

AFTER THE BATTLE

HIER RUHEN
1000 TOTE
APRIL 1945



Number 89

AFTER THE BATTLE

NUMBER 89

Edited by Winston G. Ramsey

European Editor: Karel Margry

Published by Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd.,
Church House, Church Street,
London E15 3JA, England

Telephone: 0181-534 8833

Fax: 0181-555 7567

Printed in Great Britain by
Plaistow Press Ltd., London E15 3JA

© Copyright 1995

After the Battle is published quarterly on the 15th of February, May, August and November.

United Kingdom Newsagent Distribution:
Seymour Press Ltd., Windsor House, 1270 London Road, Norbury, London SW16 4DH.

Telephone: 0181-679 1899

United States Distribution and Subscriptions:
RZM Imports, PO Box 995, Southbury, CT, 06488
Toll-free telephone: 1-203-264-0774

Canadian Distribution and Subscriptions:
Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 1 Northrup Crescent,
St. Catharines, Ontario L2M 6P5.
Telephone: (416) 937 3100

Australian Subscriptions and Back Issues:
Technical Book and Magazine Company, Pty, Ltd.,
289-299 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.
Telephone: 663 3951

New Zealand Distribution:
South Pacific Books (Imports) Ltd., 6 King Street,
Grey Lynn, Auckland 2. Telephone: 762-142

Italian Distribution:
Tutostoria, Casella Postale 395, 1-43100 Parma.
Telephone: 0521 290 387, Telex 532274 EDIALB I

Dutch Language Edition:
Quo Vadis, Postbus 3121, 3760 DC Soest.
Telephone: 02155 18641

CONTENTS

BERGEN-BELSEN	1
Bergen-Belsen 1943-45	2
Liberation	8
The Belsen Trials	24
WRECK RECOVERY	
The Return of the <i>Lady Be Good</i>	28
IT HAPPENED HERE	
A Charioteer is No Longer Missing	32
PRESERVATION	
Manod Quarry and the National Gallery Paintings	36
PACIFIC	
The Invasion of Saipan	40
PERSONALITY	
Lee Marvin: Hell in the Pacific	48

Front Cover: The full horrors of the Nazi concentration camps were revealed in April 1945 with the liberation of Belsen. This shot by Sergeant Harry Oakes of Sapper Frank Chapman on his Caterpillar D6 shocked the world. These particular corpses were buried in Grave No. 1 — seen today in its neat memorialised state. (Karel Margry/IWM)

Centre Page: The *Lady Be Good*, a B-24 Liberator of the 376th Bomb Group of the US Ninth Air Force went missing in the Sahara in 1943. Its wreckage was discovered 15 years later; now it has been recovered for eventual display at Tobruk. (Dr Fadel Ali Mohamed)

Back Cover: Recovered from their unmarked graves on Merapas Island, two members of the ill-fated November 1944 Operation 'Rimau' were finally laid to rest in Kranji War Cemetery in August 1994. (Royal Navy)

Photo credits: GBB — Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen; IWM — Imperial War Museum, London; RIOD — Rijksinstituut voor Oologs-documentatie, Amsterdam.



Fifty years ago, on April 15, 1945, British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The horrible scenes found there, captured on film by British Army photographers and cameramen, shocked the world and, for the first time, brought home the true barbarity of the Nazi regime. Soon, the name Belsen became a symbol for Nazi terror and genocide, the camp itself being seen as the prime example of a Nazi concentration camp. Shortly after liberation, this sign, and a similar one in German, was put up by the British Army on either side of the connecting gate between the SS administrative compound and the concentration camp proper. Through the gate ran the Lagerstrasse, the main camp road. Today, this part of the camp lies outside the grounds of the Belsen Memorial. (IWM)

Fifty years ago, the Allied armies advancing to the heart of Germany discovered the true character of the Third Reich when they first came across the concentration camps. On April 11, 1945, Buchenwald was liberated by the Americans and four days later, the British reached Bergen-Belsen. Dachau was freed by the Americans on the 29th, and Mauthausen on May 5. Many other, smaller camps were discovered as well.

Films and photographs of the gruesome, horrifying scenes found in the camps, taken by British and American Army cameramen, were quickly made public and a shudder of horror went round the globe. Although the outside world had long known about concentration camps in Germany, the first newspaper reports about them appearing as far back as 1935, and although Allied governments had known about the mass murder of the European Jews since December 1942, having received reliable and confirmed reports about the gas chambers at Auschwitz, for some reason this knowledge

had not really sunk in and the general public had only the vaguest notion of the true character of the camps or the conditions that existed in them. Thus, the shock and horror came only when the first visual images reached the general public.

Buchenwald and Belsen were not the first camps to be liberated. Maidanek in Poland had been captured by the Red Army as far back as July 24, 1944, and Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. However, the Germans had evacuated these locations — as they would do with numerous other camps later — before the approaching enemy armies, driving the surviving inmates all across Germany in the murderous death marches, and had systematically tried to remove or destroy as much as possible of the physical evidence of the genocide and atrocities committed in them. (At Auschwitz, the Soviets found only 5,000 survivors, and the gas chambers blown). Thus, reports of these camps did not have the impact in the West which the camps liberated in April 1945 had.



The original camp entrance is now just a wooded track leading off the main road from Bergen to Winsen. The sign boards stood some 200 metres up this track.



Of all the camps uncovered in 1945, Bergen-Belsen was perhaps the most notorious. The ghastly scenes pictured and filmed there, and the much-publicised trial later in 1945, which was the first to deal with war crimes committed in concentration camps, combined to make Belsen the symbol for all concentration camps. Many, certainly in Great Britain, regard it to this day as typical of the Nazi system of extermination.

The paradox of it all, however, is that Belsen was not at all a prototype, or even a typical example of a Nazi concentration camp. Belsen was established relatively late: in 1943; there were no gas chambers there and its fence wire was not electrified. It was not a killing centre, like Sobibor, Treblinka and Belzec, which existed for the sole purpose of gassing Jews (and which the SS had

BERGEN-BELSEN

By Karel Margry

already dissolved and obliterated all traces of long before the Red Army reached them); it was not a work camp for political prisoners, like Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg, Mauthausen, Groß-Rosen, Natzweiler, Ravensbrück, Oranienburg or their innumerable satellite camps; nor a combination of these, like Maidanek or the huge Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. Belsen's status in the Nazi camp system was an exceptional one. However, its development, in two years,

from a special camp created in 1943 to the horror camp of 1945, reveals essential elements of the Nazis' extermination policy and camp system and the mentality of its bureaucrat officials and administrators, governed as they were by cold expediency, ruthless economic calculation and complete callousness towards the sufferings of their victims.

For us to view the situation as it appeared to both the British and American public, and Allied servicemen advancing across Europe, in 1945, we must try to expunge from our minds the knowledge we now have of concentration camps. The tyranny of Nazism extended to the subjugation of nations and the brutal treatment of their population: that much was known, but the fact that the Jews of Europe were being systematically exterminated, although known in Allied government circles, had not sunk in with the general public at all. Only when Belsen and the other camps were actually liberated did the truth become known. As far as the German population was concerned, although the majority would in later years claim to have had no knowledge of the extermination camps, undoubtedly many did have more than an inkling as to what was going on. *Top:* One of a series of pictures taken by Sidney Barlow who served with the 8th Lines of Communication unit of No. 10 Garrison. This one shows Grave No. 8. *Right:* The landscaped grave midst its forest setting belies the horrors which shocked the world in 1945.





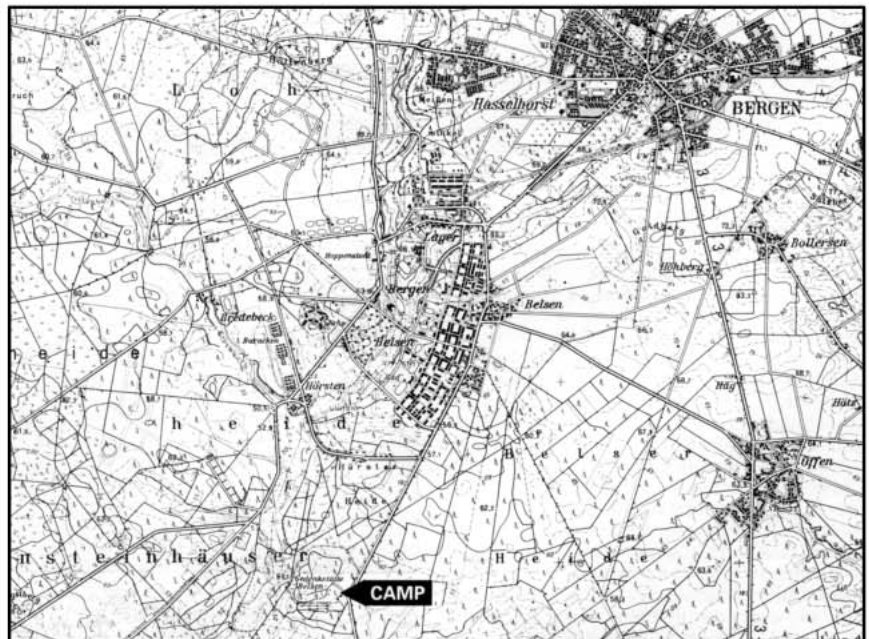
BERGEN-BELSEN CAMP 1943-45

In March 1943, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler adopted a plan formulated by the German Foreign Ministry to exchange Jews under his control against German civilians interned abroad. These Jews would not be sent to the death camps in the East but collected in a special camp. The SS initially called it a *Zivil-Internierungs-Lager* (Civilian Internment Camp), but when they found out that such-named camps were eligible to Red Cross inspections, they quickly changed the name to *Aufenthalts-Lager* (Residential or Detention Camp). Eligible for this camp were Jews with American or British passports; Jews holding passports or so-called 'promesas' (passport certificates) from neutral countries (mainly Spain, Portugal, Turkey, or Latin American countries like Paraguay and Argentina); Jews possessing so-called Palestine Certificates (permits to emigrate to the British mandate); Jews with influential connections abroad; Jews who could be used as hostage or as instruments of political or economic pressure; and Jewish top functionaries.

Before it became a concentration camp of the SS, Belsen had been a Wehrmacht prisoner-of-war camp for Soviet PoWs. Brought here in thousands after July 1941, and forced to live in holes in the ground, some 18,000 died from hunger, exposure and epidemics in the first winter alone. In all, an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 Soviet soldiers perished at Belsen, being buried in mass graves. *Left: The Russian cemetery lies just to the north of the Belsen memorial site. Right: The Russian monument was erected in the cemetery in June 1946. For a long time, the Soviet PoW side of the camp's history was completely neglected, and access to the cemetery was difficult because it lay within a NATO training area. Only in 1985 did the Land Parliament of Lower Saxony order that their history be incorporated in the memorial's exhibition, and that a path be laid from the memorial to the cemetery.*

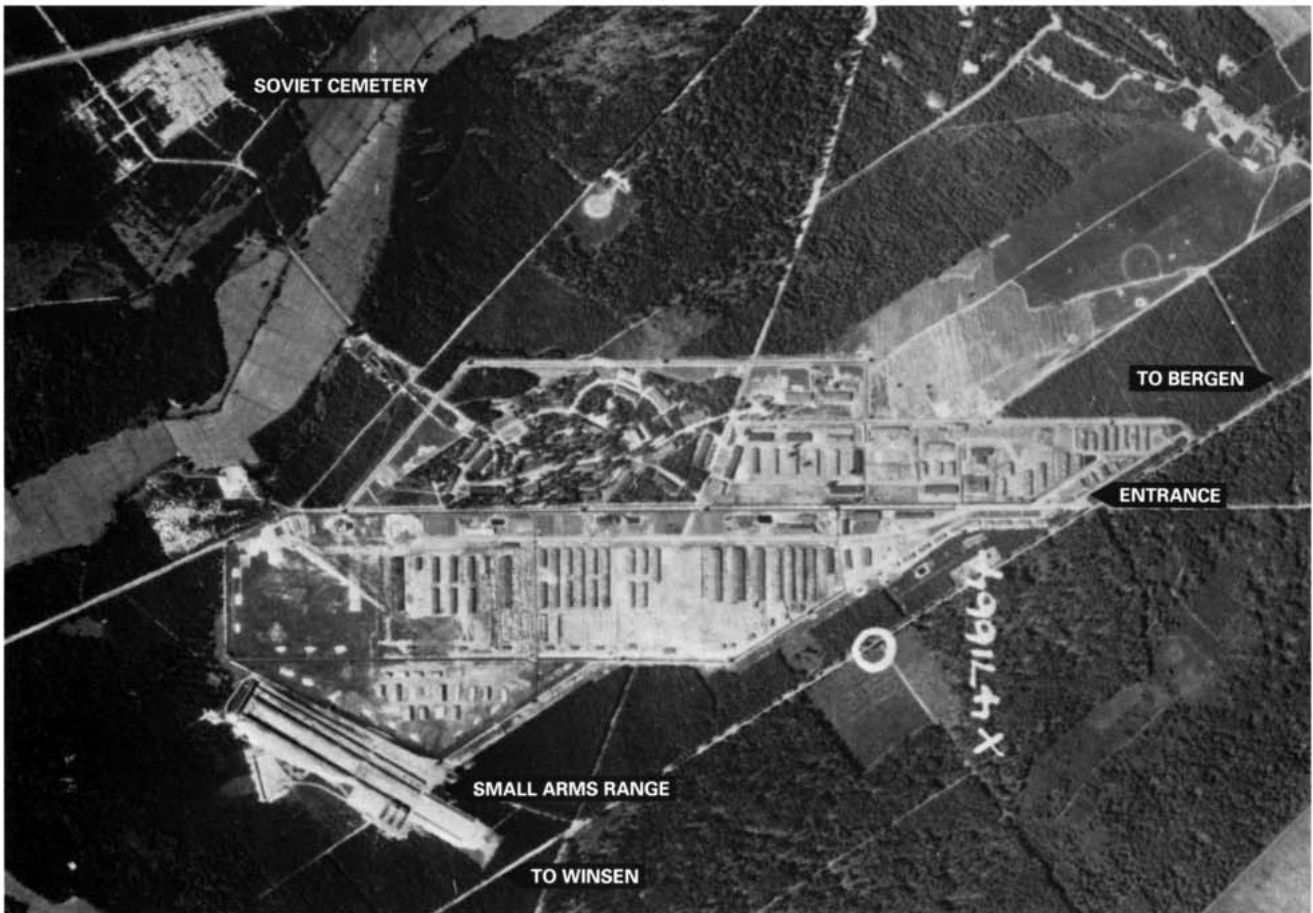
Looking for a site for the new camp, in April 1943 the SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (SS Main Department of Economic Administration) — the authority administering the concentration camps — procured permission to take over part of a Wehrmacht prisoner-of-war camp just south of the panzer training school barracks at Bergen near Hannover in Lower Saxony. Here, in 1936, a number of wooden huts had been erected to accommodate the workers building the new military barracks. In 1940, the Wehrmacht had used these buildings to house 600 French and Belgian PoWs. Then,

in early 1941, the site had been selected to become a camp for Soviet PoWs — Stalag XI C (113) — and from July 1941, some 20,000 Soviet prisoners had filled the camp to overflowing. They had been kept in the open under extremely harsh conditions, the huts being used as camp hospital. Ravaged by dysentery, typhus and tuberculosis, by the time part of the camp was handed over to the SS in April 1943, some 18,000 of the Soviet PoWs had perished there. Stalag XI C was dissolved, but the PoW hospital area was kept on, becoming an ancillary for Stalag XI B at Fallingbommel.



Left: Stalag XI C was sited at Bergen, almost midway between Hamburg and Hannover in northern Germany. Right: The PoW camp lay south of the little village of Belsen, hidden in the woods along the Bergen-Winsen road, and it was taken over by the SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (the SS Main Department for Economic Administration) in April 1943.

Although often regarded as the prototype of a Nazi concentration camp, Belsen was in fact an exception within the concentration camp system. It was set up as a special camp for so-called 'Exchange Jews', i.e. Jews who could be swapped for German nationals interned abroad, and also for Jews whose papers entitled them to be 'returned' to a neutral country.



Before the camp (of which SS-Hauptsturmführer Adolf Haas had been appointed commander) was ready for its new function, some 500 prisoners from Buchenwald, Niederhagen and Natzweiler — mainly Russians and Poles — were sent to Belsen as Bau-Kommando (Building Squad) to enlarge the camp and improve its sanitary installations. They also built a small crematorium. Then, the camp slowly filled with the 'privileged' Jews. In July, the first of 2,500 'exchange Jews', most of them holding Latin American papers, arrived from Poland. In August, 441 Greek Jews, from the island of Saloniki but holding Spanish passports, arrived. However, after trains from the Westerbork transit camp in Holland had brought in the first of nine consignments of Dutch 'exchange Jews' in September, about 2,000 of the Polish Jews were deceptively sent to Auschwitz in October 1943 and May 1944 to be gassed. In all, some 3,670 Dutch Jews were sent to Belsen. In 1944, smaller groups of 'exchange Jews' arrived from Greece (155 Spanish and 19 Portuguese Jews), Italy (200 North African Jews with British passports), France (200 Jewish wives of French PoWs), Yugoslavia, Poland, Albania and Germany, and also, in July, a large group of 1,683 Hungarian Jews.

Daily life in the 'Detention Camp' was harsh, but tolerable. The average daily ration consisted of coffee in the morning, 1.5 litres of soup at noon and, if available, 200-300 grammes of bread in the afternoon. Sometimes there would be a little jam or butter, or a small slice of sausage or cheese. A roll call was held every day at 3 p.m. which could last from one to five hours. In spite of a lapse of social and moral values — marked by petty quarrels, egoism, theft — many tried to uphold some sort of standard by engaging in cultural, educational and religious activities. Meanwhile, everyone lived in the hope that they might be released abroad and regain freedom.

The camp consisted of an SS administrative area nearest the road and beyond that a wired-in perimeter, some 1,500 yards long by 750 yards wide, which was divided into several sections for different categories of inmates. When this aerial shot was taken by an RAF reconnaissance aircraft on September 13, 1944, there existed the Prisoners' Camp, the Neutrals' Camp, the Special Camp, the Hungarians' Camp, the Star Camp, and the Tent Camp. (Crown Copyright) Below: The Belsen Memorial today occupies less than half of the original camp grounds. (Landesvermessung Hannover)



Only six group transfers ever left Belsen for the free world, and of these, only two were an exchange of the kind originally envisaged. In February 1944, the 441 Greek Jews of Spanish nationality were sent to Spain — not in exchange, but as a 'return' of citizens to a neutral country. In June, 222 Jews from Belsen were sent by train to Istanbul where they were actually exchanged for interned Germans from Jerusalem, after which they reached Palestine. In August and December 1944, the 1,683 Hungarian Jews were sent to Switzerland and freedom, not in exchange for Germans but as part of a secret deal between the SS and Jewish rescue organisations to trade people for money and goods (Himmler's main aim being to create an opening for secret negotiations with the Western Allies). Then, in January 1945, 136 American Jews were released to Switzerland in an actual American-German exchange operation. Finally, as late as March 1945, 105 Turkish Jews left for Sweden in another 'return of neutrals' operation.

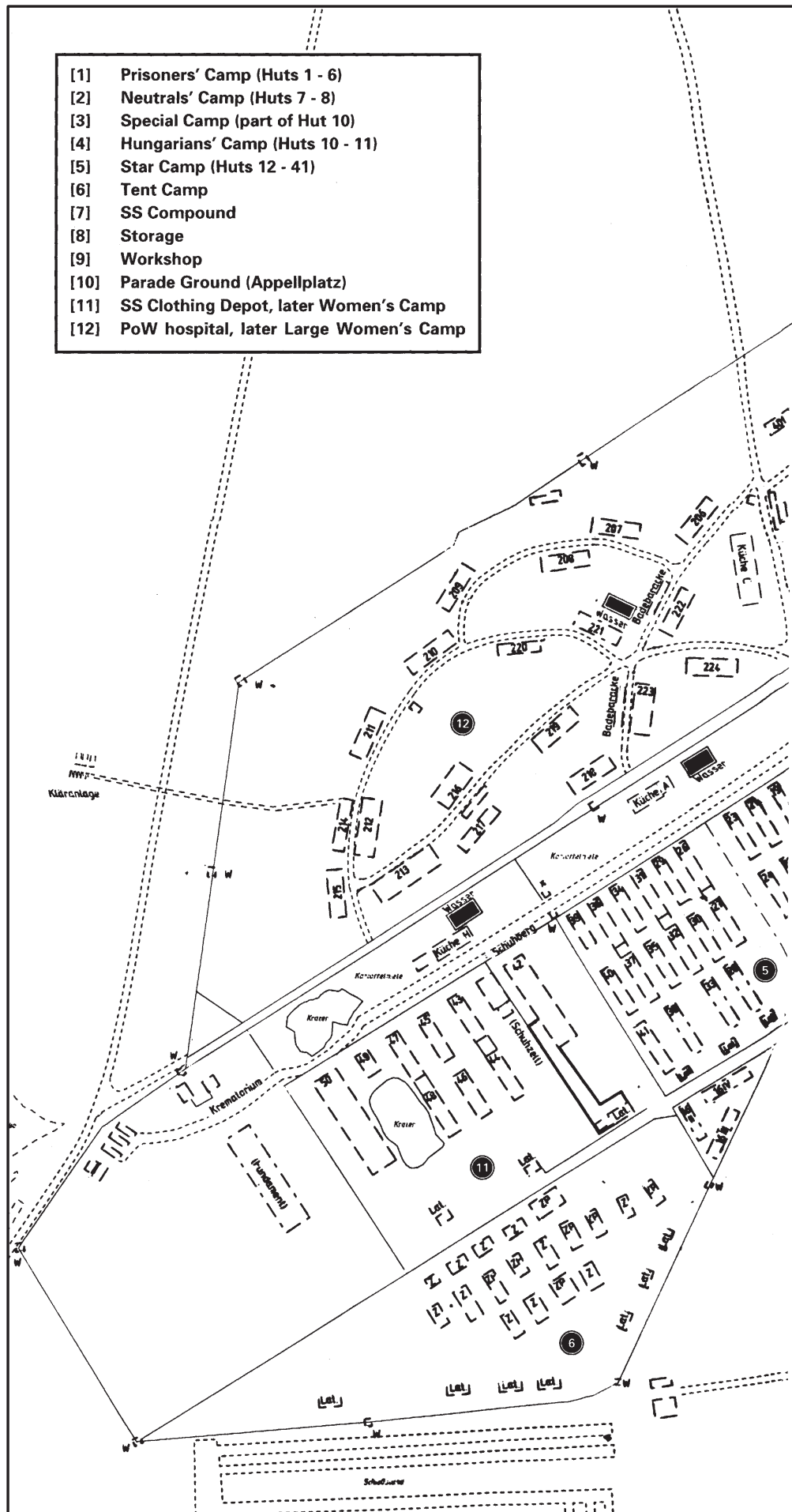
However, by then, Belsen had assumed an entirely different character. In the spring of 1944, a new development had occurred which would gradually diffuse Belsen's status of a special camp for Jews and slowly transform it to a normal concentration camp for Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners. Starting in March 1944, the SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt had begun to send to Belsen prisoners from other concentration camps who were so ill or exhausted that they could no longer work in the war industry. Since, to the WVHA bureaucrats, Belsen was an 'unproductive' camp, where inmates were not forced to work, they thought it a good idea to send as well others there who had outlived their 'economic usefulness'. So Belsen became a dumping ground for ill, sick, starved and emaciated slave workers. The first such group arrived on March 27, 1944: 1,000 men from the underground V-weapons factory at Nordhausen. More from other work camps followed.

To mark the transformation, Belsen's status was officially changed from 'Detention Camp' to 'Recuperation Camp' (*Erholungs-Lager*). However, few if any of those sent there ever recovered from their illness or exhaustion, for out of the same 'economic' reasoning, the SS thought it unnecessary to provide the camp with sufficient food or extra medical care: of some 4,000 persons sent there in 1944, some 1,700 had died before the year was out.

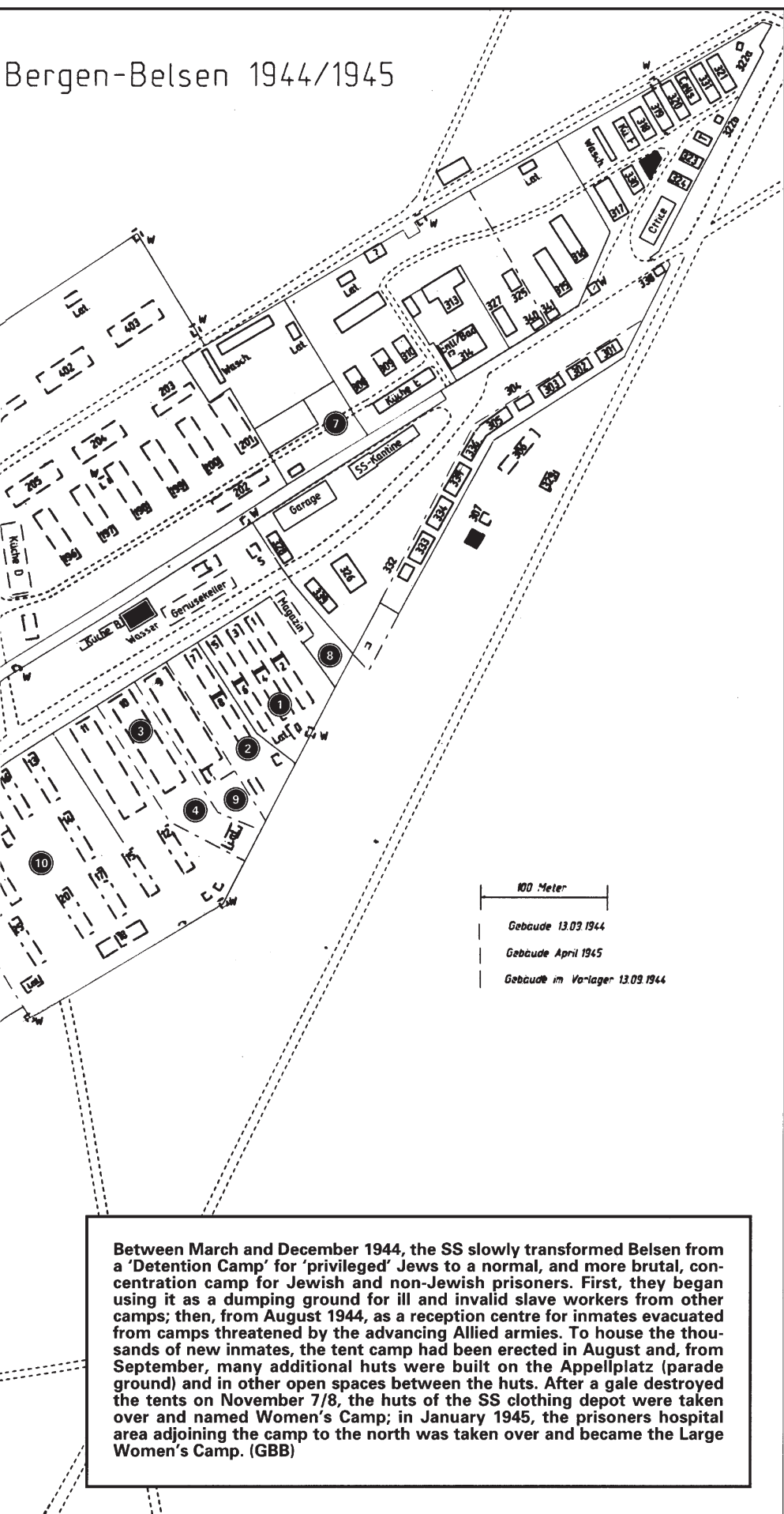
A second transformation occurred when the Nazis began evacuating concentration camps threatened by the advancing Allied armies, moving the inmates more to the interior of the Reich. The initial groups sent to Belsen consisted mostly of women. The first, comprising some 4,000 Polish women and children captured in the Warsaw uprising, arrived in August. They were followed by some 8,000 women from Auschwitz between August and early November. The women were accommodated in big tents hastily erected by the Bau-Kommando in the open space beyond the huts.

Since different categories of prisoners were sent to the 'detention', later 'recuperation' camp, the SS divided it into several sections which were treated differently and strictly isolated from one another by high wire fences so that the various groups could not contact each other. By September 1944, Belsen comprised the following sections:

The Häftlings-Lager (Prisoners' Camp) [1]. This section at first housed the 500 men of the original Bau-Kommando in four huts. Dissolved in February 1944, it was then used for the sick and disabled — all males — brought here from other camps, expanding first to eight huts and later taking over huts from other enclosures. From the beginning, this section was administered as a regular concentration camp, inmates wearing striped



Bergen-Belsen 1944/1945



camp clothes, performing hard labour to the point of exhaustion, being ruled by 'Kapos' (fellow inmates with authority over prisoners and acting as part of the camp staff) and suffering cruel mistreatment by SS and Kapos alike. After each roll call, numerous corpses would remain on the parade ground. With inadequate medical care, the mortality rate was appalling. One Kapo, Karl Rothe, murdered some 200 inmates with phenol injections. (His fellow inmates later killed him.)

The Neutralen-Lager (Neutrals' Camp) [2] of two huts contained the several hundred Jews who were citizens of neutral states, notably Spaniards, Portuguese, Argentinians and Turks. Conditions here were relatively tolerable (until March 1945), the inmates not being forced to work and the food being reasonably plenty. A 'Jewish Council' led by a 'Jewish Elder' administered internal affairs of the section.

The Sonder-Lager (Special Camp) [3], a sub-section of the Neutrals' Camp, housed the 350 Polish Jews with Latin American passports or Palestine Certificates who remained after the Auschwitz transfers. They were kept separate because they could inform the other inmates of the Nazi atrocities going on in the East.

The Ungarn-Lager (Hungarians' Camp) [4], consisting of two large huts, was opened in July 1944 to house the 1,683 Hungarian Jews about whose exchange for money and goods Himmler had ordered negotiations with Jewish organisations abroad. These inmates were allowed to wear their own clothes, albeit with the Star of David; did not have to endure the endless roll calls and were not forced to work. Like the neutrals, they had Jewish self-administration.

The Stern-Lager (Star Camp) [5] was numerically the largest and most important camp section until the autumn of 1944. In some 18 large wooden huts, it accommodated some 4,400 'exchange Jews', of which the 3,670 Dutch Jews were the largest and most-influential group. The inmates wore civilian clothes, the name Star Camp deriving from the Star of David which they had to wear on them. Here too, a Jewish Elder and Council carried out the administration. Men and women lived separately, but families were allowed to get together during the day. Inmates could write censored letters abroad. All inmates, even the old and weak, were forced to work, most of them in the so-called Schuh-Kommando (Shoe Squad), taking apart leather shoes for recycling in the German war industry. This was done in a large stable block inside the camp. Food in the Star Camp was insufficient and of bad quality. Two of the huts were used as sick bays.

The Zelt-Lager (Tent Camp) or Frauen-Lager (Women's Camp) [6], comprising some 12 big tents erected in the open area beyond the Star Camp in early August 1944, housed the numerous groups of women arriving from Warsaw and, later, Auschwitz in August-November. On the night of November 7/8, a gale completely destroyed the tents after which the women were moved into huts of the adjoining Star Camp (where new ones were being built on the central square) and into others between the Star Camp and the crematorium which, until then, had been a Waffen-SS clothes depot. This now took over the designation Women's Camp.

Many of these women did not stay long in Belsen being sent on to work assignments elsewhere. In fact, Belsen now became a sort of transit camp for female slave labourers, sending out work squads to numerous camps and factories in northern Germany, mostly outposts of Buchenwald and Flossenbürg. Meanwhile, food and water supplies began to falter; the first cases of spotted fever occurred.

Between March and December 1944, the SS slowly transformed Belsen from a 'Detention Camp' for 'privileged' Jews to a normal, and more brutal, concentration camp for Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners. First, they began using it as a dumping ground for ill and invalid slave workers from other camps; then, from August 1944, as a reception centre for inmates evacuated from camps threatened by the advancing Allied armies. To house the thousands of new inmates, the tent camp had been erected in August and, from September, many additional huts were built on the Appellplatz (parade ground) and in other open spaces between the huts. After a gale destroyed the tents on November 7/8, the huts of the SS clothing depot were taken over and named Women's Camp; in January 1945, the prisoners hospital area adjoining the camp to the north was taken over and became the Large Women's Camp. (GBB)



On December 2, the conversion to a normal concentration camp was completed when SS-Hauptsturmführer Josef Kramer, previously commander of Auschwitz-Birkenau, relieved Adolf Haas as camp commander. On this date, the number of inmates totalled 15,257. Kramer first measure was to abolish the Jewish self-administration of the Star Camp and introduce Kapo rule there as well. He also introduced collective punishments.

From January onwards, countless numbers of inmates evacuated from other camps —

A view of the camp from the watchtower nearest the perimeter gate. On the right is the compound of the Large Women's Camp while the enclosures of the original camp area on the left, with the now-much-larger Prisoners' Camp nearest to the camera. The chimned building in the foreground is the camp's Gemüse Keller (vegetable cellar); in the centre is one of the camp's five cookhouses (Kitchen B on the plan on pages 4-5); and, in between, one of the four open water basins in the camp. (IWM)

exhausted from long marches or train journeys in open carriages through icy winter — reached the camp. To find space for them, Kramer secured permission to take over the Stalag hospital area — which adjoined the camp to the north but until then had always

been separated from it — and used it to accommodate women. This enclosure of about 35 huts became known as the Großes Frauenlager (Large Women's Camp) and by January 15, women formed Belsen's major contingent: 16,475 against 5,811 men.



Today the Lagerstrasse is just a track through the woods which have grown up on the former camp site since the war.



The same cistern as seen from the ground, with the vegetable depot behind. As far as known, no photographs exist of Belsen before liberation, all pictures having been taken by British Army cameramen immediately after. This one, taken by Lieutenant Wilson, graphically illustrates a scene witnessed by

Lieutenant-Colonel Dick Taylor on the day of liberation, April 15: 'There was a concrete pit near the first cookhouse we visited, with a few inches of dirty water in the bottom — this was the only water supply that was seen, and crowds were round it trying to fill tins and jars tied to the end of long sticks.' (IWM)

New arrivals continued to pour into Belsen which was completely unable to cope. Now, the development that was to lead to chaos and, eventually, inferno, began: unbearable overcrowding, starvation, raging epidemics, resulting in appalling death rates. On February 1, the number of inmates was 22,000; that month some 7,000 people died; in March, the corresponding figures were 41,520 and 18,168.

Starvation and epidemics were the chief causes for the mass deaths at Belsen, infection spreading quickly and disastrously because Kramer and the WVHA administration failed to provide sanitary facilities which could have kept the camp clean and hygienic. When the water supply failed, because the power works supplying electricity for the area pumping station had been bombed, the nearby military barracks were supplied by water trucks, but the camp was

not. There were vast stocks of medicine and instruments stored in the Large Women's Camp which were never issued by Kramer and only discovered by prisoner doctors just before liberation.

Belsen was at its worst about three weeks before liberation. Typhus was raging and about 1,000 people succumbed to it daily but the small crematorium could not cope with the disposal of all the corpses, even though it burned day and night. There was no running water and rations were down to half a pint of soup a day and bread three times a week.

In April, the last remaining 'exchange Jews', some 7,000 in number, left Belsen for Theresienstadt in three separate groups but their departure hardly alleviated the space shortage. To cope with the unending flow of new arrivals, a part of the nearby Wehrmacht barracks was taken over, and it soon

filled with some 15,000 prisoners arriving from Nordhausen. In the first two weeks of April, some 9,000 inmates died and thousands of corpses lay strewn all over the camp. On April 11, in a last attempt at cosmetic clean-up, Kramer ordered the dead to be thrown in huge pits that had been dug. For four days, April 11-14, the exhausted inmates were forced to drag corpses to these pits, whipped on by SS guards and Kapos and working for 12 hours without food or water. This way, an estimated 17,000 bodies were disposed of in open or scarcely covered pits.

On April 11, as part of his attempts to commence negotiations with the Western Allies, Himmler gave SS-Standartenführer Kurt Becher, his Special Commissioner for all Camps, a free hand to arrange an immediate hand-over of Lager Bergen-Belsen to the approaching Allied armies.



Although the entire camp was burned down and cleared away by the British after liberation, this same cistern survived through the years. This is how we found it, outside the memorial perimeter, overgrown and forgotten, in September 1992.



In 1991, the Belsen Memorial had started a project to uncover the few remains of the camp, the cistern being a prime target. Since cleared of growth and bushes, it now makes for a much better comparison.



SS-Hauptsturmführer Adolf Haas (in the long leather coat) was commander of Bergen-Belsen from April 1943 to December 1944. Before he came to Belsen, Haas had been in charge of the

Niederhagen/Wewelsburg concentration camp near Paderborn from 1941 to 1943 when it was dissolved. Here he is pictured with the SS administrative staff and camp guards. (RIOD)

LIBERATION

On April 12, 1945, two German emissaries approached British Second Army lines along the River Aller under a white flag. They were Oberst Hanns Schmidt, deputy of Oberst Karl Harries, the commander of the Bergen military training ground, and Oberstleutnant Bohnkamp, deputy of Oberst Erhard Grosan, the local battle commander. Brought to the HQ of 159th Brigade (11th Armoured Division) at Buchholz, the German officers told of the existence of an internee camp at Bergen-Belsen. It contained some 45,000 internees and there were some 1,500 cases of typhoid, they said. Supplies of food and medicine were short. In the vicinity of the camp, which was not Wehrmacht but SS administered, there were in addition a large Wehrmacht barracks with 800 German and 1,500 Hungarian troops, a military hospital, and a PoW camp of 800 Russians. To avoid a spread of the typhus, the Germans said it was vital that there was no break-out from the camp and that the place be sealed off. They had come to propose that neither side carry the battle into the area involved. The two Germans were blindfolded and sent back to VIII Corps Headquarters at Schwarmstedt for negotiations. A further conference took place in the evening, the VIII Corps Chief-of-Staff, Brigadier Taylor-Balfour, and another officer crossing the German lines to negotiate with Oberst Grosan at Bergen and with

the chief-of-staff of 1. Fallschirmjäger-Armee at Wolterdingen.

As a result, a local truce was arranged and an area of about six by eight kilometres around the camp was declared a 'neutral zone'. The Germans were to put up 'Danger — Typhus' signs on all roads leading to the camp, guarded by an unarmed sentry. The Wehrmacht barracks was to be handed over to the British. All Wehrmacht troops, both Hungarian and German, were to remain in position, and prevent any attempt of a mass break-out from the camp; they could retain their arms but were to wear a white arm band. The Hungarians were to be at the disposal of the British for any tasks given to them, while the Germans would be released within six days and sent back to their own lines. As for SS personnel (over which the emissaries said they did not have any authority), any SS camp guards found after noon of April 13 would be regarded as prisoners-of-war. The SS administrative personnel were to remain at their post, carry on with their job, and hand over all papers to the British when they arrived.

However, apart from the typhus warning, in none of the talks had the Wehrmacht officers given an indication that anything else was seriously amiss with the internee camp.

The following day, April 13, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Taylor, CO of the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment (VIII Corps Troops), was ordered by Corps to assume control of

the truce area once it was reached by the 11th Armoured Division. Told to take one battery with him, he selected 249 (Oxfordshire Yeomanry) Battery (Major P. G. Barnett). He was also assigned a loudspeaker lorry of the 14th Amplifier Unit, commanded by Lieutenant Derrick Sington of the Intelligence Corps, for broadcasting announcements in the camp.

While Taylor knew the typhus situation in the camp was serious, he did not have any idea of its true condition or that of its inmates. Being a soldier, his thoughts were perhaps more on the military barracks and its garrison than on the camp so it was there that he decided to go first.

However, it was a further two days before the 11th Armoured, advancing north from Winsen on the River Aller, penetrated the neutral area, its 29th Armoured Brigade taking the Winsen to Bergen road which led directly past the camp entrance. About 10 a.m. on April 15, Brigadier Roscoe Harvey, the brigade commander, passed the camp with his HQ party, and told Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Daniell, CO of the 13th Regiment, RHA, to inspect it. Daniell was the very first British officer to enter the camp and his short inspection left him horrified.

At 1.30 p.m., Colonel Taylor sent his liaison officer, Captain P. T. Ashton, to contact Oberst Harries, the garrison commander, to arrange a meeting at the entrance of the military barracks.

On December 2, 1944, Haas, by now a Sturmbannführer, was relieved by SS-Hauptsturmführer Josef Kramer. Kramer was the quintessential Nazi camp official: unscrupulous and brutal towards prisoners while servile towards superiors. Born November 10, 1906 in Munich, he had joined the NSDAP in 1931 and the SS in 1932. In 1934, he became an SS guard at Dachau and, from then on, pursued a professional career in the concentration camp service, serving at Esterwegen in 1934, again Dachau in 1936, as commander's adjutant at Sachsenhausen in 1937 and Mauthausen in 1939, before becoming deputy commander at Auschwitz in 1940, then camp commander of Natzweiler in 1942. In May 1944, he was appointed commander of Birkenau, the death mill of the Auschwitz complex, where under his tenure hundreds of thousands Hungarian Jews were murdered within the space of a few months. When ordered to take over Belsen, he took with him many members of the Birkenau staff, among them a number of SS wardresses. (IWM)



The liberation of Belsen was part of a cease-fire proposed by the local German military commanders on April 12, and accepted by the British that night, in order to avoid a spread of the typhus epidemic which the Germans disclosed was raging in what they called an 'internee camp'. The German emissaries were Oberst Hanns Schmidt, deputy commander of the Bergen military training ground, and Oberstleutnant Bohnekamp, deputy commander of the local Kampfgruppe Grosan. Here, Brigadier Balfour-Taylor, Chief-of-Staff of British VIII Corps and a staff captain set off with Schmidt and Bohnekamp, the Germans' eyes bandaged for security reasons, for the German lines to discuss the terms with higher German commanders. In spite of a very extensive search of Schwarmstedt (where VIII Corps HQ was on April 12) and Buchholz (HQ of 159th Brigade of 11th Armoured Division to where the Germans had been brought first), the farm has not been identified. (IWM)



Meanwhile, Lieutenant Sington and his loudspeaker lorry had already entered the neutral zone with a column of the 23rd Hussars and reached the camp entrance. Waiting at the gate stood camp commander Kramer and a small group of SS, Wehrmacht and Hungarian officers, who all saluted Sington as he got out. From the gate, Sington could not see into the camp proper, masked as it was by the SS compound in front. When he asked about the state of the camp, Kramer replied: 'They are calm at present'. Sington therefore proposed to go in and broadcast an announcement but a Hungarian captain said it would be too risky because of the typhus. Kramer added that: 'It would be unwise to risk a tumult' so Sington decided to wait for the arrival of Colonel Taylor.

A few minutes later, Taylor arrived, with an escort of one NCO and six men, and leading two troops of 17-pdrs of 249 Battery. Not wasting any time, he told Sington to go in and make his announcement, before driving on up the road towards the Wehrmacht barracks at Bergen. The time was 3.07 p.m.

With Kramer standing on the running-board, Sington drove his vehicle through the gate, past the SS buildings, until he came to a ten-foot-high barbed-wire fence. He later wrote: 'It reminded me of the entrance to a zoo. Once through the gate this resemblance was strengthened. On the left of the thoroughfare stood row upon row of green wooden huts, and we came into a smell of ordure — like the smell of a monkey-house. A sad blue smoke floated like a ground mist between the low buildings. I had tried to visualise the interior of a concentration camp but had not imagined it like this. Nor had I imagined the strange simian throng, who crowded to the barbed wire fences surrounding the compounds, with their shaven heads and their obscene penitentiary suits, which were so dehumanising.'

As he rolled on through the camp, crowds of prisoners began surging through the barbed wire into the thoroughfare. A German soldier began firing his rifle over their heads. Sington stopped him at the point of his revolver. Suddenly, to Sington's incredulity, some prisoners began hitting the crowd with sticks and leather belts. The Kapo system was still at work. Turning his lorry into the Large Women's Camp, Sington stopped and made his broadcast. He announced that liberation had come, that help was on the way, but that no one must leave the camp because of the danger of spreading typhus. Within seconds, the car was surrounded by hundreds of crying, hailing women. Driving back to the main entrance, Sington dropped off Kramer, and turned up the road to rejoin Colonel Taylor.



When he arrived at the camp after noon on April 15, Lieutenant Derrick Sington of the 14th Amplifier Unit met Kramer at the camp main gate (which gave access to the SS compound, but offered no direct view of the camp proper) and got his first glimpses of the horror camp when he drove in with his loudspeaker van to broadcast his first announcement. This is the main gate as seen from within. (GBB)



The same view today. Once the gate to 'hell on earth', now just a track leading into the woods. Nothing — not even a trace of its foundation — remains of the guard-house on the right.



Part of the truce agreement was the hand-over of the military barracks of the Panzertruppenschule (Panzer Training School) which lay less than a mile away, near Bergen. A modern barracks, it had well-equipped housing blocks, canteens, kitchens, an officers mess, a cinema, and eight hospital blocks. (It was for housing the workers building these barracks that the original huts of what later became the concentration camp had been erected back in 1936.) Assigned to take over the barracks and the camp was the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment, commanded



by Lieutenant-Colonel Dick Taylor. Taylor, with two troops of his 249 Battery, first went to the military barracks to confer with Oberst Karl Harries, the commander of the Bergen military training area. *Above left:* The meeting took place at the Kommandantur. (IWM) *Above right:* The Panzer Training School is today NATO Camp Hohne, one of the largest NATO complexes in Northern Germany and well known to the British Army. The Kommandantur building, adjoining the northern gate, remains completely unchanged.



Left: The towed 17-pounder guns and other vehicles of the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment parked on one of the central squares of



the barracks complex. (IWM) *Right:* The westernmost of the two squares, looking north.

By this time, Taylor and his artillery column had reached the Panzer Training School barracks to be met by Oberst Harries and his deputy, Schmidt, at the gate. Taylor announced he was the Allied Military Com-

mander and demanded quarters for his troops. Questioning Harries, he learned that there were some 800 German and 3,000 Hungarian troops in the barracks area but that the nearby concentration camp was the sole

responsibility of the SS. Harries said that he acted only as a liaison with them. He also reported that sentries and typhus warning notices had been posted on all roads leading to the camp.



The barracks was garrisoned by some 800 German and 3,000 Hungarian troops (Hungary was allied to Germany and Bergen was also the training school for the Hungarian Army armoured corps). Under the truce, the garrison was allowed to retain its arms, the Hungarians remaining at the disposal of the British



and the Germans to be returned to their own lines within six days. Here, a British gunner corporal and a Hungarian soldier guard the barracks entrance. Note the white armband around the Hungarian's arm, prescribed part of the truce terms. These pictures by AFPU photographer Sergeant Harry Oakes. (IWM)



At the camp itself, Huts 11 (left) and 13 originally belonged to different sections of the camp, No. 11 being one of the two huts of the Hungarians' Camp and No. 13 being one of those erected in the Star Camp after September 1944. However, by 1945, the last of the Hungarian Jews had been exchanged to Switzerland, and the ever-expanding Prisoners' Camp had

taken over their huts and also pushed the Star Camp further west. The wire fence that separated the two enclosures has also been shifted. Behind Hut 13 is what is left of the Appellplatz square. Note the unburied corpses lying about among the milling inmates and on the Lagerstrasse in the foreground. (IWM)

At this point, the 11th Armoured's Phantom officer, Captain W. J. Gray, informed Taylor that shooting had broken out in the concentration camp. A German captain reported a phone call from the camp: 'It appears a loudspeaker went into the camp and has started a disturbance', so Taylor, with Barnett, Sington and the two German colonels, started out for the camp to inspect.

At the gate, they met Kramer. His administrative personnel was not supposed to be armed but, so he stated, if disarmed, they would be overpowered by the inmates. Seeing no other immediate way to administer the camp, Taylor allowed the SS to temporarily remain armed, but told Kramer that shooting was immediately to stop and that he would be held personally responsible. He then ordered one troop of 249 Battery to come to the camp to keep order. Cross-questioned by Taylor in his office, with Sington as interpreter, Kramer stated that all prisoner files had been destroyed on orders from Berlin; that there were approximately 40,000



From Lagerstrasse to forest lane . . . 50 years on.



Hut 11 was one of three adjoining larger-type, stone huts in the camp. The foundations of the two others, Nos 9 and 10, have now been excavated (left). Hut 9 served as a store and workshop. The front section of No. 10 contained the Special Camp



for Polish Jews. The rear section formed part of the Hungarians' Camp. Right: More or less at the spot where the corpse lay in the street, a part of the Lagerstrasse curb has been laid bare as well.



Under Kramer's rule, catastrophe set in. Although an endless stream of prisoners was coming in, the SS did not even make an attempt to supply food, sanitation or medicine for the totally overcrowded camp. Between January and mid-April 1945, it is estimated that 35,000 people died from hunger or epidemics.



Thousands of corpses were left lying about all over the camp. In the Large Women's Camp, the bodies were collected in two huge piles under the trees. *Left:* Here, weakened inmates carry a corpse to one of them. (IWM) *Right:* All that remains of Hut 210 is the sewer pit just outside the memorial fence.

inmates in the camp; that there was enough food in the camp to feed the prisoners for three days; that so far no prisoners had escaped; and that SS personnel numbered about 25 (a nominal roll showed 50 names).

About this time, Brigadier H. L. Glyn Hughes, the Deputy Director of Medical Services (DDMS), Second Army, arrived.

Just then, a Wehrmacht Hauptmann hurried up reporting that there was rioting in one of the cookhouses and that food had been stolen. Taking Kramer with them, Taylor, Hughes, Sington and the rest of the party set off for the cookhouse. Apart from Sington, none of the British had yet seen the camp proper. As they walked the 200 yards to it, an occasional shot was heard being fired from inside. Entering through the barbed-wire gate, guarded by Hungarian sentries, and proceeding down the dusty, fence-lined camp road past the separate enclosures, Taylor saw the internees for the first time: 'A great number of them were little more than living skeletons, with haggard yellowish faces. Most of them wore a striped pyjama type of clothing — others wore rags, while the women wore striped flannel gowns, or any other garment they had managed to acquire. Many of them were without shoes and wore only socks and stockings. There were men and women lying in heaps on both sides of the track. Others were walking slowly and aimlessly about — a vacant expression on their starved faces.'

On arrival at the kitchen shed, equipped with 30 cauldrons, the British officers found it deserted. An SS guard showed them one copper still full of turnip and potato soup but about a foot below the rim. This was what

had been reported as 'storming the kitchen'. Food, the SS man said, had also been stolen from the potato patch further down. As the party made its way there, shots were still ringing out. When they reached a heap of



The cistern in the Large Women's Camp had originally served as reservoir for the Stalag hospital shower baths. One of the bath huts can be seen on the right. However, by April 1945, the showers were defunct and the basin just a filthy pond. (IWM)



For more than 40 years, the Belsen memorial authorities were content to ignore the potential remains which lay outside their particular area — the south-western corner of the old camp.



***Left:* This is the overgrown storage pond as found by Karel in September 1992 but by the 50th anniversary in April 1995, it had been excavated and cleaned out (*right*).**



rotten potatoes near the crematorium, the party found 6 or 7 corpses of inmates who had obviously just been shot while others lay about wounded and crying out with pain. None of the SS in the vicinity made any attempt to help them. Enraged, the British forced the SS, Kramer included, to carry the wounded to one of the camp sick bays.

Gently, the British party persuaded the women who were swarming around to return to their quarters. A ghastly sight met them when they entered the huts for the first time. People lay three persons to a bunk designed to hold one or on the floor, in foul rags covered in human excreta, and running alive with lice. Those in the top bunks who could not get out just evacuated their bladders and bowels onto the ones below. Hughes recorded: 'It was the most moving and heart-rending sight to see these poor creatures, to hear their weak animal cries, many only just able to realise that there might still exist a ray of hope for them. In one hut, I counted 20 women in 35 square feet of space, and many huts contained over 1,000 in an area which normally should not have held more than 80 to 100 at the most.' Overwhelmed by a feeling of hopelessness, and wondering how to even begin to set in motion the machinery that might save these people, Brigadier Hughes cried unashamedly.

As Colonel Taylor entered one hut, a weak voice called out: 'Isn't it Mr. Dick?' It was a French woman who had been his mother's maid. She had been seized from her Paris flat 18 months before for helping Allied airmen to escape.

Shortly after Lieutenant Sington and his lone loudspeaker lorry had entered the camp, Colonel Taylor and Brigadier Llywelyn Glyn Hughes, the Senior Doctor of Second Army, arrived to be shocked in their turn by the sights confronting them. Right: This picture, taken by Captain Malindine in one of the hospital huts two days later, only weakly illustrates the scene recorded by Hughes as he entered one of the women's huts: 'They were lying on the floor and were so weak they could hardly move. There was practically no bedding. In some cases there was a thin mattress but some had none. Some had no clothing at all and just draped themselves in blankets and some had German hospital type of clothing. That was the general picture.' (IWM)

Few people walking the circuit path of the memorial grounds today will be able to conjure up the horror of 50 years ago.





That evening, Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor took the precaution of placing Kramer in an underground cellar, a dark cell in which fish had been kept, below the officers quarters. He was made to sleep on the concrete floor without blankets, his feet were shackled, and he was given a small boiled potato each 48 hours. John D'Arcy-Dawson saw him in his cell: 'His nerve was going by the end of the third day. When I went in, he jumped to his feet and put his hands over his face. He expected to be hanged every time the door opened.' Kramer was brought out several times to be questioned by the Field Security Police.

Left: This picture was taken in what had been the SS compound of the camp. (IWM) *Right:* Also captured by the British were some 25 SS wardresses. War correspondent Alan Moorehead was shown them when he visited the camp: 'Some 20 women wearing dirty grey skirts and tunics were sitting and lying on the floor. "Get up", the sergeant roared in English. They got up and stood in attention and we looked at them. Thin ones, fat ones, scraggy ones and muscular ones; all of them ugly and one or two of them distinctly cretinous.' In addition to the women, some 28 male SS were taken into custody.

By now, it was 9 p.m. and getting dark. As the shocked British party walked back to the camp entrance, the men of the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment were arriving. Horrified by what he had seen, Taylor ordered Kramer

arrested and confined to his own quarters; realising that the situation was far beyond the resources of his artillery unit, he sent a liaison officer to VIII Corps Headquarters with an urgent request for food, water and

further aid. First arrive was No. 76 Field Hygiene Section (Major F. R. Waldon) which immediately began working on sanitation in the camp. Later, medical and Military Government staff officers arrived.



Many liberators wondered what had possessed Kramer and his 50 'administrative SS' to await the coming of the British, and not escape before that. Lieutenant Sington commented: 'It is a strange commentary on their utter ignorance of all Western standards and codes of morals and behaviour that they should have believed their collaboration would be accepted. It also

indicates the extent to which their sense of wickedness had been dulled by years of brutish crime.' Few remains of the buildings in the SS compound can be found today. This is the foundation of the delousing station, the large building (No. 314 on the plan on pages 4-5) where incoming prisoners were bathed and deloused before entering the camp.

Having put Kramer under close arrest on the evening of April 15, next morning an enraged Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor forced an unwilling Kramer to lead a more thorough inspection of the camp. The man standing over Kramer in the Jeep is Military Police Sergeant George Robinson, who had been a party to his arrest the day before. (This rare picture was supplied by Robinson's son, Nigel.) War correspondent John D'Arcy-Dawson was present when the party reached one of the open mass graves: 'He stood there, this colossus of a man, his eyes unwinking, his face expressionless. The BGS, VIII Corps, turned a white face to the interpreter. "Tell him", he said venomously, "that when he hangs I hope he hangs slowly." The interpreter translated. Kramer was unmoved. The BGS turned to the military policemen and told them he would hold them personally responsible if Kramer committed suicide. Captain Kirk pointed out that the cord tying the camouflage jacket round the waist would make a good rope. The BGS ordered his men to strip Kramer to the waist and remove his braces and his boots. Hobbling over the sharp gravel, his great fat stomach and back naked to the wind, Kramer made his way to the Jeep, the crowds of women whom he had treated so vilely clapping and dancing and making little hoarse whispering sounds as they tried to cheer.' On April 18, Field Security removed Kramer to a PoW camp at Celle. (GBB)



At 8.30 a.m. next morning, after picking up Oberst Harries, Taylor, Glyn Hughes and Sington returned to the camp. Kramer was placed in a Jeep with three military policemen to lead a more thorough investigation. The British party saw the crematorium and the covered mass grave nearby, and saw two large piles of naked corpses in the Women's Camp and the uncovered pit further on. Sington broadcast a message telling the prisoners that German rule was over, and that food and water was on the way.

The full horror of the situation only now became clear. Of the 40,000 men, women and children in the camp — 28,000 female and 12,000 male — most were in the last stages of exhaustion from prolonged starvation. Typhus, tuberculosis and dysentery were rampant. The inmates had had no food or water for four days. Their clothes were mere rags and full of lice. Many were so weak that they just lay on the ground and took no notice of what was happening. Some 10,000 unburied, typhus-infected corpses were lying about in the camp. Some of them were in heaps, some were lying where they had been dragged, and large numbers were still in the huts, the occupants being too weak or apathetic to carry them out. At the far end of the camp, in the south-western corner, were several huge open pits with thousands of naked bodies in various stages of decomposition. In some cases, scraps had been cut from the legs, and heart and liver removed, clear signs of cannibalism.





Left: Belsen's small single-furnace crematorium was built by the Bau-Kommando in April-June 1943 at the far end of the camp to cater for the needs of the 'Detention Camp'. However, with a capacity of incinerating only three corpses at a time,



it was of course totally insufficient to cope with the thousands of prisoners that were dying at Belsen in the last months of the war. (IWM) Right: The furnace after the wooden shed in which it stood had been burned down.

There was no electricity or running water and sanitation was non-existent. Too weak to get to the few latrines, prisoners defecated and urinated wherever they sat or lay, and the whole camp was literally covered with human excreta and an unbelievable stench pervaded the whole area.

Returning to the military barracks, Taylor and Hughes inspected the part where, the day before, another 15,000 prisoners, all men, had been found. Conditions here were not so bad, the internees living in stone barracks, guarded by some 400 Hungarians, and although most inmates showed signs of serious starvation, there was no typhus. The officer in charge, SS-Hauptsturmführer Franz Hössler, stated there was food for seven days, that soup was served three times daily, and that only about half of the 34 SS personnel were still present. Taylor told him all shooting was to stop, and that one SS man would be shot for every inmate killed.



Today, the site of the crematorium is marked by a pedestal with a bronze relief map of the camp indicating the precise spot.



In March 1945, the SS tried burning the corpses in huge pyres, but this practice was soon discontinued because the forestry administration prohibited the use of wood for this purpose,



and the officers of the Wehrmacht training grounds were annoyed by the disgusting stench which was borne on the air for miles around. Right: A small mass grave now marks the site.



In the efforts to save as many of the inmates as possible, one of the biggest problems was the shortage of water. On the second day, 27 water-carts from VIII Corps reached the camp. When the British discovered a brook a few hundred metres away, in a very short time a water conduit was laid from this brook to the camp using materials found on site, thereby showing that Kramer could have solved the water problem if he had wanted to. Here, water is pumped to one of the cookhouse cisterns (marked H on the plan) along the Lagerstrasse. In the background are the huts of the Star Camp, the one nearest the camera being No. 39. On the right is the 'shoe mountain'. Picture taken by Sergeant Oakes on April 21. (IWM)

To distinguish the main camp from the extension in the barracks, the British named the former Camp 1 and the latter Camp 2. By now, 172 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Chapman) had arrived to support 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment, and Taylor sent one troop to administer Camp 2. Earlier, he had sent a second troop of 249 Battery to help at Camp 1.

That same morning, Glyn Hughes conferred with the BGS, VIII Corps, Brigadier Taylor-Balfour; the DDMS, VIII Corps, Brigadier J. Melvin; the Deputy-Adjutant and Quartermaster-General; and the Deputy Director of Military Government, VIII Corps, at the camp to coordinate arrangements. All available resources of VIII Corps and Second Army were to be used to relieve conditions in the camp. The most urgent tasks were to provide food and water; to get those who could benefit into hospital, and to bury the dead and clean up the camp. At

Right: Unlike the cisterns lying outside the memorial perimeter, those inside have been completely cleared away.



In order to better care for the thousands of starved and sick inmates, the nearby military barracks was quickly turned into a gigantic hospital. The huge transfer operation began on April 21. Left: Hungarian soldiers were put to work helping to carry



those too weak to walk to the hospital wards. Another picture from CMP Sergeant Robinson. Right: All buildings have retained their old designation which makes it very easy to find Block MB 90 in the labyrinth of Camp Hohne.

least 30,000 of the inmates needed urgent hospital attention although it was appreciated that one-third of these were probably already past all hope. The Wehrmacht barracks, handed over as part of the truce, offered excellent facilities, and these were to be made ready to accommodate those rescued from Camp 1.

By 5 p.m., 24 hours after discovery of the camp, the first rations, water-carts and coal reached Belsen. There was no attempt by the inmates to rush the food lorries or water-carts but, with little or no control or supervision of distribution, the stronger inmates got all the food and left the weaker to die. Also, many of those who did get some food killed themselves in the process by eating too much, their atrophied intestines unable to cope with the rich British Army diet. Typhus raged on. On the night of April 16/17, an estimated 500 people died.

Next day, April 17, No. 11 Light Field Ambulance (Lieutenant-Colonel M. W. Gonin) arrived to take charge of medical matters in Camp 1, and No. 32 Casualty Clearing Station (Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. D. Johnston) arrived to prepare the hospital area in the military barracks. Colonel Johnston was appointed Senior Medical Officer, Belsen, supervising medical arrangements throughout all camps and hospitals. No. 30 Field Hygiene Section (Major P. J. Fox) arrived to take charge of typhus control, and No. 7 Mobile Bacteriological Laboratory to assume responsibility for the



The small stone building on the left stood halfway between Huts 210 and 211 on the opposite side of the track. (IWM)

Meanwhile, the arrested SS were put to work removing the piles of dead from among the trees of the Large Women's Camp. Sergeant Midgley, who took these pictures together with Sergeant Oakes, recalled: 'They were kept on the move by our soldiers, picking up bodies from a heap and throwing them unceremoniously onto the trucks. The other inmates watched the loading, booing and shouting and throwing stones at the SS thugs. When the trucks were loaded, the SS men were made to jump on top of the pile of bodies and the truck drove off to the burial place. On one of these trips, one SS man jumped off and ran away. He only got a short distance before he was shot dead by a rain of bullets to the cheers of the crowd.'

reception and disinfection of patients before admission to hospital. No. 224 Military Government Detachment assumed responsibility for the control of both camps, its main task being the fair distribution of food. (Two other MG Detachments, Nos. 618 and 904, were later sent to join it). Initially, food and clothing were levied from the surrounding villages, but later normal channels of procurement were used. All relief units leaned heavily on the gunners of the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment.

As the SS personnel made no material difference in the administration of Camp 1, Colonel Taylor had them all arrested and 28 men and 25 women were rounded up. Kramer's deputy was missing at first, but later discovered disguised as an internee. The SS in Camp 2 had already been taken into custody the day before.

To visually document the horror camp for the world, for posterity, and for the war crimes trials that were certain to follow, a special team from No. 5 Army Film and Photographic Unit was assigned to Belsen. It arrived on the 17th and stayed until the camp was dissolved.

Meanwhile, the horrible task of disposing of the thousands of unburied corpses was being carried out. This was mainly the responsibility of the Royal Artillery units. Use was made of the half-filled open grave pits found at liberation, but there were so many corpses that several new pits had to be dug. This was done by bulldozers and by the Hungarian troops with picks and shovels.

Every mass grave filled after liberation was given a number — this became Grave No. 2.



SS women filling one of the pits under the watchful eyes of armed guards. Freed inmates watch from behind the fence of the Small Women's Camp. (IWM)



The arrested SS personnel, both men and women, were forced at gun point to collect the corpses onto trucks and carts and man-handle them into the pits (with the result that at least 17 of the SS men developed typhus and died because of it). It was vital that the dead be buried before the hot summer started cholera, but its soon became clear that the rate of burial was too slow. In what was to be captured in some of the most gruesome images of all the camps, many of the corpses lying about the area of the former tent camp were pushed into communal graves by a Royal Engineers' bulldozer. It was impossible to keep an accurate count of the number of bodies buried. Between April 17 and 30, some 15,000 to 20,000 were interred in mass graves, most of them clustered in the south-western corner of the camp. Before each grave was covered over, a chaplain and a Jewish rabbi held a religious service and, after the bulldozer had sealed it, a sign was put up with the date, grave number, and number of dead.



Prompt burial was essential to prevent further spread of disease. When it was realised that digging pits by hand would be too slow, the difficult decision was taken to use a bulldozer. This is the open area of the former Tent Camp. The huts in the background are Block 42 on the left and the latrine hut in the Star Camp on the right. The photographs of the bulldozer at work (taken by Sergeant Harry Oakes) remain among the most shocking images of the Second World War but no one seems to have given much thought to the poor driver from No. 619 Field Park Company. The first man detailed just could not stomach the job, so Sapper Frank Chapman who had joined the Royal Engineers in 1942, took over. 'The sight was awful and the stench was terrible. The first thing was that I was covered in DDT powder. I didn't think it was right but there was a great risk of an epidemic — you just had to get on with it. There were bodies lying all about so I started to push them in which made the job go faster. It did not take long. We had to wash down with petrol to get rid of the lice and our clothes were burned each night. I used to wear a mask to reduce the risk of inhaling germs and to lessen the smell . . . the dreadful smell of disease and death.'





No accurate count was possible, but it was estimated that about 1,000 corpses had been pushed in this pit which was later marked as Grave No. 1. Identification of the various known grave pits and the pictures taken of them is somewhat confusing. First there were those already dug by the Germans and covered by them located near the crematorium. Then there were those already dug and half filled with corpses and used by the British — like that on page 18. Finally, there were those dug by bulldozer (Frank says about eight) — easy to identify because of the rough nature of the sides — like Grave No. 1. (RIOD)

wearing protective clothing. In view of the appalling sights and smells, the RAMC men found themselves unable to work in the huts for more than ten minutes at a time and, in spite of precautions, 20 of them developed typhus. Anti-typhus measures were directed by an American, Captain W. A. Davis, the

In addition, there were the mass graves covered before liberation where the number of dead was not known. In the end, of the various mass graves, 11 were numbered. The total number of victims of Belsen between 1943 and 1945 was an estimated 50,000, most of them Jews.

On April 18, Headquarters No. 10 Garrison arrived and took over military control of the camp and barracks area. The 113rd LAA Regiment (Second Army Troops) arrived to relieve the 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment, the actual take-over occurring next day: 369 Battery took over Camp 1 and 370 Battery Camp 2, the prison, and guard duties, and 368 Battery took charge of the hospital area and the armoury on the 21st.

Meanwhile, Colonel Taylor was busy arranging the evacuation of the Wehrmacht troops from the military barracks to make room for the rescued inmates. At first, word was that the administrative part of the garrison (about 500) would be allowed to stay behind; then Oberst Harries told Taylor that most of his men would prefer to become prisoners-of-war, but a direct order from Second Army on April 19 stipulated that all Wehrmacht personnel were to return to their own lines. Owing to the transport arriving late, they did not in fact leave until 8.30 a.m. on the 20th, the convoy of 800 being escorted by 172 LAA Battery. (The German military wounded, some 2,000, were not evacuated until May 4.)

Before they could be transferred to the military barracks, all former inmates had to be disinfected by field hygiene personnel



Above: Grave No. 1 photographed on April 27, 1995 — Yom Ha Shaoh (The Jewish Day of Remembrance for Victims of Nazism) — and the day chosen by the Jewish Central Council in Germany to mark not only the liberation of Belsen but also that of all the other concentration camps. Frank Chapman had made his personal pilgrimage to Belsen the previous month on the exact anniversary — the first time he had been back. 'I was amazed at what they had done. It was a man-made heaven compared to what it was when I last saw it 50 years ago.' When Frank's presence became known to the memorial authorities, he showed them this chit (*below left*) that he had been given for damage to the clutch on his Caterpillar D6 (he went on to bulldoze the huts). As a result, an official invitation was extended to him to return, all expenses paid, to attend the official commemoration on April 27 (*below right*). 'I took them up on the honour', Frank told us. 'I think I had earned it.' (Tony Bethel)

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that 143224j Spr CHAPMAN, F. has been working with this Bty at BELSEN Concentration Camp and has been ordered to carry out certain work of a vital nature which unavoidably caused damage to the bulldozers.

23 May 45.

[Signature] Major, R.A.
Commanding 369/113 Light A.A. Regiment, R.A.+
(Commandant, No. 1 Camp, BELSEN.)

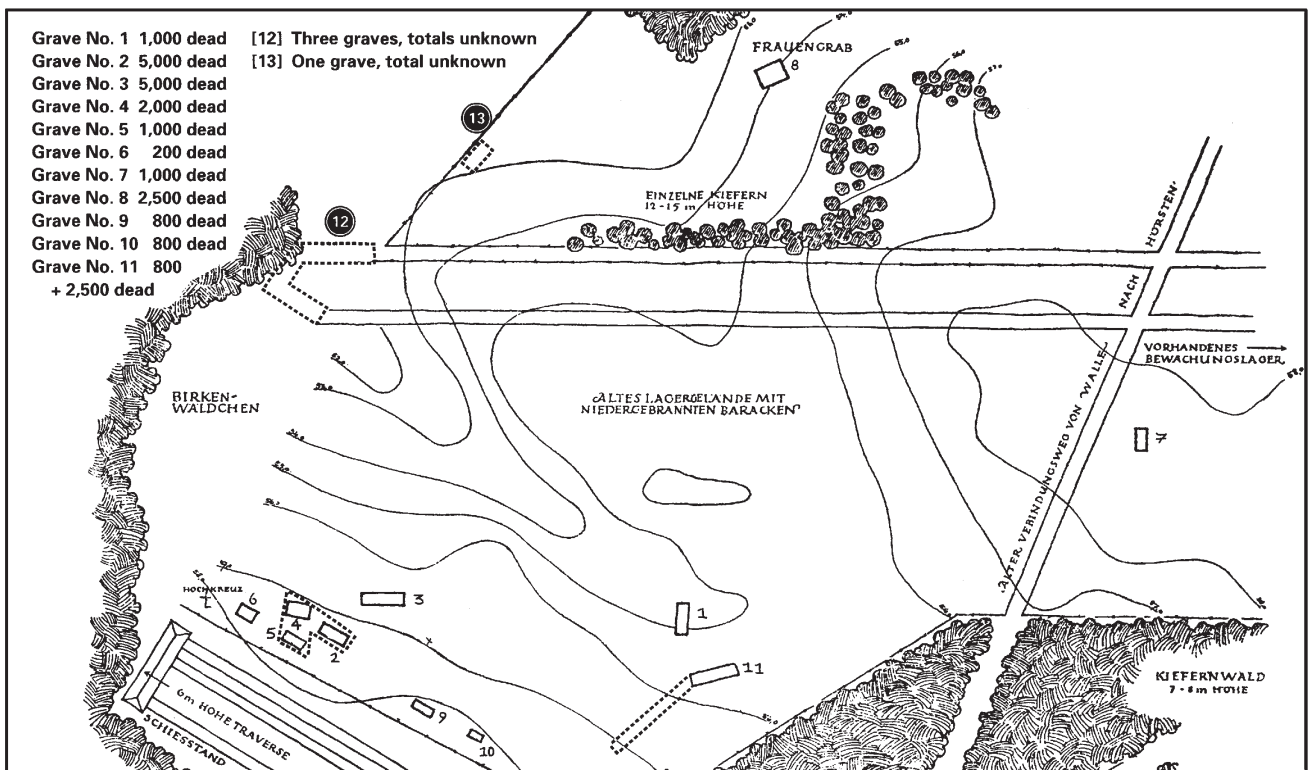
369 LT. A.A. BTY. R.A.
23 MAY 1945
Rd.
113th L.A.A. REGT., T.A.



Most of the grave pits lay in the extreme south-western corner of the camp, although it is difficult to determine which had already been dug by the Germans from those dug after liberation. This is Grave No. 2, with No. 5 behind on the left and No. 6 on the extreme right. The wall in the background is the stop butt of the Wehrmacht firing range which lay immediately alongside the camp. Another picture taken by Sidney Barlow.

Consultant in Typhus attached to British 21st Army Group from the US Typhus Commission. Slowly, the typhus epidemic was halted, then pushed back.

Some 50 doctors and 150 nurses, some trained and some not, who had been inmates in the camp tried to help the British personnel as much as possible, although most were too ill or starved to be very effective. Dr Hadassa Bimko, a Polish Jewess who had lost her entire family in the camps, had come to Belsen from Auschwitz on November 23, 1944, and had kept up the hospital in the Women's Camp with practically no equipment or medicine, was appointed Senior Internee Doctor.



Above: For some unknown reason, not all the pits are marked on this February 1946 plan so we have shown (dotted) the variations and other graves which are known to exist today.

Below left: Grave No. 3 — Sydney Barlow has caught Sergeant Oakes (on the left) at work with his camera. Below right: Nice comparison in April 1995 with a TV cameraman at work.





On April 24, all the SS men and women, together with local civil officials, were lined up beside Grave No. 3 to listen to a speech by a British officer through the loudspeaker van: 'You, who are the fathers of German youth, see in front of your eyes some of the sons and daughters who carry a small part of the responsibility for these crimes. Only a small part and yet more

difficult to carry than the human soul possibly can. But who carries the real responsibility? You, who allowed your Führer to carry out this flagrant madness; you, who could not get enough of these degenerate triumphs; you, who heard about these camps.' In the background, the huts of the Small Women's Camp, with Hut 50 on the far left. (IWM)

General Dempsey of British Second Army issued special passes permitting war correspondents from the Press Camp at Oyler to visit and describe the camp. Probably the first to reach Belsen, early on the 16th and in time to see Kramer lead the inspection tour of the camp, was John D'Arcy-Dawson of *The Sunday Times*.

Richard Dimpleby of the BBC came to Belsen on the 18th. As he tried to record his first impressions with his engineer, Harvey Sarney, Dimpleby broke down for the first time in his career, not once but five times. Then, to his rage and anguish, the BBC simply refused to believe, or to broadcast, his report unless they got confirmation from

other sources. Only after Dimpleby telephoned the newsroom with the ultimatum that he would never again broadcast in his life unless the report went through, did the BBC air his eyewitness report on the 19th. Thus, a stunned world learned for the first time of the barbarity of Belsen, the AFPU films and photos reinforcing the picture visually.



That same day, British Movietone News made recordings at the mass graves. *Left*: One of those forced to speak was SS-Obersturmführer Franz Hößler. Born February 4, 1906, Hößler had been Lagerführer at Auschwitz and later at Camp 'Dora' at Nordhausen, and had come to Belsen when that camp was evacuated in early April. He had commanded the camp section at the military barracks. *Right*: Another was the SS camp doctor, Fritz Klein. Although he had only arrived at Belsen a few weeks before liberation (his colleague, Dr Rudolf Horstmann who had been camp doctor from February to April, having escaped capture, and the sadistic doctor of the Prisoners



Camp, Dr Jäger, having been relieved of his post earlier), Klein had been at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he had carried out selections for the gas chambers, and had shown as little compassion with the inmates of Belsen. With the woman on the right, a former inmate, acting as interpreter and prodding him on, Klein said (in German): 'My name is Dr Fritz Klein. I have been a doctor in concentration camps for one and a half years. I was born on November 24, 1888, am thus 58 years old, a German from Rumania, and am talking today on April 24, 1945.' Both SS men were later sentenced to death and hanged at Hameln on December 13, 1945. (IWM)



In order to kill the typhus germs, as each hut was cleared it was burned down, being set alight by Wasp flame-throwing



carriers. These pictures were taken by Sergeant Hewitt on May 19. (IWM)

Evacuation of the acutely sick from Camp 1 to the military barracks began on April 21. It had been delayed by one day because the German troops had seen fit to cut the water supply to the barracks before they moved out. There were far too many sick to help all of them, so a selection had to be made. British medical officers went through the huts to mark those who had at least a small chance of recovery with a cross on the forehead. Hundreds of others, too far gone, had to be left to die. Those selected were stripped of all clothing and disinfected in Camp 1 and then, wrapped in blankets, moved to the so-called Human Laundry, set up in the stable block of the barracks, where they were washed, shaved, and powdered with DDT.

The transfer of the relatively fit began on April 24. They were disinfected and moved either to Camp 2, or to a new Camp 3 which was being set up at the far end of the barracks. Ultimately, Camp 2 was used for men and Camp 3 for women. The move to Camp 2 began later than had been hoped owing to a slow start with the dispersal of the fitter inmates from that camp to normal Displaced Persons camps. That first day, room was made for only 23 persons, but next day 515 persons from Camp 1 entered Camp 2.

Over the next two weeks, evacuation proceeded at an average of 1,100 persons per day. In all, some 29,000 of the 40,000 inmates of Camp 1 were moved to the barracks.

So pressing was the need for more medical personnel that a decision was made to make use of German doctors and nurses. Many patients were terrified by this, but there was no real choice and the German medical personnel proved able and efficient.

By April 26, although typhus had broken out in Camp 3, the daily death rate had decreased from 500 a day to about 300, an average which continued for a week, until May 3, when it dropped to 223. On May 11, the number dropped below 100 for the first time. On May 19, there was only one death. In all, some 13,000 inmates died, either in Camp 1 or in the barracks, between April 15 and the end of June.

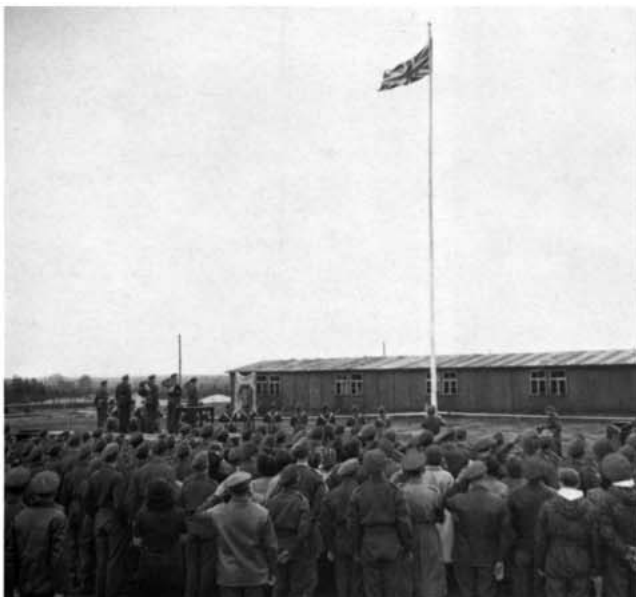
To cope with the large numbers of hospital cases, additional medical units were sent to Belsen. On April 28, No. 9 British General Hospital reached the spot, its main force with

600 beds arriving on May 4. On May 8 came No. 163 Field Ambulance followed by No. 35 Casualty Clearing Station on May 14 and, finally, No. 29 General Hospital with 1,200 beds on May 19.

That same day, evacuation of Camp 1 was completed when the last 421 persons were moved out. All buildings of the camp were to be destroyed by fire as the only sure way to get rid of the typhus germs. As soon as a hut had been emptied of its last occupants, it was set alight by flame-thrower carriers and the last hut, No. 44, was ceremoniously burned down on May 21.



On May 21, the last hut was ceremoniously set alight at a special parade, attended by Brigadier Glyn Hughes and other officers and 300 former inmates. Hut 44 lay here in the old SS depot, latterly the Women's Camp. The memorial obelisk in the left background was dedicated in 1952.



Left: No British flag had yet been flown over Belsen camp, but now the Union Jack was raised to symbolise the victory of democracy over the Nazi-totalitarian regime. Colonel Johnston of No. 32 Casualty Clearing Station fired a flare-pistol into a big picture of Hitler hung on Hut 44, after which it was set alight by a Wasp (right). (IWM)



THE BELSEN TRIALS

Their burial work finished, all SS prisoners were transferred to the prison at Celle on April 29. That same day, No. 102 Control Section relieved No. 10 Garrison of its duties. On May 5, the Hungarian troops were relieved by a battalion (formed and armed by No. 10 Garrison) of 850 released Russian PoWs, who guarded the area until May 15 when they were repatriated.

The first Belsen trial was held at Lüneburg between September 17 and November 17, 1945. In all, 45 men and women were indicted: Josef Kramer, by now brandished the world over as "The Beast of Belsen", and 32 other SS, 16 of them women, plus 12 former Kapos, five of them women. The defendants stood accused for actions both at Auschwitz, where most of them had also served, and at Belsen, being charged with responsibility for ill treatment and death of prisoners.

The films and pictures of Belsen released before the trial had generated unqualified calls for 'revenge' on the Germans in general and the SS perpetrators in particular. Being the first 'camp trial', it received worldwide publicity but, unlike Nuremberg, the Belsen trial was a British affair, not an Allied one. The court was a British Military Court. Each of the accused was defended by a British barrister (four of the Polish Kapos by a Polish one), and given every opportunity to rebut the charges in the classical manner of British justice. Chairman of the Court was Major-General H. P. M. Berney-Ficklin. Judge-Advocate was L. C. Stirling, Chief Prosecutor Colonel P. M. Backhouse.

Left: Josef Kramer and Irma Grese in the high-security prison at Celle, photographed on August 8, awaiting their trial. Irma Grese became notorious as one of the more cruel SS wardresses at Belsen. Born October 7, 1923, she began her SS career as nurse in the SS sanatorium Hohenlymchen in 1939. In 1942, she volunteered for training as SS wardress at Ravensbrück, serving there and from March 1943 at Auschwitz and Birkenau, usually as overseer of labour squads. Evacuated to Ravensbrück, she came to Belsen in early March 1945. At her trial, she admitted to having whipped and beaten prisoners, but denied responsibility for any killings. When she was hanged, she was still only 22 years old. (IWM) Right: The pictures were taken in the exercise yard of the detention cells adjoining the Celle courthouse. The old courthouse and jail no longer exist today and the modern building of the Oberlandgericht court now occupies the site. (Tony Bethel)

In all, the court sat for 54 working days. On the fourth day, September 20, a compilation of the footage filmed by the AFPU was shown. The court heard numerous witnesses, including Brigadier Glyn Hughes and Dr Hadassa Bimko for the prosecution. Much legal debate was spent on the question of state versus individual responsibility, and that of 'superior orders' — a line of defence that was to become typical for all war crime trials. Kramer and ten others — including three women: SS-Aufseherinnen (wardresses) Irma Grese, Elisabeth Volkenrath and Juana Bormann — were convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. Nineteen others received terms of imprisonment: of the SS, three got 15 years, five got 10, one 5, one 3 and one 1 year; of the Kapos, one got life (he was hanged for another crime in Novem-

ber 1945), two got 15 years, four got 10 and one 5 years. In four cases, no verdict was given because the accused fell ill before or during the trial. The remaining 14 were acquitted. Appeals for clemency were rejected and the 11 death sentences were carried out at Hameln jail on Friday, December 13, 1945, the British official executioner, Albert Pierrepoint, having been flown over to carry out the hangings.

At a second Belsen trial before a British Military Court, held in May-June 1946 at Celle and Lüneburg, another four men received a death sentence, and two men and three women prison sentences from 2 to 20 years. At a third, at Hamburg in April 1948, one other man received life.

By 1955, all those sent to jail at the Belsen trials had been released.

The SS personnel and Kapos arrested at Belsen were tried by British Military Courts in three separate Belsen trials. Left: At the first and largest, held at the MTV-Halle, the local men's gymnasium, at Lüneburg, 45 people stood accused, 24 men and 21 women. Right: Major-General H. P. M. Berney-Ficklin, president of the court. (IWM)





The Wehrmacht barracks used for the relief of the horror camp remained a Displaced Persons camp — in fact, it became the largest DP camp for Jews in Germany — until 1950. It then reverted to its original use as the military barracks for the surrounding tank training area, becoming NATO Camp Hohn.

In late 1945, the British Military Government decided to make the former concentration camp into a memorial site. Parts of it, notably the old SS compound and some other stone buildings, were still in use as part of the DP camp, but the rest of the area was cleared. What still stood — fences, watchtowers and the crematorium — were pulled down and the foundations of the huts that had been burned were removed. The mass graves were landscaped into mounds, and plans drawn up for an international monument to be erected nearby.

In April 1946, a permanent Jewish memorial was unveiled. The International Memorial, consisting of an obelisk and a curved wall with inscriptions in 14 languages, was dedicated on November 30, 1952. The same year, responsibility for the memorial

Kramer and Grese and nine others were sentenced to death and hanged at Hameln jail on Friday, December 13, 1945. First buried in the cemetery yard, they were transferred to plot C-III of the municipal cemetery 'Am Wehl' at Hameln in March 1954. Here, a total of 196 people executed by the British between 1945 and 1949 were buried. **Left:** This is how it looked in 1985. (Stadtverwaltung Hameln) **Right:** After demonstrations by neo-Nazis and counter-demonstrations had led to violence in the cemetery grounds in November 1985, the plot was levelled off in March 1988, all grave markers being removed. Thus, like the victims they helped to murder, today Kramer and his crew lie mouldering in unnamed graves.

site was handed over to the Lower Saxony authorities.

In 1955, the last occupants — German refugees — evacuated the former SS compound and all buildings there were subsequently demolished too. In 1959-61, the authorities of Lower-Saxony constructed a new entrance to the memorial, about one kilometre south of the original gate, and in 1966, an exhibition and documentation centre was opened next to it. (This was enlarged and reorganised in 1985-90.)

Over the years, although the area around the mass graves and the memorials was well kept, the rest of the former camp grounds was allowed to disappear under newly-sprung

woods of fir trees and silver birches. Nearly half the area of the camp, and all of the SS compound, lie in fact outside the fence of the present-day memorial site. The location of the camp gate of 1945 is today just an obscure track leading into the woods. In 1991, a project was started to uncover the remains of the camp hidden under the trees. Since then, volunteers from German youth organisations and school classes have laid bare the foundations of two of the stone huts (Nos. 9 and 10), uncovered two of the camp's cisterns (no trace of the other two remains), and unearthed lengths of camp road gutters in the Large Women's Camp and parts of the Lagerstrasse, the main camp road.

I have just returned from the Belsen concentration camp where for two hours I drove slowly about the place in a Jeep with the chief doctor of Second Army. I had waited a day before going to the camp so that I could be absolutely sure of the facts now available. I find it hard to describe adequately the horrible things I have seen and heard today, but here, unadorned, are the facts. There are 40,000 men, women and children in the camp. German and half a dozen other nationalities, thousands of them Jews. Of this total of 40,000, 4,250 are acutely ill or dying of virulent disease. Typhus, typhoid, diphtheria, dysentery, pneumonia, and childbirth fever are rife. 25,600, three quarters of them women, are either ill through lack of food or are actually dying of starvation. In the last few months alone, 30,000 prisoners have been killed off or allowed to die. Those are the simple, horrible facts of Belsen, but horrible as they are, they can convey little or nothing in themselves. I wish with all my heart that everyone fighting in this war, and above all those whose duty it is to direct the war from Britain and America, could have come with me this afternoon through the barbed-wire fence that leads to the inner compound of the camp. . . . Beyond the barrier was a swirling cloud of dust, the dust of thousands of slowly moving people, laden in itself with the deadly typhus germ. And with the dust was the smell, sickly and thick — the smell of death and decay, of corruption and filth.

I passed through the barrier and found myself in the world of a nightmare. Dead bodies, some of them in decay, lay strewn about the road and along the rutted track. On each side of the road were brown wooden huts. There were faces at the windows, the bony emaciated faces of starving women, too weak to come outside, propping themselves against the glass to see the daylight before they died. . . . I saw a man, wandering dazedly along the road, stagger and fall. Someone else looked down at him, took him by the heels and dragged him to the side of the road to join the other bodies lying unburied there. No-one else took the slightest notice — they didn't even trouble to turn their heads. Behind the huts, two youths and two girls who had found a morsel of food were sitting together on the grass in picnic fashion, sharing it. They were not six feet from a pile of decomposing bodies.

RICHARD DIMBLEBY,
BBC RADIO BROADCAST, APRIL 19, 1945



Richard Dimpleby beside the Jewish Memorial in April 1965.

When you come back after 20 years, you find the Belsen concentration camp almost, though not entirely, unrecognisable. Gone are the huts and the compounds and the barbed wire and the poor emaciated, tottering people that were staggering about and the SS guards, men and women — they've all disappeared. The furnace where they hit them on the head and pushed them in the fire: all this has gone. And on a day like this, cold and rainy, such a contrast to the spring day on which I came here 20 years ago, there's nothing here but the desolation of heathland. All that you really find to remind you of this place, other than perhaps the lay-out of it, which I can remember as I stand here now, are graves.

RICHARD DIMBLEBY,
BBC TELEVISION BROADCAST, APRIL 1965