

Warning:
Contains Graphic Images

The 20th Armored Division and the Liberation of Dachau:
An Illustrated Record



A Brief History of the 20th Armored Division at Dachau

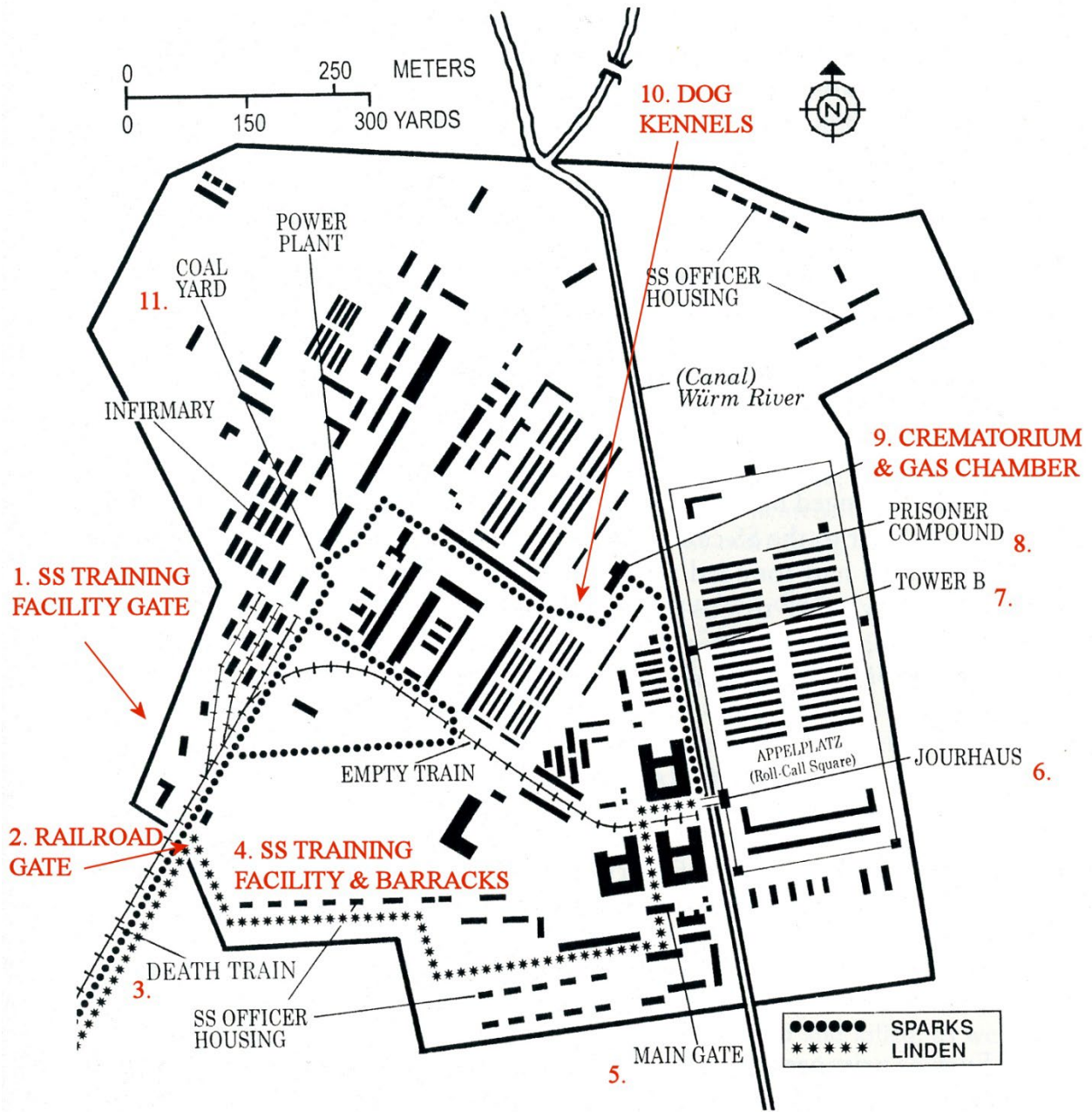
The Dachau concentration camp was not assigned to the 20th Armored Division (AD).

In mid-April, 1945, XV Corps G-5 (Civil Affairs) initially expected the 20th Armored Division to be the first unit to reach the camp. Near the end of April, officers at XV Corps headquarters saw that the 45th Infantry Division (ID) was in the best position to reach the camp first. Combat Commands A and B, 20th AD were operating on the left and right flanks of the 45th.

However, on April 29, 1945 while enroute to their assignments, soldiers of the 20th Armored Division briefly entered Dachau concentration camp. They participated in liberation including witnessing (along with GI's of the 45th and 42nd Infantry Divisions) railroad boxcars containing thousands of dead Buchenwald inmates, the stacks of dead bodies, the crematorium, the gas chamber, the gallows, the bodies of dead SS guards, and the thousands of emaciated inmates. Some shared rations until medics stopped them as the high calories were harmful to the starving inmates. Some took photographs of their surroundings.

Following their visits to the concentration camp (generally reported as 2 hours or less), soldiers of the 20th resumed movement toward their assigned objectives in the next day's Battle and / or occupation of Munich, or toward the Austrian border in pursuit of retreating German forces and a feared national redoubt in the Alps.

Pathways Into & Through the Camp



(Fair use of map from 'The Rock of Anzio,' by Flint Whitlock.)



1. S/SGT Wilburn Smith (C CO., 27th Tank Btn., **20th AD**), in a jeep at the unlocked and unguarded west gate to Dachau's SS training facility, **(1)** above. We presume this served a **20th AD** entry point into the camp.
- 1a. Wider view, souvenir photo from the collection of Pfc Felix A. Cizewski 45th Signal Co., **45th Infantry Division**.
- 1b. Soldiers of the **42nd ID** guard this same gate. (*U.S. Army photo via the NY State Military Museum.*)



2. At different times, soldiers of the **45th** and **42nd Infantry**, and **20th Armored Divisions**, also entered the SS training facility through the unlocked and unguarded railroad gate, **(2)** above. Soldiers of the **45th** killed several SS soldiers in the vicinity of the Nazi death train. (*U.S. Army photo via the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).*)



3. Each Division's units proceeded past the railroad cars of deceased Buchenwald inmates (ie., death train), into varied parts of the camp's interior. It's believed that the **20th AD** traveled the dotted line marked **LINDEN** to the main gate of the concentration camp, **(5)** above (**LINDEN** was the 42nd ID's onsite Commanding General). The pictured gate has since been demolished. (*Photo from the KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau website.*)



4. Via varied routes, each Division's personnel eventually came to the camp's Jourhaus building, **(6)** above. Photo depicts the International Red Cross (IRC)-arranged surrender of the camp to the **42nd ID**. Standing atop a Jourhaus bridge wall, theatrically directing his troops with a riding crop, is Brigadier General Henning Linden (the **42nd's** Assistant Division Commander). Standing tall at left, SS-Untersturmführer, 2nd Lt Heinrich Wicker (acting camp commander), surrenders the camp. Swiss IRC delegate, Dr. Victor Maurer (wearing a white (red cross) armband, who arranged the surrender), stands between. Troops and inmates clamber at right. Wicker (hastily thrown into camp command, just hours before) didn't survive the day. (*U.S. Army photo via the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).*)

5. Through the Jourhaus, **(6)**, soldiers of the three co-liberating Divisions entered the Prisoner Compound **(8)** above), and points beyond.



6. At some point, according to investigation by the **Seventh Army Inspector General**, soldiers of 1st Battalion, 222nd Infantry Regiment (IR), **42nd ID** and soldiers of the 157th Infantry Regiment, **45th Infantry Division** killed an estimated (17) SS soldiers at Guard Tower B, (7) above. *(Public domain photo from the National Archives.)*



7. Separately, a small number of soldiers of Co. I, 157th Infantry Regiment (IR), **45th ID**, lined up an estimated 75 unarmed & surrendered SS guards in the camp's Coal Yard, (11) above. With machine gun and small arms, they killed an estimated 17, wounding numerous others. C.O., Lt. Col. Felix Sparks (Commander, Task Force Sparks, **45th ID**) arrived & interceded to prevent further bloodshed (see photo). *(Public domain photo from the National Archives.)*

Before day's end, as many as (50) SS soldiers were killed: approx. (16) in the coal yard, (17) at Guard Tower B, (4) in the train yard, and several others, elsewhere in the camp. Ultimately, no one stood trial for murderous war crimes, as following V-E Day, General George S. Patton (in his then-role as Military Governor of Bavaria) dismissed all U.S. Army charges.



8. General Linden in triumph. *(U.S. Army photo via the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).)*

At some point later on this long day, nearing the end of this long war, the **45th ID's** Lt. Col. Sparks and the **42nd's** Brig. Gen. Linden engaged in a heated argument in front of the Jourhaus, (6), over military jurisdiction and command authority.

While Linden & the **42nd** had accepted the camp surrender, Sparks & his **45th** troops had not only arrived earlier, but (unlike Linden and company) were legitimately assigned the sector by Seventh Army command. Linden's crossing the **42nd / 45th Division** boundary not only endangered soldiers of his own **42nd** and attached **20th Armored Divisions**, but those of the **45th**, as well. Earlier in the day, Sparks and his men had come under friendly fire from units of the **42nd**. Official radio logs show that not only was the **45th ID**, but also **XV Corps** itself, dealing with the **42nd's** inappropriate crossing of Division boundaries, vis-a-vis security, safety, and care of 32,000 liberated inmates.

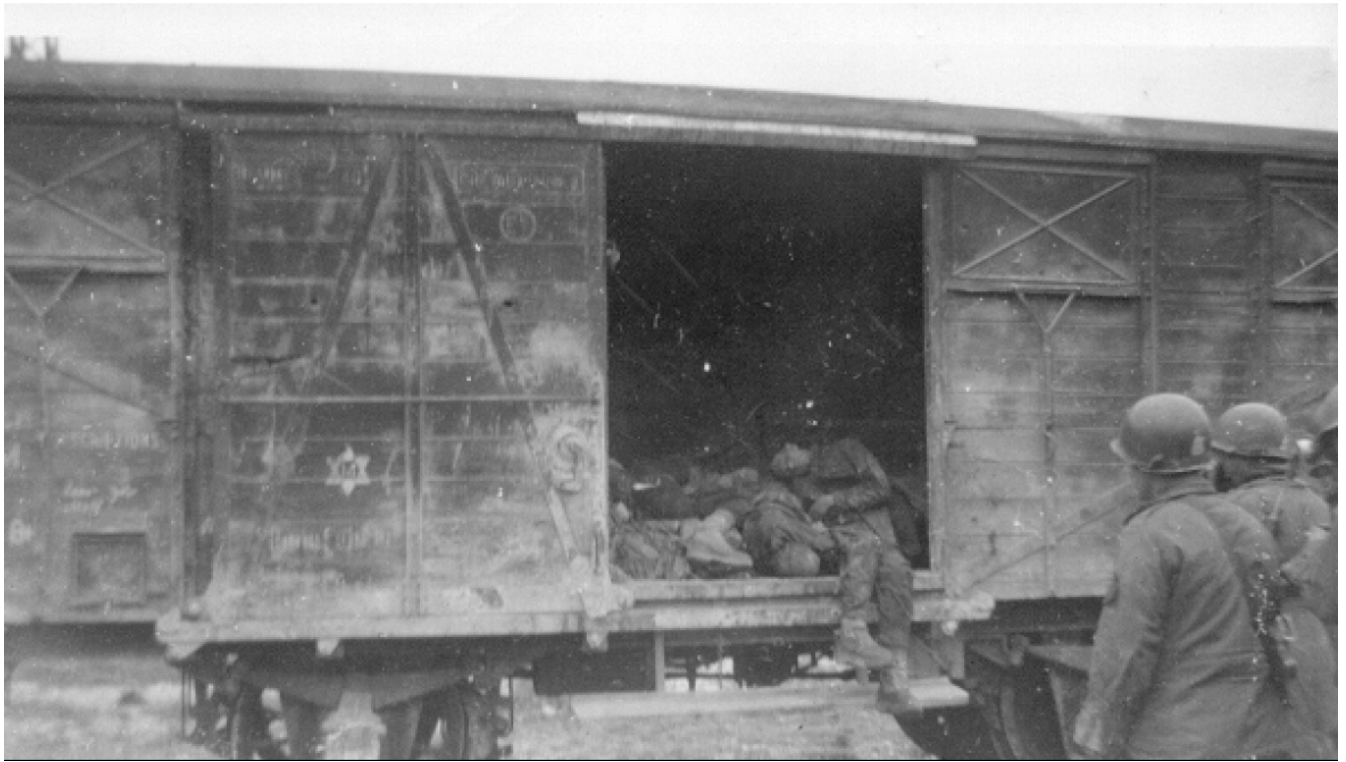
As tempers exploded, an exhausted & weary Sparks pulled his Colt .45 service pistol on the (technically) superior officer, threatening the General, accompanying journalist, Marguerite Higgins, and their media-circus entourage, to withdraw from the camp immediately.

On 1 May, Col. Sparks was relieved. It's unclear if this was over the murders of SS soldiers at the camp, his clash with Linden, or both. Col. Sparks was to rejoin the 157th in the U.S. for their deployment to the Pacific and the war with Japan.

**20th Armored Division Photographs
of the Dachau Concentration Camp**

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Train Cars with Deceased Buchenwald Inmates



Soldiers of Headquarters Company, 220th Armored Engineers Battalion, at the boxcars with deceased Buchenwald inmates ⁽³⁾.

From the collection of the late T/5 George Stuber (HQ Company, 220th Armored Engineers Battalion, 20th Armored Division).



Deceased Buchenwald inmates in a train car.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.



Deceased Buchenwald inmates in a train car.

From the collection of the late T/5 George Stuber (HQ Company, 220th Armored Engineers Battalion, 20th Armored Division).



Deceased Buchenwald inmates in a train car. Following image is of an Officer inspecting this train car.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.), the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.), and the late T/5 Richard L. Moffett (Service Co, 27th Tank Btn). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul, and T/5 Moffet's son John Moffett.



A U.S. Army Captain inspects the train car in the image above. Thought to be CPT Roy Wellburn (2nd Platoon, Company A, 692nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached to the 42nd ID, operating with the 222nd Infantry Regiment), presumably en route to the next day's occupation of Munich and photographed by a GI of the 20th Armored Division.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.



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Deceased Buchenwald inmates in a train car.

From the collection of the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy son, Larry Paul.

The Prisoner Compound



From the collection of the late CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion. Courtesy CPL Sanoba's daughter Kathi Sanoba.

Dead SS Camp Guards



Soldiers of Headquarters Company, 220th Armored Engineers Battalion on April 29, 1945, on their way to Munich. Note the 20th AD shoulder patch on the soldier at far right. This may be in the SS facility⁽⁴⁾ near the boxcars.

From the collection of the late T/5 George Stuber (HQ Company, 220th Armored Engineers Battalion, 20th Armored Division).



Apparently, the body of an SS camp guard beaten to death by inmates. Some form of identification is displayed next to his body.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.



Liberated inmates by the camp barracks. Guard Tower B⁽⁷⁾, where soldiers of the 42nd and 45th ID killed SS guards.

Man RIGHT OF CENTER looking at bodies in the Wurm River Canal.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.



Unidentified man looking at bodies in the Wurm River Canal, possibly murdered SS guards.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.

Stacks of Bodies in the Camp Yard



Bodies were stacked outdoors⁽⁹⁾.

The Allied air campaign had caused a shortage of coal. As a result, by February 1945, the crematoria in camps and subcamps had ceased operation for lack of fuel.

Shortly before liberation, the camps effectively ceased functioning. Some of the assigned guards fled. Starved and exhausted Dachau inmates were no longer able to haul by horse carts their deceased comrades to the mass grave site, 2 miles away in Leitenberg.

*From the collections of the late CPT Sherwin H. Northcutt (Commanding Officer, Co. B, 20th Tank Bn., 20th Armored Div.), and the late 2nd Lt Clifford E. Conner (Commander, 3rd Platoon, D CO., 20th Tank Bn., 20th Armored Div.)
Courtesy, Cpt. Northcutt's stepson, Jeff Milstead, and Lt. Conner's son, William E. Conner.*

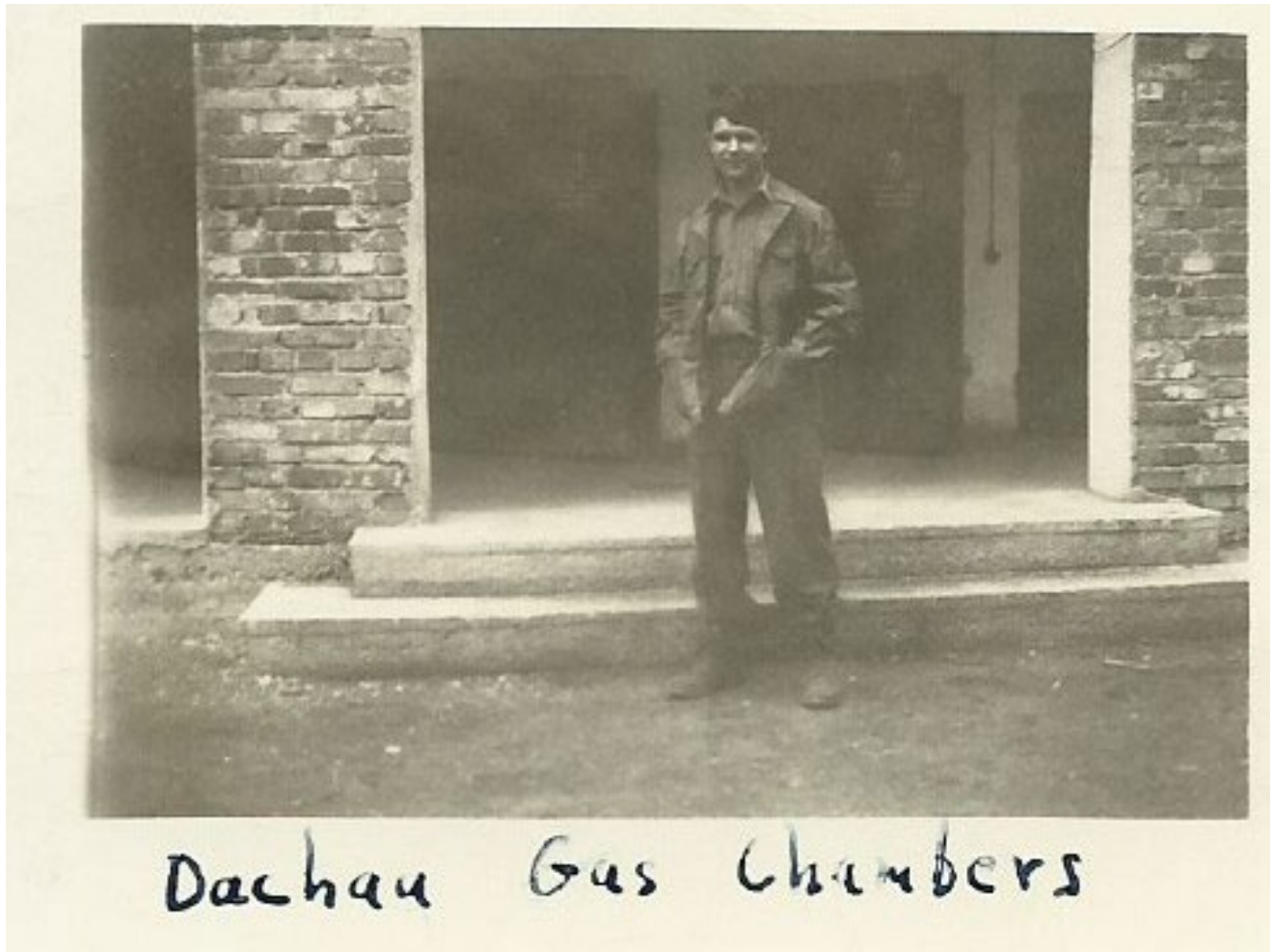
Crematorium and Gas Chamber



Dachau's Crematorium⁽⁹⁾.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul.

Gas Chamber in the Crematorium



CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion in front of the gas chamber.

From the collection of the late CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion. Courtesy CPL Sanoba's daughter Kathi Sanoba.



Inmates' uniforms, outside Dachau's gas chamber⁽⁹⁾.

It's unknown if the uniforms belonged to inmates killed in the gas chamber, or elsewhere.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, and T/4 Paul's son, Larry Pau

For reasons unknown, the SS never used Dachau's operational gas chamber for mass extermination. Gunshot and hanging were the most frequent form of execution at Dachau.



From the collection of the late CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion. Courtesy CPL Sanoba's daughter Kathi Sanoba.

Typically, inmates selected to be gassed were sent to the Hartheim Euthanasia Centre, 149 miles to the east. Likely several thousand Dachau inmates were gassed there.

Dachau's gas chamber became operational in 1944 and was used in an unknown number of deaths. Also unknown is how many of those were executions, and how many were part of ongoing SS medical experiments performed at the camp.

The Crematorium



From the collection of the late CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion. Courtesy CPL Sanoba's daughter Kathi Sanoba



From the collection of the late CPL. Ed Sanoba Co, C, 20th Tank Battalion. Courtesy CPL Sanoba's daughter Kathi Sanoba



Stack of bodies in the crematorium.

From the collections of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.), the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.), and the late T/5 Richard L. Moffett (Service Co, 27th Tank Btn). Courtesy, S/SGT Smith's grandson, Marshall Van Hoy, T/4 Paul's son, Larry Paul, and T/5 Moffett's son, John Moffett.



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SS Facility



S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.) and an unidentified colleague at the main entrance to the SS training facility⁽⁴⁾.

From the collection of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith. Courtesy, grandson, Marshall Van Hoy.



Unidentified 20th AD soldiers at the Dachau SS barracks⁽⁴⁾ in the SS compound.

As the soldiers are wearing helmets, the photo appears to be from April 29 or 30, 1945, rather than from postwar GI tourism. GIs did not wear helmets during postwar GI tourist visits. The handwritten caption, "Hitlers (sic) office", is in error.

From the collection of the late T/5 Richard L. Moffett (Service Co, 27th Tank Btn). Courtesy, son, John Moffett.

Town of Dachau



Soldiers of the 20th in the seemingly quaint town of Dachau, where Churches and a roadside crucifix are grossly at odds with the horrors occurring inside the nearby concentration camp..

From the collection of the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ CO., 27th Tank Btn., 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy son, Larry Paul.



On April 28, 1945, with American troops just across the Amper River, anti-Nazis in the town of Dachau staged an uprising. Among the resisters were escapees from the concentration camp. The SS quickly suppressed the uprising and killed as many of the resisters as they could capture. Their bodies were public display. This is tentatively identified as a photo of bodies of the resisters on display in the town of Dachau.

The resisters do not appear to have coordinated the uprising with the nearby American troops. Except for the August 1944 Paris uprising when the 2nd French Armored Division quickly came to the support of the resistance, all similar uprisings were crushed by the Nazis before Allied or Soviet troops linked up with the resisters.

From the collection of the late Robert A. Abercrombie (Company B, 27th Tank Battalion, 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy daughter, Nellie Smith.

Wallerdorf, Ger. - April 28-C
 Dachau, Ger. - " 29-C
 Munich, Ger. - " 30-C
 Putzbrunn, Ger. - May 1-C
 Poing, Ger. - " 2-C
 New Station, Ger. - " 3-C
 Hagenhofen, Ger. - " 4-C
 Penzing, Ger. - " 8-C
 Schlossberg, Ger. - " 9-C
 Aufham, Ger. - " 11
 Assling, Ger. - " 14
 Salzburg, Ger. - " 19
 Haarz, Austria - " 20
 Salzburg, Austria - June 4
 Traunstein, Ger. - " 5
 (Camp Jones - bivouac - /week)
 Cheemung, Ger. - " 11
 Traunstein, Ger. - " 18

Entry from the diary of the the late Robert A. Abercrombie (Company B, 27th Tank Battalion, 20th Armored Div.), recording "conquering" Dachau (designated by the letter C) on April 29, 1945. That may refer to both the town of Dachau, the SS Training Facility, and concentration camp as soldiers of the 27th Tank Battalion were in all three on April 29, 1945.

From the collection of the late Robert A. Abercrombie (Company B, 27th Tank Battalion, 20th Armored Div.). Courtesy daughter, Nellie Smith.

Dachau Photos from The 20th Armored Division in WWII (1946)

The following four pages are from "The 20th Armored Division in World War II: Armor in the ETO" (United States Army, 1946. World War Regimental Histories, Book 63).

Included are (21) Dachau photos illustrating what soldiers of the 20th Armored Division saw and experienced during liberation.

Seven appear in the collection of the late S/SGT Wilburn Smith (Co. A, 27th Tank Bn.), and are also included here.

One is similar to a photo in the collection of the late T/4 Hubert Paul (HQ Co, 27th Tank Bn.).

At least two are by U.S. Army Signal Corps photographers.

One is a post-liberation photo, and probably not a 20th AD soldier's.

The photographers of the remaining six are not identified.

⚡ ⚡ DACHAU ⚡ ⚡



Dachau!!!

20th Armored Division led the way to its capture by Infantry troops.

20th Armored Division troops were there and saw its nauseating horror.

Here was the proof of cruelty, sadism, ruthlessness, of every vicious characteristic of which man can be guilty.

Hardened veterans of war looked and retched. It was that bad. The pictures on these pages will

bring it back to those who saw. Only that penetrating, clinging, faint, undefinable, horrible odor of death will be missing. They will be memories that perhaps men would rather forget, but they are necessary if only as a permanent warning against what can happen with people gone mad on warped ideologies. When superrace, racial prejudice, political persecution doctrines deprive men of their humanity.

Here was the black core of Nazism. Here was the awful indictment of a people who followed an idea, "Might is right."



... this is the grisly proof



Americans caught Dachau in the middle of its macabre, ghastly work.

On a siding entering the campus-like exterior of the death camp and still in view to the neat, quaint little village of Dachau was one of the many death trains that had come to that notorious concentration lager.

Some 40 box cars were still full of their grisly cargo, starved men, humans that no longer looked like humans, just skin-covered



... Murder in the mass degree

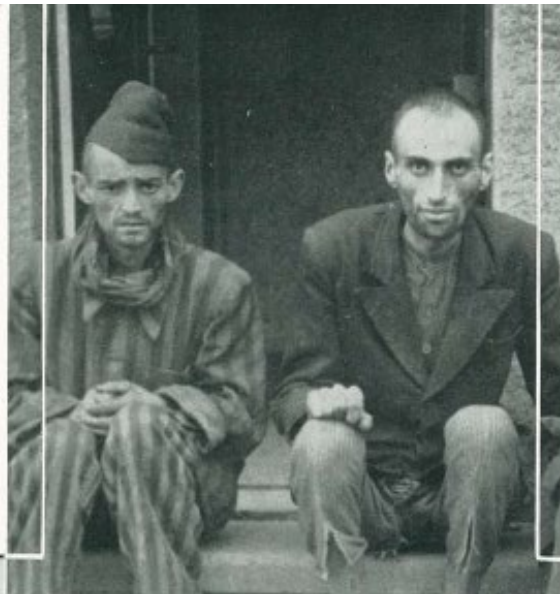


skeletons, clad in striped pajama suits. They were dead, lying grotesquely, one on the other, in the residue of animal living. A few, still alive when the train reached Dachau, lay on the tracks beside the cars where they had stumbled out, only to die.

They had been alive when the train started from somewhere. It was intended they be dead on arrival, to be disposed of in the five crematoriums of the camp.



*. . . most
were corpses*



*. . . few corpses
lived—but most
will die*



The rest of the camp was a continuation of horror. . . . dead, bone-thin bodies stacked like cordwood outside the gas chambers where they had met death. . . . yards long pile of clothes, mute evidence of other hundreds of nameless men who had died to feed the Nazi machine. . . . exuberant prisoners, the living dead, stunned at freedom . . . doomed to die despite liberation . . . prisoners drunk with looted wine, . . . prisoners squatting native fashion over small fires cooking looted stores. . . . dead SS guards, heads bashed in. . . . kennels with a bullet riddled dog in front, a dog that once had been used to kill when other methods became dull. . . . ox-tail whips, steel black jacks, instruments of persuasion. . . .

and the stories from prisoners only too glad to talk to American soldiers. . . . stories of hanging for hours from the wrists which had been tied behind the back, of death in winter by men being stripped and held under a hydrant hose, frozen stiff in the morning, of barbarity beyond description, beyond imagination in a 20th century western civilization.

And only a half a mile away was a church, and another half a mile was a roadside crucifix.

That was Dachau, synonymous with death, despair.



... the town quaint



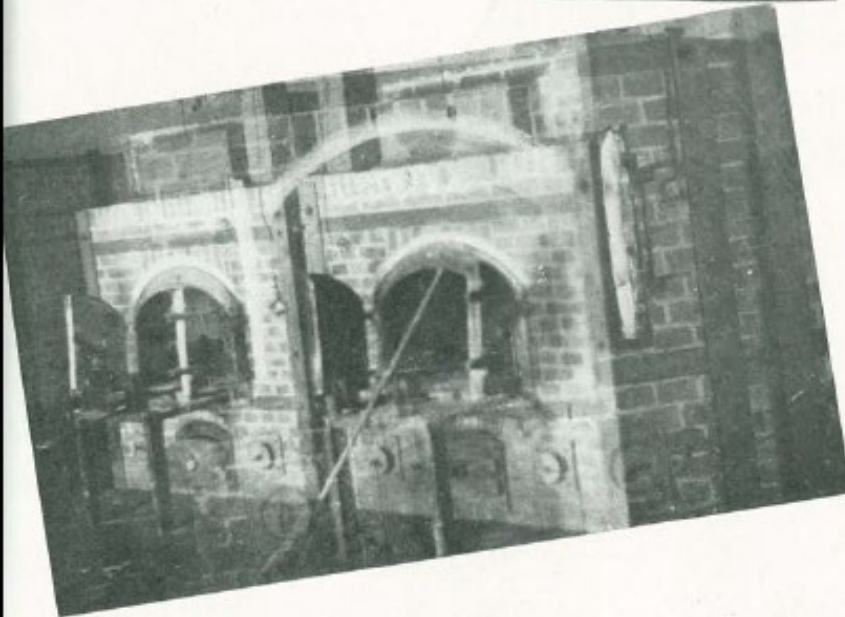
... the Crematory—Hell's Kitchen



... that to the guilty



... soldier reaction—
—it's too good for 'em!



... the Oven's
the Seventh Circle

This album researched, compiled and written by Leonard H. Cizewski and Rich Mintz

PDF constructed by Leonard H. Cizewski

Art Direction by Rich Mintz

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For more information:

[20th Armored Division in World War II](#)