



Distance from the Belsen Heap: Allied Forces and the Liberation of a Nazi Concentration Camp

Mark Celinscak

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The Jewish victims of Nazi barbarism died while the world shamefully chose to look the other way, and only when the concentration camps were liberated at war's end did a few thousand Allied personnel see the evil firsthand. In northwest Germany, the notorious Bergen-Belsen camp and its sixty thousand prisoners were surrendered to VIII Corps of the British Army on April 13, 1945. Unbeknownst to many, hundreds of Canadian airmen, paratroopers, soldiers, doctors, photographers, and other specialists assisted in the liberation and subsequent relief efforts to follow.

Mark Celinscak's *Distance from the Belsen Heap* offers the unique and haunting perspective of the language, metaphors, and narratives of many of those Canadian and British eyewitnesses—virtually all of whom held the belief that “camp” meant a “work” facility for political prisoners, not a murderous hellhole of starvation, disease, and violence: “What was now present before their eyes was previously unthinkable ... a world men felt totally unprepared and unequipped to grasp,” writes Celinscak. “Most of the inmates in Bergen Belsen had been systematically starved, most to death or near death. ... 35,000 people had died between January and March 1945. ... In the final days of German control of the camp, there was no water or food. Sanitation facilities were non-existent. Disease and infection were rampant.” Shockingly, another fourteen thousand died after the camp was liberated.

Disturbing as it is, *Distance from the Belsen Heap* is compulsory reading, nonetheless.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2016)

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