

# The Red Cross' ITS Records

**John M. and Nadine A. Hoenig say millions of WWII-era records are awaiting release**

AFTER THE FIGHTING ENDED, families divided and scattered by WWII were desperate to locate relatives. Newspapers published lists of survivors. Various aid programs sprang into existence. Eventually, much of the information wound up in the files of the International Tracing Service (ITS) of the International Red Cross.

The amount of information in the ITS files is staggering. One source indicates there are 48 million pieces of information pertaining to 14 million people at the ITS headquarters in Bad Arolsen, Germany. Another says it's 50 million records for 17.5 million people. The records pertain to both victims who perished and survived, and to Christians as well as Jews. Unfortunately, access to the information has been severely limited. It can take years for inquiries about specific people to be answered and the ITS has had no interest in helping people with general genealogical research.

That, however, is going to change.

The policy of the ITS is set by a governing Commission with delegates from 11 countries, based on consensus. For years, the Commission refused to make the records public because of privacy concerns. In recent years, most countries conceded that the information should be made available. It boiled down to one country, Germany, blocking public access. Now, Germany has agreed that the records should be more available. Hence, the records will be copied and distributed soon in digital form to national governments, who will then determine policy for making the records available. In the US, the records will go to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Another set will

undoubtedly go to the Israel Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem. Many of the records are fragile, but more than half have been digitized already.

The ITS maintains an index card file of names in its records. There are three kinds of information pertaining to people who perished, people who survived and



*The Red Cross ran evacuee camps in Iran during WWII for Polish refugees who fled the Soviet Union. The refugees' post-war relocation is recorded in the ITS records.*



people inquiring about relatives. There are records from concentration, labor and refugee camps.

In 1965, the Israel Holocaust Memorial Authority obtained microfilmed copies of the index cards, as well as much of the ITS documentation. These can be viewed in Jerusalem or you can hire a researcher to look through the films. (Go to [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org) for more details.) The book *How to Document Victims and Locate Survivors of the Holocaust* by Gary Mokotoff can also be helpful. Read an excerpt dealing with ITS records at [www.avotaynu.com/Holocaust/its.htm](http://www.avotaynu.com/Holocaust/its.htm). (The contact information for the IRC is out of date, however.) Note that the ITS holdings have vastly increased since 1965, especially with the opening of archives in Eastern Europe after

the breakup of the Soviet Union. So, the records in Israel are incomplete.

On a trip to Israel, we searched the index and found cards for several relatives who survived the war. There were cards for cousins from Lyon, France, whom we found out spent part of the war in Switzerland.

We found two cousins from eastern Poland who survived the war. The cards indicated they spent time in western Poland after the war, then went to the Degerloch refugee camp in Stuttgart, Germany, before coming to New York. The cards specified boat name and date of arrival, allowing us to obtain the passenger manifests for their

arrivals. The cards also gave us their birthdates and places of birth, and the names of their parents.

There was also a record for a cousin who presumably perished. He was listed as having been deported from a holding camp in

Malines, Belgium, to Birkenau concentration camp on Transport #3, on 15 August 1942. It gave his date and place of birth and listed his profession as furrier.

We can hardly wait until the actual records become available. After 60 years, it's about time! This will be an important resource for genealogical research in the mid-20th century.

Should you not be able to wait until the records are released, you can try obtaining the records from the ITS. Contact the Red Cross in your country and ask them to make an inquiry for you. You'll need to provide specific information on your relative. Also, find information online at [www.redcross.org/services/intl/holotracer/questions.html](http://www.redcross.org/services/intl/holotracer/questions.html).