

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.

69TH INFANTRY DIVISION



The 69th Infantry Division was formed in 1943 and deployed to England in December 1944. In late January 1945, the "Fighting 69th" landed at the French port of Le Havre and quickly advanced into Belgium. In February, it pushed into Germany, and by late March had crossed the Rhine River and begun its drive eastward to Saxony, where it captured the city of Leipzig on April 19. Less than a week later, the division made contact with Soviet armed forces at Torgau.

During the fierce battle for Leipzig, the 69th Infantry Division uncovered Leipzig-Thekla, a subcamp of the Buchenwald concentration camp, on April 19, 1945. The camp had been established in September 1943 to supply labor for the German war effort. At its height, Leipzig-Thekla held approximately 1,400 prisoners.

On April 18, 1945, the SS guards had set fire to the barracks housing some 300 inmates and shot those who attempted to escape the flames. Upon arriving at the camp, the 69th immediately began providing for the 90 to 100 survivors. Days later, U.S. Army Signal Corps photographers arrived at the site to document this atrocity. On April 28, 1945, a U.S. Army Protestant chaplain reported that 325 male prisoners, who were too ill or weak to continue working for the German war effort, had been forced into oil-soaked barracks, which were then set aflame. Prisoners who attempted to escape the conflagration were shot by the guards or electrocuted on the electrified fences. According to the report, the swift advance of the 69th prevented the SS guards from committing a similar atrocity at a nearby camp housing some 250 women.

On April 24, the newly installed Allied military government in Leipzig ordered the local German mayor to provide 75 caskets for the dead prisoners, floral wreaths for each coffin, crews of workers to bury the inmates at the entrance of the town cemetery, and 100 prominent citizens from Leipzig, representing the "City Government, Clergy, Civic organizations, Chamber of Commerce, and Educational Institutions including the University of Leipzig to attend the funeral services" on April 27, 1945. That day, the U.S. Army supervised the funeral, supplying Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant chaplains to perform the service. A guard of honor composed of survivors of the camp; 100 displaced persons bearing flags of the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia; Allied officers; and 1,000 German civilians attended the ceremony.

69TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The 69th 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 1993.

Casualty figures for the 69th Infantry Division, European theater of operations

Total battle casualties: 1,506

Total deaths in battle: 384

Division nickname

The 69th Infantry Division gained the nickname the "Fighting 69th" during World War II. The name has no heraldic significance, but simply conveys the esprit de corps of the division.