



Belsen Silence **Iolo Lewis**

The 1st National Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January 2001 celebrated the liberation of the Concentration Camps. On 27th January 1945, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, and in April 1945, Bergen-Belsen was overrun by the British 11th Armoured Division, and my regiment played a leading role; being the first to get there. I had been wounded some days previous, and flown to hospital in Brussels, where I spent a month. Strangely, I returned from England following sick leave – in a Lancaster bomber; and bizarrely, the Army truck I was being conveyed in, on my way back to the regiment – then on the Danish border; crashed, killing 6 out of 20, all returning to their units after being wounded. That was near Belsen, and so I saw (and smelled) the aftermath. It was something that really hit me. On the 50th Anniversary of the liberation of Belsen, I wrote this poem, and it was accepted by the YAD VASHEM, the Holocaust Museum in JERUSALEM, for their archives, and given an access number 11458. I read the poem on BBC3 Counties radio, and to the public as part of the 1st National Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January 2001.

- Iolo Lewis

Long gone the sound of battle from this foreign dell,
As we tread again the Belsen grass,
Remembering comrades, young men all,
Who died to reach this awful Hell,
Hallowed now for Eternity,
As the clouds from memory swiftly pass.

Listen then, can't you hear,
The silence here around,
Telling us of terror,
And ancient bestial fear;
How real is this silence,
That permeates from underground?

Only fifty years ago, but now,
Forever, the silence condemns,
For here there lie, anonymous,
'Neath the soil, as we reverently bow,
Remnants of a living dead,
Whose silence still transmits, transcends.

Listen to the silence still,
And lift your head on high,
Are you waiting for a question,
Or an answer, and a void to fill?
Quicken then the pulse, breathe deeper still,
Answer the silence to question, why?