THE MALMEDY MASSACRE (A)-THE CHENOGNE MASSACRE (B)-THE LIBERATION OF DACHAU (C)

ATROCITIES BY THE AMERICANS & NAZI'S DURING WW2 KEPT SECRET FOR OVER 40 YEARS

THE MURDERS OF MEN, THE CONTROVERSIAL TRIALS, AND INTERVIEWS WITH SOME OF THE THOSE INVOLVED

THE MALMEDY MASSACRE

175 -A

A LONG ARTICLE THAT JUMPS AROUND A BIT TO COVER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE

The bodies of 81 American soldiers from Battery B of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, were killed by Waffen-SS troops on December 17, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge near the Belgian town of Malmedy.

The photograph above shows some of the 72 bodies that were recovered after they were left lying in the snow until January 13, 1945, four weeks after they had been killed. The US Army waited four weeks to collect most of the bodies after they had been notified by local Belgian citizens. The reason given by the US Army QM unit, which eventually retrieved the bodies, was that there was still heavy fighting in the area. Another 12 bodies were recovered four months later, after all the snow had melted, making a total of 84 victims.

COMMENT

This article is not meant to imply that these 3 instances were the only atrocities by either side in WW2 because we all know better than that. The Holocaust is still much embedded in most of us who are old enough to remember. We all know that atrocities have taken place in Wars from the beginning of time. More than being written to point fingers at both sides it is intended to remind us of the terrible events that take place during Wars when people become fanatically involved in someone else's beliefs or are overcome with hatred and vengeance and put aside all reasoning and definitions of humanity.

The events that occurred in both of these "situations" were kept very quiet for many years and there are several stories about what took place. I reviewed many locations to put this together and while some instances are explained differently and some of the soldiers involved made questionable statements to protect themselves, I feel that this is a pretty actual account of what happened.

I want to say that I hope that nothing like this ever takes place in our world again, but unfortunately, similar events are happening today.

This first section (175-A) portrays an atrocity (War Crime) committed by the NAZI against American POWs in Malmedy, Belgium on December 17, 1944, during the Battle of The Bulge near the end of WW2.

The massacre, plus others committed by the same unit on the same day and following days, was the subject of the Malmedy massacre trial, part of the Dachau Trials of 1946. The trials were the focus of much controversy

Hitler's plans for the Battle of the Bulge gave the main goal (breaking through Allied lines) to the 6th SS Panzer Army, commanded by General Sepp Dietrich. He was to break the Allied front between Monschau and Losheimergraben, cross the Meuse River, and then capture Antwerp. Kampfgruppe Peiper, named after and under the command of SS-Obersturmbannfuhrer Joachim Peiper, was composed of armored and motorized elements and was the spearhead of the left wing of the 6th SS Panzer Army. Once the infantry had breached the American lines, Peiper's role was to advance via Ligneuville, Stavelot, Trois-Ponts, and Werbomont and seize and secure the Meuse bridges around Huy.

The best roads were reserved for the bulk of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler. Peiper was to use secondary roads, but these proved unsuitable for heavily armored vehicles, especially the Tiger II tanks attached to the Kampfgruppe

The success of the operation depended on the swift capture of the bridges over the Meuse. This required a rapid advance through U.S. positions, circumventing any points of resistance whenever possible. Another factor Peiper had to consider was the shortage of gasoline: the fuel resources of the Reich had been greatly reduced since the fall of Romania.

Hitler ordered the battle to be carried out with a brutality more common on the Eastern Front, to frighten the enemy. Sepp Dietrich confirmed this during the trial for the massacre. According to some sources, during the briefings before the operation, Peiper stated that no quarter was to be granted, no prisoners were taken, and no pity was shown towards Belgian civilians.

Col. Joachim Peiper in 1943

From the very beginning, German military operations on the northern front were troubled by unexpectedly obstinate resistance from American troops. Peiper had hoped to exploit an opening as early as the morning of December 16, the offensive's first day, but he had been delayed by massive traffic jams behind the front, with the infantry that was to breach the U.S. lines waiting for him to arrive. At daybreak on December 17, after moving his Kampfgruppe into the front line, Peiper broke out toward Honsfeld where elements of his force would kill several dozen American POWs.

After capturing Honsfeld, Peiper left his assigned route for several kilometers to seize a small gasoline depot in Büllingen, where a massacre of American prisoners would later be reported. At this point, Peiper was in the Americans' rear. Unbeknownst to him, had he advanced north from Büllingen towards Elsenborn he could have flanked and trapped the 2nd and the 99th Infantry Divisions with possibly a vastly different outcome. However, he followed orders to stick to his Rollbahn west towards the Meuse River and captured Ligneuville, passing by Mödersheid, Schoppen, Ondenval, and Thirimont.

The terrain and poor quality of the roads made his move difficult. Eventually, at the exit of the small village of Thirimont, the spearhead was unable to take the direct road toward Ligneuville.

Peiper again deviated from his planned route. Rather than turn left, the spearhead veered right and advanced towards the crossroads of Baugnez, which is equidistant from Malmedy, Ligneuville, and Waimes.

Between noon and 1 p.m., the German spearhead approached the crossroads.

An American convoy of about thirty vehicles, mainly elements of B Battery of the American 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion (FAOB), was negotiating the crossroads and turning right toward Ligneuville, to reach St. Vith, where it had been ordered to join the 7th Armored Division, to reinforce the city's defense. The spearhead of Peiper's group spotted the American convoy and opened fire, immobilizing the first and last vehicles of the column and forcing it to halt. Armed with only rifles and other small arms, the Americans surrendered to the Nazi tank force.

While the German column led by Peiper continued on the road toward Ligneuville, the American prisoners were taken to a field, joined with others captured by the SS earlier in the day. Most of the testimonies provided by the survivors state that about 120 men were gathered in the field.

For reasons that remain unclear today, the SS troops suddenly fired on their prisoners with machine guns. Several SS prisoners later testified that a few of the prisoners had tried to escape. Others claimed that a few of the prisoners had recovered their previously discarded weapons and fired on the German troops as they continued their progress toward Ligneuville. Of the 84 bodies recovered a month later, most showed wounds to the head, seemingly much more consistent with a deliberate massacre than with self-defense or with injuries inflicted on prisoners who were attempting to escape.

As soon as the SS machine gunners opened fire, the American POWs panicked. Some tried to flee, but most were shot where they stood. A few sought shelter in a café at the crossroads. The SS soldiers set fire to the building and shot all who tried to escape the flames. Some in the field had dropped to the ground and pretended to be dead when the shooting began. However, SS troops walked among the bodies and shot any that appeared to be alive.

Later, a few survivors emerged from hiding and returned through the lines to nearby Malmedy, where American troops held the town. Eventually, 43 survivors found refuge, some with the help of Belgian civilians.

Testimony from the survivors was taken hours after the massacre. All the accounts were similar and corroborated each other, though the men had no opportunity to discuss the events.

The bodies were taken to Malmedy, where the autopsies would take place on 14 January 1945.

Removing the bodies of the American Dead

The first survivors of the massacre were found by a patrol from the 291st Combat Engineer Battalion at about 2:30 p.m. the same day. The inspector general of the First Army learned of the shootings some three or four hours later. By late evening of the 17th, rumors that the enemy was killing prisoners had reached the forward American divisions. One U.S. unit promptly issued orders that "No SS troops or paratroopers will be taken prisoner but will be shot on sight."

There are claims that some of the American forces killed German prisoners in retaliation.

Because the Baugnez crossroads had been in no-man's-land until the Allied counter-offensive, it was not until January 14, 1945, that U.S. forces reached the massacre site and conducted an investigation. The frozen, snow-covered bodies were photographed where they lay and then removed from the scene for identification and detailed post-mortem examinations. The aim was to gather evidence to be used as part of the prosecution of the apparent war crimes.

Seventy-two bodies were found in the field on January 14 and 15, 1945. Twelve more, lying farther from the pasture, were found between February 7 and April 15, 1945.

The autopsies revealed that at least twenty of the victims had suffered fatal gunshot wounds to the head, inflicted at very close range. These were in addition to wounds made by automatic weapons. Another 20 showed evidence of small-caliber gunshot wounds to the head without powder-burn residue, and 10 had fatal crushing or blunt-trauma injuries, most likely from rifle butts. Some bodies showed only one wound, in the temple or behind the ear. Most of the bodies were found in a very small area, suggesting the victims had been gathered together just before they were killed.

American dead in the snow

PIEPER MOVES ON

The opening forced through the American lines by Kampfgruppe Peiper was marked by other murders of prisoners of war, and later of Belgian civilians. Members of his unit killed at least eight other American prisoners in Ligneuville.

Further massacres of POWs were reported in Stavelot, Cheneux, La Gleize, and Stoumont, on December 18, 19, and 20. Finally, on December 19, 1944, between Stavelot and Trois-Ponts, German forces tried to regain control of the bridge over the Amblève River in Stavelot, which was crucial for receiving reinforcements, fuel, and ammunition. Peiper's men murdered about 100 Belgian civilians.

American Army engineers blocked Peiper's advance in the narrow Amblève River valley by blowing up the bridges. Additional U.S. reinforcements surrounded the Kampfgruppe in Stoumont and la Gleize. Peiper and 800 of his men eventually escaped this encirclement by marching through the nearby woods and abandoning their heavy equipment, including several Tiger II tanks.

On December 21, during the battle around Gleize, the men of Kampfgruppe Peiper captured an American officer, Major Harold D. McCown, who was leading one of the battalions of the 119th Infantry Regiment. Having heard about the Malmedy massacre, McCown personally asked Peiper about his fate and that of his men. McCown testified that Peiper told him neither he nor his men were at any risk and that he (Peiper) was not accustomed to killing his prisoners. McCown noted that neither he nor his men were threatened in any manner, and he testified in Peiper's defense during the 1946 trial in Dachau.

Once re-equipped, Kampfgruppe Peiper rejoined the battle, and other killings of POWs were reported on December 31, 1944, in Lutrebois, and between January 10 and 13, 1945, in Petit Their. The precise number of prisoners of war and civilians massacred attributable to Kampfgruppe Peiper is still not clear.

According to certain sources, 538 to 749 POWs had been the victims of war crimes perpetrated by Peiper's men.

These figures are, however, not corroborated by the report of the United States Senate subcommittee that later inquired into the subsequent trial; according to the Committee, the number of dead would be 362 prisoners of war and 111 civilians.

The memorial of the Malmedy massacre at Baugnez, Belgium. Each black stone embedded into the wall represents one of the victims.

AFTERMATH & TRIAL

On January 13, 1945, American forces recaptured the site where the killings had occurred. The memorial at Baugnez bears the names of the murdered soldiers.

The size of the massacre, which is the only one perpetrated on such a scale against American troops in Europe during World War II, caused an uproar at the time. However, the number of victims was quite low, compared to other German atrocities.

In addition to the effect the event had on American combatants in Europe, it seems that news of the massacre also greatly affected the United States. This explains why the alleged culprits were deferred to the Dachau Trials, which were held in May and June 1946, after the war.

In what came to be called the *"Malmedy Massacre Trial",* which concerned all of the war crimes attributed to Kampfgruppe Peiper during the Battle of the Bulge, the highest-ranking defendant was General Sepp Dietrich, commander of the 6th SS Panzer Army, to which Peiper's unit had belonged. Joachim Peiper and his principal subordinates were defendants.

The tribunal tried more than 70 persons and pronounced 43 death sentences (none of which were carried out) and 22 life sentences. Eight other men were sentenced to shorter prison sentences.

Nazi General Sepp Dietrich

After the verdict, how the court had functioned was disputed, first in Germany (by former Nazi officials who had regained some power due to anti-Communist positions with the occupation forces), then later in the United States (by Congressmen from heavily German-American areas of the Midwest. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, which made no decision.

The case then came under the scrutiny of a sub-committee of the United States Senate. A young Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy (who was Irish-American but represented a heavily German-American ethnic constituency), used it as an opportunity to raise his political profile. He stated that the Court had not tried the defendants fairly.

This drew attention to the trial and the judicial irregularities that had occurred during the interrogations that preceded the trial.

But, before the United States Senate took an interest in this case, most of the death sentences had been commuted, because of a revision of the trial carried out by the U.S. Army. The other life sentences were commuted within the next few years.

The building where the trial was held

All the convicted war criminals were released during the 1950s, the last one to leave prison being Peiper in December 1956. There was a schism between the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars because World War II veterans who were members protested McCarthy's defense of the convicted. The leadership consisting of the earlier World War I veterans was reluctant to criticize him, because of his anti-communist stance.

The Malmedy Nazi Defendants

Critics of the post-war trials of Japanese military personnel have cited the release of these war criminals as an example of the racism that characterized the difference in treatment. Japanese military personnel who were convicted of killing prisoners as a matter of policy were executed per international law and custom.

The turmoil that followed the Malmedy trials and the early release of the condemned has been used as an example of biased post-war justice applied at the discretion of the victor.

A distinct lawsuit about the war crimes committed against civilians in Stavelot was tried on July 6, 1948, in front of a Belgian military court in Liege, Belgium. The defendants were 10 members of Kampfgruppe Peiper; American troops had captured them on December 22, 1944, near the spot where one of the massacres of civilians in Stavelot had occurred. One man was discharged; the others were found guilty. Most of the convicts were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment; two officers were sentenced to 12 and 15 years.

DEATH OF PEIPER

Peiper lived in France following his 1956 release from jail. In 1974 he was identified by a former Communist resistance member of the region who issued a report for the French Communist Party. In 1976 a Communist historian, investigating the STASI archives, found the Peiper file.

On June 21, tracts denouncing his presence were distributed in Traves.

A day later, an article in the Communist publication L'Humanité revealed Peiper's presence in Traves, and he became the subject of death threats. Upon the death threats, Peiper sent his family back to Germany. He stayed in Traves. During the night of July 13/14, 1976, a gunfight took place at Peiper's house. Further, his house was set on fire. ***Peiper's charred corpse was later found in the ruins, with a bullet in the chest***. The perpetrators were never identified but were suspected to be former French Resistance members or Communists. Peiper had just started writing a book about Malmedy and what followed.

RETALIATION AGAINST GERMAN PRISONERS

Knowledge of the massacre "led to considerable retaliation against German prisoners of war during and after that battle. Few Waffen-SS soldiers came to be taken prisoner by units such as the 3rd Armored Division. An example of the aftermath of the massacre is the written order from the HQ of the 328th US Army Infantry Regiment, dated December 21, 1944: "No SS troops or paratroopers will be taken prisoner but will be shot on sight" A possible example of a related large massacre against Germans is the ***Chenogne massacre***. (see below). It was determined, although never admitted to by the American guards, that the German prisoners had been severely beaten over and over by the American guards and even by the American prosecutor.

At the Saar River the 90th Infantry Division "executed Waffen-SS prisoners in such a systematic manner late in December 1944 that headquarters had to issue express orders to take Waffen-SS soldiers alive to be able to obtain information from them

IN POPULAR CULTURE

The massacre has been dramatized in three films: Judgment at Nuremberg, in which Marlene Dietrich plays the widow of a fictional German general tried and put to death for the massacre, the Battle of the Bulge (1965), and Saints and Soldiers (2004). The trial was also dramatized in the play Malmedy Case 5-24 by C.R. (Chuck) Wobbe, published by the Dramatic Publishing Company (1969). It was also alluded to in Hart's War (2002), where the eponymous hero discovers the bodies of the victims.

After the war, the Germans attempted to bring a list of 369 murder cases, involving US Army soldiers killing German POWs and wounded men, before a German court, but the cases were thrown out. The list of these 369 killings was published in a German newspaper.

THE CHENOGNE MASSACRE

175 – B

AN EYE FOR AN EYE ?????

THE AMERICANS GET REVENGE FOR THE MALMEDY MASSACRE ON DEC 17, 1944

The Chenogne massacre refers to a mass execution committed on New Year's Day, January 1, 1945, where at least 25 German prisoners of war were killed by American forces near the village of Chenogne (also spelled "Chegnogne"), Belgium, thought to be in retaliation for the Malmedy massacre.

ACCOUNTS OF THE MASSACRE

On December 17, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, German Waffen-SS troops gunned down 80 American prisoners in the Malmedy massacre. Word of this spread rapidly among American forces and aroused great anger. One American unit issued orders that "No SS troops or paratroopers will be taken prisoners but will be shot on sight." In this atmosphere, American forces executed German prisoners as retribution.

Author Martin Sorge writes, "It was in the wake of the Malmedy incident at Chegnogne that on New Year's Day 1945, some 60 German POWs were shot in cold blood by their American guards. The guilty went unpunished. It was felt that the basis for their action was orders that no prisoners were to be taken." An eyewitness account by John Fague of B Company, 21st Armored Infantry Battalion (of the 11th Armored Division), near Chenogne, describes the killing of German prisoners by American soldiers. "Some of the boys had some prisoners' line up. I knew they were going to shoot them, and I hated this business... They marched the prisoners back up the hill to murder them with the rest of the prisoners we had secured that morning... As we were going up the hill out of town, I knew some of our boys were lining up German prisoners in the fields on both sides of the road. There must have been 25 or 30 German boys in each group. Machine guns were being set up. These boys were to be machine-gunned and murdered. ***We were committing the same crimes we were now accusing the Japs and Germans of doing.***

Another witness, Burnett Miller, expressed doubt that the number killed reached 60. Miller writes: "I am not clear on the exact number of victims of this crime. It seems to me that twenty-five seems reasonable and I do not recall as many as forty...On the day that the prisoners were shot, some were taken for interrogation as I remember several days later quite a few were turned over to intelligence who were desperate for information." Joseph Cummins also relates the account by Fague regarding the killing of roughly 60 prisoners but also notes that before the execution of the POWs took place, several Germans including medics waving red-cross flags, were machine-gunned when trying to surrender[..]

Cummins further connects the massacre with the entry made by General Patton in his diary on January 4, 1945*: '*The Eleventh Armored is very green and took unnecessary losses to no effect. There were also some unfortunate incidents in the shooting of prisoners. I hope we can conceal this.

On the other hand, an official history published by the United States government states that while "it is probable that Germans who attempted to surrender in the days immediately after the 17th ran a greater risk" of being killed than earlier in the year, even so, "there is no evidence... that American troops took advantage of orders, implicit or explicit, to kill their SS prisoners."[]

However, according to George Henry Bennett referring to the above statement; "The caveat is a little disingenuous", and he proceeds to note that it is likely that the orders to shoot prisoners (given to the 328th Infantry regiment) were carried out and that other US regiments were likely also given similar orders[-]

THE SECOND VERSION OF THE KILLINGS IS THE SAME AS ABOVE

In the village of Chenogne, a unit of the US 11th Armoured Division had captured around sixty German soldiers and marched them behind a small hill, out of sight of enemy troops still holding the woods beyond the village The prisoners were subjected to a volley of machine-gun fire. On this cold and frosty first day of 1945, the GIs were showing no mercy for their unfortunate prisoners as they crumpled to the ground, dead. With memories of the Malmédy massacre still fresh in their minds, killing had become impersonal, revenge was now uppermost in their minds.

SUMMARY

Several dozen unarmed German prisoners of war were murdered in cold blood by American forces near the village of Chenogne, Belgium on January 1, 1945.

Accounts of the massacre indicate it was a revenge killing for the incident called the "Malmedy massacre" which had taken place a couple of weeks before elsewhere.

One American unit is said to have issued orders that, "No SS troops or paratroopers will be taken prisoners but will be shot on sight."

Author Martin Sorge writes: "It was in the wake of the Malmedy incident at Chegnogne that on New Year's Day 1945, some 60 German POWs were shot in cold blood by their American guards. The guilty went unpunished. It was felt that the basis for their action was orders that no prisoners were to be taken." An official history published by the United States government denies this.

An eyewitness account by John Fague of B Company, 21st Armored Infantry Battalion (of the 11th Armored Division), near Chenogne, describes the murder of German prisoners by American soldiers:

"After a rest of an hour, we received orders to go back through the town and join our vehicles on the other side of the town. We formed into a semblance of columns and trudged back. As we were going up the hill out of town, I knew some of our boys were lining up German prisoners in the fields on both sides of the road. There must have been 25 or 30 German boys in each group. Machine guns were being set up. These boys were to be machine-gunned and murdered. We were committing the same crimes we were now accusing the Japs and Germans of doing.

The terrible significance of what was going on did not occur to me at the time. After the killing and confusion of that morning, the idea of killing some more Krauts didn't particularly bother me. I didn't want any share in the killing. My chief worry was that Germans hiding in the woods would see this massacre and we would receive similar treatment if we were captured. I turned my back on the scene and walked on up the hill."

VENGEANCE AT DACHAU

THE ATROCITIES AT DACHAU BY AMERICAN SOLDIERS

175-C

FOR 41 YEARS AFTER THE LIBERATION OF THE NAZI'S DACHAU EXTERMINATION CAMP, NOTHING WAS KNOWN BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT THE WAFFEN-SS SOLDIERS STATIONED AT THE GARRISON RIGHT NEXT TO THE CONCENTRATION CAMP, OR ABOUT THE KILLINGS OF THE SS-TOTENKOPF GUARDS WHO HAD SURRENDERED TO THE LIBERATING AMERICANS

THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON SOME OF THE MORE THAN 3 MILLION FILES BEING DECLASSIFIED BY THE CIA AS PART OF THE GLOBAL EFFORT TO UNLOCK THE LAST STASH OF SECRETS ABOUT WW2 WAR CRIMES.

Much has been written about World War II and countless documentaries have been produced. As the years pass new information sheds light on the many events that took place and with that new information we might ultimately get closer to the truth. The men you see in this short trailer from the feature documentary "The Liberation of KZ Dachau" are all gone. All those interviewed for this documentary carried a curse with them for the rest of their lives, the curse of Dachau.

These interviews took place in 1989, approximately 45 years after the events of the liberation of the concentration camp at Dachau.

At the time of the interviews, the men had 45 years to think about what happened to them there and only relied on historical information presented as historical facts, but perhaps not the truth.

World War II has fallen the way of the other forgotten wars in Korea and Vietnam. To quote Voltaire, "History is mythology recreated by each generation.

What remains is that these men saw what they saw, and did what they did, or had to do…

COMMENTARY

If you do any research on this subject you will find many sources of information. Most agree on how it happened but widely disagree as to how many Germans were killed. Mostly for that reason, I'm putting a disclaimer on this document as to its total and complete accuracy. It's a very touchy subject and as noted above many people still don't believe it ever happened. Remember it was classified for 40 years and the exact numbers may be hard to recall, especially when the witnesses were the men involved. *The book above was written by then a young Medical Officer, who was present at the event.*

His book (above) talks of a second mass killing on the same day that is not accounted for in the documents recently de-classified. The writer, Col Howard A. Buechner (US Army Retired), then a young Lt, drastically changed his account of the events from his testimony in 1945 to the Military Board of Inquiry and his book written in 1986. *This remains a question to this day*. The below picture shows the figures taken from his book.

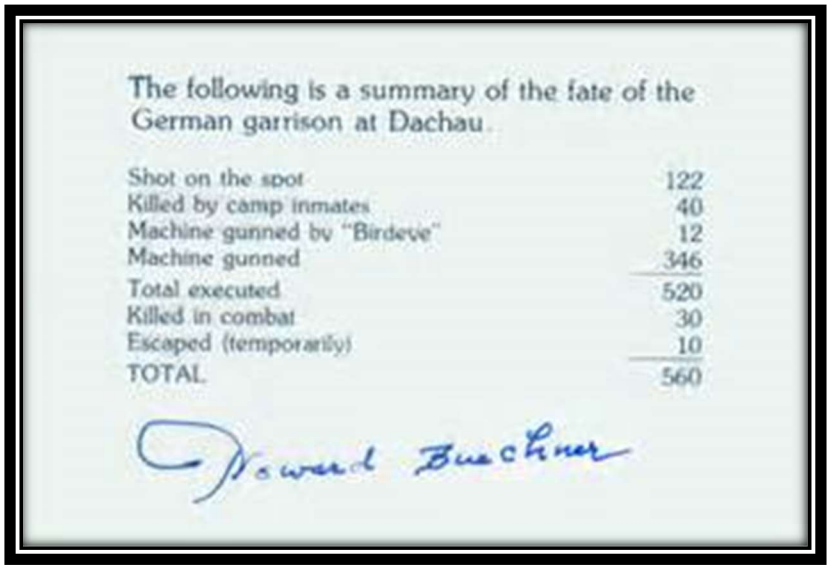
Col Buchner

THE STORY BEGINS

It was a chilling spring dawn a lifetime ago, the day before Hitler's suicide, a week before Americans danced in the streets to sweetly toast triumph in Europe.

But in that wan Sunday sunlight as the Allies raced for Munich and history, Felix Sparks, William Walsh, and John Lee were still combat soldiers trying to stay alive at the end of a long and bloody war.

Still on fierce duty. Still hunting desperate Germans pushed to the brink of defeat and disgrace. As the GIs were detoured into an intersection of righteousness and revenge at the Bavarian town of Dachau, they had no way of knowing they were marching toward one of the war's most egregious but barely explored cases of prisoner mistreatment by US forces in Europe.



The following is a summary of the fate of the German garrison at Dachau.

Shot on the spot	122
Killed by camp inmates	40
Machine gunned by "Birdeye"	12
Machine gunned	346
Total executed	520
Killed in combat	30
Escaped (temporarily)	10
TOTAL	560

Howard Buechner

They could not have fathomed that they would soon find themselves at the center of a US Army investigation into a massacre of German soldiers that General Dwight D. Eisenhower worried might erode America's moral authority to prosecute the Nazis at Nuremberg.

At first, they simply saw a train.

"The first goddamn thing we saw were 20 or 30 boxcars," said Walsh, a Newton native, his Boston accent chowder-thick. "Some open at the top, some closed in.

And here are all these goddamn people in it.

And you kind of figure, well, maybe they're sleeping. Maybe they're hungry.

Inside "The Cars"

"You soon realize: They're all dead! What the hell is this? We had never seen anything like that before. 'Few had. The horrific lexicon is familiar now. Concentration camps. The Final Solution. Six million Jews murdered by a megalomaniac on a satanic mission….. the Holocaust

But the war-worn members of the 45th Infantry Division, who received radio orders to take Dachau on April 29, 1945, knew little or nothing of concentration camps. They knew only what they could see, hear, and smell.

The sight of 2,310 decomposing corpses on that train, **an edgy silence interrupted by episodic gunfire, and the stench of death that hung in the air that day ignited a deadly fuse. It would quickly explode with fury and linger like gunsmoke for more than a half-century.**

The word went out at Dachau: We'll take no prisoners here. A machine gun was set up. Scores of captured acolytes of Hitler's Third Reich were herded into a dusty coal yard and lined up against a stucco wall.

Then American gunfire crackled. Germans fell. Officially, at least 17 were killed. Eleven other Germans who had surrendered were shot in two other locations at Dachau that day, according to records and interviews.

As an eye blink's worth of springtime light slipped onto black-and-white film from behind a camera's shutter, the dark image that slowly took focus endures today. It is frightful evidence that the evil the Nazis manufactured at their death camps was strong enough to badly cloud the judgment of some Americans who tore down Hitler's barbaric cages.

In an almost forgotten footnote of history, American investigators concluded that some of the GIs who rounded up elite SS troops during Dachau's liberation were not heroes, but murderers - the ugly underbelly of the Greatest Generation.

"It certainly has to be among the most egregious imaginable examples of misbehavior by the US military in the Second World War," said Douglas Brinkley, director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans. "It's a low point in an otherwise gallant effort to beat fascism. It's an example of what every commanding officer does not want to see happen. ... I think the general sentiment about this is: 'Oh, come on. Look how horrible the Nazis were. I would have done the same thing.' We give a bit of empathy to the soldiers who killed the Nazis. And yet, they became very much like the Nazis they were gunning down."

That sharp assessment is shared by some of the soldiers who witnessed the shootings. When forces have surrendered, their hands in the air, you don't fire, they say. If you do, you cross the line that separates soldiers from criminals.

Discovering the bodies in the railroad cars

"That is not the American way of fighting," Second Lieutenant Daniel F. Drain, who was ordered to set up his machine gun on that unseasonably cool April day, testified at the Army's official inquiry 56 years ago.

But men like General George S. Patton did not believe that. Patton dismissed the murder charges with a flourish, tossing all of the investigative files into a trash can and telling the accused men to go home and get on with their lives, according to two officers interviewed by The Boston Globe

One copy of the classified investigation survived, however, sandwiched into a gray cardboard box at the National Archives outside Washington, D.C., mislabeled, undisturbed for nearly 50 years, and reviewed by the Globe as the basis for this article.

The investigation was declassified in 1987, before the 3 million pages that have become available in the last few years under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act, some of which have formed the basis for other articles in this series. Yet according to National Archives historian Greg Bradsher, some of the best material was declassified long ago, but never examined by anybody. "If something has sat here for 50 years and nobody's used it, it's news," he said.

The report on the Dachau investigation tells a story that has gone virtually unreported in major American newspapers and magazines, meriting just several sentences, for example, in a 1995 US News & World Report account of the 50th anniversary of Dachau's liberation.

Inside those archived files, however, is gripping testimony of citizen-soldiers -- some of them just teenagers at the time -- who never forgot the moment they confronted the devilish divide between good and evil. Walk a mile in my boots, those men later would implore, before passing judgment on what happened that day at Dachau.

THE REST OF THE STORY (DETAILED)

The road to Dachau was an unwelcome diversion for battle-hardened men of the 45th "Thunderbird" Division, some of the most combat-tested soldiers of World War II.

By April 1945 they had seen 500 days of combat, enduring terror, absorbing monumental casualties, and witnessing events few men ever have. Doing things few men will ever do - like helping to rescue the world from tyranny.

They had seen civilian scavengers dig up American graves in the North African desert. They had invaded Sicily and secured strategically crucial beachheads at Salerno and Anzio. They fought in icy Italian mountains and helped liberate Rome. They landed in German-occupied southern France and pushed through the "Siegfried Line" fortifications between France and Germany.

"You've got to understand, you almost turn inhuman as to your feelings," said *Edwin Gorak*, now 80, of Elmwood Park, Ill., who marched into Dachau after its liberation and took photographs of the horror. "You get hardened."

***Felix L. Sparks* was the 27-year-old commander of one of the liberating battalions. The lieutenant colonel, a native Texan, was pushing for Munich, a coveted military prize when he was ordered to take Dachau instead.**

Sparks and his men didn't know what Dachau was. The former munitions factory 10 miles northwest of Munich had been remade into a death camp in 1933. Elite German SS troops were trained just outside the electrified barbed wire fence. Inside, the Nazis tortured, shot, starved, or worked to death more than 30,000 prisoners.

German Guards from the Guard Towers were murdered by the Americans

But to the men who advanced on the camp that springtime day, like *First Lieutenant William P. Walsh* of Massachusetts, Dachau was just a tiny point on a wrinkled war map.

"Sparks comes up to me and says, 'Walsh, take the company, and I want you to go up these railroad tracks,'" Walsh recalled in a 1990 limited-release documentary made by James Kent Strong, a California filmmaker. "There was a line of railroad tracks heading up in the general direction of the camp. You couldn't see the camp from the village. ... And he said, `Don't let anybody out.'

"He said: 'It's a concentration camp.' I didn't even know what a concentration camp was. I had seen a prisoner of war camp in upstate New York ... where they had Germans in it. I had seen them in there playing soccer and all that kind of stuff. And I kind of thought it was a compound for prisoners."

What Walsh and his men encountered stunned them: ***39 boxcars stuffed with the broken bodies of hundreds upon hundreds of men, women, and children, many in striped concentration camp uniforms. Eyes open. Mouths agape. Skeletons with skin.***

And, for many terrible moments, the soldiers' world seemingly spun off its axis.

"The effect of it just opened up a flood of raw emotions," Sparks recalled in a recent telephone interview. "Some men were screaming. Some were cursing. Some were silent. I'm afraid Walsh set the tone for it."

Walsh, his eyes wet with tears, his heart full of rage, could not comprehend such inhumanity. "I'll be honest with you. I broke down," he says in the film. "I started crying. The whole thing was getting to me."

Private Fred E. Randolph said that when four Germans, hands on their heads, surrendered to Walsh, the lieutenant was having none of it.

"Lieutenant Walsh was quite angry and upset and took them into one of these wagons and called for a machine gun," Randolph told an Army assistant inspector general on May 17, 1945. "Then he changed his mind and took them in a boxcar and fired his pistol at them. We were told as soon as we saw the bodies in the train that no prisoners would be taken."

Private Albert C. Pruitt accompanied Walsh when the four Germans were gunned down."Lieutenant Walsh shot at them, and they were suffering and taking on and I figured there was no use letting them suffer, so I shot them " Pruitt testified. "They were all hollering and taking on. And I never like to see anybody suffer."

Sparks, Walsh, and their men were cautiously advancing through the SS quarters outside the concentration camp, where gaunt prisoners soon would strain against the no-longer electrified barbed wire with disbelieving eyes. Finally, their liberators had arrived.

But first, the Americans had to deal with their newly acquired German captives. Regular German soldiers were separated from the elite corps of SS stormtroopers.

The liberators marched the SS men into a power plant's coal yard, enclosed on three sides by a concrete wall. They set up a machine gun.

"I don't think there were any definite orders given, but it was the general feeling among all of the troops when we saw those bodies and one or two skinny fellows that came out there that no prisoners would be taken," *First Lieutenant Jack Bushyhead*, who served as Walsh's top assistant, would later testify.

German guards lined up by the wall and shot

A GENERALS CONCERN

By the time the surrendered but still-defiant SS troops stared into the barrels of American guns at Dachau, General Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe, was already acutely sensitive about the handling of German prisoners of war. Just a month earlier, two almost simultaneous reports of horrible, preventable POW deaths had crossed his desk.

In late March 1945, while American soldiers were transporting thousands of German prisoners by train to two French detainment camps, 127 of the prisoners perished - essentially entombed in nearly airtight US rail cars.

Two days later Eisenhower expressed anger and deep concern in a message to General George C. Marshall, Army chief of staff."I have not yet found out the cause of the death of the German prisoners, recently reported to me, nor do I know who is responsible,"

Eisenhower wrote in a memo contained in National Archive files reviewed by the Globe. "It is irritating to have such things occur because I certainly loathe having to apologize to the Germans. It looks as if this time I have no other recourse."

US officials concluded that American guards on the train failed to take into account the unusually warm weather that day. Investigators who inspected the deadly rail cars found evidence of frantic German efforts to survive. Fingernail and teeth marks scarred the boxcars' interior plywood.

"The prisoners attracted the attention of the guards by cries of 'Kamerad kaput,' knockings, and poundings on the doors of the cars, and calls for 'air' and 'water' in English," reported *Lieutenant Colonel Marvin C. Hillsman*, the inspector general who investigated one of the cases. "The guards ... ignored these appeals and on one occasion fired shots into the upper corner of two of the cars to quiet the prisoners. No car doors were opened during the entire trip."

Military scholars say Eisenhower's preoccupation with prisoner treatment was driven equally by public relations and altruism. He insisted that film crews be allowed to record the German mass murders at concentration camps.

"He didn't want it to come out that the US had equally committed atrocities,'' said Brinkley, the Eisenhower Center director in New Orleans. "He was very conscious of living by the Geneva Convention. Eisenhower believed that when one was fighting in the Second World War for international law, to break it simply because one's emotions took over was not to be a soldier, but to be a murderer.

A true soldier understood what their job was. And their job was not to line Germans up on a whim and mow them down."

Indeed, in July 1945 Eisenhower ordered a comprehensive review into whether enemy prisoners in Europe had been killed or mistreated by US forces, dismissing as unacceptable the excuse: I was just following orders.

"America's moral position will be undermined and her reputation for fair dealing debased if criminal conduct of a like character by her armed forces is condoned and unpunished by those of us responsible for defending her honor," Eisenhower wrote in his order.

War historians Gunter Bischof and Stephen Ambrose have estimated that 99 percent of American and German POWs were returned safely home at the end of the war.

But that did not mean that both sides were innocent of fatal misconduct. For example, in December 1944 nearly 100 US troops -- caught by surprise after a rapid German advance -- were captured during the Battle of the Bulge. The Americans were herded into a farmer's field in the Belgian city of Malmedy, where a machine gunner opened fire.

Word of the "Malmedy Massacre" quickly spread throughout the European Theater, and war scholars say there is little doubt that the Americans who singled out the SS soldiers at Dachau four months later were aware of it.

In any case, when the results of the Eisenhower-ordered investigation were filed on the last day of 1945, the asphyxiations in the POW boxcars and the shootings in the coal yard at Dachau were noted prominently. In the report, compiled on an old manual typewriter, both incidents were set apart in unmistakable red ink.

DISGUST AND DISBELIEF

As *19-year-old John P. Lee*, a private first class, stood in the coal yard, guarding an estimated 50 to 125 SS prisoners, his emotions trembled between disgust and disbelief.

"We were all enraged," he said in a recent telephone interview. "Hell, what a shock when you walk up on something like that. Here are these human bodies that look like skeletons with skin on them. Quite a few had their eyes open. It's like they're saying to us: 'What took you so long?'

"The men became quite boisterous. The adrenaline was flowing. They were saying: 'Let's kill these SOBs.' And 'Let's not take them alive.' "

As Lee stood watch over the Germans, *Private First Class William L. Competielle*, a company medic, was busy just outside the coal yard, attending to a woman and two young children who had fainted at an SS camp hospital nearby.

I was there when they took [the Germans] behind the wall, but didn't have the nerve to see what was going on," Competielle testified at the inquiry. "There was so much excitement that everybody was shouting so you could not tell who the order [to separate the SS men] came from. And all I do know was they separated the SS troops from other prisoners."

But Competielle knew the Americans' intentions. "The word just got around that they were going to shoot all the SS'ers," he said. "I figured that is why they were taking them behind the wall. Then I heard somebody ask: Where is a machine gun?"

At that moment Sparks, the battalion commander, said he considered his German captives under guard and secure.

"Nothing was going on at that time," he said in a recent interview. "It looked like everything was under control, and then I heard some firing off in the vicinity of the concentration camp."

The gunfire in the near distance, the last remnants of resistance from the rapidly retreating and uncaptured German guards, distracted Sparks. He left the coal yard to investigate.

But Sparks's men remained. Lee stood guard with his rifle.

Lieutenant Drain, as ordered, set up his machine gun. Then, he said, he turned and walked away.

Corporal Martin J. Sedler stood next to the gun, and *Private William C. Curtin* aimed at the Germans, according to testimony at the inquiry.

Lieutenant Walsh was in command. "He said he was going to shoot the machine gun, and lined up [rifle] men, and called for a few Tommy gunners," Curtin testified of Walsh.

Curtin said as he fed the belt into the machine gun, the SS prisoners, by now apparently certain of their captors' intentions, began to move toward the Americans.

"[Walsh] cut loose with his pistol and said, 'Let them have it,'" said Curtin, telling investigators that he fired 30 to 50 rounds in three long bursts.

Lee said he fired only once before his gun jammed. "Somebody hollered, 'Fire!' and about three rifles and a machine gun started shooting, and my BAR [Browning automatic rifle]," Lee testified.

Bushyhead, Walsh's executive officer, testified that he believed that he, too, had joined in the firing.

"It was probably no more than 10 seconds, but it seemed like much longer," *Karl O. Mann*, Sparks's interpreter, who witnessed the shooting, said in an interview. "They fired from left to right and right to left and so on. It wasn't very long, but it was long enough to inflict damage."

Sparks, alarmed by the sudden machine gun burst, raced back to the coal yard, firing his pistol in the air and furiously signaling with his left hand for his men to stop shooting.

Lt Col Felix Sparks fires his pistol into the air to stop his troops from shooting the German Prisoners

"Some young private was on the machine gun, and I kicked him and knocked him forward," Sparks recalled in the interview. "I then dragged him by the collar -- he was a small man -- and he was crying. He said, 'They were trying to get away.' They weren't trying to get away at all. And then everything was very quiet."

The Germans lay crumpled at the base of the stucco wall. At first, it seemed scores had been killed in the gunfire. When the Americans ordered survivors to stand, however, they said many did.

'When I went over there, why, there were, I should say, about 75 or so lying on the ground," *Private Frank Eggert* testified later. "It looked like they were pretty badly wounded.

The inspector general report found that 17 were killed at the wall. And, like the visceral reaction evoked by the death train just outside Dachau, the shootings frightened and disgusted some GIs.

"[Drain] said it was one of the worst things he had ever seen since being in the Army," Second Lieutenant Donald E. Strickland testified. "He was sorry that it was his machine gun that had to be used for it."

Corporal Henry Mills, then a 22-year-old member of the battalion's intelligence and reconnaissance platoon, remembered his harrowing arrival at Dachau in Strong's 1990 documentary.

"I remember saying, 'Geez, we came over here to stop this bullshit, and now here we got somebody doing the same thing.' Once they were prisoners, they were prisoners. They were unarmed, and they were prisoners. You can't shoot them. You can't do that. That's an atrocity, I'm sure."

Mills said as he walked around the camp that day, he was overwhelmed by a yearning not often associated with toughened veterans.

"I remember it real well, I said: 'I've been here too long. I've to go home now.' And it was a funny thing. I said, 'I want to see my mom.'... I hadn't seen her for three years. That's what came into my mind: I wanted to see my mom."

Five days later, Walsh sat in a small town outside Munich before Lieutenant Colonel Joseph M. Whitaker, the Seventh Army's assistant inspector general.

"Did you intend to execute these SS men when you put them in the yard?" Whitaker asked.

"No, sir," Walsh replied.

THE INVESTIGATION

As headlines around the globe cheered the news that American troops had freed 32,000 captives at Dachau, word of the coal yard shooting reached the Seventh Army's top commanders. They ordered a formal investigation.

Four days later Whitaker was at the concentration camp, still more of a war zone than a carefully preserved crime scene. He reported finding the bodies of 17 Germans in a courtyard littered with the brass casings of spent American ammunition. He counted 12 holes in the wall. Some were still stained by blood and bits of flesh.

"Rumor had it that we were going to Leavenworth for the rest of our lives," Lee said in a recent interview. He recalled that as he sat before Whitaker, he noticed that his name and rank were already penciled onto the back of one of the shooting photos. "Somebody had already identified me. And I was scared to death."

Lee said Whitaker quickly made clear the focus of his inquiry: "He wanted to know who gave the order to fire."

Walsh told Whitaker he issued that order only after the SS men, who he said required tight supervision, moved toward his men.

"Some of the men in the yard on the right flank of that group started to move forward, towards the guards," Walsh told Whitaker. "I ordered them back. They still kept going. I ordered a machine gun covering the road to come inside and hold them back, that if they didn't stay back fire at them.

While I was there, they continued to move forward on the guards, and I told the machine gun to fire to hold them back."

Whitaker swiftly rejected that version of events. He concluded that 17 SS men were "summarily executed" under Walsh's supervision and that Bushyhead "personally participated in the execution of the seventeen."

An Army judge advocate general said Whitaker's findings were sufficient to support charges of murder against Walsh, Bushyhead, and Pruitt, who had finished off the four Germans chased into the boxcar. A separate court-martial for murder was recommended for Henry J. Wells, who allegedly shot and killed several Germans later that day after they had been taken prisoner from one of Dachau's guard towers.

But as those black-and-white murder charges wound their way up the chain of the US Army command, superior officers saw the subtler shades of gray that only foot soldiers could fully discern.

Lieutenant General Wade H. Haislip, Seventh Army commander, criticized Whitaker for failing to take into account "the horrors and shock of Dachau on combat troops already fatigued with more than 30 days continuous combat action."

Sparks said that by the time he was summoned to headquarters to account for the actions of his men at Dachau, the control of the 45th Division had been transferred to the Third Army, led by Patton.

"General Patton was appointed military governor of Bavaria and had set up headquarters in Augsburg," Sparks said in the Globe interview. "I walked into his office saluted and introduced myself. Patton said, 'Didn't you serve under me in Africa and Sicily? Well, you have a damn fine record.' " Sparks said that when he began to explain what happened in the coal yard, Patton instantly waved him off.

"He said, 'That won't be necessary. I've investigated these goddamn charges, and they're a bunch of crap.' I saluted and left, and I never heard anything more about it." (Another version of this meeting states that Gen Patton tore up the charges, threw them into a waste basket, and set fire to them)

Sparks's version of his meeting with Patton is disputed by some researchers, but it is supported by Lieutenant General Kenneth Wickham, the 45th Division's chief of staff, who now lives in Los Altos, Calif.

In any event, when the Eisenhower investigation into the American treatment of German POWs was completed at the end of 1945, Colonel Charles L. Decker, an acting deputy judge advocate, said officials doubted that convictions could ever be obtained.

"It appears that there was a violation of the letter of international law, in that the SS guards seem to have been shot without trial," Decker wrote. "But in the light of the conditions which greeted the eyes of the first combat troops to reach Dachau, it is not believed that justice or equity demand that the difficult and perhaps impossible task of fixing individual responsibility now be undertaken."

Or, as Lieutenant Harold T. Moyer, one of Sparks's men who witnessed the coal yard gunfire would put it at the inquiry:

"I believe every man in the outfit who saw those boxcars before the entrance to Dachau felt, and was justified, in meting out death as a punishment to the Germans who were responsible."

WAR'S END AND BEYOND

The war over, the charges dismissed, Lee, Sparks, Walsh, and the men who marched with them returned home to the loving embrace of their families and perpetual salutes from a grateful nation. They entered college, began new careers, married, and helped father the demographic colossus that became known as the Baby Boom.

But they could never forget the coal yard at Dachau.

For Hank Mills, the man who found himself searching for his mother's touch during his darkest hours at Dachau, the images of that day would lead to a breakdown in 1953. "I was an electric lineman. That's a hell of a job to have when you're having a nervous breakdown," said Mills, of Altoona, Pa., in the 1990 documentary. "I'm OK now. I've always been OK for a long time."

Jack Bushyhead, a Native American, became a member of the Cherokee tribal council in Oklahoma, where he helped provide food for the poor and housing for the needy. But he became increasingly haunted by alcohol-fed visions of the starved victims of the Holocaust he saw on the so-called "death train." He died on Christmas Day 1977.

"When he was inebriated he would even see these people - he called them the little people," said his daughter, Jaxine Bushyhead Gasper. "He just drank himself to death. I don't think Dad ever got over the war stuff."

Lee, a native of Delaware, earned a degree from LaSalle University and spent his career as an engineer in the steel business. Now 75 and battling Parkinson's disease, he said when he closes his eyes; he can still see things he wished he couldn't. "You've probably seen the pictures. They're just pictures to you. You've never walked up on something like that," said Lee, who now lives in Ohio. "When you see the living dead, it strikes you across the eyes. It knocks you off your equilibrium. It's part of war, but nobody prepared us for it."

Sparks served as a district attorney in Colorado after the war. He was a justice on the state Supreme Court in the 1950s. He later practiced law and became a state lobbyist. When he retired 20 years ago, Sparks placed an ad in a VFW magazine, looking for members of his old unit. It was time for a reunion, decided Sparks, now 83 and hamstrung by a failing heart. The former battalion commander found 1,500 of them, and soon hundreds of old soldiers began swapping war stories each year in banquet rooms from Boston to Chicago to Denver.

At one of those reunions, *Walsh* sat before Strong's video cameras and struggled to convey the emotions that swept over him on the German death camp's doorstep. "I'm shaking right at this minute just talking about it," Walsh said. "And I didn't know if I could talk about it. I tried to forget about it for years." When Walsh came home from the war, he worked for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an engineer, helped build a new highway called Route 128, and went to Northeastern University on the GI Bill.

When the US Holocaust Memorial Museum was dedicated in 1993, *Walsh* was invited as a special honoree. A year later, on the 50th anniversary of D-Day, he was invited to ceremonies at the US Capitol. His legs weakened by age, and two men stood next to him to provide support. *One was Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, the wounded World War II veteran who sought the presidency in 1996.*

When he died in July of 1998 at the age of 78, *Walsh* was remembered as a kind and gentle man who loved children and golf. Ruth Walsh, his wife of 46 years, said he never dwelled on Dachau. In Strong's documentary, Walsh, his hair by then white, seems a man who has long since found peace with himself.

"I guess somebody thought that maybe [for] some of the SS guys who died in that camp it wasn't a real legitimate fight, if you want to use that term. If there is such a thing," Walsh said.

"Some of the SS guys had died in the defense of that camp," he said, "and some goddamned day, when I go to hell with the rest of the SS, I'm going to ask them how the hell they could do it and what they were doing up there. And if they knew."I don't think there was any SS guy who was shot or killed in the defense of Dachau that wondered why he was killed, wondered about it, or couldn't figure it out. I think they all knew goddamned-well-right why some of them were killed down in the camp. Goddamn-well-right. And someday, as I said, when I get to hell, I'll check it out and find out whether they understood. *'But I have a funny feeling that every one of them that died in the defense of Dachau knew why he died.*

Perhaps we should each ask ourselves…..*what would I have done?*