Latin America who have gone "missing", leaving distressed relatives unsure whether they are dead or alive.

It is not the aim of this brochure to analyse or begin to describe the horrors of the armed conflicts and civil strife the Agency has evolved in, but to show that in the most adverse circumstances the human instinct for family ties remains undiminished. The C.T.A. strives to encourage by helping people on the first step to re-building their lives, whether by bringing good news or relieving uncertainty.

When the founders of the Red Cross embarked on their first humanitarian mission in 1870, it was to bring assistance to the wounded and sick soldiers of Switzerland's two powerful neighbours.

A headquarters was established in the Swiss frontier city of Basle, to where the casualties were brought for treatment. A doctor caring for the victims day after day and talking to them about their problems found the majority were in a sad state of mind because many of their families had no idea whether they had been killed on the battlefield or taken prisoner.

It was felt by the founders of the assistance bureau that the morale of the internees could be boosted if they could send letters to their families. But the Basle Agency went further and acted as courier for lists of prisoners, whether wounded or not, provided by the belligerent states – so that for the first time in history the relatives of captured soldiers heard their sons, husbands and brothers were alive when in enemy hands. The Geneva Convention of 1864 had made no provisions for unwounded prisoners, and this historic step was the beginning of a long series of initiatives.

This practice of providing humanitarian help to the victims of international conflict was repeated during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877, with the setting up of an agency in Trieste. Both these initiatives were accorded a legal base under the Hague Convention of 1907.

When war engulfed the Balkans in 1912, an Agency was established in Belgrade, and its tasks were even more far-reaching than its predecessors, with material comforts and money also being forwarded to prisoners. Another innovation, of such importance today, was the introduction by the Agency of capture cards, sent to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the five belligerent states with a view to obtaining standard information on POWs. The Serbian Red Cross proved the most adept, by sending the Agency details of 10,500 Turkish POWs, including name, rank and serial number.

During the conflict in the Balkans the Agency was for the first time confronted with the language and phonetical diversity, so much part of its work nowadays, and through excellent organisation was able to gather together the necessary personnel to translate and decipher information on the well-being of prisoners in Serbian, Greek, Turkish, and Bulgarian.

## Legal foundations

The Agency's power to act in the interests of victims of international conflicts has its base in the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Conventions contain 36 Articles relating directly or indirectly to the tasks traditionally carried out by the C.T.A. in relation with the National Information Bureaux the belligerent States are obliged to set up in time of international conflict.

When the Geneva Conventions were updated in 1977, The Additional Protocol I specifically mentioned the Agency, implying not only the permanent nature of its legal rights but the obligation States now have to allow the C.T.A. freedom of action during international conflicts.

## Right of Initiative

The development of the Agency since its founding has been a result of initiatives taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross to provide humanitarian services for victims of conflicts, when the provision of these facilities has not been explicitly referred to in international humanitarian law. The Right of Initiative, inspired by Article 3 common to all four Geneva Conventions, allows the ICRC to work for victims of civil wars and internal tension and disturbances. On its own initiative the ICRC offers its services to all sides in non-international conflicts and to governments holding political prisoners.

# WORLD WAR ONE

When war erupted in 1914, the International Committee of the Red Cross formed the International Prisoners of War Agency as envisaged in the Hague Convention of 1907. The ICRC was not specifically mentioned as the organiser of such a body in the event of conflict, but its unique experience in previous wars made it the ideal candidate. In addition, the International Red Cross movement at its World Conference in Washington two years earlier officially conferred the task to the ICRC in the event of any future war.

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At the outbreak of hostilities, members of the International Committee set up the International Prisoners of War Agency and at first handled all correspondence themselves – little knowing how widespread the war was going to become, and the tasks that lay ahead of them. But by the month of September 1914 the Prisoners of War Agency had taken on 200 employees, and several months later the staff was increased six-fold to cope with the influx of family messages and inquiries.

After the first major battles in Belgium and Lorraine 30,000 letters a day were arriving at the Geneva headquarters. Over and above the millions of messages handled between 1914 and 1918, the Agency received about 120,000 people who came personally to Geneva to make their inquiries. By the time the Armistice was signed an incredible seven million files had been compiled by the Agency, which at the same time had broadened its scope of action by sending family packages to POWs and civilians living in occupied territory, and had also been engaged in repatriating war victims.

Despite official obstacles in some quarters, a gigantic humanitarian endeavour had been completed, but the Agency saw itself as mainly the organisational body. For the success was due to other factors as well. Cooperation with Red Cross Societies in other countries, with different semi-official and aid organisations, as well as prison camp commanders and the POWs themselves enabled the Agency to surmount obstacles erected by officialdom.

Although Europe as a whole was to enjoy about 20 years of relative peace after World War One, the work of the Agency continued, due to the displacing of large numbers of civilians when the map of Europe was re-drawn, and the occurrence of regional conflicts, notably the Greco-Turkish war and the civil war in Spain.

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

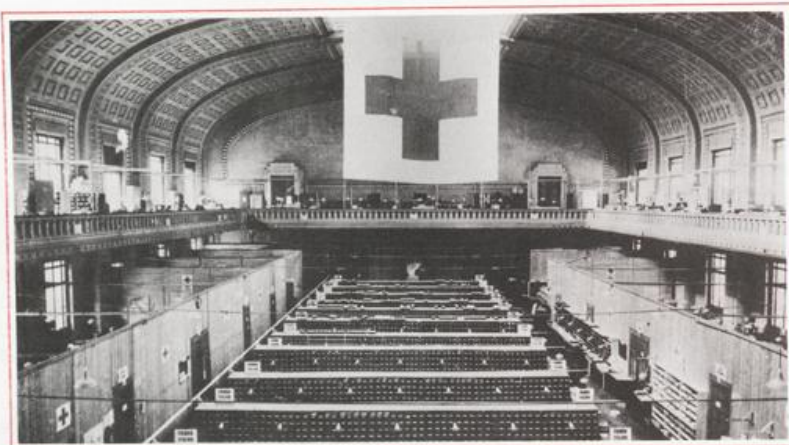
The Spanish civil war, which broke out in 1936, marked yet another new era in the work of the Agency, and the tracing work carried out for the first time in the field by Red Cross delegates had similarities to the tasks carried out nowadays in internal conflicts with an international nature, as for example in present-day Lebanon.

The Agency opened about 30,000 files concerning the civil war in Spain.

Civil wars generally spark a tide of hatred in the country and events in Spain were no exception. The first big battles of the conflict left few POWs, as most of them were executed on both sides or were forced into the army of the adversary. Neither of the rival governments would accept the ICRC's proposition to set up information offices to exchange details of prisoners. The two sides did pass on lists, but only to achieve prisoner exchanges.

The Agency managed to gain its information, as in many cases today, from indirect sources such as information from prison directors, camp commanders, the prisoners themselves and members of the military and civil administrations. Unlike in previous conflicts, the delegates undertook tracing and mailing services for combatants and civilians, and at no time was this questioned by either side, nor any foreign powers involved – despite the fact the ICRC had no legal base, save humanitarian necessity, for the Geneva Convention of 1929 covered only military victims of international conflicts. The Red Cross message form, introduced during World War One was also widely accepted in Spain as a means of communication between prisoners and their families, and separated relatives living in different zones. Many of the Spanish civil war tracing requests were still being handled in Geneva as the political situation in the whole of Europe began to deteriorate.

# THE SECOND WORLD WAR



One year before the first shots were fired in the Second World War, the Committee had set up a special "Commission for war works", to prepare the way for the re-activation of a large-scale tracing agency.

The Commission met 25 times before war broke out and by January 1939, 30 Agency veterans of the 1914-18 war had already volunteered for duty, should the need arise.

On the invasion of Poland on September 1939, the Agency was officially opened. The scale of the work the Agency was to face can be measured by the fact that in the first weeks of the war 600,000 Polish troops alone were captured by German and Soviet forces.

All belligerents were officially informed that the Central Prisoners of War Agency was in existence, and reminded that under the 1929 Geneva Convention they should

open National Information Bureaux, to liaise with the Agency on POW matters, the exchange of lists of names and messages, as well as news relating to individuals.

The Central Prisoners of War Agency rapidly adopted the most modern means of office administration and communication. Photocopiers and statistical machines, as revolutionary as computers are today, helped the 4,000 employees in Geneva and other parts of Switzerland to match the dry information from battlefields and prison camps with the desperate and heart-rending letters from wives, mothers and children.

Processing floods of information from mail deliveries that sometimes reached 100,000 items a day, the Agency's 26 services soon assumed factory proportions.

From 1940 onwards, the Agency had persuaded almost all the belligerents to make general use of Red Cross capture

cards. They did not replace the official lists sent by the detaining powers, but as the prisoners themselves filled in the cards there were fewer of the time-wasting mistakes contained on lists written by people with little knowledge of another language. More importantly, the cards arrived in Geneva sometimes weeks before the official lists and families could be informed more quickly that their relatives had been captured.

The work of the ICRC also stretched beyond Swiss frontiers. Delegates during the five years of war made 11,000 visits to POW camps and to civilian detainee camps in certain countries. But unfortunately few records were ever forwarded to the Agency from the fighting on the Eastern Front. This was because the Soviet Union had not signed the 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, and both Germany and the Soviet Union refused a reciprocal agreement on the exchange of POW details.

The belligerents refused to extend to civilians in occupied territories the benefits of the 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs. Inmates of concentration camps in Nazi occupied territory were therefore deprived of protection. The Central Prisoners of War Agency, however, had done everything humanly possible to bring what moral comfort it could to millions of other victims of the Second World War.

A total of 36 million Red Cross parcels had been distributed: 120 million letters were exchanged between POWs and their families, and 23 million between civilians living in countries at war.

It has been estimated that thanks to the Agency 700,000 people in Europe alone were reunited with their families.

Nearly 40 years after the ending of hostilities cases relating to the Second World War still arrive at the C.T.A., especially to the Polish, Italian, German and Soviet Services. These stem mainly from ex-servicemen seeking to establish their pension rights with a certificate of captivity from the Agency, and of course from people still looking for missing relatives.

How long will the millions of records held at the Geneva headquarters be needed for practical and humanitarian reasons? The C.T.A. envisages that its work will continue on WW2 at least until the year 2,000.



ICRC

But after that the files will be retained – on microfilms for maximum security – as an invaluable historic record.

With the end of hostilities in 1945, the work of the Agency was far from finished. Even today 25% of its work is taken up with the aftermath of the Second World War.

### MODERN CONFLICTS

The Agency was now firmly established as a permanent part of the ICRC, and the adoption in 1949 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to the protection of civilians in times of war, gave subsequent legal status to some of the initiatives taken by the Agency during World War II.

But peace had hardly settled on the world when the Agency was again called to render its services to the victims of war, the first post-war action being the war in Palestine in 1948. The Agency used the Red Cross message system for those cut off from their families after the creation of the state of Israel. And through the Suez Conflict, the Six Day War, the war of 1973 up until the present day the Agency has never ceased to develop its action in the Middle East. Its tracing services in the region are the largest and most continuous since the Second World War.

Indeed, the Agency has been active in practically every conflict since 1945.

Through the 60's in the conflict in Vietnam and the wars of independence in Africa, in the 70's during the Cyprus conflict and the Indo-Pakistani War the Agency has been present. Much of the work is also taken up today with visits to political prisoners all over the world. Their registration by the Agency is regarded by the ICRC and the prisoners themselves as a form of protection.

A policy of decentralisation over the past decade has also led to the creation of agencies in the field, near the theatres of operations, in Lebanon, El Salvador and several parts of Africa and elsewhere. However, this is more of an operational de-

centralisation for Geneva remains the principal point of convergence for all information obtained in the field. Over a dozen countries presently have ICRC tracing agencies, and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are continually being encouraged to establish their own services.

### Some of the Central Tracing Agency's figures for 1984:

- Nearly 41,000 new cases opened

worldwide by the C.T.A. on missing people.

- 2 million Red Cross messages exchanged between separated family members, civilians, POWs and detainees, when normal lines of communication were interrupted;
- The Agency organised family reunions or repatriations for nearly 12,000 people.



Y. MILLER/ICRC



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# WORKING CODE



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**SPEED** – A tracing request comes from someone who has no idea of the whereabouts of a loved one, so the Agency is obliged for humanitarian reasons to act as quickly as possible to allieviate anxiety and worry.

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**PRUDENCE** – The Agency is working more and more in situations of internal conflict or tension when the most basic human rights are being abused every day. Delegates themselves must work openly with the agreement of all sides. But the information they collect must be treated with the greatest confidentiality and protection of the information is essential. No information is ever passed on without the located person's permission.

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**FIRMNESS** – Never promise anything. Although it is difficult for delegates to remain unaffected by the tide of human hope behind every tracing request, a firm approach allows the inquirer to avoid unrealistic expectations.

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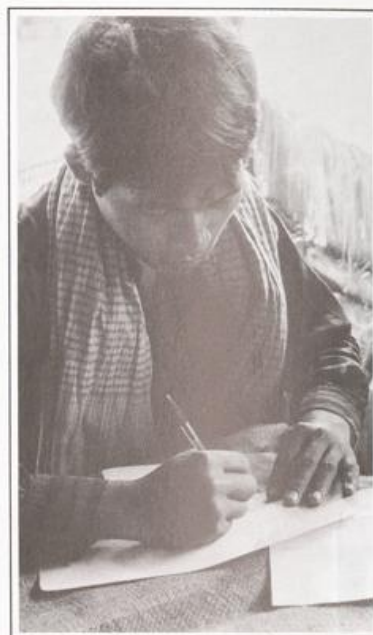
## EXCHANGE OF NEWS

One of the first aims of the Agency after restoring contact between members of a separated family would be to offer the Red Cross message service.

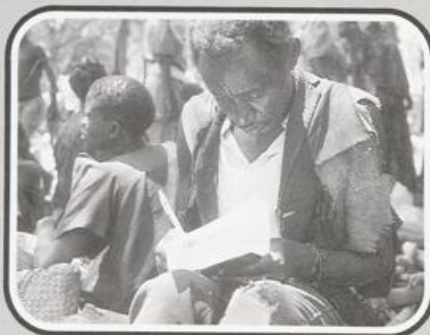
These messages written on a distinct form, and usually consisting of up to 25 words, are used mainly in situations where the normal flow of mail has been

interrupted.

The distribution and retransmission of family messages throughout the world is often done with the help of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which set up their own networks when required to help distribute messages as rapidly as possible.



G. LEBLANC/ICRC



L. DE TOLEDO/ICRC



J. SOERENSEN



J.L. RAY/ICRC

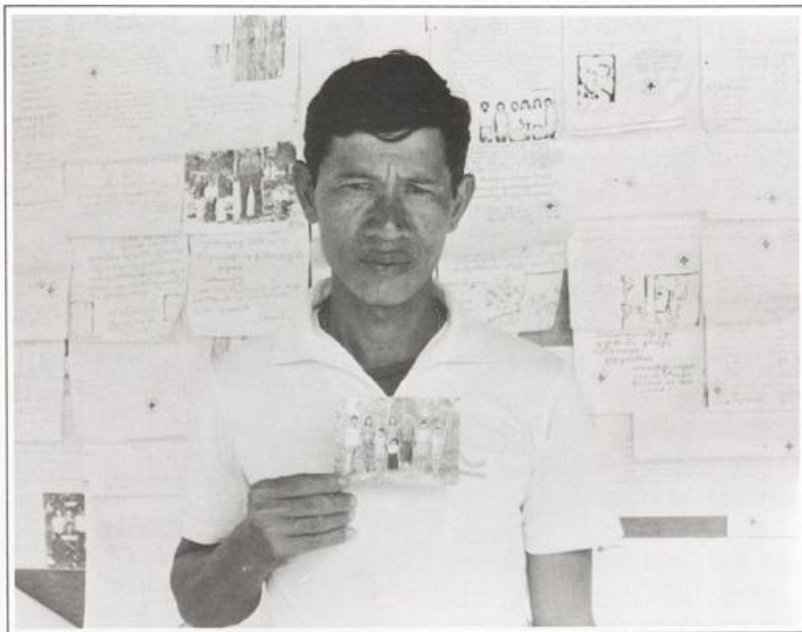


J.L. RAY/ICRC

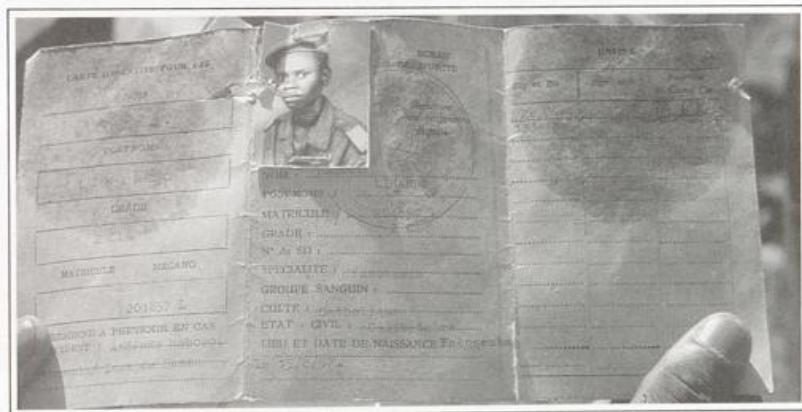
## TRACING

The Agency's simple criteria for taking up a tracing case is that the victim "disappeared" during a conflict, or civil unrest, or their aftermath. Demands for searches of a social nature, are generally passed to the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies. But every request made to the C.T.A. receives the most useful and precise answer possible. Priority is given to tracing of separated members of a family, but searches are also undertaken on requests from friends, or even former companions in captivity.

The most difficult tracing cases to solve are those of soldiers or guerrillas missing in combat – believed killed, but whose bodies have never been found or identified. The Geneva Conventions clearly state, it is the responsibility of the warring sides in an international conflict to make every effort to identify those who fall on the battlefield, and to communicate the facts to the adversary. In these cases, the Agency cooperates with the National Information Bureaux, set up during a conflict, but will also make inquiries among the missing soldiers' comrades, to their regiments or search war graves.



E. WINGER/CICR



J.L. RAY/CICR



T. GASSMANN/CICR

The most delicate cases arise during an internal conflict. These "missing" people could have been kidnapped, imprisoned in an undisclosed place, or murdered.

Overall, instant success only occurs if the person sought has himself approached the Agency to trace his relatives, or if he figures on a list of prisoners compiled by the ICRC. In effect, cases are rarely solved after the first inquiry – the key to success is perseverance.

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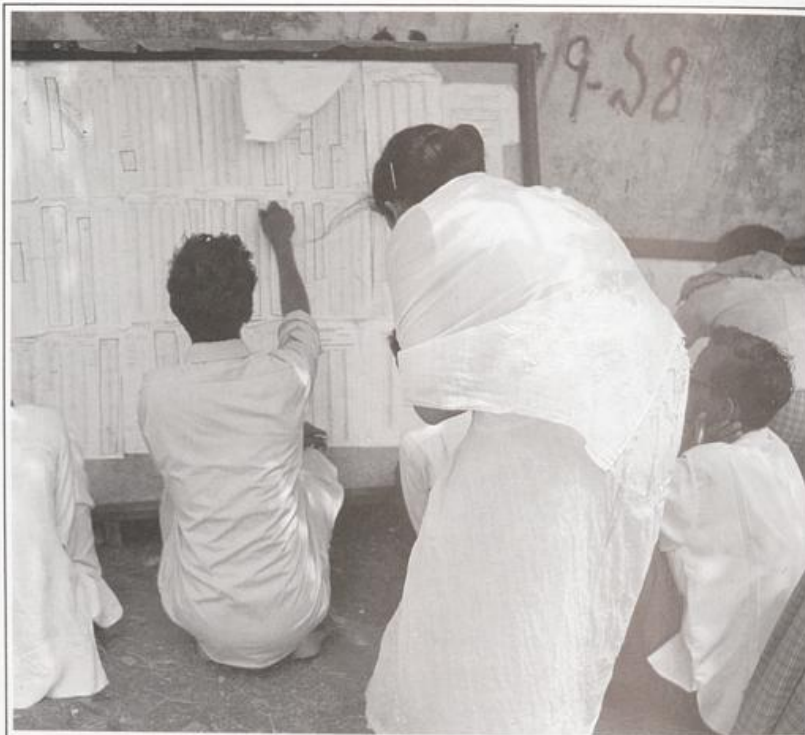
## FAMILY REUNIONS, TRANSFERS AND REPATRIATIONS

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The operational activity of the Agency that poses the greatest logistical problem is the family reunion – or similar action that brings together groups of people separated in the chaos of war or as a consequence of it.

The Agency's main role in these operations, whether the repatriation of wounded prisoners of war or a prisoner exchange, is to register those being moved to make sure they arrive at their destination.

Administrative details must also be worked out with all the authorities and other organisations (such as National Red Cross Societies, voluntary agencies, UNHCR or ICEM) concerned, and in the case of large-scale operations, aircraft must be chartered and travelling papers provided for those being moved.



CICR



L. DE TOLEDO/CICR



# COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

The use of computer technology at the Agency to store and process information is becoming more and more widespread. The nominal data relating to current conflicts is now generally computerised.

The Agency introduced computers in 1980, and the first major operation using data processing was the construction of a fully computerised card index containing over 600,000 names of Indo-Chinese refugees.

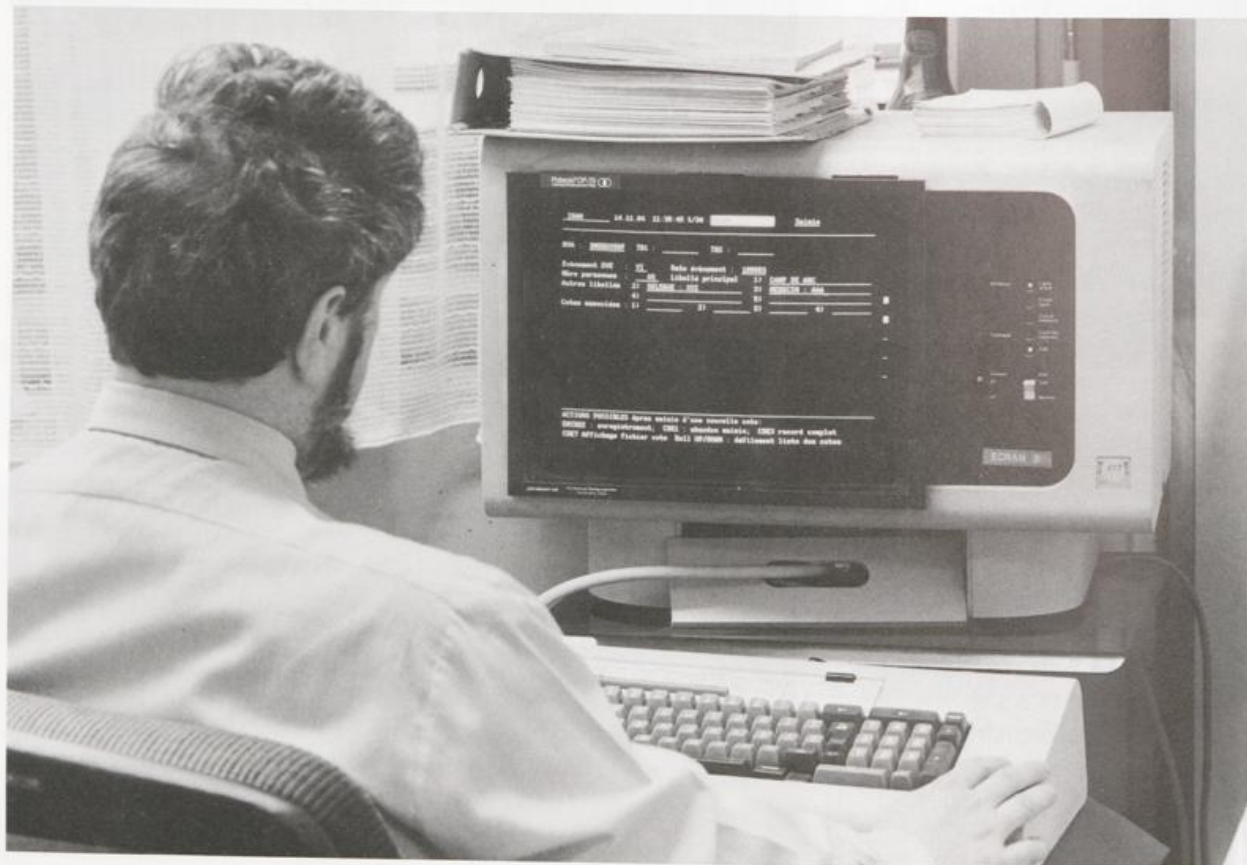
The computers now carry out operations that were previously tedious and time-consuming to do by hand, such as the selection of particular groups of people and the drawing up of lists.

It is however nothing more than a tool, a highly technical instrument, to match information.

The implementation of data processing uncovered two main problems not faced by other computer users: the Agency's field of activity – helping the victims of unexpected or volatile international events – means that general planning is highly hazardous. The Agency therefore has no means of predicting volumes of information to be processed.

Another problem is that the data to be processed sometimes come from hazardous sources or with wrongly spelt names, meaning that some of the information must be treated as unreliable. Add to this the fact that the Agency's work is often carried out at times when no efficient civil administration exists, and the information handled covers different linguistic and semantic systems.

To solve this "unreliability" problem the Agency opted for a "relational" data base computer. One computer application has been developed, that meets the long-term needs of the Agency, with variable capacity and working on the extended logical linking of basic information, rather than the precise results required, for example, for financial calculations.



(NB: following usual ICRC practice, the names given in the following articles are fictitious, in order to protect the people concerned).

### THE FATHER FROM LENINGRAD

*"I'm 37 tomorrow, and this is the best present I could ever have..." Michael's voice came over the phone, tight with emotion. Listening in Geneva, the desk officer of the Central Tracing Agency had tears in her eyes: that day, January 10, 1983, she had given Michael his birthday present in the form of the news that his father, whom he did not know, was alive and living in Leningrad.*

*Michael is German and lives in West Germany. He did not speak any Russian. His father was a Soviet citizen.*

*It all began as a simple love story. The time: early 1945, the place: eastern Germany. Young Ingrid, with her mother, had to flee the town where they lived. Like thousands of other refugees they had lost everything. They found themselves in a small village, where a farmer offered them shelter.*

*Carrying out menial tasks around the farm was a prisoner of war, a young lieutenant in the Red Army: his name was Boris. Ingrid's heart went out to him, she smiled at him. He knew a few words of German, they began to chat, and they fell in love.*

*As the war drew to an end, the young woman found she was pregnant. Boris had dreams for the future – he would take her home to his country, they would get married... but things were happening too quickly, the fateful march of history overtook them and tore them apart from each other.*

*Michael was born in January 1946. Throughout his childhood he knew nothing of his origins, and learned the truth only on his 21st birthday. From then on he swore he would find his father. The years went by, and after many fruitless enquiries Michael wrote to the Central Tracing Agency in April 1982. He told the Agency the few facts he knew: his father's name, his date of birth, the name of the village where he had been a prisoner. The Tracing Agency got in touch with the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR.*

*In January 1983, nine months after putting all his hope in his letter to Geneva, Michael – himself the father of a teenage girl – had found out his father's address, and was able to visit him in Leningrad.*

### THE JAILED TRAVELLER

*Georg, a native of Hungary, had a taste for travel which took him thousands of kilometres through Europe, to the United States, and finally to strife-torn central America. His mother last heard from him in 1976, and a year later asked the Hungarian Red Cross if they could help find him. This National Society contacted the Central Tracing Agency. In its turn, the Agency got in touch with the American Red Cross, who checked in the area he was last living but was unable to find a trace of him. The Agency had to inform the worried mother, through the Hungarian Red Cross, that her son could not be found.*

*That was where the story might have ended – but in April 1982, ICRC delegates visiting detainees in El Salvador happened to come across a young Hungarian who had been arrested at the beginning of the year. He was in poor health, and the ICRC planned to seek his freedom on humanitarian grounds. The ICRC delegation in El Salvador asked the Tracing Agency in Geneva to take the necessary steps to seek a country of asylum for the man, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Following its usual practice, the Agency checked its files and uncovered the fact that this was the same Georg whose mother had been searching for in 1977. A message was sent back to El Salvador, asking whether the man agreed that the Agency should tell his mother of his whereabouts. He was delighted, and while the UNHCR set about finding him a country of asylum, he and his mother exchanged messages regularly through the Red Cross.*

*In September 1982, Georg left El Salvador for a new home in the USA, accompanied on the flight to Miami by an ICRC delegate.*

## CONCLUSION OF A TRACING INQUIRY

When the boat, with some 300 persons aboard, reached the Malaysian east coast, near Kota Baru, it seemed that its passengers' ordeals had come to an end. It was dusk, and therefore too late that day for the refugees to be processed and registered. That is why the local authorities told the captain to set anchor near the mouth of the river, until they had the security clearance to land. But fate has its whims, and the much tried human cargo was yet to undergo one more tragedy, in the form of a violent and totally unexpected tropical storm. Strong winds and a furious sea joined forces – and the overloaded craft capsized. For about 150 persons, who drowned, the long, dangerous trip had been in vain. Their bodies were given back by the sea in the course of the next days, at various points along the coast. The sad remains, whether intact or unrecognizable, were collected and buried in mass graves. With the help of the survivors, lists of the deceased were established, and the Tracing and Mailing Services of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society had the painful task of advising families abroad and in refugee camps of their death.

But the tides and currents are capricious, and sometimes keep their victims. Some people were missing. Were they dead or alive? In such cases, doubt often spells hope. It did for a 12-year old girl, who had long ago boarded another boat, and was now safely resettled in England with a relative. Her 19-year old brother had left Viet Nam aboard that very doomed vessel, and she wrote TMS Kuala Lumpur to find his whereabouts. The young man was among the missing and, for TMS field personnel, it was the beginning of an over two-month quest for information. Day after day, they combed the coast's villages and towns, the refugees' mainland and insular camps; authorities, missionaries and, of course, his fellow refugees were questioned. But no one had a clue about him. He was nowhere to be found, dead or alive.

TMS were so taken up in their inquiry that they forgot to keep the little sister in England informed of its progress – or rather the lack of it. When, at last, they came across an eye-witness to the tragedy, one of the young man's fellow boat passengers, it was only to have their worst presumptions confirmed: he had been seen going under water, and all efforts to pull him out had failed.

There remained the painful chore of sending the girl the bad news. Which was done. In response, and in spite of her deep grief, she expressed her sincere thanks to TMS Kuala Lumpur for all the efforts made to trace her missing brother.

To the Vietnamese boat people, who have gone through so many hardships before reaching a haven and beginning a new life, a plain certitude, even if it hurts, is often less painful than endless doubts as to the whereabouts of a loved one.

## FROM THE AFRICAN BUSH TO THE BANKS OF LAKE GENEVA

Returning from a mission of several weeks up country in guerilla-controlled territory, the ICRC delegate brought back not only details of the food aid needed by a group of displaced persons, but also a tracing request from a young girl, Leila, hoping to find her mother. On the standard Central Tracing Agency form she had filled in, after her own name, were the words "fighter with the Liberation Front".

An adolescent when she met the ICRC delegate, Leila had been no more than a child when seven or eight years earlier – she didn't remember exactly any more – her mother had fled to seek refuge... in Switzerland.

For all these years contact between mother and daughter had been lost. Perhaps both had written to each other, but the letters had never reached their destination. Yet Leila thought that her mother might be in Geneva. "Can your organization try to find out where she is?", she asked the delegate, gazing at him with sorrow in her big dark eyes.

Her tracing request, entrusted to the delegate in remote country far from the capital one month before, reached the ICRC delegation there in early March 1980. It was immediately forwarded to the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency in Geneva.

Two weeks later, the public registration authorities in Geneva replied to the Agency's enquiry, confirming that Leila's mother, Halina, was in fact resident in Geneva, with friends. The Agency thereupon contacted them, only to hear that Halina was unfortunately in hospital. However the doctor treating her reassured the Agency: Halina's illness was not too serious.

It was nevertheless in a hospital bed, one arm immobilized by an intravenous drip, that Halina finally received her daughter's message on 21 March, accompanied by a reply form and a small note from the Agency asking whether she consented to details of her whereabouts being passed on to Leila, and whether her daughter should be informed about her state of health. Six days later the Agency received Halina's reply, telling her daughter how delighted she was to have heard from her, briefly mentioning her illness and promising to write again soon... The Central Tracing Agency had in turn told Halina that she would have to be patient: the ICRC delegates only rarely entered the no man's land where her daughter was living...

Indeed, many months passed before Halina heard from Leila again. Then for more than a year, letters were intermittently exchanged between mother and daughter, who longed to see each other again.

Finally in November 1982, Leila left Africa for Geneva, where she was at last reunited with her mother.

The *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) is one of the three components of the International Red Cross, the other two being the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the recognized National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as a whole. An independent humanitarian institution, the ICRC is the founding body of the Red Cross. As a neutral intermediary in case of armed conflicts or disturbances, it endeavours on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions to protect and assist the victims of international and civil wars and of international troubles and tensions, thereby contributing to peace in the world.

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