

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.

80TH INFANTRY DIVISION



The 80th Infantry Division was formed in September 1917, several months after the United States entered World War I, and served in military campaigns in France the following year. In 1942, the "Blue Ridge" division was reactivated for military service and deployed to Europe, where it landed on Utah Beach on August 3, 1944, less than two months after the Allied invasion of western Europe on D-Day (June 6).

Soon after arriving in France, the unit engaged German forces in combat in Argentan and other locales in Normandy. It subsequently drove eastward and reached the Saar region of Germany by early December. Later that month, the 80th was diverted to Luxembourg to blunt the German offensive into the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge. In January 1945, the 80th returned to the offensive and in the following months drove deep into Germany. After crossing the Rhine in late March, the division advanced through Thuringia, reaching Erfurt, Weimar, and Jena by mid-April. By war's end, the "Blue Ridge" division had advanced south through Bavaria and into Austria.

During its advance into central Germany, the 80th Infantry Division entered the Buchenwald concentration camp on April 12, 1945, to provide relief to the 6th Armored Division, which had arrived the day before. Several weeks later, as the "Blue Ridge" division pushed into Austria, it liberated Ebensee, a subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp. Construction of the Ebensee camp had begun in November 1943, and Ebensee started functioning as a subcamp in March 1944. Its purpose was to supply prisoner labor for the construction of elaborate tunnels in the nearby mountains to house underground factories for the production of rockets. Code-named *Zement* (Cement), the project required backbreaking labor done at a brutal pace. The camp population swelled to more than 18,000 in April 1945.

When troops of the 80th Infantry arrived at Ebensee on May 4–5, 1945, they found some 16,000 prisoners there. A U.S. Army report stated that conditions in the camp were "deplorable" and that several hundred prisoners had died from disease and malnutrition on the day the camp was discovered. The report further stated that

All of the inmates of the camp were badly undernourished and many were suffering from various diseases and ailments. No meals had been served at the camp for three days prior to the arrival of the American Forces in the area.

80TH INFANTRY DIVISION

Shortly after liberation, units assigned to maintaining public health and caring for displaced persons were dispatched to Ebensee to provide food and clothing to the prisoners and to combat the typhus epidemic there.

The 80th 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 1985.

Casualty figures for the 80th Infantry Division, European theater of operations

Total battle casualties: 17,087

Total deaths in battle: 3,500

Division nickname

The nickname of the 80th Infantry Division, the "Blue Ridge" division, reflects the home states of the majority of soldiers who formed the division during World War I: Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia. The Blue Ridge Mountains run through these three states.