



INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST

REMEMBRANCE DAY January 27th, 2025

Every January, we remember the victims of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the systematic persecution by the Nazi regime to murder six million Jews, along with countless other targeted groups, during World War II. This month we investigate the role that aviation played in the liberation of Europe from Nazi control.



Aerial photo of Auschwitz-Birkenau - Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Aviators Revealed the Horrors of the Holocaust

Flying an aerial reconnaissance mission to photograph chemical factories, members of the 15th Army Air Force took this photograph of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1944. Photos like these would prove crucial as evidence of the war crimes committed by the Nazis and their accomplices.

What is a Liberator?

Someone who sets another free from captivity or oppression.

The Role of Aviation

In the final years of World War II, Allied forces encountered the tragic realities of the Holocaust while liberating numerous concentration camps across Europe. Troops from the United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and other nations significantly contributed to revealing the horrific crimes that took place. Pilots from these countries were able to uncover and document the atrocities through aerial surveillance. As the war came to an end, many soldiers saw the camps firsthand and recorded their experiences to ensure the horrors would never be forgotten.



The British RAF named the B-24 bomber the "Liberator" for the role it was intended to play in the war, liberating Europe from Nazi control.



82nd Airborne Division Patch

101st Airborne Division Patch



Airborne Liberators

Among the 36 U.S. Army Divisions designated as "Liberation Units," two were Airborne Divisions. The 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division are credited with the liberation of Wöbbelin Camp and Dachau Camp respectively.

Turning Tragedy Into a Life of Service After Liberation

Harry Pawlik was 10 years old when he was separated from his family during Germany's invasion of Poland. He was sent to Mauthausen concentration camp and later to a camp in Belgium. He was liberated by General Patton's 3rd Army four years later in the winter of 1944. At 14, he fought alongside U.S. forces during the Battle of the Bulge. After the War, Pawlik sought a new life in America. He arrived in New York City at age 17 with only \$120. He graduated high school, attended college, and earned the Gen. Hap Arnold Silver Medal as the top Junior Air Force ROTC cadet. Pawlik was commissioned into the U.S. Air Force, flew various aircraft, and retired as a Lt. Colonel, expressing deep gratitude for the freedom and opportunities he received.



Lt. Col. Harry Pawlik - photo courtesy of the United States Air Force