

In one of its decisions, the Congress “stressed its deep appreciation of the importance of the humanitarian role which the International Committee of the Red Cross played in Lebanon and expressed the hope that the International Committee would pursue its activities, at the same time extending its thanks to the Committee for its action which it carried out from the beginning of the operations.”

The participants all agreed that the Congress in Algiers was a success. The pleasant atmosphere, the delegates’ constructive attitude and their wish to co-operate in harmony and to progress were all signs of the fruitful results that might be expected in the future.

CENTENARY OF THE RED CROSS SOCIETY OF FINLAND ¹

After the war of 1808-09 between Russia and Sweden, Finland, as an autonomous grand-duchy, whose sovereign was the Czar of Russia, became a part of the Russian Empire, but with its own Diet and its own administration. It remained so until 1917, when it became independent. The history of Finland during the 19th century is thus tied up with the history of Russia.

The Red Cross idea reached Finland through the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg. The initiative to found in Finland an independent Red Cross society was taken by Countess Aline Armfelt, wife of the Finnish Minister, State Secretary at the Imperial Court. In April 1877, when the Russo-Turkish war broke out, the project took form and the constitutive assembly of the Finnish Society for the Care of Sick and Wounded Soldiers was held at the Town Hall of Helsinki on 7 May 1877.

The statutes of the new society, confirmed by the Imperial Senate for Finland, stipulate that the society is an independent National Red Cross Society which, however, in case of war, would be allied with the Russian Red Cross, founded ten years earlier.

The first practical task of the society was to equip an ambulance—in fact a full surgical hospital with 50 beds—and to send it to the theatre of war. Under the leadership of Doctor Leopold Krohn, an experienced war surgeon, the ambulance was sent to the Caucasian front and it

¹ *Plates.*

worked half a year, first in the region of Eriwan, on the slopes of Mount Ararat, later in Tiflis.

A few years before the foundation of the Finnish Society, both Finland and Russia had been hit by severe failures of crops, followed by famine. This caused an addition to the entered into the statutes of both the Russian and Finnish Societies. Besides the assistance to wounded and sick soldiers, the task of the Societies would be to assist victims of famine, epidemics and other calamities. Peacetime disaster relief was thus included in their activities from the very beginning.

This did not remain a dead letter: a severe famine again hit the Volga region, in central Russia, and northern Finland, at the end of the 19th century. Large-scale relief action was organized in Finland to send the starving Russian peasants relief in money and wheat, and at the same time the Finnish people in their own country were assisted with temporary hospitals.

A good relationship existed with the Russian Red Cross headed by the Empress Dowager Maria Fyodorovna, former Princess Dagmar of Denmark, who was beloved in Finland. During hard times the assistance between the Societies worked in both directions.

Other peacetime activities started in the 19th century. The most remarkable were the training of qualified nurses, which was the responsibility of the Society until the turn of the century, and systematic first-aid teaching, which started in 1885 and was given every year to several hundred policemen, railroad and industrial workers, and other citizens.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Finnish Society sent a well-equipped hospital with 200 beds to the Russo-Japanese war in Manchuria (1904-05). The hospital worked nine months in Guntchulin, half-way between Harbin and Port Arthur, and after the Russian defeat ran a big hospital train to Irkutsk. More than 1,000 Russian wounded were treated, also some Japanese officers. During its second period the ambulance was headed by the soon-famous war surgeon, Dr. Richard Faltin, who saw among his patients his class-mate, the 35-year old colonel of cavalry, Baron C. G. Mannerheim, later Marshal of Finland. In this way two later Presidents of the Finnish Red Cross, central figures in the development of the Society, met in the Far East.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Finnish Red Cross sent two hospital units to the Eastern front. One, headed by Faltin, was first located in Vilna, Lithuania, and later transferred to Polotsk. The other, financed by Finnish industrialists, was first based in the old royal palace of Warsaw and later transferred to Dvinsk. Both hospitals became famous; Warsaw hospital for orthopedic surgery, and Faltin's

hospital for its amazing results in the field of reconstructive plastic surgery on the face, particularly in jaw injuries. Faltin became the honorary president of the Russian war surgeons.

During the First World War, a great number of Russian wounded were treated in Finland and the Finnish Red Cross provided assistance to the hospitals treating them. It played a part also in the exchange of Russian and Austro-German war disabled which, organized by the Swedish and Russian Red Cross Societies, took place via Finland and Sweden during the years 1915-17. Over 63,000 disabled were thus exchanged during the war.

The years 1917-18 were very difficult for Finland. The country became independent by the end of 1917, during the revolution in Russia, but a tragic civil war broke out in Finland itself in 1918. It would probably have been worse if the Red Cross Society, stressing the principles of the Red Cross and maintaining absolute neutrality between the parties, had not treated equally the thousands of wounded on both sides at hastily organized war hospitals.

During the following years, Russian civil war and independence wars in the neighbouring countries brought to Finland an influx of Russian, East-Karelian and other refugees.

In 1920, through Finland and assisted by the Finnish Red Cross, some 44,000 Russian and Austro-German prisoners of war were exchanged. This was the first time the FRC came into direct working relationship with the ICRC and its delegates.

That same year, in May, the Finnish Red Cross Society was officially recognized by the ICRC and became the following year a member of the League of Red Cross Societies.

In 1921, General, later Marshal, C. G. Mannerheim was elected President of the FRC, which post he held until his death in 1951. Under Mannerheim's leadership the small Society was completely reorganized and joined forces with the big Mannerheim-League, a special organization for child health and welfare. The activities of the FRC were divided in two. Preparation for wartime tasks was the first priority, and among the most important efforts was the building up of a FRC nurses reserve, in which all trained nurses in Finland joined as volunteers. At the same time a systematic build-up of field hospital materials was undertaken. Simultaneously the FRC started peace-time public health and social welfare programmes according to the recommendations of the League.

There were already several strong organizations in Finland working in these fields but, together with the Mannerheim-League, the FRC began for instance the training of public health nurses and took special

interest in developing the health conditions in the remote Eastern border regions and in Lapland. A network of small cottage hospitals and public health centres was built and courses were given in home nursing and child care. The Society was also active in improving ambulance services, road safety and first aid.

Both General Mannerheim and his sister, Baroness Sofia Mannerheim, became well-known figures within the International Red Cross. Baroness Mannerheim was the President of the International Council of Nurses and the first chairman of the League's Nursing Advisory Committee. She was also one of the leading figures in Finnish child welfare.

The most remarkable achievement of the Society until the early 1930's was a big Red Cross hospital in Helsinki, which became a centre for traumatology, neuro-surgery and blood service in Finland, as well as a training centre for doctors and nurses who wanted to specialize in these fields. The hospital also became the training centre of paramedical personnel. At that time it was the first civilian hospital in the world with gas-proof underground bomb shelters, and when the Finnish Winter War started, in autumn 1939, the hospital was the main centre to receive the victims of air raids.

The years of the Finnish Winter War (1939-40) and the "Continuation War" (1941-44) put the FRC to its greatest test. In the end, about 6,000 trained nurses, members of the FRC nurses reserve, and some 3,500 assistant nurses—trained by the FRC—were put at the disposal of the army medical services, as well as 16 complete field hospitals, over 100 ambulances, etc. The FRC hospital was much expanded and it became the national centre for the specialized care, rehabilitation and occupational training of all the war disabled, totalling over 50,000. The FRC was also the central organization of social assistance of the war disabled. All the Finnish welfare organizations joined forces to assist the civilian victims of the war, including nearly 500,000 Karelian refugees, 27,000 war widows, 50,000 war orphans and tens of thousands of other people: evacuees, victims of air raids, and so forth.

Under special protection of the FRC were also the Russian prisoners of war in Finland. By personal appeal from Marshal Mannerheim to the ICRC, considerable assistance from abroad could be obtained for the POW's, particularly in 1942-44 when the food shortage in Finland was very severe.

Finland was greatly indebted to Red Cross Societies and other organizations abroad for all the assistance the FRC and other voluntary agencies provided during the war. Particularly during the Winter War

and during the reconstruction period in 1945-47, the assistance from the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, United States and many other countries assumed massive proportions. Moreover, several foreign Red Cross Societies sent ambulances and a great number of other medical personnel in Finland mainly during the winter 1939-40.

The period after the Second World War was a time of rapid growth for the FRC. At present the Society has a strong and modern country-wide organization with fifteen districts, about 650 local chapters and 130,000 regular members. In addition there are some 200,000 permanent blood donors, tens of thousands of members in the voluntary rescue service, some 50,000 participants yearly at Red Cross first aid and other courses, etc.

The three main fields of its activity now are disaster relief, community work and blood services. The FRC has played a central role in the planning and building up of a modern disaster relief system, which combines the resources of various authorities and voluntary agencies in peacetime rescue work, wartime civil defence and a first-rate blood service which is the total responsibility of the Finnish Red Cross. FRC has also been instrumental in developing the ambulance services, the first aid services and the care of the sick, aged and handicapped in Finland. Among voluntary agencies working in the field of public health, social welfare, and rescue services, the FRC has an undisputed leading and co-ordinating role. In many respects it also functions as an intermediary between the authorities and the voluntary agencies.

The Finland Red Cross is the main channel for Finland disaster assistance abroad, and during these last years it co-operated with the ICRC in several missions, in Jordan, Bangladesh, Viet Nam, Cyprus, Lebanon, sending personnel, money and various relief goods.

One of the interesting features of the latest development is the increasing role of the Red Cross as an instrument for citizen participation in the general planning of social policies and in the development of new approaches to the problems of a modern industrial state, where the central aim during the last few years has been to find out new ways and methods to combine the efforts of the public authorities and voluntary agencies. A highly productive ideological discussion of the aims, role and working methods of a modern Red Cross has been going on for some years, and the FRC is moving into its second centenary full of confidence in the importance of its work and with the encouraging support of the majority of the Finnish people.¹

¹ Article based on a text of the Finland Red Cross Society.