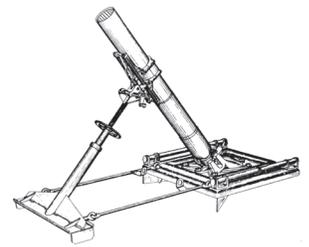


MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION



L. Lew Henry



When Carol Smith, daughter of Robert W. Johnston, approached me about her story of her fathers photos of Dachau, I knew it was important to tell and decided to include some of my father's photos as well . . . especially those of Dachau on this page because the photos inside graphically depict what humans can do to one another when an evil ideology convinces them that others are sub-human.

Man's inhumanity to man was documented at Dachau



*Robert W. Johnston
and Carol Johnston Smith*

*Editor's note: The 83rd
Chemical Mortar Battalion
participated in the liberation of*

Dachau. While C Company is given credit for being there, a few men from other companies were also there.

As I was growing up, I knew my father was in a war but did not know any details. My father, Robert W. Johnston never ever spoke of the war. Being that I was a numbers "geek" like my Father, I never paid attention to history. Later in my life after I was out of

school and living on my own, my father came to me and gave me a few pictures and said, "No one has ever seen these, not even your mother. I won't talk about it. When you are older, you decide what you want to do with them." I said OK. I took them and locked them away. Years later when I was married, my husband and I were putting personal papers

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A message from our president



Sandy Babich—

I truly hope with all of my heart that you are all well through this new way of life. When writing my last column, I never thought we would still all be enduring this situation. Blessings to Marsha for keeping us all in touch with each other.

Every day brings new challenges. Life is not easy, but having a support system makes life that much easier during these current days and being a support system even in a small way for others is a blessing to them. This special group that is reading this, I believe are the kindest and most caring people. I miss you all.

It is a challenge for everyone at every age for different reasons. I have lived on my street since I was five, as I was blessed to live next door to my parents for many years. Our kids would go next door to see what Nana cooked or baked and could go from kitchen door to kitchen door in PJs and in the freezing Winter as my Dad would shovel a path in the backyard from house to house. Now on this street, over half of the same people live here and now we do a daily text to make sure everyone is okay and see if there are any needs. My church community is unreal and we have online services. It has been one year since Ron passed and special prayers were said at the end of the service this past Sunday.

I hope we are all blessed with compassionate and kind people. My very young grandchildren

know that there are “germs” and they could not be with Nanny for a while although they live twelve minutes away. It seems we are all finding the strength and courage that lies within us to make each day as good as we can.

You are in my prayers daily and I am always so thankful for our Veterans that are with us now and those in our memories. There is a children’s choir that sing so beautifully, “Here’s to the ones that we got, cheers to the ones we wish you were here, but you are not. Close to the ones here today and close to the ones that we lost on the way.”

As I was ending this column, a shadow from my French doors behind me of a butterfly is flying by the window. My Dad lived across the street from the church. At his funeral, they brought him out and as the Army Veterans were honoring him, the butterfly hovered over him. I think he is saying hi to all of you. :)

*With Gratitude
to our
Generous Donors*

*Because we are no longer
having reunions and raising
funds through banquet
auctions, we depend on
donations to continue
printing and mailing
Muzzleblasts.*

*Many of you have donated
to this newsletter in the past
and we are grateful. In this
issue, we extend heartfelt
gratitude to
Dr. John Beasley
Mrs Clovis Birdwell
in honor of her husband
Carol Smith
Joyce Thompson*



MUZZLEBLASTS

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Joel Kveskin
Sam Kveskin
Andrew C. Leach
Carol Smith**

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in our lock box and he saw the envelope. I told him where they



Robert W. Johnstn

came from. After he looked at them, he said, "For what your father and others went thru in the war, these are Holocaust photos and we should find out what to do with them."

After my father and then my Mother passed away I started to go thru stacks of papers, etc. I found a file that had letters telling my father about the reunions, etc. I never knew about them. If I had I would have tried to get there. I then did some research on some of the names and was able



to find info on Mr. Lee Steedle. I contacted him asking about this info and found out that he served with my father. He told me about the newsletter and also about the book "Bastard Battalion". I am so honored to have this book now.

Being an avid reader, I am always at our local library for events and one time a man who worked for Intelligence during war time spoke.



Robert W. Johnstn

Aftwards I spoke to him and mentioned the photos. He said he would like to see them and he could tell me where they were from. We set up a meeting and as soon

as he looked at them, he said these are from Dachau. I researched it and read about it. I asked him what I should do with them. He said if it was him, he would have

them authenticated by the Holocaust Museum and then donate them. He said this was real life that all these brave men went thru and shouldn't be locked away. The world needs to see them. So we started the process.

The photos were authenticated. I then donated them to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC in memory of my father — Robert W. Johnston.

About Dachau

Marsha Henry Goff

Dachau was Hitler's first labor/death camp — established in 1933 shortly after Hitler took power — to house his political enemies, primarily German Communists and Social Democrats. Soon those groups were joined by others the



L. Lew Henry

Nazis considered undesirable: Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and repeat

criminals. But by 1938, Jews were the majority of prisoners held there. Prisoners were first used to construct and expand the camp and later to work on German armaments



L. Lew Henry

production. Dachau served as the training center for SS concentration camp guards and was the model for the 19 concentration camps and multiple subcamps which followed.

In addition to forced labor, prisoners at Dachau were used as human guinea pigs in medical experiments: testing the effects of freezing and atmospheric pressure on prisoners; treating them with experimental drugs after infecting them with malaria and tuberculosis; testing on them methods to make seawater potable or to halt excessive bleeding. Such experiments crippled or killed hundreds of prisoners. When the prisoners became too ill or weak to work, they were transported to extermination camps.

With the Allied advance in

the spring of 1945, Nazis moved prisoners from concentration camps near the front to Dachau causing overcrowding and typhus epidemics. On April 27, about 7,000 mostly Jewish prisoners were forced to march from Dachau to Tegernsee, far to the south. Many SS guards fled the camp the next day and the day after that, the camp was liberated by units of the 45th Infantry after a short battle with the remaining guards.

When nearing the camp, Americans found more than 30 boxcars filled with decomposing bodies. There were more bodies inside the camp along with 30,000 survivors, most of whom were severely emaciated. American troops were so angered by



L. Lew Henry

what they found at Dachau that they executed by machine-gun approximately 30 SS guards. Later, German citizens of Dachau were forced to bury the 9,000 dead prisoners found in the camp.

My father also brought home photos he took at Dachau. I have placed a few of

them here. He said the German guards were forced to load bodies while dressed in the striped uniforms the prisoners wore. With a wife and four daughters, Dad learned to accept the smells of various cosmetics and perfumes around the house, but the one odor he couldn't abide was that of nail polish remover. He said it reminded him of the smell of Dachau.

Editor's note: General Eisenhower ordered that pictures be taken of the atrocities that took place in German concentration camps, saying that eventually some would claim it did not happen. He was right in his insistence to document with photos the extent of man's inhumanity to man..



The Holocaust Museum is temporarily closed due to the pandemic. Its normal visiting hours are 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. every day except Yom Kippur and Christmas Day. Admission is free, however timed admission free tickets are required from March 1 to August 31.

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Four accounts of the Liberation of Dachau as told in Mark Freedom Paid

William C. Ford—

On April 29th we were advancing toward Munich after taking a number of smaller towns. On that day, the 157th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Division, with our "C" Company in support, reached the Dachau Prison Camp. Staff/Sergeant Robert S. White and his squad of the 157th were the first troops to open the prison gate and disarm the SS guards. I did not go inside the prison myself, but only watched just outside the gate.

only skin, stretched over their bones. Some were too weak to walk out the gate to freedom. It was a terrible sight to see

Andrew C. Leach—

The most pathetic thing of all: we liberated a large concentration camp near Munich (Dachau), and it was unbelievable to see the condition these people were in. They were walking skeletons. They had no food, and very little clothing, which was tattering about them.

They said they hadn't had anything to eat in about eight days. We sat down in groups, as we were in position firing on the next town. And when we got time we took down our own rations, built fires, and cooked them for these people. They ate it and told some awful weird stories in the meantime. When they had finished, they thanked us and wobbled off toward the road which was about a hundred yards away. Two of them fell dead by the time they reached the road.

Sam Kweskin—

I got to the edge of the railroad line, across the road from the walled entrance to the Dachau camp. The "40&8" boxcar touching the concrete pylon at the end of the rail tracks held

gray and blue prison uniforms.

At the corner of the parallel street on which we stopped our jeep were two "street signs." One of these, meticulously carved, painted, and varnished, showed two SS guards holding a Semitic-looking character, his feet off the ground. The other sign said "To the SS Barracks."

I asked an elderly woman whose house was just across the road from the camp, its doorway facing the boxcars, if — since 1933 — she had seen any people removed from the train and marched into the gate. To all my questions, she answered, "I know nothing!"

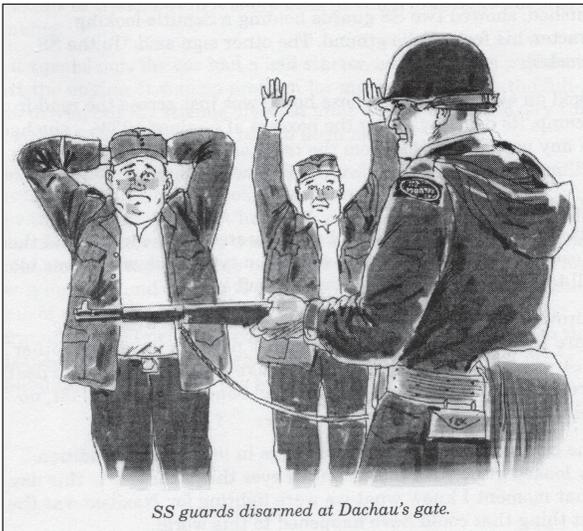
Dale C. Blank—

We three EX-PRISONERS rode our liberated bikes awhile, and then at Regensburg liberated a very small van-type truck which was too small to put our bikes in, so they were left behind.

We drove to Dachau and couldn't believe what we were seeing. Picture train flatcars with human bodies piled on top of each other like cordwood. These people all looked like they had starved to death. There was nothing to them but skin and bones, no flesh, no fat, no nothing.

In the camp, the rest of the people were in little better condition. They looked at us with those sunken eyes that I can see to this day. At that moment I knew what we were fighting for:

— *Continued on page 6*



SS guards disarmed at Dachau's gate.

Sam Kweskin illustration in Mark Freedom Paid

Staff/Sergeant White's rifle squad took the SS guards' weapons and stacked them by the gate. A camp prisoner walked over, picked up one of the stacked weapons, and fired on the SS, wounding one of them. Just one, before he was disarmed.

We moved closer to the prison gate and saw how very poor and sick some of the prisoners were. Some looked like

Continued from page 5 —

Nazism was the worst thing that could have happened to this world.

Shortly before we arrived at Dachau, American MPs brought two SS troopers to the camp. The prisoners somehow gained possession of the two SS, and beat them nearly to death. The MPs put the SS out of their misery with bullets to the head. The smell of the place was death itself.

These prisoners had been used to work in the factories around the town of Dachau, yet the German people in the town said they knew nothing about the concentration camp, although it was right there for all to see. If you wanted to know what Hell was like, camps like those all over Germany and the occupied countries were the places to visit.

The American Army should have destroyed every city and all the people in them that had one of these camps.

While driving around the town of Dachau, we saw a civilian car going down the road, and we followed it to its destination, which was a private home. After he stopped, the German proceeded to remove a washing machine from the car. This guy had been out scavenging.

We three GIs talked it over and decided that a car would be more comfortable and suit our free status better than the truck, so we persuaded the German to trade us vehicles. He was somewhat reluctant to trade, but in a short time he came around to our way of thinking.

As it turned out, the car had a bad starter and had to be pushed to start the engine. It was no problem for me because

I was the full-time driver, but my friends objected after awhile because every time we stopped the engine they had to push again.

One of the guys suggested we go back and get our truck, so we did just that. But this time I took the car and my friends took the truck. Now the German really got hostile, but it did him no good, after all we were the victors in this war and we knew that we deserved the spoils. So after explaining to him that we may do him some harm, he saw it our way and went into his house without further outbursts. None of us were in any mood to take any crap from any of the Germans in the town of Dachau, after we saw what they did to those prisoners. Anyhow we thought that maybe this was a start of his rehabilitation to re-enter the human race.

Why a Muzzleblasts issue about Dachau?

I will admit that I had reservations about making this an all-Dachau issue, but then I thought that our husbands, fathers, grandfathers, uncles and other relatives endured seeing and smelling the atrocities that occurred in the concentration/labor/death camps they liberated. Reading and viewing pictures of Dachau isn't easy, but it is a lot easier than encountering it in person.

I can understand why American liberators blamed the civilian residents of the towns where these camps were, but I also understand the words of my late friend Rosemarie, who was

proud to become a naturalized American citizen from Germany. She was raised in Bavaria and came to America as an adult with children of her own. Her father was in the German army and served on the Russian front. Rosemarie's sole recollection of him was that he was an invalid and died while she was still a young child. She loved her father and always kept the only picture she had of him — in his German army uniform — on her mantle. She once talked to me about the camps throughout Germany: "Of course the civilians in the towns knew what was going on in the camps, but what could they *do*?"

Contrast the camps in Germany with the German prisoner of war camp that was located in my city of Lawrence, Kansas, which housed 300 POWs. Technically, you might say it was a work camp, but the inmates were well fed and their medical needs were cared for. Kansas had several POW camps throughout the state and inmates were used primarily as agricultural workers filling a critical need because so much of the American labor force was in uniform. Many of them worked on the farms around Lawrence, especially

— Continued on page 11

**Our gratitude to
Joel Kweskin for his gift
of Sam Kweskin's
"Let Me Tell You A
Story" illustrated book
about his wartime
experiences with the
83rd CMB**



Sam Kweskin

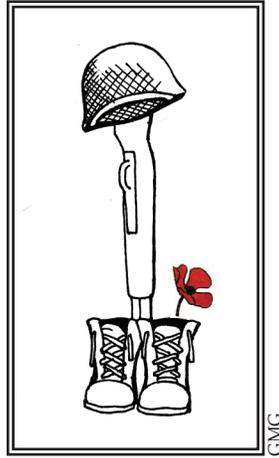
Joel thought the book would be a wonderful resource for Muzzleblast articles and indeed it will be. Eventually, it will be given to the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth in memory of its author who wrote this about it in July 1994:

What follows is not a chronicle of glory or heroism or philosophical musings.

It is only a story set within a greater story, a compiling of incidents in a soldier's service. It came in the most turbulent and tragic period of the 20th Century. It was known as the Second World War.

As such, this story is only about one person in 14 million

Day is Done



Sleep soldiers! Still in honored rest your truth and valor wearing. The bravest are the tenderest. The loving are the daring.
— Bayard Taylor

who served in the American armed forces. But in almost fifty years I may be allowed to have forgotten some occasions, or facts, or overlooked or not felt worthy some other memories.

Even as I write, some anecdotes not included come to the fore, but no editor beating a path to my door I have to rely upon myself to edit where need be.

The accounting of those 34 months perhaps serves a couple of purposes: it will, I hope, provide some historical insight into the life of a common soldier, circa 1943-1945, and it may exorcise the slightly grey cloud that many of us have hoped to dissipate.



Continued from page 10 —

potato farms. Some worked in the canning factory and one, an architect, was said to have helped on the design of Danforth Chapel on the University of Kansas campus. Many other prisoners worked on its construction.

After the war when they were repatriated, some kept in touch with the farmers for whom they worked. Willie O. Jaegar, a 19-year-old German soldier captured in France wrote a letter to our city government in 1991 which was published in our local newspaper: "I want to express my thanks to all the Americans who were kind to us, who didn't treat us as enemies or Nazi criminals, but as humans," Jaegar wrote in the letter. "In the long run, this was a much better way to make us friends of the Americans, working better than any re-education."

Collectively, Americans have always been fair-minded people and, while our country is not perfect, it far exceeds what exists elsewhere. If the situation here is as bad as a vocal minority contend, why do so many people from other countries want to immigrate and become citizens here?

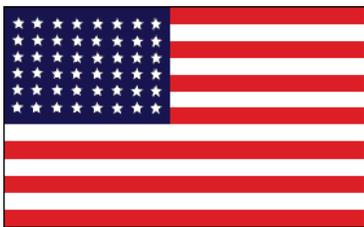
I regret the violence that we are currently witnessing in the streets of so many large American cities. Nothing, absolutely, nothing, is served by destructive riots. Not one life is saved or bettered by breaking windows in Mom and Pop businesses, tearing down statues, overturning and burning police and other vehicles.

My view is that America deserves better than that. That's my opinion. Feel free to express yours by writing to me. —MHG

83rd CMB Veterans Association
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Wartime and later photos of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion



The flag under which they fought



Robert W. Johnston



L. Lew Henry



William C. Ford
scanned from Terry Lowry's book
Bastard Battalion



Dale C. Blank



Andrew C. Leach

The book pictured below was written by men of the 83rd CMB, edited by Lee Steedle and illustrated by Sam Kweskin. Used paperback books of MFP are available on Amazon from \$4.59 to \$95.

