

## **RG-50.759.0037**

### **Summary**

Walter Doggendorf was a 22-year-old Private First Class, assigned to the 573rd Signal Air Warning Battalion when his unit was ordered to inspect the Dachau Concentration Camp, about three weeks after its liberation, so that they would know what happened there. Upon arrival, an English-speaking, inmate was assigned as guide to take a ten-men group through the camp. Some prior prisoners were still in the camp; they were there voluntarily because they had no place to go but could be fed in the camp. They were still wearing their striped prison uniform. Their hair had been shaven but it had started to grow since liberation. Most were men but there were also women and one woman had two small children in tow. Attempts were in progress to get all of them permanently settled. All were still thin-like toothpicks, due to the malnutrition suffered during their confinement. There were political prisoners, Jews, Gypsies, Poles and also Displaced Persons (DPs). The DPs had been laborers who had been taken into Germany to help the Nazi war effort and if they got sick, they were shipped into concentration camps; if they died, they were cremated, along with the other killed prisoners.

Dachau had a gas chamber which looked like a bathhouse. When Walter inspected this facility, the guide pulled on a showerhead which immediately gave way, it showed that it was a farce and not connected to any waterline. Prisoners had to strip before entering the chamber, where they expected a shower, but after the heavy steel entrance door was locked, gas came in through the floor drains. Adjacent was a crematorium with 10 ovens. Three days before the liberation, the Germans frantically tried to kill all the prisoners. They filled the bathhouse beyond its capacity all the way up to the ceiling and cremated them thereafter. Downstairs were 80 large barrels, each filled to the top with ashes which were awaiting disposition. It had been practice to provide the ashes to nearby farmers who used them to fertilize their fields. Outside there were about 10 kennels for dogs. Prisoners were tied to nearby trees to get them to talk and the dogs were used to enhance the interrogation and subsequently tare them apart. Elsewhere, wooden drainage pits were installed where prisoners were shot in the head, to catch the blood flow. It was estimated that 250,000 prisoners had been processed thru the camp. Walter's visit lasted about two hours or a bit longer, he had seen the worst.

When Walter returned home, he did not want to talk about all this and neither did people want to hear about the war; he wanted to forget about his experiences. But the war had affected him. He had become bitter, hardened and depressed. His newly wed wife had helped him towards normalcy. Twenty years later, everything changed. He now wanted to tell the story and tell what really happened. There was too much effort by others to white wash the story, to say that Dachau did not have a gas chamber; but he could tell the truth. Fifty years later his grandchildren were clueless about the war. He had the ability to tell them what really had happened, what he personally had seen.