

# A movement



## **National Society timeline** **150 years of humanitarian action**

### **The Battle of Solferino**

In June 1859, Swiss businessman Henry Dunant witnesses the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino and is inspired to create a movement of national volunteer societies

to assist the sick and wounded in battle.

### **ICRC is founded**

17 February 1863.  
Dunant's tireless work on behalf of the sick and wounded leads to the founding of the ICRC.

### **First National Society formed in Germany**

12 November 1863.  
The first National Society is formed in the Kingdom of Württemberg, now a state in Germany. The following year,

National Societies are formed in the states of Baden, Bavaria, Hamburg, Hesse-Darmstadt, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Oldenburg, Prussia and Saxe — all states in current-day Germany.

Note: Placement on the timeline is

# is born

## Exploring the lessons of history as the first Red Cross National Society celebrates 150 years of humanitarian action.

**D**RESSED IN HEAVY TROUSERS with fluorescent stripes and safety shoes, 18-year-old Annegret Graf is dressed well for today's role: a first-aid competition set in the picturesque town of Heidenheim, in Baden-Württemberg.

As she prepares, Graf recalls how she played another theatrical role just a couple of months ago, when she stood on the stage in her home town of Maulbronn as part of a historical re-enactment. In the play, set just before the First World War, village residents debated whether they should found their own Red Cross section.

The drama unfolded as the shaky peace in Europe looked like it would soon end; the mobilization for the First World War loomed on the horizon. Playing a young innkeeper, Graf was firmly convinced of the need to care for wounded soldiers, right here at home.

One of the many volunteers from the active Maulbronn branch, Graf is eager not only to work for the German Red Cross but also to tell its story. She herself had not yet come of age when she joined the Red Cross team in Maulbronn "in order to help, where it can make a difference".

As she speaks, she turns around and starts tending to a garishly made-up amateur actor, lying on the ground and moaning next to a barbecue grill: half of his T-shirt has gone up in flames and his chest is burnt. Next to him are three other semi-sober burn victims, who had poured generous amounts of flammable liquid on the grill to get the fire going.

*"That's the lesson we've learned... to always do our utmost to ensure that the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross are respected."*

**Christian Schad**, 53, German Red Cross volunteer

Although this photo was taken during First World War, it depicts a perennial issue: humanitarian workers and their essential, life-saving equipment falling victim to the brutality and recklessness of war. Photo: German Red Cross

18-year-old German Red Cross volunteer Annegret Graf takes part in a first-aid competition Heidenheim, in Baden-Württemberg.

Photo: Markus Bechtler/ German Red Cross

Graf has travelled to Heidenheim with five colleagues from her local branch to compete in the first-aid contest in the *Bundesland* (German federal province) of Baden-Württemberg. Even here in the province where the Red Cross established its very first National Society 150 years ago, Graf's team has some distinction: for years, the 30 on-call members from their town of 6,000 inhabitants have been winning prizes in first-aid contests.

In their local areas, branch members are generally firmly embedded in the medical assistance network as first responders. Even before the rescue service arrives, they provide immediate care to the wounded. If someone falls off a ladder or if there is a traffic accident or fire, the volunteers' pagers beep in their pockets. This happens around 150 times per year, or about once every other day.

These on-call teams are the backbone of the organization. Nationwide, they mobilize some 170,000 volunteers in 8,000 groups and log around 8 million deployment hours a year (48 hours per team member). They also train all year to intervene in disasters and provide medical services at major events such as soccer matches and marathons.

### Moved by history

It is perhaps no coincidence that Graf is inspired by the history of the Red Cross. Baden-Württemberg, or more precisely Stuttgart, the region's capital, is



Re-established in 1921 as the German Red Cross. East German Red Cross was established in 1952 after the country split into East and West Germany. The National Societies reunited in 1991.

**First International Conference**  
26 to 29 October 1863.  
The first International Conference was held in Geneva with the

intention of establishing ways to improve medical services on the battlefield and create national societies to aid the sick and wounded.

**Belgian Red Cross**  
4 February 1864

**Spanish Red Cross**  
2 March 1864

**French Red Cross**  
25 May 1864

**Italian Red Cross**  
15 June 1864

based on the date a National Society was formed. For more information on when the National Societies were recognized by the ICRC and admitted into the IFRC, go to [www.redcross.int](http://www.redcross.int).



natural disasters, and traditional welfare activities at an earlier stage than National Societies in other countries.

Before the turn of the century, nurses' wards and children's homes were set up. Then came the First World War. As Stefan Schomann, an author from Berlin, writes, "The Red Cross slotted right into the war machine", becoming integral to army operations.

After the war, Germany was in ruins. People received aid, in the form of food and clothing, including from Japan, which sent aid shipments to the Red Cross in Berlin. The Treaty of Versailles prohibited Germany from taking any measures that could serve to prepare for war, so the German Red Cross had no alternative but to focus entirely on peacetime activities such as disaster preparedness and welfare. Male members of medical units became ambulance officers and drivers, as well as mountain and water rescuers; women became nurses, nursery-school teachers or social workers.

### Elimination of opposition

When Adolf Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933, the German Red Cross, which had officially taken this name in 1921, was one of the largest organizations in the country. And it was an entity that was in step with Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung* (elimination of opposition, literally 'conformity'): as early as June 1933, Jews were barred from playing any role in the German Red Cross.

In 1937, *Gleichschaltung* became law and Hitler appointed *SS-Oberführer* Ernst-Robert Grawitz as vice-president of the German Red Cross.

Subsequently, the organization was linked closely to the ruling party, the NSDAP, before the Second World War broke out in 1939. Stefan Schomann was commissioned to write a book by the German Red Cross secretariat to mark its 150th anniversary. In this remarkably critical work, Schomann writes that the case of the German Red Cross is a "textbook example of the takeover of a National Society by a dictatorial regime". "They took over the organization like pirates take over a ship," he says.

In 2008, when the Red Cross presented the findings of a study of its history from 1933 to 1945, the president, Rudolf Seiters, who is still in office today,

one of the most historic places of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. For it was in Stuttgart on 12 November 1863 that the very first National Society — initially called the Württemberg Medical Association for Tending to Wounded Soldiers — was set up just two weeks after the founding conference in Geneva.

With his contacts and his commitment, Christoph Ulrich Hahn, a pastor and teacher who lived in Stuttgart, became one of the pioneering advocates for Henry Dunant's vision within German royal houses and duchies.

And it was in the nearby Hasenbergsteige that an impoverished and homeless Dunant moved into the house of another pastor in 1876. The founder of the Red Cross Movement lived in Stuttgart for more than ten years before moving back to Heiden in Switzerland. Three years ago, a column was erected to commemorate Dunant's years there.

Other sections were founded soon after the establishment of the Württemberg Medical Association. Their members devotedly tended to wounded soldiers in several 19th century wars, including the Danish–German war, the Prussian–Austrian war and the German–French war.

The German Red Cross also assumed responsibility for responding to nationwide calamities, such as

Brothers and volunteers Christian and Johannes Schad are passionate about their humanitarian work and their National Society's legacy. Here, they stand before the home where Henry Dunant lived when the first National Society was formed in Stuttgart, Germany.

Photo: Werner Bachmeier/IFRC

#### The First Geneva Convention

Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field is signed by 12 states on 22 August 1864, in Geneva.

#### Portuguese Red Cross

11 February 1865

#### Swedish Red Cross

25 May 1865

#### Norwegian Red Cross

22 September 1865

#### Swiss Red Cross

17 July 1866

#### The Russian Red Cross Society

3 May 1867 as Russian Red Cross (Soviet) and 1 July 1992 as Russian Red Cross Society.

#### The Netherlands Red Cross

19 July 1867

#### Austrian Red Cross

17 May 1867

#### Turkish Red Crescent Society

11 June 1868

#### British Red Cross

4 August 1870 as the National Aid Society. Renamed the British Red Cross in 1905.

#### Danish Red Cross

27 April 1875

said that it was “tragic to see how large parts of the German Red Cross management adapted to the conditions of the Nazi regime and moved away from Red Cross principles, how it was reshaped and instrumentalized as a National Socialist organization and how Red Cross principles were abandoned.”

### Lesson learned

So is Germany an inglorious place to take a look at the history of the Red Cross? Definitely not — not least because the German Red Cross, which was re-established in West Germany in 1950, is now the world’s second largest National Society, with some 3.5 million members and 400,000 volunteers. In addition to the 170,000 on-call members, there are 130,000 water rescuers, 5,000 mountain rescuers, 110,000 active youth volunteers, 20,000 volunteers for welfare and social work, and 22,000 Red Cross nurses.

All this is strictly organized along federal lines — a lesson that not only Germany but also the

**“When we are on mission, we always ask ourselves: are we working here according to our seven rules? Where do they clash with reality? Can or should we change something in the way we work?”**

**Johannes Schad**, 41, German Red Cross volunteer

German Red Cross had learned from the disastrous concentration of power in the hands of the Nazi regime. At the top is the federal association, which is primarily responsible for tracing, national political representation and international aid within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Next come 19 regional associations, followed by 480 district sections and more than 4,500 local sections.

At the international level, the German Red Cross is active in projects in 50 countries, which in 2012 were funded half by donations and half by allocations.

Donation income fluctuates widely in a country with a strong tradition for giving. The German Red Cross received donations totalling US\$ 168.3 million after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, compared with US\$ 33.8 million in 2012, a year marked — fortunately — by few natural disasters. As a result, ensuring the independent nature of Red Cross activities remains a constant challenge.

This point was made by 41-year-old Johannes Schad, a surgeon and emergency doctor, whose brother Christian, aged 53, is a Geneva Convention representative in the Stuttgart regional association.

The brothers live in a large property, only a few kilometres from where the first Red Cross section was founded in 1863, with four out of ten siblings and their families all under one roof. The Red Cross goes far back in the family’s history: their father was the leader of an on-call team and enjoyed taking his children along to the Red Cross Christmas dinner.

His sons, Christian and Johannes became, respectively, a teacher and a surgeon. They devoted a huge share of their time to the worldwide organization — 40 years in the case of Christian.

The contents of his bookshelves in the cellar of their house would stand out in any library. They contain virtually everything ever written about the history and dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross.

### A rare gem

The real gem in this collection is the book *Entstehungsgeschichte des Roten Kreuzes und der Genfer Konvention* (History of the development of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention), whereby



Swedish nurse Elsa Brändström was 27 years old in 1915 when she went to care for German and Austrian prisoners of war in Siberia, where detainees lived under horrendous conditions. She spent much of her life taking care of wounded soldiers and civilians in Germany during the First and Second World Wars and is an inspirational figure for many humanitarians in Germany today. Photo: German Red Cross

**Red Cross of Montenegro**  
29 November 1875 and again on 12 June 2006.

**The Red Cross of Serbia**  
25 January 1876. Red Cross of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats

and Slovenes from 29 July 1921 to 25 July 1933; Yugoslav Red Cross from 25 July 1933 to 2002; Serbia and Montenegro Red Cross Society from 2002 to 2006; The Red Cross of Serbia from 27 October 2006.

**Romanian Red Cross**  
11 July 1876

**Japanese Red Cross Society**  
1 May 1877

**Finnish Red Cross**  
7 May 1877

**Hellenic Red Cross (Greece)**  
22 June 1877

**Croatian Red Cross**  
1878 within the Red Cross of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Independent since 10 October 1991.

**Chilean Red Cross**  
1879, disbanded in 1891; re-established in 1903.

**Slovenian Red Cross**  
1879 as a part of the Austrian Red Cross. Independent since 26 January 1993.

a man from Stuttgart, Rudolf Müller, rehabilitated the impoverished Henry Dunant in 1897, helping to ensure that Dunant was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901.

The younger of the two brothers, Johannes, has also collected an impressive series of foreign missions: from Kenya to Gaza, Iraq to Haiti. He has just returned from China, where he provided Chinese special forces with disaster preparedness training.

Both brothers are steeped in historical knowledge about the German Red Cross, and display an astonishing ability to link history with the present and the present with history.

When the conversation turns to the colonial era, and more specifically to Namibia during the Herero uprising (a rebellion in 1902 against brutal German colonial rule), the brothers point out that the German Red Cross rarely, if ever, tended to wounded Africans.

With its internalized racism and anti-Semitism, had the German Red Cross leadership already known what the Nazi regime wished to impose upon it? Both nod in agreement.

“That’s how it was,” says Christian. “That’s the lesson that we’ve learned: never to let ourselves be subject to something like *Gleichschaltung* again. Rather, to always do our utmost to ensure that the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross are respected.”

Johannes Schad agrees. “When we are on mission as well, we always ask ourselves: are we working here according to our seven rules? Where do they clash with reality? Can or should we change something in the way we work? Moreover, if we put gender balance into practice, it means we have to consistently ensure that in a mobile hospital, women receive medical care just as fast as men.

“In addition to the limits which must be borne in mind in the field, such as our role and the role of the National Society,” he continues, “some issues can be settled straight off. If the German Red Cross is asked whether it will take over the [military] field hospital in Kunduz once the German army withdraws from Afghanistan, the answer can only be ‘no’. Our neutrality is a prerequisite for our survival.”

**“If you ask me what the major challenge of the future will be, I would say continuing to appeal to young people, with structures that are flexible and modern.”**

**Frieder Frischling**, district director of the German Red Cross in Stuttgart

Even in safe and quiet Stuttgart, Christian explains that the principle applies in exactly the same way: “Every time an ambulance goes out, the assumption is that everyone will be given medical care. Everyone is treated the same: the veiled woman, the man speaking broken German, the drunk and the professor.”

Every person who starts working for the German Red Cross as a volunteer must attend an introductory seminar to learn the basics of the Fundamental Principles and international humanitarian law.

“I had to work hard before the 2006 Football World Cup to make sure that our staff were properly trained,” says Christian. And they had to learn that absolutely everyone in the stadium, where things are not always all that peaceful, had to be helped without any distinction — including the English hooligans, who kept the police busy after the match with Ecuador and whom only Red Cross volunteers dared approach.

Plans to build a new train station triggered large demonstrations in Stuttgart in 2011. “There were 150 people injured,” Christian Schad recalls. “Students, policemen, masked rowdies. So you have to get everyone to understand that everybody has the same right to care.”

A German Red Cross ambulance circa 1867. Photo: A. Vennemann/German Red Cross



**Peruvian Red Cross**  
17 April 1879

**American Red Cross**  
21 May 1881

**Costa Rican Red Cross**  
4 April 1885

part of the IFRC; ceased to exist on 26 January 1909.

**The South African Red Cross Society**

**Argentine Red Cross**  
13 June 1880

**Bulgarian Red Cross**  
13 January 1885

**Association Congolaise et Africaine**  
31 December 1888. Recognized by the ICRC in 1889 but never

**The Thai Red Cross Society**  
26 April 1893

22 July 1896 as the Transvaal Red Cross. Orange Free State Red Cross founded in 1899 and a British Red Cross branch founded in Cape Colony in

**Hungarian Red Cross**  
16 May 1881

**Salvadorean Red Cross Society**  
13 March 1885

**Venezuelan Red Cross**  
30 January 1895

And that is probably exactly the approach that has brought both of them to the Red Cross. "There's something I know deep in my heart," says Christian. "I can't make the world a better place. But I can be there for those who have suffered harm."

Questions like this are consistently discussed at the highest level in Baden-Württemberg. Every year, the German Red Cross, together with the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Institute for the International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict, co-hosts a convention where participants can exchange views with experts on media and war, human rights in conflicts or new forms of war.

This year, the ever-increasing reliance on unmanned drones was on the agenda. In addition, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of its founding, the Baden-Württemberg section of the German Red Cross has published a series of papers about present-day challenges to international humanitarian law and the future of the German Red Cross and the ICRC.

Why is this kind of anniversary important to Red Cross members in a region so central to Movement history? "It provides inner motivation," says Udo Bangerter, press officer of the regional association of Baden-Württemberg. "People feel respected, taken seriously, more visible. This reinforces cooperation and self-confidence."

### The next generation

And that also might help inspire the next generation of Red Cross volunteers, despite some major challenges. In Baden-Württemberg, commitment is good when viewed through a nationwide lens: some 50,000 of the overall 400,000 volunteers throughout the country are active in the region, a much higher percentage than the national average.

But what makes them volunteer? "Most have had some kind of crucial experience," says Bangerter, who recently portrayed volunteers all over the country in a publication to mark the 150th anniversary. "It may be the death of a close relative or the fact that they have witnessed a disaster and felt that they wanted to help."

But Bangerter takes pains to note that all is not perfect in Baden-Württemberg. Both here and in the rest of Germany, the Red Cross recruits more volun-



Today, the German Red Cross is an international relief organization in its own right with humanitarian operations around the world. This German Red Cross doctor attends to a child in a makeshift medical centre on the island of Sumatra after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Photo: Fredrik Barkenhammar/ German Red Cross

teers from the countryside than the big cities. Where the next generation of management will come from is a major source of concern.

"A district director is in charge of 300 to 1,200 people — that is virtually impossible to do on a part-time basis. The demands in terms of personnel and process management are enormous."

Frieder Frischling, district director of the Red Cross section in Stuttgart, adds: "If you ask me what the major challenge of the future will be, I would say continuing to appeal to young people, with structures that are flexible and modern."

Other challenges include bridging the gap between tight funding for core activities, such as health insurance, communities and long-term care insurance. "The basic conditions are becoming increasingly difficult," says Frischling. "We have been rationalizing for years. And now we have reached the limit: after all, someone has to drive the ambulance." ■

### Jeannette Goddar

Jeanette Goddar is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.

1900. Independent since 21 May 1913.

### The Canadian Red Cross Society

10 October 1896 as part of the British Red Cross. Independent since 19 May 1909.

### Belarus Red Cross

1896 as Grodno Province department of the Russian Red Cross. Part of the Soviet Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from 1926. Independent since 26 March 1992.

### Uruguayan Red Cross

5 March 1897

### Red Cross Society of China

10 March 1904

### The Republic of Korea National Red Cross

27 October 1905. Became a chapter of Japanese Red Cross after annexation in 1910; the Republic of Korea National Red Cross (South) since 1947.

### Mexican Red Cross

6 August 1907

### Brazilian Red Cross

5 December 1908

### Cuban Red Cross

10 March 1909