

HONORING AMERICAN LIBERATORS



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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For almost two decades, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the U.S. Army's Center of Military History have worked together to define, recognize, and honor all the U.S. Army divisions that took part in the liberation of prisoners from Nazi concentration camps and other sites of incarceration.

In February 1985, two Holocaust survivors, Sigmund Strochlitz and Benjamin Meed, then serving as co-chairpersons on the United States Holocaust Memorial Council's Days of Remembrance Committee, formally requested permission from the Secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh, Jr., to display in the future Museum the flags of all the U.S. units that participated in the liberation of the Nazi camps. They also requested permission to present these colors at the Days of Remembrance ceremony held annually in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. Several weeks later, the U.S. Army agreed to cooperate with the Museum in this important joint program.

In 1985, the Museum and the Center of Military History recognized some army divisions as liberating units: the 3rd, 4th, 6th, 10th, and 11th Armored Divisions and the 42nd, 45th, 80th, 90th, and 103rd Infantry Divisions.

Within two years, this program generated so much interest on the part of veterans' associations that the Museum and the Center of Military History developed further guidelines and procedures for handling future requests for liberator status. It was decided to recognize units only at the divisional level; to accord the honor of liberator status on the basis of unit records housed at the National Archives and Records Administration, not oral testimony; to accord liberator status to those divisions arriving at the site within 48 hours of the initial division's encounter. To further facilitate this process, requests for recognition were to come through a formal petition to the Center of Military History or the Museum from the divisional association or individual members of a division. As a result of these new guidelines ten more U.S. Army divisions were recognized as liberating units: the 12th, 14th, and 20th Armored Divisions, and the 4th, 8th, 71st, 89th, 99th, and 104th Infantry Divisions, along with the 82nd Airborne Division.

In the 19 years since this program was inaugurated, the Museum and the Center of Military History have recognized 35 U.S. Army divisions for their heroism, gallantry, and help in liberating prisoners from brutal Nazi rule. Each year, the names and flags of these units are presented in a moving tribute at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda for the Days of Remembrance ceremony. In addition, the Museum displays 20 divisional flags at its 14th Street entrance. The flags are rotated so that all the liberating units' colors are prominently exhibited for the two million visitors who walk through our doors each year.

To commemorate the unveiling of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 2004, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum once again honors the brave men and women who risked their lives to free their fellow human beings from bondage.

U.S. Army Divisions Recognized as Liberating Units by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Center of Military History

INFANTRY DIVISIONS

1st Infantry Division
2nd Infantry Division
4th Infantry Division
8th Infantry Division
26th Infantry Division
29th Infantry Division
36th Infantry Division
42nd Infantry Division
45th Infantry Division
63rd Infantry Division
65th Infantry Division
69th Infantry Division
71st Infantry Division
80th Infantry Division
83rd Infantry Division
84th Infantry Division
86th Infantry Division
89th Infantry Division
90th Infantry Division
95th Infantry Division
99th Infantry Division
103rd Infantry Division
104th Infantry Division

ARMORED DIVISIONS

3rd Armored Division
4th Armored Division
6th Armored Division
8th Armored Division
9th Armored Division
10th Armored Division
11th Armored Division
12th Armored Division
14th Armored Division
20th Armored Division

AIRBORNE DIVISIONS

82nd Airborne Division
101st Airborne Division

For further information about the origins of this program, see Edward J. Drea, "Recognizing the Liberators. U.S. Army Divisions Enter the Concentration Camps," *Army History. The Professional Bulletin of Army History*, Fall/Winter 1992/1993, 1–5.

11TH ARMORED DIVISION



Formed in 1942, the 11th Armored Division landed on the Normandy beaches in France in mid-December 1944. Shortly after its arrival in Europe, the "Thunderbolt" division was deployed to Belgium to attack advancing German forces during the Battle of the Bulge. In March 1945, the 11th moved into the Rhineland and advanced eastward into the heart of Germany. The following month, the unit moved southward from Thuringia into Bavaria, capturing Coburg on April 11 and Bayreuth on April 14. On May 5, the 11th took the Austrian city of Linz, and a few days later met up with advancing Soviet forces.

During the invasion of German-held Austria, the "Thunderbolt" division overran two of the largest Nazi concentration camps in the country: Mauthausen and Gusen. On May 5, 1945, the 11th arrived in Gusen, which had originally been a subcamp of Mauthausen. The division's arrival prevented the SS guards from murdering thousands of concentration camp prisoners by dynamiting the underground tunnels and factories where the inmates had been forced to work.

The next day, the 11th Armored Division entered the Mauthausen concentration camp. In the unit's "sanitary report" of May 25, 1945, the division's Medical Inspector stated that "the situation in the camp on the arrival of the U.S. Forces was one of indescribable filth and human degradation." The report stated that 19,000 prisoners were crammed into bunks meant to accommodate around 5,000 persons and that the two- and three-level bunks held 10 to 20 prisoners each. The prisoners had been fed a mixture of sugar beets and potato peelings that "looked like worms in mud." Thousands of prisoners were naked or clothed in rags. Some 8,000 survivors in the camp, the report continued, were in need of immediate medical care and more than half of the camp's inmates "were little more than skeletons." Soon after arrival, the 11th Armored Division began implementing measures to treat the ill prisoners and improve conditions within the camp.

The 11th Armored Division was recognized as a liberating unit by the U.S. Army's Center of Military History and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1985.

11TH ARMORED DIVISION

Casualty figures for the 11th Armored Division, European theater of operations

Total battle casualties: 2,877

Total deaths in battle: 524

Division nickname

"Thunderbolt" is a nickname adopted by the 11th Armored Division during its rapid march in December 1944 to reinforce U.S. troops defending against the German military offensive in the Ardennes Forest.