

Time can't ease Dachau horror

By GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

Of all the horrors that were evident at the Dachau concentration camp, the image that stands out most in Ben Ewing's memory is a scene one day in 1945.

He spent the night in a Nazi SS officer's abandoned house. Upstairs he found a nursery with toys on the floor. On the wall was a crucifix.

But outside were tens of thousands of bodies of people who had been beaten, tortured and starved to death.

"I just couldn't grasp how anyone, with such a love of children could be a part of the horrors I saw," Ewing said.

Ewing, now a Bloomfield Township resident, was 20 at the time, but already a hardened combat soldier. But even what he had seen in battle did not prepare him for what he saw with the U.S. Army troops that liberated the camp on April 29, 1945.

Ewing had been drafted in 1943

while still in high school but his induction was deferred until after graduation. After taking part in a college program for soldiers, he was sent to Marseilles, France, after the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 as a rifleman with the 103rd Infantry Division.

He was immediately thrown into action.

"The first day there were so many casualties I became a sergeant," he said. Out of 160 men in his company, 100 were killed or wounded, prompting his battlefield promotions from the rank of private to sergeant.

"I saw a lot of people killed on both sides. But none of that prepared me for what I saw at Dachau," he said.

By April 1945, the western Allies had pushed into Germany and were advancing through southern Germany.

Ewing's unit was on its way to Munich when it was sidetracked to Dachau. Soldiers from the

42nd and 45th Divisions had gone into the camp on the morning of April 29th.

"But (some) had gone berserk over the things they had seen. They shot a lot of German SS troops who were prisoners. They seemed out of control," Ewing said.

The Army felt experienced combat troops could better handle the situation.

Ewing said he didn't know what to expect at the camp. Like most Americans, he had heard only vague reports of what had gone on there.

The picture became clearer as the troops neared the camp.

Thirty lined cars were standing outside the barbed wire fence.

"All were piled with bodies of people," Ewing said. There were nearly 3,000 bodies in the cars. They had been prisoners in the Buchenwald death camp who had been shipped to Dachau by the Germans.

"The SS wanted get them to Dachau before they were seen," Ewing said. None had been fed or given water for two weeks, he later learned. Incredibly, one person was found alive among the bodies.

Although the weather was still cool and there was snow on the bodies it was not cold enough to stop the decay.

"The smell as indescribable," Ewing said. "It was the smell of the train and the prisoners, the smell of decaying bodies."

The camp was a place of sharp contrasts. The prisoners were packed into barracks while the SS officers had brick houses with neat gardens.

"It just blew my mind away," Ewing said.

Dachau opened in 1934 and was the first concentration camp for political prisoners. Only later did it become a death camp.

When Ewing arrived, the camp

held around 30,000 prisoners — far more than it was designed to hold. The notorious crematoriums could only accommodate 300 bodies a day, so bodies were stacked up alongside the ovens.

"I don't know if they ran out of fuel or time," Ewing said.

"I guess my first reaction was sickness and revulsion that people could do that kind of thing to other people. It was humbling to a young guy who had thought he had seen everything in combat," Ewing recalled.

Ewing spent just one day in Dachau. The next morning the relief teams arrived to treat the prisoners and his unit was sent on to Munich. A few days later, the war was over in Europe.

A half-century later, Ewing sat amid the stacks of books in the Bloomfield Township library, where he is president of library board.

Many of his war memories have dimmed, but the images of Dachau are fresh.

He doesn't dwell on it, "but from time to time something reminds me of it."

Like the slaughter in Rwanda and the killing in Bosnia, he said, "(Dachau) made me realize what bigotry could ultimately lead to when taken to the extreme," Ewing said.

Having grown up in central Florida when racism was rampant and blatant, Ewing said his war experiences caused him to change his perceptions.


"I grew up with a bigotry toward blacks," he said. "That changed abruptly when his unit was trapped by some Germans."

They faced certain death but were saved by a group of black soldiers, he said.

That incident and seeing Dachau changed him, he said.

Now, he said, "I'm intolerant of intolerance."

Check it out!



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March 1995

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TRW Automotive Electronics Group

Financial boost: TRW Automotive Electronics Group, whose North and South American headquarters are in Farmington Hills, gave a financial boost to four Farmington-area organizations recently with donations from the TRW Foundation totaling \$32,200. In the above photo, Philippe Lemaire (right), executive vice president of the group, presents checks to (clockwise) Kevin Bush, executive director of the Farmington Area YMCA; Pam O'Malley, co-president of Farmington Families in Action; Beverly Papai, director of the Farmington Community Library; and Ben Marks, executive director of The Longacre House of Farmington Hills. TRW Automotive Electronics Group is a producer of safety, comfort and convenience electronics for the worldwide automotive market.

Leadership Oakland welcomes participants

Oakland Leadership Council (formerly the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Oakland County) will host a kickoff hour reception for the 1995-96 leadership Oakland class from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 25, at the Palace of Auburn Hills Palace Club.

OLC chamber of commerce members, Leadership Oakland alumni and prospective participants are invited to an charge, said Lucia Sulewski, LOC executive director. The reception is open to all interested people who work or live in Oakland County or the metro area.

Leadership Oakland helps develop leadership skills and provides a better understanding of Oakland County's business, government, education, arts, entertainment and nonprofit organizations through a series of nine monthly programs. Continued

learning opportunities are available through the alumni association.

More than 170 people have graduated from the five Leadership Oakland classes representing diverse interests, including Chrysler Corp., Oakland Community College, William Beaumont Hospital, Detroit Edison and business members of the local chambers. "Leadership Oakland is an excellent program. The clear insights into current and future issues have already provided dividends for my company and me personally. The program has also guided me in focusing my involvement in the community," said Jess Grasser, Detroit Edison, who will be graduating in May.

For information, call Leadership Oakland: (810) 443-0410. Leadership Oakland is a member of the National Association for Community Leadership.

CLARIFICATION

An article in the April 20 Farmington Observer should have said that if Farmington voters turn down the one-third mill property tax referendum for SMART — but it passes county-wide — Farmington would be liable for \$91,000 in tax revenue. If the city had opted out of the election, it would not have been liable for the tax revenue.

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- Wed. Seniors Mixed 12:30 p.m.
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- Thurs. Parent Youth 7:30 p.m.
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NOT THE PRESENCE BUT THE PERSISTENCE

Pain comes with arthritis. Characteristically that pain comes from joint to joint. You may ache in your shoulders one day, have that (chronic) only to feel a pain instead in your hips or knees.

Physicians have no explanation as to why your pain travels, or what determines the next site it will appear.

Doctors can help when pain settles in a joint and persists in its intensity. The reason is because such pain usually has a cause that examination can discover, and results from inflammation and/or swelling - conditions that medicine, aspiration, or injection can remedy.

When your pain takes on a new character, your doctor wants you to both describe the ache as best as you can, and point out its location as precisely as possible.

In general a single site of pain does well following injection therapy, while pain persisting in several areas necessitates a change in drug regimen.

Arthritis requires the cooperation of patient and physician: each participant listening to the other set up decisions that lead to appropriate therapy for the moment, and a successful response when new joint pain appears.

Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine

STRIKING UP THE (ILIOTIBIAL) BAND

Runners who feel a dull ache on the outside of their knees may be suffering from iliotibial band syndrome, a severe case of the iliotibial band, the ligament that runs along the outside of the thigh, may become inflamed and painful. These symptoms are the result of an inward-bending knee force to over-pronation of the foot. As a preventative measure, it may help to use a stretching exercise: Begin by standing with the left leg crossed in front of the right and lean with the left arm extended against a wall. Place your weight against the wall and push your right hip in the opposite direction. Then, while keeping your right foot anchored and allowing your left knee to flex, stretch the iliotibial muscle in your right hip.

It is a wise ideal to do a warm-up and stretch prior to any exercise to avoid the possibility of injury. After engaging in a physical activity such as aerobics or running, make sure to do a five minute cool-down and a five minute stretch.

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P.S. Aside from stretching, iliotibial band syndrome responds to a variety of treatments including applications of heat to the knee, massage, and hamstring stretching.

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Dentistry in the 90s
by Herbert M. Gardner, D.D.S. & Marita P. Zinderman, R.N., D.D.S.

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

Dental patients may not be aware that the dentist takes extreme precautions to eliminate any possibility that any infectious disease will be transmitted during dental procedures. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Dental Association have set down "universal precautions" that require all dental staff members wear care to use appropriate protective gear for each patient visit. In addition, a recent study in the Journal of the American Dental Association shows that nearly all dental doctors believe that transmission of infectious diseases by the CDC. Universal precautions such as gloves and gowns protect patients who cannot be sterilized in a hospital setting.

patients who cannot be sterilized are discarded in special containers.

AT FARMINGTON VILLAGE DENTAL ASSOCIATES, everything possible is done to protect you from the CDC and the American Dental Association because of fear of infection if you have questions about dental procedures, please call us at (917) Farmington Road, please call us at (810) 478-2110. We believe that an informed patient contributes to the success of dental procedures. We will be glad to schedule a convenient appointment. Times are: Mon. 9-5, Tue. 9-5, Wed. 9-5, Thu. 9-5, Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5. We provide emergency services for "badly" sleep interrupted patients.

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