

# American Friends Service Committee

20 South Twelfth Street



Philadelphia, Penna.

## BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

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For the Use of Editorial Comment and Re-publication

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Milk means life to French babies born in a land of shortage. Supplies of this precious commodity, purchased in Switzerland and distributed under the supervision of American Friends Service Committee representatives in unoccupied France are inadequate to the need. The value of these milk distributions is best expressed in the words of a Quaker worker who writes:

"One cannot tell always when such aid has actually saved the life of a baby, but we know that in many instances the fact that our stocks were there to be drawn upon has meant the difference between life and death."

### Infant Mortality Increasing.

It is important that this service be maintained and extended, for infant mortality continues to mount in unoccupied France. Howard E. Kershner, director of Quaker relief, wrote from Marseille on January 7:

"The infant mortality rate in France increased 45 percent in the year 1940 over 1939 and without any doubt 1941 will show another big increase over 1940. 1942 will be still worse."

The American Friends Service Committee is the channel through which church and philanthropic committees and generous individuals have contributed to make this service of relief possible. Frequently the words of appreciation from French people would seem to indicate that they thank the Quakers. It is rather that they, too, use the Quaker committee to give their messages of gratitude and friendship to all the Americans who have a part in this service of good will.

### Ninety-two Distribution Centers

"We now deliver milk and occasionally dried vegetables and baby foods from Funds for France to sixty-four of the clinics run by the three most important organizations for infant care in Marseille and by the French Red Cross. In addition there are twenty-three centers directed by nursing sisters of various orders to which we send small stocks of milk and so on for use for sick children in the homes visited by these sisters. There are also social service nurses in two or three special posts to whom people come for urgent needs in the line of milk and baby foods. One of these is attached to the Navy, for instance, and looks out for babies arriving or leaving Marseille who - because they are not residents - are not entitled to obtain milk through the regular channels during the few days they may be in port. There are also two other centres, one controlled by the coordinating committee of charitable organizations of Marseille. Altogether, we send supplies for babies to some ninety-two separate distribution centres. These supplies have rendered an incalculable service to the infants of this city, or those passing through the city.

Careful Supervision

"We keep a strict control on the giving out of these supplies and we have exact reports from all our centres as to the families to whom help was accorded. For example, there is a special clearing bureau to which all the names, and material given, are reported, so that no two of our centres may serve the same individual. But we have been able to keep away from the complications of red tape which make the caring for special and urgent cases almost impossible to meet through municipal channels.

"Every baby in France under eighteen months, who is not being nursed, has the right to have sixteen cans of condensed milk a month. This is too much for an infant under about three months and often not enough for one over seven or eight months; and when a child of any age is ill he usually needs milk whether he has a right to it or not. The 'Quaker milk' is given in poor families where the income is less than 11 francs per person a day and to children who need more than their ration or who, because of illness, must be put on special diets. We give out between 9,600 and 19,200 cans of milk a month, depending on the season and the need. At least, that is what we have been doing. How long can it go on?

Bonds of Friendship

"We wish all of you at home could have a chance to see these clinics and to realize the gratitude of the mothers who feel so certain that the lives of their babies have been assured by the 'Quaker milk'. The labels we attach to the cans have faithfully carried this message of friendship into thousands of homes in free France.

"This was made especially clear to us at the time America entered the war, for letters were written and messages sent to us all from many people expressing their sympathy and their anxiety now that we, too, must be visited by the scourge of war. It was the grief of friends for sorrows and deprivations that were about to afflict people dear to them, and it made us all realize the strength of the bond of affection which is being forged every day by the little services we are able to render this country and the many unfortunate people in it.

A Visit to a Baby Clinic

"But to come back to the baby clinics. I go to one almost every afternoon. In the last month, when new and more severe rulings have had to govern our distributions, I have visited at least one in every quarter of the city. As one comes in to the street where one of the "Consultations" is located, one immediately recognizes the correct house from the fact that large numbers of baby carriages will be lined up in the courtyard or along the pavement.

"As one approaches, a familiar sound which can only be termed "caterwauling" strikes the ears. Once the door into the building is opened there is a too familiar scent compounded of babies, wet diapers, humanity generally and the prevailing Marseille odor of garlic. The noise is usually deafening, the rooms stuffy without being warm and the illumination either from without or within far from brilliant. There is ordinarily an outside room where the mothers wait with their children; another where new patients are registered and the babies weighed; and perhaps an inner sanctum where the doctor and the "assistante sociale" see each case individually.

"The distributions of our supplies take place in the inner room, unless the clinic is so large a one that it is impossible to give out the supplies the same day that the medical visit is attended to. In this latter case, a special afternoon is set aside to assign milk or other products to those who should have them. The cases coming to the clinic are interviewed by patronesses and secretaries attached to the organization in charge. Each case has a chart showing the infant's weight curve and the baby is weighed and the notation made each time on the chart. The child must be undressed for this performance and then redressed because the clinics are usually not heated, except for the doctor's room, where the undressing process has often to be repeated. When the child has been weighed, it waits its turn to enter the inner sanctum for the medical examination.

#### The Assisteante Sociale

"Each clinic is presided over by an 'assisteante sociale', a kind of district nurse, who knows the families of the neighbourhood, their incomes, their general living conditions and so on because of frequent visits to the homes. She sees the children with the doctor and can furnish all the details of the family situation. It is she who distributes our supplies. One has great admiration for these nurses. They know their jobs thoroughly. I have made many visits with them in the homes and it is touching to see the dependence of the mothers on their advice.

One never enters these homes without having again to accept a profound expression of gratitude to the friends in America who continue to demonstrate their affection and their interest in the welfare of French children, in spite of the difficulties which tend in so many ways to separate people who want to show each other the depth of the sympathy and the love existing all around us even in a world aflame with war.

"Please continue to do your utmost, over there, to help us continue this aid which means so much - spiritually and physically - to those to whom we on the spot are privileged to carry it. I am so grateful that I can be of this latter number. All around one sees the constant signs of the continuing endurance and patience and courage of this great people. The fact that the 'Quakers Americains' are here to share their penalty is a gesture of fellowship that they would not forget even if we had no material help to offer. But that material help is desperately needed, and in times like this the smile accompanied by tangible relief brings infinitely more succour than no matter how warm a handclasp. With the help of all of you, we can offer both."

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