

Holocaust Survivors Hold Reunion With Liberators

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 27 — They met for just a moment more than three decades ago, after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe, and today prisoners and liberators met again.

From more than a dozen nations, they came to the first organized international meeting of liberators and liberated "to bear witness," in the words of Elie Wiesel, the author, "to what we have seen and done."

The two-day International Conference of Liberators, held at the State Department here, was largely underwritten by William B. Konar, a retired merchant and Nazi prison camp survivor from Pittsford, N.Y. And today, against a backdrop of grim pictures from the prison camps, Mr. Konar met Brig. Gen. Francis J. Roberts, who had liberated him at the camp at Niederhagen.

"I have my liberator!" bellowed Mr. Konar, who as a boy had showered in the camp's kitchen because he knew what deadly use the Nazis made of shower chambers in their concentration camps.

The Moment of Destiny

The retired Army general and Mr. Konar sat together and reconstructed the moment of destiny in April 1945 when General Roberts, then a captain in the 95th Infantry Division, first entered the camp.

"People were just penned in like animals," General Roberts recalled. "There was misery all about. They looked lethargic but happy."

"I was a kid," Mr. Konar said. "There were only 10 or 15 of us who could actually walk or run. When we saw the tanks, the people who couldn't walk sat and cried. I didn't understand why I was there, but I understood what liberation meant."

General Roberts, Mr. Konar and nearly 200 others said that they remembered the electrified fences, the mass graves and the bloodstained dirt of Adolf Hitler's concentration camps. Most of all, both liberators and survivors said repeatedly, they remembered that they must not forget.

'Tried to Bear Witness'

"In the last 30 years we have told the story, we have tried to bear witness," said Mr. Wiesel, a prison-camp survivor and chairman of the conference. "There

are still people who believe that Hitler didn't exist. Maybe the testimony of the liberators themselves will help. They have seen.

"There is a certain moral authority that goes with what we have seen," he continued. "Together we must speak up against war, hate, racism, anti-Semitism."

"If not us," he asked, "then who?"

One delegate, Abraham J. Peck, associate director of the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, bore a message of thanks from his father, a prison camp survivor, to Maj. Gen. Aleksei K. Gorlinsky, a retired Soviet Army officer who helped liberate Terezin, a debarkation center in Czechoslovakia. Other delegates bore their scars, their prison-camp tattoos and their stories.

Noise of Liberation Recalled

With each story came tears — proof some of them said, that the memory of their liberation remained with them all, survivor and liberator alike. Early in the session, a survivor of Buchenwald left the hall sobbing as George Blackburn, a former artillery captain in the Canadian Army, described the noise he heard as he entered the Nazi camp at Westbork in the Netherlands.

"It wasn't crying, it wasn't screaming, it was more like the whimpering of frightened animals," the retired officer said. "I'll never forget the dozens and dozens of skinny arms that wanted to touch us. They wanted to make sure we were real."

For some the conference was a reunion. For Gerda and Kurt Klein of Kenmore, N.Y., it was a reminder that, as Mrs. Klein said, "life is a combination of pain and awe."

She had survived a three-month death march when Mr. Klein, then a soldier in the Fifth Infantry Division, entered the small Czech town where she and 150 other Polish girls were hiding in an abandoned factory. There was, he recalled, an "aura of dignity about her."

He visited her in the hospital and, a year later, they were married. "It was the beauty of the spring and the spring of my life," recalled Mrs. Klein, who later became an author. "Now, as the autumn of my life approaches, I feel great and terrible pain that others aren't here with us, as survivors."