

**HILBERT and HOWARD MARGOL'S MEMORY OF THE LIBERATION OF DACHAU**  
by Howard Margol.



My twin brother, Hilbert, and I graduated high school in January 1942 in Jacksonville, Florida in the USA. We wanted to get as much education as we could, before going into the military, so two weeks after graduating high school we entered the University of Florida. During our freshman year, we were members of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

In October 1942 we were called to active duty and reported for Army duty on April 3, 1943. We turned down commissions as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants, feeling that to accept would cause us to be separated. We wanted to stay together. After the five Sullivan brothers went down on the same ship in the Pacific theatre in 1942, the American military would no longer allow brothers to serve in the same combat unit. As a result, we were separated and were in different units. Then we found out that, in the case of twins, President Roosevelt

would make an exception. Our mother wrote a letter to President Roosevelt requesting that her twin sons serve together. By order of President Roosevelt, we ended up together in Battery B, 392<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery, 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry "Rainbow" Division. I was a gunner of gun section #2 and Hilbert was a gunner on gun section #3.



In 1945, my twin brother Hilbert and I were deeply involved in combat in France and Germany. We were together as members of the 392<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery

Battalion, firing 105mm Howitzers, in close infantry support. Usually, we supported the 222<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment.

On the morning of April 29, 1945 our unit moved forward to a new gun position. As soon as we arrived at this forward position, we smelled a very strong odor in the air. Some of the guys said, "Based on the odor, there must be a chemical factory nearby." I said, "No, I do not think that odor is from a chemical factory." It reminded me more of what I experienced as a youngster, growing up in Jacksonville, Florida. My mother would bring home a freshly killed chicken she purchased at the local kosher meat market. After turning on the gas stove in the kitchen, she would wave the chicken over the gas flame in order to burn off the pinfeathers. In doing so, the skin of the chicken would get burned and would give off an odor. The odor we smelled was the same type of odor that I smelled in Germany on April 29, 1945. We would soon learn the true source of the strange odor and it was not from a chemical factory.

After several fire missions, things settled down. Kenny Ingalls, the driver of one of our ammunition trucks, came by our gun position and told us there was a very strange camp nearby and he thought my brother and I would be interested in seeing the camp. After a few minutes' walk through a small wooded area, we arrived at the main gate of the camp. The following words were erected over the main gate. "Arbeit Macht Frei" – "Work Makes Free." On a railroad siding next to the main gate were about 30 or 40 railroad boxcars. The members of the infantry company in front of us, from the 222<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, had already broken off the locks and slid open the doors of the boxcars. When the doors slid open, an arm or a leg

of a dead body that had been leaning against the door flopped out. The interior of the boxcars was packed with dead bodies.

At the time, we did not know why the railroad boxcars were there or why they were packed with dead bodies. We found out later that the Nazis had forced thousands of prisoners from a concentration camp in Poland, into the boxcars. It took three weeks for the train to arrive at Dachau. By that time, without food, water, or fresh air, all of the prisoners had died.

My brother and I then entered the camp. We saw the thousands of inmates, the ovens and the various buildings. As soon as we saw the ovens, we knew the source of the strange odor that some thought was from a chemical factory. We had no time to help the living or the dying. That would be done by those coming in behind us who would not be directly involved in the fighting. After about 45 minutes we had to return to our gun position as the war was still going on. After a five-minute walk through the woods, we were back at our gun position, and not a moment too soon. Our unit was pulling out and advancing toward the German army with Munich as our next main goal.

In reality, there was no actual combat involved in the liberation of the Dachau Concentration Camp. On April 28, 1945 Victor Mauer, a representative of the Swiss International Red Cross, managed to arrive at the camp. All of the SS Officers had fled, leaving one SS Officer in charge, Lt. Heinrich Wickert. Victor Mauer told Lt. Wickert that the American Army was advancing and would probably arrive the next day. He persuaded Lt. Wickert to surrender the camp when the Americans arrived. [Surrender of the Dachau Concentration Camp, 29 Apr 45 – The True Account by John H. Linden (the son of Brig. Gen. Linden), 1998, Sycamore Press Ltd.]

On April 29, 1945, my brother and I were in the camp in the morning. That afternoon Lt. Wickert surrendered the KZ Dachau to the Assistant Commander of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, Brigadier General Henning Linden. The surrender ceremony was well documented by the following correspondents who were present. Paul Levy, a Belgian Jew; Peter Furst, Stars and Stripes; and Marguerite Higgins, N.Y. Herald Tribune.

For years we wondered why everything in the camp was very quiet on the morning of April 29, 1945 when we were inside the camp. All of the prisoners remained in their barracks and very little activity was taking place. Having heard stories, from other American soldiers who entered the camp after the surrender ceremony, in which they told about prisoner activities of killing or attacking SS soldiers, etc., we could not understand why their stories were so different from ours.

Reading dispatches sent to the N.Y. Herald Tribune by Marguerite Higgins, gave us the answers. On the night of April 28, 1945 the prisoners were told the camp would be surrendered the next day and they should remain in their barracks until after the actual surrender took place. After being told that, the prisoners did not risk going outside of their barracks for fear of being shot by the SS guards. That is the reason why, after a quiet morning, many activities by the prisoners occurred in the afternoon and evening.

Later, many people have failed to understand why Dachau was not a gut-wrenching experience for me at the time. The answer is simple. I could not comprehend the full meaning of what I was seeing. I had been completely ignorant of the fact that these Concentration Camps even existed. After all, we were there to defeat the Germans and save the world from Nazism. That was our goal, not the liberation of the Camps and the saving of those prisoners. It was only after the war in Europe ended nine days later that I learned the

full story of Dachau, and the existence of many similar Camps. And it answered many of my questions but not the most important one: Why? It is important to keep commemorating Dachau and its liberation for future generations because the survivors and liberators are becoming fewer in number. In time, we will no longer be alive to tell what happened. Unfortunately, the deniers who say it never happened, will still be around to spread their lies. The world must never forget.



After my brother and I were discharged from the Army on April 9, 1946 we returned home to Jacksonville, Florida and resumed our studies at the University of Florida. We graduated in June 1948. Two weeks after graduation, I got married and looked forward to raising a family. In November 1948, my brother Hilbert got married. Today, we are both enjoying 65 years of married life.

**Photos contributed by Hilbert and Howard Margol –**

**Top** –Howard Margol at a captured German Airbase in Furth, Germany just outside of Nuremberg. “Several of us made white silk neck scarves cut from German parachutes we found in one of the buildings.”

**Center** - Hilbert Margol with his 105mm gun crew. “I’m leaning over to check something. Sitting on left is Tom Doll, Cincinnati, Ohio. Squatting is Sgt. Tom Rodgers, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.”

**Bottom** - Howard and Hilbert Margol, speakers at a Veterans Day program November 2013

