

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The twentieth anniversary of the end of hostilities in 1945 gave the Red Cross a welcome opportunity to recall the activities undertaken under its flag to allay sufferings caused by the greatest cataclysm which has yet affected the human race. The International Committee of the Red Cross which is called upon to assume heavy responsibilities in case of war wishes to put on record here some aspects of its action as neutral intermediary in favour of all the victims of the world conflict.

In war-time the basic activities of the Red Cross are carried out first and foremost by National Societies, working on the front or behind the lines, wherever hostilities cause human sufferings. The ICRC functions as a channel or as a bridge. It is often the last remaining intermediary through which relief can be sent and is the only way for people to correspond.

In the struggle against the distress and suffering caused by the hostilities and their consequences, the ICRC obtained remarkable results, with the assistance of its many collaborators, who numbered almost 4000 at the end of the war. Of course, there were failures. But the International Committee of the Red Cross had only very limited means at its disposal. Also it had to face all too often the lack of understanding by belligerents. Nevertheless, the International Committee tried repeatedly to do all it could to fulfil its mission and to satisfy the expectations of the innumerable victims of the war for whom it was the only remaining hope.

The following figures will help to illustrate the scope of its activities :

- The ICRC conveyed to camps for war prisoners, civilian internees and deportees
430,731 tons of relief supplies to a total value of about 3,312,000,000 Swiss francs, or approximately 36 million parcels.
- Civilian detainees and concentration camp inmates received 6,836 tons of relief supplies (about 1,631,000 parcels)

- Relief to war prisoners in Japanese hands which amounted to 7,000 tons of relief and 19 million Swiss francs in cash for local purchases, is not included in the above figures.
- Thanks to the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross (ICRC—League of Red Cross Societies), the Red Cross was able to assist civilian populations suffering from the war ; 165,256 tons of relief supplies (total value 314 million Swiss francs) were distributed to them.
- The ICRC had at its disposal 43 ships (of which 3 were its own) ; they made 507 sea crossings, covering a distance of nearly one million miles. After the destruction of the German railway system, the ICRC used 474 lorries which covered a total of nearly two million miles.

During the war and the months which followed the end of the hostilities, the ICRC was represented in various parts of the world by 76 delegations. Their personnel of 340 made 11,175 visits to prisoner camps.

All these activities involved a great deal of office work, as shown by the following figures, covering the period between September 30, 1939 to June 30, 1947 :

Mail items received and despatched	120,669,000
Telegrams received and despatched	567,251
Total index-cards	36,000,000
Official lists of prisoners of war (pages registered) . .	3,565,869
Civilian messages forwarded	24,000,000
Photostat copies made	3,719,914
Camp visits	11,175