

**CHARLES R. SANDLER  
LIBERATOR OF MAUTHAUSEN  
&  
GUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP**

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Charles Chandler volunteered in April 1941 for the U. S. Army. He joined as a private, advanced, eventually passed through Officer's School and served with the 11th Armored Division for the duration of the war. He came through the Battle of the Bulge, the Rhineland Campaign and the Central European Campaign. Finally, he was a member of the team that liberated the Mauthausen and the nearby Gusen concentration Camp in May 1945.

He had no idea what had happened to the Jewish population and had heard only some rumors. His task force encountered a brief resistance from a few SS men who were guarding the camp. Even before entering the camp there was a strong unexplained odor nearby but then they found rotting bodies stacked by the hundreds like cord wood. He shows several photographs of bodies and prisoners. The nearby camp Gusen was, if anything, even worse than Mauthausen. People in the surrounding communities denied knowing anything about the existence of the camp.

The liberating army group tried to nurse the inmates back to health, starting with a 900 calory diet, but many did not survive. He has had no reunion with survivors with the exception of Simon Wiesenthal who was one of those liberated and whom he met some years later in Buffalo.

In the camp the Jews were separated from the other prisoners and there were rather few Jews because they were killed faster than others. The prisoners had to live in groups of several hundred in barracks built to house 30 to 40 persons. In his uniform, he was looked on by the inmates with suspicion, but they were thrilled when he identified himself as an American Jew.

He reads excerpts from a few-page memo that was written by a non-Jewish German physician who had gone from New York to Germany but was arrested there by the Nazis.

This memo was written after the war following a visit to Mauthausen and describes the conditions in the camp, the number of victims and the various methods used by the Nazis to torture and kill people, it describes many situations which one may find difficult to believe.

Charles shows a picture of a gas chamber built like a tiles shower room, only the faucets delivered a deadly gas instead of water. There is also a photograph of an oven; when it was found, it still had bodies in it from the day before liberation. Another photograph shows the camp commandant Ziereich who was responsible for 200000 murders. Ziereich escaped from the camp but was captured by some former inmates; he was brought back alive with several gunshot wounds, but was secretly hanged by his captors during the following night (photograph).

He strongly assails groups who deride Jewish activities during the war, However, the Jews contributed more than their share to the war effort. Of the 14000 men in his Division, 4200 were killed or wounded and the proportion of Jews was higher than in the general population.

Finally, he shows a photograph of a memorial that was set up by a new generation of Austrians on the 40th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen; he could not attend the dedication ceremony.

When he returned home from the war, he felt strongly that people have to believe his experiences and he wishes that the young people particularly will remember. He hopes that such tragedies will never happen again but there is always a chance that they could.