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**SUPPLEMENT**

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# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## **What is the Italian Section of the Central Prisoners of War Agency doing today ?**

It may seem surprising that, ten years after the close of hostilities, the Italian Section of the Central Prisoners of War Agency should still be engaged on important work.

The task is not, of course, as spectacular, as that assumed by this Section during the last World War, when it had to give encouragement and help to hundreds of thousands of families seeking for information concerning combatants who had ceased to give news, and at the same time to establish and maintain the link between prisoners and their relatives.

Although less striking, in regard to the number of cases dealt with, the work pursued by the Italian Section is, nevertheless, of unquestionable utility. The Italian authorities, that is to say the Ministry of Defence and the Interministerial Commission dealing with the issue of death certificates, have constant recourse to the Italian Section in order to identify numerous Italian deceased persons ; combatants who fell on the battlefield or died in captivity, or interned and deported civilians who died while under detention, whose names are known to the Italian Government, either from lists established by the Detaining Powers in war-time, from particulars supplied by repatriated prisoners, or again—as regards Germany in particular—from information found in the records of the prisoner of war or concentration camps.

The information concerning the identification of deceased

persons is usually incomplete and often erroneous. Family addresses and places of birth are missing and family names are mis-spelt. In regard, more particularly, to combatants fallen on the battlefield, their identity particulars had often been hurriedly noted by the enemy troops, with a lack of accuracy which may well be imagined.

How does the Italian Section proceed, when endeavouring to establish the identity of deceased persons? A few examples will illustrate the method employed.

Let us take the case of a soldier, recorded under the name of

DELL DEA DELFINO (born 1918),

whose death in Germany (in 1944) was notified to the Italian authorities, without any particulars of the deceased's place of birth or home address.

*Dell Dea* cannot be an Italian surname. It has therefore been mis-spelt, and the correct name must be sought. Many Italian surnames are preceded by the particle *Del* which corresponds to *Du*. Placed before a vowel, *Del* becomes *Dell'*. The fourth letter of the name must therefore be a vowel and not the consonant *D*. The vowel which is the most similar in form to *D* is *O*, and by substituting *O*, the name is partially reconstituted and becomes *Dell'O*.

However, the right name cannot be *Dell'Oea*. Let us try once more by changing the letter *E* into a consonant; it may be *C*, badly written, which leads us to the Italian surname *Dell'Oca*.

A search among the *Dell'Oca* in the Italian card-index brings to light:

DELL'OCA DELFINO (born November 13, 1918),

prisoner of war in Germany, in an area near the place where *Dell Dea Delfino* died; the place of birth and family address are indicated.

Enquiries will be opened by the Italian authorities to ascertain if the particulars concern the same person, and, if this is the case, an official death certificate will be established.

Let us take another case; that of a combatant listed under the name of

BALBURESA Luigi (born 1923),

who also died in Germany during the war.

As *Balburesa* is not an Italian surname, we must start once again by substituting letters. The first search, based on the root *Balbu*, having led to no result, it must be presumed from the start that the first letter of the name is wrong, and should be replaced by another consonant. After several fruitless efforts, based on the first consonants of the alphabet, the letter *G* gives us *Galbu...* and a final search in the card-index brings forth (the two final consonants having been transposed)

GALBUSERA Luigi (born January 29, 1923)

who, following further enquiries, is found to be the combatant in question, whose death had already been notified.

It may well be imagined that these searches—in a card index containing over six million cards—can be arduous. This laborious task calls for infinite patience, a close acquaintance with Italian names, personal intuition and, of course, a knowledge of languages and geography.

For instance, a Greek national asks for a search to be made for an Italian soldier named

KAPOTSILI CRISTO, home address "Riboboto" Italy.

The letter *K* does not exist in Italian and corresponds to the letter *C*; but *Capotsili* could not be an Italian surname, especially on account of the termination *tsili*. What could the name "Kapotsili", thus written by a Greek, be in reality? The best course is to repeat the name aloud, in order to find some pronunciation similar to an Italian name, starting with

*Kapotsili,*

*Capocilli,*

*Capucilli,*

until one arrives at

CAPPUCCILI CRESCENZO (not Cristo), born in Ripabottoni,  
(not "Riboboto").

For this tracing to be carried out with success, the Italian Section has, fortunately, an extensive card-index at its disposal, which contains, carefully filed, not only the official information supplied by the Detaining Powers and the capture cards made out by the prisoners themselves, but also all requests for news received from families, and cards bearing information based on messages from prisoners or civilian internees, transmitted through the Agency.

After its extensive labour during the war years, the Italian Section is now able to proceed with a patient and careful study of certain cases of doubtful identity contained in its card-index. A case recently elucidated concerned a soldier named

EMICIS FIERRO (killed in action in July 1943),

whose date of birth, home address and other identity particulars had been taken by the enemy troops from papers found on the deceased. It was stated, in the official notification of death, that the deceased had been buried with his identity disc.

As *Emicis* is not an Italian surname, and no alteration of the name made it possible to establish the correct surname, a search was made on the basis of the first name *Fierro*, as a surname. Among the series of *Fierro* (surname) there emerged

FIERRO EMIDIO (not *Emicis*),

whose identity particulars corresponded, on all points, with those of the deceased. Curiously enough, however, *Fierro Emidio* had been captured the day before "*Emicis Fierro*" was killed in action, and near the village where the latter was buried.

It was therefore logical to presume that the death of an unknown person had been notified under a false identity based on papers found on the body. It was very probably the result, as in other similar cases, of the exchange of army tunics between two combatants, in the heat of the battle. The exhumation and examination of the remains of the former prisoner of war *Fierro Emidio* will perhaps lead to the identification of the unknown deceased person.

The work of the Italian Section is not, however, exclusively devoted to the identification of deceased military personnel and civilian internees. It has also to give effect to all requests for certificates of captivity emanating from former Italian prisoners of war, and former Libyan combatants who fought with the Italian colonial forces and were captured by the Allies.

In view of the anxiety felt by numerous Italian families, the Section also institutes enquiries concerning Italian combatants missing on the Eastern Front.

A recent conflict—the war in Indo-China—gave rise to a great flow of requests for news concerning Italian Legionaries, reported missing or presumed to be prisoners. Although hostilities have ceased, the families of the missing men continue to appeal to the Central Prisoners of War Agency, and ask that every possible step should be taken to throw light on their relatives' fate.

During the last World War, the Italian Section was a buzzing hive of activity, with a staff of 158, working with a will among the rattle of typewriters. Today the Section consists of a small team which carries out the task allotted to it in the same spirit, fortified in its daily effort by the feeling that it is giving useful service to so many war victims, such numbers of anxious relatives.

*M. K.*

## NEW WORK FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE :

### THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

The Federal Chancellor, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the British Ambassador and 7 other representatives of powers with an interest in the future of the International Tracing Service have today signed in Bonn Agreements transferring the responsibility for the administration of the International Tracing Service in Arolsen to the International Committee of the Red Cross for an initial period of 5 years.

Under these Agreements the International Committee of the Red Cross will be responsible for the direction and administration of the Service and for the safeguarding of its archives, and will appoint a Swiss National as Director.

One Agreement between the three former Occupying Powers and the Federal Republic of Germany formalises the transfer of administrative responsibility from the Allied High Commission to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Under this Agreement, which is based on the Convention on the Settlement of Matters arising out of the War and the Occupation, the Federal Government of Germany undertakes to finance the Service.

A further Agreement concluded between the Governments of 9 interested Powers sets up an International Commission which has the duty of ensuring coordination between these Governments on matters relating to the International Tracing

Service and of providing policy directives. Signatories to this Agreement are the Governments of Belgium, France, Federal Germany, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Secretary General of Western European Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross are also associated with the Commission.

A further Agreement regulates the relations between the Commission and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The International Tracing Service (I.T.S.) was created in 1945 for the purpose of locating the millions of civilians who had either been incarcerated in concentration camps in Germany during the Nazi period, or who had been forcibly transported to Germany during the war. ITS was initially administered by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and later taken over by the International Refugee Organisation. The Allied High Commission assumed responsibility for it on April 1, 1951.

The International Tracing Service today receives some 10,000 inquiries a month and issues approximately twice as many reports and certificates every month. In its initial phases ITS was primarily a Tracing Service but in recent years it has been issuing an increasing number of certificates for persons who, as victims of Nazi persecution, are eligible for indemnification from the Federal Republic of Germany.

These activities will now be carried on by the International Committee of the Red Cross, operating in accordance with its recognised principles of impartiality and neutrality.

Any of the signatory Powers and others which may later be represented on the International Commission may maintain liaison offices in Arolsen, to look after their special interests. Belgian, French, Italian, Luxembourg and Netherlands Missions have existed in Arolsen for some time; the State of Israel has opened a liaison mission since May 5 when the Agreements are deemed to have entered into force.

Before the expiry of the Agreement, the Governments concerned will discuss their continuation or amendment.

Among other questions to be discussed will be that of the location of the archives, whether they should remain in Arolsen or be transferred to the seat of the International Committee of the Red Cross or to any other place.

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## The Work of the Central Prisoners of War Agency in 1954

### GENERAL REMARKS

In 1954 the International Committee's investigations concerning war victims necessitated an exchange of correspondence amounting to 152,161 letters, telegrams and other documents. Photostat copies were made of 7,000 items (certificates of births, marriages and deaths, lists, etc.). The greater part of the Central Agency's work concerns missing military personnel, and prisoners of war whose trace has been lost since the close of hostilities. As in previous years the ICRC dealt with the transmission of family messages and private documents (certificates and extracts of births, marriages and deaths, certificates of captivity, etc.) and return of personal belongings of deceased persons, those humanitarian activities which conform to the spirit of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. It continued to examine documents, and to make use of the information contained therein, in connection with the tracing of missing civilians, as well as its work for the re-uniting of families separated by events of war; it established or renewed, when necessary, the "ICRC Travel Documents" of which the object is to facilitate the emigration of displaced persons.

## CARD INDEXES AND ENQUIRIES

The whole of the information sent to Geneva is, as all are aware, placed on record at the ICRC headquarters in the card-indexes of the *Central Prisoners of War Agency*.

These records which are kept scrupulously up to date, allow for careful checking to be made, by the so-called method of "tallying" while taking into account all possible misspelling of names. The ICRC is thus in a position to supply information required from the cards in its possession, or to collect details which enable it to question the authorities concerned.

The Agency services have recourse to all sources of information. They opened special enquiries which allowed for individual testimonies to be collected from members of the same units as missing men ("regimental enquiries"). In 1954 fifteen thousand enquiries were opened, in particular with local authorities, German communal administrations, French, Polish and Czechoslovak municipal authorities; they led to detailed replies which often allowed for more extensive searches.

### SECTIONS

**(a) German Section.** — During the year the ICRC received some 33,000 enquiries; searches were made for German nationals who were reported missing during the two World Wars, or recent conflicts; investigations were made concerning estates of men who died in captivity; certificates of captivity for former prisoners of war were issued. The German Civilians Section continued to deal with documents concerning individual cases in connection with the re-uniting of "Volksdeutsche" families.

**(b) Greek Section.** — During the same period the ICRC exchanged with Greece and Red Cross Societies in neighbouring countries over 10,000 items of correspondence concerning the

tracing of Greek nationals who left their country, voluntarily or involuntarily, during the war ; it transmitted family messages and dealt with cases of persons resident in Greece, or Greeks who had emigrated to Australia, whose children had been removed to other countries on account of the events of war. As in previous years, the Greek Section obtained about 5,000 positive replies ; it placed on record the numerous details supplied by the lists of repatriates, in order to bring its files, archives and card-indexes up to date.

**(c) Italian Section.** — The ICRC dealt with over 6,000 official enquiries and sundry individual requests concerning, in particular, the identification of military personnel deceased in captivity, with a view to establishing death certificates or duplicates of documents which had been lost or destroyed during the hostilities ; it was able to supply information in 5,350 cases. It continued to receive enquiries concerning Lybian ex-servicemen who had been enrolled in the Italian forces, and later interned by the British forces ; it sent replies in Arabic to 1,529 applications and issued, in 849 cases, the certificates required for the grants which the Italian Government had decided to allocate to former prisoners of war or their families. It will be recalled that the names given by the applicants did not correspond with those appearing on the lists of deceased persons or military personnel supplied by the Detaining Power during the war ; the phonetic interpretation of Arab names raised difficulties which made the work of tracing and identification more onerous.

**(d) Grouped Sections.**

**NORTHERN EUROPE.** The ICRC received about 8,000 enquiries from Poland and the Baltic Scandinavian countries. It received 1,600 positive replies to enquiries opened on missing Poles, in Poland and France, as well as those concerning Polish, Balt or Scandinavian military personnel enrolled in armed forces abroad. It issued certificates of captivity or internment to former prisoners of war or deportees, made searches for missing civilians and transmitted family messages.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. The ICRC examined over 7,000 enquiries received from Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Jugoslavia and Rumania, made searches for missing military personnel of the Second World War and former prisoners of war, issued certificates of captivity and followed up claims, in particular those in connection with back pay emanating from former Austrian prisoners of war in American hands. The ICRC also looked after the transmission of family news for displaced civilians, and the correspondence and documents concerning displaced Yugoslav children.

WESTERN EUROPE. The ICRC received over 6,000 requests for information, on which enquiries were opened, concerning Belgian, Dutch and Luxemburger nationals presumed to be held in the USSR, Spanish deportees who died in German concentration camps, and missing French nationals (Alsatians and Lorrainers enrolled in the German forces and presumed to be held in the USSR, children of ex-servicemen and French workers in Germany); 3,200 positive replies were received. At the request of relatives, it also opened enquiries on prisoners of war held by the forces of the Democratic Viet Nam Republic, and transmitted messages.

ANGLO-SAXON COUNTRIES, LATIN AMERICA, MIDDLE AND FAR EAST. The ICRC examined over 7,000 requests for information. On enquiries from the United States of America and the United Kingdom, it made searches for missing military personnel and persons deported during the World Wars. Only 2,000 positive replies were received, all enquiries concerning the Far East (Korea, China, Democratic Republic of Viet Nam) having remained unanswered.

It made searches in Latin America for persons of other continents who had emigrated overseas, and with whom their families, especially those in Europe, wished to remain in contact.

In the Middle East, it was concerned with Israeli nationals in Arab countries, and Arabs resident in Israel. It transmitted family messages and dealt with cases of civilians held on either side of the closed frontiers. It was gratified to note that, in

this connection, the Red Crescent Societies, and the " Magen David Adom " in Israel, made every effort to facilitate its work.

In the Far East, following the contacts established during the Asiatic Conference in Geneva, the ICRC resumed, during the second half-year, investigations in North Korea and China concerning military personnel presumed to be detained in those countries; over a thousand enquiry forms, giving details of the missing persons, and the circumstances, were sent to the Pyong Yang Government and the Chinese Red Cross.

Through its delegates in Viet Nam, the ICRC continued to make enquiries and to transmit messages on behalf of French combatants, and German, Spanish, Italian, Polish and other nationals, enrolled in the French Union forces and presumed to be prisoners of war, or missing. From the information it possessed, or collected, it was able to reply to numerous requests for information received from persons who had no knowledge of the lists of prisoners liberated in Indo China, issued by the French authorities.

Nine years after the close of the 1939-1945 conflict, the Central Prisoners of War Agency continues to be an instrument of careful, accurate and patient research. From all parts of the world enquirers have recourse to its services. In the case of a family trying to trace a missing person, or to renew the contact with members from which it is separated, to obtain originals or copies of personal or other documents which are essential to daily life, the social importance of its work is more than evident.