

LETTER FROM EISENHOWER TO MARSHALL

APRIL 15, 1945



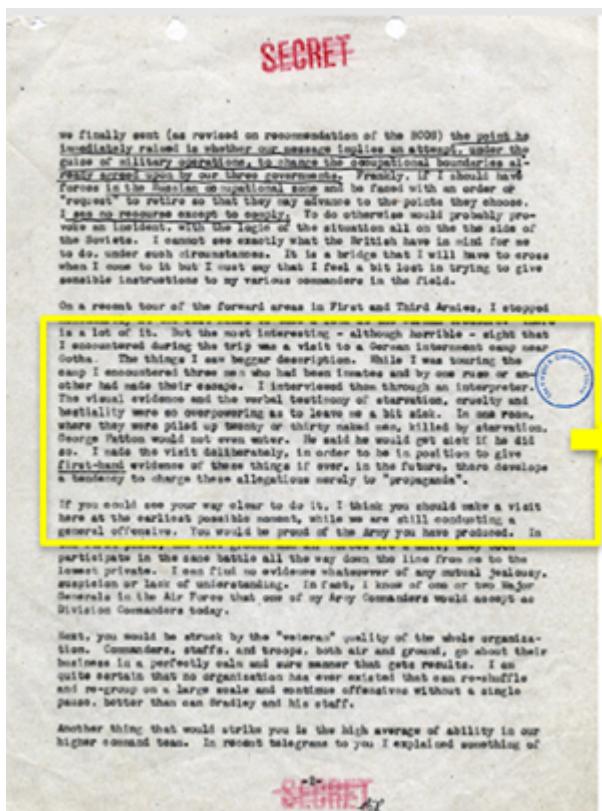
ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

Read the introduction and excerpt below. Annotate the document by highlighting key information and adding margin notes in response to the following question:

WHAT WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF LIBERATORS AS EYEWITNESSES?

The concentration camp in Ohrdruf, Germany was the first to be liberated by U.S. forces on April 4, 1945. The horrors the liberators reported led Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton to visit the camp. Eisenhower wrote to General George C. Marshall in Washington, D.C. to describe the disturbing things he saw. He requested that journalists and members of Congress be sent to witness the atrocities and convey them to the American public.



"...[T]he most interesting – although horrible – sight that I encountered during the trip was a visit to a German internment camp near Gotha. The things I saw beggar description. While I was touring the camp I encountered three men who had been inmates and by one ruse or another had made their escape. I interviewed them through an interpreter. The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where they were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation, George Patton would not even enter. He said he would get sick if he did so. I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda'.

If you could see your way clear to do it, I think you should make a visit here at the earliest possible moment, while we are still conducting a general offensive. You would be proud of the Army you have produced. In participating in the same battle all the way down the line from me to the lowest private, I can find no evidence whatever of any actual jealousy, suspicion or lack of understanding. In fact, I know of one or two Major Generals in the Air Forces that one of my Army Commanders would accept as Division Commanders today.

Next, you would be struck by the "reverent" quality of the whole organization. Commanders, staffs, and troops, both air and ground, go about their business in a perfectly calm and sure manner that gets results. I am quite certain that no organization has ever existed that can re-shuffle and re-group on a large scale and continue offensive without a single pause, better than can Bradley and his staff.

Another thing that would strike you is the high average of ability in our higher command team. In recent telegrams to you, I explained something of

THINK ABOUT IT...

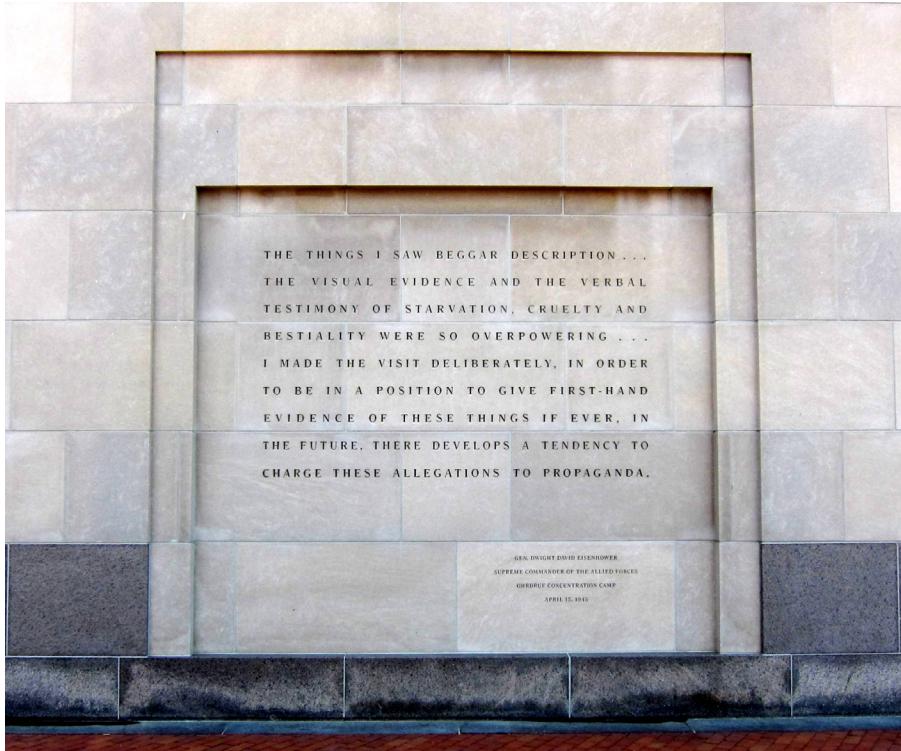
- 1 What does Eisenhower mean by “beggar description”? What does this phrase reveal about the nature of Nazi crimes?
- 2 What was the importance of the “visual evidence and verbal testimony” that U.S. soldiers began gathering at this time?
- 3 Why does Eisenhower stress that his visit was “deliberate” in order to give “first-hand evidence”?
- 4 What fears and predictions are communicated by the words “a tendency to charge these allegations merely to ‘propaganda’”?
- 5 Why does Eisenhower urge Marshall to visit at “the earliest possible moment”?

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The quotation by General Dwight D. Eisenhower on the exterior of the Hall of Remembrance at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Image source: AgnosticPreachersKid. Eisenhower quote – U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. April 14, 2010. Accessed May 18, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eisenhower_quote_-_U.S._Holocaust_Memorial_Museum.JPG.