



The card index of the International Tracing Service (top, left) sometimes reveals the location of a lost child. The typing pool (top, right) where typists of many European nationalities handle correspondence. Unclaimed war orphans (bottom, left)

play in a nursery at Bad Aiblingen. Some of them may never be claimed. A member of the ITS office staff (bottom, right) checks files where thousands of case histories are kept. Daily additional information is classified and sifted for 'clues.'

# The Saga of Europe's Greatest Treasure Hunt

## International Tracing Service Knifes Red Tape In Search for Children Seized by Germans

By BERNARD H. LIEBES, Staff Writer

THE greatest treasure hunt Europe has ever known has been going on since V-E Day.

Fifty investigators attached to the Child Search Branch of the International Tracing Service (ITS) are seeking out non-German children separated from their families during the war.

Nobody knows how many were separated from their parents, but estimates run into the hundreds of thousands.

A large proportion of the youngsters were taken by the Nazis from occupied countries—particularly Eastern nations.

They were victims of a ruthless kidnap scheme designed by SS chief Heinrich Himmler and his associates. Himmler's twofold objective was to destroy potential leadership in the occupied countries and at the same time through "Germanization" of selected alien children provide an infusion of new blood for a war-depleted Germany.

The kidnaped waifs were to be trained as faithful Nazis, effacing any trace of their previous nationality, homelife, or parents, which might enable them to return.

Children with "aryan features"—blue eyes, blond hair, whose head circumference and nose shape passed rigid examination by Nazi racial teams—were sent to the Lebensborn (Fountain of Life) agency, the National Socialist Welfare Organization (NSVD) and other similar Nazi organizations, which provided children with German names, birth certificates, and farmed them out for "Germanization" to foster homes and institutions. Children who were found "racially undesirable" were exterminated.

Thousands of other missing children came to Germany in a variety of ways.

Some accompanied their parents, brought into Germany as slave laborers.

Others were part of the mass of refugees forcibly evacuated by the Germans as Allied armies surged on Germany. Some were born to non-German mothers working on German farms or industries.

Often, the records German organizations kept of the children were destroyed or deliberately falsified. In the majority of cases, more than six years has elapsed since separation, further obscuring any clues.

Such are the complexities of the task confronting Child Search investigators. Also hampering the search is not ever knowing how many children are to be sought.

AN ESTIMATED 30,000 to 40,000 children were repatriated in early postwar years by Allied armies and a search group of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).

ITS and the Child Search were organized later as a branch of the International Refugee Organization (IRO).

ITS is grappling with its monumental task of identifying and tracing children in a number of ways.

Its investigators made an exhaustive

search of adoption records and orphanage rosters in Germany, and have scanned every Lebensborn list discovered.

Undamaged records of concentration camps, some meticulously preserved by German officials, have been forwarded to ITS officials by Allied authorities. Field searches by ITS investigators have unearthed clues.

No matter how meager a lead, investigators painstakingly have run it down. Just how remote some of the clues have been and ITS' persistence in following them through is illustrated by the following case.

The child, later identified as Peter K., was born in Germany in March 1945, and was picked up after an air raid. There were no papers to identify the baby and the mother was presumably killed in the raid. The only clue to the child's identification was a tablecloth in which the infant was wrapped and which belonged to a hospital.

Investigation disclosed that the tablecloth had been given to one Helena K., who arrived at the hospital a few days before with a child two or three days old. A man, named Josef K., brought Helena to the hospital. He said they were both Polish.

The child was registered with UNRRA in February 1947 as a result of a quadripartite Allied directive on registration

of all children believed to be non-German.

Child Search team investigators soon got the case. By exhaustive research, involving letters to England, questioning of German nurses, a court decision eliminating purposely false leads—it was finally established that Peter K. was Polish.

The case has been referred to the Polish Red Cross which is attempting to locate relatives of the child.

Investigators, in tracing clues, have been balked both by the reluctance of a child to speak his native tongue, or "Germanization" that dimmed memories of parents and home.

OFTEN, German foster parents, some who really love the foster children, some who fear being classified as Nazis, or some fearing to lose foster children exploited as a source of cheap household or farm labor, hold back vital information.

To winnow out facts and track down clues, an investigator must combine qualities as linguist, child psychologist, and detective.

Often, when speaking German to a child, investigators casually drop a question in Polish, French or Czech. The child replies in the same tongue sometimes, providing the first clue that may lead eventually to a reunion with family members. Sometimes remembrance has been rekindled by a snatch of a folk song or a native lullaby.

Operations for this vast tracing project are directed from offices located in a woolen factory in Esslingen, Wurttemberg-Baden. Here an international staff of about 250, directed by Child Search Branch Chief Herbert H. Meyer, sift and

(Continued on Page V)