

## Questions and Answers

### **Why is the time needed for responding to requests so long?**

Currently, the Arolsen Archives receive some 25,000 inquiries about individuals annually. This means that up to 500 requests in numerous languages arrive every week per email, via the online-form, or as a letter. Although we strive to respond to all the inquiries promptly and in the respective language, this isn't always possible. We work through the incoming inquiries chronologically and give priority treatment to special cases. It is understandable, then, that we respond first to requests from survivors and from elderly or ill family members and persons whose requests are particularly urgent.

### **Does the information provided really include all the documents that the Arolsen Archives have on the person in question?**

The documents preserved as historical original records or copies are also in digital form. The document collections are entirely accessible to our case workers. In conducting a search, possible variations in spelling or concerning the details of the person in question have already been taken into account, so that the information provided encompasses all the documents at the Arolsen Archives on a specific person. If, after having received negative information, you learn further/diverging particulars from other offices, we will of course make a renewed check of the documentation based on the new information. In this case, please submit a new request via our online form on our [Homepage](#).

### **How comprehensive are the document holdings? What can - and cannot - be found there?**

The Arolsen Archives are an international center on Nazi persecution with the most comprehensive archive in the world on victims and survivors of National Socialism. The collection consists of more than 30 million original documents and millions more copies and databases with references for about 17.5 million people. It contains documents on the various groups of victims of the Nazi regime, on forced labor as well as on Displaced Persons and migration after 1945. The requests that the Arolsen Archives and their predecessor organizations have received since 1945 are also an important collection today. These so-called **T/D-files** (Tracing/Documentation) are testimony to the struggles of the millions of people who searched for their relatives and friends after the end of the war. These T/D-files are also used as part of the archival search and in preparing the responses to the inquiries.

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Despite the extensive archive holdings, by far not all documents for all persecutees of National Socialism have been preserved at the Arolsen Archives. Documents were often destroyed by bombardment or fire during the war, deliberately destroyed at the end of the war or subsequently held back.

Document collections that were transferred to various archives in Europe and around the world after the end of World War II, were later partially sent to the Arolsen Archives respectively the Arolsen Archives are constantly endeavoring to acquire those in the original or as copies.

## **The Arolsen Archives offer information on the following victims groups:**

- People of all nations who were incarcerated in concentration camps, ghettos, work camps and Gestapo-prisons between 1933 and 1945.
- People who were deported into the Reich territory to be used as forced laborers.
- Displaced Persons (DPs): these were people who were under the care and protection of international refugee organizations after the liberation and who, in many cases, were able to emigrate with the support of these organizations.
- Children who were 18 years of age or younger after the liberation and who belonged to the groups persecuted.
- Soviet prisoners-of-war and Italian military internees as well as other prisoners-of-war who were deported to concentration camps or who had to do forced labor.

**The Arolsen Archives do not have any documentation on prisoners-of-war who were not forced laborers, or about the fates of the members of the Wehrmacht. Persons who fled or were driven out of the country in the wake of Nazi-Germany's defeat are also not included in the mandate of the Arolsen Archives.**

## **What does the information cost?**

The Arolsen Archives provide, in principle, free information to family members who request information on the fate of a relative or wish to establish contact with relatives. For research inquiries, the Arolsen Archives charge a fee for copies of the original documents sent. You can find the fee schedule on our [Homepage](#).

## Which data protection rules apply to the Arolsen Archives?

All personal data collected for the processing of your inquiry will be recorded and used exclusively for the internal work process of the inquiry processing. Personal data will only be passed on after approval or after the end of a general protection period of 25 years. In order to provide information, the employees have recourse to the documents kept in the collection of the Arolsen Archives as well as to copies from other archives. In some cases, third offices will also be asked for information.

The documents that have been created in this way over the past 25 years will first remain blocked from being passed on as copies. At present, this applies in particular to the so-called **T/D-files**, in which requests sent to the Arolsen Archives are filed. Since copies of documents from other offices are used as well, the data protection regulations of the respective institutions or countries apply in these cases. You will receive a link to the respective institution. Since the particulars in the documents are mainly personal data with a partly sensitive content, we ask all inquirers to use the information and the document copies with respect.

## Which other facilities and/or institutes could help in a search?

The documents that are preserved in the Arolsen Archives are also accessible in digital form at the following partner organizations:

- **Belgium:** Archives de l'État en Belgique, Brussels
- **France:** Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine
- **Israel:** Yad Vashem, Jerusalem
- **Luxemburg:** Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Résistance, Luxembourg
- **Poland:** Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN), Warsaw
- **USA:** US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington
- **United Kingdom:** The Wiener Library, London

For a more extensive search on a persecution fate or the specific places of detention, the memorial sites at the locations of former concentration camps or prisoner-of-war camps as well as the various local initiatives of former victims of Nazi persecution could be helpful, as can the national archives. **To both accelerate and simplify the procedure when inquiring at other institutes, please mention that you have already received information from the Arolsen Archives.**

## **Which office can issue certifications that may be required for official purposes?**

When certification of a death in a former German concentration camp is needed, and this information is based on the documentation stored in the Arolsen Archives, we recommend contacting the:

### **Special Registry Office in Bad Arolsen**

Stadt Bad Arolsen  
Sonderstandesamt  
Grosse Allee 26  
34454 Bad Arolsen  
Germany  
Phone: +49 5691 801183  
Fax: +49 5691 892892  
[Sonderstandesamt@Bad-Arolsen.de](mailto:Sonderstandesamt@Bad-Arolsen.de)

No further documents or particulars are kept at the Special Registry Office.

## **Which office can help in questions relating to compensation, pension and estate?**

In recent decades, in thousands of cases, the Arolsen Archives have issued certificates confirming periods of detention and forced labor as far as it was possible on the basis of its documentation, thus supporting compensation proceedings. **The Arolsen Archives themselves are no compensation authority.** If, when processing your request, we determine that this is an earlier case of compensation, we will send you all the documents available to us of the compensation matter and refer you to the competent institution. With regard to current questions on compensation for Nazi-injustice, pension payments or other financial matters, we recommend you to contact the offices below:

### **Generalzolldirektion in Köln**

#### **Referat**

#### **Zentrale Auskunftsstelle zur Wiedergutmachung nationalsozialistischen Unrechts**

Neusser Strasse 159  
50733 Köln  
Germany  
Phone: +49 221/379930  
Phone: +49 221/37993413  
Fax: +49 221/37993742  
[heinz.langkau@zoll.bund.de](mailto:heinz.langkau@zoll.bund.de)

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## **BUNDESVERBAND INFORMATION & BERATUNG FÜR NS-VERFOLGTE e.V.**

Genovevastrasse 72

51063 Köln

Germany

Phone: +49 (0)221 17 92 94 14

Fax: +49 (0)221 17 92 94 29

[www.nsberatung.de](http://www.nsberatung.de)

## Sources/Documents

### What information can be found in the documents and where are they explained?

The majority of documents contain personal information. For a better understanding, we offer an interactive [e-Guide](#) on our Homepage. The e-Guide assigns documents to their context of origin. The focus is on so-called individual documents, i.e. index cards and forms created for one individual person. In contrast to most lists, these documents are often not self-explanatory. An example document explains the individual items as well as abbreviations and characters. Moreover, additional background information can be viewed via links.

### Where do the documents stored in Arolsen come from?

Most of the documents come **from former German concentration camps**; these documents are records that were either created by the perpetrators themselves, or which the prisoner self-administration was forced to draw up. There are also documents from the World War II period which were readied by various German administrative offices or by the occupation administration. It should be noted that all these documents are records made about the victims and in many cases formulated using inhumane language. The documents from the concentration camps in particular show the extent of the ignominious racist categorizations the prisoners were humiliated with, while at the same time attempting to obscure the crimes by cloaking them in specific terminology.

The documents that were created **after the liberation and after World War II ended** came primarily from the organizations of the Allied Forces and international aid organizations, but also from the once-again functioning German administration. Some of these papers arose under difficult circumstances regarding the poor material quality (paper, writing supplies) and the registration itself. The different organizations were faced with the challenge of registering millions of people in a very short time. For this reason the documents were drafted in a variety of languages and vary widely in their appearance.

The **TD-files** created by the ITS (Arolsen Archives) consist of requests from inquirers, letters of inquiry and correspondence with third offices and information to the inquirer. They differ in scope, information content and language depending on the case. In the past, the Arolsen Archives were severely restricted in the disclosure of information contained in the TD-files by various legal regulations. At present, this information is only subject to a protection period of 25 years which can also be shortened in certain cases.

### **Why are there differences in the spelling and personal details on the documents for one and the same person?**

In only very few cases the persecutees did record the information in the documents themselves. Almost all the documents that were drawn up during World War II in the concentration camps, from the German authorities, or the representatives of the occupation administrations are based on oral statements or hand-written copies of other documents. This is how, due to the specific language and writing abilities of any particular clerk, the immense variety in notation came about. These often formed the templates that were then used and copied repeatedly, whereby diverging variations could appear time and again. The documents that were created immediately after the end of World War II came about in a similar fashion. Here, too, information was written down according to how it sounded; or duplicates and copies were made of hand-written papers or templates that were hardly legible. In some cases, however, the persecutees themselves provided differing versions of their names or birthdates. The reasons for this vary and depend on the place and time they were made. Thus an assumed identity or the date of birth could be decisive for survival. After the war, names and dates were often kept, or, depending on the new goal in life, adjusted to suit the situation. An analysis of the circumstances behind such misspellings or an attempt to reconstruct the historical contexts is no longer possible today.

**As much as we can understand and sympathize with the wish that corrections be made to certain documents, we cannot make any changes to these original papers, as they are of unusual historical value and significance.**

## **How reliable is the information given in the documents, i.e. regarding the date of death and manner of death in the concentration camps?**

Because most of the documents were created on the basis of oral statements and hand-written copies, there may be, besides variations in spelling, other inaccurate details and information fixed in the documents. In some cases this is intended, in others this has happened as a result of incorrect data and templates. The documents from the concentration camps are a special case in this respect. The details provided on the time of death and the circumstances surrounding the death should generally be understood with some caution.

- On the one hand the SS attempted to disguise their crimes by providing standardized types of death, often given hundreds and thousands of times, as though taken from a special guideline. The catastrophic living conditions in the concentration camps, often leading to death from starvation, illness, forced labor or the horrific hygienic conditions, were not to appear in the documents. Similarly, medical - and often lethal - experiments conducted on the prisoners as well as the medically-indicated murders were similarly hushed up.
- On the other hand, the administrative procedures in the camps were organized in such an inhumane and degrading way that the death of an individual was irrelevant. Gathering information on the time and cause of death most often took place decidedly later, i.e. when the clerk on duty was notified and took up his task, and a numbers count of the prisoners was conducted.

## **What do the stamps “ITS-Foto Nr. ...“ and “Carded“ mean on some documents?**

Two stamps can be found on many concentration camp documents of the Arolsen Archives: the “I.T.S. Foto” and the “Carded” stamp. They both are from the post-war period. “ITS-Foto Nr. ...” was stamped by US authorities on documents photographed in the early 1950s to secure information. The remark only means that this document was recorded. It does not mean that photos of the person have been kept.

The “Carded” stamp can be found mainly on name lists. It means that the list has been included in our Central Name Index (CNI) so that the individual names can later be easily found on a list. This task was internally called “verkarten“, derived from the English word ‘carded’. All persons named on a document were transferred to individual index cards.

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## **Why are there forms etc. on the reverse sides of documents?**

During and after World War II, sheets were often used several times due to lack of paper. On the reverse side of many documents there are forms or other markings, for example of punched cards. Sometimes sheets were also used on the reverse side for another person, so that information on different persons can be found on one document.

## **What additional sources do we use to answer requests?**

As far as possible, the Arolsen Archives inform the inquirer of other archives, memorials, authorities and data bases that may be helpful. A further check, for example of the relevant literature, cannot be made by us.