



# Freedom's Voice

The Monthly Newsletter of the  
Military History Center

112 N. Main ST  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012  
<http://www.okmhc.org/>



## "Promoting Patriotism through the Preservation of Military History"

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### Important Dates

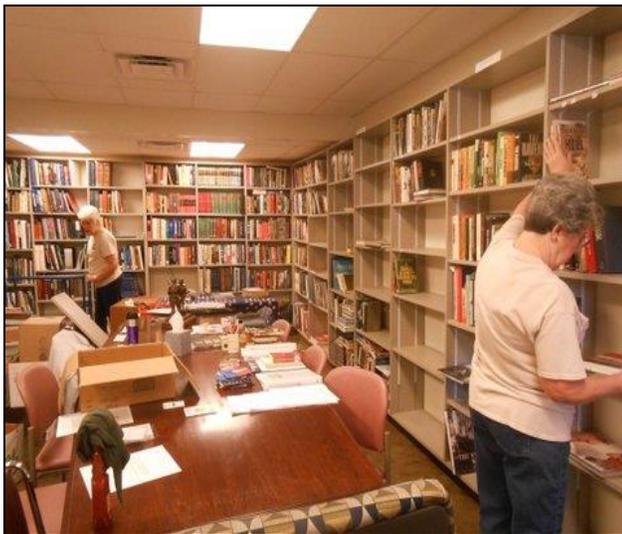
**April 29 – Golf Tournament**

**June 11 – Flag Day Event**

The MHC will host its annual Flag Day event on Saturday, June 11. The May newsletter will contain detailed information. In the meantime, please mark your calendars, and plan to attend this patriotic event.



Paul C. Collins (1921-2012) of Broken Arrow, was a World War II veteran and an eyewitness to the consequences of the Holocaust. The stories are on pages two-four.



MHC volunteers, Claudia Price and Sandra Videll, re-stocking the newly relocated and renovated research library.

The MHC Research Library has a large and comprehensive collection of more than 1,800 volumes of military history relating to all America's wars as well as biographies of military leaders and general military subjects.

It's an ideal source for high school and college researchers or anyone writing on any aspect of U.S. military history.



Lt. General Jacob Devers, Commander, North African Theater of Operations, congratulating 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Ernest Childers on receiving the Medal of Honor – April 8, 1944. The story is on page four.

## This Month's Featured Artifact



A liberated prisoner of Dachau concentration camp made this leather cigarette holder for Staff Sergeant Paul C. Collins. According to Sgt. Collins, the former prisoner made the cigarette holder and gave it to him in gratitude for his liberation. The former prisoner either had knowledge of leathercraft or knew another former prisoner who did, and was sufficiently conversant in English to communicate with Sgt. Collins. Sgt. Collins served in the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which had no part in Dachau's liberation, but was detailed for occupation duty in Bavaria after the war. MHC docent, Ken Collins, son of Sgt. Collins, graciously donated this one-of-a-kind artifact to the Military History Center.

Dachau was the first of Nazi Germany's many concentration camps. It was built near the town of Dachau in Upper Bavaria, in 1933, shortly after Hitler came to power. During its first year, the camp held about 5,000 political prisoners, primarily German communists, Social Democrats, and other political opponents of the Nazi regime. During the next few years, the number of prisoners grew dramatically, and other groups were interned at Dachau, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, homosexuals and repeat criminals. Beginning in 1938, Jews began to comprise a major portion of the prisoners.

During the course of Dachau's existence, at least 160,000, maybe as many as 200,000, prisoners passed through the main camp, and 90,000 through the sub-camps. Incomplete records indicate that at least 32,000, likely many more, prisoners perished at Dachau and its sub-camps. Countless more were shipped to extermination camps in Poland. Even so, Dachau was not the Nazi's largest or worst camp.



Scenes such as this greeted Dachau's liberators

Units of the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions of the Seventh Army liberated Dachau seventy-one years ago this month, on April 29, 1945. The 157<sup>th</sup> Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Felix Sparks, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was the first unit to enter the concentration camp; however, the camp commander surrendered to a unit of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. Veterans of the two divisions have been arguing about who liberated the camp ever since. The sub-camps, almost 100 altogether, were liberated on the same day as well as before and after the main camp was liberated. There were approximately 32,000 sick and starving prisoners at Dachau when it was liberated. An estimated 10,000 were seriously ill. Several hundred of them would die in the days immediately following their liberation.



Jubilant Dachau prisoners greet their liberators – April 29, 1945. Note the prisoners in this photo are mostly children.

### Museum Hours and Admission Fee

Tuesday – Friday: 10:00 – 4:00; Saturday: 10:00 – 2:00  
Closed Sunday and Monday and major Federal holidays

Adults – \$5.00

Members and Children under 18 – Free

**For more information, call (918) 794-2712**

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## Eyewitness Accounts of the Liberation of Dachau

Dachau concentration camp was the first such camp established by the Nazis, shortly after they came to power in 1933. In the beginning, the camp was used to detain “enemies” of the Nazi regime. Later many tens of thousands of others from all over occupied Europe would pass through the camp and its numerous sub-camps.

By the time the U.S. Army arrived, the camp was overcrowded with thousands of prisoners who had been transferred from other camps further east, and there were far too many dead for the usual process of incineration to cope with. The events of 29<sup>th</sup> April are contested. Some witnesses claim that U.S. troops massacred the SS men who were found guarding the camp on that day. Others suggest that this is a gross exaggeration of one incident where a single group of SS men were shot down, possibly for attempting to escape. Unusual in these circumstances, there is also some photographic evidence. One man provided eyewitness testimony.

Nerin E. Gun was a Turkish journalist who had fallen afoul of the Nazis for his reporting of the Warsaw Uprising. He had been arrested and sent to Dachau: “Three SS men are still on their turret ... they have pivoted their machine guns in the other direction, away from us, and they are peering into the distance ... a single man emerges from behind a cement mixer parked at the edge of the camp ... wearing a helmet embellished with leaves and branches ... he moves cautiously forward, submachine gun in one hand, grenade in the other ... he is still far away, but I imagine I see him chewing gum ... he comes cautiously, but upright, stalwart, unafraid ... I almost expect him to be followed by a pure white charger ... we knew America only by its films ... this first image of the liberation was truly out of an American western ... this soldier of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 45<sup>th</sup> Combat Division was the very incarnation of the American hero ... we will never forget those first few seconds ... the memory of the unique, magnificent moment of your arrival ... you had come at the risk of your life, into an unknown country, for the sake of an unknown people, bringing us the most precious thing in the world, the gift of freedom ... .

The detachment under the command of the American major had not come directly to the Jorhaus (*sic*). (Editor: The Jorhaus Gate was the main entrance building to the prisoners' camp at Dachau.) It had made a detour by way of the marshalling yard, where the convoy of deportees normally arrived and departed. There they found some fifty-odd cattle cars parked on the tracks – the cars were not empty. The train was full of corpses, piled one on the other, 2310 of them to be exact. The train had come from Birkenau and the dead were Hungarian and Polish Jews, children among them. Their journey had lasted perhaps thirty or forty days. They had died of hunger, of thirst, of suffocation, of being crushed or of being beaten by the guards. There was even evidence of cannibalism. They were all practically dead when they arrived at Dachau station. The SS did not take the trouble to unload them. They simply decided to stand guard and shoot down any with enough strength left to emerge from the cattle cars.

The corpses were strewn everywhere – on the rails, the steps, the platforms.” (Editor: Other witnesses report about 1,300 who could walk were initially removed from the train. Those unable to walk – the sick and dying – were left on the train to die.)

“I never saw anything like it in my life,” said Lieutenant Harold Mayer, “Every one of my men became raving mad. Within a quarter of an hour, there was not a single one of Hitler’s henchmen alive.”

An alternative account was given by Lt. Col. Felix L. Sparks, a battalion commander of the 157<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Colorado National Guard), 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, who stated that a young soldier was manning a machine gun keeping watch on a group of approximately 50 SS men in the coal yard. Sparks heard the soldier cry, “They’re trying to get away!” and the sound of the machine gun being fired. He saw that about a dozen men had been killed in the incident and more wounded. He replaced the soldier with an NCO in charge of the machine gun, and there was apparently no further shooting. Col Sparks continues: “It was the forgoing incident which has given rise to wild claims in various publications that most or all of the German prisoners captured at Dachau were executed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The total number of German guards killed at Dachau during that day most certainly did not exceed fifty, with thirty probably being a more accurate figure. The regimental records for that date indicate that over a thousand German prisoners were brought to the regimental collecting point. Since my task force was leading the regimental attack, almost all the prisoners were taken by the task force, including several hundred from Dachau.”

This and other incidents were investigated by the Seventh Army’s Assistant Inspector General, Lt. Col. Joseph Whitaker, who made recommendations that some U.S. soldiers should face charges. However, General George S. Patton, Military Governor of Bavaria at the time Col. Whitaker reported, chose to take no further action. At the end of 1945, Colonel Charles L. Decker, an acting deputy judge advocate, decided that there probably had been breaches of international law, but “in the light of the conditions which greeted the eyes of the first combat troops, it is not believed that justice or equity demand that the difficult and perhaps impossible task of fixing individual responsibility now be undertaken.” (The foregoing article is courtesy of [ww2today.com](http://ww2today.com))



Soldiers of the 157<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division rescue a young Polish Jewish boy named Mieczyslaw, who was found alive on the “Dachau death train” – April 29, 1945.



Sgt. Paul Collins standing next to a German armored train – 1945

Paul Cedric Collins was born on November 7, 1921, in Broken Arrow. He was a graduate of Broken Arrow High School. He married Pauline Ruth Dobbins on November 12, 1941, in Tulsa, just thirty-six days before Pearl Harbor. Collins was drafted into the Army in 1942.

Sgt. Collins was a member of the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry “Cross of Lorraine” Division. The 79<sup>th</sup> landed on Utah Beach on June 12-14 and entered combat five days later, west and northwest of Valognes and south of Cherbourg. After the area was cleared of Germans, the Division moved into Lorraine in eastern France, where it engaged in heavy fighting and then on into the Rhineland for more of the same. The 79<sup>th</sup> went on to cross the Rhine and was part of the clean-up of the Ruhr Pocket.

At war’s end, the 79<sup>th</sup> was moved to Bavaria for occupation duty. Sgt. Collins’ unit was detailed to guard newly liberated Dachau. The former prisoners were kept at Dachau because there was no other place to house and feed them or to give them medical care.

After the war, Mr. Collins returned to Broken Arrow and a career with the U.S. Postal Service. He died on December 22, 2012, in Broken Arrow, at age ninety-one. He is buried beside his wife in Park Grove Cemetery in Broken Arrow.

## Support the Military History Center

Do you want to join the many patriotic Oklahomans who are already supporting the Military History Center’s mission of “Promoting Patriotism by Preserving Military History”? If so, contact the Military History Center at (918) 794-2712 to learn how you can be a supporter, or click on the link below go to the MHC website at <http://www.okmhc.org/donate/>.

There’s something to accommodate everyone’s budget. Monetary donations, as well as gifts in kind, are tax deductible, subject to IRS regulations.

We invite you to be a part of this unique opportunity to support a first-class military museum and history center in Oklahoma.



August Coffey of Lower, PA is a ninety-three year-old veteran of World War II, and a liberator of Dachau. He was a corporal in the 157<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Colorado National Guard), 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, on April 29, 1945. The memories of what he witnessed at Dachau still haunt him. Among his several awards are a Bronze Star and Combat Infantryman’s Badge.

(The information about Cpl. Coffey was provided by his granddaughter, Dee Roadman of Broken Arrow. Photo by Phil Wilson – *Trib Total Media*, Greensburg, PA)



Ernest Childers was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, when at Oliveto, Italy, on September 22, 1943, he led an infantry squad against German snipers and machine gun nests. “For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty” that displayed “exceptional leadership, initiative, calmness under fire, and conspicuous gallantry”, Lt. Childers was awarded the Medal of Honor, on April 8, 1944.

Ernest Childers was born in Broken Arrow, OK on February 1, 1918. In 1937, he joined the Oklahoma National Guard in Tulsa. After World War II, he went on to serve twenty-nine years in the Army, retiring in 1966 with the rank of Lt. Colonel. He died March 17, 2005. He is buried in Floral Haven Memorial Gardens in Broken Arrow. The Veterans Administration’s Ernest Childers Out-Patient Clinic in Tulsa is named for him.

## Defending America's Rights

Not much has changed in 200 years. America's first encounter with Muslim nations was with the pirates of the Barbary Coast – the North African states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Tripoli (modern Libya). They were called pirates then; now we call them terrorists, although there isn't much difference. By the late 1700s, European nations had been, for the past several decades, paying the pirate states tribute to leave their merchant ships alone and tens of thousands of dollars, or other currencies (actually gold) to ransom captives who were enslaved on capture. President Thomas Jefferson was adamantly opposed to tribute and ransom payments. Rather, he preferred military action. But first, he had to convince a Congress who regularly balked at military spending.

Jefferson got his Congressional authorization not only to defend America's interests in the Mediterranean, but to take the fight to the pirates in their capital cities, in what became known as the First Barbary War.

The frigate, USS *Philadelphia*, was cruising off the city of Tripoli on October 31, 1803, when she ran aground on an uncharted reef off the harbor entrance. While under fire from enemy gunboats and shore batteries, Captain William Bainbridge tried desperately to refloat his ship. All attempts failed, and he was compelled to surrender. Later, the Tripolitans were able to refloat the ship.

Rather than allow *Philadelphia* to be converted to a pirate ship, the Navy determined to burn her. An assault party, led by Lt. Stephen Decatur, aboard a captured pirate gunboat, rechristened USS *Intrepid* and disguised as a Maltese merchantman, boldly sailed into the harbor during the night of February 16, 1804, and burned *Philadelphia*. When the news reached the United States, Decatur became an instant hero. President Jefferson immediately promoted him to captain. This small war began to establish the power and prestige of the United States Navy.



Captain Stephen Decatur by John Wesley Jarvis



Burning of the USS Philadelphia by Edward Moran  
*Intrepid* is in the foreground.



Attack on Derna by Charles Waterhouse

During the First Barbary War, Col. William Eaton led a squad of eight United States Marines commanded by Lt. Presley O'Bannon and a ragtag assortment of five hundred Greek, Berber and Arab mercenaries on a 500-mile trek across the desert from Alexandria, Egypt to the Tripolitan city of Derne, or Derna, in April 1805. They were able to capture the city, and for the first time, the United States flag was raised in victory on foreign soil. The action is memorialized in the Marine Corps Hymn – "the shores of Tripoli". In the painting, Lt. O'Bannon is shown commanding his eight Marines leading the assault on Derne. Two of them were killed in the assault.

This little known period in American history is well told in the recently released book: *Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates*, by Brian Kilmeade and Don Yaeger. (The book is available on amazon.com.)

# *“Lest We Forget”*



Lt. Col. Richard P. Ross, Commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, braves sniper fire to place the battalion's national colors on a parapet of Shuri Castle, Okinawa, on May 30, 1945. This same flag was first raised over Cape Gloucester (New Britain) and then Peleliu.

The landings on Okinawa began at 0830 on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945. The battle lasted eighty-two days, until June 22. It was the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theater – four army divisions and two marine divisions. American forces suffered more than 82,000 casualties of all kinds, including 14,009 who died in battle or later succumbed to their wounds. Japanese deaths, including conscripted Okinawan civilians, exceeded 110,000. 7,401 Japanese soldiers and about 3,400 Okinawan conscripts were captured or surrendered during the battle. Among the American dead was Lt. General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr, commander of the Tenth Army. General Buckner was the highest ranking American serviceman killed by enemy action during World War II. Okinawa was but a prelude for much worse, had an invasion of the Japanese home islands been necessary.

## *Freedom is not free.*