

# 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.

# 84TH INFANTRY DIVISION

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The 84th Infantry Division was formed in 1917, the year the United States entered World War I. In World War II, the "Railsplitter" division landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy in early November 1944, five months after D-Day (June 6, 1944). From France, the unit moved quickly into the Netherlands in preparation for an offensive into Nazi Germany. During the Battle of the Bulge, the 84th was diverted to Belgium to stop the German offensive. In March 1945, it moved into the Rhineland and subsequently advanced northward, capturing the city of Hannover on April 10. The 84th eventually made its way to the Elbe River and made contact with Soviet armed forces in early May 1945.

As the "Railsplitter" division advanced into the interior of Germany, its troops uncovered Hannover-Ahlem (April 10, 1945) and Salzwedel (April 14, 1945), both satellite camps of the Neuengamme concentration camp. The SS established the Hannover-Ahlem camp on November 30, 1944, after transferring the camp and its inmates from the Continental Gummiwerke factory at Hannover-Stöcken. In Ahlem the inmates were forced to work in the nearby asphalt tunnels. These were to be cleared for the production of aircraft and Panzer parts for Continental Gummiwerke and Maschinenfabrik Hannover.

When the soldiers of the 84th entered the camp in Ahlem, they discovered an undetermined number of starving and ill Jewish prisoners. Reports range from 30 to 250 persons. The SS guards had abandoned these prisoners when they evacuated the camp, taking with them some 600 "healthy" prisoners. Of the prisoners sent on this death march, only 450 made it to the Bergen-Belsen camp. The SS guards had shot many of those who were unable to maintain the pace of the march. The U.S. Army war crimes investigators reported that many of these survivors died soon after liberation from the accumulated abuse, mistreatment, and neglect they had suffered. They estimated that only 300 to 400 Jewish prisoners at Hannover-Ahlem survived the war.

Several days later, the 84th Infantry captured Salzwedel, a camp formed by the SS in July 1944 to supply forced labor for a German munitions factory. The unit found some 3,000 female inmates, mainly Jewish women who had been transported from the Auschwitz camp complex, and several hundred political prisoners. The U.S. Army reported that sanitary conditions at the camp were poor because of overcrowding and a lack of water.

# 84TH INFANTRY DIVISION

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Some 100 of these prisoners were seriously ill and 33 of them required immediate medical attention at a local hospital. The town's mayor was ordered to provide food immediately for the former inmates, who were subsequently moved into modern German barracks nearby.

The 84th 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 84th Infantry Division, European theater of operations*

Total battle casualties: 7,260

Total deaths in battle: 1,468

## *Division nickname*

The 84th Infantry Division derives its nickname, "Railsplitter" division, from the divisional insignia, an ax splitting a rail. This design was created during World War I, when the division was known as the "Lincoln" division to represent the states that supplied soldiers for the division: Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. All figured prominently in the life of President Abraham Lincoln, of log-splitting legend.