

Robert's letter from
8.5.45.

Belsen.

9 Dec.

* 121 Br Gen Hospital
B.L.A.

As you see I am still with the B.L.A. but have been detached from the hospital to do temporary duty with the hospital at Belsen concentration camp where I have found plenty to do. The conditions here quite live up to the descriptions in the papers and were even worse than I anticipated. The main trouble here was not so much deliberate torture but more and more people were crowded into a camp without any consideration as to its capacity, sanitation & feeding and were then just left there to rot. 17,000 had died in the month before we arrived and most of these had been left unburied. Since we came here we have been admitting 600 sick a day and have 7,000 in hospital and there are many thousands more waiting to come as we can sort them out and find room for them. The death rate has been going down steadily but it is still in the region of 80 a day.

I now have one block of 600 pts to look after and am assisted by one Swiss doctor two internee doctors 2 trained red Cross nurses and 4 Ramc. Practically all the pts are too weak to walk due to starvation and a large proportion also have typhus dysentery Beri beri etc. The internee staff are too weak to do much work and from years in a camp are completely demoralised and unreliable. Their one aim is to sneak as much food as they can and then retire to bed and let the patients do the best they can for themselves. The language question is terrific. Only 2 in my block speak English and a few French the rest speak Hungarian Polish Czech German Roumanian Greek and any other European language you care to mention.

At first the problem of merely feeding them was more than enough and we are only just getting down to the problem of individual treatment and diagnosis. Our latest addition to the staff is a batch of German (Nazi) doctors and nurses and I can not think of a better punishment for them than to work and live in the Hospital Blocks. The first lot were employed in the human laundry where the patients are washed shaved and de-loused. Eleven of the nurses employed there have already gone

Down with typhus, by the time the patients reach me they have been pretty efficiently deloused and I have been very thoroughly innoculated so that there is no risk of infection for me. We live in tents and although it has been very cold for a week the weather is now beautiful and I have snatched an hour off in the afternoon to type this letter sitting in the sun. Hitherto I have not finished until 11pm or later and by that time it has been too cold in my tent and I have been feeling a little tired for letter writing. The Armistice has been rather an anticlimax as we have had no wireless or papers and not much time for festivities.

I hope that you are enjoying the absence of black out and any other peace time amenities that may have materialised.