

*Darling*  
This was written by a soldier in this Division.  
It's the same camp that I wrote you about.  
Love, *Leg*

This is a tale that defies the telling. It is a story of the unbelievable, yet every word is true. It begins as all such stories do: -- "Once upon a time....."

All along the road there we had come upon them, all of them hurrying along aimlessly on the way to nowhere yet taking time to wave a cheery greeting with weary leadened arms, to salute, or to cry a weak shout of greeting. We thought nothing of it. This was a familiar scene, one we had seen time and time again. At last the road wound its way around and up the wooded mountainside. Higher and higher we made our way and at last broke our way into the clear and thus came our first view of the MAUTHAUSEN Concentration Camp. At first we could see only the walls of the institution, walls not unlike those surrounding Sing Sing or any other penitentiary over on our side of the world. The guards called our attention to a sight down the hillside to our left. We climbed out of our vehicle and moved over curiously to see -- and then the nightmare began.

Below us, extending over a large city block in length and reaching well over six feet in height was a pile of human corpses. Huge trenches were being dug by Austrian civilians.. These were the burial plots for the dead. So vast was this number that two American bulldozers were necessary to aid in the digging of the trenches. As we watched, hundreds of bodies were thrown unceremoniously into their graves. A layer of dirt followed each layer of bodies and yet the mass did not seem to diminish as trucks kept shuttling between the barracks and the burial grounds, dumping their gruesome loads and returning for still another. Numbers are meaningless. For these were not truly human bodies but skeletons of skin and bone and two or three bodies occupied the space usually required for one normal body.

We moved on to the part of the camp inclosed in the walls. Stretched across the wall from one end of the massive gates to the other was a sign reading "The Spanish Anti-fascists greet the liberating forces". It was inscribed in Spanish, English, and Russian and in the center flew the American, English, and Russian flags. Inside the enclosure the people <sup>appeared</sup> a little more human. We learned later that this section of camp was reserved for those able to work while the barracks close to the burial grounds were allotted to the sick and weak and those unable to work. The menu for the latter consisted of one liter of water a day. Why waste food on those who were to die anyway? A strange stench pervaded the air. (We were to find out why soon enough.) All about us were thousands of indescribably filthy human beings who begged incessantly for food and cigarettes. Mountains of vermin-infested clothing lay about the area. At the rear we found a hill of coffins. Many lay about semi-nude in their own offal, half-stupefied. The wiser ones had stripped themselves completely and lay around nude letting the healing rays of the sun play on their sore-infested bodies.

Off to our right was the infirmary. And a fine building it was too, given over to the healing of the sick and the cure of the dying -- now. Then we went into the cellars below the infirmary. First we came to the "Sitting room". Here the victims were requested to sit down before a well lit-up background and gaze at the birdie. They did and were shot ruthlessly in cold-blooded murder through the back of the head. The body was dragged away and another brought in to "sit" for the photographer. It was a staccato cadence not unlike

the army hut, trip, prior in double-time marching.

On we went to the Dentist's office where an SS trooper or Gestapo agent examined prospective victims for gold in their teeth, marking them for extractions to remove the gold before they were sent on into the shower room. Those without precious gold in their teeth went directly to the shower room to be cleansed -- and cleansed they were -- in gas that kills in three minutes. The bodies were then brought into the bakery where two huge ovens were in constant twenty-four hours per day operation. The two ovens comprise this small camp's crematory. Each oven could hold from four to five "fat" ones or six or seven "thin" ones. The fat ones stewed in their own juices and took two hours. The thin ones required the waste -- or so the Nazi officials called it -- of considerable fuel as a high temperature was required to burn the skeleton forms. These took three hours. The stench was terrific. We had to escape to the relatively fresh air of the outside.

We talked to many of the inmates in the course of our visit. They had many an interesting story to tell. We were shown the electric fences where once 8,000 men, women and children had been murdered through one simple order. Touch the fence they were told and those who didn't were shot down in cold blood.

Off on the hillside the site was shown us where, in the dead of winter, thousands were forced to spend the night in the nude. They were sprayed with water several times during the night. The next morning some thirty had survived. The rest were frozen to death.

We were told how train load after train load of women and children were thrown into previously prepared pits containing wood and gasoline and then a flaming torch applied. Grief-stricken, half-crazed relatives watching the massacre leaped into the pits and joined their loved ones in death.

These are but few of the stories that came to us in many languages. We heard it in German, in French, and in English. It was told in Polish, Russian, Hungarian, and Czech. And this is but one small camp. It was a good camp, they told us. You should have seen the others.

Down to the barbed wire enclosed barracks for the sick we went. Here we found the first barracks occupied by sick and dying women, lying of disease and privation. The second barracks was inhabited by surprisingly healthy Jewesses, most of them Czechs. We'll come back to them later for they are the only encouraging part of this story.

The third cage contained the living examples of the bodies we had seen buried only a few short lifetimes -- We mean hours ago. Here were truly human skeletons. Mere skin and bone. Many were past the stage of reasoning, waiting only for death as the final release from their misery. We talked to the more healthy and here too they begged pitifully for cigarettes and food. They were of all races and religions, all victims of the same Nazi scourge. We saw one particularly gruesome specimen whose hip bones extended almost a foot beyond his ribs. We wanted to take his picture. Someone said a few hurried words to him and the words must have struck some responsive chord through his stupor, for he was more dead than alive, for he drew himself erect and stood at attention while his picture was taken. He maintained this rigid posture until told that we were satisfied and then he turned and went his way. He had not said a single word. We do not think he could have spoken had he wanted to. We followed him with our eyes as he walked off and picked up a blanket. We were amazed. Where did he get the strength to do this for surely the blanket weighed more than he did. He moved on into the barracks. With startled eyes we now saw that from four to six persons lived on each bunk of the triple-decker beds.

In French and again in English we were asked if the people of the United States knew about the conditions that existed in the concentration camps. A babble of voices offered us information. We informed them that we knew about the torture chambers, about the shootings, the electrocutions, the gas chambers, and the crematories. On fact that was one of many reasons why American soldiers were here.

We moved back to the second cage where the "healthy" women were. (Medically speaking, they were not healthy. The decay was internal and had not yet reached the stage where it showed externally.) To our surprise we found that many of them spoke English rather well. We were told that the Czechoslovakian government and the Czech people tried to pattern themselves after the Americans and therefore English was taught in all Czech schools. Previously, we had met four women whose crime was that each had married a Jew and for this they had spent four years in various concentration camps. They were brought to this camp only ten days before and were scheduled for early demise in the gas chambers. Unfortunately (or so the Nazis put it) the Eleventh Armored Division made a slight change in the camp commander's plans when it sent its tanks crashing through the main gates amidst the feeble but heart-felt cheers of the thousands of prisoners who existed (you cannot call it living) there. So these were still alive but thousands upon thousands of others had been murdered in the past days. Where all the bodies were, we do not know. We saw many of them; many more will be uncovered later.

We talked at length with these women and some of us took addresses and wrote that night with light hearts to fathers telling them their daughters were alive and safe in American hands and to sons saying their mothers and sisters had survived the terrors of the ages. But here again we heard the same plaintive cries for food. It is true that the Nazis are gone and the Americans are here but still they were hungry, still there was no food. We had to explain the problems of army transportation, of the roads clogged with German prisoners, of the many soldiers to be fed and the vital but too hurriedly forgotten fact that their shrunken stomachs could not survive too rich and too much food for some time to come. (It is a pleasure to report that by the morning after our visit, the US Army Medical Corps had taken over the institution and begun the program of rebuilding and rehabilitation for these poor unfortunates. Health menus were prescribed and vitamin pills -- the kind we soldiers used to laugh at when they were proffered as part of our own meals -- were an integral part of their diet.)

Nor had all the years of misfortune dimmed their interest in their own country or in the world at large. They explained with what joy the radio, gift of American soldiers, was received. And the pleasure of reading "HITLER DEAD" in the headline of the "Stars and Stripes". Was it true that Roosevelt was a Jew? His true name was Rosenfeld wasn't it? We laughed and told them they had been listening to much to Hitler's propoganda. Are you fighting the Russians yet? This amazed us for we had not realized the extent of the propogandizing of even the inmates of Hitler's infamous institutions. We explained in all seriousness that the Russian people were our allies, that we fought together and not against each other, that it was the Russians who had taken Berlin and freed most of Czechoslovakia. Yet when we remarked that they were only some thirty miles from the American lines, they became frightened. These people too will require a re-education. What about the partition of the world? We explained that no one knew for certain but that our guess was that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia and all of Poland East of the Curzon line would go to Russia. Germany herself would consist of the lands between the Rhine and the Oder Rivers. Eastern

Germany would probably go to Poland as compensation for the territory lost to Russia and Western Germany (west of the Rhine) would in all likelihood go to Belgium and France. What about Czechoslovakia, what about Czechoslovakia? Why it would be as before with even old Benes back to lead them. They laughed and cried with joy.

Somewhere in the conversation we told them that one of us was a Jew. They would not believe it. An Irishman in our group pointed out the distinctive flavor of his Irish name in contrast with the equally distinctive Jewish flavor of his comrade's name. "We're friends", he said simply. Then we pointed out that among the four of us were one each of English, German, Irish, and Jewish descent, living and fighting together to rid the world of the worst plague in its history.

The visit to these women was most heartening after the misery we had witnessed. Here was the proof that while Hitler had broken the bodies of his victims, he had not infected their spirit. They had never lost hope. These were braver people than any soldier in uniform. We asked them to tell us quite frankly whether they had been molested by Nazi soldiers. Yes, we were told. How about these children, we asked, pointing to some fifteen and seventeen year old girls (two in particular had been confined since the ages of ten and twelve respectively, one being fifteen now and the latter seventeen). Age makes no difference.

It cannot be over-stated that the episodes and stories narrated here were told to us in many languages by many people in many different parts of the camp. We have told only those which took place in this camp. It is an old cliché but seeing IS believing and we have seen -- too much. For those who like to say that there is a difference between the Nazis and the German and Austrian people, we offer several little items in rebuttal. Every concentration camp employed civilian personnel. The heads of the prisoners were shaved so that at the end of the days work when the civilians were prepared to go out through the gates they had merely to show a full head of hair to be passed through. Prisoners foolhardy enough to attempt to escape among the civilians were shot on the spot. But the point is that the German people KNEW!

On the way back we were slowed up by a two mile column of German prisoners enroute to the Prisoner of War cages. At the rear of the column one prisoner was riding to jail on a bicycle. Newly freed men sized the bicycle and the German soldier lifted his hand to strike when he noticed the cool look on some American soldiers face as he began to caress his gun. The Nazi changed his mind quickly. Then a German woman ran up to a medical officer and complained bitterly that a bicycle had been stolen from a GERMAN -- a GERMAN, mind you, as though that were the greatest crime in the world.

In the midst of the column were many German women in uniform who had been taken prisoner along with the men. All along the route, civilians were giving food and water to the marching prisoners. They have lost, these Germans, they have lost the fight but they have not lost their arrogance. We say this as fair warning. We have won the war. We must make certain that we win the peace. In all fairness we must report that over a million Germans were murdered in ~~the~~ concentration camps but let that serve as further warning. All the good Germans are already dead!