

To all the surviving members of the 42nd Rainbow Division of WW2,

Myself and two coworkers won a DreamGrant from our work that allowed us to travel to Europe so that we could follow the 42nd Rainbow Division's route through Europe during its WW2 campaign.

Being a veteran myself this was truly a great honor and privilege that I was about to undertake. I served in the US Army with the 101st Division in D. Co. 2/187 and both of my grandfathers served during WW2. There was a lot to take in during our trip, but in the back of my mind I kept imagining what it must have been like to be fighting here in this vast countryside. I know all wars are the same and all wars are different so my experience varies greatly from the men and women who served during this time in our history.



A truly humbling experience that stands out in my mind during our trip was seeing Dachau. The three of us walked a Death March POWs had to do from Munich to Tegernsee, Germany. And although it wasn't the same because we weren't malnourished or prisoners it was an experience I will never forget. After some 68 miles we visited Dachau and had the experience of what true horrors were conducted at Dachau. It made me angry and sad all at the same time that people could commit such atrocities against their fellow man.

I can't possibly imagine what it was like when the 42nd liberated the camp and rescued all the survivors. There were many things that really touched me on this trip and opened my eyes to new experiences and cultures and it's something I don't take lightly. I can't express my respect and admiration enough for all the men and women who fought during WW2 and all the other soldiers who continue to serve today.

Sincerely,

Daniel Cornelius

Dear Rainbow Division,

I am writing to thank you for the legendary acts of service that the Rainbow Division performed during World War II. My wife Jessi, and a friend, Daniel Cornelius, and I recently returned from a trip to Europe to commemorate the mission of the Rainbow Division in World War II and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Dachau Concentration Camp.

We arrived in Marseille, France on April 18th to begin our journey through France and Germany and visit some of the important sites of World War II. On our first full day in Marseille, we visited the cathedral Notre-Dame de la Garde. While there, a thief busted out the window of our rented Peugeot and stole all of our belongings, including my passport, credit card, driver's license, clothes, phone, camera chargers, and backpack. The total value of the theft was over \$3,000. Our friend Daniel wavered on whether to continue our journey, but after some discussion, it was decided that we would all go on together.

After a couple of days in Marseille, we made our way north and visited the beaches of Normandy where the United States was so instrumental in the soon to come liberation of Europe from Nazi tyranny. We saw the craters from the shelling and the collapsed Nazi armament stations. As I

looked out at the sea, I tried to imagine the fear that would have been felt on both sides. Surely the Germans knew that defeat was coming, but they stayed and fought, making the casualties that much heavier for America and her allies. I wondered how many tears were shed in Iowa, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York, and all over America for the sons and brothers lost on that day. I wondered if those who fought for freedom on that day had any idea that sheep would one day graze on the hills where the Nazis mounted their guns, and children would play in the craters where bombs fell.

After Normandy, we traveled to Munich where we approached but did not enter the Dachau Concentration Camp. Our aim was to walk the 70 mile forced death march by the Dachau prisoners to Tegernsee in southern Germany. During our three day journey, we saw beautiful countryside and enjoyed the peace of birds chirping as we walked. I got enormous blisters on my feet but found the journey pleasant all the same. How unusual that such a beautiful place must have been so terrible to those that marched in the cold. I hoped that maybe the Jews who survived the march were able to find some joy in such beautiful country after being locked up, tortured, and nearly worked to death.

Upon arrival in Tegernsee, we immediately boarded a train back to Dachau to finally visit the concentration camp where so much evil took place. As we visited the memorial, we saw and learned of the horror that was everyday life for the interned. I cried more than once as I visited the exhibits detailing their torture. I cried again as I read about and saw footage detailing the final liberation of the camp by soldiers from the United States of America.

At one point, I stopped to reflect. How insignificant were my blistered feet. How insignificant was the theft of my phone. The Jews and others at Dachau were robbed of their families, their dignity, and their hope. Too many American families were robbed of their sons and brothers by the Nazi war machine. How much am I in debt to those who fought for the freedom that I enjoy today? Perhaps I will never know because I have never lived in a world where Americans didn't fight to preserve the freedom of their grandchildren.



This was ultimately what this trip was all about, to remember, to commemorate, and to thank. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I don't know that I will ever fully understand what it was like for those that saw and felt the horrors of World War II, but I do know that I understand what America stands for and what she has always stood for. America stands for freedom and her freedom is a beacon of light in dark world. May she ever be that beacon and may we forever thank the greatest Americans, the American soldiers.

Thank you forever for your honorable service and sacrifice.

Jared Quillen

Dear veterans of the 42nd Division WWII,

In April of this year we boarded a plane to Marseille, France to begin our journey of following your path through Europe in 1944. Our purpose was to commemorate your bravery and accomplishment of freeing those prisoners who had survived the terrible and unimaginable treatment within the Dachau Concentration camp.

We entered Marseille and stayed for several days, then traveled to Paris. We made a detour to Normandy to pay our respects for the brave men who fought to take the beaches there. From Normandy we drove to Strasbourg and stopped in Stuttgart. In Stuttgart we spent one evening with our friend's daughter who is 11, searching the town for Stolpersteines, mini gold plaques that were placed in the sidewalk in front of homes or businesses where the person identified was taken from their home by the Nazi's. As we were rubbing paper with pencils over the Stolpersteines a woman stopped and asked if we'd like to know more about the woman who was taken from the yellow and red building that stood in front of the stone. She worked at what was now a primary school but used to be the home of a young woman with disabilities. She was taken from her home one day, placed in a camp for the disabled, and later killed with the other disabled children there. The woman telling the story was noticeably disturbed and saddened by the history, she told us how she and the other teachers tell the children about the history of the house and who used to live there to make sure the children understand. That was an eye opening experience and I'm thankful she stopped to tell us the story.

The following day we took a train to Munich and a bus to the doors of the Dachau Concentration camp. We did not go in however, but turned south to begin our approximate 70 mile walk, the same walk as a large number of prisoners of the Dachau concentration camp were forced to march only days before the camp's liberation. The walk was the most memorable part of the entire trip. We walked 17 miles the first day, 28 the second day, 15 the third day and around 10 the last day. The walking wore on us and left lasting injuries. On the second day I came to a point where I could not walk any further. I took my shoes off to rest and by the time I had to put them back on again I could not fit my feet in my shoes because of the swelling. Blisters, shin splints, swelling feet, hip and knee pain were all things that we experienced from the constant walking. I was amazed at the toll it took on our bodies, we are young, fit and able and we had trouble finishing some days. I had a lot of time to reflect on what kinds of conditions the prisoners were in and how they must have felt. I was astonished that so many who were starved, beaten and weak had the will to survive and continue marching.



During our march we came across statues commemorating the death march and each time we reached one we stopped and rested by the statues. We were so happy to see wreaths, candles and flowers at each monument showing that people still remember.

After making it to Tegernsee we boarded a train back to Munich. After resting a day we travelled to Dachau to tour the concentration camp. Words cannot describe the feelings I had as I entered the gate reading "Work will set you free". We all wanted to visit the camp, however after walking the 70 miles of the death march I had a different feeling about the camp. The longer I was there the more sad I was and the feeling of wanting to leave grew stronger and stronger. As we walked from building to building all I wanted to do was walk out of the camp all together and never come back. I would repeat these words in my head "I want to leave and I am so thankful that I can". I could come and go as I pleased because of the freedom that I have. The freedom that was not free. I am incredibly thankful to you, the veterans of the 42nd Rainbow Division.



Thank you for your bravery, thank you for your courage, and thank you for your willingness to grant the future generations the freedom we have today. Lastly, thank you for being our inspiration. The feelings and experiences from this trip will last a lifetime. We truly wish we could have met some of you during the 70 year anniversary, but we tried our best to commemorate you while we followed your path to liberation.

**Thank you again, for everything,
Jessi Quillen**

Posted with permission

The photos of the wreaths laid in remembrance at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Daniel Cornelius, Jared Quillen and Jessica Quillen are from Jessi