

DACHAU: A FIRST HAND PERSPECTIVE TO BUILD EMPATHY AND TOLERANCE

Part 5: LIBERATION

On Sunday, April 29, 1945, the Allied forces liberated Dachau. Just one week later, World War II in Europe would be over. ¹

Some of the most horrifying sights of the war for the American soldiers were when they liberated the Nazi concentration camps, which Patton and Eisenhower referred to as the “horror” camps. Many of the prisoners in these camps were on the verge of starvation when they were liberated. Soldiers nicknamed the prisoners “bone men.” ²

U.S. Army Colonel Felix Sparks reported that seeing Dachau was comparable to Dante’s “Inferno.” He wrote that a number of his men, all battle-hardened veterans, became so distraught that some cried while others raged. It took Sparks thirty minutes to regain control of his men. ³



General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces, visited Ohrdruf Concentration Camp, the first camp liberated by the Allies. Eisenhower would go on to write:

“... I saw my first horror camp. It was near the town of Gotha. I have never felt able to describe my emotional reactions when I first came face to face with indisputable evidence of Nazi brutality and ruthless disregard of every shred of decency. Up to that time, I had known about it only generally or through secondary sources. I am certain, however that I have never at any other time experienced an equal sense of shock.”

“I visited every nook and cranny of the camp because I felt it my duty to be in a position from then on to testify at first hand about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief or assumption that ‘the stories’ of Nazi brutality were just propaganda. I felt that the evidence should be immediately placed before the American and British publics in a fashion that would leave no room for cynical doubt.” ⁴



Dachau Villagers Touring The Camp

Eisenhower then ordered that the press be allowed in to document and photograph the camps. He also ordered that the German people from the surrounding villages to be ushered through the camps to see what they had done. There were several instances of villagers returning home and committing suicide.⁵



The American soldiers also rounded up the local Hitler Youth to show them the horrific results of Nazi rule.⁶



Dachau's final official use was to serve as an internment camp for the Nazi Party members awaiting trial at Nuremberg for "crimes against humanity."⁷



DACHAU LIBERATION DAY: April 29, 1945



**Jean (Johnny) Voste (on right) was born in Belgian Congo ...
the only surviving black prisoner in Dachau. (May 1945) ⁸**



Survivors from Dachau

You now get to leave. You could only imagine what it would be like to come through those entrance gates, see all of this and not knowing what is in store for you.

Today, Dachau exists as museum and a monument to a time in history when our collective humanity faltered. Inside these walls where once only pain and misery lived now exists monuments to those who fought and those who perished so the rest of us might never forget.

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.

**Then they came for the Socialists and Trade Unionists,
and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist or a Trade Unionist.**

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me ... and there was no one left to speak for me.

**~~ Reverend Martin Niemoller
Dachau Prisoner ⁹**

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- ¹ “The Dachau Concentration Camp. 1933 to 1945,” Barbara Disel, Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Comite International de Dachau, 2005, p. 37.
- ² “The Dachau Concentration Camp. 1933 to 1945,” Barbara Disel, Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Comite International de Dachau, 2005, p. 21.
- ³ “That Was Dachau 1933-1944,” Dr. Stanislav Zamecnik, le cherche midi, 2004, pp. 372-273; “The Dachau Concentration Camp. 1933 to 1945,” Barbara Disel, Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Comite International de Dachau, 2005, p. 202.
- ⁴ “Crusade In Europe,” Dwight D. Eisenhower, Doubleday & Company, 1948, pp. 408-409.
- ⁵ “Crusade In Europe,” Dwight D. Eisenhower, Doubleday & Company, 1948, pp. 409; “Holocaust: Dachau and Sachsenhausen,” Artsmagic Ltd, Chronos Productions, 2006, 34:00; Dachau Scrap Book Website, <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapBook/DachauLiberation/aftermath03.html>; Ohrdruf Scrap Book Website, <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Ohrdruf/index.html>
- ⁶ Dachau Scrap Book Website, <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapBook/DachauLiberation/aftermath03.html>.
- ⁷ “The Dachau Concentration Camp. 1933 to 1945,” Barbara Disel, Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Comite International de Dachau, 2005, p. 211.
- ⁸ “Dachau Scrap Book Website,” <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapBook/DachauFAQ.html>.
- ⁹ “The World Must Know,” Michael Berenbaum, 1993, 2006 The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 37.