# **Chapter One**

# **“You Were with the Nazis!”**

# **From Revenge to Retribution in Post-Nazi Europe**

## “*They have lost every remnant of humanity.*”

## –Survivors lynch their former supervisors

In 1945, American forces liberated sick and starving inmates from Bad Tölz, a sub-camp of the Dachau concentration camp. A week later in early May, a Jewish-American officer arranged for a memorial ceremony in what had been the nearby SS Officer School, now turned movie theater. Former inmates─some leaning on walking sticks, others supporting ailing friends─gathered in the theater.

At a head table sat an American officer. Among others beside him sat Itzik Gritzmacher and Itzik Borestein; both fellow-Jews, who as *kapos* had overseen other Jews in the camp. The audience listened quietly as the chairperson of the gathering delivered his opening remarks. Next to speak was another Jewish gentleman who had been seated at the head table. During his speech, some audience members began to squirm in discomfort. Another former internee rose to speak. A buzz went through the crowd. Then, from the front of the theater, a former inmate sprang to his feet. With all eyes focused on him, he raised his fists and faced his fellow-survivors, saying angrily, “One man is speaking here about the German SS men. But before we judge them, let us take revenge on the Jewish SS men among us!”

Members of the audience leapt at the two former *kapos*. For a few seconds, the Americans in the room were in a state of shock. Lube Meskup (the girlfriend of Itzik Gritzmacher and herself a former *kapo*) blocked the hall doors, trying to save her boyfriend. The inmates proceeded to beat her while the mob caught hold of Itzik and beat him, crying, “Murderer!” and “Nazi!” Within seconds, the American soldiers pushed the crowd back and prevented them from killing the former *kapo*. Similar scenes were repeated in liberated camps and towns across Poland, France, Greece, Holland, and elsewhere in Europe. For some of the survivors, liberation had had not been a time to celebrate freedom or mourn the loss of loved ones, but rather a time to take revenge and settle accounts.