

The Dachau Gas Chamber Myth

By *John Cobden*

The Suppressed History of a Camp's Liberation

Many once widely accepted “facts” about the Dachau camp are now discredited. It wasn't long ago, however, when it was seriously and authoritatively claimed that people were killed in a gas chamber there. Eyewitness testimony was cited to “prove” that as many as 250,000 people were put to death in this gas chamber.

The Dachau gas chamber story appears to have begun as soon as American troops liberated the camp on April 29, 1945. One of the first sights witnessed by the liberators were piles of corpses of victims of disease. A room near the crematory was filled with waiting corpses. Nearby was the room that would be immortalized in photographs as the Dachau gas chamber. Soldiers who liberated the camp were told that these were the bodies of gas chamber victims. To this day many elderly former American GIs still swear that they personally saw the camp “gas chamber” and victims of gassings there.

For instance, during an appearance by two revisionists on a Boston television station, a former American soldier called in to testify that he personally saw the “gas chamber” at Dachau. With emotion dripping from his voice, he described this “gas chamber” as huge. Similarly, during an December 17, 1990, appearance by two other revisionists (Mark Weber and Theodore J. O'Keefe) on Los Angeles radio station KFI, a Second World War veteran who phoned in castigated the revisionists as liars because, he told the audience, he had personally seen the bodies of prisoners put to death in the Dachau gas chamber.

This caller's story was not, however, in line with either the current or the once-held “official” version of the Dachau “gas chamber” story. He claimed to have seen a jeep up on blocks, with a tube running from the exhaust pipe into the Dachau gas chamber. According to the older (and now universally discredited) version of the Dachau gas chamber story, gassings were supposedly carried out there by dropping cyanide gas pellets into the lethal room, or by pumping in cyanide gas through pipes.

Possibly he did see a jeep up on blocks, perhaps for repairs, and very likely he did see bodies. But this is the only account I've come across that claims that people were killed at Dachau with exhaust from a jeep. All the same, this man was on the verge of weeping as he told his “eyewitness” account. For more than 40 years he has believed that what he thought he saw is the truth, and no evidence exists that will convince him otherwise.

Former Dachau inmates have provided similarly striking “eyewitness testimony” of gassings in the camp. One such person is Nerin Gun. In a memoir of his internment there, *The Day of the Americans*, this Turkish journalist tells us that 3,166 inmates were gassed in a phony shower room near the camp crematory, and that altogether 100,000 people died in Dachau.[1] Gun even provides a vivid and rather detailed description of the alleged gassing process, which most readers would presumably accept as credible:[2]

I belonged to the team of prisoners in charge of sorting the pitiful herds of Hungarian Jewesses which were being directed to the gas chambers ...

Sometimes the internees tried to persuade those women who were carrying infants in their arms to let them take the children from them, for it was sometimes possible to stow babies away in the camp where devoted women would take care of them ... But our arguments were of no avail. It was impossible to tell the victims what was going to happen inside, for they would not have believed it, or else, seized with panic, they would have started to scream. So the mothers refused to give up their children, and the babies were asphyxiated and burned with their mothers.

Gun goes on to describe

the horror of what went on in the “shower room.” The naked women, their sweating bodies pressed closely one against the other, the babies suffocating in their arms. Maybe one mother would have put her baby down on the floor to spare it the first shock of the expected spray of scalding water... then her face contorted with the horror of seeing her baby start coughing first, as the fumes of the gas issued from the floor, start to vomit blood, turn blue, violet, black, crushed under the weight of the bodies of the other victims slipping to the floor, like melted wax.

But now suddenly, stealthily, the same horrible surprise as for the women who expected a spray of hot water and instead inhaled a deadly gas ...

In his memoir, Gun reproduces the familiar US Army photograph of a GI standing in front of the alleged Dachau gas chamber. In Gun’s memoir this photo is captioned:

The gas chamber. At the moment of liberation, the hour of the last operation was still written on the door. Since then, Germans have tried to deny that there was a gas chamber in the camp. This photograph is proof: it was taken the day of the liberation.

Comparing this photograph with the description he provides of the “gassing process,” the reader will notice that the door shown in this photo looks nothing like the door to a shower room. Furthermore this door is marked with a skull and crossbones, the internationally recognized symbol for poison, as well as a warning: “Caution! Gas! Life danger! Do not open!”

And yet, Gun wants his readers to believe that 3,166 people walked through this door believing they were entering a shower room. As a matter of fact he tells us that he and the others who helped “sort” these alleged victims didn’t warn them because they would not have believed any warnings (even, apparently, the graphic warning on the door itself).

Gun isn’t the only writer who didn’t know that Dachau had been dropped from the “official” list of death camps. In his book *Deliverance Day: The Last Hours at Dachau*. Michael Selzer tells us that “A small gas chamber was constructed late in 1942; and although it certainly was put to use (despite some reports), its full capacity seems never to have been utilized.”[3]

Also in his book Selzer reproduces the familiar Dachau “gas chamber” photo, and comments on it: “A sign in the gas chamber identifies it as such and explains that it was never used. Your guide repeats this. But you have done your research, and remember photographs of the doors before they got their new coat of grey. On them – the outer side – were once stenciled a skull and crossbones and the words *Vorsicht! Gas! Lebensgefahr! Nicht öffnen*. ‘Caution! Gas! Mortal Danger! Do not open!’.”[4]

What I find hard to believe is that more than 3,000 people (in Gun’s account, but up to 250,000 according to other eyewitnesses) would actually walk through this massive air-tight door, and think they were entering a shower. I find it impossible to believe that they would read the writing on the outside of the door, which clearly identifies the room as a lethal gas chamber, and still believe it was really a shower. Gun would have us also believe that the victims would still think this was a shower, even if they were explicitly told it was a gas chamber: “It was impossible to tell the victims what was going to happen inside, for they would not have believed it...” Gun’s account, like the accounts of other “eyewitnesses,” is an insult to the intelligence of the people allegedly exterminated.



Joyful Dachau camp inmates cheer their American liberators, April 29, 1945

The US Army's Dachau "gas chamber" photo is one of the most familiar photographs cited as evidence of homicidal gassings in German wartime camps. During the period immediately following the end of the war, it was official Allied policy that Dachau was an extermination camp. At the famous Nuremberg "war crimes" trial of 1945-46, German defendants were charged (and found guilty) of gassing thousands of victims there. In volume 19 of the Nuremberg transcripts, you can read the words of Sir Hartley Shawcross, Britain's chief prosecutor in the proceeding, who rather dramatically stated:[5]

Twelve million murders! Two thirds of the Jews in Europe exterminated, more than six million of them on the killers' own figures. Murder conducted like some mass production industry in the gas chambers and the ovens of Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Majdanek, and Oranienburg.

(Notice that Shawcross included Dachau, Mauthausen and Oranienburg, camps that no historian today believes were "extermination" camps.)

Moreover, the American prosecutor presented to the Nuremberg Tribunal a US Congressional report, labeled document L-159, that purported to explain how gassings were conducted at Dachau. According to this report:[6]



This US Army photo was taken at Dachau on April 30, 1945, one day after the camp's liberation. It shows a GI standing in front of a door marked with a skull and crossbones and the words "Caution! Gas! Life danger! Do not open!" According to the official caption, "these chambers were used by the Nazi guards for killing prisoners of the infamous Dachau concentration camp." In fact, this is a small disinfection gas chamber used for delousing clothes as part of the routine to curtail the spread of typhus. This chamber was never used to kill people. For several decades, this photo has been widely reproduced to help keep alive the notorious Dachau "gas chamber" myth. (US Army photo SC 206194.)

A distinguishing feature of the Dachau Camp was the gas chamber for the execution of prisoners and the somewhat elaborate facilities for execution by shooting. The gas chamber was located in the center of a large room in the crematory building. It was built of concrete. Its dimensions were about 20 feet by 20 feet, and the ceiling was some 10 feet in height! In two opposite walls of the chamber were air tight doors through which condemned prisoners could be taken into the chamber for execution and removed after execution. The supply of gas into the chamber was controlled by means of two valves on one of the outer walls, and beneath the valves was a small glass-covered peephole through which the operator could watch the victims die. The gas was let into the chamber through pipes terminating in perforated brass fixtures set into the ceiling. The chamber was of size sufficient to execute probably a hundred men at one time.

The room in which the gas chamber stood was flanked on both ends by warerooms in which the bodies were placed after execution to await cremation. The size of each room was approximately 30 by 50 feet. At the time we visited the camp these warerooms were piled high with dead bodies. In one of the rooms the bodies were thrown in an irregular heap. In the other room they were neatly stacked like cordwood. The irregular pile of bodies was perhaps 10 feet high, covering most of the floor space. All of them were naked.

The description provided here does not correspond with the testimony of either of the American veterans who challenged the revisionists. The first, it will be recalled, claimed that the “gas chamber” room was “huge”; according to the Congressional report it is only 20 by 20 feet. When you review the veteran’s call to the Boston television station it seems that he is describing a room much larger than this. The other veteran claimed the apparatus was an automobile with a tube running from the exhaust pipe. The document filed with the Military Tribunal by the US government doesn’t even come close to this description.

Allied officials also presented to the Nuremberg Tribunal an “eyewitness,” Dr. Franz Blaha, who allegedly helped with the gassing executions. Blaha testified:[7]

Many executions by gas or shooting or injections took place right in the [Dachau] camp. The gas chamber was completed in 1944, and I was called by Dr. Rascher to examine the first victims. Of the eight or nine persons in the chamber there were three still alive, and the remainder appeared to be dead. Their eyes were red, and their faces were swollen. Many prisoners were later killed in this way.

(Notice that, whereas Blaha claims the gas chamber wasn't built until 1944, Michael Selzer, quoted earlier, claims the lethal chamber was built in 1942.)

An US Army Investigator Reports

In his testimony to the Nuremberg trial, Blaha also claimed that, in addition to gassings, Dachau prisoners were also killed with injections of poison. But forensic evidence collected at the scene by American medical authorities actually proves this did not happen. Dr. Charles P. Larson was assigned by US military authorities to carry out thousands of autopsies at Dachau. He later recalled:[8]

I was the only forensic pathologist on duty in the entire European Theater – which is why I was detailed ultimately to conduct the autopsies at Dachau. So whether the authorities liked what I did or not, they were stuck with the only top-qualified man in my field and they had to take me!

Dr. Larson filed a report on the accusations of poisoning by injection. He wrote:[9]



An American GI opens the door of the bogus “gas chamber” at the Dachau camp. This portion of a 1945 US propaganda film was shown in March 1994 to millions of “60 Minutes” and “Donahue” television viewers as “proof” that the Germans killed Jews in gas chambers.

... According to reliable testimony, these individuals were murdered by the hypodermic injection of an unknown poison a matter of hours before the Americans liberated the camp. The German doctor for the camp – a “Dr. Blanke” – was seen to have used a large syringe with a needle and to have injected this unknown poison into these individuals. The result of the injection was death in from five to 20 minutes. Death was proceeded by generalized convulsions. In a search of the camp and of “Dr. Blanke’s” home and office, no clue was found as to the type of poison used. From some autopsies performed, the brain, portions of the liver, the spleen, the heart and one kidney were retained for transmission to the First Medical Laboratory in Paris for toxicological examination to determine the type of poison administered.

According to Larson’s biographer, “Major Larson later received reports from the FML in Paris that the organs he had sent in for toxicological examination on three autopsied cases were negative for all poisons.” On this issue, Dr. Larson’s report noted: “The testimony suggested that some of those poisoned received the injection into the chest over the heart. No needle wounds were observed on the heart in the cases autopsied.” Larson’s biographer goes on to tell us that the only forensic pathologist investigating the alleged exterminations in the European concentration camps never did find one single case of death by poison or by poison gas. He writes:[10]

In one grave the bulldozers uncovered an estimated 2,000 bodies, many of which were subjected to autopsy examination by Major Larson. All of those autopsied had died of various conditions such as emaciation with starvation, tuberculosis, typhus or other infectious diseases.

For the next ten days, many nights with only an hour or two or restless sleep, Col. Larson worked among the dead. He performed about 25 autopsies a day and superficially examined another 300 to 1,000 bodies. He autopsied only those bodies that appeared to have died questionably. “Many of them died of typhus,” Dr. Larson told me recently.

At Dachau Col. Larson’s work – the profile of the prisoner population that his autopsies projected – indicated that only a small percentage of the deaths were due to medical experimentation on humans. It indicated that most of the victims died from so-called “natural causes” at the time; that is, of disease brought on by malnutrition and filth which are the handmaidens of war.

In spite of the fact that thousands of autopsies were performed under the auspices of the US military proving that no one was exterminated by any type of poison, “eyewitness” accounts of such killings continue to flourish. For years after the war ended, Dr. Larson himself remained silent on this issue, and only rarely spoken about his forensic investigations.

In 1980, while he was being honored by the University of Kansas, he explained why in a newspaper interview. “Larson has talked little publicly about the war experience,” a journalist noted in his article about the physician’s work at Dachau. “One reason for his silence has been that his autopsy findings conflicted with the widely held belief that most Jews in Nazi camps were exterminated by gassing, shooting or poisoning.” Larson himself explained: “What we’ve heard is that six million Jews were exterminated. Part of that is a hoax.” The article went on to tell readers:[[11](#)]

Larson said in an interview Monday that certainly hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Jews died at the hands of the Nazis. But most died as a result of the conditions to which they were subjected rather than mass exterminations.

“They worked these people to death,” he [Larson] said. Fed on potato peelings, inadequately clothed and packed into shacks, they died of every known disease, he said. “In one camp, 90 per cent died of tuberculosis. It went from shack to shack.”

Other eyewitness reports also exaggerate deaths at Dachau and invent stories of gas chambers. Pastor Martin Niemoller, the well-known anti-Nazi German Protestant church leader, claimed in 1946 that 238,756 persons had been exterminated in the mythical gas chambers of Dachau.[[12](#)]

Priests in Dachau

Father Alexis Lechanski, one of the many Polish priests who had been held in Dachau during the war, made similar claims about the camp in an article published in 1989 in *The Wanderer*, a conservative Catholic weekly:[[13](#)]

During the ten [actually twelve] years of its existence, Dachau was a veritable factory of death and became an immense tomb for 278,000 men, women and children. In this number more than 50,000 Poles and about 800 Polish priests were included ...

Above a heavy door there was an inscription in the German language, *Brausebad* (shower bath). A sense of stupefaction filled your mind as you grasped the significance of that inscription. The victims to be gassed were previously told they were going to take a bath. Each would be given a towel and a small piece of soap. They would be ushered undressed into the gas chamber that really produced the impression of a bathroom. The condemned prisoners were deceived particularly by small false sieves or gratings fixed up in the ceilings. The cement floor had large holes covered with an iron grate. It could easily have been taken as the means of draining off the water. In the wall on the left side a small glass peephole was set up for watching the effects of the gas and the reactions of dying victims. It was such a tiny and harmless-looking thing.

When the room was filled with prisoners, the door was shut and the faucet at the end of the pipe for conducting gas from the outside was opened to bring a violent and dreadful end to all those unfortunate people. The gas came up from underneath the cement floor through the hole in the middle. Death followed almost in a flash, in three to five minutes' time. Then a special squad of prisoners had to clear away the warm, sometimes not quite dead, bodies of their camp fellows. The corpses afforded a horrible sight. Their faces would be distorted. Their eyes dim, glassy, wide open, and full of dread and would be stubbornly looking at some far-off distance as though sending their last thoughts to their children and all they loved; as though entreating Heaven above for revenge for their lives so cruelly tramped out.

Here is yet another "eyewitness" who has embellished his story, this time to appeal to a Catholic readership. In this account, the victims die "entreating Heaven above," and "sending their last thoughts to their children." Incredibly, Father Lechanski suggests that the Dachau gas chamber death toll was 278,000. Eyewitness Nerin Gun would only hazard a claim of 100,000 Dachau deaths, of whom, he wrote, about 3,000 died in the gas chamber. By contrast, the official organization of Dachau survivors now puts the total Dachau death toll at less than 30,000, and acknowledges that no one died in a gas chamber.

Another Polish Priest who was interned in Dachau during the war has provided a similarly imaginative account of life in the camp. As Father Bonislaw Szymanski related in a 1985 article: “His captors taught him and many of his fellow priests how to lay bricks, and forced them to construct buildings that would be useful to the camp: a crematorium, a gas chamber.”[\[14\]](#)

Although Fr. Szymanski claimed to have worked on constructing the camp “gas chamber” building, Paul Berben’s *Dachau 1933-45, The Official History* shows that this is not possible: all priests had been withdrawn from work details by the time this building was built. The earliest that any “eyewitness” claims that the “gas chamber” building was constructed is 1942. (Others claim 1944.) However, the priests were “free from work” as of March 15, 1941.

According to Berben’s *Dachau: 1933-45*:[\[15\]](#)

On March 15, 1941, the clergy were withdrawn from work Kommandos on orders from Berlin, and their conditions improved. They were supplied with bedding of the kind issued to the SS, and Russian and Polish prisoners were assigned to look after their quarters. They could get up an hour later than the other prisoners and rest on their beds for two hours in the morning and afternoon. Free from work, they could give themselves to study and to meditation. They were given newspapers and allowed to use the library. Their food was adequate; they sometimes received up to a third of a loaf of bread a day; there was even a period when they were given half a litre of cocoa in the morning and a third of bottle of wine daily ... Sometimes two or three days’ rations were issued together and the priests had to drink it at one sitting, which caused some of them to feel rather cheerful.

Szymanski also exaggerated in claiming that: “Eventually, some prisoners were allowed to receive packages from their families. Some of the Polish priests found altar breads and small containers of wine tucked into their parcels. ‘We celebrated Mass there, secretly, in Dachau,’ said Father Szymanski. It was like the early Christians in the catacombs.”[\[16\]](#)

Such fanciful tales of secret masses similar to early Christians do not correspond with the current official history of Dachau. As Berben relates, the Catholic priests there not only enjoyed preferential treatment (with Polish and Russian servants), but were permitted to openly celebrate Mass in a chapel that had been built for their use. According to Berben, this chapel could “hold about 800 people, but often more than a thousand crowded in.” Berben describes in detail the decor of the chapel, which had eight windows and a floor that was “carefully polished” with a “good-quality floor polish.” Berben’s account continues:[\[17\]](#)

The high altar was on a platform six feet square; the tabernacle, decorated at first with metal from food-tins, had been replaced at Easter 1944 by another one, made of artistically carved pear-wood, behind which a crucifix four feet high, presented by a Münster congregation and flanked on all sides by three candelabra. On the right the credence table served as an extra altar, and on the left there was a harmonium provided by the Dean of Dachau. A fine statue of the Virgin had been sent by the head of the Salvatorians in Freudenthal in the diocese of Branitz, at Easter 1943.

While Berben's description continues in this vein, this is sufficient to make the point here about Fr. Szymanski's "eyewitness testimony."

In an undated document entitled "Father Bruno's World War II Recollections," which appears to be the basis for the 1985 article about Fr. Szymanski's experiences, a priest recounts: "Whoever was unable to work, for whatever reason, had to die, and die they did ... in gas chambers. In 1942 alone about 300 Polish priests were gassed."

These priests seem to have been rather inventive in their old age. Contradicting accepted facts about Dachau, their stories predictably have nothing to back them up.

Interestingly, the same Catholic weekly that published Fr. Szymanski's fanciful account was also one of the first periodicals anywhere to expose the Dachau gas chamber story as a myth. In a 1959 issue of *Our Sunday Visitor*, a letter by reader Stephen Pinter appeared in which he responded to a previous article about Dachau:[18]

In addition, false statements appear in the Pritchett article, such as the reference to gas chambers at camp Dachau. I was in Dachau for 17 months after the war, as a U.S. War Department Attorney, and can state that there was no gas chamber at Dachau. What was shown to visitors and sightseers there and erroneously described as a gas chamber, was a crematory. Nor was there a gas chamber in any of the other concentration camps in Germany. We were told that there was a gas chamber at Auschwitz, but since that was in the Russian zone of occupation, we were not permitted to investigate, since the Russians would not permit it.

According to a special issue of the British military history periodical, *After the Battle* (which was largely devoted to Dachau), the US Army mislabeled the famous photo of the camp's "gas chamber":[19]

Although this picture, taken on April 30 by T/4 Sidney Blau, is captioned as the gas chambers being examined by the Seventh Army soldier, they are in fact the decontamination rooms for the clothing removed from the dead located at the extreme western end of the cremation building.

According to *After the Battle*, these “oven-like chambers were used to disinfect the clothing, which had been removed from the corpses, so that it could be safely returned to the clothing depot in the administrative block for re-issue.” What this means is that one of the two rooms claimed by eyewitness to have been the gas chamber where prisoners were executed was actually a facility that used cyanide gas to kill typhus-spreading lice in the clothing of dead prisoners. That is, this gas chamber was used to save lives.

After the Battle does suggest that a homicidal gas chamber was built in Dachau: “The official literature on sale in the museum shop states that the gas chamber was never used for its intended role but only as a shower room.” This claim is almost amusing. Eyewitness after eyewitness repeats gripping, mournful tales of innocent prisoners stepping in to take a shower, only to find poison gas pouring out of the showerheads. Now the “official literature” tells us that the opposite was really true. Instead of stepping into a shower room to be gassed, we are now told they stepped into a gas chamber only to be showered!

In spite of the eyewitness accounts we have recounted here, Dachau has been officially exorcised of the gas chamber demon. Simon Wiesenthal, the famed hunter of alleged ex-Nazis, wrote in a letter published in 1975: “Because there were no extermination camps on German soil the neo-Nazis are using this as proof that these crimes did not happen and furthermore exhibit witnesses from German Labour-Camps who have never seen mass-extermination.”[\[20\]](#)

One of the most prominent Holocaust historians, Dr. Martin Broszat of Germany’s prestigious Institute of Contemporary History (in Munich), stated in a letter published in 1960 in the German weekly *Die Zeit*:[\[21\]](#)

Neither in Dachau nor in Bergen-Belsen nor in Buchenwald were Jews or other prisoners gassed. The gas chamber in Dachau was never entirely finished or put “into operation.” Hundreds of thousands of prisoners who perished in Dachau and other concentration camps in the Old Reich [that is, Germany in its borders of 1937] were victims, above all, of catastrophic hygienic and provisioning conditions: according to official SS statistics, during the twelve months from July 1942 through June 1943 alone, 110,812 persons died of disease and hunger in all of the concentration camps of the Reich.

No reputable historian still contends that anyone was ever killed in a Dachau “gas chamber.” Today the only remaining dispute on this issue is between those who contend that no homicidal gas chamber ever existed in the camp, and those who argue that there was a homicidal gas chamber in Dachau, but it was never actually used to kill anyone.

One would think that all of this evidence would induce the “exterminationists” to admit that the revisionists were right all along. But that doesn’t seem to be the case. Most of them simply ignore the revisionists, and refuse to discuss the issue with them or to publicly debate them. This in spite of the fact that the revisionist case keeps getting stronger with each new bit of evidence, and the exterminationist case gets ever weaker. When a person named Shihadeh pointed out in a letter to the Penn State College student paper that the exterminationist case keeps changing, a dean of the school, Brian Winston, responded (April 17, 1989) with a blistering attack:

I’m afraid that the only thing that had been changed is the nature of Shihadeh’s ignorance. The distinction between the concentration camps, such as Dachau, and the death camps, such as Sobibor, is now understood even by the dimmest among us, it would seem. However, nowhere in the Holocaust literature that I know is there any claim that there were gas chambers at Dachau. In my research I have never encountered any eyewitness to it.

This, in the end, is the position to which orthodox believers in the Holocaust story are having to resort. In spite of many “eyewitness” accounts describing Dachau “gas chambers,” they now assert that no such accounts ever existed! In effect, they now concede that the revisionists were absolutely right all along, but they adamantly refuse to give Revisionists any credit for this. Instead they prefer to pretend that the revisionist position, which has been proven, was really their position all along.

Mass Killing of German Prisoners

This is not to say, of course, that atrocities were not committed at Dachau. Some such atrocities have already been covered in the first section of my booklet, *Dachau: Reality and Myth*. However, other Dachau atrocities have generally been ignored by historians, and are totally unknown to the general public. The first time one specific atrocity came to my attention was while reading a newspaper article by a friend who had helped liberate Dachau. In that account he briefly mentioned how the American troops had lined up and illegally executed the German troops who had surrendered the camp. I was shocked to learn this, and it was this shock that helped stimulate my interest in the truth about Dachau. Having never known that this friend had been in Dachau, I called him and asked him to recount the story. When he was finished I had one question: Did he see any evidence of a gas chamber in Dachau? His answer was a firm No. Since then, and as I further investigated the history of the Dachau camp, I have come across other accounts verifying what my friend told me.

One Dachau prisoner recounted the same story:[\[22\]](#)

I ascertain that the Americans are now master of the situation. I go toward the officer who has come down from the tank, introduce myself and he embraces me. He is a major. His uniform is dusty, his shirt, open almost to the navel, is filthy, soaked with sweat, his helmet is on crooked, he is unshaven and his cigarette dangles from the left corner of his lip.

At this point, the young Teutonic lieutenant, Heinrich Skodzensky, emerges from the guard post and comes to attention before the American officer. The German is blond, handsome, perfumed, his boots glistening, his uniform well-tailored. He reports, as if he were on the military parade grounds near the Unter den Linden during an exercise, then very properly raising his arm he salutes with a very respectful *"Heil Hitler!"* and clicks his heels.

"I hereby turn over to you the concentration camp of Dachau, 30,000 residents, 2,340 sick, 27,000 on the outside, 560 garrison troops."

Am I dreaming? It seems that I can see before me the striking contrast of a beast and a god. Only that the Boche is the one who looks divine.

The American major does not return the salute. He hesitates for a moment, as if he were trying to make sure that his is remembering the adequate words. Then, he spits into the face of the German.

"Du Schweinhund!"

And then, "Sit down there!" – pointing to the rear seat of one of the jeeps which in the meantime have driven in.

The major turns to me and hands me an automatic rifle.

"Come with me."

But I no longer had the strength to move.

"No, I stay here –"

The major gave an order, the jeep with the young German officer in it went outside the camp again. A few minutes went by, my comrades had not yet dared to come out of their barracks, for at that distance they could not tell the outcome of the negotiations between the American officer and the SS men. Then I hear several shots.

"The bastard is dead" the American major says to me.

Berben's official history gives short shrift to the fate of German troops. He does mention that on the morning of the camp's liberation "white flags had replaced the swastika on all the flagpoles in the camp, though the guard towers were still occupied and machine-guns were still trained on the blocks."[23] Other accounts also make it clear that the German troops had surrendered; they were not killed in battle but were executed while prisoners of war. Germans were put on trial and executed for similar acts, but, then, the victors were the prosecutors, judges and executioners, and they write the official history.

After the Battle recounts another Allied massacre at Dachau. In this case the German guards in the camp towers were coming down, hands raised in the international symbol of surrender:[24]

The SS men promptly came down the ladder, their hands reaching high. But now the American GI saw red. He shot the Germans down with a telling blast and to make doubly sure sent a final shot into their fallen bodies. Then the hunt started for any other Germans in SS uniform. "Within a quarter of an hour," wrote [Nerin] Gun, "there was not a single one of the Hitler henchmen alive within the camp."

Selzer also confirms this atrocity: " ... Surrender or no, the Nazis were pulverized by fire from a score of rifles as they stepped out. Climbing over their corpses, the GIs rushed into the towers. More shots were heard."[25]

Selzer recounts a third incident of murder of surrendered German troops:[26]



American soldiers who liberated Dachau summarily killed 520 of the 560 German camp personnel who had surrendered. Here, soldiers of the 157th Regiment, 45th Division, have just machine-gunned a group of about a hundred German prisoners. Four who were missed are still standing; they were killed moments after this photo was taken. No one was ever punished for this atrocity. (US Army photo SC 208765.)

“Kill ’em!” someone echoed. “Kill ’em! Kill ’em!” Others took up the cry until it seemed that the whole squad was chanting the same refrain: “Kill ’em!”

Screaming the words now, his body convulsed with sobs, Smitty let off a burst of fire from his machine gun. Noiselessly, ten or twelve Nazis slipped to the ground, dead. The spectacle did not propitiate any of the men. Without even pausing, they continued to scream. “More, more! Kill ’em all!” they yelled. Again Smitty pulled the trigger, and again Nazis fell to the ground – this time about thirty of them. Skodzensky was in this batch. But his death did not appease the GIs, either. Smitty took his time. The seconds ticked by until the suspense became unbearable. Again he opened fire, in a long raking action that felled thirty, forty, fifty, and finally nearly eighty Nazis. Now only three remained standing, miraculously unscathed by the spray of lead. Two had their hands dutifully in the air, as they had been ordered, while a third, whether out of defiance or despair, crossed his arms in front of him and awaited his fate. Smitty, however, noticing that some of the men on the ground were wounded rather than dead, temporarily ignored the three still on their feet and directed the gun at the pile of bodies on the ground. They soon stopped twitching. Now he turned his attention to the three survivors.

... But there were no more to kill. One-hundred and twenty-two Nazis lay dead in a neat row along the base of the wall.

I should, in fairness, mention here my suspicions about the validity of these first person accounts. While I do think that these incidents did happen, I am skeptical of these “first person” descriptions. It has always amazed me that those individuals who provide first person Holocaust accounts always happen to be right where the action is. Selzer does not write as if he actually witnessed anything himself; his accounts are actually based on stories he was told. He even admits that his account of Dachau is somewhat fictionalized:[\[27\]](#)

I have conflated a number of accounts given to me. That is to say, while much of an individual’s story, as told in this book, belongs to the (pseudonymous) person in connection with whom it is told, there are in almost every instance additional episodes, experiences, and insights that do not belong to that individual but to another, who makes no independent appearance in this book ... even where his friend [of various characters in the book] may know the real identity of [any character] ... they should not assume that every aspect depicted pertains to the real-life person.

In particular, Selzer's description of the Dachau massacre of German prisoners seems to be nothing more than a fictionalized account based on the photograph reproduced in this booklet. However, if you look closely at the photo you will see, at the far right, a fourth man who appears to be standing against the wall, and maybe another German guard who survived the initial executions. It appears Mr. Selzer didn't notice him.

Berben does not actually mention this massacre, perhaps because he does not wish to acknowledge any Allied war crimes. Instead, he manufactures an incident to justify the killings: " ... Gunshots were heard near the camp and the violence of the explosions made the hut walls shake. Soon, however, the noise abated. It was later learned that it was an attack on the camp by the SS Viking Division, which had fortunately been repulsed by the Americans."[28] By coincidence it was troops of the SS Viking Division who were killed in this massacre.

There are some important qualitative differences between the eyewitness testimony of the Dachau massacre of German prisoners, and the "eyewitness testimony" of execution gassings at the camp. In the case of the massacre, testimony is provided by individuals who have no motive to exaggerate or invent what really happened. By contrast, nearly all Holocaust "gassing" testimony comes not from the alleged perpetrators, but from the alleged victims, who certainly did have a motive to exaggerate and invent. In the case of the Dachau massacre, we have testimony from American soldiers as well as from prisoners who hated the Germans.

Another difference is that, whereas in the case of the massacre we know that the American troops as a matter of course had in their possession the weapons employed in the killings, while there is no documentary or forensic evidence that the Germans had or used homicidal "gas chambers." In the case of the massacre, all the eyewitnesses agree on the fundamentals. There is no disagreement about who was killed and who carried out the killings, or when and where the killings took place. This is not true in the case of "testimony" about "gas chamber" killings.

And there is another critical difference: in the case of the massacre, photographic evidence exists proving beyond any doubt that the killings actually took place. In a photo that accompanies this article (US Army photo SC 208765), the victims can be seen lying on the ground in front of the wall. Also visible are four prisoners who are still standing, awaiting the next lethal volley. The photo also shows the American troops, and a GI kneeling in front of the machine gun that was used to kill the prisoners.

Together in this single photograph, we see the victims, the instrument of killing, and the perpetrators. In the case of the alleged "gas chambers," no comparable photo exists.



Dachau camp personnel surrender to American troops. A few minutes after this photo was taken, these German prisoners were lined up against a wall and machine-gunned to death. (US Army photo.)

Another important fact about this massacre should be noted. Of all the atrocities committed at Dachau (by either the Germans or the Allies) the liberation day massacre of German prisoners was probably the worst. According to Selzer, 122 Germans were summarily killed at Dachau on liberation day (although it is not clear if he includes in this figure the guards murdered at the towers). The greatest single atrocity death toll at Dachau prior to this, according to Berben, was the execution of 90 Soviet military officers on September 4, 1944.

After the war Dachau was the site of the American-run war crimes trials at which German soldiers were tried for murdering American prisoners of war in what is known as the Malmedy incident. [29] The defendants in the Dachau “Malmedy” trial were found guilty, and 43 were sentenced to death. But unlike the murders committed by the American troops at Dachau, the Malmedy incident was not a clear-cut atrocity. As American historian Alfred de Zayas has noted, “the killings were so closely related to the fighting that the case for deliberate murder was rendered somewhat tenuous.” [30] (As it happens, this incident had already been investigated by German authorities during the war.)

The case against the Germans in the Malmedy case was so weak that General Thomas T. Handy, Commander-in-Chief of the American armed forces in Germany, commuted the death sentences to life imprisonment. As de Zayas notes: [31] “... General Handy explained his decision on January 31, 1951, by conceding mitigating circumstances, since the killings had ‘occurred in connection’ with confused, volatile and desperate fighting.” By contrast, the Dachau massacre of German prisoners had not occurred “in connection with confused, volatile and desperate fighting”; it was simply a clear cut, illegal atrocity. It has also been admitted that during the trial the “Malmedy” defendants were mistreated “at the hands of the American guards.” [32] German defendants in other postwar trials were similarly mistreated to “persuade” them to confess to various crimes. [33]

American ‘Gassing’ of Prisoners

Another Dachau “incident” that is almost entirely unknown to the general public (and which Berben in his official history fails to mention) occurred on January 19, 1946. Historian Nikolai Tolstoy writes about this atrocity in his book, *The Secret Betrayal*, which tells the story of a secret deal worked out between Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and US and British leaders at the February 1945 Yalta conference.

Under this arrangement, three million men, women and children who had been, at one time or other, citizens of the Soviet Union, were forcibly rounded up and deported to the Soviet Union, where they faced execution or imprisonment. This program, known as “Operation Keelhaul,” included women and children as well as many individuals who had left Russia before the Communist takeover of the country in 1917. Dachau comes into play because it served as a prison camp for nearly 400 Russians who had fought against the Soviets on the Axis side. Tolstoy describes what happened: [34]

It was from amongst these [Russians who were imprisoned after the war at Dachau] that the Americans decided to select the first batch for repatriation under the new McNarney-Clark directive. Rumours of what was impending spread amongst the Russians, and when they were paraded for entrainment on January 17 [1946] they adamantly refused to enter the trucks. American troops threatened them with firearms, upon which they begged to be shot on the spot – anything rather than deliverance into the hands of the NKVD [Soviet secret police]. Baffled, the guards returned them to their barracks.



Newly liberated prisoners jeer a prostrate German prison guard. Moments after this US Army photo was taken, the guard was beaten to death. In the background are the bodies of other German prisoners who have just been machinegunned by American GIs.

It was realised that the only way to effect the operation would be by means of a massive deployment of force. Two days later a shock force of 500 American and Polish guards arrived outside the camp. What followed was vividly described in a report submitted to Robert Murphy:

“Conforming to agreements with the Soviets, an attempt was made to entrain 399 former Russian soldiers who had been captured in German uniform, for the assembly center at Dachau on Saturday, January 19.

“All of these men refused to entrain. They begged to be shot. They resisted entrainment by taking off their clothing and refusing to leave their quarters. It was necessary to use tear-gas and some force to drive them out. Tear-gas forced them out of the building into the snow where those who had cut and stabbed themselves fell exhausted and bleeding into the snow. Nine men hanged themselves and one had stabbed himself to death and one other who had stabbed himself subsequently died; while 20 others are still in the hospital from self-inflicted wounds. The entrainment was finally effected of 368 men who were sent off accompanied by a [Soviet] Russian liaison officer on a train carrying American guards. Six men escaped en route. A number of men in the group claimed they were not Russians. This, after preliminary investigations by the local military authorities, was brought to the attention of the Russian liaison officer, as a result of which eleven men were returned by the Russians as not of Soviet nationality.”

The irony of this tear-gassing incident should not be ignored because it is the only “gassing” of any kind ever to take place in Dachau – and it was done by Americans. Tolstoy goes on to note:

Protests from distinguished non-Americans were also aroused by press accounts of the Dachau incident. The man whose armies had very nearly destroyed Bolshevism at birth, General Denikin, addressed a moving appeal to his fellow-soldier, Eisenhower. Three weeks later, Pope Pius XII issued a strong condemnation of the (still) secret agreement made at Yalta, protesting against the “repatriation of men against their will and the refusal of the right of asylum.”

In all likelihood, every one of these 351 men taken by force from Dachau was later put to death by the Soviets. That is, this American action most likely contributed directly to their deaths.

While these executions did not actually take place at Dachau, the circumstances of this incident rightfully makes it part of the Dachau story. The death toll of this atrocity supersedes that of the liberation day killings of German prisoners. Thus, the single worst Dachau atrocity was carried out by the Soviets with American complicity, and the second worst was carried out by American troops on liberation day. Apparently the third worst atrocity was the illegal killings of Soviet military officers by the Germans on September 4, 1944. A distant fourth was the alleged execution of 31 Soviet officers by the Germans on February 22, 1944. I am not counting here the deaths of 223 Dachau prisoners in a March 1944 Allied bombing raid because there is no indication that this was done intentionally.

The story of Dachau is a fascinating one. The truth about this camp has been illusive and distorted. Some have fictionalized it for profits to be made through books and movies. Others have distorted the truth for certain political ends. Some have simply believed propaganda that was fed to them by the victors. Few have bothered to actually carry out any investigation on their own. But Dachau does teach us something important. In war there isn't simply a “good” side and an “evil” side.

While I firmly believe that there was no valid excuse for the establishment of Dachau, or any of the other German camps, I cannot find evidence that Dachau was established systematically to murder people. I have found evidence of German efforts to make life bearable. Indeed, because the death rate for Dachau prisoners was considerably lower than it was for others in Europe during the war years, these German measures must have been successful to some degree. Nor can I find Allied actions at Dachau totally blameless; the two worst atrocities at the camp were committed by the Allies. The lesson we must learn is that there is no good war.

In *The Wehrmacht War Crimes Bureau*, Alfred de Zayas expresses a view I heartily endorse:[[35](#)]

For there are not only heroes in war but also criminals – and as Vietnam has shown us, war crimes have not been committed exclusively by one people in history, nor just by one or the other party to a struggle. In every armed conflict heinous war crimes have been committed; most of them have gone unpunished. Today, after countless fratricidal wars, Western thinking recognizes that dying for one’s country may be necessary but that death on the battlefield is not sweet, nor is it a positive value in itself. War is neither glory nor honor. It is horror upon horror, injustice, agony, and waste.

Notes

[1] Nerin Gun, *The Day of the Americans* (New York: Fleet Publishing, 1966), p. 128.

[2] N. Gun, *The Day of the Americans*, pp. 674)9.

[3] Michael Selzer, *Deliverance Day: The Last Hours at Dachau* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1978), p. 31.

[4] M. Selzer, *Deliverance Day* (1978), p. 246.

[5] International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (Nuremberg: 1947-1949 [IMT “blue series”]), Vol. 19, p. 434.

[6] International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (1947-1949), Vol. 37, p. 621. (Document 159-L is a “Report of a Special Congressional Committee to the Congress of the United States, 15 May 1945 ...”)

[7] International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (1947-1949), Vol. 5, pp. 172-173.

[8] Quoted in: John D. McCallum, *Crime Doctor* (Mercer Island, Wash.: The Writing Works, 1978), pp. 46, 57.

[9] Quoted in: J. D. McCallum, *Crime Doctor* (1978), p. 57.

[10] J. D. McCallum, *Crime Doctor* (1978), pp. 57-60, 69.

- [11] Jane Floerchinger, "Concentration Camp Conditions Killed Most Inmates, Doctor Says," *The Wichita Eagle*, April 1, 1980, p. 4C.
- [12] Paul Rassinier, *The Holocaust Story and the Lies of Ulysses* (IHR, 1989), pp. 230-231.
- [13] Fr. Alexis Lechanski, "At Dachau," *The Wanderer* (St. Paul, Minn.), October 5, 1989.
- [14] Robert Baldwin, "Priest recalls horror of concentration camp," *Our Sunday Visitor*, May 26, 1985, p. 3.
- [15] Paul Berben, *Dachau 1933-45, The Official History* (London: Norfolk Press, 1975), p. 147. See John Cobden's review of this book in *The Journal of Historical Review*, Winter 1989 (Vol. 9, No.4), pp. 485-504.
- [16] Robert Baldwin, "Priest recalls horror of concentration camp," *Our Sunday Visitor*, May 26, 1985, p. 3.
- [17] Paul Berben, *Dachau 1933-45, The Official History*. (London: 1975), p. 153.
- [18] Letter by Stephen F. Pinter, *Our Sunday Visitor*, June 14, 1959, p. 15.
- [19] Andrew Mollo, "Dachau," *After the Battle* (London: Plaistow Press, 1980), Issue No. 27, pp. 17,25.
- [20] *Book & Bookmen* (London), April 1975, p. 5; Wiesenthal similarly acknowledged that "there were no extermination camps on German soil" in a letter published in *Stars and Stripes* (Europe), Jan. 24, 1993, p. 4. A facsimile of Wiesenthal's 1993 letter is published in *The Journal of Historical Review*, May-June 1993 (Vol. 13, No.3), p. 10.
- [21] "Keine Vergasung in Dachau," *Die Zeit* (German edition), August 19, 1960 (and in the US edition, Aug. 26, 1960, p. 14); Facsimile of this letter, with translation and commentary, in *The Journal of Historical Review*, May-June 1993 (Vol. 13, No.3), p. 12.
- [22] A. Mollo, "Dachau," *After the Battle* (London: 1980), Issue No. 27, p. 13; Probably the most thoughtful and detailed account of the liberation day massacre of German camp personnel is *Dachau: The Hour of the Avenger*, a memoir and investigation by Howard Buechner. This well illustrated 175-page softcover book is available from Thunderbird Press, 300 Cuddihy Dr., Metairie, LA 70005, USA. See also: *The Journal of Historical Review*, May-June 1993, pp. 7, 8, and, *The Journal of Historical Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1993, p. 47.
- [23] P. Berben, *Dachau: 1933-45, The Official History* (London: 1975), p. 191.
- [24] A. Mollo, "Dachau," *After the Battle* (1980), Issue No. 27, p. 15.

[25] M. Selzer, *Deliverance Day* (1978), p. 176.

[26] M. Selzer, *Deliverance Day* (1978), pp. 188-189.

[27] M. Selzer, *Deliverance Day* (1978), p. 13.

[28] P. Berben, *Dachau: 1933-45* (London: 1975), p. 194.

[29] For more about this, see: Joseph Halow, *Innocent at Dachau* (Institute for Historical Review, 1992).

[30] Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *The Wehrmacht War Crimes Bureau, 1939-1945* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 119.

[31] A.-M. de Zayas, *The Wehnnacht War Crimes Bureau*, (Lincoln, Neb.: 1989), p. 120.

[32] A. Mollo, "Dachau," *After the Battle* (London: 1980), Issue No. 27, p. 20.

[33] See: Mark Weber, "The Nuremberg Trials and the Holocaust," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Summer 1992 (Vol. 12, No.2), pp. 187-193.

[34] Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Secret Betrayal* (New York: Scribner's, 1977), pp. 354-356. The British edition of this book is entitled *Victims of Yalta*.

[35] A-M. de Zayas, *The Wehnnacht War Crimes Bureau* (Lincoln, Neb.: 1989), pp. 272-273.

About the Author

John Cobden is the pen name of an American writer whose essays on political issues have appeared in nationally-circulated magazines and major daily newspapers, including the *Hartford Courant* and the *Orange County Register*. His writings on aspects of the Holocaust issue have appeared in *The Journal of Historical Review* and, in translation, in the French journal *Revue d'Histoire Revisionniste*.

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