



American Friends Service Committee

World War I European Relief Work

by Edwin R. Dubin

It was April 6, 1917 and the nation was now at war. How was a religious sect that renounced all violence going to respond? What would happen to their young men when the draft came? These are the questions that faced members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in the spring of 1917. Their answer to these two questions was the founding of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Using the English Society of Friends “War Victims Relief Committee” as a model, the AFSC was to provide, it was hoped, their young men and other conscientious objectors (Mennonites and Brethren) an opportunity to engage in European civilian relief work as a military service alternative. Rufus M. Jones was appointed chairman of the Service Committee with headquarters established in the Friends Philadelphia Meeting House at 20 South 12th Street. From 1917 to 1927, in the

first ten years of the organization, the AFSC sent volunteer relief workers to France, Russia, Germany, Poland, Austria, and Serbia.

In June 1917, the first group of nine American Friends left for France. Volunteers after that first group received training and French language lessons at Haverford College before leaving for the continent. A continual problem for the first months was that the Army drafted a large number of men who were in the training program. The hope that their members would be exempt from the military draft did not materialize in the first 1917 draft class.

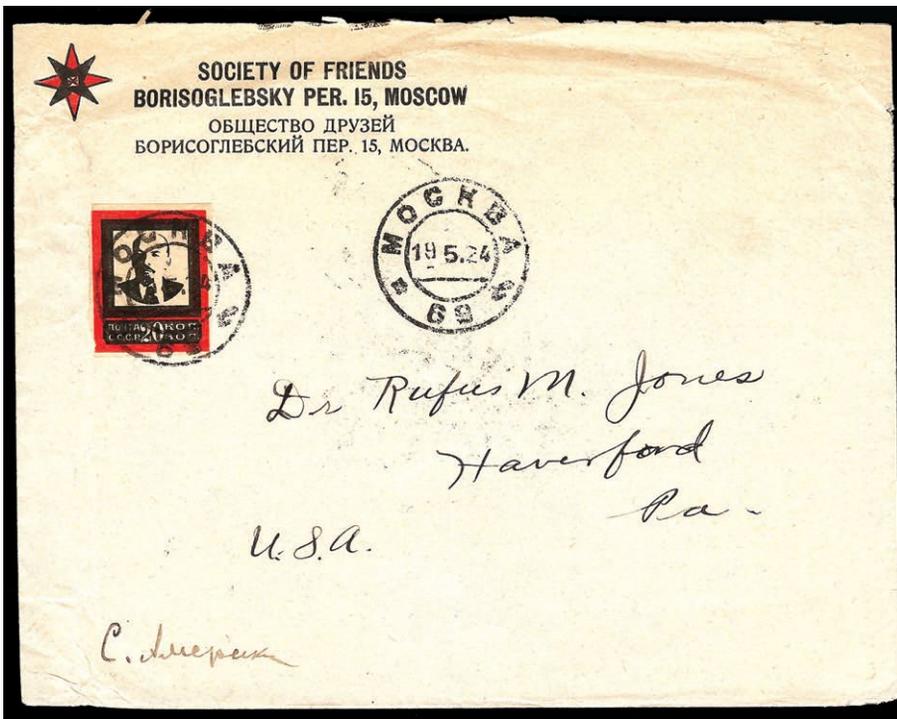
Under the 1917 draft law, conscientious objectors were drafted and offered non-combat jobs; however, many Quakers felt compelled to refuse military service of any type. These men suffered harassment and isolation in the training camps or, in the worst cases, they were court martialed and sent to prison. Not until February 1918 was the law revised to allow the furlough of drafted conscientious objectors for agriculture work in this country or reconstruction work in France.

The AFCS work in France was under a triangular management agreement with the American Red Cross (ARC) and the English Friends “War Victims Relief Committee.” The AFCS unit went to France as a bureau in the ARC Civilian Relief Department. At the same time, the AFSC merged with the English Friends to form the “Anglo-American Mission of the Society of Friends.” The merger also was known as the “Mission de la Société des Amis.” Covers are known with reference to both names and the ARC.

The ARC provided funding and help



Early mail from France sent through Army Postal Office No. 2, Paris, France. Return address Friends Unit, A(merican).R(ed).C(ross).



May 1924 cover mailed from Moscow during the AFSC Russian famine relief work period.

and the Herbert Hoover-run American Relief Administration (ARA).

In 1921 a drought in the Volga River valley created widespread famine and hunger. With the agreement of the Soviet Government, the ARA set up an American-run food relief program throughout the drought-stricken region. In October 1921 a second AFSC unit arrived in Russia and began work as an affiliated ARA unit in Buzuluk County. Initially, the AFSC worked as a separate organization from the English

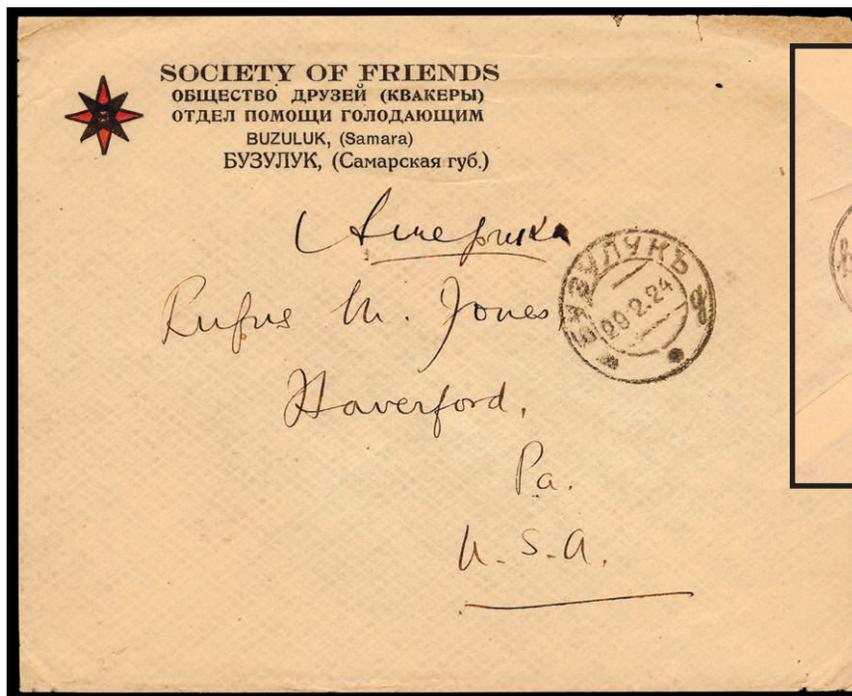
Friends, also now in Buzuluk County. The ARA handled the purchase and transportation of supplies, as well as relations with the Soviet Government. At the peak of the food distribution program, 147,000 Russians in Buzuluk County depended on the AFSC and English Friends for their daily meals. The affiliation with the ARA continued until September 1922, when the AFSC terminated the relationship. The AFSC and English Friends made a separate working agreement with the Soviet Government and continued their relief work as one organization.

In addition to the Buzuluk County work, the Friends, supported by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, ran a Minsk (Ukraine) feeding program and, in 1923, extended their relief work into Pugachev County. The work in Busuluk County continued into 1925, with reconstructive farm

aid and medical assistance to fight a malaria and cholera outbreak.

In early July 1919, a group of American and English Friends met in Berlin with a group of German charity organizations to start a feeding and care program for children. Initially working through the represented German relief organizations, \$30,000 worth of food and twenty-five tons of clothing was distributed.

The German relief work continued at a low level until

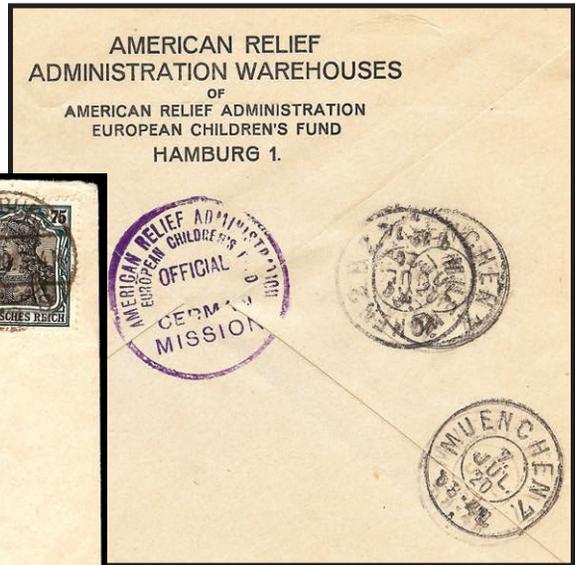


Left: February 1924 cover mailed from Buzuluk, Russia toward the end of the relief work in Buzuluk.

Above: Portion of the back of the cover with postage attached.

Right: Portion of the back of the cover with the European Children Fund Warehouse return address.

Below: July 1920 registered cover sent from the ARA European Children Fund Warehouse operation in Hamburg, Germany. The ARA used the port of Hamburg to bring in the imported foodstuffs for the AFSC feeding program.



Also in 1919, AFSC sent twenty-five workers to Poland to assist in stamping out the typhus fever epidemic sweeping the country. The unit joined the British Friends in the southwest town of Zawiercie. The combined Friends unit worked to sanitize homes and people, and in a few months had

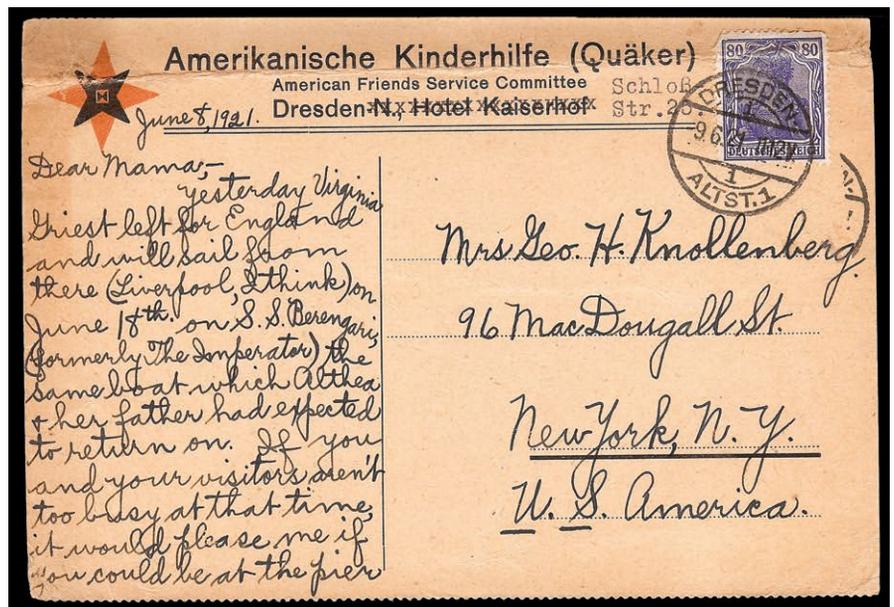
reduced the instance of new cases in the area by 90 percent. The relief work then expanded into reconstructive assistance to farmers to aid in reclaiming land destroyed in the war, including providing seed and tools to work the land. Work in Poland ended in the summer of 1925.

The work in Austria and Serbia was small in comparison to other AFSC efforts. Relief work in Austria was primarily

the autumn of 1919. That fall, Herbert Hoover requested the AFSC to act as the ARA European Children's Fund agent in Germany. Under the final agreement, the ARA contributed \$2,000,000 of food, acted as purchasing agent for foodstuffs, and provided transportation to and warehousing in Germany. The AFSC agreed to manage all fund-raising activities in the United States and distribution expenses in Germany. The feeding program started in February 1920. At its peak in June 1921, the AFSC (assisted by 40,000 German workers in 1,640 communities) fed 1,010,638 persons one meal a day. On July 31, 1922 the program was turned over to a consolidated group of German relief organizations.

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In August 1923 the German Government appealed to the AFSC to return and again organize a child feeding program. General Henry Allen, commander of American Forces in Germany, agreed to become chairman of the fund-raising committee. The feeding program started on February 15, 1924, and was run by the AFSC until October 7, 1924, when it turned over management to the German Central Committee of Foreign Relief.



June 1921 card from a worker with the AFSC children's feeding program in Dresden, Germany.

American Committee
For Relief of German Children
KENTUCKY DIVISION
BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING
LOUISVILLE, KY.

LOUISVILLE
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1924
KY.



Rev. E. L. Averett, E. Box 463 B
City.

Above: January 1924 cover from the Louisville, KY American Committee for Relief of German Children. Fund-raising effort during the second AFSC German children's feeding program.

American Committee For Relief of German Children
In Co-operation with the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
HARVEY D. GIBSON
TREASURER

MAJOR GENERAL HENRY T. ALLEN
CHAIRMAN

"Children must not be let starve while political and economic problems are being solved"

"AMERICA NEVER WAGED WAR ON CHILDREN"

KENTUCKY DIVISION
BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING
LOUISVILLE
January 5th 1924.
TELEPHONE, MAIN 2865

Rev. E. L. Averett,
P.O. No. 2, Sta. E.
City.

Dear Mr. Averett:-

I am inviting the clergy of all faith and denominations in Louisville to a meeting to be held in Exchange Hall, Board of Trade Building, on Wednesday, January 9th at 11.00 A.M. to consider the question indicated by this letterhead.

Prominent speakers will present the subject and the meeting will be short.

May I have the honor of your presence at this gathering?

I remain,
Very sincerely,
Alfred Pauley
Chairman Kentucky Committee

KENTUCKY COMMITTEE

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- ET. REV. C. E. WOODCOCK

Left: Funds solicitation letter from the Louisville, KY committee, with Major General Henry Allen listed as chairman.

an English Friends imitative. In late 1919 the AFSC sent a small number of workers from France to assist the English Friends' child feeding work in Vienna. The AFSC work expanded to fund sanitariums to combat childhood tuberculosis that continued until 1927.

In September 1919 another small group of AFSC volunteers was sent to Serbia. The group started a small hospital in Petsh that was turned over to the Serbian government in April 1922.

This article has only briefly sketched the decade of American Quaker relief work in Europe — a work that began in France in 1917 and ended in Austria in 1927. During this period of time the AFSC dispensed approximately \$25,200,000 in money and "gifts in kind." The number of Quaker volunteers in this period has been estimated at approximately 900, not a large number for the scope of their accomplishments. The AFSC was able to leverage its limited resources by working with the English Friends and the larger ARC and ARA organizations whenever possible. Also, unlike the ARC and ARA, which set up separate American-run entities, the smaller AFSC worked through local governments and charitable organizations. Between the two World Wars The AFSC continued its relief work between the two world wars and in World War II again ran relief work for the

PARIS FRANCE
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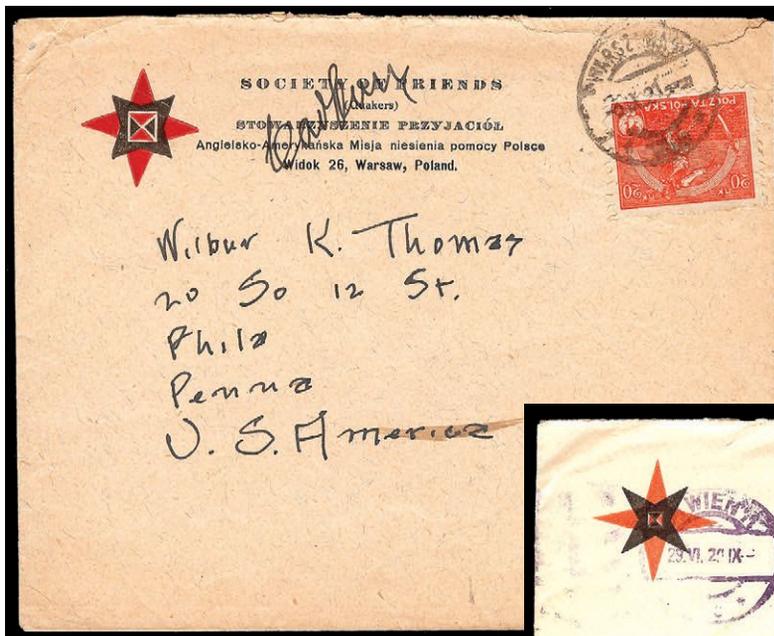
COLLER
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REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE
25
LOISLES

Wilbur A. Thomas,
Executive Secretary,
American Friends Service Comm.,
20 South 12th St.,
Philadelphia, PA.
U. S. A.

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
ANGLO-AMERICAN MISSION IN POLAND
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

July 1920 cover from an AFSC worker in Poland (Anglo-American Mission in Poland hand stamp). The cover was sent through the ARC courier system in Poland to the ARC Paris post office (weak ARC post office receiving hand stamp). The ARC post office applied the French postage stamp and mailed the cover to the United States.



October 1921 cover from an AFSC worker in Warsaw, Poland.



June 1920 cover from an AFSC worker in Vienna, Austria.

needy. The Service Committee's decades of humanitarian service were recognized in 1947, when the AFSC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

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The Author

Tedwin Dubin is employed as an engineer at Ford Motor Company. Ed is an APS life member and presently Vice Present of the Military Postal History. His main collecting interest is World War I era military postal history. Presently Ed and Al Kugel are leading a MPHS team to update the 2nd edition of the *Postal History of the AEF, 1917-1923*.



Cover (date?) from an AFSC worker in Mitrovitza, Kossowska (Kosovo), Serbia.

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