

Emotions and unforgettable moments lived by many...

On April 4th, 1945, US troops belonging to the Third US Army arrived at the Ohrdruf camp site. The camp S III was the first camp that was liberated by troops in the West.

General Dwight E. Eisenhower visited the area on April 12th, 1945.

By the end of 1944 more than 10,000 inmates were housed in the Northern and Southern camp. Today, there is hardly anything still visible of those camps. It is hard to imagine that thousands suffered so much and had to fight for their sheer survival. Only a little number of inmates survived. The name "Horror camp" is absolutely justified, when you look at the photos and the displays.

A memorial stone, near the Northern camp, remembers those victims and allows the visitors to honor them.

Today, April 6th, 2013 a small delegation of the Jonastal Association laid down a wreath for the victims of the S III camp site. We started very early at the main gate of the army barracks and a cold wind greeted us.

While we waited, we talked about the living conditions of the inmates. For us, it is unconceivable that without proper clothing, being sick and without hope, not enough rest and a lack of proper hygiene and a human place to stay, they tried to survive.

Add to this the brutal attitude of the SS thugs, the murderous work inside the tunnels and the permanent fear of not being able to survive the next day and to see their family and home country ever again. I was freezing and was grateful when at 8 am the 1Sgt Erbe took us inside the military training area. At the memorial stone of the former camp site we stood together. Johannes Alt, chairman of the association, reminded us of the suffering and added some wording as to remembrance and vigilance. I quoted a poem, called "Shadows of Fear". Uwe Pfothhauer laid down a wreath at the memorial site.

Our thoughts passed silently among us. As we stood there and reflected, my eyes crossed an information plaque with original photos, taken shortly after the liberation. I thought about Murray Goldfinger, Max K. and Cherry C., who are friends of us and were kept prisoner, but nevertheless survived. Only few were so lucky...

I also thought of Luc Vandeveld, a Belgian friend who has been looking for his father's grave for many years. Until now, he hasn't found any documents that refer to the location of the grave of his father.

Our research didn't bring us much further either. Maurice Vandeveld was transported from the Buchenwald main camp towards Ohrdruf and died there. Every year, Luc Vandeveld visits the Jonastal Association and participates at the yearly commemorations. My thoughts also went to Rose Marion, an elderly Belgian woman, whose father was murdered here, just before the liberation. She stood here with her sister at this memorial, cried and didn't want to leave. Emotions and unforgettable moments lived by many...

Fred Wander also suffered in the camp site S III and wrote about this period in his book "The seventh source".

Where now a big bell serves as a sign of vigilance, there were once barracks, filled with inmates. Crowded together in primitive wooden barracks, they tried to rest for a very short period after the hard labor, until shouting for the first road call sounded and the torture started all over again.

We remembered the victims and read the information on the displays. Not far away from the former barracks, a street runs through the area and is surrounded by old trees. My eyes discovered some old trees and I thought to myself: “what if these trees could speak?”

Silent witnesses of a gruesome period at a blood-soaked piece of earth, where thousands of inmates had no chance of survival and where murder and beatings raged and were admitted. That guilt is still very present here.

With many thoughts we left the area; thanked the 1Sgt Erbe for his kind escort and continued our journey to the remembrance ceremony in the Jonastal Valley.

Ute Dillard 6. 4. 2013