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Dr. Wand, Reel 2.

The central corridor down there the hut, which bisected the hut in its long axis, on the one side was a single very, very large room filled with bunks. On the other side of the corridor, there was another one or possibly two rooms. I can't be quite sure about this. But there was the ablutions area, the lavatories and ablutions area, which was simple open sinks with nonrunning taps.

There was no running water. The water had ceased. The lavatories had ceased to function. The ablutions and toilet part did not fill the whole of the length. It filled a small part.

The rest was, again, accommodation area with bunks. There was either one or possibly two, I think there may well have been one at each end, separate small rooms. These were rooms which had been used by the Blockleiten, the block leaders.

These Blockleiten were in a curious sort of position. They were internees. They were inmates. They were victims.

Yet, they were not victims because they were in a favored position. They were trustees, and they were well fed. It had been generally believed that they had received food both for keeping discipline within the huts, and they were usually quite attractive women and presumably what was believed was true, that they had been the SS's prostitutes.

Now the huts themselves. I'll come back to the camp after I've described the hut.

I can't be sure that I've got the size of the hut right. I think they were about 40 yards long. I think they were about 20 yards wide. They were single story. They were wooden structures.

They were relatively recently built. They had only been built in the previous two or three years, I understand. I have subsequently been led to believe that they were, in fact, only about three years old.

Parts of the floor were missing. The lavatories were not functioning. There was no running water.

There was something on the order of about 400 people within the hut and an unknown number of dead in the hut. There were three bunks, each tier of bunks was three high. There would be two or three people in each bunk. There would be no mattress. There would be lying on boards.

The dead were mixed up with the living. You would find that, in a bunk, there would be one or two people alive, one, perhaps a person, one or two dead. The dead totally indifferent to whether or not the person they were sharing the bunk with was alive or dead. The fact they were sharing a bunk with a dead person seemed to produce no emotional response at all. They were just totally indifferent to it.

The floors were covered with feces. The feces was literally inch or more thick. The holes in the floorboards were said to have been due to two reasons. Firstly, that as they'd been through a very cold winter and anything which would produce any warmth was something which was seized upon. If they had a chance to burn a floorboard or two, then good luck to them.

Because these people were dressed in these awful blue and white-striped prison pajamas. They had been through a winter wearing that. To have survived, even well-fed, a winter wearing those pajamas and nothing else was something which one just doesn't know how they managed to do. It was quite incredible they managed to survive.

Anyway, they were lying in feces. The bunks were filled with people, two or three to each tier, three tier bunks. Where the floors were intact, there were people lying on the floors. Some with blankets, some without, or wearing these awful, filthy, blue and white-striped uniforms.

The other reason for the holes in the floor, it appears, was that-- or whether it was the reason for, I can't say-- but this is

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how they had come to be used. As they had become more and more starved and weaker, so it had become more and more difficult to drag their dead out. And it became much easier to tip the dead, whilst they still had the strength, to tip the dead into the foundations of the hut through the holes in the floor. Which is, of course, what they were doing.

In the bunks themselves, they were lying in liquid feces. They couldn't move. Everyone seemed to have diarrhea. The feces was dripping from the top to the middle, from the middle to the bottom bunk, and then on to the floor. They were covered with feces.

The overwhelming impression both of the camp and of the huts, I suppose I've come on the huts first, because they were the overwhelming memory. They were not one's overwhelming impression of the camp. One's overwhelming impression of the camp I'll come to later.

But my memory brings the huts, the interior of the huts back not logically, but this is what comes first to memory, the interior of the huts. It was the smell. There are two things. There was the smell, and there was the apathy.

The smell was something which was really absolutely appalling. It never, never, never left one. The whole of the time we were in Germany, the whole time we were doing the Belsen thing, we never lost the smell.

We took it out of the camp with us. We slept with it. We woke with it. That awful smell, the smell of rotting bodies, feces.

Just as the smell of corruption, it was an awful, awful smell. We never left it. It never left us.

The other thing, of course, which I suppose was the most vivid impression of the huts was the awful apathy, the total apathy. There were 400 dead. They were technically alive, but their eyes were dead.

They were totally apathetic. They didn't care a damn what happened. They'd gone through more than they could cope with. They just didn't care anymore, the awful apathy.

So our first job was to clear that lot up. As I say, there were about 400 people in the hut. Mine was a women's hut. It was Hut 219. It was a women's hut.

The blockleiter came forward. Of course, she was not starving. I don't think she'd really quite twigged that they were under new management. But it was made fairly clear fairly quickly that there were.

There was a regiment of Hungarian troops present in the area. You've probably already got recorded how the liberation of Belsen came about. But the commander or chief of staff of the first German para army had approached the general staff of the British 8th Corps saying they'd got a situation at Belsen which was out of hand and that it was a typhus area. This was about the 12, 13 of April.

The British sent in, I think it was an RSC captain to find out what this was all about, with a Jeep. He reported back saying yes, indeed. It was an appalling situation.

A special truce was made. Fighting was going on all around. But it was made into a special truce area.

They defined a neutral area around the camp. The German troops, the German army said we were guaranteed that the SS would remain in position, and we could do what we liked with them.

There was a regiment of Hungarians. They were surrendered to us. I think this must be almost unique in the history of modern warfare. They were surrendered to us and allowed to retain their arms.

This Hungarian regiment was armed. The rank and file were very much peasantry. The officers were very dapper officers in the sort of pattern that one had come to believe the Italians had been like, the very well-dressed and not very effective officer. The rank and file retained their rifles, and the officers retained their revolvers.

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Anyway, these Hungarians were allocated to us as pairs of hands. If my memory is correct, each of the huts that we were looking after was given a pair of Hungarians to act as pairs of hands as carriers as sorry as effectors. And I had a pair of Hungarians who turned out to be, eventually, were very willing. They worked very hard.

Our first job was we got to try and produce some semblance of order within the hut. Of course, the first thing to do was to get the dead out. This is where the Hungarians were enormously helpful.

Now we had been told the conditions in the huts were so bad we had to work with gas capes on. There was no specific protective clothing that we had. But not like we have in today's nuclear war situation, where you've got really effective protective clothing.

We had gas capes. I think we had gas overshoes. I don't remember wearing those, but we certainly used the gas capes. I think it must have been certainly the first day, we carried out instructions and wore our gas capes.

But you couldn't work in them. They were too heavy. They were too hot to work in. It was very hot weather.

After a very cold spring, when we left England, there was snow on the ground, we'd suddenly gone-- and there it had been very cold there, too-- we'd suddenly gone overnight into a hot summer, really hot central European summer. It hadn't improved the louse situation, which hadn't improved the smell situation, and had made working even more difficult, particularly in the huts.

Anyway, we struggled through that first day wearing our gas capes. But thereafter, we just said, oh, no, can't do this. We're just going to take our chance and got rid of the damn things and worked in shirt sleeve order. We were working shirt sleeve order, battledress trousers, shirt sleeve order, boots, gaiters.

Anyway, that first day, we got the Hungarians and the Blockleiten and ourselves. We got the dead off the floors. We got the dead out of the bunks. We got the dead out of the foundations.

Whilst one took one's turn in getting the dead off the floors and the dead out of the bunks, we didn't have any particular compunction really in getting the Hungarian soldiers to do the dead out of the foundation's clearing. Because as we worked through the huts, we were beginning to realize that the Hungarian soldiers had been very willing accomplices of the SS. They had not been particularly kindly jailers.

How did you find that out?

From the inmates. The Hungarians had been not as bad as the SS, but they had not been far short. They had been quite willing to be cruel. So the Hungarians got the dead out of the foundations.

Now we had to get some of the feces up, too. This was really the first and second days, I suppose. I think it must have taken us a good two days before we could get the huts relatively feces free, if not smell free. So the first two days were really a question of feeding, getting bodies out, and getting feces out.

I suppose at this stage I ought really to describe what the camp was like. The camp was set amongst trees, groups of trees. These wooden huts, such as I have described, there was an administrative area where there were camp offices, and so on.

Then there was a central road, earth road, going through the camp with watchtowers and barbed wire. On the one side, going down camp from the administrative offices on the left was, I believe, if my memory is correct, was the men's lager, men's camp. On the right was the women's camp, the women's lager.

Now these huts were loosely grouped. There were several kitchen areas. There were areas where kitchens were. I presume these had not been set up after the liberation. I think these must have been present before.

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It was a pretty rough, sort of hutted small areas with field cooking equipment. It's possible that we may have supplemented cooking equipment that was found there. But it was typical of any fairly static field unit type cooking equipment, that is big cauldrons, and so on.

Now a kitchen area would serve a particular group of huts. Just as the Blockleiten, the block leaders were not starved, nor were the people who were running the kitchens. We were subsequently told, again, this might be pure hearsay. I have no means of verifying it. Certainly, they were not starving people running the kitchens.

It was subsequently told us, you see, we were with these people for four or five weeks, the survivors in the huts, we got to know them quite well. The language problem tended to sort itself out as time went by. But if you can remind me to come back to the language problem later.

Well, I'd picked up quite a lot of what had been going on in the camp. OK, we were not able to converse fluently one with another, as you would with your fellow countrymen. But one got a pretty good idea what was going on.

It had been said, it was said that the communists in the camp had made an SS man to the situation. They had made an appreciation of the situation. They reckoned that not many people were going to get out of that camp alive. The majority were going to die, either be killed or to die.

It was important that those who survived should be the right people to survive. They reckoned that the most important people to survive were the communists because they were politically correctly motivated. Now the best way to ensure the communists were to survive was for the communists to have control of the kitchens. So the kitchens tended to be commie controlled.

Now I don't know whether it's true or not. But we widely believed it to be true. There was quite a lot of-- I think there was quite a lot of evidence at the time that it was true.

Now as you walked into the camp administrative area, I told you about the one was dusted and the one had-- we'd taken over the admin area. Then there was this long corridor going down between, when I say corridor, this is a long road with barbed wire either side, between the male and the female camps, around the perimeter of course, where the high barbed wire, fences, and the watchtowers.

We were never quite sure. There were sort of things in the admin area of the camp which some of us said oh, those who were more charitably inclined say oh, those are for drying hoses, fire hoses.

But to the majority of us, they looked awfully like gallows. Those were in the admin area. But most of us thought they were gallows. But as I say, some people thought they were hose drying racks. But it could have been either.

Then there was what became later a very big business, the human laundry, which was situated in the admin area. Of course, the policy right from the beginning was to get people out of that awful place into proper surroundings. You couldn't take them out until they'd been cleaned.

The army had set up a human laundry, or was in the process of setting up a human laundry which consisted of trestle tables, water supply, trestle tables, a clothing dump, a stretcher dump, old clothing to be discarded, fresh clothing to be provided after the inmates would be brought out of the huts, hosed down, washed down, deloused, and then put into fresh clothes, and then evacuated from the camp. So they evacuated, an enormous number of people had evacuated.

It was reckoned that when the primary task, of course, was to save life and to get people fed, to get them out of the camp into proper conditions where they could be nursed and looked after and saved from dying. But you couldn't take people out of their camp until they had been cleaned of the filth and the lice. Everyone, but everyone in the camp were visibly lousy. There was no such thing as the non-lousy person. They were all lousy.

The majority had got diarrhea. They were all, with the exceptions of very few, the Blockleiten, the kitchen people, and some of the children who had been sacrificed for. obviously, the inmates, they made an enormous effort to try and

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survive the children.

But everyone was going to burn. They were walking skeletons. Total apathy, the picture of the camp, the huts, the dust, everything was done. There was a lot of dust, the smell, the dust, the apathy.

Looking back on it, dust was a very big feature of the camp. Because it was very dry. Everywhere you walked, you raised a cloud of dust. One knew perfectly well we wanted to try to keep the dust down. The dust was carrying infection and smell and everything else. It was just plain unpleasant.

What did you have in the way of equipment and drugs?

Almost nothing. You see, there was a war still being fought. Whilst we got British army formations, there was 11 field ambulance. I remember that particularly because-- I'm digressing. 11 field ambulance is an East Anglian field ambulance in Ipswich. It was based on Ipswich. Its commanding officer was a Colonel Gonin.

The reason I remember it so clearly is that in my subsequent military career as a territorial army doctor, this was a 11th field amateur territorial army field ambulance. when amalgamation took place in 1966, '67, the unit I was in, which was 10 General Hospital at that time, became 256 General Hospital.

It took the three field ambulances, the East Anglian field ambulances, 161, 162, and 163, and it amalgamated with those and with 57 General Hospital to form a single TA general hospital, two five seven. 161 was the direct successor to 11 field ambulance.

In fact, I became, eventually, the CEO of what was in essence the successor unit of 11 field ambulance. I'm currently its honorary colonel. I feel particularly proud this should be so.

But anyway, there was a CCS. There was 32 CCS. There was an anti-aircraft regiment. There was a control unit.

There were a few British army units which had been allowed to be in reserve at Belsen. But their primary function was not to look after Belsen. Their primary function was to back up the 21st army group in trying to get that war over.

There was very little to spare. Most of what we had was captured German equipment. The war was still on.

The captured German equipment was very poor stuff indeed. Dressings were both very scarce and of exceptionally poor quality. We had a German synthetic preparation which was used by the Germans in the treatment of scabies. Not only were lice, it was lice, universal, almost universal with scabies, they all had scabies. The biggest bunch of scabies you would ever see in 40,000 people with scabies.

Anyway, there was this stuff called Mitigal, which I think it was a German synthetic anti-scorbutic substance which is still being made by a Swiss firm, I believe. I think they call it Eurax.

There was a certain amount of sulfonamide. There was quite a lot of opium in one form or another, and it was much needed, both as a pain reliever and to help stop the universal diarrhea. Virtually, that's about all there was.

There was very, very little in the way of medication or equipment. But then even if there had been, the problem was one couldn't have used it because the problem was too overwhelming. One medical student and two Hungarian soldiers are not really a very effective medical team for 400 people where the definition of a well person is a person who could stand.

If a person could stand, he was well. If he couldn't stand, he was ill. This was the arbitrary classification we had to use, whether the individual could literally stand unaided. If he could, he was regarded as a well person and the fact that he could stand meant he was potentially usable as a pair of hands.

Our chief initial thing was to get to some form of sanitation, some form of feeding going. The British soldier, when he

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came into the camp, with enormous generosity had given them all their food and killed an enormous number of people.

Dr. Wand, Reel 3.

I should perhaps amplify to suggest that the British soldier was a worthy successor of his SS counterpart. This is not so. What had happened was these poor, pathetic skeletons of people, the British soldier had simply given these people his rations, his bully beef, his biscuits, his field rations.

Of course, these people had not been used to eating for so long. They were starved. They'd been starved for weeks. They were in the last stages of starvation.

If you give a person who is literally dying from starvation bully beef and hard tack, you tend to kill them. And they did. They died. A lot did.

So you were saying you had to organize the feeding?

That was a very important part of our function, yes. A very important part of our function was to organize the feeding. That was very difficult. Because we didn't know, no one seemed to know what these people needed in the way of food.

Because even in the last stages of starvation and dehydration, because there had been no water supply to the camp for a long time, too, and the British had had to re-establish a water supply, we didn't know what these people could eat. There was this curious condition called famine edema, where when a person goes beyond a certain stage of being starved. Some individuals, and we don't know why some individuals did and others didn't, instead of becoming a skin and bone, literally, a skeleton that's covered with skin, in fact, got a fluid retention which blew them up into balloons.

Presumably it was happening because they'd gone into kidney failure and this was a fluid retention due to renal failure. But of course, we have very, very limited means of investigation. An army mobile path lab was working, but the task, again, was quite overwhelming for it.

The general hospitals which were on the spot were trying to establish hospital areas for evacuation. But they certainly couldn't do much to help us with the people still in the camp, only the ones we could get out. So our chief thing was this question of nutrition.

We have been told that a preparation called Bengal famine mixture was going to be the appropriate way of feeding them. This had been a mixture which had been used in India in the Bengal famine of some two or three years, I think it was two or three years previously, and apparently it had been successful. But what was wanted, the Bengal famine mixture was put up by our kitchens was too sweet for them. They couldn't take it. It was unpalatable because it was too sweet.

What they seem to want were soups, particularly with potato. Potatoes were highly prized. They wanted thin potato soups. they seemed to be able to keep those down. they seemed to be able to want to take them.

They quite liked the glucose vitamin C drinks that we were able to produce for them. We brought some glucose vitamin C powder over with large quantities of it. We also brought over some stuff called protein hydrolysate, which tasted just about as filthy as the name suggests that it probably should taste. It was awful stuff.

It was reconstituted. They tried flavoring it. They tried disguising it. They tried putting it in things. It still smelt like casein glue, the awful stuff. Indeed, I believe in certain cases, they even tried to see whether it would work as an intravenous drip, which, if my memory is correct, simply killed people.

But feeding was a major problem. I suppose that looking back on the whole thing objectively, one says so far there are three spheres in which we were able to do something. One was the sanitation, trying to clean the place up a bit. The second was in the form of medical treatment, where our abilities, we were overwhelmed by numbers. The equipment we had to play with was very small, very sparse.

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Then what was the third, the third sphere was feeding. We didn't know what sort of food they should be having, and we hadn't got it anyway. It was a ridiculous situation that we were having to scrounge for food for these people.

We were. I spent a lot of time scrounging for food for what we believed to be the right sort for them, scrounging for potatoes, arguing with cookhouses, trying to tell the army cooks, catering people, and the cook who had taken the cook houses over, what we wanted for these people. They're telling us no, you don't want that. You want what we're going to give you. Having to argue with them, Ridiculous.

What were we there for? That was very difficult to answer. Because clearly, on the face of it, we shouldn't have been very effective.

Because we weren't really fulfilling a need, really meeting a need under any of three headings, were we? Neither medical help, nor really, we weren't producing decent accommodations. You couldn't in those awful huts. Nor were we producing effective feeding.

Could I ask you more about the diseases? You've already mentioned scabies and typhus. What were the other diseases?

Diarrhea was universal. Whether it was infective diarrhea or nutritional diarrhea, one doesn't know. We didn't know at the time. We assumed it was probably nutritional diarrhea.

Scabies, yes, universal. Typhus, we had an outbreak of typhus. They were all lousy, and there was a lot of typhus. We had typhus in the huts. Tuberculosis, we assumed that everyone was tuberculous.

Indeed, when they got out, of those who did survive, quite a lot were. Infections, skin infections, gangrene, a condition called cancrum oris, where you get the mouth sort of dissolving into a mess of nothingness, where the tissues simply eat themselves away into huge ulcers, cancrum oris. What we called decubitus sores, which are pressure sores from lying on bare boards. Where the sores were pressure sores in which the bone of the back bone was exposed.

Gangrene. I believe there was very little actual typhoid, if any. As far as I'm aware there was no cholera. Respiratory diseases, chiefly tuberculosis, enormous, enormous skin abscess-- subcutaneous abscesses.

Primary starvation, it was starvation as a disease. These weren't hungry people. These were people who were starving to death.

What about mental complaints? Was it possible to detect them?

No. The fact that they had survived so long suggested that most of the people there were survivors, using the word in its current meaning of people who were mentally tough to survive. Don't forget most of them have got the tattoos on their arms, meaning they'd suffered the forced march from Auschwitz when the Germans evacuated Auschwitz, Oswiecim, in the face of the Russian advance, they had evacuated people.

I believe that it some of it was probably done in cattle trucks. I don't know. But quite a lot, I believe, in fact, were forced marched from Oswiecim to Wilson.

Most of these people were Auschwitz survivors. Too have got that far, they must have been very tough people indeed.

So there weren't people wandering around raving?

Oh, no. No. You'd find them desperately withdrawn. Quite the reverse, raving no. Withdrawn, yes.

When I said to you earlier on, when I was talking earlier on about the overwhelming impression one got of the place was of apathy, they were dead. Their eyes were dead. They weren't responding to anything. They were totally apathetic. They didn't care what was going to happen anymore.

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One would be walking round, one would be walking about the camp, and you would see one of these pathetic creatures in their prison pajamas, perhaps their blanket draped around their shoulders, who just literally suddenly dropped down dead in front of you, just like that. Again, coming back to the very way I should have been describing the camp originally, in each of the camps, there were the huts. There were the huts.

It was not unpleasant countryside. It was heather-covered countryside. Outside each of the huts, there were bodies scattered around.

The Hungarian troops and the British troops with German Wehrmacht-- I think the SS had been put under lock and key at that stage, or were working on the burial sites. I don't think they let any SS around and about unless very closely supervised. I think there were Wehrmacht, a certain amount of Hungarians were used for clearing up the campsite, of keeping the body count down, and with getting the bodies transferred to the burial areas.

But outside each hut, what one used to do is you used to pile your daily dead like milk bottles. There'd be a pile of dead by the front door of each of the huts, a pile of dead waiting collection. The first 24 hours I took over Hut 219, the first 24 hours I think we had-- I think that night I think I had between 40 and 50 die. I think it was about 40 who died that night.

Do you know how many survived in your hut?

The answer to that is that my hut had been totally evacuated by about the 16th of May. I think that we evacuated 220 out of the 400. The death rate went down. First night, I think, it's very difficult to remember figures precisely. But I think we lost 38 to 42 the first night.

Then there came a day, and this was the turning point, there was a day when nobody had died in that hut. For a whole 24 hours, that was a real turning point. That had been the first time that had happened. There had been no death in that hut for many, many months. That took place about the 11th day.

You talked about the SS people. But was there any retaliation against the people who had been responsible?

Don't know. Don't know. There might well have been. Don't forget, we'd only-- the British went into Belsen about the-- by the time the special truce area had been sorted out, by the 18th or 19th of April.

And we didn't arrive in the camp until about the 1st of May, 1st, 2nd of May. I expect they were-- I think this is one of the reasons that the Hungarians were allowed to retain their arms. Of course, there was a fear that those who were fit enough to do so, of the inmates-- we came to know them, by this stage, as DPs, Displaced Persons. And there was fear that they would in fact get out and raise hell in the local towns. They would, in fact, indulge in an orgy of looting and sheer destruction.

They were too weak to do it. But this, I think, was what was-- I think this is why the Hungarians were allowed to retain their arms. Did the inmates ever express to you any desire for revenge?

No.

Well, I mean, one can-- I mean, there are certain salient-- salient things, which about-- which were landmarks. There, one would have thought that there would be absolute joy when their tormentor, Himmler, was picked up. He was picked up in LÃ¼neburg. And he went and bumped himself off with a cyanide capsule. And we knew about that, pretty damn quick, because LÃ¼neburg wasn't all that far away.

And we tell our hut, oh, Himmler's dead. It was like announcing that the fact of the coming of Christ to a fishmonger's stall of dead fish-- absolute no reaction whatsoever. Then there was the news of Hitler's death. Hitler's dead-- the guy who started the whole thing. Total deadpan. They couldn't care less. No reaction whatsoever. The war-- the war is over. No reaction at all. Complete deadpan.

The only thing which did produce a reaction was when there had been no death for a day. And that, to them, that was really miracle time.

Do you think they knew who you were?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. They knew that we were out there to help. And I think that's what-- I think that's what our actual function was to make it that they felt that there was someone caring at long last.

How apprehensive were you, personally, about infection?

Not. Just the luck of the draw. If we got infected, that's just tough. I mean-- and Andrew Dossetor-- Andrew Dossetor got typhus. And Derek Marsh, who was one of Bart's team, he got a very unpleasant facial abscess. He's dead now. He had a coronary and died a few years ago. But he had a facial abscess, which hospitalized him.

We all had diarrhea. Most of us had infections of one sort or another. But it didn't-- it's not a loss or something to be terribly worried about, which we just accepted as, if it happened to us, it was the luck of the draw, which was tough.

You've talked about the attempt of the British troops, before you came, to feed them.

Yes.

But the description you give of the huts gives the impression that practically nothing had been done before you came.

Well, they had done their best. They couldn't. There was nothing they could do the. Number of troops, who had been detached from the battle, was too small to make any real difference. It was much more important that they should be trying to get things organized for the eventual evacuation of the camp, than they should be using their meager resources for working, ineffectually, which is what they would be doing.

You were in charge of a women's hut.

Yes.

But do you think that there was any difference between the men and the women in who suffered most?

I've no idea. I have no idea. I can't say. The policy was, systematically, of course, as you know, to prepare hospital areas in the Hohne area. Make the barracks, that we were living in, into a hospital. And this was reflected, of course, in the fact that the spaciousness, with which we were able to live, gradually contracted until we were nice and packed tight, in overcrowded conditions, in order to produce a hospital accommodation.

If you go to Hohne today, which is a British-- it's a British headquarters in Germany, a part of our NATO commitment. And you go to the NAAFI there, we knew that NAAFI. And it hasn't changed, really. It's the roundhouse. It was a beautifully built, beautifully designed, beautifully built, recreational hall. I don't know whether it was a hall for junior ranks or for officers. If it was for junior ranks, it must have been the most palatial junior rank NAAFI, for the German junior ranks, that there ever could have been. If it was for officers, it was certainly right up to officer expectations. It was beautifully built, beautifully designed.

Now, we took the whole place over and made that into a hospital. That happened to be part of my stint. My particular hut was evacuated into the roundhouse. Now, we set up where you currently got the NAAFI, the floor where everything is sold, the counters and so on. And we set up about 500 or 600 beds.

What would have been a beer cellar, a sort of beer cellar terrace, which I seem to remember I was looking after that. I think I had 70 beds up there. And our policy was to try to evacuate the sick, to separate the well from the sick, and to evacuate the sick into hospitals, into makeshift hospital conditions, which were being prepared for us in the Hohne area.

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And as the huts were evacuated, they were going to be burnt down. They were absolute pits of pestilence. God knows how many bodies got burned in the foundations of those huts when they went off. And then, of course, eventually, there was the final clearing of the last hut.

And there was a ceremonial burning down. They were burnt down by the use of flame throwing [INAUDIBLE] carriers. The last hut got set fire to slightly premature there, because someone pressed the trigger before they were ready to-- before the speeches had been made. Anyway, it went up.

I suppose, in retrospect, I think almost the most distressing thing of all, in retrospect, was that the poor devils, in the huts, when it came to evacuating, they didn't want to go. They just didn't want to go. They didn't want to leave.

Just because of the fear of the unknown, you mean?

I think so. Because something had been achieved within the hut. They had managed to achieve something within the hut that they had. The awfulness of the hut, which was still awful, was still less awful than it had been. They had formed a corporate identity, with themselves, at long last that they didn't want to be separated from the people they've been with.

They wanted some sort of continuity. It represented home. And they didn't want to be separated. And of course, we were able to manage this. We were able to see that the huts that-- huts were evacuated, as a whole, they were kept together. Of course, evacuation-- and again, memory is not very clear on this.

But evacuation of the huts had happened in two phases. Because I remember, one phase, I think after a few days, after about a week, nine days, a hut had been evacuated, completely, close to mine. I think it was the next door. And I think it was 220. And it had been able to be evacuated completely. And it had been able to be cleaned properly. And some form of makeshift hospital accommodation, as a temporary expedient, had been able to be set up. So we were able to evacuate into a slightly better hut in parallel before we were able to get them out of the camp.

I was going to, earlier on-- I said I'd come back to it, this question of language. The inmates all spoke Polish, in essence, because most of them had come from Poland. I think most of them had been lifted in from Krakow. There were Hungarians.

In fact, although it's difficult to remember particular deaths, I do remember two particular deaths. One was the death of a girl, who, following the first time that there had been no death for 24 hours, the great event, the real V-day, this was the girl who went and broke the sequence. And she was a young girl. There were two, it was she and her sister. And they were both Hungarians. They were Jewish Hungarians from Budapest.

And they were two sisters. One of whom was about-- the older was about 15, and the younger was about 13. And it was the 13-year-old. And it was a hot afternoon. And I remember the occasion very clearly. The older sister came to see me to tell me to tell her younger sister was unwell. She got tummy ache.

I went and had a look at her. And indeed, she was an ill girl. And she had got-- she obviously got something wrong with her tummy. There was a field ambulance. One of the medical officers from the field ambulance in my part of the camp, I went out to get him. From the time she presented, with abdominal pain, to the time she was dead was well under an hour. And she died from acute appendicitis. She had appendicitis. And she had died. She died in less than an hour from the time it presented.

The other was, I remember, was-- again, it was in the very early days of the hut, when a pathetic sort of skin-and-bone woman, with fair hair, and an obvious aristocratic voice, one of three in a feces-soaked middle compartment, asked me-- asked for help. apparently, she was a Hungarian countess, [INAUDIBLE]. And she died that afternoon.

And I remember her, because, one could tell that she was, in fact, a very well educated, very well brought up woman, despite her skin-and-bone and the fact one couldn't understand her language.

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But the language, Hungarian, Polish, they acquired quite a bit of German, of course, because of the German guards. Most of us had a certain amount of-- we obviously got some schoolboy French. Most of us got some schoolboy German. Yiddish was the lingua franca of the place. Yiddish was largely spoken.

We learned it. We picked it up. It's surprising how one did. And they picked up some English. We had a bit of German. After all, Yiddish is basically only a mixture of German and Polish and Hebrew. And Yiddish became, presumably, a bit more altered along the path and became a little more polyglot.

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