

VOLUNTARY RELIEF WORK IN GERMANY

The man-in-the-street in the British Zone of Germany naturally assumes that all the British men and women whom he sees in uniform are either in the Forces or in the Control Commission. But for many months there have been at work in Germany some eight hundred men and women who are not part of the occupying forces, and who are in Germany—and proposing to stay throughout the winter—of their own free will. They are members of various British Voluntary Societies, sent out from Britain in relief teams of about twelve members, or as mobile hospitals of about twenty-four members, equipped with trucks and ambulances for the relief of human suffering in North-West Europe, wherever the need should be greatest. They have been trained and sent out by the British Red Cross & Order of St John, the Quakers, the Salvation Army, the Scouts and Guides, the Save the Children Fund, the Catholic Committee for Relief Abroad and the International Voluntary Service for Peace. Each of these societies has its own distinctive tradition of relief work, its own methods, and its own insignia. But whilst holding to their own ways, they cooperate freely under one central Headquarters (British Red Cross Civilian Relief) established at Vlotho, near H. Q. British Army of the Rhine. In this way the spirit of independent voluntary service is combined with full co-ordination, so that effort is not wasted. For the sake of convenience, the teams receive rations, petrol and other stores from the Army, and most of them wear khaki, but they are neither paid nor minutely regulated by the Army. Indeed many of them receive no pay at all.

After caring for refugees and victims of epidemics and starvation in Normandy, Belgium, Holland and the Rhineland during the period of fighting, the teams turned their attention to the needs of Displaced Persons. They helped to group them into camps, to ensure sanitation, medical attention and registration, and then, later, to arrange facilities in the camps for worship, for education, and for self-help, the lack of which over so many years accounts for much of the discontentment and indiscipline of which DPs are accused. Now that UNRRA is taking over this work, about twenty of the British Voluntary Societies' teams are free to leave the DP camps and move to districts where the German people themselves are in need of help.

How do they approach this new task of trying to help the German people? They approach it in the belief that our common humanity and the value of the

individual life are far greater than parties, sects, races and classes, and that when a man, woman or child is suffering the duty of a neighbour is not to leave the job to someone else, or to make excuses on grounds of politics, but, like the Samaritan on the road to Jericho, to put first things first and bind up the wounds. That is what voluntary relief workers have been doing in Britain throughout the war, that is what they did in the Concentration Camps of Belsen and Sandbostel earlier this year, and that is what they will help German voluntary organisations to do this winter.

Already several teams have been assisting with the streams of German refugees—Operation Stork, for instance, and also the exchange of refugees between the various Zones. Now the Quakers and the Salvation Army are moving into some of the larger cities to help with health and welfare problems. They are already at work in Aachen, Berlin, Bochum, Dortmund, Duisburg, Düren, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Hamburg, Herne, Köln, Mettmann and Oberhausen. Other teams will follow shortly, and still others are being called forward from the United Kingdom. Their hope is to find, and to foster, the same spirit of voluntary self-help and neighbourliness amongst those with whom and for whom they work.

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