

The birth and growth of a National Society

by H. Haug

The Swiss Red Cross has celebrated its centenary ; during the commemoration ceremony its Secretary-General, Mr. Haug, delivered the following paper at the 81st Ordinary Meeting of Delegates, in Zurich.¹

He outlined the development of the Swiss Red Cross, giving a detailed and precise analysis of the almost universal process of National Society growth. Tasks are gradually added to those assumed at the outset, others disappear ; the Society membership waxes and wanes. But the confidence of the public and of officialdom steadily grows and the National Society becomes an essential part of the community it is designed to serve. Its scope extends beyond the military sector to the civilian ; its ambit transcends frontiers as it extends its help to sister Societies. (Ed.).

Voluntary medical assistance

In conformity with the resolutions of 1863 and the Swiss policy of armed neutrality, our National Red Cross Society has from its very beginning considered support of the army medical service to be one of its primary tasks. First to assume this task was the *Société de secours aux militaires et leurs familles*, which was founded on July 17, 1866. Apart from training volunteer first-aid workers to tend the wounded and the sick, the Society also extended its help to the families of soldiers mobilized in war-time. It carried out its main social work during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71

¹ See *International Review*, July 1966.

and also rendered assistance to French troops interned in Switzerland. The Swiss Central Red Cross Society, which was founded on April 25, 1882, and replaced the *Société de Secours*, also planned to "promote the care of the sick in time of peace and of war", at the same time considering it its duty to render "first-aid in the event of accident".

During the years which followed, voluntary medical assistance was reinforced by the *Société suisse des troupes sanitaires*, created in 1880, and the *Alliance suisse des Samaritains*, founded in 1888. With a view to co-ordinating operations to assist the army medical service—in which operations the *Société d'utilité publique des femmes suisses* also participated, the three organizations mentioned associated with the Swiss Central Red Cross Society towards the end of the century, but each retained its autonomy. Subsequently a joint secretariat—the *Secretariat central suisse de l'aide sanitaire volontaire*—was set up. At about that time an officer of the army medical staff was appointed head of voluntary assistance services, with responsibility to ensure close co-operation between the army medical service and the Swiss Central Red Cross Society and its affiliated organizations.

These developments were officially confirmed by the "Federal decree relating to medical assistance to the armed forces", of June 25, 1903, according to which the Swiss Government recognized the Swiss Central Red Cross Society as representative of all societies and institutions devoted to voluntary medical aid and to the formation of nursing personnel. From that time on, the Federal Council was authorized to grant annual subsidies for the training of professional nursing personnel, for the institution of first-aid courses and for the storing of equipment for transport and hospital services. The Central Society's new tasks were laid down in the statutes of June 28, 1903, and again in greater detail in the statutes of July 12, 1914, in accordance with which the Swiss Central Red Cross Society took the title *Swiss Red Cross*. The whole foundation of today's Swiss Red Cross is contained in that statute: the regional sections which are active members of the general organization; auxiliary institutions which may be affiliated to the Red Cross; the central organization (the Meeting of Delegates, Administration, Central Committee, Commissions and Central Secretariat), and

the function—unique of its kind—of the “ head physician of the Red Cross ” as the “ head of medical relief ” was then styled.

It was during the First World War that this new organization proved its efficiency for the first time. It was then seen that all efforts were concentrated on helping the army medical service. Throughout the entire war, the Society undertook no activity as an independent institution; it was subject, with all its personnel and material resources, to control by the military. The chief physician of the Red Cross, appointed by the Federal Council, replaced the Society's civilian controlling bodies and he directed the Society according to instructions from the Army Command. This complete “ militarization ” of the Red Cross, which was not provided for in the Geneva Conventions, was fortunately attenuated by the fact that the head physician carried out his functions with great competence and humanity. Nevertheless, the “ Swiss Red Cross report on its war-time activities from 1914 to 1919 ” mentions that “ extreme militarisation of voluntary medical services, and hence of the Red Cross, even if limited to war-time, would not be an advantage for the development of our work ”.

Red Cross units and detachments during the First World War performed only a relatively restricted activity for the army medical service. On the other hand, Red Cross social work in favour of servicemen and their families was very extensive. Again during the influenza epidemic, 750 Red Cross nurses tended the sick; 69 of them paid with their lives for their dedication.

We shall see later on how help was given during this period to foreign war-disabled.

During the inter-war years, voluntary medical services were developed further. The number of teams and units was increased and, for the first time, motorized Red Cross transport units were formed, with female drivers. In addition, reserve medical stocks were increased and regional depots set up.

The 1914 statutes were still in force when the Second World War broke out. The Swiss Red Cross as a whole was therefore once more placed under military control, that is to say under the control of the head physician of the Red Cross. When it became apparent, in view of our country's neutrality, that the National Society would have to undertake large-scale relief actions both

within our country and abroad, the army command and the head physician themselves advocated revision of the medical service regulations and of the statutes governing the Swiss Red Cross. New regulations were introduced in 1942; the Swiss Red Cross then again became a civilian organization and its civilian activities were controlled by the association's civilian bodies. The Swiss Red Cross therefore had free rein to intervene widely for the benefit of the victims of a war which was becoming ever more closer to the extreme of total war. It became possible, not only to intensify civilian relief actions, but also to give additional help to the army medical service.

In the course of the Second World War, 13,000 female nurses, first-aid workers, drivers and girl guides—and 1,400 men liable for defence service duties, co-operated at one time or another in the military section of the Red Cross, particularly in military medical establishments. In addition, the head physician undertook to organize a blood transfusion service for the army. The Swiss Red Cross considerably increased its reserves of equipment and supplied linen and other articles of clothing to conscripted soldiers.

During the two decades following the end of the Second World War, the voluntary medical services were systematically developed. One important step in this direction was the "Federal Decree on the Swiss Red Cross" of June 13, 1951. This confirmed the obligations of the Swiss Red Cross towards the army medical service and voluntary medical assistance was considered as one of the Society's main tasks. In 1950, the Federal Council promulgated a decree concerning voluntary medical assistance and the organization of Red Cross units. This was the first complete set of regulations concerning Red Cross Services. The Swiss Red Cross Statutes of 1949 and 1963 lay down, once more, the functions of the head physician and his responsibilities in peace-time and in case of active service. These responsibilities are limited to the tasks which the Swiss Red Cross must assume with a view to assisting the army medical service.

"The Red Cross Service Ordinance" of May 18, 1962, which is still valid today, stipulates that the Swiss Red Cross shall organize units and ensure that they are available to the army for the care and transport of wounded and sick and for the operation of a blood

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transfusion service. Whilst the Red Cross army units consist of men liable for defence duties, the Red Cross detachments consist of women doctors, nurses, assistant nurses, first-aiders, girl guides, etc. By means of the Red Cross detachments, which are independent of the women's voluntary service, the National Society makes available to the army medical service all female nursing personnel enrolled on a voluntary basis; the Federal constitution makes no provision for compulsory service by women.

It should be mentioned that according to the ordinance concerning the Red Cross, the National Society, which must make detachments of properly trained persons available, is authorized to give directives on professional training in nursing schools which it recognizes and it must see to it that these directives are followed.

These provisions, which are to be found for the first time in a Federal Council decree of 1946 and which were repeated in the Federal Council's 1950 decree on voluntary medical services, bring us to the second very important task actively assumed by the Swiss Red Cross for a number of years.

Development of nursing care

Two imperious reasons have induced the Swiss Red Cross to give special attention to the training of professional nursing personnel, namely the obligation to make trained professional nurses available to the army medical service, on the one hand, and the absence of any Federal legislation on professional training of nursing personnel on the other. There have been several attempts at introducing such legislation but they did not achieve any result as it is generally held that the problem of nursing care is one which should be left to the cantonal authorities. The Swiss Red Cross intervened to make good this deficiency, for it was increasingly apparent that the introduction of an improved national regulation on the training of nursing personnel was a growing need. In addition, cantons could not take this task in hand unaided. The Society therefore acted in its capacity as a politically and religiously neutral institution capable of carrying out its task completely impartially and with an open mind.

Its first important step in the field of nursing was the setting up in 1899 of a nursing school at the "Lindenhof" private hospital

in Berne; this was the first non-sectarian Swiss institution for the training of nurses without religious affiliations. Both the school and the hospital have continued to expand from that time.

After the entry into force of the Federal Decree of 1903 on voluntary medical assistance and its relevant administrative ruling, the National Society was entrusted with sharing out the Federal subsidy among all the associations and institutions concerned with nursing personnel training. As this subsidy is only granted to institutions which undertake to make two-thirds of their personnel available for voluntary medical assistance and which guarantee to provide adequate practical and theoretical training, the Red Cross was obliged to exercise control over these training centres and to assess the services they render. The Swiss Red Cross henceforth had to approve nursing schools. This recognition is not granted merely on the basis of the schools' contribution to voluntary medical services and the granting of the Federal subsidy; it also implies an acceptable standard in the life of the community.

In 1923, the Society agreed to sponsor the Protestant school of nursing, "La Source"; this had been founded in 1859 and had been open to nurses of every religion. It was renamed "Ecole romande de gardes-malades de la Croix-Rouge suisse".

It was in 1924 that the first directives were given on the training of professional nurses. In the course of time, the number of recognized schools continued to grow: there were twelve at the beginning of the Second World War. However, it was during the war years that giant strides were taken in nursing activities. In 1944, the Swiss Red Cross set up the Nursing Commission to which was accredited a new body, the Nurses Central Secretariat. The Swiss nursing association, the result of the amalgamation of the two professional associations, became affiliated to the National Society as an auxiliary institution. In 1950, the Red Cross school of advanced nursing was created and organized regular courses in Zurich and Lausanne.

Developments were both of a legal and a practical nature. The Federal Council Decrees of 1946, 1950 and 1962 concerning voluntary medical assistance authorized the Red Cross to issue directives concerning professional training in the schools it had recognized, to supervise the training of nursing candidates and to

hold a watching brief during examinations for diplomas. However, the National Society's activity in the field of nursing went far beyond Red Cross service, a fact legally recognized for the first time in the Federal Decree concerning the Swiss Red Cross of 1951. This laid down that apart from voluntary medical assistance (Red Cross service) one of the main tasks was "the development of professional nursing and supervision of training in schools recognized by the Swiss Red Cross".

Today there are 35 general nursing schools turning out pupils in accordance with Red Cross directives and thus entitled to "recognition". Some 11,000 female and male nurses from these schools are at present employed for the care of the sick. In accordance with a Federal decree of September 24, 1962, these schools receive an annual subsidy; the amount depends on the number of diplomas awarded and is separate from the subsidy granted for making personnel available to the Red Cross.

The Swiss Conference of heads of medical services also appreciates the work done in the field of nursing. This it proved in 1960 when it decided to entrust to the Red Cross the framing of regulations and the supervision of training in the schools for assistant nurses for medico-social institutions (elderly persons and the chronically sick), medical laboratory assistants and maternity and child welfare nurses. The National Society will probably be entrusted with the control of training of male and female nurses in psychiatric care and it has good reason to hope that, as it proposed, the cantons grant it annually, from 1967 onwards, an important over-all contribution to enable it not only to pursue but also to enlarge its activity to promote nursing in certain sectors.

Blood transfusion service

This important service originated from the Society's co-operation with the army medical service. During the Second World War, when blood transfusion began to play a very important rôle in the medical services of the belligerents, the Swiss Red Cross participated in the founding of such a service for military needs. The idea later developed to organize a national blood transfusion service for the benefit of the army and the civilian population. This new institution, as in the past, was based on the principle of the free

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donation of blood. In terms of the Red Cross ideal, this is an act of solidarity by a person in good health for the benefit of his sick and generally anonymous neighbour. However, the Red Cross blood transfusion service was not limited to supplying reserves of fresh blood and to recruiting donors for hospitals and the medical service. It has also to apply all the new scientific and technical innovations in hematology and in the preparation and preservation of blood products. The fact that donors give their blood freely implies the obligation to supply the blood and its derivatives on a non-profit-making basis.

Since it was started in the years 1948-1949, the blood transfusion service has become a wide scale medico-social undertaking. It includes the regional organization (which today consists of no less than 55 centres) and the central laboratory in Berne. The Red Cross has undertaken the supply of the army medical service with blood products which can be preserved such as dried plasma and blood substitutes; it has also undertaken to ensure the continual renewal of the reserve stocks for war. The preparation of the products required by the army is for the most part carried on in underground establishments belonging to the government but operated by the Red Cross, which also obtains the necessary blood. In conformity with a Federal Council decree of November 13, 1953, the central laboratory has also the obligation to determine blood groups and rhesus factors of all Swiss conscripts.

Another feature of our blood transfusion service is that it is closely attached to the Red Cross organization. The third important task for our institution under the Federal decree of 1951 is to maintain a blood transfusion service for military and civilian needs. The National Society is responsible for operating this blood transfusion service. It was, in fact, decided not to set up an autonomous organization having its own legal personality. Similarly, the regional transfusion centres are connected to the Swiss Red Cross; they in fact depend on the local sections which, together with the "Samaritan" sections, participate in the organization of mobile teams for the collection of blood donations.

The close ties between the blood transfusion service and the Red Cross, which should in particular guarantee the maintenance of the humanitarian ideal within an organization which grows

unceasingly, has not by any means hindered the development of the other specific activity of our blood transfusion service, that is to say, scientific research. The Red Cross has shown itself perspicacious and generous in its encouragement of this activity. The research work carried on today by the central laboratory, in co-operation with the University of Berne and several clinics in that town, and with financial assistance from the Swiss National Fund for scientific and industrial research in the private sector, is particularly productive. There is no doubt that these contacts with the country's scientific circles and with the work carried on by the central laboratory in this field make the greatest contribution to the increasing renown of the blood transfusion service in specialized circles in Switzerland and abroad.

“ Samaritan ” organization and rescue work

The Swiss Red Cross has always co-operated with the “ Samaritan ” sections of the “ Alliance Suisse des Samaritains ”, created in 1888 to promote voluntary medical assistance and the dissemination, in time of peace, of instruction in first aid and home nursing. The first agreement between the two associations was signed in 1893. It is in the 1914 Red Cross Statutes that the term “ auxiliary institution ” can be found for the first time; it is a term which covers associations whose activities are similar to those of the Red Cross and which are affiliated to it whilst retaining their autonomy. This is the case for the “ Alliance Suisse des Samaritains ” on whose co-operation the Red Cross can always count. In addition, the Red Cross has supported and continues to support the wide activity of the “ Alliance ” which, like the other auxiliary institutions, is entitled to display the red cross emblem.

In this connection we would mention the existence of the typically Swiss “ auxiliary institutions ” which in general have stood the test of experience and this type of organization continues to develop in keeping with the necessities of the times. Indeed, it enables independent associations to extend their action to particular fields in agreement with the National Red Cross and taking their inspiration from the same principles. At the present time, there are six auxiliary institutions (Swiss Society of Medical Troops, “ Alliance Suisse des Samaritains ”, Swiss Nursing Association, Association

of Swiss Establishments for the Sick, Swiss Rescue Society and Swiss Air Rescue Corps) whose existence especially avoids a cumbersome centralization of tasks and activities in a single organization of unmanageable proportions.

Civil Defence

Proceeding from voluntary medical assistance, nursing, blood transfusion and first-aid, is a further important task for the Red Cross, namely participation in measures taken by the authorities to ensure protection and assistance to the civilian population in the event of war. This task was born from the increasing danger with which modern warfare threatens civilian populations and it is within the scope of the first mission of the Red Cross, namely assistance to the victims of war. These measures are based on international public law since the introduction of the Geneva Conventions relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war.

Before this new task could be included in the statutes and put into effect, it was necessary for the protection of the civil population in time of war to be recognized in federal law as a national task forming part and parcel of the country's defence. In 1953, the assembly of Swiss Red Cross delegates voted a resolution according to which they recommended a federal law on civilian protection and declared that the Red Cross was prepared to co-operate in that protection. In the course of the years which followed, the Red Cross participated in the legal and public relations aspect of civil defence preparation. In 1959, the electors and the cantonal authorities accepted an article in the constitution and a federal law on civil defence entered into force in 1963. This was followed, a year later, by a federal law on constitutional work for civil defence.

In 1963, the Swiss Red Cross totally revised its statutes in order to include therein protection and assistance to civilian war victims as one of its tasks. According to the definition adopted by the Federal Council, the Swiss Red Cross should, in time of peace, "co-operate in informing the population on the dangers in which they may be involved and the means of protection; training of Red Cross personnel for work with the medical service of the Civil Defence Organization and with civilian hospitals; the supply of

equipment". In the event of the army being on active service, the Red Cross ensures the transport of wounded and sick, nursing care, blood transfusion; these are measures designed to supplement the army medical service in co-operation with the Civil Defence Organization and the civilian hospitals. In other words, the mission of the Red Cross in the medical field exceeds its work as an auxiliary to the army medical service to include the civilian population; its medical service must be fully organized to cope with the demands of modern warfare.

This important task does not merely entail providing the army medical service, Civil Defence and civilian hospitals with already existing reserves of personnel and equipment: it implies an appreciable increase in available means, that is to say, greater strength in personnel, equipment and also blood products. Only efforts on a greater scale will make it possible to supply the army and Civil Defence with the assistance they are entitled to expect from the Red Cross. So far, the Red Cross has only devoted a minor part of its resources to protection for the civilian population in time of war. Stress must still be laid on training auxiliary nursing personnel and further developing the blood transfusion service. Training of the numerous first-aiders and "Samaritans" is a task incumbent on the "Alliance Suisse des Samaritains". This programme will require ten to twenty years for completion.

Junior Red Cross, courses, social work, assistance in disaster

The Junior Red Cross, which was introduced in our country following on a resolution of the meeting of delegates in 1949, first met with a number of difficulties for several reasons; schooling is not uniform throughout the country, teachers are required to give their time in other fields and there were already many youth groups and movements. However, in the course of the last few years, the Junior Red Cross has begun to take solid footing. Several projects are likely to meet with enthusiasm from youth; such as the "Casa Henry Dunant" at Varazze and the "coach for the disabled", the training of first-aiders and life savers. Support must be given to the efforts of the Junior Red Cross which has the function of recruiting adolescents to the Red Cross cause and thereby ensuring our Society's future. At the same time it awakens those humane

qualities which will be ever more necessary in our world which is governed by technology.

As for courses in home nursing, maternity and child welfare, and training of Red Cross nursing auxiliaries, these have developed in encouraging fashion. These courses meet a genuine need and through them the Red Cross reaches all sections of the population.

With regard to social activities, the assistance given by voluntary Red Cross workers and professional occupational therapists to the aged and the disabled is extremely useful. Mention should also be made of the assistance given to indigent Swiss families (e.g. provision of free beds) and also of relief work in disasters, which also includes minor interventions, after fire, for example, as well as large-scale actions following avalanches or flooding.

International mutual assistance

This task may be considered in part as a consequence of the country's policy of neutrality and solidarity.

The first relief work abroad by the Swiss Red Cross was during the Boer War; this was followed by work during the war in the Balkans and then during the catastrophe at Messina. But it was not until the First World War and the years which followed that our Society carried out any large-scale activity outside our own frontiers on behalf of the victims of war. At the Federal Council's request, it organized rail transport 300 times, either for the exchange of wounded or sick prisoners between belligerents, or to bring to our country wounded prisoners who had to be interned here. More than 80,000 persons from various countries benefited from these transport arrangements. After the war, our Society provided relief to needy civilian populations, particularly to the inhabitants of famine-stricken Vienna.

Towards 1930, in response to an appeal from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Swiss National Society organized assistance programmes for the benefit of the victims of the Italo-Abyssinian War and of the Spanish Civil War. A fleet of coaches evacuated 2,500 women, children and elderly people from Madrid.

During the Second World War, the Swiss National Society's action was on an even greater scale. In Switzerland itself it helped the authorities responsible for looking after interned troops and

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civilian refugees, and it organized exchanges and repatriations through Switzerland. It also played an active part in arranging for tuberculous cases to go to hospital and for the accommodation of adolescents and disabled soldiers. The "Secours aux enfants" which attended to the placing of child victims of the war in Swiss homes grew rapidly. By the end of 1948, it had arranged accommodation for more than 150,000 children.

Assistance outside Switzerland extended to 21 countries; beneficiaries were both military and civilian. In a number of countries the "Secours aux enfants" set up delegations which, apart from selecting the children to be sent to Switzerland, distributed foodstuffs and clothing, medical assistance, and undertook the maintenance of homes.

Since the end of the war, the Swiss Red Cross has unceasingly provided help for people in other countries. Actions in favour of war victims are generally conducted in co-operation with the ICRC. In addition there are the relief campaigns undertaken by the League of Red Cross Societies for the benefit of refugees and the victims of natural disasters. It is thanks to the constant support given by the population and the authorities that the National Society is able to carry out these activities.

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