

In War and in Peace the Red Cross is Present

The presence of the Red Cross is felt under the most varied circumstances—where its help is needed, where human beings are suffering and need assistance. The disparity between the dimensions of the humanitarian tasks which must be carried out in today's world and the modest means available for these tasks should not discourage us—for in wartime and peacetime, under the banners of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun, the members of National Societies, along with various international organizations, are taking action in an ever-increasing variety of fields. Originally present only on the battlefields, they are now to be found doing many new things—protecting the environment, helping aged people, etc.

Fridtjof Nansen spoke in the manner of Henry Dunant when he confronted timid people who tried to bring him back to a "sense of reality". He told them, "Yes, it's impossible, and so we'll do it!" Humanitarian work, more than any other work, is inspired by, and can only go on through, the exercise of imagination. A random look through past issues of the *International Review* reveals a host of examples:

In Australia, Red Cross volunteers bring flowers to hospital wards and arrange for symphony concerts in a number of psychiatric hospitals; volunteers in Great Britain provide advice to patients, bring them books and decorate their rooms with reproductions of paintings, which are changed from time to time. In both cases, the Red Cross workers resort to beauty as a source of consolation and encouragement.

A number of National Societies have undertaken to bring the joy of reading to blind people. In the United States, for example, Junior Red Cross volunteers provide for the publication of various periodicals

in Braille. The Brazilian Red Cross set up courses in assistance to the blind for nurses, "samaritans" and voluntary social workers, who learn to transcribe reading matter into Braille.

Voluntary workers of many National Societies bring comfort and help to aged people, in Finland, New Zealand, Australia and the Netherlands, to mention only a few of them. The Netherlands Red Cross conceived the idea of cruises at sea for invalids and the chronically sick. It is easy to imagine the pleasure provided to these unhappy people, sitting in comfort on the deck of the hospital ship "Jean-Henry Dunant" and watching the coastline of their country pass before their eyes.

Another field in which the Red Cross plays an important role is in rescue work in the mountains and at sea. In a large number of countries, nautical and mountain sports have increased rapidly, resulting in many accidents. This opened up a large new field for Red Cross action. As early as 1932, the *Review* published an article on "The Red Cross in the service of winter sports," reporting on the mountain rescue service of the Bavarian branch of the German Red Cross.

In this new sector, the Bulgarian Red Cross is one of the most effective of all, with particular regard to the rescue of swimmers. During the entire season, and in some places throughout the year, it operates more than 1,200 rescue and first aid stations, manned by more than 10,000 lifeguards whom it has trained.

By 1914, the American Red Cross had already set up an organization of lifeguards, starting a programme which has since increased enormously. This Society was able to arouse great interest among the public for this activity and for the first-aid work which constitutes a large part of its programme. The people trained for these purposes carry out a simple and fundamental task: they save lives, anywhere and at any time.

In the modern world, with States taking an increasing part in social work, one might fear that there would be fewer occasions for voluntary services to intervene. It is reassuring to note however that these services are holding their own and even enlarging their functions. In the United States, people are well aware of the invaluable assistance given, through the intermediary of the Red Cross, by the "grey ladies" in hospitals, sanitariums, clinics, rest homes and convalescent homes. Trained volunteers, including men, take on many such jobs, especially for people who are victims of prolonged sicknesses.

Under the aegis of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun, the activities of volunteers are also developing in other fields and in other countries. Women's committees in numerous National Societies carry out highly effective work in the event of disasters, for example. Members of these committees prepare parcels, distribute relief and provide shelter, help and counsel to injured persons and refugees.

First aid is an especially widespread and important activity. In Africa in particular it is one of the main tasks of members of various National Societies. In their visits to different countries, delegates of both the ICRC and the League have witnessed many demonstrations of first aid and have seen the great capacities of both young and adult volunteers for helping their people.

In 1960, the *Review* published an article on first aid in China, describing how the Chinese Red Cross in Peking had trained hundreds of thousands of persons in this field. At that time they had already set up an extensive network of medical and hygienic services in hospitals, clinics and other establishments in the capital, providing vital auxiliary assistance to the governmental medical services. They had also set up youth camps, giving advanced training to first-aid workers.

Assistance to children has also been a Red Cross task to which Societies have devoted great efforts. This may involve relief or milk distribution in the schools, as in Central America, but it may also extend to training in humanitarian principles. As shown in an article published by the *Review* in 1961, the Japanese Junior Red Cross was already active in the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions, encouraging teachers as well as students to familiarize themselves with these humanitarian texts, combatting prejudice against them, popularizing them in publications and organizing courses on these subjects for Junior Red Cross and student group leaders.

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These examples, providing only a partial picture, make no reference to the magnificent wartime work of the Red Cross, which will be described in another article in this issue. To realize the extent of this work, it suffices to thumb through the issues of the *Review* for the years 1940 to 1946. Month after month we find reports on the assistance given by the National Societies, alongside the ICRC, to victims of World War II in belligerent and occupied countries.

These reminiscences are not intended to encourage any spirit of complacency among leaders and members of the Red Cross. In today's world, the Red Cross has indeed assumed a place which must be further enlarged, especially in the countries of the Third World. It is now faced with more numerous and more difficult problems than ever before, and that is why the re-appraisal of its role is so timely. As the author of the final report on that study, Donald T. Tansley, said:

“The overall conclusion of the Final Report is that the major challenges to Red Cross, today and in the future, are not from its external environment but from within. The fundamental question for Red Cross, as it considers this agenda, and continues its Re-appraisal, is very simply whether it has the will and the imagination to overcome its internal problems and thus to close the gap between its vast potential and its present actions.”

Such observations correspond to those of the Norwegian Red Cross, published in the *Review* in November 1972. Mr. Torstein Dale spoke there of the need for voluntary organizations to perform a pioneering function and to continue without letup to turn their efforts toward new areas where anguish and misery prevail. He also insisted upon one need which we regard as fundamental—to keep alive throughout the whole Red Cross movement, nationally and internationally, the everlasting and forever-inspiring spirit of service. He spoke of the need to return to the sources of the Red Cross spirit and to reaffirm, in the face of a hostile world, that when human beings are suffering there must be no prejudice or discrimination in relieving them. He warned:

“A growing ‘dehumanization’ is taking hold of our society. It represents a major challenge for voluntary organizations. They must not only serve as effective channels for public help; they must also actively encourage the development of a feeling of solidarity among people, a feeling of responsibility towards one's fellowmen.

“But solidarity must exist as a reality and not just as fine words. We must begin with ourselves and with our own organization. We must in fact return to one of the basic ideas of the Red Cross movement and build our work on this ideological concept. If we can recapture the spirit of those pioneering days I think we can make a major contribution to society.” (J.G.L.)

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We have recently received two articles. One of these refers primarily to wartime activities and was sent to us by the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR. The second deals with activities on behalf of handicapped persons and came from the Swiss Red Cross, describing the centres for ergotherapy which it has established. We publish the two articles together, thus offering our readers two examples which illustrate the scope and universal presence of Red Cross activities. As we can see, the Red Cross is always there, in war and in peace.

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FIDELITY TO HEROIC TRADITIONS

The history of Leningrad is rich in events which demonstrate the courage and devotion of several generations of its inhabitants. These qualities are found again, in tracing the records of the Red Cross of that city, a Red Cross with a history of 120 years.

As long ago as the 1850's, while the Crimean War was raging, a voluntary society known as the "Society of the Cross" was already in existence, as a non-profit organization of nuns who cared for sick and wounded Russian soldiers. Founded in what was then St. Petersburg, on the initiative of the great Russian surgeon N. I. Pirogov, the society was well known in Russia and abroad. It was the first women's voluntary organization created to provide free care for the wounded. The two founders of this nursing society, Catherine Hitrovo and Catherine Bakunin, assumed a lasting place in history and deserve universal recognition.

A further step forward in Red Cross work took place in 1867 with the founding in St. Petersburg of the "Society for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers" which enjoyed the support of progressive public opinion from its inception.

After the victory of the Socialist Revolution of October 1917, organized care to improve the health of the people was backed not only by the whole of society, but also by the State, the Communist Party and V. I. Lenin. The activities of the Soviet Red Cross had far-reaching consequences.

Under the difficult conditions of the civil war and during the postwar period of famine and destruction, attended by epidemics and a high mortality rate, the Red Cross movement in the city on the Neva grew stronger and ever-more effective. During the years of World War II, the Leningrad Red Cross gained everlasting glory. In the battle against the enemy which besieged the city for 900 days, members of the Red Cross displayed boundless courage, determination and an unlimited spirit of self-sacrifice. From the earliest days of the war, 1,800 medical teams presented themselves at assembly points throughout the city. Later, as many as 3,000 such teams were at work in Leningrad, in areas particularly exposed to the fire of the enemy.

These teams patrolled the streets, providing immediate aid to people wounded by bombing or artillery fire, setting up and equipping temporary hospitals with whatever means at their disposal. They transported the wounded, people with frozen hands or feet, people weakened by hunger and sickness, and gave them the care they needed.

Scores of children, whose parents were missing or dead, were saved from death by Vera Chtchekina, a member of the Red Cross. Many of them later took her family name as their own.

Feelings of solidarity among the people, and of devotion one to another, became universal. Without thought for the difficult conditions, for the ring of steel which surrounded the city, the people of Leningrad, including the members of the Red Cross, came forward without being asked to the centres for blood transfusion, to give their blood to save the lives of soldiers wounded in defending their country.

The Institute for Blood Transfusion was damaged by incendiary bombs and artillery shells. Water mains and electric cables were cut; medical equipment and bandages were lacking. Nevertheless, the Institute went on with its work. The heroic members of the organization set up operations in the basement of the building and continued, every day, to supply blood. Many blood donors, as well as some Institute workers, were killed by enemy artillery right at the entrance to the building. There was nothing however which could destroy the courage of the people of Leningrad.

During the bitterest winter cold, and in the face of constant enemy attacks, the school children of Leningrad courageously fought the fires set off by incendiary bombs, putting them out or preventing them from spreading. On sleds, for distances of miles and miles, they carried water

for the aged and sick and helped provide care in the hospitals. For these deeds, 5,000 schoolchildren were decorated with the medal "For the Defense of Leningrad".

In ambulances and hospitals, thousands of young girls, nursing students of the Red Cross Society, were at work with their medical kits, along with thousands of medical teachers and men and women ambulance workers. For the magnificent heroism they displayed during the war, more than 250 members of the Leningrad Red Cross were decorated with the Medal of the USSR.

To maintain that noble tradition, the work of assistance goes on today, in peacetime. Assuming its principal responsibility—to protect the health and provide hygienic guidance to the people of Leningrad—the Leningrad Red Cross gives particular attention to the training of cadres. Thus, more than 75,000 residents of the city have learned to care for the sick and to give first aid in case of accidents. Every year, tens of thousands of members of medical teams and health stations are trained either at work or in various organizations and educational institutes.

In the field of hygiene, most of the city's administrative buildings are checked regularly by inspectors. Every year, as many as 15,000 active members who have received special courses in home nursing provide care for old people, invalids and others. "Houses of Health", opened up on the initiative of the Red Cross in conjunction with polyclinics, are playing an ever-increasing role in the effort to improve health services.

State registered nurses, whose Institute is closely associated with the Committee of the Red Cross Society, do not concern themselves only with medical assistance and care for the sick, but also with helping to solve people's day-to-day problems.

In 1957, the Leningrad Red Cross Society undertook the promotion of a solidarity fund, a patriotic example which was followed throughout the country. From year to year, the number of donors continued to increase. In 1957, only eleven persons contributed to the fund, the "Kirov Foundation", but in 1974 there were more than 3,000. This is evidence of the effectiveness of the educational work carried on over the years by the Red Cross Committees, in co-operation with other health organizations in the city.

The Leningrad Red Cross Society, whose membership continues to increase, enjoys great prestige and popularity among the people of the city. This is attested by many letters of appreciation, the finest reward possible to Red Cross members for their devotion to the interests of the people.

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AMBULATORY ERGOTHERAPY

A Pioneering Activity of the Swiss Red Cross

Ergotherapy, relatively unknown and often confused with physiotherapy, has been increasingly used during the past few years.

To offer a simple definition, we may say that ergotherapy is a treatment aimed at the readaptation of the patient. Specialists distinguish three categories:

The first of these, "activation ergotherapy," as applied to chronically ill or handicapped patients, seeks to restore capabilities which have been lost or forgotten or to create new ones. The therapist helps the patients to make use of the capacities they still possess. Thanks to the resulting physical or mental activities, they can maintain their place in society and despite age or infirmity feel they belong to it. Whether they live with their families, in special homes or hospitals, it is important for such people to maintain human contacts. Various methods, ranging from handicrafts to the organization of social and cultural events, are characteristic of this type of ergotherapy.

The second form is known as "functional ergotherapy". Its purpose is to improve body functioning, mobility and muscular energy. The aim

is to restore to the handicapped patient the utmost possible independence in his day-to-day life, through the use of accessories and specially designed prostheses.

The third category, “psychiatric ergotherapy”, is for the mentally ill. Either through individual or group therapy, it seeks to restore the patients’ psychic equilibrium. In a protected milieu, manual work and housework—and also music, games, theatrical performances and discussions—help the patients to regain their self-confidence by engaging in creative activities.

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More than twenty years ago, the Swiss Red Cross understood the value of ergotherapy. It all began quite simply, and, as often occurs, the impetus for this new kind of endeavour was given by practical need.

In the Zurich branch, in 1952, the first twelve volunteers to work in the newly constituted visiting service, soon recognized the bad effects of inactivity on the patients they saw. In 1953, an ergotherapist was employed to work with the volunteers. The profession at that time was still in its early days. Courses in ergotherapy were provided for social workers and nurses. It was not until 1957, however, that the first Swiss school of ergotherapy was established, with a three-year training programme. The Zurich branch obtained the services of one of the school’s first graduates.

A boom period soon followed for ergotherapy, with a mounting demand for its practitioners, especially after the inception of insurance against invalidity. It was no longer simply a matter of providing distraction for chronically ill people and for residents in homes for the aged. The Zurich branch provided a place for treatment, with different types of equipment for readaptation, constituting the first ergotherapy centre to be established by the Swiss Red Cross. Since ergotherapy supplemented conventional medical treatment and included a social element, it came to be recognized as a “Red Cross job” and as such became more and more important. Today, Switzerland has eighteen Red Cross ergotherapy centres, run by seventeen branches. Their procedures differ to some extent, depending on whether they are in cities or in the countryside.

The particular novelty in the approach of the Swiss Red Cross is in the emphasis it gives to the ambulatory character of ergotherapy, as part of an overall effort to develop extra-hospital services. Both for individual and group treatment, ergotherapists and their assistants make regular visits to patients' homes, residence institutions and certain hospitals which do not have their own facilities. Patients who are able to do so go to the ergotherapy centres in their vicinity.

The activities of the Swiss Red Cross centres for ambulatory ergotherapy are now undergoing a slow evolution. Less and less use is made in the centres of what we have called "functional" ergotherapy—increasingly the affair of specialized institutions—and more and more use is made of "activation" ergotherapy. Consideration is being given to establishing an "activation" ergotherapy school with an eighteen-month training period.

Another special aspect of the Swiss Red Cross ambulatory ergotherapy centres is the fact that Red Cross volunteer workers in almost all of the centres take an active part in the work, especially in old people's homes, and in group therapy at the centres themselves. It would indeed have been impossible, for lack of both money and personnel, to depend only upon qualified ergotherapists. Before starting to work under the direction of professionals, or undertaking quasi-independent work, the volunteers take training courses which familiarize them with the psychological problems involved and also with the various techniques they will use—weaving, braiding, fabric printing, etc.

The work of these volunteers is greatly appreciated. They constitute a main point of contact between the patients and the outside world. They provide a link between those who are well and those who are sick, between the young and the old. Many times, indeed, their regular presence helps the families of patients to take an active part in the rehabilitation of handicapped family members. The task of these volunteers is not an easy one. In addition to manual skills, they must have great capacities of human warmth, intuition, friendliness and considerable perseverance. A great many young people, however, are fascinated by this work. In this field, it seems certain that the torch will neither fail nor fall to the ground.