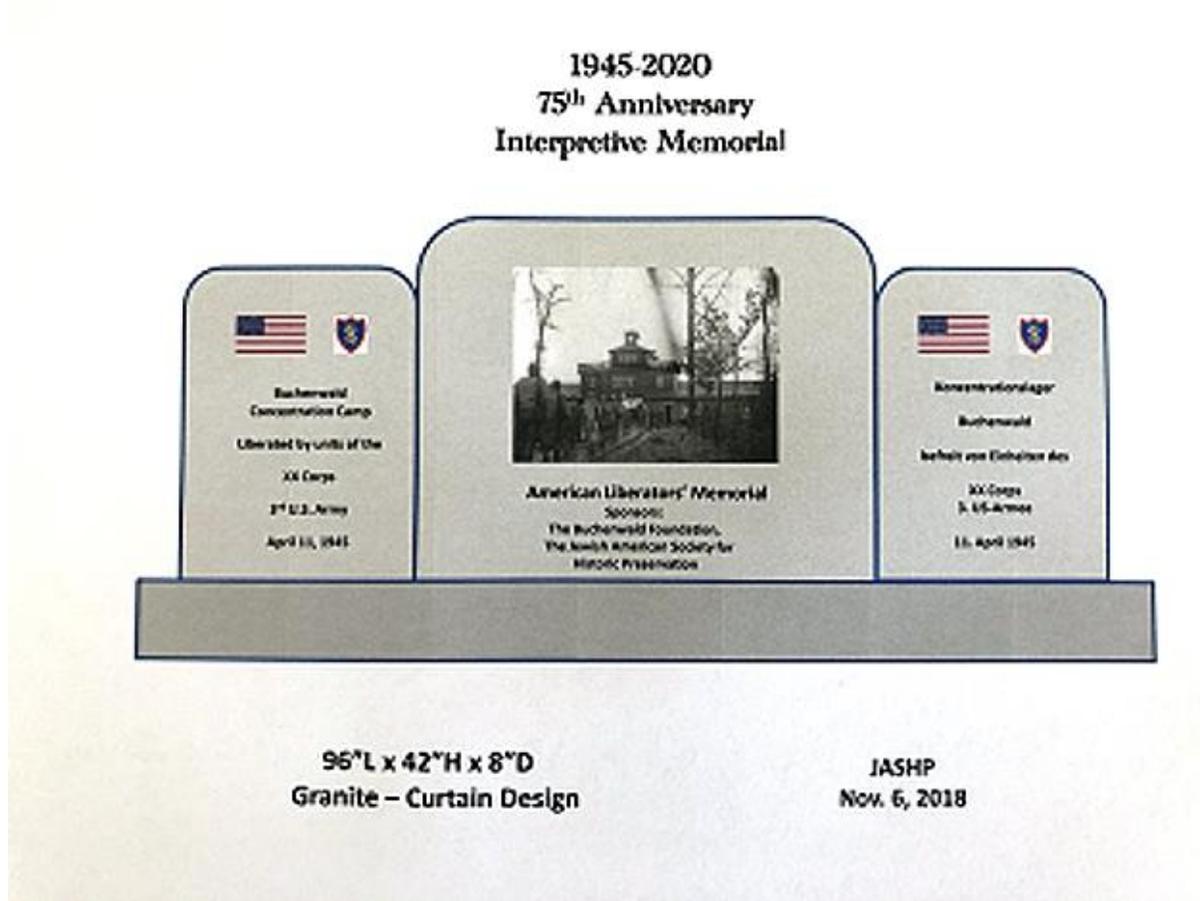


The Liberation of Buchenwald that Never Happened.



American Liberators' Memorial

By Jerry Klinger

Americans emphatically state, American Armed Forces liberated the notorious Buchenwald Concentration Camp. The Germans say it never happened.

The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation proposed an American Libertors' Memorial for the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Buchenwald. The Communists bitterly opposed it.

Without knowing it, JASHP had stepped on a major political/historical landmine in Germany.

April 11, 1945, a probing patrol edged through the gate of the large, imposing Camp. The first soldiers entered tentatively not knowing what they might

encounter, perhaps Germans waiting to ambush them. As their feet crossed into the Camp, what they encountered confused, then horrified them, as living skeletons, bodies, and the smell of death filled the air. The American soldiers pulled back, not venturing too far in until reinforcements and armor arrived.

A week earlier, the Americans had "liberated" their first concentration Camp, Ohrdruf, a sub-Camp of the larger Buchenwald Concentration Camp network they were now penetrating. Ohrdruf was a horror to the young American soldiers. For the first time, they visibly understood the monster they were fighting, the monster of Nazism and its totalitarian vision displaying its contempt for unapproved human life.

April 11, General Eisenhower personally went with "Old Blood and Guts" General Patton to witness with their own eyes the masses of dead and horror of Ohrdruf. "Old Blood and Guts" Patton threw up when confronted by the reality of Ohrdruf. Patton could not even go into some of the barracks where the piles of dead still lay. Eisenhower did.

Eisenhower explained in a dispatch he sent April 15, why he went to Ohrdruf.

"The things I saw beggar description... The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering... I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to "propaganda."

Buchenwald was the largest, and most notorious Nazi Concentration Camp in Germany. Buchenwald was the first Nazi Concentration Camp in Germany. It was opened in 1937 in the German State of Thuringia. Thuringia was the first German State to come under Nazi Control. It was all done Democratically, by popular vote.

Buchenwald is located just a few miles outside of the beautiful German city of Weimar. It is located on the backside of a small mountain, Mt. Ettersberg, surrounded by dense forests. Weimar is a city of culture, history, learning. Johannes Bach wrote music there, and the famed German writer Goethe had a home. It was named associated with the recently failed post WWI, reforming Weimar government.

Buchenwald was known to the people of Weimar. And it was P.C. conveniently brushed from their conscious aware-ness.

From 1937 until it was liberated, over 250,000 victims passed through Buchenwald. Over 50,000 were murdered in the Camps by starvation, disease, work, abuse, medical experiments, and hanging, the favorite method of public terror used by the Nazis. There were no gas chambers.

Buchenwald was not created specifically for the Jews. It was a Camp the Nazis sent all those it did not like or were subhuman, 7th Day Adventists, political dissidents, Russian prisoners, Homosexuals, Communists, Romanies (gypsies), and a favorite of the Nazis, Jews.

At the top of the mountain, near the main gate, were the best barracks for the Aryans. Below the Aryans barracks, descending down were the lower and lower life unworthy or life forms of prisoners, until it reached the bottom of the slope. At the bottom of the slope was an entirely separate Camp with its own barbed wired surroundings and guard towers. It housed, in beyond inhuman conditions, the lowest forms of life fit only to be worked to death, the Jews. The Jewish Camp was called "Das Kleine Lager", the "Little Camp". The filth, the runoff from the upper Camp flowed into the boggy Jewish Camp.

During the War, the Red Cross inspected Buchenwald for human rights and conditions. The inspectors never went further into Buchenwald than the well-kept Aryan barracks. The inspectors never saw or were never interested in the "Little Camp."

It took a day or two after the American liberators arrived before the gates of the "Little Camp" were opened. American medical relief poured in. In the "Little Camp" a man, less than a hundred pounds, lay on an upper bunk, barely alive. He would survive because of the American liberators. His name was Fritz Klinger, my father.

I first visited Buchenwald on the 50th anniversary of its liberation in 1995. The sprawling Camp had been converted into a vast show memorial to the dead and resistance to the fascists by the Communist Government of East Germany. Germany, reunified in 1990, further developed the site and maintains the largest Concentration Camp in Germany as an educational facility. The fact that

the Communists maintained and used Buchenwald after the War to incarcerate and murder people they did not like was not P.C. to interpret. “Das Kleine Lager”, the Jewish Camp at the bottom of the mountain, was forgotten.

No structure, no memorial, no memory existed of the “Little Camp.” The site had been deliberately, neglectfully, permitted to vanish. Shortly after the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Buchenwald, I became an associate member of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad. The Commission created by President Bush, as a small Commission under the U.S. House of Representatives was Chaired by Warren Miller.

Chairman Miller’s vision was to create a permanent memorial inside the physical area of the “Little Camp” to the memory of its victims, the Jews. I was privileged to significantly assist in the creation of the “Little Camp” Memorial.

Nearly 2,000,000 people annually visit Buchenwald.

I am President of The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, www.JASHP.org. The purpose of the Society is to identify and recognize sites of American Jewish historical interest that reflect on the commonality of the American experience. Late 2018, I brought a proposal forward. There was no memorial at Buchenwald to the American Liberators. The 75th anniversary of the Camp’s liberation would be April 11, 2020.

Throughout Thuringia, there are over three score memorials to the Russians who never liberated Buchenwald.

JASHP designed and funded a deliberately modest memorial to honor the American liberators. JASHP recognized the political nature of the never done before effort but also the necessity for historical memory as the last of that era were passing into the oblivion of greying historical fog.

Initially, natural allies were sought to support the effort, Jewish groups, such as the Jewish War Veterans and even the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Support for an American Liberators’ Memorial at Buchenwald was rejected. The American Battlefield Commission was interested but could not participate in the time left. The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad was interested and then was not. They said their focus was on Ohrdruf.

In the end, other than individual Jews, no Jewish organization, even if no money was being requested, was interested in or provided support to the American Liberators' Memorial project.

Susan Eisenhower, the granddaughter of General/President Dwight D. Eisenhower, was reached out to. She sent a strong letter of support for the American Liberators' Memorial project. Susan's letter of support led to supporting letters from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Senatorial, Congressional, and crucially, support from American Ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell. Ambassador Grenell, brought the issue of the American Liberators' Memorial to the highest levels in Germany. Ambassador Grenell was very strong. Ambassador Grenell, a Trump appointee, was the first openly Gay American Ambassador to Germany. He personally understood the meaning of bigotry and prejudice. He assigned Consul General Timothy Eydellant to assist me in the effort.

German friends of the American Liberators' Memorial were developed. One remarkable group of supporters was a group of WWII, primarily German, European reenactors who supported the project. They were assembling a *Liberty Convoy* that would travel through Germany, culminating in a dedication in Buchenwald. The *Liberty Convoy* and the German supporters of the project honored the American veterans as having not just liberated Buchenwald but all of Germany and Europe from the boot of Nazism and later Communism. They understood, without the Americans, Nazism would not have been defeated. Buchenwald would not have been liberated.

As friends were being developed, and apathy became apparent, enemies arose. JASHP and I were attacked by name by the Communists.

The Buchenwald Memorial Foundation was approached. They initially received the idea for a memorial positively. What they wanted though, dropped to only a plaque.

Letters of support were provided to the Buchenwald Memorial for their review Commission. The design was considered, and I was investigated. The Buchenwald Commission would be meeting in July, 2020. Responsive communication to the Buchenwald Foundation became unresponsive. Requests

if any additional information or support materials were needed went unanswered.

A few hours before the July review Commission was to meet and consider the American Liberators' Memorial proposal, the chairman canceled the meeting without explanation. It was re-tabled for November 2020.

JASHP and its German supporters confirmed that even with a November approval date we could meet the time needed to produce the American Liberators' Memorial. Consul General Eydelnant met with the Directors of the Buchenwald Memorial and Ambassador Grenell kept the issue active in Berlin. The enemies of the project did not remain still either.

November 2020 the Buchenwald reviewing Commission met and rejected the American Liberators' Memorial. They countered with a plaque that would be affixed to a former S.S. Barracks later used as a Field Hospital by American Medical staff assisting the newly freed prisoners of Buchenwald.

JASHP wrote to the Director of Buchenwald that the response and text were not appropriate. The text was modified. The location of the plaque was changed from the S.S. Barracks to in back of the ceremonial flag poles at the entrance to Buchenwald. The new text reflected the political/ historical minefield that the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation was attempting to navigate.

When Buchenwald was under full Nazi control, the Nazis did not control the interior of the Camp. 1200-1500 S.S. troopers were assigned to guard the outside perimeters and man the guard towers. The S.S. chose special internal administrative and policing units inside the Camp drawn from the prisoner population to run the Camp from the inside. The administrators of Buchenwald for the Nazis were the Communists. In return, the Communists were given special privileges, better rations and a certain degree of autonomy.

In the months leading up to the liberation, the Communists had accumulated a few dozen rifles, a small machine gun, and a radio. The materials were secreted in the Nazi provided movie theater and brothel for the Communists.

As the Americans drew close, the S.S. at first tried to drive the 20,000 surviving prisoners out on a death march. When that failed, partly because the Communists would not cooperate administratively, the S.S. ran for lives. Some

donned prisoner uniforms, others, women's clothing. Almost all the S.S. ran. A few die-hards remained in the towers.

When the Americans were only hours away, *the Communists rose in revolt* and took possession of Buchenwald. The arriving Americans found the Camp in control of the Communists and their International Camp Committee of supporters. The Communists claim they liberated Buchenwald and then the Americans showed up.

It was plainly evident that if the Americans had not been nearby and almost the entire garrison of S.S. deserted, any revolt would have been a general massacre of prisoners, especially the Communists who ran Buchenwald. The approaching Americans made the liberation of Buchenwald a fact.

The political/historical dilemma for the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation is Buchenwald is located in the former Communist East German controlled area of Germany. Today, Thuringia is politically led by a far-left government. The Buchenwald Memorial is run subject to Thuringian control and not from Berlin.

The plaque was moved from the S.S. Barracks honoring the American Field Hospital support but with wording that reflected the S.S. ran away and the American arrived. The key words, American Liberators, remained verboten.

Consul General Eydelnant strongly encouraged me to attend the dedication of the plaque. He explained if I did not, the Russians would have the visible dominance with their large contingent. The Buchenwald Memorial Foundation asked me to be the speaker at the dedication. I reluctantly agreed to go. It was not what I wanted. It was the best that could be had at the time.

The dedication was scheduled for April 5. It never happened. The Commemorations, the Liberty Convoy, everything to remember the end of Nazism at Buchenwald were cancelled by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

No doubt in 2021 something will be again scheduled. It will be small. There will be new administrators of the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation.

A new fight for an American Liberators' Memorial at Buchenwald is not in the immediate cards. A different tactical approach has been proposed by JASHP.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad never developed or advanced any American Liberators' recognition at Ohrdruf. General Eisenhower's visit to the sub-Camp hell hole of Buchenwald is unmemorialized. JASHP, once the terror of the Coronavirus has passed, or perhaps a vaccine is developed, is proposing a new memorial at Ohrdruf.

The memorial at Ohrdruf will have the words American Liberators and the quote from General Eisenhower. The quote is the same quote carved on the walls of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The S.S. deserted Ohrdruf as the American approached. There was no revolt by the "Communists" liberating Ohrdruf. JASHP has again agreed to underwrite the memorial.

It is far from a done deal. My German supporters have advised me that the local Ohrdruf government is opposed to a Liberators' Memorial. They argue that Americans arrived to an uncontested Concentration Camp. The Americans liberated nothing.

We will see...

Jerry Klinger is president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation.

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