

Annual Report 2016

Strategy and Milestones

The analog and digital future of the ITS

The documents in the archive of the International Tracing Service (ITS) represent the collective memory of the victims of National Socialism and the consequences of Nazi crimes. We achieved a great deal in 2016 to ensure the preservation of this important collection. I'm referring in particular to the new archive building that will be constructed in Bad Arolsen. We are currently on schedule with our plans. Once the building is completed, our documents – which have been listed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register – will be stored in accordance with archival principles and thus protected for generations to come.



The value of the archive is growing along with the number of people who can use it. We are accomplishing this by making the documents available online. I believe this is one of our key tasks for the coming years. Our prospects are good: Hardly any other archive has been digitized and indexed to the same extent as the ITS.

My first year as Director was an exciting one. We laid the foundations for enhancing the international profile of this unique and important institution. This was achieved by means of strategic and target plans that were developed with great effort and efficiency by a team of staff members. The International Commission of the ITS unconditionally approved these plans.

The ITS is changing – and so is the design and content of the Annual Report. The 2016 report will be the first to be published in an online version on our website. We've included more graphics to illustrate the work of the ITS. I would like to highlight one figure in particular: In 2016, 15,635 people contacted the ITS with questions about former victims of Nazi persecution. The search for answers continues, and the desire to fill gaps in family history remains strong – even after more than seven decades.

Floriane Hohenberg

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1. Focus and Viewpoints

New strategic and target plans, milestones for the years leading up to 2020, and the new archive building: many foundations were laid in 2016.

“The ITS is gaining momentum,” said Paul Dostert, Chairman of the International Commission, commenting on the evolution of the International Tracing Service (ITS) in October 2016. The development of a strategy and system of targets has played an important role in this. Floriane Hohenberg initiated this process just a few weeks into her role as the new ITS Director. The 22 employees on the strategy team were chosen to represent as many different perspectives as possible. In a total of five meetings, the team developed a strategy for the years leading up to 2020 based on the ITS Mission Statement. The International Commission welcomed these new targets and gave the green light for their implementation at its annual meeting in Rome in June 2016.



First meeting of the ITS Strategy working group

The ITS system of targets at a glance:

- **Preservation** – We are the guardians of the ITS Memory of the World.
- **Access** – We enable tailored access – locally and globally.
- **Service** – We offer prompt, customized, and competent service.
- **Network** – We constitute the core of the ITS network and are a partner in other relevant networks.
- **Visibility** – We shape remembrance and make the ITS visible internationally.

23 sub-goals define the individual steps that are necessary to succeed in all five areas by 2020.

The new archive building and the visitor center in the main building will play an important role in achieving these objectives and milestones.

New archive building

The plans are gradually moving forward for the new ITS archive building. This new structure near the main building will make it possible to store our documentary heritage in accordance with archival principles. Before construction starts in 2018, many of our holdings will need to be placed in temporary storage because an existing building is going to be torn down. In 2016 we focused on preparing for the move and planning the logistics. A substitute archive was also set up which provides better storage conditions than the room used previously. The German Federal Archives, an institutional partner to the ITS, has confirmed the suitability of the temporary archive.

Room for exhibitions

It is planned that the new building will provide the necessary archive space as well as a multipurpose room to be used for an exhibition on the history of the ITS, among other things. This was decided by the International Commission in 2016. The exhibition will provide visitors with a vivid overview of the institution, its work with victims of Nazi persecution, and less familiar aspects of postwar history.

Visitor center

Parallel to this, other auxiliary buildings will be vacated in the coming years, and the main building will be redesigned to house a new visitors' center. This should also simplify our working processes and save rental costs so that more resources can be applied to our projects.

Director Floriane Hohenberg talks about the strategic reorientation of the ITS

Why was it important for you to quickly develop a strategy and system of targets for the ITS?

Although new tasks had been defined, no strategy had been formulated for the ITS since the archive was opened at the end of 2007. But a strategy is important for making the best use of available resources. Even in my first discussions with the staff, it became apparent that we needed a strategic direction, and many employees actively contributed to this so we were able to move forward quickly.



Director Floriane Hohenberg talks about the strategic reorientation of the ITS

Will the ITS be modernized as a result?

Yes, absolutely, not least because we will examine and rethink our working processes in 2017 in order to achieve our strategic goals. There has been a lot of restructuring in the ten years since the archive opened. We're reviewing everything now to see what kind of processes we need for our new strategy. Every position will be defined, so everyone will know why and how they will contribute to our primary goals. I think this is very important to motivation, because it's meaningful.

What are the biggest challenges?

Changes take time, which is something we don't necessarily have when we know that we want to make up for missed opportunities with people making inquiries and using the archive. That's one challenge. Resources are the second one. We have a budget that is not growing. We need to improve our efficiency so we can apply resources to these new tasks. And another thing: We need new experts in Bad Arolsen. To acquire these experts and maintain our team here, we have to show that we are an attractive employer.

Have you already had some success?

Definitely! We put the general inventory online in a short period of time thanks to close cooperation between the departments. The ITS has redefined its role and centered itself in the network of partner institutions who hold copies of the digital ITS archive. We were able to hand over more personal effects than last year, and we will now actively seek family members in order to return as many of these personal items as possible. The focus of the Research and Education Branch is also clearer. It's apparent that we can accomplish a lot as a mediator and service provider. And I'm very pleased that we're thinking less in the context of individual departments and more about joint projects.

Milestones for the ITS

As part of its system of targets, the ITS is planning several milestone projects between now and 2020. The following milestones have a high priority:

Packing and new damage analysis – For decades, the documents in the ITS archive were tools used on a daily basis to respond to inquiries. For this reason, they were not packed and stored in accordance with archival standards. Two milestones are important for preserving the holdings: Before the documents are moved to the provisional archive, a new damage analysis will be carried out in 2017 as the basis for a 10-year restoration plan. The move in the second quarter of 2017 is also the deadline for all documents to be repacked in accordance with archival principles. One of the last collections to be repacked will be the more than 30,000 boxes that make up the Central Name Index, which contains reference cards relating to the fate of 17.5 million persecuted individuals.

Description and indexing – Another project for 2017 involves determining when each document collection should undergo archival description. This milestone is important because the priorities set here will also determine what is published online. As soon as a collection has been described, the archival description can be published in the general inventory on the website. Then the documents can also be uploaded to the Online Archive of the ITS.

Center for Digitization – Since the ITS began digitizing documents in 1998, it has acquired a great deal of expertise in this segment. By 2020, the technical framework should be in place for the ITS to offer its digitization services to other archives and institutions.

Fundraising and third-party funds – The ITS is generally funded by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM). But various projects planned by the ITS require additional funding in order to be realized. For this reason, a high priority has been placed on acquiring third-party funds and establishing a fundraising program. In 2017 we will initiate the concepts for quickly getting this under way.

Exhibition and conference for the ITS anniversary in 2018 – The ITS is planning an exhibition on its history and work to mark the 75th anniversary of the start of Allied tracing activities and the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the ITS. The exhibition will give visitors the opportunity to learn about these tracing activities, the establishment of the archive, and the development of the institution. Parallel to the opening of the exhibition, we will hold an international conference dealing with aspects of the history of the ITS as well as the research potential offered by the archival holdings.

„We want to optimally support the ITS by intensifying our cooperation, sending clear messages, and implementing concrete goals. In the coming year, the International Commission will meet for the 80th time. To mark this occasion, we will hold a conference in Luxembourg which looks back on the fight to open the archive. We want to raise even more awareness of the wealth of documents available in Bad Arolsen.“



In June 2016, Paul Dostert assumed Chairmanship of the International Commission on behalf of Luxembourg.

Online exhibitions – To make the topics and projects of the ITS more internationally visible and accessible to all internet users, the ITS will offer online exhibitions on the Google Arts & Culture platform starting in 2017. The first step will be to present a small project about displaced persons based on the traveling exhibition “Where should we have gone after the liberation?” This will be followed by an exhibition developed in cooperation with the Buchenwald Memorial on the first 149 prisoners who were deported to this concentration camp 80 years ago.

E-guides to the documents in the ITS archive – Documents from the ITS archive, especially those from the Nazi era, require explanation – for researchers and family members alike. The ITS is therefore issuing a series of three electronic guides (in German and English) which explain various types of documents. The first guide covers documents from concentration camps, and it will be followed by guides for documents about forced laborers and about displaced persons (DPs). All three guides will be published online in the coming years.

Knowledge management – Since many ITS employees will be retiring in the years to come, a concept will be developed for transferring knowledge about the collections and the inquiry process to the next generation. This will include events such as “Employees Training Employees,” introductions to the sub-collections, and the development of a database with text modules on historical keywords.

Archive pedagogy: Memorial visits – The ITS will develop a document-based program to support groups before and after they visit a memorial. It will be based on the ITS archive, with its extensive holdings on concentration camp prisoners. Through these prisoners’ biographies and histories of persecution, direct connections can be drawn between the areas in which the groups of visitors live and the sites of Nazi terror – in nearly all regions and cities of Germany and other European countries. The groups can use the material to prepare for or follow up on a visit to a concentration camp memorial. The materials supplied by the ITS can also be used as a starting point for local history initiatives, such as memorial projects.

A few milestones in pictures



E-guides: E-guides with explanations of various types of documents are planned. The first guide relates to documents from concentration camps.

are you looking for a missing child?

ricercate un bimbo disperso?

suchen sie ein vermisstes kind?

NOTICE

P.C.I.R.O. (Preparatory Commission International Refugee Organization) ROME, HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT ABOUT 4000 CHILDREN OF ALL NATIONALITIES WHO WERE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES BECAUSE OF THE WAR, ARE PRESENTLY LIVING IN GERMANY UNDER P.C.I.R.O. CARE.

Parents or relatives may apply to this agency for particulars as to the procedure to follow in order to contact a missing child.

AVVISO

P.C.I.R.O. (Commissione Preparatoria Organizzazione Internazionale Profughi) DI ROMA, È STATA AVVISATA CHE CIRCA 4000 BAMBINI DI OGNI NAZIONALITÀ CHE FURONO DIVISI DALLE LORO FAMIGLIE PER CAUSE DI GUERRA, SI TROVANO ATTUALMENTE IN GERMANIA SOTTO LA PROTEZIONE DI P.C.I.R.O.

Parenti o congiunti desiderosi di ricostruire un loro bambino di sperso sono pregati di rivolgersi a questo ufficio per i dovuti schiarimenti.

ZUR BEACHTUNG

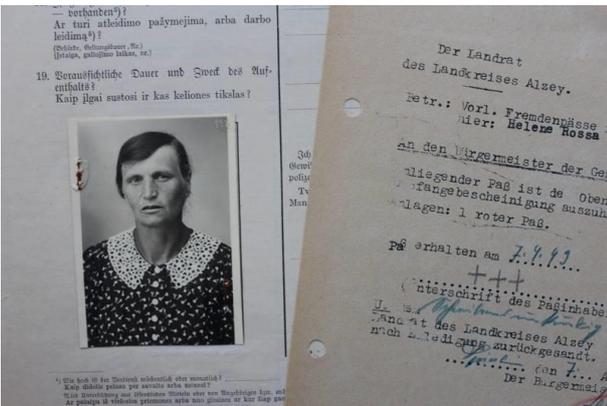
P.C.I.R.O. (Vorbereitungskommission der Internationalen Flüchtlinge Organisation) IN ROM, WURDE VERSTÄNDIGT DASS CIRCA 4000 KINDER VERSHIEDENER NATIONALITÄET, WELCHE WAHREND DES KRIEGES VON IHREN FAMILIEN GETRENNT WURDEN, DERZEIT UNTER BETREUUNG DER P.C.I.R.O. IN DEUTSCHLAND LEBEN.

Eltern oder Verwandte eines verschollenen Kindes mögen sich zwecks Erlangung der gewünschten Mitteilungen an die unterzeichnete Stelle wenden.

Exhibition: To mark its anniversary in 2018, the ITS is putting together an exhibition about its history and activities.



Knowledge management: The systematic transfer of knowledge about the inventories is part of the "Employees train employees" project.



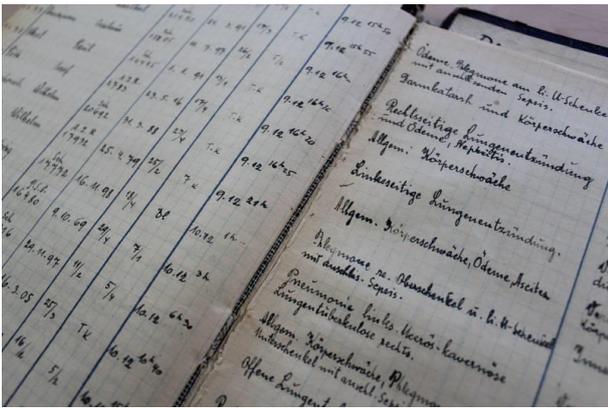
Restoration plan: The damage analysis becomes the basis for a ten-year restoration plan.



Online exhibition: The children's search service will be the subject of the first online exhibition on the Google platform.



Indexing: The index of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden is an example of how the ITS indexes document holdings for public use.



Damage analysis: Many documents have to be restored due to heavy use during the search work.



Packaging: In 2017, the Central Index of Names will be relocated to archive-compatible packaging.



Memorial tours: The ITS is developing a document-supported offer for the preparation and follow-up of memorial tours.

2. Highlights and Projects

One key goal of the ITS in 2016 was to expand our online content. New works were published in print as well.

The first collections from the ITS archive were made available online in October 2015

The ITS began digitizing its documents early on, so it can now make digital data available to researchers. It has primarily done so in cooperation with its partner institutions, which hold digital copies of the archive in seven countries. In 2016, several ongoing ITS projects aimed to make it easier to work with the digital data and to expand the online content. Tools such as the new website and informative social media activities are being used to draw international attention to the ITS and its online archive.



The first collections from the ITS archive were made available online in October 2015

The online archive of the ITS

The first document collections from the ITS archive went online in October 2015. This digital archive offers direct, innovative access to the documents and descriptions of each collection, as well as the opportunity to comment. Expanding the online archive is one of the key tasks for the coming years.

Smaller collections with generally wide appeal were chosen for the test phase. In the first step, photos of around 3,200 personal effects from concentration camp prisoners, documents about Allied investigations into death marches, and a sub-collection of the Child Search Branch were published.

In 2016, the ITS prepared to put the next collections online. The card file of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany will be uploaded at the start of 2017, along with other documents on death marches from concentration camps – a total of around 47,000 documents.

Online general inventory

Thanks to a direct link to the ITS database, the entire general inventory of the ITS has been accessible online since the end of 2016. Archive users can now gain an impression of how the collections are structured and read brief descriptions of the various sub-collections prior to their visit. The general inventory is available in German and English, and it can be searched by keyword. For reasons of transparency, even collections that have not yet been fully described are displayed in the general inventory. Detailed descriptions of these collections will gradually be added in the coming years.

Online finding aids for Nazi camp history

Documents on concentration and extermination camps, ghettos, and other similar camps in Nazi Germany are the focus of a new online finding aid published by the ITS in May 2016 on the portal of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) and the German Archives Portal. This index was created between 1970 and 1982, and it served primarily as a tool to assist the ITS teams in their work. The German Research Foundation (DFG) supported the electronic description of the information for users today. Information was recorded on the level of individual sheets due to the tracing activities of the ITS, so the finding aid offers particularly in-depth descriptions of the content of the documents.

Website and social media

When the new ITS website was launched in March 2016, the number of online inquiries rose immediately. In the first three months, until the end of June, the ITS received 13 percent more inquiries via its online form, which is available in German, English, French, and Russian, as well as Polish since mid-2016.

The website is optimized for smart phones and tablets for improved mobile use. A special introduction to the various activities of the ITS is offered for different target groups. The website explains the 70-year-old mandate of the ITS for the victims of Nazi persecution and their families. It also provides information about current research and education programs, the collections in the archive, and the international network of the ITS.

Vivid impression of the ITS

Since June 2016, a new Facebook page has offered more insights into the daily work and network of the ITS. This quick and current medium additionally provides information about interesting documents, partnerships, visitors, less-familiar historical content, and research opportunities. The ITS has also been publishing this content and other information on Twitter since November 2016.

Improved service through expanded indexing

“The ITS is very advanced in its indexing, since names from many individual documents were recorded in the context of its tracing activities. It is highly unusual for an archive to offer descriptions on the level of individual sheets. We have an indexing team that is currently prioritizing the description of the around three million correspondence files relating to victims of Nazi persecution.



Dr. Christian Groh, Leiter Abteilung Archiv

The expanded archival description of individual sheets would offer tremendous benefits to the users of the ITS archive, both locally and online. This is why we began looking into additional automated indexing in 2016. We send test data to various providers who describe the documents by place name, by the names of concentration camps, or by document type. Then we evaluate and compare the results. What can the different systems do? How precisely and quickly can we index collections by using them? And how high are the costs? Afterwards we'll decide how to use automated text recognition processes as an additional type of archival description.”

Christian Groh, Head of Archives

Publications 2016

What is to be gained by reconstructing paths of persecution and spaces of terror? Answers to this question can be found in the fifth volume of the ITS yearbook entitled *Freilegungen – Wege, Orte und Räume der NS-Verfolgung* (“Uncovered – Paths, Places and Spaces of Nazi Persecution”). The nine essays and case studies that make up the bulk of this scholarly work show how geographical research in the ITS archive can benefit the investigation of the history and postwar examination of Nazi crimes.

The yearbook was published by the Wallstein Verlag Göttingen. With this series of books, which was launched in 2012, the ITS aims to draw attention to important fields of research and how its collections can be of use in various approaches to research and education.

With essays by Henning Borggräfe (ed.), Christian Groh, Alina Bothe, Sebastian Bondzio, Christoph Rass, Ismee Tames, Beata Halicka, Anna Meier-Osiński, et al.

EUR 29.90 (D) ISBN: 978-3-8353-1925-7 (2016) Also available as an e-book.



Cover Freilegungen (2016)

„ With these ‘findings’ we want to draw attention to the diversity of our documents and to encourage historical initiatives and scholars to carry out research in the collections of the ITS.“

Akim Jah, research associate at the ITS



“The deportation of Jews from Germany and their suppressed history after 1945” is the subject of a new volume in the ITS series Fundstücke (“Findings”). The two authors and editors, Akim Jah and Gerd Kühling, explain which documents about deportation are held in the ITS archive and how the approach to this key chapter of the Holocaust has changed in the postwar decades. This volume of the Fundstücke series was produced in cooperation with the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site.

In its Fundstücke series, the ITS presents less well-known but historically significant testimonies from the Nazi era and the postwar period.

EUR 9.90 (D) ISBN: 978-3-8353-1860-1 Also available as an e-book.



Cover Fundstücke 4 (2016)

3. Facts and Figures

How many people have turned to the ITS? Who is looking for information? And how is the digitization project coming along? Here you will find all the information presented in graphs.

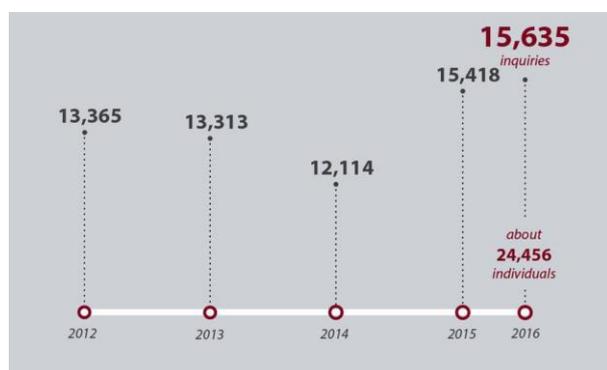
The ITS is funded by:
Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien

Chair of the International Commission
until 8.6.2016 Dr. Mario Guarany for Italy
until 15.6.2017 Dr. Paul Dostert for Luxembourg

14,290,000 €
Budget 2016

Director
Floriane Hohenberg

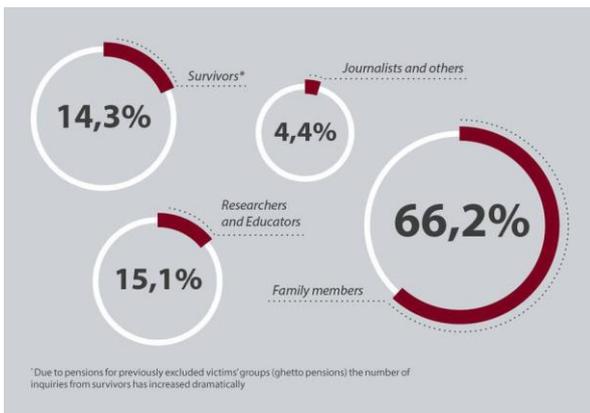
General Information



Numbers of Inquiries since 2012



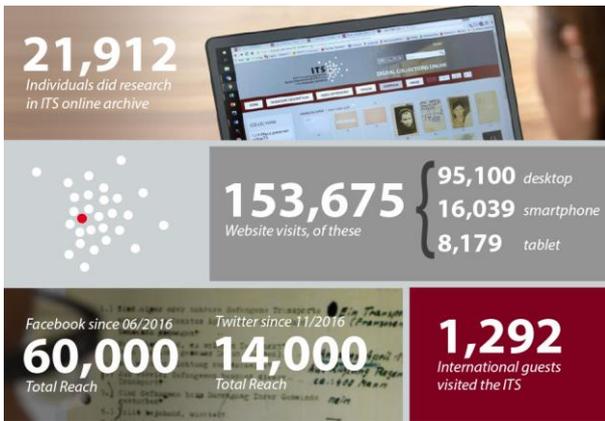
Figures 2016



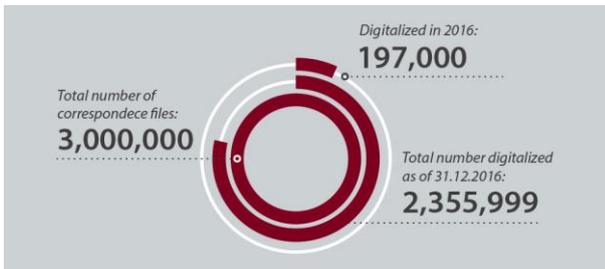
Who were the inquirers in 2016?



Where did the inquiries come from?



Visits 2016



Digitization of the correspondence files



ITS Archive Facts and Figures



ITS Staff Members by Department (Status as of January 1, 2017)



International Commission and Partner Institutions

4. Network and Dialog

Through events and initiatives with partners, the ITS gave new impetus to research, education, and the use of the ITS database in 2016.

The new target system calls for the ITS to strengthen its national and international connections and stimulate activity in its various networks. In 2016, there were two main events to highlight in connection with this:

The ITS and the Max Mannheimer Study Center organized a workshop entitled “Life in the Aftermath – Displaced Persons, Displaced Children and Child Survivors on the move.” What happened to the people who survived forced labor, deportation, and the concentration camps? And what challenges were faced by liberated adolescents and children?

In recent years there has been growing interest in researching the situation of displaced persons (DPs) after 1945. At the end of May 2016, an international workshop on this topic was held in Dachau.



Teilnehmer*innen der Veranstaltung „Nach der Befreiung - zur Situation von Überlebenden und Kindern als DPs“

The ITS is continually improving access to the around 85 percent of its archival documents pertaining to Nazi crimes and their consequences that have already been digitized. At the international workshop on “Improving Access to the ITS Archives” in March 2016 in Bad Arolsen, representatives of the partner institutions of the ITS learned about strategies and tools for searching the digitized ITS archive. One focal point of the workshop was the interaction between copyholders and ITS employees.

Connections with international institutions also played an important role in the personal effects initiative launched by the ITS in 2016 – learn more.

New partnerships and initiatives were launched or supported:

ASF volunteer service

The ITS has been a project partner to the German International Program of the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ASF) since 2016. Starting in September 2017, volunteers will help research the fates of individuals persecuted by the Nazi regime in the digitized ITS archive and assist the Polish- and Russian-language teams in processing inquiries from victims of the Nazis and their families.

EHRI fellowship project

The ITS has participated in the fellowship program of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) since 2016. The goal of this EU-financed project is to encourage and support research into the Holocaust. Four scholarship holders conducted research at the ITS in 2016. Angela Boone looked into discrimination against Jews in the Netherlands after the war. Anna Maria Droumpouki worked on her project about Holocaust reparations in Greece. Polish Jews who were deported to Siberia were the focus of research by Lidia Zessin-Jurek. And Katharina Hering was drawn to the ITS for her project about ethical questions arising from public access to files on claims for compensation and restitution.

Antisemitism today

“If law enforcement, governments, and political leaders fail to respond to antisemitism, it sends the message that we tolerate and completely accept it.” In a short film from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg clearly expresses a zero-tolerance strategy for dealing with antisemitism. Together with renowned human rights experts and representatives from politics, business, and religion, she warns of the societal consequences of hate and antisemitism.

Research in the archive

We would like to introduce four visitors and their projects who represent nearly 500 scholars who carried out research in Bad Arolsen in 2016. Click the photos if you want to learn more.

“I found much more than I expected”

In order to trace the fates of former prisoners for an exhibition planned at the Brandenburg-Görden Prison Memorial, historian Uta Fröhlich researched names and life stories at the ITS

Historian and exhibition curator Uta Fröhlich is very familiar with the archive of the International Tracing Service (ITS). “I’ve been to Arolsen often. I first carried out research here in 2009, when I looked at the Children Tracing Archive for the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.” In July and at the end of September 2016 she visited the ITS again to carry out research for the Brandenburg an der Havel Memorials. Her findings will be incorporated into a new permanent exhibition for the memorial at the former Brandenburg-Görden prison, where 2,031 people were executed by the Nazis.



Historian and exhibition curator Uta Fröhlich

Insights into individual fates

Uta Fröhlich is researching the fates of former prisoners for the exhibition, which is scheduled to open in 2017. “Various groups were imprisoned in Görden: political prisoners from all over Europe and people in preventive detention, but also forced laborers and POWs who had been caught in the gears of justice, as well as homosexuals and Jews. The people who weren’t executed often experienced incredible journeys through various penal institutions, and also through concentration camps and different satellite camps. I found much more than I expected. That’s why I’ve come back a second time. The documents reveal the full range of fates that befell persecutees.”

This historian is bringing a lot of material back to her colleagues for the exhibition – almost too much, as she knows from experience. “I’ll probably be able to give them some new insights into individual fates. It won’t be easy to analyze all of it.” She has found references to the Görden prisoners on transport lists, prisoner registration cards and lists of names from concentration camps, for example, but also in postwar documents from the Allies and aid organizations and in the correspondence files of the ITS that document the inquiries made by victims of the Nazis and their families.

Uta Fröhlich curated the exhibition “Batteries for the Wehrmacht – Forced Labor at Pertrix 1939-1945,” which will be on display at the Nazi Forced Labor Documentation Center in Berlin until July 2017. “I couldn’t come

do the research myself at the time, but thanks to the ITS we were able to find 1,700 of the 2,000 forced laborers used by Pertrix, so we could create a database with their names and fates. Some of this was included in the exhibition.” The historian is pleased that so much has changed at the ITS since 2009. “It’s such a great archive and I really like coming here, because you can find an unbelievable amount of information about people. Topical research is somewhat more difficult, but it will get better and better with more finding aids and facilities.”

“More than just names”

Ute Hoffmann is the Director of the Bernburg Memorial, which commemorates the mass murder of sick and disabled people by the Nazis. She spent four days researching at the ITS in early November 2016.



Ute Hoffmann, director of the Bernburg Memorial

What you are researching in the ITS archive?

I’m here to compile information on the concentration camp prisoners killed at the Bernburg gas murder facility in the context of the "Special Treatment 14 f 13" program. We’re planning a new permanent exhibition at the memorial, in which I’d like to show more than just the victims’ names.

The Nazis killed more than 14,000 people in the Bernburg murder facility. How many of them were concentration camp prisoners?

About 2,500 of them. We know their names from transport lists.

What types of documents are you looking at?

I’ve gotten an overview of the material on the Flossenbürg, Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, and Buchenwald concentration camps, and now I’m working through the lists of names in search of individual documents. Letters, for example, but also death certificates with false information about the dates of death and supposed causes of death, such as pneumonia. And then there are the inquiries sent to the ITS after 1945 which contain information on the victims.

Research for members of the family

Hans-Peter Klein can’t say how many times he’s been to the International Tracing Service (ITS) archive. Since the archive opened in 2007, he takes advantage of every opportunity to research the fates of victims of Nazi persecution. In addition to supporting and initiating commemorative projects such as the laying of Stolperstein memorials, he also gathers information about individual persecution histories for relatives of Holocaust victims who live in the U.S.

One of the people Hans-Peter Klein supports in their research is Dennis Aron, the son of Jewish emigrants, who comes from a town near Chicago. Together, the two of them have already taken several steps to reconstruct the lives and fates of Aron’s ancestors. Aron set out on his search after the death of his mother, who never talked about her painful past, and after his own retirement.



Dennis Aron, the son of Jewish emigrants, who comes from a town near Chicago, was supported from Hans-Peter Klein

Klein translated letters Aron’s grandmother had sent from Germany to his mother in America. And in 2014, he travelled through Hesse with Aron in search of traces of various branches of the family. “On that trip we laid four Stolperstein memorials for his family in Borken. Those were the first Stolpersteine that had ever been laid there. For the city, it provided an impulse to keep working on the subject,” Klein recalls. During Aron’s last visit in October 2016, the two of them came to the ITS together to inspect the few surviving documents on the fate of Aron’s family on his mother’s side, and to talk about some of the other questions Aron has in the context of his intensive research.

His mother Hilde Speier was the only one of the family to survive. She managed to emigrate to Chicago in 1937, at the age of sixteen. Her parents Franziska and Levi Speier and their second daughter Ursula did not succeed in fleeing Germany. The ITS archive holds the only document pertaining to the family's fate – a list of the names of the Jews deported from Frankfurt am Main on 22 November 1941. The list specifies Riga as the transport destination, but in fact the Nazis took the deportees to Kaunas in Lithuania.

Their fate is known from the "Jäger Report" of December 1941. Karl Jäger, an SS Standartenführer and the commander of the security police in Kaunas, had listed all executions carried out by Task Force 3 (Einsatzkommando 3) with Lithuanian helpers in Vilnius and elsewhere in Lithuania as of July 4, 1941. It cites the number of persons shot to death at 133,346. Among those persons were Dennis Aron's grandparents and aunt, who – along with the rest of 5,000 persons who had come on five deportation trains – were executed between November 25 and 29, 1941 in Fort IX in Kaunas directly upon arrival. From the ITS Aron received copies of the list showing the names of his relatives along with information on their last place of residence.

Hans-Peter Klein has been devoting himself to the histories of Jewish families in Northern Hesse for thirty years, and has set up a website on the subject. On January 27, 2014, he was presented with the Obermayer German-Jewish History Award at the Berlin House of Representatives for his volunteer work. "To date I've researched approximately thirty families at the ITS," Klein told us. In addition to this volunteer work, he also comes to the ITS with prospective history teachers in the framework of his professional career. Klein is the head of the history department at the high-school teacher training college in Kassel, and an adjunct professor of history teaching methodology at the Universität Kassel. "I consider it important for teachers to be familiar with this institution and to use the ITS's offers for project work with their classes."

"A Social History of the Holocaust"

Dan Stone, Professor of Modern History at Royal Holloway University of London, spent four weeks in the archive of the ITS researching his project "Tracing the Holocaust," which is being funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

What is your research project about?

The first part will be a brief institutional history of the ITS. Following on that, I would like to benefit from the ITS documents to write a history of the Holocaust that does not start out with the authorities. It should be a bottom-up view instead, more of a social history of the Holocaust. For this the ITS offers a wealth of information. It's ironic that, for some parts, a history from below can only be written with documents from above. It is precisely there where you can often find details about people.



Dan Stone, August 2016

Were you able to find any enlightening documents?

Copies of letters from survivors from Czechoslovakia who were persecuted and deported as "half-Jews" (Mischlinge) by the Nazis are also very interesting. After 1945, these survivors had written to IRO employees saying that after being persecuted because of their Jewish roots they were now being persecuted in their own country because they spoke German. You can find accounts of their circumstances in the letters. They asked the IRO for help in emigrating because they didn't see a future for themselves in Czechoslovakia.

The ITS archive offers plenty of topics and approaches. What do you want to focus on?

At the moment I'm just gathering information, and I'm quite overwhelmed by all the possibilities. Maybe it's not necessary at this point to have a specific focus. But, among other things, I'm planning to look into some unknown satellite camps. A large number of the camps haven't been given much scholarly attention as yet, for example very little is known about Concentration Camp Gross-Rosen in English-speaking academic circles.

I would also like to demonstrate that the Holocaust was a widespread crime which affected all European countries and beyond. For me, it is important to view European history as a common history and not to look at it solely from a national perspective. This is also significant in today's political climate. The ascent of right-

wing populism in Europe is proof that the memory of Nazism is not exclusively a German problem. I understand the right-wing populist movements as being to some extent contemporary successors to wartime factions and fascist-oriented collaborators.

The ITS is not a “traditional” archive, in that the documents had previously been described and used for the sole purpose of serving the needs of a tracing service. How much of an effect does this have on scholarly work?

It's not as easy for me as it may be for local historians, who research a lot at the ITS. When you have specific questions you can quickly find the documents. It's different with broader-scale projects. You make discoveries, but there's always something serendipitous about these. This reflects the development of the archive itself, the structure of which has strongly depended on chance.

But the ITS is becoming increasingly better-known internationally. Being able to use this archive is very important for doctoral students and other scholars. By the way, in my lectures I'm always drawing attention to the potential of the ITS. My colleagues probably think that's all I ever talk about.

International workshop in Dachau

The workshops on the second day of the seminar focused on DPs as a topic in the educational work

What happened to the people who survived forced labor, deportation, and the concentration camps? And what challenges were faced by liberated adolescents and children? In recent years there has been growing interest in researching the situation of displaced persons (DPs) after 1945. At the end of May 2016, an international workshop on this topic was held in Dachau with the title of “Life in the Aftermath – Displaced Persons, Displaced Children and Child Survivors on the Move: New approaches in education and research.” The workshop was organized by the ITS and the Max Mannheimer Study Center. It was accompanied by the ITS exhibition entitled “Where should we have gone after the liberation?”



The workshops on the second day of the seminar focused on DPs as a topic in the educational work

Historian Boaz Cohen, Head of Holocaust Studies at Western Galilee College in Akko, Israel, emphasized that postwar history remains incomplete if we do not take displaced children into account, particularly considering how important this generation still is today. The files of the Child Search Branch in the ITS archive, which have not yet been thoroughly researched, are an important starting point.

US historian Atina Grossmann drew attention to the fact that only a few years after Nazi Germany had been declared “free of Jews,” some 300,000 Jewish people, primarily from Eastern Europe, were living in Germany and several of its neighboring countries. Although the Jewish DPs and the German population resided in the same country, they lived in different worlds and were fundamentally separated by their experiences of the war.

The pedagogical sections of the workshop focused on DPs as a topic in education, with some references being made to the current dimension of “displacement” in light of the refugee situation in Europe. Scholars from seven countries also presented their research projects, which covered the consequences for the children and adolescents as well as research into professional aid structures.

„The conference was very enriching for our work. It advanced public discourse on the issue and spawned several new project ideas.“

Nina Ritz, Pedagogical Director of the Max Mannheimer Study Center



Interaction with partner institutions

The ITS is continually improving access to the around 85 percent of its archival documents pertaining to Nazi crimes and their consequences that have already been digitized. At the international workshop on “Improving Access to the ITS Archives” in March 2016 in Bad Arolsen, representatives of the partner institutions of the ITS learned about strategies and tools for searching the digitized ITS archive. One focal point of the workshop was the interaction between copyholders and ITS employees.



Participants in the international workshop “Improving Access to the ITS Archives” in Bad Arolsen

The event had nearly 50 participants and was organized by the ITS together with the Wiener Library in London and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. It was an important step in the strategy of the ITS to play a new role in its network of copyholders. ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg said: “As the nucleus of the user network around the digital ITS archive, we will hold annual user workshops at the ITS starting in 2017 in order to share knowledge about the collections and research strategies.”

„This workshop in Bad Arolsen was about working together directly with the staff members of the ITS and sharing solutions. And it worked – everybody learned from the experience.“

Christine Schmidt, Director of Research at the Wiener Library in London



Personal effects from concentration camp prisoners

Wallets with family photos, engraved wedding rings, letters, documents: The ITS archive still holds around 3,200 personal effects. These are personal belongings that were taken from individuals when they were imprisoned by the Nazis. Most of them come from the Neuengamme and Dachau concentration camps.

The ITS now plans to start searching proactively for the relatives of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to return these items. The number of objects returned more than doubled compared to 2015. In 2016, the ITS was able to return keepsakes to 35 families.

Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Investigations into Nazi Victims Branch, explained: “We check to see whether, in addition to personal effects, the ITS also holds documents with potentially helpful clues about these former victims of persecution. Around 500 people came from Germany. In these cases, we’ve started with an external search in places such as registry offices. We’ve also talked with our partners in Poland, who are now spreading the word about the collection of around 600 Polish personal effects. And we’ve begun searching for family members in Poland as well.”



The personal effects of Josef Andreas Baier, who was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp
The personal effects of Josef Andreas Baier, who was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp

„To date I've found four families. Sometimes it takes me several days to conduct the research; in the case of Johannes Berens, it took several months (see pp. 66-67). My most recent search had to do with two young policemen. I found out that the Nazis arrested many policemen in the Netherlands. A great number of them died in the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps. The discovery of the personal effects has sparked new interest in their fate.“



Ever since he saw a feature about the ITS Online Archive and its personal effects on Dutch television in 2015, Erik Dijkstra has been helping return items to family members.

New focal point: Promoting research

How can the ITS make the most effective use of its research capacity? As the provisional head of research and education, Henning Borggräfe worked on honing the division's profile and taking the first steps in a new direction. He was appointed Head of the Research and Education Branch on January 1, 2017.



Dr. Henning Borggräfe, Head of Research and Education

What characterizes the new direction of the ITS in terms of research?

Research at the ITS will mean three things in the future. First, we will promote research into Nazi persecution and its consequences in various ways. Second, we want to highlight the potential offered by the ITS archive. And third, we will conduct fundamental research into the archival documents to supply researchers – and family members – with basic knowledge. We are also intensifying our cooperation with network partners in all three areas to expand our coverage.

Can you mention some examples of promoting research?

We're becoming more active in the field of research-related teaching in particular. To this end, we're holding seminars at the ITS for groups of students. In 2016, for example, students from Humboldt University Berlin and Ruhr University Bochum worked in Bad Arolsen. Additionally, starting in 2017 we will offer an annual research seminar in Bad Arolsen in cooperation with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., for master's and doctoral candidates from German universities.

What are you doing beyond research-related teaching?

Above all, we're planning conferences and publications with partners. In 2016 we held a DP workshop in cooperation with the Max Mannheimer Study Center. The history of the ITS will be the main focus of the next conference in 2018. The ITS yearbook will be separated from the conference proceedings, which will be published every two years following the conferences. We are also striving to give more lectures and presentations about the ITS in order to draw attention to our research potential.

You want to expand the service for visitors as well. What are you planning?

We plan to establish a new visitor center in the main building. Until it's ready, the computer workstations will be integrated into the library with continuous on-site support in early 2017. Instructions for conducting research in the ITS digital archive will make this work easier. We are intensively discussing ways of improving our visitor support. At the end 2016, for example, I participated in the EHRI seminar on "Reference Services: Best Practices and Innovative Use of Materials" at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.



Workshops on the topic of forced labor

“Although millions of foreign men and women were forced to work in Nazi Germany and the topic has been very well researched, forced labor is still an astonishingly rare subject in the classroom.” This is why Elisabeth Schwabauer, Head of the Pedagogy and Education Department at the ITS, and her team developed a workshop in 2016 which focuses on the conditions and effects of forced labor. The ITS holds an extensive collection of documents that provide an insight into how forced laborers were treated and which regulations and punishments they were subjected to. “We are additionally drawing attention to topics such as the treatment of pregnant forced laborers and the exploitation of children and adolescents,” Elisabeth Schwabauer explained. “It is also interesting to explore local connections which, on account of our extensive archival holdings, can be made to nearly every region of Germany.”



The ITS has a large collection of documents about forced labor in its archive

“Forced labor under National Socialism” study day

In June 2016, the ITS, the Educational Center of the Fritz Bauer Institute, and the Jewish Museum Frankfurt jointly offered a new workshop as a study day for teachers and educators from various memorial and educational institutions. It was followed by other events with network partners. The International Winter School for Educators, which was organized by the ITS together with the Nazi Forced Labor Documentation Center in Berlin and was held for the first time in February 2017, is also dedicated to this important chapter in the history of Nazi persecution.

„The teachers who attended were impressed by the opportunity to research directly in the ITS database and then use scans of the documents. They said that the proximity to their students’ own current living environment was especially motivating. Researching in the database suggests the kind of practical teaching that appeals to the reception habits of young ‘digital natives.’ The ITS speakers gave a solid introduction to the state of research and the collections. They created a matter-of-fact and yet considerate atmosphere, which is critical to the success of the emotionally taxing activity of exploring Nazi crimes.“

Gottfried Kößler, deputy director of the Fritz Bauer Institute

For educators

As one important component of its restructured educational approach, the ITS is offering a range of one- and two-day workshops for educators. The workshops are based on the focal points of the collections and work of the ITS, including deportations, displaced persons (DPs), and displaced children.

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5. Overview of 2016

We’ve put together a timeline to give you an overview of some interesting events from the ITS calendar.

6. Menschen und Geschichten

First photo of his parents together



Joost de Snoo was named after his father, whom he can barely remember. He was three when his father was arrested in August 1944 and deported via the Amersfoort police transit camp to Neuengamme concentration camp. When his father was arrested, the Gestapo took his wallet which held family photos. Joost de Snoo died in Neuengamme in January 1945. 71 years later, in May 2016, the ITS handed the wallet to his son. Before then, he had never seen any photos of his parents together. "I'm very happy that I made this journey and picked up the documents. I did it for the father I never knew." (Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Investigations into Nazi Victims Branch, showing documents from the ITS archive, photo: ITS)

A happy meeting



She lives in Germany, he lives in Israel: The daughter and son of a Holocaust survivor found each other through the ITS. Born in 1920 in Romania, Nathan Ulinski was taken to an American displaced persons (DP) camp in the Voith settlement in Heidenheim in 1947 with his two sisters and his mother. That's where he met and fell in love with Ruth, a German woman. They kept their relationship a secret and had a son, Gerhard, in 1948, followed by a daughter in early 1949 – Ursula. But before Ruth gave birth to their daughter, Nathan emigrated to Israel and lost contact with Germany. "He was her one true love", Ursula says. "That was the only thing my mother ever revealed to us about him." After her mother died, Ursula started to look for their father, and she turned to the ITS in 2014 for help. On Ursula's birth certificate, her father's name was written as Ulinczki. The more conventional Romanian spelling is Ulinski, however. The ITS searched for this corrected name and also contacted the Israeli aid organization Magen David Adom. It turned out that Nathan Ulinski had died in 1986, but he had also had another son in 1956. In September 2015, Ursula phoned her half-brother Eli in Israel for the first time. "That was one of those moments you never forget." Since then, the siblings have spoken weekly, with their children often taking part in the conversations. The two finally met in June 2016. "Getting to know my brother Eli is a wonderful gift that I never expected to receive." Eli was happy too. Until then, he had known almost nothing about his father's life before emigrating. "My father was a very warm man, but also gravely ill. He didn't want to talk about the past." (Ruth as a young woman, photo: private)

Unexpected family history find



The American John Bendetson had actually wanted to conduct research for friends and acquaintances in the ITS archive. But then he unexpectedly found a copy of his birth certificate and photos of his parents from 1951. The Nazis had deported Jan Bendetson from Warsaw to Fulda as a forced laborer in 1940. "I didn't know anything about it. My father hardly ever spoke about that period of time," his son says. The next trace doesn't appear until the end of 1944. It leads to a Wehrmacht POW camp, Stalag IVb, in Mühlberg an der Elbe. Prior to this, Jan Bendetson had participated in the Warsaw Uprising as an underground fighter with the Polish Home Army. "A Wehrmacht soldier once held a pistol to his head. But his comrades kept him from pulling the trigger. That's the only experience my father ever mentioned," Bendetson says. The Polish resistance fighter survived the war and captivity. He wanted to emigrate to the USA instead of returning to his home country. He registered as a displaced person (DP) with the Allies and then looked for work with the US Army. In 1946 he had a minor accident in a jeep, and he was taken to the hospital where he met his future wife, a nurse. Jan completed his architectural studies in Darmstadt. The two then married and had their son John in 1951. His birth was registered by the registry office in Bad Nauheim. In 1956 the young family finally emigrated to the USA, where they made a home for themselves in Connecticut. The various stations of their postwar life and efforts to emigrate are documented extensively in the DP files of the ITS archive. "The abundance of documentation is surprising," Bendetson said of his visit. "And the search efforts by the ITS go far beyond what I had expected." (John Bendetson, August 2016, photo: ITS)

Reply to a letter of farewell



Jean-Marie Vinclair's family never told him about his great-uncle Raymond Vinclair, who was murdered by the Nazis in July 1944. Now he is shooting a film about Raymond's fate – and has carried out research in the ITS archive for it. It was a call from the historian Volker Issmer from Osnabrück that got the ball rolling. "This story found its way to me," Jean-Marie Vinclair says. "I have to tell it." His great-uncle Raymond Vinclair had been a forced laborer for the Reich railway in Osnabrück during World War II. The Frenchman had helped POWs escape, but he was discovered and arrested by the Nazis. He was initially incarcerated in the Berlin-Plötzensee prison and then executed by guillotine in the Brandenburg-Görden jail. According to the execution report, his death took "eight seconds" – and this is also the title of the documentary film. Jean-Marie Vinclair sought and found information in various German and French archives, including the ITS, which holds documents pertaining to Raymond Vinclair's arrest and murder. Jean-Marie Vinclair also found out during his visit that a relative had asked for and received information after the war. But this relative said nothing to his other family members, who were uneasy about Raymond Vinclair's left-wing views. "The research changed me," the filmmaker acknowledges. "It's important to me to lay a new foundation for the history of my family. Every family has questions to ask history. That's what's universal about the film." The farewell letter that his great-uncle wrote to his parents shortly before he was executed also plays an important role for him. "The film will be a kind of poetic reply to his letter, and a response to the fates of the many victims," the filmmaker says. "I often ask myself what I would have done in his place. Reality is far more complex than good and evil." He believes the film is also a way of recognizing and paying tribute to resistance. (Nathalie Letierce-Liebig, staff member, with Jean-Marie and Eve Vinclair visiting the Central Name Index, photo: ITS)

A pocket watch from Dachau



Father Engelmar Unzeitig died from typhoid fever in March 1945 in Dachau concentration camp after caring for other prisoners who had fallen ill. In June 2016, the ITS was able to return his pocket watch and two religious medals to two of his fellow brothers from the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill. Pope Francis had officially declared Father Engelmar Unzeitig to be a martyr of the Catholic Church in January 2016. Given the name Hubert Unzeitig at birth, Father Engelmar was arrested by the Nazis in April 1941 and sent to Dachau in June of the same year. He had spoken out publicly on behalf of persecuted Jews. (Original documents and the personal effects of Father Engelmar, photo: ITS)

A candle on her grandfather's grave



The German occupiers deported Julian Banaś from Poland to Germany for forced labor. He never returned to his wife and three children. His family knew nothing about his fate until his granddaughter sent an inquiry to the ITS. When her father fell severely ill, Żaneta Kargól-Ożyńska felt a growing desire to find answers for him about his own father's fate. She also hoped to find her grandfather's grave. She managed to do both things – with the help of the ITS. "We were overwhelmed by the lengths everyone went to answer our questions!" The documents revealed that Julian Banaś was first forced to work for a farmer in Ergste, a suburb of the town of Schwerte. On October 18, 1941, he was arrested by the Gestapo and detained in the Steinwache prison in Dortmund, supposedly for having had forbidden relationships with Germans. A death certificate issued in 1946 mentions July 27, 1942, as his date of death. The decisive reference to his gravesite in Dortmund was found on the back of this certificate in the ITS archive. Seeking more information about the murder, the ITS contacted Alfred Hintz, author of a book about Schwerte during the Nazi era, who had submitted an inquiry to the ITS a few years earlier. He knew of the tragic circumstances surrounding the death: Julian Banaś had been executed by the Gestapo in the Ergste forest. Żaneta Kargól-Ożyńska also learned that a commemorative initiative had placed a "Stolperstein" (a small commemorative brass plaque) in front of the Schwerte town hall in honor of her grandfather in 2010. Żaneta Kargól-Ożyńska came to Germany early in August 2016 with her husband and daughter to visit the grave and light a candle. She also visited the ITS. When looking at the original documents, she was surprised to find her grandfather's signature. The ink had been too faint to be seen in the scans that had been sent to her previously. She was moved to see her grandfather's handwriting. (Małgorzata Przybyła from ITS shows the guests from Poland the documents retracing Julian Banaś's fate, photo: ITS)

„We want to talk about people like her“



Sixteen members of the Lagergemeinschaft Ravensbrück/Freundeskreis (Ravensbrück Camp Community/Circle of Friends) visited the ITS in September 2016. This first visit culminated in the presentation of copies of documents to the descendants of concentration camp prisoners. When Bärbel Schindler-Saefkow looks through lists in the ITS archive that were drawn up by Nazi bureaucrats about deportation, imprisonment, and murder, the names become stories. "Marianne Gundermann! She was a well-known women's rights activist in the circle of illegal party groups. I wish someone would write down her story." The historian and daughter of Anton Saefkow, a resistance fighter who was executed, and Aenne Saefkow, who was imprisoned in Ravensbrück, has spent her life researching the resistance groups in her parents' circle and fighting for the commemoration of the "women of Ravensbrück." She was impressed by the large number of documents about her father. "I've never seen ninety percent of the papers, although I've always looked for documents." She stressed the value of the ITS holdings for the Lagergemeinschaft as well. "Now we have new names!" She was also pleased to find more information about the founders of the "camp community." "The Lagergemeinschaft was built up by strong figures such as Erika Buchmann, women who saw to it that Ravensbrück – the terrible Ravensbrück – became something beautiful through solidarity. Today, we as a Lagergemeinschaft want to talk about people like her." (Members of the Lagergemeinschaft Ravensbrück / Freundeskreis (Ravensbrück Camp Community / Circle of Friends) visited the ITS, photo: Waldeckische Landeszeitung / Armin Haß)

„I've wanted to learn more about him“



Wendy van Eijnatten from the Netherlands traveled to Bad Arolsen in April 2016 to see original documents pertaining to her uncle and find out more about his short life. "Ever since I saw his photo, I've wanted to learn more about him," she said. Jan van Boeckel, born on February 11, 1923, in the Dutch city of Breda, was a freedom fighter in Belgium and had joined the Front de l'Indépendance group in the Ardennes. In May 1944 he was arrested with other resistance fighters and sent to the Ebrach prison in Upper Franconia, Germany, as a "Night and Fog" prisoner. In February 1945 he was transported to the Flossenbürg concentration camp and then transferred to the Saal/Donau satellite camp. The prisoners there had to dig tunnels for an underground Messerschmitt aircraft factory under atrocious conditions. Jan van Boeckel died shortly before the end of the war on a death transport by rail to Dachau. Wendy van Eijnatten has spoken to eyewitnesses, carried out research in numerous archives, and is now writing a book about her search and the fate of her uncle. (Wendy van Eijnatten during her visit at the ITS, photo: ITS)

A thousand kilometers for his mother's ring



Eugenia Genowefa Mazuchowska survived forced labor and Nazi concentration camps, then emigrated to Sweden. She kept her experiences to herself. Jan Anderson contacted the ITS while searching for traces of his mother's history. In addition to documents, the archive also held a ring belonging to her – one of the personal effects from the Neuengamme concentration camp. Jan Anderson received the ring in person. "This is a big day for me!" (Ring and historical photograph of Jan Anderson's mother, photo: ITS)

„I never saw my family again“



Dagmar Lieblová was the only member of her family to survive the Theresienstadt ghetto and the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. In July 2016, the 87-year-old visited the Vöhl synagogue in North Hessen to read from her book *Jemand hat sich verschrieben – und so habe ich überlebt* ("There was a misprint – and so I survived") as part of a series of events entitled "Auschwitz." After the reading, Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Investigations into Nazi Victims Branch at the ITS, presented Dagmar Lieblová with copies of the documents preserved in the ITS archive relating to her fate, including an index card about the transport to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, as well as numerous liberation lists showing her name. She managed to survive because her incorrectly written date of birth showed her to be 16 years old. She was therefore assigned to work in Auschwitz and escaped being gassed. The Nazis sent Dagmar Lieblová to three different satellite camps of Neuengamme, where she was forced to do clearance work in bombed-out Hamburg. She was then sent on a death march to Bergen-Belsen, where, suffering from tuberculosis, she was liberated by the British army. (Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Investigations into Nazi Victims Branch at the ITS, presented Dagmar Lieblová with copies of the documents preserved in the ITS archive on Dagmar's fate, photo: ITS)

A wallet is returned



The Dutch policeman Johannes Wilhelmus Hendrikus Berens died shortly after the liberation at the age of 21 from the effects of forced labor and imprisonment. His sister was stunned to receive his wallet after so much time. On October 11, 1944, Johannes Wilhelmus Hendrikus Berens was deported by the Nazis to Neuengamme concentration camp in Germany – “for labor deployment”, as the documents relating to prisoner number 56240 tersely stated. His sister, 87-year-old Johanna Aykens-Berens, explained what had happened: “He refused to participate in the search for and deportation of Jews who had hidden from the Germans.” Berens had started police training at the age of just sixteen to follow in his father’s footsteps. He was forced to relinquish his wallet when he was admitted to the concentration camp. The wallet was one of the personal effects preserved in the ITS archive. When Johanna Aykens-Berens learned of the existence of the wallet, she and her son got in the car and drove to Bad Arolsen. “I wanted to pick it up in person. He was my brother, such a dear boy.” The wallet testifies to a fun-loving person, with its photos of girlfriends and schoolmates, letters from his mother, and membership cards for a sports club and a dance club. But his sister was most pleased about a photo of him as a child. Until then she had only had a single photo of her brother, as their family home had been destroyed in the bombing of Rotterdam on May 14, 1940. “It’s good to have something you can see and touch,” said his nephew Janwillem Aykens when the wallet was presented. Johannes Wilhelmus Hendrikus Berens lived long enough to be liberated but subsequently died of tuberculosis on May 11, 1945. (Johanna Aykens-Berens and her son Janwillem Aykens from Amstelveen, Netherlands, photo: ITS)

The story of a great love



Long after Lilia Ivanova had given up, she finally discovered who her father was. A short time later, the Ukrainian woman met relatives in France who were able to tell her about her parents. Having survived forced labor, war, and hardship, the Ukrainian Alexandra Istomina and Frenchman Leon Bardoux believed their story had come to a happy end when their baby was born on September 25, 1945. Alexandra Istomina had been deported to Germany in 1942 at the age of 19. Two years later she met the forced laborer Leon Bardoux in Duisburg. But their hopes for a happy life after the liberation were short lived. In the winter of 1945, Alexandra and her newborn, Lilia, were forcibly repatriated from France to the Soviet Union. Lilia lost both of her parents as a result: Her mother died in 1947 from the effects of the pneumonia she had contracted on the transport, and she never saw her father again. It wasn’t until she was 65 that Lilia found out her father’s name from an uncle and started to search for traces of Leon Bardoux. Her inquiry to the ITS was successful. An extensive search in numerous French administrative offices and archives produced the relevant information: Leon Bardoux had died in 1989 in Amiens. The search also turned up the location of his grave and – by asking who was responsible for tending to it – provided the first clue to Lilia’s French relatives. Lilia found a large family through the ITS, including her half-sister from Leon Bardoux’s later marriage. They first became acquainted by telephone and email before Lilia finally traveled to France with her family. Her granddaughter describes the first meeting with half-sister Dominique as follows: “She ran towards us, and we saw tears of joy in her eyes. She hugged my grandmother. This moment was indescribable.” Lilia heard a lot about her parents’ great love and about her father, and she was able to visit his grave. She also received her birth certificate in Lille. (Léon and Alexandra as a couple in 1945, photo: private)