



THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS:

AMERICAN LIBERATORS OF
NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg
HOLOCAUST RESOURCE CENTER
AND ARCHIVES



QUEENSBOROUGH
COMMUNITY COLLEGE







THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS: AMERICAN LIBERATORS OF NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS

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LIVING, FOR MAKING AVAILABLE THE PHOTOS AND TEXTS OF LIBERATORS
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UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, FOR HIS VALUABLE
SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE TEXT OF THE EXHIBIT

“The most moving moment of my life was the day the Americans arrived. It was the morning of April 11 [1945]. I will always remember with love a big black soldier. He was crying like a child—tears of all the pain in the world and all the rage. Everyone who was there that day will forever feel a sentiment of gratitude to the American soldiers who liberated us.”
 (“Facing Hate,” Public Affairs Television, 11/27/1991).

SUCH WERE THE SENTIMENTS of Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, expressed during a TV interview. Forty-six years following his liberation from the Buchenwald concentration camp, Wiesel shared a moment that forever marked his life. He, together with thousands of Jews and other people enslaved and tortured by the Nazi war machine, lived to greet and welcome the American army that liberated them. All were grateful for the gift they were granted, a new lease on life that only a few weeks earlier seemed a wishful dream.

Buchenwald, Nordhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, are the names of some of the camps the American army liberated, including satellite camps, such as Ohrdruf Nord. A Buchenwald sub-camp, Ohrdruf was the first occupied camp that American forces encountered. The army, largely made up made by 19 to 25 year-old men, had already experienced the ravages of war and the grief engendered by the sight of lost comrades. But these young soldiers had neither heard of the concentration camps nor of the horrors that were committed inside their gates. The Holocaust, as it was to become known in later days, was unknown to them. One after another, in oral and written testimonies, as well as in photos they took of the remnants of the genocide committed behind fences and in wooded areas, laid the foundation of unprecedented events in human history.

This exhibit will document the American armed forces’ liberation of the concentration camps as witnessed by the soldiers themselves. Whenever possible, we will use the liberator’s own words to tell the story. The photos will illustrate “the cruelty of the killers, the cowardice of the bystanders, the brutality of the collaborators, the desperate faith of the believers, the solitude of the condemned, the magnificent bravery of the liberators.” (Elie Wiesel in Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. X).

IT WAS only when the new millennium turned the corner that “researchers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum began the grim task of documenting all the ghettos, slave labor sites, concentration camps and killing factories that the Nazis set up throughout Europe.” What they found so far has “shocked even scholars steeped in the history of the Holocaust. The researchers

have cataloged some 42,500 Nazi ghettos and camps spanning German-controlled areas from France to Russia and Germany itself during Hitler’s reign of brutality from 1933 to 1945.” (Eric Lichtblau, “The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking,” *The New York Times*, Sunday, March 3, 2013, “Sunday Review,” p. 3).

This map is limited to marking the liberation of the major Nazi camps, the month and year of their liberation and the various armed forces responsible for liberating the camps.



PHOTO OF MAP WITH PERMISSION FROM JOSEPH J. PREIL, ED. *HOLOCAUST TESTIMONIES: EUROPEAN SURVIVORS AND AMERICAN LIBERATORS IN NEW JERSEY*, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2001.

THE LIBERATION of Dachau (12 miles northwest from Munich) by the 42nd Infantry Division took place on Sunday, April 29, 1945. Only the survivors in better physical condition could meet their rescuers standing on their feet, waving and smiling with gratitude on their faces. Leonard “Pinky” Popuch, wrote many years later about the prisoners who kissed the Americans, “They fell on the ground at our feet and kissed our boots and grabbed our hands and kissed them... There were women, children and men alike—those that were able to walk—all crying, half mad with happiness.” (Michael Hirsh, *The Liberators: America’s Witnesses to the Holocaust*, p. 220).



▲ DACHAU SURVIVORS GATHER BY THE MOAT TO GREET AMERICAN LIBERATORS.

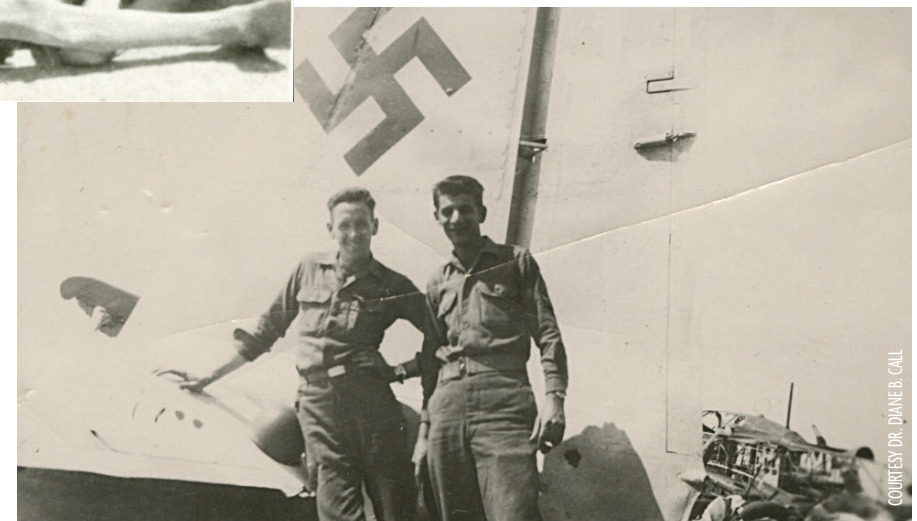


◀ SURVIVORS OF THE EBENSEE CONCENTRATION CAMP (ONE OF THE SIXTY-PLUS SUBCAMPS OF MAUTHAUSEN, AUSTRIA) WHO WERE LIBERATED BY 80TH DIVISION ON MAY 9, 1945, MARCH OUT OF THE CAMP BENEATH THE SIGN “WE WELCOME OUR LIBERATORS.”



▲ IN DACHAU, LIBERATORS FOUND A GRISLY SIGHT COMMON TO ALL THE CAMPS THEY ENTERED: BODIES STACKED UP LIKE CORDWOOD. TWO PINE WREATHS WERE HUNG ON A NEARBY WALL PROBABLY BY U.S. SOLDIERS AS A MODEST AND HEARTFELT TRIBUTE TO THE DEAD. (THE PHOTO WAS FOUND AMONG THE WAR MEMORABILIA OF CHARLES FRANCIS BOVA).

► DACHAU LIBERATOR FIRST SERGEANT CHARLES FRANCIS BOVA (1929-1974, BRONZE STAR RECIPIENT) STANDING ON THE RIGHT WITH A FRIEND, AND BEHIND THEM A NAZI SWASTIKA. HE WAS ONE OF THE SOLDIERS IN THE TANK DESTROYER BRIGADE OF THE U.S. THIRD ARMY UNDER THE COMMAND OF GENERAL PATTON.



IN THE Dachau Concentration Camp and its 240 sub-camps prisoners lived in conditions that were the nearest thing to Hell that a human being could imagine. “The death rate from disease and starvation reached catastrophic proportions. [This] was of no interest to the concentration camp commanders since new bodies were constantly available. The pervasive smell of death was everywhere. This was the scene that greeted [the American liberators]. They simply were not prepared for the sights they encountered. They walked into the camps as boys. They came out with memories that would stay with them until they took their last breath.” (*The Day the Thunderbird Cried*, p. 90)

Robert Fasnacht was a nineteen-year-old soldier from Canton, Ohio, who “knew nothing about concentration camps, nothing about the Holocaust” when he entered Ebensee. He did not encounter cheering survivors. He would reminisce many decades later how beyond him it was to understand “that humans could do this to humans...I’ve often wondered if Hitler knew, the scale of this sort of thing. Now, the pictures I’ve taken, I’ve showed those to people. They don’t believe it.” Many decades later, Fasnacht was invited to speak about the liberation at a Cleveland synagogue. “This man,” he said, “who was maybe ten years younger than me, said to me, ‘Where were you?’ I said, ‘Well, at Ebensee.’ And he said, ‘Can I hug you?’ And I said, ‘Why?’ And he said, ‘I was there when you came.’” (*The Liberators*, p. 250)



▲ EBENSEE “MUSELMANNER” FOLLOWING LIBERATION. (MUSELMANN WAS A SADLY DEROGATORY TERM USED AMONG CAPTIVES OF NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS TO REFER TO THOSE SUFFERING FROM A COMBINATION OF STARVATION AND EXHAUSTION, WHO WERE RESIGNED TO THEIR IMPENDING DEATH).



COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION / USHMM, AND DAVID CROWN

TOO WEAK to leave their infirmary barracks for Jewish prisoners in the Ebensee concentration camp, these survivors happily greet 22-year-old 123rd Combat Unit photographer J. Malan Heslop. As Heslop later wrote: "Men took the posture of thankful prayer as I entered some of the crowded barracks. I did not have the capacity to fathom how terrible the situation was. The pictures tell the story."

COL. (RET.) Lewis H. Weinstein, accompanied General Dwight Eisenhower during his visit to the Ohrdruf concentration camp. Weinstein reported reading about a letter that Eisenhower had written to the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General George C. Marshall: "The things I saw beggar description. The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty, and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick...I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda.'" Ike's instinct was right on target: he knew that a time would come when all he witnessed would be denied. (Brewster Chamberlain and Marcia Feldman, eds., *The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps* 1945, p. 76).



COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION AND THE USHMM.

▲ ON APRIL 12, 1945, GENERAL DWIGHT EISENHOWER AND A PARTY OF HIGH RANKING U.S. ARMY OFFICERS, INCLUDING GENERALS OMAR BRADLEY, GEORGE PATTON, AND MANTON EDDY, ARRIVED IN OHRDRUF. SURROUNDED BY ARMY MEN AND SURVIVORS, THEY VIEWED THE CHARRED REMAINS OF PRISONERS WHO WERE BURNED ON A PYRE. ALSO PICTURED IS JULES GRAD (THIRD FROM THE LEFT TAKING NOTES), CORRESPONDENT FOR THE STARS AND STRIPES U.S. ARMY NEWSPAPER AND 1ST LT ALOIS LIETHEN, ACTING AS INTERPRETER.



AS FAR as the American army was concerned, liberation of the Nazi concentration camps involved not only wrestling the camps from Nazi control and extending immediate help to survivors, but also investigating, learning, and recording the magnitude of the crimes carried out within their limits. During an official tour of the newly liberated Ohrdruf camp, an Austrian survivor described the use of gallows to General Eisenhower and the members of his entourage. "Before leaving Ohrdruf, Eisenhower issued an uncharacteristically emotional order. He said: 'I want every American unit not actually in the front lines to see this place. We are told that the American soldier does not know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against.'" (*The Liberators*, p. 100).

JUST A day before General Eisenhower visited Ohrdruf, the 6th Armored Division entered the Buchenwald concentration camp. It was April 11, 1945. Just a day earlier, Communist-led inmates, aware of the American army's imminent approach, mounted a rebellion against the hard-core SS guards, who fled the camp. As the Americans were approaching the camp, a 14-year-old Jewish boy, Menachem Lipshitz, went to the roof of the hospital where he was hiding, and saw the American tanks coming from both sides of the camp. "A jeep with American soldiers came into the camp, and that's the first time I saw an American soldier in my life. And that's how we were liberated." (*The Liberators*, p. 43).



COURTESY USHMM AND K.L. RABINOFF-GOLDMAN

▲ AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN DACHAU EXAMINE PILES OF PRISONERS' CLOTHING FOUND NEAR THE CREMATORIUM.

► ON THE DAY OF LIBERATION, GENERAL PATTON, JOINED BY MEMBERS OF THE THIRD ARMY, VIEWED ARTICLES MADE OF PRISONERS REMAINS AS SURVIVORS WATCH. ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF THEM, ARE ARTICLES MADE OF PRISONER REMAINS, AS WELL AS PRESERVED HUMAN ORGANS, AND WIGS. THESE BELONGED TO ILSE KOCH, THE BRUTAL WIFE OF THE CAMP'S COMMANDER KARL-OTTO KOCH. THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN BY PRENTICE G. MORGAN, A MEMBER OF PATTON'S ARMY, WHO ALSO PARTICIPATED IN THE LIBERATION OF BUCHENWALD.



COURTESY USHMM AND TOM MORGAN, THE SON OF PRENTICE G. MORGAN.



▲ A SURVIVOR DEMONSTRATES SS METHODS OF TORTURE AND EXECUTION IN BUCHENWALD TO A VISITING DELEGATION OF AMERICAN CONGRESSMEN, APRIL 24, 1945.

SOON AFTER General Eisenhower informed President Roosevelt regarding the atrocities he had witnessed, he cabled the President again requesting that a delegation of newspaper and magazine editors come to Germany immediately “to record for the American people and for posterity what the Allied forces discovered. Within days, the group was on its way. A similar group of Congressmen and Senators, made up of equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, was also selected to bear witness to the German atrocities... so that it shouldn’t be said in the future that these atrocities never happened.” The American legislators visited Buchenwald, Nordhausen, and Dachau. They later presented the findings to the 79th Congress, Senate Document N. 47, entitled “Atrocities and Other Conditions in Concentration Camps in Germany.” (David L. Israel, *The Day the Thunderbird Cried: Untold Stories of World War II*, p. 166).



THE MAUTHAUSEN concentration camp, located ten miles southeast of Linz, Austria, was liberated on May 5, 1945 by the 11th Armored Infantry Division. 20,000 prisoners, men and women, were liberated. Irving Fox, a member of the 59th Field Hospital, was a Mauthausen liberator. In a letter dated July 15, 1945, he wrote to his brother PFC Henry Milton Fox, stationed at the time in the Marianna, Florida, Army Air Field. "If I told you all the stories of horror that the Jews and other people endured here, you'd never believe it; it's the truth about quarries, crematories, gas chambers, etc." (Yaffa Eliach and Brana Gurewitsch, *The Liberators: Eyewitness Accounts of the Liberation of Concentration Camps*, p. 51).

▲ SPANISH SURVIVORS TAKE DOWN THE NAZI EAGLE THAT HANGED ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THE SS COMPOUND IN MAUTHAUSEN ON THE DAY OF LIBERATION.



▲ NEWSREEL FOOTAGE AVAILABLE AT THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM WEB SITE SHOWS AMERICAN SOLDIERS COMPELLING LOCAL GERMAN CIVILIANS TO VIEW THE CAMPS, DIG GRAVES, AND GIVE THE DEAD PROPER BURIAL. WITHOUT EXCEPTION THESE CIVILIANS FROM THE NEARBY TOWN OF HURLACH SAID: "WE KNEW NOTHING." IN THE PHOTO, GERMAN CIVILIANS ARE SEEN LISTENING TO A SPEECH BY COLONEL SEILLERS OF THE U.S. 12TH ARMORED DIVISION, WHO IS SPEAKING THROUGH AN INTERPRETER, MAX BEER.

“THERE WERE eleven camps named for the nearest railway station, called Kaufering. They were all subcamps of the oldest concentration camp established by the Reich, Dachau. The camps had been built to house prisoners who would be used as slave labor to build three underground bunkers where parts of the Messerschmitt jet fighter plane would be manufactured.” But Kaufering IV was different from the other ten. This was “the Krankenlager, the sick camp, which was filled with roughly 3,000 inmates suffering from typhus, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and dysentery.” (*The Liberators*, p. 162).

On April 27, 1945, units of the 10th and 12th Armored Divisions and the 63rd Infantry Divisions were at the gates of the camp and liberated it.

THE AFTER Reaction Report of the 102nd Infantry Division arriving on the morning of April 16, 1945, describes the atrocity at Gardelegen, 40 miles northeast of Braunschweig, Germany. In the town's outskirts "was discovered the worst atrocity that this division has observed. Approximately 1100 prisoners of war had been herded into a large barn, the floor of which had been covered with oil-soaked straw, and burned to death, or shot while trying to escape. Some of the bodies had been buried in a common grave resembling a tank ditch, while approximately 450 burned and mutilated bodies still remained in the barn." These prisoners of war of various nationalities were guarded by a few Wehrmacht troops and a motorcycle patrol of several SS men. (*The Liberators: Eyewitness Account*, p. 29).



COURTESY NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION, ARNOLD BAUER BARACH AND USHMM

▲ THE DIVISION COMMANDER ORDERED THAT THE CIVILIAN POPULATION BE FORCED TO VIEW THE SITE AND TO DISINTER AND REBURY THE VICTIMS IN A NEW CEMETERY. IN THE PHOTO, THE MAYORS OF THREE NEARBY TOWNS ARE FORCED TO SEE THE CORPSES BURNED ALIVE IN THE BARN.



▲ GERMAN CIVILIANS FROM THE NEARBY TOWNS OF SCHWERIN, HAGENOW, LUDWIGSLUST, AND CAPTURED GERMAN OFFICERS, WERE FORCED BY OUTRAGED ALLIED COMMANDERS TO VIEW THE ATROCITIES AND THEN BURY THE BODIES OF PRISONERS IN THEIR TOWNS. THE BURIAL IS TAKING PLACE ON THE PALACE GROUNDS OF THE ARCHDUKE OF MECKLENBURG.

► AMERICAN SOLDIERS OBSERVE A MOMENT OF SILENCE AT A MASS FUNERAL ON THE PALACE GROUNDS OF THE ARCHDUKE OF MECKLENBURG. ON A CROSS IN FRONT OF THEM THERE IS ALSO A STAR OF DAVID, PROBABLY INDICATING THE BURIAL OF A JEWISH PERSON.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE subcamp of Neuengamme, Wöbbelin, 20 miles southeast of Schwerin, Germany, was captured by the 82nd Airborne Division on May 4, 1945. According to the Division's Commander, Lt. General James M. Gavin, "Wöbbelin camp wasn't a concentration camp in the sense that they had gas chambers or various devices...not a...death camp specifically. They had their own, sophisticated way of killing, of getting rid of these people. They just starved them to death...A picture just can't tell you what something like that is like. Those people smelled for miles. It wasn't their fault. They're dead and they're rotting, some of them. There was excrement all over the floor, and how anyone ate there I don't know. You couldn't tell the living from the dead, it was awful. So I told General Moshe Dayan many years later in Jerusalem." (*The Liberators: Eyewitness Account*, p. 53-54).



THE SURVIVORS' gratitude to their liberators was boundless. Years following their liberation the survivors continued to search for and many times find those responsible for saving their lives. But immediately after the gates of their hell were opened survivors already wanted to express their sentiments. US Army Corporal, Glenn Runyon, a member of the 465th Engineer Company took this picture when his company visited Buchenwald after its liberation. He saw survivors hanging a banner outside the main gate of Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, inviting American soldiers to attend a memorial celebration [sic] for the 51,000 prisoners killed in the camp.



COURTESY USHMM AND GLENN RUNYON



WHENEVER THEY could survivors killed some of their guards in explosions of vengeance. Such killings took place particularly in Buchenwald. Yet another way of expressing their anger at the Nazi regime following liberation was recorded by photographer Kevin Howard in Dachau where former inmates created a gallows hanging Hitler in effigy. The graffiti on the wall reads: "Hitler must die in order to let Germany live."

COURTESY YALD VASHEM PHOTO ARCHIVE

LANDSBERG, GERMANY, was famous in Nazi lore since Hitler had been incarcerated in this town in 1924. But it became infamous since around it were located the eleven Kaufering concentration camps. “David Nichols Pardoe spent no more than fifteen or twenty minutes with the 255th Regiment of the 63rd Infantry Division at Landsberg, but it was enough. He saw the walking skeletons tottering around in striped uniforms. He observed that they walked as though they were lost. ‘Suddenly they had their freedom, and they didn’t know what to do. Where were they going to go? Where was their family? We have no one—no anything’” (*The Liberators*, p. 281)

Following the war’s end Landsberg also became the site of one of the largest Displaced Persons (DP) Camps. In the photo Landsberg DP survivors celebrate their first Purim holiday following their liberation. Just as Purim is marked by the impaling of Haman on the stake—Haman, was the biblical arch-enemy of the Jews in ancient Persia bent on annihilating them—so a group of liberated Landsberg survivors celebrated Purim on a mock grave of Hitler, the Haman of their time. On an equal footing with Haman and Hitler, the survivors also interred the “White Book, Land of Israel politics,” a reference to the “White Paper of 1939” issued by the British government under Neville Chamberlain, which, among other items, set a limit of 75,000 Jewish immigrants for the five-year period 1940-1944, with a yearly quota of 10,000. Holocaust survivors viewed such a measure as yet another barrier in their quest to regain their footing and rebuild their lives.

The Hebrew text on the grave says: “Here are interred the foes of the Jews, Haman the son of Hamdatah, Adolf Hitler, White Book Land of Israel politics. May they rest in the midst of swarming insects and in hell. May their names be erased.” On the left upper corner are also listed the names of Haman’s ten sons executed by the Persian Jews. (Esther 9:7).



COURTESY YAD VASHEM PHOTO ARCHIVE



AS THE American and Allied liberators kept destroying the Holocaust kingdom, survivors, against so many odds, went on rebuilding the shreds of their torn lives. Only some months after the liberation of Buchenwald, a group of them decided to emigrate to Israel. None of them found it strange or macabre to call their new found community “Kibbutz Buchenwald.” None of them had homes to go back to, all had barely survived. The State of Israel didn’t even exist yet. But the survivors prepared by learning agriculture in little German villages and proudly put up a banner in Hebrew letters spelling “Kibbutz Buchenwald.”

THE AMERICAN process of liberating Nazi concentration camps went beyond burying the dead, caring for the sick, and feeding the emaciated survivors. In the fall of 1945, General Eisenhower “received a strongly worded cable from President Truman directing him to institute reforms to improve living conditions of displaced Jews in the American zone of occupation.” Jewish organizations such as ORT, JDC, and HIAS joined forces with many other welfare organizations and, together with UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) went about implementing President Truman’s directive.



COURTESY USHMM, BETT HATUTSOT, AND SAUL SORRIN

▲ GENERAL DWIGHT EISENHOWER, ACCOMPANIED BY AMERICAN ARMY PERSONNEL, WALKS OUT OF THE NEU FREIMANN [MUNICH] DISPLACED PERSONS' CAMP SYNAGOGUE.

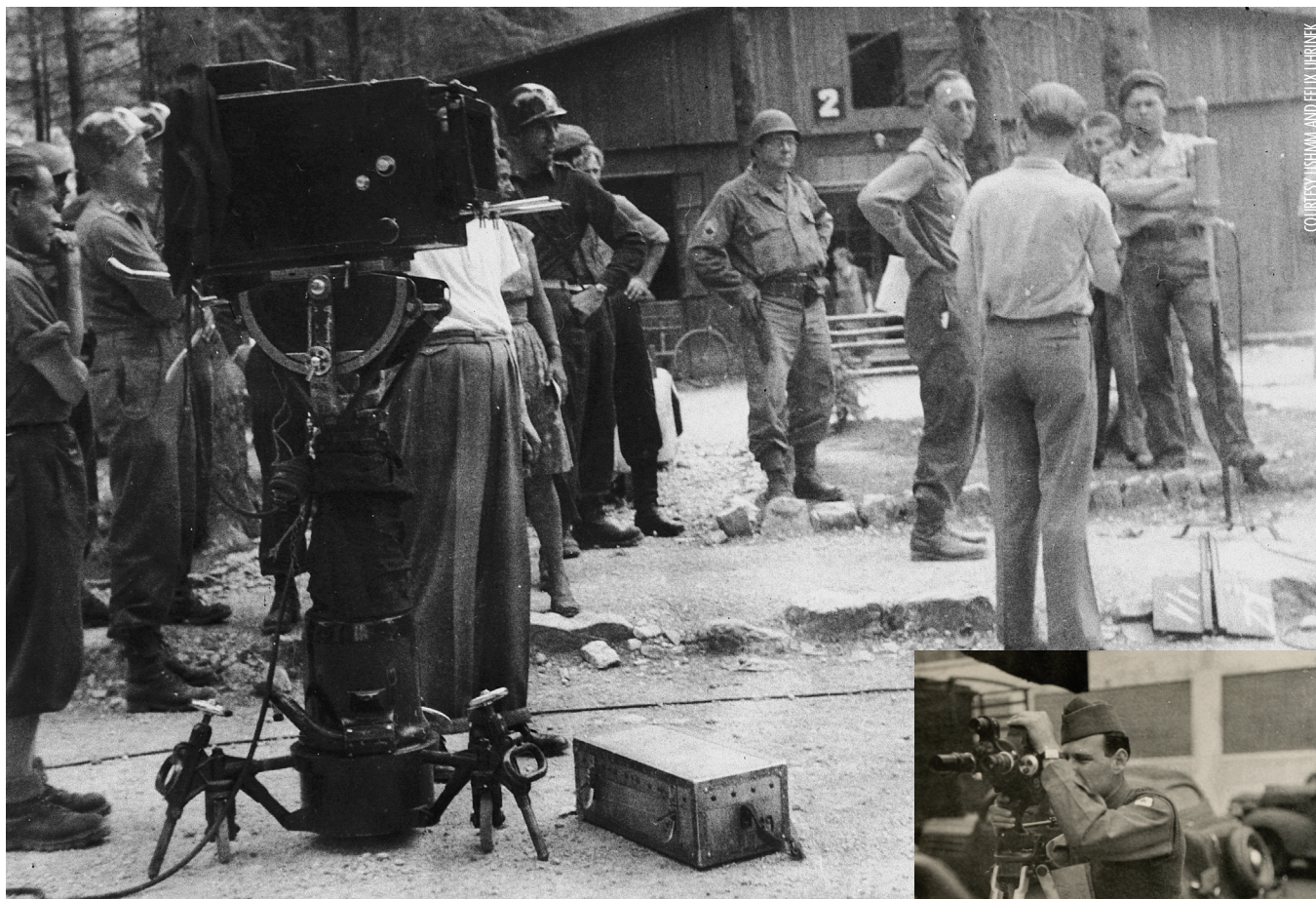


▲ A MONTH FOLLOWING LIBERATION, RABBI SCHACHTER CONDUCTED SHAVUOT SERVICES FOR JEWISH SURVIVORS. ISRAEL MEIR LAU, ISRAEL'S FORMER CHIEF RABBI, IS PICTURED SEATED THIRD FROM LEFT, IN THE FIRST ROW, BETWEEN TWO AMERICAN SOLDIERS.

“THE SMOKE was still rising as Rabbi Herschel Schachter (1917-2013) rode through the gates of Buchenwald. It was April 11, 1945, and Gen. George S. Patton’s army had liberated the concentration camp scarcely an hour before. Rabbi Schachter, who was attached to the Third Army’s VIII Corps, was the first Jewish chaplain to enter in its wake.” Ha would later remember “the sting of smoke in his eyes, the smell of burning flesh and the hundreds of bodies strewn everywhere. (Margalit Fox, “Rabbi Who Cried to the Jews Of Buchenwald: ‘You Are Free.’” *The New York Times*, 3/27/2013 A1, A17).

“ON APRIL 12, before the 120th arrived at Buchenwald, CBS war correspondent Edward R. Murrow reached the camp with one of the early units. He spent the better part of a day there...[His] report is somber; it is straightforward...It is not especially eloquent. Murrow was holding back, and he said as much. ‘I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I have reported what I saw and heard, but only parts of it. For most of it, I have no words.’” (*The Liberators*, p. 123)

In a concerted effort to reinforce the verbal testimonies, the U.S. Army remained engaged in recording everything it saw in photos and films



▲ AMERICAN SERVICEMEN GATHER DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF THE NAZI CRIMES COMMITTED IN THE EBENSEE (AUSTRIA) CONCENTRATION CAMP, MAY 6, 1945.

► PORTRAIT OF AMERICAN JEWISH SIGNAL CORPS PHOTOGRAPHER PAUL ENFIELD WITH HIS MOVIE CAMERA.



COURTESY USHMM AND FELIX UHRINEK

COURTESY USHMM AND JILL ENFIELD
U.S. ARMY



▲ ARMY TECHNICIAN
5TH GRADE, VIRGIL
WESTDALE THEN

► VIRGIL WESTDALE
NOW



PHOTO COURTESY MARCH OF THE LIVING 2012

“FOR OVER two decades, The March of the Living has been committed to designing innovative educational programs for young people, adults and survivors. Through [its] educational mission to Poland, March of the Living participants engage in a journey through time and history where, in addition to visits to the camps and destroyed communities of Eastern Europe, they commemorate Yom Ha’Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, through the three kilometer march from Auschwitz to Birkenau.” (Dr. David Machlis, Vice Chairman International March of the Living). The 2012 March was dedicated to reuniting liberators and Holocaust survivors for the first time.

Liberator Virgil Westdale, 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, 442nd Regiment, “earned a pilot’s license and enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942. Because of his Japanese-American heritage, the War Department transferred him from the Air Corps to the Infantry, a devastating blow. As a member of a Japanese-American combat team, he saw some of the fiercest fighting in Europe, and helped to liberate Dachau. For his service, he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. At age 77 he started another career as an Airport Security Officer, and in 2011 at age 91, he retired as TSA’s oldest employee. He has published his autobiography, *Blue Skies and Thunder*.”

RUSSEL WEISKIRCHER was an assistant squad leader with the 157th Infantry Regiment got to the town of Dachau on April 29, 1945. He would later recall that “it was a little old Bohemian artist’s colony; at one time it was the Greenwich Village of Europe.” But as he and his comrades got closer to the town their noses could not do away with an indescribable odor. “The source,” they found out, “was a field full of bodies alongside boxcars and open-top gondola cars loaded with corpses. They had started out alive but had been locked in the railcars without food, sanitation, or water. And the irony of it, [noted] Weiskircher, is they were being taken to Dachau to be done away with while Hitler was trying to hide the evidence.” (The Liberators, p. 192)

► LIBERATOR DONALD L. GREENBAUM, (PICTURED THEN AND NOW) CURRENTLY OF BALA CYNWYD, PA, WAS A MEMBER OF THE TROOP WHO FOREVER CARRIED WITH HIM THE MEMORY OF “BOXCAR AFTER BOXCAR OF EMACIATED PRISONERS AND CORPSES SPILLING OUT ONE ON TOP OF ANOTHER. “

AS A RESULT OF DONALD’S WIFE WRITING AN ARTICLE ABOUT DONALD’S WAR EXPERIENCES IN A PHILADELPHIA PUBLICATION, HE WAS REUNITED WITH ERNIE GROSS, A 16-YEAR-OLD WHO HE HAD LIBERATED. THE TWO BECAME CLOSE FRIENDS.



COURTESY MARCH OF THE LIVING 2012



The Dachau death train consisted of nearly 40 railcars containing the bodies of between 2,000 and 3,000 prisoners who were evacuated from Buchenwald on April 7, 1945. The train arrived in Dachau on the afternoon of April 28.

◀ THE CORPSE OF A PRISONER THAT FELL OUT OF ONE OF THE RAILCARS OF THE DACHAU DEATH TRAIN WHEN AMERICAN TROOPS OPENED THE DOORS.

COURTESY USHMM



AMERICAN LIBERATORS were honored in Birkenau on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, on April 19, 2012, at a commemoration held during the course of that year's March of the Living. One of the liberators is seen lighting one of six torches in tribute to the Six Million Jews murdered during World War II.

COURTESY MARCH OF THE LIVING

SUGGESTED READINGS

Michael Hirsh, *The Liberators: America's Witnesses to the Holocaust*. Probably the most comprehensive text on the subject.

Joseph J. Preil, ed. *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey*.

Brewster Chamberlin and Marcia Feldman, eds. *The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps 1945: Eyewitness Accounts of the Liberators*.

Jim Sanders as told to Martha Loeffler. *Saving Lives, Saving Memories: A 19-Year-Old Ambulance Driver in the Wake of Patton's Army*.

David L. Israel. *The Day the Thunderbird Cried: Untold Stories of World War II*.



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