

PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING MINUTES



Lyle Creelman | March, 1945
Ziekenboeg Dutch for Sick Bay
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Soldier of Peace, Lyle Creelman

“UNRRA must not merely do its job well; it must do it so well that it will give heart and courage to the governments who, slowly but steadily, are building up the international structure of peace ...”

Lester B. Pearson

Lyle Creelman was Director of Public Health Nursing for the City of Vancouver and President of the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia when UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, called.

At 37 years of age Creelman was appointed Chief Medical Officer for the British zone of occupied Germany. Her job was to organize nursing services to help care for millions of displaced persons (DP) of many nationalities as they awaited repatriation. The enormous task was made more difficult when displaced persons refused repatriation. Some feared the communist regimes to which they would return while many Jews feared further persecution and even murder. The displaced person camps became very crowded and the risk of epidemics increased. Creelman had to use her considerable skills to organize, negotiate and educate in dire situations.

The direst situation Creelman faced was in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. She was in the forefront of medical care after it was liberated by the British in April 1945. RCAF trucks carrying medical supplies and food were among the first to reach the inmates barely clinging to life. Canadian war artist Alex Colville painted the scene that greeted those who entered the place of horrors. After removing the living, the British burned the camp to the ground.

Creelman constantly had to make difficult staffing and

supply decisions as there just wasn't enough to satisfy the pressing needs in situations as desperate as Bergen-Belsen. In spite of these challenges, she pioneered specialized nurses' training programs in the camps under her supervision. She was acutely aware that the displaced persons would need either documentation or new learning to serve in war-torn communities to which they would return.

- Sixty Canadian nurses served with UNRRA.
- Mr. Colville described his experience at a disease-riddled Bergen-Belsen concentration camp http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/sub.cfm?source=collections/hrp/hrp_detail&media_id=639

