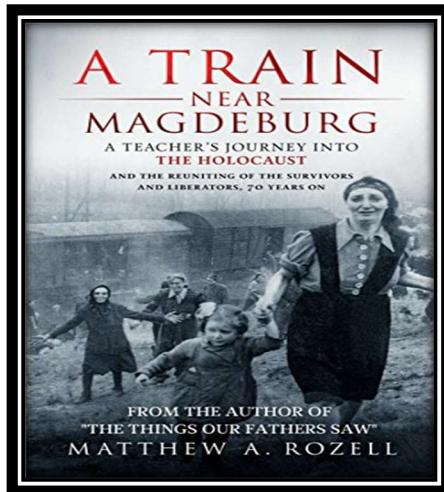


**THE TRUE STORY OF THE HOLOCAUST TRAIN RESCUED FROM
THE HEART OF DARKNESS ON FRIDAY, APRIL 12TH, 1945**

ONE OF THE "RIGHT KIND OF STORIES" FROM WW2

BECAUSE SOMEONE CARED

329



A TRAIN NEAR MAGDEBURG

The incredible **TRUE STORY** behind the iconic photograph, **taken at the liberation of a death train deep in the heart of Nazi Germany**, brought to life by the history teacher who reunited hundreds of Holocaust survivors of this train and their children with the actual American soldiers who saved them.

TEACHING HISTORY MATTERS

"for the sake of humanity"... A small-town American high school history project changes lives worldwide. These are the observations of a veteran teacher- on the Power of Teaching, the importance of the study of History, **and especially the lessons we must learn, and teach, on the Holocaust.**

(BEGIN)

'I cannot believe, today, that the world almost ignored those people and what was happening. How could we have all stood by and let that happen? They do not owe us anything. We owe them, for what we allowed to happen to them.' - **Carrol Walsh, Liberator.**

Near the end of the war, Jewish prisoners from the Bergen-Belsen death camp were being transported to another camp when the Germans abandoned the train. The US Army came upon the survivors. Two soldiers took photographs. And from those pictures, decades later something wonderful happened.

Matthew Rozell, the author, is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Teacher Fellow and teaches history at his alma mater in upstate New York. His work has resulted in the reuniting of 275 Holocaust survivors and the American soldiers who freed them.

How that came about is a story of curiosity, chance, the human spirit, and the power of photography. **Matthew was interviewing World War II US Army tank commander Carrol Walsh in July 2001 about his experiences in WW2.**

'For two hours we talked about battles and close calls, friends he lost and those he bonded with,' Matthew writes. 'He hated the war, he hated the Army - "Well, I think you had an obligation and you knew it, and you weren't going to let the guys down, that's all." **Walsh mentioned the train, almost as an afterthought, and only when prompted by his daughter.**'



*Friday, April 13th, 1945. The Moment of Liberation.
Farsleben, Germany. By U.S. Army, Major Clarence Benjamin, 743rd Tank Battalion.*



George Gross and Red Walsh

"This is a picture of two comrades who depended upon each other in the war. I am the one on the viewer's left; on the right is Judge Carroll S. Walsh, who was with me at the train and most of our memorable experiences in combat."

Carrol Walsh invited Matthew to contact his friend on the West Coast, George C. Gross, who had a negative of the photo you see at the top of this story, and ten others of the train liberation that he took.

COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER TO VIEW

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9hzpsOIJ10>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL783iSeULw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PR0K2XePXjw>

What happened next made the past come alive. Dr. Gross was happy to meet and talk. In March 2002, Gross told Matthew his story. The captions to the images below are his words. Dr Gross got to know quite a few of the people he helped save before he died on Feb 1, 2009. Before we hear from him, some words about that train. In his book Move Out Verify: the Combat Story of the 743rd Tank Battalion, Wayne Robinson tells us what the Americans saw:

A few miles northwest of Magdeburg there was a railroad siding in a wooded ravine not far from the Elbe River. Major Clarence Benjamin in a jeep was leading a small task force of two light tanks from Dog Company on a routine job of patrolling. The unit came upon some 200 shabby-looking civilians by the side of the road. There was something immediately apparent about each one of these people, men and women, which got our attention. Each one of them was skeleton thin with starvation, a sickness in their faces, and how they stood there was something else. At the sight of Americans, they began laughing in joy-if it could be called laughing. It was an outpouring of pure, near-hysterical relief.

The tankers soon found out why. The reason was found at the railroad siding.

There they came upon a long string of grimy, ancient boxcars standing silent on the tracks.

In the banks by the tracks, as if to get some pitiful comfort from the thin April sun, a multitude of people of all shades of misery spread themselves in a sorry, despairing tableau [sic]. As the American uniforms were sighted, a great stir went through this strange camp. Many rushed toward the Major's jeep and the two light tanks.



The first sighting of the train by the American at the Railroad Siding

Bit by bit, as the Major found some who spoke English, the story came out.

This had been and was a horror train. In these freight cars had been shipped 2500 people, jam-packed in like sardines, and they were people that had two things in common, one other: They were prisoners of the German State and they were Jews.

COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER TO VIEW

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCt2gXkcC9k>

These 2500 wretched people, starved, beaten, ill, some dying, were political prisoners who had until a few days before been held at a concentration camp near Hanover. When the Allied armies smashed through beyond the Rhine and began slicing into central Germany, the tragic 2500 had been loaded into old railroad cars-as many as 68 in one filthy boxcar-and brought in a torturous journey to this railroad siding by the Elbe. They were to be taken still deeper into Germany beyond the Elbe when German trainmen got into an argument about the route and the cars had been shunted onto the siding. Here the tide of the Ninth Army's rush had found them.



"This is a shot of others on the train. I am moved still by all those smiles, particularly the one on the thin little girl in front at the left".

THE WORDS OF GEORGE C. GROSS – SPRING VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 3, 2001

“On Friday, April 13, 1945, I was commanding a light tank in a column of the 743rd Tank Battalion and the 30th Infantry Division, moving south near the Elbe River toward Magdeburg, Germany. After three weeks of non-stop advancing with the 30th from the Rhine to the Elbe as we alternated spearhead and mop-up duties with the 2nd Armored Division, we were worn out and in a somber mood because, although we knew the fighting was at last almost over, **a pall had been cast upon our victories by the news of the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.**

I had no inkling of the further grim news that morning would bring. Suddenly, I was pulled out of the column, along with my buddy Sergeant Carroll Walsh in his light tank, to accompany Major Clarence L. Benjamin of the 743rd in a scouting foray to the east of our route. Major Benjamin had come upon some emaciated Finnish soldiers who had escaped from a train full of starving prisoners a short distance away. The major led our two tanks, each carrying several infantrymen from the 30th Infantry Division on its deck, down a narrow road until we came to a **valley with a small train station at its head and a motley assemblage of passenger compartment cars and boxcars pulled onto a siding.** There was a mass of people sitting or lying listlessly about, unaware as yet of our presence (**see picture top of page 1866**). There must have been guards, but they ran away before or as we arrived, **for I remember no firefight.** Our taking of the train, therefore, was no great heroic action but a small police operation. The heroism that day was all with the prisoners on the train.

COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER

A TRAIN NEAR MAGDEBURG TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBTalumZmj8>

“Major Benjamin took a powerful picture just as a few of the people became aware that they had been rescued. (**See book cover on the first page and picture on top of page 2**) .It shows people in the background still lying about trying to soak up a bit of energy from the sun, while in the foreground a woman has her arms flung wide and a great look of surprise and joy on her face as she rushes toward us. **In a moment, that woman found a pack left by a fleeing German soldier, rummaged through it, and held up triumphantly a tin of rations.**



This view shows compartment cars. Most of the train was made up of boxcars. It looks as though one man in the lower left is praying; others are sitting or lying on the ground.

“I pulled my tank up beside the small station house at the head of the train and kept it there as a sign that the train was under American protection now. Carroll Walsh’s tank was soon sent back to the battalion, and I do not remember how long the infantrymen stayed with us, though it was a comfort to have them for a while. I recollect that my tank was alone for the afternoon and night of the 13th. Several things happened fairly quickly. We were told that the commander of the 823rd Tank Destroyer battalion had ordered all the burgermeisters of nearby towns to prepare food and get it to the train promptly, and were assured that the Military Government would take care of the refugees the following day. **So we were left to hunker down and protect the starving people.**

"A young woman named Gina Rappaport came up and offered to be my interpreter (see picture below) She spoke English very well and was conversant with several other languages besides her native Polish.

We stood in front of the tank as a long line of men, women, and little children formed itself spontaneously, with great dignity and no confusion, to greet us. It is a time I cannot forget, for it was moving to see the courtesy with which they treated each other, and the importance they seemed to place on reasserting their individuality in some seemingly official way. Each would stand at a position of rigid attention, held with some difficulty, and introduce himself or herself by what grew to be a sort of formula: the full name, followed by "a Polish Jew from Hungary" – or a similar phrase which gave both the origin and the home from which the person had been seized.

Then each would shake hands in a solemn and dignified assertion of individual worth. Battle-hardened veterans learn to contain their emotions, but it was difficult then, and I cry now to think about it. What stamina and regenerative spirit those brave people showed!"



Gina Rappaport - Friday, April 13th, 1945.

This is Gina Rappaport, who spoke very good English and spent a couple of hours telling me her story. I have notes packed away somewhere but have never felt up to trying to make an essay of them. She was in the Warsaw ghetto under terrible conditions and then was sent to Bergen-Belsen. She said that the people on the train had been hurriedly jammed into cars and sent on a meandering journey back and forth across central Germany to escape the British, American, and Russian troops. The attempt was evidently to get them to a camp where they could be eliminated before they could be liberated.

NOTE: Below is a picture of Gina Rappaport taken 62 years later



Gina Rappaport of Israel looks at her 1945 photograph, 62 years on, taken on the day of her liberation by Sgt. George Gross, one of the liberating tank commanders saved her and 2500 others in April 1945.

"Also tremendously moving were their smiles. I have one picture of several girls, specter-thin, hollow-cheeked, with enormous eyes that had seen much evil and terror, and yet with smiles to break one's heart. Little children came around with shy smiles, and mothers with proud smiles happily pushed them forward to get their pictures taken. (see picture next page) I walked up and down the train seeing some lying in pain or lack of energy, and some sitting and making hopeful plans for a future that suddenly seemed possible again. Others followed everywhere I went, not intruding but just wanting to be close to a representative of the forces that had freed them.

How sad it was that we had no food to give immediately, and no medical help, for during my short stay with the train sixteen or more bodies were carried up the hillside to await burial, brave hearts having lost the fight against starvation before we could help them. (see picture at top of next page)

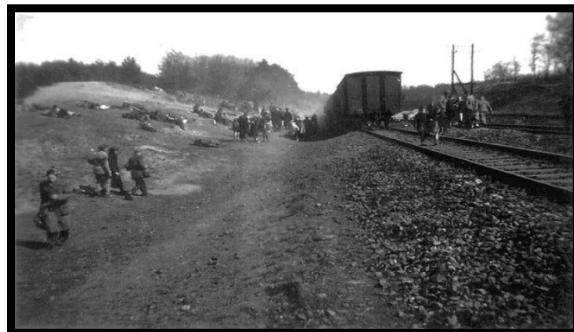
"The boxcars were generally in very bad condition from having been the living quarters of far too many people, and the passenger compartments showed the same signs of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. But the people were not dirty. Their clothes were old and often ragged, but they were generally clean, and the people themselves had taken great pains to look their best as they presented themselves to us. I was told that many had taken advantage of the cold stream that flowed through the lower part of the valley to wash themselves and their clothing. Once again I was impressed by the indomitable spirits of these courageous people.

"I spent part of the afternoon listening to the story of Gina Rappaport, who had served so well as interpreter. She was in the Warsaw ghetto for several years as the Nazis gradually emptied the ghetto to fill the death camps, until her turn finally came. She was taken to Bergen-Belsen, where the horrible conditions she described matched those official accounts I later heard. She and some 2500 others, Jews from all over Europe, Finnish prisoners of war, and others who had earned the enmity of Nazidom, were forced onto the train and taken on a back-and-forth journey across Germany, as their torturers tried to get them to a camp where they could be eliminated before Russians on one side or Americans on the other caught up with them. Since the prisoners had little food, many died on the purposeless journey, and they had felt no cause for hope when they were shunted into this little unimportant valley siding. Gina told her story well, but I have never been able to write it. I received a letter from her months later when I was home in San Diego. I answered it but did not hear from her again. Her brief letter came from Paris, and she had great hopes for the future. I trust her dreams were realized.



I find this picture very moving: mothers love to show off their youngsters, no matter what the situation. The little fellow was pleased at having his picture taken. Note the thin legs and brave smile.

"We were relieved the next morning, started up the tank, waved goodbye to our new friends, and followed a guiding jeep down the road to rejoin our battalion. I looked back and saw a lonely Gina Rappaport standing in front of a line of people waving us good fortune. On an impulse I cannot explain, I stopped the tank, ran back, hugged Gina, and kissed her on the forehead in a gesture I intended as one asking forgiveness for man's terrible cruelty and wishing her and all the people a healthy and happy future. I pray they have had it."



"This is a view of the train from the rear, showing boxcars like those in picture 1. On the hill to the left are people resting-some forever. Some sixteen died of starvation before food could be brought to the train and were buried on the hill at the left."



"This one, too, is very moving. My original note says, 'The little girl in the middle is so weak from starvation she can hardly stand-yet she has a smile for her 'liberators.' One might say the same of the two children on either side."

"This is a shot of others on the train... I am moved still by all those smiles..." -George C Gross, liberator.





Notice all of the small children.

COMMENTS FROM SURVIVORS AND SOME LIBERATORS

"It was a beautiful, balmy morning in April 1945, when I entered Major Adams' makeshift office in Farsleben, a small town in Germany, to offer my services as an interpreter. It made me feel good that I could show, in a small way, the gratitude I felt for the 9th American Army, which had liberated us as we were being transported from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

'Orders found by the Americans in the German officer's car directed that the train was to be stopped on the bridge crossing the Elbe River at Magdeburg, then the bridge was to be blown up, also destroying the train and its cargo all at once.

The deadline was noon, Friday the 13th, and at 11 A.M. we were liberated!

'With the liberation had come the disquieting news that President Roosevelt had died, and while I was airing concern that the new President, Harry Truman, (a man unknown to us) could continue the war, a sergeant suddenly said, "Hey, you speak pretty good English. I am sure the major would like to have you serve as his interpreter."

'Major Adams had not been told of my coming, so he was startled when he saw me. No wonder! There stood a young woman as thin as a skeleton, dressed in a two-piece suit full of holes. The suit had been in the bottom of my rucksack for 20 months, saved for the day we might be liberated, but the rats in Bergen-Belsen must have been as hungry as we were and had found an earlier use for my suit. For nine days we had been on the train, and this was the only clean clothing I owned.

'Major Adams quickly recovered from his initial shock and seemed delighted after I explained why I had come. He asked how his men had treated us, and I heaped glowing praise on the American soldiers who had shared their food so generously with the starving prisoners. Then he took me outside to meet the "notables" of the German population, and with glee, I translated orders given to them by the American commander. The irony of the reversal of roles was not lost on me or the recipients; I was now delivering orders to those who had been ordering me around for so long! The Germans were obsequious; profusely claiming they never wanted Hitler or agreed with his policies and hoped the war would soon be over.

'When asked to come back the next day, I was delighted but hesitated, wondering if it would be appropriate to ask a favor. Major Adams picked up on my hesitation, so I asked him to help me contact my family in America. We had emigrated to the U.S. in 1939, but after six months I returned to Holland to join my fiancé who was in the Dutch army. My parents knew that eight months after we were married my husband was taken as a hostage and sent to Mauthausen concentration camp where he was killed in 1941, but they did not know if I was alive, not having heard from me in more than two years.

'Major Adams gave me a kind glance, saying, "Give me a few handwritten lines, in English, and I will ask my parents to forward the letter to them."

'When he saw the address on the note he looked at me, his mouth open in total amazement, and then he started to laugh - his parents and my parents lived in the same apartment building in New York City!

'And so it was on Mother's Day that his mother brought to my mother my message:

"I am alive!"'

LISSETTE LAMON – A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

"I survived because of many miracles. But for me to meet, shake hands, hug, and cry together with my liberators-the 'angels of life' who gave me back my life-was just beyond imagination.'

LESLIE MEISELS – HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

"We'd heard stories about the mistreatment of Jews, about them being tortured and being put to death, but we dismissed what we thought was propaganda. We didn't believe one group of human beings could do that to another group of human beings. It wasn't until we saw this trainload of Jews that we believed."

U.S ARMY FIRST LIEUTENANT FRANK TOWERS - LIBERATOR

'I cannot believe, today, that the world almost ignored those people and what was happening. How could we have all stood by and let that happen? They do not owe us anything. We owe them, for what we allowed to happen to them.'

U.S. ARMY SGT CARROL WALSH – LIBERATOR

'Battle-hardened veterans learn to contain their emotions, but it was difficult then, and I cry now to think about it. What stamina and regenerative spirit those brave people showed!

GEORGE C. GROSS - LIBERATOR

'[People say it] cannot happen here in this country; yes, it can happen here. I was 21 years old. I was there to see it happen.'

LUCA FURNARI, US ARMY-LIBERATOR

[After I got home] I cried a lot. My parents couldn't understand why I couldn't sleep at times.' –

WALTER 'BABE' GANTZ –US ARMY MEDIC – LIBERATOR.

'I grew up and spent all my years being angry. This means I don't have to be angry anymore.'

PAUL ARATO – HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

For the first time after going through sheer hell, I felt that there was such a thing as simple love coming from good people-young men who had left their families far behind, who wrapped us in warmth and love and cared for our well-being.

SARA ATZMON – HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

'It's not for my sake; it's for the sake of humanity that they will remember.

STEVE BARRY – HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

Thanks to Matthew's story, the story got out. 'Then, the first miracle happened,' he notes. 'I heard from my first Holocaust survivor now living in Australia, a grandmother who had been a little girl on the train. In short order, I heard from a doctor in London, a scientist in Brooklyn, and a retired airline executive in New Jersey. ***So I decided to host a reunion for them at our school.***

Judge Walsh met them with a laugh and said "Long time no see".



World War II infantry veteran Carrol Walsh, top, hugs Holocaust survivor Paul Arato at a reunion in Queensbury, N.Y., on Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009. "Please hug me. You saved my life," Arato told Walsh.

Mr Arato was just 6 when he was rescued. A GI gave him a Tootsie Roll. He never forgot it.

Can you even imagine what unfolds as liberating soldiers and the children they saved from death re-meet each other after 65, or 70 years? The old GIs uniting with the ACTUAL people they saved, two generations on?

Carrol Walsh died on Dec. 17th, 2012. He was 91. A retired state judge whose account of liberating Holocaust victims from a Nazi train led to reunions with the survivors 60 years later.

"He's the catalyst for everything," said Matthew. "All of these people, men, women, children, jam-packed in those boxcars, I couldn't believe my eyes," Walsh said in 2001. "And there they were. So, now they knew they were free, they were liberated. That was a nice, nice thing."

Matthew Rozell continues his compelling work at his excellent website **Teaching History Matters.**



After the war, the woman and her daughter seen above in the haunting moment captured by Major Benjamin returned to their native Hungary. They did not want to be identified.

You can read more about the train and people who came together one day in 1945 in Matthew's excellent book: **A Train Near Magdeburg: A Teacher's Journey into the Holocaust, and the reuniting of the survivors and liberators, 70 years on.**

The trailer for the proposed movie can be viewed by copying and pasting the below link into your browser:

<https://teachinghistorymatters.com/the-film/>

The movie was supposed to be finished in 2020 but the inability of the author to go to the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary and funding problems have delayed the project.

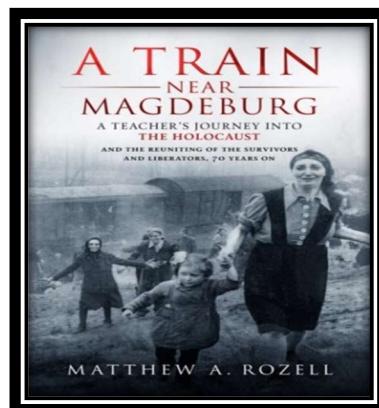
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more information on this or any other project please go to the author's Website at www.teachinghistorymatters.com.

He also has a Facebook account under [Matthew Rozell Books](#).



MATTHEW ROZELL



THE BOOK THAT TELLS THE STORY



MATTHEW ROZELL is an award-winning history teacher, author, blogger and speaker. He has been featured as the ABC World News 'Person of the Week' and has had his work filmed for CBS News, NBC Learn, the Israeli Broadcast Authority, the New York State United Teachers, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Most recently, he is the recipient of the New York State Education Department's Yavner Teaching Award for Distinguished Contributions to Teaching the Holocaust and Human Rights.

THE HOLOCAUST was a watershed event in history. In this book, award-winning author Matthew Rozell reconstructs a lost chapter—the liberation of a ‘death train’ deep in the heart of Nazi Germany in the closing days of World War II. Drawing on never-before-published eye-witness accounts, survivor testimonies and memoirs, and wartime reports and letters, Rozell brings to life the incredible true stories behind the iconic 1945 liberation photographs taken by the soldiers who were there. He weaves together a chronology of the Holocaust as it unfolds across Europe, and goes back to literally retrace the steps of the survivors and the American soldiers who freed them. Rozell’s work results in joyful reunions on three continents, seven decades later. He offers his unique perspective on the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations and the impact that one person, a teacher, can make.

WATCH THE SHORT – ABC WORLD NEWS PERSON OF THE WEEK CLIP WITH DIANE SAWYER

COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER TO VIEW - THIS SITE TALKS ABOUT THE REUNION

<https://teachinghistorymatters.com/holocaust-survivors-liberators-reunited/>

75th COMMEMORATION IN GERMANY CANCELLED BECAUSE OF THE CORONA VIRUS
HOPE TO HAVE IT NEXT YEAR 2021
THIS IS WHAT" WOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE"

On April 13, 2020, the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the first train transport out of Bergen-Belsen, I will board an airplane for Germany. I will return to the site of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, and make my way to the liberation site at Farsleben near the city of Magdeburg on the Elbe River, to join survivors, their families, and the second generation of soldiers in commemoration with local students, teachers, and others. We are humbled that the organizers have asked us to attend.

In 2013, I traveled the same railroad route from near Bergen-Belsen to Magdeburg in less than an hour. In 1945, starved, emaciated, and typhus-stricken prisoners covered the same journey with little food water, or sanitation for nearly a week. Then, the tank commander appeared on the scene, in his tank with the white star, with another tank commander and their crews, and their major who snapped one of the Most Iconic Photos of the 20th Century. (On page -The book cover)

It is fitting that I travel back to this place, this time with an Emmy Award-winning film director and with our cameras rolling.

The two tank commanders, by the way, were not Jewish, contrary to some things you may find on the internet. The two filmmakers, Mike and I, are not Jewish either. Does that matter? To us, of course not.

But in a world where Jew-hatred has existed for millennia and antisemitism rears again, we stand with the Jewish people as those American soldiers did in 1945. They were faced with a moral choice in a shooting war. And they chose to DEFEND, PROTECT, AND CONFRONT. And with our film, based on my book, we choose to affirm and promote those values.

We will witness, once more, and we want our viewers to think about what they saw, what they did, and the lessons they now pass on to us all as they take their final leave.

The Unveiling of the Liberation Monument is planned to take place in Farsleben on 17 April 2020. 13 April is Easter Monday and 19 April is the Liberation event of Bergen-Belsen. On 21 April other events will be planned, to be mentioned later. The committee is now seeking Government funding, media coverage, and public donations, now that the Stranded Train Charity has officially been registered. The Farsleben Foundation and the Stranded Train Committee, together wish to collect at least 15,000 Euros. The maximum amount was estimated to be 25,000 Euros, which if collected will be spent on more enhancements for the monument.”



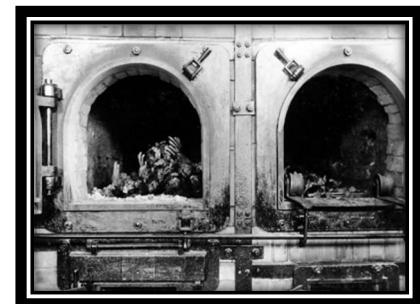
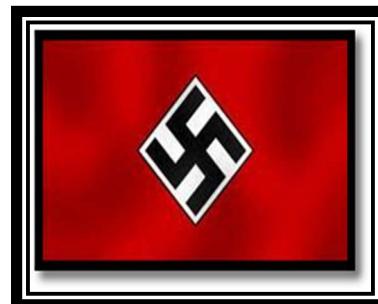
Students planting a hickory tree near the site of the liberation of the Train near Magdeburg, 2019.

OH YES, IT ALL HAPPENED

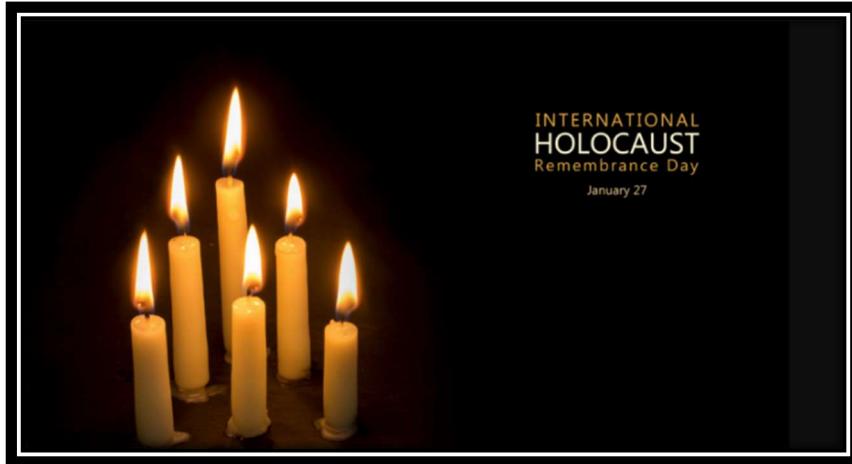




WHAT THE ALLIES FOUND AS THE CAMPS WERE LIBERATED
VERY GRAPHIC PICTURES



Pray we never forget about this part of our history and that we teach our children and our Grandchildren about this. They need to know how very bad some people can be at times and know how people can suffer under a person like Hitler. ***It's their right to know.***



Honoring all who suffered in any way during the Holocaust



The hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in a time of moral crisis. – Dante

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

-- Martin Niemöller (1892-1984), Protestant pastor who opposed Adolf Hitler and spent the last 7 years of Nazi rule in concentration camps.

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DISCLAIMER

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM WHAT APPEARS TO BE AUTHENTIC WEBSITES I CANNOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.