

Major Allan, reel one. You were telling me earlier that you landed at Normandy on D plus one.

Yes.

Can you tell me which unit you were with, and in what capacity you were serving?

Well, I was with the 113 Light Ack-Ack regiment. And I was in the recce party of the regiment, which was composed of three batteries. And I was in 368 battery. And we landed at Sword Beach I remember. And it was heavily pillboxed, and we got into a house, and took that as a headquarters. It's that picture over there. And we dug various holes in the courtyard, and lined them with wardrobes.

And we stayed there for quite a considerable time. Other batteries covered Pegasus Bridge and various features of locks at the mouth of the River Orne. And while we were there, we watched the tremendous raid at Caen, the huge bomber raid. And they came over endlessly. And I remember about four or five one night, and dropped so much stuff that it stopped any advance that we made at all.

I think it was-- it was the 51st, I think, the highland division was there. And--

So it hampered the advance?

It hampered the advance in the end. It was really too much, I think. It clogged all the communications. But it was quite a long time really we were pinned into the beachhead. It seemed that we would never believe the dream that Montgomery unfolded in his own group that we would break out eventually. But of course, when we did, we did. And I remember going through Falaise and seeing the destruction to the-- I don't know, it was the 14th army I think. But it was a whole army was left very reminiscent of the scenes that we've just seen in the Gulf, you know, fleeing stuff that had been hemmed into the Falaise gap and trapped. And it was just shot to pieces.

Did your unit take part in the bombardment of the Germans in the Falaise Gap?

No, not at all. No, we were Ack-Ack. And our primary task was anti-aircraft work really. So we very seldom really were involved in ground work like anti-tank. We did fire tracer paths sometimes. But no, actually sometimes we used an anti-tank role, but not often.

Were there many German planes in Normandy to shoot at?

Well, surprisingly enough we weren't harassed really. But our planes, although they had air superiority, did meet German opposition in the air. There's no doubt. But the German planes did not as a rule attack ground forces. They weren't confident enough to do that, I don't think. But they did fight our planes and bring our planes down.

Did your unit have to fire at any German planes?

Oh, quite a lot. We had quite a heavy engagement when we were at Ouistreham, because I don't know why, but it was right on the extreme edge of the Allied flank. And so we did get quite a lot of work to do there.

You said that you landed on D plus one, on Sword Beach. Was it a peaceful or an opposed landing, as far as you were concerned?

Well, it was remarkably quiet, very, very peculiar, very peculiar feeling. There had been obviously very heavy fighting. But the fighting on the actual pillbox front and so on had been more or less the commandos had done a tremendous job. And there was very little opposition there.

What did the beaches look like when you landed?

Well they're still full of tank, obstacles and parts. But of course, the places where we landed were free. And we had no trouble at all.

Had the dead bodies been removed?

No. They're still there. Still there.

Did you see anything of the commandos or the airborne at Pegasus Bridge?

Oh, yes. They were there. But of course, they'd gone further to the other side. They'd got a bulge out from the bridge, and established a bridgehead on what I would call the enemy side of the river.

But it was a very, very small bridge, of course. I had the little canal and the lock beside with the famous cafe, which I believe has been sold recently I think I read in the paper.

When you landed in Normandy, did you feel confident that the Allied forces would be able to break out of the beachhead?

Well, it's a hard question really to answer. I think we all had a certain amount of trepidation and wondering, in spite of what we've been told and so on, that it would work, that it would really be effective. We didn't know. But of course, as time went on, we became more confident really, especially when we got news about the American landings and so on further along the beach, and the opening of the-- I've forgotten the name of the harbor now. The Mulberry, but I forget what port it was at. But of course that came. And of course supplies and reinforcements came rolling in.

What do you remember about the pursuit of the Germans from Norway up into the low countries, as far as you personally took part in it?

Well, as I have said, we broke out, or really we didn't break out. The armored people broke out, obviously. But it was just like a car ride really. It was absolutely absurd, the speed of the advance was incredible. Because we started off from-- I forgot the name of the place now. I've got no map with me here.

But we crossed the Seine at [FRENCH]. And we started moving from there in a tremendous speed. We went through the Somme and saw the Menin Gate and all the rest of it, without any opposition at all. And we went breezing along until we found ourselves in Brussels.

What kind of reception did you get from French civilians?

Oh, incredible. Incredible. Incredible. I mean they got in the way, throwing everything in the air and flowers, and a great reception really.

Had that been the case also in Normandy?

Yes. I think so. I remember in Normandy, we were at a place called Thury-Harcourt, and we got into a farm which had been used by Jerry. And we'd settled down more or less there in the barns, and outbuildings, and so on. And the chappie came along, Monsieur Laurent, and he was the man who owned the farm building. And he was in a terrible state. He had lost his wife. And she'd gone to another village down the road. And so anyway I got in my Jeep, and shoved him in the Jeep. And we went off down and we recovered her.

And oh, he was tremendous. He went to the garden and dug up his champagne reserve, and it was wonderful hospitality.

How old was he?

Oh, he was about 55. But he wrote me a long, long time after the war. And he sent various books and presents to my children, and so on. And he and his wife are now dead.

What do you remember of the entry into Brussels?

Well, as I've said, I mean it was very difficult to proceed along the road because of the crowds of people who were lining the road. We were fortunate. We had a Belgian liaison officer with us, Captain-- I'm not sure. Captain [? Levy. ?] And he lived in Brussels actually. And he was most useful as a liaison officer. And as I say, we got to Brussels and we pushed on towards Antwerp. And we came back, we retreated as it were back, and based ourselves in Brussels for a time.

You were telling me earlier that you accompanied the Irish guards.

Oh, yes.

Crossed towards Arnhem, to try to relieve the troops.

Yes. Well, I always remember at Somme Bridge there was Colonel Vandeleur, and the Irish guards. And he forced his way across an extremely difficult crossing of the river. I forget what it was, the river the Somme Bridge but the Somme Bridge itself had been destroyed. And he with his leadership and so on, just made his men just run after him. And they got right across. And it was there, as I said, that we had contact with the 82nd Airborne.

I remember I got a job of trying to liaise with the airborne lot, and as a result of that I got the Bronze Cross, United States Bronze Cross, and a mention in dispatches, but they were a funny lot because I remember spending a very uncomfortable night one night in a kind of a cellar. And they were very itchy triggered paratroopers who I don't know what they did to the Germans, but they put the wind up me.

What kind of a man was Vandeleur from what you could see of him?

Oh, incredible, just an incredible man, total disregard of his own safety, and had great powers of leadership, obviously. But really if you called him a mad major, about it I should think.

What did he carry with him?

A swagger stick, and that was all. Well, he had his revolver obviously. But that was it. His swagger stick was the thing. He used that at every occasion. He used to whack his leg with it, and throw it forward. Wherever he is, like Richie you know, throwing the heart forward, he threw his stick forward and followed it.

What do you think his men thought of him?

The world. The world.

What did you do with your unit in the Netherlands?

Well, as I say, after Brussels and crossing the Somme and so on, we went to the bridges over the Escaut and the Albert canals, and we went through on the way to relieve or give air protection at Arnhem. We crossed the Rhine at Nijmegen, and liaised with a Polish air drop which was there to support the Arnhem people. But of course, as you know, Arnhem, they came out of Arnhem, they crossed the river at night, and they were in a terrible state when it came over.

And we were stationed for a time at Nijmegen near the great bridge. And so it was a horrible affair crossing the bridge because I think earlier had 88 trained on it, and you had to wait for one, or a salvo to go, and then just scoot across the bridge as fast as one could. And our headquarters was on the other side of the Rhine. And we were there for some time.

But we were there, I think, I forget the name of the place which is north of Nijmegen, where the Polish people were--

[? Ostaback? ?]

No, not as far as [? Ostaback. ?] [? Ostaback ?] was on the-- no. I haven't got a map, unfortunately. But that was a bit of, well, it was all right I suppose. But I think the Poles got dropped in the wrong place, myself. Because they were dropped half way between Nijmegen and the lower Rhine and the upper Rhine. And they should have been dropped higher up, I think.

How did you spend that winter? In great discomfort?

Not really. Don't laugh. We were in a piano factory. It was fairly comfortable.

Where was that?

At Nijmegen, on the north bank. And I think we were there actually when-- we were getting ready for a Christmas dinner. All the officers were getting the dinner ready for blokes and so on. And we got an order to get up and pack, straight away which we did. And we found ourselves on the way to the Ardennes, Gervais and so on, all that and the bitter cold weather. And of course, we saw plenty of Jerry aeroplanes there.

I mean sometimes the regiment's on the move and firing the guns off their wheels going along.

Were you very effective against the German Air Force in the Ardennes Offensive, do you think?

Well, we certainly kept them away, kept them off the roads. I mean, Bofors is not a terribly effective weapon, except against low-flying aircraft. But we gave as good as we got, I think, really. And then in the Ardennes we went through [? Dino ?] and then on to Gervais. And we came into no contact at all with Germans in the Ardennes whatsoever.

But I think that the Second Army had been moved or units by Monty to back up the Americans really, but I think the Americans after there was a period of very bad flying weather in which the Germans really got into the air, but after that, they died down and we saw very, very little of them.

Did you actually hit German planes with your AA guns?

Oh, I should think so, yes. Various guns had planes marked on, stenciled on, whether optimistically or not I wouldn't swear. But they did claim. They did have certain claims, yes.

And what do you remember about going into Germany? Was it in February?

Well, let me see. It must have been because we went to the Maas, the crossings of the Maas, and then the Rhine crossings at Xanten and Rees. You know, pontoon bridges were flung across, and we crossed the Rhine there. And of course, we saw airborne troops used there with great effect in the Rhine crossing. And there was very little opposition, especially not in the air, because it just wasn't there.

Then, of course, we went along. We were still, I forget. Were we in 12th Corps then? I think. But we went into Eighth Corps area and we suddenly got an order to move. Well, it was a peculiar kind of order because we were not told really the destination or what the destination was. But we were going under a flag of truce, which was the most peculiar feeling. And it was quite a long journey.

We took the whole regiment about 220 miles I think it was in 24 hours, which wasn't bad going really. And then we arrived at Belsen. And we weren't the first unit in, of course, at all because a troop of the 53rd wasn't it? No. I'm sorry the 63rd, anti-tank regiment had been there before, about a week before. And our recce group arrived.

The Germans applied for a truce. They were frightened of Belsen, and the state it was in, the disease, and so they were frightened that if the camp inmates got out, the typhus, and so on infection, disease would spread. And they applied to Eighth Corps for a truce. And that was on the 13th of April. On the 15th, the 63rd anti-tank regiment went in, and also our recce group.

And then the main body of the regiment moved under a flag of truce on the 19th of April. And the 63rd anti-tank regiment was relieved.

So you went in on the 19th personally?

Yes, the 19th.

Had you been warned about what to expect?

Not really. We were told it was a difficult situation. But the extent of the problem, and so on had not really been fully, well it probably hadn't been fully known. But we certainly weren't told. It was a quite unexpected sight, the sight that we met. We came in under-- it was dark. And we came in, and settled down for the night more or less. And then the extent of what was before us came to light in the morning. And of course, it was the most horrific sight.

Can you describe in detail what you saw?

Well, the only way really to describe it is the fact that there just was a carpet of human bodies, mostly very emaciated, many of them unclothed, jumbled together. People had just died where they stood. And they were outside and inside, of course, the various huts. But they were outside lying where there were trees or any open ground. It just went on. It was incredible, the mass of-- the bodies didn't putrefy because they were so skeletal. There was so little flesh on them. Their arms and their legs were just like matchsticks really.

But it was a gruesome horrible sight. I'll never forget, never.

And the smell?

Well, as I say I don't know whether it was the fact that they were so spare and lean, it was a very unpleasant smell. It was incredible. But not so much as one would expect. I mean I've smelt worse in Normandy through you know killed cows and so on lying in fields, getting putrescent and so on. But it wasn't so bad. Inside the huts, of course, it was appalling.

Because not only were the living who could hardly do anything, who could hardly move or do anything for themselves, but of course, there were bodies inside as well. So the big thing was, of course, that we had to do something about the bodies, and remove , them and give them some burial. It was impossible to do anything except bury in mass pits.

And of course, the ground was rather sandy there. Bulldozers were of very little use because the soil, as I say, was so sandy. Even when it was wet down, wet it down to try and get bulldozers. So shoveling had to be done. That wasn't done. It was done by the Hungarians. There was a large Hungarian force of troops left there, had been prison guards.

And they were given shovels, and they had to dig pits. And into these pits the bodies were gradually put. There were, I should imagine I think a pretty good estimate that there were about over 10,000 corpses to bury. And there were five great pits buried. And to carry the poor emaciated remains in, they had to be-- it was a great difficulty really with lorries. We had to construct ramps and so on to let people carry the bodies up.

And German troops were used and the SS troops were used sometimes. For this and the British soldiers were supervisory capacity all the time, watching the pits being gradually filled up. And when they were filled up, just the earth was spread over the top. And they put down about two foot high, and a notice was put up, the date, and number of bodies, approximate number of bodies.

Eventually after the big burial got reduced, we were able to have individual burials. And over all the burials, I know the our padre. Reverend Ross, he was a marvelous man.

Weren't you scared getting any disease yourself?

Oh, yes. Well, I was frightened to death. I think we all were frightened. Because I mean typhus was rampant and so on. And we thought that we might get disease transmitted and an outbreak amongst the troops. But it never happened. I mean people got ill through I think psychological reasons and so on really. But as far as I know, in 113 Ninth Ack-Ack regiment, there were no cases of typhus.

Were you sprayed?

Yes, oh powdered. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Oh, and when you went into an area, you were powdered. And when you came out you were powdered, dusted down. Did you detect any vermin or fleas on your body?

No. No, I mean the inmates obviously were infested. But we didn't really. I think the precautions that were taken were pretty effective. I mean we had this, presumably I don't know, I don't know the chemical name for it, powder. But anyway, it was syringe, and we had a good supply of those things. And everybody followed the instructions.

So your unit had been drafted into Belsen with a specific purpose of helping clear up?

Well, there were various jobs. Obviously, there was the burial which I mentioned before. But there was also the job, of course, of feeding and cleansing the people who were inside. And to cleanse them, we had to operate a kind of a human laundry in which people had to be washed and scrubbed and so on, but ever so gently because of course their skin was like paper, just stretched over bone. And to get help for that, we got German nurses in from Celle. And they helped in the laundry, and a lot of them contracted typhus.

There were about 50 I think of those nurses, and I think about 30 of them died.

Major Allan, reel two.

Well, of course, one of the biggest problems really was how to feed the inmates, the rest of the inmates who were still alive. It was a vast job really, because there was no water supply as such. There was no food. And we did get an awful lot of food from a Wehrmacht barracks, and food stocks were uncovered there. And we got a dump of tentage, and we pitched that to relieve the overcrowding.

And we had about 10,000 allocated, about 40,000, 50,000 people to each cookhouse. And we had to adapt cook houses and erect cook houses, and even build one. We built one from scratch. All the RA carpenters all chipped in and anybody who knew anything about building. And up it went, and we got a new cook house going. And of course, the only kind of food containers we had to issue food with were dustbins really. But that's what we did.

And of course, I'm afraid in the original stages, we probably didn't help people at all by the diet, because it wasn't controlled and we didn't know what we were doing. And it wasn't until we got help in from Second Army, and we got diet experts in, Glyn Hughes, Brigadier Glyn Hughes got them in. I think they were somebody from-- I forget his name now. But he came from Joe [? Lyons, ?] [? Lyons ?] and [? Gluckstein, ?] or somebody.

And we had Bengal famine diet and so on, which people were able to take, and we had various grades of diet in each kitchen, about three grades, for those who were weaker and so on. And the amazing thing was that within two or three weeks, the difference, they looked like human beings instead of living skeletons. They seemed to recover extremely well.

Did the survivors seem to know what was happening, that they were being liberated?

Oh, yes. Yes, they did. I think from the very inception really, when you walked into a hut at the very beginning. You had to kind of force yourself to walk into a hut. But when you walked in, they were very, very grateful to think that their term was ending, that they were going to be released. Because nobody who ever went to Belsen ever came out, except for those people that we liberated. They all died.

I don't understand the mentality of it. And it was called a krankenlager. It was a camp from which nobody through starvation, overwork, ill treatment, cruelty, and so on-- nobody ever recovered. It was a living death. Krankenlager means sick camp.

Yes. Yes. So-called.

Were you able to converse with any of the survivors?

Well, no. I'm not a linguist. And although I did sit in with some interviews that were carried out by the military government, I got some transcripts really. But I did not myself, I wasn't able really to converse, except with one or two people who spoke French.

So you don't remember anybody saying anything, any of the survivors saying anything to you of significance?

Not really, no. I'm afraid we're too busy really to try to get creature comforts really going to really hold much conversation with the inmates.

Had you known anything about concentration camps before you went?

No. It was an utter surprise to me.

Had you heard the word concentration camp.

Oh, yes. But I had no idea that anybody, any human being could do such things to other humans really. Although this probably was not the same-- there was a crematorium there. But as far as I know, on hearsay and so on, there was no mass extermination at Belsen. But people just went there and they were callously worked to death or died.

I always remember and I shall never forget that at the entrance to camp one, there was a pile of boots. Now, don't ask me why there should be a pile of boots. But it was 12 feet high. I remember higher than that wall there. And it was 36 feet long. And I wouldn't know how many pairs of boots must have been in it. But whether they had been taken off the people who had died or the people who had been in the crematorium, I presume, they did use the crematorium. I don't know. It must have been hundreds of thousands of pairs of boots.

Did you see any other possessions taken from survivors?

Oh, yes. There were various little hoards of loot that had been taken-- jewelry, wristwatches, and so on. And of course, whether to curry favor or not, so German guards revealed their presence. And of course it was no uncommon sight to see some of their soldiers with an armful of wristwatches in the end.

But I think there were things, various odds things like cameras and so forth.

Where was the jewelry kept?

They were in the administration block belonging to the SS.

Did you see anything of the Germans who had supervised the camp?

Oh, yes. Quite a bit. Until the SS personnel were removed, they were taken to the jail and Celle in the end. But Kramer and what was the other infamous person? Irma Grese, the rather fat buxom Germanic type of woman who was supposed to be rather sadistic towards the prisoners and so on. Kramer was a funny man. He was quite aloof. And one another German of note was a Dr. Klein, who was supposed to have carried out various inhuman experiments on living prisoners in the camp.

The Wehrmacht personnel, there was nothing extraordinary about them, a lot of Hungarians, about 2,000 or 3,000

Hungarians had been employed as prison guards. They were more or less useless but they formed a good sort of labor force that we could use for various things.

How do you mean there were more or less useless?

Well, I don't think they were-- I don't think they had been implicated in any actual cruelty towards the prisoners. They were just prison guards. But I don't think that they were more or less perimeter guards, I think.

What were Kramer and the other top people doing?

Before we went in?

No, after you went in. What did you see them doing? Can you describe?

Well, they were under close arrest.

Whereabouts?

Near camp one. I think I've got a picture somewhere of Kramer standing in front of his Jeep. Oh, no, not sorry, in front of his Jeep, in front of--

What was the demeanor of Kramer and Grese and so on?

Well, I think they were quite arrogant. But the arrogance seemed to fade until such time as they were transferred to Celle. But I think the SS obviously had been sold by the Wehrmacht. They've been left, as it were, behind. And I don't know quite-- I don't know what happened to Kramer. I think he went before the war crimes, I think.

Was anybody trying to take revenge against--

Yes. I remember the CO, Colonel Mather, said, of course he said I remember in an old group he told everybody that we must be careful to contain our feelings, and not to allow ourselves to become brutalized, as the Germans had. And not to be unduly out of control, as it were. And of course, I think everybody paid attention to that.

It is true, of course, that we did make the Germans help to remove the bodies and so on and so forth. But we had little option. I mean they had to be removed. And I think it was only fair that we did use them really.

How did they perform the task?

Oh very unwillingly, the Wehrmacht. And they were really affected themselves, I think. Whether some of the Germans actually knew what had been going on inside the camp or not, I don't know.

How did you observe them to have been affected themselves?

By the sight of what they were doing, I mean.

Is that that they were affected themselves by the sight of it?

Oh, yes.

What did you observe of that?

Well, I really think that, I mean we most certainly could not believe it. And I really think in a way they could not believe it. So how far that they had been inside the camp or not, I don't know. But they really did, and I think we got some Wehrmacht prisoners in also who seemed really horrified at what they saw.



So you think it's true that some Germans didn't know the true picture of these?

I'm certain of that. I also remember one occasion. I don't know how that was arranged, possibly through Second Army. But the burgomasters of Celle, and various towns round about were taken to the camp and shown one of the last pits to be filled in. And they, of course, were horrified. And we did get an awful lot of various help from them in the way of clothing and so on.

But I think they did not know either. You see, the funny thing was that this place on LÃ¼neburg Heath, beautiful surroundings. Admittedly it was near a tank training school and so on. But I think that it was a place that just was not known of. The railway lines led straight to it. And I suppose the trains carrying intended prisoners were driven there. And they were taken out of the trucks and so on. And they just swallowed up, and nobody ever knew.

You said that [? Yossi ?] had warned against taking revenge.

Yes.

Do you think his orders were obeyed?

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think the greater admiration for the Geordies, and I think the people from the Northeast were hard but extremely fair. They were very, very good.

A lot of your unit were Geordies, you said.

Oh, yes, I would say about I was one of the black sheep, as it were.

Where do you come from?

Oh well, I come from Aberdeen really. But I've lived in all my life down here in London.

Did you see anybody take revenge?

No. No. I categorically haven't seen it.

Did you see anybody try to take revenge?

No. I don't think so at all. Of course, I'm not saying that there was any kind of fraternal feelings towards the SS or the Wehrmacht even. But I think everything was extremely correct, extremely.

Did what you saw at Belsen change your attitude to Germans and German people?

I'm afraid so. Yes, it did. I've never been able to go into Germany. Well, that's wrong because I once went as far as Cologne. And I had to turn around and come back.

Because of Belsen?

Yes, I'm afraid. It is. It's lasted, not an active kind of hatred. But I have no wish to associate myself with anything Germanic or German at all.

You mentioned Hughes.

Oh, yes.

Can you tell me anything about the other people, important people who were working you?

Well, --an awful lot of help obviously from Second Army, although of course, we got an awful lot kind of people who came to see what was happening. And that was a bit sick making. I didn't like that at all.

But we did get all kinds of help in the way of support from Ninth British general hospital. We had a mobile laundry. But I must say that I didn't come into contact really with any, as it were, top brass at all, really. We had the British Red Cross there. And we had RAMC specialists. And I mentioned to you we had Typhus Joe, an American doctor, who was marvelous in organizing the human laundry.

What was the human laundry?

Well, it was really for the disinfection and bathing of all persons evacuated from the concentration camp. And within seven days, a complete disinfection with anti-lice powder it was called I think.

I think it was AL63 but I'm not sure. It was carried out within seven days. And you asked about-- I can't really remember. Unfortunately, my memory is not such that I can remember who the dietitian expert was that was sent over.

Can you describe this Typhus Joe?

Well, he was very relaxed, the expression is laid back, isn't it, type of person who was very compassionate. And he really, he knew what he was doing, and he got people to-- and he said if we carried out make sure of personal cleanliness and delousing and so on, and powdering, the risk of infection was minimal. Well, we more or less believed him I suppose. But he was a marvelous man really.

And of course, our own RAMC people were extremely wonderful. And of course, military government was full, was swarming there. There was various groups from the detachments-- we have [NON-ENGLISH], about three I think working on taking prisoners' statements and so on and so forth.

What do you remember of Brigadier Hughes?

Well, very little. I didn't really meet him personally. But I know that he ensured that we got everything that we wanted or asked for.

Do you remember the work of any British medical students who was--

Oh, yes, they came over quite a lot. And we thought, oh, what a bloody nuisance they're going to be. But they were far from it. They were fantastic. I forget how many came over. But I think there were about 200 or 300, and mostly from London, I think.

Why did you think that they would be a nuisance?

Well, I think we were so not full of our own self-importance, but we were so busy ourselves in looking after mundane things. And we thought what the hell are they going to be doing? But in actual fact, of course, they helped with the very, very sick. And they actually fed an awful lot of the people who couldn't feed themselves. And they were fantastic really in what they did. And of course they were only-- well, I say only students. They were youngsters. And of course, I suppose we in a way had been a little bit more mature and battle hardened as it were. But they were wonderful.

How did the camp come to an end?

Well, it was on the 21st of May. Crocodiles came in with flamethrowers, set alight to all the huts which were now deserted and empty, except for a few skeletons, I suppose, you might say and full of human rags and excreta and all the rest of it. And all those camps, all the huts within the wire were set on fire one by one. And they went up in a great plume of horrible so wonderful really smoke and flame.

Somebody told me who was present there that there was a mistake about setting it alight too soon. Do you remember that?

No, I don't remember that. There was certainly everybody had been evacuated to the new areas. I mean I don't think there was any mistake at all. Well, they may have been set alight too soon. I don't know--

I mean by a few minutes.

No. I didn't hear anything like that.

Was there any ceremonial when it was burned?

No, not to my knowledge.

Do you think there was any excuse for what happened at Belsen?

Well, I have heard various excuses offered-- the lack of water for example, and the lack of electricity and so on. The water supply failed, owing to the electricity supply being out, and the electricity supply being out was blamed onto Allied bombing and so on. And of course the starvation of the inmates was also blamed onto the interdiction from the air, which of course, obviously didn't hold water. Because there were large stocks of food, as I had mentioned before in Wehrmacht dumps, which could have been made available. And they weren't. They were there.

And of course, the whole business really, I mean the tank training school, the officer's mess, great huge building with a great central area, and various rooms, off on all sides. Magnificent building. I've never seen anything like it before. I mean and the depot, the dump was near there. And it was full of food. So I don't really see myself that the aerial interdiction had caused or aggravated. I think people had been dying in Belsen. I mentioned a mountain of boots for years before conditions got worse.

They did get worse, admittedly, in the short time before we got into Belsen itself.

How long were you there yourself?

Right up to the end of May, I think it was. A good six weeks.

So you went out with the rest of your unit?

Yes. We got a holiday at his Majesty's expense at Travemünde, the most beautiful place. And we needed it. It was on the Baltic, it had a lovely silver sand beach.