

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.

63RD INFANTRY DIVISION



The 63rd Infantry Division was created in 1943 and landed in southern France in December 1944, some six months after the massive Allied invasion of western Europe on D-Day (June 6). The "Blood and Fire" division advanced northward and eventually crossed the Saar River into Germany in early February 1945. At the end of the following month, on March 30, the unit took the town of Heidelberg, advanced southward into Bavaria, and crossed the Danube River.

As the 63rd advanced farther into the Bavarian countryside, on April 29–30, 1945, it liberated several Nazi subcamps attached to the Kaufering camp complex in the Landsberg region. One battalion of the division was ordered to search for and secure all the concentration camps in the area. Seven camps and hundreds of dead prisoners were discovered. The army reported that the camps

were full of starving and dying political prisoners. These people, many of them recently moved from DACHAU, many of them from the Ghettos of Poland, were found in advanced stages of malnutrition, typhus, diarrhea, skin diseases, boils, and abscesses, and mental and emotional illness. The torture and starvation to which they had been subjected were visible on many persons; they walked like puppets—if they could walk; or lay on bare boards too weak to do more than motion feebly to their mouths. Some of them could not speak; others cried like children.

Although the SS had attempted to evacuate the prisoners on death marches to the south, U.S. Army units discovered hundreds of sick, starving, and weakened inmates who had been left behind to die.

The army reported finding in one of the Kaufering camps about 900 prisoners living in earthen huts. In describing the living conditions, one document stated that

In the barracks the pointed roof touches the ground, and the inner room is dug in about 3 foot, so that only in the center of a barracks can a man stand upright. The inmates were crowded 60 to a barracks of 15' x 50' and had only wooden shelves for sleeping, sitting, and eating accommodations. All of these people were in very bad physical and emotional condition.

Soon after liberation, the army began organizing emergency medical treatment for the prisoners.

63RD INFANTRY DIVISION

The 63rd Infantry 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 2000.

Casualty figures for the 63rd Infantry Division, European theater of operations

Total battle casualties: 4,504

Total deaths in battle: 980

Division nickname

The 63rd Infantry Division was nicknamed the "Blood and Fire" division soon after its formation in the spring of 1943. The nickname commemorates British prime minister Winston Churchill's statement at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943: that "the enemy would bleed and burn in expiation of their crimes against humanity." The divisional insignia illustrates the nickname.