

Dr. Wand, Reel 1. How was it, Dr. Wand, that you came to go to Belsen in the first place?

Well, I was a medical student at Bart's. The London hospitals, as a whole, were asked to send teams of medical students to do civilian relief in, at that time, occupied northwest Europe. Each of the hospitals chose to follow its own policy as to which students should go.

But the policy was that students in their penultimate clinical year should go. Some hospitals sent final year students. Others sent first year clinical students. Bart's happened to choose people who were coming to the end of their intermediate, second clinical year. The way that Bart's set about it is they chose a particular person to raise a team. The person they chose was a chap called Roger Dixey.

He chose the team he wanted to take out. That team, I can recall very well. Do you want to know who it was?

Yes, please.

Well, there was Roger Dixey. There was David Bradford. There was Bill Clark. There was Ian Jackson. I do know, in fact, what happened to all these people after they qualified.

We were all prepared to go to do relief in, at that time, occupied Holland. We were due to do civilian relief. A few days before we went off to northwest Europe, we were told we were not going to occupied Holland, but we were going to Germany and to Belsen.

Belsen had been liberated somewhere around about the second or third week in April. So they kitted us out at [PLACE NAME] Square, British Red Cross. We were given battle dress.

We were immunized. I think our immunizations only took place, more or less, on the eve of departure. So I seem to remember having a very sore arm on the way down to Cirencester.

Immunized with what?

I imagine it was-- I think it must have been purely and simply typhoid, because there was no effective typhus vaccine. That was our chief danger. I have read subsequently we were immunized against typhus, but I simply don't believe it.

There wasn't one. There was no vaccine against typhus. The answer to not getting typhus was not to get bitten by lice who were carrying the typhus germ.

Anyway, we had been previously kitted out. We'd been told we were going to Holland. Then we were called in. I seem to remember very short notice indeed and told no, you're going to Germany. You're going to Belsen. I think we were on our way down to Cirencester within about 24 hours of that.

Had you heard much about the existence of concentration camps before you went?

Well, yes. I mean, Belsen itself had had a tremendous amount of publicity from the time it was liberated. I think it was about the 19th of April, 18, 19. There had been a great deal in the press about Belsen and about Auschwitz and the other concentration camps, which had been overrun by the Russians.

Of course, there had been other camps overrun by the 21st army group. Oh, well, I'd known about concentration camps throughout the war. I had known about them before the war. I mean, Dachau was known about in 1933.

But the idea, whilst one had known about concentration camps where people had a habit of dying quite extraordinarily rapidly from inverted commas, "natural causes," close inverted commas. We hadn't known of them as extermination camps. One had known of them as concentration camps where you were liable to be murdered, where you stood a very small chance of getting out of alive, where one would be imprisoned primarily for one's happening to be born with a

particular religion, or into a particular sect of society, such as being a gypsy.

Indeed, one didn't have to be Jewish. One simply had to be a believing Catholic. One was aware that concentration camps were the fate which would meet what today we call dissidents, people who disagreed with the state, who did not agree with the policies, the people who were not prepared to be yes men. One was aware that in the concentration camps, people got killed, that there was no such thing as justice, that people got killed and that their ashes would be sent to the relatives with a flimsy cover story. One's chances of getting out were slim.

Oh, we knew about them from 1933. It's just that no one wanted to know about them. They commanded little publicity in the British press.

Did you have a conception of what conditions were like for the inmates before you went?

Well, the answer to that is both yes and no. Because one certainly-- there'd been a lot of publicity from the time Belsen had been liberated. There was a lot of publicity from the time Auschwitz and Dachau had been overrun.

There had been a lot of pictures in the British press about what was found at Belsen. Of course, there was always a suspicion that there had been a certain amount of embroidery to the thing to produce effect from a propaganda point of view. So one always was slightly suspicious that, well, things were not quite as bad as they'd been painted. We got a pretty shrewd idea it was pretty awful there, yes.

So when you actually saw conditions there for the first time, what kind of reaction did you have?

I wish I could answer that. I can't remember. All I knew was that the whole picture one saw was a job one had been sent out to do something about, to clear up. It wasn't a question of how one reacted to the whole thing so much as oh, we better do something about this lot. We can't let things go on as they are.

How did you actually get across?

Well, we went on by train from, I suppose, Victoria, was it? I don't know. Paddington, Victoria, it was jolly cold.

We were put in a transit camp near Cirencester. We were fed. We seemed to spend most of the time trying to get in-- we were put in Nissen huts. And I seem to remember my first evening in that sort of uniform was trying to get the stove to go, to try and get some warmth. It was desperately cold.

Next morning, we were taken by truck to an RAF aerodrome whose name was given me. When I went out on the Danish exercise and the Baltic approach exercise last autumn, I had to go via one of the RAF aerodromes. I was told which aerodrome it had been. I've forgotten it, unfortunately. It might have been South Cerney. I'm not sure.

Anyway, we were shoved into Dakotas. I think I'm right in saying that there were nine Dakotas. We were left in the Dakotas all morning, getting colder and colder and colder. There was snow on the ground.

I think a Laffly truck brought us a cup of tea round about middle of the morning. Then about lunchtime they said no flying today and took us off back to this wretched transit camp where we were slightly better organized. We at least got the stoves going a bit better that night.

The same thing happened next day. We were shoved in the aircraft, and we were left there. Two aircraft, in fact, started up engines and got away. One of which landed at, I believe, Croydon because of weather.

The other of which got through-- the one I was on-- we got through. I remember we flew over occupied Holland, and we turned back because of weather over Eindhoven. We came back. We landed at Brussels.

I can remember this quite vividly because although I imagine they'd had plenty of time since the previous autumn for clearing the airfield, there was, I remember, an aircraft which had got off the taxiway which blew up on a mine at

Brussels airport.

But anyway, they got us off the aircraft. We were shoved into Brussels, which was really rather nice at that time. Because it was rather like going back to a pre-war capital because you could buy vacuum flasks.

We were put in a barracks, the St. Jean, Barracks St. Jean. We were ranking as, in event of capture, we were ranking as sergeants. But I seem to remember that we were put in barracks, into a junior ranked barracks, or NCO barracks.

We didn't think much of that, and we told them so. So they switched us over and put us in officer barracks, which we were much happier about. It was quite civilized. It was warm, hot showers. The food was good. They flew us off next day.

We were the first of the Dakotas to get in. Now I think we landed at Celle. Whether there was an airport at Celle or not, I don't know. Whether we had thought that what is today regarded as Hanover airport was Celle, I simply don't know. But we thought it was Celle.

I remember the airfield very well. I remember coming into land with the Dakota because it was a grass runway. There were some not very well filled in bomb craters on the runway. We did a fair amount of bouncing as we came in.

There were a lot of wrecked German aircraft around the peritrack. There were some very well built and remarkably little damaged aircraft buildings, aerodrome buildings, which were named after German air aces of the previous war, Richthofen house, that sort of thing.

They were built, obviously, to a very high standard of internal-- they were very nicely finished. A lot of wrecked aircraft around the peritrack.

Whilst we were waiting for transport to take us to what is now known as Hohne, which is the barrack area, I remember seeing a one of the German jets going overhead at an enormous height. I'd never seen one of those before. I think it was the Comet 163 Messerschmitt. I think that's what it was.

Anyway, we were taken by lorry to the barrack area at Hohne, which at that time was the area where it had been a training school for, I think, the Germans raised armored divisions there. It always has been, I believe, since we've had armor, it always has been an area for the raising of armored divisions and regiments. It's still used as a tank training ground, the LÄ¼neburg Heath.

This had been, I believe, that either Panzer or SS Panzer regiments have been raised and trained in that place. We were put into a barrack block which, by comparison with our transit camp, it was like walking into a palace. It was beautifully built and it was relatively clean. It was quite well-furnished.

There was hot and cold. There was, if my memory is correct, there was certainly cold running water. I think there was hot running water, too.

It was fair littered with bits and pieces that one would expect of a retreating army, helmets, and bits of weaponry, and so on. We certainly settled into a very comfortable barrack block.

We waited. They didn't want us ready to start work until everyone else had arrived. We had taken off from Brussels on the early morning of, I think it was May the 1st.

The other aircraft, if you remember most of them were still near Cirencester. One was at Croydon. We'd got through to Brussels, and we'd then gone on to Celle. We were then waiting the others to come through.

I did think we went into the camp before the others had arrived. I might have done. I can't remember.

But the others had arrived. They got away that day. They had all arrived by late afternoon, evening. If my memory is

correct, we first went into the camp as a composite whole the following morning, which was May the 2nd. But I'm not sure of dates.

We were all housed in these barracks. There was plenty of space. We had lots of room. They were comfortable. We were living in a mess. We messed communally, the medical students. It was a German officer's mess, which on subsequent visits back to Hohne, I've tried to identify and I've been unable to do so.

I can remember the mess very clearly because it was a very pleasant building. I seem to remember it as being like a large English country house. half-timbered type of house, overlooking pleasant lawns going down to a lake. That's what I remember. Of course, memory may be fallible.

It was a very well-furnished mess. I think Roger Dixey, in one of the BBC programs which were broadcast earlier this year, mentioned the chandelier and the English sporting prints. I can certainly corroborate that. Indeed, I mentioned exactly the same things when I was giving an interview for ITN earlier this year. I can remember the crystal chandeliers, the English sporting prints, the general feeling of opulence, and well-being of the whole mess, very comfortable, very comfortable, indeed.

We ate there. It was our communal area. We lived in the barracks. These barracks, of course, still exist. It still is part of a tank training area.

So we all went up. We went down. We were taken off next morning, in three tonners, three ton trucks, to the concentration camp, which was about a mile and a half down the road. We entered the camp into the admin area.

Now the camp ran along the side of the road. The size of the camp, I would find very difficult to remember the precise size. I have been back subsequently. I've read how many hectares it covered.

But of course today, going back to the camp it's a very difficult exercise. Because one can't orientate at all. I'll probably come back to this later in this interview. But orientation is very difficult.

Now as you know, today, the camp is called the Memorial. No one knows there's a camp there. The local population never heard of a concentration camp. But there's a Memorial.

The entrance to the Memorial, as it's called today, was not the entrance to the concentration camp as we knew it. Going from the direction Hohne Camp to the entrance to what is called the Memorial, where you've got the mass graves, and the museum, and so on, about half a mile before you get to the entrance to the Memorial, a track runs off to the right. You're coming in the direction from Hohne.

A track runs off to the right. That's for a ride through the woods. That, in fact, was the previous camp main entrance. It's all grown up now.

Previously, the camp was-- the woods which today envelop the heath-covered area were not there. It was an exposed area. It was totally visible from the road. One could see from the road the camp, where today, of course, you see a swathe of trees.

Then of course, the heather-covered Memorial area, the camp as was, the bleak, awful camp, is now no longer visible from the road. But it certainly was then.

Anyway, the lorries, the three ton lorries disembarked us at the entrance. Of course, the first thing that happened was that-- and this became very much part of our lives-- the first thing that happened was that we had to go through an anti-louse powder sort of area, where we were squirted with either DDT or AL 63. They used both.

This was a routine. Whenever we entered the camp, we were squirted with the powder. Whenever we left the camp, we were squirted with the powder. The powder was dispensed in enormous sort of powder syringes. They were very big. Don't know how. Presumably, I don't think they were compressed air worked. I think they were just ordinary

mechanical syringes.

But great gouts of powder would be squirted down one's neck, up one's sleeves, down one's trousers, in one's cap. We were wearing battledress. We were fair doused with the powder. We were doused with the powder, again, when we left the camp.

The object, obviously, was to prevent us getting lousy. Well, it did and it didn't. When we got back to our billets in the evenings after our day's work, we were not lousy in that we were not covered with lice that were alive.

We were still lousy, but the lice were dead. We got lice-infested, certainly. But by the time we managed to find them, they were dead lice.

Anyway, I think we were then addressed by the principal medical officer, who I think at that time was Colonel Johnson and by Dr. Meiklejohn, who was the UNRRA doctor, who was really the person who was there to coordinate our efforts and to direct them. There was a natural leader amongst the students. I think there were 90-- I can't remember if there were 96 students. I'm told that's wrong.

I'm told, though, in fact, there were 95 or 97 but not 96, but something of that order. There was a chap called Crisp, Tom Crisp. I think it was Tom Crisp. I don't know what his hospital was. I rather think it was either Kings or UCH.

He had seen service. He was older than the rest of us. He had seen service in the Western desert. He had gotten MC.

He was the person who clearly was our natural spokesman and leader. We accepted him simply and easily as the person who was the CO of the students. But Meiklejohn from UNRRA, he coordinated our efforts, and I think he told us what he thought our first job was to be. We were allocated huts and off we went to find them.

One hut each?

Do you know, I can't remember. I think it was one hut each. But some people had two huts.

Now my memory suggests that most of us had one hut. But my memory equally suggests that where two people were allocated to a hut, they worked more than doubly as effective as one person working on his own. I remember in particular there were two old friends of mine because I'm sure the people working, when they were working together, they worked very, very much, much more effectively than when one was one up.

I remember in particular the two people-- what was his name? Ian Whimster, who became a pathologist at St. Thomas' and Alan McCausland who became a GP, I think, in that part of London eventually. Alan McCausland and Ian Webster I had known when I was at Cambridge with them. We had both been members of the Cambridge University home guard. Alan McCausland and I were both officers in the Cambridge University home guard.

I remember that they were working very, very well together. But the job of the hut, well, the hut, again, I would have to consult diaries, and so on. But memory suggests the huts were about 40, 50 yards long, about 20 yards wide, and they were divided into two parts by a central corridor, a door at either end, and a corridor running down the long axis of the hut in its center. On the one side were purely and simply accommodation units. Just one--