

THE RELIEF OF BELSEN

Based upon the published account - Durham County Record Office D/DLI 7/4040/10.

10

Presentation by Time Bandits:

Dramatis Personae:

Anna - Kinder Transport (Louise Barton)

Eva - Warsaw Ghetto 1943 (Sarah-Jayne Goodfellow)

Deputy-Reichsmarshal (Belorussia) Walter Kube (Bill Pickard)

Hannah - Hungary 1945 (Rosie Serdiville)

Capt. Andrew. Pares 1 13 L.A.A. Batt. (John Sadler)

*The Presentation is divided into two parts, the first delivered by JS in lecture format lasting 30 minutes and based on **The Story of Belsen** written by A. Pares as adj. 1 13 L.A.A. Batt. 1945.*

The second part is a series of five dramatised monologues, each of approximately 5 minutes duration by the above cast in period costume; note that the Kube character will be wearing Nazi party insignia.

*These are based upon the following sources: Anna - is based upon the combined testimonies of several who were involved in the Kinder Transport and as contained in the BBC archive. Eva - is based partly upon the account provided by survivor Eva Galler, otherwise on general accounts of the Ghetto fighting. Kube - is based upon information gleaned from a number of sources, primarily Alan Clark's *Barbarossa*. Hannah is based on the diaries and poems of Hannah Senesh. Pares - based upon his own account of 113 Batt., as above.*

Note: there are sound effects of gunfire.

Anna

I was born in Berlin; I always thought of myself as German. My dad had fought for the Kaiser in the Great War - he had the medals to prove it; we lived in a nice house and everything seemed fine, I knew lots of people in my neighbourhood and, although times were hard, we got by well enough. I used to spend my summers in Danzig; the place all the fuss was about, though I didn't really understand why, my aunt, who I stayed with, seemed quite happy. But it was there when I was eleven I first saw anti-Jewish slogans appearing on walls, I didn't understand it then - I thought they surely couldn't mean me, after all, I'm German, my father a decorated veteran.

My school taught both Jews and Gentiles, there wasn't any real tension, at least not to begin with; I was keen on sport, quite good at it too, especially swimming; but I found I was banned from the public pool after a while because I was Jewish - when my school put forward a team to take part in the gymnastics display for the '36 Olympics, I wasn't allowed to take part. The next year I was expelled, not because I'd done anything wrong, it was all about my being Jewish - my parents had to arrange for private tuition for me and a group of other kids - we'd all been excluded from the state system because of our faith. At the time I still couldn't really understand it; these were the same people I'd known all my life - all that changed for good in 1938, what they now call *Kristallnacht* - I watched as the shops and Jewish businesses burned; I saw our synagogue go up in flames and a chemist's shop. I realised then I didn't belong any more, I wasn't classed as a German even though we'd always lived there, even though father had been a soldier, I was an outcast, an alien and the people I thought of as friends and neighbours hated and despised us. I was a detested foreigner in my own country; we all were, the Star of David branded us as monsters, traitors; the enemy.

For the first time I heard my parents talking about fleeing from our homeland; it wasn't easy, we were no longer German but nobody else wanted us either, worse my father was sick - his illnesses caused by old war wounds and couldn't travel. In March 1939 my

parents and I parted company, they'd arranged for me to get onto a train that was going all the way to England. I was so terrified - the English had been the enemy during the war and now offered our only refuge', leaving my parents was the hardest thing I ever had to do - I was fourteen at the time and there was 200 hundred of us children crammed onto this train which took days and days to cross France before we were put on a ship for England. Many of the children were dreadfully upset, they cried all the time for their families, I was just numb, my whole world seemed to have been unraveling and this appeared as the last act.

We were taken to London where I stayed for a while with some of my parents' friends who'd left earlier then was placed with another family, as though my own was already dead. I'm 17 now and the war has been going on for three years, I'm due to start training as a nurse soon.

I've never heard from my parents.

Eva

It was very cold, snow was falling. It was January in the Ghetto when they came for us, hard and crunching beneath your feet. We weren't the first to be taken. They'd begun moving people the previous summer - we heard dreadful stories about what happened to those people in Lithuania. We knew then what the Nazis had in store for us; a group had got together to form the ZOB - a kind of resistance organisation, not that we had much to resist with', we had no arms, no supplies, no training. The Polish Resistance in Warsaw refused to help us because we were Jews, we had a common enemy in the Germans but somehow that still wasn't enough; by that September 300,000 of us had been deported. Moving from one vision of Hell to another; we knew we would die it was just a question of how.

This time we fought back - Mordecai Anielewicz was our leader; we harassed the SS right there in the Umschlagplatz; gave them a fright, Jews who resist; for a while they didn't know what to do. It couldn't last, we knew that but it was still intoxicating, fighting back

after those years of torment, of fear and hunger, disease, deportation and causal killings. After four days they gave up on the deportations; it was a kind of victory, even if, in reality, just a reprieve. People began to join us, by the spring we had maybe six hundred members ready to fight; to fight with whatever they had; we had very few guns, I'd an old pistol which rarely works, but we made Molotovs and manufactured home made grenades.

It's 20th April today; Hitler's Birthday and Himmler is making him a gift of our deaths, there's a brigade of SS attacking the ghetto, thousands more in Warsaw itself As soon as the Nazis attacked hundreds more joined us, bringing whatever they had, even once they'd seen the SS had tanks and armoured cars, flamethrowers to burn us in the shelters, machine guns and rifles; heavy guns and as many grenades as they could use. Yet they're frightened of us; we'd dug a whole series of deep shelters, bunkers and we threw petrol bombs from the rooftops. I was there, I threw at a German half track and it caught fire - their brave troops were driven back by the fury of our defence - they actually retreated - the elite of the Master Race beaten by a handful of Jews.

We fought so hard they've given up attacking and decided to burn us out; blasting buildings with artillery; the warehouses are in flames, a great black pall hanging over the dying ghetto like a shroud. We're fighting them street by street, house by house, cellar by cellar, we're running out of our few bullets and have no gasoline left, they've killed all the patients and nurses in the Hospital, they'll finish the rest of us before long but this time we won't die like sheep of cattle queuing for the slaughter; this is one pogrom they won't so easily forget. I've two bullets left, if the damn gun fires.

Gunfire - Eva cries out, stumbles and dies.

Kube

You know me, of course, General Commissar, under our Heinrich himself; not bad for a railway inspector you'll say, but that's the New Germany, the top jobs aren't just for your Junkers types any more. God, I love National Socialism - if it wasn't for the Party I'd still

be punching train tickets the bloody Rhineland. Now Rosenberg, stuck up tosser, objects when I was appointed to carry out his policies in Belorussia - complained I was too heavy-handed! What do you want, I asks, if you want rid of the Jews it ain't a job for the pastor, you need someone with a bit of enthusiasm.

Big job too, no sinecure, even if there's a few perks (some of the women look almost German, (blondies I call em) In front on me there's the Front, Bock Army Group Centre, pretty rough too they tell me. Still we civil servants do our bit and Minsk's not that bad, well not for Russia anyway. Got to give old Heinrich his due; he might be bonkers but he's an eye for business; I picked up a few factories here, nothing much, but contributes to the war effort of course, ten per cent for me, five for the Boss, a lot for sitting on his fat behind in Berlin but, hey, who's complaining, plenty to go round.

The locals can be got to work; you just need a firm hand and enough ammo. To be fair my team's a bit raw, fresh from training most of 'em, none with much experience but they can nose out gold and valuables with the best, just as well with those damn SS around - know what they did, right in the middle of my patch, without as much as a *guttentag*; descended on Slutsk like the plague, hauled out all the Jews and had some fun, bodies everywhere, Jews of course and a few of the locals as took their fancy, shot a bunch of Poles too who I'd brought in as we were short of skilled labour - wasn't my fault we'd billeted 'em in the Gaol, there was nowhere else.

Now, as you know, I'm not one to go soft on Jews, you know me better than that; but there's a science to these matters; no point shooting some bugger then asking where he'd hid the dosh is there. No point a tall, give 'em a good vigorous workout beforehand so they cough; nothing sophisticated, just use your belt of the butt of your rifle, that's what they're for. Besides there's Jews and Jews, some of them are actually bloody useful, they know things other people don't, now there's discrimination and there's using your loaf, if the Jew has a purpose, put him to work, they're all going the same way in the end but no reason they shouldn't work in the meantime. That's the art to being a Commissar, harnessing the local economy to the war effort, no reason you can't find yourself a few blondies even here, vodka's good and the beer ain't bad.

Glances at Eva 's corpse Wouldn't mind the SS so much if they'd just clean up when they're done.

Hannah

I don 't remember if I have already told you that I am a Zionist, I feel now that I am with all my heart a conscious Jew ... I am proud of my Judaism and I am committed to emigration to Eretz Israel and taking part in its building up. I wrote that entry in October 1938, only seven years ago, seems like a different century. In those heady days I was full of my commitment to Israel. I did it too, at 19, left everything of the Old World behind and went - enrolled at the Nahalal Agricultural College; my mother stayed behind at our home in Budapest; I gave up my tennis shoes for farmer's boots! It was hard too, sometimes my hands were so swollen and calloused I felt I could hardly pick up my pen.

Of course the news from home got steadily worse, much worse, I remember my entry on the 26th June 1940 fearing for my brother Giora who'd fled to France but now with the Nazis poised at the gates of Paris; it was horrible yet seemed so distant, I'd got used to the life in Israel but no amount of blue skies could make us forget what the Nazis were doing to our people in the countries they'd occupied. From College I moved to the Kibbutz at Sdot Yam; life was creative and fulfilling but there was no escaping the news filtering through from Europe - it was worse than our worst imaginings, even the little we heard. The Nazis were embarked on a programme of extermination', they'd defeated the Allies just about everywhere. We knew we had to do something.

The plain fact was the Allies didn't really want to care, we were a nuisance in Israel and irrelevant in Europe. We'd try to persuade them to let us establish our own rescue unit to get the Jews out before it was too late but nobody really wanted to listen but, finally last year, after the Allies landed in Normandy, we had the chance to join the British Special Forces - SOE; volunteers were needed for parachute training to be dropped into Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Austria; we'd be there to gather intelligence but also to organise networks for saving Jews. I knew I had no choice; thought

the SOE recruiters were brutally honest, the odds against our survival weren't really worth calculating.

I found myself in Egypt, 240 of us, men and women, each determined to do our bit; the training was rigorous and the selection tough', only 26 of us made it through', 1 was trained to jump by parachute, in weapons handling, radio and sabotage. I hoped to get to Hungary of course though we were dropped first into Yugoslavia, for three months I lived and fought with Tito's partisans till I got across to Hungary and only after I'd insisted. God what a homecoming, a man called Eichman in charge of the deportations, hundreds being sent daily to one of their camps, placed called Auschwitz. I had to do my bit, it doesn't matter that they caught me, the Hungarians, doesn't matter about the Gestapo we had to try to show those left behind we cared enough to come back from them, to look the monster in the face and not flinch.

Sound of the firing squad

Pares

Based upon the published account - Durham County Record office D/DLI 7/4040/10.