Hope and Certainty

The German Red Cross Tracing Service
Dear readers,

The Tracing Service of the German Red Cross is an institution founded in 1945 out of humanitarian necessity. Today, in collaboration with the international network of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), it provides essential services for those people who have lost contact with their families.

It touches us to witness how people who were separated from each other for a long time by a distressing fate are united again at last. The touching conclusion of just one of these stories is captured in the image on the cover of this brochure: After years of agonising uncertainty Tatyana S., a woman from Belarus living in Germany, is overjoyed as she holds her two daughters in her arms. They had been missing in Sierra Leone.

This brochure tells the story of the diversity of work the Red Cross Tracing Service performs, provides a closer look at how the staff operates and looks back at the origin of the Tracing Service during the post-war period.

The German Red Cross Tracing Service has always stood behind those in need. By taking this attitude to heart, it truly embraces the supreme principle guiding the German Red Cross: devotion to humanity. For more than 65 years it has made every effort to clarify the fate of missing persons from the Second World War. Germans in the successor states of the former Soviet Union who want to repatriate with their families receive thorough counselling and support. The Tracing Service helps reunite refugees and migrants in humanitarian emergencies and can help families stay in touch through Red Cross Messages sent to families when regular channels of communication have collapsed; in situations such as civil war. A nationwide network of volunteers are standing by to provide information about missing family members in the event of a disaster or major calamity in Germany.

I would like to express my gratitude to the many full-time and volunteer staff members of the Red Cross Tracing Service at all locations at the federal level and in regional and district branches of the German Red Cross. Without their commitment, the fates of many would have been uncertain and countless families would not be reunited. I would also like to thank the authorities, institutions and organisations in our country that actively support the work of the Red Cross Tracing Service. I would also like to make special mention of the Federal Ministry of the Interior for both its institutional support and the decades of close, faithful and constructive collaboration it has provided.

I wish you an instructive and enjoyable reading experience!

Dr. rer. pol. h. c. Rudolf Seiters
President - German Red Cross
Everyone has the right to know where their relatives are and what has happened to them. Whenever people are separated from, or without news of, their loved ones as a result of armed conflict, other situations of violence, natural disaster or other situations requiring a humanitarian response, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement responds efficiently and effectively by mobilizing its resources to restore family links.

(Restoring Family Links - Strategy of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, August 2007)
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In 1945 the Tracing Service was established by the German Red Cross (GRC) to investigate the fate of missing persons from the Second World War. Other activities include the reunification of families of refugees and ethnic German repatriates as well as the provision of information about missing persons in current conflicts and disasters.

Assistance in current conflicts and disasters

Searching with all means of communication

„Saida is alive,“ a Red Cross worker said on the phone - that was the best news the 46-year-old Haitian Salvani had ever heard. When the earthquake hit in January 2010, the school her nine-year-old daughter Saida attended was destroyed and the girl was buried. Aid workers rescued her from the rubble and brought her to the hospital. Salvani had no information about the whereabouts of her daughter and was afraid Saida had been killed in the earthquake. The distraught mother turned to the Tracing Service of the Red Cross. The search was conducted with all available means: Saida's name was broadcast on radio stations and her name was searched on hospital lists to no avail.

After the earthquake, many injured people were evacuated to other countries where they could receive better medical attention. The Red Cross Tracing Service contacted its sister societies in these countries and finally found Saida’s name on a list of children who had been brought to the Antilles. When the Red Cross called Salvani to inform her of the news, Saida was already sitting on a plane to Port-au-Prince. A few hours later, the mother was once again holding her child in her arms.

The German Red Cross Tracing Service helps people …

- with global search for family members that have been separated in armed conflict, disasters or migration.
- by forwarding messages to the family when contact has been made.
- by reuniting separated families in Germany.
I am alive – An internet list filled with hope

The core task of the Red Cross Tracing Service is the search for missing persons and the reunification of families that have been torn apart by armed conflicts, wars or disasters.

The International Committee of the Red Cross maintains a pool of Tracing Service specialists who are able to respond immediately and quickly in order to gather the information necessary. Within 48 hours after the earthquake in Haiti, the team had already arrived in Port-au-Prince and was ready for deployment. They enabled communication between the survivors and their concerned family members in other regions of Haiti and even worldwide using computers and satellite phones. The names of missing persons were broadcast on local radio stations and announced using loudspeakers. The Tracing Service set up a website that enabled people to register their missing relatives and the survivors could post „I’m alive!” to reassure their families. Just one week after the earthquake, nearly 23,000 people had registered on the site and 1,600 Haitians had informed their family members that they survived and were alive and well.

The GRC Tracing Service helps families living in Germany find their missing family members in disaster areas. And vice versa: It helps those wanting to emigrate find their relatives living in Germany. A Haitian family, who had lost a child in the earthquake, wanted to leave their homeland and move to Germany to be joined with family already living there after the terrible things they experienced in Haiti. The Tracing Service staff helped them with the formalities and assisted the family with their applications for rights of residence based on humanitarian grounds.
Uniting families of ethnic German repatriates

The GRC Tracing Service at the border repatriation facility in Friedland

There is no smile on Anastasia's face. The young girl sits in silence with her mother, father and grandfather in the office of the GRC Tracing Service at the border repatriation facility in Friedland. Her head is bowed down and her hair hangs in her face. Her mother has large, sad eyes. The Lachauer family is at their second appointment with Gabriele Rosbach-Penke from the Tracing Service. „Can you help us?“ Anastasia's grandfather Alexander Lachauer asks. His granddaughter hasn’t received a residence permit. The news came as a surprise and everyone is shocked. Anastasia is just 18 years old. Must she return to Russia alone? If she must return, then her mother will go with her and the Lachauer family would be separated. The Tracing Service employee answers: „We will do everything we can for you.“

The German Red Cross Tracing Service helps people …

- by finding relatives, with whom contact has been lost after emigration to Germany.
- by reunifying ethnic German repatriates with their families from countries of origin.
- by providing material support for ethnic German repatriates and their families in their countries of origin.

And everything had appeared to be in order. The Lachauer family are repatriates from Russia. Because of their German ethnicity they were discriminated against for years after the war as Germans were considered fascists. They were not, however, allowed to simply leave for the Federal Republic of Germany. This became possible with the demise of the Soviet Union and the political changes that ensued after 1989. Since then, more than three million ethnic Germans and their families have been allowed to move to Germany.

Friedland is the point of entry for all ethnic German repatriates in Germany. Here they are registered by the Federal Office of Administration and dispersed throughout the federal states. The Lachauer family also attends a 6-month integration course here where they learn a lot about Germany: politics, culture, history and the basic values of democracy and German language lessons are on the curriculum.
A classic family of ethnic German repatriates

The Lachauers are a typical example of a resettled family: grandfather and grandmother are recognised repatriates and, as descendants, their sons and grandchildren may also join them just as their wives may, although they do not have German roots. Stepchildren like Anastasia occasionally run into difficulties. The stepchildren of a repatriate may come to Germany with the family as long as they are minors, but need to apply for a residence permit before their 18th birthday. The family was not aware of this regulation and no one had brought it to their attention in time. Now the Lachauers have a problem.

„There certainly have been worse cases, we’ll take care of it!,” assures Gabriele Roßbach-Penke from the GRC Tracing Service. She is full of energy and confidence. She has cases like this every day - in a month it can be a hundred and over a thousand a year. „I get my strength from helping people,” she says. Most of the repatriates come to her to ask how their families from the former Eastern block can join family in Germany. Language tests, financial information, forms that must be filled out correctly - the GRC Tracing Service knows the bureaucratic pitfalls and clears the way, enabling families affected to live together once again. Gabriele Rossbach-Penke also assists with health issues; she sends a wheelchair to Russia or organises a patient transfer for repatriates who are too ill or too weak to manage the trip to Germany alone together with the help of her colleagues of the Tracing Service in Hamburg. She is in contact with the people at the border repatriation facility in Friedland every day. Every morning, she walks through building 9, where the new arrivals are housed, distributing information flyers and offering assistance.

This is the sort of assistance the Lachauer family is receiving now. They virtually lay out their lives on a desktop: applications, forms, documents and certificates. Gabriele Roßbach-Penke examines and makes copies of them all, reads them closely and checks for procedural errors: which authority confiscated Anastasia’s passport and when? Who was supposed to apply on her behalf for a residence permit? These are all the questions she will investigate and summarise in a report. After that she will explain to the Lachauers exactly how to convince the immigration authorities to let Anastasia stay and avoid separation from her family. „Hope dies last,” says grandfather Lachauer. Anastasia smiles.
Clarification of fates:
The Second World War and its consequences

Compensation after more than 60 years

Reinhard Domke is 91 years old and lives in a small town in Saxony-Anhalt. More than 60 years after the end of the Second World War he enlisted the help of the GRC Tracing Service for the first time: In 2008, as the Returnees Compensation Act came into force. „I read in the newspaper that East German war veterans could now receive compensation,” he says. „I immediately sent a letter to the Federal Office of Administration in Cologne stating that I am one of those.”

One of those - that means a Wehrmacht soldier who was taken prisoner and lived in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) after being released in the Soviet occupation zone. In the GDR they had no right to compensation; the new law allowed them to submit a claim for the first time. Applicants are, however, only entitled under the condition they were not involved in the crimes of the Nazi regime.

This describes Reinhard Domke well. He had served in the Wehrmacht as a paramedic and was captured in 1945 in Latvia where he was also working as a paramedic. In 1949 he returned to Germany. Like millions of other prisoners of war, Reinhard Domke’s suffering only ended after his release from captivity.

In order to obtain compensation for his imprisonment, the 91-year-old had to present the original certificate of discharge from the year 1949 to the Federal Office of Administration. „Well, of course I didn’t have it any more after such a long time,” he says. So he wrote a letter to the GRC Tracing Service requesting a duplicate. The Tracing Service staff found the required document in a special index and was able to help Reinhard Domke. He then received compensation from the Federal Office of Administration. His request for certificate of discharge was not an isolated case. Nearly 8,000 Returnees’ Compensation Act requests were submitted to the GRC Tracing Service. And more than 5,000 people could be assisted in obtaining prisoners of war compensation - almost 65 years after the end of the Second World War.
The missing persons of the Second World War

Apart from requests that have been submitted to the GRC Tracing Service due to the implementation of the Returnees’ Compensation Law, there is still a steady stream of requests being submitted for missing persons of the Second World War.

In the last months of the war, millions of urban residents were fleeing the bombings. Millions of people from the former eastern territories fled or were expelled. Millions of Germans became prisoners of war or were interned in camps scattered over different countries around the world. In May of 1945, countless uprooted and homeless people - soldiers and civilians alike - strayed through a largely devastated country with little remaining infrastructure. Many of them were in search of their family members. At this time the GRC Tracing Service began its work with the systematic collection of search requests and the provision of information.

In 1950 the federal government urged the public to report any persons that were still missing from the war. The Tracing Service was able to solve nearly half of the 2.5 million missing persons cases submitted. But uncertainty remains about the actual fate of some 1.3 million cases. The war haunts its victims to this day. Although many of them were still children at the time, their childhood experiences come to bear in old age. And so the 70+ generation is now processing what was experienced during the war years and thereafter. They remember loved ones that were missing and never found again.

And suddenly the phone rings……

This is precisely what happened to Ingrid K. from Berlin who was born in 1935. For years she had been looking for the two cousins she lost contact with in 1944. Ingrid suspected the two had been abducted by the Red Army. At war’s end they were young women in their early twenties. Ingrid K. asked the GRC Tracing Service for help. The Tracing Service staff began the search in the central name index and discovered that the cousins had applied for a displaced persons identity card in the 1950s, as both of them had been driven out of Silesia in 1945. Further research revealed that one of the cousins had already died. But the second cousin was still alive and when the Tracing Service notified her that Ingrid is looking for her, she picked up the phone and called her - the first phone call after 65 years!

More and more children of the war generation are turning to the GRC Tracing Service, for instance, when they find clues about missing persons in the estate of their parents and want to know what’s become of these families. The GRC Tracing Service can now often provide new information using entirely new sources such as the Russian military archives that became accessible after the political upheavals in the Soviet Union. For decades they were under lock and key - since 1992 they have finally been the key to detailed knowledge about the fate of German soldiers and civilians in Soviet captivity. The fates of more than 230,000 people have been clarified with this information.
Separated in the post-war period

Detained and the families do not know: NKVD camps

The end of the Second World War did not bring an end to people’s suffering. Even after the armies had put down their weapons many families were separated and countless people disappeared without a trace. This is exactly what happened to Richard Rabe, a businessman from Dommitzsch. „He left after breakfast and never returned. That was on 20 May 1945 - Pentecost Sunday,” says his grandson Ronald Rabe. At that time - a few weeks after Germany’s surrender - the Soviet occupation forces were searching for war criminals to imprison them in the camps of the Soviet secret service, the NKVD.

Approximately 123,000 people who had belonged to the Nazi party and any of its related structures or had been accused of violating any policies and orders of the occupying power were interned in the Soviet occupation zone as late as 1950. Many arrests were made for no apparent reason or as a result of denunciations. Richard Rabe was abducted for his membership in the Nazi party. „My grandfather set up a shoe shop in 1919 and was, like most businessmen in the city, a party member. He worked as a cashier and was not guilty of anything,” says his grandson. All attempts Ronald Rabe and his father Rudolf made to learn about the fate of their (grand) father were unsuccessful. „In the German Democratic Republic the topic was off limits anyway. It was useless to ask about the whereabouts of my grandfather,” says Ronald Rabe. The Rabe family’s hope was rekindled after the fall of the wall. „We tried to contact people who had also lost family members like we had and we turned to the GRC Tracing Service. Piece by piece we made progress.”

The German Red Cross Tracing Service helps people...
- clarifying the fate of political prisoners in the Soviet occupation zone and the former GDR.
- searching for relatives they have lost contact with due to the division of Germany after World War II.
New information sources after decades

The opening of the Russian archives for the GRC Tracing Service in 1992 brought clarity on the fate of Richard Rabe and tens of thousands of his fellow prisoners. In addition, many survivors finally received official confirmation of their years of captivity and could begin a rehabilitation process.

“I know now the details of what my grandfather went through: after his arrest he was held two or three days in the Russian headquarters in Dommitzsch and was then transferred to Bautzen where he remained until November of 1945. From there he was taken to Tost in Upper Silesia and Graudenz in West Prussia. He ultimately arrived at NKVD Camp No. 9 in Fünfeichen, Neubrandenburg on 16 January 1946 where he died on 25 July 1946 - presumably due to the bad hygienic conditions there and malnutrition,” says Ronald Rabe in reflection. „I went to the place of my grandfather’s death to lay down a wreath and ring the bell for him at the entrance to the camp.“ The man from Dommitzsch is relieved.” At last I was able to bring closure to something that affected our entire family every day for such a long time.”

German-German separations

The fates of these NKVD prisoners and their families are just one example of the countless families torn apart in the post-war period that the GRC Tracing Service is now investigating. Soldiers of the occupying powers also left behind many illegitimate children in Germany. Many of their mothers lived in such difficult conditions that they willingly gave their children up for adoption. In the German Democratic Republic there were cases of forced adoptions resulting from the parents’ escape from East Germany. Similarly, the Tracing Service also helps families who were separated by the wall and have not been able to re-establish contact even two decades after reunification of the two states. Supporting Cubans, Angolans, North Koreans and Mozambicans who had studied abroad in the former East Germany and are now looking for their children conceived during their stay opens a relatively new chapter in the Tracing Service’s work.

NKVD special camps at a glance

- Ten Soviet internment camps were built by the Soviet NKVD secret service immediately after the Second World War in concentration camps and war prisoner camps from the Nazi era as well as in residential areas.
- Around 123,000 people were interned. Nearly 43,000 of them died in the camps and about 45,000 were released after the dissolution of the camps.
- In 1950, 14,200 prisoners were handed over to the East German authorities and continued to be detained in prisons. 3,385 of them were convicted in the Waldheim trials and sentenced to further imprisonment. 24 death sentences were issued.
- 19,450 prisoners were deported to the Soviet Union.

Still coming to terms with history

After the German unification the GRC Tracing Service was able to provide information on more than 10,000 cases similar to Richard Rabe’s involving prisoners of NKVD camps. But the work is far from finished: more than 60 years after the death of the prisoners the Tracing Service is still evaluating the documents from Russian archives and comparing them with the documentation in the central name index and other specialised registers. This work provides families with clarity after all these years and returns the identity to the many victims who had remained anonymous.
Prepared for the worst:  
GRC Offices for Disaster Tracing Inquiries

Certainty in conflicts and disasters

Imagine, there is a bus accident on Highway A24 in the north of Germany involving numerous vehicles. There are fatalities and the injured are taken to different hospitals in a large-scale rescue operation between Berlin and Hamburg. Situations like these can cause feelings of powerlessness amongst family members and trigger a need for clarity. The first point of contact for the relatives and friends of victims to obtain information about the whereabouts of their loved ones is, in this case, the GRC Tracing Service. After large-scale emergencies or natural disasters of this kind Offices for Disaster Tracing Inquiries are set up. All work is coordinated by the regional branches.

Approximately 4,600 volunteers work in GRC Offices for Disaster Tracing Inquiries on district level. Peter Lück is head of the Office in Oranienburg: „We are responsible for collecting all the information on missing persons, injured persons and others affected by a disaster and to provide information to their whereabouts. We also register rescue workers. We must be as accurate as possible. Every little bit of information can help give searching relatives more certainty.”

In the event of war, the Federal Republic of Germany as a treaty member to the Geneva Conventions is committed to establish a „National Information Bureau“ (NIB). The federal government has assigned this task to the GRC Tracing Service. The NIB exchanges information concerning prisoners of war being held by the conflict parties as well as information concerning other protected persons (e.g. civilian internees).

The German Red Cross Tracing Service helps people...
- who have lost contact with their families in disasters or accidents.
- with information on POWs and civilian internees in ongoing wars and armed conflicts.
Always on site and on standby

The Offices for Disaster Tracing Inquiries are divided according to regions so its staff can be deployed quickly. Depending on the nature and scope of the event, there are also mobile Offices or District Offices of different regions working together. A call centre at the Tracing Service in Munich can be quickly activated in events that affect large areas of the country.

Peter Lück has been working at the Tracing Service for 12 years now. So far there haven’t been any major emergencies. „That’s a good thing,” he says. „Nevertheless, there is a lot going on. Whether it’s a bus accident or bomb threat, a disaster can develop quickly. And when it does, I want to be prepared and ready to help.” His District Office has advanced warning in many cases and is on standby to support other District Offices - for example when the Oder River was threatening to flood in the summer of 2010.

The disaster at the Duisburg Love Parade in July of 2010 quickly turned into an emergency. Two hours after being alarmed, the Tracing Service staff of eight German Red Cross District Offices were ready for deployment. Approximately 50 volunteers supported the District Office for Disaster Tracing inquiries in taking the calls of several thousand concerned parents and friends. In 114 cases they were able to provide callers with information on the exact whereabouts of their loved ones, taking away the fear they could be amongst the fatalities.

Tracing volunteers train in realistic exercises

Full-scale exercises are held on a regular basis so tracing volunteers are prepared for an emergency. „Twice a year we rehearse with the entire regional branch and once a year with our District branch,” says Peter Lück. Volunteers practice procedures so everyone knows what to do in an emergency. Other organisations join the Tracing Service in the exercises because collaboration is essential in an emergency.

„We work closely with all emergency services, including the Red Cross Disaster Response Teams, other rescue services as well as the fire brigade and hospitals.”

Some German Red Cross Disaster Tracing deployments in recent years have included:
• Elbe flood 2002
• Tsunami 2004 (hotline for relatives in Germany)
• Flood in Saxony and Bavaria in 2004 and 2006
• Bus accident in Radevormwald in 2009
• Shooting rampage in Winnenden, 2009
• Nationwide flooding in 2010
• Love Parade in Duisburg in 2010

Behind the scenes: The Tracing Service sets up Offices for Disaster Tracing inquiry in advance of major events to be prepared for emergencies.
• 2006 Football World Cup (in Germany)
• G8 summit in Heiligendamm in 2007
• NATO summit in Kehl and Baden-Baden 2009
• Marathon events
• Visit of the Pope 2011

According to Mr Lück, the head of the District Office for Disaster Tracing Inquiries, the exercises should be as realistic as possible. „We simulate problems that can occur in emergencies. People under shock spell names differently or mix up telephone numbers.” The volunteers learn how to deal with difficult situations. Peter Lück is convinced: „This challenges our staff and motivates them.” Apart from the full-scale exercises, Lück and a small group of his colleagues meet every six weeks for first-aid training or to share information about important issues such as data privacy issues related to their work.
A large network to provide effective assistance

When volunteers receive a request through the telephone hotline or a personal consultation, the first thing they do is try to gather all the important information about the missing person. "The more we know about a person, the greater chance we have of finding them," says Peter Lück.

"Each tracing request is processed in two ways," says Peter Lück, "First using index cards, then electronically." Volunteers enter the data into the Tracing Service software called Xenios that the GRC Tracing Service has developed. There is no other software like this in Germany. "We can continue our work even if there is a power outage or a computer crash," says Lück.

The information can then be processed by a central server that can connect all the information centres throughout Germany. "If, for instance, a bus from Munich has an accident here, the District Offices for Disaster Tracing Inquiries in Bavaria can access the system and provide information quickly. This gives families certainty much faster and is really a great help for everyone affected."

The internet-based data acquisition and information software Xenios is just one example of the networking opportunities the GRC Tracing Service makes use of. Other German Red Cross services such as the psycho-social emergency counselling and support services ensure people who are affected are not left alone in caring for victims and their loved ones.

Xenios, The German Red Cross Tracing Service software

• The data can be processed locally, in LAN networks or through a central server
• All available information regarding those involved, such as whether they have been evacuated or injured, is recorded
• Tracing requests can be matched effectively with information on those involved
• The data can be evaluated and used for statistics
• User management complies with data-protection legislation
• Interfaces to other information systems are possible
Cooperation with other organisations -
The data of the GRC Tracing Service are constantly supplemented by information from
• Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies
• International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
• Foreign archives
• Tracing Service of the ecclesiastical welfare associations (KSD; Kirchlicher Suchdienst)
• International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen (ITS; Internationaler Suchdienst)
• The Deutsche Dienststelle (WAS) - a German Agency which maintains records of members of
  the former German Wehrmacht who were killed in action
• National Association of the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutscher Kriegsgrä-
  berfürsorge)

The more sources of information the Tracing Service staff have at their disposal, the greater
their chances are of helping bring clarity to a situation. This is why the Tracing Service collaborates nationally and internationally with other organisations, uses newly opened archives and the Internet and promotes regular training for its employees.
Old and new: sources, inventories and digitizing

The GRC Tracing Service has an extensive collection of unique records on index cards, files, microfilm and in electronic databases that have been systematically developed. These media enable Tracing Service staff to investigate thoroughly and effectively respond to requests for missing persons. The GRC Tracing Service works together with other organisations to supplement its own data.

Information on more than 20 million tracing requests

The Central Name Index is the most important information resource for clarifying the fate of missing persons. At the Munich office you’ll find roughly 50 million index cards with information on more than 20 million tracing requests, particularly for missing soldiers and civilians in the Second World War, for children separated from their parents and prisoners in the territory of the Soviet occupation zone and the German Democratic Republic. The Central Name Index records inquiries from relatives and public agencies and matches them with reports of missing persons. The following special card indexes have also been incorporated:

- Children’s register with name cards of unaccompanied children
- POWs and missing persons registration from 1950
- Complete survey of losses due to expulsion from 1955-1959
- Centralised Internee register which also contains GDR imprisonment cases
- Register of the „Group Against Inhumanity“ with some 900,000 cards
- Returnee registration cards
- Approximately 200,000 cards from the Danish Refugee Administration in Copenhagen with information about the people from East Prussia that fled from the approaching Red Army across the Baltic Sea in the brutal winter of 1944/45 and were interned in Denmark.
Card indexes for special groups

In addition to the Central Name Index, the GRC Tracing Service can access a number of special registers such as the Children’s Tracing Service’s distinguishing feature register that between 1945 and 1960 catalogued children who were too young to give details of their names and their origins. Physical characteristics like eye colour or conspicuous scars as well as where they were found and personal belongings were also recorded. The special register of the releasing camp in Gronenfelde near Frankfurt (Oder) contains records of more than a million German prisoners of war and civilian internees who were released from Soviet captivity.

This archive is an important source of information on the whereabouts and fate of German prisoners of war. It consists of a collection of information from returnees about the conditions in more than 12,800 former detention places, mostly in the former Soviet Union.

There are also registers dedicated to investigations into „specialists“ such as the register of scientists, engineers and craftspeople who were deported to the USSR from 1950-1956. At the Hamburg office information on family reunification is systematically collected and recorded on electronic media. Here, in addition to documents and index cards, correspondence in connection with efforts to leave the former USSR, including the so-called „embassy forms“ are stored. Starting in 1955, people of German descent used these forms to apply for authorisation to leave the country at the German embassy in Moscow. Along with other certificates, documents and certificates these can be used as evidence in current applications.
New sources boost clarification

After the reunification of the two German states and the collapse of the political system in the Soviet Union, many new databases became available that had previously been inaccessible. In 1992, the Russian government gave the GRC Tracing Service data, derived from the Centre for the Preservation of Historical Documentation Collections, on around 325,000 German soldiers who had died in Soviet captivity.

The Tracing Service received comprehensive details from the „October Revolution“ Moscow State Archives about the deaths in the Soviet secret service's (NKVD) camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the former GDR. Since 2004, the Russian State Military Archive in Moscow has been providing the GRC Tracing Service with digitised files on prisoners of war as well as on missing civilians and soldiers. So far, nearly two million files have been shared. The Tracing Service has created an electronic database containing details of these cases, including release documentation death certificates.
Certainty at last

In 1950, a mother submitted her first inquiry: she wanted to know what had happened to her son who was taken prisoner at the outset of World War II. The extensive research conducted by the GRC Tracing Service was inconclusive. In 1974 her son was declared dead by Jena’s district court. In the hopes that the databases in Moscow that had become accessible after the reunification could provide some information, a distant cousin of the missing man submitted another tracing inquiry in early 2010. This time it produced a prisoner of war record located in Moscow! The man had been deported to Siberia and died on 6 November 1942 in a camp near Irkutsk. Finally, the relatives knew for sure what had happened.

With the help of these new sources, previously unsolvable cases can now be clarified after more than 65 years. Since the archives were opened in 1992 more than 230,000 incomplete search inquiries have been conclusively clarified. For those affected, it is a relief to finally know the exact date and place of death of their loved ones. In some cases the location of a grave can also be provided - the bereaved now have a place where they can mourn those that have died.

The GRC Tracing Service systematically evaluates the newly acquired documents and informs family members and loved ones if any new information has been found.
Detective instincts

Maritta Wojtech and Karin Fiedler process cases at the GRC Tracing Service office in Munich. The Tracing Service cases involving Soviet war casualties are passed on to them from the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the successor states of the former USSR. Solving these cases requires dedication, good instincts and, at times, unusual methods.

Karin Fiedler

„Quite often we receive inquiries for fallen soldiers of the Red Army that begin with the tricky task of clarifying the geographical location of the place of death. In the former German eastern territories there were many places with similar names. On some of the Russian documents the names of German towns were also rendered incorrectly. Where in the world could ’Els’, ’Klisterfelde’, ’Sauberg’ or ’Satzberg’ be?”

Often we then compare many pages of Russian deceased lists, scan military history books or search the Internet to track where the front was at the time of death to determine the actual place of death. We also identify Polish and Czech names of places that used to be German."

Maritta Wojtech

„Collaboration with memorial sites, associations and documentation centres is very important for our work. From 1939 to 1945 there was a prisoner of war personnel main camp, a so-called Stalag, in Luckenwalde. The camp’s cemetery was refurbished in 2009 to commemorate the deceased and to tell the history of the Stalag as an addition to the local history museum in Luckenwalde."
In our search for the grave of a Soviet prisoner of war, the head of the local museum was very forthcoming in providing us access to the database they have created that lists the known names of the prisoners of war buried in the cemetery. This will make processing inquiries at this Stalag much faster.

Karin Fiedler

“The working committee, ‘Soviet memorials and cemeteries’ at the Brandenburg Friendship Association in Potsdam has become a valuable partner for us. Only with the dedication of their volunteers were we able to conclusively determine where the soldier Dmitri Brusnik had actually fallen. According to the request he fell in May of 1945 in the town ‘Forte’ or ‘Friz’ some 12 kilometres outside of Berlin. The Russian documents cited 8 May 1945 as the date of death.

In the end, the results of the investigation came from Potsdam: this member of the Red Army was killed near Vieritz and was moved to grave in the Soviet memorial cemetery in Beetzsee sometime after 1945.

“Our work is incredibly exciting and now, with the internet, a whole new set of search options has become available. But we are still not able to solve all inquiries. Many documents - in particular regarding Soviet prisoners of war - were destroyed during the war and many a fate will therefore unfortunately remain unresolved.”
Total commitment to people

Advice and support

From family reunifications to the procurement of necessary documents, the staff of the GRC Tracing Service at federal, regional and district level can help those looking for assistance in a variety of areas. We focus primarily on family reunifications for repatriates as well as refugee and migrant issues.

Family reunification support

The Tracing Service helps repatriates, refugees and migrants in all matters of family reunification and provides advice on what to do in administrative or judicial proceedings. Our staff provide support with regard to the recognition of repatriate status in accordance with the Federal Law on Refugees and Displaced Persons with regard to ethnic German repatriates (BVFG) or clarify in the status determination process whether applicants have family roots that could justify receiving German citizenship.

A large repository of documents and a unique network enable the Tracing Service to provide assistance in compensation, pension or inheritance when repatriates have a lack of evidence.

If family members are only able to enter Germany after fulfilling the provisions of the German Residence Act, the Tracing Service staff can provide advice on the specific legal requirements and support family members in their interaction with German missions abroad and the immigration authorities to expedite visa procedures.

If repatriates are looking for relatives they have lost contact with, for example in connection with their emigration to Germany, the Tracing Service can be helpful with determining their current location. The GRC Tracing Service can also give refugees and migrants, who wish to be reunited with their families, advice and practical help.

The Tracing Service provides all consultation free of charge and is a neutral and independent body that does not act as an authorised representative.

Assistance at all levels

Nearly 400 Tracing Service employees working on district level of the German Red Cross are available to answer any questions you may have regarding family reunifications, help you fill out the necessary forms and provide you with support in dealing with the authorities. Their work is guided and coordinated by the German Red Cross regional branches.

In Hamburg and Munich some 200 Tracing Service employees provide support for managing individual cases:
• Clarification inquiries regarding the fates of people from the World War II period,
• Humanitarian searches
• Processing family reunifications,
• Material and health assistance.

In Hamburg and Munich the Tracing Services extensive repository of information is accessible for processing cases. Status: December 2011
Assisting repatriates with emigration

The departure from the country of residence can be difficult even when repatriates are in possession of an entry permit for the Federal Republic of Germany. Some countries of the former USSR demand the living relatives in Germany produce a „request“ before they will grant a permit to leave. The GRC Tracing Service issues the necessary forms, providing a free translation and assistance if problems occur. If repatriates are unable to travel to Germany on their own due to health reasons, the Tracing Service will provide, if necessary, advice on possible financial assistance for the transfer and organise the formalities associated with the departure.

Material and health assistance

Many Germans in their regions of origin nowadays are forced to live on an inadequate income or a small pension that barely covers medical costs. The GRC Tracing Service supports sick people and those in need in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe and in the Asian countries of the former USSR by providing orthopaedic and medical aid such as prostheses, blood pressure monitors and eyewear. Costs for medication and treatments can also be covered.

The Tracing Service also supports the livelihoods of these people by providing food parcels, clothing or financial resources. To receive support, those seeking help can send a request to the Tracing Service which can then provide assistance in individual humanitarian cases. Assistance for people of German descent and their families are financed by federal funds and funds of the German Red Cross.

Message to the GRC Tracing Service from 2010

„You are my last hope.
My wife, whom I love very much, resides in Germany and I live in Russia. I cannot get an exit visa because I do not speak German. I can only truly master the German language if I am with my beloved wife and my son who will be born in late February. I am currently learning German, but it’s hard for me because my thoughts are with my wife and my son.
Why is the law against me?
I would like to ask for some advice. What should I do to be with my family?
Please help us.
I thank you for your effort in advance.“
Well-trained staff

On the cutting-edge of knowledge

Whether it’s changes in legislation or new working methods, the tasks carried out by the Tracing Service are changing constantly. Tracing Service employees undergo frequent training so they can continue to provide expert advice and effective assistance. Continued training, sharing experiences and an effective flow of information within the Tracing Service are important components of the work. Increasingly, legal issues concerning refugees and displaced persons or privacy issues are involved. Communication skills in difficult counselling settings are also on the agenda because human problems and legal issues often collide in the every-day work of Tracing Service staff.

Psychological training

After a serious accident, people calling the Tracing Service hotline to inquire into the whereabouts of their loved ones are often anxious, frightened or panic-stricken - a situation that could easily fluster poorly trained staff. In a pilot project at the University of Heidelberg, district office volunteers are prepared for taking difficult calls. They learn how to quickly assess the mental state of a caller and respond appropriately. Simple but effective guidelines help them stay on track. The volunteers also learn how to handle the pressure and the psychological stress situations like these can cause. They put the theory to use in training where actors simulate troubled callers.
Interview with the psychologist and Tracing Service trainer Dr. Lutz Lyding

What is special about your training for GRC Tracing Service staff?

“We want to give guidelines for emergency situations to the employees providing information over the telephone. Our project is the first of its kind; there has not been any scientifically-based approach to training in this area before. To find out what difficulties arise in such conversations, we spoke extensively with relatives of disaster victims and numerous hotline staff. We applied the knowledge of current psychological research to what we discovered there to create our training materials.”

How should employees behave in disaster situations?

„First of all, the best thing you can do is listen. Some very practical things are important such as asking for the caller’s name and telephone number as the mobile network may break down or be quickly overloaded in a disaster situation. Apart from this, conversation about everyday things can be reassuring. Ideally, after just a few minutes all the important data will have been collected and tracing can begin.“

Is there something hotline staff should absolutely avoid saying?

„Things like ‘It’ll be alright’ are absolutely counterproductive. This makes people furious. It is much better to simply listen and repeat what the caller has said. That is the best way to help a troubled person.“
The Tracing Service and privacy

Confidentiality as a principle

The more information the GRC Tracing Service gathers on a missing person, the greater the chances are of finding them. Families hoping to find their loved ones often provide a lot of personal data. A trusting relationship is only possible if one does not have to worry about data being used for other purposes or forwarded to other agencies without proper cause. The GRC Tracing Service takes the protection of personal data very seriously to prevent information from being misused.

Stipulated by law: the handling of personal information at the Tracing Service

The Tracing Services Data Protection Act clearly states what personal information the GRC Tracing Service may collect, process, use and transmit to third parties. Any data processing by the GRC Tracing Service is subject to the caveat that it is „necessary for the fulfilment of tasks performed by the Tracing Service“. The transfer of data is only permitted when the data transmission does not violate legitimate interests. And, once a person is located, they may decide for themselves whether their details are forwarded or not.

Compliance with the Data Protection Act and the confidential handling of the information of those concerned is the subject of regular training. Technical and organisational measures ensure that the use of modern information technology in the Tracing Service’s work - such as queries via the Internet or use of large databases - can be performed without compromising the data of those affected. The handling of sensitive information is monitored by the data protection officer at the GRC Tracing Service.
Across all borders and barriers the Red Cross Tracing Service is able to gain fast and often non-bureaucratic access to information and people. Tracing Service staff relay family messages, visit prisoners and organise phone calls throughout the world.

Three lines of joy

In the era of e-mails, Twitter and mobile phones, it is almost hard to believe what extreme happiness three handwritten lines can bring or that one phone call requires weeks of preparation. In 2005 the GRC Tracing Service was tasked by the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with locating the brother of a Guantanamo prisoner who allegedly resides in Düsseldorf. The ICRC is the only international humanitarian organisation that has been granted regular authorisation to provide counselling for prisoners in the U.S. prison. The search was successful and the Tracing Service staff were able to relay a hand-written note from the brother being detained in Guantanamo. The short message is written on an internationally binding form that is not sealed and can be read by the authorities.

Telephone call to Guantanamo

The Red Cross staff arranged for the brothers to speak to each other personally for the first time after many years - even if only by phone. The brother living in Germany had to go to the office of the GRC Tracing Service to wait for the call from Guantanamo. In preparation for the call the U.S. authorities and the ICRC had already verified the identity of the brother, clarified the language to be used in the call and organised an interpreter. Then the date could be set. At the agreed time, the Tracing Service called the office of the prison administration, cited the prisoner number and then passed the phone to the brother. They had nearly an hour to talk. An interpreter was seated in the office of the prison administration during the call to ensure that no political or military issues are addressed.

The Red Cross Message

Family members in areas of crisis can share personal messages using a DIN A5 (German standard) form. The Red Cross forwards this open letter that may not include political, military or discriminatory content. The authorities in the areas of conflict are entitled to read the messages before they are forwarded to the addressee. The Red Cross can deliver short messages of this type only because of its universally recognised neutrality that is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions.
The right to know

Communication between family members may be interrupted for various reasons; natural disasters, armed conflict, detention, displacement or politically motivated isolation. The internationally recognised neutrality of the Red Cross makes it possible for the organisation to allow communication between family members even beyond the borders of hostile states.

The Tracing Service of the German Red Cross is part of a worldwide Tracing Service network of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in 186 countries. In close international cooperation trained professionals quickly obtain local information and establish contact with those affected. The Restoring Family Links (RFL) network of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was created to help families learn about the fate of their relatives in armed conflicts or wars. Employees of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements gather information on missing people all over the world. They monitor names in camps and hospitals, conduct research at the offices of local authorities and use every opportunity to get hold of information on the whereabouts of persons.

The only visitors come from the Red Cross

Delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) travel to the remotest corners of the earth to talk with prison inmates, to record their names and obtain information on the whereabouts of other prisoners. In countries where the life of a prisoner is often worth less than a pair of shoes, it may be a matter of life or death that their names are publicly known. The delegates of the Red Cross return regularly and hope that by doing so they can ensure the humane treatment of the prisoners. Prisoners have a right to adequate shelter, adequate food, medical supplies and clothing - as stipulated in the internationally recognised human rights conventions. In times of war, international humanitarian law takes effect with the Geneva Conventions to ensure these basic rights.
Certainty brings relief

The idea of the Tracing Service goes back to the founder of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant. On the battlefield of Solferino in 1859, Dunant found a badly wounded soldier who lay dying. The young man asked Dunant to inform his parents about his fate. Back in Geneva, Dunant devoted himself initially to the founding of the Red Cross, but did not forget the promise that he had made to the dying soldier. So he travelled to Lyon, found out where his parents lived and personally brought them the news of their son’s death.

This was the beginning of the Tracing Service. The ultimate goal was and is to help people reunite with their loved ones or at least provide certainty about their fate.

This is exactly what the service accomplished for Gaudencia, a Congolese woman who now has contact with five of her six children. For three years she did not know how her children were faring. Gaudencia was president of a women’s organisation in Lukala in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She was attacked by government security forces, brutally raped in the presence of her children, threatened and eventually arrested. After her release from prison she fled to Germany where she turned to the Tracing Service of the German Red Cross. The whereabouts of five of her children could be determined with the help of colleagues from the Congolese Red Cross. The sixth is still missing. Gaudencia has received Red Cross Messages from her children; she looks again and again at the pictures they contained and hopes soon to be able to embrace her children once again.

Current crises

The civil war that ended in 2009 in Sri Lanka resulted in more than 280,000 persons seeking refuge. For many this flight has already lasted for months and has torn families apart, leaving them without news of each other’s fate. The German Red Cross alone has received 257 queries from worried relatives. In Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and many other countries families have been separated by armed conflict and often have no news for years about the fate of their relatives.
The uncertainty is gruelling. Where are my children? How are my brothers and sisters? What has happened? These are questions that torment the relatives of missing persons. Relatives have a right to know and the Red Cross Tracing Service helps them in gathering information.

Certainty is a fundamental human need

„I am stricken with grief and would be very happy if we can hold each other in our arms soon. I have been trying to find you for years and have given the Red Cross and other organisations a picture of you,“ writes Peter A. to his missing father, a Russian soldier who was stationed in East Germany and had to leave the country in 1957 due to the relationship with Peter A’s mother. Since that time, all that was left from his father was this picture and an invalid address in Russia - until recently he received news.

Hoping for news

Countless people like Peter A, who are looking for relatives cannot find rest for years. Torn between the hope of a reunion and the thought of the horrible death of a loved one, the anxiety it brings is like a silent torture. „The uncertainty about the whereabouts of a loved one is just as difficult to endure as physical suffering,“ This basic principle taken from the 1948 protocol of the International Red Cross Conference in Stockholm stated certainty as a basic human need since the beginning of the Tracing Service.

Armed conflicts continue to tear families apart and bring uncertainty about the whereabouts of loved ones. International humanitarian law establishes humanitarian rules to protect victims. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional protocols play a central role in defining these rules which include the right of families to information about the fate of their relatives. The Conventions require states to support the search for missing persons and facilitate the reestablishment of family contacts. The Federal Republic of Germany joined the Geneva Conventions in 1954.
Firmly anchored: The GRC Tracing Service in Germany

As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing service network, the GRC Tracing Service primarily performs the tasks emanating from the Geneva Conventions, their additional protocols and the resolutions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conferences. These include: the search for missing persons, the delivery of Red Cross Messages between family members who have been separated, clarifying the fate of relatives, material assistance and the reunification of refugees and migrants.

In the early 1950s, the federal government’s tracing service agreement assigned many tasks to the German Red Cross, including research on prisoners and missing persons of the Second World War, children's tracing services, the tracing of missing persons in conflicts and disasters, family reunification, material and health assistance and documentation work. In addition, the Federal Government commissioned the German Red Cross in 1966 to establish a National Information Bureau for conflict situations. The Federal Government complies with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions by providing funding for the Tracing Service.

Due to its special humanitarian and ideological importance, “tracing and family reunification” is a mandatory statutory duty of all German Red Cross branches on regional and district level. The obligation to establish a National Information Bureau and to enable the exchange of family messages in conflict situations has been enshrined as a German Red Cross task in the German Red Cross Law since 2008. Agreements with the civil protection authorities ensured that the GRC Tracing Service's District Offices for Disaster Tracing Requests help restore contact between family members in domestic disasters.

**Geneva Conventions**
The Geneva Conventions form the core of international humanitarian law. They protect people from cruelty and inhumanity in war zones. Further information is available on the website of the German Red Cross www.drk.de

**The German Red Cross Law**
The Law primarily governs the special position of the German Red Cross as a „National Society of the Red Cross on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and voluntary aid society of the German authorities in the humanitarian field.“ It determines the mandatory tasks the German Red Cross must perform throughout the country. More information on the German Red Cross Law is available at www.drk.de.

**The charter of the German Red Cross**
Tracing missing persons and family reunification are important tasks defined in the charter of the German Red Cross. The Red Cross federal charter can be downloaded at www.drk.de.
Around 55 million people died, countless were displaced or became refugees. Such were the consequences of the Second World War. It left behind family members without any news about the fate of their relatives. The origins of the Tracing Service of the German Red Cross can be found in this chaos.

The beginnings

The work of the Tracing Service of the German Red Cross began in Flensburg in April of 1945. The Second World War came to an end, millions of uprooted and homeless people strayed through a largely devastated country. Among the influx of refugees, volunteers registered those people searching and those people being searched for and collected information about missing persons practically from nothing. The spontaneous action of a few people initially marked the birth of the Tracing Service. As part of the tracing service working group, consisting of the Red Cross, the Catholic Caritas Association and the Protestant Church, the Tracing Service initially worked without any infrastructure under extremely difficult conditions. The alliance dissolved in 1948.

In September 1945, the Flensburg Tracing Service office was relocated to Hamburg under the name „German Red Cross, Refugee Relief Organisation, Investigation Service, Central Tracing File“. It continued its work as the „Hamburg Zone Centre“. Almost at the same time, the Tracing Service began work in Munich in the Zone Centre in the US sector.

The Tracing Service staff had their hands full as they recorded search enquiries, conducted research on missing relatives and tried to reunite families spread out among different countries. The Tracing Service started work on cases involving people living in the former German territories in Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. Many of them wished to emigrate to Germany and the Tracing Service of the newly established German Red Cross joined forces with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to help them. „Operation Link“, which continued through 1951, was able to retrieve more than 80,000 people from Poland and bring them to the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic.
1950 was an important year for the Tracing Service. After the new government officially called for all POWs and missing persons to be registered, some 2.5 million soldiers, civilians and children were registered within a very short time. Efficacy was further improved when the GRC Tracing Service merged its extensive registers in Munich and Hamburg, creating one archive at the Munich office with some 50 million file cards. In the late 1970s the services expanded to include the children’s Tracing Service and investigations for persons that had gone missing in the former GDR. By 1950, some 16 million search requests had been submitted and the Tracing Service was able to clarify 8.8 million cases and pass on news of the fate of the missing persons to the next of kin. The Tracing Service interviewed war veterans and received very detailed information on the fate of their companions in misfortune. The so-called list of missing persons has made a great contribution. It provides the photographic identification of more than 1.5 million missing soldiers and civilians and is accessible at all GRC Tracing Service offices in the regional and district branches and in public buildings. Announcements about missing persons made in the media, especially on the radio, have also been very effective.

The 51-volume UN documentary „Prisoners of War and Missing Members of the Wehrmacht“ was released in 1955. It lists the German soldiers who are still missing and presumably have fallen and is a valuable resource for the continued search internationally.

In 1957, the German Red Cross and the Soviet Red Cross agreed to provide joint support on tracing requests. By the late 1980s the Red Cross of the former Soviet Union had assisted with nearly half a million requests. Still, many Cold War fates remain unclear. Gorbachev’s policies and the upheaval they caused in the Soviet Union triggered the opening of the Russian archives. Many inquiries could only be processed after 1990 and today there are still many open cases.
The roots of family reunification

Germany in 1955: There are still more than 10,000 German prisoners of war in Soviet custody. After lengthy negotiations, the Federal Government under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer negotiated the release of these prisoners. Not long afterwards they arrived - emaciated and weakened - at the border repatriation facility in Friedland and the search for their families began.

The assistance the Tracing Service offers extends to the hundreds of thousands of Germans and ethnic Germans in Eastern and Southeastern European countries and the former Soviet Union who need the support the Tracing Service provides. The consequences of war have been particularly long-lasting for the so-called Russian-Germans. Many of these German immigrants settled in Russia several hundred years ago. During the war many of them were deported to Siberia or to the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan. Still others who lived in areas that had been occupied by the Wehrmacht were relocated to other areas (Warthegau) due to their status as Soviet citizens of German ethnic origin. In the process of this displacement, they were regularly naturalised as German citizens. This group and the ethnic Germans in the former USSR are known as Russian-Germans.

In the USSR, after 1945, they were considered traitors to their country because they had either accepted German naturalisation or simply because they were considered German due to their ethnicity. That was sufficient to prompt discrimination, deportation, and internment in labour camps. The Russian-Germans seek to avoid this fate by joining their relatives in the Federal Republic of Germany. But how?
A first glimmer of hope: In 1955 the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations with the USSR. At the (Federal) German Embassy in Moscow, the Russian-Germans were allowed to register for the first time, signalling their existence and that they wanted to leave. But they were only eligible if they could prove they had close relatives in Germany – and at times that was not even enough. The Tracing Service provided services to find these relatives.

Hundreds of thousands applied using the so-called “embassy forms”. This involved risks. Anyone who expressed a desire to leave the Soviet Union had to reckon with disadvantages: job loss, abuse, incarceration. Dramatic scenes played out: embassy forms were even smuggled in loaves of bread in order to avoid stoking resentment. The embassy forms symbolised the beginning of the Tracing Service’s family reunification work for the Germans and ethnic Germans in the former USSR.

The Soviet Union had developed a sophisticated exit system. Anyone wishing to emigrate to Germany had to produce an invitation, a so-called “Wysow”, from a relative living in the Federal Republic. Here, again, the Tracing Service came into play: the German Red Cross Tracing Service took care of the issuing of the forms and ensured they were translated and forwarded correctly. Embassy forms, “Wysow” applications and German Red Cross questionnaires still form the basis of the tracing work performed today. In contemporary exit procedures these documents are still used to demonstrate family members have declared their German origins.
Further information on the Internet
You can find detailed descriptions of the history, organisation and operations of the GRC Tracing Service at www.drk-suchdienst.de. You can also submit tracing requests and contact requests online.

Personal consultation in the offices of the German Red Cross at state and district level
Almost all German Red Cross branches on regional and district level have professional Tracing Service staff on hand.

Please contact them directly to arrange an appointment. Contact details can be found at www.drk-suchdienst.de.

### Tracing Service offices at federal level

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<th>International Tracing and Family Message Unit</th>
<th>Second World War Missing</th>
<th>German Red Cross Tracing Service Head Office</th>
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<td>German Red Cross Secretariat-General</td>
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<tr>
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<td>German Red Cross Tracing Service Hamburg office</td>
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The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Humanity
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality
It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality
In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence
The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service
It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity
There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.