

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

Germany

FEDERAL REPUBLIC

In March 1967, the ICRC President, accompanied by one of the institution's staff members, Mr. F. de Reynold, went to Munich on the invitation of the Gesellschaft für Auslandskunde, to deliver an address on legal and practical aspects of the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross during armed conflicts. In the course of his trip he had the opportunity to meet the Bavarian State Minister and also the President of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany.

This Society has two Tracing Services, one for civilians, in Hamburg, and the other in Munich for servicemen posted missing during the Second World War. Mr. Gonard paid an interesting visit to the latter service, which today employs a staff of eighty people, co-operates closely with the ICRC Central Tracing Agency and has 38 million index cards and documents. This useful service, with modern technical equipment, was the subject of a folder issued by the National Society in April 1966; we believe our readers will be interested in this folder the gist of which is quoted below.

Methods and Results.—The primary task of the Munich Tracing Service of the German Red Cross is to search for missing members of the German armed forces of World War II. Even today, its files still record the names of some 1,270,000 soldiers missing due to war activity or war captivity. The number of close relatives of these missing persons is estimated at more than three million parents, wives and children. The Tracing Service is untiring in its efforts to supply answers to their anxious questions on the fate of a father,

son or daughter. Apart from the moral right of relatives to such answers there is often the necessity of ascertaining marital status, for instance in the case of remarriage or inheritance.

The basis and starting point of research work have been the enquiries by relations of missing persons in March, 1950, when the government first established in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin a record of missing persons and prisoners of war. Even today, an average of 7 new enquiries come in every day. They are often sent by repatriates from East European countries and by persons coming from the German Democratic Republic (DDR), and even by German citizens of the Federal Republic who, for one reason or the other, had no opportunity to turn to the Tracing Service at an earlier date.

Tracing.—Search for missing soldiers takes the following two main channels:

- 1) questioning of comrades having been associated with the persons during the war or captivity, and
- 2) enquiries of the Red Cross Societies in the relevant former enemy countries in those cases where there is adequate proof that the missing person was held prisoner of war there.

Since 1947, the Tracing Service has conducted this questioning of returned former soldiers who had been eye-witnesses to the events at that time.

Lists of the Missing.—In order to establish a background for this questioning and to aid repatriated soldiers in remembering and supplying information on their missing comrades in the same unit or POW camp, the Tracing Service has entered the names and all essential personal data of all missing persons registered with them in lists classified by former military units or POW camps. It has even been possible to attach photographs to the listing of 900,000 missing soldiers—an essential memory aid in the questioning of returnees. This questioning is still producing excellent results today—21 years later.

This complete record of lists and photographs of military personnel missing since World War II, including persons of non-

German nationality, serving in the German forces, such as natives of Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Alsace-Lorraine, comprises a total of 186 volumes. For each returnee whose name and address is known to the Tracing Service (unfortunately, these are only about one third of the former Wehrmacht members who have returned) the lists of his unit and POW camp are taken from the file and presented to him through the local German Red Cross offices with the aid of the approximately 7,000 male and female helpers.

Up to this date, more than 5.4 million interrogations of returnees have been conducted to investigate into the fate of the returnees' comrades. Almost two million statements were obtained in this manner.

In addition, the Munich Tracing Service has, since 1961, carried out so-called group interrogations in companies and public bodies. The purpose of these group interrogations is to present the lists and photographs also to those WW II soldiers and POW's whose names are *not known* to the Tracing Service.

Furthermore, a complete set of lists and photographs is continuously available at each of the 523 District Tracing Offices (Kreisnachforschungsstellen) of the German Red Cross throughout the Federal Republic. This gives every returnee an opportunity to look up any time at the district office nearest his place of residence any lists in which he may be interested and to study them at his leisure to help us obtain additional information on missing comrades.

All information given by returnees on former WW II comrades is passed on to the relatives of the missing person. About two thirds of all reports obtained so far are death reports. The remaining ones mostly confirm that the missing person was a prisoner of war.

Cooperation of the Red Cross Societies in Tracing Activities.— A reliable statement that the person sought was taken prisoner is, both in Eastern and Western countries, a precondition for addressing an enquiry to the Red Cross Society of the country by which the person was held prisoner.

In the Eastern countries, the problem of soldiers missing during war imprisonment is not only numerically greater, but also more

difficult, because the USSR, for example, has not acceded to the Prisoner-of-War Convention of 1929 and, therefore, did not feel inclined to supply any information until the then President of the German Red Cross, Dr. Weitz, established direct Red Cross contacts in 1957. Since May, 1957, an agreement on mutual research aids has been in force between the German Red Cross and the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR which has enabled more than 150,000 German research enquiries to be forwarded to Moscow so far. About 80 % of these enquiries have been answered by the Soviet Red Cross. Nearly one response in three enabled the Service to clarify the fate of the person in question.

Similarly, the Red Cross Societies of Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, as well as of the other South-east European countries also rendered valuable assistance in the clarification of the fate of missing persons.

Close cooperation in all tracing problems is, of course, maintained with the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva as well as the Red Cross Societies of the West European and Overseas countries.

Achievements of the Tracing Service.—The investigations conducted by the Munich Tracing Service have so far produced results in more than 450,000 cases. Compared to the total figure of 1.7 million missing members of the Wehrmacht originally registered, this means that it has been possible to satisfy one out of every four tracing requests received. It is interesting to note that the number of missing soldiers whose fate was definitely clarified, included in this figure, exceeds by far the number of all soldiers missing as a result of World War I. The Tracing Service will continue to endeavour, wherever possible, to clarify the immense number of cases of missing persons by questioning returnees and Red Cross Societies, in order to relieve anxious relatives from the burden of uncertainty.