

What I Saw: Personal Accounts of Concentration Camp Liberators

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Introduction

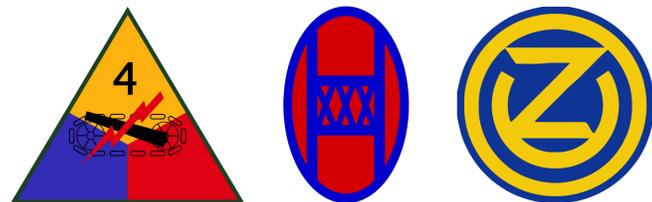
What I Saw focuses on the memories of concentration camp liberators and how the trauma embedded in them affected their view of Holocaust liberation in retrospect. One of its chief concerns is the similarities and differences between each of the veterans' retellings, and what may contribute to these narrative trends.

Approach- Walkthrough of Interview Process

The veterans were contacted via phone/email and asked if they would be interested in discussing their experiences in World War II.

Methodology- Questions Posed to Veterans

- Describe to me what you saw.
- How did this make you feel emotionally?
- What did you know about the Holocaust prior to this?



Results

The notion of a lack of knowledge about the camps prior to discovering them was prominent among many liberators. A sense of shock and disbelief was also very pronounced in most narratives. Additionally, many liberators were quite vocal regarding where they felt the guilt resided for the crimes committed at the camps: the inaction of German civilians.

Map of Concentration Camps



Conclusions

- Lack of awareness may be rooted in the term “concentration camp”
- While descriptions are vivid, they are not exact replications of what liberators saw/felt in 1945
- Liberators were integral to defining German guilt for the Holocaust
- Liberators were among the first documentarians of the Holocaust

Future Work

Considering the dwindling number of liberators –as well as WWII veterans more broadly- it is imperative these stories are documented while the liberators are still living.

References

1. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995)
2. Robert Abzug, *GIs Remember*, (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Jewish Military History, 1994).