

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

A TRACING SERVICE IN 1817

The review of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany recently published an interesting article by Dr. G. Gewecke, in which he draws attention to the existence as long ago as 1817 of what might be considered the precursor of the tracing services and set up by National Societies and the ICRC and which became so extensive during the two world wars.

This is a historical fact worthy of interest and it is for this reason that we summarize below the article in question, starting with a reference to the editor's preliminary note pointing out that Lieutenant Heinrich Meyer, who is mentioned below, had a fore-runner in the fourth century in the person of the Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus, who ordered enquiries to be made into the names of soldiers and civilians taken prisoner by the Germans.

A chance discovery in the records of the State of Lower Saxony showed that already in 1817 there was a tracing service. From 1807 to 1813 the Kingdom of Westphalia forcibly recruited regiments for service with the French army in Russia. Few soldiers returned home and in order to find out the fate of the missing, the Royal Government ordered Lt. Heinrich Meyer, of the Hanover battalion, to undertake enquiries on the spot. He went to Russia where the Imperial Government gave support and ordered all provincial governments to assist Lt. Meyer to accomplish his mission.

Heinrich Meyer examined hospital registers, official records, police documents and made other investigations. He delivered five lists of names to his government and elucidated the fate of 3,638 inhabitants of Hanover who never returned home. It is very likely that a much greater number disappeared in Russia in 1812 and 1813. The lists were printed and distributed to the authorities to enable families to consult them; they contained the name,

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Christian names, residence, army unit, rank, place of capture or death, known stay in Russia and the origin of the information obtained on each person.

Of the 3,638 missing, Meyer reported 3,191 dead, showing for example: " according to police report to the government, deceased at Goroditsche " or " according to the hospital registers, died at the Orel hospital ", or yet again, " died at Moglin, according to the records of the local army command ".

Some three hundred Hanover citizens enlisted in the Russian army, over a hundred settled in the country, where they married and carried on their trade. Meyer himself interviewed many former subjects of Hanover. Several had sworn allegiance to Russia and wished to remain in their new country; others planned to stay there for some time before returning home.

Meyer's fifth list included 1,040 soldiers' names; these he had gleaned from a careful examination of documents, and he grouped them together because it had not been possible to show exactly from which German province they originated. As can be seen, Lt. Heinrich Meyer accomplished a useful tracing service during his enquiries in the villages and towns through which the *Grande Armée* had passed.