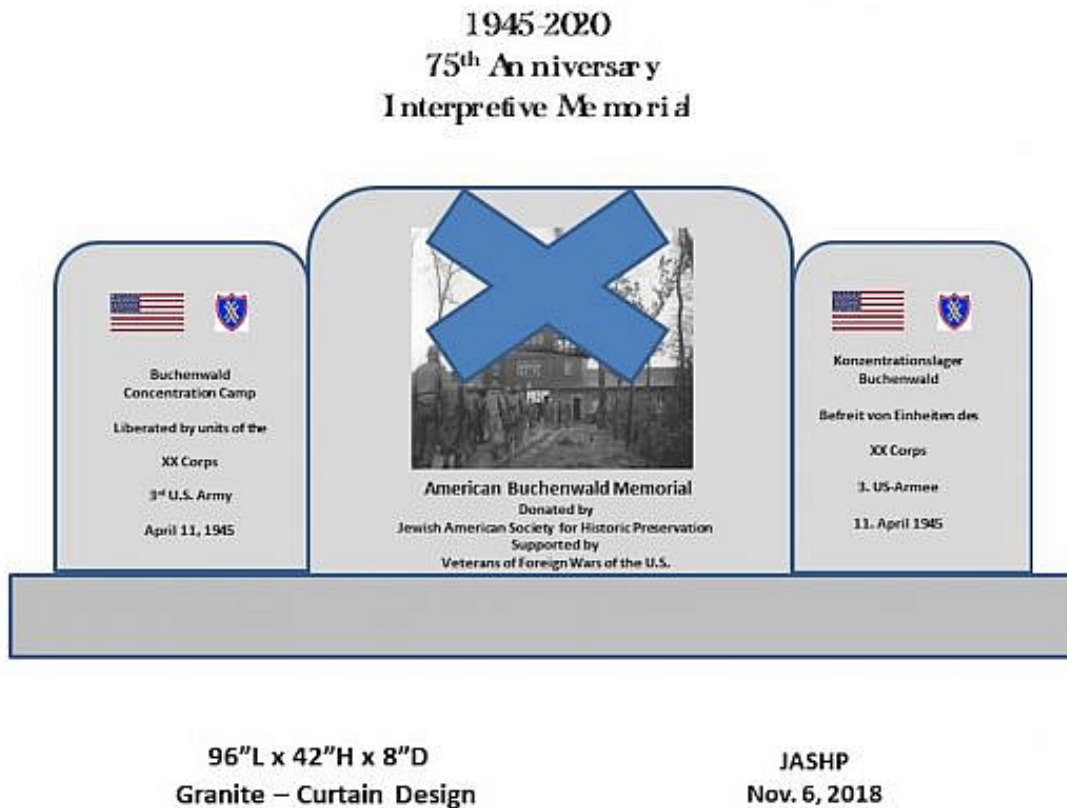




THE BLOGS

# Jerry Klinger

## Holocaust Memory – Jewish Responsibility – Jewish Failure



If Jews don't, or won't, remember the Holocaust and the Liberators, why should the non-Jewish world remember the Jewish Holocaust?

My father was liberated from the infamous Buchenwald Concentration Camp by the American Army – April 11, 1945. April 2020 is going to be the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Buchenwald. It was the largest and most notorious of the Nazi concentration Camps in Germany.

Jews were victims in Buchenwald. However, Buchenwald was not a Jewish Concentration Camp, only a section of it was, with extreme brutality reserved for the Jews. The majority of the camp was for everyone National Socialism hated, from 7th Day Adventists, Christian Free Thinkers, the Sinti, Homosexuals, Political Dissidents, Russian prisoners, anyone.

Today, it is a major tourist and German Memorial educational site with over 1,000,000 visitors annually.

Having been centrally involved in the creation of the Little Camp (the Jewish Camp) Memorial in Buchenwald, I knew there had never been a memorial in Buchenwald specifically honoring the American 3rd Army, XX Corps. They were key to Buchenwald's liberation.

There is a modest plaque in Dachau to the American Liberators. In Mauthausen, there is a large stone wall memorial to the Americans. In Buchenwald there are lots of memorials to the dead but nothing to the Americans who made the difference to the survivors.

As American forces approached, the S.S. abandoned the control of the Camp, except for a few dozen die-hards. Buchenwald had been guarded by 1200-1500 S.S.

Led primarily by the Communists, who had been running the Camp internally for the S.S. for years as "favored" prisoners, the Communists rose in revolt against the handful of S.S. left. They took complete control. It was just a few hours ahead of the American arrival.

Even today, long after the German reunification, the Communists have a very strong influence and are adamant about their having liberated the Camp.

The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation (JASHP), which I am president of, proposed to the Buchenwald Memorial administration they would like to donate a Memorial to the American Liberators for the upcoming 75th anniversary. It was logical, and it was appropriate. It was the right thing to do. It also created a hornet's nest of a firestorm.

Letters of support from Senators and Congressional Reps, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (U.S.) with 1.7 million members, even from the Eisenhower family were obtained and presented to the Buchenwald Memorial Committee. The Memorial effort was supported in Thuringia and in Berlin with strong, energetic endorsement by Ambassador Richard Grenell, a Trump appointee.

A small active cadre of German supporters backed the effort. A conceptual letter of support from Chancellor Merkel followed.

No major Jewish organization, not even the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum or Thuringia's German Jewish Community endorsed or supported the effort. One assumed natural American Jewish ally organization suggested, for the right donation, their name might be used. It was declined.

The Buchenwald Memorial administration declined to provide guidelines, advice, recommendation, directions, instructions, site regulations, or procedures for a permanent memorial. A deliberately simple design, to avoid the inevitable historical fighting, was created and presented. Though it was a blind design, it was the best possible under the circumstances.

Buchenwald deferred to a Scientific Review Committee to consider the proposal. They were to meet in July. The day before the meeting, with no reason given, the meeting was canceled. The vote was tabled until November 7.

Strategically the review committee knew, if concerns came up about the design, text or siting for the American Liberators' Memorial, it would be very difficult to comply after November 7. The 75th commemorations were only four months away. It would be difficult but, JASHP confirmed to the Buchenwald Memorial administration, it could still manage.

November 8, one day before Kristallnacht, the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation Director, reported the Review committee rejected, unanimously, the proposed American Liberators' Memorial. They instead opted for a small historical interpretive black and white plaque; commonly found at various sites in the Camp. They wrote the text. They controlled the narrative.

A three-sentence sop to the American Liberators was inserted into the long historical text. Buchenwald linked liberation to the Americans. For 75 years, it was not P.C. The three sentences are sure to cause deep heartburn to those opposed to

honoring the Americans.

*“In memory of the soldiers of the XXth Corps of the 3rd US Army: On 11 April 1945, units of the XXth Corps of the 3rd US Army reached the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. The SS fled. Thereupon political prisoners, who were organised in the International Camp Committee, took control of the camp.”*

The Memorial Foundation Director explained it was a special responsibility of Buchenwald's, to write, design, and place the historical interpretive plaque. JASHP's efforts were appreciated but not needed.

All had to be done diplomatically and carefully. They were writing the American Jew out.

Ambassador Grenell has been appealed to, to try and help one more time.

A major war had been fought behind closed doors of the Committee. JASHP's proposal had touched the modern political third rail of German Nazi history. It shook the interpretations of German Memory of the Camps and the Liberators.

Many Germans prefer to think of German Camps, like Bergen-Belsen, as hallowed Cemeteries, not places to honor foreign liberators. The German Communist Organization came out directly attacking me and JASHP's proposal.

The Director informed me the plaque will be placed on a former S.S. Barrack's outside wall. It will not be, as hoped, front and center to where the maximum number of eyes can see it.

The yearlong process for the Memorial made eminently clear there are many historical perspectives involved in a place like Buchenwald. The Jews, naturally, want it about them and their memory of the Holocaust. They choose to overlook the Sinti.

Buchenwald was created and used not as a Jewish extermination center. The S.S. were, just the same, very good at inflicting horror and death on the Jews there. Buchenwald is not about the Jews alone.

Human beings from over 30 countries were victims in Buchenwald.

The Europeans were not interested in the Jewish memory in Buchenwald. They were interested in themselves and their own people's liberation.

The Russians were not interested in the Holocaust and the Jews. The entire war was one of national survival for them. When they liberated Auschwitz, it was not about the Jews. The Jews were victims of the larger monster, Nazism.

The Germans and German memory are complicated. They are a combination of support, guilt, excitement, wishful forgetfulness, time to move on. The world will not let them simply move on.

Germans, those who supported the American Liberators' Memorial explained, the Americans liberated them, and all of Europe from the scourge of National Socialism, Nazism. They owe their freedom today from the Communists, from the Nazis, to the Americans.

And the Jews...

As Chairman, a longtime back, of a 300 Jewish student synagogue school, we followed the educational guidelines of the Board of Jewish Education re Holocaust education. It was little more than an hour or two on one day in a school year. Invariably, enraged Jewish parents came in, beyond furious. How dare we traumatize their children by teaching them about the Holocaust.

Every year, Holocaust memorial services are shrinking in attendance. Holocaust Museums are fading as are the few precious eyewitnesses we have left. The Rabbis...the Rabbis have refused to create a single, Halachically mandated Holocaust prayer. My own Rabbi said there will be a prayer someday. Perhaps, he said, in a few hundred years when we have a better perspective...

The lines of a universally accepted Holocaust prayer will endure far longer than a building, or obscure, unread books on dusty library shelves waiting for the PC time to be discarded.

The Sun-Sentinel wrote an article about my efforts to place the first-ever Memorial in Buchenwald honoring the American Liberators. They placed the article, not in the regular paper, but in the weekly Jewish Journal. That week, the front-page story was about the 17th celebratory anniversary of the LGBTQ Synagogue in Miami. The story about the American Liberators' Memorial was on page 17.

It never occurred to the editors, if the American liberators had failed, the LGBTQs would have all become Luftmenschen – ash gray powder emerging from a crematorium's chimney. The effort to honor and remember the American Liberators should have been on page 1.

The editors were correct. There was no response.

The Holocaust was and is about the Jews. If the Jews won't remember the liberators, why should the children of the liberators remember us?

Jewish memory is a Jewish responsibility. The necessity is for tomorrow.

Ironic, today is November 11, Veterans Day.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jerry is the president and founder of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, [www.JASHP.org](http://www.JASHP.org). He is the son of Survivors of Buchenwald and Bergen Belsen. He is a former Yeshivah student and served with the IDF in the Sinai. He is the author of over 100 articles in publications ranging from the Jerusalem Post to the Prairie Connection to the San Diego Jewish World. Jerry is frequently interviewed on T.V. and Radio about the American Jewish experience. The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation has completed projects in 39 US. States and in 5 countries. Over 7,000,000 people annually benefit from one of JASHP's projects. JASHP has completed seven projects in Israel. Five more are in development. Recently, JASHP completed the first-ever historic memorial to the Exodus in Israel, July 2017. The Exodus was known as the "Ship that Launched a Nation". December 2017, the Machal Memorial in Jerusalem to the 5,000 Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers who came to Israel when they needed her most during the War of Independence, was completed. JASHP is working on five new projects in and for Israel. We expect to have them completed in 2020.