



REAGAN DEFENDS HIS VISIT TO BITBURG CEMETERY BUT ASSURES HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS DURING BERGEN-BELSEN VISIT 'I PROMISE YOU, WE WILL NEVER FORGET'

By Edwin Eytan (Bitburg) and David Kantor (Bergen-Belsen)

May 5 (JTA) — President Reagan today continued to defend his decision to visit the military cemetery at Bitburg while at the same time assuring the victims of the Holocaust, "I promise you, we will never forget."

Reagan, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany, visited the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp this morning where both leaders spoke and then flew by helicopter to Bitburg where 45-50 members of the Waffen SS are buried among some 2,000 German war dead. The two men also made an unscheduled stopover at the grave of Konrad Adenauer, West Germany's first post-war Chancellor who is revered as the architect of its democracy.

Reagan and Kohl spent barely three minutes at the cemetery where the President placed a wreath. He then addressed some 11,000 American servicemen and their families at the U.S. Air Force base nearby.

At Bergen-Belsen, Reagan quoted extensively from the diary of Anne Frank, the publication of which more than a generation ago made the Dutch-born Jewish teen-ager who perished there one of the most tragic symbols of the Holocaust. The President was clearly seeking to soften the pain and anguish caused Jews and many non-Jews by his decision, at the insistence of Kohl, to pay homage to dead German soldiers, among them the notorious killers of the SS.

Speech At Bitburg Air Force Base

In his speech at the Air Force base, the President again addressed himself to the Holocaust victims and survivors, declaring:

"Your terrible suffering has made you ever vigilant against evil. Many of you are worried that reconciliation means forgetting. I promise you, we will never forget. I have just come this morning from Bergen-Belsen where the horror of that terrible crime, the Holocaust, was forever burned upon my memory. No, we will never forget, and we say with the victims of the Holocaust: Never Again."

But the main theme of Reagan's talk to the U.S. Air Force personnel was "reconciliation" with the enemies of 40 years ago. He assured them — and the many American veterans and their families who felt the visit to Bitburg was an insult to Americans who died fighting the Germans in World War II — that "Our gesture of reconciliation with the German people today in no way minimizes our love and honor for those who died for our country. They gave their lives to rescue freedom in its darkest hour . . ."

In a reference to the storm of controversy surrounding the Bitburg trip, Reagan said "Old wounds have been reopened, and this I regret very much, because this should be a time of healing."

But the President persisted in defending his decision to place a wreath at the Bitburg cemetery with the same justifications that he had used in Washington during the past few weeks to deflect criticism. He also appeared to equate the Holocaust and anti-Semitism with far more recent manifestations of inhuman treatment perpetrated by the Soviet Union and other Communist or putatively Communist regimes.

Mourns German War Dead

"The war (against Nazism) was not like other wars," the President stressed at the Air Force base. "Nazis turned all values upside down." He added, "Nevertheless, we can mourn the German war dead today as human beings crushed by a vicious ideology."

Reagan stressed further that only 48 of the dead at Bitburg belonged to the SS. "Others buried there were simply soldiers in the German army." He asked, rhetorically, "How many were fanatical followers of a dictator and wilfully carried out his orders? And how many were conscripts, forced into service during the death throes of the Nazi war machine?"

"We shall never know the answer. Many, however, we know from the dates on their tombstones were only teenagers at the time. There is one boy buried there who died a week before his 16th birthday. There were thousands of such soldiers to whom Nazism meant no more than a brutal end to a short life."

"We do not believe in collective guilt. Only God can look into the human heart. All these men have now met their supreme judge, and they have all been judged by him as we shall all be judged."

Those remarks were an almost word-for-word echo of Reagan's defense of his Bitburg trip to European journalists at the White House barely a week ago when he claimed that the fallen German soldiers were "surely" no less victims of Nazism than those who perished in the death camps. They also echoed his observation that the dead at Bitburg have long since been judged by God.

Cites Narrative Of Two German Women

Reagan launched into a narrative about how on Christmas night during the Battle of the Bulge in December, 1944, two German women sheltered three American soldiers who were lost behind enemy lines, one of them wounded, and also four German soldiers, aged 16-23. He did not reveal the source of that story but named the two women's sons.

Then the President reminded his servicemen audience that 22 years ago President Kennedy went to the Berlin Wall and proclaimed, in German, "I am a Berliner."

"Today," said Reagan, "freedom-loving people around the world must say, 'I am a Berliner, I am a Jew in a world still threatened by anti-Semitism, I am an Afghan, and I am a prisoner of the Gulag, I am a refugee in a crowded boat foundering off the coast of Vietnam, I am a Laotian, a Cambodian, a Cuban and a Mesquito Indian in Nicaragua. I, too, am a potential victim of totalitarianism.'"

Earlier in the day, at Bergen-Belsen where 1,000 police were posted in and around the concentration camp site, having long since removed protestors, Jewish and non-Jewish, from the scene (See separate story), Reagan said:

"This painful walk into the past has done much more than remind us of the war that consumed the European continent. What we have seen makes it unforgettably clear that no one of the rest of us can fully understand the enormity of the feelings carried by the victims of these camps. The survivors carry a memory beyond anything that we can comprehend. Today we have been grimly reminded why the Commandment of this camp was named the 'Beast of Belsen.'

"Above all, we are struck by the horror of it all—the mausoleum, incomprehensible horror. That is what we have seen — but its what we can never understand as the victims did. Nor with all our compassion can we feel what the survivors feel to this day and what they will feel as long as they live."

Reagan and Kohl were received at Bergen-Belsen by Hans Albrecht, Prime Minister of the Federal State of Lower Saxony. They spent about 10 minutes at the documentation center at the site where a permanent exhibition of Nazi horrors displayed.

From there, the President and Chancellor were driven to the Jewish Memorial where Reagan walked up to the 25-meter-high obelisk overlooking a 50-meter wall with inscriptions in many languages. On his way, Reagan paused at the mass graves where 5,000 of the 50,000 mostly Jewish victims of Bergen-Belsen are buried.

The ceremonials at the memorial had been scheduled to include kaddish service. But no Jew was present. Every rabbi invited had refused to attend in protest against the Bitburg visit which was to follow. A Protestant Minister and a Roman Catholic priest spoke, one of them about the sufferings of the Jews.

Kohl Does Not Refer To Jews

After the President placed a wreath at the memorial, Kohl spoke and his remarks were conspicuous for the absence of any direct reference to Jews.

"Mr. President," said the Chancellor, "you have come here to pay homage to the victims of National Socialist tyranny. Bergen-Belsen was a place of unimaginable atrocities. It was only one of the many sites testifying to a demonic will to destroy."

"At a ceremony here two weeks ago, I, in my capacity as Chancellor, professed our historical responsibility. You, Mr. President, represent a country which played a decisive part in liberating Europe and ultimately the Germans, too, from Hitler's tyranny. We Germans reverently commemorate the soldiers of your nation who lost their lives in that act of liberation. We bow in sorrow before the victims of murder and genocide."

"The supreme goal of our political efforts is to render impossible any repetition of that systematic destruction of human life and dignity. With their partners and friends, the Americans and Germans therefore stand together as allies in the community of shared values and in the defense alliance in order to safeguard man's absolute and inviolable dignity in conditions of freedom and peace."

There were about 350 official guests at the Bergen-Belsen ceremony and about the same number of reporters from the world media. The ranking Jewish

dignitaries present -- in fact the only Jews -- were Israel's Ambassador to Bonn, Yitzhak Ben Ari, whose attendance apparently was dictated by protocol, and the U.S. Ambassador, Arthur Burns.

HUNDREDS OF JEWISH PROTESTORS EXPRESS OUTRAGE, ANGUISH AT REAGAN AND KOHL FOR VISITING BITBURG

By Edwin Eytan

BITBURG, May 5 (JTA) -- Hundreds of Jewish protestors from the United States, Europe and Israel lined the roads to and from the military cemetery here today to pour out their anguish and outrage at President Reagan and Chancellor Helmut Kohl for honoring the German soldiers of World War II buried there, among them some 50 members of the notorious Waffen SS.

Unlike the scene at Bergen-Belsen earlier in the day where hundreds of other Jewish protestors were removed by police from the concentration camp site hours before Reagan arrived (See separate story), the authorities at Bitburg were lenient. As a gesture of good-will, in fact, the police laid down their clubs and shields.

The demonstrators, who had converged here from Britain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Israel and all parts of the U.S., most of them young people and students, but many Holocaust survivors as well, were allowed to station themselves along the route taken by the Reagan-Kohl motorcade from the cemetery to the nearby U.S. Air Force base. They gave the police their word that their demonstration would be peaceful, but not that it would be silent.

The ceremony at the small gothic cemetery was very brief. Reagan, accompanied by Kohl and appearing to be in a sombre mood, paused at the entrance while a German army bugler sounded an old tune, dating back to World War I and perhaps before -- "Once I had a comrade -- he is no more." Reagan then walked up to the 50-foot-high granite war memorial, placed a wreath and shook hands with Col. Count Berthold Schenk von Stauffenberg, co-opted by the Bonn authorities to represent the German army. Earlier, on a television interview, Stauffenberg indicated distaste for the assignment. Stauffenberg's father was executed by the Nazis for trying to assassinate Hitler.

Reagan arrived at the cemetery by a different route than the one by which he departed. White House aides assured the press -- a limited number were allowed inside the cemetery -- that the President was well out of earshot of the jeers and shouts by the protestors which were in angry counterpoint to the plaintive notes of the bugler.

But on his way back, passing through the center of Bitburg, the President not only saw but heard the hundreds who cried out against his presence at the cemetery. Using bull horns they chanted, "Ronnie, Ronnie, Why? Why?" Another group picked up the chant: "Why? Why did you forget our dead?"

In the heart of Bitburg, passing through massed demonstrators, Reagan could not help but see a man standing on a railing who shouted at him, loudly and clearly, "Why did you do it? The SS killed my father." But if he heard this and other expressions of anger, the President gave no sign. He leaned slightly toward the crowd and waved from the window of his car.

Along the route taken by the motorcade were flagpoles every six feet and on each there was a demonstrator or who had climbed to the top, among them a member

TWO U.S. JEWISH LEADERS CONFLICTED OVER REAGAN'S VISIT TO BITBURG AND HIS REMARKS AT BERGEN-BELSEN

NEW YORK, May 5 (JTA) — Two American Jewish leaders clearly expressed today the conflicting reactions of many other Jews to President Reagan's visit to a German military cemetery containing the bodies of Waffen SS troops and earlier too hastily-arranged stop at a former Nazi death camp.

Howard Friedman, president of the American Jewish Committee, noted again the failure of the Committee and other Jewish leaders to persuade Reagan to cancel the visit to the Bitburg cemetery. But he praised the President's remarks at the Bergen-Belsen death camp and his visit to West Germany's first Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's grave, another last minute arrangement.

"Our lingering sadness over Bitburg must not be allowed to interfere with our determination to look ahead," Friedman declared, noting that "there is the irony that the unfortunate controversy over Bitburg has widened almost beyond comprehension the attention to the Holocaust and to its challenge that its lessons must never be forgotten."

Reagan had steadfastly contended the meaning of his visit should be to focus on the reconciliation of Germans and Americans as staunch allies 40 years after the Third Reich collapsed.

Nathan Perlmutter, director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said the President's "gentle eloquence" at Bergen-Belsen "will resonate for a long time. Not so his discomfiting walk at Bitburg."

But, Perlmutter added, "It's all over now. The President has a new debit in his ledger: Bitburg. But as we all want to be judged by our full records rather than on our worst lapses, so should a President be judged. Bitburg evidences an insensitivity to the victimized dead. The miraculous airlift of Ethiopian Jews from Sudan and the defense of Israel reveal a great sensitivity for the living and the future."

PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS IN ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 5 (JTA)—Students, gradeschoolers scouts and members of leftwing political parties protested today outside the U.S. Embassy here and the American Consulate in Jerusalem, while rightwing members of the Betar youth movement held a protest demonstration outside the West German Embassy in Tel Aviv last night. All the demonstrations expressed opposition to President Reagan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery today.

Among those demonstrating outside the German Embassy last night was Deputy Foreign Minister Ronnie Milo, who said in a television interview today that his action was "unusual and unprecedented." But he said he thought the special circumstances of the President's wreath-laying at a cemetery in which SS men were buried warranted his action.

Mapam's political secretary, Knesset member Victor Shemtov, who headed the Mapam demonstration in Tel Aviv, handed in a letter to the U.S. Embassy, for transmission to Reagan, expressing regrets that he had given way to German pressure to go through with the visit.

"We are protesting that the U.S. President at one and the same time lays a wreath at the memorial to the victims of the Nazis, and also at the graves of their murderers," Shemtov said later.

"We cannot agree to this balance. I would prefer that Reagan not visit Bergen-Belsen."

FORMER WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING LEADER CALLS FOR DAY OF MOURNING AND FASTING OVER BITBURG VISIT

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 5 (JTA) — Abba Kovner, a writer and poet who was a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, called on the leaders of Israel today to go to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial tomorrow and to fast as a gesture of national mourning over President Reagan's visit to the Bitburg military cemetery and for what he perceived to be the "mild" Israeli reaction to that visit.

Kovner charged, in a television interview, that the Jewish people did not stand up for their interests in connection with Bitburg. "Do we not have red lines to the spiritual existence of the Jewish people?" he asked.

There are such red lines, Kovner said — the murder of the Jewish people in the Holocaust and the murder of Jewish history at Bitburg today. "More than 40 years ago, my people were led to slaughter. Today their memory was executed," Kovner said.

Israel's two Chief Rabbis — Mordechai Elisha, Sephardic, and Avraham Shapiro, Ashkenazic — sent a cable of protest to President Reagan in Germany. "The blood of our brethren, the Jewish people of Europe, which were annihilated by those murderers, with the purpose of annihilating the entire Jewish people, cries from under the ground," their message said.

The Executive of the World Jewish Congress presented letters of protest to the U.S. and German Ambassadors in Tel Aviv today.

Yitzhak Koren, chairman of the Israeli Executive of the WJC, and Avi Bekker, director general, met with the German envoy, Nils Hansen. They expressed deep concern over the rising wave of anti-Semitic articles in West Germany in the week before Reagan's visit to Bitburg. Koren expressed concern that the visit would strengthen the trend among the German public to deny the Holocaust.

AN SS MURDERER IS ENJOYING HIS OLD AGE IN FREEDOM IN AUSTRIA

By Reinhard Engel

VIENNA, May 5 (JTA) — There is one SS mass murderer who is not buried at Bitburg. His name is Franz Murer and he is enjoying his old age in freedom on his farm in Styria in his native Austria. His victims were the Jews of the Vilna ghetto.

Tried for his crimes in the Soviet Union — where he was convicted — and re-tried in Austria — where he was acquitted — Murer's repeated escapes from justice were hardly a matter of luck. It is attributable to the willingness of many of his fellow-Austrians not only to forgive and forget but actually to embrace one of the most vicious criminals of the Holocaust.

It is such attitudes that many Jews and non-Jews fear will be encouraged — albeit unwittingly — by President Reagan's visit today to the military cemetery at Bitburg where some 47 members of the notorious Waffen SS are buried along with other German war dead.

Murer, like Hitler, an Austrian by birth, joined the SS in 1938. From 1941-1943 he served as aide to the area commander in Vilna and was responsible for the forced labor of Jews. According to survivors, he was also responsible for their mass slaughter.

The British army captured Murer after the war and handed him over to the Russians in whose jurisdiction his crimes were committed. In 1948 he faced a Soviet

military court in Vilna, was convicted and sentenced to death. But his sentence was soon commuted to 25 years at hard labor. In 1955, after the signing of the Austrian State Treaty which ended the four-power occupation of that country, Murer was sent back to Austria where he was to serve out the remainder of his sentence.

But he did not. The Austrian Ministry of Justice ruled that the proceedings against Murer were closed because he had already been tried in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Ministry initiated a motion for a new trial. Murer, meanwhile, had become a leader of a local chapter of a farmers Conservative Party.

He was re-arrested in 1961. Coincidentally, the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann was then underway in Jerusalem. Farmers in Murer's home village demonstrated in his behalf. They were convinced that, like Eichmann, he had been kidnapped by Israeli agents.

After two years of pre-trial confinement, Murer again faced a court. He was charged with 15 specific murders. Later, based on the testimony of witnesses, the number was raised to 17.

Emotional Atmosphere At the Trial

Contemporary newspaper accounts reported an extremely emotional atmosphere at Murer's trial. Witnesses, survivors of the Vilna ghetto, burst into tears as they recounted how Murer cold-bloodedly shot members of their families. The public prosecutor urged the jury to judge Murer as if he had murdered their own children or close relatives.

"We have to prove that the past is past in Austria and that anybody who kills, regardless of the race of the victim, will be punished," the prosecutor said.

The jury did not get the message. He was acquitted. According to witnesses at the trial, some of the jurors joined Murer at a nearby restaurant afterwards for a drink to celebrate his acquittal. The public prosecutor appealed the verdict. It seemed for a time there might be a new trial. But in 1974 the proceedings were formally and permanently closed.

Justice was not entirely defeated. Two of Murer's direct subordinates, SS officers Martin Weiss and Walter Hering, were convicted of war crimes in 1949 in Wuertzburg, West Germany, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

There is an ironic footnote to the story. Murer's son, Gerulf, entered politics, not in his father's Conservative Party but as a member of the Liberal-Right Freedom Party. Today he is a Secretary of State in the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture.

250,000 PEOPLE GATHER FOR ANNUAL SOLIDARITY SUNDAY FOR SOVIET JEWRY By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, May 5 (JTA)—Tens of thousands of persons were today joined by national and state legislators, Jewish activists and leaders as well as Archbishop John O'Connor in the annual mass rally opposite the United Nations in support of Soviet Jewry.

Under cloudy skies, a crowd estimated by Mayor Edward Koch at nearly 250,000 people gathered in Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza for the 14th annual Solidarity Sunday for Soviet Jewry, sponsored by the Coalition to Free Soviet Jews.

Speaker after speaker stressed the urgency of the plight of Soviet Jewry, who continue to suffer from Soviet government sponsored harassment and intimidation and are refused the right to emigrate despite requests from hundreds of thousands of Jews that they be allowed to leave the USSR.

Last month merely 166 Jews were allowed to emigrate. While the figure represents an increase from the 97 allowed to emigrate during the previous month it continues to remain significantly less than during the peak year of 1979 when some 51,320 Jews were allowed to emigrate. Last year, about 900 Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union.

Herbert Kronish, chairman of the Coalition to Free Soviet Jews, urged the Reagan Administration to press for easing by the Soviet Union of its emigration policies. He called for the issue of Soviet Jewry to be raised during all bilateral discussions between the U.S. and the Soviets. "Freedom and dignity for Soviet Jews must be high on the agenda," Kronish declared.

Before gathering in the plaza opposite the UN, thousands of demonstrators marched south along Fifth Avenue with Koch and other officials leading the protesters who carried placards declaring "Freedom for Soviet Jews" and "Let them live as Jews or let them leave," and chanting "1,2,3,4 open up the iron door, 5,6,7,8 let our people emigrate."

O'Connor Greet Official Entourage

As demonstrators passed St. Patrick's Cathedral, O'Connor, a Cardinal-designate, greeted Koch and the other members of the official entourage in a demonstration of the church's support for Soviet Jewry. Last year O'Connor greeted the demonstrators in similar fashion and told the rally's organizers that he would address the gathering this year.

Keeping to his pledge, O'Connor, who was greeted with sustained applause, told the crowd, "I am of the passionate conviction that to destroy Jews anywhere is to destroy Christians everywhere." The entire world, he said, "lives in slavery" when Jews are not allowed to live and practice their religion freely.

"They are our brothers and sisters," Governor Mario Cuomo declared of Soviet Jews, and they are being "persecuted for being Jews." Cuomo called for Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to demonstrate by deeds not words, that his government is willing to allow Soviet Jews to live in freedom. "Mr. Gorbachev, let our people go, in the name of fairness, in the name of humanity. Let our people go."

Elie Wiesel, author and chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, noted that the Soviet Union has denied the existence of the Holocaust when it constructed a monument at Babi Yar near Kiev and failed to note that Jews were massacred there during the war. "What an arrogance," Wiesel declared, "What a viciousness, to deny their Jewishness posthumously."

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's Ambassador to the UN, denounced the Soviet Union, saying that the anti-Semitism practiced today by the Soviet government is more oppressive than that of the Czarist regime. "Czarist anti-Semitism was a child's play compared to that of the Soviets," Netanyahu said.

Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D. N.Y.) said that should the Soviet Union return to the practice of permitting free emigration of Jews, that there would be a willingness by some Congressmen to explore the expansion of Most Favored Nation trade status with the Soviet Union.

of the Knesset, Uri Tzaban, and the French writer, Marke Halter. A group of Americans led by Rabbi Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper, Dean and Associate Dean respectively of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, left the scene a few minutes before the President passed. Hier said, "I did not want to embarrass the President. As it is, I feel sorry for him for what he had done."

After the motorcade left the city, the Jewish demonstrators, joined by several North African anti-racists, kept up their chanting. Several demonstrators donned yarmulkas and recited Kaddish — the prayer for the dead. All demonstrators dispersed when police threatened them with arrest for blocking traffic.

According to reports by some who witnessed the ceremony at the cemetery, Reagan walked swiftly to his car after placing the wreath without looking at the gravestones or the names engraved on them. But later, addressing U.S. personnel at the Air Force base, he claimed the dates on the gravestones showed that many of the German war dead were youthful conscripts. One died just a week before his 16th birthday, according to the President.

Bitburgers Watch Events In Silence

Bitburg is a town of about 12,000. During the battles of World War II it was reduced almost to rubble. But it has been rebuilt, neat, clean, quaint and prosperous-looking — largely because of the 11,000 U.S. servicemen and their families at the nearby base.

The Bitburgers watched today's events mostly in silence. Those who expressed opinions told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency they were "upset" or "outright angry" at the protests which marred what they saw as "the German-American reconciliation." They said they understood the need of Jews to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust but insisted this was "neither the time nor the place."

Most Germans with whom the JTA talked differentiate — as Reagan has done — between the Waffen SS, the combat arm of the Nazi elite corps, and the SS itself which was in charge of the death camps. According to these Germans, the Waffen SS were "just fighting men like all others." They refuse to argue the matter. The words most often heard here today were: "Let the past remain closed and let the dead lie in peace."

This is at odds with the feelings of Jews: "Never Forget."

REAGAN'S VISIT TO BERGEN-BELSEN

By David Kantor

BERGEN-BELSEN, May 5 (JTA) — President Reagan's visit to this concentration camp site today was not on his original itinerary. It was added by his aides only a few weeks ago to defuse the uproar in the U.S. and elsewhere over the President's decision to visit the military cemetery at Bitburg, a decision taken after Reagan last March flatly rejected a proposal, ostensibly from Chancellor Helmut Kohl, that he visit the Dachau concentration camp site.

The background of his visit here, and its juxtaposition with a same day visit to the Bitburg cemetery where members of the Waffen SS are buried along with other German war dead, triggered plans for a mass protest by Jews and others who felt that under these circumstances, Reagan's presence at Bergen-Belsen would desecrate the mass grave of the Holocaust victims who perished there.

Hundreds of Jews and many non-Jews from the U.S., Israel and European countries began gathering in nearby Hannover several days ago. Yesterday, a thousand or more heavily armed police forced them to move far from the concentration camp site. At midnight last night, the eight remaining Jewish protestors left, unwillingly but without resistance.

An Eloquent Protest

By morning, hours before Reagan and Kohl were scheduled to arrive, there were no protestors within sight or sound of the Bergen-Belsen memorial. Their absence and the silence proved a more eloquent protest — and quite possibly an embarrassment to the official party — than any demonstration that might have been staged.

There was to have been a prayer service — kaddish — for the Holocaust victims at Bergen-Belsen in the presence of Reagan and Kohl. But the 10 Jews required for the minyan were not to be found — either among the protestors or in Hannover, the nearest city with a Jewish community.

The Central Council of West German Jews, headed by Werner Nachmann, boycotted the Bergen-Belsen ceremonies. But they did strive, unsuccessfully, to raise a minyan. As Nachmann told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the boycott was a political gesture but the minyan would be a gesture of respect to the dead martyrs.

As it turned out, the dead did not go unmemorialized. Kaddish was recited at Bergen-Belsen today in the presence of many hundreds of Jews — after Reagan and Kohl had departed for Bitburg.

'We Shall Never Be Silent'

Among the Jewish groups who had turned out to protest and stayed to pray was one headed by Rabbi Avraham Weiss and Ronald Schwarzburg, both of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, N.Y. They arrived Friday and camped in sleeping bags. Weiss said, "We shall never be silent. If we, the Jews do not remember what happened, no one will."

Another group of American Jews was led by Henry Siegmán, executive director of the American Jewish Congress. He said his grandfather had been one of the first prisoners in Dachau. "I and countless other Jews like me cannot accept to see the President of the United States pay tribute to a cemetery where 49 former SS are buried," he said.

Catholic Bishops Protest Bitburg Visit

Jews were not the only ones to protest. The Catholic church in Germany sent out signals of displeasure with the Bitburg choice. Several bishops delivered sermons today critical of it.

A German army officer, Col. Berthold von Stauffenberg, who was assigned — along with U.S. World War II Gen. Matthew Ridgeway — to accompany Reagan and Kohl to Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg was not happy. He said on a television interview last night: "I am an army officer and I was told to go. I obey orders."

Stauffenberg's father, Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, a Wehrmacht colonel in World War II, was one of the ranking German officers implicated in the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler and was tortured and executed.

In Paris today, some 10,000 people, many non-Jewish deportees and former resistance fighters, demonstrated in front of the U.S. Embassy to protest Reagan's trip to Bitburg. A similar demonstration by about 500 persons took place outside the U.S. Consulate in Bordeaux.

The Association of Jewish Students in West Germany published an "open letter" to Chancellor Kohl last Friday declaring that Reagan's visit to Bitburg was a mockery of the victims of Nazism.

The letter, released in Bonn, charged that "the highest representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany are apparently trying to equate things which are incomparable." It referred to recent legislation in the Bundestag which makes it a civil crime to deny the Holocaust and also to deny that Germans were dispossessed before and after the end of World War II.

The letter also assailed "those who pronounce Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg in one breath," a reference to the Reagan-Kohl visit to both places. The students took the Bundestag majority to task for refusing to denounce the reunion of former SS officers in the Bavarian town of Nesselwang this week.

Ex-SS Officers Holding Reunion

About 300 former SS officers of the "Totenkopf" (Deaths Head) division arrived in Nesselwang on Friday. They will be followed next week by hundreds of veterans of the SS "Hitlerjugend" and "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" divisions -- names out of Germany's ghastly past.

According to Mayor Oswald Kainz of Nesselwang, these reunions cannot be banned because they are being held in a private hotel, the Krone. The hotel is owned by a former SS man who is now a neo-Nazi activist.

500 JEWS AND CHRISTIAN PAY THEIR RESPECTS TO SOLDIERS WHO LIBERATED EUROPE FROM THE NAZIS

By Judith Kahn

ARLINGTON, Va., May 5 (JTA) -- Just hours after President Reagan laid a wreath at the German military cemetery at Bitburg, with its graves of soldiers who fought for the Nazi army, some 500 Jews and Christians -- among them Holocaust survivors and American veterans of World War II -- paid their respects to those soldiers who liberated Europe from the Nazis, in a memorial ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

Sponsored by the Washington chapter of the Jewish War Veterans, the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington and the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, the ceremony was publicized as a "Tribute to America's Defenders and Liberators." But the tribute was clearly an expression of the continued anguish over the President's visit to Bitburg this morning.

"Over the last days, there has been a growing consensus among American veterans and interfaith and Jewish groups that it is of paramount importance to honor in an appropriate manner the heroism of those who perished in the defense of freedom from Nazi tyranny," the Rev. Edward White, president of the Interfaith Conference, said in his welcoming address.

Says Reagan Sending 'Wrong Signals'

Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering and Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, was more direct in criticizing Reagan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery and in linking the controversy with the tribute today.

"Sadly, we live in a world of images. The image of the American President -- however well-intentioned -- at a German cemetery where soldiers are

buried, including Nazi SS elite and concentration camp guards, sends to the world wrong signals," Meed told the crowd that filled the area of the cemetery's small memorial Amphitheater.

Maintaining that "there can be no reconciliation between murderers and their victims," Meed stressed that the spirit of reconciliation with Germany, which has been Reagan's justification for the visit, cannot be achieved by honoring Nazi soldiers.

"We have seen our leaders go to great pains to separate the evil of Nazism from the German people as a whole," Meed said. But he added that "the Nazis did not operate in a vacuum," and that "the German nation was willingly mobilized to carry out the Nazi policies and therefore shares its moral responsibilities . . . for the destruction they brought."

"The reason for the outcry about Bitburg is precisely this: the attempt to obscure and absolve a nation of its moral responsibilities both to the victims and humanity," Meed said. "True reconciliation can only be found if we confront this fact of history -- as painful and as ugly as it was -- truthfully and fully."

Army Represented At the Tribute

The sponsoring organizations had initial difficulty in obtaining a permit to hold the ceremony at Arlington, in part, according to one report, because the Army viewed it as a demonstration that would appear hostile to the Commander-in-Chief.

But the Army was represented at the tribute today. Its band played American patriotic melodies as well as Jewish liturgical music, and soldiers paraded with the flags of battalions that participated in the liberation of Europe. Following the laying of three wreaths -- one by each of the sponsoring organizations -- people filed past, laying flowers that had been presented to them at the entrance.

One of the wreaths was in the shape of a Star of David, contributed by the JWV.

FORMER JEWISH FIGHTERS IN THE FRENCH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT DEDICATE FOREST IN MEMORY OF NAZI VICTIMS

JERUSALEM, May 5 (JTA) -- At the very hour that President Reagan visited the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp today, a group of 200 former Jewish fighters in the French resistance movement met to dedicate a forest in the Jerusalem hills in memory of Nazi victims and Jewish freedom fighters in France during World War II.

Ambassador Jacques Dupont, who attended the ceremony, said it was too early to forget the Holocaust and it was too early to forgive and reconcile with the German people. "Just as we condemned the French regime which collaborated with the Nazis, so must we condemn any attempt at reconciliation," he said.

Moshe Rivlin, chairman of the Board of the Jewish National Fund, focused on the symbolic difference between laying wreaths on the graves of SS soldiers and planting trees in Israel. The latter, he said, symbolizes life, liberalization, renovation and peace.

The ceremony ended with the participants, which included Likud MK Eliahu Ben-Elissar, planting the first trees dedicating the Liberation Forest on the 40th anniversary of the end of the war.

Additional stories on President Reagan's visit to Bitburg as well as the Solidarity Sunday for Soviet Jewry rally in New York are continued in the supplement.