

## Pavilion Talk – June 3

Jack McGee, a soldier in the 157<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and a graduate of Pavilion Central School, fought against the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) in Europe in 1944 and 1945. PFC McGee was one of the soldiers participating in the liberation of the Dachau Concentration Camp on April 29, 1945. Among the prisoners freed on that day was Dr. Walter Neumann. After liberation, Dr. Neumann immigrated to the United States, and practiced medicine on Route 63, across from the Pavilion Central School District. Dachau was the first major concentration camp in Germany, and subsequently, in German-occupied Europe. At one point, there were about 980 such camps. Dachau, as the first of these centers of human misery, came into existence in 1933. By the end of that year, there were 110 concentration camps in Germany.

Dachau was located just north of the German city of Munich. It was by March of 1933 that Dachau first incarcerated political prisoners – or those disagreeing with the ideas and policies of the Nazi government, which first came into power only two months before. Dachau then housed others, such as those born Jewish, or practicing Christians opposed to the brutality of the Nazi regime, a government fiercely opposed to individual freedom.

Dachau was not a prison as most of us think of a prison. It was, instead, a place in which inmates were routinely tortured, beaten, raped, and starved. Corporations used inmates as slave labor. In existence for twelve years, it housed about 200,000 men, women, and children. At least 32,000 human beings died there of starvation and disease. Physicians also used selected prisoners as guinea pigs in medical experiments. Some non-German prisoners of war were housed in camps like Dachau, such as Russian soldiers (Slavs were considered by the Nazis to be *untermenschen*, or sub-human), African-American soldiers captured by the Nazis, and American soldiers of Jewish faith. Catholic priests and Protestant ministers critical of the Nazis were also sent to concentration camps such as Dachau.

Dr. Neumann's experience reminds us that no one is completely safe, even in a civilized country like Germany before Hitler's rise to power. Ordinary, law-abiding people could be unjustly arrested and imprisoned. Without warning, their lives could turn into chaos. Their neighbors can turn on them, and treat them horribly. Jack McGee helped to free such people from the unspeakable sadism of a place like Dachau and defeat the government that created such a place. He – and his

fellow veterans – deserve the utmost respect and honor from the rest of us.  
Thank you.