

EXHIBIT SUMMARY

The Red Cross Tracing Agency 1914-1994 and the Search for Missing Persons Due to War

Significant items:

A large portion of this exhibit includes the use of Red Cross Tracing Labels which are very scarce. Generally only a few will reach the market in a given year, with the committee labels only rarely being available. Of 11 styles of World War One labels shown, 13 earliest and latest dates of usage are included. In the last 10 years I have been able to record approximately 200 covers from WWI with Tracing etiquette labels that are already in collectors hands, or have been available on the market. Several styles are recorded with under 10 examples known.

Treatment and structure:

- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) tracing services are arranged chronologically by conflict, and subdivided into distinct ICRC committee sections.
- Committee sections are then further broken into the countries involved.
- Although most items are scarce to very rare, those in red frames are noted for specific reasons as compared to the material overall.

History and general information:

- The ICRC has set up in times of war a missing persons tracing service for family members. These include those persons who have been 1) captured or arrested, 2) refugees who have fled their home country, 3) Persons who have been separated across front lines, 4) have died.
- In 1914 the ICRC set up the International Prisoner of War Agency in Geneva. Information would be received by personal visits to POW camps and hospitals, reports from military administrators, and capture cards from POW's. Nearly 5 million individual index files were created on the missing, wounded and captured. Information requests would be received mainly via written enquiries, however 120000 people personally visited the agency with requests.
- During the Spanish Civil War, neither side would allow a central tracing bureau. Instead the work was done in the field with local ICRC delegates.
- The ICRC set up a Central Prisoner of War Agency in 1939 as the tracing division. It would eventually make 11000 visits to POW and civilian camps. The agency however would receive very little information from the eastern front since the Soviet Union had not ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention, and Germany and the Soviet Union refused to sign a reciprocal agreement.
- After the surrender of Germany the allies began to realize the extent of the German atrocities. An International Tracing Service was established in Arolsen to help former victims of the Nazi regime.
- In modern times the ICRC has used traditional tracing services in conflicts such as the Yugoslavian civil war, and more novel approaches, such as radio broadcast in Somalia, since there was no postal service during the civil war.

- You will note that the Korean and Vietnam wars are not included in this exhibit. Both north communist states would not allow the ICRC to visit and record POW's so the tracing service was essentially not available.

 **Items of special interest are bordered in red.**

General Tracing Agency Study and Research:

- 15+ years of collecting ICRC tracing service postal history, original research, discovery of new labels styles and detailed examination of use and time periods.
- Census surveys by John West and the late Ian Gilchrist are included, as well as subjects located through internet and traditional auction houses.
- Unique items and earliest/latest usages are assumed based on reports made, subject to change.

Exhibit Plan:

See title page.

Previous Awards:

This specialist exhibit is new.

Bibliography

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