

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The International Committee's action in the Near East

Last month the *International Review* gave a general and day-by-day account of the ICRC's action in the Near East. This report went only as far as the end of June, in order to meet the deadline for publication, and we now continue our report.

To start off, some daily news items are given to outline the main aspects of the action as it developed throughout July 1967.

June 28.—*On June 28, 139 children, with 3 mothers and 3 aged persons, all called for by their families in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon, were taken to the Allenby bridge at Jericho. They had come from Ortas near Bethlehem and from two schools in Jerusalem.*

The Magen David Adom arranged their transport in 8 ambulances. Dr. Hans Bernath, doctor-delegate of the ICRC, accompanied the column across the desert.

It should be recalled that on June 22, 30 Jordanian children, separated from their families, were repatriated by ICRC aircraft from Tel Aviv to Amman.

June 30.—*On June 30, General Moshe Dayan, Israeli Minister of Defence, received Mr. Pierre Gaillard, delegate general of the ICRC in the Near East, as well as Mr. Laurent Marti and Mr. Pierre Boissier, delegates in Israel.*

He expressed satisfaction to them over the first repatriation of

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

prisoners of war with Jordan and hoped that further repatriations would follow shortly.

The ICRC will be able to organize the rapid routing of family messages. Its delegates will collect them in areas under Israeli control and transmit them to the Arab countries. Individual inquiries will also be able to be made in those regions.

In addition, the ICRC delegates will be given free access to this same territory in order to fulfil their humanitarian mission.

The ICRC has therefore set up three sub-delegations. The first of these is at Gaza with residence at Ashkelon (twenty minutes by car from Gaza) and not in Gaza itself, where accommodation is unobtainable and a curfew is still imposed. From there, the delegates can easily go to the Gaza-El Arish area. The second, in West Jordan, is in Jerusalem and the third in occupied Syrian territory with a delegate at Kuneitra. Delegates on mission in these three zones will have an Arab-speaking officer.

July 1.—Mr. Pierre Boissier, ICRC delegate, went to the Gaza strip at the beginning of July and had meetings there with the Israeli General Moshe Goren, Area Commander, Lt. Col. Moda'el, commander of Gaza town, and Mr. Alexander Squadrelli in charge of UNRWA work in the area, and many other military and civilian personalities.

He was able to observe that there are no more prisoners of war in the Gaza area, nor interned civilians within the meaning of the Fourth Geneva Convention. There are at present only some hundred persons at liberty under army surveillance.

Hospitals in the area had previously been visited by Dr. Jean-Maurice Rübli and Dr. Edouard Leuthold. Since June 16, some twenty Egyptian doctors, who had been temporarily taken to Israel, have now returned to their posts. No exodus of the civil population has taken place in the area.

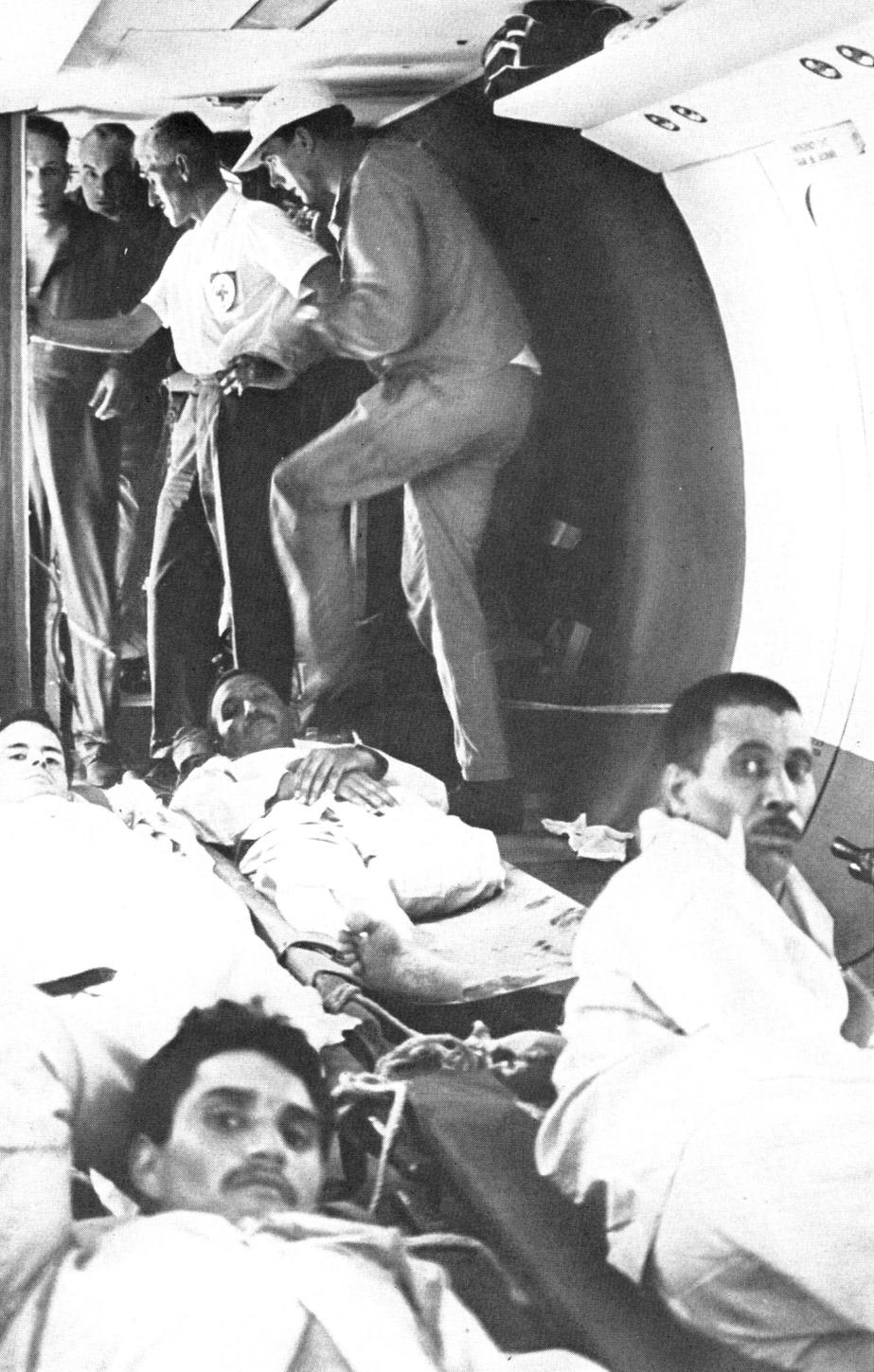
UNRWA is dealing with 315,000 Palestinian refugees. Two hundred thousand of these are in camps where they have free movement. These camps comprise infirmaries, schools and distribution centres.

115,000 Palestinian refugees are living outside the camps, notably in the town of Gaza.



19 young girls from Bethlehem crossing the Allenby bridge to rejoin their parents in Jordan. They are accompanied by ICRC delegates.

Photo



At Tel-Aviv airport, the ICRC general delegate in the Near East supervises the embarkation aboard the Red Cross plane of wounded Jordanian prisoners...

Photos Jean Mohr



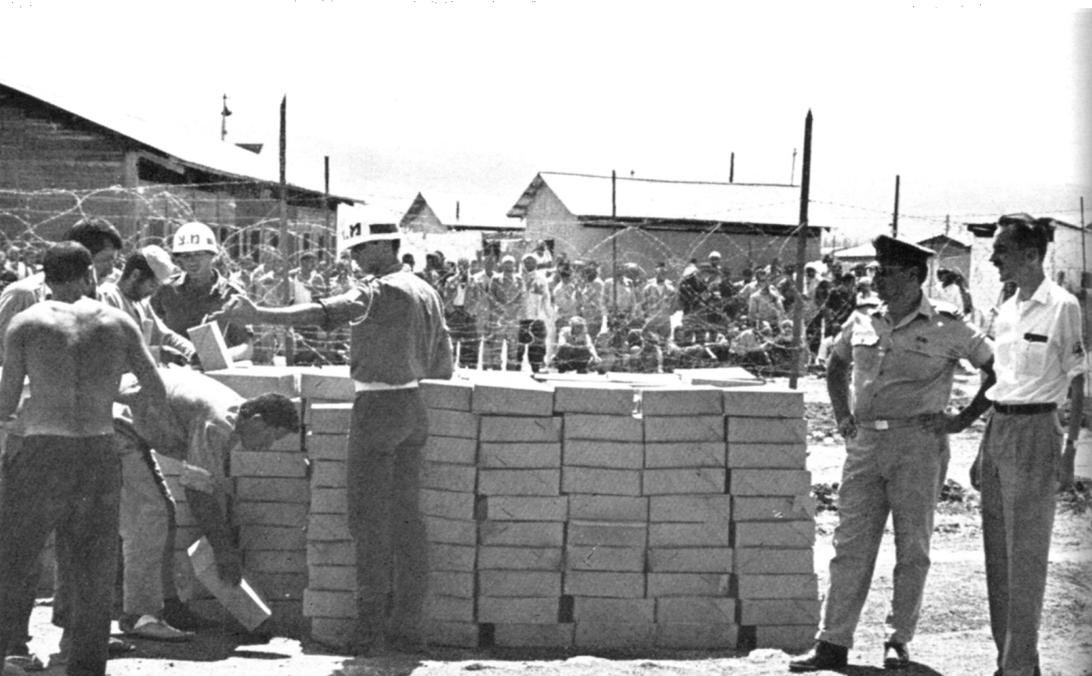
... who were flown to Amman, where they were taken care of by the Jordan Red Crescent.



In Atlith Camp, an ICRC delegate talks to a group of Egyptian POW's...

Photos Jean Mohr

... and supervises distribution of relief parcels from the U.A.R.



The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip (excluding refugees) number about 100,000, some of whom have families in the UAR. The ICRC delegate supplied 1,500 civilian message forms, which had been distributed to them by the Israeli army and UNRWA. These forms will subsequently be forwarded to the ICRC delegation in Cairo, which will then transmit them to the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva.

July 2.—*Following an agreement between Israel and Jordan concluded through the ICRC, 425 Jordanian prisoners of war were able to be repatriated on June 27. With these were 3 Iraqi civilians.*

This agreement, on Red Cross headed note-paper, has been the only one so far to have been signed jointly by those two governments.

Immediately after the signing, ICRC delegates Mr. Laurent Marti, Mr. Gotthard Jakob and Dr. Edouard Leuthold went to Atlith camp to inform the Jordanian detainees of their imminent repatriation. Dr. Leuthold, after having examined the wounded in a condition to leave, assured those more seriously stricken that they would be repatriated, under ICRC supervision, when their state of health permitted. This applies to about 23 Jordanians of whom 22 were able to leave Tel Aviv on July 3 by ICRC aircraft on two direct flights to Amman. They were accompanied by Dr. Werner Bärtschi, ICRC doctor-delegate.

The road convoy repatriating the 425 wounded prisoners, consisting of 9 motor buses, with an ICRC car in front, was escorted by military vehicles. Shortly before reaching Jerusalem a vehicle of the Magen David Adom joined the column.

Allenby Bridge having been destroyed, to cross the river Jordan it is now necessary to descend steep slopes, cross a footbridge of planks and climb the opposite bank. The Red Cross flag flew midway on the footbridge. The first to cross the Jordan were two Israeli pilots who had come from Amman. They were immediately flown by helicopter to Jerusalem. In the opposite direction 3 members of the former Iraqi Consulate in the old City of Jerusalem (visited the day before by an ICRC delegate in Ramleh Prison) crossed first, then 27 officers, followed by 24 wounded, supported by the delegates, whose crossing of the river was extremely difficult because of their condition. Finally, 384 other ranks crossed the improvised bridge.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

July 11.—*The delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria, in close co-operation with the Syrian authorities and Red Crescent, are successfully continuing to distribute Red Cross relief to refugees and displaced persons in that country.*

These refugees number about 100,000, of whom 16,000 "former refugees" are dependent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

On July 9, 10 and 11, the Syrian authorities distributed in the presence of ICRC and Syrian Red Crescent delegates, 10,000 blankets, 10 tons of flour, 21 tons of dates and 112 tents. In the refugee camp at Deraa milk is at present being distributed to 5,000 persons. These distributions will be still further increased in the next few weeks.

In order to discover for themselves the needs of refugees in Syria and whether relief distributions are running smoothly the ICRC delegates have made 36 visits to camps since June 15.

July 12.—*In agreement with the Israeli Government, the ICRC will co-operate in repatriating refugees who wish to return to the west bank of the Jordan.*

Repatriation arrangements will be discussed by ICRC delegates and representatives of the governments concerned. Two ICRC delegates in Israel will sit on a commission which has been formed to consider ways and means of solving the problems arising from the movement of returning refugees and those who still wish to leave territory under Israeli control. To speed arrangements, the ICRC has proposed a meeting on the banks of the Jordan of its delegates and representatives of Israel and Jordan.

By the end of July, the ICRC had thirty-two delegates distributed over six different countries, including Libya. The Central Tracing Agency in Geneva had received nominal rolls of nearly 5,800 prisoners of war and had opened more than two thousand inquiries to which about five hundred positive replies had already been given. About a hundred thousand civilian messages had been handed to the ICRC delegates and transmitted from Jordan to Israel. Thousands of civilian messages had, in addition, passed via Geneva.

As regards relief, the *International Review* mentioned in its previous issue that the ICRC immediately took steps to bring aid to the victims and that three days after the outbreak of the conflict, one aircraft marked with the red cross emblem flew from Geneva carrying six tons of relief supplies. The action became intensified with the despatch of other aircraft which has resulted in a considerable tonnage of relief sent by air to the Near East. The ICRC has also made use of sea transport. For the first time, on July 3 and 5, supplies left Marseilles for Beyrouth. These consisted chiefly of food, tents and blankets for distribution according to need. Subsequently, on July 12 and 15, two further transports took place by sea. As an illustration of this it should be pointed out that at the end of July the ICRC had received nearly three million Swiss francs in cash and that relief in kind valued at several million francs passed in transit through Geneva and announced to the ICRC for administering and distributing under the responsibility of its representatives.

We shall now come to the victims themselves and it can be seen that wounded prisoners of war have for the most part been repatriated.¹ The ICRC has been able, in addition to these operations, some of which were carried out by means of Red Cross aircraft (on July 20, wounded Egyptian prisoners of war were flown in two flights from Tel Aviv to Cairo), to arrange the transporting of wounded to other countries. This was the case for seventeen wounded Syrians whom the French Government had offered to hospitalize and which took place on July 22 in the ICRC aircraft.

A certain number of exchanges of prisoners of war took place after negotiation by the delegates of the ICRC. On July 17, to quote only one example, the delegates in Israel and Syria gave their support in the exchange of Syrian and Israeli prisoners. The representatives of the ICRC also visited camps in which prisoners are detained, sometimes even on two occasions.² They observed that, generally

¹ *Plate*.—At Tel Aviv airport, Pierre Gaillard, ICRC delegate general in the Near East, supervised the embarkation aboard the Red Cross plane of wounded Jordanians who were flown to Amman, where they were taken care of by the Jordan Red Crescent.

² *Plate*.—In Ailith camp, the ICRC delegate, Pierre Boissier, talks to a group of Egyptians POW's and supervises distribution of relief parcels from the UAR.

speaking, the Geneva Conventions are respected and that the exchange of mail between prisoners and their families is continuing.

The civilian problem is of vast proportions. For, if one has to intervene in order to aid the reuniting of families, of which such large numbers were dispersed¹, to undertake searches and transmit messages, it appeared essential in order to help refugees first of all to make a distinction between former and new refugees. In fact, in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Gaza, there have been living, ever since the 1948 hostilities, refugees in the charge of UNRWA, a specialized agency of the United Nations. The ICRC, however, concerns itself with refugees who have left their homes since the recent conflict in the Near East. It therefore undertakes a large part of the distribution of relief for new refugees in Syria who number more than a hundred thousand. Since July 8, the League of Red Cross Societies has assumed the charge of relief action for refugees in Jordan, in accordance with the general plan for the division of responsibilities established between the League and the ICRC.²

In conclusion, we would mention that Mr. Samuel Alexandre Gonard, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, accompanied by Mr. Pierre Gaillard, delegate general, and Mr. Pierre Basset, Assistant Director of the ICRC, has returned from the Near East where he examined the work accomplished in that region by the ICRC delegations.

In the course of his mission he contacted governments, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Israeli Society "Magen David Adom".

This tour enabled the ICRC President to take up with the authorities in the five countries concerned the main problems involved in helping the wounded, the prisoners of war, and the civilian victims of the conflict, such as the Jordanian refugees to be repatriated.

The ICRC President went to the United Arab Republic, Israel, Jordan, the Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus, where the ICRC general delegation for the Near East is established in Nicosia.

¹ *Plate.*—19 young girls from Bethlehem crossing the Allenby Bridge to rejoin their parents in Jordan. They are accompanied by ICRC delegates.

² See *International Review*, July 1967.

In order to see for himself the practical problems facing the ICRC, Mr. Gonard went to the Gaza Strip, the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan, Jerusalem and Kuneitra. In Jordan he visited a camp of refugees from West of the Jordan.

Mr. Gonard called at the sub-delegations set up by the ICRC on territories controlled by the Israelis.

In Syria, where the ICRC, the Red Crescent and the Syrian Government are conducting a large-scale operation for the benefit of the 105,000 refugees from Israeli-occupied territory, he inspected a camp near Damascus and the ICRC stores in the town.

The ICRC President also studied the problem of co-ordinating the various relief actions in the Middle East, particularly in the course of discussions with the UNRWA Director-General in Beyrouth and U Thant's special envoy to the Middle East.

In every country which he visited in the course of his voyage, Mr. Gonard was warmly welcomed by the authorities and the National Societies.