

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 ARMORED DIVISION



The 8th Armored Division landed in France in January 1945 and advanced rapidly to the Alsace region by the end of the month. From here, the "Iron Snake," or "Thundering Herd," division was deployed to the Netherlands in late February or early March 1945. In late March, the 8th crossed the Rhine River and moved into the industrial Ruhr region, where it took part in heavy fighting. By war's end, the division had advanced to the Harz Mountains.

As it moved into central Germany, the 8th liberated Halberstadt-Zwieberge, a subcamp of the Buchenwald concentration camp, between April 12 and 17, 1945. The area around the city of Halberstadt housed a number of Buchenwald subcamps that had been established in 1944 to provide labor for the German war effort, including Halberstadt-Zwieberge I and Halberstadt-Zwieberge II. More than 5,000 inmates were incarcerated in these two subcamps, where they were forced to hollow out massive tunnels and build underground factories for Junkers Aircraft of Aircraft Motors Construction Company, which produced military aircraft.

The 8th 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 1995.

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

Total battle casualties: 2,011

Total deaths in battle: 469

Division nickname

The nickname of the 8th Armored Division, the "Thundering Herd," was coined before the division went to Europe in late 1944. It was also known as the "Iron Snake" late in the war, after a correspondent for *Newsweek* likened the 8th to a "great ironclad snake" as it crossed the Rhine River in late March 1945.