The Holocaust and survivors' stories

After 1933, Hitler's assumption of power in Germany saw the rise of Nazi persecution of European Jews. This created a refugee problem which, by 1938, had reached crisis point. At this time Australia was identified as a suitable place of refuge due to its democratic traditions and small population.

Several resettlement schemes proposed the purchase of land in Australia using funds provided by wealthy philanthropists (like Baron Maurice de Hirsch) to provide a safe haven for persecuted Jews. In May 1939, the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonists dispatched Isaac Steinberg (1888-1957) to investigate the feasibility of purchasing 7 million acres in far Northwestern Australia on which to settle 75,000 Jewish refugees. Known as the 'Kimberely Scheme', it was the intention of this project that Jewish settlers would help develop pastoral and agricultural industries in this sparsely populated region.

Australians first became aware of the Holocaust during World War II following the announcement, on 17 November 1942, of the massacre of Jews in German-occupied Poland. Welfare groups soon formed around the country to raise funds and collect goods for Jewish relief. In 1943, Prime Minister John Curtin was presented with a resolution confirming the 'parlous state of European Jewry' which was endorsed by all Australian Jewish Communities.

Even before the end of the war, Australian Jewry began to think about post-war immigration. In the aftermath of allied victory, confirmation of the Holocaust brought the full enormity of what had occurred to wider public attention, and sensitised Australians to the need for many European Jews to find a new place to call home. Determined to do everything possible to assist in the rehabilitation of Holocaust survivors, many Australian Jews actively sponsored emigration to Australia.

The enormity of the destruction levelled on European Jewry by the Holocaust first became clear with allied liberation of the concentration camps. Among the early outsiders to bear witness to the Holocaust was Muriel Knox Doherty, an Australian-born nurse. Doherty arrived at Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in July 1945, two months after the British had liberated the camp from the Nazis on 15 April.

Faced with the mammoth task of nursing thousands of sick and starving survivors, and establishing a hospital at Bergen-Belsen, Doherty's Community Letters were sent to groups of family and friends. Often written by candlelight early in the morning or late at night, these letters record Marton Doherty's personal insights into life at Bergen-Belsen, and document a little known facet of Australian wartime involvement, also offering a valuable woman's perspective on war and its aftermath. Doherty remained at Bergen-Belsen for a year. In 1945 she was awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal (1st Class) for her work there.

Survivor's stories

Hilda Friend speaks about 'Kristallnacht', 1938

Friend recalls her experiences on the 'Night of Broken Glass', 9-10 November 1938, during which a series of Nazi co-ordinated attacks against Jews took place in Germany and Austria.
Hilda Friend speaks about 'Kristallnacht', 1938

Charlotte Melkman speaks about life under Nazi rule, 1940-1945

Melkman recalls life as a Dutch Jew during the early years of World War II and her subsequent transportation to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
Edith Adler speaks about a life in Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1944

Adler recalls her arrival in Auschwitz as part of a transport of Czechoslovakian Jews from the Theresienstadt Ghetto which included her entire family.

Edith Adler speaks about a life in Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1944

• Get a Library Card [2]
Tom Foster speaks about life in a Ukranian Labour Camp, 1944

Foster recalls his experiences working in a labour camp for boys, his survival against the odds and the importance of friendship.

Olga Horak speaks about life in Bergen-Belsen, 1945

Horak recalls her experiences of concentration camp life during the last days of the war and following the allied liberation.
Olga Horak speaks about life in Bergen-Belsen, 1945

- Get a Library Card [2]

Transcript:
Community Letter 5
Belsen No. 1

Dear Friends,

I am sending this account of Belsen for I know that you will all be interested in the early history as well as the present state of this extraordinarily (sic) community.

The figures quoted are authentic and I am hoping to procure some photographs which I shall bring back with me. Any information has been extracted from official documents gathered from talking to those who actually carried out the pioneering work, to displaced persons who have experienced the terrors of a concentration camp and from our own observations since arriving at Belsen on July 11th 1945.

The work which was carried out here in the days immediately after the liberation by the British of the infamous Belsen horror camp, by doctors, medical students, nurses, Red Cross and St John's Ambulance teams, army personnel and others, is one of the most remarkable achievements in medical history.
On April 12th 1945, when a decisive battle was being fought all round the Belsen area, the Chief of Staff of the First Para Army (GERMANY) approached the Brigadier General Staff of the British 8th Corps. He explained that a terrible situation had arisen at the Concentration Camp and that a typhus epidemic was raging. He invited the British to take the Camp over, as it was quite disorganised.
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A special truce was arranged under the terms of which the British agreed to take over the camp around which a neutral area was to be defined.

The S.S., or die Schutz Staffel (sic) (Black Guards) camp staff were to remain and the British were to deal with them as they wished. The Hungarian regiment which had been moved in by the Germans before the liberation to reinforce the SS whose morale was disintegrating, were to remain armed and be used by the British as long as they had a use for them.

The brutal and infamous Commandant Kramer and some of his male & female henchmen are, I believe awaiting trial in a nearby jail. The remainder did not reach that sanctuary, and a few escaped and have since been recaptured. The Hungarians may be seen about the camp today, unarmed doing the scavenging and heavy work, an exceedingly lazy, rather unpleasant lot of men.
Brigadier Glyn Hughes, Deputy Director of Medical Services Second Army is believed to be the first to arrive at the camp. The first British Unit in was an anti-tank battery which arrived on April 15th and on April 16th the infamous Belsen Camp was liberated and some glimpses of hope.
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Transcript:

and life came to those who long before had despaired of ever being free again.

The R.A.M.C. under the command of Lt. Col. J.A.D. Johnston commanding the 32nd British Casualty Clearing Station, the 11th Light Field Ambulance and the two Hygiene sections began work on April 17th. With the CCS were eight sisters of Q. A. I. M. N.S., the first women to arrive.

Lt. Col. Mather with the 113th Light Anti Aircraft Regiment, HQ [ ] Garrison and 224 Government Detachment came in on April 18th when the L.A.A. took over from the Anti Tank Battery. Medical personnel of all kinds was at this time urgently needed for the treatment of British war casualties, so that it was impossible to divest more R.A.M.C. personnel to Belsen before the capitulation of Germany.

The first Red Cross and St John’s Ambulance teams with four sisters arrived on April 21st and from then on steady flow of reinforcements from RAMC, QAIMNS and other British Army Units and various voluntary organisations
began. Miss G. F. Campbell formerly of RPA Hospital Sydney and now the QAIMNS\R of the 9th British General Hospital was amongst these.

[NB: Q. A. I. M. N. S\R : QUEEN ALEXANDRA IMPERIAL MILITARY NURSING SERVICES (RESERVE)]

Because of the extreme shortage of medical personnel in the area and the great urgency of the situation it was decided
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X Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Nursing Service (Reserve)
Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

Transcript:

To ask the students from the London Medical School who were being held ready for work in Holland should be sent immediately to Belsen to give assistance there. Ninety-six medical students commenced work on May 2nd. Belsen Camp consisted of sections, Camp No. 1 the Horror Camp, and Camp No. 2, an overflow area in the German Panzer Barracks Buildings some 1 miles from Camp 1.

Between the two camps hundreds of men, women, children, destined for camp 1 but for whom there was no room had been forced to live in the open, under the trees without food shelter or warmth. All were closely guarded by ruthless SS men & women.

Some 800 girls were marched on foot from Bremen to Belsen shortly before the camp entered upon its final phase of horror. They had been used as street sweepers in Bremen. Some had shoes of a kind, others did not. They were three days on the march without any food. Their guards carried lashes. The girls sang on the way but were cruelly thrashed for this.
When the British were expected in Hamburg, the German Commander of a worker concentration camp hastily evacuated a large number of girls. After travelling three days & two nights (the lines were blocked and travelling was slow and confused) under terrible conditions they reached Bergen-Belsen. A Czechoslovak girl told the following

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Between the two camps hundreds of men, women and children destined for camps, but for whom there was no room, had been forced to live in the open, under the trees, without food, shelter or warmth. All were closely guarded by ruthless S.S. men and women.

Some 400 girls were marched on foot from Bremen to Belsen shortly before the camp entered upon its final phase of horror. They had been used as street sweepers in Bremen. Some had shoes of a kind, others did not. They were three days on the march without any food. Their guards carried lances.

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When the British were expected in Hanover, the German Commandant of a women concentration camp hastily evacuated a large number of girls. After travelling three days and two nights, (the lines were blocked and travelling slow and confused) under terrible conditions they reached Bergen-Belsen. A Czechoslovak girl told the following
Transcript:

story in her own way:

“the way and all we saw on the way was fearful. Crazy SS women accompanied us, throwing stones into the crowd of women, who were 100 on one truck. We had no place to sit or lie; we could not leave the truck for the lavatory; it was a desolate situation; people got mad and some dies from this fearful way, from hunger, thirst and desolation”

“Arrived a Bergen-Belsen we were surprised by another fearful aspect. Hundreds of trucks with dead and dying men were standing in the railway station. Their bodies were blue & bloody skeletons, the faces wounded, their dirty clothes torn and full of lice. That was so called transports of men to Bergen-Belsen. This transport never reached its destination”

“We on our way from the station to the camp had to reflect about the purpose of our coming here. The result was
very bad. We saw lots of torn, dirty clothes and shoes, no people at all and a hidden camp in the forest.”

“We did not think anything else other than that we came to an empty camp, where transports were killed by some unknown way. The more we witness of so many German crimes that these beasts did not wish us to over live the war.”

“The liberation was so near, we were full of hope and had to die just now, after having spent so hard years
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"And the miracle happened again, we did not die. The 15th April was the miraculous day when the second British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen – we greeted our safers (sic) with deepest thankfulness and never will forget the historical day which gave us back our lives."

That girl had been in three terrible concentration camps including Auschwitz the notorious torture camp with its gas chambers and crematoria. Deliberate and slow starvation had been carried out at Belsen camp up to the time of
liberation. Word spread and internees of other camps knew when sent to Belsen that they would starve.

Camp No.2 in which there were approximately 15,000 men who had only been there a few weeks, was free from typhus, the internees suffering only from starvation The medical problem there was nothing to that at Camp 1 which at the time of liberation contained some 50,000 people, mingled with about 10,000 dead in the huts or lying unburied in piles about the camp.
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The starving and disease ridden inmates including a number of children had received no food or water for about 7 days after a long period of semi-starvation. Their food had consisted of watery soup, potato and dry bread in very small quantities. The lack of water resulted from the act of sabotage carried out by the Germans during the truce which they had requested for handing over the camp. All camp records were destroyed by the SS guards during this time.

A pump in the yard was found surrounded by 300-400 bodies piled up, where they had fallen in their vain effort to obtain water and whose end was hastened by the rifle butts and lashings of the SS Guards and the sniping of the Hungarian troops.

There were some 25,000 living sick who were dying at the rate of % (about 100) per day. In many huts the living were packed on the floor amongst the dead often times naked. Owing to illness & despair corpses were often not
moved from the bunks which were shared with the living.

Louse born typhus, diarrhea and pulmonary tuberculosis in advanced stages were rampant. Excreta was everywhere. Faeces were 6” deep on the floor of the huts. The walls were heavily coated also. Thousands were too ill to move. Those living on the lower of the
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A pump in the yard was found surrounded by 30-40 bodies piled up, where they had fallen in their vain effort to obtain water and where it was hardened by the saline fluids and leachings of the S.S. Guards and the shooting of the Hungarian troopers.

There were some 28,000 living sick who were dying at the rate of 10 per day. In many huts the living were packed on the floor amongst the dead. Stitches had. Amongst illnesses deep pain, corpses were often not moved from the tanks which were shared by the living.

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Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

Transcript:

two tiered bunks had no protection from the excreta dripping from above. Lice were everywhere. Filth, stench, decomposition & corruption almost beyond comprehension prevailed. The air was heavily polluted. The weather was hot and the temperature was 95 F. This abounded.

The work facing the liberators must have at first appeared insurmountable and praise is too high for those men and women who by their courage, energy, initiative& enthusiasm, brought to the survivors of this horror, tragedy and suffering, food & drink, cleanliness and sympathy and some glimmer of hope for the future.

The immediate task on liberation was to provide water & food for the starving. The first small units of British troops who arrived were only able to deliver food from the cookhouses to the door of the huts, leaving distribution to the inmates.

Those who were able to stagger seized what they could. So broken was the morale and so long had existence in the camp depended on ‘every man for himself’ and the ability of the strongest to secure as much food as he...
could, that many became extremely ill from over eating, and numbers died as a result of this, while large numbers of helpless patients died because there was no one to feed them.

The cries of ‘essen essen’ were heartrending. The liberators cleared out the large barracks of a

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Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

German Panzer Training School in the neighbourhood – the present Belsen Camp. Parties of armed troops collected from the surrounding country all the equipment necessary for a 7,000 bed emergency hospital. Col. Johnston’s anesthetist of the 32rd BCC Station was in charge of the collection and distribution of these supplies. On the day that this hospital was ready for use the Germans again sabotaged the water supply & delayed transfer.

Before leaving Camp 1, all patients who were considered fit to walk were taken to a large building, all clothing removed & burnt, and their bodies cleansed of the gross filth & deloused. As far as possible women & children were evacuated first and the sick were transported direct from Camp 1 to the Human Laundry.

I have been told that many internees were horrified on hearing that they were being taken to the bath, for in the Camp of Auschwitz where so many had been before coming to Belsen, those marked for incineration were first given soap & towel, marched to the showers, from which they never returned, for instead of water came lethal gas.
Ambulances conveyed the sick direct from the huts and the ‘walking’ cases who had received the preliminary cleansing & delousing, to the Human Laundry in Camp 3 in the German Barracks Area. German nurses supervised by the British were obliged to scrub and cleanse and dust with DDT each
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Transcript:

one – From 500-900 persons were treated per day – These poor creatures, some of whom were but skeletons with only a spark of life within them, were then wrapped in a clean blanket and conveyed in a ‘Decontaminated’ Ambulance to the ‘Blocks’ as they were called. Here they were placed naked in a clean blanket (there were at this time no clothes) on a straw palliasse on a barracks stretcher where the sisters and other workers fed them & gave them nursing care.

By May 1st 1945 7,000 sick had been evacuated to the hospital area, but there were still approximately 10,000 persons in Camp 1, requiring urgent medical attention and for whom no hospital accommodation could be provided for some days. The male members of the BRCS RAMCD [ ] + British troops & doctors & nurses from among the D.Ps [Displaced Persons] who were fit to work carried on in the intense squalor of the horror camp, feeding and nursing patients, cleansing huts, rendering first aid & performing minor operations. SS Guards under close supervision & pressure where necessary from the British troops and assisted by bulldozers, dug enormous graves.
and buried the dead.

On May 2nd the medical students commenced work in the Camps under direction of Dr A P Meiklejohn member of the Rockefeller Foundation Health Commission, who
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These poor creatures, some of whom were bent skeletons, with only a spark of life within them, were then wrapped in a clean blanket and conveyed in a "decontaminated" ambulance to the "blocks" as they are called. Here they were placed naked in a clean blanket - (there were at that time no clothes) in one of the passageways on a barrack stretches, where the Sisters and other workers gave them nursing care.

By May 24, 1945, 70,000 sick had been evacuated to the hospital area, but there were still approximately 20,000 persons in camp requiring urgent medical attention and for whom no hospital accommodation could be provided for some days.

The male members of the M.D.'s, troops, doctors, nurses from among the D.P.'s who were fit to work carried on in the medical squadron of the Dora Camp, feeding patients, cleansing burnt, rendering first aid and performing minor operations. S.S. guards under close supervision. Pressure when necessary from the British troops and assisted by bulldozers, dug enormous graves and buried the dead.

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* Displaced persons.
Transcript:
was seconded to the Nutrition Section of the Health Division European Regional Office, UNRRA. [In the huts - struck through] Each one assumed responsibility for one or more huts with 100-150 sick patients and about 200-300 so called 'fit' internees able to feed themselves. Other students worked in co-operation with officers in charge of the army cook houses, travelling with the food trucks and delivering the food personally to their colleagues in the huts, who had the extremely difficult task of seeing that the food was fairly distributed among all. Here again the cry of 'essen, essen'. ['Food, Food']

A dispensary was organized by some of the students and medical treatment given to the sick in the huts, whilst others assisted by groups of internees endeavoured to clean out the worst of the filth and dirt which lay inches deep on the floors of the huts.
Twenty-five medical students led by Capt. [       ] MC Kings Royal Rifles, one of the senior students, and under the direction of the RAMC officer in charge, created within the horror camp, a hospital area in which the most seriously ill were nursed until they could be evacuated. They cleansed the filthy, verminous huts, creosoting the floors, disinfecting huts with DDT and equipping them with necessities of a
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Within 2 weeks of the medical students setting up this hospital in the camp, 1,200 patients had been washed, disinfected and admitted, where they were treated & nursed entirely by the medical students & volunteer nurses from among the internees. It has been authoritatively stated that a large number of patients owe their lives to this achievement.

This venture was so successful that the hospital was allowed to function until all the other patients in the horror camp had been transferred to the German Barracks. They eventually evacuated patients, equipment & nurses to the very palatial ‘Round House which had been the German officer’s mess of the Wermacht [sic - Werhmacht],
and where it is said Kramer, the beast of Belsen, once entertained

[27]
Hospital ward.

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Mention must be made here of Dr W. A. Davis, M.S., Deputy Medical Officer of the Typhus Control Commission, who was working at Bergen-Belsen on the control of the typhus epidemic - Typhus "Jo" as he is called can today look back on a task efficiently completed.

Within a week of the medical students setting up this hospital in the camp, 1200 patients had been washed, disinfected and admitted, where they were treated and nursed entirely by the medical students. Additional nurses from among the internees. It has been authentically stated that a large number of patients owe their lives to this achievement.

This venture was so successful that the hospital was allowed to function until all the other patients in the brothel camp had been transferred to the German barracks. They eventually evacuated patients' equipment. Thence to the very palatial "Armee Hofs" which had been the German officers' mess of the Wehrmacht, and where it is said, Kemmerer the Beast of Bergen-Belsen once entertained
Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

Transcript:

such high ranking Nazi officials as Himmler, Goering & Gobbels [sic - Goebbels].

On May 19th the last of the 25,000 persons was evacuated from the Concentration Camp to the four hospitals and three transit camps in the barracks area. Up to that time 2,000 had died since leaving the camp and the British had supervised the burial by SS guards and German P.O.W of some 23,000 of which approx. 10,000 or even more lay unburied when they arrived on April 15th 1945.

The daily death rate has steadily decreased. On April 30th 1945, 548 people died, on May 17th 97. The burning of the infamous Belsen Concentration Camp commenced on May 19th and the historic ceremony of the burning of the last hut took place on 21st May 1945 at 6pm, when Col. H.L. Bird Commander 102 Control Section, 2nd Army, addressed those assembled. With him were Col. J.A.D. Johnston and Brigadier Glyn Hughes, DDMSW, 2nd Army.

An invitation to attend was given to personnel & to all DPs who wished to attend & transport was arranged. A large
number accepted. Brig. Glyn Hughes & Col. Johnston each directed a flamethrower on to a huge portrait of Adolf Hitler at one end of the hut and a large
On May 19, 1942, the last of the 28,000 prisoners evacuated from the Concentration Camp to the four hospitals and three transit camps in the Barreled Area. Up to that time 2,006 had died since leaving the camp, and the British had supervised the burial by 53 guards and German POWs of some 23,000 of which approx. 10,000 or even more lay unburied when they arrived on April 13th 1945.

The daily death rate has steadily decreased. On April 23rd 1945, 548 people died, on May 17th 1947.

The burning of the infamous Belzec Concentration camp commenced on May 19, 1942, and the historic ceremony of the burning of the last hut took place on 21st May 1945 at 6 pm, when Col. H. K. Bird, Commander 1st Control Section 2nd Army addressed those assembled. With him were Col. J. A. Johnston and Brigadier F. R. Hughes 2nd M.S. and Arm 2nd Army principal.

An invitation was given to all SSP to attend. Transport was arranged. A large number accepted. Brig. F. R. Hughes and Col. Johnston each directed a flame through one to a large portrait of Adolf Hitler at one end of the hut and a large
Transcript:

Nazi flag at the other and the hut was finally reduced to ashes. The Union Jack, symbol of British freedom and protection of the oppressed was unfurled. Thus concluded the first phase in the history of Belsen since it was liberated by the British.

On 27. 7.45 I was driven to the site of the Belsen Horror Camp by a member of the BRCS and St John's Ambulance (amalgamated during the war) who was one of the original workers there.

The camp is some 1 miles from the Panzer Barracks and is surrounded by lovely forests of spruce, birch and beeches – approaching along the roadway was evidence of the habitation in the woods of those whose “home” it had but recently been – all who tried to escape were shot dead by the SS guards.
The camp itself was entirely surrounded by two sets of heavily barbed wire, which before liberation was charged with electricity – outside this prison wall were the watch towers, situated at close intervals nearby, but also outside the camp were deep shelters for the guards. There was no provision for the protection of internees during air raids.
The Holocaust and survivors' stories
Published on State Library of NSW (https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

Nazi play at the other end and the hut was finally reduced to ashes.

The Union Jack, symbol of British freedom and protection of its oppressed was unfurled.

Thus concluded the first phase in the history of Belzec since it was liberated by the British.

On 20.7.45 I was driven to the site of No. Belzec Labor Camp by a member of the R.A.C.S. and St. John's Ambulance (amal originally during the war) who was one of the original workers there.

The camp is some 1 1/2 miles from the Lanzar Barracks and is surrounded by lovely forests of spruce, each enclosed. Approaching along the roadway was evidence of the habitation of those whose "at home" it had but recently been. All who tried to escape were shot dead by the SS guards.

The camp itself was entirely surrounded by two sets of heavy concertina wire, which before liberation was charged with electricity. Outside this prison wall were the watch towers, situated at close intervals, nearly but also outside the camp were deep trenches for the guards. These was no provision for the protection of inmates during air raids.
Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

Having satisfied the British guard that we had authority to enter the camp and that we had been inoculated against typhus we drove to the first section, carefully wired off by the Germans, & which had been the administrative section, housed in the usual hutted buildings.

On the right was a large stable or garage in which all entrants to the camp after liberation were dusted with DDT. We walked through the dispensary, dressing room, and room where all the minor operations were performed and first aid was rendered by the British assisted by doctors, nurses from among the D.Ps.

All was chaotic, quantities of damaged medical equipment, furniture, rags, papers littered the floors. We passed the cleansing station where the ‘fit’ were cleansed & deloused and clothed if possible before being transferred to the barracks transit camp. A nauseating odour still pervaded these buildings. At the entrance to the actual
concentration camp area where the British found 50,000 souls huddled together in filth, disease and decomposition, terror & despair are two large notice boards – one in English on

a1204112h.jpg [33]
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We passed the cleaning station where the "fit" were cleansed, shaved and clothed if possible before being transferred to the barracks transit camp. A nauseating odour still pervaded these buildings.

At the entrance to the actual concentration camp area were the British found 50,000 bodies bundled together in fields and decomposition, lice and vermin, are two large notice boards - one in English and...
Transcript:

The left, the other on the right, in German, reading thus:

“This is the site of the infamous Belsen Concentration camp liberated by the British on 15th April 1945. 10,000 unburied dead were found here. Another 13,000 have since died. All of them victims of the German New Order in Europe. And an example of Nazi Kulture.”

We drove past vast areas of burnt out huts with only the charred remains & a few odd bits of china & rusted & burnt metal to mark the site. Enormous graves holding from 500 to 8,000 bodies each are grim reminders of Nazi brutality. Practically no children under two survive. A crematorium complete with metal stretcher and long handled...
metal stoker, nearby, needs no explanation. No babies born in camp were allowed to live. An enormous pile of half burnt out leather boots & shoes, marks the place where they were dumped by the Germans to be used as fuel. The pump where so many were beaten to death as they crawled in search of water, was evident.
The left, the other on the right in German reading
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The infamous Belsen Concentration Camp
liberated by the British on 15th April 1945.
10,000 unburned dead were found here.
Another 13,000 have since died.
All the victims of the German New Order in Europe
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Enormous graves holding from 500 to 5,000
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long-handled metal shovels, nearby needed no
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The pump where so many were beaten to death
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Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

Transcript:
We saw a relic of the striped blue & white prison garb stretched on the barbed wire fence. A large yellow cross was branded on the back of those worn by Jews, I am told. Outside the camp we had seen a large drum of yellow paint.

We drove past the site of the Medical Students Hospital now a charred mass. The huge camp ovens & cauldrons which the British set up are still there. The SS guard’s quarters were wired off & well protected from the inmates of the camp. The stone prison was in this area, quite a small building the tiny windows being guarded with barbed wire interlaced in the iron bars. A large dog Kennel marked the HQ of the savage dogs which are said to have patrolled the area between the building and the barbwire barriers. I saw an erection which could have been a gibbet, in full view of the camp. Two poles mark the site where the final burying ceremony took place & from which the portrait of Adolf & the Nazi flag were suspended – Adolf took a lot of setting on fire, I believe!
We saw a relic of the striped blue and white prison garb stretched on the bare wire fence. A large yellow cross was branded on the back of those women by Jews I am told. Outside the camp we had seen a large drum of yellow paint.

We drove past the site of the medical students’ hospital now a charred mass.

The huge camp ovens on stovetops with the students’ set up are still there.

The SS guards’ quarters were walled off and protected from the inmates of the camp.

The stone prison was in this area heavily walled off into a small building. Tiny windows; they guarded with barbed wire interlaced in the iron bars. A large dog kennel marked the W. E. of the savage dogs which are said to have patrolled the area between the building and the barbed wire.

I saw an erection which could have been a gibbet, in full view of the camp.

Two poles mark the site of the final burning ceremony took place upon which the portrait of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi flag were suspended. Adolf had a lot of settling on fire, I believe!
The platform from which the final ceremony was conducted still stands. From this point the vast area of the devastated camp can be surveyed – A foul blot in a picturesque countryside, hidden by thickly wooded country.

As we left this scene of desolation, tragedy & despair where thousands of Jews & non-Jewish French, Belgian, Russians, Poles, Dutch, Greeks, Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, Italians, Austrians and Gypsies met their deaths, I no longer found it hard to believe that Nazi brutality & ruthlessness was a fact for I had also seen many victims of these Nazi crimes in the hospital wards.

In spite of the pact that the Panzer troops were forbidden to visit the SS Guards at camp No.1 & vice versa, one finds it difficult to believe that the horrors which existed in that camp were unknown to those living in the neighbourhood.

Transcript:
I felt proud to be British.

M K Doherty
Matron, UNRRA
Belsen Camp
NW Germany
The platform from which the final ceremony was conducted, still stands.

From this point the vast area of the devastated camp can be surveyed - a foul blot on a picturesque countryside, hidden by thickly wooded country.

As we left the scene of desolation, tragedy & despair where thousands of Jews from Poland, France, Belgium, Norway, Rumania, Russia, Greek, Czecks, Germans, Hungarians, Romans, Italians, Austrian and Gypsies met their death, I no longer found it hard to believe that Nazi brutality & ruthlessness for I had also seen many victims of these Nazi crimes in the hospital wards.

In spite of the fact that the larger troops were forbidden to visit the S.S. Guards at Camp No. 1, one finds it difficult to believe that the horrors which existed in that camp were unknown to those living in the neighborhood.

I felt proud to be British.

Mr. Roberly
Inhorn, Wales
Belsen Camp,
In Germany
Folder 1: Letters by Muriel Knox Doherty, May-July 1945

May-July 1945

Muriel Knox Doherty

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