

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank for your kind invitation.

The history of the 42nd Rainbow Division goes back to the First World War, and I am sure, that there are many exciting and important moments within this long period. However I want to stress today evening the important role, the unit played during the liberation of Dachau concentration camp. Because the liberation of the concentration camp by the 42nd US Rainbow Division and other units marked the end of the camp's twelve year history, a history of oppression and suffering, of misery and death, but also of resistance and survival, of tenacity and mutual support.

As far as the prisoners were concerned, the final weeks of Dachau Concentration Camp were a race against time, a race which thousands of them ended up losing. And apart from the question as to weather they would succeed in holding out until the liberators arrived with food and medical treatment they increasingly feared that there were plans to liquidate all prisoners. Rumors and conjectures circulated in the camp, and the fear grew stronger that the SS would not even shy away from mass murder in order to eliminate the witnesses of their crimes.

On April 26, over 10,000 prisoners were forced to leave the Dachau concentration camp on foot, in trains, or in trucks. The largest group of some 7,000 prisoners was driven southward on a "death march" lasting several days. Overall the evacuation transports – a few days before the liberation – still cost many thousands of prisoners their lives. Two days later the noise of the tanks coming from the city of Dachau could be

heard at the camp already. The next morning, April 29, a white flag could be seen on one of the buildings in the vicinity of the neighboring SS camp and the anxious excitement among the prisoners grew.

At the same day the U.S. troops received the order to take over the camp. While another Infantry Division had approached from the west, it was an advance commando from the 42nd "Rainbow" Division under Brigadier General Henning Linden that officially accepted the surrender from the acting SS commandant of Dachau. In a Memorandum Brigadier General Linden described this important moment: *"At about 15.00 on 29 April I arrived...in Dachau... three people approached down the road under a flag of truce... These three people were SS troopers who said that they were the camp commander and the assistant camp commander and that they had come ... for the purpose of turning the camp over to the advancing Americans. The Swiss Red Cross representative acted as interpreter and stated that there were about 100 SS guards in the camp who had their arms stacked except for the people in the tower. ... He asked if I were an officer of the American army, to which I replied, 'Yes, I am Assistant Division Commander of the 42nd Division and will accept the surrender of the camp in the name of the Rainbow Division of the American army.'"*

I would like to end with a citation from the diary of the Dachau survivor Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, who described the situation inside of the concentration camp at the same time: *"The Americans are here! The Americans are in the camp' Hurrah, hurrah, they are at the parade ground!' Everybody is in motion. The sick are leaving their beds, those who are almost well, and the block personnel are running out into the block road, jumping out of the windows, climbing over wooden fences,*

*rushing to the parade ground. From the distance, all the way to here, you can hear the shouting and cheering. They are shouts of joy. Everyone is continuing to run around. Everybody has expressions of excitement on their transfigured faces. 'They are here, we are free, free!'*"

Thank you for listening.