



# REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

SUPPLEMENT

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## THE SWISS AERONAUTICAL RESCUE GUARD

*On June 30, 1956, the United States and the entire world were horror-stricken by the news of a terrible accident which occurred during a storm in the Grand Canyon district of Arizona, when two aircraft collided. This catastrophe, which claimed 128 victims, has no precedent in the records of air transport companies. Access to the scene of the disaster appeared to be almost impossible; the American air lines, therefore, with a view to saving whatever could be saved from the wreckage, appealed to relief societies and, through Swissair, to the Swiss Aeronautical Rescue Guard.*

What is this organisation, set up in one of the world's smallest countries but to which one of the greatest nations on earth turned at a time of distress?

This article is intended to answer this question, on the basis of the material kindly lent by the Swiss Aeronautical Rescue Guard to the Editor of the *Revue internationale*; a member of the ICRC staff collected, translated and summarised the articles and reports of which the material consisted and which illustrate the fine work accomplished.

To study the efforts made by the Rescue Guard to become an organisation with adequate and efficient equipment, we must go back to the winters of 1950/51 and 1951/52, with their tragic records of avalanches that devastated numerous areas in Switzerland and Austria.

At that time, all relief organisations were called upon to help, in particular the Swiss Life-Saving Society, founded some twenty years previously.

During the operations the latter found that the material aid it could provide lost most of its efficiency through the lack of adequate means of rapid transport.

For many years past the members of the Swiss Life-Saving Society had been endeavouring to make influential circles aware of the increasing importance of aviation in life-saving operations in mountain districts; they were given no encouragement, however, to put into practice ideas which were considered, at the time, to be visionary. The tragic experiences of the early stages of the Korean conflict, were to prove that they were right.

Today everybody is aware of the invaluable service which can be given from the air in evacuating medical cases, and assisting in the care of the wounded and sick, particularly by means of parachute drops.

The Swiss Life-Saving Society, fully conscious of the aid which could be given by this means to the population, and in particular to mountain dwellers who so often suffer disasters, steadily pursued its study of the technical possibilities of the undertaking until the day when, at a meeting of the delegates in April 1952, it was unanimously decided to form the *Swiss Aeronautical Rescue Guard* (SARG) with headquarters in Zürich; the object of the Guard was to give rapid aid in certain circumstances and according to plans which had been drawn up after long and careful preparation.

This organisation has a special feature which we wish to emphasise; its field of action is not—as shown by the Grand Canyon catastrophe—limited to Swiss territory only; the SARG may be called upon in the event of disasters in other countries; there have been many occasions where it lent its services with successful results.

This particular feature will certainly be of interest to the Red Cross movement since, in its own sphere, international mutual aid is considered to be one of the essential humanitarian principles; moreover, it is interesting to note that, in the event of a relief action in a foreign country, SARG may place its services at the disposal of the Swiss Red Cross, the International

Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and other relief organisations abroad.

SARG acts in Switzerland and abroad, therefore, in the following circumstances :

*In Switzerland*

1. Accidents to civilian and military aircraft in the mountains (in accordance with the Convention on International Civil Aviation concluded at Chicago<sup>1</sup>; it is, in such cases, at the disposal of the Office fédéral de l'Air) :
2. Mountain disasters (land-slides, falls of rock, etc.) :
3. Disasters caused by avalanches :
4. Floods :
6. Shipwrecks on the lakes :
6. Traffic accidents (when access to the scene of the accident is particularly difficult) :
7. The SARG also lends its services to the organisation entitled « Secours suisse en cas de sinistre ».

*In other countries* SARG is called upon in the event of :

1. Accidents to military and civilian aircraft in highland regions :

In such cases, according to the Chicago Convention, SARG is at the disposal of the Office fédéral de l'Air and, through the latter, indirectly at the disposal of the Air Ministries of States bordering on Switzerland in case of accidents near the Swiss border.

2. Mountain disasters (land—slides, falls of rock, etc.).
3. Disasters caused by avalanches.
4. Floods (bursting of dykes, dams, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> Convention on International Aviation, signed in Chicago in 1944 by the representatives of 56 nations. It gave birth to the International Civil Aviation Organisation which, in time of peace, ensures the development of international aviation in accordance with the requirements of humanity and sees that civil air transport does not become a cause for international tension.

SARG is an auxiliary relief organisation (except in very exceptional cases); that is to say it intervenes only at the request of other relief or life-saving organisations, such as the Club alpin suisse, the Swiss Red Cross, etc : when war threatens or during hostilities it places itself at the disposal of the Federal Council and, through it, of the Swiss Confederation.

This organisation has proper technical equipment, such as helicopters, aircraft and parachutes, of which some are its own property and others belong to commercial air lines or flying clubs, which are called upon to lend equipment in case of need.

A plan for petrol stores in the Alps and the fore-Alps is under preparation, as is a further plan for the stocking of relief equipment in five main depots and several smaller depots in areas where weather conditions have been closely studied.

With regard to the air routes for relief actions, these have been planned with a view to rapid penetration, with a minimum of " search flights " in the principal valleys perpendicular to the Alpine ranges.

The SARG teams include parachutists (doctors, first-aid workers) and relief workers (non-parachutists), i.e. mountaineers, guides, pilots, etc. Their equipment has been carefully planned to enable them to deal with mountain accidents of any description.

We must not omit to mention avalanche dogs and ambulance dogs which, with special training, are now accustomed to air transport, in most cases by helicopter; thus the animals no longer arrive on the scene of the disaster already exhausted by a long journey over the mountains.

The regulations concerning the admission of members to SARG are very strict. At present the organisation has its own training school (the first parachutists were trained in England) and the pupils include doctors, first-aid workers or mountaineers. They must all be familiar with the meteorological and topographical conditions they will meet during their work. In addition they must be excellent skiers and swimmers, and also—a most important point—they are all blood-donors.

We wish to mention one other point, as it reveals that

altruism also shown by Red Cross workers, namely, the voluntary nature of the members' services. The SARG teams are composed solely of persons who give their services *voluntarily* to the association and take the necessary training courses at a sacrifice, in most cases, of their spare time. In addition, they show the greatest physical and moral courage, since they risk their lives in going to the aid of persons in distress.

In practice SARG has shown itself indispensable and this is to some great extent due to the careful training of its teams and the continual improvement of its technical equipment.

Today, several years after its foundation, SARG has a great many rescues to its credit. The documents consulted only refer to a few which took place during the first months of 1955, which we feel are particularly worthy of mention as they show the fine qualities of the rescue teams or give an account of situations which, without help of SARG, would have been desperate : they were as follows :

Organisation of an air-lift between Zermatt and Brigue to provide food for the population of Zermatt cut off by an avalanche disaster; it was carried out by the pilot H. Geiger, flying a Piper Super Cub and S. Bauer with a helicopter.

Transport of a person suffering from an acute heart seizure from Arolla to Sion.

Searches, at the request of the families, for the bodies of two climbers who fell in the high Alps (Rottal disaster).

Transport by helicopter of a seriously injured woodcutter from the place of the accident to Glaris Hospital, within six minutes.

Aid to an injured shepherd on an alpine slope near Arolla, at an altitude of 2,500 m : blood transfusion on the spot by means of blood plasma provided by the Swiss Red Cross; transport to Sion Hospital.

Saving three shipwrecked persons from Bienne Lake after a violent storm.

Searches for the bodies of the crew of an American amphibian craft which fell into Bienne Lake.

Transport by air to Kloten of the seriously injured victim of a road accident near Lake Garda. Further transport from Kloten by helicopter to Coire Hospital; duration of the life-saving operation (twice across the Alps) 2 h. 50 m.

Transport of the victims of avalanches in the Vorarlberg, Austria.

\* \* \*

As we have already stated, SARG is also known beyond our frontiers. Numerous countries have shown great interest in the results of its life-saving operations and are planning a similar organisation.

In *Spain*, for instance, the Spanish Red Cross has requested SARG to co-operate in this undertaking.

Thanks to SARG, the *Austrian* Flying Club now has its first team of parachutists, who passed their tests for the federal certificate in the presence of the experts of the Office fédéral de l'Air, at Altenrhein. During the avalanche disaster in Austria in 1954, SARG gave assistance to the victims and this led to the formation of a team in the Vorarlberg. The Minister for Physical Training in *Uruguay* asked SARG to assist with the organisation of a guard in his country.

The *Canadian* Embassy in Bern asked for advice from SARG based on its experience in life-saving from the air.

But to carry on such an important task with success, considerable financial means are essential. SARG, which receives no government subsidy, has to meet its heavy administrative costs (purchase of aircraft, helicopters, etc., cost of upkeep of life-saving equipment) from funds drawn from private sources.

In order to interest the public in its work it organises life-saving displays. Thus, with the generous help of Swissair, Air import and Swiss manufacturers interested in its work, it organised a great public display at Zurich, which was a success, not only as publicity but also from the financial point of view; it produced, in fact, a considerable amount. Over 350,000 spectators watched with enthusiasm the various life-saving exercises which took place over the lower part of Lake Zurich.

One point may be mentioned in this connection as an example of friendly co-operation; the parachutes ordered for the occasion from a factory in the United Kingdom could not be delivered in time; in desperation, as the show could not be postponed, SARG telephoned to the Air Ministry in London; the Royal Air Force immediately made 30 double parachutes available; these arrived by a special plane of the Swissair, which had taken over the transport free of charge. To the great surprise of the organisers of the show, there stepped out of the aircraft on

arrival two British colonels who had not wished to miss the pleasure of giving their personal support to the parachutists—their former pupils—in their display.

\* \* \*

In our day, when so many commonplace and insignificant events are noisily advertised by all modern methods of publicity, it gives rare pleasure to see an organisation carry out remarkable live-saving operations so unobtrusively.

In the Colorado catastrophe the men who gave their aid were drawn from the most varied professions; they included a pilot, a professor, a draughtsman, a guide, a business man, a railway employee and a policemen. They were animated by a single purpose—the desire to help.

As a press correspondent so rightly said, they were there as “eight ambassadors of a country which, for America, has become a symbol of mutual aid”.

\* \* \*

As this symbol of mutual aid is that of the Red Cross we can but support and encourage such efforts, as we have so often done in regard to National Societies which, with their own equipment, or in co-operation with public or private bodies, meet the heavy task of saving human lives.

Let us remember the Norwegian Red Cross which by means of its section for life-saving by air has rescued people on many occasions, particularly in mountain districts. The Canadian Red Cross also makes use of aircraft; its Disaster Service has on several occasions made rescues with aircraft; it also employs aircraft when it has to reach distant regions in the Great North, for the purpose of removing to hospital a seriously injured or sick person whose life depends upon prompt medical or surgical treatment.

The same applies to the Finnish Red Cross; thanks to an article which this Society has kindly prepared for us, we shall

shortly be able to publish some very interesting information on the subject dealt with in these pages.

As regards other continents, it will be found that the directors of National Societies are also interested in aviation and the invaluable service it can give at all times when efficient results depend upon rapid action. In South American areas subject to frequent natural disasters, the National Societies seek increasingly greater co-operation with the air services, in accordance with the regulations and standards established, in most cases, by the public services concerned. This is the case with the Chilean Red Cross which follows with particular attention the progress of civil aviation, especially the Medical Air Service recently founded; and a great many nurses who have joined this Service in various capacities belong to the Society's nursing personnel and were specially trained by it.

Special training is, in fact, required for this personnel which will have to undertake, in circumstances which may be difficult or even perilous, tasks outside the usual course of Red Cross activities. As an example, we have mentioned the Lebanese Red Cross which has instituted for its aerial first-aid section, recently formed, a series of training courses based on those given by the French Red Cross for the Pilot-Nurses of its Aerial First-Aid Section.

Much more could be said as to the importance and the increasing use of aviation in life-saving operations. The results achieved by SARG in this field vividly illustrate the position. We are pleased to note that the National Societies are trying by all means in their power to carry out—in co-operation with public or private bodies or independently—the inspiring mission of saving human lives.

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# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## RECOGNITION OF THE RED CROSS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

GENEVA, November 1, 1957.

*418th Circular  
to the Central Committees of the National Red Cross  
(Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

We have the honour to inform you of the official recognition of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

When, on May 23, 1957, the International Committee of the Red Cross recognised the Red Cross of the Republic of Viet Nam it stated in its 415th Circular concerning this recognition: " Its decision will not in any way be prejudicial to the recognition of a Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Viet Nam—which the International Committee would be prepared to accord as soon as the Society has made an application and fulfilled the necessary conditions—or, possibly, the recognition of a society whose activity would extend to the whole of the Viet Nam territory ".

In a letter dated September 11, 1957—received in Geneva on October 16—the President of the new Society applied for its recognition by the International Committee under the title: “Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam”. In support of his request he enclosed the text of the governmental decree recognising the Society, its Statutes and a report on its work.

A study of these documents, in conjunction with the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies, showed that the conditions which govern the recognition of a new Society by the International Committee of the Red Cross had been fulfilled.

The Society, which today becomes a member of the International Red Cross, was founded in 1946; the following year it was recognised by its Government. According to the Statutes, its mission consists, in particular, in helping to prevent disease, giving assistance in the event of public disasters, aiding the victims of conflicts without any discrimination and, in general, carrying out within its terms of reference the provisions of the Geneva Conventions for the amelioration of the condition of war victims; the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam acceded to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 on June 28, 1957.

According to the report on its work, this Society has, since its creation, undertaken the most varied tasks which it is continuing to develop, such as assistance to the wounded and sick, children and the disabled, health education, first aid, assistance to prisoners, exchange of the wounded, assistance to persons in need, etc. It is directed by a Central Committee, elected by the National Congress, its supreme deliberative body. The President of the Society is Dr. Vu Dinh Tung; the Society's headquarters are in Hanoi.

Its recognition announced today by the International Committee of the Red Cross marks a further step forward on the road to Red Cross universality. As stated above, this recognition will not in any way be prejudicial to the recognition, at a later date, of a Society whose activity would extend to the whole of the Viet Nam territory. The International Committee also wishes to recall what it has already emphasised in connection

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with the recent recognitions granted, i.e. that its decision concerns the Red Cross only and that, with the sole aim of helping the extension of humanitarian action among all peoples, it does not take into account divergences which might arise as to the international status of States.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has much pleasure in admitting this new Society into the International Red Cross, accrediting it to all other National Societies and recommending it to their kind attention. The Committee would also like to express its best wishes for the Society's future prosperity and for the success of its humanitarian work.

I have the honour to remain,  
Yours obediently,

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS

**LÉOPOLD BOISSIER**, *President*

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## RECOGNITION OF THE SUDANESE RED CRESCENT

GENEVA, November 1, 1957.

*419th Circular*  
*to the Central Committees of the National Red Cross*  
*(Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

We have the honour to inform you of the official recognition by the International Committee of the Red Cross of the Sudanese Red Crescent.

In a letter dated October 8, 1957, the Secretary-General of this Society applied for its recognition by the International Committee. The letter stated that the Sudanese Red Crescent accepted the ten conditions which govern the recognition of National Societies and agreed to be bound by them.

In support of this request were enclosed the text of the Society's Statutes and a declaration of the Government of the Republic of the Sudan approving the formation of the Red Crescent Society. A study of these documents, in conjunction with the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies, showed the International Committee that the conditions for recognition had been fulfilled.

According to its Statutes, the Sudanese Red Crescent is officially recognised by its Government as a voluntary aid Society, auxiliary to the public authorities, in particular the Army Medical Service, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, its mission will be to assist the victims of public disasters, to help in the prevention of disease, to train medical personnel and to further the Red Cross ideal among the population, especially among young people.

The Republic of the Sudan acceded to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 on September 23, 1957.

The Sudanese Red Crescent, founded only a year ago, has taken over and continued the activities previously undertaken by the British Red Cross, in the most varied fields: first aid courses, blood transfusion, junior section, rehabilitation centre ambulance brigade, etc. The Society's work is directed by a management committee composed of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary-General, chosen by a Central Committee which is itself elected by the General Assembly.

The Sudanese Red Crescent, placed under the patronage of the President and members of the Supreme Commission of the Republic of the Sudan, has its headquarters at Khartoum.

The International Committee has much pleasure in admitting this new Society into the International Red Cross, accrediting it to all other National Societies and recommending it to their kind attention. The Committee would also like to express its best wishes for the Society's future prosperity and for the success of its humanitarian work.

I have the honour to remain,  
Yours obediently,

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS

LÉOPOLD BOISSIER, *President*

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**VISIT OF THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS TO SYRIA AND THE LEBANON**

Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee, who was accompanied by Mr. M. Borsinger, member of the ICRC Secretariat, paid a visit to the Near East on his way to New Delhi to attend the XIXth International Red Cross Conference. He stopped first at Beirut where he met the Marquise de Freige, President of the Lebanese Red Cross. He was later received by Mr. Camille Chamoun, President of the Republic of Lebanon and Mr. Sami Solh Bey, Prime Minister.

On the same day a dinner was given in his honour by the Minister for Switzerland at Beirut, which was attended by several persons of consequence in Lebanon and members of the foreign colonies. They included Mr. Skaff, Minister for Health and Social Welfare, the Marquise de Freige, Mr. Nassif, Head of the International Organisations Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Tabet, who was representing the Lebanese Red Cross at the International Red Cross Conference in New Delhi, and Mr. Lalive, UNRWA Adviser.

On the following day Mr. Boissier went to Damascus. He was met at the frontier by leading members of the Syrian Government and, as at Beirut, had some very interesting discussions on matters concerning the International Committee's activities in the Near East. He saw for himself the excellent relations which have been established between the Lebanese Red Cross, the Syrian Red Crescent and the ICRC. He also

met the persons who were to represent the Government of Syria and the Syrian Red Crescent at New Delhi, and thus had the opportunity of informing them of the International Committee's views on several matters which were to be discussed a few days later at the XIXth International Red Cross Conference.

Mr. Mardam Bey, President of the Syrian Red Crescent, gave a dinner for Mr. Boissier which was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, and representatives of intellectual and charitable associations of Syria. Next day, as the President of the Republic, Mr. Kuwatly, was in ill health, Mr. Boissier was invited to lunch with Mr. Assali, Prime Minister of Syria, and Mr. Kallas, Minister for National Economy and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs; several prominent officials were present.

The kindness of the welcome given to the President of the ICRC in Syria was further emphasised by the award to Mr. Boissier of the Syrian Order of Merit, presented by the Primer Minister.

Mr. Boissier was to leave Beirut by air the following day for New Delhi, and on his departure from Damascus eminent people he had had the privilege of meeting during his few days' stay came to bid him farewell, some of them accompanying him as far as the Syro-Lebanese frontier.

The consideration shown to the President in Syria and Lebanon is most gratifying to the International Committee which sees therein a further proof of the spirit of fellowship, co-operation and friendliness which reigns in all countries flying the flags of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

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RELIEF ACTION  
ON BEHALF OF ALGERIAN REFUGEES IN MOROCCO

During the month of October last, the International Committee of the Red Cross undertook further relief action on behalf of Algerian refugees in Morocco <sup>1</sup>. As the need for clothing was becoming urgent with the approach of winter, Dr. Gaillard and Mr. Colladon, the delegates of the ICRC, made considerable local purchases of clothing material, trousers and shirts. This clothing was then distributed in the various refugee centres, priority being given to those in urgent need. Distributions were made from October 16 to 26 in the frontier areas at Saida, Ahfir, Berkane, Beni Drar, Oujda, Bou-Beker, Tiouli, Tairat, Tendirara, Bouârfa and Figig.

As on previous occasions, these distributions were carried out in conjunction with the refugees' local representatives and under the supervision of the delegates of the International Committee.

Over 32,000 metres of printed dress material, some 6,200 shirts and 7,800 pairs of trousers were thus handed over to the families most in need. It may be estimated that over half the refugees benefited by the relief action for which the ICRC expended the sum of 11,600,000 Moroccan francs.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale*, October 1957.

FURTHER VISIT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE'S  
DELEGATE TO DETENTION CAMPS IN CYPRUS

Early in December 1957, Mr. D. de Traz, General-Delegate of the ICRC for the Near East, made further visits to places of detention in Cyprus. During this fourth mission Mr. de Traz was able, as customary, to speak without witnesses with the internees' Camp Committee members in Pyla and Kokkino-Trimithia Camps, and with persons under detention in Nicosia Central Prison. The points noted at the time will be brought to the knowledge of the authorities concerned by the ICRC.

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