Twentieth Anniversary of the International Tracing Service

In one of its previous numbers, the International Review *mentioned that the International Tracing Service (ITS) had in 1965 celebrated its 20th anniversary of existence and that this also marked ten years of the ICRC's presence at Arolsen. We also gave some figures which showed a constant increase in inquiries reaching Arolsen between 1951 and 1965, about 1,900,000 in all. It can already be seen from annual statistics, that even twenty years after the end of the war, the public still has to resort to the ITS to obtain information and documents. We would moreover recall that on June 30, 1965 that Service numbered 234 on its staff.*

In order to celebrate this anniversary and give as general an idea as possible of the work accomplished, the ITS has now produced a brochure in French, German and English of some thirty pages which contains interesting details about the documents in its possession, information it supplies in the use of these documents and also on the special methods of work.

The utilization of these documents often places the ITS in difficult situations which other tracing services probably do not have to encounter. These therefore merit mention as well as the methods applied to resolve them. This brochure gives technical details and in particular how identification can be made of persons from the documentation and what observations lead to working on the latter. It also contains reproductions of various items such as a " Certificate of Incarceration ", " Certificate of Residence " and " Excerpt from Documents about the stay in former concentration or labour camps ", etc...

We think it will be of interest to give some additional information and we now produce the two first chapters of the brochure on the ITS, edited by the International Committee.

The International Tracing Service is this year looking back on twenty years' of activity. The disastrous events which made it

necessary to establish such a tracing service are only too well known. In deference to the unfortunate victims it would be inappropriate for the ITS to commemorate this occasion particularly. It will only be attempted here, in fact for the first time, to give a more general picture of the ITS' activity in the form of a concise study. Hitherto the ITS had only shown its current work in the periodical activity reports.

A brief outline of the ITS' origin seems necessary in order to characterize the present organization.

Towards the end of World War II, a small tracing service dealing mainly with individual cases had been attached to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe. Its main task consisted in the co-ordination of the tracing of missing persons in the territory already occupied by the Allied Nations. When, after the cessation of hostilities UNRRA transferred its Headquarters for Germany to Arolsen, this tracing service was attached to it [1]. This explains the present location of the ITS.

One of UNRRA's tasks consisted in assisting DPs, i.e. nationals of member countries of the United Nations who had been forced by the war to leave their country, and to facilitate the return to their home. It was also one of UNRRA's tasks to assist DPs in tracing their relatives from whom they had been separated as a result of the war. To this end UNRRA expanded the tracing service mentioned above, which was then called the " Central Tracing Bureau ". In view of the fact that this bureau did not yet possess the documents which formed the later ITS' archives, it could only co-ordinate the tracing between the National Tracing Bureaux on one hand and the tracing services of the different zones of occupations of Germany on the other hand. In 1948, when most of the DPs wishing to return home had been repatriated, UNRRA was dissolved and replaced by a new organization of the United Nations, the IRO, which dealt with DPs who did not wish to be repatriated. The IRO's task consisted in assisting DPs and in

[1] Abbreviations used in this article :

CC — Concentration Camp.
DP — Displaced Person.
IRO — International Refugee Organization.
UNRRA — United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

facilitating their emigration. This organization called its tracing service ITS ; the name it has kept until today. In 1951 already, the IRO, having completed its mandate to a large extent, was dissolved in its turn.

IRO's Tracing Service was taken over by the Allied High Commission which functioned until May 1955 when, as a result of the abrogation of the statute of occupation in the Federal Republic of Germany, new dispositions had to be taken with regard to the ITS. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva was then entrusted, in agreement with an International Commission for the ITS, formed by representatives of ten member nations, with the direction and the administration of the ITS.

ITS documents.—At the outset, neither the Central Tracing Bureau nor the succeeding ITS had any documents at their disposal upon which they could have based their tracing. Only in 1948 the ITS received some of the documents which the Allied Forces had secured on the closure of various CCs and which had until then been available to the Nuremberg Tribunal for War Crimes. Shortly before the disbandment of the IRO the " War-Time Documents " (cf. page 3) were added. The " Post-War-Time Documents " (cf. page 3) i.e. the records of the DPs established by UNRRA and IRO, reached the ITS only later, when the IRO had been dissolved.

Whilst UNRRA dealt exclusively with DPs, the IRO was concerned in addition to the DPs in the strictest sense also with refugees who reached the Federal Republic of Germany or Austria coming from Eastern Europe from the end of the war until 1951.

The archives of the ITS are divided into three sections according to subject matter as follows :

1. *CC-Documents*

These records comprise lists and individual documents of prisoners from CCs which existed from 1933 to 1945 in the territory of the former German Reich and in occupied countries. There are lists of arrival in camps, lists for the issue of prisoners' numbers, deportation lists of persons directed from occupied countries and from Germany to various destinations, lists of liberation established

by the Allied Forces; individual documents such as prisoners' questionnaires, prisoners' cards, records of personal effects withdrawn from the prisoners at entry into the CC, infirmary cards, working-and post control-cards.

The archives comprise as well some card-indices from certain Gestapo offices in Germany and a small number of files from the People's Courts (Volksgerichte).

These documents provide for all intents and purposes the following information: place and date of arrest, duration of detention in the CC, reason given for detention (political, racial etc.), general state of health on arrival in the camp, diseases and wounds contracted during detention, type of forced labour, transfers to work commandos or to other CCs and, where applicable, releases, liberations or death. Some individual documents contain, in addition, information on near relatives who were also detained in CCs and of personal effects withdrawn from the prisoners.

The Historical Section is closely connected with the CC-documents. It comprises the records with general data on CCs and analogous subjects. They are currently consulted in order to answer general questions on detention etc.

This section has also a small reference library at its disposal concerning National Socialist persecution and geographical matters, maps and gazetteers.

2. *War-Time Documents*

These documents concern non-Germans who lived from 1939 to 1945 outside CCs or Prison-of-War camps in Germany, mainly on the territory of the present Federal Republic. These documents are in fact excerpts from war-time records established shortly after the war by German authorities by order of the Occupying Powers. The sources of information were registers for foreigners, documents drawn up by employers, by insurance offices, hospitals, by the police or by prisons etc.

The following types of information are provided by this documentation: place and length of stay, employers, invalidity insurance, medical treatment, detention in civilian prisons. Death cases are found in notes from civil registers or in grave lists.

3. Post-War-Time Documents

They give information on DPs who lived, mainly from 1945 to 1951, in the Western zones of occupation of Germany and Austria. The greater part of these records was established by UNRRA and IRO.

The documents contain information on places and dates of residence after the war, sometimes for the past ten years including persecution during the war. There are also medical reports and information on hospital treatment. Special questionnaires provide information for the examination as to the eligibility for IRO assistance. These forms show also where whole families lived during the war, what education they had received and where they had worked. These items can be used as an indirect proof for detention etc. during the war in connection with indemnification claims.

The Child Tracing Section is in fact a sub-section of the Post-War-Time Documents. Here the files are gathered of DP-children who were separated from their parents during or after the war. These records contain detailed information concerning not only the identification and the fate of the child itself during the war but also of its nearest relatives. Therefore, these records can frequently be consulted for inquiries precisely about these relatives.

The three sections of the ITS' archives comprise approximately 2½ million pages of lists and more than 8 million individual documents.

The ITS is not only obliged to maintain its archives in good order, within the limits of its attribution, it should also extend them through new acquisitions. In order to ensure the good condition of the documents they are covered mechanically on both sides with plastic sheets. An inventory in the form of a card-index assures that every record can easily be found. New acquisitions during the last ten years have increased the volume of the CC documents by one third and that of the Post-War-Time documents by a quarter.

In order to treat a case, all records referring to the person in question, must be consulted from one or more of the archives' sections. Individual records can be filed alphabetically, but what about the over 2 million pages of lists ? The ITS had therefore to

build up an auxiliary method which is the key to records in the three sections of the archives:

It is the master index with over 20 million reference cards. These cards give information on the person, on the respective record and the place where it is filed plus a summary of the content of this record. The Master Index cards are classified according to a phonetic-alphabetical system. This method had to be adopted on account of the different spelling of names to be found above all in Slavonic and Oriental Jewish surnames which represent about 60% of the total. For each inquiry dealt with, with positive or negative result, an inquiry card is left in the Master Index as all information-cards referring to the case are kept in the individual case-file. These inquiry cards give in addition to the personal data and the reference number of the file, a summary of the alleged fate as mentioned in the inquiry. If, subsequently, the information-card referring to a newly acquired document, when inserted in the Master Index, encounters the relevant inquiry card, the result of this " meeting " will be communicated spontaneously to the inquirer.

Auxiliary indices to the Master Index had to be established in order to evaluate completely the content of the archives. The main auxiliary indices will be mentioned under " IV. Special working methods " (cf. page 9).

Information required from the ITS.—The criteria vary constantly, according to which archives are consulted. It depends on the type of questions put to the ITS which section of the archives is to be consulted. Certain sections such as the War-Time Documents came only recently into use on a large scale. The principal types of information required are mentioned below:

Tracing inquiries

Despite the fact that the tracing of missing persons forms today only about 10 % of the inquiries, this type of work is mentioned first as it was initially the main activity of the ITS and, last but not least, because " Tracing " forms part of the title of the ITS. First of all it must be stressed that the ITS does not, so to speak, trace anyone anywhere. Its tracing activity is restricted to the

scope of its archives. Only if a lead on a sought person is found in the archives is it followed up by addressing inquiries to other agencies. It must not be forgotten that the most recent information the ITS holds on a person dates from at least fifteen years ago. This information might be found on a list of the inmates of a DP-camp dissolved long ago or on an emigration list of the early fifties. Once such a lead is found the real tracing starts. It is done through the intermediary of various agencies and particularly through the National Red Cross Societies. The ITS respects the following principle : an address should never be disclosed to the inquirer without the formal consent of the person that was found.

Excerpts from documents

One must keep in mind that the content of ITS' archives generally cannot be confirmed by other sources. The CC and Post-War-Time records are unique. The sources for the War-Time documents have practically become inaccessible or have been destroyed. The circle of persons within the sphere of the ITS have, however, to produce for various reasons evidence of their detention, of the fact that they contracted diseases or received medical treatment at a given moment, or must just prove where they lived at a given time during a period which reaches from the beginning of the war to the immediate post-war time i.e. from 1939 to 1951. It must be remembered that these persons were not registered anywhere else during this period. In answer to such requests the ITS draws up excerpts of its documents on the appropriate form.

Today 90 % of the activity of the ITS consists in such excerpts in various forms. The main reasons for which these excerpts are required are given below :

Claims for compensation

For claims for compensation on account of National Socialist persecution, mainly the proof of detention in a CC, found in the respective section of the archives, is required. In 1949, according to compensation laws of some " Länder " of the Federal Republic of Germany, the first requests reached the ITS. Under the terms of the respective law of 1954 for the entire Federal Republic and to a much larger extent under the supplementary legislation of 1956

these requests formed the majority of inquiries addressed to the ITS, reaching up to 80 % of the total.

From 1945 to 1951, DPs were not obliged to register with the German authorities. Therefore, they needed for their claims, in addition to the proof of their detention, evidence of their residence during the immediate post-war period. This information can only be secured from the UNRRA and IRO registration records.

The same type of evidence is requested by the ITS for indemnification schemes of other countries and of the UNHCR.

Evidence of physical injuries

Diseases and injuries are mentioned in the documents of all three sections of the archives. There are also to be found the results of medical inspections at the entry into a CC and on arrival in a DP-camp. Such medical records are required in order to substantiate claims for compensation for physical injuries according to the German indemnification law or for invalidity pensions of many countries. Even physicians ask for these records as a basis for their present treatment of a patient.

Restitution claims

Claims are lodged with the Federal Republic of Germany by former prisoners for valuables withdrawn from them in a CC. The necessary evidence can be found on the individual effects card where all personal property withdrawn from a prisoner in a CC is recorded.

Proof of employment and invalidity insurance

Foreigners who worked in Germany during the war had to be insured against accidents by their employers. More and more former workers need evidence, if possible, that they were insured or at least for which period and for whom they worked, when they reach the age to receive a pension. This evidence is required for German as well as for other insurance companies.

Emigration and nationalization

Former DPs require for these purposes excerpts from documents from the post-war-time archives in lieu of certificates of good conduct (polizeiliche Führungszeugnisse).

Proof of death

This evidence found in the three sections of the archives is necessary to solve legal questions according to civil law. There is a Special Registrar's Office in Arolsen which is authorized to register deaths of CC-inmates which occurred in the former German Reich or in German occupied territories. The necessary documentary evidence is put at the Registrar's disposal by the ITS.

Procedure of declaration of death

All courts of the first instance of the Federal Republic of Germany received instructions to submit to the ITS all requests for declaration of death concerning the circle of persons falling within the scope of the ITS. The ITS may then be able to furnish evidence not only of deportation or detention in a CC of the person for whom a declaration of death is required, but also the actual date and place of death which renders the action for declaration of death unnecessary. The ITS also examines all procedures submitted by the member nations to the United Nations International Bureau for Declarations of Death in Geneva.

General information on CCs etc.

Based on the above mentioned historical archives, general information is given on CCs and other camps and their organization.

In the years from 1949 to 1951, the ITS published a " Catalogue of Camps and Prisons in Germany and in German Occupied Territories from 1.9.1939 to 8.5.1945 " of over 900 pages. This register shows camps of different categories from CCs to simple camps where foreign workers lived, in geographical order, i.e. subdivided into various countries; localities are indicated alphabetically and under each locality the camps or prisons which existed there. In contradiction to the catalogue's title, information on CCs goes sometimes back to 1933.

The second edition of this publication is already exhausted. The ITS, therefore, decided to prepare a revised and extended edition.

The old catalogue was based mainly on testimonies given by former prisoners, as the ITS had at that time practically no doc-

umentation on the CCs at its disposal. It has been mentioned above to what extent the ITS' archives had been expanded since the catalogue was edited. Similar registers of camps had been established by some countries in the meantime which were also put at the disposal of the ITS.

In the first instance, with the assistance of a historian, a wider scheme was drawn up within which the new edition of the catalogue should be expanded. Preference was now to be given to documentary evidence as against the testimonies.

Thereupon all sections of the archives including the historical one were to be checked for evidence to be included in the catalogue. The photocopies of the relevant documents are collected thematically. This work will soon be terminated. It was surprising how much new or more precise data was found in the personal documents of the three sections of the archives. Not only exact dates of opening or closure of CCs and their commandos were established, but also important movements during a camp's existence and previously unknown work commandos could be ascertained.

In a third phase this documentation will have to be sifted, some (still uncertain) questions will have to be elucidated and finally excerpts will have to be established according to the scheme mentioned above.

The new catalogue will not only give more ample information, many errors of the old one will be rectified. Historical institutes of several countries already give valuable assistance to the ITS. The exact geographical location of each town or village to be mentioned in the catalogue has to be ascertained. A specialized group is entrusted with this complicated work.

This last phase of the preparatory work of the catalogue, the sifting of the documentation and extracting therefrom the necessary data, is still in its initial stage. However, as all documents concerning one camp are filed together, specific inquiries on a given camp can already now be answered according to the ITS' most recent data. In fact quite a number of such requests are received currently.