

The Liberation of Bergen-Belsen

Source 2

Copy of a typewritten 'Interim Report of Collection of Evidence at Belsen-Bergen Camp' by Captain H. G. Sherrin, Military Government Legal Officer, 27 Apr 1945.

Report looks at the purpose of concentration camps, the nature of Belsen, crimes committed and witnesses, and the case of Keith Mayer, a Royal Marine murdered in Belsen. It also includes a Nominal Roll of SS Men and Women, a list of witnesses and some witness statements.

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Please be aware that some of the witness statements included within the report include graphic accounts which may cause distress.

Interim Report on Collection of Evidence at Belsen-Bergen Camp.Part I

This is an interim report made after 6 days of work. It does not include the statistics which will form an important part of any completed report, because the officers who would supply them are very heavily engaged in work in the camp and because any statistics required are not yet complete.

1. The purpose of concentration camps.

It would appear that the purpose of the camps was to destroy sections of the population. Two limiting factors prevented this being done immediately on their arrival. First the Germans wished to benefit by having in their power hostages for the good conduct of those left behind. Secondly immediate destruction would have produced greater resistance.

It is quite clear that what took place in the concentration camps was not intended to be mere incarceration, but was destruction immediate or delayed.

2. Nature of this camp.

Belsen-Bergen was a "Krankenlager" or sick camp. It was not in any sense a hospital camp, as prisoners do not seem to have been intended to recover. It was announced by various camp commandants that anyone who went to Belsen did not come back, and amongst the inmates of camps a transport to Belsen was regarded as your last journey.

3. Witnesses available.

It has been difficult to find any witnesses who had been in Belsen Camp any length of time, and in the early days almost all the witnesses were rambling and incoherent. There was however a number of women brought from working camps near Bremen and Hamburg. These had had no food for seven days before liberation, but were able to give evidence. They knew little of Belsen Camp and the result is that the bulk of evidence recorded relates to crimes

committed elsewhere. The higher officials of these camps moved from one camp to another so that there is in their stories evidence against Kramer, the commandant, and Klein, the doctor, captured at this camp.

The only food over a period of years was swede soup and bread and before Allied advances caused supply problems, the ration was 250 grams of bread and 3 pints of swede soup per day per person. Almost all the many bodies found in the camp show starvation. Typhus and some other disease may have been the immediate cause of death, but it is difficult to imagine that persons so undernourished could recover.

4. Classes of persons in the camp.

A black board used in the office to record numbers shows the classes into which the Germans divided the inmates. These are

1. Protection custodees
2. Bibelforscher (a religious sect)
3. Homosexuals
4. Members of the German army
5. Clergymen
6. Spanish Communists
7. Foreign civilian workers
8. Jews
9. Antisocials
10. Professional Criminals
11. Habitual Criminals
12. Gypsies
13. Prisoners of War.

It will be noted that Prisoners of War are included. There was at least one English Prisoner in the camp.

5. Case of Keith Mayer.

Keith Mayer of 3 Margaret Road, Penworthen near Preston, Lancs was a member of the Royal Marines and was left behind after a raid on the coast of Norway in 1943. He was one of a party of six of our men who fell in the hands of the Gestapo and were never handed over to the Wehrmacht. The only other whose name I have obtained is Alfred Munro.

After a stay in Griny camp in Norway the six men were sent to

Sachsenhausen camp near Berlin. There they were set to march round a circular track with a 20 kilo weight in each pack. Keith Mayer, who was clearly of considerable physical strength and great mental courage, was the last to fall ill. He kept a tally of the distance he covered and at the end of his marching said he had covered 8,200 km. I have made enquiries as to which Rapportfuhrer ordered this punishment, but so far without result. It is possible that enquiries at Sachsenhausen might produce evidence upon which he could be convicted.

On the night of 29/30th January, Keith Mayer, Munro and the other English soldiers paraded with other prisoners for execution. The other English soldiers had already been killed, when an air raid caused the proceedings to be stopped. They were not recommenced. Mayer was sent from Sachsenhausen to Belsen in February and on the night of the 28th March he was murdered by the orders of Rapportfuhrer Emerich by a stormtrooper whom a man at present sick says he can identify and who is in our custody. Much time has been spent in obtaining evidence against Emerich and his assistants, and it is thought that a satisfactory case will be produced against them. Two of the witnesses are suffering from typhus. A statement has been obtained from one, but so far the other has not been able to tell his story at all.

It is hoped the evidence will be completed next week. As a precaution, evidence of other murders by Emerich is being collected.

6. Germans captured at the Camp.

Appendix A of Part II of this report is a list of SS men and women at the camp. They are by no means representative of the SS, as they are the older men who were used on administrative duties. In addition to these the Commandant Kramer and the Rapportfuhrer Emerich are in custody.

7. Crimes provable against Germans held.

At present there is evidence against five. Kramer is responsible for the general condition in which the camp was found.

In addition he can be shown to have committed thousands of murders and many varied acts of pure cruelty. Dr. Klein took part in selections and is thus guilty of thousands of murders. Emmerich murdered Keith Mayer and various others. Wolf is probably also a murderer of Mayer and Herzog was in the habit of beating prisoners and specific cases will be proved against him.

8. Legal Requirements.

A.D.J.A.G. Second Army advises that affidavits should be sworn by the witnesses and forwarded to J.A.G. Branch at the War Office.

9. Recommendation.

The punishment of War Criminals after trial has been accepted as a war aim of the Allies. If this is to be carried out, reliable evidence must be collected and recorded. At the moment there is no organisation for doing this, probably because the volume of the evidence is unexpectedly great. A perusal of Part II will show what a wealth of evidence could be obtained, if a proper organisation was set up. It is most desirable that the officer collecting evidence at Belsen should know who is in custody at Sachsenhausen and vice versa. It is recommended that, if it has not already been done, a staff be set up to direct the collection of evidence and its collation.

(Signed) "H.G. SHERRIN"

Capt

27th April 1945.

Mil. Govt Legal Officer

Part II Appendix "A"

NOMINAL ROLL OF S.S. MEN

Rank	NAME		HOME TOWN
	Christian	Surname	
Rottenfuhr.	LUDWIG	EIZNAUER	WUISCHER (slav.)
"	WALTER	MELCHER	LOTTE THEKLEG !
Oberscharf.	THEODOR	HEUSKEL	BORN
Hauptscharf.	PAUL	STEINMETZ	HEULM
Obergefr.	ANSKAR	PICHEN	HINDENBURG
Unteroffz.	WALTER	DOERING	VIRSEN
Sturmmann	JOHANN	KASANICKY	GOLNITZ (slav.)
Sturmmann	NIKOLAUS	JENNER	HATZFELD (Rumanian)
Rottenfuhr.	HEINZ	BAD	BRAUNSCHWEIG
Untersturmf.	KURT	KLIPP	KOLN a. RHINE
Sturmmann	ANTON	MARSCH	GUNBAJA (Hungary)
Sturmscharf.	HANS	MAY	MURNBERG
Unterscharf.	JOACHIM	WOLF	HALLE a.d. SAAL
Sturmmann	ANTON	KLENKARZ	OBERWINDTHORST (Jugoslav.)
Hauptscharf.	FRITZ	KLEIN	ZSIDEN
Unteroffz.	FRITZ	MATHES	OFFENBACH a. MAIN
Unterscharf.	ARNOLD	WILMSCHEN	DINSLAKEN
Unterscharf.	Karl	EGERSDORF	ERLANGEN
Schutze	HANS	HEINRICH	BANAT (Rumanian)
Oberscharf.	WILHELM	EMERICH	TEPFENBACH
Unterscharf.	KARL	FRAZICH	MARTINAU
Oberscharf.	FRIEDRICH	HERZOG	DORTMUND
Sturmmann	ROBERT	KURZ	BIRNBAUM
Unterscharf.	KARL	JOACHIM	WEIL a. RHINE
Oberscharf.	KURT	RASCHAK	CHEBIZT
Sturmmann.	LADISLAV	GURA	BRATISLAVA (slav.)
Sturmmann	PETER	WEINGARTNER	RUMA (Jugoslav.)
Unteroffz.	FRANZ	MODEREGGER	BERCHTESGADEN
Rottenfuhrer	WILHEM	SPARR	BERLIN (61 yrs)

(Part II Appendix "A" - NOMINAL ROLL OF S.S. MEN)

Rank	NAME Christian	Surname	HOME TOWN
Unterscharf.	WALTER	OTTO	WUPPERTAL
Rottenfuhrer	EMIL	REIMEN	LUXEMBURG
Schutz	WENZEL	ZANKEL	LOWENTAU

NOMINAL ROLL OF SS WOMEN.

CHRISTIAN	NAME	SURNAME	HOME TOWN
RUTH		ASTROSENE	WEILHEIM
JUANA		BORMANN	BIRKENFELD (Ostpr.)
HERTA		BOTHE	TETEROW
HERTA		EHLERT	BERLIN
GERTRUD		FEIST	EGELSDORF
LISBETH		FITZNER	GRUNBERG
IDA		FORSTER	FRIEDBERG (Iserg b.)
ILSE		FORSTER	NEUSALZ a.d. ODER
HILDEGARD		HAHNEL	BERLIN
IRENE		HASCHKE	FRIEDBERG
HILDEGARD		KANBACH	HIRSCHBERG (Schlesien)
MAGDALENE		KESSEL	BRESLAU
CHARLOTTE		KLEIN	EILENBURG bei LEIPZIG
ANNELISE		KOHLMANN	HAMBURG
MARTA		LINKS	FRIEDBERG (Isergeb.)
HILDE		LISIEWITZ	GRUNWALD
MARTA		LOBELF	EILENFELD I. VOGELT
GERTRUD		NAUMANN	TAUCHA bei LEIPZIG
KLARA		OPITZ	SCHMIDEBERG (Riesengeb.)
CHARLOTTE		PLIQUET	KONIGSBERG
GERTRUD		REINHOLD	THIERENBERG (Fischhausen)
GERTRUD		SAUER	BORLITZ
ROSINA		SCHIEBER	APATIN (Hungary)
ILSE		STEINBUSCH	AACHEN
ELIESABETH		VOLKENRATH	SCHONAU b. BADLANDEG
FRIEDA		WALTER	BEUTHEN a.d. Oder

Part II

Appendix "B"

LIST OF WITNESSES

Joop Zwart	No. 1
Rolf Klink	No. 2
Max Markowicz	No. 3
Franz Bialowski	Nr. 4
Jan Belunek	Nr. 5
Dr. Fritz Lee	Nr. 6
Dr. Zdenek Wiesner	Nr. 7
Dr. Peter Leonhard Makar	Nr. 8
Gretel DenBaufmann	Nr. 9
Jeannette Kaufmann	Nr. 10
Magda Einhorn	Nr. 11
Hilde Löffler	Nr. 11
Rachel Misrahi	Nr. 12
Hermine Kranz	Nr. 13
Helena Trzoiniska	Nr. 14
Erika Hitter	Nr. 15
Mina Wadowska	Nr. 16
Hella Jura	Nr. 17

I, Rolf Klink, born the 16.4.08 at Teschen, Austria,
make oath and further say.

1. On the 7th May 1945 I was shown by Capt H.G. Sherrin photos of the SS men taken into custody at Belsen-Bergen Camp.
2. I recognise the third man from the left on picture No. 1 as being the new Unterscharfuhrer who was with Emmerich when I last saw Keith Mayer.

Sworn by the above named
Rolf Klink
at Belsen-Bergen Camp
this 7th day of May 1945,
before me.

(signed) Rolf Klink

(signed) H.H. Cochrane

Major I.C.
315 Mil.Gov.Det.

I hereby certify that the deponent speaks and reads English
and that I have satisfied myself before administering the oath
that the contents of this affidavit were fully understood by him.

(Signed) H.H. Cochrane

Major I.C.
315 Mil. Gov. Det.

1. Harry Gillett Sherrin, Captain King's Royal Rifle Corps (T A)
make oath and say as follows.

1. On the 7th May 1945 I took to Rolf Klink photos of the SS men formerly at this camp and now in prison at Celle.
2. He immediately recognised and indicated to me the third man from the left on photo No. 1 of the series of photographs taken by Ground Photo Recce Unit, Kinema Branch, H.Q. 2nd Army as the Unterscharfuhrer who was with Emmerich when he, Klink last saw Keith Mayer.
3. The name of the man indicated by Rolf Klink to me as shown on the key for the said photos is Joachim Wolf.

Sworn by the above named
Capt. Harry Gillett Sherrin
at Belsen-Bergen Camp
this 7th day of May 1945
before me.

(signed) H.G. Sherrin
Captain.

(signed) H.H. Cochrane
Major I.C.
315 Mil.Gov.Det.

Von Zwart, Nederlands subject, journalist, states

I have been in Belsen camp since January of this year. This is a camp for political prisoners, criminals and civilian internees, including many JEWS from Hungary, Holland and Poland. The criminals are mainly German and there are a few German political prisoners. They did not send Norwegians or prominent people here, as people were only sent to die or be put to death. The Norwegians were looked after by the Swedish Red Cross who prevented much ill treatment. Our Dutch Red Cross officials were Nazis and did nothing. Reports did not get through.

Kramer has been commandant ever since I arrived. There were 46,000 prisoners in the camp when I arrived. The daily ration of food in my part of the camp was 1500 grams of bread between six persons and 3 pints of soup for each person. The chief of the block generally issued 180 gram of bread and 2 pints of soup made from roots such as turnips for each person, retaining the rest. The full ration was issued by the cook house. We were at that time 1000 in the larger buildings and 500 in the small. This made it necessary for three persons to sleep in each bed.

The only medical aid we had was from prisoners who were doctors or nurses. The capacity of the hospital in the men's camp was 200 - 300 persons. There were in January about 2½ to 3 thousand sick. There were no medical supplies provided. The water allowed per day for the typhus cases was 200 litres for them all. There were 1200 persons suffering from typhus.

Twenty-five per cent of the prisoners died each month. That is about 4,000 deaths each week. When I first came, the bodies were burnt in the crematorium. At the time of my arrival, there were 1700 corpses waiting disposal outside the crematorium. This increased to 4,000 and they started to bury them. They began to be left about the camp. It was especially bad in the week before the British came.

As long as people slept in their normal barracks, they had to be brought out for counting once or twice each day. If they could not walk, they were dragged out behind the others.

We never had enough water to wash or deal with our excrements.

They made us work 12 or 14 hours a day. There was an interval for lunch each day, but we seldom got the slice of bread we were supposed to have. The respite was for the benefit of the guards who could not make us work all the time.

We saw men beaten to death every day. The people were so hungry that they were searched and those found with a potato were given twenty-five strokes with a cat or a heavy stick. (stock). The beating was generally applied to the kidneys and they either died immediately or four or five hours afterwards. Frequently the guards made prisoners do the beating.

The hunger was so great that prisoners went to the corpses at night and cut off the soft pieces to eat. I saw corpses of which the heart and the balls had been removed to boil and make food. The hunger drove the prisoners to steal from each other. I remember two Poles that received parcels. They were murdered that night by other prisoners for the food. These are two cases I saw, but I know there were many others.

An English soldier was in my transport group and was a friend of mine. He was a Prisoner of War taken in Norway, not a criminal or a political prisoner. He had typhus and was unable to walk. Orders were given to other prisoners to drag him out and he was shot. He was Keith Mayer,

3 Margaret Road, Penworthen near Preston, Lancs.

Jewish families were brought here with children three months old.

I and certain others were registered dead by our friends. The Germans could not make any check of the dead. So we escaped execution. Had the truce not been made, we should all have been dead; they killed as many as they could.

Instructions for executions came from Obersturmführer Ostmann and Obersturmführer Brandt in Berlin. The Rapportführer of each camp gave the necessary orders.

Of my travelling group of 21, six survive.

Joop Zwart, Netherlands Subject, Journalist, further states.

I have seen Rapportfuhrer Emmerich at several times to give the order of prisoners brought to the gate. There he would order prisoners standing by to give 25 or more strokes with sticks. In many cases the kidneys were damaged. I can state this because the urination was affected afterwards.

On the 2nd or 3rd of March, a former Russian prisoner of war named Jefgenij had attempted to smuggle in potatoes. Emmerich caught him and ordered 25 strokes to be given to him. The beating was carried out by a prisoner called Zoddel who was in the category of a professional criminal. I saw Jefgenij beaten in the morning and I visited him in the afternoon. He then said that he wanted a drink, as he could not urinate and complained of pains in the kidneys. I saw his dead body the following day.

I, Rolf Klink, born the 16.4.08 at Teschen, Austria,

make oath and say as follows.

I knew Keith Mayer when he came to Sachsenhausen camp. When he arrived, he and at least three other Englishmen dressed in the uniform of the English soldiers were kept separate from the rest. I used to see him doing his marching. I and two others were able to approach them to bring them food. I speak English and we became friends. There was another one called Alfred Monroe and these two were the survivors of the English soldiers. Mayer and Monroe were forgotten at Sachsenhausen when the others went to transports. I used sometimes to organise jams for Mayer. When we were moved from Sachsenhausen to this camp, I suggested he should be registered as Dutch, because then they would take less notice of him and we did this. Here he felt ill in the stomach and had a bad right foot. One night he said, "Rolf, I am so weak and I feel I have a high temperature". The next day he could not get up and said, "I feel I have got typhus". The next morning we sent him to block 17. I saw him every day. He asked for jam and Swedish bread and I got it him. One afternoon I was called by Emmerich. He had two numbers and told me to find them, saying that they had forgotten to send these two for a transport. I called the chiefs of the blocks, asking them, if they had people of this number. The chief of block 17 said, "he is here, but he has got typhus". So I went with him. It was then that I remembered that this number was Keith's number. I went back to Emmerich and told him, "one number we have. The man is in hospital with typhus and cannot go". He said, "is he very ill?" I said "Yes". So Emmerich went away. At 10 o'clock in the evening I was told by Emmerich to get Keith Mayer. Emmerich went away and the new Unterscharfuhrer waited. When the medical orderly was sent for Mayer, Mayer came back with him. The Unterscharfuhrer told me to put down Mayer's name and date of birth. Mayer held my hand to support himself and whispered his name, date, month and year. Then the Unterscharfuhrer went 4 or 5 steps to the door. Keith said, "I know you love England. When you get there, tell them the truth". That was all. We had often talked of going to England together after the war. England was my second country.

Sworn by the above named
Rolf Klink
at Belsen-Bergen Camp
this 7th day of May 1945
before me.

(signed) H.H. Cochrane

H.H. Cochrane

Major I.C.
315 Mil. Gov. Det.

I hereby certify that the deponent speaks and reads English and that I satisfied myself before administering the oath that the contents of this affidavit were fully understood by him.

(signed) H.H. Cochrane

Major . I.C.
315 Mil. Gov. Det.

Max Markowicz , French, born 14.11.1919 at Mannheim.

I was employed in this camp making a list of those who died.
I was therefore frequently in block No. 2 where Keith Mayer lay ill.

I have read the statement of Klink and I can say that the Unterscharfuhrer to whom he referred in his statement is Unterscharfuhrer Wolf, because at that time he was the only stormtrooper who wore a black rubber coat and because he otherwise corresponds with the description given in it.

I saw the body of Mayer lying near the kitchen on a heap of straw with his arms outstretched. He had a small hole in the centre of his forehead made by a pistol bullet. The sentries around this place were so disposed that, had Mayer been shot attempting to escape the camp, he could not possibly have been shot through the centre of the forehead. Furthermore the sentries in the watch tower had repeating weapons and when they killed somebody the bodies would be riddled with bullets. The other sentries would have been some distance behind Mayer had he been trying to leave the camp and were armed with French Lebel rifles, shots made with those making much larger holes. The marks on those prisoners who were shot with the weapons were entirely different from that of Mayer.

As it was my duty to register the dead, I brought the matter to the notice of Emmerich. I believe that if I seemed to know about this body, I might place myself in danger. So I said to Emmerich, "Who is this man? I do not know him." Emmerich answered, "Call it an unknown body".

Usually when prisoners were shot without execution, there were a lot of formalities to be gone through. I used to have to get the name and number of the man and make a sketch of the place where he was found, so that they could be shown to have been shot escaping. In this case no such formality was carried out. I consider it likely that they had orders to kill Mayer from the political department of the camp. The general policy was laid down in Berlin, but the political department in the camp had authority to kill individual prisoners. The political department was under Obersturmfuhrer Friedrich and Unterscharfuhrer Pott.

I, Franz Bialkowski, Pole of Budzin (Kreis Kolmar) West Prussia, 44 years old, make oath and say as follows.

I have been in Belsen camp since 1st August 1943. There was always disease and hunger. At first there was a little more bread than later. There was always only bread and soup of swedes. Friedrich Herzog habitually beat people on the heads. That I have seen very often. I have not seen him kill anybody.

(signed) Bialkowski Franz

Sworn by the above named
Franz B i a l o w s k i
at Belsen - Bergen Camp
this 7th day of May 1945

before me.

(signed) H.H. Cochrane
Major I.C.
215 Mil.Gov.Det.

I hereby certify that this affidavit was translated to the deponent before swearing and that I satisfied myself before administering the oath that its contents were fully understood by the deponent.

(signed) H.H. Cochrane

Major I.C.
315 Mil.Gov.Det.

Jan Belunek, 25 years old, of Horni Beova, Morava, Czecho Slovakia.

I have been a prisoner in concentration camps for five years: Dachau, Neugamme, Natzweiler and Belsen. I came to Natzweiler in the winter of 1943/44. Kramer was the then-commandant of Natzweiler. The conditions at Natzweiler at that time were not too bad, but deteriorated slowly until I left.

I came to Belsen in August 1944. Whilst in Natzweiler, I personally witnessed 15 hangings. These hangings took place before the assembled camp. I personally spoke to 6 or 7 persons, as they were led out of the barracks to be imprisoned and they told me that they did not know what offence they had committed. Kramer was present at all these hangings. The deputy commandant always gave an address of varying length prior to the hanging. The effect of these speeches was: You will never get out of this place alive. On one occasion that deputy commandant states that it did not matter whether he killed 10,000 or 20,000. The name of this deputy commandant was Zeus.

I personally received 25 strokes in the presence of the inmates of the block. The act I had committed was attempting to maintain the morale of the other inmates. I saw numerous floggings. On many occasions over a hundred lashes were given. Sometimes the man had to be revived by throwing water on them and then the flogging was continued. In Belsen I have seen a man beaten up for giving a piece of bread to a hungry worker.

When prisoners were marched out for work, perhaps one would fall out or lag behind owing to lacking strength. On one or two occasions I saw Kramer hitting such men with his fist or his boot.

I personally saw corpses with the heart, the penis etc. having been cut out by a knife. I saw a man sitting beside one of such corpses, and he was eating flesh which I have no doubt was human flesh.

Kramer, prior to having been commandant of Natzweiler, was commandant of Auschwitz.

(signed) Jan Belunek.