



HISTORY

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CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN - (522nd FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION)

On March 9, 1945, the [522nd Field Artillery Battalion](#) left the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#) at the Maritime Alps. The 522nd was sent north to the Lorraine region of France to provide artillery support for the [Allies'](#) final drive into Southern Germany.

From March 12-21, 1945 the 522nd joined the 63rd Division in an assault on the Siegfried Line between central France and Germany. Once the men broke through the Siegfried Line, the front was very fluid. The U.S. combined firepower was tremendous, but the 522nd worked so quickly that often the [Nisei](#) completed the mission before any other artillery could fire a round.

The 522nd became a roving battalion, shifting to whatever command most needed the unit. The [Nisei](#) fired more than 11,000 rounds, accomplished every one of their 52 assignments and supported more than seven different army divisions and units. They traveled 1,100 miles - racing through 40 towns in 60 days and chasing the quickly retreating Germans from the Saar and Rhine Rivers in the west to the Austrian border in the east

The 522nd joined the 45th Division when it crossed the Rhine River. Then, it joined the 44th Division where it provided supporting fire in the attack on Mannheim. It then returned to the 63rd for the Neckar River crossing and the fall of Heidelberg. On April 1, the 522nd traveled 90 miles east to help with the 4th Division's drive on Aub. On April 26 the men supported the 12th Infantry on the Danube River crossing.

In the last four days of April, the battalion displaced its guns 14 times during the 4th Division's drive south toward Munich. Often the 522nd's advance scouts were racing up to 25 miles ahead of the rest of the battalion.

On April 29, 1945, several scouts were east of Munich in the small Bavarian town of Lager Lechfield when they saw a sight they would never forget. The [Nisei](#) came upon some barracks encircled by barbed wire. Technician Fourth Grade Ichiro Imamura described it in his diary:

"I watched as one of the scouts used his carbine to shoot off the chain that held the prison gates shut. . . They weren't dead, as he had first thought. When the gates swung open, we got our first good look at the prisoners. Many of them were Jews. They were wearing striped prison suits and round caps. It was cold and the snow was two feet deep in some places. There were no German guards. The prisoners struggled to their feet. . . They shuffled weakly out of the compound. They were like skeletons - all skin and bones. . ."

Holocaust historians conclude that the [Nisei](#) liberated Kaufering IV Hurlach. This camp housed about 3,000 prisoners. Hurlach was one of 169 subordinate slave labor camps of Dachau. Dachau, like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Mathausen and Ravensbruck, was surrounded by hundreds of sub-camps. In Germany alone, there were 956 sub-camps.

In the spring of 1944, the Nazis built Hurlach and 11 other camps around Landsberg and Kaufering. More people were killed in these camps in less than a year than were murdered in the main Dachau camp in more than 13 years of operation. Fifteen thousand people were worked to death building jet fighters for the German air force. The slave laborers were Jews from Hungary, Poland and Lithuania. Most survived less than four months in the camps.

On April 29, Charles Feibelman, a Jewish Captain and forward observer in the 522nd witnessed the liberation of Hurlach. Feibelman had left Europe in the 1930s and studied law in the United States. He found out later that several members of his family were murdered in Auschwitz.

The *Nisei* found Hurlach mostly deserted because Hitler and Himmler had already ordered the concentration camp commanders to march the prisoners south to the Austrian border, away from the advancing Allied armies.

On April 24, the brutal death marches began. Jewish prisoners from the outer Dachau camps were marched to Dachau, and then 70 miles south.

Many of the Jewish marchers weighed less than 80 pounds. Shivering in their tattered striped uniforms, the "skeletons" marched 10 to 15 hours a day, passing more than a dozen Bavarian towns. If they stopped, their brutal guards shot them and left their corpses along the road. By the fifth day, fewer than 6,000 of the original 15,000 were still alive. On May 2 the death march was outside Waakirchen, Germany, near the Austrian border.

On May 2 soldiers from the 522nd were patrolling near Waakirchen. The *Nisei* saw an open field with several hundred "lumps in the snow." When the soldiers looked closer they realized the "lumps" were people. Some were shot. Some were dead from exposure. But hundreds were alive - barely.

The 522nd came across hundreds of prisoners with black and white prison garb, shaven heads, sunken eyes, and hollowed cheeks. Some roamed aimlessly around the countryside. Some were too weak to move. All were severely malnourished. One soldier gave a starving Jewish prisoner a candy bar, but his system couldn't handle solid food. Then the Americans were told not to give food to the prisoners because it could kill them.

For the next three days, the *Nisei* carried the survivors into warm houses and barns. The soldiers gave them blankets, water and only tiny bits of food.

The soldiers left Waakirchen on May 4. The 522nd, along with the 101st Airborne Division, participated in the capture of Hitler's rest and recreation hideout at Berchtesgaden. In November 1945 the 522nd went home to America.

Many Japanese American soldiers returned to American concentration camps, like Manzanar, Minidoka and Poston. They helped move their parents and siblings out of the barbed wire camps. They found work and housing and tried to pick up their lives. But they would never forget the sight of the starving Jewish prisoners.

In the spring of 1945, the men in the 522nd had participated in one of the greatest ironies of World War II. Members of a persecuted minority, the Japanese Americans reached out to members of another persecuted minority, the European Jews. These two minority groups were victims of the most blatant disregard for civil liberties and human rights that a government ever perpetrated against its people - one for being of Japanese ancestry, the other for being of the Jewish faith.

Lieutenant James Kurata said:

“What I saw. . . was too horrible for words to describe. It was pitiful. How could anyone be that cruel to human beings? We didn’t know how important what we were doing was in liberating the death march of Dachau.”

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