

5-1-2008

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ScholarWorks Citation

Hauenstein, Ralph, "Liberating Dachau" (2008). *Features*. 29.
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/features/29>

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Liberating Dachau

Americans Entered the Concentration Camp on April 29, 1945

By Ralph Hauenstein

When I accompanied the troops that liberated the Dachau concentration camp outside of Munich, I found myself appalled that such an entity could have existed beneath our American intelligence radar. As we stepped through the front gates, we found the Nazis still putting bodies into the ovens. We also came upon several boxcars waiting to be unloaded, filled with the bodies of the living and the dead. The living had survived only by eating the vital organs of their deceased fellow prisoners. What a ghastly sight.

A prisoner approached us and told us to go to the nearby water tank and see if anyone was, in fact, in the tank. When we arrived at the tank, we found a nude male prisoner submerged in the tank. The Germans were conducting a human experiment with the prisoner. At the request of the German air force they were testing to see how long a human could survive in water and at what temperature. The poor emaciated prisoner was taken out of the tank and given a blanket to cover his nude body. He appeared to be so stunned with his rescue that he could barely talk. I will never forget this poor unfortunate man. I had a picture taken as evidence of the German maltreatment of prisoners.



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As I continued to walk through the camp, I came upon another gruesome scene. It was a wall with wrist shackles mounted high on the wall. When I asked the purpose, I was told that male prisoners were suspended from the shackles. Cord was then tied around their testicles with a stick on the end. The Germans had trained dogs to then jump up and pull the stick, thereby inflicting great pain on the suspended prisoners. About this time, one of the vicious dogs appeared, and, without any hesitation, we shot him. My sergeant took a picture of the dead dog. Such terrible torture.

I then interrogated the camp commandant, who had on his desk three lamps with shades made from the skins of inmates, and I found him to be cold, aloof, and of no value from an intelligence point of view. His icy demeanor prompted one of my men to draw a pistol as though to dispatch him, but we restrained him. I had never before seen anything akin to what I saw in that concentration camp, and I certainly hoped the world would never see such atrocities again.

As I left the camp, I had my aide take one final photograph of the sights we had seen. It depicts the German guards collected in one area within barbed wire, with the prisoners they so brutally treated looking on. In some extreme cases, the liberating forces had been so affected by what they saw that the German guards were summarily shot on sight.

As a side note: during the liberation of Dachau, my men happened to take pictures of the ovens used to cremate prisoners and noticed the brand name of a German manufacturer embossed on the doors. The name became permanently etched into my brain. Years later, as an international buyer of food machinery, I was up for a contract with a large bakery in New York that produced Kosher baked goods. I found out that my sole competition was the German manufacturing firm who had produced the ovens at Dachau. I dug up the photo, showed it to representatives from the bakery, and soon thereafter was awarded the contract. It was to this camp that General Eisenhower took the entire citizenry of the local town to view the horrors.

Ralph Hauenstein served as chief of intelligence for the U.S. Army in the European Theater of Operations (ETOUSA) during World War II. This essay is excerpted from *Intelligence Was My Line: Inside Eisenhower's Other Command*, by Ralph Hauenstein and Donald Markle.