

Doctors and the Red Cross

By Hans Meuli

The International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy (ICMMP) was founded in 1921, its membership to-day comprising 84 States which send their official representatives to the Congresses organized every two years. At the XIXth Congress in Dublin from 29 December to 2 October 1969, 130 delegates were present. The ICRC attended as one of the seven organizations invited and was represented by Mr. Hans Meuli, Doctor of Medicine, Member of the ICRC and Honorary President of the ICMMP.

The agenda for the scientific meetings included three questions: a) Recent discoveries in blood preservation; b) The importance for the armed forces of tracing and eliminating centres of endemic infections (failures noted particularly in tropical pathology); c) Minimum medico-surgical requirements in fighting areas. In addition, among the many papers delivered, we might mention those dealing with "radiology in aeronautic and space travel medicine", "medical treatment in the US army" and the treatment and detention conditions of prisoners of war in South Vietnam.

The next International Congress will be held in Brussels from 29 June to 1 July 1971. As usual it will deal with three major topics. The fifth International Refresher Course for Junior Medical Officers will take place from 14 to 25 September 1970 at Macolin in Switzerland.

As the doyen of honorary presidents, Mr. H. Meuli took the floor at the opening meeting of the Congress, and at the closing meeting he delivered an address on behalf of the ICRC which we deem expedient to reproduce below. It deals not with the duties of the doctor, which are often the subject of discussions, but with the relationship between the ICRC and the medical profession. (Ed.).

Representing the International Committee of the Red Cross on this occasion gives me a welcome opportunity to thank the International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy (ICMMP) for its constant help and support and at the same time to thank the many medical officers who offered their services to us for various medical missions in so many countries. The ICRC has always need of doctors and qualified medical personnel and we hope that these invaluable and essential volunteers will continue to come forward in sufficient numbers for the accomplishment of manifold, interesting, and satisfying humanitarian assignments.

The XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross which was held at Istanbul closed on 13 September, 1969. It adopted 33 resolutions and was attended by 610 delegates from nearly every country in the world, representing 77 States having acceded to the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC, the League of Red Cross Societies and the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies. Several international organizations including the ICMMP sent observers.

The reaffirmation and development of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts was the main subject of the Conference. The proceedings resulted in a resolution requesting the ICRC to continue its work in this field in order to draw up international legal rules. In the field of international law other resolutions were adopted, concerning such subjects as the diffusion of knowledge of the Geneva Conventions, the application of the IVth Convention, the protection of prisoners of war, civilian medical and nursing personnel and victims of non-international armed conflicts. The Conference approved a series of "Principles and Rules for Red Cross Disaster Relief" and the relevant resolutions were concerned also with international disaster relief air transport and the organization of international medical teams.

Following the resolutions adopted and the recommendations expressed by the International Conferences of the Red Cross at Vienna in 1965 and at Istanbul, the ICRC will not fail to frame draft conventions and agreements. We hope that a Diplomatic Conference will be convened to discuss these in the next year or two

DOCTORS AND THE RED CROSS

and will convert them into rules to be respected and applied by all States which have ratified the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

We must of course close the loop-holes in the Conventions and no one knows war and can assess its horror, and therefore hate it more, than the medical officer. No one is better placed than he to take a stand in favour of peace against war. There is every reason—I would even say necessity—for medical officers in charge of army medical services to participate as members of their countries' governmental delegations in the International Conferences of the Red Cross and in Diplomatic Conferences. They would be first class experts provided they knew the Geneva Conventions, and I hope they will always and everywhere make use of the various opportunities to influence, as government advisers and delegates, the people who direct policy affecting the diffusion of the Conventions, the necessity for revising them, their application which should always be strictly supervised, and I hope they will always see to it that the humanitarian principles are respected.

It goes without saying that an army medical service should be closely linked to the National Red Cross, Red Crescent or Red Lion and Sun Society of its country and I appeal to you—because I know this does not occur everywhere—to maintain these contacts and strengthen the links. It is also essential to establish good co-ordination even in time of peace between the military medical services and those civilian organizations responsible for the protection of the civilian population. There is no doubt that the personnel of the civil defence medical services should, like that of the medical services of all armies, be given the benefit of as effective as possible a protection to enable them to carry out their considerable task in favour of the victims of disaster and especially in the case of armed conflict. All-out war makes distinction in first aid and medical treatment for soldiers and civilians impossible. It strikes wide and deep the whole nation; it is a war in which the entire nation is involved.

One aim of the ICMMP Congress is to contribute indirectly to that amity among nations which is so desirable, through the relations which will surely be formed among officers who are privileged in the exercise of their noble art to serve loyally both their countries and the higher laws of humanity.

The duty incumbent on us all, medical officers of all countries, is to assist the distressed, the wounded and the sick irrespective of nationality, race or religion, and to work against war and for peace. None of us is a representative of one of the forces whose *raison d'être* is destruction, but of the medical service whose aim is to bind the wounds, to help and to heal. In this field there are no diplomatic fetters, no longer are there wages of success, frontiers which we are forbidden to cross, or mutual mistrust.

We discuss in an atmosphere of frankness, confidence and good will. On returning home, medical officers, through their direct influence on their comrades and superiors, have it in their power to promote the diffusion of the Conventions and contribute to limiting the evils of war. And they are also able to spread throughout the world the spirit of confidence not only in the interest of their own countries but in that of all mankind.

*

Allow me to turn back just a few pages of the fascinating history of the Red Cross which has, for more than one hundred years, led us to the problems and gloomy predictions of the present day. It is worthwhile our knowing that history better.

On 17 February 1863, four years after the battle of Solferino and one year after the publication of Henry Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino*, there met a private committee of Geneva citizens; they were General Guillaume-Henry Dufour, the legal expert Gustave Moynier, doctors Theodore Maunoir and Louis Appia and Henry Dunant himself. This Committee of Five organized in Geneva an international congress attended by 31 representatives of 16 countries, 21 of them doctors. That congress, under the profound impression left by Dunant's book, recommended the founding of voluntary relief societies and asked governments to grant protection and support to volunteers. It expressed the wish that in time of war belligerents recognize medical units as neutral, that is to say inviolable, and that that protection be extended to the medical personnel of armies, voluntary aids and the wounded themselves in the forces of both parties to a conflict, and, finally, that governments

DOCTORS AND THE RED CROSS

choose a single distinctive sign to identify all protected persons and property.

In 1864, the Swiss Federal Council, on a proposal by General Dufour, convened a Diplomatic Conference in Geneva. It was attended by 26 plenipotentiaries—eleven of them doctors—from 16 countries. It drew up the “ Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field ”, which was signed on 22 August of that year and ratified in the years to follow by almost every State in the world.

That First Geneva Convention gave effect to the recommendations of the 1863 Congress and stated the important principle which was decisive for the whole project; that the military wounded and sick should be collected and cared for irrespective of nationality. A sign was chosen to guarantee the protection and assistance thus conferred, it was the protective sign of the Red Cross on a white ground.

The Committee of Five set itself up on the first day as a permanent institution. It was the founder body of the Red Cross and the promoter of the Geneva Conventions. From 1880, onwards it took the name ICRC and to-day, under the direction of its ninth President, Mr. Marcel A. Naville, it comprises 21 members, nine of them legal experts, two doctors and one nurse.

We know Montesquieu’s phrase: “ The law of nations is based on the principle that nations should act for each other’s greatest benefit in peace and least possible harm in war.” And he added the words quoted by the eminent ICRC President Léopold Boissier on 15 September 1959 at the first International Refresher Course for Junior Medical Officers: “ If man must suffer, let him suffer as little as possible.” Such is the keystone of the Geneva Conventions. Medicine strives for the same objective. The ICRC owes much to doctors; several took part in its foundation and in the drawing up of these Conventions. By recognizing that principle and adhering thereto, the doctor of to-day will help in making them a universal obligation on all consciences as one of civilisation’s primary acquisitions.

Yes, it is true that the ICRC owes a great deal to doctors, but they too, like nurses and other medical personnel, owe much to the

ICRC, which endeavours to make it possible for them to give better assistance to the wounded and the sick. Nurses, like doctors, detest war because they too know its horrors and have seen at close quarters all the misery and distress it causes. The book " American Women of Nursery ", recounting the work of 180,000 female nurses of the American armed forces during the Second World War has the following dedication:

" This book is dedicated to nurses of all nations and colors who served in World War II in the hope that they may be the last generation of nurses required for such services."

We might repeat what General Dufour and Gustave Moynier affirmed at the opening session of the first Geneva Conference and which another outstanding ICRC President, Max Huber, summarized as follows 70 years later:

" The Red Cross can and must transmit the spirit of peace by which its members give an example of selfless assistance, by which the barriers separating classes, parties, races and nations are removed. For peace to be maintained, it is certainly not sufficient for a peace treaty to be signed: peace must take root in the hearts of men and women."

In the report which the ICRC submitted in 1963 to the Council of Delegates we may read:

" We have reached a turning point. Methods of warfare are such to-day that any attempt to limit them is in vain; only peace is a valid solution. The need for recourse to the peaceful solution of disputes has become to-day imperious and, in its own field, the Red Cross, by the decisions it reached at Prague in 1961 and by its role in the Cuba events, has shown the importance it attaches to the prevention of conflicts."

Since then armed conflicts have not ceased. The Red Cross carries out its mission and will continue to do so. It takes inspiration from the courage, confidence, faith and hope of its founders.

DOCTORS AND THE RED CROSS

Resolution No. X adopted by the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross at Vienna in 1965 “urges all governments to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in the spirit of international law”.

By helping the victims of armed conflicts, by demanding that they be protected, and by urging the respect by enemies of certain principles, the Red Cross strives with all its strength for ideas of fraternity and human tolerance. By doing so it introduces a spirit of peace which can help to diminish hate and violence and might contribute to the cessation of hostilities.

Recent resolutions of International Conferences required the Red Cross to work even more directly for peace. These resolutions recommend National Societies to take, as one of their natural duties, steps to diffuse among youth the ideals of peace, mutual respect and comprehension. They especially encourage the ICRC, in the discharge of its humanitarian mission, to undertake every effort necessary to prevent armed conflicts.

We doctors know especially well that prevention is better than cure. Henry Dunant knew it too and I have no doubt you will be pleased to learn of a little known and quite charming incident: the good Samaritan on the battle-field of Solferino, the founder of the Red Cross who, jointly with Frédéric Passy in 1901, was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize, was, on 8 August 1903, elected doctor of medicine *honoris causa* by the Heidelberg University Faculty of Medicine.

We must bear high the torch which lights the principles of medical ethics, the intangible laws of medical deontology—the Hippocratic oath and the Geneva Declaration—both in civilian and military life.

A feeling of solidarity, confidence, brotherhood and friendship, an indissoluble bond which, transcending their differences and peculiarities, unites men whose conception of life is the same, whose profession is identical and who have lived like experiences. We wish also to help our colleagues in the medical services of developing countries and who need our support. It is important to make these bonds ever closer and to see to it that this international co-operation among doctors is carried on remote from any political consideration.

DOCTORS AND THE RED CROSS

Medical officers can maintain cordial solidarity, despite any national antagonism, because they serve a true common ideal which teaches nations respect for human life.

The years go by and our generation will fade away. Our younger colleagues must set their hearts on accomplishing, in the future which awaits them, the duty of charity which is the medical mission.

In our suffering world, the Red Cross is a force for good, neutrality and solidarity, a means of understanding among the nations; it is a moral force and a symbol of unselfish aid without conditions throughout the world.

Beside its old motto *Inter arma caritas*, there is now a second one *Per humanitatem ad pacem*, and we know well that peace is the true final aim of the Red Cross ideal.

Hans MEULI
Member of the ICRC