

Captain Walter C Winterbottom RAMC

Approximate war service

May 1940 Broadstairs or Margate, Kent receiving Dunkirk casualties

During Battle of Britain Chartham, Kent hospital treating B of B casualties

Then School of Tropical Medicine, London

Posted to Ibadan, Nigeria, arrived 14 May 1941 (unofficially helped with anaesthetics with native doctors) - he was an anaesthetist.

Early 1943 ill with malaria, out of hospital 16 February 1943

Returned to England spring 1943 then fought shingles

Then posted to Stannington nr. Newcastle on Tyne and was also at Inverary, Scotland treating casualties from pre D Day training.

Pre D Day at Camberley

Normandy Landings definitely not D1 but could have been D2 or 3 (would love to know).

Antwerp the Begen Op Zoom, Holland. Crossed the Rhine at Nimegen

Relief unit RAMC Bergen Belsen (see below)

By June 1945 on coast near Copenhagen

Married Rowna (Fletcher) Paddington, London 25 July 1936

Son Oliver Carton Winterbottom born 24 February 1944

Daughter Sara (Helmer) born 22 August 1948

BELSEN

Film Holocaust on Channel 4, 24th January 2015

I watched this programme and felt that it failed to portray the dreadful work that the doctors faced. One of the doctors was my father.

He never talked of this episode of his war and indeed my mother said it changed him for ever.

The British arrived there on 15th April 1945 "under a white flag" after the Germans negotiated a local cease fire due to the epidemic of typhus in the camp which was in danger of spreading into Europe. The film stated that there were no shots fired but I understood from my father that there were - although not inflicting any casualties.

The British had known that there were terrible epidemics in the camp, but they were unprepared for the gruesome sight of the dead bodies, and it came as an enormous shock to them. I understood from my father that all the British doctors were physically sick upon arrival despite being battle hardened through 5 years of war.

My father Captain Walter "Frosty" Winterbottom RAMC entered Belsen as one of the doctors under Brigadier Llewelyn Glyn-Hughes of 21st Army Group liberation team. I believe there were only 6 or 8 doctors at that stage.

They were based at the Panzer Barracks at Hohne on the edge of Bergen village about a mile from the concentration camp.

Captain Winterbottom was charged with providing hospital beds for survivors so as I understand it, teams were sent out to commandeer these from the local people at gunpoint. The army hospital at Hohne provided the nucleus of this.



Maj. H.D. 'Johnny' Johnston, Hadassah Bimko, Ruth Gutman and Capt Winterbottom (right) in the Gro8es Frauenlager. Bergen – Belsen. Dated: 17 April 1945 Source: Unknown

SOME REFERENCES TO Dr. WINTERBOTTOM IN PRINT

JR Army Med Corps 2001

“Rescue of the Remnants: The British Emergency Medical Relief Operation in Belsen Camp” 1945 by E Trepman

“The physician in charge of hospital stores at Belsen, Capt. “Frosty” Winterbottom, RAMC, equipped 7000 beds in one week by “freezing all he could lay hands upon” around Belsen. In addition, Winterbottom organised thousands of sets of clothing and footwear for the liberated prisoners, a hairdressing salon, a group of plumbers for the hospital buildings, internee seamstresses who mass produced the “standard Belsen nightie” for the sick, and a workshop for wirelasses and bicycles.

He also organised a nightclub – “The Coconut Grove” – “chiefly for rehabitating the patients”. A former stable in Camp 2 was converted to an issue store for clothing requisitioned from German townships miles around Belsen, and was named Harrods.

OCW Note: Cpt Winterbottom in the British press for creating a retail shop environment for the distribution of life’s essentials to Belsen survivors using Harrods of London as a name. This formed part of the attempts to return the inmates to a non camp lifestyle. Many found it very difficult to readjust to a non incarceration environment.

JR Army Med Corps 1984

“Belsen: Medical Aspects of a World War II Concentration Camp”

Paper 1 Col. E E Vella, Assistant Editor, Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps

"In Camp 2, a former German military training school the hospital area was prepared. At first some 7000 beds were equipped but later this figure was to be considerably expanded."

"A gigantic task faced a small medical team consisting of 32 Casualty Clearing Station, 11th Light Field Ambulance and 7th Mobile Bacteriological Laboratory. I was particularly interested to meet Capt. "Frosty" Winterbottom RAMC, a Mary's man, who was anaesthetist to the 32 CCS. "Frosty" was certainly one of the best known of Belsen personalities. He was officially in charge of hospital stores and his fame is well founded on his achievement in equipping the 7000 bedded hospital in Col. Johnsons first report. With knowledge of only negligible stocks of medical ordinance stores available, by scouring the district and "freezing" all he could lay hands upon, Capt. Winterbottom equipped 7000 beds at the rate of 1000 each day.

Contributed by John Hankinson (St. Mary's)
From St. Mary's Hospital Gazette 1945

JR Army Med Corps 1986 (RAMC journal)
Reflections on 40 years ago – Belsen 1945
Major D T Prescott MB, BS, FRCGP, RAMC

"We were a handful of officers who had to take charge of administrative duties, and if I remember rightly, Major Max Griffen, who was a pathologist and a member of 32 CCS., was in charge of the "human laundry". Another member of 32 CCS who was an anaesthetist was a Major (Sic) Winterbottom, the inmates soon regained their sense of humour and referred to him as "Major Frosty". The hospital area was created from what could be scrounged or commandeered locally and staffed by any local or continental doctors and nurses who were available".

Recollections of an Army Doctor by J A D JOHNSTON 1972

BELSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP - continued

This department, which came to be known as the human laundry, had, I suppose, a certain spectacular appeal and received considerable press publicity at the time. It was controlled by Major Max Griffin whose normal employment as a pathologist hardly provided suitable training for the skill he displayed as a human laundry man.

The clearing and cleaning out of barrack rooms was carried out by 400 soldiers of a Hungarian battalion which had been left behind in Hohne Barracks; they were supervised by one of my non-medical officers who had been a guardsman before he was commissioned. The re-equipping was done by personnel of my unit working to scales which we had drawn up. Sufficient basic equipment - palliasses or beds, blankers, sheets, pillows, feeding utensils etc - was discovered in various buildings throughout the barracks to cater for some 5,000 patients. **As this equipment was found, it was transferred to the building earmarked as a store under the charge of an officer of my unit, Captain 'Frosty' Winterbottom, who was given the task of acquiring sufficient to equip a total of 15,000 beds. 'Frosty' was an anaesthetist under normal circumstances but he turned out to be a superlative warehouseman; indeed I never ceased to be amazed by the remarkable versatility displayed by all my officers and sisters at this time.**

Second Army were given a list of our requirements of stores but neither they nor military government were able to give us much assistance and it soon became clear that the task of obtaining it would have to be undertaken by us.

Accordingly, for the first few days, the majority of my officers and NCOs were employed in acquiring equipment. This they did by simply going to the local towns and villages in trucks and demanding it either direct from houses or through the local burgomaster. Their success was phenomenal.

Letters from my father to my mother:-

Capt W. C. Winterbottom
32 (Br) CCS
BLA
25 April 1945

I am very busy & have literally not had time to write for five or six days – I will be able to tell you what I am doing soon. Pat has caught us up & tells me he telephoned you. This is a colossal job. We are not yet in the postal service & I have not had any of your letters & it has also been difficult to post any to you. I have not seen the papers but I gather we were in the Daily Mirror about 20th or 21st

Capt W. C. Winterbottom
32 (Br) CCS
BLA
6th May 1945

Thank you for all your lovely letters – they are grand. I can tell you now that I am working in Belsen concentration camp & that I am responsible for equipping 13,000 beds for cases of typhus, typhoid and malnutrition. It is perhaps the hardest work I have ever had to do. Then there are conferences to attend & bed is usually hit pretty late or early in the morning. It really is the most colossal undertaking. I have by now of course got 7,000 beds fairly well equipped and have still got another 7,000 to do.

Capt W. C. Winterbottom
32 (Br) CCS
BLA
28th May 1945

The dress was made by an internee of the Belsen concentration camp. The material was liberated by me for use in the hospital workrooms which we got going soon after we arrived. I hope the censors & customs will understand the position.

Letter from Denmark after leaving Belsen
Capt W. C. Winterbottom
32 (Br) CCS
BLA
19th June 1945

I was hoping the mail would come in tonight but so far the truck has not come back from Copenhagen so I must write as it returns again in the morning. We have had our first hot day today and Johnnie, Suzanne and I had a swim. It is very cold but we shall get used to it. Suzanne fell off the jetty & I thought I should have to go in after her but she swam quite well. Later I threw her in and she quite enjoyed it. I wonder if you could possibly get me a pair of trunks, I am using shorts. I tried in Copenhagen but they were unobtainable. We shall swim everyday here was? if the weather has really changed. Also darling, Col Lipscomb who has been staying with us may ring you up & I asked him if you could possibly increase my cigarette ration, we are desperate here. We are not getting our quota & also the barter value is very high & I think the non-smokers are buying them & I have now got sixty Woodbines to last me for 4 days. Bloody poor show after fighting a war I think. Still if you could get Harrods of London to increase the quantity just for a month or two we should be alright. I must say the radio is a joy here. I have had the mess and all the tents put in the 220 volt main supply & I have two lights & a radio in my tent. I am not out as often as the others, in fact I am in alone again tonight, in bed & Suzanne is asleep lying at my feet. She is getting heavy & will have to have a box soon. She will waken at about 5 & rush around the tent. So radio reception is usually very good here. Johnnie told me this afternoon that I should probably get leave in the middle of July. We have started with the men, 10 went off yesterday – God it will be wonderful

(Suzanne was an Alsation guard dog puppy “liberated” from Belsen. My father gave her to a Danish farmer before he returned to the UK for de-mob.).

I visited Belsen 20+ years ago. I did not feel that the British effort was well represented as there seemed to much American activity recorded.

Oliver Winterbottom (son of Dr. “Frosty” Winterbottom)
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I know a British newspaper had an article and photograph of my father and the "Harrods" sign. I would appreciate a copy if anyone knows a source. Probably the Daily Mirror as in the letter (below)