

*THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE'S ACTION
IN THE NEAR EAST*

A delegate's account

As is known, the ICRC is continuing its activity in various countries of the Near East. It is concerning itself at the same time with prisoners of war, internees and refugees. It is also trying to resolve in a practical way certain problems which affect civilians more especially. Mention was made in the last issue of the *International Review* of the repatriations of Egyptian civilians which took place in October and for which one of the ICRC delegates assumed practical responsibility. On his return to Geneva he gave an account which we consider to be of interest.

It should first of all be recalled that it was a question first of all of women and children who had arrived from the El Arish area and who, through the ICRC's intermediary, were to return to their own country across the Suez canal. To this group permission had been given to be joined by some sick whose condition demanded special care.

The operations could only succeed with the agreement of both sides, Egypt and Israel in this case, for the express purpose of reuniting families. The ICRC's task was first of all to obtain the necessary authorizations and to that end to draw up lists of persons wishing to return West of the canal. These lists were then sent to the ICRC delegation in Cairo which submitted them to the appropriate authorities and returned them, once they had been approved, to the International Committee's sub-delegation in Gaza.

Everything was then ready for the start of this humanitarian action which we now describe and which was carried out with the practical assistance of the ICRC. Indeed it was the Red Cross which

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

to some extent "neutralized" the part of the Suez Canal military zone across which the civilians passed. In fact, since the beginning of hostilities, the only contacts established between the two banks were made thanks to the presence of the International Committee and its representatives. One of these, Mr. J. Eggimann, has given us this account of one repatriation operation which was, moreover, preceded and followed by several others.

"As soon as the agreement of the Egyptian authorities was confirmed for the repatriation of the civilians, we immediately went to El Arish to settle with the military governor questions of control, information and the assembling of the persons concerned. We submitted for that purpose a list of 600 names received from the Egyptian Government and which stated who were to be admitted. Of the 6000 civilians who had announced themselves two months previously some of these under their own resources had left for Jordan by the Allenby bridge. The lists given to us by the Egyptian Government were not in fact up-to-date and we therefore had to carry out an accurate check to discover the amount of transport to be organised.

Two days later we were able to inform Mr. Boisard, the ICRC delegate in Cairo, of the exact number of civilians who would be arriving at El Qantara for this repatriation operation, arranged to take place at 11 hrs. on October 9, 1967. The Israeli liaison officer dealt with transport arrangements and drew up a time-programme.

We arrived at El Arish at 7 hrs. and supervised the departure of the civilians who had been assembled in a former Egyptian camp. Everything went according to plan and the convoy, consisting of ten buses, two ambulances, four lorries loaded with baggage, a military escort and a vehicle with red cross markings, left camp at 8.45 hrs.

In another Red Cross vehicle, together with the liaison officer, we arrived at El Qantara at 10.30 hrs.¹

The operation did not start until 14.30 hrs. The first batch consisted essentially of mothers with their children, numbering 564 in all.

¹ *Plate.* Egyptian civilians arriving at El Qantara... then embark to cross the Canal, under the control of ICRC delegates.



Egyptian civilians arriving at El Kantara...

EGYPTIAN CIVILIANS REPATRIATION

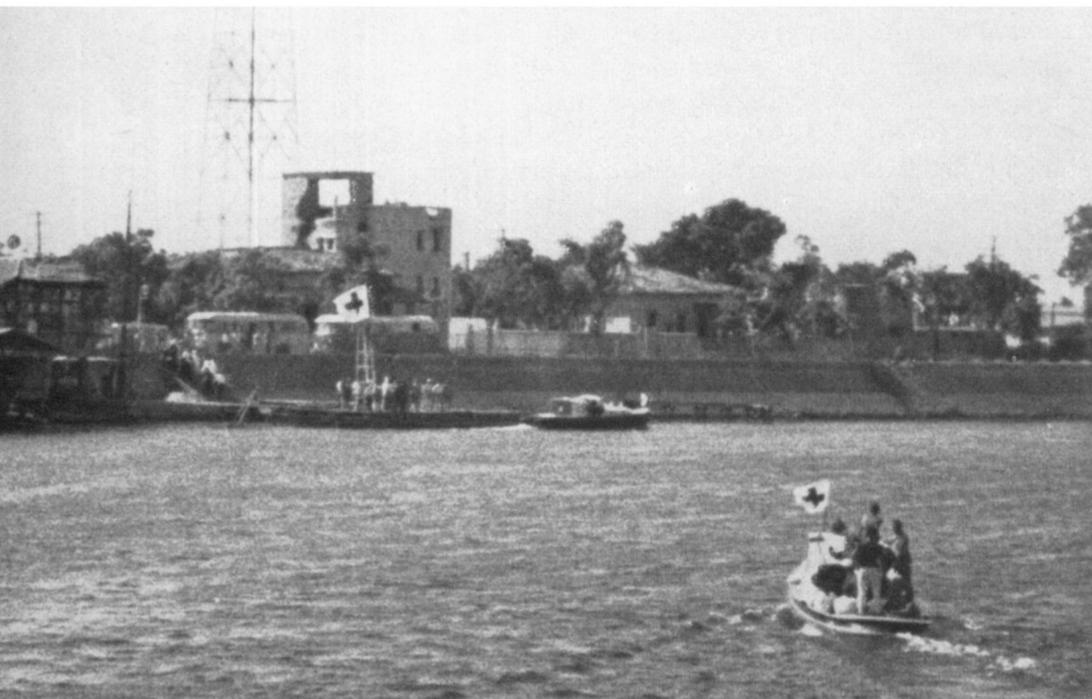
... then embark to cross the Suez Canal, under the control of ICRC delegates.





The sick also embarking...

...then, craft cross the Canal, below the flag of the Red Cross.



Since no means of transport were any longer available, two craft arrived from Ismailia. They sailed under the protection of large white flags with the red cross emblem. They traversed the Canal several times in both directions.¹ At embarkation and disembarkation points there were flags of the Red Cross flying and near them stood the ICRC delegates as a guarantee of strict neutrality.

The operation ended without incident at 5.30 p.m., and the craft returned to their bases, together with the ICRC representative in Egypt. ”



¹ *Plate.* Craft crossing the Canal, under the flag of the Red Cross.