

**CH. 7: LIBERATION**

**IN**

**THE HOLOCAUST**

**A NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER'S RESOURCE**

**FEATURING THE NARRATIVES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS**  
**WHO BECAME NORTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS**

This guide is available for free download, in its entirety and by individual narratives and chapters,  
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North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

## VII ■ LIBERATION ■

### OVERVIEW

- *“One of the [prisoners] comes back and says ‘I can’t believe it, the gate is open, and there isn’t anyone around.’”* \_\_\_\_\_Zev Harel
- *“How can I describe the jubilation I felt when I first glimpsed the tank flying an American flag?”* \_\_\_\_\_Morris Glass
- *“I didn’t realize I was going to be liberated. I was liberated instantly. We had no idea.”* \_\_\_\_\_Abe Piasek

Young Allied soldiers entering Nazi-occupied territory as the war neared its end had no idea what horrors awaited them. Although Allied leaders knew about the Nazi concentration camps, there was little awareness or acknowledgment that they represented a brutal highly organized policy of mass murder. As the young soldiers reached these camps—often abandoned by the Germans—they found thousands of skeletal victims and thousands of piled corpses. “We went inside and saw all the bodies,” recalls George Rose, a liberator of Dachau who now lives in Wilmington, NC. “We went through the main gate, and there was a wall all around it with bodies like rag dolls, like little dolls thrown on top of one another. Then [survivors] started screaming ‘Amerikaner, Amerikaner.’ They came out and they were hugging us and kissing us. I didn’t realize I’d done something so important.”

#### LIBERATION OF THE CAMPS AND GERMANY’S SURRENDER

As Allied forces marched through Europe from the east (Soviet army) and from the west (American, British, Canadian, French, and other forces), they liberated hundreds of Nazi concentration camps. They gave food and medical care to the survivors and they buried the dead by the thousands. They compelled local residents to view the horrific camps and help transport bodies to burial. They photographed and filmed the horrors to document the genocide they saw firsthand.

#### LIBERATION OF MAJOR CAMPS

			Liberated by
Majdanek	Poland	July 23, 1944	Soviet Army
Auschwitz	Poland	Jan. 27, 1945	Soviet Army
Ohrdruf	Germany	April 4, 1945	U.S. Army
Buchenwald	Germany	April 11, 1945	U.S. Army
Westerbork	Holland	April 12, 1945	Canadian Army
Bergen-Belsen	Germany	April 15, 1945	British Army
Dachau	Germany	April 29, 1945	U.S. Army
Ravensbrück	Germany	April 30, 1945	Soviet Army
Mauthausen	Austria	May 5, 1945	U.S. Army
Ebensee	Austria	May 6, 1945	U.S. Army
Theresienstadt	Czechoslovakia	May 8, 1945	Soviet Army
Surrender of Germany (V-E Day)		May 8, 1945	

As spring arrived, the defeat of Nazi Germany became complete. On April 25, 1945, the Soviet and American armies met at the Elbe River in central Germany. On April 30, Hitler committed suicide in his underground bunker in Berlin. On May 2, Berlin surrendered to the Soviet army. The German forces surrendered unconditionally on May 7 in the west and May 9 in the east.

#### DISPLACED PERSONS

The Allied forces faced the daunting challenge of providing relief for war refugees labeled “displaced persons”—the millions of liberated slave laborers and concentration camp survivors. Much of this work was accomplished through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which set up hundreds of displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. They set up housing in former army barracks, schools buildings, and even concentration camps; provided medical care, schools and training centers,

and cultural programs; helped DP's find surviving relatives; and helped them get home—or wherever they felt would provide security and a future. Many Jewish DP's went to Palestine on the eastern Mediterranean coast, where the state of Israel was created in May 1948. About 80,000 emigrated to the United States. The experiences of Holocaust survivors who came to the U.S. and eventually settled in North Carolina are featured in this guide

**SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES** Many survivors did not talk about their experiences for many years, even to their children and other relatives. With time, and the growth of Holocaust commemorations, museums, memoirs, and programs like Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation to record survivor interviews, we have a permanent record of individuals' experiences. Many survivors continue to speak to students, the military, and other public groups.



## ONLINE RESOURCES

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- Resources from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
  - ♦ Liberation [www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/special-focus/liberation](http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/special-focus/liberation)
  - ♦ The Aftermath of the Holocaust [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-aftermath-of-the-holocaust](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-aftermath-of-the-holocaust)
  - ♦ Displaced Persons [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons?series=48246](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons?series=48246)
  - ♦ Archival footage: liberation of camps (not a complete list)
    - Auschwitz (child survivors) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-auschwitz-child-survivors](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-auschwitz-child-survivors)
    - Auschwitz (victims' belongings) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-auschwitz-belongings-of-victims](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-auschwitz-belongings-of-victims)
    - Bergen-Belsen [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-bergen-belsen-1](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-bergen-belsen-1)
    - Buchenwald (color) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/german-civilians-forced-to-view-atrocities-committed-in-buchenwald](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/german-civilians-forced-to-view-atrocities-committed-in-buchenwald)
    - Dachau [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-dachau](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-dachau)
    - Dachau [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/us-soldiers-care-for-dachau-survivors](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/us-soldiers-care-for-dachau-survivors)
    - Ebensee (color) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-ebensee-camp](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-ebensee-camp)
    - Majdanek [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-majdanek](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-majdanek)
    - Mauthausen and Gusen [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-mauthausen-and-gusen](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-mauthausen-and-gusen)
- "Memory of the Camps," unfinished 1945 documentary with footage taken by British and American film crews with troops liberating the camps, presented by PBS Frontline in 1985 (57:32). Graphic footage. [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/memory-of-the-camps/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/memory-of-the-camps/)
- Resources from the USC Shoah Foundation
  - ♦ Online exhibition: Stories of Liberation [sfi.usc.edu/liberation](http://sfi.usc.edu/liberation)
  - ♦ Witnesses for Change: Stories of Liberation (video clips from seven testimonies) [sfi.usc.edu/exhibits/witnesses-change-stories-liberation](http://sfi.usc.edu/exhibits/witnesses-change-stories-liberation)
- Liberation and Survival (lesson, Yad Vashem) [www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/liberation-and-survival.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/liberation-and-survival.html)
- "Why We Fight," depiction of the liberation of Dachau; Episode 9 of *Band of Brothers* (HBO)/YouTube [youtu.be/sHcJtU9dr6l](http://youtu.be/sHcJtU9dr6l)
- Media coverage of the 2015 North Carolina General Assembly remembrance honoring survivors and liberators on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dachau concentration camp
  - ♦ WRAL-TV, Raleigh, NC, April 29, 2015 [www.wral.com/legislators-honor-holocaust-survivors-solidier/14613083/\[sic\]](http://www.wral.com/legislators-honor-holocaust-survivors-solidier/14613083/[sic])
  - ♦ WWAY-TV, Wilmington, NC, April 29, 2015 [www.wwaytv3.com/2015/04/29/veteran-concentration-camp-survivor-reunite-70-years-later/](http://www.wwaytv3.com/2015/04/29/veteran-concentration-camp-survivor-reunite-70-years-later/)
  - ♦ "Holocaust survivors emotionally reunite with soldier who helped free them," *People*, April 30, 2015 [people.com/human-interest/holocaust-survivors-meet-george-rose-soldier-who-freed-them-from-dachau/](http://people.com/human-interest/holocaust-survivors-meet-george-rose-soldier-who-freed-them-from-dachau/)



Access the valuable teaching resources of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at [www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust](http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust). The museum's offerings include lesson plans, teaching guidelines, online activities, interactive maps, audio and video collections, the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and other exemplary classroom resources.

## LESSON ■ LIBERATION

- **Narrative: Morris Sees an American Tank**
- **Narrative: Abe Survives a Death Train**
- **Narrative: Edith Is Freed from Auschwitz**
- **Narrative: Zev Meets His Liberators**

All four of these camp survivors were teenagers during the Holocaust. To lead students into the liberation narratives, ask these questions: (1) How might it have influenced their experiences that they were teenagers in the camps? (2) How would it feel to realize you might never see your family again? (3) When life changes abruptly, as in being liberated after years of brutal treatment, how does one adjust to a radically different world—freedom?

Introduce the North Carolina survivors whose liberation narratives are presented here.

- ♦ **Morris Glass** was 11 when the Nazis invaded Poland. He survived over four years in the Lodz ghetto and was liberated from the Dachau concentration camp. He moved to Raleigh in 2000.
- ♦ **Edith Neuberger Ross** was 15 when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. She went into hiding but was captured and sent to Auschwitz where she was liberated. In 1947 she married David Ross, a Kindertransport survivor, and they settled in Apex in 1988.
- ♦ **Abram (Abe) Piasek** was 11 when the Nazis invaded Poland. He endured forced labor in three forced labor camps and was on a death train to Dachau when liberated by Allied troops. He moved to Raleigh in 2009.
- ♦ **Zev Harel** was 14 when he was sent from Hungary to Auschwitz and later Ebensee, where he endured hard labor until liberation. He moved to Greensboro in 2013.

Also note the liberation experiences of camp survivors Julius Blum and Morris Stein in Ch. 4 and of Gizella Abramson in Ch. 5.

Have students consider these questions as they read the narratives.

1. How did Morris, Edith, Abe, and Zev sustain their will to survive?
2. What does Zev mean by “the finish line”? How did the other survivors express this idea?
3. In what ways did they feel that luck helped them survive? How did their own quick thinking and personality help them survive? (Remember that many victims died regardless of their strengths and character.)
4. How did Morris, Abe, and Zev respond to seeing African American soldiers?
5. How have the survivors expressed gratitude to each other, to those who helped them during the war, and to their liberators?
6. What aspects of the liberation experience do you find in all the narratives? What unique aspects do you find?

### ***“Translate statistics into people.”***

In its guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust (see Supplemental Materials), the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum recommends using first-person accounts of survivors

*“precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims; [they] add individual voices to a collective experience and help students make meaning out of the statistics.”*

7. All four survivors were teenagers in the concentration camps. How does that affect your understanding of their experiences, and of the narratives they created many years later?
8. What questions would you want to ask Morris, Edith, Abe, and Zev if you met them?
9. Let's say these four narratives are to be published in a small book and you are asked to write the introduction for students. Write an introduction of three to five paragraphs that includes (a) an overview of the liberation experience, (b) guidance on reading the narratives as a careful and compassionate observer, and (c) a statement of your personal response to the narratives.
10. Write a dialogue of 50-100 lines between two of these survivors. In your introduction, explain why you chose the two people and what characteristics of their experiences you would emphasize to the reader. In the final lines of the dialogue, have them pose a question to the reader, share a wish for the future, offer a lesson from their experiences—or you can create a similar concluding element.
11. Create a chart with five columns. Title the four right columns with the names of the four survivors. Title the rows of the first column with these entries, and, if you wish, add two to three entries of your own. What patterns do you find upon completing the chart? What questions do you have?
  - Age when liberated
  - Last camp before liberation
  - Location (country) of camp
  - Liberated how? by what army?
  - When did the person realize he/she was free?
  - What was his/her physical condition on liberation?
  - To what factors does the person attribute his/her survival?
  - What did the person do immediately, and shortly after, being liberated?
  - Did the person return to his/her home country?
  - Was the person able to find surviving members of his/her family?
  - Did the survivor go to Palestine or, later, Israel?
  - When did the survivor come to the U.S.? How?
  - Where in North Carolina did the person settle?
  - Write one statement in the narrative that most affected you.
  - Why did this affect you?
12. View and read the media reports below about the 2015 North Carolina General Assembly remembrance honoring survivors and liberators on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dachau concentration camp. One of the survivors at the remembrance was Abe Piasek, whose narrative is included in this chapter. What do you learn about the experience of being liberated, and of being a liberator, from these reports?
  - "Legislators honor concentration camp survivors, soldier," WRAL-TV, Raleigh, NC, April 29, 2015  
[www.wral.com/legislators-honor-holocaust-survivors-soldier/14613083/](http://www.wral.com/legislators-honor-holocaust-survivors-soldier/14613083/) [sic]
  - "Veteran, concentration camp survivor, reunite 70 years later," WWAY-TV, Wilmington, NC, April 29, 2015  
[www.wwaytv3.com/2015/04/29/veteran-concentration-camp-survivor-reunite-70-years-later/](http://www.wwaytv3.com/2015/04/29/veteran-concentration-camp-survivor-reunite-70-years-later/)
  - "Holocaust survivors emotionally reunite with soldier who 'helped free them,'" *People*, April 30, 2015  
[people.com/human-interest/holocaust-survivors-meet-george-rose-soldier-who-freed-them-from-dachau/](http://people.com/human-interest/holocaust-survivors-meet-george-rose-soldier-who-freed-them-from-dachau/)



## LIBERATION ■ MORRIS SEES AN AMERICAN TANK

*Morris Glass was born in 1928 in Pabianice, Poland. He was 11 years old when Germany invaded his country in 1939. He and his family suffered through four and a half years in the ghettos of Pabianice and Lodz. In August 1944 the Lodz ghetto was liquidated and its residents sent to Auschwitz, where Morris, his father, and his brother were separated from his mother and two sisters, whom he never saw again. Soon after, Morris's brother was sent to a forced labor camp in Germany, Morris and his father volunteered to work in Germany in order to leave Auschwitz. They arrived in the Dachau concentration camp in October 1944, where his father died from the hard labor and brutal treatment. In April 1945, as U.S. troops approached Dachau, most of the prisoners were marched to a train as the Germans evacuated the camp.*

**W**alking the half kilometer from Kaufering IV [Dachau subcamp] to the railroad tracks was no easy task for most of us. We walked as slowly as possible and as close to each other as possible in order to help those who were struggling—otherwise, they would have been shot. After we had waited several hours, a huge train appeared. It stretched as far as the eye could see and held thousands of people. Because the cattle cars were full, my group was put in a coal car where we were stacked like sardines, one on top of the other. Most were sick and burning with fever. People were dying all around me. Once again I thought, “This is the end.” But now more than ever, I desperately wanted to live. I was certain that the war would end soon. Liberation seemed very near.

***Once again I thought, “This is the end.” But now more than ever, I desperately wanted to live.***

There were a number of signs that indicated that the days of the mighty Third Reich were numbered. The Allied guns sounded very close. I saw very young boys, maybe 14, 15, or 16 years old, manning huge anti-aircraft guns—a sure sign that the Germans were on their last leg. Furthermore, it was whispered that some of the SS guards had been heard to say that the surrender would be soon. I had listened to rumors for years, but I knew this one must be true. Unfortunately, we also heard troubling reports that we were being sent to the Tyrol Forest on the border between Germany and Austria to be fed poisoned soup. This was a rumor that I hoped was not true, but knowing the Nazis, I feared the worst. Thank God for Generals Patton, Eisenhower, and Taylor, and all the others! It was because of their rapid advance that I never found out if there was truth to the poisoning rumor.



Morris Glass shortly after the war, wearing a borrowed beret of the Jewish Brigade

I'm not sure how many days I was on the train. At some point, we came under fire from American and British planes that were attacking German anti-aircraft guns. In order to discourage the attack, the Germans deliberately parked our train next to the guns. The Allied planes were flying very low—so low the pilots could see us. I know that they tried not to hit us, but sometimes they did. Those of us in open cars lay there totally helpless, like dead ducks. There were a lot of casualties. I saw people

with missing arms and legs and other terrible wounds. There was no one to care for them. All of a sudden, I felt wet and warm. I thought, "Oh, no, after all these years, I'm to be killed by my friends." When I recovered from my fright and I checked myself, I was okay. What I had felt was hot water gushing from a locomotive that had been punctured.

As a result of the Allied attack, our train was damaged and stalled, and there were piles of dying people in my car and along the tracks. There was confusion and panic everywhere.

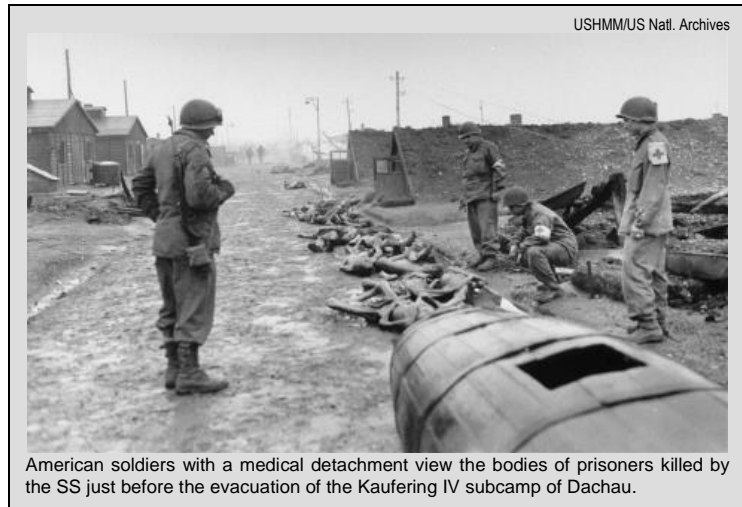
When I saw some SS fleeing into the woods, I thought that I must be hallucinating, but then I realized that the war just might be over. I decided that if the SS were leaving, then I too would leave, and so I and four others rolled off the train. I said to them, "It's a matter of hours. Our liberators must be very close. Let's walk toward the village," and off we went. One of my friends, Libel, had pneumonia and was burning with fever. He was very sick, so we walked slowly.

We walked to a farm, where the family gave us food. Thinking that the war must be over and that we were safe, we rested for several hours. But our dream of freedom was soon ended when some German militia arrested us. First, we were taken to a Wehrmacht [German armed forces] officer who spoke kindly to us and assured us that the war would be over shortly. We begged him to let us go, but he said that he was under orders to detain all prisoners. Then the SS came and accused us of being spies who were running toward the Americans. They wrote down our numbers and told us that we would be executed in the morning. I don't know why they did not shoot us then, but luckily for us they didn't. The SS took us to a wooded area where there were hundreds of wounded and dying prisoners. We could hear them crying "Hear O Israel" and pleading for help. Amidst all the suffering, it was hard to think about myself.

Nevertheless, knowing that the war was almost over, my friends and I were determined to escape execution. Since the SS knew us only by the numbers on our jackets, we exchanged our jackets for the jackets of dead prisoners. Feeling protected by our new numbers, we slept through the night. In the morning, after some SS gave us permission to get water for the sick and dying, the five of us started to walk away from the camp. Just as we started walking, the sky became very dark and rain started to come down in sheets. With our movements shielded by the dark and the rain, we walked away from the SS as fast as we could. Finally, we met a farmer who took us in, gave us food, and hid us in his hayloft. While we were lying in the hay, we heard the SS come. They searched and searched, but they did not find us. When we went to sleep that night, we were aware that we had much to be grateful for.

When we awoke in the morning, we were greeted by the great news that there had been a radio announcement (which it turned out was incorrect) that Germany had surrendered. Our joy at this news was tempered by the worsening condition of Libel. We knew something had to be done immediately or he would die. Seeing how sick Libel was, the farmer told us that there was a hospital only a kilometer away. It seemed once again that luck was with us.

Jauntily, we set out for the hospital. Believing that the war was over, that we were out of danger, and that there was a place nearby where Libel would be cared for, we were a happy group. Unfortunately, we had not walked far when we learned that all was not well. The messenger of





Waffen SS soldier, 1945

bad news was a hulking SS officer who was sitting on a motorcycle in the middle of the road, holding a machine gun. As we rounded the curve and saw him, I thought, “Oh, my God, what will we do?” Somehow, I quickly came to my senses, calmly walked up to him, and told him that we were lost and wanted to go back to the train. He must have believed me because he gave us directions and let us go. We started walking as instructed, but as soon as the road curved, we raced into the forest.

We would have been happy to have stayed in the forest until we knew for certain that the SS had departed and that the war was really over, but Libel was very very sick and we had to get him to the hospital. We waited until dark and then set out once again. Covering the short distance to the hospital took a long time because every time we heard a car or any strange noise, we would jump back into the woods. Finally, we saw the lights of a large building. We went around the back, and I knocked on the door. It was opened by a nun. I didn’t have to say anything; she just motioned us to come in. We had arrived at St. Ottilien, a Benedictine\* monastery that

had been converted into an SS hospital. We were now under the care of kindly nuns and monks, but we were not yet out of danger.

The nuns were so good to us. They gave us food and took our filthy prison clothes, which they burned. When I said, “I have one wish. I would like to take a bath,” they took all of us to be bathed. And wonder of wonders, there I was, I who had not had a real bath in years, in a bathtub with soap, hot water, and a nun who came and scrubbed me. This was heaven!!! I must have been in that tub for hours. After the bath, the monks gave us new clothes, and then they whisked us away and hid us in a hayloft—it was still an SS hospital. The monks told us that it was a matter of days until the war would be over and we would be free. In the meantime, we could stay where we were and they would bring us food.

A day or two later, the monks told us that the Americans were very near, and since there might be some shooting, we should move to the basement where it would be safer. We went to the basement. I found a box to stand on so that I could see out of the window—I was not going to miss a thing. Before long, I was rewarded with a view of an American tank coming up the hill.

How can I describe the jubilation I felt when I first glimpsed that tank flying an American flag? There is no way to describe the joy in my heart—the joy of being free! I ran outside and embraced the first soldier I saw and then another and another and another. I was happy beyond my ability to describe it. I was free! I was free! I was free! A



An American tank of the 1st Infantry Div. rolls through Gladbach, Germany, March 1, 1945, as the Allied troops neared victory over the Nazis.

\* A Roman Catholic monastic order.



minute ago, I had been a prisoner and hiding, and now I was free and hugging every American soldier I could find. I just could not believe it.

I was then and I remain now very grateful to the American army for giving me back my life and my freedom. My gratitude has no bounds. Every time I see the Stars and Stripes, I am reminded of my debt to those soldiers and to the American army.

On spotting us, one of the soldiers yelled out, "We need five beds immediately." On his orders, we were taken into the hospital and everything possible was done to help us. The Americans put us on a strict diet and checked us

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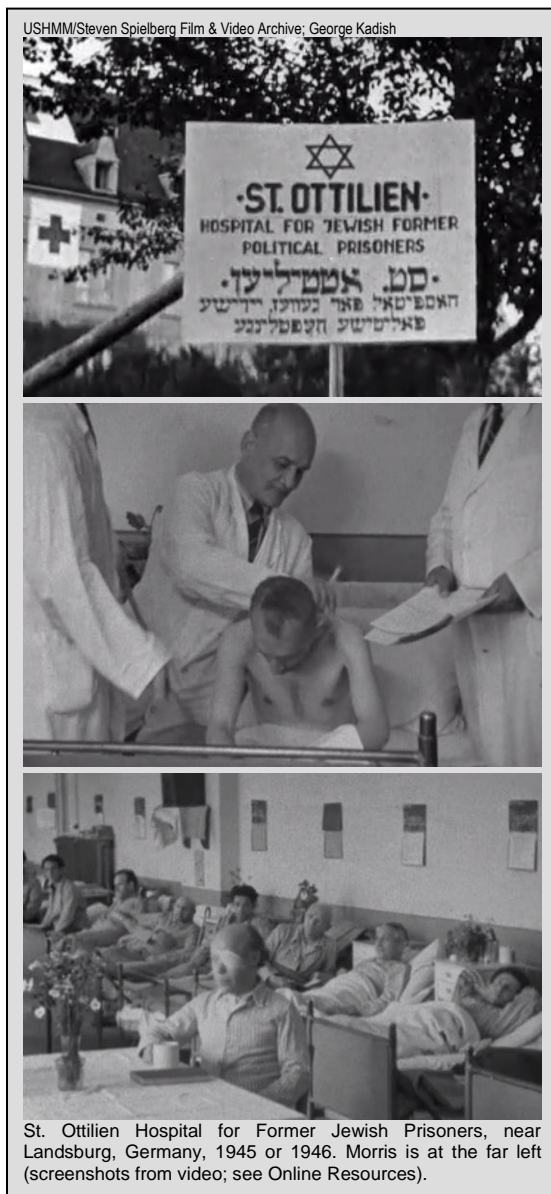
***My gratitude has no bounds.  
Every time I see the Stars and  
Stripes, I am reminded of my  
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to the American army.***

every few hours. Because so many survivors had died from overeating, they carefully supervised what and how much we ate. The German SS doctors treated us politely and tried to help us—they said they wanted to redeem themselves. Of course, the nuns and the monks were wonderful. Much care was devoted to Libel. The Americans and the Germans tried to save him, but he died shortly after we were liberated. To lose him, especially after we were free, put a damper on our spirits, but even his death could not destroy our joy.

Shortly after I was put in the hospital, the soldier who had ordered the beds came to check on us. When he was giving the order, I thought that I heard him using some Jewish words, but I said, "No, no, Morris, you are fantasizing." Well, I wasn't. It turned out that he was a Jewish guy from Brooklyn. That made me so proud—one of my saviors was an American Jew! Also among the American liberators was a black man; this was the first time that I had ever seen a black person except in the circus.\* My life was indeed full of new and wondrous things.

St. Ottilien was a perfect place for me to be. In addition to the hospital, it included a farm with cows and other animals, and wheat and potato fields. The bounty of nature and the serenity of the countryside buoyed my spirits, and with the good care that I was receiving, I improved rapidly.

Recognizing that this was an ideal place to recover, General Eisenhower decreed that St. Ottilien was to be a hospital for Jewish survivors. Within two or three weeks, there must have been a



St. Ottilien Hospital for Former Jewish Prisoners, near Landsburg, Germany, 1945 or 1946. Morris is at the far left (screenshots from video; see Online Resources).

\* Most major European circuses featured black African performers.

thousand of us there, all needing medical attention. The SS doctors were removed from the hospital and replaced by American doctors and by Jewish doctors who were themselves survivors. The Jews there, like survivors everywhere, were desperately seeking their loved ones. As soon as I met another survivor, I would immediately ask if they knew my family and they would ask me the same question. It was a search that was to go on all over Europe and the world for a very long time.

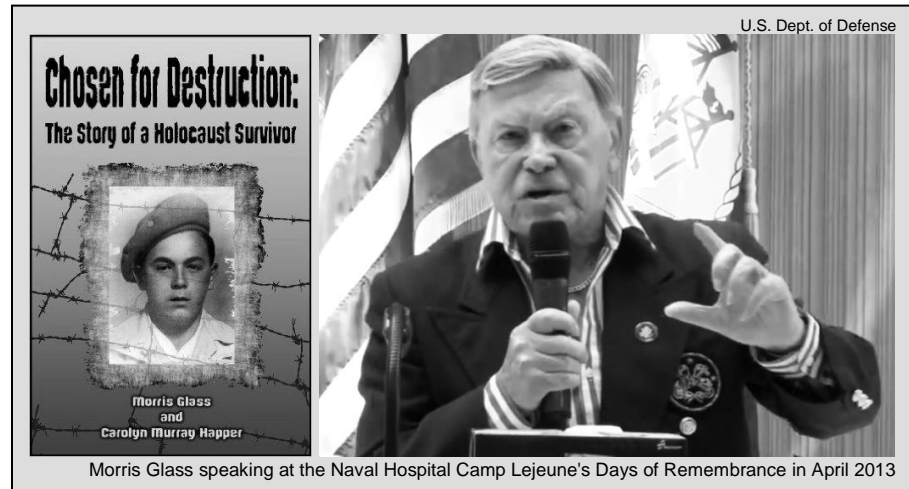
*Of 42 members of his family, only Morris, his brother, and a cousin survived. While in a DP camp in Italy, Morris learned that his brother had survived and was in a DP camp in Germany. Sponsored by an uncle (the brother of their father), they came to the U.S., arriving in New York City on June 2, 1949. Morris settled in New Jersey where he*

*bought and expanded a coat manufacturing company. There he met his wife Carol; they have seven children, 18 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. In 2000 they moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, where three sons live. For years Morris spoke across the state to school, military, and public groups about his Holocaust experience. In 2011 he published his Holocaust memoir, *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, co-written with historian Dr. Carolyn Murray Happer.*

*[Read other selections from Morris's memoir in Ch. 1 (Anti-Semitism) and Ch. 4 (The Holocaust: Ghetto).]*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Video: Morris Glass's presentation with Carolyn Happer (co-author of Mr. Glass's memoir, *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, 2011), Raleigh Weekend C-Span, 16 May 2013, 28:56  
[www.c-span.org/video/?313006-1/chosen-destruction](http://www.c-span.org/video/?313006-1/chosen-destruction)
- Video: Morris Glass's presentation to the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, April 2013, video possibly taken by the U.S. Dept. of Defense, uploaded on YouTube by the *Jacksonville Daily News*, NC  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSkq-kYI\\_o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSkq-kYI_o)
- Video: Morris Glass reviews the experiences in his memoir, *Chosen for Destruction*, 2013 (C-Span/YouTube, 28:32)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_-1sYifN5U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_-1sYifN5U)
- Video: St. Ottilien Hospital for Jewish Former Political Prisoners, 1945 or 1946, 6:23 (Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)  
[collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/fv1260](http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/fv1260)



Selection from *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, by Morris Glass and Carolyn Murray Happer, 2011. Reproduced by permission of Morris Glass and Carolyn Murray Happer. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photograph of Mr. Glass after the war (with beret) reproduced by permission of Morris Glass.

## LIBERATION ■ EDITH IS FREED IN AUSCHWITZ



Edith on the rooftop of her house in The Hague, Holland, before the war

*Edith Neuberger was born in 1925 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. After the Nazis invaded her country in 1940, her parents sent her and her older sister Bobbie into hiding with a family near The Hague. Her parents and little brother were arrested, and soon after, in December 1942 when Edith was 17, she and her sister were discovered and arrested. They were sent to the Westerbork camp in Holland, from which Jews were sent to death camps in Poland. Separated from her family, Edith was sent to Auschwitz alone and endured brutal treatment. In January 1945 as the Soviet army approached Auschwitz, she was sent to the camp hospital with suspected tuberculosis. The Germans abandoned the camp, leaving Edith and thousands of other survivors on their own.*

I had such a tremendous fever that I was petrified to fall asleep in case I wouldn't wake up in the morning. It was really very very bad. Finally they decided to examine me, and they decided that I had TB. How they decided it, I don't know, but it was highly likely, and it turned out they were correct. So they put me in the TB block, and it was well known that when it comes to selection [for death], the whole TB block goes. I and another girl—I remember her name, it was Enid—she was a German Jewish girl, and we were both so-called diagnosed having TB and had to go to the TB block. So we go through the doors and I remember saying to Enid, "We'll never get out of here. This is really it. This is it." And it was it for her: she never made it.

I stayed in there for about a week or ten days, when an announcement came through from Berlin, an order that all the crematoria had to be broken down because they wouldn't want to leave behind any evidence for the Russians, which was my luck. So I remember a German SS man walking through the barrack and talking about this in a loud voice and saying in German he had never seen those Jews work so hard, trying to break down the crematoria.

We knew the Russian front was coming near. During all the time I was there, whenever a transport [train] came into the camp, I tried to find after appel [roll call] some Dutch people and learn where the transport had come from. One day I came across a transport from Grenoble, France, and one of the people told me that landings had begun in June [D-Day invasion], so we were aware of that. I also found out through the grapevine that Bobbie was in Auschwitz I—Birkenau



Women survivors on the day of liberation, January 27, 1945



One of the destroyed crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau after the liberation, late January 1945

was called Auschwitz II—and that Bobbie was used as a guinea pig in experiments. She survived it all; she lives in Holland. So I knew Bobbie was alive, and that gave me some hope. I thought, if she's alive, then I'm going to make sure that I stay alive.

***So I knew Bobbie was alive, and that gave me some hope. I thought, if she's alive, then I'm going to make sure that I stay alive.***

The Russians were coming near. By now it was near the end. It was December '44 and we could hear shooting or whatever. We heard something. The day came that the Germans decided they were going to leave the camp, so they went into every barrack and gave the order to the kapos [inmates assigned to be guards] "*alle Juden raus!*"—all the Jews out! The others could stay. So I made myself as flat as possible and tried to hide. But I had no such luck. The Ukrainians were only too glad to get rid of the Jews. They hated us. They found me and they dragged me down, and they told me I had to get out. They gave me a thin blanket, a safety pin to get the blanket around my body, and a pair of shoes.

And I went out in the cold, and December in Poland is very cold. I went out and we were supposed to line up five abreast. I was number two in one of the five somewhere. And I was standing there, and the SS man in charge of this particular group somehow caught my eye and told me to come to him. And I was scared stiff, of course, and I came to him, and then he pulled his pistol and put it on my ear, and he said, in German, of course, "You can't even walk half a mile. What do you think you can walk, five miles?" Well it wasn't any five miles; it was hundreds of miles, or hundreds of kilometers, that these people walked. "You can't even walk half a kilometer." And he was right. I couldn't. I was really in sad shape. So after he cocked his pistol, he told me I wasn't worth his bullet. "So go back into the block, and eventually we'll shoot all you Jews in the block that can't walk."

So I walked back to the block, and I was petrified that he was going to shoot me in the back anyway. But he didn't. I got into the block, and the Ukrainians that had thrown me out wanted to throw me out again. And so I told them in German, hoping they at least would understand some German, because I don't speak Ukrainian or Russian, that the SS man had told me to go back. He was going to shoot me here; he wanted to shoot me here, I said. So they said, "All right, go!" So I was allowed in, and I stayed. I went back to my bed—of three, up high—and I stayed there.

Eventually I learned that they had gone away, the Germans, with all these people that were supposed to walk [on a "death march" to Germany]. And what happened, I heard later, that as soon as you sat down on this walk, they shot you in the neck. They didn't leave you sitting—they shot you. They killed each and every one who couldn't walk anymore. So I almost certainly would not have made it. I wouldn't have made it even one mile.

So now the Germans had gone, and there was no food at all. There wasn't even that turnip soup. I just lived on snow. I went outside and tried to find some snow that was clean, because the so-called potties were overflowing, so everybody went out in the snow and did whatever they had to do. So I tried to find some snow that was clean. And I lived on that for about five days, I think.

***So now the Germans had gone, and there was no food at all. There wasn't even that turnip soup. I lived on snow.***

Then the Russians came, and there was a Yugoslav partisan girl that had a bed close to me. But the only way I could talk to her—she didn't speak any German—she could speak a little bit of school French, and I could speak school French, so we made do with that, and the rest talking with our hands. So one day she handed me a pocket knife, and I didn't know what was going on. I thought she'd gone mad and was going to attack me. But she put it in my hand and

she pointed it at the door of the barracks. And I went there and I saw a whole group of women hovering over a dead horse. And they were all cutting a piece of horse to eat. So I worked my way through them and I cut myself a piece of horse and just ate it. It just about killed me because my dysentery was worse than ever. I couldn't digest anything anymore. So I made my way back to my bed and I passed out. Then when I came to, I just stayed there. I was having dysentery all the time. It was just terrible. There was blood all over the place.

*The Russians began transporting the survivors to their home countries. Because the German railroads were destroyed, the Dutch survivors were to go by train to the Black Sea and then by ship through the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to Holland. While still in poor health, Edith began the journey, which stopped for a time in Chernivtsi, Romania [now Ukraine], on the way to the Black Sea.*

I had with me about seven or eight dresses which I had received from the Yugoslav girl, who was in much better shape than I, because after all she wasn't Jewish so she wasn't beaten, she wasn't treated as badly. And she had gone after the Germans left and raided the barracks where they kept all the clothes that they took away from the Jews when they arrived. Everybody that could, did, but I couldn't. She had grabbed armfuls of clothes. Now when she got back to her bed, seeing that it was January and it was cold, she kept all the winter clothes, and the summer clothes that she had grabbed were no good to her, so she gave them to me. So I was thrilled with it. Although they were cotton dresses, I put one over the other. I was nothing but a skeleton, anyway. I weighed in at 59 pounds after liberation. So I put just one over the other, and I thought, well, six summer dresses will keep me just as warm as one winter dress.

When we got to Romania and it got warmer, I didn't need them all, and so I sold them on the marketplace. People came up to me and didn't speak my language and I didn't speak their language, so they came and they touched my clothes, and you talk with your hands, and I stripped off the dress—I had plenty underneath. And I got money for it, for which I bought—they sold a lot of yogurt and blueberries there. And I ate yogurt and blueberries, which I'm sure was very good for me. By that time I could digest food again. So this is how I got some money, by selling my clothes off my body.

One day we went to the marketplace in order to sell a dress of mine again so we could have some food. And I passed out. I completely collapsed and I was out. I was totally out. When I came to, I was covered with paper money. All the farmers in the market knew where we came from, because we had no hair, you know, we were shaven. And your hair doesn't grow back if you don't get anything to eat. Your hair just doesn't grow. So they knew where we came from, and I was covered with all this money. And my friend and another Dutch girl—there were three



Liberated women in Auschwitz, January 27, 1945



An Auschwitz warehouse overflowing with clothes taken from prisoners, January 1945

of us together—thought this was fantastic, and right away told me “We’re going back tomorrow and you’re going to faint again!”

But it didn’t work out that way, because a woman came up to me, very well dressed, and spoke to me in German, and she said, “Do you understand German?” And I said, “Yes, I do.” She said, “I am Jewish and I am Austrian, and I’m married to a Russian Jewish doctor here. And I think it would be better for you if you would be in a hospital bed.” Everybody knew in Chernivtsi where we were and who we were. She said, “Why don’t you come tonight for dinner?” And I couldn’t believe my ears. So the three of us went there, and I hadn’t sat at a table with a tablecloth and with a knife and a fork and regular food—I just couldn’t believe it. So they treated us very well, and it turned out that the Russian Jewish doctor was the head of the TB hospital there.

*The doctor confirmed the diagnosis of TB and Edith was treated in the hospital and regained strength. She left Romania on a train bound for Holland, this time traveling through Poland and Germany. In Berlin, Edith and her traveling companions were able to get from the Russian occupation zone to the American zone, and from there Edith finally arrived at the Dutch border.*

When I got to Holland, they gave me a hard time at the border, because this stupid man said to me, “Where are your papers showing that you are Dutch?” And I said, “Well, what do you expect? I don’t have any papers.” And so he started with “Well, then we can’t let you in.” I got so mad that I started swearing in Dutch till there was no end to it. And he said, “If you can swear in Dutch like that, you’ve gotta be Dutch.” And so that’s how I got back into Holland.

*Edith was reunited with her sister and successfully treated for TB. She learned that she could not emigrate to the U.S. until she had been free of TB for five years, so she decided to go to Israel. On the way, she met David Ross, who as a child had been sent from Germany to England through the Kindertransport program. They were married in 1949 in Israel and, after living in London for several years, they moved to the U.S. in 1953, settling in Delaware. They moved to Apex, North Carolina, in 1988. They have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oral testimony of Edith Ross, 1997, video, 2½ hrs. (USC Shoah Foundation) [youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA](https://youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA)
- Women in Auschwitz (classroom activity with readings, Yad Vashem) [www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/ceremonies/women-auschwitz.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/ceremonies/women-auschwitz.html)

Excerpted from the Shoah Foundation testimony of Edith Ross, 1997, from the archive of the USC [University of Southern California] Shoah Foundation, [youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA](https://youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA). For more information, see [sfi.usc.edu/](http://sfi.usc.edu/). © USC Shoah Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the USC Shoah Foundation. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Family photographs reproduced by permission of Edith Ross.



Edith and David Ross on their wedding day, Haifa, Israel, 1949



Edith Ross during her interview with the Shoah Foundation, Apex, NC, 1997



## LIBERATION ■ ABE SURVIVES A DEATH TRAIN

*Abram Piasek was 12 years old in 1940 when the SS entered his town of Bialobrzegi in Poland and killed or deported most Jewish residents. He was separated from his parents and sister, whom he never saw again. For two years he endured forced labor in a weapons factory in the Radom camp in Poland and then was sent via Auschwitz to the Vaihingen camp in Germany, where he repaired airfields cratered from Allied bombing raids. After several months he was transferred to the nearby Hessental camp to work on railroad maintenance. In spring 1945 as Allied troops approached, the prisoners who could walk were put on trains to be transported deeper into Germany.*

**B**efore the liberation, we were put on cattle cars. This has to be about two weeks before the liberation. And we had no idea where we were going. They put us on a train from the Hessental camp—a labor camp, which was about a few miles [from Vaihingen]—that was a real slaughterhouse. And they took us away. They loaded up the cattle cars, and we were going back and forth for a couple days, and we had no idea why we were going back and forth.

All of a sudden the train stopped. The train stopped because the American Air Force bombarded the locomotive. We couldn't get out from the cattle car because it was locked from the outside. Some people got out because their cattle cars were locked from the inside. So one guy was yelling "what's going on?" and he opened the cattle car, and as we opened up we saw the SS running away. They dropped their weapons, they were running away. And the people [camp inmates] from the Polish army, they picked up the weapons and started shooting the guards. I didn't see it, but I heard the shots. They were killing them.

I didn't realize I was going to be liberated. I was liberated instantly: we had no idea. Actually, we were supposed to end up in Dachau. That was the train to Dachau—that was the last stop. We stopped a few miles from Dachau. And at that time, we were liberated. They bombed the locomotive, and the army was coming fast. I was 17. When the Germans took me away from my home, I was 12. When I was liberated, I was 17.



Abe Piasek in 1946



Hessental airfield with craters from Allied bombing, 1945

We had no idea what we were going to do, so we sat on the crater where they had been bombing. And then I saw a guy coming out from a jeep, or a tank or a big truck, who was black. That's the first time I'd seen a black person, and I had no idea who they were. And of course at that time they were segregated, and so that's the first thing I saw.

Then we were running around wild, me and my friends. And we were actually starting to rob places in the town. We went into banks,

into jewelry stores. And I was looking for bread, but my friends were looking for jewelry. They sure enough got the jewelry, but I was not interested in the jewelry; I was interested in bread.

They stopped us—the MP [Military Police]—and they brought us to a camp, Feldafing, near Munich. It was run by UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Admn.]. We threw away our [prisoner] uniforms and got regular clothes. After that we were robbing the trains, really robbing the trains, because we were wild. We robbed the trains; we threw out the suitcases. Maybe about 10, 15 of us. You know, there was everything you can think of in the suitcases, but I still wasn't interested. I was interested in eating food.

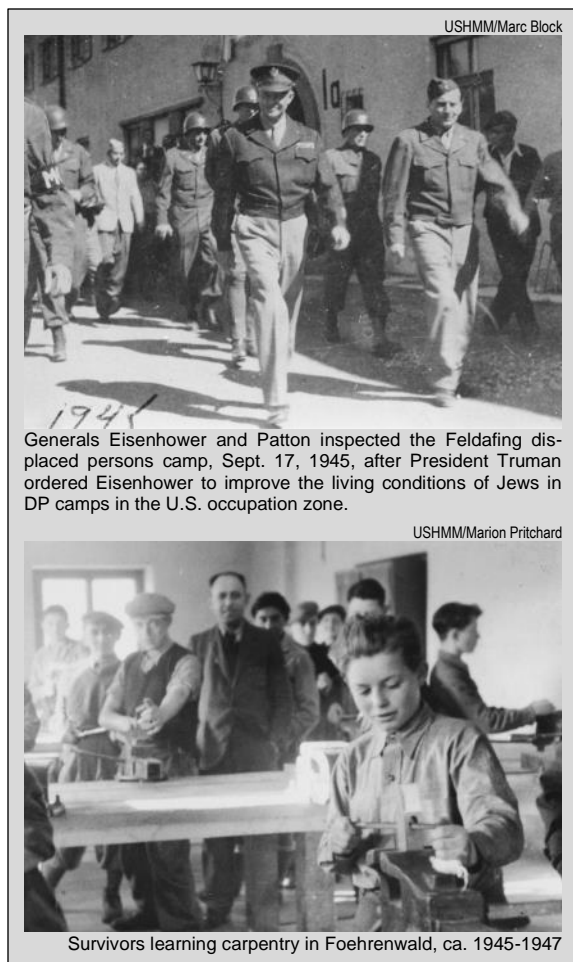
Then Patton and Eisenhower stopped us. Patton told the people from camp that if you don't stop robbing the train, he was going to put barbed wire around the camp. But the people didn't like that. So Eisenhower came, and they promised him that nobody would rob the trains again. And he told Patton not to put wire around it.

In a couple weeks, when we got used to the camp, they had all the teenagers line up outside the barracks. And they told us we were going to go to another camp, Foehrenwald. All the young people, I would say from 15 to 25, we were put in that camp.

I was there from 1945 till 1947. And meanwhile we were learning a trade. We were learning how to dance. And they brought in all the girls, you know, and romance was going on.

***We forgot that we had been in a [concentration] camp because they didn't let us remember, and I think that was good. . . . We were busy constantly, from morning till night, till we went to sleep. So we couldn't even think about what had actually happened to us.***

busy constantly, from morning till night, till we went to sleep. So we couldn't even think about what had actually happened to us. Our minds were in left field, because nobody talked about it. Nobody. For so many years to be locked up—didn't think about it.



I was learning to be a carpenter. But I really wasn't—I didn't care for it. But anyway, we went to school. We were learning Hebrew. The teachers were Israelis, the Israeli soldiers, from the Palmach.\* And we were learning, and the food was good, and we were gaining weight, and a lot of the people, the elderly people, got married. And two years, from 1945 to 1947, the camp almost doubled in population, with babies being born.

We forgot that we had been in a [concentration] camp because they didn't let us remember, and I think that was good. They were really trying to get the kids away from what they went through. We were

\* The Palmach was the elite brigade of Jewish soldiers fighting for the establishment of the state of Israel, which was created in May 1948.



They asked us who wants to go to Israel. That was in '46. A lot of people went to Israel. And I decided, well, I wanted to come to the United States. I remember as a kid, my grandmother received packages from New York, in the thirties when I must have been five, six, seven years old. And I remembered her name. So I went to the consulate and I told him that I have some relative, but the relative I picked—must have been about a thousand of them in the book—so I have no idea who they were. So I closed my eyes. I said this is the one, I just put my finger on it. And two months later it came back. And he said, “Mr. Piasek, you picked the wrong people.” And I said, “Why?” “They’re not even Jewish!” So they decided I wasn’t going. And, well, I didn’t give up. And a few months later they decided—the Americans probably decided, I assume so—that the teenagers who wanted to go to the United States should register, and I was picked to register to come to the United States.

*With about 50 other survivors from Foehrenwald, Abe boarded a ship in Bremerhaven, Germany, and on August 3, 1947, arrived in New York City.*

They put me in a hotel with all the people who came with me, the young kids. And we were there for about two weeks—must have been about 300 or 400 of us from all the camps around the Munich district, from Bavaria. They gave us five dollars. At that time five dollars was a lot of money.

Then after a few weeks some other kids were coming, so they told us we had to decide where we want to go. And we knew very little. They asked me, “Where do you want to go? You have two choices, Connecticut or California.” I said, “How far is California?” They said, “2000 miles.” “How far is Connecticut?” “100 miles.” So I said Connecticut.

But I had nobody there. When I came there, they put me into a lady’s [home] who was taking in the displaced persons. She was Jewish, and she got paid for it. So five of us were staying in her home. So we stayed over there for, I would say, for about a year. And it was nice. I learned a trade, I went to school. And over here, I had to find a job. So I found a job, and I was working in a coat factory, in Manchester, Connecticut.

I was a presser. I was making, I think, twenty cents or thirty cents a coat. And then they put me in another home. Their name was Waxman, in Hartford, Connecticut. And they had two boys my age. I was there for about eight, nine, months, and I worked there at the laundry. And I still went to school, night school, and daytime I was working, so I saved up a few dollars.

And then I met Shirley through a friend of mine. He went out with another girl, and she went along with them. So he was talking to her, and I said, “Whom are you talking to?” He said, “Her

GOOD FOR ONE JOURNEY ONLY  
**CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY IN LIEU OF PASSPORT**  
 AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL, MUNICH, GERMANY  
 Date April 28th, 1947

1. This is to certify that **ABRAHAM PIASEK** name in full, born at \_\_\_\_\_, born at \_\_\_\_\_, on \_\_\_\_\_ 1928, male, single, intends to immigrate to USA.

2. He ~~will~~ be accompanied by **nobody of his own family**

3. His ~~present~~ occupation is **no occupation**

4. DESCRIPTION  
 Height **5** ft. **6** in.  
 Hair **black** Eyes **brown**  
 Distinguishing marks or features: **none**

5. He (she) solemnly declares that he has never committed nor has he been convicted of any crime except as follows \_\_\_\_\_

6. He is unable to produce birth certificate. **unable to produce birth certificate for the following reason(s): unable to contact proper authorities**

I hereby certify that the above are true facts, proper photograph and description of myself.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 28th day of April 1947.

*Paula Ellman* (Signature of applicant)  
**ABRAHAM PIASEK**

*Shirley* (Signature of consul)  
**SHIRLEY**

Fee No. **10526**  
 equal to 20. Marks

Abe's ID issued by the U.S. consulate to substitute for his birth certificate. Most Holocaust survivors had none of their official documents, such as birth certificates, identification cards, etc., and had no way to get copies.

- 2. He will be accompanied by: nobody of his own family.
- 6. He is unable to produce birth certificate for the following reasons(s): unable to contact proper authorities.



Shirley and Abe with their children at the Statue of Liberty, 1956

name is Shirley.” I said, “Can I talk to her?” And he said, “Sure.” So I talked to her and made a date. And we went out to a hamburger place—I didn’t have any money, very little. And I didn’t like her at the beginning. When I came home, another guy said, “How is she?” I said, “She’s ok.” “Do you like her?” I said, “No.” “Can I have her telephone number?” I said, “No, I’m going to take her out once more.” So I did, and from then on, it’s history. I came in ’47 and in ’49 I was married.

When I got married, I worked in a few jobs. Shirley’s father was a carpenter, so I helped put in the carpets, put in linoleum. Then I joined the National Guard, and then I joined the army. In ’49 there was a depression here—very hard to find a job, so I joined the army. Then Shirley got pregnant and we had a baby, and that’s how I got out from the army. From 1950 to 1955 I was in the reserves.

After that, I went to get a bakery job, because my wife’s sister’s friend’s friend knew the owner from the bakery. So I got a job right away. And since then, I’m still baking.

I never talked about it until, I would say—of course, my wife knew, a lot of people knew that I was a displaced person. But we never got in a discussion about what happened until the ’80s. That’s the first time I opened up. I was interviewed by Spielberg.\* And then they said, you have to speak in schools, to tell your story. So I did. So I started to talk about it. Very difficult.

*Abe and Shirley have two children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandson. They moved to California in 1975 and later to Florida, as Abe continued his profession as a baker. In 2009 they moved to Raleigh to be near a daughter. Abe continues to speak to students and other groups in North Carolina about his Holocaust experience.*



Abe Piasek (right) with camp liberator George Rose and Mr. Rose’s wife, April 29, 2015, at the North Carolina General Assembly remembrance of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dachau concentration camp

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- “Holocaust survivor Abe Piasek discusses the time he spent as a prisoner,” *The Daily Reflector*, Greenville, NC, April 29, 2016.  
[www.reflector.com/News/2016/04/29/Holocaust-survivor-details-harrowing-experiences.html](http://www.reflector.com/News/2016/04/29/Holocaust-survivor-details-harrowing-experiences.html)
- Displaced Persons camps (USHMM)
  - ◆ Feldafing [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/feldafing-displaced-persons-camp](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/feldafing-displaced-persons-camp)
  - ◆ Foehrenwald [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/foehrenwald-displaced-persons-camp](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/foehrenwald-displaced-persons-camp)

Adapted from the interview of Abe Piasek by Linda Scher and Larry Katzin, Raleigh, NC, July 20, 2015; reproduced by permission of Abe Piasek. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photographs of Mr. Piasek courtesy of Mr. Piasek. 2015 photograph of Mr. Piasek courtesy of Marianne Wason.

\* Steven Spielberg, the Hollywood film producer, founded the Shoah Foundation in 1994 (now at the University of Southern California) after working with Holocaust survivors while filming *Schindler’s List*. The Foundation has recorded interviews with over 55,000 Holocaust survivors, including Abe Piasek, who was interviewed in 1995.

## LIBERATION ■ ZEV MEETS HIS LIBERATORS

*Zev Harel was born in 1930 in Kis-Sikarlo, Hungary (now Borgou, Romania). In March 1944, when he was 14, he and his family were sent to Auschwitz, where he avoided death in the gas chamber by saying he was older. Soon he was sent with his older brother to the Ebensee labor camp in Austria. Separated from his brother, Zev endured hard labor until liberation on May 6, 1945, by the U.S. Third Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, whose reunions Zev has attended.*

**T**rying to think back on those days and recalling the thoughts and feelings of then, two memories that I have—the finish line, the expectation that I'll get there, and not so much the reasons why. Other than the sense of "keep on going" because the finish line is there and you'll get there, you'll get through, and what it is that will be there. And wanting to get back and to see what happened to my father and mother and to see them again.

*On his last weeks before liberation.* Our work detail [in a quarry near Ebensee] was across the street from a place called the Marian Guest House. While we were working there—when the SS guards were not nearby—we had all kinds of ways of supporting one another. And we had what I call rescue fantasies: "When this is over, I'll do this and this." Some of the other people would say "the first meal that I will have my wife cook for me will be this and this." Or "the first food that I eat will be this and this." And my fantasy was "when I'm done with this, I will go into that restaurant and order a meal, and not only eat it, but I'll pay for it." That was one of my rescue fantasies.

The person who owned the quarry that I worked at, he also had horses and cows and the like. And so once every week one of the SS guards would take me there to do work that needed to be done in the barn. The owner had a daughter who was older than me—she was probably about 17 or 18 years old—and she would bring a nice plate and give it to the SS officer so that he could have his meal. But, bless her heart, she would sneak whatever she could, a piece of bread or something that she could bring in and just set there in the barn for me to have to eat. So I appreciated it to this day, and when I had a chance to go back, I personally thanked her for that. [See p. 150.]

*In the last days before liberation, Zev was assigned to the crematorium detail. On May 5, 1945, as the U.S. Army approached, the SS guards fled and the Americans entered the camp the next day.*

Already there were the beginning rumors that the American soldiers are not far away, that the Russians are closing in, that the finish line is getting closer and closer. But what we feared is that the Germans will not want anyone who has been part of knowing how they were



Zev Harel (circled) stands with other Ebensee survivors in this famous photograph taken by a U.S. army photographer.

USHMM/Arnold Samuelson; Felix Uhrinek



Survivors gather in the main square of Ebensee after liberation.



Survivors leave Ebensee by cart and on foot.

burning the bodies to be around to tell about it. So I remember the last day in camp that a Russian guy and I who were on the same work detail, that we decided that we'll just hide, and so we hid under an old barrack. We were expecting the Germans to come—it was a dumb thing to do, in retrospect—we were expecting the Germans to come with the dogs to sniff us out—but it was too late already. We had done this dumb thing, just on the spur of the moment.

And then we hear noise and this guy, who was one of the [imprisoned] Russian soldiers, crawls out and looks in and comes back and says, "I can't believe it, the gate is open, and there isn't anyone around." So I came out, and we are going toward the gate, and the gate is open, and so with the flow of people out of the gate—and that's my liberation.

The American soldiers arrived and liberated us. I learned in retrospect that that morning, when the German soldiers were aware that the Americans are nearby, they handed over the guarding to some civil militia. A minute or two after the Germans departed, they just left their posts, and so people just started streaming out of camp. What I recall of that day is just a mass of people walking out and being part of the people that walked. I wanted to get away from Ebensee as far as I could. That's the sensation that I remember carrying with me. I can't really recall any triumphant joy, expressions of joy or any of that thing. It took about two or three days to sink in that we are liberated, for me.

U.S. National Archives



African American soldiers of the 666th Quartermaster Truck Company, 82nd Airborne Division, in Europe, 1945

As we were walking out of the camp, the last thing that I remember is that I fell into a roadside ditch. I had typhoid. So I was in the ditch—not knowing much about what was happening—and there are two or three African American young men in this group. And African American soldiers were not allowed to fight because they were discriminated against. They were in the support units. So a young African American member of that support unit picked me up from the ditch—now try to imagine that—something in the roadside ditch, he picked me up, drove me to the nearby town where he knew that there was a hospital—Linz—which was about ten miles from our camp—took me to the hospital and asked the nurses

to nurse me back to life. So you can have a sense that I am very proud to be an American. I owe my life to the brave American soldiers. And had it not been for those that fought against the Nazis and brought about the defeat of the Nazis—had it not been for that concerned

discriminated-against young African American man that took me from the roadside ditch and took me to the hospital for me to be brought back to life, I would not be standing here and sharing with you.

***I asked him [Sen. John Glenn] to help me find that young man that I owe my life to. But I have not been successful.***

I tried to find that young man because I wanted personally to have an opportunity to thank him. Over the years I got to know Senator John Glenn who chaired the Senate Special Committee on Aging, and he's also a retired colonel. So I asked him to help me find that young man that I owe my life to. But I have not been successful.



Zev's Israeli passport photo, 1952

After the liberation, my brother, then 19, went to a youth village that had been set up for young survivors. When I recovered and left the hospital, I spent a short time—about three weeks—working with the Russian military in Austria. I was comfortable using Russian and all the Slavic languages, but I wanted to go “home,” so I walked away and went back to the village where I’d grown up. I got home [in January 1946] and fortunately my brother also survived, and the two of us figured out that we didn’t want to stay in the place where we grew up, so we left everything and went back to Germany and I spent time in a displaced persons camp [Bergen-Belsen]. And there I applied for coming to the United States. In order to come to the U.S., someone who wanted to come from another country had to get permission. I had an uncle who agreed to sponsor me and send me papers, but I was waiting and waiting there for the State Dept. to agree and process the papers. Since I picked up languages very easily, during the year I was in camp I learned to speak Russian, to speak

Polish, to speak the various languages. So after spending time and helping the members of the Palestine Jewish Brigade smuggle persons who wanted to go to Palestine, they rewarded me by having me replace one of the Brigade soldiers, and I got to then-Palestine that way. When I got to then-Palestine [July 1946], I was 16 years old. Again I decided to pretend that I was older. I pretended to be 18 years old. I volunteered to serve in the then-Israeli military and I take pride in the fact that I succeeded in contributing to the establishment of the state of Israel.

*Zev completed high school and college in Israel and came to the U.S. in 1965 for graduate studies at the University of Michigan, where he met his wife Bernice. After completing his Ph.D. in social work at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, he began a long career as a professor of social work at Cleveland State University.*

In May 1995, at the 50th anniversary of liberation, World War II veterans were invited to attend the annual Holocaust commemoration in Cleveland, Ohio, sponsored by the Kol Israel Foundation. Among the attendees was Captain Carl Delau. He was the commanding officer of the 3rd Cavalry squadron that liberated Ebensee camp. We enjoyed meeting each other after the commemoration.



Zev with members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron at its 2005 reunion

Following the event, we were invited to attend the 3rd Cavalry reunions and did so for several years. They were held in Detroit, Michigan, or Chicago, Illinois. These reunions provided opportunities for the World War II veterans to recall and share their experiences and observations about the war years. It was very special for me to be able to thank in person the veterans who saved my life. In addition, I could highlight the historical significance of their service and the defeat of Nazi Germany. It was also heartwarming to see that it meant something to them to meet the people they had saved and to see that they had a good life. I continued to meet in person with Capt. Carl Delau, who resided in Amherst, Ohio, until he passed away in 2005.

*Zev retired in 2009, and in 2013 he and Bernice moved to Greensboro, North Carolina. Dr. Harel makes presentations on his Holocaust experience to schools and public groups across the state.*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oral testimony of Zev Harel, 1984, video, 2½ hrs. (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)  
collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn505019
- Oral testimony of Zev Harel, 1996, video (USC Shoah Foundation) Access video via [sfi.usc.edu/vha](http://sfi.usc.edu/vha).
- Oral testimony of Zev Harel, 2005, video, 45 min., (USHMM)  
collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn78755
- “70 years after liberation, a North Carolina Holocaust survivor tells his story,” audio, 19:12, *The State of Things*, March 27, 2015 (WUNC-FM)  
[www.wunc.org/post/70-years-after-liberation-north-carolina-holocaust-survivor-tells-his-story](http://www.wunc.org/post/70-years-after-liberation-north-carolina-holocaust-survivor-tells-his-story)
- Video: Liberation of Ebensee, May 1945, 2:21 (USHMM) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-ebensee-camp](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/liberation-of-ebensee-camp)
- The Liberation of the Ebensee Concentration Camp (U.S. Army Center of Military History)  
[history.army.mil/news/2015/150500a\\_ebensee.html](http://history.army.mil/news/2015/150500a_ebensee.html)

Narrative adapted from: (1) Zev Harel, interview by the Natl. Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section, 23 July 1984; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of the Natl. Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section; (2) Zev Harel, presentation at Congregation Shaarey Tikvah, Beachwood, Ohio, 12 April 2005; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of Congregation Shaarey Tikvah; (3) “Mythbuster: Zev Harel, Educator and Gerontologist,” Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 July 2010, [www.benrose.org/mythbusters/MB\\_Harel.cfm](http://www.benrose.org/mythbusters/MB_Harel.cfm); (4) Email communication with Dr. Harel, 18 Sept. 2016. Reproduced by permission of Dr. Harel. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photographs of Dr. Harel courtesy of Dr. Harel. Photograph of Dr. and Mrs. Harel courtesy of Marianne Wason.



Bernice and Zev Harel, 2016. Zev wears the cap of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry squadron that liberated Ebensee, and he holds a plaque displaying an article on his reunion in 1981 with the woman who slipped him food while he was in Ebensee. In the plaque photo is Carl Delau of Cleveland who helped feed liberated prisoners in the camp.

**Diane Suchetka, “Forty years later, a reunion,” *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, Ohio, May 4, 2005** [excerpts].

[Dr. Harel] drove to Ebensee to see the memorial there. But first, he walked to the guest house across the street. “Table for one,” Zev told the hostess, his concentration camp fantasy finally coming true.

He sat down and read the menu, decided on the wiener schnitzel, looked up to find the waitress. Instead his eyes met a familiar face. “Will you join me?” Zev asked. The woman sat down in the chair across from Zev.

“Do you remember me?” She looked more closely. “I was the boy who cleaned the stalls during the war.”

The dark-haired girl who smuggled food to him, who helped keep him alive, was grown now and running her father’s guesthouse. She insisted on treating Zev to dinner, but he refused.

When the check came, he paid, just the way he’d dreamed as a prisoner 40 years before. . . .

Zev won’t stop looking, though, for the man who saved him—a pile of skin and bones in a dirty cloth sack—from that ditch at Ebensee. He wants to thank him before it’s too late. He wants to thank him, too.