

# Knife from Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp

Inscribed **OFFIZIERHEIM BERGEN**  
Courtesy of Sidney **SCHWIMMER**, USA



From the collection of Sydney Schwimmer

I possessed this knife a few days before my liberation from Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp on April 15, 1944. I was in Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp block #5, six weeks before the liberation. When I arrived, there were thousands of inmate's corpses lying on the ground. The inmates died from starvation and typhoid, which was rampant in the camps. The Germans gathered thousands of the inmates from several concentration camps before the liberation. At that time, aside from the Jewish inmates, there were also Russian POWs. The hunger was unbelievable; people were too weak to move. Near block 5, was a small yard, fenced around with wire. In that yard, there was a pile of rutabagas, gathered from fields and brought there. They were used to make a soup to feed the inmates. These rutabagas were frozen and some were rotten. The fence was guarded by the SS. The inmates in block #5 could see the rutabagas, but could not reach them. Occasionally, when the wind blew, the rutabagas were blown next to the fence. If you were lucky, sitting and waiting, you could sneak a moment when the guards were not watching and try to reach under the wire to fetch a rutabaga. The rivalry for food among the inmates was so great, that if one inmate discovered you have the rutabaga, they would try to grab it away. In the final days at Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp, very few people had enough strength to wait near the fence for an opportune moment. On one of my final days at the camp, I was the lucky one waiting for the wind to blow. I tried to get the rutabaga with my hand, digging under the wire, and then finally successfully reached it. The rutabagas were hard and small and frozen from the winter's cold. I tried to eat it, but since I was so weak I could not bite into it. A few yards away from the fence, I saw small fires made by the Russian POWs. (The Russian POWs were identifiable. Since they were in captivity, they did not have striped uniforms; they were in torn military clothes. Some of the Russian POWs were engaged in cannibalism. They had objects, made from tin, that were used as eating utensils. From afar, one of the Russian POWs noticed that I had a rutabaga and asked me for one half of it. He offered the knife he was using for cannibalism, for 1/2 the rutabaga. He cut the rutabaga in one half and gave me the knife in return. After seeing the fires, he told me he was using the knife to slice up bodies. I took the knife and used it to cut up the remaining rutabaga into small pieces. I took the small pieces and ate them slowly to satiate my hunger. I could hardly chew. I do not

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know how he obtained this knife but knew that the Germans officers had flatware engraved. The knife was from the German guard headquarters.

The knife is engraved with the inscription OFFIZIERHEIM BERGEN\ (Home of the officer's in Bergen). The knife is still in my possession.