

HONORING AMERICAN LIBERATORS



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

HONORING AMERICAN LIBERATORS

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.

83RD INFANTRY DIVISION



The 83rd Infantry Division was first activated in the fall of 1917, several months after the United States entered World War I. It was deployed to France in 1918.

On June 18, 1944, less than two weeks after the Allied D-Day (June 6) invasion of western Europe, the "Thunderbolt" division landed on Omaha Beach and began advancing into France. By the end of September, the division had moved into Luxembourg. In late December 1944, the 83rd took part in the Allied effort to stop the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge. Several months later, it crossed the Rhine and subsequently captured the German city of Halle on April 6, 1945. At war's end, the "Thunderbolt" division had established a bridgehead on the Elbe River.

On April 11, 1945, the 83rd encountered Langenstein, a subcamp of the Buchenwald concentration camp. The camp was created in April 1944 to provide concentration camp labor for the German war effort. In its one year of existence, the camp's population greatly expanded from 214 prisoners in April 1944 to about 5,400 in March 1945. The prisoners were detailed to build underground factory installations and to carry out forced labor for Organization Todt.

When the 83rd Infantry arrived in Langenstein, its troops found some 1,100 inmates in very poor physical condition. The unit reported that the prisoners had been forced to work 16 hours a day in nearby mines and that the SS had murdered those prisoners who became too weak to work. Deaths, the division's report continued, reached 500 per month. Upon overrunning the camp, U.S. troops estimated that the newly liberated inmates weighed only 80 pounds each as the result of malnutrition at SS hands. They also estimated that, due to severe physical debilitation, prisoners continued to die at a rate of 25 to 30 persons per day.

To halt the spread of sickness and death, the 83rd ordered the local German mayor to supply the camp with food and water. The unit also requisitioned medical supplies from the U.S. Army's 20th Field Hospital. In addition, the "Thunderbolt" division recovered the camp's documents for use by war crimes investigators.

83RD INFANTRY DIVISION

The 83rd 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 83rd Infantry Division, European theater of operations

Total battle casualties: 15,910

Total deaths in battle: 3,637

Division nickname

The 83rd Infantry Division received its nickname, the "Thunderbolt" division, after a division-wide contest for a new nickname held in early 1945. The earlier nickname, "Ohio," was based on the division's insignia (which includes the name "Ohio," where the division was raised during World War I). A new nickname was desired to represent the nationwide origins of the division's personnel during World War II.