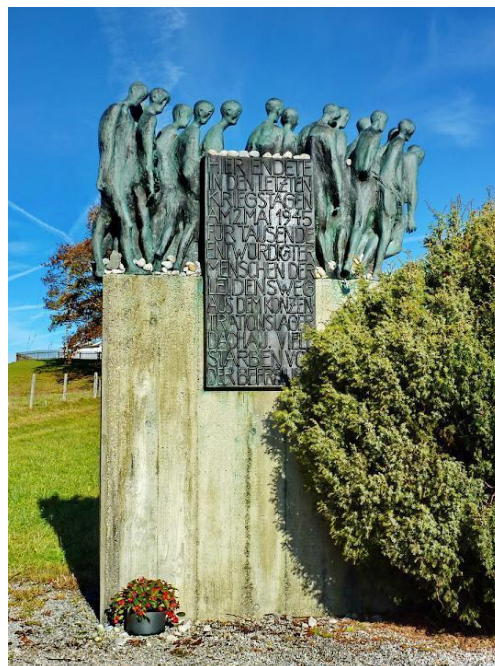




**The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion and the Waakirchen Death March Rescue:
An Illustrated Record**



Memorial between Bad Tolz and Waakirchen commemorating the liberation of the inmates from the death march

Dedication

Dedicated to the soldiers of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion

The Death March

In April 1945, the SS decided to kill all the inmates of the concentration and slave labor camps. The SS did not want them liberated by the Allies or the Soviets. They had intended to eventually kill the Jewish inmates. The other inmates were considered enemies of the Reich. The war was lost and they were no longer needed as slave laborers. Killing all the inmates was also revenge for the defeat of the Nazis.

The SS officers and soldiers in charge of the camps were left on their own to implement Himmler's order.

By April 1945 *"the extermination facilities had been decommissioned, the traditional murder bureaucracy had fallen apart, and the key officers of the security police, the SD ...were no longer at their posts"*

(Daniel Blatman, "The Nazi Death Marches, 1944-1945)

The Dachau system was not an extermination system, and the main camp was not a death camp for mass extermination. The main Dachau camp was an internment camp and a slave labor camp that managed about 140 satellite slave labor subcamps.

The Dachau SS had to switch from managing an internment and slave labor system to mass killing.

The SS had conflicting priorities. The SS were aware that the war was lost, and the Third Reich and SS were ceasing to function and were collapsing. The SS was aware that they were at risk of soon being abandoned. That meant that the SS soldiers and officers may soon need to choose between staying at their posts to implement Himmler's order or escaping to avoid capture and being held accountable for their criminality.

In that context, the implementation of the decision to kill the inmates was chaotic, haphazard, confused, disorganized, and half-hearted.

The SS decided to evacuate the Dachau subcamps to the main Dachau camp. In addition, the SS evacuated inmates from other camps to Dachau.

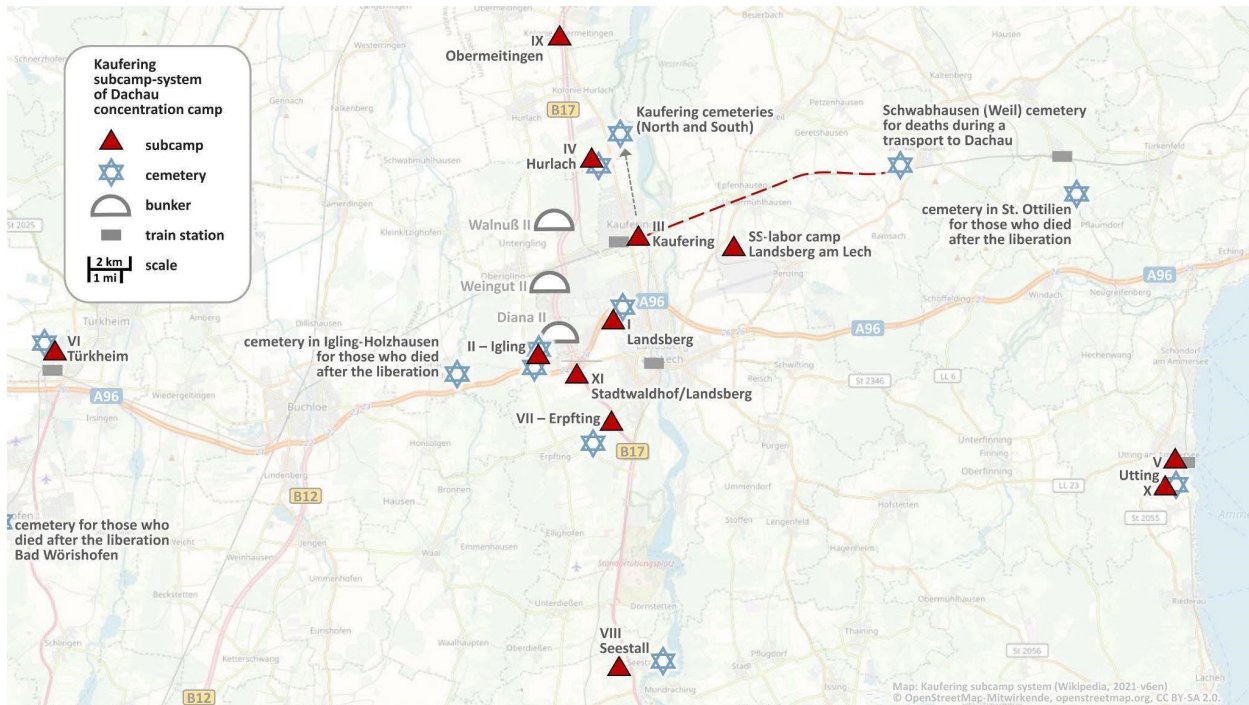
The SS intended that during transportation to cause the deaths of as many inmates as possible through starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, disease, and murder.

Mortality on death marches was at least 50%. On the train from Buchwald to Dachau, the SS reached a mortality of about 83%. 4400 to 4800 began the transport at Buchenwald. Only about 800 were alive when the train reached Dachau.

The SS plan appears to have been to finish the killings at the remote location at the end of the death march.

The SS killed inmates unfit for transport then transported by trains and death marches the remaining subcamp inmates to the main Dachau camp.

Kaufering consisted of eleven subcamps (map below). Most of the inmates rescued by the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion (FAB) at Waakirchen were from the Kaufering subcamps of the Dachau system.



Map © OpenStreetMap-Mitwirkende, openstreetmap.org, CC BY-SA 2.0. supplemented by the locations of the subcamps of subcamp system Kaufering.

At Kaufering IV at Hurlach, the SS burned to death the inmates who were unable to travel.

Kaufering IV at Hurlach was one of the subcamps encountered by the 522nd. (The 63rd Infantry, 12th Armored Division, and 101st Airborne are the recognized co-liberators at Kaufering IV. The 522nd reports being there from 0940 to 1055 on April 29, 1945.. While the soldiers of the 522nd do not mention the smell of burnt corpses in their accounts at the subcamp, from the reports from other units, the 522nd was long enough and close enough for soldiers of the 522nd to have smelled the burnt corpses.

The short time the 522 was at the subcamp was consistent with the assignment of the 522nd. Combat units were not to remain at liberated camps but to keep advancing. The Civic Affairs Regiments, Seventh Army were to assume responsibility for Kaufering IV as soon as possible.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has [graphic photos of the Kaufering subcamp](#) including the barracks where SS burned inmates to death and the charred corpses. A photo of corpses in nearby woods may be inmates murdered while on the death march. The units of the American soldiers in the photos are not identified but are not soldiers of the 522nd. They may be soldiers of the Civic Affairs Regiments, Seventh Army.

The Kaufering IV subcamp inmates from Hurlach along with the other function Kaufering subcamps were transported to the main Dachau camp then were sent on a death march. Survivors may have been among those rescued by the 522nd at Waakirchen.

About 33% of the inmates were Jewish with most of the 67% being Slavic, mostly Polish and Russian.

Most U.S. troops were aware of the persecution of the Jews. Most were unaware that the Nazi racial supremacist ideology included the killing of an almost equal number of non-Jews and the enslavement of many groups of non-Jews. Most were unaware that resulted in about 2/3 of the slave laborers in the Dachau system were non-Jews, mostly Polish and Russian Slavs.

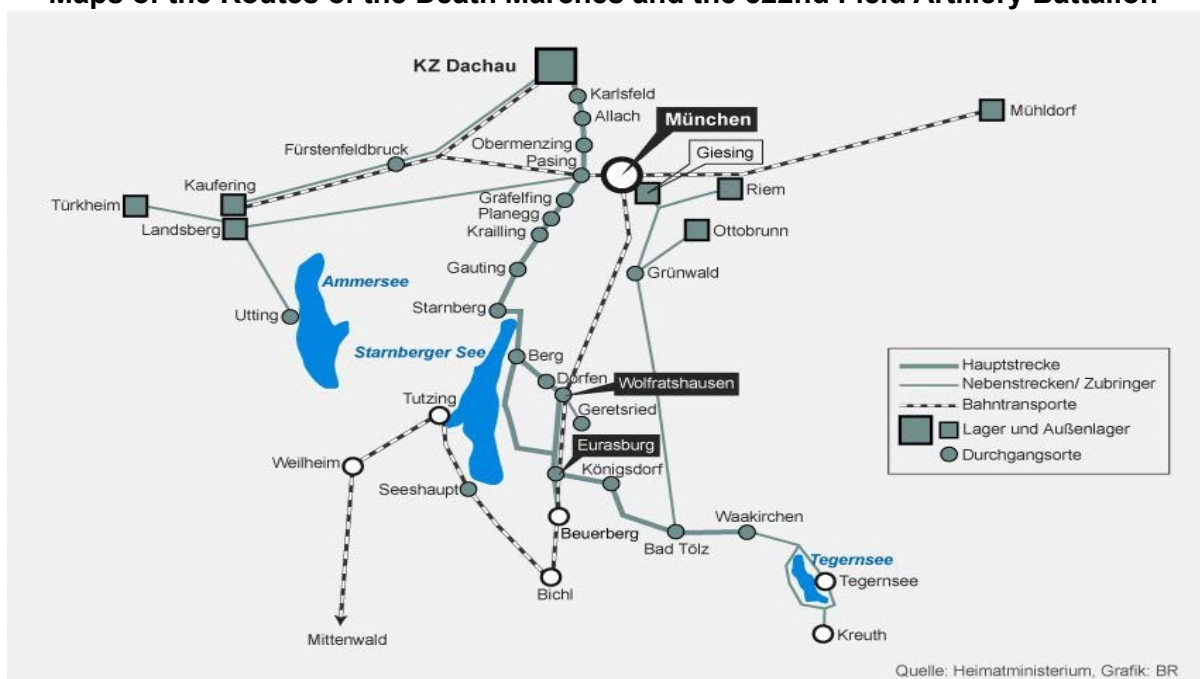
The Kaufering subcamp inmates and other Dachau subcamp inmates brought the main Dachau camp prisoner population to about 39,000.

Starting as early as April 23, the SS guards began fleeing Dachau. Those were the SS guards with the most experience in running the camp and therefore in implementing the plan to kill the inmates.

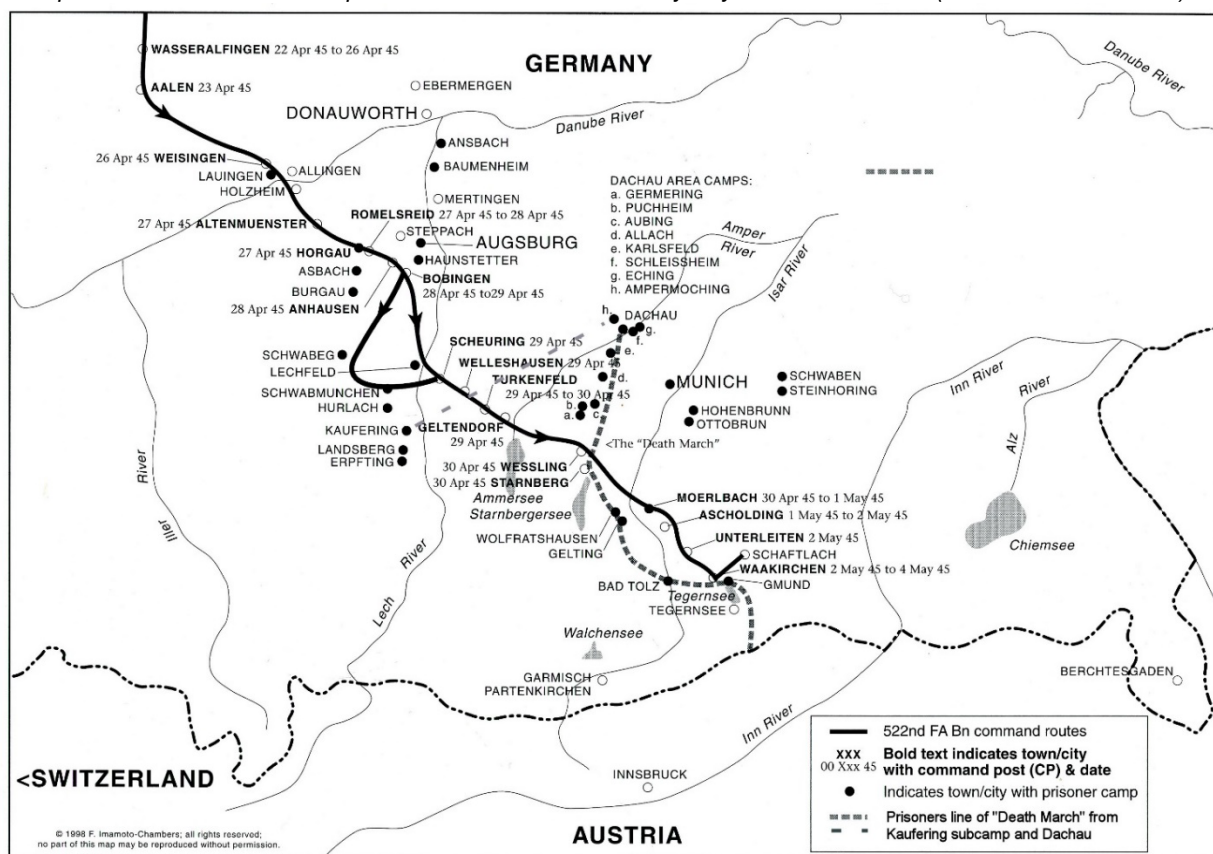
On April 26, the SS who had taken over trying to run Dachau sent 6887 prisoners, mostly from the Kaufering subcamp on the death march. Another 7,000 prisoners, mostly Jews but also Slavs and German political prisoners, from Munich area subcamps were added to the death march, bringing death march total to 14,180.

The route of the death march was south towards Tegernsee. With the Allies approaching from the west and the Soviets from the east that was the only route left to the SS.

Maps of the Routes of the Death Marches and the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion



Map Credit: Public domain map of the route of the marches by Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Public Radio).



Map from *Fire for Effect*, page 76

On April 28, the International Red Cross (IRC) negotiated with the SS commander an end to the death marches and the surrender of the Dachau. The SS commander of Dachau handed over command of Dachau to a newly arrived SS officer then fled. That ended any further death marches from Dachau or other attempts to implement Himmler's kill order.

Meanwhile, the death march continued with thousands dying from starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, disease, medical neglect, and murder by the SS. By April 30, about 9,000 to 10,000 prisoners remained on the death march. About 3,000 were abandoned on the west bank of the Loisach River and later rescued by the U.S. Army.

The SS continued the death march with the remaining 6,000 to 7,000 prisoners, committing two more massacres on April 30 and May 1. The SS realized that they no longer had the ability to fulfill their orders to kill the survivors in the last days or hours of the war. Instead, the SS chose to try to evade the consequences of their years of criminality by attempting to escape capture.

On May 1, an unknown number of survivors were abandoned by the SS along the road between Bad Tolz and Waakirchen.

Unlike earlier in the war when combat units advanced from a camp or subcamp to their next objective, on May 2, the war was almost over. That may be why units of the 522nd were allowed to remain with the rescued inmates for two days. The other may be that the rescue was in such a remote location that the Third Army Civic Affairs and Medical units needed two days to deploy to the area.

Soldiers of the 522nd stayed with the survivors until May 4. The photos below suggest that they moved the survivors into the town of Waakirchen for shelter, care, and security. The war was still on. Combat with SS units was still continuing nearby and armed SS soldiers who had not surrendered were in the area. Third Army Civic Affairs and Medical units relieved the 522nd.

(Details of the death march from: [The Death Marches from the Dachau Camps to the Alps during the Final Days of World War II in Europe](#) by Eliezer Schwartz)

Clandestine Photos by German Civilians of the Death March



Undated sometime after April 11: Kaufering subcamp inmates on a death march heading east on Neuen Bergstraße through Landsberg towards the main Dachau concentration camp.

Fair use of photo by Johann Mutter from Stadtarchiv Landsberg am Lech

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/fuerstenfeldbruck/fuerstenfeldbruck-todesmarsch-1.2449563>



April 27 or April 28, 1945: The rear of the main group of the Death March on Würmstraße (Wuermstrasse) in Starnberg.

The women with an “X” on their backs are prisoners wearing civilian clothes rather than the striped pajama-like prison uniforms. The “X” was painted on for identification.

Fair use of photo by Benno Ganter from the Municipal archives Landsberg am Lech

Three more of Benno Ganter’s photos may be viewed on Yad Vashem’s website:

https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/death_march/photos.asp



April 29, 1945, the Death March in Gruenwald, Germany.

Fair use of photo from the collections of Yad Vashem.



Late April 29. Unidentified location.

Fair use of photo from the collection of Yad Vashem.



April 29, 1945, the Death March in Gruenwald, Germany.

Sources: *"Todesmarsch von Dachau – Gedenken in Würmtal – Dachauer Dokumente"*
"Fair use of photo from the collection of Yad Vashem."

The Rescue on the Road



522nd soldiers S/Sgt. George Oiye (Behind tree) and Technician Fourth Grade (T/4) Yuki Minaga (Right) preparing a campfire for the rescued inmates. Waakirchen is in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps which is why snow is on the ground in May. Both are from C Battery.

Photo - 2nd Lt. Susumu Ito, 522nd FAB, C Battery, , possibly taken by PFC Francis I. Tsuzuki, C, Battery.

From the collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul



Survivors from a death march from Dachau huddle around a campfire prepared by Japanese American soldiers with the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. The soldier on the left is Sgt. George Oiye and on the right is T/4 Yuki Minaga. Both are from C Battery.

Photographer - 2nd Lt. Susumu Ito, C Battery.

From the collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul



May 2, 1945: 522nd FAB, C Battery soldier T/4 Tahae Sugita (RIGHT) stands next to a rescued inmate. The rescued inmate to LEFT of Sugita is holding a rolled blanket possibly given to him by a soldier of the 522nd

Photo by 522nd FAB, C Battery S/Sgt. George Oiye, C Battery

From the Collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul

In Waakirchen: Providing Care, Shelter, and Security



2nd Lt. Susumu Ito, 522nd FAB, C Battery in Waakirchen

From the collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul



Liberated death march survivors in Waakirchen where after May 4 the U.S. Army set up a field hospital to provide for their care after their rescue by the 522nd

Photo from the collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul



Rescued inmates at Waakirchen. The inmate on the left is wrapped in what appears to be an Army blanket possibly given to him by a soldier of the 522nd

Photo by Lt. Albert E. Benotti, 522nd FAB, A Battery

From the collection of the USHMM courtesy of Eric Saul



Rescued death march inmates in the town of Waakirchen

Photo by Technician Fifth Grade Nobuo Takamori', Headquarters Battery, courtesy of his son Craig Takamori'

Death March Memorials

At least nine identical memorials are placed along the route of the death march from Dachau to Waakirchen from north to south at Dachau, Fürstenfeldbruck, Gräfelfing, Planegg, Krailling, Gauting, Berg-Aufkirchen, Wolfratshausen, and on the road between and at the site of the 522nd's rescue on the road between Bad Tolz and Waakirch. An additional memorial stands in the Shoah-memorial park Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and Waakirchen.



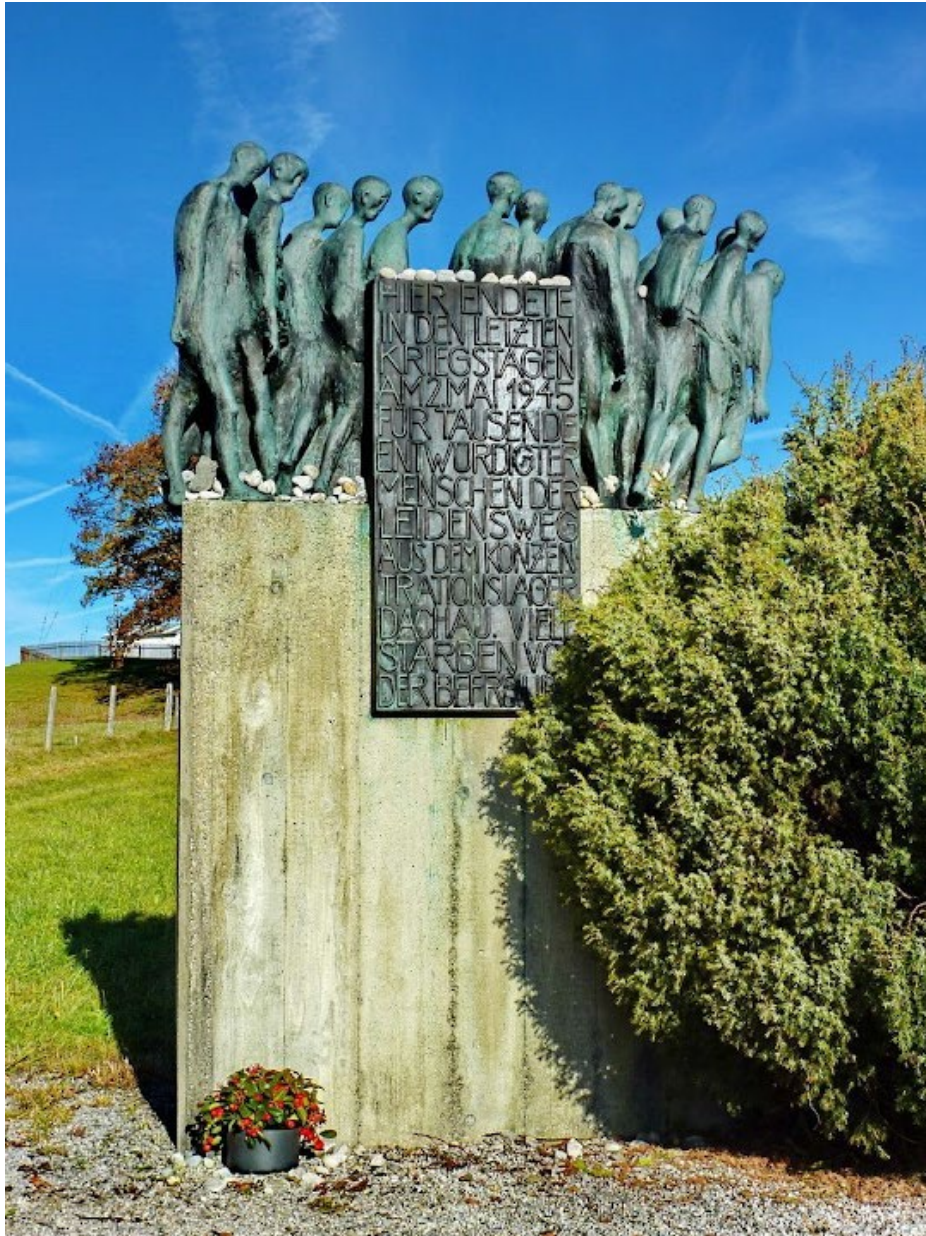
The death march monument at the intersection of Theodor-Heuss-Straße/Sudetenlandstraße, Dachau memorializes the arrival of the inmates at the main camp and the start of the death march to the south.

Fair use of photo from the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site.



Death march memorial in Krailling, 17 miles south of Dachau and 55 miles north of Waakirchen.

Fair use of the image by the Committee International de Dachau



Death march memorial at the site of the rescue by the 522nd on the memorial road between Bad Tölz and Waakirchen.

Map of the location of the

Translation of the plaque:

"Here, in the final days of the war on May 2, 1945, the ordeal of thousands of degraded people from the Dachau concentration camp ended. Many died before liberation."

Translation by Christopher Focke

Soldiers in the Illustrated History and the Incarceration and Internment of Japanese Americans

Japanese American citizens living in California, Oregon, and Washington, the three states designated a “military zone”, were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in camps in other states.

Non-citizen Japanese Americans were designated “enemy aliens” and interned elsewhere.

None of the soldiers named in the **Illustrated History** were incarcerated. They either enlisted before the incarcerations or were from states not in the “military zones” from which Japanese Americans were relocated. Several had family members who were incarcerated or interned.

2nd Lt. Susumu Ito was from California.

Family members were incarcerated at Rohwer, Arkansas.

Technician Fourth Grade Yuki Minaga was from Utah which was outside of the “military zone” from which Japanese Americans were relocated.

Staff Sergeant George Oiye was from Montana.

His father and sister were in one of the states in the “military zone” from which Japanese Americans were removed.

His native-born citizen sister was incarcerated at Manzanar, California.

His noncitizen father was designated an enemy alien and interned at an undisclosed location

Technician Fourth Grade Tahae Sugita was California.

Currently, we have no information on the incarceration of his family.

Technician Fifth Grade Nobuo Takamori was from Hawaii.

His family was not among the over 2000 of the 160,000 Japanese Americans in Hawaii were interned or incarcerated.

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Based on the art design by Rich Mintz

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