

Central Tracing Agency

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II. CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY

There was a marked increase in the volume of work handled by the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) in 1974.

The Geneva office received 109,254 letters (about 40,000 more than in the previous year) and sent out 83,418. During that same period it received 933 lists, containing 200,398 names which were registered in its card-index. In addition, 6,978 capture cards and 90,481 repatriation cards, also received in 1974, were inserted in the CTA card-index.

The full extent of the CTA's work cannot be properly appreciated by sole reference to its activities at Geneva. A vast amount of work is performed, in conjunction with headquarters, by the tracing agency offices set up in the field. It has therefore been thought preferable to report below on the combined activities of the CTA and its local agencies.¹

Cyprus

At CTA headquarters in Geneva

From the time the Cyprus conflict erupted, the CTA was faced with thousands of inquiries from anxious persons living outside the island, seeking information about their relatives there. The earliest inquiries were immediately transmitted to the branch agency in Cyprus by radio (at that time the only means of communication) and a large number of positive replies were sent back through the same channels.

This sustained activity went on for several months. Over 35,000 inquiries were launched by the CTA, and positive replies were obtained for approximately half that number.

The CTA also forwarded mail from and to prisoners of war and civilian internees, as well as messages from civilians to and from places outside Cyprus, while the local agencies dealt with the transmission of messages between the two zones in the island.

The CTA received 162 lists containing more than 22,000 names of prisoners of war, civilian internees, released detainees and refugees.

¹ Except for field-work in Cyprus, for which a detailed account is given in a separate chapter of this report (see p. 15).

Asian sub-continent

At CTA headquarters in Geneva

During the first four months of 1974 the CTA continued to record in its card-indexes the names of Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees who had been released. The repatriation operations, which began in September 1973, were pursued until the end of April 1974. In addition, the CTA registered the names of all civilians transferred from Bangladesh to Pakistan and vice versa. In all, 171,000 names were recorded.

The end of the repatriation operations did not bring CTA activities in the Asian sub-continent to an end. The return of the last contingent of internees led to a new wave of inquiries regarding servicemen and civilians, including Indians, Pakistanis and persons of Bengali origin, who had been missing since 1971. Many families in Bangladesh also asked the CTA to contact close relatives who had been moved to Pakistan after having been interned in India, and whose whereabouts were unknown to them.

In the field

Tracing agencies set up in Islamabad, New Delhi and Dacca forwarded more than 600,000 family messages, some exchanged between Pakistani prisoners in India and their relatives in Pakistan or Bangladesh, and others between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The tracing agency in Dacca also bore a considerable part of the burden in registering Pakistanis wishing to be repatriated and non-locals applying for emigration to Pakistan (see page 36).

After August 1974, most of the tasks performed by the tracing agency office in Islamabad were taken over by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society, which had in the meantime formed its own national information bureau.

Middle East

At CTA headquarters in Geneva

Through the early part of 1974 the CTA continued the registration of servicemen captured or killed in the October 1973 war and belonging to the armed forces of all parties to the conflict. It also

recorded the names of prisoners of war repatriated during the first half of 1974.

In addition it forwarded several thousand messages exchanged between families living in the occupied territories and their relatives in various countries in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

In various countries in the Middle East

ICRC delegations in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Israel handled altogether 338,707 family messages and transmitted a large number of official documents such as marriage certificates, death certificates, academic diplomas, etc.

The ICRC delegations also dealt with about 16,900 requests to trace servicemen listed as missing and civilians who were no longer giving any sign of existence to their relatives.

Indo-China

In 1974 the CTA, at the request of the Red Cross of the Republic of Vietnam, opened about a thousand inquiries with the object of tracing missing servicemen and civilians.

The names of several thousand servicemen and civilians reported missing in Laos and the territory of the Khmer Republic were also registered.

A task of considerable magnitude was accomplished by the tracing agency at Phnom Penh, run by the Khmer Red Cross, which prepared 75,000 cards and handled 10,000 requests for inquiries. Officials of the tracing agency, which operates nine local branches, visited 44 refugee camps regularly in the course of their inquiries.

Chile

At CTA headquarters in Geneva

In 1974 the CTA recorded 257 lists of detainees visited at regular intervals during the year by ICRC delegates. The information contained in these lists was added to that previously recorded during the last three months of 1973. By the end of 1974, the CTA had established 33,000 cards.

Inquiries were opened by the CTA, through its Santiago agency, with the object of obtaining news of detainees or of missing persons.

It also endeavoured to trace Chileans who had sought refuge in other countries and whose families in Chile were without news. Various bodies requested the CTA to intervene in a number of difficult cases involving the reuniting of families.

At Santiago

The Santiago agency kept up its extensive card-index, which proved to be of invaluable assistance to visiting delegates and was utilized to substantiate the merits of requests for aid made by the families of detainees.

Numerous cases of emigrants and persons wishing to be reunited with their families were also handled by the Santiago agency, in co-operation with the CTA, the Chilean authorities, COMAR (*Comisión de Ayuda a los Refugiados*) and representatives of specialized agencies. In this connection, the Santiago agency delivered travel papers to persons without passports.

* * *

Finally, names of detainees visited by ICRC delegates in various African countries and in Indonesia were also filed by the CTA.

Besides these activities connected with current events or conflicts of recent origin, the CTA continued to reply to all requests still being received from authorities of the home countries, National Societies or private persons concerning persons who were made prisoner or who died during the Second World War. As in past years, the 38 million cards relating to the 1939/45 conflict held at the CTA constitute an irreplaceable source of information as evidence for the delivery of certificates in view of war pensions or for determining the fate of missing or displaced persons. These tasks were performed in close co-operation with the International Tracing Service at Arolsen, and depended to a great extent on the valuable aid furnished by National Societies.

INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

The International Tracing Service (I.T.S.) at Arolsen, which has the task of gathering and utilizing its archives concerning concen-