

Corrections and Comments on the
Interview of Captain Billy Taylor, Battalion Headquarters, 522nd Field Artillery Battery

Comments and Corrections

Oral History Interview, September 2, 1989, Captain Billy Taylor, 522nd Field Artillery Battalion

Part 2

<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn511111>

6:30: Captain Taylor gives a secondhand account of a sergeant of the 522nd shooting the lock off the gate at Dachau.

Correction:

Dachau was entered through an unlocked and unguarded railroad gate in the SS facility.

No force was used. Troops entering Dachau met no resistance. Representatives of the International Red Cross were nearby and were negotiating with the SS for the surrender of Dachau.

All gates of Dachau were intact with no evidence of forced entry.

9:29: "Other people said they were the first ones into Dachau"

Correction:

The first soldiers into Dachau were from Task Force Sparks which consisted of elements of "I" and "L" Companies, 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment supported by elements of the 191st Tank Battalion, 45th Infantry Division. At almost the same time soldiers of Company A, 1st Battalion, and Company F, 2nd Battalion, 222nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd Infantry Division arrived. The time soldiers of the third co-liberating division, the 20th Armored Division, first arrived has not been determined.

No evidence has been found that any soldier of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion was at Dachau on April 29, 1945. That is the official position of the veterans of the 522nd.

The official records place the 522nd on April 29, 1945 at the Kaufering IV subcamp of the Dachau system at the Lechfeld Airfield near Hurlach, about 38.5 miles west of Dachau. Soldiers of the 522nd photographed themselves with their personal cameras there. None of the Signal Corps photos or films, photos by the civilian war correspondents, or photos taken by the soldiers of the three co-liberating divisions show any soldiers of the 522nd at Dachau on April 29, 1945.

11:19: Jews were political prisoners.

Correction:

Jews at Dachau were racial prisoners to be worked to death as slave laborers.

Comment:

This is one of many instances where Billy Taylor is not sharing his oral history of his service in the 522nd. He is sharing his personal opinions or his interpretation of history from information he obtained in the 44 years since the war. The level of detail he is discussing such as the classification of prisoners at Dachau was not known in April 29, 1945. The earliest that information was available to GIs was shortly after the end of the war in a report by the Seventh Army OSS.

11:39: Dachau was a death camp

Correction:

While Dachau was not a death camp but an internment and labor camp, thousands of executions took place there. The total and reasons will never be known, as the SS destroyed Dachau's records three weeks before liberation.

Adapted from "The 20th Armored Division and the Liberation of Dachau" by Rich Mintz and Leonard Cizewski

11:43: They gassed them. There were gas chambers there.

Dachau's gas chamber became operational in 1944.

The SS never used Dachau's operational gas chamber for mass killing. The reasons remain unknown.

An unknown number of inmates were killed in the gas chamber.

Also unknown is how many of those deaths were executions, and how many part of the ongoing program of SS medical experiments performed at the camp.

However, the Seventh Army Office of Strategic Services (OSS) recovered enough records to determine that a minimum of 45,855 executions occurred.

29,138 of these were of Jews transferred from other concentration camps.

16,717 were Germans from other countries.

Members of resistance organizations and others were also executed, for many.

Gunshot and hangings were the most frequent form of execution at Dachau. These were inflicted in the crematorium area, isolated from the rest of the camp. Soldiers of the 20th also saw the gallows near the crematorium.

Adapted from "The 20th Armored Division and the Liberation of Dachau" by Rich Mintz and Leonard Cizewski

Comment: The good faith error about the gas chamber in the Seventh Army OSS report on Dachau has

been used by Holocaust deniers is among the reasons that Billy Taylor's erroneous statement about the Dachau gas chambers needs to include a correction.

14:31:

Capt. Taylor At the meeting it was decided that engineers would dig trenches by the boxcars and tip the boxcars so the bodies would go into the trenches.

Correction: He is referring to the railroad cars with the deceased Buchenwald inmates.

Seventh Army Civil Affairs, Military Government, and Medical units were responsible for Dachau after liberation, not combat units. |

To contain disease outbreak, U.S. Army units at Dachau organized the transport of all the dead bodies including the bodies in the train cars to at Leitenberg. Because of the number of bodies and the disease outbreak, from May 9 to 13, the 2829th Combat Engineer Battalion, 40th Combat Engineer Combat Group dug trenches at Leitenberg for mass burial.

Prior to liberation, the Seventh Army had plans in place for Dachau. Those plans were implemented with the deployment of XV Corps, Seventh Army officers to Dachau within hours of combat troops entering Dachau. No additional meetings with middle level officers of a field artillery battalion were necessary to plan post-liberation care of the liberated inmates.

The corrections and comments were submitted to U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) with a request that they be appended to Captain Taylor's interview. The USHMM replied:

Thank you for your follow up on Capt. Taylor's testimony. While I recognize that he misspeaks several times throughout of testimony, offers second hand information, and provides information that he learned after the fact, there is not much that we can do as an archive. Our practice is to present the information that the interviewee provides and allow patrons, scholars, and historians such as yourself to judge the relative value and accuracy for yourselves. It is generally recognized that, unlike official documents and artifacts, oral history testimonies present individual perspectives, understandings, memories and are thus fallible. They are subject to shared memories, attained knowledge, and memories may change in the 40 years that occurred between the events being recounted and the recording of a testimony.

The information that you provided is well researched and correct. As an individual engaged in the interpretation of the historic record you are doing a tremendous job, however, as a cataloger my duty differs. I am tasked with presenting the information offered by the interviewee. I fully agree with your assessments, for instance Dachau was not a death camp, but that is the description provided by the eye-witness. Our catalog record does not repeat the error and we have applied the subject heading "Dachau

(Concentration camp)" but it is not our practice to offer assessments of an interviewee's memories.

Thank you for reaching out with this information. Again, I agree with your assessments of the testimony and trust that you have conducted well informed historical research. Our cataloging, however, is grounded in archival description of the information provided rather than in historic assessment and interpretation.

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Compiled by Leonard H. Cizewski, April 30, 2023

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