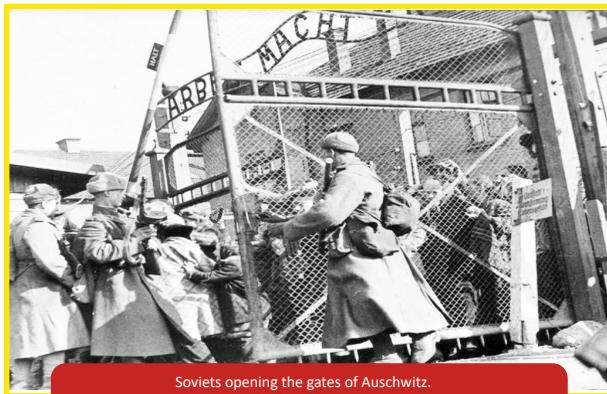# WITNESS TODAY

## JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2021-5781

## Holocaust Remembrance Day
### The Liberation of Auschwitz

On November 1, 2005, the United Nations dubbed the 27th of January to be the official International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This date was specifically chosen as it marks the momentous day when the prisoners of the Auschwitz death camp were finally liberated.

With the approach of the Red Army, the Nazis began evacuating Auschwitz, sending its inmates to the hitherto unthreatened concentration camps lying farthest from the approaching Allied forces in the heart of Germany. Nearly 60,000 prisoners were forced to go on these death marches, many of whom did not survive. This meant that only about 7 thousand people remained in Auschwitz at the time of liberation. Nonetheless, for those survivors, this time of liberation marked a victory. As the concentration camp with the highest death toll, Auschwitz has become the symbol of


Soviets opening the gates of Auschwitz.
Credit: reddit.com

the barbarity of the Holocaust. Hence, every year, on the anniversary of the camp's liberation, the world comes together in remembrance of the atrocities of the Holocaust and the month when it all finally came to an end.

## The Jewish Commander
## Who Liberated Auschwitz

Lieutenant Colonel Anatoly Shapiro was a Ukrainian Jew and the highly decorated Soviet officer who commanded the liberation of Auschwitz. He led the 1085th 'Tarnopol' of the Soviet 322nd Rifle Division- an elite force which was called into immediate action on January 25th, 1945. Shapiro and his men were among the first to fight their way towards Auschwitz and face the desperate Nazi resistance. The Germans exhausted their last feeble attempts to maintain control and possession of their atrocious secret - the complex that was Auschwitz, but as the Soviets pushed forward, they scrambled to destroy the evidence of their crimes and flee.


Auschwitz liberator Anatoly Shapiro.
military.wikia.org

On the morning of January the 27th, Shapiro and the Red Army broke through the final forces and entered the camp, to behold unimaginable devastation. "I had seen a lot in this war," explained Colonel Shapiro, "I had seen many innocent people killed. I had seen hanged people. I had seen burned people. But I was still unprepared for Auschwitz..." The scene was one of utter, unimaginable horror.

Upon entering the hospital, the Soviet soldiers were met with the terrified screams of the Jewish children who called out "We are not Jews!" The children had mistaken them for German soldiers and were terrified for their lives. This, recalls Shapiro, "was the hardest sight of all." The Nazi's inhumane crimes were inconceivable, and the Soviets were horrified by what they beheld upon entering Auschwitz.

On January the 27th, 1945, the inmates of Auschwitz, many of whom were Jewish, were liberated by the soldiers of the Red Army. And in fortuitous providential defiance of the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jewish race, among these rescuers was a fellow Jew.

Sources: After Hitler: The Last Ten Days of World War II in Europe "The Jewish Combat Commander Who Liberated Auschwitz," by Martin Sieff. Strategic Culture Foundation