

SUMMER, 1945

GERMANY, JAPAN AND
THE HARVEST OF HATE

Thomas Goodrich

Germany, Japan and the Harvest of Hate

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To the voiceless victims of the world's worst war My special thanks go out to Lady Michele Renouf, Peter Rushton and G. Wayne Ashbee for their valuable contributions in the creation and completion of this book.

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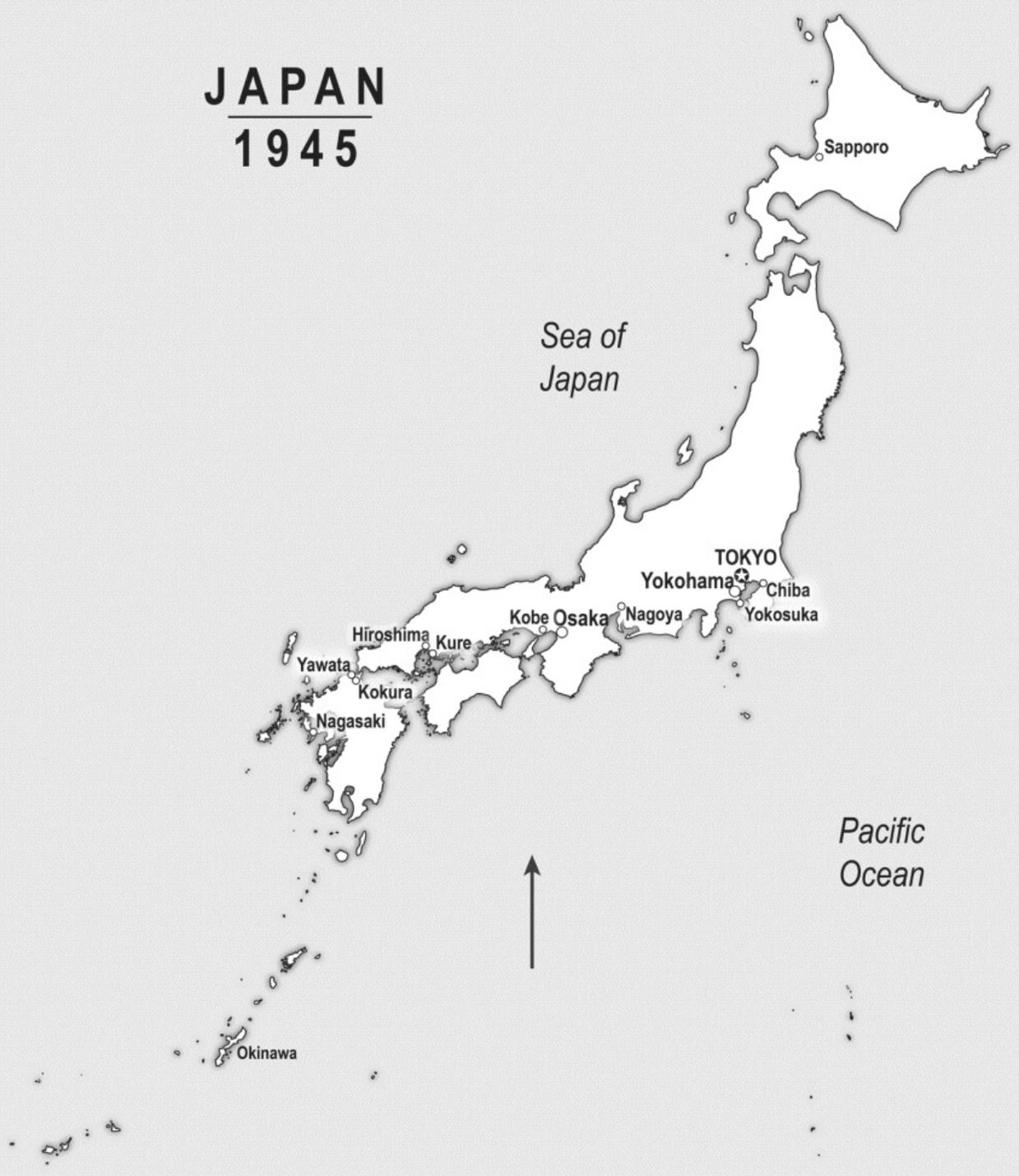
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Foreword

T

his book is about crime and the evil things evil men do. This book is about words and hate and the powerful price of propaganda. This book is about the savage, no-quarter war waged against Japan during the summer of 1945 and it is about the equally

savage no quarter “peace” waged against Germany during that same summer, 1945. There is no attempt herein to recite the numerous atrocities attributed to the Germans and Japanese by the victorious powers. Certainly, some of these crimes were true; equally certain, many of these crimes were not. Such is winning and losing. Such is war.

To most modern readers, the “unique” guilt attributed to the Axis powers in starting World War II as well as their supposed barbaric behavior in prosecuting it are too well known to repeat. For those who wish to learn more of the victor’s version of the war, a simple trip to the book store or library, or the viewing of virtually any feature-length movie or documentary film will offer up the Allied account of the war. This book is, instead, devoted to the inhuman treatment and savage atrocities directed at the losers of the war by the winners, both during and after that war. This book is about the evil things evil men do.

Just as my previous book on Allied war crimes during and after World War II in Europe—*Hellstorm: The Death of Nazi Germany, 1944-1947*—illustrated how deadly propaganda can be, especially when the intended target audience for such propaganda are eighteen-year-olds with weapons in their hands, so too does this book attempt to illustrate how vicious words fired by experts are far more deadly than bombs and bullets for, unlike bombs and bullets which kill only once, words kill again and again and again. Simply, Japanese and German propaganda never came close to matching Allied propaganda in pure hate; Japanese and German propaganda never had the dripping venom and murderous malice that American and British propaganda had then, and, for the most part, still has now.

While the victors, to this day, vilify and condemn the Germans and Japanese for their treatment of American POWs, never mentioned is

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that at least the Germans and Japanese took prisoners. Few, very few,

German and Japanese soldiers survived actual combat to reach an American POW camp. While the victors, to this day, assail again and again the Germans for crimes against Jews or attack the Japanese for crimes against the Chinese, seldom does one hear about the crimes against the Germans or the crimes against the Japanese, of the deliberate firebombing of millions of German and Japanese women and children, of the wholesale rape of countless women and children, of the utter and abject subservience that both nations even today still find themselves locked in.

Finally, it is the most fervent hope of the author that after finishing *Hellstorm* and this, its companion study, *Summer, 1945*, that the reader will not simply set the volumes down and return to a life of indifference and apathy. It is the author's greatest wish that each reader will instead work with others to ensure that never again—not in our name, not in our time, not in our world—will we ever allow such evil propaganda such as was used in World War II to ever repeat itself; that no matter who it may next be directed at, be it Germans, Japanese, Iranians, North Koreans, or Israelis, we will not ever again allow such vicious, sadistic, and evil words to be used to either create a war or create a “peace.” As the past has proved, such reckless, murderous words reap reckless, murderous harvests of innocent and guilty alike. Unless we all work to throttle evil men and their evil words and evil deeds, then soon, very soon, that evil will almost certainly be directed at us and those we love.

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Prologue One Germany Must Perish

I
t is a cool, overcast day. It is an April day so typical in southern Germany, not quite winter, not quite spring.

They stand painfully, unbearably alone against a gray wall, under a gray Bavarian sky. Two of the three have their arms held high, facing the camera. The arms of these two are raised in such a way as to suggest that they have either been held in that position for a very long time or that they are now simply arms resigned to their fate. The other soldier has folded his arms quietly over his stomach. Perhaps he is sick. Perhaps he is wounded. Perhaps,

like the others, he too simply does not care any longer.

They are all young; perhaps 17, or younger. At their feet, laying in piles up and down the line, there lay the others. Some are dead. Some, agonizing in their own blood, are yet alive. Others, no doubt, are uninjured but there they lay, unmoving, feigning death, eyes shut tight, brains pounding hard, minds screaming loud, “Why? Why? Why?” The machine-gun facing those on the ground and those yet standing is now being reloaded.

The three boys still standing are terrified. In all likelihood, one or all have lost control from fear and have urinated on themselves. Hearts are beating three times their normal rate. The pounding throb in each boy’s temples is so loud that it drowns out all other sound. Each face is pale. Each body is weak. Each mind is lost. Each boy is trying to make sense of it all. Such a thing as this cannot be happening. It is all a mistake. It surely is but a dream. Surely it is a nightmare from which they will soon awaken. Those soldiers facing them are Americans. They, like Germans, do not do such things. Each boy perhaps has a cousin or an uncle in America. They would not do such a thing.

Or perhaps the boys are beyond all this. Perhaps they know; know it is not a dream, but really happening to them. Perhaps they look to the left, then to the right, then down to their feet to see the red blood pouring in streams from those once their friends, their classmates, their cousins, even their brothers. Perhaps, as others about to die, perhaps their lives are already passing rapidly before their eyes— back to their childhoods, back to their teachers, back to their families, their pets, their girlfriends, back to the day when one of them nearly drowned in the lake and a British tourist saved him; or back to the pretty farm now turning from winter gray to spring green, the sweetsmelling apple orchard now in bloom, the orchard he loved so much, just as his parents had, just as his grandparents had, just as their parents had.

Or perhaps the young men imagine that it was a miracle; when all else were shot by the machine-gun and died, God had sent them a miracle; a message from heaven that they would live. What else could have saved them when so many hundreds had died? Who else but God could have spared them?

We will never know what the boys were thinking as they stood alone in a sea of the dead. In a moment, the machine-gun will be reloaded and the

Americans, laughing, shouting, staring at the young men with eyes of sadistic hate will then shoot them down.

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Of all the graphic photos I have viewed in my years of research, the most horrific is not the smoldering bodies at Dresden after the firestorm, not the German women and children flattened by Soviet tanks on a snowy road in East Prussia, but that of the bodies at Dachau. No, not the bodies; not the emaciated concentration camp inmates who died not from a deliberate policy of extermination—as we have been told for decades now by the victors—not those, not those who had succumbed in the late stages of the war to typhus, diphtheria, dysentery, starvation, and neglect. No, the bodies I speak of were German bodies, German soldiers. And the photo is graphic not merely for the obvious; the photo is hideous more for what is not actually seen, than what is. There is a crushing, paralyzing oppression in the gray tones of the image; there is an overwhelming sense of evil in the very air; there is a terrifying embodiment of hate and malice in the forms of the Americans as they mechanically, and with utter detachment, go about their inhuman business.

As US forces swept through Bavaria toward Munich in late April, 1945, most German guards at the concentration camp near Dachau wisely fled. To maintain control and arrange for an orderly transfer of the 32,000 prisoners to the approaching Allies, and despite signs at the gate warning, “No entrance—typhus epidemic,” several hundred German soldiers obeyed when they were ordered to the prison.¹

When American units reached the camp the following day, the GIs were horrified by what they saw. Outside the prison were rail cars brim full with diseased and starved corpses. Inside the camp, wrote a witness, were found “a room piled high with naked and emaciated corpses. . . . Since all the many bodies were in various stages of decomposition, the stench of death was overpowering.”²

Unhinged by the nightmare surrounding them, conditioned by years of vicious anti-German propaganda, the troops turned their fury on the now disarmed German soldiers. While one group of over three hundred were led away to a walled enclosure, other Germans were murdered in the guard

towers, in the barracks, or they were chased through the streets. All were soon caught and many were deliberately wounded in the legs, then turned over to camp inmates who first tortured, then tore limb from limb the helpless men and boys.³

[A] German guard came running toward us. We grabbed him and were standing there talking to him when . . . [a GI] came up with a tommy-gun. He grabbed the prisoner, whirled him around and said, "There you are you son-of-a-bitch!" The man was only about three feet from us, but the soldier cut him down with his sub-machine gun. I shouted at him, "what did you do that for, he was a prisoner?" He looked at me and screamed "Gotta kill em, gotta kill em." When I saw the look in his eyes and the machine gun waving in the air, I said to my men, "Let him go."⁴

While the tortures and murders were in progress, 350 German soldiers were lined up against a wall, two machine-guns were planted, then the Americans opened fire. Those yet alive when the fusillade ended, including the three young men still standing, were forced to wait amid the bloody carnage while the machine-guns were reloaded.

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Although cold-blooded and deliberate, the murder of disarmed and helpless German soldiers by the Americans was nothing new; it was a ruthless policy that stretched from the beaches of Normandy all the way through France, Belgium and into Germany. Dachau was only one of thousands of deliberate massacres that had taken place throughout the defeated Reich, on land, on sea and from the air, during the last year of war. If there was any significance at all to the Dachau slaughter, it was that the war, for all intents and purposes, was finally over. As far as any strategic value to the Allied war effort, there was none at Dachau. Nor was there any strategic value to the countless massacres that occurred during the deliberate firebombing of German cities where hundreds of thousands of women and children were burned alive. Nor was there any strategic value to the sinking of numerous refugee ships on the Baltic filled mostly with the very old and the very young. They were, all of them, simply a harvest of hate.

In 1933, after Adolf Hitler came to power, the World Jewish Congress

declared economic warfare against Germany. Well aware of Hitler's plan to end all Jewish influence in Germany—economically, politically, culturally— influential Jews in Europe and America engaged in a vast anti-German propaganda campaign. The campaign, said organizer Samuel Untermyer of the United States, was a “holy war. . . a war that must be waged unremittingly. . . [against] a veritable hell of cruel and savage beasts.”⁵

As a consequence, Germans responded in kind with a campaign of their own. While citizens were encouraged to shun Jewish businesses, a series of laws were enacted designed to not only drive Jews from the German arts, the media and the professions, but laws were passed to force them entirely from the nation as well. As the economic struggle continued, Jewish journalists, writers, playwrights, and filmmakers from around the globe joined the fray. With the outbreak of war in 1939 and the entry of the United States into the conflict two years later, the war of words reached pathological proportions. Increasingly, as rumors of widespread persecution against Jews under Nazi control spread, the propaganda campaign directed at Hitler and National Socialism devolved swiftly into a fanatical cry of extermination. Nowhere was hatred more intense than among American Jews.

“[A] cancer flourishes in the body of the world and in its mind and soul, and . . . this cancerous thing is Germany, Germanism, and Germans. . . ,” announced Hollywood script-writer and director, Ben Hecht. “That this most clumsy of all human tribes—this leaden-hearted German—should dare to pronounce judgment on his superiors, dare to outlaw from the world the name of Jew—a name that dwarfs him as the tree does the weed at its foot—is an outrageous thing. . . . It is an evil thing.”⁶

“Germany must perish. . . ,” echoed Theodore N. Kaufman in a widely-read book of the same name. “There remains then but one mode of ridding the world forever of Germanism—and that is to stem the source from which issue those war-lusted souls, by preventing the people of Germany from ever again reproducing their kind.”⁷

After years of this and other poisonous propaganda in newspapers, magazines and movies, eventually, in the minds of a sizable percentage of Americans and Britons, little distinction was drawn between killing a Nazi soldier and killing a German child.

On September 15, 1944, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt made the demand for extermination official when he endorsed the so-called “Morgenthau Plan.” Named for Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, but actually conceived by the secretary’s top aide, Harry Dexter White—both of whom were Jewish—the program called for the complete destruction of Germany after the victory had been won. In addition to the dismantling or destruction of German industry and the permanent closure of mines, the Morgenthau Plan called for a reduction of the Reich’s land area by one half. As many calculated, and as Roosevelt, Gen. George C. Marshall and other proponents of the plan well knew, this act guaranteed that roughly two-thirds of the German population, or fifty million people, would soon die of starvation. With the remnant of the population reduced to subsistence farming, and with the shrunken nation totally at the mercy of hostile European neighbors, it was estimated that within two generations Germany would cease to exist.⁸

“Henry, I am with you 100%,” Roosevelt assured his Treasury

Secretary.⁹

“They have asked for it. . . ,” snapped Morgenthau when someone expressed shock at the plan. “Why the hell should I worry about what happens to their people?”¹⁰

“You don’t want the Germans to starve?” Roosevelt’s incredulous son-in-law asked the president in private.

“Why not?” replied Roosevelt without batting an eye.¹¹ In fact, the American president had even greater plans for those Germans who were not starved to death or otherwise murdered. “We have got to be tough with Germany and I mean the German people, not just the Nazis,” Roosevelt privately assured Henry Morgenthau. “You either have to castrate the German people or you have got to treat them in such a manner so they can’t go on reproducing.”¹² “The German is a beast,” agreed Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Not only would the top general give the Morgenthau Plan his whole-hearted support, but he would personally do his utmost to kill as many Germans—soldiers and civilians—as he possibly could.¹³

And thus did the murderous Morgenthau Plan become the undeclared, but

understood, American policy toward Germany. From the firebombing of Hamburg in 1943 to the firebombing of Dresden in 1945, the goal of the British RAF and the US Eighth Air Force was now to kill every man, woman and child in every German city and town. Likewise, from their first footfall into Germany, the goal of the Red Army in the east and the American army in the west was to rape, and often murder, every woman they caught, to kill all the men they captured and to destroy or steal virtually everything German they came in contact with.

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Just as at Dachau, when the American army reached the various German concentration camps with dozens of reporters and cameramen in tow, the viewers were horrified by what they saw. The thousands of dead, emaciated bodies seemed proof of the propaganda they had read about for years; proof that the Nazi regime had indeed been engaged in a deliberate policy of mass murder and extermination of Jews. Certainly, men like the political generals, Eisenhower and Marshall, and the willing propagandists themselves, knew better. But with carefully crafted words, and now with photos and film of bodies, it would be an easy sell to millions in the US, Europe and others around the world.

And so, thus began phase two of the vicious propaganda war against Germany. The first phase had begun with the election of Adolf Hitler and continued down to the war's end. The second phase would continue from the so-called "peace" and occupation of Germany right through to the present moment. On cue, from their first footfalls into Germany, hate-filled propagandists like the following began the coordinated psychological attack on the occupied Reich, on her people, on every man, woman and child.

"You must expect to atone with toil and sweat for what your children have committed and for what you have failed to prevent," warned one Allied spokesman on camera as horrified German civilians were forced to parade in penance through the Belsen concentration camp. A place like Belsen was, the man continued, "such a disgrace to the German people that their name must be erased from the list of civilized nations."¹⁴

Given the circumstances, the fate of those Germans living near this and other concentration camps was as tragic as it was perhaps predictable. After compelling the people to view the bodies, American and British officers forced men, women and children to dig up with their hands the rotting remains and haul them to burial pits. Wrote a witness at one camp:

[A]ll day long, always running, men and women alike, from the death pile to the death pit, with the stringy remains of their victims over their shoulders. When one of them dropped to the ground with exhaustion, he was beaten with a rifle butt. When another stopped for a break, she was kicked until she ran again, or prodded with a bayonet, to the accompaniment of lewd shouts and laughs. When one tried to escape or disobeyed an order, he was shot.¹⁵

Few victors, from Eisenhower down, seemed to notice, and fewer seemed to care, that conditions similar to Dachau and the other concentration camps existed in cities and towns throughout much of Germany. Because of the almost total paralysis of the Reich's roads, rivers and rails caused by around-the-clock air attacks, supplies of food, fuel, clothes, and medicine had thinned to a trickle in the devastated German communities and dried up almost entirely at the concentration camps. As a consequence, thousands of camp inmates swiftly succumbed in the final weeks of the war to disease, starvation and neglect.¹⁶ When pressed by a friend if there had indeed been a deliberate policy of extermination, one of the few guards lucky enough to escape another camp protested:

"It wasn't like that, believe me; it wasn't like that! I'm maybe the only survivor who can witness to how it really was, but who would believe me!"

"Is it all a lie?"

"Yes and no," he said. "I can only say what I know about our camp. The final weeks were horrible. No more rations came, no more medical supplies. The people got ill, they lost weight, and it kept getting more and more difficult to keep order. Even our own people lost their nerve in this extreme situation. But do you think we would have held out until the end to hand the camp over in an orderly fashion if we had been these murderers?"¹⁷

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The Dachau Massacre was a relatively small affair as numbers go and it

might have remained little more than a footnote in World War II history but for one thing: Dachau was symbolic. The cold-blooded murders occurred after the war was won by the Allies and the peace, for all intents and purposes, should have been declared. The evil turned loose that gray day at Dachau was a terrible harbinger of what was to come; it was a clear and unmistakable announcement to the world that the war and bloodshed would continue. Dachau was also grisly proof that what had been the world's worst war would now transition into the world's worst peace, or, as Henry Morgenthau demanded, a "peace of punishment."¹⁸

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Finally, the two machine-guns were reloaded and the order to fire was given. In a moment, as the bullets tore into them, the young Germans standing fell upon the bodies below. Perhaps all three were killed outright; or perhaps, in yet another miracle, perhaps the three were merely wounded and feigned death.

Certain it was that among all the wounded soldiers, their lips prayed silently, under their breath, "Please, dear God, oh, please . . . please do not let this happen."

In a short while, newly freed concentration camp prisoners in their striped clothing were handed pistols and ordered by the Americans to go among the stacks of bodies and finish the job. Thus, as .45 caliber slugs mechanically blew open the skulls of all German soldiers, dead and living alike, any miracles at Dachau officially ended.¹⁹

"We shot everything that moved," one GI bragged.

"We got all the bastards," gloated another.

In Henry Morgenthau's world, there was no room for "miracles"—

Germany must perish and all Germans must die.

Prologue two Dirty Japs

A

s a child, I vividly recall a scene from an old war movie. The US Marines are storming some Pacific island during World War II and driving a herd of terrified “Jap” defenders before them, much as safari beaters drive prey. The wild chase increases in

momentum until the enemy is finally flushed from the palms and onto the sandy beach. Halting their tanks, situating their machine-guns for maximum effect, the marines open fire. Scores of Japanese are mowed down mercilessly. With no hope, with no escape, the survivors leap into the surf and try to swim for it. In a matter of minutes, there is not a living “Nip” among them.

Another scene I vividly recall seeing—and this only once—was in a war documentary. A Japanese sailor is struggling in choppy water amid a flotsam of oil and debris, desperately trying to save himself. Clearly, he is a survivor from a recently sunk ship. The sailor is so close to the American naval vessel that I can clearly see the fear and confusion etched on his face. Suddenly, from a point beyond camera range, bullets spray the water around the man. In a panic, the sailor begins swimming around and around in circles. Finally, a well-aimed bullet blows the young man’s head apart and he sinks silently beneath the surface.

In those old documentary films that cover the war in the Pacific, there is a very good reason why one seldom sees a live Jap in any of them, much less a prison camp filled with them. Just as they were doing in Europe, Americans in the Pacific were taking no prisoners. The awful truth never mentioned in these films, or in any book, for that matter, is that the war with Japan from start to finish was a merciless, no-quarter contest in which the rules of engagement were shockingly simple: If the Japanese won, they lived . . . if they lost, they died.

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Savage and sadistic as World War II was for Germany, nowhere was the terrible price of propaganda more evident than in the war with Imperial Japan. Unlike the Germans who not only looked and acted much like the Americans, British, French, and Russians, and also shared a similar language, religion and culture, the Japanese were outwardly, at least, very different

from their opponents. Most obvious, of course, was race and the fact that the Japanese were Asians.

Although racially and culturally the enemy nations differed, prior to hostilities each side had no difficulty at all interacting amicably with one another. Indeed, a great degree of mutual respect, even admiration, existed between the two peoples.

All that changed in a blink, of course, on December 7, 1941. With the sudden attack on Pearl Harbor the American propaganda mill had no problem at all transforming those who had been universally acknowledged as a kind, courteous, and dignified people into a race of “sneaky rats,” “yellow monkeys” and “dirty Japs.” Thus, unlike the vilification campaign waged against Germans which took a great amount of time, effort and imagination, the job of demonizing the Japanese was simple. Once the US Government and entertainment industry was up and rolling, the natural outrage and racial instincts of white Americans took over.

In the anti-Japanese furor that swept America following Pearl Harbor, in the hyper-heated madness to exact revenge for the attack, rare was that American who paused to consider that perhaps the motive behind Pearl Harbor was the months of deliberate and humiliating aggression directed at Japan by the Franklin Roosevelt administration, including the embargo of vital raw materials without which Japan was doomed to collapse as an industrialized nation. Publicly, the American president’s announced impetus for such sanctions was Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930’s and its continued occupation into the 1940’s. Long admirers of the vast British Empire, Japanese leaders aspired to lay claim to their own empire in Asia and seize muchneeded resources. When the British and Americans threatened Japan and used the Chinese occupation as a pretext for possible war, astute Japanese considered it pure hypocrisy. Both the US and Great Britain had been involved in aggressive colonialism much longer than Japan.

“Just when we learn to play poker they want to change the game to bridge,” nodded one shrewd Japanese leader.

Well before December 7, 1941, such sanctions were correctly viewed by the proud Japanese leadership, as well as the world, as a de facto declaration of war by the United States. Although tiny Japan had worked tirelessly to avoid

a military confrontation with the US industrial colossus, Roosevelt either ignored or contemptuously flung back each attempt at peace. In fact, the American president had secretly ordered US warships into Japanese waters in hopes of provoking an incident.

If such a move could indirectly ignite war with Nazi Germany, Roosevelt had laughed, “I don’t mind losing one or two cruisers.”¹

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Because of Japan’s defensive pact with Nazi Germany, the American president and his Jewish advisers—Henry Morgenthau, Bernard Baruch, Harry Dexter White, and others—desperately hoped that insults, threats and backing the Japanese into a corner would provoke a military response resulting in the United States entering the European war via a conflict with Japan. In that case, the US would then join with Britain and the Soviet Union to crush Hitler and Germany.

Originally, Franklin Roosevelt’s entire focus had been on inciting a direct war with Hitler’s Germany itself. FDR’s malignant hatred of not just Adolf Hitler—a major world rival whose accomplishments in a few short years dwarfed his own—but also his hatred of the German people themselves, or those who had made Hitler’s economic miracle possible, was well-known in political circles. Also well known was the fact that nearly 90% of all Americans wanted no part of another European war, no matter how much Roosevelt and his Jewish friends did. Thus, while the deceptive politician constantly assured Americans of his determination to stay out of Europe—“I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars”—Roosevelt was simultaneously, in fact, working feverishly behind the scenes to send millions of those American “boys” into those very wars . . . and into their very graves.

Soon after the outbreak of the European war in 1939, the Roosevelt administration staged numerous provocations against Germany in hopes of igniting a military response—freezing German assets, giving fifty naval destroyers to Germany’s enemy, Great Britain, depthcharging German submarines. To these breaches of neutrality, and more, the Germans did not fall into the trap and failed to retaliate. Thus Japan, as a “back door” to Europe, offered Roosevelt perhaps his greatest, and perhaps his only, hope.²

If that hope ever became reality there was never a doubt among most US political and military leaders how such a conflict with Japan would turn out.

Assured Navy Secretary, Frank Knox, expressing the general American consensus: “We can wipe the Japanese off the map in three months.”³

In truth, many political leaders in Japan felt the same way. In virtually every category—industrial, financial, technological, militarily—any contest between the two nations was a classic mismatch. Nevertheless, despite grave concerns over the outcome of a war with the US, many astute Japanese increasingly realized they simply had no other option. To have withdrawn from China and the other colonies she laid claim to in Asia, as the Americans and British demanded, would have been for Japan unthinkable; to meekly relinquish its nascent empire of vital raw materials it had fought so long and hard to attain would have been not only cowardly and unmanly, it would have been seen by the world as a clear admission of Japanese weakness. And these negative traits would have been characteristics that a proud people could never admit to or accept. As many of her leaders already understood, any extended war with America was a war that Japan could never win. Hopelessly outmatched by the great giant in virtually everything save heart and soul, the outcome of such a conflict would never be long in doubt. In the mind of Japan’s leadership, however, it was far more honorable to fight a war and lose an empire than simply accept defeat and surrender it. While many sage Japanese well understood the unavoidable imbalance in the coming contest others felt that indomitable will alone might make up for the otherwise vast disparity.

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Long before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt and his fellow conspirators were already looking ahead to the “real” war, the war raging in Europe, the war to destroy Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. As long as the struggle in Europe continued, the hard, fast focus of the closet communist, FDR, as well as the Jews surrounding him—more of whom he had chosen to fill influential positions than any previous administration— would always remain locked on Hitler and his threat to world Jewish power and Soviet Communism. Japan and the Pacific would remain little more than a sideshow which the huge American power could easily keep at bay until victory in Europe had been

achieved.⁴ When that hoped for war with Japan would come was the only question.

“Sooner or later the Japanese will commit an overt act against the United States and the nation will be willing to enter the war,” a confident Roosevelt had assured others involved in the plot.⁵

“The question was how we should maneuver [Japan] into . . . firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves,” revealed one of the plotters, Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, after a meeting with the American president a fortnight before the attack at Pearl Harbor.⁶ One week after that meeting, because of a cracked Japanese code, Roosevelt and others in his circle were well aware of an imminent attack in the central Pacific.

Thus, and almost on cue, came the “unprovoked and dastardly attack” at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the “date which will live in infamy.” Curiously, the famous last phrase was altered from the original “date which will live in world history,” no doubt because the former now sounded much more dramatic, outraged and righteous. And as for “dastardly”? Perhaps. But “unprovoked”? Hardly. These new phrases, and many more, were trotted out by the propagandists as rallying cries to whip an already furious American public into a frenzy of anger, hatred and revenge.⁷ Indeed, such was the murderous climate in America after the attack that when the US Congress rubber-stamped war with Japan the following day, the vote was unanimous . . . save one. On philosophical grounds, and despite great pressure, Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin of Montana refused. “As a woman I can’t go to war,” Rankin said simply amid rounds of hisses from the gallery, “and I refuse to send anyone else.” After casting her vote a shouting mob of reporters and others pursued and cornered the sixty-one-year-old woman in a telephone booth. Only the timely arrival of police saved Rankin from further insults and possible injury.⁸

Naturally, like his boss and the other conspirators, Henry Stimson was elated by the news from Hawaii. “My first feeling,” revealed the secretary of war, “was of relief . . . that a crisis had come in a way which would unite all our people.” Apparently the sinking of five battleships, the deaths of over two thousand sailors and soldiers, as well as the slaughter of thousands more to come was a small and insignificant matter to Stimson compared to his

“relief” that the American government had successfully engineered one of the greatest acts of deceit and treachery in world history.⁹

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After Pearl Harbor, and during the ensuing government roundup of over one hundred thousand Japanese-Americans and their imprisonment in concentration camps scattered about the nation, the vaunted US Constitution became a virtual dead letter. The brutal lock-up of American citizens was grim, merciless and sweeping, but necessary, explained the Los Angeles Times, because “a viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched—so a Japanese-American, born of Japanese parents, grows up to be a Japanese not an American.” The officer in charge of the operation, Lt. Gen. John DeWitt, agreed wholeheartedly: “A Jap is a Jap. . . . Japs we will be worried about all the time until they are wiped off the face of the map.”¹⁰ A mere three days after Pearl Harbor, the Chicago Tribune would suggest to its readers that the US should wage a war “without mercy on a treacherous foe.”¹¹

If possible, the degree of American rage actually increased four months later when lurid details of the “Bataan Death March” reached the public. Bad enough in its own right, the chaotic 60-mile forced march of over 70,000 American and Filipino troops captured after the “Siege of Corregidor” was made infinitely worse by the fact that many of the prisoners were already “walking skeletons” near death from lack of food and medicine consequent to the long siege itself. Overwhelmed by the sheer number of prisoners, unable to provide transportation, the Japanese could do little else but watch as hundreds of prisoners dropped dead along the road during the long march. Conveniently missing from the accounts of murder and abuse from Bataan was the fact that over 50 US nurses were also captured by the Japanese and none were raped, molested or harmed.¹²

Describing them as “yellow vermin,” angry American artists created posters depicting the Japanese as everything and anything, save human—sneaking cockroaches, rampaging monkeys, large-fanged snakes, flapping vampire bats—an official US Navy film described enemy soldiers as “living, snarling rats.”

Reinforcing this dehumanization of the enemy were American political and military leaders. Hard-nosed navy admiral, William Halsey, US commander of operations in the South Pacific, seemed determined that not a single Japanese in his sphere of operations would live long enough to even reach a concentration camp.

“Kill Japs! Kill Japs! Kill more Japs!” Halsey exhorted his men time and time again. “Before we’re through with them, the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell.”¹³

Thus, in what was perhaps the worst-kept secret throughout all branches of the US military, it was this tacit directive to all American servicemen, high and low, that there was to be absolutely no mercy shown the enemy either during combat or after capture.

“You will take no prisoners, you will kill every yellow son-of-abitch, and that’s it,” yelled a marine colonel to his men as their landing craft was about to touch shore on one Japanese-held island.¹⁴

Following the very first fight on the very first island that the US invaded, Guadalcanal, the merciless, murderous pattern was set. “After an all-night, hand to hand struggle,” admitted one marine, “the Japanese [wounded] were bayoneted on the beaches.”¹⁵

And thus it was from the outset, from the initial island invasions of 1942, all the way down to 1945 and the nuclear holocausts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, “no quarter” was the unwritten, unofficial, but understood, policy toward Japan and the Japanese.

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Despite the generally held belief that persists to this day, a belief which argues that all Japanese soldiers willingly, even eagerly, died for the emperor, relatively few young men embraced such an end if there was any hope of living. Like the Americans, British and Australians they were facing, most Japanese soldiers dreamed only of a day when the war was over; when they could return home in peace to family and friends; to marry a sweetheart; to raise a family; to tend a small garden; to enjoy life. Nevertheless, from the

first, it soon became apparent to these young men that there would be, that there could be, no surrender.

“We are taught,” explained one American soldier from Guadalcanal, “that the only safe Jap is a dead one—they are so tricky. I’ll never let one surrender. Nor will any of us. We have heard so much about their cruelty that they seem more like snakes than humans.”¹⁶

Like the soldier above, although most had not actually seen any Japanese atrocities for themselves all had heard of them and, more importantly, all US soldiers believed in them. Likewise, although most Americans had no personal accounts of Japanese deception or “trickery” of their own, they were well aware of all the numerous tales passed up and down the line by others. And thus, such unfounded hearsay coupled with the already virulent propaganda being spread by the US Government and “entertainment” industry was all that was necessary for the average American, already hateful, already vengeful, already fearful, to show no mercy.

“Japanese,” noted an American early in the war, “were known to come out of the jungle unarmed with their hands raised above their heads, crying, ‘Mercy, mercy,’ only to be mowed down by machinegun fire.”¹⁷

Time and again, on every contested island and every spit of sand, Japanese soldiers and sailors were slaughtered the instant they raised their hands and walked forward to surrender. “If one gets to our rear area alive,” admitted one US officer, “it’s only because we . . . can’t afford to shoot.”¹⁸

Although they kept their thoughts largely to themselves, some US soldiers were initially stunned, shocked and sickened by such grisly acts, disgusted by the cold-blooded murder of terrified men trying to surrender. According to one of the few Americans involved in the Pacific war who managed to maintain his reason, logic and humanity in tact, such sadistic crimes not only were wrong, but they made no sense.

“It doesn’t encourage the rest to surrender,” reasoned world famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh, “when they hear of their buddies being marched out on the flying field and machine-guns turned loose on them.”¹⁹

After scores of such encounters in which breathless comrades in hiding watched, waited, then witnessed the massacre of their unarmed friends, fewer and fewer Japanese soldiers entertained even the slightest notion of giving up. Paradoxically, though murdering a helpless enemy may have brought some sadistic satisfaction to Allied soldiers, the failure to take prisoners insured that thousands of comrades would also be killed by an enemy now forced to dig deep and fight to the finish. It is also a fact that as the war wore on and defeat became certain, more and more Japanese soldiers would have gladly surrendered if only they could. As the years of savage fighting continued, time and again, with each captured island, there were virtually no Japanese captives of the original thousands who fought the US invasions.

Far from the popular image of being a mindless fighting machine who could live on weeds and water and was totally indifferent to normal emotions, the typical Japanese soldier was ultimately very human.

“Who cares about the enemy?” one starving Japanese soldier asked. “How can they be so foolish as to expect us to fight when we are not fed right. . . . What do we care about the war? From today we’ll all sleep the afternoon through. Our main object will be rest and wait for the day when we are to be relieved.”²⁰

And as for American air superiority, the utter failure of the Japanese air force to provide even a minimum of air cover proved a terrible blow to the average soldier’s fighting spirit. The constant bombing and strafing by US aircraft was not merely “terrifying” but it was utterly “unbearable.”

“There was complete loss of morale among troops,” acknowledged one Japanese soldier regarding the constant air attacks.²¹

“If men had been allowed to surrender honorably,” admitted another Japanese veteran late in the war, “everybody would have been doing it.”²²

In addition to the murder of prisoners, numerous other atrocities occurred. When one marine battalion captured a Japanese field hospital containing over four hundred unarmed men, including patients and medics, all were slaughtered on the spot.²³ Other massacres occurred when hundreds, even thousands, of Japanese were driven onto beaches or small peninsulas where

there was no hope of escape. “Our method of fighting the Japanese was to close the back door before we began to fight, to cut off their lines of escape,” described one infantryman. “This made it a rat killing program where we counted only those we exterminated.”²⁴ Such wholesale “kill offs” reminded one Kansas marine of nothing so much as the merciless massacre of jack rabbits driven into fenced enclosures back home.

Wrote the famous US war correspondent, Ernie Pyle:

In Europe we felt our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But out here I gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.²⁵

“Nothing can describe the hate we feel for the Nips,” explained an American lieutenant to his mother. “The destruction, the torture, burning & death of countless civilians, the savage fight without purpose—to us they are dogs and rats—we love to kill them—to me and all of us killing Nips is the greatest sport known—it causes no sensation of killing a human being but we really get a kick out of hearing the bastards scream.”²⁶

“As the bodies jerked and quivered,” offered one marine when he and others continued to shoot Japanese corpses long after they were dead, “we would laugh gleefully and hysterically.”²⁷

Remembered another witness:

When a Japanese soldier was flushed from his hiding place the unit was resting and joking. But they seized their rifles and began using him as a live target while he dashed frantically around the clearing in search of safety. The soldiers found his movements uproariously funny and were prevented by their laughter from making an end to the unfortunate man. Finally, however, they succeeded in killing him, and the incident cheered the whole platoon, giving them something to talk and joke about for days afterward.²⁸

Surprisingly, the bulldozer was one of the Americans’ favorite weapons. Often landing on a beach even before most soldiers, the huge, almost indestructible machine could be used to not only destroy fixed enemy

positions but bury alive Japanese in bunkers and caves. When the bulldozer had finished its murderous work, it could then be used to clear brush and trees for aircraft landing strips.

“The Japs can’t build like we can,” bragged one proud US general. “They haven’t got anything that can touch the bulldozer.”²⁹

Flamethrowers were another weapon favored by the Americans. Unlike bombs and bullets which tended to kill quickly, the flamethrower was a slower and more sadistic way to “roast rats.” The horror of it all was not lost upon one marine at Iwo Jima:

You’d come across dead Japanese, some hit by flame-throwers, eyes boiled out, lips burned away, white teeth grinning, uniforms burned off and sometimes the first layer of skin, too, so the muscles would show as in an anatomical sketch. Penis sticking up like a black candle stub. Napalm boiled the blood, causing an erection, some said.³⁰

“We are drowning and burning them all over the Pacific, and it is just as much pleasure to burn them as to drown them,” boasted William Halsey. As the admiral was well aware, his men were doing much more than just burning and drowning the enemy. . . .³¹

With discipline lax or non-existent, those who wanted to torture, maim and mutilate, did. Desecration of bodies began with the first islands invaded. Along a wide stream dividing the two armies on Guadalcanal, fresh arriving troops noticed Japanese heads stuck on poles facing the enemy across the river. There on the “Canal” and elsewhere, US Marines tossed the dead and dying into open latrines while others laughingly urinated into the open mouths of the bodies.³²

The collection of ears, noses, fingers, and other body parts was a pastime many marines proudly participated in. Some strung the trophies and wore them like necklaces.

“Our boys cut them off to show their friends in fun, or to dry and take back to the States when they go,” said one man matter-of-factly.³³

Japanese skulls were another popular trophy. Some were sent home to friends, family, even sweethearts. Most heads, however, after being “cured”

by ravenous ants or boiled in kettles to remove flesh, were then sold to eager naval personnel.³⁴ Bones were also collected. Some were carved to form letter openers for folks back home. Even the White House received one such present.

“This is the sort of gift I like to get,” laughed President Roosevelt. “There’ll be plenty more such gifts.”³⁵

Understandably, when news reached Japan that the bodies of their sons and husbands were being wantonly abused and that the US president himself countenanced such atrocities, there was outrage. The Americans were portrayed in the furious Japanese press as “deranged, primitive, racist, and inhuman.”³⁶

“Destroy This American Barbarism. . . ,” headlined the largest circulation newspaper in Japan. “Let us vow the destruction of American savagery from the face of the earth.”³⁷

Explained one American, himself equally outraged:

The thought of a Japanese soldier’s skull becoming an American ashtray was as horrifying in Tokyo as the thought of an American prisoner used for bayonet practice was in New York.³⁸

Of all trophies, however, none were more sought out than goldcapped teeth. After any battle or massacre, the mouths of the fallen were often the first stop for many Americans. Like South Sea prospectors, fights broke out when “claim-jumpers” attempted to steal the bodies claimed by others. One excited marine felt he had struck it rich after spotting a dead enemy. “But,” according to a witness . . .

. . . the Japanese wasn’t dead. He had been wounded severely in the back and couldn’t move his arms; otherwise he would have resisted to his last breath. The Japanese’s mouth glowed with huge gold-crowned teeth, and his captor wanted them. He put the point of his [knife] on the base of a tooth and hit the handle with the palm of his hand. Because the Japanese was kicking his feet and thrashing about, the knife point glanced off the tooth and sank deeply into the victim’s mouth. The Marine cursed him and with a slash cut his cheeks open to each ear. He put his foot on the sufferer’s lower jaw and tried again. Blood poured out of the soldier’s mouth. He made a gurgling noise and thrashed wildly. I shouted, “Put the man out of his misery.” All I got for an

answer was a cussing out. Another Marine ran up, put a bullet in the enemy soldier's brain, and ended his agony. The scavenger grumbled and continued extracting his prizes undisturbed.³⁹

Understandably, Japanese soldiers had no more desire to surrender and be tortured than did US soldiers fighting the Indians on the plains of America a century earlier. Each fought to the finish, but each also saved the "last bullet" for themselves. If a Japanese soldier found himself surrounded with no way to escape and no ability to kill himself, he committed suicide by walking calmly back and forth along the enemy lines until a bullet found its mark. Sometimes ten, even twenty, Japanese would thus kill themselves simultaneously.

Once the Americans reached Saipan and other Japanese islands with civilian populations, mass rape was added to the menu of war crimes. Small wonder that a Japanese soldier, or civilian, for that matter, would do whatever it took to keep from falling into Allied hands. As one American reported:

The northern tip of Saipan is a cliff with a sheer drop into the sea. At high tide the sharp coral rocks are almost covered with swirling surf. The Japanese civilians and the surviving soldiers were all crowded into this area. Now one of the worst horrors of the war occurred. In spite of loudspeaker messages asking them to surrender, and assurances that they would be well-treated, they began killing themselves. Soldiers clutched hand grenades to their bellies and pulled the pins. Through our spotting scopes from our observation post I witnessed this sickening spectacle. One of the worst experiences of my life.⁴⁰

Not only were there virtually no survivors among the 30,000 men of the Japanese garrison on Saipan, but two out of every three civilians—some 22,000 in all—were either murdered or committed suicide.

"We just blew it all up," admitted one marine. "We don't know if there were women and children or whatever, we just blew them up."⁴¹

"Japanese are still being shot all over the place," an Australian late in the war recorded. "The necessity for capturing them has ceased to worry anyone. Nippo soldiers are just so much machine-gun practice."⁴²

A handful of Japanese prisoners did manage to get captured, of course, by

accident if nothing else. Most were spared solely for the information they might provide. When the interrogation was through the subjects were of no further use. Wrote a witness:

When they flew Japanese prisoners back for questioning on a C-47, they kept the freight door at the side of the plane open, and when the questioning of each man was concluded, he'd be kicked overboard before they reached their destination.⁴³

Other Japanese were captured alive, not for what they might know, but merely to provide hellish entertainment. According to one account from New Guinea, "they took forty-nine Japanese prisoners, tied them up in a tight ring, doused them with airplane fuel, and burned them all." Another American recounted watching as a terrified Japanese captive was simply beheaded by a US soldier with a sharp machete. "War is war, and the Geneva Red Cross Convention ... is a long, long way from the front line," scratched the viewer in his diary. "There is but one law here, KILL, KILL, KILL!"⁴⁴

Of course, it was not just island-hopping marines who committed countless atrocities; virtually all American servicemen partook. A Japanese sailor whose ship or submarine was sunk stood no better chance of survival than his comrade on shore. US naval vessels and aircraft routinely sank all hospital ships, shelled all life boats, then machine-gunned any survivors still struggling in the water.⁴⁵

Cursed a Japanese survivor after one such watery massacre:

Seeing no one on board, they strafed those in the water. The swine! Not satisfied with sinking the ship, they must kill those swimming in the sea! Was this being done by human beings? We were utterly helpless.⁴⁶

"We came to believe he was slime . . .," admitted a US sailor, "not worthy of life; seeing dead Japanese in the water was like making love to a beautiful girl [i.e., 'satisfying']."⁴⁷

Overhead, Japanese pilots who escaped from burning aircraft were themselves murdered by Allied airmen as they struggled in their parachute harnesses.

“The Japanese made the perfect enemy,” explained one candid marine speaking for all. “They had many characteristics that an American marine could hate. Physically they were small, a strange color and, by some standards, unattractive. . . . Marines did not consider that they were killing men. They were wiping out dirty animals.”⁴⁸

“‘They really are lower than beasts. Every one of ’em ought to be exterminated.’ How many times I heard that statement made by American officers in the Pacific!” Charles Lindbergh recalled as he travelled with the US Air Force.⁴⁹

As late as October, 1944, it was announced that a mere 604 Japanese were being held in Allied POW camps.⁵⁰

And thus, from beginning to end, the war in the Pacific was not so much a “war” in American minds as it was a hunt; a hunt to run down “dirty animals” and murder as many as possible. With propagandists actively encouraging the slaughter of the Asian sub-humans, with political and military leaders, as well as the American people, demanding a massacre without mercy, it is not surprising then that the young men comprising the bulk of US fighting forces reacted accordingly.

Chapter 1 The Hour Zero

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he long gray column stretched east for mile upon muddy mile. Like a wounded animal searching for a quiet place to die, the line moved slowly, painfully, yet steadily. Limping and dragging, staggering and stumbling, the once-mighty German

Wehrmacht was now bound for slavery and death. In a stand-up club and claw fight to the finish, a contest between Adolf Hitler and European Nationalism versus Josef Stalin and International Communism, the latter, with the power and weight of the United States and the British Empire behind him, had come off victorious. Now, just as the ragged, starving old men and boys in gray were marching east to oblivion, much of the Europe they were leaving was also passing into its own oblivion; for years to come the once

bright and beautiful continent would know little else than darkness, degradation, death, and despair.

Above, black as a funeral, the brooding clouds of dejection and defeat. Below, littering the muddy road to Siberia, tattered bits of burnt clothing, broken strips of boot leather, dirty brown bandages, and puddles of blood, fresh, wet and dark. Ahead, years of back-breaking, mind-killing work in mines, bogs and forests and for almost all, the end—a frozen, unmarked grave. Behind, thousands of dead comrades, thousands of dead friends, thousands of dead family members—men, women, children, pets—buried beneath the rubble of a place that no longer resembled anything of this world. Behind, Berlin, the last battle of the war.

“The capital of the Third Reich is a heap of gaunt, burned-out, flame-seared buildings,” reported one of the first Allied correspondents to reach Berlin. “It is a desert of a hundred thousand dunes made up of brick and powdered masonry. . . . It is impossible to exaggerate in describing the destruction. . . . Downtown Berlin looks like nothing man could have contrived. . . . I did not see a single building where you could have set up a business of even selling apples.”¹

Others who reached Berlin when the bombs stopped falling were likewise stunned by the almost total destruction. Block after block, mile after mile, as far as eyes could see and as far as legs could walk, there was no end to the ruins, ruins that once were one of the most gorgeous and glittering capitals on earth. But even more staggering to those who first viewed Berlin after the war was the total disbelief that anything calling itself “human” could still exist amid such utter ruin.

“Seeing them you almost hope that they are not human,” admitted a visitor.² But, and almost miraculously, there were humans yet living in Berlin. When the guns finally fell silent on May 8, 1945, these tattered and starved survivors crept from their cracks and caves, trying to flee a nightmare, they knew not where.

“We clamber over bomb craters,” describes one woman trying to escape. “We squeeze through tangled barbed wire and hastily constructed barricades of furniture. It was with sofas that our army tried to block the Russian advance! . . . One could laugh if it didn’t rather make one feel like crying.”³

Tanks riddled with holes block the way. A pitiful sight, pointing their muzzles toward the sky. . . . Burned-out buildings left and right. . . . Behind a projection in a wall sits an old man. A pipe in his right hand, a lighter in his left. He is sitting in the sun, completely motionless. Why is he sitting so still? Why doesn't he move at all? A fly is crawling across his face. Green, fat, shiny. Now it crawls into his eyes. The eyes . . . Oh God have mercy! Something slimy is dripping onto his cheeks. . . .

At last the water tower looms up in the distance. We are at the cemetery. The gate to the mortuary is wide open. . . . Bodies, nothing but bodies. Laid out on the floor. Row after row, body after body. Children are among them, adults and some very old people. Brought here from who knows where. That draws the final line under five years of war. Children filling mortuaries and old men decomposing behind walls.⁴

What had taken the German race over two millennia to build, had taken its enemy a mere handful of years to destroy. When the fighting finally ended, the Great German Reich, which had been one of the most modern industrial giants in the world, lay totally, thoroughly and almost hopelessly, demolished. Germany, mused an American newsman drifting through the rubble, resembled nothing so much as it resembled "the face of the moon."⁵

At Germany's second largest city, Hamburg, what Philip Dark found likewise staggered the senses. It was, thought the soldier, "a city devastated beyond all comprehension. It was more than appalling. As far as the eye could see, square mile after square mile of empty shells of buildings with twisted girders scarecrowed in the air. . . ."⁶

And what Leonard Mosley saw when he reached Hanover epitomized the condition of all German cities at war's end. Hanover, typed the British reporter, "looked like a wound in the earth rather than a city. As we came nearer, I looked for the familiar signs that I used too know, but . . . I could not recognize [them] anywhere. . . . The city was a gigantic open sore."⁷

Just as in Berlin, to the shock and surprise of not only Dark and Mosley, but to the survivors as well, life actually existed among and under the seemingly sterile rock piles. Like cave-dwellers from the beginning of time, men, women and children slept, whispered, suffered, starved, cried, and died below

the tons of jagged concrete, broken pipes and twisted metal.

Other than being utterly destroyed, another feature shared by Hanover, Hamburg, Berlin, and every other German city was the nauseating stench that hung over them like a pall. “[E]verywhere,” remembered a witness, “came the putrid smell of decaying flesh to remind the living that thousands of bodies still remained beneath the funeral pyres of rubble.”⁸

“I’d often seen it described as ‘a sweetish smell’—but I find the word ‘sweetish’ imprecise and inadequate,” one survivor scribbled in her diary. “It strikes me not so much a smell as something solid, tangible, something too thick to be inhaled. It takes one’s breath away and repels, thrusts one back, as though with fists.”⁹

By their own tally of firebombing casualties, the British estimated that they had killed upwards of half a million German civilians. That some sources from the Dresden raid alone set the toll there at 300,000– 400,000 dead would suggest that the British figures were absurdly— and perhaps deliberately—low.¹⁰ Whatever the accurate figure, the facts are that few German families survived the war intact. Those who did not lose a father, a brother, a sister, a mother—or all the above— were by far the exception to the rule. In many towns and villages the dead quite literally outnumbered the living. For some, the hours and days following the final collapse was simply too much. Unwilling to live any longer in a world of death, misery and alien chaos, countless numbers took the ultimate step.

“Thousands of bodies are hanging in the trees in the woods around Berlin and nobody bothers to cut them down,” a German pastor remarked. “Thousands of corpses are carried into the sea by the Oder and Elbe Rivers—one doesn’t notice it any longer.”¹¹

Nor did one notice any longer the thousands of black and bloating bodies laying in the German countryside, on farms, in pastures, along fields, by roads, in ditches, the bodies of gray old men and fresh-faced boys of the Volkssturm, or militia, the pathetic last line of defense; disarmed, beaten, then murdered in cold blood by the same American army that murdered the boys at Dachau, murdered as they desperately tried to surrender, to somehow survive a war that was already over.

For Germany, May 8, 1945 became known as “The Hour Zero”— the end of a nightmare and the beginning of a dark, uncertain future. Most assumed, no doubt, that awful though the coming weeks and months would be, the worst was nevertheless behind them. It seemed to these dazed and damaged people that nothing the future had to offer could match what they had suffered through in the past.

But these people were wrong. The worst yet lay ahead. Though most of the shooting and bombing had indeed stopped, the war against Germany would continue unabated, forever if necessary, until the last German was dead. World War II was by far history’s most terrifying war, but what still lay ahead would prove, as Time magazine later phrased it, “History’s most terrifying peace.”¹²

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It is amazing to observe how brave and firm some men become when all danger is past. I have noticed on fields of battle brave men never insult the captured or mutilate the dead; but cowards and laggards always do. — US Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman

While the Allied occupation of Germany was in progress, the coldblooded murder of Nazi Party members, German SS troops and other anti-communists was in full swing. Unaware of the vicious propaganda aimed at them in America, when proud SS units surrendered to the US Army they naively assumed that they would be accorded their rights under the Geneva Convention and respected by fellow soldiers as the unsurpassed fighters that they certainly were. Instead, moments after giving up their weapons thousands were simply beaten bloody, then slaughtered where they stood. No less than seven hundred troops of the 8th SS Mountain Division were massacred by the Americans soon after surrender. Likewise, members of the SS Westphalia Brigade were marched a short distance then shot in the back of the head.¹³ Elsewhere, other SS units fared no better for the unwritten but understood orders from above were “no members of the SS shall be taken prisoner.”

“The Americans forced the Germans to walk in front of them with raised hands in groups of four,” recounted an eyewitness on the fate of another fifty surrendered soldiers near Jungholzhausen. “Then they shot the prisoners in

their heads from behind.”¹⁴

After shooting them and smashing their skulls with rifle butts, the US 7th Army threw another two hundred SS men into a mass grave.¹⁵
Reveals one American soldier of another massacre:

As we were going up the hill out of town . . . some of our boys were lining up German prisoners in the fields on both sides of the road. They must have been 25 or 30 German boys in each group. Machine guns were being set up. These boys were to be machine gunned and murdered. We were committing the same crimes we were now accusing the Japs and Germans of doing. The terrible significance of what was going on did not occur to me at the time. After the killing and confusion of that morning the idea of killing some more Krauts didn't particularly bother me. . . . I turned my back on the scene and walked on up the hill.¹⁶

“Those who were able stood at the window, and told those of us who were lying down what was going on.”

So wrote Lt. Hans Woltersdorf. At that moment, the young officer was himself recovering in a German military hospital when US forces arrived. Outside, a motorcycle with a sidecar had just pulled up carrying an officer and two men of the Waffen-SS. When the Americans disarmed them, the two soldiers were allowed to proceed on foot but the officer and others were led away. Soon, Woltersdorf and the other patients heard a loud burst of submachine gun fire.

“Did you see that? They shot the lieutenant! Did you see that? They're shooting all the Waffen-SS officers!” shouted the men at the window. Horrified, but thinking quickly, several patients raced down to the hospital office, destroyed all the SS medical files they could find, then replaced them with records from the regular German Wehrmacht. After locating a number of army uniforms for the SS men to wear, the soldiers could only hope and pray that their efforts were rewarded.¹⁷ Unfortunately, such stratagems seldom succeeded since SS soldiers had their blood-type tattooed under the left arm.

“Again and again,” continues Woltersdorf, “Americans invaded the place and gathered up groups of people who had to strip to the waist and raise their left arm. Then we saw some of them being shoved on to trucks with rifle

butts.”¹⁸

When French forces under Jacques-Philippe Leclerc captured a dozen French SS near Karlstein, the general sarcastically asked one of the young soldiers why he was wearing a German uniform.

“You look very smart in your American uniform, General,” replied the boy. In a rage, Leclerc ordered the captives shot.

“All refused to have their eyes bandaged,” a priest on the scene noted, “and all bravely fell crying ‘Vive la France!’”¹⁹

Although SS troops were routinely slaughtered upon surrender, anyone wearing a German uniform was considered extremely fortunate if he was merely punched, kicked, then marched to the rear.

“Before they could be properly put in jail,” records a witness when a group of little boys were marched past, “American GIs . . . fell on them and beat them bloody, just because they had German uniforms.”²⁰

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While the brutal mistreatment and murder of German military men was in progress, elsewhere, in neighboring countries, but especially Czechoslovakia, a horror unimaginable was transpiring. On May 5, when rumors swept through Prague that US forces were only a short distance away, the citizens of the Czech capital rose up against Nazi occupation. Before the day was out most of the German garrison had been isolated and surrounded.²¹

Meanwhile, the roundup of German civilians in the city, including many refugees, began. Years of pent hatred for the German minority in their midst now finally had a free hand among the population. As men, women and children were marched through the streets, large crowds of Czechs were waiting. Amid a shower of rocks, bricks, kicks, and blows, the Germans were forced to run a terrifying gauntlet to the prison. Men in the mob grabbed fleeing women and girls and dragged them aside. Some were raped in the streets, others had their heads shaved and swastikas were painted on their bare backs and breasts.²²

“Woe, woe, woe, thrice woe to the Germans. . .” threatened the revenge-minded Czech president, Edvard Benes, as he returned from exile. “We have decided . . . that we have to liquidate the German problem in our republic once and for all.”²³ Unfortunately, many Czechs eagerly embraced Benes’

words at their literal worst.

When the fighting in Czechoslovakia finally ended a few days later, the mob then turned its attention to the thousands of captives locked in prisons.

“Several trucks loaded with German wounded and medical personnel drove into the [prison] court,” records a young journalist, Jurgen Thorwald. “The wounded, the nurses, the doctors had just climbed from their vehicles when suddenly a band of insurgents appeared from the street and pounced upon them. They tore away their crutches, canes, and bandages, knocked them to the ground, and with clubs, poles, and hammers hit them until the Germans lay still.”²⁴

“So began a day as evil as any known to history,” muttered Thorwald.

In the street, crowds were waiting for those who were marched out of their prisons. . . . [T]hey had come equipped with everything their aroused passions might desire, from hot pitch to garden shears. . . . They . . . grabbed Germans—and not only SS men—drenched them with gasoline, strung them up with their feet uppermost, set them on fire, and watched their agony, prolonged by the fact that in their position the rising heat and smoke did not suffocate them. They . . . tied German men and women together with barbed wire, shot into the bundles, and rolled them down into the Moldau River. . . . They beat every German until he lay still on the ground, forced naked women to remove the barricades, cut the tendons of their heels, and laughed at their writhing. Others they kicked to death.²⁵

At a local hospital, ten of the youngest and prettiest Red Cross nurses were ordered into the street as were ten injured German soldiers. As they were marched toward a public square all were ordered to sing the German National Anthem. Those who did not sing loud enough were kicked and punched. Finally, when the column halted amid a huge, shouting mob, the patients and nurses were ordered to undress. When the nurses refused, they were slapped and knocked to the ground. “Undress or die!” screamed the leader of the gang. When all were finally nude, the girls—each hiding her face in shame—were lined up opposite the soldiers, then ordered to tear off the genitals of each man. No one moved at this horrific command. “Rip it off! Rip it off!” shouted the sadistic leader as the crowd thereupon clapped and shouted in unison. When the girls still refused all were either killed or beaten

unconscious with rifle butts.²⁶

Elsewhere six young Germans were ordered to haul away several bodies that had been hung upside down, the teeth of each kicked out, then all set on fire with gasoline. Surrounded by a howling crowd the young men quickly did as ordered.

“The faces were mutilated beyond recognition . . .,” recounted one of the Germans, “the mouths just bloody holes. The roasted skin stuck to our hands. We had to carry them . . . and drag them when we could no longer carry. . . . When we had put the bodies down we were forced to kiss them on the mouth. We were told, ‘They’re your brothers, now kiss them!’ No matter how revolting it was, staying alive was more important, and so we squeezed our lips together and pressed them into the bloody ooze that represented their mouths.”²⁷

As he struggled to escape the city a German soldier disguised as a priest saw sights that seemed scripted in hell. On one street the man encountered a young mother kneeling, sobbing uncontrollably. In the woman’s arms was her dead child, eyes gouged out, a knife still stuck in his tiny stomach. It was clear from the mother’s torn clothing and mangled hair that she had fought furiously to save her child. Horrified, the soldier urged the woman to leave before another mob approached and killed her.²⁸

“But that’s what I want!” the mother cried out. “I don’t want to go on living without my little Peter!”²⁹

On another street, the disguised soldier saw a shouting mob bind several German women with rope to a poster pillar. Their seven children were then stuffed into the gutter drain at their feet. Soon, while others were spitting on them and tearing fistfuls on hair from the victims, an older Czech woman ran up and poured gasoline over the mothers as well as into the gutter. Laughing hysterically, another woman quickly appeared with a flaming newspaper. In a sudden fiery blast, the screaming victims were lost in a ball of orange flames. With a final act of desperation, one of the mothers managed to break free of the rope. Falling to her stomach like a living torch, with super-human strength the dying woman yanked the heavy grating off the gutter and reached into the mass of screaming children. In a moment, however, the mother was dead, as were the other women and children. With that, the mob

danced around the pillar, shouting and laughing deliriously.³⁰

When the same witness reached the city's central square it was evident that an orgy of blood and hate was in progress. Hanging dead from every lamppost lining the streets was a German soldier, most of whom had been dragged from hospital beds. In the center of the square a large crowd danced and shouted as two men held a totally naked German girl. With both breasts pierced by large safety pins that displayed Iron Cross medals, a bar bearing a swastika flag was stabbed into the screaming girl's navel. Nearby, a naked mother lay motionless beside her trampled child. The woman had been beaten to death and a gaping head wound revealed her brain as it oozed out.³¹

Elsewhere in the square, five Germans were pulled from a truck. The hands of the men were tied while the other end of the rope was fastened to the hitch of the vehicle. A young Czech thereupon climbed into the driver's seat and started the engine. When the truck pulled away, the shouting crowd fell into a wild frenzy of hatred. For a few moments the captives were able keep up with the slow-moving vehicle. The more the driver gained speed, however, the more it became impossible for the men to keep their feet. One after another the victims fell, then all were jerked and dragged along at ever-increasing speed. After only a few rounds of the square, the Germans were mangled beyond recognition. When the truck finally stopped the victims were simply raw lumps of blood, flesh and filth.³²

Ultimately, the terrified soldier-clad-as-priest managed to escape the Prague slaughter pen, one of the few Germans to do so.

Meanwhile, at the huge sports stadium, thousands of Germans were herded onto the field to provide amusement for a laughing, shouting audience.

"Before our very eyes . . . [they] were tortured to death in every conceivable way," remembered Josefina Waimann. "Most deeply branded on my memory is the pregnant woman whose belly . . . uniformed Czechs slashed open, ripped out the fetus and then, howling with glee, stuffed a dachshund into the torn womb of the woman, who was screaming dreadfully. . . . The slaughter happening in the arena before our very eyes was like that in ancient Rome."³³

The horror born at Prague soon spread to the rest of Czechoslovakia, particularly the Sudetenland, where Germans had lived for over seven centuries.

At Aussig on the Elbe River, an estimated 2,000 Germans were murdered

when Czech militiamen drove them en mass into the river. “Women were thrown into the Elbe along with their babies in their prams,” wrote a witness, “and the soldiers then used them for target practice, shooting at the women until they no longer surfaced.” In another town, a farmer was nailed to his barn door upside down. Sharpened wooden matches were shoved under his finger nails, then lit.³⁴

When a train carrying Germans fleeing the purge was stopped by Czech soldiers at Prerau, the people were ordered off and told to begin digging a huge trench. At midnight, when the hole was deemed wide enough and deep enough, the soldiers murdered every man, woman and child and rolled them into the mass grave. The oldest victims were in their eighties, the youngest, eight months.³⁵

Soon after the Red Army reached Czechoslovakia, Soviet commissars—Jewish political officers who traveled with the Red Army to ensure that soldiers exhibited proper “communist zeal”—added their own brand of sadism to the murderous mix. Torture pens were set up where the entertainment went on for days. In one basement German men and women were not only raped and beaten but were held down while a garden hose was shoved up their rectums and turned on to its maximum. In another pen, Germans were forced to crawl on their knees, give the Nazi salute and kiss photographs of Adolf Hitler that dripped with fresh sputum. Others were compelled to drink urine out of buckets. Some had their heads submerged in toilets filled with excrement, then were ordered to sing the German national anthem. Few survived such ordeals, of course, and perhaps even fewer hoped to.³⁶

“Take everything from the Germans,” demanded Czech president, Edvard Benes, “leave them only a handkerchief to sob into!”³⁷

“You may kill Germans, it’s no sin,” cried a priest to a village mob.³⁸ At Bilina, stated a chronicler . . .

. . . men and women were rounded up in the market square, had to strip naked and were made to walk single-file while being beaten by the population with whips and canes. Then . . . the men had to crawl on all fours, like dogs, one behind the other, during which they were beaten until they lost control of their bowels; each had to lick the excrement off the one in front of him. This torture continued until many of them had been beaten to death. . . . What was done to the women there simply cannot be described, the sadistic

monstrousness of it is simply too great for words.³⁹

“When I passed through Czechoslovakia after the collapse,” one German soldier recalled, “I saw severed human heads lining window sills, and in one butcher’s shop naked corpses were hanging from the meat hooks.”⁴⁰

When the fury had finally spent itself in Czechoslovakia, over 200,000 people had been butchered. Similar purges of German minorities occurred in Hungary, Yugoslavia and elsewhere when men, women and children, by the hundreds of thousands, were massacred in cold blood. The slaughter throughout Europe was not confined to ethnic Germans alone. Following the Allied occupation of France, over one hundred thousand French citizens were murdered by their communist countrymen because of collaboration with the Germans or other anti-communist activities. Similar, though smaller, reckonings took place in Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Norway.

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By mid-May, 1945, the Allied conquerors had laid claim to virtually all of what was once the Third Reich—the Americans, British and French in the west, the Soviets in the east. Behind the Red Army lines, the final pockets of resistance also surrendered.

At the Courland enclave on the Baltic, over two hundred thousand German soldiers and Latvian volunteers laid down their arms, then joined the defenders of Berlin on the long, one-way march to Siberia. After seventy days of desperate, heroic struggle, the besieged garrison of Breslau also lowered its flag and these men too began their Siberian death march. And also after surrender, the already haggard females of Breslau began pondering “whether life had not been sweeter during the worst days of the siege.”⁴¹
Remembered one girl:

Rape began almost immediately and there was a viciousness in the acts as if we women were being punished for Breslau having resisted for so long. . . . Let me say that I was young, pretty, plump and fairly inexperienced. A succession of Ivans gave me over the next week or two a lifetime of experience. Luckily very few of their rapes lasted more than a minute. With many it was just a matter of seconds before they collapsed gasping. What

kept me sane was that almost from the very first one I felt only a contempt for these bullying and smelly peasants who could not act gently towards a woman, and who had about as much sexual technique as a rabbit.⁴²

“For four years [Propaganda Minister, Joseph] Goebbels kept telling us that the Russians were rapists, that they would violate, murder, rob and pillage us,” explained one woman. “Such propaganda did not shock us and we looked forward to being liberated by the Allies. . . . We could not bear it when Goebbels turned out to be right.”⁴³

“Red soldiers during the first weeks of their occupation raped every women and girl between the ages of 12 and 60. That sounds exaggerated, but it is the simple truth. . . ,” a stunned American reporter revealed. “Husbands and fathers who attempted to protect their women folk were shot down, and girls offering extreme resistance were murdered.”⁴⁴

Although frantic females tried numerous stratagems to stop the attacks, nothing they did seemed to slow, much less halt, the Soviet sexual assaults—not age, not looks, not illness, nothing.

“A young Russian with a pistol in his hand came to fetch me,” a mother of two small children reminisced. “I have to admit that I was so frightened (and not just of the pistol) that I could not hold my bladder. That didn’t disturb him in the least.” When this same woman later went with her sister to see a Soviet military physician, far from helping the females, the doctor and another officer raped them both. The young mother herself was on her menstrual cycle; her sister was in the late stages of pregnancy.⁴⁵

Far from being sanctuaries, houses of worship were some of the first stops for the Red Army. In addition to the mass rape of females who sought shelter in churches and cathedrals, nuns likewise suffered the same. In one Silesian city alone, Soviet soldiers brutally raped nearly two hundred Catholic sisters leaving sixty-six pregnant nuns in their wake.⁴⁶

Although German women were naturally their favorite targets, virtually any female in the path of the communist army would do. Thousands of women of all nationalities held in German and Polish labor camps were not merely liberated when the Soviets arrived.

“I waited for the Red Army for days and nights,” admitted one Russian female. “I waited for my liberation, but now our soldiers treat us far worse than the Germans did. They do terrible things to us.”⁴⁷

At devastated Dresden, Chemnitz and other cities in eastern Germany that now for the first time experienced Soviet occupation, the situation was the same. Encouraged by the Jewish propagandist, Ilya Ehrenburg, Soviet soldiers were not merely encouraged to rape and kill all Germans they encountered, they were all but ordered to do it; it was the Red soldier’s “patriotic duty,” insisted Stalin’s murderous mouthpiece.

“Kill them all, men, old men, children and the women, after you have amused yourself with them!” demanded Ehrenburg. “Kill. Nothing in Germany is guiltless, neither the living nor the yet unborn. . . . Break the racial pride of the German women. Take her as your legitimate booty. Kill, you brave soldiers of the victorious Soviet Army.”⁴⁸

Although front-line troops—Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians— committed their share of savage atrocities, it was the rear echelon— Mongolians, and other Asiatics—that were responsible for perhaps not just the greatest number of crimes but also the greatest degree of crimes. To most Germans, however, all were known simply as “Russians,” or “Ivans.”

“There were no limits to the bestiality and licentiousness of these troops . . . ,” remembered a pastor from Milzig. “Girls and women were routed out of their hiding-places, out of the ditches and thickets where they had sought shelter from the Russian soldiers, and were beaten and raped. Older women who refused to tell the Russians where the younger ones had hidden were likewise beaten and raped.”⁴⁹

When groups of fleeing refugees were overtaken by the Soviets the rapes and murders took on a massive, mechanical quality. Typically, all captured females—old, young, sick, pregnant, mothers and their children included— were forced to lie by the sides of roads while the laughing Soviet soldiers lined up, then lowered their trousers. One after another, the attacks continued. Generally, as more passing troops arrived, the lines got longer, not shorter. Those females who lost consciousness from blood loss were dragged to the side or rolled into a ditch. Any mother who tried to save her daughter was

automatically shot. Even those soldiers who would have otherwise avoided such sadistic crimes were compelled, “without exception,” to join in by “grinning officers” who stood at the head of each line.⁵⁰

Like the case above, whenever possible commissars made certain that German men—fathers, husbands, priests, soldiers—were forced to watch the rape of German women be it inside homes, schools, churches, in parks, on sidewalks, or by the roadsides.

With machine guns trained on them, one large group of surrendering German soldiers, including the famous air ace, Erich Hartmann, were forced to look on as a mob of drunken Soviets threw captured women and girls to the ground, tore off their clothes, then, amid howls and laughter, began their violent sexual attacks.

A young German woman, mother of a twelve-year-old girl, knelt at the feet of one Soviet and begged that he and the others take her, not the child. Ignoring her tearful pleas the man strode away, a mocking grin on his face. “Damned fascist pig!” yelled a soldier nearby as he kicked the mother in the face then shot and killed her. With that the killer dragged the dead woman’s daughter behind a nearby tank. He was joined by others and for half an hour only the screams of the little girl and laughter of the men was heard. Then, their hate and lust sated, the rapists finally withdrew. Completely naked and unable to stand, the bloodied child crawled slowly back to her dead mother. An hour later the sobbing little girl at last stopped crying and joined her mother in death.⁵¹

At the same time as the above was transpiring, eight- and nine-year-old children were also being raped and sodomized repeatedly by the Soviets. Mothers who tried to protect their daughters were beaten unconscious and dragged to the side where they themselves were savagely raped and killed.⁵²

“Kill! Kill!” urged the blood-thirsty propagandist, Ilya Ehrenburg. “In the German race there is nothing but evil; not one among the living, not one among the yet unborn but is evil! . . . Stamp out the fascist beast once and for all in its lair! Use force and break the racial pride of these German women. . . . Kill! As you storm onward, kill, you gallant soldiers of the Red Army.”⁵³

“Fear is always present,” young Regina Shelton admitted. “It flares into panic at tales of atrocities—mutilated nude bodies tossed by the wayside—a woman nailed spread-eagle to a cart and gang-raped while bleeding to death from her wounds—horrible diseases spread to their victims by sex-drunken Mongolians.”⁵⁴ Those frustrated rapists too drunk to physically conclude their act instead used the bottle they were drinking from to symbolically continue the savagery with even more hideous damage done to the victim.⁵⁵

Certainly, not every soldier in the Soviet army was a drunken, sadistic monster. Some officers protected helpless German victims. Other upright soldiers placed their own lives on the line to defend the defenseless.⁵⁶ A few, like the poet, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, were haunted for the rest of their lives by the things they had seen . . . and haunted by the things they had perhaps even done:

Twenty-two Hoeringstrasse. It’s not been burned, just looted, rifled. A moaning by the walls, half muffled: the mother’s wounded, half alive. The little daughter’s on the mattress, dead. How many have been on it? A platoon, a company perhaps? A girl’s been turned into a woman, a woman turned into a corpse. . . . The mother begs, “Soldier, kill me!”⁵⁷

No, not all Soviet soldiers were child-killing rapists . . . but enough were. Ilya Ehrenburg:

Break the racial pride of the German women. Take her as your legitimate booty. Kill, you brave soldiers of the victorious Soviet Army. ✘ ✘ ✘

Meanwhile, to the west, the Americans were engaged in their own version of sexual conquest. Soon after they stormed ashore on D-Day, June, 1944, the worst elements in the US Army were allowed virtual free reign to rob, rape and kill.

“[R]eports that disciplinary conditions in the army are becoming bad,” General Eisenhower’s personal driver and mistress, Kay Summersby, candidly recorded. “Many cases of rape, murder, and pillage are causing complaints by the French, Dutch, etc.”⁵⁸

Expecting an army of heroic liberators, the Europeans were naturally

surprised and shocked at the lack of discipline among the Allied forces, especially that of the Americans. Drunkenness, theft, wanton destruction of public and private property, casual sex on streets and in parks, but above all, violent sexual assault—many French soon referred to the American occupation as a “regime of terror . . . imposed by bandits in uniform.”⁵⁹

Historian, Mary Louise Roberts, poignantly recounts one such incident:

The handsome American soldier was Elisabeth’s tenth client that evening. Working her trade on the top floor of a dingy apartment block in Paris, she felt that she had seen them all.

For the past four years, the men had been Germans, and now, since the city had been liberated in August, 1944, they were Americans. It made little difference.

Elisabeth held out three fingers of her hand to indicate the price of her body — three hundred francs.

“Too much,” said the soldier.

Elisabeth sighed. She had seen that before as well. Wearily, she kept the three fingers held up, almost as an insult.

There was no negotiation — three hundred was little enough as it was.

“Two hundred,” the soldier insisted.

“Non,” said Elisabeth. “Three hundred or nothing.”

The soldier approached her, hate in his eyes. Elisabeth glowered back, starting to feel scared.

“In that case,” said the soldier, “it will be nothing.”

The soldier then placed his huge hands around Elisabeth’s neck and started to squeeze. She struggled as hard as she could, lashing out, but it was in vain.

After a minute or so she slumped down, her lifeless body falling on to the stained sheets. The soldier then calmly removed his trousers and had sex with her. For nothing.

Afterwards, he went through Elisabeth’s belongings and stole her cash and jewelry. He then went round the block, found another prostitute and took her to dinner and the movies.

For the GI, it had been a swell evening. Paris was just as they said it was.⁶⁰

“The French now grumble that the Americans are a more drunken and

disorderly lot than the Germans and hope to see the day when they are liberated from the Americans,” admitted one US general in disgust. “I am informed the Germans did not loot either residences, stores, or museums. In fact the people claimed that they were meticulously treated by the Army of Occupation.”⁶¹

After raping and robbing their way across France and Belgium, the US Army reacted much like the Soviets once they crossed into Nazi Germany in early 1945. Imagining the Americans to be much like the disciplined and well-behaved Wehrmacht, many German women, young and old, actually greeted the invaders euphorically as the long-sought symbol that the war was finally over and peace was at hand. Unfortunately, most found out too late, just as the boys at Dachau discovered, that these were not the Americans of their imaginations.

“We were crazy with happiness when the Americans came. . . ,” lamented one woman, “[but] what [they] did here was quite a disappointment that hit our family pretty hard.”⁶²

“After the fighting moved on to German soil, there was a good deal of rape by combat troops and those immediately following them,” offered Australian journalist, Osmar White, a war correspondent traveling with the Americans.⁶³ Soon after entering towns and villages the rapes began. Indoors or out, night or day, on park benches, against walls, on shop floors, the sexual attacks continued as the American conquerors laid claim to the conquered. Often going house to house in search of victims, some rapists initially claimed that they were looking for weapons, or food, or German soldiers in hiding. All too quickly their true purpose was made clear.⁶⁴ In one German town, a group of six GIs found an attractive mother and her teenage daughter home alone. In the struggle to drag the victims upstairs, the females escaped out the door and hid in a neighbor’s closet. Finding their hiding place, the soldiers immediately threw the mother and daughter onto beds and one after another took turns raping the females, even as the daughter cried out, “Mama, Mama.”⁶⁵

At the Bavarian village of Ramsau, revealed one priest, “eight girls and women [were] raped, some of them in front of their parents.” In other villages, “heavily drunken” US soldiers helped themselves to the females.

After raping one woman, a GI bragged that he had “liberated” her.⁶⁶ In an apparent attempt to make the job easier for their men, some US officers required all homes to state the names and ages of their inhabitants and then nail the lists to their doors.

“The results of this decree are not difficult to imagine. . . ,” a priest from one town answered. “Seventeen girls or women . . . were brought to the hospital, having been sexually abused once or several times.”⁶⁷

Rather than use their authority to punish the criminals and thereby stop most of the sexual attacks, American officers, much like their Soviet counterparts, seemed utterly indifferent to the crime, preferring instead to either ignore it entirely or blame the victims. Instead of arresting black soldiers for a massive number of rapes, the victims themselves were blamed because they “smiled” at the negroes while begging food. US Lieutenant General Edwin Lee Clarke went even further. “German women are creating a feeling of great insecurity among our soldiers by untrue charges of rape. . . ,” announced Clarke. “[T]hese tactics might be part of a German plan.”⁶⁸

As with the Soviets, the Americans seemed to have no age limit and an elderly woman of 65, or older, could expect to be raped just as could a child of seven, or younger.⁶⁹ There were other similarities. Revealed an Allied official:

German women were more frequently injured, beaten unconscious, abused more frequently in front of husbands or relatives and more frequently penetrated orally or anally by GIs than by the British or French.⁷⁰

“Americans look on the German women as loot, just like cameras and Lugers,” confessed a reporter for a New York newspaper.⁷¹

“[W]e too are considered an army of rapists,” admitted a US sergeant matter-of-factly.⁷²

Added a writer for Time magazine succinctly: “Many a sane American family would recoil in horror if they knew how “Our Boys” conduct themselves . . . over here.”⁷³

And the duty of concealing from the American public these crimes their husbands and sons were committing in Europe—and later, in Japan—was the job of the Office of War Information. Issuing its unequivocal marching

orders to a small army of journalists following along with American troops, the OWI simply perfected a Soviet style censorship on all news and information destined for the US. “The rules for correspondents [were both] . . . imposed and self-imposed,” explained the American writer, John Steinbeck, about how he and other reporters hid the truth:

There were no cowards [or rapists or murderers] in the American Army, and of all the brave men the private in the infantry was the bravest and noblest. . . . A second convention held that we had no cruel or ambitious or ignorant commanders. . . . We were all a part of the War Effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it. Gradually it became a part of all of us that the truth about anything was automatically secret and that to trifle with it was to interfere with the War Effort. By this I don’t mean that the correspondents were liars ... [but] it is in the things not mentioned that the untruth lies. We felt responsible to what was called the home front. There was a general feeling that unless the home front was carefully protected from the whole account of what war was like, it might panic. Also, we felt we had to protect the armed services from criticism, or they might retire to their tents to sulk like Achilles.⁷⁴

Thus, in effect, each “reporter” was expected to ignore or deny the looting, rape and murder committed by the Americans and exaggerate or invent the war crimes committed by the Germans; to dutifully deify their friends in the one breath and viciously vilify their enemy in the next. In essence, a corp of conscientious, diligent newsmen during times of peace had been transformed into an obedient herd of propagandists during times of war.

While some upright American officers, like their Russian counterparts, tried manfully to control the scourge of rape in their units, most did not.⁷⁵ For German women, the baffling contradictions in each army was itself a source of nonstop terror and stress. Near Berlin, when a family encountered their first Soviets at war’s end they were naturally paralyzed with fear, fully expecting a riot of robbery and rape to envelop them. Surprisingly, the Russians were very polite and left without harming anything or anyone, including the family’s females. When the Americans later arrived, however, one of the daughters was raped so brutally that years later she still had not recovered.⁷⁶

Although sexual assaults by French troops in Germany were fewer than other allies, perhaps only because there were fewer French troops to begin with, not so the African colonials under their command—Moroccans, Senegalese and others who raped on a massive scale. Just as with their American and Soviet allies, the French commanders seemed indifferent to the fate of German civilians, especially women. Indeed, many French officers seemed to gloat in their power and allowed their black troops to run wild, robbing, raping, and murdering. “In the next few nights,” boasted one French sergeant, “no woman will go untouched.”⁷⁷ When Senegalese troops reached Stuttgart in southwest Germany, they herded thousands of women, and a number of men, into the subway then raped and sodomized them all at their leisure.⁷⁸

While the British were far and away the most disciplined and correct of all Allied forces, that army too had its criminal element. “I didn’t go out and chase my chaps away from the women,” laughed one junior officer. “I didn’t have time. I was doing it myself!”⁷⁹

And thus, in the east, in the west, in their thousands, in their tens of thousands, in their hundreds of thousands, perhaps in their millions, the sexual assaults and spiritual slaughter of German females continued long after the war was declared over.

“I was panic-stricken. I was always afraid that everybody could see it in me. I was insecure in myself. I felt so empty,” confessed one young victim expressing the emotional chaos and confusion of countless others. “I wanted to do away with myself and kept crying. My mother would not let me go anywhere alone, not even to the toilet.”⁸⁰

“Is this the peace we yearned for so long?” cried Elsbeth Losch from a town near Dresden. “When will all this have an end?”⁸¹ ❖ ❖ ❖

Although forced to the shadows by growing public opprobrium, the “brutal and vicious” Morgenthau Plan for Germany was never actually abandoned by Franklin Roosevelt.⁸² Indeed, until his death in April, 1945, the American president had secretly favored the “Carthaginian” approach for the conquered Reich. When Roosevelt’s successor, Harry Truman, met with Soviet strongman, Josef Stalin, and the new British prime minister, Clement Attlee, outside of Berlin at Potsdam in the summer, 1945, most of the teeth in

Morgenthau's murderous scheme remained on the table. With the signature of the "Big Three," the plan went into effect.⁸³

"It is not the intention of the Allies," argued the joint declaration, "to destroy or enslave the German people."⁸⁴ Virtually word for word, a similar declaration was directed at Japan, then on the verge of total collapse. Despite such solemn pronouncements meant to mollify a watching world, it soon became abundantly clear, first to the Germans, then to the Japanese, that the victors came not as peaceminded "liberators," as propagandists were wont to declare, but as conquerors fully as ruthless, vengeful and greedy as any who ever won a war.

The plundering of Germany by the Soviet Union first began when the Red Army penetrated East Prussia in late 1944. With war's end the following year, Stalin's methodical looting in the Russian Occupation Zone now became prodigious. Steel mills, grain mills, lumber mills, sugar and oil refineries, chemical plants, optical works, shoe factories, and other heavy industries were taken apart down to the last nut and bolt and sent east to the Soviet Union where they were reassembled. Those factories allowed to remain in Germany were to operate solely for the benefit of Moscow.

Electric and steam locomotives, their rolling stock, and even the tracks they ran on were likewise sent east.⁸⁵ While the Soviet government pillaged on a massive scale, the common Red soldier was even more meticulous.

"The Russians systematically cleared out everything, that was for them of value, such as all sewing machines, pianos, grand-pianos, baths, water taps, electric plants, beds, mattresses, carpets, etc.," itemized one woman from eastern Germany. "They destroyed what they could not take away. . . . Not in a single village did one see a cow, a horse or a pig. . . . The Russians had taken everything away to the east, or used it up."⁸⁶

Like millions of other refugees, Regina Shelton managed her way home at the end of the war. Also like millions of other refugees, the woman was warned of the utter devastation she would find in the wake of the Soviets.

Thus we expect the worst, but our idea of the worst has not prepared us sufficiently for reality. Shocked to the point of collapse, we survey a

battlefield—heaps of refuse through which broken pieces of furniture rise like cliffs; stench gags us, almost driving us to retreat. Ragged remnants of clothes, crushed dishes, books, pictures torn from frames,—rubble in every room. . . . Above all, the nauseating stench that emanates from the largest and totally wrecked living room! Spoiled contents ooze from splintered canning jars, garbage of indefinable origin is mixed with unmistakable human excrement, and dried stain of urine discolors crumpled paper and rags.⁸⁷

Americans were not far behind their communist counterparts and what was not wantonly destroyed, was pilfered as “souvenirs.”

“We ‘liberated’ German property,” winked one GI. “The Russians simply stole it.”

Unlike its Soviet ally which had been bled white by nearly thirty years of Marxism, the United States had no need for German plants and factories. The Reich’s hoard of treasure, however, was another matter. Billions of dollars in gold, silver and currency, as well as priceless paintings, sculptures and other art works were plucked from their hiding places in caves, tunnels and salt mines and shipped across the Atlantic. Additionally, and of far greater damage to Germany’s future, was the “mental dismantling” of the Reich. Tons of secret documents revealing Germany’s tremendous organizational talent in business and industry were simply stolen, not only by the Americans, but by the French and British. Hundreds of the greatest scientists in the world were likewise “encouraged” to immigrate by the victors. As one US Government agency quietly admitted, “Operation Paper-Clip” was the first time in history wherein conquerors had attempted to drain dry the creative power of an entire nation.⁸⁸

“The real gain in reparations of this war,” Life magazine openly confessed, was not in factories, treasure or artwork, but “in the German brains and in the German research results.”⁸⁹

While the Soviet Union came up short on German scientists and technicians simply because most had wisely fled and surrendered to the West, Russia suffered no shortage of slave labor. Added to the millions of native dissidents, repatriated refugees and Wehrmacht prisoners toiling in the gulags, were millions of German civilians snatched from the Reich. As was commonly the case, those who were destined to spend years or their entire lives in slavery were given mere minutes to make ready. In cities, towns and villages, posters suddenly appeared announcing that all able-bodied men and

women were to assemble in their local square at a given time or face arrest and execution.

“The screaming, wailing and howling in the square will haunt me the rest of my life,” remembered one horrified female. “Mercilessly the women were herded together in rows of four. Mothers had to leave tiny children behind. I thanked God from the bottom of my heart that my boy had died in Berlin shortly after birth. . . . The . . . wretched victims [were] then set in motion to the crack of Russian whips.”⁹⁰

For those forced east on foot, the trek became little better than a death march. Thousands dropped dead in their tracks from hunger, thirst, disease, and abuse. “It took all of our remaining strength to stay in the middle of the extremely slow-moving herds being driven east,” said Wolfgang Kasak. “We kept hearing the submachine guns whenever a straggler was shot. . . . I will never forget . . . the shooting of a 15-year old boy right before my very eyes. He simply couldn’t walk anymore, so a Russian soldier took potshots at him. The boy was still alive when some officer came over and fired his gun into the boy’s ear.”⁹¹

“One young girl jumped from a bridge into the water, the guards shot wildly at her, and I saw her sink,” recalled Anna Schwartz. “A young man, who had heart-disease, jumped into the Vistula. He was also shot. . . . Thirst was such a torture, and we were so tired.”⁹²

Those who traveled by rail to Siberia fared even worse. With standing room only, small, filthy freight cars were commonly crammed with over one hundred people each. After a suffocating trip of 20 or 30 days, with starvation, thirst, beatings, and rape every mile of the way, fully one third to one half of the passengers were dead when the trains reached their termini. And of those who stepped down, all, thought one viewer, more resembled “walking corpses” than living humans.⁹³ “[N]ow the dying really began . . . ,” as Anna Schwartz recollected.

The huts, in which we were quartered, were full of filth and vermin, swarms of bugs overwhelmed us, and we destroyed as much of this vermin as we could. We lay on bare boards so close together, that, if we wanted to turn round, we had to wake our neighbors to the right and left of us, in order that we all turned round at the same time. The sick people lay amongst us, groaning and in delirium. . . . Typhoid and dysentery raged and very many died, but death meant rather release than terror to them. The dead were

brought into a cellar, and when this was full up to the top, it was emptied. Meanwhile the rats had eaten from the corpses, and these very quickly decayed. . . . Also the wolves satisfied their hunger. . . .94

While Anna's camp worked on a railroad and was driven day-in, day-out "like a herd of draught animals," and while others toiled in fields, factories, bogs, and lumber camps, thousands more were relegated to the mines.⁹⁵

"[W]e sometimes had to remain as much as 16 hours down in the pit," recounted Ilse Lau. "When we had finally finished our work by summoning up our last strength, we were not allowed to go up in the lift, but had to climb up the ladders [450 feet]. We were often near to desperation. We were never able to sleep enough, and we were always hungry."⁹⁶

At one large coal camp, fifteen to twenty-five people died every day. Each night the corpses were carried out and dumped without ceremony into a mass grave.

Despite the never-ending nightmare, Christians still gathered for a few minutes on each Sunday to renew their faith.

"Often a commissar came and shouted out: 'That won't help you!'" remembered Gertrude Schulz.⁹⁷ But it did.

Just as faith in the Almighty was often the thin divide which separated those who lived from those who died, so too did simple acts of kindness offer strength and rays of hope in an otherwise crushing gloom. As Wolfgang Kasak and his comrades stood dying of thirst one day, a Russian woman appeared with buckets of water.

"The guards drove the woman away," Kasak said. "But she kept on bringing water, bucket after bucket, to the places where no Russians were standing guard. I know now the Russian soldiers closed one eye and took a long time in following their orders to keep the woman from giving us something to drink."⁹⁸

Siegfried Losch, a youth who had become a recruit, soldier, veteran, deserter, prisoner, and slave before he had seen his eighteenth year, was hard at work one Sunday morning when an old grandmother approached. Judging by her clothes, she was very poor. Judging by her limp she was crippled. Indeed, thought Losch, the old woman looked like the witch from Hansel and Gretel. But the grandmother's face was different.

[T]he face emanated . . . warmth as only a mother who has suffered much can give. Here was the true example of mother Russia: Having suffered under the Soviet regime, the war, having possibly lost one or more of her loved ones. . . . She probably was walking toward her church. When she was near me, she stopped and gave me some small coins. . . . Then she made a cross over me with tears in her eyes and walked on. I gave her a “spasibo” (thank you!) and continued my work. But for the rest of the day I was a different person, because somebody cared, somebody let her soul speak to me.⁹⁹

Precious as such miracles might be, they were but cruel reminders of a world that was no more. “We were eternally hungry . . . ,” recalled Erich Gerhardt. “Treatment by the Russian guards was almost always very bad. We were simply walking skeletons. . . . From the first to the last day our life was a ceaseless suffering, a dying and lamentation. The Russian guards mercilessly pushed the very weakest people forward with their rifle-butts, when they could hardly move. When the guards used their rifle-butts, they made use of the words, ‘You lazy rascal.’ I was already so weak, that I wanted to be killed on the spot by the blows.”¹⁰⁰

“We were always hungry and cold, and covered with vermin . . . ,” echoed a fellow slave. “I used to pray to God to let me at least die in my native country.”¹⁰¹

Cruelly, had this man’s prayers been answered and had he been allowed to return to Germany, the odds were good indeed that he would have died in his homeland . . . and sooner than he imagined. Unbeknownst to these wretched slaves dreaming of home, the situation in the former Reich differed little, if any, from that of Siberia. Indeed, in many cases, “life” in the defeated nation was vastly worse.

Meanwhile, on the far side of the world, Germany’s former ally was also facing its own terrible trials by fire. And just as was the case with Germany, should this nation fail in the final hour its very existence as a free nation would be over, no doubt for many years, perhaps for all time to come.

Chapter 2 Hell’s Cesspool

The Allied armies, through sacrifice and devotion and with God's help, have wrung from Germany a final and unconditional surrender. The western world has been freed of the evil forces which for five years and longer have imprisoned the bodies and broken the lives of millions upon millions of free-born men. They have violated their churches, destroyed their homes, corrupted their children, and murdered their loved ones. Our Armies of Liberation have restored freedom to these suffering peoples, whose spirit and will the oppressors could never enslave.

Much remains to be done. The victory won in the West must now be won in the East. The whole world must be cleansed of the evil from which half the world has been freed. United, the peace-loving nations have demonstrated in the West that their arms are stronger by far than the might of the dictators or the tyranny of military cliques that once called us soft and weak. The power of our peoples to defend themselves against all enemies will be proved in the Pacific war as it has been proved in Europe. . . .1 —US President, Harry Truman, May 8, 1945

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here had never been the slightest doubt in anyone's mind about Franklin D. Roosevelt's deep hatred for Germany and Germans. Too many public and private utterances on the subject were available for anyone to confuse Roosevelt's thoughts on the

matter. Nor could most Americans miss for a moment the depth of animosity the president felt for Japan and the Japanese, as his feigned fury over the so-called "Day of Infamy" at Pearl Harbor would seem to imply. And yet, with Roosevelt's death in the spring of 1945, it quickly became apparent to all that if anything, the new US president, Harry Truman, would not only continue the seething sentiment FDR felt for each enemy nation, but that he would actually magnify the murderous mood double-fold.

"We must work to finish the war. Our victory is but half-won," added Truman. "The West is free, but the East is still in bondage to the treacherous tyranny of the Japanese."2

In fact, Truman was being disingenuous. The war was not merely "half-won"

. . . it was entirely won, and the new president was entirely aware of the fact. In January, 1945, several months before Truman took office, his predecessor had received word from Supreme Allied Commander in the Pacific, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, that Japan was now ready to quit; Japanese leaders were at that moment suing for peace. In three years of all-out war with the American giant, the industrial capacity of tiny Japan had been all but destroyed, its navy and air force had been swept from the sea and sky, and the nation itself, because of the US blockade, was on the verge of starvation. Japan would thus surrender unconditionally as demanded, accept its punishment, and relinquish its all; all, that is, save the Emperor. And that was the point upon which the Japanese would never waver. If surrendering meant that she must give up her Emperor then Japan would fight on to the death for without the spiritual embodiment of the nation that the Emperor represented the Japanese would not only lose their living heart and soul but they would lose their racial identity and cease any longer to be Japanese. Gen. MacArthur urged the president to accept the Japanese offer, thereby saving an estimated one million American lives.³

But to the Japanese offer, Roosevelt could only smile; the president was in no mood for peace and he would not even consider a Japanese surrender. The war was going well, very well, and there were enormous financial and political profits yet to be plucked from it. Another important reason for continuing the war, perhaps even the most important reason, was the fact that the American people themselves had simply not yet tired of it. “The ‘dirty Japs’ started this war,” as the reasoning ran, “but we Americans will finish it. The Japs did it . . . now they will pay.”

“MacArthur is our greatest general,” laughed FDR cynically, “and our poorest politician.”⁴

And thus, an already murderous, merciless war was allowed to continue by American political leaders long after it could have been concluded by American military leaders. Unfortunately for the history of the world, the three years of vicious brutality that had already characterized the war in the Pacific thus far would prove only the faintest foretaste of what was yet to come.

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Unlike the German army, which maintained a hard and fast discipline over its troops even in the last days of catastrophic defeat, the average American soldier became, if anything, even more undisciplined, even more uncontrollable, even more vicious, even more violent, in victory. Not every US fighting man was so, of course, as numerous, heart-warming accounts of compassion attest. Unfortunately, these acts of courage and humanity, in both Europe and Asia, lay like tiny diamonds all but lost in dark caves of hate.

In the case of Japan and the Pacific War, the scruples and ethics of the minority counted for little or nothing as the majority seemed bent on heeding every hideous piece of propaganda they encountered that portrayed the Japanese as subhumans fit only for extermination. Had somewhere up the American chain of command there been but the simple desire to prevent the wholesale torture and slaughter of prisoners, or had there been the mere will to halt the atrocious savagery perpetrated against enemy civilians, then it could have been, and would have been, enforced, much as it was enforced in the German army. But there clearly was no such desire, much less will, to show even a spark of humanity on the part of US political and military leaders during World War Two, and none was thus shown.

“The Buck Stops Here,” read the popular passage on President Truman’s desk in the White House. Another phrase that might have sat easily there, but didn’t, was “The Hate Begins Here.” It was an inveterate anti-Japanese animus that began at the top with the new US president and quickly filtered down. Truman’s unblanched hatred flowed first to his top military commanders who either ordered the war crimes outright or simply allowed them to occur. From there, the hate settled swiftly down into the undeveloped souls of the teenagers and young men in the field, or those who committed the actual atrocities themselves and who thoughtlessly, and often laughingly, obeyed all criminal orders as they went about their bloody business of murder, torture and rape.

“[T]he Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic,” hissed the new US president without blinking an eye or missing a beat.⁵

“The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them,” Truman continued. “When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him like a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless

necessary.”⁶

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On the morning of April 1, 1945, the largest American amphibious force of the Pacific war went ashore on the island of Okinawa. Outnumbering their Japanese opponent five-to-one, over half a million soldiers, sailors and marines, along with hundreds of ships and airplanes, were arrayed against the tiny island. For the Americans, Okinawa was the last obstacle to an all-out invasion of the Japanese home islands several hundred miles to the north. For the Japanese, Okinawa was one final chance to turn the fortunes of war in their favor, one final chance to save face in the world and stave off an impending, humiliating defeat. Consequently, when the surprised Americans landed without opposition, it was clear that the Japanese commanders had wisely chosen to fall back to the southern half of the island where natural defensive positions were plentiful. Nevertheless, and as all Japanese commanders already knew, their job was hopeless. As most of the top military and political leaders of Japan clearly understood, only a miracle could turn the tide of battle. The greatest that Japan could hope was to make the fight so bloody and costly that the Americans would reconsider the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands and withdraw.

In addition to their overwhelming might in man-power, the Americans out-classed their opponents in heavy tanks, artillery, ammunition, medicine, food, and virtually everything else needed to win a modern battle. Above all else, however, US aircraft ruled the skies, bombing and strafing targets at will. Additionally, hundreds of new flame-throwing “Satan” tanks were brought to bear in the fighting. In addition to destroying natural cover where Japanese troops and snipers hid, the tanks were used to scorch black the hundreds of caves and tunnels on Okinawa where enemy troops, as well as local civilians, had taken cover.

Very quickly, another American pattern appeared at Okinawa that had begun on Guadalcanal and had continued to all other Japanese-held islands. Just as with the earlier victories, the island-hopping massacres of the preceding years were played out on a vastly larger and much deadlier scale on Okinawa. “No quarter!” was still the understood, if unofficial, command of all US forces. And unfortunately, just as American soldiers had demonstrated on Saipan,

little distinction was shown between a Japanese soldier and a Japanese civilian. All would die.

After urging Japanese soldiers from their caves and hiding places with promises of chocolate, tobacco and safety, Americans commonly murdered all in cold blood. Likewise, many terrified civilians who chose to seek greater safety under cover of darkness were slaughtered in their thousands.

“When dawn came,” recalled a marine after his unit had massacred one such group, “[we] left our foxholes, observed the carnage strewn about the road . . . women, old men, children. My guesstimate, in the hundreds.”⁷

And as for rape. . . .

Because the great bulk of fighting in the war against Japan was fought on the water, in the air or across islands either uninhabited or sparsely populated, “rape” is a word seldom mentioned in American war diaries or official reports during the years 1941-1944. However, when US forces invaded Okinawa, Saipan and other islands home to Japanese civilians, this changed.

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Soon after US troops came ashore at Okinawa, sexual assault on a massive scale began. What immediately occurred on the Motobu Peninsula was typical. With all local men pressed into service for the battle by the Japanese, only women, children and the aged remained. Moments after reaching the various villages and finding no enemy opposition, the American soldiers spread out and began the hunt for hiding females. In broad daylight, with US officers looking the other way, the women and girls of Motobu were easily found, dragged out, then forced to endure gang-rape.⁸

In one area of Okinawa alone, during one ten-day period, over one thousand women reported being sexually assaulted. Since most victims, young and old, would never come forward and voluntarily suffer such shame in a society where chastity was valued above all else, the number of rapes was undoubtedly much greater than reported.

When US troops landed on nearby Zamami, a small islet west of Okinawa, they immediately began the systematic rape of all women found. Many

soldiers dragged the struggling females down to deserted coastal areas and gang-raped them at leisure. After being attacked repeatedly, most of the surviving women were allowed to return home. . . but only to face gang rape by the next wave of Americans. As often as not, there was nowhere to run.⁹

“On the ground lay the body of a young Okinawan, a girl who had been fifteen or sixteen, and probably very pretty,” remembered an American officer. “She was nude, lying on her back with arms outstretched and knees drawn up, but spread apart. The poor girl had been shot through the left breast and evidently violently raped.”¹⁰

Fresh arriving troops to Okinawa were initially surprised by the rape rampage. Incidents like the following, however, became common:

Marching south, men of the 4th Marines passed a group of some 10 American soldiers bunched together in a tight circle next to the road. They were “quite animated,” noted a corporal who assumed they were playing a game of craps. “Then as we passed them,” said the shocked marine, “I could see they were taking turns raping an oriental woman. I was furious, but our outfit kept marching by as though nothing unusual was going on.”¹¹

Some injured women, those who had suffered savage, repeated rapes or actual war wounds from the desperate fighting all around, awoke to find themselves being treated in local hospitals or even at US medical field camps. But even there the violent assaults continued. One victim, a child, was raped by a GI in front of her father who happened to be in the tent tending to her. Any Asian male—father, son, brother, stranger—who attempted to stop the attacks was himself murdered on the spot.¹²

Other young women and children were sexually assaulted when starvation forced them to approach Americans to beg for food.¹³ Those Okinawan females trapped in the recently constructed concentration camps were easy prey of the US invaders who went from one tent to another in their daily and nightly “girl hunts.”¹⁴

The ordeal of Haruko Oshiro is fairly typical of the trials faced by women fleeing the horror. Terrified by the countless enemy ships, the low-flying aircraft and the ceaseless bombing, Haruko and several friends decided to

escape the small island they were living on and try to reach nearby Okinawa.

“I decided that if I was to die I wanted to die where my family resides,” the young woman explained.¹⁵

Reaching Okinawa safely, the females suddenly had to seek cover to avoid an on-going American air raid. After a dangerous, circuitous trek of three-days, Haruko finally reached her family’s home only to find it and everything else utterly destroyed. Although her family was ominously missing at that time, Haruko miraculously found them all later living in an outdoor trench.

One day, when American patrols were in the area, Haruko’s sister could not stop her baby daughter from crying. Fearful that the child would draw the soldiers to the hiding place, the mother slipped away to try and quiet her infant. Later, Haruko became worried and went looking for her sister. In a nearby graveyard, she noticed a figure lying on the ground. She cautiously approached.

I then found a person whose face was swollen and covered with dirt mixed with blood; her internal organs protruding from her kimono. I couldn’t recognize who she was but the pattern of her kimono caught my eye. It was the same kimono that I had given to my sister.¹⁶

Her sister’s child was discovered nearby, also dead.

As if the trials and terrors of war were not already nightmarish enough, Haruko’s starving family was forced to seek food in the only area not teeming with US soldiers—a dangerous, dark valley known for its numerous Habu, a large, venomous and extremely aggressive snake.

Finally, after surviving for nearly a week in the trench, Haruko’s family saw US troops working their way down a nearby mountain. Horrified, and with dreaded rape clearly ahead, Haruko and the other females quickly did one of the few things they could.

“We cut off our hair and smeared our faces with soot from the bottom of pots and pans to make ourselves look ugly to avoid the American soldiers,” recounted the desperate woman. “But I was soon captured and became a prisoner of war....”¹⁷

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Increasingly, as word spread of murder and rape at the hands of the invaders,

rare was that Okinawan, male or female, who hesitated to flee. By the tens of thousands, Okinawans joined the Japanese defenders as they fell back south from one defensive position after another. While most sought protection far to the rear, many refugees actually armed themselves and joined the hopeless defense. Likewise, thousands of young women and girls volunteered for duty as nurses. Seventeen-year-old Yoshiko Shimabukuro was one.

Well-intentioned as her motives were, Yoshiko soon regretted the move. Replacing the daily terror of hiding from the Americans, now came the hourly nightmare of actual combat.

We only had basic training in how to put on bandages, but the wounded soldiers they brought in were beyond help. . . . They had legs ripped off, their intestines were falling out, faces missing. We simply had no idea what to do. . . . The constant screaming was dreadful.¹⁸

In the chaos of the caves and tunnels that served as crude hospitals, Yoshiko and her young friends soon became casualties themselves, either from American bombs and bullets, or merely from the horror that surrounded them. With continuous combat at every hand, a ceaseless supply of terribly wounded victims was always assured. Since medical supplies were virtually non-existent, Japanese soldiers screamed for others to simply shoot them and end the torture as arms and legs were being amputated without anesthetics. And, as was generally the case elsewhere, when the US attacks increased and the end drew near for various defended positions, officers ordered civilians to leave so that troops yet alive could fight to the death.

“We wanted to stay in the caves and die together,” said Yoshiko, “but the Japanese soldiers sent us away.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, a majority of Yoshiko’s friends were themselves mowed down by the Americans as they tried to flee.

“Where was I supposed to go, abandoning the cave when the enemy was right out there?” asked another teenage nurse, Ruri Miyara, Many of the schoolgirl’s classmates had already been killed by grenades, flamethrowers and bullets fired into the cave. Eventually, during the weeks of intense fighting, many more would die in their desperate, but futile, bid to find safety. Soon, of the 225 girls Ruri had started out with, only a mere score remained alive.²⁰

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While Okinawa civilians and the Japanese defenders were suffering through a nightmare of terror and torture unimaginable, US soldiers were passing through their own personal hell.

By far, Okinawa was the worst combat that Americans experienced of the entire Pacific war. Terrible as places like Tarawa and Iwo Jima had been, they were nothing compared to Okinawa. Not only was the enemy more numerous, more determined, more deeply dug in, and backed by vastly more artillery than in the past, but the cold, wet weather and the muddy, mountainous terrain was the bane of all foot soldiers. Additionally, unlike the other island battles which were over and done fairly soon, Okinawa was a grinding, sucking, static fight that seemed endless to the men involved. And never before were the horrors of war more graphic . . . or more sickening.

“Corpses litter the gray, muddy landscape,” typed a dazed correspondent accompanying the troops. “There are numerous severed arms and legs. And an occasional head. . . . Some of the corpses seem to be grinning. The flesh has rotted away from the skull and the teeth are bared. I am afraid that if I stare, one of these grinning dead might ask: ‘Don’t you belong with us?’”²¹

“We could be sitting there eating a C ration can or a Hershey bar,” reminisced twenty-year-old marine, Bill Pierce, “and right there where Quincy’s lying, there’s a dead Jap, with an arm sticking up or a mangled leg. It didn’t mean a thing. We’d become completely immune to it. You became hardened to it immediately.”²²

And unlike other island battles, the enemy’s constant use of heavy artillery was by far the greatest mental challenge for young American soldiers on Okinawa. During such an earth-shaking, non-stop thunderous roar as an artillery barrage could deliver, all reason, all sanity, all rational thought was utterly lost as the terror-stricken soldier shivered and cringed at the bottom of a muddy hole, arms squeezed tightly around his helmeted head, urinating, or defecating, or both, in his pants, convinced every shell screaming down had his name written on it.

“Loads of people shit in their pants, believe me, even if you didn’t have

diarrhoea,” laughed Bill Pierce.²³

Then, when an already terrified soldier saw another man “atomized” by a direct artillery hit, it altered that soldier forever. From that moment forward, whether it was an enemy or a friend, it was always he, the viewer, who received that direct hit, always he who was blown into a fine red mist of a million particles, always he who was next in line.

“From my experience, of all the hardships and hazards the troops had to suffer, prolonged shell fire was more apt to break a man psychologically than anything else,” offered one marine private, Eugene Sledge.²⁴

Some of the concussion cases could walk and were helped and led (some seemed to have no sure sense of direction) to the rear like men walking in their sleep. Some wore wild-eyed expressions of shock and fear. Others whom I knew well, though could barely recognize, wore expressions of idiots or simpletons knocked too witless to be afraid anymore. The blast of a shell had literally jolted them into a different state of awareness from the rest of us.²⁵

“I’ve seen guys sitting there sobbing,” recounts young Bill Pierce. “Others refused to go up the line. . . . Anything you do could get you killed, including absolutely nothing. That’s what it felt like.”²⁶

Because of the rain and close-quarter fighting in difficult terrain, thousands of bodies of friend and foe alike were seemingly everywhere and simply did not get buried for days, or weeks.

“The stench of death was all over,” Pierce continues. “It stank no matter where you were. . . . When you ate, you opened a can and the flies would be all over it in seconds. You had to try and cover the can up.”²⁷

The smell of rotting bodies truly was “overpowering,” agreed Private Sledge. “The mud was knee deep in some places, probably deeper in others if one dared venture there. For several feet around every corpse [and there were thousands of those], maggots crawled about in the muck and then were washed away by the runoff of the rain. . . . The scene was nothing but mud; shell fire; [and] flooded craters with their silent, pathetic, rotting occupants.”²⁸

If a Marine slipped and slid down the back slope of the muddy ridge he was apt to reach the bottom vomiting. I saw more than one man lose his footing and slip and slide all the way to the bottom only to stand up horror-stricken as he watched in disbelief while fat maggots tumbled out of his muddy dungaree pockets, cartridge belt, legging lacings, and the like. . . .

Every crater was half full of water, and many of them held a Marine corpse. The bodies lay pathetically just as they had been killed, half submerged in muck and water, rusting weapons still in hand. Swarms of big flies hovered about them. . . .29

For Eugene Sledge and thousands of his comrades, Okinawa was as much about sanity as it was survival for to lose the one was the same as to lose the other.

I existed from moment to moment, sometimes thinking death would have been preferable. We were in the depths of the abyss, the ultimate horror of war. . . . Men struggled and fought and bled in an environment so degrading I believed we had been flung into hell's own cesspool.30

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Meanwhile, as the Japanese Army strove to make the invasion of Okinawa so costly that the Americans would never even consider an attack on the Japanese home islands, the Imperial Air Force was engaged in a similar operation. In this case, however, the object was not the mere bleeding of the US Army but rather the utter destruction of the US Navy.

That the US ruled both in the air and on the sea surrounding Okinawa was never in doubt, among the Japanese or anyone else. But Americans also ruled Okinawa under the sea. Even a year before the invasion, US submarines swarmed like sharks in the waters around Japan, sinking merchant, hospital and refugee ships alike, as well as vessels of the Imperial Navy. On June 29, 1944, a US submarine torpedoed a Japanese troop ship, the Toyama-Maru, resulting in the death of over 5,000 soldiers. A short time after, another lurking submarine late one night sank an Okinawan refugee ship. Over a thousand passengers perished, including nearly 800 children.31

One reason Okinawa was considered hopeless by Japanese leaders was because reinforcements could not slip past the American armada. Unless the enormous US fleet was destroyed, the war would certainly be lost.

“Kamikaze!” It was a word that would soon strike instant fear into the hearts and minds of all US seamen. In the waters surrounding Okinawa thousands of American sailors on hundreds of ships would pass through their own personal crucibles as they faced one kamikaze attack after another. Although the attacks at sea by these “Special Attack Forces” would often be no more successful than Japanese banzai charges on land, enough aircraft would manage to get through to keep the nerves of all American defenders crackling to the breaking point.

“I had three rather personal experiences with suicide bombers in the Pacific,” reminisced one US carrier pilot. “I know something of the fear and panic that is generated when Kamikazes approached our Navy Task Force. I saw our ships’ gunners so jittery by the presence of Kamikazes that they fired on our own planes returning from strikes on Japanese targets.”³²

Initially, most US sailors were not merely horrified by the determined kamikaze attacks, but also confused. Many young Americans tried manfully to square the propaganda of the Japanese soldier as a cunning, yet cowardly, “yellow rat” with what were clearly acts of incredible bravery by young men their own age, young men giving the ultimate sacrifice for their country. No doubt many Americans remembered just such willing sacrifice by Texans at the fall of the Alamo.

“You hated to see them coming,” confessed one US officer who survived two hits on his ship, “but at the same time you couldn’t deny the courage of these pilots.”³³

Another officer whose ship was struck by a kamikaze admitted that he was “overwhelmed at the fighting spirit exhibited by the attacking pilot.”³⁴

“There was a hypnotic fascination to a sight so alien to our Western philosophy,” remembered US Vice Admiral Charles Brown. “We watched each plunging kamikaze with the detached horror of one witnessing a terrible spectacle rather than as the intended victim. We forgot self for the moment as

we groped hopelessly for the thoughts of that other man up there....”³⁵

Nevertheless, the hatred was so great and the propaganda so poisonous that many more would never admit that their deadly enemy was even a human, much less a brave one.

“Fighting the Japs is like fighting a wild animal. . . ,” spit one sailor. “The Japs take all kinds of chances, they love to die.”

“He isn’t afraid to die,” added another. “In fact, he seems to like to die.”³⁶ This “blind, fanatical wish to die,” this “struggle between men who want to die and men who fight to live,” as a narrator for a war documentary at the time grimly announced, was the only explanation that many Americans could offer because to admit that the kamikaze pilot exhibited bravery and patriotism was to confer a shared humanity onto a despised enemy. Many US seamen were certain that such a hated foe had to be drunk or drugged, then chained in his cockpit to do such a thing. Others were sure that to kill themselves so recklessly most pilots had to be coerced.

In fact, a majority of all kamikaze pilots were volunteers, neither drunk, drugged, or shackled in their cockpits. For the most part all were average young men—husbands, fathers, sons—with the greater share of their lives yet ahead of them. If giving those lives could somehow save their loved ones at home and the nation at large, most were willing to give it. Far from being crazed maniacs or suicidal robots who preferred death over life as many Americans imagined, almost all valued living fully as much as their US enemies.

“The public praises us as members of the Special Attack Forces,” confessed one kamikaze pilot, “but the truth is I do not want to die.”³⁷

“It is easy to talk about death in the abstract. . . ,” explained pilot, Ichizo Hayashi. “But it is real death I fear, and I don’t know if I can overcome the fear. Even for a short life, there are many memories. For someone who had a good life, it is very difficult to part with it. . . . To be honest, I cannot say that the wish to die for the emperor is genuine, coming from my heart.”³⁸

Although most kamikaze pilots dug deep and managed a brave, bold front for their officers, families and the camera crews, virtually all struggled with their inner most fears. Regarding such thoughts on their approaching death as defeatist to the Emperor and dishonorable to their families, few of these same proud men would even write about, much less mutter aloud, their true

sentiments on impending death. But there were other ways.

A custodian at a Japanese naval airbase happened to be on hand when a group of pilots met for their last night on earth. Initially, many of the soon-to-be-dead spoke sadly to one another, quietly talking of their parents, their fiances and the faces of girl friends that they would never see smile again. Very quickly, however, as more and more sake (rice wine) was consumed, the hall where the young men met became a noisy bedlam. With military songs, curses and shouts of rage filling the air, some pilots drew their swords and angrily attacked lights and furniture. Others grabbed chairs and broke windows and vases. A few sad young men found tables in corners where they wrote their wills or simply lay their heads to think and contemplate. As the hours passed, eventually, one by one, all left the hall after their last night of life.³⁹

“They all took off wearing the rising sun headband the next morning,” remembered the custodian.⁴⁰

“We tried to live with 120 percent intensity, rather than waiting for death,” admitted one pilot. “We read and read, trying to understand why we had to die in our early twenties. We felt the clock ticking away towards our death, every sound of the clock shortening our lives.”⁴¹

“How lonely is the sound of the clock in the darkness of the night,” revealed another pilot before his death.”⁴²

Some, like twenty-two-year-old Ryōji Uehara, only hours away from his own final mission, was one of those who actually welcomed death, but not for the reasons many American sailors might have imagined.

“When the woman for whom I cared so dearly passed away, I emotionally died with her,” said the young pilot. “The idea that she waits for me in Heaven, where we will be reunited, makes death not particularly frightening for me, since it happens only on my way to Heaven.”⁴³

In some cases, to avoid such painful separations as the above, young women, their love for their sweet-hearts greater than their fear of death, in some cases they were allowed to join the pilots on their last flights. Such was the case with Asako, the new bride of Second Lieutenant Tetsuo Tanifuji.⁴⁴

And many other Japanese patriots, like the American Revolutionary hero, Nathan Hale, who regretted that he had only one life to give for his country, undoubtedly felt the same.

“I wish that I could be born seven times, each time to smite the enemy,” announced twenty-three-year-old Isao Matsuo to his parents just before he

seated himself in his cockpit.⁴⁵

But virtually every kamikaze pilot who climbed into his aircraft for that final flight, Isao Matsuo included, longed to live for all the same reasons other humans longed to live. In a first and last letter to “My Beloved Child,” Lt. Sanehisa Uemura wrote his final farewell to his infant daughter:

Motoko,

You often looked and smiled at my face. You also slept in my arms, and we took baths together. When you grow up and want to know about me, ask your mother and Aunt Kayo.

My photo album has been left for you at home. I gave you the name Motoko, hoping you would be a gentle, tender-hearted, and caring person.

I want to make sure you are happy when you grow up and become a splendid bride, and even though I die without you knowing me, you must never feel sad.

When you grow up and want to meet me, please come to Kudan [shrine to military dead]. And if you pray deeply, surely your father’s face will show itself within your heart. I believe you are happy. Since your birth you started to show a close resemblance to me, and other people would often say that when they saw little Motoko they felt like they were meeting me. Your uncle and aunt will take good care of you with you being their only hope, and your mother will only survive by keeping in mind your happiness throughout your entire lifetime. Even though something happens to me, you must certainly not think of yourself as a child without a father. I am always protecting you. Please be a person who takes loving care of others.

When you grow up and begin to think about me, please read this letter.
Father

PS In my airplane, I keep as a charm a doll you had as a toy when you were born. So it means Motoko was together with Father. I tell you this because my being here without your knowing makes my heart ache.⁴⁶

Resigned to his fate, caught up in a war not of his choosing, one young man

penned a final and simple farewell to his mother, then went bravely to his death.

“I will be content with beautiful white clouds in the skies as a grave marker,” he wrote. “Now I go to die for the Emperor and for the mountains and rivers of my beloved Japan.”

Despite dedication and determination, very few kamikazes got anywhere near a US naval vessel; brave as they were, the young, green pilots in their slow, out-classed aircraft were easy prey for fast, farranging US fighters flown by experienced pilots. It was not uncommon for one American pilot to shoot down as many as six kamikazes before they even saw a US ship.⁴⁷ And of those Japanese who did manage to get close, most were blown out of the sky by hundreds of naval guns. It was, quite simply, a massacre. But of those few who managed to break through, the results were devastating.

“We got it today,” wrote one sailor aboard the USS Idaho in his diary. “Terrific suicide attack by God knows how many Jap planes—55 were shot down in our immediate area. We got 5 in 4 minutes.”⁴⁸

Unfortunately for the Idaho, one determined kamikaze did slip through. “When that guy hit us he really raised hell . . .,” continued the sailor. [T]he pieces of plane covered the entire platform—I pulled 5 pieces of Jap pilot off my clothes—the largest about as big as my hand—the explosion sure scattered him.”⁴⁹

“The deck near my mount was covered with blood, guts, brains, tongues, scalps, hearts, arms, etc. from the Jap pilots,” said another horrified seaman on a US cruiser. “The Jap bodies were blown into all sorts of pieces.”⁵⁰ After one direct hit, another sailor, a gunner, noticed that his ammunition man nearby was holding onto the magazine and trying to say something:

His lips were moving—I had the earphones on and I didn’t know what he was trying to say. Then the explosion came . . . a piece of metal flew by and decapitated him. Just like that, his head fell off at my feet. I looked down . . . and I believe his mouth was still trying to tell me something. His body was still up, holding onto that magazine for what seemed like thirty minutes, but I know it was just a few moments. Then the body began to shake [and] it just fell over.⁵¹

“One of them hit the . . . gun turret and that killed about six people and maybe injured another six,” recalled a pilot on a British aircraft carrier after kamikazes struck. “And the second one bounced right off the flight deck aft and that swept a few airplanes into the sea and killed maybe eight people. And all they do is brush the remains over the side. That’s all they can do. And that’s how we buried our friends—I mean there were only bits and pieces left.”⁵²

During the Battle of Okinawa, thirty-four US ships were sunk, including three aircraft carriers. Nearly four hundred vessels were damaged. Additionally, nearly 10,000 American sailors were killed or wounded, and this by a relative handful of kamikaze pilots who managed to get through. But perhaps even more than the physical damage to the US fleet was the psychological damage. After the carnage at sea surrounding Okinawa, rare was that American seaman eager to approach the Japanese home islands and face entire new swarms of kamikazes.

With fate against them, with defeat looming, with utter humiliation and shame about to descend on a proud people, the kamikaze pilot was the last source of hope, pride and honor among all Japanese. They were the best and the bravest, the most patriotic, the most passionate, yet the most life-loving, of all Japanese. In the hearts of all wartime Japanese these young warriors would remain forever enshrined as Kamikaze—the “Divine Wind.”

And so, from the first naval engagement of the war to the last, it was not the large and extremely costly Japanese battleships or carriers which were the greatest threat to the American fleet; it was, in fact, that determined solitary pilot in a single slow aircraft who posed, by far, the greatest threat to the mighty US Navy. That simple warrior, in his teens or twenties, willing to die that his nation might live, he was still the mightiest and most feared weapon of modern war. . . .

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By late June, 1945, the battered, beaten and heavily outnumbered Japanese defenders of Okinawa had been driven back to their final defenses at the southern tip of the island. And now, more than ever, tens of thousands of terrified civilians sought refuge from the advancing Americans.

The experiences of fifteen-year-old Fumiko Shimabukuro were the experiences shared by thousands of others. Moving from cave to cave to stay ahead of the US advance, the young woman saw sights she was unprepared for, sights that seemed straight from hell—whether it was ponds literally red with blood from the dead and dying, or whether it was a mother struggling along with her decapitated child still strapped on her back, there was no escaping the horror of Okinawa. Eventually, Fumiko found yet another small cave and although it was packed with at least twenty others, the girl was hopeful. Unfortunately, American soldiers soon found the refuge and ordered the people to come out. So terrified were those inside that no one moved when the soldiers began firing into the cave. Finally, and to the horror of everyone inside, the soldiers sprayed liquid fire into the cave from a flame-thrower. Those near the front of the cave were quickly killed. When the Americans again called for all to come out, those who had survived did.⁵³

“Around 20 Okinawans went into that cave,” Fumiko recalled, “but only seven of us came out. When I emerged, my kimono was burned to my skin and I was half naked.”⁵⁴

Civilians in caves had reason to be doubly terrified. If a Japanese soldier among them rashly fired his weapon at approaching Americans, the soldiers were sure to toss in a satchel charge, or phosphorus grenades, or a blast from a flame-thrower or Satan Tank. Another method to kill all in a cave was to drill holes from above then pour in and ignite gasoline.⁵⁵

After one group of US soldiers received enemy fire, a mother and child was seen nearby and it was quickly assumed the woman was spotting for snipers. “Shoot the bitch, shoot the Jap woman,” they yelled. A bullet quickly knocked the woman down. She soon staggered to her feet again, however, then tried to pick up the baby she had been holding. More bullets dropped the mother for good.⁵⁶

During the last days of Okinawa, large numbers of Japanese soldiers, fearful to surrender lest they be slowly tortured to death, either committed suicide or fought then and there to the bitter end.

“Our company attacks aimlessly into the American camp with nothing but grenades, looking for an honorable death,” recounted one man determined to

die fighting. “Wounded soldiers retreat in the knee-deep mud wearing badly torn uniforms. . . . There is no time to take care of the bleeding. We drink drops of dew and eat grasses and tree roots. We fight bitterly but what can we do against their modern arms?”⁵⁷ Ammunition was also in short supply for the defenders. “I am really surprised at the amount of ammunition that the enemy has,” thought one Japanese. “When friendly forces fire one round, at least ten rounds are guaranteed to come back.”⁵⁸

Likewise, civilians, especially women fearing gang rape and shame, chose to end their lives by embracing hand grenades and pulling the pins. Since there was seldom enough grenades to go around, frightened people often gathered in groups before pulling the pin. Others, with no better means, simply found anything sharp—a piece of jagged metal, a shard of glass—and cut their own throats and those of their children.⁵⁹

Finally, as the last hours approached and the end was in sight, tens of thousands of civilians and Japanese troops jammed together on the cliffs at land’s end.

“Young women sat on the rocks, carefully combed their black hair, and then quietly jumped into the ocean,” stated a witness. “Infants and small children drowned with their mothers.”⁶⁰

As if the horror were not already great enough, US airplanes strafed the mass with machine-gun fire, sending hundreds tumbling over the cliffs.⁶¹

“There was literally nowhere left to run,” recounted one young man. “We were caught like mice in a trap. Very soon there were so many bodies we were tripping over them.”⁶²

On a narrow ledge overlooking the sea, Lt. Generals Mitsuru Ushijima and Isamu Cho whispered to each other for a moment as they knelt side by side on a white sheet. A military aide stepped forward, bowed to the officers, then handed each a gleaming knife. Another soldier stood by with a razor-sharp sword. Both generals thereupon unbuttoned their blouses, then unbuckled their belts. General Ushijima leaned forward and with both hands pressed the blade into his stomach. The soldier with the sword did not hesitate but immediately stepped forward and with a single blow whacked off the

commanding general's head. The same act was repeated for General Cho. The bodies were then carried away.⁶³

Twenty-second day, sixth month, 20th year of Showa era. I depart without regret, fear, shame or obligation. Age on departure 51 years.
— Lt. Gen. Isamu Cho⁶⁴

And so, on June 22, 1945, after eighty-three days of bloody combat, the fight for Okinawa finally ended. In addition to over twelve thousand American deaths on land and sea, virtually the entire force of one hundred thousand Japanese defenders were killed, either in actual combat, or murdered while trying to surrender, or due to their own suicide. Fully as horrific, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the population of Okinawa itself, from 100,000 to 150,000 people, also died. It was, by far, the greatest death toll of the entire Pacific war to date.

Okinawa, described one historian after the battle, was a “vast field of mud, lead, decay, and maggots.”⁶⁵

Concluded Hanson W. Baldwin of the New York Times: “Never before had there been, probably never again will there be, such a vicious sprawling struggle.”⁶⁶

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But the horror did not end on Okinawa simply because the Japanese defenders had been wiped out. As was the case in Europe, with the fighting ended the raping began, especially by those who had seen little of actual combat, the rear echelon of troops. In countless towns and villages on the island women and girls, imagining that the war had ended, soon found out otherwise. Rape was so pervasive after the American victory that virtually all Okinawan women either suffered themselves, or knew someone who had. Later, a historian commissioned by Okinawa estimated that more than 10,000 rapes occurred during the three months of fighting; as many or more were committed after the battle.⁶⁷ The crime was so common, in fact, that in some rare cases the enraged people determined to fight back.

In Katsuyama, after the victory, three nineteen-year-old black marines were in the habit of raiding the village every weekend. There, they would catch

and carry away women and girls a short distance then rape them at their leisure. The Americans became so comfortable with the inaction of the cowed villagers that they left their weapons back at camp. On one such trip, as the marines were making their way to Katsuyama, two Japanese soldiers hiding in the brush shot and wounded the men. On cue, dozens of villagers raced out and beat the Americans to death with rocks and clubs. Now fearful that their homes would be destroyed in reprisal, the people dragged the bodies to a dark cave with a deep bottom, then tossed them in. After that, the villagers could only wait and pray that their act would not be discovered.⁶⁸

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Meanwhile, with the fall of Okinawa, the Japanese government began the grim preparation for an American invasion. With both the Imperial Navy and Air Force utterly destroyed the last stand of Japan would be waged not with technology and machines but with the courage and the will of her people.

“We can no longer direct the war with any hope of success,” admitted military leaders. “The only course left is for Japan’s one hundred million people to sacrifice their lives by charging the enemy to make them lose the will to fight.”⁶⁹

Because of a shortage in metals, old men and boys were trained with rifles that fired wooden bullets. Bows and arrows, rusty swords, even awls were now regarded as viable weapons. Women and girls went through intense physical training on how to resist machineguns, flame-throwers and tanks with kitchen knives and sharpened bamboo poles.

And thus, as the women and children of Japan were being trained to fight to the death to defend their nation, they were also being trained to fight to the death to defend their dignity and honor against American gang rape. Likewise, the women and children of defeated Germany were undergoing their own journey through hell, striving to somehow survive the “peace” made by a vindictive, evil enemy still waging war on them, in a land lacking law or justice, in a land of rape, torture, starvation, and death.

Chapter 3 Of Crimes and Criminals

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ven as the physical massacre of Germany was in progress, the spiritual massacre of German womanhood continued without pause.

Although violent, brutal and repeated rapes persisted against defenseless females for years, most Soviet, American, British, and French troops quickly discovered that hunger was a powerful incentive to sexual surrender. Usually, a piece of bread, a little candy or a bar of soap made violent rape unnecessary.¹ In their utterly devastated cities, young girls roamed the streets seeking something to eat and a place to sleep. Having only one thing left in the world to sell, they were not slow to sell it.²

“Bacon, eggs, sleep at your home?” winked Russian soldiers over and over again, knowing full well the answer would usually be a twominute tryst among the rubble. “I continually ran about with cooking utensils, and begged for food. . . ,” admitted one girl. “If I heard in my neighborhood the expression ‘pretty woman,’ I reacted accordingly.”³

Despite General Eisenhower’s edict against fraternization with the despised enemy, no amount of words could slow the US soldier’s sex drive. “Neither army regulations nor the propaganda of hatred in the American press,” noted newswoman, Freda Utley, “could prevent American soldiers from liking and associating with German women, who although they were driven by hunger to become prostitutes, preserved a certain innate decency.”⁴

“I felt a bit sick at times about the power I had over that girl,” one troubled British soldier confessed. “If I gave her a three-penny bar of chocolate she nearly went crazy. She was just like my slave. She darned my socks and mended things for me. There was no question of marriage. She knew that was not possible.”⁵

As this young Tommy made clear, desperate German women, many with children to feed, were compelled by hunger to enter a bondage as binding as any in history. With time, some victims, particularly those consorting with officers, not only avoided starvation, but found themselves enjoying luxuries long forgotten.

“By no means could it be said that the major is raping me,” revealed one

woman. “Am I doing it for bacon, butter, sugar, candles, canned meat? To some extent I’m sure I am. In addition, I like the major and the less he wants from me as a man, the more I like him as a person.”⁶

Unlike the above, relatively few females found such havens. For most, food was used to bait or bribe them into a numbing sexual slavery in which the simple avoidance of starvation was the day-today goal. Just as Lali Horstmann was about to sign up for kitchen duty in the Soviet Zone, a job that paid with soup and potatoes, a girl next to her whispered that her sister had volunteered several days before on the same job and had not been seen since. When an old, unattractive woman nearby raised her hand to volunteer, the Red officer in charge ignored her and instead pointed a pistol at a pretty young girl. When the girl refused, several soldiers approached.⁷

“She was in tears as she was brutally shoved forward,” recorded

Lali, “followed by others who were protesting helplessly.”⁸ “[A] Pole discovered me,” acknowledged another girl, “and began to sell me to Russians. He had fixed up a brothel in his cellar for Russian officers. I was fetched by him. . . . I had to go with him, and could not resist. I came into the cellar, in which there were the most depraved carryings on, drinking, smoking and shouting, and I had to participate. . . . I felt like shrieking.”⁹

While many women endured such slavery—if only to eat—others risked their all to escape. Recounted an American journalist:

As our long line of British Army lorries . . . rolled through the main street of Brahlstorf, the last Russian occupied town, a pretty blond girl darted from the crowd of Germans watching us and made a dash for our truck. Clinging with both hands to the tailboard, she made a desperate effort to climb in. But we were driving too fast and the board was too high. After being dragged several hundred yards she had to let go and fell on the cobblestone street. That scene was a dramatic illustration of the state of terror in which women . . . were living.¹⁰

“All these women,” wrote a witness, “Germans, Polish, Jewish and even Russian girls ‘freed’ from Nazi slave camps, were dominated by one desperate desire—to escape from the Red zone.”¹¹

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By the summer of 1945, Germany had become the world's greatest slave market where sex was the new medium of exchange. While the wolf of hunger might be kept from the door, grim disease was always waiting in the wings.

“As a way of dying it may be worse than starvation, but it will put off dying for months—or even years,” commented an English journalist.¹²

In addition to all the venereal diseases known in the West, German women were infected by a host of new evils, including an insidious strain of Asiatic syphilis. “It is a virulent form of sickness, unknown in this part of the world,” a doctor's wife explained. “[I]t would be difficult to cure even if we were lucky enough to have any penicillin.”¹³

Another dreaded concern—not only for those who were selling themselves, but for the millions of rape victims—was unwanted pregnancy. Thousands who were in fact pregnant sought and found abortions. Thousands more lived in dreadful suspense. And for those infants who were carried and delivered, their struggle was usually brief.

“[T]he mortality among the small children and infants was very high,” noted one sad woman. “[T]hey simply had to starve to death. There was nothing for them. . . . Generally, they did not live to be more than 3 months old—a consolation for those mothers, who had got the child against their will from a Russian. . . . The mother worked all the time and was very seldom able to give the child the breast.”¹⁴

As the above implied, simply because a mother sold her body to feed a child did not necessarily save her from back-breaking labor. Indeed, with the end of war, Germans old and young were dragooned by the victors for the monumental clean-up and dismantling of the devastated Reich. Sometimes food was given to the workers—“a piece of bread or maybe a bowl of thin, watery soup”—and sometimes not. “We used to start work at six o'clock in the morning and get home again at six in the evening,” said a Silesian woman. “We had to work on Sundays, too, and we were given neither payment nor food for what we did.”¹⁵

From the blasted capital, Berlin, another female recorded:

Berlin is being cleaned up. . . . All round the hills of rubble, buckets were being passed from hand to hand; we have returned to the days of the Pyramids—except that instead of building we are carrying away. . . . On the embankment German prisoners were slaving away—gray-heads in miserable clothes, presumably ex-Volkssturm. With grunts and groans, they were loading heavy wheels onto freight-cars. They gazed at us imploringly, tried to keep near us. At first I couldn't understand why. Others did, though, and secretly passed the men a few crusts of bread. This is strictly forbidden, but the Russian guard stared hard in the opposite direction. The men were unshaven, shrunken, with wretched doglike expressions. To me they didn't look German at all.¹⁶

“My mother, 72 years of age, had to work outside the town on refuse heaps,” lamented a daughter in Posen. “There the old people were hunted about, and had to sort out bottles and iron, even when it was raining. . . . The work was dirty, and it was impossible for them to change their clothes.”¹⁷

Understandably, thousands of overworked, underfed victims soon succumbed under such conditions. No job was too low or degrading for the conquered Germans to perform. Well-bred ladies, who in former times were theater-going members of the upper-class, worked side by side with peasants at washtubs, cleaning socks and underclothes of Russian privates. Children and the aged were put to work scrubbing floors and shining boots in the American, British and French Zones.

Some tasks were especially loathsome, as one woman makes clear: “[A]s a result of the war damage . . . the toilets were stopped up and filthy. This filth we had to clear away with our hands, without any utensils to do so. The excrement was brought into the yard, shoveled into carts, which we had to bring to refuse pits. The awful part was, that we got dirtied by the excrement which spurting up, but we could not clean ourselves.”¹⁸

Added another female from the Soviet Zone:

We had to build landing strips, and to break stones. . . . [F]rom six in the morning until nine at night, we were working along the roads. Any Russian who felt like it took us aside. In the morning and at night we received cold

water and a piece of bread, and at noon soup of crushed, unpeeled potatoes, without salt. At night we slept on the floors of farmhouses or stables, dead tired, huddled together. But we woke up every so often, when a moaning and whimpering in the pitch-black room announced the presence of one of the guards.¹⁹

As this woman and others acknowledge, although sex could be bought for a bit of food, a cigarette or a toothbrush, some victors preferred to take what they wanted, whenever and wherever they pleased. “If they wanted a girl they just came in the field and got her,” recalled Ilse Breyer who worked at planting potatoes.²⁰

“Hunger made German women more ‘available’,” an American soldier revealed, “but despite this, rape was prevalent and often accompanied by additional violence. In particular I remember an eighteen-year-old woman who had the side of her face smashed with a rifle butt and was then raped by two GIs. Even the French complained that the rapes, looting and drunken destructiveness on the part of our troops was excessive.”²¹

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“God, I hate the Germans,” wrote Dwight D. Eisenhower to his wife in 1944.²²

As Mrs. Eisenhower and anyone else close to the general knew, her husband’s loathing of all things German was nothing short of pathological. With the final German capitulation in May, 1945, the Allied commander found himself in control of over five million ragged, weary, but living, enemy soldiers.²³ “It is a pity we could not have killed more,” muttered the general, dissatisfied with the body-count from the greatest bloodbath in human history.²⁴ And so, Eisenhower settled for next best: If he could not kill armed Germans in war, he would kill disarmed Germans in peace. Because the Geneva Convention guaranteed POWs of signer nations the same food, shelter and medical attention as their captors, and because these laws were to be enforced by the International Red Cross, Eisenhower simply circumvented the treaty by creating his own category for prisoners. Under the general’s reclassification, German soldiers were no longer considered POWs, but DEFs—Disarmed Enemy Forces. With this bit of legerdemain, and in direct violation of the Geneva Convention, Eisenhower could now deal in secret

with those in his power, free from the prying eyes of the outside world.²⁵

Even before war's end, thousands of German soldiers who somehow escaped being murdered by the Americans when they surrendered and who actually did reach a POW camp, nevertheless soon died in captivity from starvation, neglect and, in many cases, outright murder. At one camp along the Rhine River in April 1945, each group of ten men were expected to survive in the open, on a plot of mud a few yards wide, in cold, wet weather, without shelter or blankets, with virtually no food. When the Americans finally "fed" the prisoners, it was one slice of bread that had to be cut ten ways, a strip for each man. A voice on the camp loud speaker arrogantly announced: "German soldiers, eat slowly. You haven't had anything to eat in a long time. When you get your rations today from the best fed army in the world, you'll die if you don't eat slowly." This mocking, murderous routine continued for three months. Once healthy prisoners soon became barely-breathing skeletons. Like clockwork, large numbers of dead were hauled away every day.²⁶

"[T]he provision of water was a major problem," revealed another witness, "yet only 200 yards away was the River Rhine running bank full."²⁷

With the war still in progress, when the hard-pressed German leadership heard of these American atrocities they naturally appealed to the International Red Cross.

"If the Germans were reasoning like normal beings, they would realize the whole history of the United States and Great Britain is to be generous towards a defeated enemy," came Eisenhower's pompous reply. "We observe all the laws of the Geneva Convention."²⁸

With German surrender and the threat of retaliation against Allied POWs entirely erased, deaths in the American concentration camps soared dramatically. While tens of thousands died of starvation and thirst, hundreds of thousands more perished from overcrowding and disease. As sixteen-year-old, Hugo Stehkamper, graphically described:

I only had a sweater to protect me from the pouring rain and the cold. There just wasn't any shelter to be had. You stood there, wet through and through, in fields that couldn't be called fields anymore—they were ruined. You had

to make an effort when you walked to even pull your shoes out of the mud. . . . [I]t's incomprehensible to me how we could stand for many, many days without sitting, without lying down, just standing there, totally soaked. During the day we marched around, huddled together to try to warm each other a bit. At night we stood because we couldn't walk and tried to keep awake by singing or humming songs. Again and again someone got so tired his knees got weak and he collapsed.²⁹

The situation at American death camps near Remagen, Rheinberg and elsewhere, was typical. With no shelter of any sort, the men were forced to dig holes with their bare hands simply to sleep in. At night, the prisoners would lower into the holes and try to stay warm by clinging to one another. And since it rained virtually every day, those holes that did not collapse always filled with water. Because of rampant diarrhea many of the victims were forced to defecate on the ground. Others were so weakened from sickness and starvation that they could not even lower their pants. Quickly, everyone's clothes became infected with excrement and very soon, all the men suffered from chronic diarrhea. One camp "was nothing but a giant sewer, where each man just shit where he stood," recounts a victim. Another enclosure was "literally a sea of urine" where prisoners were compelled to live and sleep.³⁰ Even though the Rhine River flowed nearby, there was no water in most camps to drink, much less wash clothes in. As the prisoners rapidly weakened, many who fell into the numerous dug holes found it difficult or impossible to get out again without the help of others. "Amputees slithered like amphibians through the mud, soaking and freezing. Naked to the skies day after day and night after night. . . ," remembered a witness.³¹

When the camp commandant decided to feed the prisoners, generally every other day, the starved men read on the ration container that the amount was only one-tenth the normal daily diet fed US troops. One prisoner actually complained to a camp commander that the starvation diet was against the Geneva Convention.³²

"Forget the Convention," snapped the American officer. "You haven't any rights."³³

As elsewhere, within days of enduring such deadly conditions many of those

who had gone healthy into the Remagen camp were being dragged out the front gate by their heels and thrown onto a waiting truck.

“The Americans were really shitty to us,” a survivor at another camp recalled. “All we had to eat was grass.”³⁴

At Hans Woltersdorf’s prison, the inmates survived on a daily soup made of birdseed. “Not fit for human consumption,” read the words on the sacks.³⁵

At another camp, a weeping seventeen-year-old stood day in, day out beside the barbed wire fence. In the distance, the youth could just view his own village. One morning, inmates awoke to find the boy dead, his body strung up by guards and left dangling on the wires. When outraged prisoners cried “Murderers! Murderers!” the camp commander withheld their meager rations for three days.

“For us who were already starving and could hardly move because of weakness . . . it meant death,” said one of the men.³⁶

Not enough that his American jailers were starving them to death; Eisenhower even forbade those on the outside from feeding the prisoners:

Under no circumstances may food supplies be assembled among the local inhabitants in order to deliver them to prisoners of war. Those who violate this command and nevertheless try to circumvent this blockade to allow something to come to the prisoners place themselves in danger of being shot.³⁷

Horrified by what they could see at a distance, heart-broken women from towns and villages surrounding the camps did indeed bring their own meager food stocks to share with the starving men. Good to his word, Eisenhower’s guards always chased the women and children away, scooped up the food, poured gasoline over it, then set the piles on fire. As warned, when some anguished women persisted, they were shot. After this murderous decree, anyone who insisted that the goal of the American general was anything less than the massacre of those under his control was simply one of those privy to the plan.³⁸

There was no lack of food or shelter among the victorious Allies. Indeed, American supply depots were bursting at the seams. “More stocks than we can ever use,” one general announced. “[They] stretch as far as [the] eye can see.” Instead of allowing even a trickle of this bounty to reach the

compounds, the starvation diet was further reduced. “Outside the camp the Americans were burning food which they could not eat themselves,” revealed a starving Werner Laska from his prison.³⁹

“When they caught me throwing C-Rations over the fence, they threatened me with imprisonment,” confided an angry American guard, Private Martin Brech. “One Captain told me that he would shoot me if he saw me again tossing food to the Germans. . . . Some of the men were really only boys 13 years of age. . . . [or] old men drafted by Hitler in his last ditch stand. . . . I understand that average weight of the prisoners . . . was 90 pounds.”⁴⁰

As Brech noted, many of the prisoners were mere children. Some little boys were still clad in the same grimy pajamas the Americans had arrested them in. Fear that the children might form guerrilla groups was the official reason given.⁴¹

Horrified by the silent, secret slaughter, the International Red Cross—which had over 100,000 tons of food stored in Switzerland—tried to intercede. When two trains loaded with supplies reached the camps, however, they were turned back by American officers. “These Nazis are getting a dose of their own medicine,” a prison commandant reported proudly to one of Eisenhower’s “political advisers.”⁴²

“German soldiers were not common law convicts,” protested a Red

Cross official, “they were drafted to fight in a national army on patriotic grounds and could not refuse military service any more than the Americans could.”⁴³

Like this individual, many others found no justification whatsoever in the massacre of helpless prisoners, especially since the German government had lived up to the Geneva Convention, as one American official put it, “to a tee.”

“I have come up against few instances where Germans have not treated prisoners according to the rules, and respected the Red Cross,” wrote war correspondent Allan Wood of the London Express.⁴⁴

“The Germans even in their greatest moments of despair obeyed the

Convention in most respects,” a US officer added. “True it is that there were front line atrocities—passions run high up there—but they were incidents, not practices; and maladministration of their American prison camps was very uncommon.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite the Red Cross report that ninety-nine percent of American prisoners of war in Germany had survived and were on their way home, Eisenhower’s murderous program continued apace.⁴⁶

One officer who refused to have a hand in the crime and who began releasing large numbers of prisoners soon after they were disarmed was George Patton.⁴⁷ Reasoned the general:

I emphasized [to the troops] the necessity for the proper treatment of prisoners of war, both as to their lives and property. My usual statement was . . . “Kill all the Germans you can but do not put them up against a wall and kill them. Do your killing while they are still fighting. After a man has surrendered, he should be treated exactly in accordance with the Rules of Land Warfare, and just as you would hope to be treated if you were foolish enough to surrender. Americans do not kick people in the teeth after they are down.”⁴⁸

Although other upright generals such as Omar Bradley issued orders to release POWs, Eisenhower quickly overruled them.

Mercifully, for the two million Germans under British control, Bernard Montgomery refused to participate in the massacre. Indeed, soon after war’s end, the field marshal released and sent most of his prisoners home.⁴⁹

After being shuttled from one enclosure to the next, Corporal Helmut Liebich had seen for himself all the horrors the American death camps had to give. At one compound, amused guards formed lines and beat starving prisoners with sticks and clubs as they ran the gauntlet for their paltry rations. At another camp of 5,200 men, Liebich watched as ten to thirty bodies were hauled away daily. At yet another prison, there was “35 days of starvation and 15 days of no food at all,” and what little the wretched inmates did receive was rotten. Finally, in June, 1945, Liebich’s camp at Rheinberg passed to British control. Immediately, survivors were given food and shelter and for those like Liebich—who now weighed 97 pounds and was dying of dysentery—swift medical attention was provided.⁵⁰

“It was wonderful to be under a roof in a real bed,” the corporal reminisced. “We were treated like human beings again. The Tommies treated us like comrades.”⁵¹

Before the British could take complete control of the camp, however, Liebich noted that American bulldozers leveled one section of the compound where skeletal—but breathing—men still lay in their holes.⁵²

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If possible, Germans in French hands suffered even more than those held by Americans. When France requested slaves as part of its war booty, Eisenhower transferred over half a million Germans east.⁵³

“Gee! I hope we don’t ever lose a war,” thought a GI as he stared at the broken, starving wrecks being selected for slavery.⁵⁴ At one American camp of over 30,000 prisoners, a stunned French officer was horrified to see nothing but a vast killing field, “peopled with living skeletons, male and female, huddling under scraps of wet card board.”⁵⁵

Martin Brech happened to be in a truck slowly following one group of Germans that were marching toward France and slavery. “Whenever a German prisoner staggered or dropped back, he was hit on the head with a club and killed,” recalled the shocked US private. “The bodies were rolled to the side of the road to be picked up by another truck. For many, this quick death might have been preferable to slow starvation in our ‘killing fields.’”⁵⁶

“When we marched through Namur in a column seven abreast, there was also a Catholic procession going through the street,” remembered one slave as he moved through Belgium. “When the people saw the POWs, the procession dissolved, and they threw rocks and horse shit at us. From Namur, we went by train in open railroad cars. At one point we went under a bridge, and railroad ties were thrown from it into the cars filled with POWs, causing several deaths. Later we went under another overpass, and women lifted their skirts and relieved themselves on us.”⁵⁷

Once in France, the assaults intensified. “[W]e were cursed, spat upon and even physically attacked by the French population, especially the women,” Hans von der Heide wrote. “I bitterly recalled scenes from the spring of 1943,

when we marched American POWs through the streets of Paris. They were threatened and insulted no differently by the French mob.”⁵⁸

Like the Americans, the French starved their prisoners. Unlike the Americans, the French drained the last ounce of labor from their victims before they dropped dead. “I have seen them beaten with rifle butts and kicked with feet in the streets of the town because they broke down of overwork,” remarked a witness from Langres. “Two or three of them die of exhaustion every week.”⁵⁹

“In another camp,” a horrified viewer added, “prisoners receive only one meal a day but are expected to continue working. Elsewhere so many have died recently that the cemetery space was exhausted and another had to be built.”⁶⁰

Revealed the French journal, *Le Figaro*: “In certain camps for German prisoners of war . . . living skeletons may be seen . . . and deaths from undernourishment are numerous. We learn that prisoners have been savagely and systematically beaten and that some have been employed in removing mines without protection equipment so that they have been condemned to die sooner or later.”⁶¹

“Twenty-five percent of the men in [our] camp died in one month,” echoed a slave from Buglose.⁶²

The enslavement of German soldiers was not limited to France. Although fed and treated infinitely better, several hundred thousand POWs in Great Britain were transformed into virtual slaves.⁶³ When prisoners were put to work raising projects for Britain’s grand “Victory in Europe” celebration, one English foreman felt compelled to quip: “I guess the Jerries are preparing to celebrate their own downfall. It does seem as though that is laying it on a bit thick.”⁶⁴

In vain did the International Red Cross protest:

The United States, Britain, and France . . . are violating International Red Cross agreements they solemnly signed in 1929. Investigation at Geneva headquarters today disclosed that the transfer of German war prisoners captured by the American army to French and British authorities for forced labor is nowhere permitted in the statutes of the International Red Cross,

which is the highest authority on the subject in the world.⁶⁵

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Meanwhile, those Germans not consigned to bondage continued to perish in American prisons. Soldiers who did not succumb to hunger or disease often died of thirst, even though streams sometimes ran just a few feet from the camps. “[T]he lack of water was the worst thing of all,” remembered George Weiss of his enclosure where the Rhine flowed just beyond the barbed wire. “For three and a half days we had no water at all. We would drink our own urine. It tasted terrible, but what could we do? Some men got down on the ground and licked the ground to get some moisture. I was so weak I was already on my knees.”⁶⁶

At one death camp, after a German officer submitted an official protest over the withholding of water from the prisoners, the American commandant ordered a large fire hose dragged into the densely-packed compound then told his men to turn it on to its utmost. Because of the great pressure, the hose flailed violently, knocking already weakened prisoners to the ground right and left. Still, many men, dying of thirst, tried desperately to capture even a few drops of water. As intended, such a spectacle provided great amusement for the US guards. “They laughed at our predicament as hard as they could,” noted one dying prisoner. When the hose was then quickly turned off only a thin layer of mud remained, which, of course, soon dried in seconds. Such sadistic treatment not only insured men would die but it guaranteed others would be driven insane.⁶⁷

Some prisoners, observed American guard, Martin Brech, “tried to escape in a demented or suicidal fashion, running through open fields in broad daylight towards the Rhine to quench their thirst. They were mowed down.”⁶⁸

As if their plight were not already hideous enough, prisoners occasionally became the targets of drunken and sadistic guards who sprayed the camps with machine-gun fire for sport.⁶⁹ “I think . . .,” Private Brech continued, “[that] soldiers not exposed to combat were trying to prove how tough they were by taking it out on the prisoners and civilians.”

I encountered a captain on a hill above the Rhine shooting down at a group of

German civilian women with his .45 caliber pistol. When I asked, “Why?” he mumbled, “Target practice,” and fired until his pistol was empty. . . . This is when I realized I was dealing with cold-blooded killers filled with moralistic hatred.⁷⁰

While continuing to deny the Red Cross and other relief agencies access to the camps, Eisenhower stressed among his lieutenants the need for secrecy. “Ike made the sensational statement that . . . now that hostilities were over, the important thing was to stay in with world public opinion—apparently whether it was right or wrong . . .,” recorded a disgusted George Patton. “After lunch [he] talked to us very confidentially on the necessity for solidarity in the event that any of us are called before a Congressional Committee.”⁷¹

To prevent the gruesome details from reaching the outside world— and sidetrack those that did—counter-rumors were circulated stating that, far from mistreating and murdering prisoners, US camp commanders were actually turning back released Germans who tried to slip back in for food and shelter.⁷²

Ultimately, at least 800,000 German prisoners died in the American and French death camps. “Quite probably,” one expert later wrote, the figure of one million is closer to the mark. And thus, during the first summer of “peace,” did ten times the number of German soldiers die than were killed on the whole Western Front during the whole six years of war.⁷³

“It is hard to escape the conclusion,” admitted a journalist after the war, “that Dwight Eisenhower was a war criminal of epic proportions.”⁷⁴

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Unlike their democratic counterparts, the Soviet Union made little effort to hide from the world the fate of German prisoners in its hands. Toiling and dying by the tens of thousands in the forests, bogs and mines of Siberia, the captives were slaves pure and simple and no attempt was made to disguise the fact. For the enslaved Germans, male and female, the odds of surviving the Soviet gulags were even worse than escaping the American or French prison camps and a trip to Siberia was tantamount to a death sentence. What

little food the slaves received was intended merely to maintain their strength so that the last ounce of energy could be drained from them.

And so, with the once mighty Wehrmacht now disarmed and enslaved, and with their leaders either dead or awaiting trial for war crimes, the old men, women and children who remained in the dismembered Reich found themselves utterly at the mercy of the victors. Unfortunately for these survivors, never in the history of the world was mercy in shorter supply.

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While disarmed and helpless German soldiers were dying by the hundreds of thousands in American death camps, helpless German civilians were likewise dying of deliberate starvation in their uncounted thousands. Indeed, in “peace,” all of Germany itself had become the world’s largest death camp, just as Henry Morgenthau had hoped and planned.

Because Germany’s entire infrastructure had been shattered by the war, it was already assured that thousands would starve to death before roads, rails, canals, and bridges could be restored. Even when much of the damage had been repaired, the deliberate withholding of food from Germany guaranteed that hundreds of thousands more were doomed to a slow death. Continuing the policy of their merciless predecessors, Harry Truman and Clement Attlee allowed the spirit of Morgenthau to dictate their course of action regarding post-war Germany.

No measures were to be undertaken, wrote President Truman to General Eisenhower, “looking toward the economic rehabilitation of Germany or designed to maintain or strengthen the German economy.”⁷⁵ In other words, the shattered Germany economy would remain just as it was and the people would simply be allowed to starve.

Not only would food from the outside be denied entry, but US troops were forbidden to “give, sell or trade” supplies to the starving. Additionally, Germany’s already absent ability to feed itself would be stymied even further by withholding seed crop, fertilizer, gas, oil, and parts for farm machinery. Because of the enforced famine, it was estimated that thirty million Germans would soon succumb.⁷⁶ Well down the road to starvation even before

surrender, those Germans who survived war now struggled to survive peace.

“I trudged home on sore feet, limp with hunger . . . ,” a Berlin woman scribbled in her diary. “It struck me that everyone I passed on the way home stared at me out of sunken, starving eyes. Tomorrow I’ll go in search of nettles again. I examine every bit of green with this in mind.”⁷⁷

“The search for food made all former worries irrelevant,” added Lali Horstmann. “It was the present moment alone that counted.”⁷⁸

While city-dwellers ate weeds, those on the land had food taken from them and were forced to dig roots, pick berries and glean fields. “[O]ld men, women and children,” a witness noted, “may be seen picking up one grain at a time from the ground to be carried home in a sack the size of a housewife’s shopping bag.”⁷⁹

The deadly effects of malnutrition soon became evident. Lamented one anguished observer:

They are emaciated to the bone. Their clothes hang loose on their bodies, the lower extremities are like the bones of a skeleton, their hands shake as though with palsy, the muscles of the arms are withered, the skin lies in folds, and is without elasticity, the joints spring out as though broken. The weight of the women of average height and build has fallen way below 110 pounds. Often women of child-bearing age weigh no more than 65 pounds.⁸⁰

“We were really starving now. . . ,” acknowledged Ilse McKee. “Most of the time we were too weak to do anything. Even queuing up for what little food there was to be distributed sometimes proved too much.”⁸¹

Orders to the contrary, many Allied soldiers secretly slipped chocolate to children or simply turned their backs while elders stole bread. Others were determined to follow orders implacably. “It was a common sight,” recalled one GI, “to see German women up to their elbows in our garbage cans looking for something edible—that is, if they weren’t chased away.”⁸² To prevent starving Germans from grubbing American leftovers, army cooks laced their slop with soap. Tossing crumbs or used chewing gum to scrambling children was another pastime some soldiers found amusing.⁸³

For many victims, especially the old and young, even begging and stealing

proved too taxing and thousands slipped slowly into the final, fatal apathy preceding death.

“Most children under 10 and people over 60 cannot survive the coming winter,” one American admitted.⁸⁴

“The number of still-born children is approaching the number of those born alive, and an increasing proportion of these die in a few days,” offered another witness to the tragedy. “Even if they come into the world of normal weight, they start immediately to lose weight and die shortly. Very often mothers cannot stand the loss of blood in childbirth and perish. Infant mortality has reached the horrifying height of 90 per cent.”⁸⁵

“Millions of these children must die before there is enough food,” echoed an American clergyman traveling in Germany. “In Frankfurt at a children’s hospital there have been set aside 25 out of 100 children. These will be fed and kept alive. It is better to feed 25 enough to keep them alive and let 75 starve than to feed the 100 for a short while and let them all starve.”⁸⁶ From Wiesbaden, a correspondent of the Chicago Daily News sat with a mother and watched as her eight-year-old played with her only toys, a doll and carriage. The reporter saw at a glance that the thin, frail child was starving.

“She doesn’t look well,” I said.

“Six years of war,” the mother replied, in that quiet toneless manner so common here now. “She hasn’t had a chance. None of the children have. Her teeth are not good. She catches illness so easily. She laughs and plays—yes; but soon she is tired. She never has known”—and the mother’s eyes filled with tears—“what it is not to be hungry.”

“Was it that bad during the war?” I asked.

“Not this bad,” she replied, “but not good at all. And now I am told the bread ration is to be less. What are we to do; all of us? For six years we suffered. We love our country. My husband was killed—his second war. My oldest son is a prisoner somewhere in France. My other boy lost a leg. . . . And now. . . .”

By this time she was weeping. I gave this little girl a Hershey bar and she wept pure joy—as she held it. By this time I wasn’t feeling too chipper myself.⁸⁷

When a scattering of reports such as the above began filtering out to the American and British public, many were shocked, horrified and outraged at the secret slaughter being committed in their name. Already troubled that the US State Department had tried to keep an official report on conditions in Germany from public scrutiny, Senator James Eastland of Mississippi was outraged.

“There appears to be a conspiracy of silence. . . ,” announced Eastland. “Are we following a policy of vindictive hatred, a policy which would not be endorsed by the American people as a whole if they knew true conditions?”⁸⁸

“Yes,” replied a chamber colleague, Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana, no doubt with Henry Morgenthau on his mind:

The fact can no longer be suppressed, namely, the fact that it has been and continues to be, the deliberate policy . . . of this government to draw and quarter a nation now reduced to abject misery. In this process this clique, like a pack of hyenas struggling over the bloody entrails of a corpse, and inspired by a sadistic and fanatical hatred, are determined to destroy the German nation and the German people, no matter what the consequences. . . . [T]his administration has been carrying on a deliberate policy of mass starvation.⁸⁹

The murderous program was, wrote an equally outraged William Henry Chamberlain, “a positively sadistic desire to inflict maximum suffering on all Germans, irrespective of their responsibility for Nazi crimes.”⁹⁰

Because of these and other critics, Allied officials were forced to respond. Following a fact-finding tour of Germany, Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the late president, professed to see no suffering beyond what was considered “tolerable.” And General Eisenhower, pointing out that there were food shortages all throughout Europe, noted that Germany suffered no more nor less than its neighbors. “While I and my subordinates believe that stern justice should be meted out to war criminals . . . we would never condone inhuman or un-American practices upon the helpless,” assuaged the general as helpless Germans died by the tens of thousands in his death camps each month.⁹¹

Although some nations were indeed suffering shortages, none save Germany was starving. Many countries were actually experiencing surpluses of food, including Denmark on Germany's north border, a nation only waiting Eisenhower's nod to send tons of excess beef south.⁹²

"England is not starving . . . ," argued Robert Conway in the New York News. "France is better off than England, and Italy is better off than France."⁹³

When Senator Albert Hawkes of New Jersey pleaded with President Truman to head off catastrophe and allow private relief packages to enter Germany, the American leader offered various excuses, then cut the senator short:

While we have no desire to be unduly cruel to Germany, I cannot feel any great sympathy for those who caused the death of so many human beings by starvation, disease, and outright murder, in addition to all the destruction and death of war. . . . I think that . . . no one should be called upon to pay for Germany's misfortune except Germany itself. . . . Eventually the enemy countries will be given some attention.⁹⁴

In time, Germany did receive "some attention." Late in 1945, the British allowed Red Cross shipments to enter their zone, followed by the French in theirs. Months later, even the United States grudgingly permitted supplies to cross into its sector.⁹⁵ For millions of Germans, however—the old, the young, the injured, the imprisoned—the "attention," as originally planned, was far too little, far too late.

Had rapes, slavery and starvation been the only trials Germans were forced to endure, it would have been terrible enough. There were other horrors ahead, however—some so sadistic and evil as to stagger the senses. The nightmarish fate that befell thousands of victims locked deep in Allied prisons was enough, moaned one observer, to cause even the devout to ask "if there really were such a thing as a God."

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Soon after the Allied victory in Europe, the purge of National Socialist Party members from government, business, industry, science, education, and all

other walks of German life commenced. While a surprising number of Nazis were allowed—even compelled—to man their posts temporarily to enable a smooth transition, all party members, high and low, were sooner or later excised from German daily life. In theory, “denazification” was a simple replacement of National Socialist officials with those of democratic or communist underpinnings. In practice, the purge became little more than a cloak for rape, torture and death.

Because their knowledge of the language and culture was superb, many of the intelligence officers accompanying US and British forces into the Reich were Jewish refugees who had fled Germany in the late 1930s. Although their American and English “aides” were hardly better, the fact that many of these “39ers” became interrogators, examiners and screeners, with old scores to settle, insured that Nazis—or any German, for that matter—would be shown no mercy.

One man opposed to the vengeance-minded program was George Patton. “Evidently the virus started by Morgenthau and [Bernard] Baruch of a Semitic revenge against all Germans is still working. . . ,” wrote the general in private. “I am frankly opposed to this war-criminal stuff. It is not cricket and it is Semitic. . . . I can’t see how Americans can sink so low.”⁹⁶ Soon after occupation, all adult Germans were compelled to register at the nearest Allied headquarters and complete a lengthy questionnaire on their past activities. While many nervous citizens were detained then and there, most returned home, convinced that at long last the terrible ordeal was over. For millions, however, the trial had but begun. “Then it started,” whispered Anna Fest, a woman who had registered with the Americans six weeks earlier.

Such a feeling of helplessness, when three or four heavily armed military police stand in front of you. You just panic. I cried terribly. My mother was completely beside herself and said, “You can’t do this. She registered just as she was supposed to.” Then she said, “If only you’d gone somewhere else and had hidden.” But I consider that senseless, because I did not feel guilty. . . . That was the way it went with everyone, with no reason given.⁹⁷

Few German adults, Nazi or not, escaped the dreaded knock on the door. Far from being dangerous fascists, Freddy and Lali Horstmann were actually

well-known anti-Nazis. Recounts Lali from the Soviet Zone:

“I am sorry to bother you,” he began, “but I am simply carrying out my orders. Until when did you work for the Foreign Office?”

“Till 1933,” my husband answered.

“Then you need fear nothing,” Androff said. “We accuse you of nothing, but we want you to accompany us to the headquarters of the NKVD, the secret police, so that we can take down what you said in a protocol, and ask you a few questions about the working of the Foreign Office. . . .”

We were stunned for a moment; then I started forward, asking if I could come along with them.

“Impossible,” the interpreter smiled.

My heart raced. Would Freddy answer satisfactorily? Could he stand the excitement? What sort of accommodation would they give him?

“Don’t worry, your husband has nothing to fear,” Androff continued. “He will have a heated room. Give him a blanket for the night, but quickly, we must leave. . . .”

There was a feeling of sharp tension, putting the soldier on his guard, as though he were expecting an attack from one of us. I took first the soldier, then the interpreter, by their hands and begged them to be kind to Freddy, repeating myself in the bustle and scraping of feet that drowned my words. There was a banging of doors. A cold wind blew in. I felt Freddy kiss me. I never saw him again.⁹⁸

“[W]e were wakened by the sound of tires screeching, engines stopping abruptly, orders yelled, general din, and a hammering on the window shutters. Then the intruders broke through the door, and we saw Americans with rifles who stood in front of our bed and shone lights at us. None of them spoke German, but their gestures said: ‘Get dressed, come with us immediately.’ This was my fourth arrest.”⁹⁹

Thus wrote Leni Riefenstahl, a talented young woman who was perhaps the world’s greatest film-maker. Because her epic documentaries—Triumph of the Will and Olympia—seemed paeans to not only Germany, but National Socialism, and because of her close relationship with an admiring Adolf Hitler, Leni was of more than passing interest to the Allies. Though false, rumors also hinted that the attractive, sometimes-actress was also a “mistress

of the devil”—that she and Hitler were lovers.¹⁰⁰

“Neither my husband nor my mother nor any of my three assistants had ever joined the Nazi Party, nor had any of us been politically active,” said the confused young woman. “No charges had ever been filed against us, yet we were at the mercy of the [Allies] and had no legal protection of any kind.”¹⁰¹ Soon after Leni’s fourth arrest, came a fifth.

The jeep raced along the autobahns until, a few hours later . . . I was brought to the Salzburg Prison; there an elderly prison matron rudely pushed me into the cell, kicking me so hard that I fell to the ground; then the door was locked. There were two other women in the dark, barren room, and one of them, on her knees, slid about the floor, jabbering confusedly; then she began to scream, her limbs writhing hysterically. She seemed to have lost her mind. The other woman crouched on her bunk, weeping to herself.¹⁰²

As Leni and others quickly discovered, the “softening up” process began soon after arrival at an Allied prison. When Ernst von Salomon, his Jewish girlfriend and fellow prisoners reached an American holding pen near Munich, the men were promptly led into a room and brutally beaten by military police. With his teeth knocked out and blood spurting from his mouth, von Salomon moaned to a gumchewing officer, “You are no gentlemen.” The remark brought only a roar of laughter from the attackers. “No, no, no!” the GIs grinned. “We are Mississippi boys!” In another room, military policemen raped the women at will while leering soldiers watched from windows.¹⁰³

After such savage treatment, the feelings of despair only intensified once the captives were crammed into cells.

“The people had been standing there for three days, waiting to be interrogated,” remembered a German physician ordered to treat prisoners in the Soviet Zone. “At the sight of us a pandemonium broke out which left me helpless. . . . As far as I could gather, the usual senseless questions were being reiterated: Why were they there, and for how long? They had no water and hardly anything to eat. They wanted to be let out more often than once a day. . . . A great many of them have dysentery so badly that they can no longer get up.”¹⁰⁴

“Young Poles made fun of us,” wept a woman from her cell in the same zone.

“[They] threw bricks through the windows, paper bags with sand, and skins of hares filled with excrement. We did not dare to move or offer resistance, but huddled together in the farthest corner, in order not to be hit, which could not always be avoided. . . . [W]e were never free from torments.”¹⁰⁵

“For hours on end I rolled about on my bed, trying to forget my surroundings,” recalled Leni Riefenstahl, “but it was impossible.”

The mentally disturbed woman kept screaming—all through the night; but even worse were the yells and shrieks of men from the courtyard, men who were being beaten, screaming like animals. I subsequently found out that a company of SS men was being interrogated.

They came for me the next morning, and I was taken to a padded cell where I had to strip naked, and a woman examined every square inch of my body. Then I had to get dressed and go down to the courtyard, where many men were standing, apparently prisoners, and I was the only woman. We had to line up before an American guard who spoke German. The prisoners stood to attention, so I tried to do the same, and then an American came who spoke fluent German. He pushed a few people together, then halted at the first in our line. “Were you in the Party?”

The prisoner hesitated for a moment, then said: “Yes.”

He was slugged in the face and spat blood.

The American went on to the next in line.

“Were you in the Party?”

The man hesitated.

“Yes or no?”

“Yes.” And he too got punched so hard in the face that the blood ran

out of his mouth. However, like the first man, he didn’t dare resist. They didn’t even instinctively raise their hands to protect themselves. They did nothing. They put up with the blows like dogs.

The next man was asked: “Were you in the Party?”

Silence.

“Well?”

“No,” he yelled, so no punch. From then on nobody admitted that he

had been in the Party and I was not even asked.106

As the above case illustrated, seldom was there any rhyme or reason to the examinations; all were designed to force from the victim what the inquisitor wanted to hear, whether true or false. Additionally, most such “interrogations” were structured to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible.

“A young commissar, who was a great hater of the Germans, cross examined me. . . ,” Gertrude Schulz remembered. “When he put the question: “Frauenwerk [Women’s Labor Service]?” I answered in the negative. Thereupon he became so enraged, that he beat me with a stick, until I was black and blue. I received about 15 blows . . . on my left upper arm, on my back and on my thigh. I collapsed and, as in the case of the first cross-examination, I had to sign the questionnaire.”107

“Both officers who took our testimony were former German Jews,” reminisced a member of the women’s SS, Anna Fest. While vicious dogs snarled nearby, one of the officers screamed questions and accusations at Anna. If the answers were not those desired, “he kicked me in the back and the other hit me.”

They kept saying we must have been armed, have had pistols or so. But we had no weapons, none of us. . . . I had no pistol. I couldn’t say, just so they’d leave me in peace, yes, we had pistols. The same thing would happen to the next person to testify. . . . [T]he terrible thing was, the German men had to watch. That was a horrible, horrible experience. . . . That must have been terrible for them. When I went outside, several of them stood there with tears running down their cheeks. What could they have done? They could do nothing.108

As part of one “interrogation” process, Johann Heilmeyer was forced to watch as Americans tied a woman’s hands to a chair, tore off her clothes, then took turns raping her. Other women were warned that if they failed to sign false confessions they would be turned over to black troops who would do with them as they saw fit.109

Not surprisingly, with beatings, rape, torture, and death facing them, few

victims failed to “confess” and most gladly inked their name to any scrap of paper shown them. Some, like Anna, tried to resist. Such recalcitrance was almost always of short duration, however. Generally, after enduring blackened eyes, broken bones, electric shock to breasts—or, in the case of men, smashed testicles—only those who died during torture failed to sign confessions.

American author, Marguerite Higgins, asked and received permission to visit one “Interrogation Center.” What the writer expected to find is unclear, but what she did discover after a GI led her through the main door of the prison the lady was utterly unprepared for.

“Behind the bars of the cell we saw 3 uniformed Germans,” the woman recalled. “Two of them, beaten and covered with blood, were lying unconscious on the floor. A third German was lifted up by the hair on his head, and I shall never forget, he had red hair like a carrot. A GI turned his body over and struck him in the face. When the victim groaned, the GI roared, ‘Shut your mouth, damned Kraut!’”¹¹⁰

To her horror, the American author soon learned that for the past fifteen minutes over a score of US soldiers had been beating and kicking the three Germans on the floor as well as three other victims nearby.

“The boy with the red hair was 14 years old,” remembered Marguerite. “The other 5 German boys in the cell blocks were between 14 and 17 years old.”¹¹¹

In the British Zone, a journalist stumbled upon the aftermath of yet another “interrogation.”

“I’m afraid the prisoners don’t look exactly nice,” laughed the captain in charge.

Crumpled on the floor, laying in pools of blood, the newsman saw several German prisoners moaning. When they were ordered to stand to attention for the guest, slowly, all made the painful attempt. The first man to rise stood on uncertain legs and leaned against the wall for support. Then, his body shaking, the man made a reflexive motion with his arms as if to fend off blows. Others, with difficulty, eventually managed to stand, swaying against the wall. “Come off the wall,” shouted a British sergeant. Unsteadily, the beaten, bleeding men did as told.

In a nearby cell, the “medical officer” had just finished his examination of a German and on the floor lay the victim drenched in his own blood. “Up,” shouted the medical officer to the man when the visitor entered. “Get up.” Painfully, using the arms of a chair, the victim tried to rise, but could not. Again he was ordered to get up. This time, on weak, shaky legs the man succeeded.

“Why don’t you kill me off?” moaned the victim as he stretched his arms pleading to the men.

“The dirty bastard is jabbering this all morning” the sergeant nearby growled.¹¹²

Alone, surrounded by sadistic hate, utterly bereft of law, justice or hope, many victims understandably escaped in the only way they could—by taking their own lives. Like rays of sun in a black world of ugliness and evil, however, miracles did occur.

As guards led him back to his prison cell on painfully weakened legs, one Wehrmacht officer reflected on the insults, beatings, and tortures he had endured and contemplated suicide.

I could not see properly in the semi-darkness and missed my open cell door. A kick in the back and I was sprawling on the floor. As I raised myself I said to myself I could not, should not accept this humiliation. I sat on my bunk. I had hidden a razor blade that would serve to open my veins. Then I looked at the New Testament and found these words in the Gospel of St. John:

“Without me ye can do nothing.”

With those simple, yet profound words, and despite the terrible pain and agony, the suffering soldier felt something stir within himself, something he had not felt for a very long time. His body beaten, bloody, broken, but his soul . . . untouched, unharmed, unshakable.

New strength seemed to rise in me. I was pondering over what seemed to me a miracle when the heavy lock turned in the cell door. A very young American soldier came in, put his finger to his lips to warn me not to speak.

“I saw it,” he said. “Here are baked potatoes.”

He pulled the potatoes out of his pocket and gave them to me, and then went out, locking the door behind him.¹¹³

Chapter 4 An Island of Fire

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ust as Allied air armadas had mercilessly bombed, blasted and burned the cities and civilians of Germany, so too was the US air force incinerating the women and children of Japan. As was the case with his peers in Europe, cigar-chewing, Jap-hating Maj. Gen.

Curtis LeMay had no compunction whatsoever about targeting noncombatants, including the very old and the very young.

“We knew we were going to kill a lot of women and kids,” admitted the hard-nosed air commander without a blink. “Had to be done.”¹

Originally, and although it would have been in direct violation of the Geneva Convention, Franklin Roosevelt had seriously considered gassing Japan. Much as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had proposed doing to Germany earlier in the war, the American president had felt that flooding Japan with poison was not only a fine way to end his war, but a just punishment upon those who had started that war. Unlike the Germans who had their own stock of deadly gas and who could have easily retaliated against the Allies had they been so attacked, Japan had virtually none of its own. To further the plan, Roosevelt ordered his staff to test the waters by discretely asking Americans, “Should we gas the Japs?” Since the plan was shelved, perhaps too many Americans remembered the horrors of trench warfare during WWI to want a repeat. The US Government then came up with the idea of unleashing “bat-bombs” on Japan. The brain-child of an American dentist, tiny incendiary time bombs would be attached to thousands of bats which would then be dropped on Japan from aircraft. Soon after they sought shelter in Japanese homes, schools and hospitals the bat bombs would explode thereby igniting fires all across the country. After spending two million dollars on the project, and after some serious consideration, the bat bomb, like poison gas, was also dropped. Ultimately, deadly fire bombs were developed and finally accepted as the most efficient way to slaughter Japanese and destroy their nation.²

The Allies first created the firestorm phenomenon when the British in the summer of 1943 bombed Germany’s second largest city, Hamburg. After first

blasting the beautiful city to atoms with normal high explosives, another wave of bombers soon appeared loaded with tens of thousands of incendiary bombs. The ensuing night raid ignited numerous fires that soon joined to form one uncontrollable mass of flame. The inferno was so hot, in fact, that it generated its own hurricane-force winds that literally sucked the oxygen out of the air, suffocating many victims. Others were hurled into the hellish vortex like dried leaves or they became stuck in the melting asphalt where they quickly burst into flames. LeMay hoped to use this same fiery force to scorch the cities of Japan. Tokyo would be the first test.

On the night of March 9-10, 1945, over three hundred B-29 bombers left their bases on the Mariana Islands. Once over Tokyo, advance scout planes dropped firebombs across the heart of the heavily populated city to form a large, fiery “X.” Other planes “painted” the outer limits to be bombed, thereby encircling those living in the kill zone below.³

Soon, the remaining bombers appeared and easily followed the fires to their targets. When bomb bay doors opened tens of thousands of relatively small firebombs were released—some, made of white phosphorous, but most filled with napalm, a new gasoline-based, fuel-gel mixture. Within minutes after hitting the roofs and buildings below, a huge inferno was created. Since the raid occurred near midnight, most people were long in bed, thus ensuring a slow reaction. Also, the sheer number of firebombs—nearly half a million—and the great breadth of the bombed area—sixteen square miles—insured that Tokyo’s already archaic fire-fighting ability would be hopelessly inadequate to deal with a blaze of such scale.

When the flames finally subsided the following morning, the relatively few survivors could quickly see that much of the Japanese capital had been burned from the face of the earth. In this raid on Tokyo alone, in one night, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people, mostly women and children, were, as Gen. LeMay announced proudly, “scorched and baked and boiled to death.”⁴ Only the incineration of Dresden, Germany, one month earlier with an estimated death toll of between 300,000-400,000, was greater.

“Congratulations,” wrote Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold to LeMay after hearing the news. “This mission shows your crews have got the guts for anything.”⁵

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Following the resounding success with Tokyo, Gen. LeMay immediately

turned his attention toward the similar immolation of every other city in Japan. As was the case with Germany, then later Tokyo, the aim of the US Air Force under Curtis LeMay was not so much to destroy Japanese military targets or factories so much as it was to transform all of Japan into a blackened waste, to kill as many men, women and children as he could, and to terrorize those who survived to as great a degree as possible. In other words, under the command of LeMay the air attacks against Japan, just as with the air attacks against Germany, was “Terror Bombing,” pure and simple.⁶

To make this murderous plan as effective as possible, the US air commander and his aides studied the entire situation. Night raids were preferred, of course, since it would catch as many people in bed as possible. Also, dry, windy conditions were selected to accelerate the ensuing firestorm insuring few could escape. Additionally, since the Japanese air force had for all intents and purposes been destroyed in three years of war, there was little need for armament of the American bombers. Thus, the extra weight that ammunition, machine-guns and the men to fire them added to the aircraft was removed, making room for even more firebombs. But perhaps most important for Gen. LeMay was the decision to radically reduce the altitude for his bombing raids.

Prior to the Tokyo raid, standard bombing runs took place at elevations as high as 30,000 feet. At such great altitudes—nearly six miles up—it was insured that most enemy fighters and virtually all ground defenses would be useless at these heights. By 1945, however, with the virtual elimination of the Imperial Air Force and with normal anti-aircraft ground fire woefully inadequate or non-existent, enemy threats to American bomber waves was greatly reduced. Thus, the firebombing of Japan could be carried out by aircraft flying as low as 5,000 feet over the target. This last measure not only guaranteed that the US attacks would be carried out with greater surprise, but that the bombs would be dropped with deadlier precision. One final plus for the new tactics was the demoralizing terror caused by hundreds of huge B-29 bombers—“B-San,” the Japanese called them, “Mr. B”— suddenly roaring just overhead and each dropping tons of liquefied fire on those below. In a nation where most homes were made of paper and wood, the dread of an impending firebombing raid can well be imagined.

As one US intelligence officer accurately reported to a planning committee: “The panic side of the Japanese is amazing. Fire is one of the great things they are terrified at from childhood.”⁷

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Following the destruction of Tokyo in which most of the city center was scorched black, and following the enthusiastic endorsement of American newspapers, including the curiously named Christian Century, Gen. LeMay swiftly sent his bomber fleets to attack virtually every other city in Japan. Osaka, Nagoya, Kobe, Yokohama, and over sixty other large targets were thus treated to the nightmare of firebombing. And simply because a city had been bombed once was not a guarantee that it would not be bombed again and again. Such was the terrible fate of Tokyo. Not content with the initial massacre, LeMay demanded that the Japanese capital be attacked until everyone and everything was utterly destroyed; “burned down,” demanded the US general, “wiped right off the map.”⁸

Unfortunately, no community was any better prepared to face the attacks than Tokyo had been. Fully expecting that if the US air force ever attacked, it would be with typical high explosives, local and national authorities encouraged Japanese civilians earlier in the war to dig their own air raid shelters near or under their homes to withstand the blast and shrapnel of conventional bombs. Additionally, women were encouraged to wear heavy cloth hoods over their heads to cushion a bomb’s concussive force and prevent hearing loss. After Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and other firebombing raids, however, it was clear that past defensive tactics were useless when facing the hellish firestorms.

Typically, first warning of a potential American air raid came with the city sirens. Like their German counterparts early in the war, the Japanese likewise sprang from their beds with every such alarm, either to join their various “bucket brigades” or to wet their mats and brooms and fill their water troughs just in case of fire. Most simply dashed to the holes in the ground they called “shelters.” But also like those in Germany, with numerous false alarms came predictable apathy on the part of the Japanese and an almost utter disregard of sirens. Often, when a few B-29s on reconnaissance were indeed spotted far above leaving their vapor trails, excited air raid wardens would run through

the streets beating on buckets as a warning to laggards.⁹ But soon, even these warnings were ignored.

“As the B-29’s came over us day in and day out, we never feared them,” admitted one woman weary of the alarms.¹⁰

That all changed dramatically following the firebombing of Tokyo. After that night, especially on dry, windy nights, in each Japanese city, in each Japanese heart, there was never any doubt that the war—a hellish, hideous war—had finally reached Japan.

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First hint of an impending American air raid on a Japanese city came with a low, but ominous rumble from afar. That menacing sound soon grew and grew to an approaching roar that caused the windows to rattle and the very air to vibrate. Finally, in one great burst, a terrible, continuous thunder exploded just overhead. In no way, however, did the horrible sound prepare the people below for the horrible sight they then saw above. Usually at night, but sometimes even during the day, the sky was literally blotted out by the sight.

“I had heard that the planes were big,” gaped a stunned spectator, “but seen from so close, their size astounded me.”¹¹

“Gigantic,” thought one spellbound viewer.¹²

“Enormous,” added another awe-struck witness. “It looked as if they were flying just over the telegraph poles in the street. . . . I was totally stupefied.”¹³

“They were so big,” remembered a young woman staring in disbelief. “It looked like you could reach out and grab them.”¹⁴

Then, amid the terrifying sights and sounds, the awe-struck people watched in utter amazement as the bomb bay doors of the frightening things sprang open as if on cue.

Falling not vertically, but diagonally, the objects which then began to shower down were at first thought by many viewers to be pipes, or even sticks.¹⁵

Within a few seconds, the true nature of the objects became known to all.

“They’re coming down,” the people screamed. “They’re coming down.”¹⁶

Almost immediately, as if a switch had been thrown, from every corner of the targeted city the night became light as day as each of the thousands of fire bombs ignited on impact. Quickly, the deadly liquid spread and in mere

minutes the targeted city was totally engulfed.

“At that moment,” said 24-year-old Yoshiko Hashimoto, “we were caught in an inferno. The fire spread so quickly. The surroundings were seized with fire in a wink.”¹⁷

“The wind and flames seemed to feed into each other and both gained intensity,” described one teenager. “Pots and pans blew about on the ground and blankets flew through the air. People ran in all directions.”¹⁸

Since their homes and businesses made of wood and paper were mere “match boxes” ready to ignite, most people recognized instantly the futility of trying to fight the fire and they quickly fled into the streets.

“Roofs collapsed under the bombs’ impact,” said an eyewitness, “and within minutes the frail houses . . . were aflame, lighted from the inside like paper lanterns.”¹⁹

It was at that terrifying moment, when the entire world seemed on the verge of being consumed by smoke and flames that single mothers, their husbands dead or off at war, were forced to make life and death decisions. To save small children, some were compelled to leave old, feeble relatives behind; others had to abandon beloved pets or needed animals. One mother, to save her two tiny tots, made the heart-breaking decision to leave her handicapped child to certain death.²⁰

“The three of us dashed out into the panic and pandemonium of the streets,” recalled Masayoshi Nakagawa, a father of two little children and a man whose wife was in a local hospital expecting their third child. “People were carrying whatever they had managed to salvage: quilts, pillows, frying pans. Some of them had carts; others lugged bicycles on their backs.”²¹

Once in the streets, the refugees were greeted by a “red blizzard” of sparks. Unlike typical sparks, however, those created from the incendiary bombs were large “chunks” of oily, wind-driven flame that would instantly ignite the clothes of those fleeing.²² Another hazard was the “hail” of bombs themselves. So many of the relatively small bombs were dropped on any given city that many victims were actually struck by them. Most, of course, were instantly wrapped in a ball of fire and died in terrible agony. One woman watched in horror as her husband ran from their family business shouting “Air Raid! Air Raid!” and was immediately struck in the head by a firebomb.

“He was instantly wrapped in a sheet of bluish flame. . . ,” recounted the horrified wife. “I could not put out the fire. All my desperate efforts were of

no avail. . . . His hair was still sizzling and giving off a blue light. His skin peeled away in sheets, exposing his flesh. I could not even wipe his body.”²³ Just as with the man above, those victims who actually came in contact with the napalm found that the fire could not be extinguished and would burn and sizzle all the way to the bone.²⁴

Desperately, those trapped within the encircled target zone searched for avenues of escape. Unfortunately, at every turn the victims met only more fleeing refugees and more smoke and flame. Those who had remained at their own air raid shelters near their homes were already dead, the holes acting like earthen bake ovens in the heat. Others met similar fates when they wrongly assumed that the few brick and concrete buildings in the city would protect them. They did the opposite. When the racing flames reached such buildings those inside were quickly incinerated. Iron rafters overhead sent down a rain of molten metal on any still alive.²⁵

Nor did parks prove to be havens. With temperatures reaching 1,800 degrees, the trees quickly dried then burst into flames. Additionally, those who sought out open spaces, or areas burned bare from previous raids, were easy targets for US fighter pilots who routinely machinegunned fleeing refugees, just as they had done in Germany. Other American aircraft watched the streets for any Japanese fire companies bold enough to attempt to fight the fires, then attacked with high explosives.²⁶

By the hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands, the people fled through the streets as the furnace became fiercer and fiercer.

“Hell could get no hotter,” thought French reporter, Robert Guillain, as he watched the crowds struggle against the murderous heat and the “hail” of huge, flaming sparks.

People soaked themselves in the water barrels that stood in front of each house before setting off again. A litter of obstacles blocked their way; telegraph poles and the overhead trolley wires that formed a dense net . . . [of] tangles across streets. . . .The fiery air was blown down toward the ground and it was often the refugees’ feet that began burning first: the men’s puttees and the women’s trousers caught fire and ignited the rest of their clothing.²⁷

As noted, in the furious heat and wind it was often a victim’s shoes or boots which erupted in flames first, followed quickly by the pants, shirts, and air

raid hoods that many women still wore.²⁸ As the horrified people stripped off one layer of burning clothing after another, many rolling on the ground to smother the fires, some simply burst into flames entirely—hair, head, skin, all. One witness watched as a child ran by screaming shrilly, “It’s hot! It hurts! Help me!” Before anyone could reach him, the child burst into flames “as if he’d been drenched in gasoline.”²⁹ In the midst of her own desperate bid to escape, one teenage girl saw a mother and father bravely place their own bodies between the killing heat and their small children. At last, when the father simply burst into flames he nevertheless struggled to remain upright as a shield for his children. Finally, the man teetered and fell.

“I heard him shouting to his wife,” recalled the witness, “‘Forgive me, dear! Forgive me!’”³⁰

Likewise, thousands of victims in other Japanese cities could not bear the ferocious heat and simply exploded in flames from spontaneous combustion.³¹

The streets, remembered police cameraman, Ishikawa Koyo, were “rivers of fire . . . flaming pieces of furniture exploding in the heat, while the people themselves blazed like ‘matchsticks’ . . . Under the wind and the gigantic breath of the fire, immense incandescent vortices rose in a number of places, swirling, flattening, sucking whole blocks of houses into their maelstrom of fire.”³²

Continues French visitor, Robert Guillain:

Wherever there was a canal, people hurled themselves into the water; in shallow places, people waited, half sunk in noxious muck, mouths just above the surface of the water. . . . In other places, the water got so hot that the luckless bathers were simply boiled alive. . . . [P]eople crowded onto the bridges, but the spans were made of steel that gradually heated; human clusters clinging to the white-hot railings finally let go, fell into the water and were carried off on the current. Thousands jammed the parks and gardens that lined both banks of the [river]. As panic brought ever fresh waves of people pressing into the narrow strips of land, those in front were pushed irresistibly toward the river; whole walls of screaming humanity toppled over and disappeared in the deep water.³³

With his two little children clutched under his arms, Masayoshi Nakagawa raced for the canals and rivers as everyone else, hoping to find a haven from the deadly heat.

Suddenly I heard a shout: “Your son’s clothes are on fire!” At the same instant, I saw flames licking the cotton bloomers my daughter was wearing. I put my son down and reached out to try to smother the flames on his back when a tremendous gust of wind literally tore me from him and threw me to the ground. Struggling to stand, I saw that I was now closer to my daughter than to the boy. I decided to put out the fire on her clothes first. The flames were climbing her legs. As I frantically extinguished the flames, I heard the agonized screams of my son a short distance away. As soon as my daughter was safe, I rushed to the boy. He had stopped crying. I bent over him. He was already dead.³⁴

Grabbing his daughter and his son’s body, Masayoshi joined the fleeing crowds once again, trying to escape the “ever-pursuing inferno.”

“Once in the open space . . .,” continues the grieving father, “I stood, my daughter by my side, my dead son in my arms, waiting for the fire to subside.”³⁵

Surprisingly, during days and nights such as these filled with nightmares scripted in hell—children bursting into flames, glass windows melting, molten metal pouring down on people—often it was the small and seemingly trivial sights and sounds that sometimes stayed with survivors forever. One little girl, after watching a panicked mother run past with her baby totally ablaze on her back, after seeing children her own age rolling on the ground like “human torches,” after seeing and hearing the sounds of a man and a horse he was leading both burning to death, still, again and again, the little girl’s mind wandered back to the safety of her cherished doll collection, then on display at a local girl’s festival.³⁶

“To my surprise,” recalled another survivor, “birds in mid-flight—sparrows and crows—were not sure where to go in such a situation. I was surprised to see that the sparrows and the crows would cling to the electric wire and stay there in a row. . . . You’d think they’d go into the bushes or something.”³⁷

Amid all the horror, another woman never forgot the strange sight of a refugee standing in a large tank of water holding only a live chicken. Another young female, admittedly “numb to it all,” found as she passed a mound of dead bodies that her eyes became transfixed on a pair of nose holes that seemed to be peering up at her.³⁸

Finally, on numerous occasions, because of the American “encirclement” of a targeted city, thousands of refugees fleeing from one direction collided head-on with thousands of refugees fleeing from another direction. In this case, the panicked multitude, now incapable of moving forward because of an equally panicked multitude in front, and incapable of moving backward because of the pursuing fire storm, simply became wedged so tightly that no one could move. Horrific as the ordeal had been thus far, it was nothing compared to this final act of the hellish horror. Since most refugees were fleeing instinctively toward water, many crowds became wedged on bridges. Thousands of victims were thus overtaken by the fury and were burned to a crisp by the fiery winds that to some resembled “flamethrowers.” Thousands more, horribly burned, managed to leap or fall to their deaths into the rivers and canals below. Eventually, metal bridges became so hot that human grease from the victims above poured down on the bodies of victims below.³⁹

And as for those far above, to those who had dropped millions of firebombs on the cities and towns of Japan, the horror show they had created below was readily apparent in all its lurid detail. At such low altitudes, with night now day, those above had a front row seat to all the hellish drama below. Fleeing humans racing for life down streets now more “rivers of fire” than streets, screaming horses engulfed in flames galloping in all directions, bridges packed with doomed mothers and children, rivers and canals jammed with the dead and the dead to be. For those US fighter pilots whose job was to massacre refugees who reached the open spaces, their view was even closer. In the red and white glare of the fires, these Americans could actually see the faces of those they were machine-gunning, the women with babies, the children running and falling, the old, the slow, the animals. The violent updrafts from the heat below was a much greater threat to US bombers than the almost non-existent Japanese anti-air defenses. Wafted on the heat thousands of feet up was the scattered debris from below—bits and pieces of homes, offices and schools; tatters of burnt clothing; feathers and fur from

dead pets; and, of course, the pervasive smell of broiled human flesh.

“Suddenly, way off at 2 o’clock,” noted an awe-struck American pilot arriving on the scene, “I saw a glow on the horizon like the sun rising or maybe the moon. The whole city . . . was [soon] below us stretching from wingtip to wingtip, ablaze in one enormous fire with yet more fountains of flame pouring down from the B-29s. The black smoke billowed up thousands of feet . . . bringing with it the horrible smell of burning flesh.”⁴⁰

Once the attacking force had loosed all its bombs and banked for home, the red glow of the holocaust they had created could be seen for as far as 150 miles.⁴¹

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With the departure of enemy aircraft and the eventual subsiding of the fires, workers and volunteers from throughout the stricken region finally felt safe enough to venture into the scorched zone and begin rescue operations. Given the frail, flammable nature of most Japanese cities, virtually every structure in a targeted area—homes, shops, businesses—was utterly leveled. As a consequence, because there was seldom need to clear stone, brick, metal, and other rubble from a bombed area, as was the case in Germany, the search for bodies in Japan was made easier, if not easy.

By the thousands, by the tens of thousands, the charred victims lay everywhere. Many died alone, overcome in their flight by heat and exhaustion. It was common to find a single blackened mother laying upon a single blackened child that she was trying so desperately to protect. But many more victims seemed to have died in a mass. Time and again rescue workers encountered “piles” and “mounds” of bodies, as if all suddenly found their way ahead cut off or as if the people unsuspectingly entered areas vastly hotter than elsewhere and succumbed as one quickly. “I saw melted burnt bodies piled up on top of each other as high as a house,” remembered one ten-year-old.⁴² In such areas, below the piles of blackened bodies, large dark puddles of human rendering was noticed.

“What I witnessed,” said one badly burned woman leading her blind parents, “was the heaps of bodies lying on the ground endlessly. The corpses were all

scorched black. They were just like charcoal. I couldn't believe my eyes. . . . We walked stepping over the bodies being careful not to tread on them." Unfortunately, the woman's parents tripped and stumbled over the corpses again and again.⁴³

"We saw a fire truck buried under a mountain of blackened bones," wrote another witness. "It looked like some kind of terrifying artwork. One couldn't help wondering just how the pile of bodies had been able to reach such a height."⁴⁴

Many victims, it was noticed, had heads double and triple their normal size.⁴⁵

Others gazed in wonder at the array of colors the bodies displayed; many, of course, were scorched black, but some were brown, red or pink. "I particularly remember a child," said one little girl, "whose upper half of the body was coal-black but its legs were pure white."⁴⁶

"I . . . saw a boy," another child recalled. "He was stark naked, and had . . . burns all over the body. His body was spotted with black, purple, and dark red burns. Like a rabbit, the boy was hopping among the corpses . . . and looked into the dead persons' faces. . . . He was probably searching for his family members."⁴⁷

Elsewhere in the stricken cities, before disease could spread, rescue workers began the grim task of disposing of the unclaimed bodies as quickly as possible. By the hundreds, then by the thousands, many scorched and shriveled victims were buried in common trenches with others.⁴⁸ Some survivors took it upon themselves to collect the remains of friends and neighbors. When the air raid began in her city, one woman was talking with a neighbor when an explosive bomb blew him to bits. Later, feeling compelled to do so, the lady returned and began the horrible recovery of the body parts, including the head. "I was suddenly struck with the terrifying thought," the woman, who was on the verge of fainting, recalled, "that perhaps someday soon someone would have to do the same thing to me."⁴⁹ Workers elsewhere simply did not have the time or patience for such care and simply tossed the body parts they encountered into the rivers.⁵⁰

Initially, when rescuers entered the few brick and concrete buildings in the stricken cities, they were mystified. Expecting heaps of bodies, they found only layer upon layer of ash and dust. Far from being points of refuge as the

unsuspecting victims imagined, the buildings had served rather as super-heated ovens, not only quickly killing the people when the flames neared but baking each body so thoroughly that only a faint dry powder remained. Even with only a slight breeze, other such baked victims simply blew away “like sand.”⁵¹

Following such horrific attacks, many stunned survivors simply stumbled among the ruins aimlessly as if in a trance, dazed, disoriented, seemingly looking for something, but actually looking for nothing. With a new and unimaginable terror springing up at every turn during every second of the night before, time then seemed to have telescoped, then stopped. “It took seemingly forever to cover a distance that ordinarily would take two or three minutes,” noted one surprised survivor. And for those victims who gathered their wits and somehow managed to stagger from targeted cities with only minor injuries, such treks generally became terrifying odysseys unto themselves. After escaping the inferno at Chiba the night before, and with a two-year-old sister in her arms and an eight-year-old sister on her back suffering from a terrible head wound, little Kazuko Saegusa finally reached the countryside the following morning in a drizzling rain. Finding a hand cart, the exhausted ten-year-old placed her sisters inside then set off in hopes of finding a doctor or a hospital to help her injured sister. While pulling the cart between muddy rice paddies, the terrified little girl was repeatedly strafed by American fighter planes. Nevertheless, Kazuko refused to run for cover and leave her sisters behind. Eventually, and almost miraculously, the child reached a hospital. Unfortunately, there was no happy ending.

“The corridors of the hospital were packed with people burned past recognition,” remembered Kazuko. “There were many young people whose arms or legs had been amputated. . . . The screaming was beyond description. . . . Maggots wriggled from the bandages.”⁵² Conditions at the hospital were so bad that Kazuko and her sisters, along with many others, were moved to an open area near a church. But again, American aircraft soon made their appearance and strafed the victims, forcing the little girl to grab her sisters and finally find safety in a stand of trees.⁵³

Although the dead outnumbered the living following such nightmares, for many shattered survivors, like little Kazuko, the trials continued.

After losing his son the night before, with the dawn, Masayoshi Nakagawa and his tiny surviving child now set off to find his pregnant wife somewhere in the destroyed city.

My daughter and I, hand in hand, alone now, started off. Weary and emotionally drained, we had to force ourselves to struggle on through mounds of debris and corpses; among the foul, pungent odors, and the groans of the injured and dying. A man holding a frying pan gazed blankly at ashes that had been a house. Another squatted, dazed and helpless, in the middle of the street. Mothers frantically called for their children; small children screamed for their parents. I neither could nor wanted to do anything for the suffering people. My own suffering was too great. Probably all the others felt the same way.

Near [a] railway station, mounds of bodies clogged the track underpass. The walls were spattered with blood. A charred mother sat embracing her charred infant. The dead, burned beyond recognition, looked like grotesque bald dress-maker's dummies. Those who were still alive moaned against the heat and called for water.⁵⁴

Unbeknownst to Masayoshi, his wife, after a "difficult delivery," had given birth to a healthy baby girl at the hospital during the height of the firestorm the night before. Because of the approaching flames, everyone in the hospital had urged the mother to leave her newborn and flee while she could. Refusing to do so, the weakened woman wrapped her infant then fled into the inferno. Pale and bleeding, facing the flames and deadly sparks, the mother kept her baby covered tightly and sprinkled her with water throughout the hellish night. The following day, the utterly exhausted woman collapsed in the street and could go no further. Fortunately, a kind man, forgetting his own misfortune for the moment, carried the mother and child to a nearby hospital. After only the briefest of rests, the woman and her baby again set off in search of Masayoshi and the children.

Finally, after days and days of fruitless searching for a wife that he assumed was, like his son, dead, the husband learned from a mutual friend that the woman and their new child were yet alive and uninjured. For the husband and father, the news was the first reason to smile in what seemed a lifetime.

"I was overjoyed," Masayoshi said simply, yet with a heart filled with emotion.⁵⁵

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Following the deadly firebombing of Japanese cities, the death toll in each continued to climb for days, even weeks as those terribly burned and maimed succumbed to injuries. With a sudden shortage of doctors, nurses and medicine, most victims were cared for by family and friends who coped as best they could. Some were successful, some were not.

When she first realized that her daughter's badly burned legs had become infested with maggots, one horrified mother promptly fainted from shock. After she came to, the determined woman found a pair of chop sticks and immediately went to work picking out the maggots, one at a time.⁵⁶

Others died in different ways. Two days after the raid upon her hometown in which her husband was killed, Fumie Masaki's little son and other boys discovered an unexploded bomb while on a playground. When a fire warden arrived to dispose of it, the bomb exploded. Eight children were killed, including Fumie's son.⁵⁷

For a nation surrounded and blockaded, starvation was already a very real concern for Japan. In the bombed and burned cities with their rail, road and river traffic destroyed, it was an even greater threat. Adults soon noticed that children now suddenly grew gaunt and pale and looked "somehow older" than before. Many thin babies had escaped the firebombings only to starve in the days and weeks following. Dogs and cats were no longer seen in Japan. Even the Japanese government urged the people to supplement their diets with "rats, mice, snakes, saw dust, peanut shells, grasshoppers, worms, silkworms, and cocoons."⁵⁸

Added to starvation was chronic exhaustion from lack of sleep and rest. Those who somehow managed to remain in bombed cities did so with the constant dread of the nightmare's repeat. Those who moved to undisturbed cities did so fully expecting the fire to fall at any hour.⁵⁹

"I wish I could go to America for just one good night's sleep," groaned one exhausted post man.⁶⁰

Exacerbating the daily stress and strain of Japanese civilians was the American "targets of opportunity" program. Just as they had done in Germany, US commanders ordered their fighter pilots aloft with orders to shoot anything in Japan that moved. Unfortunately, many young men obeyed

their orders “to the letter.” Ferry boats, passenger trains, automobiles, farmers in fields, animals grazing, women on bicycles, children in school yards, orphanages, hospitals . . . all were deemed legitimate targets of opportunity and all were strafed again and again with machine-gun and cannon fire.⁶¹ “And not a single Japanese aircraft offered them resistance,” raged a man after one particular strafing incident. The angry comment could just as easily have been spoken after all American attacks, firebombings included. Certainly, the most demoralizing aspect of the war for Japanese civilians was the absolute American control of the air above Japan. During the nonstop B-29 attacks against the cities and towns, seldom was a Japanese aircraft seen to offer resistance.

“When . . . there was no opposition by our planes . . .,” offered one dejected observer, “I felt as if we were fighting machinery with bamboo.”⁶² Even members of the military had to agree. “Our fighters were but so many eggs thrown at the stone wall of the invincible enemy formations,” admitted a Japanese naval officer.⁶³

And as for anti-aircraft guns. . . .

“Here and there, the red puffs of anti-aircraft bursts sent dotted red lines across the sky,” recounted one viewer, “but the defenses were ineffectual and the big B-29s, flying in loose formation, seemed to work unhampered.”⁶⁴ Indeed, those guns that did fire at B-29s seemed more dangerous to those on the ground than to those in the air. Early in the bombing campaign, after a single B-29 on a reconnaissance mission flew away totally unscathed following a noisy anti-aircraft barrage, shrapnel falling to earth killed six people in Tokyo.⁶⁵

“Our captain was a great gunnery enthusiast,” sneered a Japanese sailor. “He was always telling us that we could shoot Americans out of the sky. After innumerable raids in which our guns did not even scratch their wings, he was left looking pretty silly. When air attacks came in, there was nothing much we would do but pray.”⁶⁶

In July, 1945, Curtis LeMay ordered US planes to shower with leaflets the few remaining Japanese cities that had been spared firebombing with an “Appeal to the People.”

As you know, America which stands for humanity, does not wish to injure the innocent people, so you had better evacuate these cities.

Within days of the fluttering leaflets, half of the warned cities were firebombed into smoking ruins.⁶⁷

With the destruction of virtually every large Japanese city, LeMay kept his men busy by sending them to raid even the smaller cities and towns. After his own remote community was attacked, one resident knew the end was in sight. “When we were bombed,” admitted the man, “we all thought—if we are bombed, even in a small mountain place, the war must certainly be lost.”⁶⁸ Others felt similarly, including a high-ranking civil servant:

It was the raids on the medium and smaller cities which had the worst effect and really brought home to the people the experience of bombing and a demoralization of faith in the outcome of the war. . . . It was bad enough in so large a city as Tokyo, but much worse in the smaller cities, where most of the city would be wiped out. Through May and June the spirit of the people was crushed. [When B-29s dropped propaganda pamphlets] the morale of the people sank terrifically, reaching a low point in July, at which time there was no longer hope of victory or a draw but merely a desire for ending the war.⁶⁹

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According to American sources, the first firebombing raid on Tokyo, the raid that was the most devastating of all raids and the raid that provided the blue print for all future firebombing raids on Japan, was a complete and utter success. Not only was the heart of the great city totally scorched from the face of the earth, but over 100,000 people were also killed. Furthermore, American sources also estimate that from that first raid on Tokyo to the end of the war approximately sixty Japanese cities were laid waste and that roughly 300,000-400,000 civilians were killed in Gen. Curtis LeMay’s firebombing raids.

The firebombing of Japan by the United States Air Force in the spring and summer of 1945 was simply one of the greatest war crimes in world history. Arguments that the operation helped speed Japanese defeat and surrender are little more than self-serving nonsense. For all intents and purposes Japan was already defeated, as the January, 1945 attempts to surrender already illustrated. In that month, peace offers to the Americans were already being tendered. The mere fact that the vast majority of the estimated 300,000-400,000 deaths from firebombing were women, children and the elderly

should alone put the utter lie to the claim that such a crime added anything material to ultimate American victory. As was the case with the saturation bombing of Germany and the consequent firestorms that slaughtered countless women and children, far from pushing a nation to surrender, the murder of helpless innocents in fact enraged and strengthened the resolve of the nation's soldiers, sailors and airmen to fight, if necessary, to the death.

“Seeing my home town ravaged in this way inspired me with patriotic zeal,” revealed one young Japanese speaking for millions. “I volunteered for military service soon after the . . . raid because I felt that in this way I could get even with the Americans and British, who . . . were nothing but devils and beasts.”⁷⁰

And as for the American “estimates” of Japanese firebombing deaths. . . . When the first B-29 raid took place in March, 1945, the targeted killing zone of Tokyo contained a population of roughly 1.5 million people. Given the fact that most living in this area were, as always, the most vulnerable—women, children, the old, the slow—and given the tactics used—saturation firebombing, dry conditions, gale force winds to accelerate the flames, encirclement, fighter aircraft machinegunning those in parks or along rivers—and given the fact that the firestorm's devastation was utter and succeeded even beyond Curtis LeMay's most sadistic dreams, to suggest that out of a million and a half potential victims in the death zone only a mere 100,000 to 200,000 died while well over a million women and children somehow managed to escape the racing inferno is a deliberate attempt to reduce the number of slain and thereby, with an eye to future criticism and condemnation, a deliberate attempt to reduce the crime itself.

Additionally, although the greatest loss of Japanese life occurred during the Tokyo raids, hundreds of thousands of victims also perished in other large cities. To suggest, as modern American sources do, that even including the death toll in Tokyo the number killed in similar raids nationwide only came to 300,000-400,000 victims is, again, a deliberate attempt to reduce the number of victims in hope of reducing the extent of the crime. Indeed, any modern attempt that calculates the number of firebombing deaths in Japan at less than one million should not be taken seriously.

As one expert wrote:

The mechanisms of death were so multiple and simultaneous—oxygen deficiency and carbon monoxide poisoning, radiant heat and direct flames, debris and the trampling feet of stampeding crowds—that causes of death were later hard to ascertain.⁷¹

Accurate for the most part, one element left out of that death assessment is also that which seems the least likely—drowning. In one of the cruelest of ironies, more people may have actually died from drowning during the firestorm raids than from the flames themselves. In their frantic attempts to escape the torturous heat, even those who could not swim—the very old, the very young—sprang into any body of water available—reservoirs, rivers, canals, ponds, lakes, even large, deep water tanks—and took their chances there, drowning below being clearly preferable to burning above. Of the tens of thousands of drowning victims recovered, no doubt tens of thousands more were swept down rivers and streams and out to sea, never to be seen again.

Whether they drowned or burned to death, it was all one and the same to Curtis LeMay.

“I’ll tell you what war is about,” explained the merciless US general, “you’ve got to kill people, and when you’ve killed enough they stop fighting.”⁷²

Unfortunately, while a significant percentage of Americans felt just as LeMay, virtually all US leaders and opinion molders felt that way.

“Keep ’Em Frying,” laughed the Atlanta (Ga) Constitution.⁷³

And “keep ’em frying” Curtis LeMay would.

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Fortunately for the future of mankind, in the very midst of a merciless war waged by evil men and prolonged by equally evil politicians, many ordinary individuals nevertheless always remain true to their better selves.

In spite of the US firebombing massacre and the inhuman “targets of opportunity” slaughter taking place, when an injured American fighter pilot was forced to bail out over Japan, instead of being machine-gunned as he floated down or being beaten to death by angry villagers when he touched ground, he was instead taken to a hospital that his serious wounds might be treated.

During his short stay, four young Japanese pilots, curious more than anything, visited the injured American. Whatever transpired during those brief moments of broken English, of eyes wide with wonder for an enemy pilot, and perhaps even soft smiles of sympathy for a dying brother at arms—a bond was quickly formed.

Finally, as the Japanese air men said their polite goodbyes and quietly turned to leave, the fast failing US pilot begged one of the young men to please wait for a moment. Working something free from his hand, the heavily bandaged American asked the visitor, only moments before his mortal enemy, for a first, and final, favor: When the madness was finally over, when reason had once more returned to the world, would the young man please carry the wedding ring to the United States? And once there would he please tell a young American widow how her young American pilot had fallen to earth one day and how he had died?⁷⁴

Chapter 5 The Hate of Hell

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orrific as denazification was in the British, French and, especially, the American Zones, it was nothing compared to what took place in Poland, behind Soviet lines. In hundreds of concentration camps sponsored by an apparatus called the

“Office of State Security,” thousands of Germans—male and female, old and young, high and low, Nazi and anti-Nazi, SS, Wehrmacht, Volkssturm, Hitler Youth, all—were rounded up and imprisoned. Staffed and run by Jews, with help from Poles, Czechs, Russians, and other concentration camp survivors, the prisons were little better than torture chambers where dying was a thing to be prolonged, not hastened. While those with fair hair, blue eyes and handsome features were first to go, anyone who spoke German would do.¹

Moments after arrival prisoners were made horrifyingly aware of their fate. John Sack, himself a Jew, reports on one camp run by twenty-six-year-old Shlomo Morel:

“I was at Auschwitz,” Shlomo proclaimed, lying to the Germans but, even more, to himself, psyching himself like a fighter the night of the championship, filling himself with hate for the Germans around him. “I was at Auschwitz for six long years, and I swore that if I got out, I’d pay all you Nazis back.” His eyes sent spears, but the “Nazis” sent him a look of simple bewilderment. . . . “Now sing the Horst Wessel Song!” No one did, and Shlomo, who carried a hard rubber club, hit it against a bed like some judge’s gavel. “Sing it, I say!”

Cautiously, nervously, a few of the terrified Germans began mouthing the words to the old Nazi Party anthem. In a moment, angry and cursing, Morel shouted that everyone must sing, only louder. All quickly did. This sound, of course, quickly enraged Morel even more than simple silence. Exploding toward the blondest German in the room, the attacker swung his rubber club and smashed it against the man’s head. As the victim reeled backward, Morel hit the hated blond head again even as he screamed at the stumbling victim to keep singing.

“Nazi pig!” shouted Morel.

Singling out another German who was still not singing loud enough to suit him, Morel’s club came down hard again . . . and again.

“Schweine!” cried the crazed attacker.

When the victim instinctively raised his arms for protection, the furious Jew threw down the club and grabbed the leg of a wooden stool. After beating the man so savagely that the leg actually broke, Morel grabbed another stool and continued the bloody assault. By this time, all the horrified prisoners had naturally quit singing. It was at this point that the other Jewish guards attacked all the remaining Germans and brutally clubbed each, one after the other. Later that night, when the exhausted guards had finished, those prisoners still breathing were ordered back to their cells.

“Pigs! We will fix you up!” yelled the Jews as the dazed and bloody victims staggered from the room.²

The next night it was more of the same for the new German arrivals . . . and the next night and the next and the next. Those who survived such “welcoming committees” at this and other camps were flung back into their pens.

“I was put with 30 women into a cell, which was intended to accommodate one person,” Gerlinde Winkler recalled. “The narrow space, into which we were rammed, was unbearable and our legs were all entangled together. . . . The women, ill with dysentery, were only allowed to go out once a day, in order to relieve themselves. A bucket without a cover was pushed into the cell with the remark: ‘Here you have one, you German sows.’ The stink was insupportable, and we were not allowed to open the little window.”³

“The air in the cells became dense, the smell of the excrement filled it, the heat was like in Calcutta, and the flies made the ceiling black,” wrote John Sack. “I’m choking, the Germans thought, and one even took the community razor blade and, in despair, cut his throat open with it.”⁴

When the wretched inmates were at last pried from their hellish tombs, it was only for interrogation. Sack continues:

As many as eight interrogators, almost all Jews, stood around any one German saying, “Were you in the Nazi Party?” Sometimes a German said, “Yes,” and the boys shouted, “Du schwein! You pig!” and beat him and broke his arm, perhaps, before sending him to his cell. . . . But usually a German said, “No,” and the boys . . . told him, “You’re lying. You were a Nazi.”

As before, there was never a correct answer that the Germans could offer. A “yes” to any particular question brought a beating just as certainly as a “no” did. Often, to the question, “Were you in the Nazi Party?” a German’s simple and truthful denial would elicit hours, even days of brutal beatings until the pathetic victim would actually scream, “Yes, I was a Nazi!”

“But sometimes a German wouldn’t confess,” explains Sack. “One such hard case was a fifty year-old. . . .”

He’d lost his left arm in World War I and was using his right arm to gesture with, and, to the boy, he may have seemed to be Heiling Hitler. The boy became violent. He grabbed the man’s collar, hit the man’s head against the wall, hit it against it ten times more, threw the man’s body onto the floor, and, in his boots, jumped on the man’s cringing chest as though jumping rope. A half dozen other interrogators, almost all Jews, pushed the man onto a couch, pulled off his trousers, and hit him with hard rubber clubs and hard rubber hoses full of stones. The sweat started running down the Jews’ arms,

and the blood down the man's naked legs.

“Warst du in der Partei [Were you in the Party]?”

“Nein [No]!”

“Warst du in der Partei?”

“Nein!” the German screamed—screamed, till the boys had to go to

Shlomo's kitchen for a wooden spoon and to use it to cram some rags in the German's mouth. Then they resumed beating him. . . . The more the man contradicted them, the more they hated him for it.⁵

After undergoing similar sessions on a regular basis, the victim was brought back for the eighth time.

By now, the man was half unconscious due to his many concussions, and he wasn't thinking clearly. The boys worked on him with rubber and oakwood clubs and said, “Do you still say you weren't in the Party?”

“No! I didn't say I wasn't in the Party!”

“You didn't?”

“No!” said the punch drunk man. “I never said it!”

“You were in the Party?”

“Yes!”

The boys stopped beating him. They practically sighed, as if their

ordeal were over now. They lit up cigarettes. . . .

“Scram,” one said to the German. The man stood up, and he had his hand on the doorknob when one of the boys impulsively hit the back of his head, and he fell to the floor, unconscious. “Aufstehen, du Deutsches schwein. Stand up, you German pig,” the boys said, kicking him till he stood up and collapsed again. Two boys carried him to his cell and dropped him in a corner. . . .⁶

Like the above, most torture sessions lacked even the pretense of an examination.

“My cell door opened. The guard, who, because of the foul smell, held a handkerchief to his nose, cried, ‘Reimann, Eva! Come!’”

Hands tied, Eva was led to the first floor torture chamber where an

“interrogator” yelled at her to kick her shoes off and lay on the floor. With a bamboo stick the man then began beating the soles of the woman’s feet savagely. When Eva screamed out, sharp blows to her face caused profuse bleeding from the mouth and gums. Again, the bamboo whistled down on the feet and again the victim screamed at the “unbearable” pain.

Finally, cigarette in mouth, the head of the prison entered the room.

“What’s wrong here?” asked the smiling man. “Why do you let yourself be beaten? You just have to sign this document. Or should we jam your fingers in the door, until the bones are broad?”

When Eva refused, a man lifted her up by the ankles then let her drop hard on her head. For a moment, the stunned woman lay in a spreading pool of blood.

“Stand up!” someone shouted.

With “unspeakable pain,” Eva did manage to rise. When a pistol was placed to her head and someone demanded that she “confess,” the victim simply begged the man to shoot her.

“Yes, I hoped to be freed from all his tortures,” recalled Eva. “I begged him, ‘Please pull the trigger.’”⁷

After barely surviving his own “interrogation,” one teenager was taken to the camp infirmary.

“My body was green, but my legs were fire red,” the boy said. “My wounds were bound with toilet paper, and I had to change the toilet paper every day. I was in the perfect place to watch what went on. . . . All the patients were beaten people, and they died everywhere: at their beds, in the washroom, on the toilet. At night, I had to step over the dead as if that were normal to do.”⁸

At another torture camp, “prisoners who do not die of starvation or are not beaten to death, are made to stand up to their necks, night after night until they die, in cold water.”⁹

When the supply of victims ran low, it was a simple matter to find more. Any man or woman with blond or light hair, any man or woman who was handsome or beautiful, any man or woman who was tall and slim, virtually anyone who did not look dark or Jewish was a potential victim. Since black was the color of the SS, even those unsuspecting individuals who wore that color of pants or skirts could be brought to the torture pens to “confess.”

When a fourteen-year-old was brought into one prison, the young female guards set him on fire. It mattered little, if at all, that the black pants he wore were merely part of his boy scout uniform.¹⁰

At the larger prison camps, Germans died by the hundreds daily.

“You pigs!” the commandant then cried, and he beat the Germans with their stools, often killing them. At dawn many days, a Jewish guard cried, “Eins! Zwei! Drei! Vier!” and marched the Germans into the woods outside their camp.

“Halt! Get your shovels! Dig!” the guard cried, and, when the Germans had dug a big grave, he put a picture of Hitler in. “Now cry!” the guard said. “And sing All the Dogs Are Barking!” and all the Germans moaned,

“All the dogs are barking,
All the dogs are barking,
Just the little hot-dogs,
Aren’t barking at all.”

The guard then cried, “Get undressed!” and, when the Germans were

naked, he beat them, poured liquid manure on them, or, catching a toad, shoved the fat thing down a German’s throat, the German soon dying.¹¹

Utterly unhinged by years of propaganda, by the loss of jobs, homes, and loved ones, for the camp operators, no torture, no sadism, no bestiality, seemed too monstrous to inflict on those now in their power. Some Germans were forced to crawl on all fours and eat their own excrement as well as that of others. Many were drowned in open latrines. Hundreds were herded into buildings and burned to death or sealed in caskets and buried alive.¹²

Near Lamsdorf, German women were forced to disinter bodies from a Polish burial site. According to John Sack:

The women did, and they started to suffer nausea as the bodies, black as the stuff in a gutter, appeared. The faces were rotten, the flesh was glue, but the guards—who had often seemed psychopathic, making a German woman drink urine, drink blood, and eat a man’s excrement, inserting an oily five-mark bill in a woman’s vagina, putting a match to it—shouted at the women . . . “Lie down with them!” The women did, and the guards shouted,

“Hug them!”

“Kiss them!”

“Make love with them!”

and, with their rifles, pushed on the backs of the women's heads until their eyes, noses and mouths were deep in the Polish faces' slime. The women who clamped their lips couldn't scream, and the women who screamed had to taste something vile. Spitting, retching, the women at last stood up, the wet tendrils still on their chins, fingers, clothes, the wet seeping into the fibers, the stink like a mist around them as they marched back to Lamsdorf.

There were no showers there, and the corpses had all had typhus, apparently, and sixty-four women . . . died.¹³

Not surprisingly, the mortality rate at the concentration camps was staggering and relatively few survived. At one prison of eight thousand, a mere 1,500 lived to reach home.¹⁴ And of those "lucky" individuals who did leave with their lives, few could any longer be called human.

And while Jews inside the torture camps of the Soviet zone were living out their darkest fantasies and doing their sadistic best to prolong the deaths of helpless Germans, other Jews outside the prisons were doing their best to actually speed up the deaths of Germans in Germany itself. With Allied bayonets to cover their every crime, Jews enjoyed a virtual carte blanche after the war to do as they pleased in the war-ravaged Reich, free of arrest, jail or prosecution.

Near Nuremberg in the spring of 1946, Jewish terrorists discovered where the bread was baked for an American prison holding German SS officers. Early one morning the group entered the bakery and laced the day's batch of bread with arsenic. According to reports, nearly two thousand German POWs fell ill after eating the bread and of that number as many as one thousand may have ultimately perished. Hoping to up the ante, another group of Jews plotted to poison the water supplies in a number of large German cities, including Hamburg and Munich. Had the murderous scheme not been foiled, a death count in the hundreds of thousands might easily have been reached.¹⁵

For the most part, Allied political and military leaders turned a blind eye to the savage slaughter in the US and Soviet zones. Some, like new American military governor of Germany, Lt. Gen. Lucius Clay, even claimed that far

from being sadistic monsters, the Jewish commanders running the American and Polish torture pens were admirable for their forgiving nature and the humanity they displayed to their former enemies.

“[I]n spite of their natural hatred of the German people,” wrote Clay, “[Jews] have been remarkably restrained in avoiding incidents of a serious nature with the German population. . . . [T]heir record for preserving law and order is to my mind one of the remarkable achievements which I have witnessed.”¹⁶

“We do not want revenge. If we took this vengeance it would mean we would fall to the depths and ethics and morals the German nation has been in these past ten years,” said Jewish doctor, Zalman Grinberg, in a public speech, even as Jewish camp commanders were drowning German men, women and children in outdoor latrines and burning them alive in wooden sheds. “We are not able to slaughter women and children! We are not able to burn millions of people! We are not able to starve hundreds of thousands!”¹⁷

Despite Grinberg, Clay and other soothing apologists, when a smattering of accounts began to leak from Poland of the unspeakable crimes being committed, many in the West were stunned, sickened.

“One would expect that after the horrors in Nazi concentration camps, nothing like that could ever happen again,” muttered one US senator, who then reported on beatings, torture and “brains splashed on the ceiling.”¹⁸

“I’d rather be ten years in a German camp than one day in a Polish one,” admitted a man who had spent time in both.”¹⁹

Added Winston Churchill: “Enormous numbers [of Germans] are utterly unaccounted for. It is not impossible that tragedy on a prodigious scale is unfolding itself behind the Iron Curtain.”²⁰

While Churchill and others in the West were expressing shock and surprise over the merciless massacre taking place in the Soviet zone, precious little was said about the “tragedy on a prodigious scale” that was transpiring in their own backyard.

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Among the millions imprisoned by the Allies were thousands of Germans accused of having a direct or indirect hand in war crimes. Even during the war, as Allied newspapers were creating one propaganda piece after another on reported German atrocities, many Allied military leaders recognized such charges as politically motivated lies. Most combat generals had great respect for their battlefield opposites. A few refused to be silent.

“Frankly,” stated US Maj. Gen. Robert W. Grow, “I was aghast, as were many of my contemporaries, when we learned of the proposed ‘war crimes’ trials and the fact that military commanders were among the accused. I know of no general officer who approved of them.” Having led an armored division all the way through both France and Germany the American officer emphatically and fearlessly declared: There was “no atrocity problem” caused by the German military.²¹

“In no instance,” continued General Grow, “did I hear of personnel from our division receiving treatment other than proper under the ‘Rules of Land Warfare’.”²²

In fact, added a writer for an American journal, of all belligerents the Germans far and away had the best record. Not only did the Wehrmacht treat all prisoners according to the rules of the Geneva Convention but in virtually every other respect the dictates of the International Red Cross were obeyed stringently. Unlike the Americans and Soviets who abused, brutally beat or murdered virtually every surrendering German they laid their hands on and literally laughed at the Geneva Convention, an Allied soldier raising his arms to the Germans was from that point on guaranteed that he would not only survive the war, but that he would survive the war free from beatings, torture, starvation, and death, even free from insults and verbal abuse.²³

During the final days, while Germany teetered on the brink, numerous neutral observers noted that no nation in modern memory upheld its dignity and honor to a greater degree, to the very end, than did National Socialist Germany.²⁴

Nevertheless, the victorious Allied politicians demanded swift and severe punishment for German “war criminals” and swift and severe punishment they would have. Thus, with the stage set for the trial at Nuremberg, Allied

prosecutors were urged to get the most damning indictments in as little time as possible. Unfortunately for the accused, their captors seemed determined to inflict the greatest amount of pain possible in the process.

“[W]e were thrown into small cells stark naked,” Hans Schmidt later wrote. “The cells in which three or four persons were incarcerated were six and a half by ten feet in size and had no windows or ventilation.”²⁵

When Schmidt and the other prisoners went to the toilets they were forced to run a gauntlet of American soldiers who hit the men with clubs, belts and broom sticks. Genitals were an especial target. Inside the toilet itself another guard struck and spit on the prisoners. On the return to their cells the Germans were compelled to endure the same brutal beating.²⁶

Once in their totally darkened cells, which were heated like ovens, Schmidt and the others were fed almost nothing. Occasionally, guards entered and chained the men back to back, then threw large amounts of water on the red-hot radiators which created such clouds of steam that breathing was almost impossible. At other times the Americans amused themselves by pushing the naked men against the radiators, which caused severe burns.

For thirteen days and nights Schmidt and the others received the same treatment, over and over. When they pleaded for water, the guards mocked and laughed at the suffering men. As each prisoner eventually collapsed, cold water roused him again. Every twenty minutes the cell doors were thrown open and while the men were forced to stand at attention, the guards insulted and struck them. Two plates of food, heavily spiced with salt and pepper to make the prisoners even thirstier, were delivered every day. Burned, beaten, kicked, sleepless, starving, dying of thirst. . . .

“In this condition,” said Schmidt, “I was brought to trial.”²⁷ ❖ ❖ ❖

During the Nazi war crime hearings, almost any method that would obtain a “confession” was employed. Some methods were simple, but effective.

After one German officer refused to cooperate with interrogators, the British tried the time-tested sleep-deprivation torture. “We sat in the cell with him, night and day, armed with axe [sic] handles,” admitted one Tommy. “Our job

was to prod him every time he fell asleep to help break down his resistance.” After three days and nights without sleep, the German did indeed break down and made a full confession.²⁸ Other “investigators” used a combination of mental and physical pain.

Eager to implicate high-ranking German officers in the Malmedy Massacre, American investigator Harry Thon ordered Wehrmacht sergeant, Willi Schafer, to write out an incriminating affidavit. When Thon returned the following morning and read the report, he angrily tore it up and struck Schafer. After threatening to have him killed unless Willi wrote what was wanted, Thon left. Minutes later Schafer’s cell door opened, a black hood encrusted with blood was placed over his head and the prisoner was led to another room. With Thon’s threat echoing in his ears, the black cap had a crushing effect on Schafer’s will. Although they later admitted they were forced to confess falsely, four men of Willi’s company had accused him of war crimes. Nevertheless, the sergeant still refused to incriminate his superiors.

Finally, an exasperated Harry Thon told Schafer that if he continued his silence this would be taken as proof of his Nazi opinions, and his execution was simply a matter of time. Thon told the German that he stood no chance against four witnesses, and advised Willi for his own good to make a statement against his superiors after which he would be set free. Schafer still refused. He told Thon that although his memory was good, he was unable to recall any of the events his tormentor demanded he admit to.

The angry American left but returned shortly with another Jew, Lieutenant [William] Perl, who immediately began to threaten Schafer. In a menacing manner, Perl made it clear that if the victim signed the confession he would be set free; if he refused, then within half an hour he would be dead. Alone, exhausted, emotionally drained, Willi at last reached his limit.

“I decided for life,” admitted the sergeant.²⁹

Another former soldier unable to resist the pressure was Joachim Hoffman. Unlike Willi Schafer’s torment, which was more mental than physical, Hoffman’s ordeal was entirely physical. Soon after placing a black hood over his head in preparation for his “hearing,” the guards began hitting and kicking

the helpless man. Instead of helping the hooded prisoner down two flights of stairs the Americans simply kicked him down, resulting in serious injuries to Hoffman's head and face. At the hearing itself, when the former soldier reported to the panel his brutal treatment, they only laughed. Because the prisoner's replies to questions were not the answers the panel wanted to hear, the hood was placed back on his head, he was beaten, then he was kicked repeatedly in the groin.³⁰ One favored torture of the sadists, and one with far worse consequences than mere kicks in the genitals, was the slow and systematic crushing of both testicles, either in a vice or with the aid of metal tools; it was a medieval process, explained a witness, one that had victims "thrashing about and screaming like wild animals for hours."³¹

Understandably, after such sessions, even the strongest submitted and signed papers incriminating themselves and others.

"If you confess you will go free," nineteen-year-old Siegfried Jaenckel was told. "[Y]ou need only to say you had an order from your superiors. But if you won't speak you will be hung."³²

Despite the mental and physical abuse, young Jaenckel held out as long as he could: "I was beaten and I heard the cries of the men being tortured in adjoining cells, and whenever I was taken for a hearing I trembled with fear. . . . Subjected to such duress I eventually gave in, and signed the long statement dictated to me."³³

Far from being isolated or extreme cases, such methods of extorting confessions were the rule rather than the exception. Wrote author Freda Utley, who learned of the horror after speaking with American jurist, Edward van Roden:

Beatings and brutal kickings; knocking-out of teeth and breaking of jaws; mock trials; solitary confinement; torture with burning splinters. . . . Judge van Roden said: "All but two of the Germans in the 139 cases we investigated had been kicked in the testicles beyond repair. This was standard operating procedure with our American investigators." He told of one German who had had lighted matchsticks forced under his fingernails by the American investigators to extort a confession, and had appeared at his trial with his fingers still bandaged from the atrocity.³⁴

In addition to testimony given under torture, those who might have spoken in defense of the accused were prevented. Moreover, hired “witnesses” were paid by the Americans to parrot the prosecution’s charges.³⁵

When criticism such as Utley’s and van Roden’s surfaced, and even as victims were being hung by the hundreds, those responsible defended their methods.

“We couldn’t have made those birds talk otherwise. . . ,” laughed Colonel A. H. Rosenfeld. “It was a trick, and it worked like a charm.”³⁶ ❖ ❖ ❖

Meanwhile, as the judicial charade was in progress behind prison walls in Germany, a “trick” of another kind was playing out to the south in neighboring Austria.

When the Western Allies overran Germany and Austria, millions of Russians fell into their hands. Among the many points discussed at Yalta was one especially near and dear to the heart of Josef Stalin—the repatriation of all Soviet citizens, including large numbers of POWs and slave laborers.³⁷ Among all Soviet nationals, however, Stalin was particularly anxious to lay hands on Andrei Vlasov, the fiercely anticommunist general who had hoped to lead his million-man army in the liberation of Russia. Eager as always to please “Uncle Joe,” as they affectionately dubbed him, Roosevelt and Churchill happily agreed to send back all Soviets encountered, regardless of laws, treaties or the common dictates of decency and humanity. Although several repatriations of Russian prisoners had occurred shortly after Yalta, fear of German reprisals against Allied POWs prevented more.³⁸ Now, with the war over and the threat of German riposte removed, the return of Russians began in earnest.

Since Soviet soldiers captured or surrendering in German uniform were guaranteed protection under the Geneva Convention, most Russian prisoners felt certain they were beyond Stalin’s grasp; that the Western democracies, founded on freedom, liberty and law, would honor the treaty and protect them, all blindly assumed.³⁹

“We believed totally in the Western forces,” admitted one anticommunist from Russia. “We believed in them as the defenders of Western democracy. It

did not enter our heads that we, active fighters against communism, should be given into the hands of the communists.”⁴⁰

Although many British and American soldiers initially despised their Soviet captives, both for being an enemy, as well as “traitors” to their country, attitudes among most began to soften upon closer examination. “When the screening began, I had little sympathy for these Russians in their battered German uniforms . . . ,” wrote William Sloane Coffin, Jr., who acted as translator for several colonels who interrogated the prisoners. “But as the colonels, eager to establish their cover and satisfy their curiosity, encouraged the Russians to tell their personal histories, I began to understand the dilemma the men had faced.”⁴¹

They spoke not only of the cruelties of collectivization in the thirties but of arrests, shootings and wholesale deportations of families. Many of the men themselves had spent time in Soviet jails. . . . Soon my own interest was so aroused that I began to spend evenings in the camp hearing more and more tales of arrest and torture Hearing . . . the personal histories of those who had joined Vlasov’s army made me increasingly uncomfortable with the words “traitor” and “deserter,” as applied to these men. Maybe Stalin’s regime was worthy of desertion and betrayal?⁴²

Explained a Russian prisoner, one of thousands captured by the Germans who joined Gen. Vlasov rather than starve in a POW camp:

You think, Captain, that we sold ourselves to the Germans for a piece of bread? Tell me, why did the Soviet Government forsake us? Why did it forsake millions of prisoners? We saw prisoners of all nationalities, and they were taken care of. Through the Red Cross they received parcels and letters from home; only the Russians received nothing. In Kassel I saw American Negro prisoners, and they shared their cakes and chocolates with us. Then why didn’t the Soviet Government, which we considered our own, send us at least some plain hard tack? . . . Hadn’t we fought? Hadn’t we defended the Government? Hadn’t we fought for our country? If Stalin refused to have anything to do with us, we didn’t want to have anything to do with Stalin!⁴³

“I lost, so I remain a traitor. . . ,” conceded Vlasov himself, who, though he might easily have saved himself, chose instead to share the fate of his men.

As the Russian general reminded his captors, however, if he was a traitor for seeking foreign aid to liberate his land, then so in their own day were George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.⁴⁴

Despite the Geneva Convention, despite the strong likelihood that returnees would be massacred, Gen. Eisenhower and other top leaders were determined that Russian repatriation would be carried out to the letter. Terrible portents of what lay ahead had come even before the war was over. When the British government prepared to return from England thousands of Soviets in the winter of 1944/45, many prisoners attempted suicide or tried to escape. Once the wretched cargo was finally forced onto ships, heavy guards were posted to prevent the prisoners from leaping overboard. Upon reaching Russian ports, few British seamen could doubt the fate of their charges once they were marched out of sight by the NKVD. At Odessa on the Black Sea, noisy aircraft soon appeared and circled tightly over the docks while loud sawmills joined the chorus to drown the sounds of screams and gunfire echoing from the warehouses. Within half an hour, the airplanes flew away, the sawmills shut down, and all was quiet again.⁴⁵ A similar scenario was played out when four thousand Soviets were forcibly repatriated from the United States.⁴⁶

To prevent Russian riots in Europe when the war was over, Allied authorities kept the operations top secret, with only a minimum of officers privy to the moves. Additionally, rumors and counter-rumors were planted, stating that the prisoners would be transferred to cleaner camps soon or even set free.⁴⁷

Not all Americans had the stomach for it. As a translator, William Sloane Coffin, Jr. had not only grown to like and respect the Russians, but he empathized with their plight. On the night before the surprise repatriation from the camp at Plattling, Germany, the prisoners staged a theatrical performance in honor of several US interrogators. Sickened by their own treachery, the officers spent the night drinking and ordered Coffin to fill in for them instead.⁴⁸

For a while I thought I was going to be physically ill. Several times I turned to the [Russian] commandant sitting next to me. It would have been easy to tip him off. There was still time. The camp was minimally guarded. Once outside the men could tear up their identity cards, get other clothes. . . . Yet I

couldn't bring myself to do it. It was not that I was afraid of being court-martialed.... But I too had my orders....The closest I came was at the door when the commandant said good night...I almost blurted out ...“Get out and quick.” But I didn't. Instead I drove off cursing the commandant for being so trusting.⁴⁹

In the pre-dawn darkness the following day, as tanks and searchlights surrounded the camp, hundreds of US soldiers moved in. Surprised though they were, some Russians acted swiftly.

“Despite the fact that there were three GIs to every Russian,” Coffin noted, “I saw several men commit suicide. Two rammed their heads through windows sawing their necks on the broken glass until they cut their jugular veins. Another took his leather boot-straps, tied a loop to the top of his triple-decker bunk, put his head through the noose and did a back flip over the edge which broke his neck.”⁵⁰

With clubs swinging, troops ruthlessly drove the startled survivors into waiting trucks which were soon speeding toward the Soviet lines.⁵¹

“[W]e stood over them with guns and our orders were to shoot to kill if they tried to escape from our convoy,” confessed an American officer in one group. “Needless to say many of them did risk death to effect their escape.”⁵²

Much like the British and American sailors who had delivered a living cargo to its executioner, Allied soldiers knew very well the journey was a one-way trip. “We . . . understood they were going to their deaths. Of this, there was never any doubt whatsoever,” a British Tommy admitted. “It was that night and the following day that we started to count the small-arms fire coming from the Russian sector to the accompaniment of the finest male voice choir I have ever heard. The voices echoed round and round the countryside. Then the gunfire would be followed by a huge cheer.”⁵³ In much the same way as above were the rest of Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army forced from the camps in Germany and Austria and handed to Stalin. Many, maybe most, were dead within hours of delivery.

“When we captured them, we shot them as soon as the first intelligible Russian word came from their mouths,” said Captain Alexander Solzhenitsyn.⁵⁴

Another group of “traitors” Stalin was eager to have repatriated were the Cossacks. Long known for its courage and fierce independence, the colorful nation fled Russia and years of communist persecution when the German Army began its withdrawal west in 1943.⁵⁵ Recorded an Allied soldier:

As an army they presented an amazing sight. Their basic uniform was German, but with their fur Cossack caps, their mournful dundreary whiskers, their knee high riding boots, and their roughly-made horsedrawn carts bearing all their worldly goods and chattels, including wife and family, there could be no mistaking them for anything but Russians. They were a tableau from the Russia of 1812. Cossacks are famed as horsemen and these lived up to their reputation.⁵⁶

Like the Americans who returned Vlasov’s army, the British were eager to appease Stalin by handing back the hapless Cossacks. Unlike the Americans though, the British realized that by separating the thirty thousand followers from their leaders would make the transfers simpler. When the elders were requested to attend a “conference” on their relocation elsewhere in Europe, they complied. Honest and unsophisticated—many having served in the old Imperial Army—the Cossack officers were easily deceived.⁵⁷ “On the honor of a British officer . . . ,” assured the English when the people asked about their leaders. “They’ll all be back this evening. The officers are only going to a conference.”⁵⁸

“They believed implicitly in the word of an Englishman,” acknowledged one British soldier.⁵⁹

With the beheading of the Cossack Nation, the job of repatriating the rest was made easier, but not easy. When the men, women and children at the various Cossack camps refused to enter the trucks and go willingly to their slaughter, Tommies, armed with rifles, bayonets and pick handles, marched in. “We prefer death than to be returned to the Soviet Union. . . ,” proclaimed signs printed in crude English. “We, husbands, mothers, brothers, sisters, and children pray for our salvation!!!”⁶⁰ Recounted one British officer from the Cossack camp at Lienz, Austria:

As soon as the platoon approached to commence loading, the people formed themselves into a solid mass, kneeling and crouching with their arms locked around each others’ bodies. As individuals on the outskirts of the group were

pulled away, the remainder compressed themselves into a still tighter body, and as panic gripped them [they] started clambering over each other in frantic efforts to get away from the soldiers. The result was a pyramid of hysterical, screaming human beings, under which a number of people were trapped. The soldiers made frantic efforts to split this mass in order to try to save the lives of these persons pinned underneath, and pick helms and rifle butts were used on arms and legs to force individuals to loosen their hold. When we eventually cleared this group, we discovered that one man and one woman [had] suffocated. Every person of this group had to be forcibly carried onto the trucks.⁶¹

When one huddled mob was beaten into submission, the troops waded into another.

“There was a great crush,” recalled a Cossack mother as the Tommies cut and clubbed their way forward. “I found myself standing on someone’s body, and could only struggle not to tread on his face.”⁶²

One by one the soldiers snatched people and wrestled them up into the trucks, many of which then left only half-full. From all sides in the crowd could be heard cries: “Avaunt thee, Satan! Christ is risen! Lord have mercy upon us!” Virtually all who were pulled away by the soldiers, women as well as men, fought fanatically. When one soldier grabbed a child from his mother, a terrible struggle ensued in which the Tommie pulled the terrified child one way and the mother pulled him the other way. To the horror of all, the little boy was smashed violently against the side of a truck and dropped lifeless to the ground.⁶³

As in the case above, soldiers tried first to wrench children from their mothers’ arms for once a child had been hurled into a truck the parents were sure to follow. In the tumult, some victims managed to break free and run. Most were mowed down by machine-gun fire. Those not hit drowned themselves in the nearby river or cut the throats of their entire family. In the Lienz operation alone, as many as seven hundred men, women and children committed suicide or were cut down by bullets and bayonets.⁶⁴ Eventually, the entire Cossack nation had been delivered to the Soviets. Within days, most were either dead or bolted into cattle cars for the one-way train ride to Siberia.⁶⁵

Certainly, not every British or American officer had a heart for the repatriations, known broadly—and aptly—as “Operation Keelhaul.” Some

actually placed their careers on the line. When Alex Wilkinson was ordered to turn over Russians in his district to the Soviets, the British colonel replied: “Only if they are willing to go.”

It was then suggested to me that they should be collected and put into the trains whether they liked it or not. I then asked how they were to be put into the trains? And I was told that a few machine-guns might make them change their minds. To which I replied “that will not happen while I am here.”⁶⁶

When Wilkinson finally agreed to obey orders “on the one condition that the trains go west not east,” his commander was furious. “Within a fortnight of that meeting,” said the colonel, “I was relieved of my command and sent back to England with a report that ‘I lacked drive.’”⁶⁷

Another British officer who “lacked drive” was Harold Alexander. “To compel repatriation,” the field marshal informed his government from Italy, “would certainly either involve the use of force or drive them into committing suicide. . . . Such treatment, coupled with the knowledge that these unfortunate individuals are being sent to an almost certain death, is quite out of keeping with the traditions of democracy and justice, as we know them.”⁶⁸

Unfortunately, such courageous acts had little impact on the removals. Alexander, like Wilkinson, was soon sent elsewhere and officers less inclined to make waves took their place. Nevertheless, word of what was occurring did trickle out, forcing top Allied officials to issue denials.

“[I]t is not and has not been the policy of the US and British Government [sic] involuntarily to repatriate any Russian. . . ,” assured a spokesman for Supreme Allied Command.⁶⁹

“[N]o instances of coercion have been brought to our attention,” echoed US Secretary of State, George C. Marshall. “[I]t is against American tradition for us to compel these persons, who are now under our authority, to return against their will.”⁷⁰

With what little public concern there was allayed by such announcements, the Allies worked feverishly to fulfill their pact with Stalin. “We ought to get rid of them all as soon as possible,” wrote an impatient Winston Churchill.⁷¹

Another category of Russians the Allies repatriated were the POWs in German hands. Because of Stalin's well known equation of capture or surrender on the battlefield with treason, few of these starved, diseased and ragged Red Army veterans were eager to return where, at best, a slow, agonizing death in Siberia awaited. And even for those stalwart patriots who steadfastly refused to collaborate with the Germans and remained in their prison camps where, because the USSR had refused to sign the Geneva Convention, they ate tree bark, grass, and their dead comrades, a "tenner"—or ten years in Siberia—was almost mandatory.⁷² When a curious Russian guard queried one such repatriate what he had done to deserve a twenty-five year sentence, the hapless prisoner replied, "Nothing at all."

"You're lying," the guard laughed, "the sentence for 'nothing at all' is ten years."⁷³

Yet another group on the seemingly endless list Stalin wanted returned were Soviet slave laborers. Again, the Allies made haste to comply. "We had to go round the farms to collect the Russians who had been working as laborers on the farms," one British lieutenant remembered. "[They were] mostly old men and women, and [we] were amazed and somewhat perplexed to have people who had literally been slaves on German farms, falling on their knees in front of you and begging to be allowed to stay, and crying bitterly—not with joy—when they were told they were being sent back to Russia."⁷⁴

"It very quickly became apparent," added another English officer, "that 99% of these people did not wish to return to the Motherland, because (a) they feared the Communist Party and the life they had lived in Soviet Russia and (b) life as slave-laborers in Nazi Germany had been better than life in Russia."⁷⁵ Because of their exposure to the West with its freedoms and high standard of living, Stalin rightly feared the "contaminating" influence these slaves might have on communism at home and abroad if allowed to remain. Another body of Russians Stalin demanded the return of were the emigres, or those "whites" who had fought the Bolsheviks in 1917 and fled to the West upon defeat. Included in the number were individuals who had been mere children at the time of the revolution. Indeed, so willing were the Allies to comply with Stalin's every demand, that Soviet authorities were themselves surprised at how easily this latter group of "traitors" were delivered to the executioner.⁷⁶

The roundups and repatriations continued across Europe until eventually over

five million Soviet citizens had been delivered to slavery, torture and death.⁷⁷ However, if the Allies expected to enamor Stalin by their actions, they were mistaken. In fact, quite the opposite occurred. Rightly regarding the repatriations as a Western betrayal of its natural allies, the Red dictator and other Soviet leaders viewed the entire program as proof of American and British moral decay and a blatant, “groveling” attempt at appeasement.⁷⁸ Curiously, it was Liechtenstein, one of the tiniest nations in Europe, that Stalin had most respect for, for it was Liechtenstein—a country with no army and a police force of only eleven men—that had the moral integrity to do what others did not dare. When the communists angrily demanded the return of all Soviet citizens within the little nation’s boundaries for “crimes against the Motherland,” Prince Franz Joseph II politely, but firmly, requested proof. When none was forthcoming, the Soviets quietly dropped the matter. Recalled a visitor: “I asked the Prince if he had not had misgivings or fears as to the success of this policy at the time. He seemed quite surprised at my question. ‘Oh no,’ he explained, ‘if you talk toughly with the Soviets they are quite happy. That, after all, is the language they understand.’”⁷⁹ When the camps were finally cleared and the dark deed was done, many soldiers who had participated wanted nothing more than to forget the entire episode. Most found, however, that they could not. “My part in the . . . operation left me a burden of guilt I am sure to carry the rest of my life,” confessed William Sloane Coffin, Jr.⁸⁰ “The cries of these men, their attempts to escape, even to kill themselves rather than be returned to the Soviet Union . . . still plague my memory,” echoed Brigadier General Frank L. Howley.⁸¹ “It just wasn’t human,” an American GI said simply.⁸² Well aware that some grim details from Operation Keelhaul were bound to surface, Allied leaders were quick to squash rumors and reassure the public. “[T]he United States Government has taken a firm stand against any forced repatriation and will continue to maintain this position,” announced a spokesman for the War Department long after most of the Russian returnees were either dead or enslaved. “There is no intention that any refugee be returned home against his will.”⁸³ To do otherwise, General Eisenhower later chimed, “would . . . violate the fundamental humanitarian principles we espoused.”⁸⁴ Even as he was soothing public concern over Russian repatriation, Eisenhower’s “humanitarian principles” were hard at work in the numerous

American concentration camps where upwards of a million helpless, disarmed German POWs were dying of hunger, thirst and outright murder.

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During the first summer of “peace” conquered Germany was little better than a vast concentration camp. Coinciding with the ruthless Allied program of denazification and “reeducation,” was the American and British policy of nonfraternization. In theory, “non-frat”—or, as some Allied soldiers termed it, “non-fuck”—was little more than a simple segregation of victors from vanquished to ensure that the occupation was both efficient and economical. In cold, hard fact, however, the program was a deliberate attempt to further degrade and demonize Germans and crush what little pride and respect remained.

Ran one post-war pamphlet issued to US troops:

[T]he shooting is over but there is a lot to be done. . . . Look out, the people are still a formidable enemy. . . . There are children who shuffle from one foot to another outside your mess hall; they’ll be too polite or too scared to ask for food but you can see in their eyes how hungry they are. . . . Old men and women pulling carts, young girls in threadbare clothing . . . are still better off than thousands of the Greeks and Dutch and Poles they enslaved. . . . The ragged German trudging along the street with a load of firewood may not look vicious but he has a lot in common with a trapped rat.⁸⁵

With centuries of colonial experience to draw upon, the British Government issued similar directives to its soldiers stationed in “darkest Germany”:

Do play your part as a representative of a conquering power and keep the Germans in their place. Give orders—don’t beg the question. Display cold, correct, dignified curtness and aloofness. Don’t try to be kind—it will be regarded as weakness. Drop heavily on any attempt to take charge or other forms of insolence. Don’t be too ready to listen to stories from attractive women—they may be acting under orders. Don’t show any aversion to another war if Germany does not learn her lesson this time.⁸⁶

While nonfraternization became the official vehicle to dispossess Germans of

their homes and property and deny them access to shops, stores and restaurants, unofficially the edicts acted as a license for the conquerors to abuse, insult and mistreat the conquered whenever the urge struck.⁸⁷

“I HATE GERMANS,” a sign over an American major’s desk warned. Not surprisingly, many enlisted men took such hints to heart. One American soldier, Joseph Halow, a young GI who had made friends of many Germans and knew how hard it was for them to keep the few clothes they owned clean, remembered one Jewish-American translator who never missed an opportunity to splash muddy water on pedestrians when driving his jeep. “He grinned at me,” said the soldier, “and freely admitted that it was all deliberate, that he thought the Germans had it coming.”⁸⁸ Another sport Allied soldiers in jeeps enjoyed was hooking with a cane the ankles of women they passed and upending them. German men were bashed over the head.⁸⁹

Joseph Halow recalled another incident that became all too common. “I noticed a crowd gathered at the corner,” said Halow. “Hurrying over, I discovered the attraction.”

What the American found was a GI beating a man savagely who was offering absolutely no resistance. As the victim rolled on the pavement in agony he begged again and again in German, “But I’ve done nothing!” His pleas did not calm the frenzied attacker in the least. Halow asked a bystander what had happened, then learned that the German had supposedly insulted an American girl by calling her a “whore.” As the man lay there helpless, the enraged soldier then commenced kicking him furiously, in the ribs, in the chest, all over his beaten body. Among the crowd watching were two US officers. From the look on his face, one of the men was clearly disgusted by the brutal assault. When Halow asked him to use his authority and stop the beating, the officer without a word merely shrugged his shoulders.⁹⁰

Nor was such random brutality lost on the Germans themselves. “When I was a soldier in France, I never had a chance to enjoy life and kick other people around as you do,” complained one former Wehrmacht member to an American. “We were strictly disciplined and told to be polite and considerate to the French; we lived with them in their houses, and did not throw them into the gutter as you do us. We have learned our lesson though; if there is

ever a next time you have taught us Germans what is permitted to a conqueror.”⁹¹

Although some soldiers wholeheartedly embraced the nonfraternization edict with a vindictiveness to satisfy even Eisenhower, many GIs and Tommies remained true to their better nature.

Peter Fabian, a young artillery officer in a British division, recalled one day when a “very distraught” German mother rushed up to him. The frantic woman had run miles from her farm seeking help for her baby who had been terribly scalded in an accident. Without any authority or permission, Fabian quickly found an army physician, then stole a jeep and sped the doctor and mother back to the farm. Though terribly burned, the child survived. The next morning, Fabian was ordered to report to the commander.

“How dare you speak to the Germans! You’ve absolutely no right,” growled the irate officer. “Don’t you know there’s a law about that sort of thing! Next time you’ll be in serious trouble.”

“This made me very, very angry,” recalled Fabian, “so I retorted: ‘Well, now I know how you Christians feel about these things, but I’m afraid we have other standards’.”

The commander’s face reddened, but he found no words. “Alright,” he ordered, “go.”

Fabian heard nothing more on the matter.⁹²

Walking with his German girlfriend one day, another British soldier saw an all-too-common sight approaching: A former Wehrmacht soldier shuffling slowly along, ragged, gaunt, downcast. Stepping smartly up to the starving man, the Tommy’s indignant girlfriend cursed her countryman as a “prolonger of war,” then slapped the man across the face. Shocked, outraged by the act, the Tommy quickly apologized, reached into his pocket, gave the man a gift of cigarettes, then abandoned his heartless girlfriend on the spot.⁹³

Such islands of humanity—tiny havens that they were—could not materially ease the dreadful conditions existing throughout Germany, nor could they ameliorate the vast sea of human suffering. Throughout the summer of 1945, the former Reich was still a land of “troglodytes” with urban-dwellers

clinging precariously to their caves and cracks. After viewing for himself conditions in Hamburg, Victor Gollancz was horrified.

“In one room were living a soldier, his wife (who is expecting a baby in a fortnight) and his seventy-two-year-old mother,” penned the Jewish publisher to his wife in England. “They live, eat, cook, work, and sleep in the one room. There is one bed; a table; two chairs; a very small side-table; and a little cooking stove. . . .”

The old mother used the single bed, added Gollancz, but the married couple were forced to sleep on the floor. The wife’s clothes were rags and she was barefoot. There was no baby clothes or cradle. Despite the wretched poverty all around, the main concern of the couple was finding a simple basket within the next two weeks to place the newborn in.

“I asked the old mother whether she had enough to eat,” continued the visitor, “and she replied with a smile, ‘Nein, nein, Ich bin immer hungrig (‘No, no, I am always hungry’)’—as if that were the fault of her appetite.”

Gollancz thought the terrible conditions in the home was unique until he stopped at the next dwelling.

“It was heaven—I really mean this—in comparison with the next place,” muttered the stunned journalist.

What Gollancz found was a “home” little better than a cave—a cellar covered under rubble. One tiny window offered a modicum of air and light. The air was so humid and heavy that the publisher’s glasses fogged over. There was a single bed in the place for the mother and father and a couch where a son, crippled from the war, lay. On an “indescribably filthy” mattress with sawdust spilling out, was the daughter.

She looked fifty but I suspect she was about twenty-five. . . . [with] several front teeth missing. She also appeared to be pretty crippled, and her hand was shaking terribly, I suppose from hunger. There was no free space in the cellar at all and again they lived, ate and slept here. Nobody could work—the young man could not because he was crippled, and the father because he was too weak. . . . The woman cried when the Salvation Army people gave her some money.⁹⁴

As Gollancz made mention, one of the few relief organizations that dared face and fight the incredible suffering, regardless of Allied political pressure, was the Salvation Army. With characteristic warmth and compassion that seemed all the more startling amid the crushing climate of hate and revenge, the charity dispensed food, clothing and shelter.

But even the heroic efforts of the Salvation Army and its wellfunded, well-organized staff could hardly make a dent in the growing catastrophe.

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In Berlin alone, an estimated 50,000 orphans struggled to survive. “[S]ome of them,” wrote a witness, were “one-eyed or one-legged veterans of seven or so, many so deranged by the bombing and the Russian attack that they screamed at the sight of any uniform, even a Salvation Army one.”⁹⁵

Given the feral conditions and the scarcity of resources, competition among the swarms of orphans was keen.

“Every time a lorry drove out of a coal depot,” one British officer recalled, “hundreds of little kids would run out after it to pick up any pieces of coal that fell off as it swept past, and many of them were run over in the melee.”⁹⁶

Some in the victorious nations were not troubled in the least by starving or dead children. In a blood-thirsty screed reminiscent of Ilya Ehrenburg, one hate-filled propagandist seemed to encourage the killing of German children. “There is nothing that is, decent, or gentle, or humble to be read in them,” the man stated to a British newspaper. “Everything that is beastly and lustful and cruel. This is a generation . . . trained deliberately in barbarity, trained to execute the awful orders of a madman. Not a clean thought has ever touched them. . . . Every German born since 1920 is under this satanic spell. The younger they are the more fiercely impregnated are they with its evil poison. Every child born under the Hitler regime is a lost child. It is a lost generation.”⁹⁷

While occupation troops dined on five-course meals complete with fried sole, Dutch steak and ice cream, thousands of starving children felt fortunate if a potato peel or crust of moldy bread was unearthed.⁹⁸

A British soldier recounted an incident that occurred during dinner at a British mess. In an adjacent hall, the dining men were startled by a loud

commotion. Soon, dragging a small boy behind him, a German waiter entered and announced that he had caught the child stealing items from the soldiers. To reach the rooms the child was forced to scale a drain pipe four-stories high.

So there he stood, this little German ragamuffin, in front of us grand British officers. He was only about 10, thin as a bean pole, clothes hanging on him like sacks—when kids are starving their clothes always look too big for them.

He was stood in front of the senior officer present . . . and the major asked him, “Why did you do it?”

The boy just stood there and said nothing. He was blonde and Aryan and defiant, and suddenly the major leaned forward and whacked him across the face with his hand.

“You fucking little kraut!” he yelled. “Come on, where have you put it all?” Bash, bash! The boy just stood there with the tears streaming down his face and the German mess waiter behind him snarling at him in German. His eyes were so blue and his hair was so blonde and he stood there so arrogant and defiant that I’ve always asked myself right to this day: “God, I wonder how many of our boys would be as tough as that?”

“The point is,” continues the witness, “that none of us could have cared a bit for that little boy. He was probably an orphan, his father dead on the Eastern Front, his mother rotting under the rubble of the bombed-out ruins, and here he was—starving and risking his life climbing up drainpipes in the middle of a British tank regiment. So what? We didn’t feel any compassion for him or any of the Germans.”⁹⁹

Children who could not live by their wits, died. Those who didn’t starve, were crushed by the walls of their caves or torn to shreds by unexploded bombs which lay scattered across Germany by the ton.

“I saw a friend playing with a hand grenade,” said nine-year-old Martha Suentzenich. “It exploded and blew off his head. He jumped around like a chicken with blood going everywhere.”¹⁰⁰

On their own, orphans aged fast, and little girls aged fastest of all. Like their older sisters, the children soon discovered that selling themselves could stave

off starvation.

“Germany’s youth is on the road . . . because there was not enough to eat at home,” the New York Times reported. “Homeless, without papers or ration cards . . . these groups rob Germans and displaced persons. They are . . . wandering aimlessly, disillusioned, dissolute, diseased, and without guidance.”¹⁰¹

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Just as pangs of conscience were creeping over many Allied soldiers— as well as New York reporters—so too were others beginning to recoil at the ruthless reign of terror transpiring in Germany. Over the next months and years, voices, heretofore muted or silent, at last were lifted.

George Kennan, a high-ranking US State Department official, was outraged by what he saw in Germany. “Each time I had come away with a sense of sheer horror at the spectacle of this horde of my compatriots and their dependents camping in luxury amid the ruins of a shattered national community . . .,” wrote Kennan, “flaunting their silly supermarket luxuries in the face of a veritable ocean of deprivation, hunger and wretchedness.”¹⁰²

Added fellow American and historian, Ralph Franklin Keeling:

While the Germans around them starve, wear rags, and live in hovels, the American aristocrats live in often unaccustomed ease and luxury. . . . [T]hey live in the finest homes from which they drove the Germans; they swagger about in fine liveries and gorge themselves on diets three times as great as they allow the Germans. . . .When we tell the Germans their low rations are necessary because food is so short, they naturally either think we are lying to them or regard us as inhuman for taking the lion’s share of the short supplies while they and their children starve.¹⁰³

One of the underlying concerns that many critics of Allied policy had was that the atrocious example being set by the democracies would soon drive all Germans into Soviet hands; that the victims, despite their instinctive aversion to Marxism, would soon view the communists as the lesser of two evils.

“What we are doing is to utterly destroy the only semi-modern state in Europe so that Russia can swallow the whole,” warned Gen. George Patton prophetically, shortly before he was sacked by Eisenhower.¹⁰⁴

As the general had earlier made clear, and in spite of the worldwide sympathy expressed for Jews persecuted by the Nazis before and during the war, a rising tide of voices were equally horrified by Jewish treatment of Germans after the war. Certainly no anti-Semite herself, as fervently anti-Nazi as she was anti-communist, journalist Freda Utley gave substance to the growing mood of many in her book, *The High Cost of Vengeance*:

Unfortunately for the future, the revengeful attitude of some Military Government officials who were Jews, the fact that Morgenthau gave his name to the policy of genocide underwritten by President Roosevelt, and the abuse by many non-German Jews of their privileged position as D[isplaced] P[ersons] have converted more Germans to anti-Semitism than Hitler’s racial laws and propaganda. Under the Nazis many, if not most, Germans sympathized with the Jews and were ashamed of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. But according to what I was told by German Jews, since the defeat of Germany and the Allied occupation more and more Germans formerly free of anti-Semitic prejudice are saying that after all Hitler was right; the Jews are the cause of German misery and the unjust treatment Germans receive at the hands of the victorious democracies. . . . Jeanette Wolff, the intrepid Jewish Social-Democratic leader . . . told me that it was tragic for the German Jews that the behavior of many American Jews and DP’s was giving legitimate grounds for anti-Semitism in Germany. . . . Jeanette Wolff’s views were not exceptional. Whereas hatred of the German people too often drives out all pity and sense of justice among those Jews who escaped from Germany in the thirties or never lived in Germany, the German Jew who stayed at home and suffered under Hitler’s terror, whose relatives and friends were murdered, and who themselves endured the horrors of the concentration camps, are for the most part without hatred of the German people, and still feel themselves to be Germans. It is the American Jews (often of Polish or Russian origin) and the returned exiles who seem determined to avenge the agony of the Jewish people in Hitler’s Reich by punishing the whole German people. I suppose the explanation lies in the fact that the Jews who stayed in Germany know from experience that the German people as a whole were not

responsible for Nazi crimes. Many of them owe their survival to the risks taken by plain ordinary Germans to save them by hiding them or feeding them. And the Jews who emerged alive from the concentration camps know that many Germans suffered the same hunger and torture as the Jews because they opposed the tyranny of the Nazis and spoke out against the persecution of Jews.¹⁰⁵

While politics and fear of further anti-Semitism motivated many critics, nothing more than genuine compassion for innocent victims compelled others to speak out. In his Christmas Eve 1945 message, Pope Pius XII appealed to the world to end the “ill-conceived cruelty” that was secretly destroying the German people.¹⁰⁶

As powerful as the Pope’s plea undoubtedly was, a report later filed by Herbert Hoover was perhaps more shocking and had greater implications. After visiting Germany, the former US president told of homeless children freezing to death by the hundreds, of men and women fainting at their work stations from hunger, of motorists taking special care not to run down diseased and emaciated pedestrians as they crossed the streets.¹⁰⁷ Also sifting to the surface were horrific tales of Allied torture chambers.

“Americans torture Germans to extort confessions,” ran British headlines. “[A]n ugly story of barbarous tortures inflicted in the name of allied justice. . . strong men were reduced to broken wrecks ready to mumble any admission demanded by their prosecutors.”¹⁰⁸

Embarrassed and aghast, many Americans were horror-struck. Viewing Allied atrocities against Germany as a whole, it was, said Henrick Shipstead on the floor of the US Senate, “America’s eternal monument of shame, the Morgenthau Plan for the destruction of the German-speaking people.”¹⁰⁹

Although Henry Morgenthau was gone—ousted by President Truman—and although some of the more savage aspects of the plan had been shelved, the agreement signed by the victorious Allies at Potsdam was in many respects even more draconian than the original. Even as the chorus of critics over the sadistic treatment of Germany grew, a nightmare of almost unbelievable proportions was developing within the Soviet Zone. Here, in the centuries-old provinces of East Prussia, Pomerania, but especially Silesia, the seeds sown

at Yalta and Potsdam bore a rich and terrible fruit. What transpired in these former German regions was, announced an American historian at the time, “the most staggering atrocity in all history. It is deliberate, it is brutal, it is enormous—and it is an Allied crime. It is an American, British, Russian, Morgenthau, Potsdam crime.”¹¹⁰

It was, an American bishop said simply, “the greatest crime of the age.”¹¹¹

Chapter 6 Infamy

Y

awata was a small city situated in the south of Japan. Known locally for its iron and steel works there was little else in Yawata to distinguish it from any other small Japanese city. But Yawata was different. Yawata had the unwanted distinction of

becoming the first Japanese city attacked by American B-29 bombers in the summer of 1944. Unfortunately, Yawata also had the unwanted distinction of being one of the last cities attacked by B-29’s in the summer of 1945. The first raid on Yawata was a failure with only one high-explosive bomb landing anywhere near the prime target. The last raid, however, was an overwhelming success. In August, 1945, over 200 B-29 bombers dropped thousands of firebombs on Yawata and left most of the city a smoking ruin.

Early the following day after that last raid, August 9, a single B-29 was flying high above the neighboring Japanese city of Kokura. The large, four-engine plane circled for several minutes, apparently looking for something below. Because the city was totally obscured by the smoke drifting in from the Yawata firebombing raid of the day before, it was decided to ignore Kokura altogether and fly to the next name on the list.

Twenty minutes later the B-29 found itself high over the secondary target. But again, the city below was obscured, this time not by drifting smoke but by heavy cloud cover. The aircraft, low on fuel, continued to circle nervously several times hoping for an opening in the clouds. Finally, just as the pilot was about to give up and bank for home, the bombardier saw a tiny break in

the clouds. Frantically looking for landmarks that would help locate their position above the target, the airman at last identified one—a church, a Christian church, the largest Christian church in east Asia. Inside the cathedral directly below, a large mass was being held this day.¹

With a great sense of relief the entire crew of the B-29 prepared to drop their payload, a single, though huge, bomb. In a moment, the bomb bay doors opened. Below, through the brief hole in the clouds, lay the beautiful church in the beautiful city of Nagasaki.

Three days previous, on August 6, 1945, the bomb bay doors of another B-29 had opened wide to drop another single, but huge, bomb, this one over Hiroshima.

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Although virtually every Japanese city had been scorched from the face of the earth by American firebombing raids, a handful of cities had hardly been touched. Kokura and Nagasaki were two of them; Hiroshima was another. Rumors abounded in all the spared cities as to why, when all else had been leveled, they were not. Nowhere were the rumors more pronounced than in the unscathed city of Hiroshima. Some speculated that because many Hiroshima residents had emigrated to the US years before, there was a “special relationship” with the Americans, an unspoken understanding, a mystical meeting of hearts and minds, of Asian and Anglo. Others imagined that Hiroshima must be home to some very important Americans, including President Truman’s mother. Still more theorized that the reason the city was spared when all else were destroyed was due to the fact that Hiroshima, like Nagasaki, was home to a large Christian community. In any case, whatever the cause, most people felt that their city’s salvation was nothing short of a miracle. Perhaps even a few felt that for the first time in the war, with Japanese collapse clearly looming, with peace close at hand, that the Americans were displaying a hint of human mercy for the soon-to-be defeated. With war ending, with emotions easing, with tempers cooling, surely many leaders in America were looking ahead to a better day, a day when war was replaced by peace, when hate was replaced by mercy.

But, of course, none of the above was so. There was no mercy in the heart of

Americans for the Japanese, just as there had been none for the Germans. Fury over Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, the mistreatment of American POWs, and anger over a long list of real or rumored war crimes was fully as great, perhaps even greater, than when the war began in 1941. Hence, when Harry Truman found out about the new weapon, there was never the slightest doubt.

Following the initial test of the “wonder” weapon in the desert of New Mexico, the new American president read the reports and saw the film of the detonation . . . and he was ecstatic.

“We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world,” Truman excitedly wrote in his diary.

This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. [Henry] Stimson to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on [civilians].²

What Truman—with a cocked eye to future publication and posterity—scratched in his diary was one thing; what he actually thought and did was something else. As Truman well knew when he gave his approval, all of the targets selected for the new weapon were cities, cities crowded with women and children and not forts filled with soldiers nor harbors crammed with sailors. Additionally, the American president seemed to have no qualms whatsoever in ordering the nonstop firebombing raids of Japanese cities resulting in the nightly massacre of thousands of civilians. In fairness to Truman, his open hatred of the Japanese was merely a manifestation of those around him, including a significant percentage of the American population.

Long after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, such was the hatred felt for the “sneaky Japs” by almost all Americans that there was virtually no opposition to the continued imprisonment of well over a hundred thousand Japanese-Americans in remote concentration camps even years after it was clear the prisoners posed no threat and the US would easily win the war. Even when it was obvious to all that Japan would be defeated, a 1944 opinion poll found

that a significant percentage of the US public still favored the utter extermination of all Japanese men, women and children, across the board. Bug spray, rat traps and other similar products sold to the American public were advertised as great ways to kill “insects, rodents and Japs.” Hollywood movies continued to portray Japanese soldiers and airmen as laughing, psychotic sadists who enjoyed torturing captives and machine-gunning defenseless civilians for sport.

“[Japan] should be cast out from the world family of nations,” announced a Florida congressman in 1943. “There is no place for mad dogs.”³

“The only way to beat the Japs is to kill them all,” reasoned a naval commander. “They will not surrender and our troops are taking no chances and are killing them anyway.”⁴

“ Apparently the atrocities by the Japs have never been told in the US,” Air Force Gen. Henry Arnold angrily wrote in June, 1945, “[of] babies thrown up in the air and caught on bayonets, autopsies on living people, burning prisoners to death by sprinkling them with gasoline. . . . There is no feeling of sparing any Japs here; men, women or children; gas, fire, anything to exterminate the entire race exemplifies the feeling. . . . They are not pretty stories but they explain why the Japs can expect anything.”⁵

And thus, to mirror American sentiment, to prove to US voters that he could fill the shoes and follow in the footsteps of the late, lamented Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman was willing to use “anything” against the hated Japs . . . anything!

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On the morning of August 6, 1945, doctors and nurses were quietly beginning their normal duties at the downtown Hiroshima hospital. Since their city had been spared the horrors of war and firebombing, the eighty patients being treated here this particular morning were typical of virtually any hospital in the world—broken legs, cancer, child birth, old age.

At 8:15 AM, two thousand feet directly above the hospital the bomb exploded. There was a blinding brightness like “a thousand suns.” In a

fraction of a second all those inside the hospital—doctors, nurses, patients—were vaporized. They simply disappeared. Hundreds on the streets outside the hospital likewise vanished in the 10,000 degree flash. In some cases there was a dark shadow on a floor or wall where a human had been; in most cases, nothing.

Further away, two hundred yards or more, victims were instantly carbonized in their tracks. In a flash, humans and animals were transformed into what seemed burnt logs. If a victim happened to be walking, running, exercising, or merely standing or sitting, at that precise fraction of a second just so were they carbonized in death.

Still further along, several hundred yards, the eyeballs of humans and horses alike melted and poured down faces that were no longer faces. Noses, mouths, ears, chins, as well as breasts, hands, fingers, feet—all vanished in a blink.

Then, in a moment, the great, deafening boom. In another moment, the blast of a fiery, furious 400 MPH wind. Virtually everything standing—hospital, buildings, shops, street cars, towers, light poles, trees, humans, animals—all were broiled and flattened. Hundreds of blackened bodies were flung into the river.⁶

Further along, half a mile, the wind ripped clothing from people. The heat burned off hair and fused fingers together. The old, the young, dogs, cats, birds, all were blown away like burning leaves. Homes exploded. Broken glass, nails and splinters shredded the flesh of those inside who then quickly died from blood loss.

And above everything, a towering, churning cloud of fire, smoke, dirt, and sand billowed and boiled madly, completely obscuring the blue sky of only a few seconds before.

Further still, a mile from the blast center, those who had survived yet had not sensed the excruciating pain to come—from their hideous burns, from the glass and wood embedded in their heads and bodies, from the sand and mud filling their mouths, from the skin hanging from their naked selves like sheets—these victims thought that a bomb had exploded right at their feet, or,

often, many felt that the earth had opened up below and that hell itself had been unleashed on the world.

Just over a mile from the blast, thirty-three-year-old housewife, Futaba Kitayama, had been working with a group of volunteers as they helped create city fire-breaks just in case some night they were visited by the fire-raining B-San. The explosion buried Futaba under debris.

Finally I did manage to crawl free. There was a terrible smell in the air. Thinking the bomb that hit us might have been a yellow phosphorus incendiary like those that had fallen on so many other cities, I rubbed my nose and mouth hard with a [towel] I had at my waist. To my horror, I found that the skin of my face had come off in the towel. Oh! The skin on my hands, on my arms, came off too. From elbow to fingertips, all the skin on my right arm had come loose and was hanging grotesquely. The skin of my left hand fell off too, the five fingers, like a glove.

I found myself sitting on the ground, prostrate. Gradually I registered that all my companions had disappeared. What had happened to them? A frantic panic gripped me, I wanted to run, but where? Around me was just debris, wooden framing, beams and roofing tiles; there wasn't a single landmark left.

And what had happened to the sky, so blue a moment ago? Now it was as black as night. Everything seemed vague and fuzzy. It was as though a cloud covered my eyes and I wondered if I had lost my senses.⁷

Yet further, people were knocked off their feet by flying debris as their homes collapsed around them. Those who were only slightly injured and could free themselves from the rubble were initially confused. Virtually all were certain that something terrible had happened, but most imagined it had happened to they and they alone. Soon, with an enormous mushroom-shaped cloud boiling black and red high above Hiroshima, surviving mothers and fathers, surviving husbands and wives, all thought not of themselves and their injuries, but of those they loved who lived, worked or went to school in the city center. Thus, hundreds of stunned survivors mere minutes after the blast of heat and wind began walking, and in some cases running, toward Hiroshima. Soon, these dazed people trying to reach the city encountered those terribly injured survivors trying to escape the city. And what they saw

was worse than their worst nightmare.

In absolute silence, many of those fleeing Hiroshima approached in shreds of clothing, bloody, staggering, arms stretched as if reaching for something that was not there. Still more limped along utterly nude, their bodies raw and swollen with enormous blisters. Then came the others.

“They all had skin blackened by burns. . . ,” remembered one man. “They had no hair . . . and at a glance you couldn’t tell whether you were looking at them from in front or in back. . . . Many of them died along the road. . . . They didn’t look like people of this world.”⁸

“They resembled living pieces of charcoal, wandering mindlessly unless they collapsed and died,” recalled another horrified witness.⁹

As the would-be rescuers moved further into the totally destroyed city the hideous sights and horror only increased.

“I saw people burned from head to foot, eyeless, and grotesquely disfigured,” said Tomio Yoshida, a young soldier recently arrived in Hiroshima. “A woman who had gone mad embraced a hot water bottle as if it were an infant. Adhering to a crumbling wall I saw a piece of white medical coat. The only trace of the doctor who had worn it was a dark, rubber-like patch that had once been his head.”¹⁰

Mothers trying to breast feed dead infants . . . infants trying to feed from dead mothers . . . a man holding his own eyeball . . . birds hopping on the ground because their wings were burned off . . . horses, yet on fire, screaming in their death agony . . . people standing like black statues, burned to carbon . . . carbonized legs still standing, without bodies . . . ghostly shadows on walls and streets of traffic police, vendors and children, all vaporized.¹¹

“I finally saw the Tsurumi bridge and I ran headlong toward it, jumping over the piles of rubble,” recalled Futaba Kitayama when she finally found the strength to move. “What I saw under the bridge then horrified me.”

People by the hundreds were flailing in the river. I couldn’t tell if they were men or women; they were all in the same state: their faces were puffy and ashen, their hair tangled, they held their hands raised and, groaning with pain, threw themselves into the water. I had a violent impulse to do so myself, because of the pain burning through my whole body. But I can’t swim and I held back.

The stunned woman wandered until she finally reached a parade ground.

Around me on the parade ground were a number of grade-school and secondary-school children, boys and girls, writhing in spasms of agony. . . . I heard them crying ‘Mama! Mama!’ as though they’d gone crazy. They were so burned and bloody that looking at them was insupportable. I forced myself to do so just the same, and I cried out in rage, ‘Why? Why these children?’ But there was no one to rage at and I could do nothing but watch them die, one after the other, vainly calling for their mothers.

“When I reached the local elementary school,” recounted Toshiko Saeki, a twenty-six-year-old mother desperately searching for her children, “people were . . . jammed in the hallways. Everywhere was filled with moans and groans and sobs and cries. I couldn’t find any of my family, so I went out to the playground.”¹²

There were four piles of bodies and I stood in front of them. I just didn’t know what to do. How could I find the bodies of my beloved ones? When I was going through the classrooms, I could take a look at each person, but these were mounds. If I tried to find my beloved ones, I would have to remove the bodies one by one. It just wasn’t possible. I really felt sad. There were all kinds of bodies in the mounds. Not only human bodies but bodies of birds, cats and dogs and even that of a cow. It looked horrible. I can’t find words to describe it. They were burned, just like human bodies, and some of them were half burnt. There was even a swollen horse. Just everything was there, everything.¹³

Meanwhile, those still trapped in collapsed buildings faced yet another peril. When the fires already ignited by the explosion finally reached the shattered wood, spilled oil and ruptured gas lines, a huge fire storm was started that then swept an already devastated Hiroshima.

Perhaps the only survivor in his school, a thirteen-year-old boy finally freed himself from the bone-crushing debris just as the flames were about to reach him.

I checked my body. Three upper teeth were chipped off. . . . My left arm was pierced by a piece of wood that stuck in my flesh like an arrow. Unable to

pull it out, I tied a tourniquet around my upper arm to staunch the flow of blood. . . . Then I saw an arm shifting under planks of wood. Ota, my friend, was moving. But I could see that his back was broken, and I had to pull him up into the clear. Ota was looking at me with his left eye. His right eyeball was hanging from his face. I think he said something, but I could not make it out. Pieces of nails were stuck on his lips. He took a student handbook from his pocket. I asked, "Do you want me to give this to your mother?" Ota nodded. A moment later he died. By now the school was engulfed in flames. I started to walk away, and then looked back. Ota was staring at me with his one good eye.¹⁴

As sixteen-year-old Akira Onogi was fleeing the flames with others, a tiny, crying child begged him to save her mother who was trapped under debris. "Together with neighbors, we tried hard to remove the beam, but it was impossible without any tools," recalled Akira sadly. "Finally a fire broke out endangering us. So we had no choice but to leave her. She was conscious and we deeply bowed to her with clasped hands to apologise to her and then we left."¹⁵

Just as desperate to get away, another terrified teenage boy would stop for nothing.

I . . . was running, [and] hands were trying to grab my ankles, they were asking me to take them along. . . . And I was horrified at so many hands trying to grab me. I was in pain, too. So all I could do was to get rid of them, it's terrible to say, but I kicked their hands away. I still feel bad about that. . . . At the river bank, I saw so many people collapsed there. And the small steps to the river were jammed, filled with people pushing their way to the water. I was small, so I pushed on [to] the river along the small steps. The water was [full of] dead people. I had to push the bodies aside to drink the muddy water.¹⁶

In a world where every horror seemed not only possible, but probable, a tornado of fire suddenly appeared roaring down a street. Those few survivors who could flee from the path of this new terror did; those who could not were immediately immolated and tossed about like flaming leaves. Reaching the river the fiery twister uprooted large trees and flung them in the air; then in the next instant it transformed itself into a waterspout three hundred feet high

and crossed the stream. Unfortunately, a large group of refugees had taken shelter on the opposite shore in the direct path of the tornado. Helpless, many victims were instantly hurled back into the river to their deaths.

“After a while, it began to rain,” remembered a young woman. “The fire and the smoke made us so thirsty and there was nothing to drink, no water. . . .”

As it began to rain, people opened their mouths and turned their faces towards the sky and try to drink the rain, but it wasn’t easy to catch the rain drops in our mouths. It was a black rain with big drops. . . . They were so big that we even felt pain when they dropped onto us. We opened our mouths . . . as wide as possible in an effort to quench our thirst. Everybody did the same thing. But it just wasn’t enough. Someone found an empty can and held it to catch the rain.¹⁷

As this victim and other thirst-crazed survivors discovered, onehalf hour after the explosion, dark, heavy, and extremely large drops of rain began to fall on certain areas of Hiroshima. Ugly, surreal, this “black rain” was a deadly cocktail of dirt, soot and highly radioactive particles.

“It was a black and sticky rain. It stuck to everything,” one witness remarked. “When it fell on trees and leaves, it stayed and turned everything black. When it fell on people’s clothing, the clothing turned black. It also stuck on people’s hands and feet. And it couldn’t be washed off.”¹⁸

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Without exception, everyone in Hiroshima that day had a story to tell . . . a terrible story to tell:

A young manThe river was also filled with dead people blown by the blast and with survivors who came here to seek water. Anyway I could not see the surface of the water at all.¹⁹

A teenager. . . . I saw a man whose skin was completely peeled off the upper half of his body and a woman whose eye balls were sticking out. Her whole baby was bleeding. A mother and her baby were lying with all skin completely peeled off.²⁰

A child I saw badly charred bodies all jumbled together close to the

riverbank where the reeds were growing. The internal organs of one body had spilled out. Another had no head. My knees were literally knocking together as I took in the scene. It looked like hell on Earth.²¹

A writer walking alligators . . . now eyeless and faceless — with their heads transformed into blackened alligator hides displaying red holes, indicating mouths. . . . The alligator people did not scream. Their mouths could not form the sounds. The noise they made was worse than screaming. They uttered a continuous murmur—like locusts on a midsummer night. One man, staggering on charred stumps of legs, was carrying a dead baby upside down.²²

A housewife I saw a lot of bodies floating in the water like dead dogs. . . . At the river's edge, near the bank, a woman lay on her back with her breasts ripped off, bathed in blood.²³

A newspaper photographer There were junior high school girls . . . having been directly exposed to the heat rays, they were covered with blisters the size of balls, on their backs, their faces, their shoulders and their arms. The blisters were starting to burst open and their skin hung down like rugs. Some of the children even have burns on the soles of their feet. They'd lost their shoes and run barefoot through the burning fire. When I saw this, I thought I would take a picture and I picked up my camera. But I couldn't push the shutter because the sight was so pathetic. Even though I too was a victim of the same bomb, I only had minor injuries from glass fragments, whereas these people were dying. It was such a cruel sight that I couldn't bring myself to press the shutter.²⁴

A female volunteer . . . a woman lying dead at a house by the river bank, her neck stuck through with a piece of glass blown by the blast. The glass must have cut the artery. Blood was scattered around her. She had been suckling her baby. The baby was still absorbed in sucking the breast.²⁵

A doctor The streets were deserted except for the dead. Some looked as if they had been frozen by death while in the full action of flight; others lay sprawled as though some giant had flung them to their death from a great height. . . . I saw nothing that wasn't burnt to a crisp. Streetcars were standing and inside were dozens of bodies, blackened beyond recognition. I saw fire

reservoirs filled to the brim with dead bodies who looked as [if] they had been boiled alive. In one reservoir I saw one man, horribly burned, crouching beside another man who was dead. . . . There were the shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and hands dangling. These people . . . had been burned and they were holding their arms out to prevent the painful friction of raw surfaces rubbing together. . . . Big black flies appeared and tried to lay eggs on human flesh. The injured were so weak that they couldn't brush away the flies that nestled on their hands and necks.²⁶

As the above reveals, despite death and destruction almost utter, nature's eternal pest, the fly, seemed troubled not in the least. Mere minutes after the explosion, thousands of severely injured people were beset by swarms of flies. Drawn to the scent of burned and rotting flesh, millions of flies made a horrible situation vastly worse. Many victims were too injured to keep the insects away and eventually even those tending the wounded found it an almost impossible task. "Some were black from a blanket of flies that covered them," said an incredulous witness. One woman soon found her bleeding eyes infested with maggots. Others fought as well they could the egg-laying pests but soon stomachs, backs, arms, legs, even heads and faces were a mass of moving, white maggots. There was little the horrified, wretched victims could do but add this "infernal agony" as yet another trial to endure.²⁷

Little Hideko Tamura had survived the bomb blast with only a cut foot. Her uncle, however, cried out in pain. The man was sitting just outside the rear gate. His shirt was now wet with blood and his eyes were shiny and hollow. The uncle had been shredded by flying glass and blood streamed from his throat where a large nail had been driven. Hideko's aunt sobbed as she began picking out jagged shards of glass embedded deep in her husband's skin. Although only tenyears-old and totally terrified, Hideko soon left on her own to search for her mother who had been working in the center of the stricken city.

Somewhere along the way Hideko heard a voice cry out her name. It was a friend, Noriko. "As we talked," remembered the child, "large blisters formed

on Noriko's face and it became so swollen that I could scarcely recognize her any more. . . . At the river, we saw a young schoolgirl slowly walking along, with pieces of skin hanging from her arms. Someone said she was trying to cool her burned skin, but as she rubbed water on it, it came off. She cried in pain.”²⁸

As for Hideko's father, a soldier, he had escaped serious injury because his job at the harbor was two miles from the blast. Nevertheless, like so many others the father was soon drawn toward Hiroshima. “A few hours afterward,” recalled the little girl. . . .

. . . he had encountered a young American prisoner of war wandering in a daze. The young man looked no older than 17, with blond hair and blue eyes, and was naked except for his boxer shorts. He was surrounded by a crowd of injured civilians, mostly old men and women, carrying stones which they were about to use against him. My father, speaking as an army officer, reproached the otherwise ordinary and peaceful citizens. The young American, he said, was a prisoner under the protection of the military. He was not armed and he was obviously not about to harm anyone. They must not become killers themselves.²⁹

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Father John Siemes was one of a group of German priests who lived and worked on the outskirts of Hiroshima. After the blast that morning he and his brothers, themselves injured, ventured into what had been Hiroshima to offer help where they could. What they saw was incredible.

Where the city stood, there is a gigantic burned-out scar. We make our way along the street on the river bank among the burning and smoking ruins. Twice we are forced into the river itself by the heat and smoke at the level of the street.

Frightfully burned people beckon to us. Along the way, there are many dead and dying. . . .Beneath the wreckage of the houses along the way, many have been trapped and they scream to be rescued from the oncoming flames. They must be left to their fate. . . . In the park, we take refuge on the bank of the river. . . .

[T]wo children . . . seen in the river. We rescue them. They have severe burns. Soon they suffer chills and die in the park. . . . From the other side of the stream comes the whinny of horses who are threatened by the fire. . . . A group of soldiers comes along the road and their officer notices that we speak a strange language. He at once draws his sword, screamingly demands who we are and threatens to cut us down. Father Laures, Jr., seizes his arm and explains that we are German. We finally quiet him down. He thought that we might well be Americans who had parachuted down. Rumors of parachutists were being bandied about the city.³⁰

Throughout the night and into the early morning hours the exhausted, injured priests continued their work. At first light. . . .

We take off again with the hand cart. The bright day now reveals the frightful picture which last night's darkness had partly concealed. Where the city stood everything, as far as the eye could reach, is a waste of ashes and ruin. Only several skeletons of buildings completely burned out in the interior remain. The banks of the river are covered with dead and wounded, and the rising waters have here and there covered some of the corpses. On the broad street in the Hakushima district, naked burned cadavers are particularly numerous. Among them are the wounded who are still alive. A few have crawled under the burnt-out autos and trams. Frightfully injured forms beckon to us and then collapse. An old woman and a girl whom she is pulling along with her fall down at our feet. We place them on our cart and wheel them to the hospital at whose entrance a dressing station has been set up. Here the wounded lie on the hard floor, row on row. Only the largest wounds are dressed. We convey another soldier and an old woman to the place but we cannot move everybody who lies exposed in the sun. It would be endless and it is questionable whether those whom we can drag to the dressing station can come out alive, because even here nothing really effective can be done. Later, we ascertain that the wounded lay . . . in the burnt-out hallways of the hospital and there they died.³¹

Indeed, of the city's two hundred doctors before the explosion, a mere handful were yet alive. Of the nearly two thousand nurses before—only 150 remained who were able to tend to the sick and dying.³² The conditions in the burned-out or otherwise demolished hospitals were so grim that when the

pain-wracked patients heard one of the few available nurses approaching down the hall, everyone— “both adults and children”—would beg to be killed simply to end their suffering.³³

Alas, to those yet living on that second day there seemed no end to the ghastly nightmare. At every turn, there were new horrors. Records one survivor on the injuries among the hundreds of victims she saw:

The skin [would] just peel off. Some of them you could see the bone. Their eyes were closed. The nose bled. Lips swelled and the whole head started swelling. And as soon as they gave water to them, they’d vomit it all out and they’d keep on vomiting until they die, blood rushed out and that was the end of them. On the second day, the wounds became yellow in color and they’d go deeper and deeper. No matter how much you try to take off the yellow, rotten flesh [it] would just go deeper and deeper.³⁴

Also on that second day following the explosion, August 7, the terrible task of dealing with the bodies began in earnest. From every park and school ground in destroyed Hiroshima came the smoke and smell of the dead. “The smell was quite strong,” recalled a young army doctor. “It’s a sad reality that the smell human beings produce when they are burned is the same as that of the dried squid when it is grilled.”³⁵

When corpses were cleared in one area, trucks filled to the brim hauled away yet more bodies from another area.³⁶ So many thousands of scorched and mangled bodies were rotting and stinking in the streets of Hiroshima that those assigned the task of recovery were often negligent in determining who was dead and who was not.

“They were loading bodies, treating them like sacks,” said Yoshitaka Kawamoto, a terribly injured thirteen year-old boy. “They picked me up from the river bank and then threw me on top of the pile. My body slid off and when they grabbed me by the arm to put me back onto the truck, they felt that my pulse was still beating, so they reloaded me onto the truck carrying the survivors.”³⁷

Ten-year-old Hideko Tamura, who had left the home of her aunt and uncle the previous day, continued to search for her mother by stopping at the

various “rescue” stations set up around the destroyed city:

The stench of rotting flesh filled the air. Soft moans were the only signs of life. I called out Mama’s name. It was difficult to think of her lying there, one of those disfigured, helpless people. But I could not bear thinking of Mama dying alone. Calling her name caused people to stir. They asked for water, but I had none. No one did.³⁸

Later, Hideko’s father did indeed find the remains of the little girl’s mother. The ashes, what little remained, he brought home in a handkerchief.³⁹

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For many of those who had survived, it was only now, on the second day, when they first came to terms with their own injuries. Recounts one teenage girl:

I found a piece of mirror and looked into it. I was so surprised. I found my left eye looked just like a pomegranate, and I also found cuts on my right eye and on my nose and on my lower jaw. It was horrible. I was very shocked to find myself looking like a monster. I even wished I had died with my sisters.⁴⁰

Another young woman, Seiko Ikeda, was also horrified by the image she first viewed in the mirror. Indeed, so concerned had been Seiko’s parents at what their daughter would see, that they took the precaution of hiding all mirrors. What the girl and thousands of others in Hiroshima eventually saw they at first did not recognize. Seiko’s once pretty face had melted like wax. Gone forever were the bright eyes, smooth skin and quick, familiar smile. Now, only a hideous, frightening mask stared back. Rather than live out the remainder of her life as a freak—no love, no husband, no children—from that first horrifying glimpse the young woman made it her life’s mission to kill herself. Not even death would be more terrible than the face she would be forced to live with forever. When the parents learned of their daughter’s determination to end her life, their fear naturally reached panic proportions. Locked in her own personal nightmare, Seiko then overheard her distraught parents speaking softly in another room.

“I know her face is terrible,” said the sad father to the mother, “but I am so glad she lived. I love Seiko no matter what she looks like.”

Hearing such words from the man she loved most on earth caused a sudden change in the young woman. Knowing that someone, anyone, could actually still love her, in spite of her looks, was startling to the girl. After thinking over how selfish had been her plan, those loving words straight from a father’s heart were enough that Seiko determined to deal with her problems directly and not bring even more tears and sadness into her parents’ lives.⁴¹

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Fearful of another such attack, those who could flee Hiroshima did. One of those was Tsutomu Yamaguchi. In the city on business when the bomb exploded, Yamaguchi spent a terrifying night in the stricken area at a local air-raid shelter. The blood-curdling screams of the dying all around made sleep and rest impossible. On the following day, with his wounds wrapped in bandages, Yamaguchi navigated through the piles of burnt and mangled bodies until he reached the railroad station. From there he would catch one of the first trains to escape Hiroshima and return the nearly two hundred miles back to his home. There, in beautiful Nagasaki, the businessman was sure he would be safe.⁴²

Out of a population of nearly three hundred thousand, in all likelihood half, or 150,000 men, women and children, died at Hiroshima on that day, August 6, 1945. And of those who survived, thousands would not live to see another year, another month, even another week.

US President Harry Truman:

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima. . . . It is an atomic bomb. . . . We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. . . . If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air the like of which has never been seen on this earth.⁴³

Hit the Japs again and again, an enthusiastic US Senator from Georgia, Richard Russell, telegraphed to Truman. Hit them, urged Russell, until they are “brought groveling to their knees.”⁴⁴

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‘There she goes!’ someone said. Out of the belly of the [B-29] what looked like a black object came downward. . . . [Soon] a whirlwind from the skies will pulverize thousands of its buildings and tens of thousands of its inhabitants. . . . Does one feel any pity or compassion for the poor devils about to die? Not when one thinks of Pearl Harbor and of the death march on Bataan. . . .45

So wrote William L. Laurence, former Pulitzer Prize winner, now science writer for the New York Times, as he watched the second atomic bomb to be dropped on Japan disappear toward Nagasaki below. In 47 seconds the bomb would explode over the unsuspecting city. And in that 48th second tens of thousands of men, women, children, babies, animals, all, would be vaporized, carbonized, blackened like burnt logs, skinned alive by heat and blast, covered with blisters the size of softballs, shredded like cabbage by flying glass, nails and splinters— and almost all had absolutely nothing to do with Pearl Harbor, the death march at Bataan, or even the war. Would the writer have been so euphoric about this bomb—this “thing of beauty,” as he termed it— had he been on the ground to witness the effects of the other bomb, the one which was dropped on Hiroshima three days previous? In all likelihood, yes. After all, Laurence was the only journalist present at the initial test of the bomb in New Mexico and thus he certainly had a better understanding than most of the power behind this new “wonder weapon” and its method for dealing out death and destruction on a massive scale. However, had the reporter witnessed for himself the fate of those victims who somehow managed to “survive” the bomb’s blast and what they endured during the following days, weeks, months, and years, perhaps that sobering sight alone would have moderated Laurence’s joy somewhat over this “marvelous” new weapon, this great “thing of beauty.” But probably not.

[E]ven though we were turning away in the opposite direction, and despite the fact that it was broad daylight in our cabin, all of us became aware of a giant flash that . . . flooded our cabin with an intense light. We removed our glasses after the first flash but the light still lingered on, a bluish-green light that illuminated the entire sky all around. A tremendous blast wave struck our ship and made it tremble from nose to tail. This was followed by four more

blasts in rapid succession, each resounding like the boom of cannon fire hitting our plane from all directions.

Observers in the tail of our ship saw a giant ball of fire rise as though from the bowels of the earth, belching forth enormous white smoke rings. Next they saw a giant pillar of purple fire, 10,000 feet high, shooting skyward with enormous speed.⁴⁶

Eventually reaching the stratosphere at a height of 60,000 feet—over eleven miles high—Laurence and the crew of the B-29 could still view the mushroom cloud over Nagasaki from two hundred miles away.

As was the case for those who dropped their bomb three days previous, once the science writer and his Nagasaki bomber crew reached home, there would be lots of back-slapping, congratulations all around, laughter, food, and beer aplenty—a great celebration for a mission accomplished, for a job well done.

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Upwards of 80,000 people perished in a blinding flash when the bomb exploded over not only Japan's most Christian city, but one of the nation's most beautiful and untouched cities, Nagasaki. Again, the same nightmare was played out here as was played out three days previous in Hiroshima—people, including all those attending mass in the cathedral, vaporized in a split second, others carbonized like charcoal, melting eyeballs running down faces that no longer had features, blisters as big as grapefruit, skin hanging in sheets, bodies shredded by glass, splinters and metal. And again, hours, days later, the hopeless attempts of stunned, suffering survivors trying to save the unsavable.

“I thought, only a week ago I would have been horrified at a paper cut on my finger,” remembered fifteen-year-old school girl, Michie Hattori. “Now I found myself helping carry dead people whose skin was tearing off in my hands.”⁴⁷

Fortunately, Tsutomu Yamaguchi was not one of them. Upon his return from Hiroshima, and with his burns still swathed in bandages, the businessman reported for work on August 9. Yamaguchi's boss and co-workers listened

spell-bound as the exhausted and injured man described how a single bomb had destroyed an entire city.

At 11.02 AM, and once again, as before, less than two miles from the center, Yamaguchi saw a familiar flash of light. This time a 25-kiloton plutonium bomb exploded above Nagasaki, throwing Yamaguchi to the ground. Once more the businessman staggered away from an atomic blast. Reaching home Yamaguchi, his wife and baby son survived and spent the following week in a shelter near what was once their home.

“It was my destiny that I experienced this twice and I am still alive to convey what happened,” said the grateful husband and father simply.⁴⁸

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On the same day as Nagasaki, August 9, Japan suffered another blow. The United States clearly ruled the sky above Japan and could with impunity do whatever it chose. In desperation, Japanese military leaders proposed a daring plan—a suicide raid on the Marianas Islands, home base of the deadly B-29 squadrons. If the huge bombers could be destroyed on the ground in a surprise attack, most of the firebombing raids would cease, as would the attacks by the new atomic weapon. Thus began a secret attempt to concentrate hundreds of Japanese bombers and thousands of men for the suicide mission. Unfortunately, American intelligence learned of the move and swarms of US bombers and fighters attacked and destroyed most the secret aircraft, thereby preempting the bold plan. Additionally, by the end of August, a third atomic bomb was scheduled to be delivered and dropped, this time on the already destroyed Japanese capital, Tokyo.

Having heard of the destruction of Hiroshima, then Nagasaki that very day, one Tokyo housewife’s confusion and frantic state of mind was certainly shared by millions more:

Up to now, we’ve been ordered not to wear white garments, not even when it was hot, because they were easy for the enemy planes to see. Now we’re warned not to wear black garments because they burn easily. So what in the world is safe for us to wear? We don’t know anymore. The thought of a single aircraft destroying a large city in an instant is driving us to nervous

breakdowns, and I feel as though we have no choice but to die or go crazy.⁴⁹

In addition to the atomic bomb earmarked for Tokyo, eight more such bombs would be completed and ready to finish the nuclear immolation of Japan by November.⁵⁰

Also on August 9, the Japanese suffered yet another in a long list of blows, this one the greatest blow so far. After months of speculation, and with the war against Nazi Germany successfully concluded, the Soviet Union suddenly declared war on Japan. To do so, and with an eye on seizing as much Japanese territory as possible, the communists simply tore up the neutrality pact they had signed with Japan in 1941. Although the outnumbered Japanese army fought with typical courage and determination in Manchuria and their other colonies on the Asian mainland, the sheer size and speed of the battle-tested Red Army insured that soon, very soon, the home islands of Japan would be faced with a two front invasion—the Americans to the south, the communists to the north. As one high-ranking US officer astutely observed months earlier, “If at any time the USSR should enter the war, all Japanese will realize that absolute defeat is inevitable.” And thus, when Gen. Torashirō Kawabe, the deputy chief of staff of the Japanese Army, was asked later he admitted that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki only became known “in a gradual manner” and was not foremost in Japanese reasons for surrendering. Indeed, at most, the atomic bombs were a distant second or even third as Japanese reasons to surrender. Even as the atomic bombs were being dropped there were even then several firebombing raids in progress throughout the destroyed nation. But “in comparison,” Gen. Kawabe continued, “the Soviet entry into the war was a great shock.”⁵¹

“It was as if they were burglars breaking into an empty house,” thought one cynical Japanese officer.⁵²

As most Japanese leaders now suddenly realized, not only was there absolutely no possibility of defeating even one, much less two, colossal armies, but if the communists swarmed onto the home islands they would not only insist upon the removal of the Emperor, just as the Americans had been demanding, but they would also foist a Marxist regime on the people. And, since both changes would, in effect, mean the spiritual and cultural death of

the Japanese people, it was a situation Japanese leaders were determined to forestall.⁵³

The following day, the Japanese offered to the United States their surrender terms, again—the “new” terms being virtually the same surrender terms they had offered in January of that year, and the same terms offered several times afterward—surrender with the Emperor. With General MacArthur’s pragmatic insistence that maintaining the Emperor in his palace could be used as an efficient and economical way of controlling the Japanese people during US occupation, this time President Truman and the Americans accepted. Over the next several days, the two sides discussed the details of surrender. Nevertheless, with final surrender pending and peace at hand, US air commander, Curtis LeMay, could not pass up the opportunity to strike one more terrible blow against the hated Japs. Assembling the largest air armada thus far—over one thousand planes—the general sent them raiding Tokyo, Osaka and other Japanese cities, adding to the destruction and death count. Indeed, the unconditional surrender between Japan and the US was signed before the returning aircraft touched down at their bases. And so, once again, thousands of Japanese, just as thousands of Germans, thus survived years of war only to die on the first day of “peace.” Too, this final act of barbarity had no more to do with the surrender of Japan than did the two atomic bombs or the months of firebombing raids—it simply felt good.⁵⁴

Curiously, Gen. James Doolittle, hero of the largely symbolic first raid on Japan in early 1942, and commander of the US 8th Air Force, refused to send his crews into the air during this last raid on Japan, more concerned with keeping his men alive to enjoy peace than eager to kill even more Japanese women and children.⁵⁵

Finally, that day, August 15, 1945, the thing which Japan had been trying to do since early that year—surrender—was at last accepted by the Americans and World War Two, the most destructive, the most deadly, the most evil, and the most avoidable war in human history, technically came to an end. And with that end, perhaps as many as five million Japanese soldiers, sailors and airmen thus surrendered to the Americans and British. At the same time, hundreds of thousands more also surrendered to Soviet forces on the Asian mainland. Cruelly, ironically, a majority of this latter group would soon end up as slaves in Siberia ceaselessly dropping and dying in the same mines and forests as their former German allies.

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Following the absolute devastation of Hiroshima, after the blast, after the fire and the wind, himself seriously injured, stunned, stumbling through the ruins of his beloved home town, Dr. Michihiko Hachiya tried desperately to comprehend what great force could have accomplished such death and destruction so quickly, trying to understand and make sense of what possibly could create such complete and utter ruin. Although most of what he saw and experienced made no sense, one sight did stand out with absolute clarity in the doctor's mind. It was a symbolic sight and one he would never forget.

Somewhere in the jumbled debris, Dr. Hachiya saw a large number of sharpened bamboo spears. Nearby, he also stared at boxes of wooden bullets. Even then the comparison, and the contradiction, was clear to the doctor. It had always been a war that Japan could never have won. It was a war between a modern industrial giant and a brave, but backward, dwarf. The war had been utterly unwinnable . . . and the war had been utterly a massacre.⁵⁶

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Four years of bloody war, four years of savage, unforgettable combat on the islands, in the air and on the sea. And yet, all was now suddenly overshadowed by the end of the war and the atomic bombs. Followed so quickly by the Japanese surrender, almost all Americans assumed that the amazing secret weapons alone were responsible. And almost all Americans, of course, were euphoric that the war was over. US newspapers gladly fed the insatiable public demand to know more about these marvelous wonder weapons that could so suddenly force an enemy to end a war.

“The most terrible weapon in history. . . ,” announced the New York Daily News. “The bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of TNT. It had more power than 2,000 times the blast power of the British ‘Grand Slam,’ which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare . . . it is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East. . . . War Secretary Stimson revealed that even deadlier atomic bombs will soon be made. ‘Improvements,’ he said, ‘will be forthcoming shortly which will increase by several fold the present

effectiveness of the terror weapon.”⁵⁷

Referring to American leaders and the use of the new weapon which could destroy entire cities and vaporize thousands of people in a split second, the Chicago Tribune commented that these “wise” US leaders by “being merciless, they were merciful.” To twist such Orwellian logic even further, the same paper displayed a sketch of the dove of peace flying over Japan, an atomic bomb in its beak.⁵⁸

“Peace! Our bomb clinched it!” ran a headline from the Hanford, Washington, newspaper, the town where the plutonium was manufactured for the first atomic weapon.⁵⁹

“This town just went totally nuts,” announced a resident of Hanford as workers’ children paraded through the streets beating pots and pans. “It was euphoria, just the whole atmosphere was party-time, patriotic.”⁶⁰

Indeed, many Americans, for at least one reason, were unhappy that the war was over. A poll conducted by Fortune Magazine showed that a significant minority of US citizens (22.7%) wished that more atomic bombs could have been dropped on Japan.⁶¹ The words of the American President certainly did nothing to reduce that percentage.

First learning of the incineration of Hiroshima while sailing home after his meeting with Allied leaders in Potsdam, Germany, Harry Truman was ecstatic upon hearing the news.

“This is the greatest thing in history!” exclaimed the president, his voice “tense with excitement.”

The World will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians. . . . The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. . . . We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan’s power to make war.⁶²

Japan’s “power to make war” was already completely destroyed and Truman

knew it; bamboo spears and wooden bullets proved it. And those who also knew better—top US military leaders, the Japanese government, and especially Japanese survivors themselves—were not swayed in the least by such transparent lies and peace-time propaganda, either about the military nature of the targeted cities or that the end of the war and the Japanese surrender was due to the atomic bombs. On April 11, 1945, for example, US military intelligence reported that Japan would quickly surrender if the Soviet Union entered the war against them. And as early as the Potsdam Conference that summer, President Truman knew very well that Stalin would not only attack Japan as promised, but when he would attack. “He’ll be in the Jap War on August 15,” wrote Truman in his diary. “Fini Japs when that comes about.”⁶³

Of the eight highest-ranking US generals and admirals, seven already had serious misgivings about the “greatest thing in history,” as Truman had termed it. One of those was Douglas MacArthur, overall military commander in the southwest Pacific.⁶⁴

“It was not the atomic evisceration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended the Pacific war,” said the general. “Instead, it was the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and other Japanese colonies that began at midnight on Aug. 8, 1945 [sic]—between the two bombings.” MacArthur condemned the bombing as an unnecessary “slaughter.”⁶⁵

And Dwight D. Eisenhower—a man who himself knew more than a little about the mass murder of a helpless enemy—suddenly found a mote of pity when he registered his complaint against the use of the hideous new weapon. “The Japanese were ready to surrender. . . ,” the European commander wrote. “It wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing.”⁶⁶

Even Curtis LeMay, a general whose firebombing attacks were responsible for vastly more civilian deaths than the new terror weapon publicly admitted that the atomic bombs were unnecessary and that Japan would have speedily surrendered without them. The bombs, he asserted, “had nothing to do with the end of the war.”⁶⁷

Admiral William D. Leahy, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, heartily agreed:

It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was taught not to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.”⁶⁸

“The use of the atomic bomb, with its indiscriminate killing of women and children, revolts my soul,” former US president, Herbert Hoover, added shortly after the news reached him.⁶⁹

With surrender and US occupation, most of those who visited the destroyed cities after the surrender were horrified by what they saw and heard. Slowly at first, and despite US censors, what happened began to seep out to the world at large. Terrible as the atomic bombings themselves were, with the passage of every day it became clearer and clearer that the worst was still to come.

More and more, as the euphoria over war’s end began to fade, many thoughtful Americans themselves began to harbor reservations not only about atomic weapons and the terrible fact that they were used, but the reasons for them being used when they so clearly were unnecessary. As Felix Morley, former editor of the Washington Post, so adequately summed it up, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan was “an infamous act of atrocious revenge.”⁷⁰ And as for those individuals from President Truman down who advocated the use of such terror weapons as the atomic bombs as a way to save lives by shortening the war, one of the foremost military historians in the world, Maj. Gen. J. F. C. Fuller, begged to differ:

Though to save life is laudable, it in no way justifies the employment of means which run counter to every precept of humanity and the customs of war. Should it do so, then, on the pretext of shortening a war and of saving lives, every imaginable atrocity can be justified.⁷¹

As the above comments angrily make clear, to many then, to many more now, it is difficult to bestow any moral equality, much less moral superiority, on any people who not only use a hellish weapon on women and children, but who use it on an utterly defeated people who admitted they had lost the war

and who were trying desperately to surrender.

And thus, the war that began with a “Day of Infamy” at Pearl Harbor was now ending with another. This latter act of infamy, however, had far, far greater ramifications for the future of mankind and the world than the former.

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Meanwhile, with the close of actual war, those who had planned and waged that war to absolute and unconditional victory could finally relax and rest on their laurels.

“The war with Japan is over as far as creative work is concerned,” announced US Army Air Corp commander, Henry Arnold. The old general’s curious use of words might suggest that the massacre of over a hundred thousand surrendering Japanese troops and the incineration of perhaps a million women and children was some beautifully “creative” or artistic process.⁷²

“Nothing new about death,” added an equally proud Curtis LeMay, “nothing new about death caused militarily. We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of 9-10 March than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”⁷³

And for at least one enthusiastic military historian, his look back on the accomplishments of US air power more resembled a radio broadcaster recapping an exciting sports contest than the wholesale massacre of innocents:

Highlights of the entire Twentieth AF blitz against Japan was the last five months of dynamic operation. In reaching this fiery perfection, which literally burnt Japan out of the war, the Twentieth came a long way from its meager [beginnings]. . . . In its climactic five months of jellied fire attacks, the vaunted Twentieth killed outright 310,000 Japanese, injured 412,000 more, and rendered 9,200,000 homeless. . . . Never in the history of war had such colossal devastation been visited on an enemy at so slight a cost to the conquerors.⁷⁴

One might add that never in the history of war had so many women and

children been murdered, both in Germany and Japan, and never in the history of war had so many of the murderers felt so little concern for the victims or so little moral compunction over the deed itself. Truly, World War II was the dark divide at which man willingly, even eagerly, began his slide back down that slippery slope of human evolution.





(above) The Dachau Massacre

(below) Franklin D. Roosevelt (left) and Henry Morgenthau (right)



(above)

Germany—The Hour Zero
(below) Japanese—The Enemy

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(above) Surrender
(below) Edvard Beneš



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(above) The

Prague Purge

(below) Sanehisa Uemura and daughter, Motoko





(above) Suicides—Death Before Dishonor
(below) Tetsuo and Asako Tanifuji



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(above)

Denazification
(below) Dwight D. Eisenhower

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(above) Somewhere in the Pacific
(below) US Death Camp



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(above) Firebombing Japan
(below) After the Raid—Tokyo





(above) One of the Few—A Live Captive
(below) Leni Riefenstahl



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(above) American Torture Pen

(below) Shlomo Morel 196



(above) The Morgenthau Plan
(below) Anne O'Hare McCormick



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(above) Hiroshima
(below) War's End
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(above) Japan—Comfort Station
(below) Victors and Victims



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(above) Expulsion—No Home, No Hope
(below) Freda Utley

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Chapter 7 Inhuman

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s was the case throughout eastern Germany during the summer of 1945, millions who had fled in terror from the Red Army during the spring fighting now found themselves homeless, impoverished and adrift on a sea of hate. Thus, with Germany's

surrender, thousands of starving, bedraggled refugees returned east, trusting that it was better to suffer and die at home, surrounded by all that was familiar, rather than suffer and die on the roads as homeless vagabonds. Unbeknownst to this multitude of wretched humanity, they were living on borrowed time—they no longer had homes.

Under agreements articulated at Yalta and codified at Potsdam, the Soviet Union would receive vast stretches of Polish territory and, in recompense, Poland would absorb large tracts of the former Reich, including much of East Prussia, Pomerania, East Brandenburg, and the extremely rich, industrialized province of Silesia. What such an action implied was chillingly revealed by Winston Churchill. When a Polish official expressed doubt that such a massive uprooting of people could be carried out, the British prime minister waved all concerns aside: “Don’t mind the five or more million Germans [sic]. Stalin will see to them. You will not have trouble with them: they will cease to exist.”¹

And thus was set in motion, wrote Anne O’Hare McCormick of the New York Times, “the most inhuman decision ever made by governments dedicated to the defense of human rights.”²

Just as with the show trial at Nuremburg, might, not morality, and vengeance, not justice, now held sway over the people of Europe and there was not one thing on earth they could do to stop it.

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Even as the Red Army was overrunning eastern Germany in 1945, armed Polish militiamen were hard on their heels, eager to lay claim to what would soon be theirs. For German survivors who thought they had seen and suffered everything under the passing Soviets, they soon discovered that they had not.

“The weeks during which the Russians had occupied the village seemed

peaceful in comparison,” wrote an astounded woman from Silesia.³

“There is something strange and frightening about this Polish militia,” another viewer offered. “It consists, not of soldiers and policemen, but of rabble—youths, dirty and unkempt, cruel and cunning.”⁴

As these witnesses and many more made note, the malice of the Polish invaders was more extreme than even that of the Red Army. Unlike the typical Russian, who harbored no great, personal ill-will for the average German, the centuries of conflict between neighboring Poland and Germany had nurtured a deep and abiding hatred.⁵

“[T]he Russians . . . are spiteful in a manner that is different from that of the Poles,” observed one clergyman. “The maliciousness of the Polish militia . . . is cold and venomous, whereas Russian maliciousness is somehow warm-blooded.”⁶

“They were constantly drunk and gave vent to their rage upon the Germans,” records Silesian, Maria Goretti. Even though she had treated him well, Maria was startled one day when she looked up and saw her Polish employee leading a gang of drunks to her home. While one man held her hands, the others began beating the terrified woman with their fists. When Maria finally fell to the ground the drunken Poles thereupon joined in kicking her. Gaining her feet, the desperate victim fled out the door. Maria’s escape was short-lived, however. One of the men managed to trip her ankle and the woman fell, cutting her face severely on a sharp rock. Once more, the enraged attackers began their savage assault, so much so that Maria thought she would be killed.

“That was the thanks I got from the Poles for having protected them during the Hitler regime” railed the bitter German woman.⁷

“[T]here was hardly a German in the whole village who was not beaten on some occasion or other . . . ,” revealed another pummeled victim. “To mention but three examples of Polish methods of tormenting the Germans: they pushed one German under the weir; they made another villager lie on the ground and eat grass; on another occasion they made one of the villagers lie on the floor and then they climbed onto the table and jumped down onto his stomach.”⁸

Because many militiamen came with wives, sweethearts and sometimes children, massive rapes on a Soviet scale did not occur.⁹ For the victims of beatings, torture and around-the-clock terror, however, this was cold comfort. All residents were fair and easy game.

“Since all Germans are required to wear white arm bands, they are marked prey for these willful adolescents and can be easily identified and herded off for any type of labor or humiliation,” noted Regina Shelton. “The few German men in town, most of them well beyond their prime and found physically unfit for military service during the war, bear the brunt of degradation and terrorism. Sooner or later, each is arrested on whatever pretext comes to a Polish mind.”¹⁰

Arrests were sudden, random and usually based on rumors or hearsay. Remembered one man from the city of Neisse:

I had just stepped outside, after finishing my soup, when a civilian and a Russian, wearing the uniform of the Young Communists Movement, came up to me. . . . He informed me that I was suspected of having mishandled Poles. I denied this accusation. The young Russian, who was about twenty-six, thereupon hit me in the face and shouted, “You fat German pig, never worked, only eat and drink, hit workers, and go with women.” I objected to this accusation most strongly, whereupon he hit me in the face a second time. Then they marched me off, allegedly to interrogate me. They took me to the cellar in the boys’ school, where four Russians promptly seized hold of me and began beating me. Blood streamed out my nose, mouth, and ears, and finally I collapsed.¹¹

“[A] Polish militiaman appeared at the house,” added another man in another village. “[He] said to me, ‘German man says you got wireless.’ I replied, ‘German man telling lies.’ The Pole thereupon kicked me in the stomach, arrested me and took me to the headquarters. . . . I was interrogated for hours. . . . They hit me in the face and mouth and kicked me in the stomach. Then they locked me up in a cell, which was so small that there was only enough room to stand or sit, but not to lie down.”¹²

“We were crowded together like a lot of animals. . . ,” reported a prisoner at Trebnitz. “Swarms of lice ran about on the rags on which we slept. At night they plagued us to such an extent that we hardly got a wink of sleep, but it

was hopeless to try and catch them as it was so dark in the cell. There was an old bucket in each cell which we had to use when we needed to relieve nature. Needless to say, the stench from the bucket was horrible. The militia guards . . . took a special delight in tormenting the poor prisoners every day, either by beating or kicking them or by setting the dogs at them. They were highly amused whenever one or other of the prisoners got bitten.”¹³

When the prison interrogations began, many of the torture sessions were simply an attempt to discover where Germans had buried imaginary gold, silver and jewels. Almost any method was used to inflict pain, including crushed genitals, sharpened slivers tapped under toenails, red hot pokers, and of course, vicious beatings.¹⁴ To drown the hideous shrieks echoing through the streets, radios were often turned to full volume.¹⁵ Those who managed to survive these sadistic torture sessions could only pray that their agony was ended. Almost always, it was not. Time and again, hundreds of thousands of victims were forced to endure the horror over and over.¹⁶

“At ten o’clock they . . . started interrogating me again,” recalled one beaten and bruised German. After he was forced to strip naked, then lie across a chair, the man was flogged mercilessly with whips. When the victim tried to rise he was kicked and beaten back down.

“Now will you tell us where you’ve hidden your valuables?” the tormentors asked.

“I haven’t hidden anything,” pleaded the man.

Finally, the victim was forced to the floor on his stomach. With a hammer, one of the torturers then began pounding the man’s toes, one at a time until all were smashed flat.¹⁷

As was the case above, when one form of savagery failed to work, the sadists laughingly moved on to the next.¹⁸ With knives and bayonets young torturers cut swastikas into the backs and bellies of screaming prisoners. For those who fainted, a splash of water revived them so that the torment could continue.¹⁹

No one escaped the horror. Returning German soldiers, those who thought they had faced all the terrors six years of war could deliver, soon discovered that indeed, they had not. Records one of those young men on his own personal journey through hell:

My father and I were locked up in a cell together. . . . Soon afterwards they came and took my father away. I heard someone shout, “Trousers down! Lie down, you swine!” Then I heard the sound of blows descending on naked flesh, followed by screams, moans, and groans, and at the same time derisive laughter, jeers, oaths, and more blows. I trembled with rage and indignation at the thought that the Poles had flogged my father, an old man of sixtyeight. Then I heard a faint moaning sound, and after that all was quiet. . . .

Soon, the soldier’s cell door was again thrown open and in rushed four Poles. “Out you get, you swine, you son of a bitch,” shouted one of the torturers. “Trousers down! Get a move on! Quick!”

Before the son had time to react, the men grabbed him, yanked his pants down, then threw him over a stool. With grins of delight spread across their faces the Poles thereupon began a brutal flogging of the victim’s buttocks and thighs. With the pain utterly excruciating and all but unbearable, the soldier nevertheless bit his lips.

“I was determined not to let these devils see how much they were hurting me,” acknowledged the victim. “But I was unable to control the twitching of my body, and I wriggled about like a worm. . . . Then I fainted.”²⁰

Days and nights on end, such terrible torture continued against thousands of German men and women. When the radios were turned up or accordions started to play, the horror commenced. “As soon as we heard them,” one quaking victim recalled, “we knew that the torture was due to begin.”²¹

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Not all crimes were committed in secret behind prison walls. Those individuals fortunate enough to escape the hell of Polish prisons found themselves slaves in all but name. Thousands were thrown into labor camps and toiled in the fields, forests and factories until they dropped.

“One day they were in the bloom of health, and in 14 days corpses,” noted a German at Grottkau. “The Poles laughed when they saw the great number of corpses.”²²

While hundreds perished daily in the work camps, millions more who held to their homes were subject to slave labor on a moment’s notice.

“Any half-grown Polish militiaman . . . had the right to stop the Germans on the street, even when they were going to church, and take them off to work somewhere,” disclosed one observer.²³

“We were brought to the town in long columns like criminals under guard,” remembered Josef Buhl, a photographer from Klodebach. “It reminded one of the slave trade of the middle ages, when we were drawn up on the town’s square. We were examined like goods for sale.”²⁴

As the weeks and months passed more and more Poles—men, women and children—migrated into eastern Germany crowding the residents and expropriating their property. “Every house received one or several families,” Josef Buhl goes on. “They lived in the best rooms and not only did they take the best furniture for themselves, but also the cattle and our clothes.”²⁵

Homes not stolen outright were subject to plunder raids at any moment. “The Germans,” a woman in Liegnitz wrote, “were forced to open cupboards, chests of drawers and such-like furniture, and then the Poles took what they wanted with the words: ‘All mine.’ If he took a fancy to the beds, the mattresses and other furniture, a day later a truck stopped before the house, and everything was put into it.”²⁶

German signs in German towns now disappeared, replaced by those in the Polish language. Many now found it difficult to find their way around their own communities. Schools were taken over by the invaders and German children were not allowed in the streets; those that did venture out were beaten with sticks.

“[We] Germans had no right of complaint,” a witness explained. “We were utterly defenseless and at the mercy of the mob.”²⁷

On the countryside, land-hungry Poles fanned out and greedily seized the rich, productive farms. With a militiaman holding a watch, residents were given five minutes to clear the premises since the home and land were now the property of Poles. For those Germans who were slow, clubs were used freely to quicken their step.²⁸

Many Polish invaders, more prudent, stole farms but wisely retained the owners as slaves. “I now farmer, you Hitler, work,” commanded one usurper to a hapless German who suddenly found himself enslaved on his own farm.²⁹ Soon, concludes Josef Buhl, “everything belonged to them. . . . Work

was the only thing they did not take from us.”³⁰

“[The] Poles ventured to commit more and more excesses against Germans,” recorded a Pomeranian farmer. “They drove us out of our beds at night, beat us, and took us away for days at a time, and locked us up. . . . [W]hen the Germans were sleeping, there would suddenly come into the room a horde of Poles, for the most part drunk; the German families had to move, just as they were. . . . Thus our conditions of life steadily got worse.”³¹

“Generally,” concluded a woman in Silesia, “no other course remained open to the Germans than to leave their property, in order not to die of starvation.”³²

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And thus, by tens and twenties, by hundreds and thousands, many Germans “voluntarily” abandoned their ancestral homes and began drifting west with no clear goal in mind. Surprisingly, despite the daily terror and torture they faced, many eastern Germans displayed a dogged determination to ride out the storm, naively assuming that since life could obviously get no worse, it must only get better. Nevertheless, the fate of all Germans in the east had been sealed at Potsdam.³³

Although the timing varied greatly from region to region, when the fateful day arrived there was no mistaking the matter. Commonly, the shattering of glass and doors were the first sounds a victim heard, soon followed by angry shouts to clear the home within thirty minutes, ten minutes, five minutes, or. . .

“Cold-bloodedly and sarcastically, they informed us that we must leave the house at once . . . ,” one German recounted. “[S]ome of them were already ransacking the rooms. They told us we could each of us take a blanket, so we hurriedly stuffed two pillows inside the blanket. But when the Polish officer, who, incidentally, was rushing up and down in the room like a maniac, striking his whip against his ridingboots, saw the pillows, he said, ‘Leave those here. We Poles want something as well!’”³⁴

“I was dumbfounded,” admitted Heinrich Kauf shortly after learning he had to leave his home immediately. With his wife yet weak after giving birth the night before, the father frantically sought help from the mayor.

“Leave your wife at home,” advised the mayor. “You must go away with the children.”

Racing back, Kauf found Polish militia already taking control of his home. With help from a neighbor the crazed man hitched horses to a cart, carefully loaded his wife and newborn in the back, rounded up the other children, then left his home for good. Too late, the frenzied father realized he had forgotten to pack clothing for the other children.³⁵

While militiamen stood with watches in hand, frantic residents elsewhere rushed in a mad attempt to scoop up what little remained to them.

“I was only allowed 10 minutes,” shrugged an elderly woman, “and was just able to drag my grandchild, who was 1 year old down the stairs. . . .When I wanted to fetch my cloak out of my house, the Poles did not let me in again remarking, that the 10 minutes were passed.”³⁶

“You have seven minutes. Six minutes. Five minutes. Four,” impatient men shouted.³⁷

For those who tarried beyond the time limit, whips, sticks and clubs were used freely. Once in the streets, the victims were strip searched.³⁸ One seventy-five-year-old woman was flogged with a heavy riding whip until she surrendered her fur coat. Then, after taking her place in a farm cart another Pole leaped aboard and searched the woman down to her underwear. When the thief discovered a purse with jewels, the cart—also occupied by two dying women and two girls, ten and twelve, who could not walk because of venereal disease—was allowed to leave.³⁹

“A Polish girl took my shoes from my feet, which I had kept on when sleeping for weeks. . . ,” another grandmother sobbed. “My hair was hanging down and disheveled, as the Russians had taken all my hair clips and combs. . . . I was 6 times searched in my vagina for jewelry.”⁴⁰

“Polish militiamen on horseback drove the poor people through the streets, lashing them with whips,” recorded a German from one town in Silesia. “The entire population of Zobten lined up on the square in front of the town hall. They were all clutching small bundles containing their belongings. Women and children were weeping and screaming. The men folk wore an expression of utter despair on their faces. Every now and again the Poles cracked their whips and brutally lashed the poor people standing on the square.”⁴¹

“We stand numb before the bankruptcy, our own and that of generations before us,” muttered Regina Shelton to herself. “They had made this land ours by their sweat and blood. How can a whole people be uprooted,

disowned, tossed aside like useless flotsam—how? With the stroke of a pen, with a new line drawn on a map, we are sentenced to homelessness.”⁴²
“As they left town in an endless procession,” a viewer from Gruenberg reminisced, “Polish soldiers fell upon them, beating and flogging them in a blind rage. . . . Robbed of all they possessed and literally stripped of the last of their belongings, . . . these poor creatures trudged along in the wind and the rain, with no roof or shelter over their heads, not knowing where they would find a new abode.”⁴³

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And thus, from throughout eastern Germany, from farms, villages, towns, and cities, from homes where countless generations had been born and raised, began the greatest death march in history. Crippled and starved, diseased and enfeebled, with virtually nothing to their name, set adrift in a hostile, hate-filled land already bled to the bone, it was preordained that millions would never survive the trek. Except for those able-bodied individuals held as slaves and young girls retained for sex, roughly eleven million Germans took to the roads, going they knew not where.

“The Poles had by their conduct made the departure from our home easy,” confessed Josef Buhl. “It almost caused us joy.”⁴⁴

“Almost,” but not quite. As the long lines of misery began wending their way west, many, like Anna Kientopf, well knew that they would never see their ancestral homes again. “I remained further behind, and went slowly. I often looked back, the farm was in the evening sun; it was an old farm, where I had been born. My parents had lived and worked there before us, and had been buried in the cemetery. . . . The sheep and cows were peacefully grazing. Who would milk them this evening and the following days?”⁴⁵

“Wherever we looked on the road,” Isabella von Eck took note, “the same wretched columns were to be seen, wheel-barrows were pushed by women, loaded with luggage and small children. . . .”⁴⁶

While millions set out afoot, thousands more were expelled by rail. Recalled Regina Shelton:

The train stands ready, sliding doors gaping to receive us into the dark space of the freight cars. It seems to stretch for miles beyond the platform, and many of the cars are already occupied. The revulsion of having to clamber up

and into the inhospitable black holes is given short shrift by the militia swarming among the evacuees and counting heads to fill each car to capacity. Straw is pushed to the walls around the cavernous rectangle. When the quota in our car is filled, we are told to spread out the straw. Baggage stacked against the walls, each family builds a lair of sorts, and the lucky ones garner a corner as far away from the door . . . as possible.

Then the platform is empty, except for the militiamen on guard. At a signal the sliding doors clang shut and are latched from the outside. . . .When the train jerks into motion, we still do not know where it will carry us. . . . The small window draws me like a magnet. Stepping over bags and around huddled or sprawling bodies, I make my way to it to stand by it as long as the train keeps rolling to see the familiar scenes glide by for the last time.⁴⁷

In addition to those traveling overland, thousands of Germans were crammed like cord wood onto barges and boats and floated down rivers.

Almost immediately, the ragged refugees were set upon and robbed by gangs of Russians, Jews, gypsies, and other DPs moving in the opposite direction. Poles who already occupied the villages and towns through which the people passed were also lying in wait. “Polish civilians lined both sides of the road and the refugees were systematically robbed and beaten as they walked by,” said one victim.⁴⁸

“The Poles robbed us of anything they found in our possession, swore at us, spat in our faces, and flogged and beat us,” added another refugee.⁴⁹

If anything, those trapped in cattle cars were even more vulnerable. As Maria Popp recorded:

Whole bands of fellows attacked every wagon, and when 2 left it 3 got in. The train kept stopping to help the plundering, and no-one was left in peace. There were about 70–80 persons in each wagon, and each one was separately searched for valuables or money. Anyone, who was wearing good clothes, had to take them off, even shoes if the plunderers liked them. If anyone refused, he was beaten until he yielded. . . .Very few of us were able to think clearly, and no-one dared to help the cripples and the dying. . . . The crutches were snatched out of their hands, and one of them was literally kicked to

death. I shall never forget his screams.⁵⁰

“Throughout the whole journey,” recounts another of those fleeing, “the Poles continued to rob the expellees on the train, both during the day and by night. I saw one Pole hit the Mother Superior . . . in the face because she refused to give him the only suitcase she had.”⁵¹

And while some were robbing, others were raping. Many females were violated thirty or more times during the trek. “Women who resisted were shot dead,” a horrified viewer divulged, “and on one occasion . . . a Polish guard [took] an infant by the legs and crush[ed] its skull against a post because the child cried while the guard was raping its mother.”⁵² When the weary travelers halted for the night they were compelled to bed down in barns, deserted homes or nearby woods.

“[B]ut even there the Poles did not leave us in peace,” moaned one victim.⁵³ Moving among the wretched refugees, the attackers robbed and raped at will.

“Our cart was plundered the same night by the Poles, who stole everything that they liked,” offered Heinrich Kauf, the man whose wife had given birth the day before. “The next morning we continued our journey, and I took my wife out of the village in a hand-cart. We had scarcely got out of it, when a Polish woman came, and took the bedding away from my sick wife.”⁵⁴

Like Kauf, many others lost to thieves not only their possessions but their sole means of transport.

“One cart I saw,” wrote a wanderer, “was being drawn by six children, instead of by a horse, and there was a pregnant woman pushing it. Old women of seventy were laboriously pulling handcarts, and I saw some Sisters of Mercy with ropes tied round their chests engaged in the same task. Venerable Catholic priests were toiling along the roads with the members of their parish, pulling and pushing carts.”⁵⁵

Slow and agonizing as every mile was, the columns nevertheless continued to press ahead for only death and misfortune awaited those who dallied. The old and sick were first to go and their withered remains littered the roadside by the thousands. Little children and newborns were next.

“Nursing infants suffer the most. . . ,” observed one of those on a refugee train. “[T]heir mothers are unable to feed them, and frequently go insane as

they watch their offspring slowly die before their eyes. Today four screaming, violently insane mothers were bound with rope to prevent them from clawing other passengers.”⁵⁶

“[A] young married couple . . . were pushing a perambulator, containing a cardboard box,” scratched a diarist. “They said, ‘Our baby is in that box. We are going to bury it. We buried our other little one a week ago. They died of starvation’ . . . There is no food, no doctor, and no medicine to be had!”⁵⁷

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As the refugees approached the Neisse and Oder, there was renewed hope. Once over these rivers, which marked the new boundary between Germany and Poland, many felt their great trial would be, for the most part, over. Unfortunately, when the trekkers reached the two streams the worst leg of the odyssey began. To the Polish soldiers and the civilians along the frontier, it was one final chance to wreak vengeance on the hated Germans. Many made the most of it. One last time, what little remained to the refugees was stolen, tossed or simply destroyed. One last time, women were publicly strip-searched and their vaginas meticulously probed for hidden valuables. One last time, victims were forced to crawl on all fours and eat grass, dirt . . . or worse. Those who balked were beaten or killed.⁵⁸

The horror and chaos of the moment is vividly captured by Anna Kientopf:

We had to pass through a lane of Polish soldiers, and people were taken out of the column. These had to drop out, and go to the farms on the highway with their carts, and all that they had with them. No one knew what this meant, but everyone expected something bad. The people refused to obey. Often it was single individuals, particularly young girls, who were kept back. The mothers clung to the girls and wept. Then the soldiers tried to drag them away by force and, as this did not succeed, they began to strike the poor terrified people with rifle-butts and riding whips. One could hear the screams of those who were whipped, far away. . . .

When Anna spotted a group of Polish soldiers coming directly her way she knew crying and begging for mercy was futile.

“Come, it is no use resisting,” the young mother of three reasoned with several female friends traveling with her. “They will beat us to death. We will

try to escape afterwards.”

Judging by their cynical looks, a number of Russian soldiers standing nearby were clearly disgusted by the intentions of the rapists, but did nothing. When Anna made an appeal to the men, they merely shrugged their shoulders helplessly, implying they now had no authority over the Poles. At that moment, just when Anna lost all hope, she saw renewed hope: An older Polish officer. The young woman begged him for help. “Go to the highway!” shouted the kindly man above the din. Wasting no time, Anna and her grateful friends grabbed the children and their cart and fled to the highway. Unfortunately, the road was jammed with other refugees and their carts became hopelessly entangled. From the opposite direction, Russian trucks, horns blaring, threatened to run over the people unless they cleared the road. Anna and her friends managed to avoid the trucks but it was then that more Poles attacked the trekkers.

Four Polish soldiers tried to separate a young girl from her parents, who clung in desperation to her. The Poles struck the parents with their rifle-butts, particularly the man. He staggered, and they pulled him across the road down the embankment. He fell down, and one of the Poles took his machine pistol, and fired a series of shots. For a moment there was a deathly silence, and then the screams of the 2 women pierced the air. They rushed to the dying man. . . . When we finally went on, the desperate weeping of the 2 women echoed behind us, mingled with the screams of the people, who were being beaten. . . .

With a renewed sense of terror and desperation, Anna’s group pushed on as hard and fast as they could toward the Oder/Neisse Line, determined to cross “at any price.” On each side of the road, the bodies of murdered trekkers increased.

Finally, Anna and her friends spotted the Oder bridge just ahead. With all the remaining strength they possessed the women pulled the heavy cart toward what they saw as their only salvation.

“We were ready to give everything, which we still possessed, if we could only pass over the Oder,” admitted the young mother. “Our one object was to get away from these robbers and murderers.”

Alas, just when Anna's group was ready to cross the river, with only a handful of carts ahead of them, the barrier gate suddenly came down indicating that no more could pass over until the following day.

Understandably, Anna's disappointment was "boundless" and the terror she felt for her children, her friends and herself during the coming night was beyond words.

Mercifully, after spending "a terrible night," but an otherwise safe night, in a drenching downpour, Anna and her party the following day again moved toward the river.⁵⁹

In addition to robbery and rape, Poles also used this last opportunity to dragoon the able-bodied into slavery.

"My God, my God, this is a bitter life," moaned one priest. "I am more than 70 years old. When mother died, I thought: that is hard. Then Hermann and Arthur were killed in the war, and I thought: that is still harder. Then the Russians came, and robbed us of everything, and then I thought: that is the hardest blow of all; but what we are now suffering, is the hardest, and I shall not survive it for long. If it were not for Anni and the 2 little children, I should kill myself."⁶⁰

Many, rather than endure further torture, did in fact end their suffering then and there on the Oder/Neisse line. "The only thing they let me keep was this rope, and I'm going to hang myself with it before the day's over," vowed a man who could stand no more.⁶¹

When demented refugees attempted to escape the horror on the bridge above by crossing over the river below, Polish guards systematically shot them dead. "Why don't you drive us into a big enclosure like a herd of cattle, surround us with machine-guns, and shoot us on the spot!" one crazed woman cried.⁶²

For those survivors who finally entered the bridge, there was one last gauntlet to run.

"They robbed us and flogged us as we crossed the bridge," stated one victim. "Children screamed, grown-ups collapsed, and some of them died and were left lying there on the ground at the end of the bridge. Others fell into the Neisse, but the Poles were indifferent to their fate. They drove us on unmercifully across the bridge."⁶³

And as for Anna Kientopf and her group as they crossed the bridge. . . .

Now we thought, that the worst was past, but at the other end of the bridge, there were Russian soldiers with their green caps, and also girls in uniform. We were again controlled, all our sacks were opened, and turned upside down. Many lost the few valuables, which they still possessed. From me they took my wedding ring, which I foolishly had [put back] on my finger. Then we had to collect the sacks together, and were forced with blows to leave the Oder bridge as quickly as possible. They drove us without mercy down the steep embankment.⁶⁴

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For the miserable refugees, the first hint that there would be no happy ending to the story came when those Germans desperately trying to reach the Neisse/Oder west bank found thousands of other Germans desperately trying to reach the Neisse/Oder east bank. With what little shelter that remained in the war-ravaged Reich already jammed to overflowing, with starvation stalking the land, with murder, rape and slavery the order of the day, many earlier refugees from Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia were frantic to return to homes that were no longer theirs. As one viewer recorded:

[C]rowds kept calling to the Silesians who were trekking eastwards, “Turn back! There’s no sense in going on. You can’t get across the Neisse! The Poles will take all your belongings from you. They’ll rob you like they did us and throw you out of Silesia. Go back where you’ve come from!” On hearing this, those who were aiming to get back to Silesia grew confused. Many of them refused to believe what they were told and pushed on; others, however, decided to turn back.⁶⁵

For those weary, starving trekkers moving west, signs greeted them at every turn in every town and every village:

REFUGEES NOT PERMITTED TO STAY. THEY MUST MOVE ON.
MOVE ON! MOVE ON!

THERE IS FAMINE IN GOERLITZ. THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FOOD
SUPPLIES. IF YOU DISREGARD THIS WARNING YOU WILL
PROBABLY DIE OF STARVATION.⁶⁶

Warnings such as these were not idle words, as one witness makes clear:

The inhabitants of Goerlitz resemble living corpses—deathly pale, sunken cheeked, and haggard. . . . Many of the refugees are unable to move on, for their strength is at an end and they are slowly wasting away. Draycarts come to collect the bodies of those who have died of starvation. I counted sixteen coffins on one dray-cart, coffins of grown-ups and children. . . . I actually saw people collapse on the street, weak with hunger.⁶⁷

With waning hope and fading strength, the expellees trudged deeper into Germany. Unable to walk any further, thousands simply dropped dead by the wayside.⁶⁸ Increasingly, and with building momentum, Berlin became the star of hope for many. If there was any succor yet left in the world, here, most felt, was where it would be found. What the people discovered upon reaching the former capital, however, were endless ruins, rotting corpses, “living skeletons” boiling grass for soup, and still more signs:

ATTENTION, REFUGEES! NEWCOMERS BANNED FROM SETTLING IN BERLIN. USE DETOURS. AVOID ENTERING THE CITY LIMITS. CONTINUE WESTWARD.⁶⁹

Few heeded such words . . . few could. A British officer was on hand at one Berlin rail station when a transport arrived from the east. When the cars finally halted there was a “great long groan” that seemed to rise from the entire train, thought the officer. Many people clung to the outside of the cattle and boxcars. For a considerable time, no one in or on the cars moved, nervous eyes searching instead everyone standing, sitting or laying on the platform. When the refugees at last began to step down, all seemed stiff and crippled. Some stumbled and fell. Others, those who had clung for hours, even days, to doors and fittings of the cars found that they could not now use their arms or hands and thus crept forward with outstretched, paralyzed limbs like creatures from a horror movie. Children, their faces blotched and gray, looked more dead than alive. Everyone was filthy. A race that around the world was known as a model of cleanliness and hygiene, was now covered head to toe in dirt, grease and grime. Male and female, old and young, the hair of all was matted, filthy and in disarray. Children were covered with running sores and scratched at them constantly. Old men, unshaven for days, weeks, their red-rimmed eyes staring blankly at anything, everything, nothing. Whether out of courtesy or from fear, those already camped on the

platform pressed back to make room for the newcomers.

“Everyone seemed to be a unit of personal misery, complete unto himself,” concluded the shocked British officer.⁷⁰

“Filthy, emaciated, and carrying their few remaining possessions wrapped in bits of cloth,” typed a reporter for the New York Daily News, “they shrank away crouching when one approached them in the railway terminal, expecting to be beaten or robbed or worse.”⁷¹

Each train that unloaded held horrors that soon seemed common: From one train Red Army soldiers lifted nearly a hundred corpses from the cars . . . while relatives shrieked and sobbed, as many more bodies from another train, the stiffened corpses quickly piled on trucks and driven off to a nameless pit . . . people packed so tightly in cars that they could not move to relieve themselves and thus they arrived at stations covered in excrement . . . ranting lunatics . . . babbling grandfathers . . . sobbing mothers . . . dead children. . . . “Many women try to carry off their dead babies with them,” a Russian railway official observed. “We search the bundles whenever we discover a weeping woman, to make sure she is not carrying an infant corpse with her.”⁷²

Barges and small craft also docked in Berlin. One boat, a Red Cross worker reported, “contained a tragic cargo of nearly 300 children, half dead from hunger, who had come from a ‘home’ . . . in Pomerania. Children from two to fourteen years old lay in the bottom of the boat, motionless, their faces drawn with hunger, suffering from the itch and eaten up by vermin.”⁷³

Those expellees who did not wander off into the wilderness of rubble that was Berlin, to root, grub and die like moles, remained camped in the railroad stations for weeks, even months, where they died from disease and starvation by the thousands.⁷⁴ At one depot alone, “an average of ten have been dying daily from exhaustion, malnutrition and illness . . .,” protested an American official to the US State Department. “Here is retribution on a large scale, but practiced not on the [Nazis], but on women and children, the poor, the infirm.”⁷⁵

“It was a pathetic sight . . .,” echoed British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, after a trip to Berlin. “The most awful sight one could see.”⁷⁶

When horrifying accounts such as the above began circulating in the US and Britain, readers were shocked, sickened. Vengeful and bloody-minded as many in the West had been during war, with peace most no longer had a

stomach for the cold and calculated slaughter of a fallen foe.

“[A]n apparently deliberate attempt is being made to exterminate many millions of Germans . . . by depriving them of their homes and of food, leaving them to die by slow and agonizing starvation,” influential British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, warned in the London Times. “This is not done as an act of war, but as part of a deliberate policy of ‘peace’.”⁷⁷

“The scale of this resettlement and the conditions in which it takes place are without precedent in history,” added Anne O’Hare McCormick in the New York Times. “No one seeing its horrors firsthand can doubt that it is a crime against humanity.”⁷⁸

Offered an equally outraged American academic, Austin J. App:

Cannot each of us write a letter to President Truman and another to each of our senators begging them not to make the United States a partner to the greatest mass atrocity so far recorded in history? Calling it the greatest mass atrocity so far recorded in history is not rhetoric. It is not ignorance of history. It is sober truth. To slice three or four ancient provinces from a country, then loot and plunder nine million people of their houses, farms, cattle, furniture, and even clothes, and then . . . expel them “from the land they have inhabited for 700 years” with no distinction “between the innocent and the guilty” . . . to drive them like unwanted beasts on foot to far-off provinces, unprotected, shelterless, and starving is an atrocity so vast that history records none vaster.⁷⁹

Fortunately, these voices of protest and the pressure they exerted on Western leaders were welcome signs that the physical torture of Germany was, at the very least, easing, if not ending. Unfortunately, by the time the horror became common knowledge, the deed was all but done. Of the roughly eleven million expellees hurled from their homes in East Prussia, Pomerania, East Brandenburg, and Silesia, an estimated two million, almost all women and children, perished. Equally as horrifying, though less well known, were the nearly one million Germans who died during similar expulsions in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. Additionally, an estimated four million more ethnic Germans were sent east to the Soviet Union where their odds of surviving as slaves were worse than as refugees.⁸⁰

While Western leaders such as Winston Churchill expressed astonishment at

the tragedy they had wrought in eastern Germany, little was said about the deliberate starvation in the rest of the Reich, and utter silence prevailed concerning the Allied torture chambers in Germany and Poland, the on-the-spot massacre of Nazi Party members and SS troops, or the death camps run by Eisenhower. Indeed, taken as a whole, it is not improbable that far more Germans died during the first summer of “peace” than died during the previous six summers of war.⁸¹

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Like Winston Churchill, other prominent figures who had lent a guiding hand to Allied atrocities began distancing themselves from the deeds when some of the first damning details became known. When particulars of Dresden and the firebombing campaign in Germany began to surface, RAF commander Arthur “Bomber” Harris insisted matter-of-factly that he was only following orders; “orders,” Harris stated, from “higher up.” And even Ilya Ehrenburg, that most virulent of propagandists and a man whose words to the advancing Red Army did more perhaps than all causes combined to insure the rape and slaughter of millions, even Ehrenburg had the temerity to plead innocence years after the war.

I had feared that after the crimes the invaders had perpetrated in our country, our Red Army men might try to settle accounts. In dozens of articles I kept on saying that we should not and, indeed, could not exact vengeance, for we were Soviet people, not Fascists. . . . There were, of course, cases of violence, of looting: in every army there are criminals, hooligans and drunkards, but our officers took measures against excesses. . . . Patrols protected the population. . . . [I]solated cases of excesses committed in East Prussian towns . . . aroused our general indignation. . . . pity welled up in my heart. . . . [T]he feeling of revenge was alien to me.⁸²

Despite such protests and similar ungainly attempts to put as much time and space between themselves and their dark deeds as possible, Ehrenburg and other Allied leaders actually had very little to fear. They had, after all, won the war. With a more-than-willing army of apologists, polemicists, journalists, film-makers, and “historians” to cover their tracks, none of the major, or minor, Allied war criminals ran any risk of being called to account for their acts. Far from it. At the lower levels, those who actually committed

the atrocities at Dachau and a thousand other points on the map, were quietly forgiven while at the upper end, US generals became American presidents and English prime ministers became British knights.

Meanwhile, as the voices of conscience were drowned in a flood of Allied adulation and celebration, much of the world's attention was riveted on Nuremberg. There, the victors sat in judgment over the vanquished. There, the accused German leaders were tried, there they were convicted, and there they were dutifully hung, for planning aggressive war . . . for waging criminal war . . . for crimes against peace and humanity . . . for crimes planned . . . for crimes committed . . . for crimes against. . . . And all this, it may be presumed, spoken slowly, solemnly, and with a straight face.

From afar, Austin J. App watched the ongoing charade in Nuremberg with mounting indignation. Like a good many others, the American academic had followed closely the course of the war and he, for one, was appalled and outraged by the utter hypocrisy and sanctimony displayed.

Germans still have much to feel guilty of before God. But they have nothing to feel guilty of before the Big Three. Any German who still feels guilty before the Allies is a fool. Any American who thinks he should is a scoundrel.⁸³

Chapter 8 To Bear the Unbearable

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urrender! It was a word most Japanese never expected to hear in their lifetime. Since the days of the “Divine Wind”—the Kamikaze—when a miraculous tempest had destroyed the invasion fleet of the Mongolian emperor, Kublai Khan, in the 13th Century, all Japanese never doubted that their nation was favored by god. Now, in the late summer of 1945, many expected a modern divine wind would destroy a modern invader in the last hour just as the same breath of god had destroyed the invader of the past. Alas. There was indeed a wind blowing over Japan on September 2, but it was not the breath of god. Instead, this wind carried the stench of sulfur, smoke and burning flesh. And fanning that wind over the surrender ceremony

in Tokyo Bay, a wind soon to spread across the face of the once sacrosanct land, were 2,000 American aircraft circling in a grand show of overwhelming might and absolute mastery of heaven and earth.¹

Although most civilians were deeply shocked and surprised that their nation had indeed surrendered, many of those closer to the war, those who had fought it, were not shocked or surprised in the least. In a thousand ways, these men had seen it coming. There were the obvious warnings that anyone could recognize—the almost endless number of US fighting men in their almost endless number of ships, planes, and tanks, numbers that could be brought to bear at any given point at any given time. Even more overwhelming, there was America’s incredible organizational skills, its vast natural resources almost inexhaustible, its crushing industrial might, its advanced science and technology that made most nations look primitive by comparison, its incredible power to produce virtually anything, and everything, whenever, wherever.

“We have learned from this war how inferior are our sciences and industry to those of the enemy,” scribbled one wounded and distraught Japanese soldier in his diary. “From the outset, I never thought we could win.”²

But often, especially for the average Japanese soldier, it was the smaller, seemingly insignificant disparities that largely destroyed his faith in victory.

For one sergeant, as he and his men slept by night and hid by days in muddy holes and wet caves on a nameless island, the epiphany came one quiet night as he looked down on a brightly lit enemy camp.

I imagined the Americans sound asleep in their tents. They might well be easing their weariness by losing themselves in a novel. In the morning they would rise at leisure, shave, eat a hearty breakfast, then come after us as usual. That sea of glowing electric lights was a powerful mute testimonial to their “assault by abundance”. . . . I had a vision of the island divided into adjoining heaven and hell, only a few hundred metres apart.³

Nothing, not even a combined US air and sea bombardment brought home to the witness above the uneven scales of the contest more than did this tranquil, almost indifferent, spectacle of technology, organization and wealth at war.

That a nation barely a hundred years removed from the feudal age could hope to contest against a modern super-power seemed ridiculous in hindsight. It suddenly occurred to one soldier, as he watched Japanese officers using swords to direct fire at B-29s from largely ineffectual anti-aircraft batteries, that he was watching a comedy, a farce, a satirical battle between the backward 19th-Century and the modern 20th-Century.⁴

Another young soldier on one island, sneaking and starving in the weeds and brush like a wild animal, trying to avoid US patrols, one day happened to spot something tiny blowing carelessly beside a road. The soldier stopped for a moment, then stared . . . and stared. When the man finally looked up, he was depressed, more depressed than he had ever been before. The young soldier knew as he walked away from the American gum wrapper laying by the road that something inside him had changed forever.

“Here we were, holding on for dear life,” he thought to himself, “and these characters were chewing gum while they fought! I felt more sad than angry. The chewing-gum tinfoil told me just how miserably we had been beaten.”⁵

Simply because many Japanese fighting men recognized the obvious did not mean any welcomed the result. Fighting for four bloody years in a war where victory was highly unlikely still never prepared anyone for surrender and defeat. As the Japanese military began laying down their arms with the surrender there was the universal sadness and depression among all soldiers, sailors and air men that they had failed to do that which they had sworn to their families and friends they would do—namely, win; that all their sacrifice and efforts had been for naught; that the best years of their life had been wasted; that all their dead comrades had died for nothing.

Civilians, however, especially women and children reacted differently. For females, peace would mean no more fathers and sons killed in battle, no more dead children killed in air raids, no more moving from town to town in hopes of escaping the dreaded B-Sans, no more being roused from short, fitful naps by the daily, nightly, even hourly sounds of the dreaded air-raid sirens, no more boiling of grass and weeds to stave off starvation. For children. . . .

“My mother seemed somehow relieved,” remembered one child. “We’d survived the war after all. I think I felt partially like that too: ‘I didn’t die’.”⁶

“There were two things . . . that made me think ‘Oh, so this is what peace is’,” recalled a thirteen-year-old boy. “One was the fact that we could now leave our lights on freely after years of nightly enforced blackouts. I remember seeing the gathered faces of family members under a bare light bulb and thinking, ‘Peace is light and brilliant!’ I knew I could sleep that night without fear of air raids—a wonderful feeling in spite of my hungry stomach.”⁷

Other children associated surrender with no longer being compelled by hunger to eat tiny frogs, insects, tree bark, and roots. ✖ ✖ ✖

Nothing could exceed the abjectness, the humiliation and finality of this surrender. It is not only physically thorough, but has been equally destructive on Japanese spirit. From swagger and arrogance, the former Japanese military have passed to servility and fear. They are thoroughly beaten and cowed and tremble before the terrible retribution the surrender terms impose upon their country in punishment for its great sins. . . .⁸

So wrote Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander, soon after accepting the Japanese surrender. One of the general’s first acts as military governor of Japan was to set up headquarters in Tokyo, a devastated city that more resembled the surface of the moon than the capital of a country. There, MacArthur would enter his office, take his seat, then, as his words above suggest, he would rule the conquered nation more ruthlessly than perhaps even Kublai Khan and his Mongols would have done. “Have our country’s flag unfurled and in the Tokyo sun let it wave in its full glory, as a symbol of hope for the oppressed and as a harbinger of victory for the right,” ordered the general in a brief ceremony.

“The guard of honor presented arms,” recorded a witness, “and the officers saluted, as the Stars and Stripes waved over Tokyo, Japan’s capital city—humbled, charred, and flattened in defeat.”⁹

Almost immediately the US public relations officers went right to work polishing the American image to suit the folks back home. Just as they were doing in defeated Germany, those PR men in Japan worked night and day assuring that little or nothing negative ever escaped the occupied nation. Ran a press release that would soon become typical:

Calming a nervous populace called for discipline and friendliness. General MacArthur's troops proved themselves equal to the task. American personal kindness and official consideration were wholly unexpected by the Japanese. Those factors went far toward building good relations with an emotionally disturbed people. Beginning with the first hours of the Occupation, the old authoritarian background of the Japanese contrasted with the free, liberal philosophy of the American forces. Adjustments had to be made and sometimes led to misunderstanding and confusion.

Simultaneously, American soldiers on patrol or sightseeing in trucks and jeeps circulated throughout the occupied areas. Amused by the Japanese children, they handed out chocolate bars, hard tack, chewing gum, and candy drops.¹⁰

Unfortunately, American soldiers were doing much more than sightseeing or tossing candy to kids. From the moment US troops landed on the Japanese home islands, the raping began. Just as with Okinawa and Saipan, no one in authority, from MacArthur down, seemed troubled in the least as their sex-crazed men immediately began the hunt for enemy females.

Even before the advent of Gen. MacArthur and the formal surrender, thousands of panicked women and girls jammed the Japanese railway system in a desperate bid to flee the cities before the Americans arrived. While many managed to escape, most did not. Unfortunately, just as in Germany, the worst fears of Japanese females proved true. On cue, some of the very first US troops to step foot on Japan immediately began the "horizontal" conquest of the women they found. In Yokosuka, US Marines on an "inspection tour" entered one home and at gun point spent their time raping a 36-year-old mother and her teenage daughter. At another home in the same town, two marines chased a terrified housemaid upstairs and, cornering the woman in a small room, both took turns raping her.¹¹

In another community, small gangs of marines spread out. One group of three offered a young housewife ten yen for sex and when she flatly refused they dragged her into another room and raped her anyway. In the same town, four American soldiers burst into a home and rather than sexually assault the wife and mother, the male homeowner was himself raped.¹²

In the larger cities there were few preliminaries. American soldiers simply burst into homes and raped whomever they chose. In a ten-day period in the Tokyo and Yokohama area alone there were over a thousand reported rapes. And because of the well-known modesty and chastity of most Japanese women, and because of the shame associated with such vile attacks, for every reported rape there were generally at least ten unreported rapes.¹³ Many Japanese females were so worried about attacks that they cut their hair short and tried to pass themselves off as men. Some women reportedly carried cyanide tablets, ready to commit suicide before enduring the terrible shame.¹⁴

“When US paratroopers landed in Sapporo, an orgy of looting and drunken brawling ensued. Gang rapes and other sexual atrocities were not infrequent,” revealed a Japanese historian, adding that some of the rape victims committed suicide.¹⁵

Ever since the massive sexual assaults during the invasion of Saipan, the Japanese had heard, of course, that the Americans were an “army of rapists.” Virtually all, however, were startled and horrified to see that army in person. To many proper Japanese, the insatiable sex drive of the conquerors, their lust, was “animalistic.”¹⁶ It was not only the violent raping and sodomizing of Japanese women, and sometimes men, it was also the nonstop sexual innuendo, the lascivious leering, the “wolf” whistles, the attempts to engage women and girls in sex, in the open, in public. After learning “hello” and “goodbye” the next words many Japanese orphans and street children learned was “You like to meet my sister?”¹⁷

So concerned were Japanese leaders about the American reputation for rape—in Europe, on Saipan, at Okinawa—that even before the final surrender they had gone to work. Drawing upon the tens of thousands of destitute and starving females in Japan, authorities established a system of national bordellos to service the occupiers. Additionally, Japanese leaders appealed to the females’ sense of patriotism by explaining that their services would raise a “dike” to protect mothers and daughters elsewhere. “You should bear the unbearable and be a shield for all Japanese women,” explained one proponent.¹⁸ It was hoped that if the occupying soldiers and sailors could engage in controlled sex, there would be no need for violent sex.

And thus, “comfort stations,” as they were politely called, were established in areas close to American military compounds and housing. Some idea of the problems facing all Japanese women came just days before the government bordellos opened for business when hundreds of impatient US soldiers broke into two of the buildings and raped every women in them multiple times.¹⁹ When the stations officially opened for business, the number of yelling, laughing Americans outside waiting was so immense that the girls inside stared in horror.

“The women were petrified of the U.S. soldiers pouring in and began weeping,” remembered one Japanese female. “There were even some who clung to posts (holding up the roof) and wouldn’t move.”²⁰ Those who tried to escape were forced back inside by American military police.²¹

“They took my clothes off,” revealed one little girl. “I was so small, they were so big, they raped me easily. I was bleeding. I was only 14.”²² “I cut off all my hair during that period to make myself look as unattractive as possible,” said another sex slave. “I cut my hair until I was quite bald, but it did not help me; I became a curiosity object.”²³

Although such stop-gap measures as the comfort stations did prevent wholesale rape on a German scale, this was small consolation to the thousands of women and children who had to endure the sanctioned sex attacks. Earning anywhere from eight cents to a dollar a day, a girl working in a “rape station,” as they more commonly were called, might be brutally raped and sodomized from fifteen to sixty times a days. On her first day, one woman served nearly 50 customers yet took home less than two dollars.²⁴ Many such females found little time to eat, much less sleep.

Despite hundreds of thousands of American and Australian occupation soldiers using the comfort stations, thousands more preferred seizing their sex violently. In the days, weeks and months after the surrender, numerous atrocities were committed as the victors laid claim to what they felt was rightfully theirs.

In the spring of 1946, American GIs cut the phone lines in Nagoya and raped every women they could get their hands on, including children as young as ten. At another city, US soldiers broke into a hospital and spent their time raping over seventy nurses and patients, including one who had just given birth. The mother’s infant was flung to the floor and killed. Male

patients who tried to protect the women were themselves killed. In the same year, Australian troops in Kure routinely dragged young women into their jeeps then spent the night raping them at a nearby mountain. "I heard them screaming for help nearly every night," recalled a witness.²⁵

In Yokohama, American soldiers grabbed a young woman off the street then drove back to their barracks. Once there the kidnappers and nearly thirty others raped the woman until she was unconscious.²⁶

Wrote one sympathetic Allied officer:

I stood beside a bed in the hospital. On it lay a girl, unconscious, her long, black hair in wild tumult on the pillow. A doctor and two nurses were working to revive her. An hour before she had been raped by 20 soldiers. We found her where they had left her, on a piece of waste land. . . . The girl was Japanese. The soldiers were Australians. The moaning and wailing had ceased and she was quiet now. The tortured tension on her face had slipped away, and the soft brown skin was smooth and unwrinkled, stained with tears like the face of a child that has cried herself to sleep.²⁷

Japanese attempts at self-defense were punished severely. In one community, when local residents formed an anti-rape vigilante group and retaliated against off-duty soldiers, armored vehicles in battle array entered the streets and took away the ringleaders. All those arrested received lengthy prison terms. When Japanese even spoke to one another about the massive rapes in their area they were arrested and sentenced to hard labor "for spreading rumors derogatory to occupation forces."²⁸

Had Allied commander, Douglas MacArthur, spent even half the time stemming rape as he spent censoring news on rape, the attacks would have stopped. But, like his opposite in Europe, Dwight D. Eisenhower, he did not. Indeed, the general seemed utterly indifferent to the pervasive crime. When Japanese newspapers tried to report on the nation-wide sexual attacks, the American commander shut them down. When the remaining Japanese newspapers attempted to report on the mere censorship of other newspapers, MacArthur censored them as well, then closed their doors.²⁹ Wrote one French researcher:

MacArthur censored newspapers, radio, old and new movies, lantern slides, theatrical scripts and performances, kabuki, bunraku, plays, music, songs,

postage stamps and currency, books, magazines and journals, speeches, teaching courses, mail, phone and the telegraph. Even Allied military reports were subject to self-censorship. MacArthur also forbade any mention of even the existence of censorship in the press, and exiled or fired Stars and Stripes editors as well as Time, Reuters, Saturday Evening Post and Christian Science Monitor correspondents who didn't obey.³⁰

The only "news" to reach the outside world about conditions in Japan was that which Douglas MacArthur wanted the world to hear. When even a note of negativity escaped the island lock-down, the general and his "aides" were quick to respond.

"The press and the people alike were soon to learn that even in the few instances when women were molested, the offenders were punished," lied the general concerning the rapes of perhaps millions of Japanese women that went almost entirely unpunished.³¹

Instead of the harsh realities of a brutal American occupation, MacArthur and his publicists focused on the folks back home and their sons and husbands in Japan, relaying to Americans how "impressed" the defeated Japanese were with the GI's "friendly boyishness" and their "spontaneous generosity."³²

"Again, I wish to pay tribute to the magnificent conduct of our troops," praised the general. "With few exceptions, they could well be taken as a model for all time as a conquering army. Historians in later years, when passions cool, can arraign their conduct."³³

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As they had done in Germany, the US occupiers were quick to appropriate the best homes and buildings still standing in Japan and either kicked the owners into the streets or kept them on in their own homes as maids, servants, cooks, or gardeners. The sudden change in the "fortunes of war" was a thing many Americans reveled in.

"I and nearly all the Occupation people I knew were extremely conceited and extremely arrogant and used our power every inch of the way," confessed one American.³⁴

Considering that many urban Japanese were already homeless or living in shacks salvaged from the ruins, the contrast between well-dressed victors and ragged vanquished could not have been sharper.

“The world beyond our brightly lighted Allied billets, offices and railroad coaches,” recalled another American, “was largely peopled by warped and ugly creatures from some Oriental [fairytale].”³⁵

If possible, the contrast was even greater on the island of Okinawa. Already responsible for the death of one third the population in the terrible battle from April to June, 1945, the US Army herded the remaining Okinawans, roughly two hundred thousand people, into forty concentration camps where they would languish and die for well over a year. When the Americans were criticized for not lifting a finger to alleviate the terrible condition of the people, the general in charge responded.

“We have no intention of playing Santa Claus for the residents of occupied territory,” the officer arrogantly announced.³⁶

From their recently acquired thrones the new rulers of Japan lived “like Rajahs and reigned like tyrants,” thought one American writer. All forms of Japanese militarism was immediately banned, of course. The Japanese army, navy and air force were disbanded; the few remaining ships, planes and tanks were destroyed; rifles, pistols, even ceremonial swords, relics from centuries past, were confiscated.³⁷ As for the surviving Japanese soldiers and sailors themselves, there were no parades, no awards, no medals, no crowds of well-wishers. Indeed, for the most part, returning Japanese veterans were pariahs, ignored, shunned, even angrily blamed for the defeat which now enslaved their nation.

“When I was discharged from the army,” said one former soldier, “I received as a reward for my years of service to the country a handful of rice, some clothes, and a dim outlook of the uncertain postwar years.”³⁸

Although the man above had no way of knowing it, he was one of the lucky ones. Of the hundreds of thousands of comrades who had surrendered to the Soviet Communists in the last days of the war tens of thousands were doomed to die as slaves in the mines and forests of Siberia. Additionally, nearly two hundred thousand Japanese soldiers and sailors were retained by the Americans and British as slave labor to dismantle fortifications

throughout Asia and the Pacific. Tens of thousands more were compelled to act as mercenaries, or “slave soldiers,” fighting against indigenous uprisings in southeast Asia as a result of colonial powers being dislodged years before by, ironically, the Japanese invasions. Tens of thousands of Japanese men and boys thus died fighting as slaves far from their homes.³⁹

Other than rape, confiscations, total censorship, and slavery, there were numerous other ways to drive home defeat to a once proud people. While large and small US flags seemingly sprouted everywhere from doors, windows and streets, there was not a Japanese banner to be seen. Flying of the Japanese national flag, the “meatball”, as Americans derisively called it, was forbidden. Those who dared were tossed into prison and sentenced to six months at hard labor.⁴⁰ American soldiers roared with laughter when polite Japanese tried to speak a few words of English while the Americans themselves did not deign learn a word of Japanese. Likewise, gum-chewing GIs relished giving orders to elder Japanese politicians and businessmen; those who did not move quick enough were punished with a kick in the pants. Others who resented such treatment were often slapped and beaten in public where they stood.⁴¹

For a normally prim and proper people, the daily attrition they faced drove home their conquered condition. To one Japanese physician, those now in control looked like the worst humans the world had to offer.

People with evil faces and foul tongues were wearing the best clothes. . . . [Some] looked like gangsters and cheap politicians. These fellows would enter the little shacks near the station, boldly and obscenely fondle the . . . girls, and otherwise behave outrageously. The country was in the clutches of the mean and unintelligent. I felt hate in my heart for them and gritted my teeth to think they had come to power.⁴²

On a trolley, the same doctor overheard a young Japanese angrily talking to a friend about his supposed girlfriend who was now the property of a US soldier. Suddenly, the car came to an abrupt stop.

Looking out to see what had happened, I saw three drunk [soldiers] behaving outrageously. They had forced the car to stop by stepping into its path, and now they pushed the conductor aside and climbed aboard. Belligerently, they bullied the conductor, roughed up the motorman and stalked back and forth

through the car making threatening gestures to anyone who got in their way. They forced the motorman to stop again so they could get out. Not one of them paid his fare. There was no one to make them. . . .43

Additionally, numerous shops, businesses and public buildings now sported signs that read “Japanese Keep Out” and “For Allied Personnel Only.” Other establishments had separate doors: One for the conquerors and one for the conquered.⁴⁴ No Japanese were permitted to leave the country. All letters, all incoming mail, all magazines, all newspapers, all school books, all forms of communication were strictly controlled and censored. And, of course, any criticism of the American regime was quickly and ruthlessly dealt with.⁴⁵ Apparently, judging by his windy and pompous pronouncements, Douglas MacArthur not only accepted what he wrought but he was pleased with it.

Certainly one of the most sadistic and shameful aspects of the American occupation was the starvation of Japan. Those Japanese who imagined that surrender and peace would at the very least mean an end to the hunger and want of the war years were mistaken. Few Japanese had any money, of course, but even had they the means there was very little to purchase anywhere. Most of those starving in the cities were so desperate for something edible that they scrambled aboard any and all freight trains bound for the countryside where they tried to trade treasured, but valueless, keepsakes for any rice or vegetables available. Those with nothing to barter scavenged for grass, weeds and tree bark. On the streets former soldiers and amputees begged for food. Many children had their growth stunted by malnutrition and it was noticed by all that the children of the 1940’s were smaller than those of the 1930’s.⁴⁶

“I was put into an orphanage,” said one little boy, a terribly disfigured child from a firebombing. “There generally was nothing to eat. Just no food at all. . . I went with other kids to dig for potatoes. I even ate cicadas. The thing about cicadas is that there’s really only a small bit behind their wings that you can actually eat.”⁴⁷

Eventually this child ran away from the orphanage to a city. There he lived and slept in the tunnels below a railway station. Early each morning, after tying a towel tight over his face to hide his hideous scars, the boy would climb out of his dark hole and beg for food in the streets above.⁴⁸

It was not a question of ability to import the food; the US had the largest merchant marine in the world and could have easily shipped in more than enough food to feed all. Indeed, MacArthur had no trouble at all feeding hundreds of thousands of US soldiers, sailors and airmen, all of whom were sleek and healthy. Clearly, much like his general on Okinawa, the commander of Japan simply had no desire to play “Santa Claus” to a despised enemy. The conditions of hunger and homelessness did not improve for years under MacArthur. Millions of Japanese simply starved on scraps that “did not reach the level necessary to sustain a healthy life.”⁴⁹

Hand in hand with starvation was alcoholism and crime. For countless Japanese, one way to make the occupation of their nation less onerous was liquor. Surviving soldiers, widows, mothers who had lost children, horribly disfigured victims of the bombings, these and more escaped reality in whatever way they could. Unfortunately, the only liquor most could afford was a toxic mix of alcohol and chemicals that was itself a cause of many deaths.⁵⁰

Correspondingly, although a non-issue before the war, crime soared during the so-called “peace.” With very little food to buy even if the people had the means to buy it, with starvation stalking the land, Japanese, young and old, did what they had to do to survive. By 1949, half of all crime committed in Japan was done by those between the ages of eight- and twenty-five-years-old. Thousands of homeless orphans were forced to gang together in order to live. Similarly, returning soldiers hardly recognized the land they once loved and many were compelled to steal to survive. One army veteran returned to find his home destroyed and his wife and children missing. What little money the man had was quickly exhausted by inflated food prices. Worse, “not a single person gave me a kind word. Rather they cast horrible glances my way.” Eventually, the former soldier decided to turn to crime. Although it did not seem so at the time, it was propitious that the first victim the man chose to rob happened to be an off-duty policeman. Instead of arresting the veteran, the officer gave him some of his own clothing to wear as well as handing him a hundred-yen note. Overwhelmed by this, the first act of kindness he had received since reaching home, the would-be career criminal saw it as a sign and vowed that he would henceforth live as he had always lived—honestly.⁵¹

While many Japanese were turning to alcoholism and crime, and while many more Japanese were starving, the American occupiers were living lavishly, shopping for food and clothing in special stores, holding noisy parties and loudly enjoying their victory. Because of the great influx of American bureaucrats and military dependents, MacArthur ordered the construction of 17,000 homes to lodge the newcomers, all to be paid for by the Japanese. Indeed, thirty percent of the Japanese national budget was used to fund the entire US occupation of their nation. Thus, Japan was forced to pay for its own enslavement.⁵²

For at least one American, however, such an arrangement between wealthy, arrogant victor and battered, beaten loser was a bit too much. George Kennan of the US State Department felt that MacArthur in his Asian bailiwick was akin to a parasite that lived in “comfort, elegance and luxury” while those around him in a “defeated and ruined country” struggled merely to exist.⁵³

And even within MacArthur’s own command apparatus, there were some troubled by the savage treatment being dished out to a beaten, starving foe. Japan, ran one secret memo, “can only be considered a vast concentration camp under the control of the allies and foreclosed from all avenues to commerce and trade.”⁵⁴

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In May of 1946, the trial of Japanese political and military leaders accused of war crimes began in Tokyo. Additionally, various tribunals sitting elsewhere sat in judgment of some five thousand Japanese accused of similar crimes. With good cause, such trials were viewed nervously by many American political and military leaders. As some well knew, the only thing separating themselves from the accused were the “fortunes of war.” Rightly, many around the world saw such farcical proceedings in which the victors appoint themselves to sit in judgment of the vanquished, both in Tokyo and Nuremburg, for the shameless, sanctimonious show trials that they were—or, in its simplest terms: a mere question of might parading as morality, of who won versus who didn’t.

Robert S. McNamara, soon an important American leader in his own right, at the time an officer in Curtis LeMay’s B-29 air armada, remembered his

commander later admitting, “If we’d lost the war, we’d all have been prosecuted as war criminals.”⁵⁵

“And I think he’s right,” admitted McNamara. “He, and I’d say I, were behaving as war criminals. . . . LeMay recognized that what he was doing would be thought immoral if his side had lost. But what makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win?”⁵⁶

Indeed, crimes charged against the Japanese leaders and men could have been just as easily charged against Americans had roles been reversed. As for the mistreatment of Allied POWs, including starvation, torture and murder, and as for the accusation that 27% of all Allied prisoners died while captives of the Japanese, the fact is that at least the Japanese were taking prisoners.⁵⁷ American policy from the first battle at Guadalcanal to the last at Okinawa was simply one of “no quarter”; surrendering Japanese were, almost without exception, murdered on the spot. Those who somehow managed to be captured alive were kept only until whatever information they could offer was given up, and then they too were killed. The mere fact that almost to the end of the war less than a thousand Japanese POWs were still alive is a terrible indictment against the Americans and the merciless course they had pursued.

And as for Allied POWs held by the Japanese, as late as January, 1945, the British Foreign Office could still report:

There was evidence that prisoners of war in Japan itself and in more accessible regions are treated reasonably well, according to Japanese standards, and that reports of serious ill-treatment come from outlying areas where the Japanese government has little control over the local military officers in charge of the camps.⁵⁸

And as for the charge of “crimes against humanity” that they were accused of, especially in China. . . .

“A lot of the stuff about what Japan is supposed to have done in China is simply invented,” explained a Japanese staff officer who himself had fought in China. “At the end of the war, I had to negotiate constantly with Nationalist [Chinese] army officers. None of them said a word about, for instance, a massacre in Nanking. OK, some people died there, because there

was a battle and people die in battles. But this idea that 150,000 or 200,000 were killed—who is supposed to have counted them?”⁵⁹

And even if such accounts were true, and terrible as they may have been, nothing the Japanese did in China or elsewhere even approached the deliberate, calculated and methodical incineration of Japanese towns and cities during the B-29 firebombing raids. Upwards of a million people, mostly women and children, were burned alive during these intentional massacres of the innocent.

For these and similar other reasons, this is why a few intrepid individuals from around the world argued that such trials staged by the winner’s against the losers of modern wars were themselves war crimes and should instead be conducted “by representatives of neutral nations free from the heat and hatred of war.”⁶⁰ This, of course, was something that the American and British victors, either in Japan or Germany, would never countenance.

One of those saddled with the thankless job of defending those who were, for the most part, already convicted was Okamoto Shoichi, a Japanese attorney. Although he knew his task was hopeless, Shoichi was at the very least hoping throughout the course of the trial, hoping that a hint, a glimmer, a note of humanity might be expressed by the American victors; something which in the long term might have a profound and positive impact on his countrymen. Unfortunately, the lawyer was disappointed.

What was always in my mind during this period was how unfair it was that, due to the simple fact that they won the war, the victor nations had never been questioned about their responsibility for some of their actions which violated international law. I was, however, quietly hoping that the leaders of the victor nations would at least express remorse for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the peace treaty had been concluded [sic]. A year has already passed, yet there is no sign of such action.⁶¹

Indeed, in a nation already totally censored, what took place at Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war were the most censored events of all. Despite tight American control, however, what took place in those two cities during the summer of 1945 began to reach the Japanese people one word at a time. Despite the burning of cards and letters intended for the outside world, despite the destruction of photographs and their negatives, despite doctors and medical personnel forbidden from sharing information and discussing

possible treatments for the injured, even despite a ban on all forms of mourning for the victims in the stricken cities themselves, still, slowly, slowly, the horror that was Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to trickle out.⁶²

The Japanese had become accustomed to horror stories. After months of firebombing raids by the B-Sans, after months of schools, hospitals and orphanages being shot up by American fighter pilots, after months of starving children and grandmothers eating insects and weeds, the Japanese imagined that they had already seen and heard the absolute worst that one war had to give. However, such thoughts soon dissolved into nothingness by the accounts now escaping from Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Initially, the Japanese, from one person to the next, heard rumors and tales from the stricken cities. Some said the terrible destruction was caused by an incredible new death ray that was fired from the sky. Others stated that the Americans spread a highly flammable film of gas over the cities, then ignited it, which explained the terrible burns victims experienced. Ultimately, it was realized that over each city one plane dropping one bomb was responsible.

Reports from survivors of the two cities spoke of people actually being disintegrated, or vaporized, by a ball of fire brighter than a thousand suns. They spoke of others being charred to nothing more than shrunken black trunks; of others whose skin literally melted and hung to the ground in strips or “sheets” as they staggered away; of bodies so blackened and disfigured that the viewer could not tell the front of a victim from the back, whether they were young or old, male or female, human or “alligator”; of those now ghastly beyond belief, blinded when eyeballs were melted from their sockets; of children covered so thoroughly with hideous heat blisters that their bodies had expanded to double their normal size.

Terrifying as these initial accounts were, what followed was horrible beyond anyone’s wildest nightmare. As the weeks and months passed, incredible, almost unbelievable, accounts of the aftereffects of these terrible weapons became better known.

Within a week of the attacks, thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki who imagined they had escaped the blast unharmed began to suffer fevers, nausea, headaches, diarrhea, and their hair began to fall out in huge clumps. Any

wounds a victim may have suffered then now began to ooze copious amounts of pus; gums began to swell and bleed; purple spots—hemorrhaging beneath the skin—now began to cover bodies, as did boils. A disgusting green discharge began to drip from mouths and ears. Victims began to vomit blood and chunks of flesh as the internal organs started to dissolve. Bloody diarrhea ravaged the body virtually nonstop. Adding to the horror were those confused survivors trying desperately to aid the sufferers throughout such carnage.⁶³ Generally, within days of the onset of such symptoms the victims mumbled deliriously, lapsed into a coma, then died in extreme agony.

When horrific accounts such as the above began to leak from Japan, the US military simply denied the reports as “propaganda.” Later, when called before the US Senate to explain, Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, head of the atomic bomb project, attempted to ameliorate the situation when he stated that death from severe radiation exposure was “without undue suffering.” It was in fact, added the general, “a very pleasant way to die.”⁶⁴ Needless to say, none of those who were enjoying that “pleasant way to die” at that very moment by coughing up their own internal organs in streams of blood were called upon to testify.

The Japanese called the terrible new weapon pika-don, or “flashbang.” The world now knew it as the atomic bomb. Unlike other bombs that blasted and burned only once, the atom bomb was something that kept on killing years after the explosion. Soon, there was a near universal cry from around the globe demanding that such devilish weapons be banned and never used again, much as mustard gas from World War I was proscribed. Many others, when they learned the true nature of the weapon, now asked angrily why the bombs were used at all.

As more and more information seeped from Japan and its military blackout, it became clear to many that while some had argued that the bombs were necessary to end the war, the fact was that they were not. Numerous top military leaders admitted that Japan was already defeated and wanted to surrender when the bombs were dropped. Truman’s explanation for dropping the bombs, that it would save not only American lives, but Japanese lives, in the unlikely event a US invasion had been launched, was nonsense. Vaporizing and broiling three hundred thousand women and children to

potentially save combat deaths at some possible point in the future was positively Orwellian in its logic.⁶⁵

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If certain acts of violation of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany [or Japan] does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow. To pass these defendants a poisoned chalice is to put it to our own lips as well.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, and in spite of the profound, heartfelt words of one of the wisest of Americans, Justice Robert Jackson, Chief Prosecutor at the Nuremburg War Crimes Trial, the victorious politicians and propagandists of World War II seemingly were not troubled in the least about being “judged by history” nor of sipping from a “poisoned chalice.”

And so, just as at Nuremberg in Germany, the vanquished in Tokyo became the predictable victims once more of the victors. Of those Japanese charged with war crimes, nearly a thousand were found guilty and hanged.

“I still don’t believe that was the right thing to do,” argued one angry

American general who, like millions more, recognized the hypocrisy of victors sitting in judgment of the vanquished. “We wanted blood and, by God, we had blood.”⁶⁷

Unfortunately, nowhere was there a court to place the winners of the war on trial; a trial for those who not only ignored the Geneva Convention utterly, but those who openly laughed at it; a trial for those who took no prisoners, who shot down tens of thousands of terrified men trying to surrender, who then mutilated their bodies in the most savage manner possible; a trial for those who sank hospital ships and machine-gunned all survivors; those who deliberately firebombed cities filled with women, children, the old, the weak; those who not only raped women and children but those who turned their backs and allowed it, even laughed at it; those who dropped the most terrible

weapons in the world on a nation that was already defeated and trying desperately to surrender.

The use of atomic bombs, where they were used, but perhaps even more importantly, when they were used, was perhaps the greatest of all war crimes in a war filled with war crimes—World War Two. There are numerous excuses for why the bombs were supposedly dropped—to save American lives, to save even Japanese lives, to end a war that had already ended, to awe the Soviet Union with American might—but ultimately, at its core, there is only one true reason why these weapons were used and that reason is as old and primal and savage as the cave itself—Hate. If the hate-filled Americans, urged on by evil men and their obscene propaganda in movies, newspapers, magazines, and posters, felt justified in wiping out “yellow rats”—or, as President Truman called them, “beasts”—with bayonets, bombs, bullets, and flame-throwers on the beaches of Pacific islands, why should they worry about wiping out two entire cities of “beasts” with atomic bombs? Indeed, had the bombs been available to drop on Germany, as they were originally intended, they would have been dropped without a second thought. When hate-inspired propaganda is used to denigrate, vilify and dehumanize an enemy to the level propaganda was used against Germany and Japan, the results in war will always be the same.

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In a cold rain, as he walked through the wet nuclear waste that was then Hiroshima, a man who had seen many sights over the past weeks now saw another sight that made him pause in mid-step:

I saw a thin, woebegone dog making his way. . . . He had something in his mouth and when he got nearer, I discovered it was a bit of vegetable. He must have found it on the garbage dump. . . . What a pitiful sight, I thought. . . . Most of his hair was gone so I guessed he suffered radiation injury, too. Somehow this dog was symbolic. What a dismal view, standing there. . . . [T]he shabby figure of a dog trudging along with his hips bent, tail down, and hair gone.⁶⁸

Perhaps this sad symbol that the thoughtful man quietly watched was merely that of his beloved nation, Japan, in its present fallen state, in its current

terrible condition. If so, then it is understandable how the unfortunate dog could easily provide the perfect sad symbol for an unfortunate nation.

But perhaps the dog's symbolism went even further, even deeper, than that. Perhaps what the man caught a glimpse of in the form of this pathetic dying animal was the final defeat and last dying vestige of all human hope, the utter collapse of man's morality and the death of the human spirit. Perhaps, after such a triumph of evil around the world, perhaps the old human heart of hope, honesty, truth, justice, honor, mercy, decency, and humanity, like the old dog, would never, could never, recover from such a terrible setback as World War Two had proven to be.

But then, perhaps the historian reads too much into too little. Perhaps he wants to see, hopes to see, has to see, in others what he wants to see, hopes to see, has to see, in himself. We do not really know what the man saw on that cold walk in that cold rain—the one, the other, both, or neither. He did not say. We only know what the historian thinks the man saw on that walk, since that is also what the historian saw.

Epilogue

When it comes to propaganda, we suspected our enemies of it, but we never figured we were using propaganda. We felt like our country was too honest to use propaganda on us, and we honestly were not conscious that they were.¹

So wrote Katharine Phillips, an American Red Cross worker during World War II. Hardly concealed in Katherine's words written long after the war, is the fear, the dread fear, that perhaps the "inhuman evil" her generation was told to hate a thousand times over during four years of war may not have been so evil or so inhuman after all. Just as with every other war known to man, World War II had also been a war of words, a war of poisonous words; a war of deceit, treachery, hate, and lies in which trusting, unsuspecting people were lashed once again into a frenzy of murderous madness by outrageously vicious and vile propaganda. True, some angry words are perhaps necessary in times of war to awaken and impassion the indifferent among us to work and strive to win such a contest; but equally true, some of that same propaganda, in the hands of evil men with evil agendas, sitting

safely behind desks far removed from danger, contribute to outright murder of the most cruel and cold-blooded kind, encourage rape on a massive, historical scale, add to the agonizing death by fire of uncounted millions of women and children, and engender enough hate, misery and pain to make a planet groan.

Three, five, even ten years after the war, the Allies in Europe began to open up their prisons and close their slave camps and those rare German soldiers who had somehow survived their brutal captivity were allowed to enter railroad box cars and leave for the West. With no home or family to return to any longer some joined the French Foreign Legion. More emigrated to North or South America. Most, however, like beaten dogs returning each night to the porch of their suffering because it was all they knew, most merely returned to die in the place of their birth.

“But the cargoes those trains carried,” observed one horrified witness.

“Starved, emaciated skeletons; human wrecks convulsed with dysentery due to lack of foods: gaunt figures with trembling limbs, expressionless gray faces, and dim eyes.”²

“Oh great God! How miserable can it get?” asked Ruth AndreasFriedrich one day from Berlin.

Sometimes, when walking through the streets, one can barely stand to look at all the misery. Among the smart American uniforms, the well-fed figures in the occupying forces, the first German soldiers appear ragged and haggard, sheepishly looking around like caught offenders. Prisoners of war from who knows where. They drag themselves through the streets. Seeing them one wants to look away because one feels so ashamed of their shame, of their wretched pitiful looks. . . . They shamle around like walking ruins.

Limbleless, invalid, ill, deserted and lost. A gray-bearded man in a tattered uniform leans against a wall. With his arms around his head he is quietly weeping. People pass by, stop and shyly form a circle around him. He does not see them.³

And what of the others? What of those few Germans who escaped the Allied torture pens with their lives? What of those survivors? These men, women and children were no more “survivors” than were those who were beaten to death with stools or those who were drowned in outdoor latrines or those who

were buried alive in coffins. Sadly, many of those who found loved ones yet alive after the war realized too late it would have been far, far better had they discovered them dead.

Overwhelmed with excitement by the news, Regina Shelton rushed into a village tavern one day in “breathless expectation” of finding her father, who everyone had given up for dead. Suddenly, the woman froze in her tracks:

I see a lonely figure. . . . He sits at the table by the tile stove where the regulars used to have their friendly card games and mugs of beer. He sits without moving, and I am struck motionless by the sight. Now and then, the breeze from the open window touches him and makes him shiver as if from an icy wind. The only other sign of life is a steady rivulet out of the corner of one eye, tracing a shiny line along the parchment nose and joining the saliva that drools from the slack, half-open mouth. The hairless skull hangs low on his chest, arms dangle between his wide-spread legs, and a drop from his chin falls at regular intervals between them on the floor. Except for the drip and the chill that trembles through him occasionally, he resembles a broken statue, with rags tossed over its ragged edges. . . . Sunken eyes glisten feverishly in their hollows, glazed, vacant, dead. Like a scarecrow bleached by sun, wind, and rain, the figure is of an indefinable color, skin and rags blending to an ashen gray.

The greeting has frozen on my lips. What is there to say to a man who seems no longer human? whose instincts, surely, more than any conscious decision have carried the remains of his body to the place where he used to be a man? who lights like a homing pigeon on the very spot that was his point of departure into regions beyond nightmare? . . . In an irrational reversal of my earlier thoughts, I tiptoe by him, no longer wishing the man to be Father. . . .

In the kitchen, the others are huddled in a helpless hush, not knowing how to approach this intruder from the nether-world who has given them no sign of being aware of where he is or who they are. Mia . . . is almost out of her mind and without a clue how to cope with the repulsive creature who is her husband. . . . His obvious state of near-starvation at last gets Mia’s practical mind working. She carries a bowl of steaming soup to him. When she comes back, she whispers, horror-stricken: “He can’t even eat any more. You should have seen him sinking his whole face into the soup and slurping it, not even

using a spoon. And he kept trying to drink it while it was coming back up. It's terrible!"⁴

Similar accounts could be spoken about Japan, of men living like wild beasts for years, even decades, after the war, still afraid to come out from their island hideaways and be tortured and killed and mutilated as their friends were; of thousands of survivors from the firebombings and atomic attacks who had melted like wax, but somehow survived, only to spend the rest of their days as hideous freaks whose faces terrified children and adults alike.

The statistical results of World War II were devastating. Nations, ancient cultures, wiped from the face of the earth, billions upon billions of dollars of public and private property, including irreplaceable works of art stolen or simply destroyed, tens of millions of men, women and children killed in battles, bombing raids or by outright murder. . . . The statistics from the world's worst war are staggering. But what of the others? What of those casualties who fail to fall into neat rows of precise facts and figures? What of them? Although she may have survived physically how does a German or Japanese female go back to being a normal person again after the shame of rape? How does a German school teacher return to her role of being a simple school teacher the following day, the following year, or forever, after her entire class was forced to watch one afternoon while a hundred laughing Mongolians stood in line for oral sex, one after the other? Or how does a Japanese wife and mother go back to being a normal wife and mother after her husband and children were present when a dozen Americans gangraped and sodomized her one night on the floor of her home? Or how does a ten-year-old German or Japanese child grow up to lead a normal life, to play, to pretend, to dream, to fall in love, to marry, to have children of her own, how is this possible when her first sexual acts were violent, savage, painful, and continued for hours, days, even weeks?

The answers to all the above are, of course, never. Although these victims may have physically survived the war, the war killed them spiritually just as thoroughly, just as certainly, as any bomb, bullet or bayonet.

"It has shaped my life as a woman," whispered one victim of gang rape. "I have promised myself to stay alone."⁵

As a fifteen-year-old virgin who was sexually assaulted repeatedly for weeks,

one elderly woman long after the war no doubt spoke for millions of rape victims.

“I live with what happened to me. . . ,” confessed the lady. “There are days I cannot eat because of it, even now all these years later. . . . I cannot even say that word.”⁶

And yes, even “all these years later,” even the young victimizers, those who committed such terrible atrocities against helpless women and children, even they too found they were now new victims of a sort, the victims of sleep startling, nightmarish memories, of the daily, nonstop torture of their own awakened souls.

We were young, strong, and four years without women. So we tried to catch German women and. . . ten men raped one girl. There were not enough women; the entire population run from the Soviet Army. So we had to take young, twelve or thirteen year-old. If she cried, we put something into her mouth. We thought it was fun. Now I can not understand how I did it. A boy from a good family. . . . ⁷

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For many Americans, much like Katherine Phillips above, it took years before they came to realize that the very people they had been programmed to despise, dehumanize and ultimately exterminate like vermin were but after all, very frail, very frightened, very human, and finally . . . all were very much like themselves.

For many Americans like Katherine, such an epiphany came long after the war. For Joe O’Donnell it came much quicker. In September, 1945, one month after the surrender, O’Donnell was a twentythree-year-old Marine Corps photographer whose assignment was to photograph the aftermath of not only the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the consequences of US firebombing raids on Japanese cities. What the stunned soldier saw proved lifealtering.

“The people I met,” reminisced O’Donnell, “the suffering I witnessed, and the scenes of incredible devastation taken by my camera caused me to question every belief I had previously held about my so-called enemies.”⁸

For a fortunate few, however, even in the midst of the terrible inferno itself, reality sometimes shattered the hate-filled propaganda unexpectedly.

The sudden rehumanization of the Japanese came as a shock to some. While sifting through a blackened, blown-out island cave, one marine was “horrified” when he discovered some childish and brightly-colored paintings strewn among the wreckage. After poring over the art work, the soldier was stunned.⁹

“The Japanese soldiers had children . . . who loved them and sent their art work to them,” the incredulous marine suddenly realized, just as American children would send pretty pictures to their equally proud fathers.¹⁰

Rummaging Americans were startled when they found newspaper clippings of baseball teams back home in Japan, just as any normal American soldier would carry; or they discovered inside enemy helmets photos of beautiful Japanese movie stars just as many US marines folded pinups of Betty Grable or Rita Hayworth in theirs; or they unwrapped delicate letters from home with pictures of girlfriends inside; or, amid the debris of battle, they stumbled upon a torn photo of a now-dead soldier laughing and rolling on the ground in his back yard back home under a swarm of wagging and licking puppies. Another American, a marine officer, was startled by the family photos of the dead soldiers he searched. Far from faces that looked sneaky, cunning or cruel, the photos revealed, wrote the marine, “a nobility which would be difficult to match.” For some Americans, the abrupt realization that there were far more similarities between them and their enemy than not was life-altering.¹¹

On one island, an American soldier and friend blundered straight into a Japanese position:
through the pockets of a fallen enemy, other

As we crouched there hardly daring to breathe, listening to their jabbering, it came to both us at once that we were listening to some pretty scared Japanese boys looking for reassurance that they were not alone. It was so absurd, a couple of frightened Yanks playing Indians and crawling around on one side of the grass screen and a bunch of frightened Japs crouching on the other.¹²

During the war, in the midst of a storm of hate-filled propaganda, virtually anything and everything bad leveled at the Japanese or Germans was unquestionably accepted as true.

“[T]here was evidence of filth and neglect wherever they lived. . . ,” said one of those who had more than likely never seen, much less known, a Japanese in his life. “The Japs are evidently the filthiest race of so called civilized people in existence.”¹³

But front-line troops knew better.

Although “dirty Jap” was the term most used, and although hate-filled propagandists like the above said they smelled and acted “like animals,” the typical Japanese soldier was anything but “dirty” or “smelly.” Even in the most filthy and impossible combat conditions, as numerous Americans attest, the average Japanese soldier or sailor was “scrupulously” clean and groomed.¹⁴ Another matter that was unimportant to the propagandist and the politician but was extremely important to the fighting man himself was something quite simple.

“One thing I’ll say for the Germans,” admitted more than a few Allied soldiers, “they were better than we were with enemy dead; buried them properly and neatly with their equipment . . . over the crosses.”¹⁵

Occasionally, in even more startling ways, the realization of shared humanity came when a dead soldier’s diary was discovered:

Sept. 30 1942 (still on Guadalcanal) We took a short rest in the grove, when we found a figure of a man in a bush. Had he escaped from a crashing plane or infiltrated from the sea? Two or three soldiers chased and caught him after five minutes or so. He was a young American soldier.

He got a bayonet cut on his forehead and was bleeding. He sat down on the ground leaning on coconut trunks and had his hands tied behind his back. He looked thin, unshaven and wore a waterproofing overcoat.

He pleaded with me to help him, ‘General, Help me! ‘General, Help me!’ He thought I was senior and an officer of higher rank. In the rain, I stood hesitant about what to do with this American soldier. It was impossible for me to set

him free. We couldn't take him with my party. . . . We had not roughed him up after capturing him, but the moment I had deported him, the men of the HQ treated him violently. I thought later I should have released him.

I regretted what I had done to him. He didn't make me feel any hatred as an enemy. It was a strange feeling for me. He looked quite young and mild-mannered, and didn't look strong or ferocious at all. He was gentle but fully composed and never disgraced himself. I can't say what befell this young soldier. . . . I am afraid he never returned to his camp.¹⁶

As the above suggests, even in the midst of a savage, merciless war where evil and hate seemed the only gods, there are the few, but better, spirits that remain true to themselves no matter what the surrounding circumstances are. Although many Japanese POW commanders were harsh, as many more were not. Some allowed their prisoners to come and go from the camps to the nearby towns to visit shops and bars, even brothels, all on the honor system. Camp guards themselves commonly shared food and medicine with the prisoners, as did Japanese civilians.

"Nearly every former POW, including me," said one US Marine long after the war, "can recall individual acts of kindness or compassion by Japanese citizens or camp guards."¹⁷

After Irwin Scott and a camp guard briefly spoke about a tune the American prisoner had been humming from the opera, *Madame Butterfly*, the guard turned to leave. But before the soldier walked away, Scott heard something drop to the ground nearby.

I looked down and it was a banana leaf...inside was some rice and something else. It was his bento, his lunch. And I ate it, I was hungry. After that...he would come by...probably every third day...he would come by without anybody seeing, drop a package. It would be a banana, something like that.¹⁸

When Scott developed a serious case of malaria, the guard shared half of his own much-needed quinine until the American recovered.¹⁹

Others would owe their lives to someone they did not know and would never know, but it was someone who had summoned with all his will the final shred of mercy in his heart. Amid the insane upheaval of combat, the same soldier

who might one moment murder helpless prisoners could the next risk his own life to pull screaming men from a burning enemy tank. Hans Woltersdorf stood for one eternal instant, his machine-gun trained on several Russians he had surprised, the last flicker of humanity struggling mightily against all the dark forces of his past.

“Do I shoot or not. . . ?” the German lieutenant asked himself, as the terrified prisoners begged for mercy. “They got up . . . , stumbled backwards a few steps more to the fir thicket, turned round, put their hands down and ran like the devil. . . . Did I try to shoot? Did my machine gun really fail to function, as I claimed later?”²⁰

And many others, not the victims but the victimizers, would also have to carry the crushing weight of their decisions to their graves. For his own minor roll in “Operation Keelhaul,” perhaps the greatest act of deceit and treachery of all time, an aging British officer admitted that he would remain “haunted and horrified” by his actions until the day he died. “Even up to now . . . ,” confessed the man thirty years later, “I’ve been having nightmares about this incident, and I had a rather bad nervous breakdown about it all. I would wake up in the night in this awful situation. I could see the suicides, I could see the people screaming at me to help them or to shoot them.” Sworn to secrecy, forced to carry the terrible burden of guilt in silence for the rest of his life, there was no outlet for this man’s painful emotions save the torturous, nonstop nightmares. “Of course,” the former soldier concluded sadly, “it did remain a secret with me until thirty years afterward. . . . A most unpleasant secret.”²¹

Another aging man, an American in the Pacific war, to his surprise miraculously managed to survive the brutal fighting only to ponder for the rest of his life the things that he had seen and done. During the final hours in the battle for Okinawa, as he was leading a squad of US soldiers up a trail, young Virgil Simmons heard the strange sound of hooves approaching. Ordering his men off the path, Simmons was startled to behold a resplendently dressed Japanese officer on horseback. Pulling his army pistol, Simmons stepped forward and ordered the officer to throw down his own sidearm. The officer did as ordered, but then he also reached for his sword and unsheathed it.

“I just couldn’t take it,” reminisced the American soldier many years later. “I could see my head laying there on the trail. So I touched one off. I blew him out of the saddle.”²²

Collecting the dead man's dog tag, Simmons could see that he was a general. But amid the typical celebration that would follow the killing of such a high-ranking enemy, young Simmons was troubled. Was the Japanese general about to use his sword, or was he merely trying to surrender it? The US soldier kept the dog tag from that day but for the rest of his life he questioned his decision to kill a man who, in all likelihood, was merely trying to surrender and survive the war, just as Simmons and every other American was trying to do.²³

Long after the war, an aging American army vet was surprised to receive a letter from Japan. After opening the envelope the man could see that the words were neatly written in careful English. His mind then returned to summer, 1945. During the terrible fighting on Okinawa, in the very depths of a merciless, no-quarter madness, the young American soldier had not only guarded one of the few Japanese soldiers ever taken prisoner, but beyond any doubt he saved the captive from certain death. Even stranger, the American soon grew to know and even like the Japanese captive. The letter from Japan was from the man the US soldier had saved.

"I never fail to mention it to the Japanese people, whenever I have the opportunity," the grateful man wrote, "telling how you were openhearted and kind, and treated me generously, disregarding the difference of nationality. Though I was a POW you treated me so kindly as if I were one of your . . . friends."²⁴

✱ ✱ ✱

With the dawn of peace, men and women of good will finally find the strength and courage to revisit the awful crucible they had just so recently escaped from. Some, in shame, cast off the old prejudice and hate they once so eagerly embraced, and seek a reckoning, a new and honest understanding of the past that they had played a part in.

"Had the Germans won the war, should we or ought we to have been tried as war criminals. . . ?" asked one Allied soldier after the war, echoing thoughts that millions no doubt pondered for the rest of their lives. "[T]he thoughts live with me to this day."²⁵

Such thoughts were also the haunting thoughts of Edgar Jones. A veteran himself, first in Europe, then in the Pacific, Jones struggled mightily to make

sense of the many senseless things he had seen, heard and perhaps even done. When he was through, when he truly understood what had occurred, the veteran exploded in anger . . . and honesty.

We Americans have the dangerous tendency in our international thinking to take a holier-than-thou attitude toward other nations. We consider ourselves to be more noble and decent than other peoples, and consequently in a better position to decide what is right and wrong in the world. What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway? We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers. . . . [W]e mutilated the bodies of enemy dead, cutting off their ears and kicking out their gold teeth for souvenirs, and buried them with their testicles in their mouths. . . . We topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an all-time record for instantaneous mass slaughter.

As victors we are privileged to try our defeated opponents for their crimes against humanity; but we should be realistic enough to appreciate that if we were on trial for breaking international laws, we should be found guilty on a dozen counts. We fought a dishonorable war, because morality had a low priority in battle. The tougher the fighting, the less room for decency, and in Pacific contests we saw mankind reach the blackest depths of bestiality.²⁶

Fortunately, the passionate, heartfelt words of Edgar Jones now

speak for millions more around the globe. Alas, if only such words as his could be emblazoned across the sky in fiery letters before each and every rush to war and before each and every “holy crusade” to slaughter an “inhuman” enemy, then certainly the world would be a happier, kinder and better place because of it.

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