

# 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.

# 8TH INFANTRY DIVISION

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The 8th Infantry Division was formed in 1918 during World War I and was sent to France that same year. During World War II, in early July 1944, the "Golden Arrow" division landed on Utah Beach in Normandy, just weeks after the Allies invaded France on D-Day (June 6). Shortly after its arrival, the division captured the French cities of Rennes and Brest.

Following these actions, the 8th turned eastward toward the German border, taking part in the heavy fighting in the Hürtgen Forest in November 1944. In early March 1945, the 8th had advanced into the Rhineland. It fought its way into the Ruhr region the following month. By war's end, the "Arrow" division had advanced to the Elbe River in central Germany.

On May 2, 1945, as it advanced into northern Germany, the 8th Infantry Division encountered the Neuengamme concentration camp Wöbbelin subcamp, near the city of Ludwigslust. The SS had established Wöbbelin in early February 1945 to house concentration camp prisoners who had been evacuated from other Nazi camps to prevent their liberation by the Allies. Wöbbelin held some 5,000 inmates, many of whom suffered from starvation and disease. The sanitary conditions at the camp when the 8th Infantry Division and the 82nd Airborne Division arrived were deplorable. There was little food or water, and some prisoners had resorted to cannibalism. In the first week after liberation, more than 200 inmates died. In the aftermath, the U.S. Army ordered the townspeople in Ludwigslust to visit the camp and bury the dead.

The 8th 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 1988.

*Casualty figures for the 8th Infantry Division, European theater of operations*

Total battle casualties: 13,986

Total deaths in battle: 2,852

# 8TH INFANTRY DIVISION

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## *Division nickname*

The 8th Infantry Division was known as both the "Golden Arrow" and "Pathfinder" division during World War II. Both nicknames originated from the division's insignia, which includes a gold arrow to represent the nineteenth-century explorer of California, John Fremont. The division was formed in California in 1918.