



REVUE INTERNATIONALE  
DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

ET

BULLETIN DES SOCIÉTÉS  
DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

SUPPLEMENT

*First Year, 1948*

GENÈVE

1948



# SUPPLEMENT

VOL. I

REVUE INTERNATIONALE  
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August, 1948

No. 8

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## INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

### *THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN PALESTINE*

A preceding article <sup>1</sup>, speaking of the reorganization and decentralization of the Committee's Delegation in Palestine, stated that in future the Delegation would confine itself more closely to the usual work of the Committee, as stipulated in the Conventions or sanctioned by custom and precedent. We added: "It is obvious, however, that the delegates will not shrink from any duties and missions which may help to save human lives that are in danger."

One delegate, M. André Durand, of Geneva, has proved that the spirit which informs the Committee's representatives, is not a vain word. On July 17, M. Durand, who had arrived shortly before in Palestine, was in the Old Arab City of Jerusalem. After bitter fighting had taken place all night, the truce imposed by the UNO Commission for the Holy City had come into operation at dawn, wounded lay between the Jewish and Arab lines, and no-one dared to remove them, as they had fallen in the midst of a mine-field. They were Arabs, and their comrades begged M. Durand to undertake a rescue expedition, which he at once agreed to do. Alone, he advanced between the lines in dead silence. Suddenly there was an explosion. Shots were fired. M. Durand staggered a few steps further and then fell. He lay helpless for almost an hour, bleeding from his wounds, until he was removed by Jewish soldiers. The net result of his attempt was a wound in the thigh, and a mangled right arm, which had to be amputated above the elbow.

As usual in such cases, the exact circumstances of the accident are difficult to determine. The only point which concerns

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale*, June 1948.

us here is the selfless act of this delegate who, in his anxiety to save the wounded, did not hesitate to expose himself, and who is now maimed for life. It should be added that M. Durand has expressed the desire to resume his work, as soon as his wound begins to mend.

Other incidents, happily less tragic, mark the work of the Committee's Delegation in Palestine during the past weeks—for instance, the evacuation of 1068 Arab women, children and old people from the region of Natania-Haifa, which has already been mentioned. Reports on this transfer have now reached headquarters in Geneva. Here are some extracts from M. Courvoisier's account :

On June 14, 1948, the civil authorities of the towns of Nablus, Tulkarem and Jenin, and many inhabitants drew my attention, to the fact that between Tel-Aviv and Haifa about 2,000 Arab old people, women and children were detained by the Jewish military authorities. The Arab authorities asked me to take steps through our delegation at Tel-Aviv to have these old people, women and children released. On June 16, M. Gouy, our delegate in Tel-Aviv, informed me by radio of arrangements allowing a little over 1,000 persons to be handed over unconditionally on June 18.

The arrival of 1,000 refugees in towns like Tulkarem, Nablus and Ramallah, which are already overcrowded, called for preparation. To this end, I asked the Mayor of Tulkarem if he could receive all these refugees. The Mayor consented, on condition that Nablus and Ramallah agreed to take their share. The Mayor of Nablus pointed out that he already [had 30,000 refugees ; consequently it would be physically impossible for him to receive more, as the problem of water and food had become acute during recent weeks. I then went to Ramallah, where I got into touch with H.E. Aref Pasha, Civil Governor of the District, who promised that one fourth of the full number would be taken in. He also pointed out that 500 refugees could be sent to Hebron. The Mayor of Ramallah fully agreed with the proposals made by the Governor...

On June 18 at 10 a.m. the transfer took place. I had arranged with the Mayor of Tulkarem for transportation and water supply. Forty motor-coaches, and thirty-five cars, accompanied by several Iraqi officers and by the representatives of the civil authorities of Tulkarem and of the local police, went over to the Arab front lines. I crossed the "no man's land" in my car, and after meeting M. Gouy and Dr. Fasel, who were on the Jewish front lines, the column of refugees began to move.

Exactly 1068 old people, women and children walked the mile which separated them from the Arab front lines. It was a moving sight to see these women carrying enormous bundles on their heads, and two or three children in their arms.

It was not easy to make them get into the buses in orderly fashion and on many occasions I had to act as policeman.

At Tulkarem the population gave a rousing reception to the convoy.

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The Delegation is now giving particular attention to the question of relief to prisoners of war, which is its essential task. It has helped on both sides in the installation of prisoner of war camps. Both the Jewish and Arab authorities have most willingly accepted the advice given by the delegates, and have never objected to the inspection which the latter wished to carry out. The greatest good-will has been displayed in this matter of prisoners of war. In a comparatively short time the Delegation was supplied with lists of prisoners of war, could visit the men in their camps, and especially arranged for the exchange of correspondence between the prisoners and their next of kin. Taken as a whole, the number of prisoners of war visited and assisted by the Delegates in Egypt, Transjordan, Arab Palestine and Jewish Palestine may be estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000. Several thousand cards and letters were exchanged through the hands of the delegates, without censorship or control, but always with the knowledge of the responsible authorities and in answer to their request.

As an instance, the following are extracts of a report of a camp visit made on July 10, 1948, to Djalil by Dr. Louis Fasel, delegate at Tel-Aviv.

*Accommodation:* The camp is situated in a former Arab village. The mud huts in good condition are occupied; the others, dirty and full of vermin, are destroyed and the sites disinfected with D.D.T. The prisoners are lodged in a few huts and under canvas. They are supplied with straw pallets or mats and have one blanket each. The men complain of the shortage of blankets.

Officers are lodged in a house outside the camp. They live in a room with a tiled floor and sleep on mattresses. They requested the delegates to obtain beds for them and a table for meals.

*Hygiene:* Prisoners have a shower-bath room, with a constant supply of water. There is also a wash-house and a laundry, where the washing of clothes is done by men accustomed to the work.

The officers also have running water for washing purposes.

*Food:* The prisoner in charge of the camp food showed the delegates a list of daily supplies, which represent about 1700 calories daily. Working prisoners receive extra bread rations, which bring the figure up to 2800 for the workers. The delegates pointed out to the Camp Commandant that this ration was not sufficient. The prisoners ask for food more adapted to the diet to which they are accustomed—olives, cheese, sweetstuffs, etc., which the Jewish authorities are not able to supply, as they have none. The prisoners complain of the shortage of cooking and eating utensils, spoons and plates in particular.

*Ration schedule:*

400 gr. bread,  
65 gr. meat,  
170 gr. vegetables (carrots, radishes, tomatoes),  
165 gr. potatoes or 55 gr. rice,  
25 gr. sugar,  
25 gr. sardines,  
14 gr. salt,  
3 gr. tea,  
85 gr. dried vegetables,  
30 gr. oil or fat,  
50 gr. onions.

*Medical attention:* There is no Arab doctor in the camp, only an Egyptian medical orderly who attends to his comrades. A Jewish doctor who speaks Arabic pays daily visits to the camp. The state of health is satisfactory; an epidemic of dysentery, which occurred at the beginning, has now been checked. There are a few cases of mental disorder and some blind, who will be evacuated shortly. The prisoners would like to have an Arab doctor.

*Work:* Prisoners are not obliged to work; only those who are voluntary workers are employed for camp upkeep and the building of a new camp.

*Spiritual needs:* The prisoners have a mosque in the camp and four Moslem priests hold services. The Arabs of Christian faith would like to have the visits of a priest.

*Correspondence:* Prisoners are authorised to write one letter weekly. In reality, they may write one card weekly and one letter a month, without restriction as to the number of words.

*Treatment:* The prisoners are well treated in general. The Commandant seems well disposed towards them and very humane.

*Interview with Camp Leader:* The Camp Leader stated his wish to remain in close contact with the delegation; his letters to the delegates are not transmitted rapidly enough. The delegates arranged that he should send them a weekly report on the situation.

*General remarks:* This camp was installed recently and is the central camp for prisoners of war in Jewish hands. A few improvements are required in accommodation and food, but it may on the whole be considered satisfactory.

In the camp the delegates found 90 aged persons and 77 children whom the authorities wish to repatriate. Their departure has not yet been organised.

The presence in Palestine of a United Nations Commission has given rise in the public mind to some confusion as to the respective tasks of this Commission and of the Delegation of the Committee. It should be clearly understood that these two undertakings, although sometimes perhaps complementary, are clearly distinct from each other. The work of the ICRC can only be done in obedience to principles of absolute neutrality, in a humanitarian sense, and in behalf of all victims of present events.

This uncertainty was apparent especially at the time when the terms of the first truce were published. Article 8 of the Truce Convention submitted by the UNO to the belligerents stipulated that the ICRC should ensure the protection of the supply convoys for Jerusalem. The following is the text of this Article :

Relief for the populations of both parties in the areas which have seriously suffered from the fighting, such as Jaffa and Jerusalem, shall be distributed by the ICRC in such a way that the reserve stocks of essential commodities shall be practically the same at the end as at the beginning of the truce.

It was clear that such an undertaking could not fall within the Committee's activities, and that there could be no question of the ICRC ensuring the food supply for a civilian population which was intermingled with fighting forces. In the circumstances, the Delegation decided to confine its assistance solely

to the transportation of medicaments and food for the hospitals. Thus, fifteen hospitals and nursing centres, with a total of 2,000 beds, were supplied. A first fleet of seventeen trucks conveyed without difficulty 64 tons of food and medicaments from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. A second fleet of eight trucks transported 20 tons of supplies. The third fleet—the largest—included 56 trucks, all flying the Red Cross flag, conveyed 125 tons of miscellaneous supplies and 7,500 gallons of gasoline, Diesel oil and kerosene for the use of the hospitals. Lastly, at the beginning of July, a fourth fleet carried another three tons of food and medicaments. This relief scheme, which was in addition to the foodstuffs carried by the UNO, was greatly appreciated by the Jewish authorities. A similar scheme for the besieged Arab villages was attempted, but failed. On the other hand, the Committee's delegates managed to get food through to the Arab population who had remained in Jaffa. The supplying of hospitals in Jerusalem was not always understood, and there was some idea that this was a one-sided and general scheme in behalf of the Jewish population, whereas it was a matter of supplying the hospitals exclusively. To make things clear, the Committee's Delegation published the following statement through the press and radio :

Amman, July 2, 1948 : The Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross makes the following statement.

Inaccurate reports continue to circulate amongst the public about certain activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross, especially in the matter of supplies for the New City of Jerusalem during the truce.

It should therefore be stated clearly that the general provisions stipulated under Point 8 of the Truce Agreement were finally not put into effect. It is thus not the International Committee of the Red Cross, but exclusively the United Nations Organization (Count Bernadotte's Mission) who have taken charge of arranging for and supervising the supply convoys from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, while always ready to extend assistance, must however abide by the Geneva Conventions and the general Red Cross principles. These principles permit the Committee to undertake only the supplying of hospitals, welfare institutions, prisoners of war and civilian internees, and in certain instances, civilian populations who are non-combatant and totally disarmed.

We should allude here to the steps the Delegation took to protect the Government Hospital of Jerusalem. This hospital was placed under the Red Cross flag and handed over by the Delegation in Jerusalem to the Arab medical authorities. Its situation is a dangerous one. Since the outbreak of the fighting, it has been in the Jewish zone, at about 250 yards from the firing line. It was hit several times by bombs, and by artillery and rifle fire. The presence of the Red Cross nurses and the repeated interventions of the delegates allowed the medical and hospital staff, and the Arab patients to remain without serious harm in the hospital. It now enjoys greater peace, since a new truce has fortunately stopped the fighting.

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It will be recalled that, for the first time in the history of the Red Cross, the International Committee opened in Jerusalem safety zones for the protection of non-combatants. Safety Zone No. 1 included the King David Hotel, the YMCA building and the Terra Sancta Hostel. This zone formed a complete unit. On June 15 the Delegation in Jerusalem agreed to detach the King David Hotel from Zone 1, and place it at the disposal of the mediator of UNO. The Red Cross flag was lowered and replaced by the UNO emblem. At the close of the truce, the UNO officials left the hotel, which was at once occupied by the forces of the Haganah. For this reason, the King David became a military objective, and was at once attacked by the Arabs; the Jewish garrison retaliated. These engagements endangered the other two principal buildings of Safety Zone No. 1, namely, the YMCA building and the Terra Sancta Hostel. The Delegation then asked that the Jewish troops should leave the King David and that the latter should once more be placed under the Red Cross flag. This course proved impossible, and it was then decided to abolish Safety Zone No. 1. The YMCA Hostel was given back to its owners and included amongst the buildings which are under the United States Consulate. The Terra Sancta Hostel was likewise returned to its owner, the

Franciscan Order. These operations led the Committee in Geneva to publish the following statement :

Geneva, 22 July 1948 : During the truce which for four weeks suspended hostilities in Palestine, the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross responded to a request by the Mediator of the United Nations, and in agreement with the Arab and Jewish authorities, handed over to him the King David Hotel in Jerusalem.

It will be recalled that together with the YMCA Hostel, this hotel was included in one of the safety zones organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross, in which non-combatant civilians find protection and are sheltered from the fighting.

The Red Cross flag of the International Committee was consequently replaced on this building by the emblem of the United Nations.

At the expiry of the truce and after the departure of the staff of the UNO, the building was occupied by the Jewish forces. For this reason, the situation of the refugees who had remained under the protection of the International Committee in the YMCA Hostel opposite the King David Hotel, became precarious as a result of artillery bombardment.

The International Committee then asked the Arab and Jewish authorities to agree to reintegrate the King David Hotel in the safety zone. The Arab authorities put off their answer until later. The Jewish authorities stated that for imperative military reasons, they could not contemplate abandoning this position.

The International Committee was therefore compelled to notify the belligerents that the safety zone situated in the YMCA Hostel would be closed, on July 22, the day when all who wish to leave this zone will have been evacuated.

On the other hand, as long as circumstances permit, the second Safety Zone, which includes the former residence of the High Commissioner, will continue to function.

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One of the most deplorable aspects of the conflict in Palestine is the very precarious living conditions of a large number of refugees who left their homes of their own free will, or who were compelled to do so when hostilities became imminent or had started. These refugees are for the most part Palestine Arabs. A very large number of these people are still in Palestine and have withdrawn to certain centres of the Arab zone. In some cities and townships the population was thus doubled

within a few days. Grave problems connected with feeding and sanitation therefore arose, and in several places epidemics of typhoid were announced. The refugees are sometimes housed in dwellings, but are mostly living under canvas or in the open. The necessary sanitary precautions are not taken, for lack of adequate means.

Another set of refugees has found temporary asylum outside of Palestine, either in Transjordan, Syria or Lebanon. Many of these are destitute and have no employment. They are assembled in camps and for the most part very poorly fed, badly cared for and depressed. The ICRC has endeavoured to assist them with the few means at its disposal. The Committee has sent some of its nurses to the camps to carry out general vaccination, and to give first aid to the sick and wounded. The problem is however on such a scale and the numbers of refugees so great that unless it receives the necessary material means, the Committee cannot contemplate any general relief scheme for these victims of the conflict. This is one of its most serious causes for anxiety.

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We have already published a first list of donations which have reached the Committee for distribution in Palestine<sup>1</sup>. The ICRC has pursued its efforts to procure fresh supplies. Its main endeavour is to help in the first place prisoners of war and patients in the hospitals. By order of priority, the ICRC are then taking up the question of the refugees in Palestine territory, in particular the children and expectant mothers. Next come the refugees in other countries, then the settled civilian population, —children and mothers always being considered as the first to benefit by any relief which may be distributed.

The Committee has instructed its delegates in Palestine to supply precise information as to the requirements which come to their notice. In order to coordinate work in this field, the ICRC has sent out a delegate, Dr Calpini, who will have special charge of the relief question. In addition to the relief supplies

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale*, July 1948

which have already been mentioned, the ICRC has received the following donations :

- French Red Cross :* Dressings and medicaments.
- British Red Cross :* Sulphamides and dried blood plasma (£1,724) and a large quantity of penicillin.
- Through the British Red Cross in favour of the Syrian Red Crescent :* 50 units of blood plasma (£61)
- American Red Cross :* Dressings, catgut, sulphamides, anaesthetics, calcium (\$3,977).
- International Committee of the Red Cross :* Various medicaments, stretchers, syringes and needles (Sw. francs. 4,700).
- American Red Cross :* Penicillin, anaesthetics, analgesics, disinfectants, sulphamides, heart tonics, dextrose, vaccines, catgut, syringes and needles (\$20,300).
- British Red Cross :* 5,000 doses of typhoid vaccine.
- From the International Union for Child Welfare, on behalf of the French Committee for Child Relief :* Fr. francs 25,000.

The Ministry of Hygiene of the Egyptian Government has just made available to the ICRC 100,000 doses of vaccine which will enable measures to be pursued against the typhoid epidemic. The Egyptian Government is further prepared to supply another 200,000 doses, should circumstances require.

At the time of writing, the second truce is still making its welcome effects felt. The Delegation in Palestine is nevertheless pursuing its work, and will continue to do so as long as the presence of a neutral intermediary appears necessary and is desired by both parties to the conflict. To these the ICRC will lend its good offices, with its customary impartiality and neutrality.

*FROM NABLUS TO JERUSALEM, MAY 14<sup>1</sup>*

“That car has a charmed life: the bullets just bounce off!”

Before the eyes of the Arab officer who had let fall these words, a white car, painted with the Red Cross on its sides, sped down a field and across a stretch of “no man’s land”, swept by fire. A tall fellow got out, shook himself and in great strides made off into the Arab lines. It was May 14, and we were on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jean Courvoisier, delegate of the ICRC, on his way from Nablus, had to reach the city at all costs, to join M. de Reynier, head of the Delegation in Palestine.

It was the eve of the departure of the British forces. Quick on their heels, the Jews and Arabs were in a great hurry to occupy the best strategic positions, and operations on a big scale were afoot. Meanwhile, in the Holy City a handful of men of goodwill were seeking how to mitigate the effects of this clash of arms. If they could succeed in their plan, then in Jerusalem, spared from battle, the women, children and old people would find a refuge. But to carry through such a plan, the combatants would have to be ousted and the delegates would have to sound the commanders, secure an agreement from them and get a truce signed.

As a matter of fact, the delegate from Nablus was carrying within him the answer of an Arab general. Before pursuing on this venture, he had to get his car inside, which he had left in the care of an Arab driver. He was in for a parley of an hour and a half: patience and doggedness are the word in this country!

Already in the course of that day, three times as it happened, he had had to skirt the Jewish positions. Three times the Arabs

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue*, July 1948.

had taken him for a Jew, and only the eloquence of the driver had served to get him out of the fix. He was coming from a suspect direction and was bound for another no less questionable—nothing could be more calculated to arouse suspicion.

The last stage especially is worth recording. Now, the battle was on, and the road lay between the two lines of fire. In the car, viewing the prospect, the two men glanced at one another ; then each lit a cigarette, swearing he would cross the lines or perish in the attempt. The machine guns, however, had the last word. Brought to a standstill, the delegate at the door of the car waved the Red Cross flag. A second more, and it was lying in the dust, riddled with bullet holes. A further spurt of two hundred yards up to the first Arab outpost and there the inevitable match began between the driver, leaning out of the car and bawling, and the muffled voices coming from behind the sandbags. A few minutes which dragged like hours, and leave to pass was granted. It did not avail very far, for soon the road was blocked. From behind the sandbags came the categorical refusal to open the barrier under enemy fire. Nothing for it : the delegate had to get to work himself, with the help of the driver. It took three-quarters of an hour to get the car through and to put the boulders and barrels back in place.

Evening fell. For the delegate, safe and sound in the Arab lines, the respite was short. Once arrived in Jerusalem, he found a further battle was going on, cutting him off from his headquarters. Incredibly enough, the telephone had not been cut. From Arab G.H.Q. he called up M. de Reynier, who was surprised : why was any fighting going on ? Both sides had taken counsel with him and had agreed on a cease fire at six that evening. The Arabs said that they had not been able to observe the truce, since the Jews had given no assurance that they would agree to it. A fresh start had to be made ; the talks began again ; telephoning resumed, and at last the efforts of the Delegation were rewarded. A cease fire was agreed for nine thirty that evening.

The Jews were notified by M. de Reynier that an Arab armoured car, with a loud-speaker, would make a tour of the front : they were asked to give an undertaking not to attack it. At the appointed hour, all gradually became quiet. In the

whole quarter of the Government Hospital, Barclay's Bank, the American Colony, Sheikh Zanah at any rate there was silence. In an atmosphere which had become more propitious for discussion, the delegate laid before Arab G.H.Q. the International Committee's plan for making the city a neutral area. The explanation was made in English, the only common language. The negotiations were not at all easy, but ended in agreement. On the strength of a promise of acceptance of his plan, the delegate felt at last that he could take a little rest.

He had no sooner done so, when at midnight there was a sharp burst of fire about three hundred yards from his lodging. He made up his mind at once to go to the Old City, taking with him his host, a member of the Arab Higher Committee, who also brought along his mother and her servant. For an hour and a half they had to creep along under the walls. At last they reached the Austrian Hospital where the two women found shelter. There the surgeons were operating without pause by the light of an oil lamp. The delegate was in a hurry, however, to get more information on the situation. With an Arab liaison officer he gained the lines. In the moonlight, he could clearly make out the moving up of the men. Later, he established the fact that the truce had been broken by the action of extremists. The rest of the night was passed in telephoning and in all sorts of negotiations, in the coming and going of ambulances, and in searches for the wounded. Muddle and confusion grew.

At six in the morning, the delegate decided to try his luck once again in an attempt to reach the delegation. He got through to M. de Reynier on the telephone and reported. His chief then got into touch with the Jewish Agency, to make sure that the car would not be fired on. The Damascus Gate, the French Hospital, the last Arab post were all passed. A little further, at a distance of three hundred yards near Barclay's Bank, the Jewish lines began. There was a whistle of bullets. Further on the road was probably mined. There was no guide ; the driver sounded the horn, the car slowed down, and then came to a standstill before the Jewish posts. An officer came creeping up ; he was in command of the Stern gang men who were defending that sector. He claimed not to be in contact with

the Jewish Agency and had therefore had no instructions. He allowed them to take cover behind a building. The car was inspected and the driver carefully searched. What put out the officer more than anything was the presence of the Arab driver ; he could not permit him to cross into Jewish territory. Would he have to turn on his tracks so close to his goal ? The discussion sharpened ; the delegate refused to yield and to being parted from his gallant Mahmoud. Rather would he return to the Arab lines, and it would be the responsibility of the officer that he had been turned back. Very fortunately, this last argument went home and a few minutes later the car safely reached the headquarters of the Delegation.

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