

Imperial War Museum
Department of Sound Records

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LIFE UNDER NAZI OCCUPIED EUROPE 1933-1945

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Access Code A

CXW Can you tell me first of all, Dr Clarke, how you came to go to Belsen in the spring of 1945?

LC We were medical students at Barts Hospital, and they asked for volunteers to go to feed the starving Dutch, because they didn't feel that there were enough - they could do with some medical assistance in all respects, and we were still over a year away from our final exams. So several of us volunteered to go to feed the starving Dutch, and then we suddenly got the call one day to report to Lowndes Square the next day, where a lady with a great deal of silver braid said that we would be better occupied in Belsen in the concentration camp which had just been liberated. But she said that anybody who didn't wish to go could pull out there and then, but nobody did.

CXW Who was the lady with the silver braid?

LC I can't remember her name, I think she was Lady Reading or something. She was the head of the St Johns, or one of the heads.

CXW What was your reaction when you heard that you were going to Belsen?

LC I think in some respects we were pleased that we were going to do something that we might think was of some use in the War since we had so many friends who'd gone away and we would never see again. And we felt a bit out of it really, since we were in a reserved occupation.

CXW Did you know anything about concentration camps before you went?

LC Only what I'd seen in the papers, nothing otherwise.

CXW What was that?

LC Well there were large areas of buildings housing people who were just dumped there in great masses, far more than they could cope with, and that most of them seemed to finish up dead, and there seemed to be a shortage of food in these places. I didn't realise quite the extent until I saw it.

CXW Had you heard of the name Belsen?

LC Yes.

CXW What special arrangements, if any, did you have to make to go there?

LC Personally I didn't have to make any. Three of us lived in a flat together in London. I think I just rang up my parents and said that I was off the next day - no, I think I rang the night before to say I was probably going off to Holland. I don't think I had the opportunity to correct it to them, but it was in the papers that we'd gone so I presumed that they would find out.

CXW How did you actually get there?

LC We were taken to a train at Paddington, I think it was, where we travelled down to the West Country to a place near Cirencester called Rover Camp. We were told that the next day we would be taken by aircraft up to Celle. I think we spent that night, the most coldest night that I can ever remember, we were in Nissen huts, and I can remember almost wearing my greatcoat in the middle of the night because we were so freezing. We were taken then by coach to the airfield. We got into the aircraft and about an hour later - it seemed to us it was jolly cold - but about an hour later somebody came and opened the aircraft and said "It's all scrubbed, it's too cold", it was freezing up at ground level. When we discovered what all scrubbed meant, we were taken back to

Rover Camp and told we would do the same thing the next day.

So I think we did this for the next two days before we actually went off.

CXW So you flew to Celle?

LC We flew to Celle. I can remember coming in at Celle airport most impressed by the seeming efficiency of a front line airforce unit. The commanding officer was one minute saying hello to us and the next minute barking out orders over a microphone and sending some planes out to meet some Focke Wulfs which apparently were coming into the airfield. I remember him remarking to me "I'm glad you chaps are in because we've just got some Focke Wulfs coming over". Any way, eventually transport arrived to take us to Belsen itself but not the actual concentration camp, but to the panzer grenadier school two miles away, I think it was at Huhne.

CXW Did the countryside round about show much sign of the War having passed through it?

LC No, because I don't think the War in that part had passed through it, it had gone round it, because I think they had a truce to say that they would try and avoid any fighting in the concentration camp, otherwise I think the Germans were frightened that the inmates would spread the diseases, mainly typhus, to the rest of the German populace.

CXW What did the panzer grenadier camp look like?

LC I've never been to Sandhurst but I've seen pictures of it, and I would think it's the equivalent of Sandhurst in Germany. It was in most pleasant surroundings, nice villas, a lovely mess. There was one very big building which was obviously for social purposes, and the lower floor was full of bottles of wine, bottles no longer containing wine. Then they had a dance floor, the ground floor itself with a little place at the side of the wall for the orchestra, which I'd never seen in any dance floor in England, but I presume that was back

to the Vienⁿese days. And on the top floor there were lots of little bedrooms.

CXW That's where you were housed was it?

LC No, we were housed in these relatively comfortable, not exactly Nissen huts but bungalows. They were small but they were reasonably comfortable and as reasonably comfortable as we could expect in the circumstances.

And I remember my colleague and I, we were put in this room, and on the door still was the name of two Hungarians who'd just been pushed out so that we could sleep there. We didn't know who they were to start with, but we enquired and found that they were Hungarians who had taken over in the interim while the Germans moved out and the British moved in, to keep control.

CXW Who was there in the panzer grenadier camp? Were there any German personnel there or was it all British?

LC I think it was all British that we saw. I think there were some German civilians that were still employed. They had large billets which we didn't use, but I think they had people cleaning these up ready for the people in the concentration camp proper.

CXW Once you'd got settled in were you then taken to the camp itself?

LC We settled in one day, and I think we had a sort of conference that night in the big mess hall. The next day we were taken down to the concentration camp itself. I think the first day we were taken down. I think after that we had to hitch lifts, and it was about two miles away, that I remember very well because it seemed that the chaps who you hitched the lifts from used to delight in bumping you along this road as fas as possible. It was sometimes very difficult in the back

to keep your footing, and I can remember bouncing up and down in the middle, trying to keep myself from going over the edge. But any way, we used to hitch down to the camp. Every day, another thing that sticks out in my memory, is that we used to have to go through a hut where we were covered in DDT literally, hats, ^{off} blow it in your hair, up your sleeves and down your trousers. And every day we had this when we went in because I think mainly they were worried we would get lice which were prevalent, and it was believed that the typhus was mainly spread via the lice. This was not thought to be true later on, it was thought to be dust-borne. But any way, it was as well not to get any lice and the DDT I think did this. What else it did I don't know.

CXW You said you had this conference before you went. What did that consist of?

LC They more or less just put us in the picture of what they hoped they do the next day, that they'd take us down and show us the camp, and then we would have another conference when we'd had a look at the place. The general plan was, there were a hundred of us I think, a hundred and something, that would be allocated - when we went in there would be two to a hut. And we were to go to the huts and see what we could do there. And I think I went with a pal of mine to Hut 240, that rings a bell in my mind.

CXW When you say they, who were they who spoke to you?

LC I think in the entrance, before we actually went in ^{main part of} to the concentration camp, it was a lady, and I think she was a St Johns person herself. I can't accurately remember that. The other civilian people there were the Quakers. I don't think she was one of the Quakers but she was one of the administrative officers that were around at the time. She wasn't in the army. I can't remember exactly which unit she was attached to.

CXW Can you recollect what they said to you about what to expect?

LC I don't think they told us much about what to expect. I think it had been in the papers in England and I think they said it's much as you've been told in the papers in England. And indeed it was exactly like the papers in England. They were obviously authentic photographs that had been taken.

CXW So you were prepared for a shock, were you?

LC Oh yes, I was prepared to see what we'd seen in the papers.

CXW Can you describe your first impressions when you went in?

LC I think my first impression was that it confirmed my preconceived ideas that the press had actually been very factual on this. This dusty vast array of wooden huts separated down the middle by a sort of dirt track, barbed wire keeping people where they thought they should be. And then this vast array of people shuffling. Nobody seemed to lift their feet. Nobody seemed to have the strength to lift their feet. And from time to time you came across people who were obviously dead. All of the people seemed to be emaciated. The smell still lingers on/ⁱⁿ the memory, difficult to describe, but I'm sure if I ever smelt it again it would come back to me.

CXW The smell of decay, was it?

LC The smell of decay, smoke as well, because they had started to burn some of the mess in the camp, because I think it was still ten days to a fortnight after it was liberated. So they had actually been burying the bodies that had died. I think when we arrived they'd buried the bodies up to three days before, a backlog of about three days.

/Were...

CXW Were the dead just lying about? in large numbers, or what?

LC They had sort of got them organised into heaps, if you like, and then they were gradually transported down to the big graves where they were pushed into these mass graves.

CXW Who was doing the manual work there?

LC When we got there I don't think there were any Germans doing the manual work. I think it was all army men. I don't remember any civilians in the camp itself. I think the army had taken over and had left enough to do the essentials, and the main thing was to get the food round, or the food equivalent. And I think this was being done by the RASC if I remember. When we got to our huts the food arrived and then we organised things from then on.

We could call upon a unit of artillery men who were the only army people who were there, went in at the beginning, and stayed until we had taken over. And we could call on them because they were the only armed people, we didn't have any arms. And one of my colleagues in the neighbouring hut did have a sort of semi-riot when the first food arrived, and he had to call on one of the artillery men to come in with his tommy gun to keep the order, to make the people understand that they'd got to keep order, and that they'd got to form a queue. But otherwise you were much on your own.

We did have the Hungarians, that Hungarian Brigade. After a day or two we were allocated - when we went into the camp we were allocated two of these Hungarian soldiers who were absolutely excellent. They did everything we asked without any query. They were helpful, they were cheerful. They carried out the dead bodies, they did all the manual work we asked them to do. It would have been very difficult, I think, without them.

/Who...

CXW Who were you paired with personally?

LC At first I was pared with a chap called Ian Jackson, and subsequently a man I shared a room with, which was David Bradford.

CXW So can you describe Hut 240 that you were encharged with?

LC Hut 240 was very much better than the majority of the huts there. It did contain some children, and apparently they had tried to guide the children in the concentration camp to Hut 240, and had also tried to get into that hut any nurses that they discovered. So they did ^{manage} to make this reasonable, if that's the word - it was much better than the other huts.

I suppose there were about three hundred in this huts, whereas in a similar sized hut of one of my colleagues there'd be somewhere like six hundred.

CXW Who were the nurses?

LC Well when I say nurses, they were girls who had been put in the concentration camp and somebody had discovered they had nursing experience, and so where possible, they seemed to have got them into Hut 240.

CXW Because of the children?

LC Because of the children.

CXW What was the state of the inmates?

LC Some of them - most of them were utterly emaciated. Some had died, some were about to die. In this particular hut there were one or two who were reasonably fit, and I gathered from them that they were reasonably fit because they'd only been in the place about a month, so they hadn't had time to starve. There didn't seem to be a lot of actual disease in that actual hut, again probably because they had some people there who did know something about nursing, but how much this helped in those circumstances I don't know.

One of the problems of course was the language situation, and I asked if anybody could speak English, and many people said "Yes, yes" but then you found the only thing that they could say was yes or no.

But there was one extremely nice Polish girl who could speak very good English, and she had been to England in the past, and she had a grandmother who lived in Scotland. So she became my interpreter and was most helpful.

CXW

Were the inmates as thin as you see them on the movie films?

LC Yes, except for the few exceptions of the people who'd only been there a relatively short time. I think there were several Rumanians in mine. They seemed to have just had an intake from Rumania about a month before, and they seemed to be reasonably fit.

CXW What was their reaction to you when you came into the hut - was it passive or active or what?

LC In that particular hut it was fairly active because I think they had probably fairly intelligent girls, and with the help of this interpreter we could get across what we were trying to do.

In fact that hut was so much better than the other huts that I went back to the lady who allocated us our huts and said "Look, there's not a lot we can do in that hut, they're so well organised compared with the others, would you please give me another job?" which she did.

CXW What job was that?

LC Well she put ^{me} in charge of the field radios the first day because somebody had to man the field radio because this

/was...

was the only means of communication with the outside world. And I did that for two or three days, and I think on the second or third day I heard Churchill come across saying that the War was over in Europe and I was actually on the field radio when this came through. And I managed then to get somebody else to keep the field radio while I went round to tell the inmates. I got a friend of mine to go round the men's side while I went round the women's side, thinking of course they'd be, well not exactly over the moon but at least relieved. They were so apathetic. One or it two it registered. One or two it raised a cheer, not many, they were too far gone.

CXW So your job was to send messages for equipment and so on to the outside world?

LC Well just to keep in communications, I didn't do very much, but somebody had to be, in case there was something come through. But I was only on that for two or three days, and I think they got alternative accommodation.

Then they put me onto - they were trying to evacuate the people, clean them up, put them through what we called a human laundry, put them into decent surroundings. And they were taking them down the road so that eventually they went through this so-called human laundry, and they were scrubbed by German nurses. Then they had completely clean clothes on. They went into clean beds. The main one was in Huhne itself.

But that didn't go through fast enough/^{so}they asked me to organise one in the camp itself. And they managed to clean up one hut and get straw palliasses into this. They managed to find some showers, and so at least they could put some people temporarily into better accommodation. And I remember vividly doing that for a few days because I remember many of them very weak, and I had to help them through the showers. And then they were sprayed with DDT again, into their palliasses.

And I can remember one very frail chap. And I discovered he

was an ex-professor. And when I got him tucked up in bed and safe and put a blanket over him he grabbed me by the arm and would not let me go. He kissed my arm all the way up and all the way down, and he nearly had a fit saying "Hitler, Hitler- I kill Hitler!"

And also I remember while I was doing this particular job a unit of RAF chaps who'd been delegated to go round and find war criminals, or people they suspected of being war criminals. And one of these chaps came in while I was helping in this human laundry, and he asked me about it, and then he said "I've been given this job of finding war criminals. I wasn't really keen on the job at all, I didn't really have much incentive - by golly I've got an incentive now". And he went off seeing that he could do something on that line.

CXW How did the German nurses react to doing the work in the human laundry?

LC I think they themselves were appalled at the state of the inmates, and they seemed to work very well in the human laundry. They seemed to work hard and I don't think they ever complained.

CXW What kind of food were you giving them? Was there any problem with the food?

LC There was a problem with the food because if you gave them a proper diet then their stomachs couldn't take it because they'd been without good food for a long time. They had a bio-chemist there who was producing some tasteless stuff which I don't think seemed to do an awful lot of good, some hydrolisate I think. But by and large there were stews, things of that nature. People were mainly starving because the system of keeping order in the concentration camp had been that they had one bit at the end of the hut separated off from the rest. And in this bit they had/^{what}was called a blockleader who in many cases had been a German criminal.

And the food was always delivered to the blockleader where she took out what she or he what they wanted and gave it to a few favourite friends and then what was left over was distributed to the people at the other end of the hut. But most of them hadn't had any nourishment at all for a long time.

But indeed, after a few days I think we universally hit upon the idea that we should make one person who was ambulant responsible for a person who couldn't get up, and take him the food. In other words they couldn't have their own food unless they took one to somebody else. And I think we all managed to do this and saved probably a few lives that way.

CXW Were there any kinds of food which you tried which were not suitable?

LC I think this hydrolisate was the only one really. I just gave them what arrived, but I didn't have much to do with that side of it.

CXW Did the number of inmates dying each day - was it a very large number?

LC It was a large number. I suppose of all the people in an average hut, something like a twentieth, at a guess, were dying each day. Of course the actual factual numbers got less as more died off. But yes, it was...

CXW Could you tell as soon as you went in, the ones who would survive and the ones who wouldn't?

LC No, you couldn't. You'd have a pretty good idea. In fact it took a brave chap to get right down and feel their pulse or listen to their ticker because you'd be right in the squalor yourself. But I did, I must say, one looked absolutely dead and was just pointing to this, what I thought was a corpse, and asking the Hungarians to take them out, take it

/out...

out. And the lady next to her said "Nee, nee" and she was still alive. She died the same day.

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CXW Were there instances of people dying from over-eating to your knowledge?

LC It's very difficult to be sure that they did die from over-eating. The very emaciated were dying fairly regularly any way, and whether the fact that they'd eaten made any difference I honestly don't know. I didn't have any direct evidence of it.

CXW Were the inmates totally without possessions?

LC Except for the sort of rags they were standing up in I think they were. Yes, I don't remember any possessions.

CXW Were there signs of property having been taken from them in the camp?

LC There were certainly signs of that, yes. I happened to pal up with a couple of chaps who had been sent, I think, from the RASC, to sort out the huge collection of watches which had been found at the camp. I gather that when the Germans had the truce with the British, that there would be a take over, that three cart loads were despatched from the concentration camp. The first cart load contained, apparently, wines, the second cart load was alleged to contain jewellery and rings, and the third cart load contained watches. Apparently a few people saw these go. They told the British about the watches whereupon the British promptly found these watches and dug them up, and they occupied quite a fair sized room which I saw, which was knee-deep in watches. Apparently the people in the know, when they saw the British did this, they didn't tell them where the wine was, they didn't tell them where the

/jewellery...

jewellery was. But apparently some of the inmates used to go out at night and come back with arms full of bottles of wine. But whenever they were followed by the British people there they came back without anything. They weren't going to let on that they knew where that was.. And to the best of my knowledge no-one knew where the jewellery and rings were, but that must have been a pretty enormous collection, because for everyone that had a watch presumably they had a ring and some piece of jewellery when they went into the camp, at a guess.

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The method of/what happened to the watches was that these chaps had instructions to pick up a watch, wind it twice, shake it twice, and if it went, it went on one side and went back to the army, and if it didn't tick it was chucked away. And there were some lovely watches there, gold Omegas, vast numbers.

CXW Did the inmates show any signs of wanting their property back?

LC Oh they didn't, I think it was so far removed from them, I don't think they realised there was any chance. These presumably had accumulated over the years, not just the recent ones in there. I don't know how many watches there were, but there must have been an accumulation of several months any way, if not years, for the numbers. No, I think the people there, the ones that survived, were just glad to have survived, weren't thinking of anything going back to them at all.

CXW What about other property in the way of clothing?

LC The army went round to the local areas requisitioning clothing from the neighbourhood. They just went in and took it and told them what it was for. And I think the local people realised - whether they realised before it was liberated I don't know, but they certainly realised afterwards because they were forced to be taken around the camp, to make sure

they could see the conditions that had been down the road from them. And so, not that they could argue, but the army brought in large quantities of clothes, and then they were dished out by a quartermaster. And when they had been through the human laundry they then got a new set of clothing, not the old grey and blue "uniform" sack.

CXW Did you see any sign of a crematorium there?

LC The nearest you could see to a crematorium was a large ex-oven in which there were three stretchers on racks, is probably the better way of putting it, and nearby this, the fuel which was used for this were the dried shoes of the people who'd been to the camp. And outside the door was this mountain of shoes as big as a normal house. It was pretty definite these had been used as a fuel because there were parts of shoes and there were bits of shoes in the bottom bit where the fire would have been, and there were lots of bits all burnt all round the place, so this must have been the nearest they had to a crematorium.

CXW Did the inmates make complaints about each other to you?

LC No, I don't think I ever heard them complaining between themselves except in the case of the blockleaders. The blockleaders were not very popular with the rest of the inmates of the huts, and not surprised. And indeed when the food first started to come round and was not taken to the blockleader they became pretty aggressive. They wanted to know why the things weren't going on the same as before.

CXW Did anybody try to take revenge against them?

LC Not that I know of. I think they were too apathetic by then really. I think you can fit the degree of apathy with the fact you never saw them pick their feet up, they just shuffled. They probably had to shuffle because they

/hadn't...

hadn't got the shoes.

CXW You said you heard the interpreter, but did you hold any conversations with any of the inmates? Did any of them, apart from the medical work, did any of them tell you about what they'd been through or tell you anything else?

LC They seemed strangely reluctant to tell you because it was so appalling they just said "Ah, what's the use of reiterating it". But there was just one time when my interpreter broke down and she then told me. And that was the day that they were going to burn that hut, our hut. And I went past, and they'd got all of the people out of it, and we went to see that nothing was left. And she suddenly started to burst into tears, and I asked her why she was bursting into tears now when it was more or less a happy time that the hut was going to be burnt. And she then told me that six months before it was snowing, that it was thought unfit for the girls to take them down to the place where they worked which was apparently down the road.

And she said that instead they got them out at six in the morning as usual and made them stand outside their hut with their hands on their head until six o'clock at night, in the snow. And if they fell down they beat them until they stood up again or died. That was the only time that I really heard any direct evidence of physical maltreatment or torture, whatever you like to call it. But I think simply because they didn't want to tell you, didn't want to know any more.

CXW Can we go on now to the actual medical work that you and your colleagues were doing in the camp? What were the main complaints that you were trying to treat?

LC Oh I think that the main complaint that we were trying to treat was the starvation. There was typhus but one could do so little. One couldn't do anything about typhus any way.

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I think we were trying to alleviate pain. I opened a few abscesses just to relieve the pain, and we did that with ethyl chloride spray. You spray it on to the skin and it freezes the skin, but in one or two cases they were so extensive that I used the ethyl chloride spray over a handkerchief to use it as a general anesthetic, or at least to make them a little bit woozy while I opened their abscess. But this didn't happen very often. In actual fact I don't think any knowledge of medicine was necessary or of any use, it was common sense really.

One of my friends - I remember very well indeed meeting him between his hut and mine, where there was a woman sitting on the ground howling away. And she had no mouth or most of her mouth - the lips, had disappeared, a condition which you call cancrum oris which is associated with longstanding starvation. And she was moaning and obviously in a lot of pain. And this pal of mine said "Have you got a morphia handy?" and I said "I'll go back to the hut and get some". And I went back to the hut to get some and we met again - and when we came back we couldn't find her. We never found her again, which was not difficult because there were so many people shuffling aimlessly around. It was often quite difficult to find a person again.

CXW Why do you think she disappeared?

LC She just shuffled off into the crowd. She didn't know that we were going to go and get something for her. My chum was going to take her into a hut I think and give her the injection, give her a bit of "special" supervision. This one tended to do. You could see that people were, perhaps if you did put a bit time in, see they did get fed, then it was just possible that that particular one might be saved. Others you knew they weren't going to be saved, you could see they were dying.

And one particular instance of this was one lady who had two
This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.
/daughters...

daughters by her. I thought one of her daughters was her mother, and apparently they were twins of eighteen, and they looked like twins of sixty or seventy. I didn't really think there was a hope, but she pleaded with me, and pleaded with me, "Please can you do something?" So I did get them some priority in getting them moved to where they could get the food which they hoped would be of some use. Unfortunately it didn't seem to work any better than the rest, and I gather they died the next day. No, we didnt really use any medicine.

CXW You talked about morphia...?

LC We had a few ampules of morphia, the ones that the army used, the squeeze type where you pulled the case off the needle and then pushed in the needle and then squeezed it like a toothpaste tube. I don't know where we got them from but we managed to get them from somewhere.

CXW Were there drugs which you would have liked which you didn't have?

LC Not really, because it was so difficult supervising them even getting food, I don't know how we could possibly have supervised them getting any/^{actual}medicines really. But I think this was taken care of once they'd gone through the human laundry. Everything was so haphazard until then, 'til the place was actually burnt. This of course I'm talking about No. 1 Camp which was the main camp, in which there were alleged to be about a hundred thousand alive when we got there. Goodness knows whether it was sixty thousand or a hundred and sixty thousand, no way of telling.

CXW Did you go to any other camps?

LC No, I didn't. There was a No 2 Camp, I gather, which was not quite as bad as No 1 Camp, and not so big. That was between No 1 Camp and the place where we were billeted.

CXW You talked about abscesses^s - were they a particular problem?
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LC Yes, well infection as such, but it showed itself on the skin as abscesses, yes, it was a problem. But there were so many problems^s. But this at least, ^{was one} there was something we could do something about. We couldn't do much about the other problems. You couldn't do ^{anything} much about the diarrhoea, you couldn't do anything about the fact they were so emaciated they were going to die just from exhaustion, except feed them, when and where you could.

CXW Some of the other medical students whom I've spoken to have talked about the appalling state of sanitation when they first got there - did that strike you?

LC As far as I'm concerned there wasn't any sanitation at all. The excrement was just between the floorboards that were missing. In all the huts that I went in there were some floorboards that just weren't there, and these were conveniently used by the inmates as a sort of latrine, if you like to call it that. But then outside the huts they just squatted where they could, so it was just as bad really, less concentrated, but just as bad outside the huts.

But the people that I think did even more than we did for their benefit were the Quakers who laid on water, and they got fresh water to Belsen. And they seemed to have no fear, they didn't mind what they did, and they worked very hard, and I had a great respect for them. And of course water was probably more important than the food, and that did provide some minor sanitation later. They could go to the end of a hosepipe and at least get some water from that to wash with. But otherwise I didn't see any sanitation in my hut at all.

CXW So when you arrived was there any water supply at all?

/I...

LC I can't remember that, I can't remember that the water was actually on then, but I think it came through about that time. But I know it was the Quakers who were responsible for it.

CXW They got water through pipes did they?

LC They did. I don't know all the details but I know that the water was the greatest business and they had these pipes in the camp that you could go and get water from.

CXW Were they like standpipes?

LC They were like standpipes, yes.

CXW Was the place covered with flies?

LC I didn't notice flies as a major problem. There were flies, but I didn't notice it as a major problem. When we left England, having been delayed by freezing weather, we arrived and we were in a heatwave. So they cut the speed limit down, I think, to five miles an hour in the camp, because they realised the dust was blowing any infection all round the place. And it was believed at the end that the typhus was mainly dust-borne. It was extremely hot there.

CXW You said that no medical knowledge was needed - do you mean that literally?

LC I don't think any of my knowledge as a medical student, apart from opening the odd abscess, was really of any use, I can't think where. If somebody had pneumonia, you couldn't do anything about it, there was no point in diagnosing it. So I don't know - where would the medicine have come in, knowledge of medicine? Common sense, and as most of us then were, reasonably fit, youth, able to carry on and do things.

CXW What were your emotions in going into the camp?

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LC I think they were a continuation of the scene which I said earlier, that we felt that at least now we could do something for the war effort, relief. Anything that one could do made it seem worthwhile that there'd been a battle really. I always had doubts as a boy and ever since as to what ever was achieved by the First World War. It seemed to me that if we'd lost the First World War I don't know, but I don't see that things would have been all that much worse than when we won it. But I'd no doubts about the second one. If ever there was a war worth fighting I think Belsen confirms it.

CXW But you talked about the lack of fear of the Quakers, did you feel fear and your colleagues?

LC No, I don't remember feeling frightened. I don't think - mind you we didn't come up against any bullets, and I think we were used to going round wards with diseased people. So we had seen people who were dying of cancer who looked just as emaciated as these people. I suppose to some extent we'd met the awful things of life. It was just the enormity of it, you didn't just meet one. But I think because we were all there together as well, all of much the same age, and the evenings I think one got rebound. You didn't sit down and brood. You sat down, all chaps together and made the best of what was a bad job, but I think you got some rebound, and you almost laughed more in the evenings than one normally would.

CXW But were you frightened of catching the infectious diseases?

LC No. I don't think we realised at the time the high risk we were in, which we were, because as you probably know, ten per cent - was it a tenth of us? - I think it was a tenth of us came home with typhus.

CXW Did you catch it?

/No...

LC No, not to my knowl^ledge. No, I felt fine when I came home.

CXW Did it make you hate the Germans?

LC I think that I already hated them, Germans in general, it probably made me hate them more, yes. Yes, it did. But I think when you've lived through four years of war at that age, more than that, wasn't it, but at that age I think we were indoctrinated to hate the Germans to a large extent. We were told of all the awful things they did and I realised that they did when I saw Belsen. And it wasn't just propaganda - yes I hated them more after that.

CXW How long would you spend doing your work, from what time in the morning to what time in the afternoon?

LC I can't remember - I suppose we got to the camp between nine and ten, and I think we went back about four to five as far as I can remember. It wasn't a particularly arduous day, certainly we didn't go in the dark, and we were told not to be out in the dark, to get back before dark.

CXW What about the children, what kind of an impression did they make?

LC Well there weren't many, but I didn't see any children outside Hut 240. Some were reasonably fit, others were suffering in the same way as the older ones. But where it had been possible to get any extra bits, the nurses in Hut 240 by and large favoured the children, but that was an exceptional hut in the right direction.

CXW Was there sign of mental breakdown?

LC Extreme apathy I think was a sign of the mental breakdown. I think when they'd been in this terrible situation for any length of time, I think their minds just had to opt out

/and...

and a mental blank. Whether this ever came back I wouldn't know. I haven't actually met people who've been in Belsen way back, I haven't seen them when they've recovered. I suppose it left a permanent situation in a lot of them.

CXW What about the other extreme: from passivity, was there mania or people behaving oddly or anything of that kind?

LC I didn't see any myself, except to say when my pal had to get in the artillerymen to control what was becoming a mob. But I think this was just to try to get the food.

CXW You've talked about Poles and Rumanians. What other nationalities did you come across?

LC Czechs, French- well I presume they were French. I could speak a bit of French and found one or two who could speak a bit of French so it was just a joint language, but I don't know whether they all came from France. I didn't meet any Russians that I know of, I met a lot of Germans, but probably a lot of German Jews from appearance, but ordinary Germans as well. I got the impression that the chaps who were trained at Huhne probably knew what was going on down the road, and this surely was the situation that they faced when they went into the army. If they didn't do as they were told they were liable to finish up in a place like Belsen. And if they did behave themselves they finished up in a place like Huhne. That's the impression.

CXW Did there seem to be any difference between the men and the women from the point of view of how much they suffered?

LC I don't think so. I didn't see that much of the men because I was on the women's side of the barrier. The two didn't really meet. They did later on but I was always working on the women's side. So I didn't talk to many of the men. I didn't see any gross discrepancy between the two though.

CXW Did you see anything of the people who were responsible for the camp?

LC No. Kramer and the SS men had gone. Kramer was in the cells in Celle, and what remained of the SS men were also there, but there weren't that number left of the Germans, the guards who were there when we occupied it.

CXW What had happened to them?

LC Well I gathered that most of them had disappeared down into the mass graves as they threw in the bodies. They were, I think, burying the dead at the double, at first without any decontamination suits, and I gather that many of them fell in with the dead and couldn't get out again. I don't think anybody tried to help them out.

CXW They were deliberately thrown in?

LC No. I gather they fell in from exhaustion as they were throwing in the bodies, because they were throwing in the bodies from the edge of the graves. The artillerymen we saw for a short time said they'd seen it all, but we only overlapped with them for a day or two, and I did see some photographs that they had taken I'd never have seen otherwise of the mass graves of the Germans chucking in the bodies. But I do gather that many of them just fell into the grave on top of the others and they went on chucking more bodies on top of them and that was that.

CXW Did you see the end of the camp?

LC You mean the final burning?

CXW Yes.

LC No. Three of us, myself and my room mate, David

Bradford, and one of his friends, we thought what we would like while we were out in Germany was to swan off. We weren't particularly fond of ceremonies, and we had this first day off, and we thought we'd swan off and see one of the big towns and what had happened to that. And we swanned off to Brunswick. We hitched a lift to Brunswick and we saw what was left of Brunswick.

But our colleagues told us that we missed quite a ceremony, I gather.

CXW What did they tell you?

LC They said that they were paraded outside the last hut which had been specially decked up with a Swastika and with a picture of Hitler, I gather. And that it was going to be burnt by a flame thrower. And apparently the chap leant on the flame thrower button before he should have done, so I was told, whereupon the sergeant major said "Get that fire out" and some poor chap had to jump on the roof to try and get the fire out. And I gather he got the fire out just in time for the chap to say "I now burn Belsen" and they got him off the roof just as the chap pressed the button to burn the place down again. One tended to tell these stories a lot more than one tended to talk about the camp.

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CXW What did you actually see of Brunswick?

LC Well we saw the devastation of the buildings as we went in, rubble that was all round the place. As we went in we hitched a lift from what had been the autobahn. And the first chap that picked us up was a great big Mercedes occupied by the Colonel of the Grenadier Guards, who asked us where we wanted to go. And we told him, and told him where we'd come from, and he said "Hop in then". And as we entered the outskirts of Brunswick he said "You chaps don't happen to

to know where Conquer Forward is, do you?" And we said "No, we don't, tell us what it is." He said "Oh, it's a big meeting we've got, I just wondered if knew anything about it".

Any way, he swept into the military building in Brunswick, and said "Well there you are chaps, you can get out here and see Brunswick". And what he hadn't said was that we hadn't got any pass to get into Conquer Forward. Any way we went along. Partly, it was big American generals and our generals meeting at this place a sort of military meeting. And we found ourselves having lunch with all these generals. The Americans were very hospitable. And we told them where we'd come from and they gave us a very nice lunch. And we found ourselves sitting next to the colonel who'd brought us in. But then our problem was to get out, but we managed to get out.

CXW Did you actually wander around Brunswick?

LC We wandered, not much, because we were in this place which was closely guarded, the military building which was Conquer Forward, this big military meeting. So we didn't see an awful lot of Brunswick because by the time we got out of the camp we were off on our way home again. I don't know how far it was but it was a fair distance, certainly wouldn't do it now.

CXW Were there Germans wandering around Brunswick?

LC Oh yes, indeed the hitches we got were German cars.

CXW What was their attitude towards you?

LC Sullen, quiet, kept their mouths shut really, did what we asked, I think because they were frightened to do anything else, even though we weren't armed.

CXW Did you come across any hostility from any Germans?

LC No.

CXW What kind of living standards did the German civilians seem to have at the time?

LC We only stopped at one place. We only went into one farmhouse. That was all rather pathetic and we did actually feel terribly sorry for the lady of the house. One of our chaps could speak a bit of German, and he extracted the fact that she had nothing left, that her sons had been killed on the Russian front, her husband had died too and the farm was going to rack and ruin and she didn't seem to be very pleased with the starting of the War any way in the first place. She seemed a very normal sort of person who'd suffered, being on the wrong side, and had suffered most of the things that unfortunate people had suffered in our country as well. We felt rather sorry for her, in fact we felt very sorry for her.

CXW Had the damage to Brunswick been done wholly by air raids from what you could tell?

LC I would think so, yes. I don't think a battle had raged through Brunswick, I think it was the air raid damage, as indeed most of the devastation was at that time because the advance had been very, very rapid through that part, hadn't it.

CXW Was it completely razed?

LC No, there were one or two buildings still standing.