

From the Testimony of Shlomo Cohen on the Liberation from Bergen-Belsen

... Luckily for us, we were finally transferred to Bergen-Belsen.

On the last day before the liberation one of the inmates climbed up a tree, he was so hungry that he began to eat the leaves. After an hour or two there was nothing left on the trees. Where people got the strength to climb trees and eat, I have no idea.

On that same day, at about 4 p.m., I was in the yard of the camp. I was weak and I walked slowly. I could hardly stand on my feet. Suddenly I heard a loud noise from far away. Immediately we understood that these were English tanks. They didn't enter the camp, but about an hour later an English military jeep with loudspeakers arrived and told everyone to report to the yard. They started talking in all different languages and said we weren't yet liberated. We had to watch over each other, they were only soldiers. After them the Red Cross would come and help us.

They gave us what they had with them – a few biscuits, chocolate – and there was a real battle over who could grab first. We thought we were already rescued, but it was not so. There was still no bread a few days later. They started to give out sweetened milk in the camp, they brought parcels and all kinds of cans of preserves. They started distributing lard freely, as much as you wanted, and that was the great tragedy of this camp.

People came down with diarrhea and they started to fill all the toilets, the road, all the paths, and a lot of people died...

I was in that camp for about six months, but we were free, we could go wherever we wanted. Then they told us we could register either to return to Greece or go to Eretz Israel or to the United States. I registered for two places, Greece or Palestine, but what I really wanted was to go back to Greece and wait a few months to see if anyone from my family was still alive...

In Athens I met a neighbor who had been with my brother at Jaworzno camp. Right away I asked him about my brother and [in reply] he made circles in the air with his finger – meaning my brother had been taken to the crematorium in

Auschwitz. I almost passed out, I didn't know what to do with myself. I had thought that he was the only one who could have remained alive, he was strong. His name is Avraham. And from that day no one came back.

I was in Greece for about six months. From Athens I was transferred to Saloniki, my birthplace, but I didn't want to be there for even one day. Our houses were destroyed, we saw only pits instead of houses, because after we were deported the gentiles started to search for gold, they razed the houses and dug pits to look for gold. I met one Greek whom I had known before the war, and he asked me: "Why did the Germans leave you alive?" Why didn't they turn you into soap?" After hearing that, I understood that there was no longer place for me here...

Source: *The Anguish of Liberation- Testimonies from 1945*, Edited by Y. Kleiman and N. Springer- Aharoni (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995) p. 54-55