



Located in Bad Arolsen, Germany, the ITS (International Tracing Service) archives comprise of approximately 30 million documents about incarceration in concentration camps, ghettos and Gestapo prisons, and about forced labour and displaced persons. An important key to the documents is the alphabetically and phonetically arranged Central Name Index containing over 50 million reference cards for more than 17.5 million people.

International Tracing Service (ITS)

If your research involves tracing the movement of family members who found themselves in Germany during or after WWII, then the ITS archives may prove invaluable. The ITS archives hold approximately 30 million documents relating to concentration camps, prisons, forced labour camps, displaced persons camps, migration records, ship manifests and employment details.

The Central Name Index search system is arranged alphabetically and phonetically and contains over 50 million reference cards for more than 17.5 million people.

The ITS also have a collection of photographs and items from WWII that they are trying to return to families. To request information:

- 1 Go to the ITS website: "www.its-arolsen.org/en"
- 2 Click on: "Information"
- 3 Click on: "The search service of the ITS"
- 4 Click on: "To the form"
- 5 Fill out the form and include as much information as possible. The archivists should be able to find records with just the names, birth dates and nationalities, but any extra information is welcome.
Hint: Include known aliases and provide spelling variants for both given name and maiden name (if known).
- 6 To request documents for multiple persons, at the end there will be an option to add a person and then you will repeat part of the process in a new form. If papers are found, the ITS will send them to you free of charge.

If you need help or have any concerns, you can contact the ITS directly by email:
communications@its-arolsen.org

History of the ITS

As early as 1943, and on the initiative of the Allied Forces Headquarters at the British Red Cross in London, the Department of International Affairs was transformed into a Tracing Bureau. The new service began with the task of tracing and registering missing persons.

As the outcomes of the war became increasingly clear to the Allies, more exact investigations into the situation of prisoners, forced labourers and refugees in Central Europe were carried out. This task was undertaken by SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces), which established the Central Tracing Bureau on February 15, 1944. The location of the bureau moved along with the Front, from London to Versailles, and then on to Frankfurt am Main, to begin the work of repatriating the first wave of liberated prisoners and deportees.

Concern for the care and immediate repatriation of these people led to the creation of 'Assembly Centres', where Displaced Persons (DPs) were housed until they could be returned to their homelands. The UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) carried out the principle task of caring for and repatriating the millions of non-German refugees, from the end of the war until June 30, 1947.

Meanwhile, in January 1946, the humanitarian organisation was moved to Arolsen, because of its central location between the four occupation zones and because the town was largely intact. On July 1, 1947, the IRO (International Refugee Organization) took over the Central Tracing Bureau, giving it the new name "International Tracing Service" (ITS) on January 1, 1948, by which it is known today.

In April 1951, the ITS was placed under the management of HICOG (Allied High Commission for Germany). While preparations were being made in 1954 to revoke Germany's status as occupied territory, steps were taken to ensure the continued existence of the ITS. The service was to pursue its activities under the umbrella of an international commission and would be managed by an entirely neutral and impartial institution, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) in Geneva.

Based on a petition made to the President of the ICRC, Dr. Paul Ruegger, by the then German Federal Chancellor and Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, the ICRC agreed to take over the direction and administration of the ITS in 1955. As laid down in the Bonn Agreements, the ICRC appointed a Swiss citizen as Director, who acted in accordance with ICRC instructions.

Tracing missing persons, clarifying people's fates, providing family members with information on their dear ones and clearing up compensation matters still are the principal tasks of the ITS.

In November 2007 the archive opened to research. The ICRC withdrew from the ITS management in December 2012 and today the German Federal Archives is the institutional partner of the ITS.

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