

PERSONAL REPORT

Lessons from visit to Dachau

The liberators helped those were unable to help themselves



A MELDING OF NATIONS IN THE ASHES OF BRUTALITY

A twofold message — extermination and hope — at the Dachau concentration camp, in French, English, German and Russian.

By SHANA R. GOLDBERG

IJN Assistant Publisher

The *IJN* was part of a communal delegation to the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Dachau.

Also in the delegation was Shayna Alexander of ADL; Rabbi Eliot Baskin of JFS; Dwight Henninger of Vail Police Dept.; Georgina Kolber of Mizel Museum, which hosted and coordinated the delegation; Melanie Pearlman of The CELL; Doug Seserman of JEWISHcolorado — and members of the Colorado and Oklahoma National Guards at the sites of Nazism in Bavaria.

RETURN

DACHAU — Is it possible to revisit a place you've never been to before?

This is a place I never intended to visit. I had opportunity but opted not to come. Yet, it is a return.

"I have long contemplated the question of whether you can experience trauma from something you didn't go through," says Shayna Alexander, who descends from Holocaust survivors.

There is a collective history here: the history of the persecuted, the

history of the resisters, the history of evil. That is the potency of this place, for it represents the Nazi regime in its horrifying entirety: the persecution, the repression, the consolidation of power, the mechanisms of mass murder, the unchallenged

tion . . . It represents a lineage of men and women that are totally prepared to pay the ultimate sacrifice to help those who cannot help themselves."

The heritage felt by these soldiers, the pride in their forefather, Brig.

It's different, being here

power of the paramilitary.

There is, however, also another element in the collective history here: liberation.

We are travelling with a group of the Colorado and Oklahoma National Guards. As part of the 157th Infantry, they are the descendants of the division that liberated this camp, the 45th Thunderbird Division.

For most in the group, this is their first time returning to this seminal ground in their unit's history.

"I am proud to wear the Thunderbird on my shoulder more than I ever have been," says Lt. Col. Brad Carter of the Oklahoma National Guard. "[It] represents something more than a proud military forma-

Gen. Felix Sparks, who led the unit at the time of liberation, is palpable. The book about his larger-than-life military career, *The Liberator*, is mandatory reading for the unit, and is often referenced throughout the journey.

I speak to Lt. Col. Brey Hopkins while we're in Munich's quintessential boisterous beer hall, the Hofbräuhaus, which served as the command post for the 157th after it occupied Munich just after leaving Dachau.

"As we sit here today, it's really a big deal that I can look back and say, well, those were my forefathers.

"Every time I set up my command post in the field today, I'm thinking back to seeing [the front pillar of the Hofbräuhaus once labeled with "157th"] and knowing that after 511 days [in battle] they came in here right at the very end of the war and set up their map boards, set up their radios, do the same thing we do today, just in a different environment."

Hopkins, who served in other legendary divisions, such as the 101st Airborne, was pivotal to reestablish-

ing the culture and heritage of the unit after a 45-year hiatus.

The unit was "struggling to find its own identity," he says. "It's one thing to have a number associated to a unit, it's something completely different to dig into the history and see what happened with those numbers way back when."

Others were here before.

Jack Adler, a Holocaust survivor from Lone Tree, Colorado, was liberated here 70 years ago. He was on a death train when American soldiers liberated him near Wolfratshausen. He had been separated from his father less than two months earlier in Kaufering, a subcamp of Dachau.

At a DP camp, Adler found out that he was the only survivor of his immediate family.

Col. Adam Silvers of the Colorado National Guard visited Dachau in 1984 on a high school trip. The Chicago native's father is Jewish; his ancestors are Ukrainian Jews who escaped the Bolshevik revolution.

When Silvers came to the camp 30 years ago, when he entered the darkness of the Jewish memorial, evocative of the of hell, punctuated only by a thin shaft of hopeful light. "I felt I needed to say a prayer."

In a place like this, born of a regime founded on the hatred of Jews, there is the undeniable reality for people of Jewish descent, no matter how religious or secular they may be: "Nothing would've spared

Please see DACHAU on Page 7

Next Week
Shavuos Youth & Home Issues

TO SUBSCRIBE
CONTACT CAROL

carol@ijn.com • 303-861-2234

IJN Deadlines

Deadline for press releases, photographs and social announcements is Thursday, 1 p.m., for the following week's Friday publication. You may fax material to (303) 832-6942; or mail or hand deliver it to 1177 Grant St., Ste. 200, Denver, CO 80203.

Requirements for stories and photographs:

- Copy must be typewritten or emailed, double-spaced, liberal margins.
- Photographs: quality prints or digital jpg. Color or black and white. All persons in photos must be identified. There is a charge for photo reproduction.

Free for publicity chairpersons: the *IJN* stylesheet, including "How To Prepare Press Releases for Publication in the *IJN*."

Call Larry Hankin, 303-861-2234.

JEWISH NEWS

1177 Grant St, #200 • Denver, CO 80203
(303) 861-2234 • FAX (303) 832-6942
Published every Friday
ISSN #0047-0511 • email@ijn.com
www.ijn.com

Staff

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER:
Miriam H. Goldberg

EXECUTIVE EDITOR:
Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, PhD hillel@ijn.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
Larry Hankin larry@ijn.com

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Chris Leppok ijnews@aol.com

SENIOR WRITER:
Andrea Jacobs andrea@ijn.com

SPORTS EDITOR: Gerald Mellman

FEATURES: Elaine Goldberg, Dennis Prager, Tehilla R. Goldberg, Amy Lederman, David Sirota

ISRAEL BUREAU: Rabbi Mattis Goldberg

ADVERTISING: Lori Aron lori@ijn.com

Send advertisements to: advertising@ijn.com

PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY:
Seiji K. Nagata seiji@ijn.com

BUSINESS STAFF:
David H. Fetscher dave@ijn.com
Carol Coen carol@ijn.com

LEGAL SECRETARY:
Carol Coen legal@ijn.com

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER AND WEB EDITOR:
Shana R. Goldberg shana@ijn.com

MAX GOLDBERG:

Editor and Publisher (1943-1972)

ROBERT S. GAMZEY:

Editor, Israel Correspondent (1943-1975)

DORIS SKY: Managing Editor (1962-1990)

JOSEPH POLAKOFF:

Washington Bureau (1972-1996)

JUDY WALDREN:

Office Manager (1984-2011)

BERNIE PAPPER:

Advertising Executive (1988-2012)

Circulation

IJN HOME DELIVERY: CALL 303-861-2234

IJN ON NEWSSTANDS:

EAST

- Kavod Senior Life 22 S. Adams St.
- East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St.
- Jewish Community Center, 350 S. Dahlia St.
- Pete's Fruit and Vegetables, 5600 E. Cedar Ave.
- Rose Medical Center Gift Shop
- Tattered Cover Bookstore, 2526 E. Colfax Ave.
- Zaidy's Deli, 121 Adams St.

SOUTH OF ALAMEDA

- Bagel Deli, 6439 E. Hampden Ave.
- Bagel Store, 942 S. Monaco Pkwy.
- Jewish Family Service, 3201 S. Tamarac Dr.
- King Soopers, 4910 S. Yosemite St.
- New York Deli News, 7105 E. Hampden Ave.
- Tattered Cover Bookstore, 9315 Dorchester St.

WEST

- Raleigh Professional Pharmacy, 4200 W. Conejos Pl.

DOWNTOWN

- Denver Press Club, 1336 Glenarm Pl.
- Intermountain Jewish News, 1177 Grant St., Suite 200
- Tattered Cover LoDo, 1628 16th St.

BOULDER

- Boulder JCC, 3800 Kalmia Ave.

Copyright

The entire contents of this newspaper and L'CHAIM® are copyrighted by the INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS®, with all rights reserved. Nothing in the *IJN*, whether news, editorials, features, columns, letters, advertising copy, design elements, photographs or any other material may be reproduced in any form — reprint, photocopy, Internet or otherwise — without specific, written permission from the *IJN*. Request should be addressed to the *IJN*, Reprint Permissions, 1177 Grant St., Suite 200, Denver, CO 80203-2362.

The INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS® and L'CHAIM® are registered in United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Affiliation

MEMBER American Jewish Press Assn., Colorado Press Assn., World Federation of Jewish Journalists, National Newspaper Assn., Better Business Bureau, Metro Denver Chamber of Commerce.

SERVED JTA, Israel 21c, Ashernet, JointMedia News Service

KASHRUT We are not responsible for the kashrut of any product or establishment advertised in *IJN*.

PICTURE There is a charge for photo reproduction.

Postal

INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS® (ISSN 0047-0511). Published weekly by INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS, Inc., 1177 Grant Street, Ste. 200, Denver, Colorado 80203-2362. \$62.00 annual subscription, \$1.75 per issue, L'CHAIM special issue, \$5.00, 100TH ANNIVERSARY special issue, \$25.00 (\$10.00 for subscribers only). Periodicals postage paid at Denver, Colorado. All rights reserved.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS, 1177 Grant Street, Suite 200, Denver, Colorado 80203-2362.

Awards



newspaper member
A Colorado Statutory Publications, CRS (1973) 24-70 et al
2015



NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

PERSONAL REPORT

Lessons from a visit to Dachau

Jews say 'never forget.' The military says 'always remember.'

DACHAU from Page 2

me," says Silvers. The Nazis' anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws defined a Jew as someone with one Jewish grandparent.

Being back at Dachau makes him "proud to be part of my organization." He shows me the pin representing his service in the Army Special Forces, whose motto, fitting for the occasion, is De oppressor liber, or "to free from oppression."

RESPONSIBILITY

On this journey we visit the Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg, where thousands gathered in mass worship of the madman they elevated to a godlike status.

We visit a brand new museum documenting the history of Nazism in Bavaria. We learn the context within which National Socialism was able to succeed. We are informed of the complicity of Germans from all walks of the life, from the working class to the patrons, and, perhaps most important, the police force.

We are confronted with how the Final Solution began, festered, flourished.

For Dwight Henninger, police chief in Vail, Colorado, the absorption of the police into the Nazi structure is instructive.

"How is it that your local police force can become part of the death squads in a five or ten year period of time is really amazing. It stepped from being part of the government to part of overthrowing the government to taking really bad action."

Mass complicity. One example. At Dachau, residential homes abut the camp, and in the museum I read that the town wanted the camp there; it would be good for business. Road signs directed visitors to the camp, as if it were a destination for those out on a stroll. This place was quite literally in people's backyards; yet they claimed they didn't know.

Following liberation, local townspeople of Dachau were brought to the camp by the US Army to help bury the heaps of corpses left in the Nazi wake.

At the newly-opened Documentation Center in Munich, built on the site of the Brown House, the headquarters of the Nazi Party, there is a wall. It is filled with the various edicts passed against Jews.

Some are Orwellian: Jews are forbidden from running any business they own (December, 1938).

Others are prescient: Jews are forbidden from taking part in air-raid exercises if Germans make up the majority of inhabitants in a building (October, 1939).

"I was angry, I just was angry," says Maj. Gen. H. Michael Edwards on leaving the exhibition. "Reading when they started enacting, *Jews cannot this, Jews cannot that*, so a shop owner all of the sudden loses his shop, his living, his family . . . it made me angry."

This wall of edicts illustrates how genocide is enacted, says Alexander. "We're not talking about going to concentration camps first. It's minor things chipping away at equality."

It is this wall, and so much more, that this trip, and the preparation for it, hammered home the utter futility of that pathetic excuse, "We didn't know."

I will allow that the average German probably did not know about the gas chambers. But that does not absolve anybody. The gas chambers were only the final step in what was a deliberate and very public

plan to remove Jewry from Europe. Whether one knew of the final mechanism the SS chose is immaterial to taking responsibility.

Beginning in 1920, Hitler was already speaking about *Lebensraum*, the expansionary policy that triggered his declaration of war in 1939. His anti-Jewish venom did not hide behind politeness or niceties; one poster in the museum advertising a talk Hitler gave in the early 1920s was titled, "Why we're anti-Semites."

Doug Seserman sees parallels in modern day Iran. Like National Socialists, the mullahs say openly what they believe, he says. The lesson is clear: "When a genocidal leader makes statements, you have to take them at face value, because they materialize sometime later. Today we have the same risk with Iran and ISIS."

After the Nazis took power, the Nuremberg Laws were enacted, Jewish shops were boycotted, humiliated Jews were paraded through the streets, shipped off to camps, *Mein Kampf* was given to newlyweds at their marriage ceremonies. There is no plausible deniability for any German of the time that he or she did not know that Jews were being removed from German society.

As Chaplain Jefferson Bell of the Colorado Guard says, the persecution of Jews and others, like the mentally ill or Roma, became "the societal norm."

There is another excuse used by Nazis: the Nuremberg Defense, "I was just following orders."

The Colorado National Guard expose the fallacy in this.

Edwards: "In some respects, when you think about the military in Germany during World War II, you have a kind of understanding that they were, quote, obeying orders. But in our military, we talk about lawful and unlawful orders."

Is this part of the basic education of a soldier?

"It gets more emphasized as you're getting ready to go into a conflict situation, so that you understand the rules of war, especially with the treatment of POWs or how you should be treated if you're taken prisoner."

Hopkins reiterates the point: "In the US military and obviously the US culture there's a certain amount of questioning in everything. There's a lawful order and there's an unlawful order. And we are trained to understand the difference."

What would constitute an unlawful order?

Bell speaks about visiting the battlefields of the Civil War, with their wholesale slaughter in places like Antietam. "But it was because I'm a soldier, you're a soldier and we are fighting for something . . . there's an honor between soldiers. I'm not going to line up 6,000 of you against a wall or 200 of you just because my commanding officer told me to. I'd be like, wait a minute, that's not a lawful order. I can't do that."

In a place like Dachau, there was no honor. The people who suffered here did not come here with the honor of a soldier. They were forced to be here, enslaved and murdered against their will. And that makes the Nuremberg Defense not only meaningless, but offensive.

RESTORATION

A discussion arises in our group: Should these camps be restored to their original condition?

A common perception — and crit-



REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS

Rabbi Eliot Baskin and Chaplain Jefferson Bell recite blessings at the conclusion of the wreath laying ceremony at the Waldfriedhof Cemetery, where many victims of the Dachau death march are buried, as are other inmates who succumbed to illness following liberation.

icism — of Dachau is that it's whitewashed. In the place of long-bombed barracks are beds fills with stones and pebbles. Two barracks still stand, but they are replicas. I'm told that in Polish concentration camps, things have been left as is.

I cannot relate to this criticism. The weather is miserable — overcast, grey, a steady stream of rain. I see no whitewashing; I see no hope, no life in this place. Instead, I see barrenness, the utter destruction wrought by the Nazi regime. I see crematoria and a gas chamber, the mechanisms of Nazi genocide, even if this particular gas chamber was never used for mass murder.

"You cannot understand the brutality until you walk the ground," says Silvers.

Ultimately, these camps, in whatever condition they may be, are the tangible proof that genocide, that the Holocaust, happened.

Ironically, the absence left by genocide makes it difficult to prove. Mass murder cum crematoria leave little or no evidence. The camps and the mechanisms they house are the proof.

"Anyone who discounts the Holocaust as a myth has never been to Dachau," says Carter.

Regardless of whether the most heinous of Nazi crimes were committed at Dachau, the camp is emblematic of what a regime based on racism and other forms of hatred must do to ensure its power: imprison, torture and ultimately murder its enemies. The hierarchy of concentration camps is not something that resonates with me.

Being here is terrible enough. For the first time in my life, despite the times I've read, despite the family history I've researched, the Holo-

caust is real in a way I never before could have imagined.

This is why I feared coming here. Yet being here doesn't make me reflect only on my people, and on the past; seeing the mechanisms of genocide, I find myself considering the other mass murders across the globe. Genocide is suddenly very real.

I understand now the importance of visiting such places. Of being the voice "for those whose voices were silenced," as Jack Adler says. Or bearing witness, as Alexander says, of "getting partial justice for myself — and those who can't be here today to get that justice."

It is ineffably different when you're standing on the very ground where the crime was committed. To paraphrase Rabbi Eliot Baskin, this land is both sacred and profane.

"It's hard to imagine how someone could do that to another person," says Bell, as we walk through the rain en route to the main commemoration ceremony at Dachau. "And how you could have the plan; I mean, it's so deliberate. And everyone bought into it."

And so, these camps must be maintained, for they radiate, in an irrefutable way, the reality of Nazism.

Yet, there is a question of resources and funding. Baskin poses the quandary: Should funds be put into this preservation, or put toward schools, summer camps, synagogues — today's living Jewish life?

There's no easy answer.

REPENTANCE

If we believe in collective memory does that also mean we believe in collective guilt? And, consequently, collective repentance?

Any visitor to Germany confronts this question. It is a country openly grappling with its past, in the museums, in the young tour guides educating visitors — both foreign and German — about the ill of National Socialism, in the maintenance of the concentration camps.

It is amazing, says Henninger, "that they can accept the shame of their country and move forward."

Seventy years ago, many Germans said they didn't know what was going on. Now they can no longer pretend they don't know.

The bitter irony is the decreasing number of survivors and liberators means that the perpetrators and eyewitnesses are also dying out. "We're witnessing a transition in the historical record," says Georgina Kolber.

"The generation that was associated with World War II, they're dying, so the new consciousness is coming through," says Edwards.

Will the sins of the fathers forever haunt the sons?

The question, Baskin says, is "Do you believe in *teshuvah*?"

"In Judaism, if someone's apologizing, we're supposed to accept it and move forward," echoes Seserman. "I'm respectful of the acknowledgement of the German government and society in facing their past, but I'm still troubled and working through how something like this happens."

"If we're going to accept all this bad stuff [about Germany], we also need to accept the good stuff," says Baskin, such as, as Melanie Pearlman points out, Germany being the most pro-Israel country in the EU.

"Do we ever express our gratitude for that?" asks Baskin.

RETURN

What is the aftermath of such a journey?

There is humility; civilians humbled by, as Pearlman says, the commitment of the liberators then, and the servicemen and women now. And of the National Guard humbled by the resilience of the survivors.

There is a renewed sense of responsibility, in the words of Carter, to "ensure the individual freedoms of all people," and to ensure that the legacy of both the liberators and survivors remains strong.

This journey brought together an unlikely confluence of groups: members of the Colorado and Oklahoma National Guards and the Colorado Jewish community — and with it, rich exchange between them. Whether at the lively, shared Shabbat meal at Chabad of Munich, or with the Guard as it laid wreaths for the victims, there was a sense of learning from each other, and of shared values.

What struck me most was the shared respect for heritage and tradition, the pride in our forefathers, the idea that remembering and honoring the past provides a foundation for the future. In the Jewish world, we say *never forget*; the military flips it around. To them, it's *always remember*. The essence is the same.

"Seventy years ago, the American Army and the Jewish culture collided," says Hopkins. "And they collided at Dachau. And I think both came away with a sense of gratitude and appreciation for what the other had endured. With this trip, we're bringing those same groups back together again."

Shana Goldberg may be reached at shana@ijn.com