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ACTIVITIES  
OF THE  
JOINT RELIEF COMMISSION  
OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS



REVISED EDITION

GENEVA  
November 1943

362.191/1185  
(ENG Br.)

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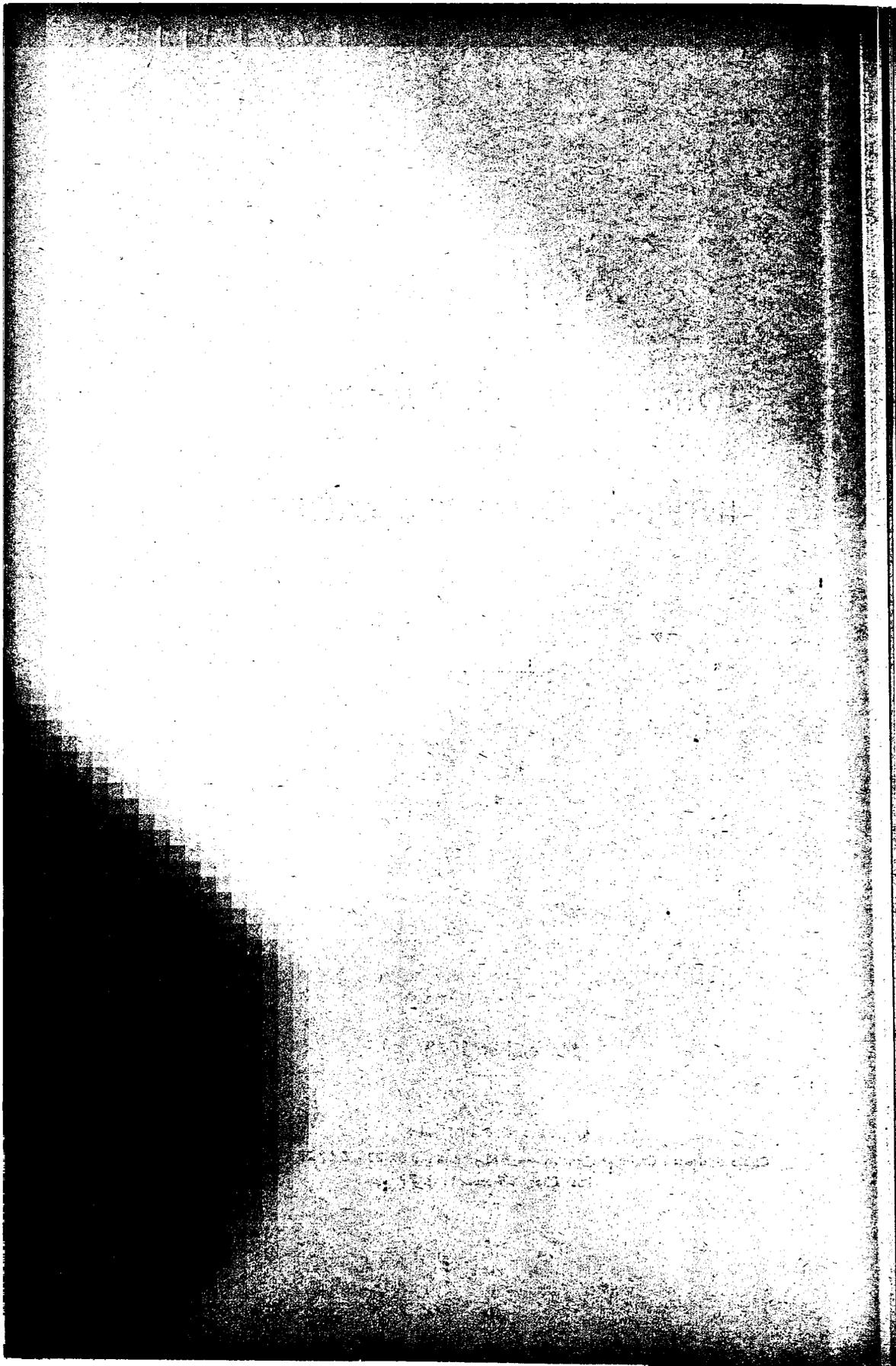
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**GENEVA**  
**4, Cours des Bastions**

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The Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross is an organ of both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies (the latter being a federation of national Red Cross societies). Its purpose is the relief of civilian populations victims of the war.

The statutory regulations of the International Red Cross provide for the cooperation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies in fields of work common to both organizations, and in particular in the relief of distress caused by national or international disasters. With a view to obtaining the maximum from this cooperation, in the Autumn of 1940, the Committee and the League founded the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross, whose aim is to bring relief to civilian populations and more particularly to women and children victims of the war.

Whereas prisoners of war are protected by international conventions, — the most important of these being the «Prisoners of War Code», adopted in Geneva in 1929 —, there are no conventions whatever as to the treatment of civilian populations, whom total warfare has exposed to a much worse fate.

During the Summer and Autumn of 1940, when the consequences of military operations were brought to bear even more terribly on civilian populations than on the armies in the field, the Committee and the League, deeply concerned by this situation, deemed it their duty to intervene and to alleviate these sufferings.

An appeal was addressed to the majority of Governments and Red Cross Societies, urging the dispatch of relief in cash or kind, or the granting of certain facilities (export licences, means of transport, etc.). But in most cases, the Red Cross Societies had to shoulder heavy responsibilities in their national work and this first appeal brought in little more than 60'000 Swiss francs. This amount, however, enabled the Joint Commission to begin its work and larger sums were soon entrusted to it.

In the vast majority of cases, these funds which are remitted for the relief of specified countries, are provided by various national humanitarian organizations, whose offices may be either within or without their own country and who work in cooperation with local Red Cross Societies.

## **I. Structure of the Joint Commission**

The Joint Commission's function is to purchase relief supplies (foodstuffs, clothing, drugs, medical equipment, etc.) needed for relief purposes and to organize their transport and distribution, with the cooperation of local Red Cross Societies and, when possible, through the agency of delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Joint Commission also concerns itself with the forwarding of consignments from overseas of goods intended for stricken civilian populations. Such consignments consist chiefly of medical supplies, donated by Red Cross Societies.

As regards internal organization, the Joint Commission is directed by a Council of five members: two from the International Committee (Professor Carl J. Burckhardt and Dr Alec Cramer), two from the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies (Mr B. de Rougé, Mr G. Milsom) and a fifth member, not belonging to either institution (Dr R. Bœhringer). At the present time, the chairman of the Council is Professor Burckhardt, while Dr Bœhringer is acting as managing director.

The Council is assisted by a qualified staff. Owing to the technical character of its work, it is essential that the Joint Commission's staff be competent to solve the many commercial, financial and legal problems that arise daily. The purchase of foodstuffs and medical supplies, their dispatch and distribution, the initial work of procuring funds and transport facilities, of obtaining information as to the needs of the various countries concerned, are so many operations demanding technical knowledge.

These many sided activities are carried out by different departments: a central Secretariat, dealing with general correspondence and questions of principle; a Foodstuffs and Clothing Department and a Pharmaceutical Department (for civilian populations), with their respective Transport Sections; and lastly an Accounts Department.

These departments, which have over sixty members, occupy two stories of a house in the Cours des Bastions (No 4), Geneva, not far from the head offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross at the Hôtel Métropole and those of the Central Agency for Prisoners of War and the League of Red Cross Societies.

## **II. Activities of the Joint Commission**

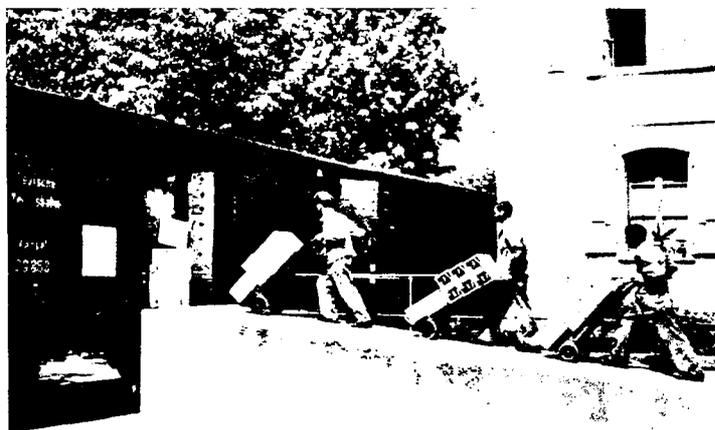
The Joint Commission has no funds of its own; it is dependant upon sums of money placed at its disposal. From the outset, it has been a constant practice with donors to send in gifts with a « special attribution », i. e. earmarked for the relief of a definite country.



Headquarters  
of the Joint Re-  
lief Commis-  
sion of the  
International  
Red Cross

From left to right:  
Messrs. Carl J. Burckhardt,  
Member of the Interna-  
tional Committee of the  
Red Cross and Chairman  
of the Joint Relief Com-  
mission; B. de Rougé, Se-  
cretary General of the  
League of Red Cross So-  
cieties; R. Bøehringer,  
Member and Managing  
Director of the Joint Re-  
lief Commission, during  
a meeting of the Joint  
Relief Commission





Trucks of Swiss  
milk products  
for Greece

Consignment  
of condensed  
milk for  
Belgium



Cases and  
drums of  
medical sup-  
plies stored  
in Geneva  
whilst await-  
ing shipment  
to Poland

While in 1941, the Joint Commission received funds to the amount of approximately 5'500'000 Swiss francs, the total received in 1942 exceeded 30'000'000 and nearly 12'000'000 has been received during the first half of 1943. The steadily increasing scope of the Joint Commission's activities, due to the extension and violence of the war, is evidence of the confidence it inspires in the contributing organizations, as are also the many letters received.

Funds received by the Joint Commission fall under two heads :

- a) funds received from non-European, or overseas countries;
- b) funds received from European countries, either belligerent, occupied, or neutral.

a) From its institution up to January 1st 1943, the Joint Commission received over 10'000'000 Swiss francs from countries outside Europe. On account of the strict regulations governing economic warfare, these funds could be transferred only upon the express condition that they be spent exclusively in neutral European countries.

Such a stipulation restricts purchases in no small measure, since almost all European countries with markets still open to outside buyers belong to one or the other group of belligerents, which precludes using funds from overseas for purchases therein. The Joint Commission has however been able to use these funds by securing from neutral Governments (particularly from Switzerland) on humanitarian grounds, authorisation to buy and export certain foodstuffs and medical supplies.

Altogether, close on 1'100'000 kilograms of foodstuffs and medical supplies were purchased in 1942 by the Joint Commission with funds supplied by non-European countries. Of this amount, 360'000 kgs were sent to Belgium, 600'000 to Greece, 85'000 to Serbia and 10'000 to Poland. Other large purchases are being negotiated.

b) The Joint Commission has also received funds from European countries in the form of gifts from private persons or humanitarian organizations in neutral countries and deblocked funds belonging to institutions in occupied countries.

The funds from Europe used by the Joint Commission for the relief of stricken populations in the course of 1942 amounted to nearly 10'000'000 Swiss francs, represented by large quantities of medical supplies and 5'500'000 kilograms of foodstuffs. Of the foodstuffs 2'770'000 kilos were sent to Belgium, 2'300'000 to France and 240'000 to Greece. From January 1st to July 1st 1943 the sums utilised in the same way amounted to over 8'000'000 francs. These purchases, consisting largely of pulse foods (peas, beans, lentils and dried vegetables) have made it possible to organize soup kitchens for the needy populations of the three above mentioned countries.

The Joint Commission has also been called upon repeatedly to facilitate the forwarding of medical supplies from overseas organizations (particularly from the United States), intended for Belgium, France, Poland (General Government) and Serbia.

Finally, the scope of the Joint Commission's activities has been still further extended during the last few months, in that it has been asked to undertake the dispatch of Portuguese and Spanish foodstuffs to the distressed Belgian civilian population.

It may be of interest here to recall the difficulties that have to be overcome by the Commission's technical departments before relief can reach its destination. In the first place, the Joint Commission has to inform itself as to the needs of the different countries. While there is no great difficulty in ascertaining those needs as regards foodstuffs, this is not the case in respect of medical supplies. In this field where lengthy preliminary negotiations are indispensable, the Joint Commission's activities have become very extensive.

In the second place, the necessary funds have to be procured. In view of present day difficulties in the way of any transfer of money, it is not enough to secure the promise of a given amount: this amount must also be deblocked and transferred, in order to be available in the country where the goods can be purchased. Once funds have been secured, goods have to be found. The present dearth in almost every country makes this a very complicated task.

Next come negotiations to obtain licences for export, transit and transport. Then comes the problem of finding rolling stock and of obtaining free transport in order to reduce expenses to a minimum.

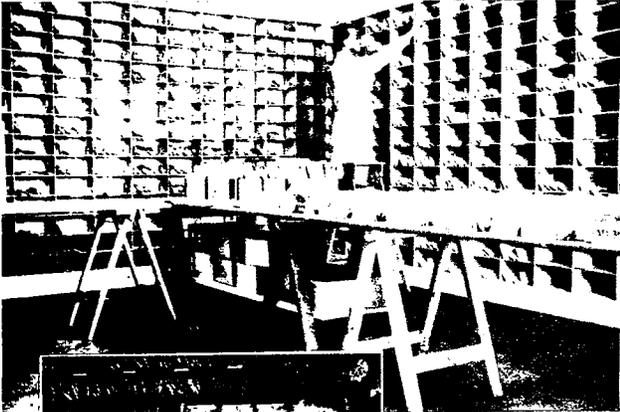
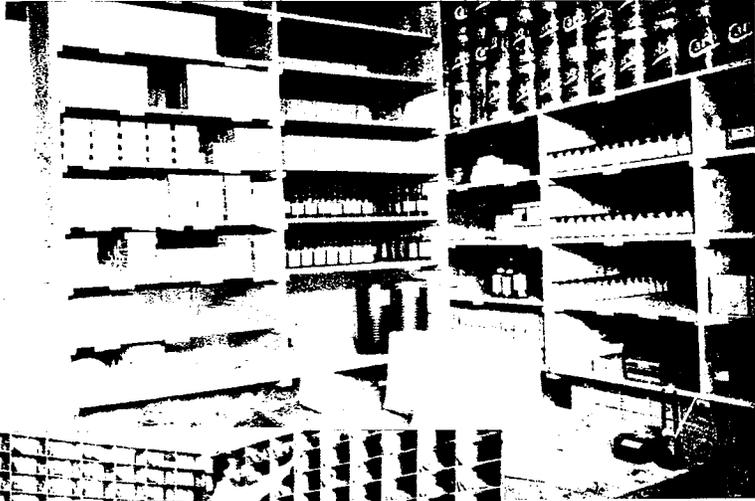
When the relief supplies reach their destination, the Red Cross distributes them among day-nurseries, children's homes, canteens, soup kitchens, dispensaries, maternity homes and hospitals.

In view of its responsibilities towards donors, the Joint Commission must be in a position to send them reports showing that distributions are carried out rationally and in conformity with their desires.

Through the agency of delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Joint Commission is able to ensure that distributions are properly effected. Not a single case has come to its knowledge of relief supplies that have not been used solely for the benefit of the needy civilian population of the country for which they were intended.

The Joint Commission's work has been made possible by the good will of many. The generosity of national groups which have put funds (often large amounts) at the disposal of the Commission for the relief of their fellow countrymen in occupied regions should be recalled here. On the other hand, the Red Cross Societies of occupying Powers, particularly the German Red Cross, have lent their help,

Red Cross  
medical  
supplies at  
the Bonded  
Warehouse



The Spectacles  
Service

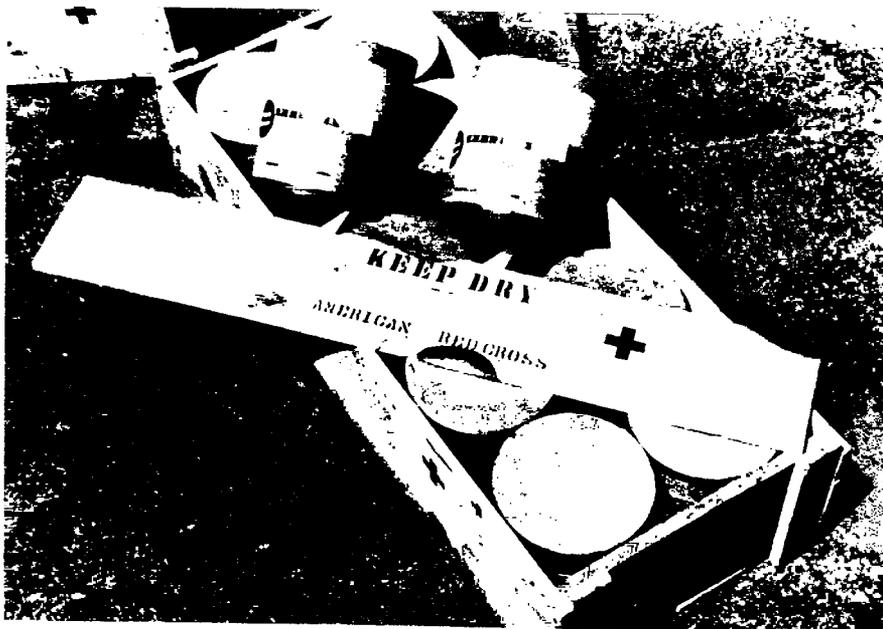


Red Cross medical supplies at the  
Bonded Warehouse at Cornavin in  
Geneva where the Joint Commission  
stocks part of the supplies to be sent  
out in emergency cases





American medical supplies in Belgium





Greek children in the waiting  
room of a general hospital



Greek children at the most  
critical period of the food  
situation



After distibutions of Swiss Milk  
in Athens



Distribution to Greek children organized by the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and by the Mission of the Swiss Red Cross, thanks to consignments sent out by the Joint Relief Commission



in speeding up the forwarding of consignments and seeing that they are duly delivered to the national Red Cross Societies concerned. Generally speaking the important task of distributing relief falls to the Red Crosses of occupied countries.

## BELGIUM

Ever since relief was begun, Belgian organizations (the Belgian Red Cross, Belgian Winter Relief, National Child Welfare Institution, National Anti-Tuberculosis League) have been much to the front, owing to the large funds placed at the disposal of the Joint Commission by the Belgian Winter Relief and by Belgian citizens living abroad.

In 1941, the Joint Commission bought for the needy population of Belgium more than 2'300 tons of foodstuffs, representing over 2'000'000 Swiss francs, to which should be added 500'000 francs worth of medical supplies.

In 1942, 3'500 tons of foodstuffs representing 5'300'000 Swiss francs were dispatched, as well as close on 3'000'000 francs worth of medical supplies. From January 1st to July 1st 1943, 3'700 tons of various products have been purchased. Most of the goods were purchased with funds deblocked in Hungary and in Rumania. Foodstuffs consisted chiefly of pulse foods and dehydrated vegetables (beans, peas, lentils) from the two latter countries. Moreover, Switzerland issued permits for the export of milk foods, tonics and patent medicines.

On several occasions, representatives of the Joint Commission were sent on special missions to negotiate the purchase and dispatch of goods. These missions brought them into contact with the representatives of the interested Belgian organizations. The perfect coordination of all departments concerned made it possible to effect the consignments mentioned above.

Since 1942, the Joint Commission has also cooperated more directly with Belgian organizations outside their own country in the forwarding of relief from Portugal to Belgium. Consignments have consisted chiefly of fish, (salted, smoked, pickled or tinned), dried fruits and vegetables. The relief forwarded in 1942-43 by the Joint Commission or by the organizations in Lisbon reached Brussels in good condition.

The Joint Commission also concerned itself with the forwarding to Belgium of several large shipments of medical supplies from the American Red Cross.

A joint distribution committee composed of the Belgian Winter Relief, the Belgian Red Cross and the National Child Welfare Institution was entrusted with the task of distributing relief supplies among

the chief Belgian humanitarian organizations. These in turn have ensured their distribution among the poorer sections of the population, in particular among the whole child population.

Thanks to these despatches, 750'000 children have received a daily portion of soup at school. In the schools of 328 townships, a supplementary light meal was served free, five times a week, to about 250'000 ailing children and young people. Children's holiday camps and homes also received their share. Moreover 400'000'000 tablets of vitamins C and D were distributed among Belgian school children during the winter of 1942-1943. A new consignment of these vitamins is planned for the winter of 1943-44.

It should also be mentioned that recently the Joint Commission purchased, for the use of necessitous sections of the population in Belgium, about 40'000 pairs of shoes, valued at nearly 500'000 Swiss francs. Three thousand cases of Swiss condensed milk are to be despatched before the close of 1943.

It should be noted that all foodstuffs reaching Belgium as relief, are distributed as supplementary rations, and are not taken into account in the official rationing scheme.

## FRANCE

The Joint Commission has worked in close cooperation with the French Red Cross and the National Relief Fund.

While in 1941 less than 1'000'000 Swiss francs were entrusted to the Joint Commission for the benefit of French relief organizations, such funds amounted to over 7'000'000 francs in 1942. More than 2'300 tons of foodstuffs were sent to the various distributing agencies in both « zones ». During the first half of 1943, 1'400 tons of foodstuffs have been purchased for the social agencies of the French Red Cross.

The relief action on behalf of internees' camps in the South and South West of France should also be mentioned. In addition to several consignments of foodstuffs and medical supplies, the Joint Commission distributed a large quantity of clothes donated by a great American charitable organization. A delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, representing the Joint Commission, took part in the distributions of clothes in these camps.

On several occasions the heads of the French Red Cross visited Geneva and examined with the Council of the Joint Commission means whereby greater results could be achieved in the relief action undertaken. In particular, the French Red Cross stressed the urgent need for medical supplies, and considerable quantities of these were purchased.



Soup kitchens in Brussels. Foodstuffs sent by the Joint Commission are distributed to the needy population

A soup kitchen in Brussels supplied partly by the Joint Commission. — Distribution of a dish which the population can take away with them



Distribution of ovomaltine to Belgian children



Distribution of Spanish oranges in schools in the Netherlands



## GREECE

Relief work on behalf of Greece falls under two heads : consignments from Europe and shipments from overseas.

Large quantities of foodstuffs and medical supplies have been bought in Europe itself by the Joint Commission. Considerable amounts of money were put at its disposal by charitable organizations or individual donors in neutral countries (by the Swiss Red Cross, for instance) as well as by groups of Greek citizens living abroad. Thus it has been possible to forward to Greece some 1'400 tons of various foodstuffs and medical supplies (chiefly Swiss milk foods). In 1942 the Joint Commission received over 5'000'000 francs from various sources for this purpose.

On the other hand, with the support and cooperation of the international organizations of the Red Cross in Geneva and the Swedish Red Cross, an agreement was reached between the belligerent Powers, permitting a monthly shipment of 15'000 tons of Canadian wheat to Greece. To the end of 1942, nearly 80'000 tons of wheat reached Greece on Swedish ships. From January to October, 1943, about 116'000 tons of wheat were received from Canada. Other consignments consisting of dried vegetables, dried milk and medical supplies were dispatched regularly through the same means. From the outset, the organization and control of distribution were in the hands of the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Wheat and dried vegetables from overseas were distributed to soup kitchens by a managing committee comprising Swiss and Swedish delegates.

Milk and medical supplies from Europe purchased by the Joint Commission were distributed through the Swiss Red Cross « Distribution Centres » to infants, children, sick persons, pregnant women, etc.

In 1943, various foodstuffs (about 550 tons in all) were bought by the Joint Commission and forwarded to Greece. The Joint Commission also undertook the despatch of several consignments of pharmaceutical goods of different kinds.

Since foodstuffs and particularly milk with its high nutritive value are extremely precious, strict supervision proved essential. This is effected in two ways : in the first place, the actual existence and exact age of the children has to be proven ; in the second, foodstuffs dealt out in each centre are carefully checked.

Thanks to this supervision, which has proved very efficient, the Joint Commission has been certain that the supplies forwarded have in fact benefited the sections of the population for whom they were intended.

The shipments of foodstuffs and medical supplies from overseas, together with those that were purchased in Europe by the Joint Com-

mission, have saved a great number of human lives. The food and health situations show a measure of improvement, but are still serious. It is a well-known fact that, before the war, Greece had to import a large proportion of its necessary foodstuffs.

#### LATVIA

The Joint Commission was entrusted with the forwarding of 37 cases of medical supplies from the British Red Cross. Having reached Geneva safely, this consignment was checked carefully, in the autumn of 1943, before being forwarded to Latvia.

#### NORWAY

Thanks to funds supplied by Norwegians living abroad, it was possible to send 25'000 tins of minced meat to Norway. A large consignment of Swiss condensed milk was also purchased. Moreover, in the course of the present year, several cases of medicaments were despatched with the aid of the Joint Commission. Further, a consignment of fruit is being despatched shortly.

#### NETHERLANDS

The situation in Holland did not arouse such anxiety as that of Belgium, which is more industrialised. This explains why the Joint Commission's activities on behalf of the Netherlands remained on a small scale up to the end of 1942. As difficulties have increased, however, several consignments have been despatched, consisting of medical supplies, tonics, milk foods from Switzerland and fruit from Spain. This was made possible by the liberality of Dutch citizens living abroad, who placed over 1'100'000 Swiss francs at the disposal of the Joint Commission up to the end of 1942.

In 1943, the Joint Commission undertook the despatch of 100 kilos of tunny-fish-liver oil, and also forwarded an important consignment of medical supplies sent by the American Red Cross.

Moreover, it made arrangements for the despatch of 2'500 cases of lemons from Spain, which reached their destination in Holland safely. Negotiations are at present in progress for the purchase of 120 tons of orange juice, also from Spain.

The Dutch Red Cross is proceeding with the distribution of these supplies, with the occasional assistance of a delegate of the International Red Cross.

#### POLAND

Poland has also benefited by a large number of consignments. In 1942, over 1'000'000 Swiss francs, placed at the disposal of the

Joint Commission by the representatives in Switzerland of Polish citizens abroad, were used for the purchase of foodstuffs, particularly milk foods and medical supplies, almost all of Swiss origin.

The Joint Commission also had to take charge of another important consignment, consisting of 36'000 kilograms of various medical supplies, donated by the « Commission for Polish Relief », an American organization. The Joint Commission ensured the forwarding of this consignment to the General Government. Distribution was carried out according to an agreement reached between the occupying authorities and the Joint Commission and with the assistance of a special delegate from the International Committee. This delegate was able to inspect the several distribution centres and to see that they functioned satisfactorily.

Furthermore, during 1943, the Joint Commission was able to arrange for several consignments of Swiss medicaments to be sent to Poland, and forwarded 139 parcels of medicaments of American origin.

The Commission is at present dealing with a consignment of 21 tons of vitaminized powdered milk.

## SERBIA

The situation in this country has changed very much for the worse, especially since refugees poured into the larger towns. These refugees were often entirely destitute.

Thanks to funds amounting to over 600'000 Swiss francs, several purchases of foodstuffs, clothing and medical supplies were made during 1942.

In 1943, the Joint Commission sent to Serbia 800 doses of anti-typhus (exanthematic) vaccine, and large quantities of medicaments and disinfectants. It also undertook to forward to this country materials for dressings made from paper.

Other relief action on a larger scale is under study or in process. Over 1'000 tons of foodstuffs (fish, olives, figs, dried fruits, etc.) from Turkey are on their way to Serbia. By 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943, 635 tons had arrived in Belgrade.

Distributions in this city and in other Serbian towns are undertaken by the Serbian Red Cross, assisted by the delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Hospitals, out-patient hospitals and dispensaries have received medical supplies purchased with gifts from Yugoslavs living abroad, and from the American, German and Swiss Red Cross Societies, as well as medical supplies despatched from London by the British Red Cross.

In addition to the activities above described, the Joint Commission has cooperated with the International Committee in collecting throughout Switzerland spectacles for prisoners of war and certain categories of civilian war victims. This campaign was a great success, since over 80'000 pairs of spectacles were collected. Moreover the Medical Supplies Department organized several collections of artificial teeth, medicinal herbs and samples of patent medicines.

The organization of relief consignments demands that the Joint Commission have the most accurate knowledge in respect of the needs of the countries concerned. It is important, therefore, to have various information, in particular as to relief already received by a given country. With this object in view, the Joint Commission collects all possible data concerning consignments from all sources dispatched by various humanitarian organizations to war-stricken countries.

Such data, together with information as to the actual health and food situation in the various countries, will make it possible to prepare a better organization of relief, on a larger scale, when new possibilities open up. In particular, prophylactic measures for fighting epidemics are under study.

As the war draws on and difficulties increase, Commission's activities multiply. Its action has been particularly efficacious as regards health and medical supplies: in almost every case, indeed, it has been possible to forward to the interested countries the supplies most required.

As regards food, the need has become so great in the past two years that the consignments forwarded by the Joint Commission can alleviate it only in a small measure. Nevertheless they have relieved the sufferings of many.

As the war goes on, more and more appeals are made to the Joint Commission, which does its utmost to respond to them, within the limit of its possibilities.

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CICR BIBLIOTHEQUE

