

## BOOKS AND REVIEWS

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OTTO RAGGENBASS: «TROTZ STACHELDRAHT»<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Raggenbass, of whose recent death we have learned with regret, has given this title (its translation is "In spite of barbed wire") to a book which we have pleasure in presenting to our readers.

This work, which is amply illustrated by photographs and contains an interesting selection of documents and maps, was written with the object of making known the tragic events which took place on the North-East frontier of Switzerland between 1939 and 1945. Whilst bringing out the importance of the action of the Red Cross, the author vividly describes those scenes and recalls the various humanitarian interventions which were successful during the upheaval of the Second World War.

This work is of continuous interest and we cannot do better than reproduce part of its preface written by Mr. Carl J. Burkhardt, former President of the International Committee and who is now an honorary member.

"The International Committee of the Red Cross vividly recalls the time during the last years of the Second World War when it worked with the local authorities of the Cantons of Thurgau, St. Gallen and Schaffhausen . . .

. . . From the beginning of 1945, numerous discussions took place at Kreuzlingen and Constance for the exchange of prisoners of war, aid to refugees, the repatriation of internees of concentration camps and the co-ordination of common action. During the course of these deliberations, conducted in the two neighbouring towns, the civilian and military services in the Rhine area between Lake Constance and Schaffhausen were continuously co-operative. Particular mention should be made of the unflagging efforts of Mr. Otto Raggenbass, District Governor. All that was achieved by

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<sup>1</sup> Im Verlag des Südkurier, Konstanz, 1964, 225 p.

the authorities of the frontier cantons and especially by Kreuzlingen where Mr. A. E. Zollinger, a Permanent delegate of the ICRC had established himself, can once again serve as an example. An account of this is described in this work, supported by documents . . .

Apart from the millions of prisoners of war and civilian internees for whom the ICRC was responsible for giving aid and protection, those anonymous figures, internees of the concentration camps whose terrible fate far surpassed anything that could be imagined, were the object of our efforts. For years, all our attempts to come to the aid of the most unfortunate of human beings met with icy refusal. It was only towards the closing stages of the war that any results were obtained. By the end of June, 1945, more than 23,000 detainees of concentration camps reached Kreuzlingen and over 20,000 also arrived on Swiss soil at St. Margarethen-Altstätten, whilst 50,000 refugees were welcomed, aided and given relief. We put into practice the improvised idea of forming columns of white-painted lorries and I shall never forget the moment when the first group of detainees arrived mainly from the Ravensbrück concentration camp. The Mayor of Kreuzlingen had the bells rung in all the churches and women, broken and miserable, who were now saved, left the lorries, many of them kneeling on the ground to give thanks for their deliverance.

All these events, simply recorded by documents, are a real testimony to the town of Kreuzlingen and the Cantons of Thurgau, St. Gallen and Schaffhausen. The voluntary relief actions which were then accomplished in that area, contrasting the horrors of previous years with the present, are like a sign of a better world which permits the hope which so much destruction will always be able to arouse in the hearts of adverse forces, those of pity and human kindness.

May this book meet with much sympathy and interest, so that future generations find comfort in recalling the events which took place on the Swiss frontier at that time."

*J.-G. L.*