

Gegen das Vergessen

Prof. Dr. theol. Kuhlmann, Bohmte/Osnabrück

Über die Ereignisse in den Kriegsgefangenenlagern der Amerikaner in den „Rheinwiesen“ 1945 sendete das deutsche Fernsehen schon vor Jahren einen erschütternden Bericht, dem aber dann keine weitere Reaktion folgte. Die Bücher von *James Bacque*, die jetzt in neuer und erweiterter Auflage erschienen sind, wurden in der *FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINEN ZEITUNG* bereits am 28.11. 1995 besprochen und am Ende mit dem Satz aus dem Vorwort des amerikanischen Völkerrechtlers Alfred de Zayas gewürdigt: „Gehen wir nun zur Debatte über.“

Um diese Debatte zu beginnen bzw. ihr ein Podium zu bieten, hatte die Regio Osnabrück der WSG den kanadischen Schriftsteller James Bacque selbst eingeladen, um ihm Gelegenheit zu geben, seine Erkenntnisse am 22. Juni direkt vorzutragen. Den persönlichen Einladungen waren circa 80 Personen gefolgt, von denen im Anschluß auch einige spontan ihren Beitritt zur SWG erklärten.

James Bacque, inzwischen 80 Jahre alt, hielt seinen Vortrag vor einem aufmerksamen und sichtlich betroffenen Publikum. Was da auf Englisch (Prof. Kuhlmann übersetzte) und kurzen deutschen Einschüben vorgetragen wurde, war den meisten völlig unbekannt, kannten sie doch die Amerikaner nur als die „Befreier“, in deren Machtbereich viele Soldaten der Ostfront zu gelangen suchten, um sich vor der Roten Armee zu retten. Das Kapitel „Rheinwiesen“ war jedoch das Gegenteil von Befreiung und Anfang und Ende eines grauenvollen Sterbens von Hunderttausenden. Auf Befehl des amerikanischen Oberbefehlshabers Eisenhower wurde den deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, die man in riesige Stacheldrahtverhaue unter freiem Himmel und ohne ausreichende Nahrung gepfercht hatte, der Status eines Kriegsgefangenen entzogen. Sie wurden einfach zu „entwaffneten feindlichen Personen“ erklärt, und damit des Schutzes der Genfer Konvention beraubt. Die katastrophalen Verhältnisse spitzten sich durch das kalte und regnerische Wetter in den Monaten April und Mai noch zu. Den in Erdlöchern hausenden Männern fehlte alles. Versuche einiger Deutscher, die von den Zuständen in den „Käfigen“ erfahren hatten und die Nahrungsmittel hineinschaffen wollten, wurden mit Waffengewalt verhindert. Augenzeugen berichten, dass die Amerikaner sogar Bulldozer einsetzten, die im Schutz der Dunkelheit mit ihren Frontladern über die Erdlöcher fuhren und Lebende, Sterbende und Tote einfach mit dem Erdreich zuschoben.

Wie aber konnte es dazu kommen, dass diese Ereignisse weithin unbekannt blieben? So gibt es z. B. zwar in Bretzenheim ein kleines Museum, das die Zustände dokumentiert sowie ein „Feld des Jammers“ mit einem großen Gedenkkreuz und Hinweisen auf das Geschehen dort. Fakt jedoch ist, dass gerade von deutscher offizieller Seite bis heute alles versucht wird, diese dunkle Seite amerikanischer Nachkriegspolitik zu vertuschen. Die

Opferzahlen werden bewusst heruntergespielt; Ausgrabungen, die ja den Nachweis der wirklichen Opferzahlen erbringen könnten, sind behördlich untersagt.

In der anschließenden Diskussion stellte sich James Bacque den zahlreichen Fragen. Auf die Frage, warum er denn überhaupt als Angehöriger einer Siegermacht sich der Aufklärung dieser Vorgänge angenommen habe, sagte er schlicht: „Because I must!“ (Weil ich musste).

Im Folgenden dokumentieren wir den gesamten Text der Rede von James Bacque.

Meine Damen und Herrn Dr. Kuhlmann Guten Abend.

Ich bedanke mich Karl Heinz Kuhlmann für seine Einladung nach Deutschland zu fahren um dieses Gespräch mit Ihnen zu führen. Er hat eine Menge Arbeit gesteckt, die Leute zu organisieren und das Geld aufzubringen, um diese Abend zu ermöglichen. [Turn to Dr. K] Ich bin persönlich dankbar für Ihrem Vertrauen und Weitblick und auch im Namen von meine Freunde und Leser in Deutschland, herzlichen Dank.

Many thanks to you, Reverend Dr Karl-Heinz Kuhlmann who suggested that I come to Germany to talk to you tonight. He has worked hard organizing people and raising money to help make this evening possible, and I thank him personally for his faith and his vision and on behalf of my friends and readers in Germany.

Seit dem ersten Erscheinen meines Buches *Der geplante Tod* neunzehn hundert neun und achtzig in Deutschland und Kanada, haben mir Tausende von ehemaligen Kriegsgefangenen geschrieben, mich angerufen, Faxe oder Emails geschickt und sogar an der Tür meines Hauses in Toronto geklingelt um mir über Ihre Erlebnisse zu erzählen und zu bestätigen was ich über die Lager geschrieben hatte. Diese Unterstützung fand ich sehr ermutigend, weil ich von der Regierung der Vereinigten Staaten und später Frankreich schlimm angegriffen wurde.

Die meisten dieser Angriffe waren von Akademikern, Reporten, und Beamten des Staatsministeriums geleitet, Leute, die keine Lager gesehen hatten und keine originale Forschung gemacht hatten.

Aber die Kriegsgefangenen hatten das Elend erlebt und mir gedankt, dass ich Ihre versteckte Geschichte erzählt hatte.

After the publication of my book *Der geplante Tod*, in 1989 in Germany and Canada, thousands of former prisoners wrote to me or my publishers, telephoned me or came to my door in Toronto to tell me about their experiences and confirm what I had written about the camps. This was very encouraging to me because I was already under serious attack by the government of the United States, soon joined by the government of France. Most of the attacks were directed by academics, reporters and State Department officials who had not been in the camps and who had done no original research into them, whereas

all the thousands of supporters had been in the camps and thanked me for telling their hidden story.

Die wohl treffendste Begebenheit in dieser Hinsicht wurde von einem ehemaligen Gefangenen, Johannes Heising, erzählt, vormals Abt in einem Kloster. 1991 [neunzehn hundert, ein und neunzig] hat ein Buch über seine Erlebnisse im Lager Remagen veröffentlicht. Nachdem das Buch herausgekommen war, sprach Dr. Heising mit einem anderen ehemaligen Gefangenen aus Remagen, Franz-Joseph Plemper, der ihn an etwas erinnerte, was Heising in seinem Buch nicht erwähnt hatte: wie eines Nachts die Amerikaner mit ihrem Bulldozern die Menschen in ihren Erdlöchern lebendig begruben. Plemper beschreibt ihm die Szene; "In einer Nacht im riesigen Kriegsgefangenenlager der U.S.Armee auf den Rheinwiesen bei Remagen im April 1945 (neunzehn hundert fünf und vierzig) wurde ich aus dem Dahindämmern in Regen und Schlamm durch gellende Schreie und lautes Stöhnen aufgeschreckt. Ich sprang auf und sah in einiger Entfernung (von 30 (dreißig) bis 50 (fünfzig) Meter) die Scheinwerfer eines Bulldozers. Dann sah ich, wie dieser Bulldozer sich vorwärts durch die dicht liegenden Gefangenen bewegte. Vorn...hatte er eine Planierschaufel. Der Bulldozer bahnte sich einen Weg. Wie viele der Gefangenen dabei in ihren Erdlöchern lebend begraben wurden, weiß ich nicht. Das läßt sich nicht mehr feststellen. Deutlich hörte ich Schreie: Ihr Mörder!..." Und dann erinnerte sich auch Heising wieder.

Here is what the camps looked like from the outside in early April, 1945...

April 20 was a blustery day with rain sleet and snow and cold winds blowing along the Rhine from the north over the Rheinwiesernlagern ...Huddled close together for warmth behind the barbed wire was an awesome sight—nearly 100,000 haggard, apathetic, dirty, gaunt men clad in dirty field grey uniforms and standing ankle-deep in mud. Here and there were dirty white blurs which were men with bandaged heads or arms or standing in shirt sleeves. The German Division commander reported to us that the men had not eaten for at least two days and the provision of water was a major problem—yet only 200 meters away was the river Rhein running in full spring flood

This description was written by two US army doctors, Colonel James B. Mason and Colonel Charles H. Beasley. The view from the inside was worse:

One inmate at Rheinberg was over 80 years old and another was aged nine years. They were hungry and they were thirsty and they were dying of dysentery. Weeks of rain fell on them. The amputees slither like amphibians through the mud soaking and freezing. Naked to the skies day after day and night after night, they lay desperate or slept exhaustedly into eternity in their collapsing holes.

Neunzehnhundert fünf und vierzig [1945] haben die Alliierten euer Land erobert. Wir übernahmen die Herrschaft über euch. Wir ließen eure Kriegsgefangenen Hungers sterben. Wir ließen weitere Millionen eurer Frauen und Kinder sterben. Wir kassierten die Wahrheit hinsichtlich dieser Ereignisse und ersetzten sie durch Propaganda. Diese Propaganda sagte, die Deutschen, seien böse und trügen die ganze Verantwortung für den Krieg. Unsere Schande wurde so zu eurer Schande. Aber wir beschenkten euch mit einem neuen Geschichtsbild.

Hier ein Beispiel, wie das vor sich ging. In den Sechziger Jahren suchten deutsche Familien immer noch nach ihren Brüdern, Vätern, Onkeln, Söhnen und Freunden, von denen sie glaubten, dass sie am Ende des Kriegs in Gefangenenlagern der Alliierten gewesen , aber dann nicht heimgekehrt seien.

Willy Brandt, der unter Georg Kiesinger Außenminister war, berichtete vor dem Bundestag, am [25.April 1969], (fünf und dreißig, April, neunzehn hundert neun und sechzig) dass die Regierung die Veröffentlichung einer Buchreihe über die Schicksale der Kriegsgefangenen in ihre Obhut nehmen werde. Er sagte ganz offen, dass dies geschehe, weil er verhindern wolle, dass die Autoren die Besatzungsmächte provozierten. Er wollte also jene Besatzungsmächte nicht provozieren, die für den Tod von anderthalb Millionen deutscher Soldaten verantwortlich waren, die sich den Alliierten ergeben hatten.

Die Regierung der Bundesrepublik beauftragte einen ehemaligen Nazi-Propagandisten namens Erich Maschke mit der Redaktion dieser Buchreihe. In diesen Büchern war dann zu lesen, dass ungefähr eine Million- vier und neunzig tausend-zwei hundert fünfzig deutsche Soldaten nach dem Krieg in sowjetischen Lagern gestorben seien. Lediglich einige Tausend seien in britischer, französischer und amerikanischer Gefangenschaft gestorben.

Wo starben die Übrigen?

Wie starben sie?

Die Antwort findet man in diesem Buch (Jim hält das Buch *Der geplante Tod* hoch.)

Weil das Buch veröffentlicht wurde, ehe die sowjetischen Archive geöffnet wurden, war sein Inhalt von diesen Archiven in keiner Weise beeinflusst. Es sagte, dass ungefähr ein Million Gefangener in amerikanischen und französischen Lagern gestorben seien.

Dies bedeutete, dass ungefähr fünfhunderttausend Gefangene in der UDSSR gestorben sein mussten.

Aber es gab darüber keine Angaben von seiten der Sowjets. Sie schwiegen sich aus.

Aber dann, ganz plötzlich im Jahre [1992] neunzehn hundert zwei und neunzig, fiel die USSR auseinander, und die neuen zuständigen Leute öffneten die Archive des KGB, um die Verbrechen des kommunistischen Regimes zu enthüllen. Unter diese Verbrechen rechneten auch die toten deutschen Kriegsgefangenen.

Die sowjetische Akten sagten, dass etwa fünf hunderttausend deutsche Gefangene in ihren Lagern gestorben seien – ein großes Verbrechen, das fünfzig Jahre verborgen geblieben war.

Dennoch nicht groß genug, um den Tod der anderthalb Millionen zu erklären.

Wo waren die anderen gestorben?

Nach Auskunft der historischen Buchreihe eurer Regierung jedenfalls nicht in den Rheinwiesenlagern, also nicht in den einzigen Lagern, in denen sich eine Million deutscher Gefangener befanden. Die logische Antwort konnte nur sein: sie waren aus den Rheinwiesenlagern geflohen, hatten sich umgebracht, und da ihre Leichen nicht gefunden wurden, hatten sie sich offenbar auch selbst begraben.

War dies eine Lüge Willy Brandts? Belügt die deutsche Regierung durch das Statistische Bundesamt euch auch heute noch in dieser Sache?

Das Ganze erinnert mich an einen Vers des deutschen Dichters Christian Morgenstern:

Weil, so schließt er, messerscharf

Nicht sein kann, was nicht sein darf.

What may not be, cannot be.

Willy Brandt printed only a very small number of copies of the books, so very few people in Germany knew about them. But everyone in Germany related to a prisoner, knew that the thesis of the books was a lie. Everyone in Germany knew that the prisoners in the Rheinwiesenlagern had been kept in the open air behind barbed wire for many months without food, or without sufficient food, and sometimes even without water, while they died.

And many people in Germany knew that General Eisenhower had issued a command on May 9, 1945 warning the mayors and Burgermeisters of every town and every village and every Land in western Germany that to bring food to the camps was a crime punishable by death.

Many people knew that young women who approached the wire with food for prisoners were likely to be shot. And some people knew that a few of these young women were shot. But who could prove it? The records were in the conquerors' hands. The newspapers, radio, books and schools were in the conquerors hands.

The new German history was so successful that it deceived almost everyone in Germany, including the famous historian Ernst Nolte himself, who was a brave man, not intimidated by his numerous enemies. I met him in Berlin in about 1997. We had dinner and talked about these events, and I mentioned that Konrad Adenauer in his *Erinnerungen* had said that about six million Germans had died in the expulsions and in Germany itself in the expulsion years.

Nolte could hardly believe this. We went his library in his apartment and he took down Adenauer's *Erinnerungen* and he opened the book and there he read

“Ich muss in diesem Zusammenhang zunächst von den Problemen der Vertriebenen sprechen. Es sind aus den östlichen Teilen Deutschlands, aus Polen, der Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn usw. Nach den von amerikanischer Seite getroffenen Feststellungen insgesamt 13.3 dreizehn punkt drei Millionen Deutsche vertrieben worden. Sieben punkt drei (7.3) Millionen sind in der Ostzone und in der Hauptsache in den drei Westzonen angekommen. Sechs millionen Deutsche sind vom Erdboden verschwunden. Sie sind gestorben, verdorben.”

Nolte had read this and forgotten it. He had read this important and disastrous fact and forgotten it. His whole career had been based on writing truthfully about this era, and he had forgotten a passage demonstrating one of the outstanding aspects of it--the enormous dimension of the suffering of the German people, and the vicious enduring intensity of the allied vengeance against Germans after the war.

Now, consider how it is that Nolte finds out about this. He is told by a writer from Toronto who has never studied German history and can hardly speak more German than “Achtung Schpitfeuer.”

He and others like him could not properly know the history of Germany because they live in Germany or they were educated in Germany. In other words, they learn German history from German sources. And those sources are polluted. Nolte knew the truth and was pushed to believe otherwise. Only by propaganda.

This propaganda worked all right until the Soviet archives were opened in the early 1990s.

These revealed vast Soviet atrocities which had been carefully and accurately recorded by the Soviets themselves.

The Katyn massacre of Polish officers in 1940 was blamed on the Germans by the British, Americans and Soviets as part of wartime propaganda.

The KGB archives revealed that the Soviets had killed all the Poles, and that the number was far higher than even the Polish government in exile claimed.

This new evidence, and much other, including the deaths of Japanese prisoners of war, showed that the KGB archives were completely reliable.

So the policy worked. But why was it created in the first place? It was simply wartime propaganda engendered by wartime hatred. That is how much of the history of the Second World War was written and is still being written, and taught. The victories are presented as successes, but the successes are never described as horrors. The *atrocitiy* began in the spring of 1945 when the U.S. State Department unilaterally and secretly abrogated the Geneva Convention covering prisoners of war, at the request of the American commander, General Eisenhower.

The *coverup* began simultaneously, at a press conference in Paris where Eisenhower was asked about prisoners of war and the Convention. He replied, “If the Germans were reasoning like normal human beings they would realize the whole history of the United States and Great Britain is to be generous toward a defeated enemy. We observe all the laws of the Geneva Convention.”³ The deception remained official U.S. government policy for years. In 1947, the International Committee of the Red Cross was officially

misinformed by Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson, that even if prisoners were officially downgraded in status from the prisoner of war category to Disarmed Enemy Forces, there was no difference in the actual treatment. And the prisoners today in Guantanamo Bay are held and tortured under the same deception.

By June 15, 1945, some 5,224,310 prisoners had been taken in by Eisenhower in his command in northwest Europe. Many hundreds of thousands more were captured by the U.S. army command under General Mark W. Clark in Italy. The British and Canadian armies captured some 2,000,000 more, and the Russians took in 2,389,560. The Russians also imprisoned 271,672 civilians as substitutes for captive soldiers who had died or escaped during transfer from the army camps at the front to the KGB camps in the rear.

In the Eisenhower camps, starting in April, 1945, most of the prisoners were given no shelter at all, very little food, and for long periods, no water. They were simply herded through the barbed wire gates, deprived of their pay-books, ID discs, and left to starve in a field under the open sky. The US Army General Richard Steinbach, put in charge of a group of camps near Heilbronn in southwest Germany late in 1945, said, "The conditions were terrible. I was amazed and disgusted at the same time...I immediately sent to the railhead for supplementary rations..." Professor Martin Brech, formerly a guard at Camp Andernach in Germany, said that the 50,000 men there were starving. He fed some with loaves of bread through the wire, and was told by his superior officer, "Don't feed them. It is our policy that these men not be fed." Later, at night, Brech sneaked some more food into the camp, and the officer told him, "If you do that again, you'll be shot."

One of the prisoners, who was half-American, Charles von Lutichau, has written,

"To sleep, all we could do was to dig out a hole in the ground with our hands, then cling together in the hole. We were crowded very close together. Within a few days, some of the men who had gone healthy into the camp were dead. I saw our men dragging many dead bodies to the gate of the camp where they were thrown loose on top of each other onto trucks which took them away."

General Steinbach blamed the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry C. Morgenthau for the treatment inflicted on the prisoners. Steinbach has written in his memoirs, "This was caused by the Morgenthau Plan. His objective was vengeance rather than promoting U.S. national objectives."

The conception of the Morgenthau Plan for the postwar treatment of Germany by the United States has been described by an eye-witness, who wrote down his notes immediately after a meeting between Secretary Morgenthau and General Eisenhower in England in August, 1944.

"Actually, it was General Dwight D. Eisenhower who launched the project...

He said, "I think the Germans have 'punishment coming to them...the whole German population is a synthetic paranoid... I would like to see things made good and hard for them for a while...I will tell the president myself if necessary.'" 9

Colonel Philip S. Lauben, who was in charge of the German Affairs Branch of SHAEF, and who also negotiated prisoner transfers among the French, British and Americans, saw the camps in eastern France. He told me, "The Vosges was just one big death camp."

Captain Fred Siegfriedt, a guard officer in an American Vosges camp, has written “It just broke your heart to see it.” Captain Ben H. Jackson said, after seeing one camp, “I could smell it a mile away. It was barbaric.”

Approximately 700,000 to 750,000 people died in U.S. captivity, and many hundreds of thousands more were turned over to the French in dying condition, to be used as slave labour. Of the French prisoners, some 250,000 died.

News of the camps was easy enough for Eisenhower to control, because he maintained tight censorship in the occupied country. Control was so tight that even the newspaper, the *New York Times*, complained, a little. But when the French began demanding some German prisoners to use as slaves--again in contravention of the Geneva Convention--the tight censorship began to burst. In September and October, 1945, a young French reporter named Jacques Fauvet printed two stories in *Le Monde* which read,

“As one speaks today of Dachau, in ten years people throughout the world will speak about camps like Saint Paul D’Eyjeaux, where 17,000 people taken over from the Americans in late July were dying so fast that within a few weeks two cemeteries of 200 graves each had been filled.” By the end of September, the death rate was over 21 per cent per year, about 18 times the ambient European death rate. “People will object that the Germans weren’t very particular on the manner of feeding our men, but even if they did violate the Geneva Convention, that hardly seems to justify our following their example...People have often said that the best service we could do the Germans would be to imitate them, so they would one day find us before the judgement of history, but...we didn’t suffer and fight to perpetuate the crimes of other times and places.”

Some people have suggested that it was inevitable that the German prisoners would die because of “the chaos” in the country, and because there was a “World Food shortage” which had been caused by the war, which had been caused by the Germans. In fact, the U.S. army denied food to the Germans that was parked right beside the camps. Captain Lee Berwick of the 424th Infantry who commanded the guard towers at Camp Bretzenheim, has said that he can not understand the accusation in *Other Losses* that prisoners in his camp starved to death. He told me, “Food was piled up all round the camp fence.” Prisoners there saw crates piled up “as high as bungalows.” Yet the official U.S. Army ration book for the camp, taken after the war by a German trusty, who presented me with a photocopy, (**JIM Hold up a page**) shows that the ration per person was 600-850 calories per day. Sometimes the prisoners got nothing.

This was in line with General Eisenhower's policy to starve the men. In a letter sent from Koblenz on May 9, the day after the capitulation in the west, by urgent special courier to all the leaders of the German towns and Laender, his military government says,

Die Militärregierung hat mich ersucht, bekanntzugeben, dass unter keinen Umständen unter der Bevölkerung Lebensmittel gesammelt werden dürfen, um sie deutschen Kriegsgefangenen zuzustellen. Wer dieses Gebot übertritt und gegebenenfalls unter Umgehung der Absperrung, den Gefangenen trotzdem etwas zukommen zu lassen, setzt sich der Gefahr aus, erschossen zu werden.

In besonderen Einzelfällen - Zuwendungen an nahe Verwandte kann dies nur durch den Militärkommandanten vermittelt werden.

Ich ersuche, hiernach alles daran zu setzen, etwaige Sammlungen zu unterbinden und die Bevölkerung in geeigneter Weise über diese Tatstand aufzuklären.

And some women taking food to the starving were shot, by the Americans and by the French. That these conditions were deliberately imposed is certain from the fact that no such mass die-off occurred in the British and Canadian camps. The British and Canadians were able to treat their prisoners well enough that every one of the scores who have reported to me said that there were no widespread atrocities, and certainly not mass deaths.

How is it that such widespread suffering was inflicted, that millions of people were starved to death, that the worst ethnic cleansing in human history was carried out, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights betrayed, the Geneva Convention denied, without all this being noticed, reported and denounced in the western press?

Such cover-ups begin at the top, as we have seen, with the presidents, prime ministers and generals. Their words become our history because no-one challenges them. The coverup that began in 1945 continues to this day. It doesn't matter how absurd their stories are, the fear of becoming an outcast keeps the professors, writers and historians in the pack.

Apologists for the American army and for Eisenhower have said in effect that although no such events occurred, they were caused by the Germans themselves. The absurd thesis goes that they started the war, causing so much devastation that widespread suffering was inevitable. And that this deserved suffering was not serious. Conveniently overlooked are the facts that Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939, not the other way around, that nearly all the devastation in Germany itself was caused by the allied air-raid assaults on civilian targets, and that allied postwar policy deliberately reduced German industrial and agricultural production below starvation levels.

The famous American historian Stephen E. Ambrose led the way in suppressing this story, probably after he realized that it showed that he was an incompetent historian. In autumn, 1989, just after *Other Losses* was published he was asked by a student at a conference why, as Eisenhower's biographer, he had not discovered the story himself. He replied that he had not thought of looking at the prisoner of war records. Later, he told me, "You have the broad outline of a truth so terrible that I really can't bear it." In the spring of 1989, just a few months before publication of *Other Losses*, he met Col. Dr. Ernest F. Fisher at a conference in Washington to hand him a copy of the galleys (Fisher had helped me with the research and with a Foreword). Ambrose told Fisher, "This book destroys my life's work." Nevertheless, he continued his public support, for a little while, driven by his agonized conscience.

German historians even today rely on a series of German books about the missing prisoners edited by a former Nazi Party member and mercenary historian for the Third Reich, Dr. Erich Maschke. The purpose of the series was described by the German Foreign Minister, Willy Brandt, who controlled Maschke. This odd interest of the German government--in subsidizing and controlling a series of history books by academics--arose because the government wished to respond to public demand for information about 1.5 million prisoners of war still missing

from their homes in the 1960s. Presenting the purpose of the Maschke series in the Bundestag in April, 1969, Brandt said,

“Nachdem die beiden ersten Bände vorlagen, entschieden sich jedoch die beteiligten Stellen mit Billigung des Auswärtigen Amtes, diese Bände zu veröffentlichen. Für die restlichen Bände kam das Auswärtige Amt zu dem Ergebnis, dass es einstweilen besser sei, über die ursprüngliche Zweckbestimmung nicht hinauszugehen. Dies sollte von vornherein, so meinte mein Amt, das Mißverständnis ausschließen, mit einer massierten Publizierung des Materials werde eine politische Absicht verfolgt und eine Diskussion in der Öffentlichkeit des Inlands oder gar des Auslands provoziert. Dies hätte bei allen Beteiligten - oder bei vielen beteiligten - alte Wunden aufreißen können und wäre der auf Versöhnung gerichteten Außenpolitik der Bundesregierung nicht dienlich gewesen.”

The writer of the one slim volume concerning Germans in American hands, Kurt W. Bohme, nowhere cites the most authoritative source for statistics on prisoners of war in American hands, the Modern Military Records section of the U.S. National Archives. These contain many thousands of pages of documents which describe much of the fate, and the death statistics, of the German prisoners. It is very doubtful that Bohme even visited the archives at all, because he quotes no documents that he could not have gotten from U.S. Army official publications. If the papers were open to him, how could he have missed the story that Col. Fisher and I discovered there? If they were closed to him, one must ask why? His work was closely controlled by a NATO ally, West Germany, and if it were true that the U.S. army had nothing to hide, as Ambrose contended, why did the U.S. Army not offer the papers to this person commissioned to quell a controversy “without opening a public discussion.”?

Bohme, faithful to his government’s purpose, tells the world that civilians frequently brought food to several of the U.S. camps, without mentioning the eye-witnesses who saw people being shot for doing just that, in line with Eisenhower’s edict against civilians bringing food. Not only were hundreds of thousands of such eye-witnesses available to Bohme, there were in the archives of all German towns, villages and *Leander* copies of Eisenhower’s letter forbidding civilians to bring food to the camps.

During the height of the controversy between me and Ambrose over the statistics, the KGB archives were opened. I went to Moscow in 1992 and 1993 to work in that gloomy building. I never saw or heard that anyone from Ambrose’s team, or from the United States Army Centre for Military History had been there, or was expected. The reason became clear as soon as I saw the Bulanov report on the fate of Second World War prisoners in Soviet hands. This report, supplemented by a subsidiary report on seized civilians, showed that the Soviets had taken in far fewer German prisoners than the Maschke series had reported. And that a total of just over 500,000 had died. Subtracted from the 1.5 million missing--a figure which no-one had ever disputed--this left about one million to be accounted for. This was the accounting which had already appeared in *Other Losses*.

Ambrose and the Ike-minded admitted that they were suppressing the story. Ambrose had begun his 1988 letter to me with the admission that the story “can no longer be suppressed.” He and his cohorts often admitted they had no facts to rebut the book, then rebutted regardless. They admitted that they preferred their own estimates to the documents in the archives. Eisenhower and the State Department had begun this process in 1945, but it was reinforced by Drew Middleton, writing in the *New York Times* in 1945. Middleton, one of the *Times*’ star correspondents during the war, had written several stories defending Eisenhower against the charges brought by Fauvet in *Le Monde*. In one of the stories, he said that he had visited the camps and found none of the evil conditions that made Fauvet compare St. Paul D’Eyjeaux to the infamous Nazi camp at Dachau. In 1988, when the final draft of the MS was ready, I phoned Middleton, described briefly what I had discovered, and asked him for an interview. Sucking on a pipe in his narrow cranny of an office in the *Times* building, he

calmly told me that “I am not surprised that you were able to dig up some bad things from that time.” He then admitted that he had not visited the camps themselves, but only driven by. I offered to show him the full MS so he could check it out, because it proved that either he had made a vast error, or he had lied to cover up a tremendous American war crime committed by the general who became president. Middleton scoffed at the offer. “Don’t worry about me,” he said.

I was shocked. As Ambrose had said, I had the goods on these guys, but Middleton did not care. This really impressed on me--and I am still impressed--that those who do or who cover up such dreadful things are so powerful that even the threat of exposure does not perturb them.

This confidence is not confined to the Americans. Sir Michael Howard, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* admitted that he is an “innumerate historian” not qualified to judge the statistical analysis in *Other Losses*. He develops a “criterion” to help him along. This is “the criterion of inherent probability,” which relieves him not only of the need to do research, but of the need to understand research set plain before him. Howard writes, “Which is in fact the more probable explanation; that a million German prisoners quietly died in American hands in 1945 without anyone noticing, or that the American authorities ...made mistakes in their initial figures...?” Which of course not only gets him out of having to understand research, but also cynically ignores that a million and a half Germans had never come home from allied captivity. For Howard, the fate of these people is as nothing compared with the need to defend the flightless swans of academe from the terrorist raid that *Other Losses* represents to them. One would think that effete could go no further, but Professor Stefan Karner of Graz, Austria, succeeds. He actually went to Moscow and saw the Bulanov report. Having seen it, he decided it was not there. Or at least, that it did not mean what it said. What he did find in Moscow were estimates. His own. He does not present a single valid reason for doubting the Soviet figures, which of course had been kept secret by the Soviets because they are irrefutable evidence of an enormous atrocity against people of many nations. The Soviet figures for captures and deaths of Japanese prisoners, Polish officers and civilians, and German civilians, had already been independently corroborated by the Japanese, Poles and Germans themselves. There is not the faintest doubt of the accuracy of the KGB figures. And there is no archival or documentary or anecdotal support for the Maschke, Ambrose or Karner figures on prisoner deaths. They are all fiction.

Perhaps the best insight into the minds of historians was displayed by the mayor of Rheinberg during an interview with me in autumn, 1988. I already knew that many thousands of prisoners had died in the camp in 1945, but I was curious to find out what the town archives had to say about the deaths, since all deaths in Germany must be reported to the local authorities. I asked the mayor how many prisoners had died there, and he gave me an absurdly low figure, somewhere around 500. I said, “Do you believe that?” He looked uncomfortable and said, “No.”

“Then why do you give out the figure?”

“We have to say something.”

So horrible was the war that the people who suffered hate to remember what they went through, and the people who committed the crimes cannot bear to recall what they have done. Victor and victim stand alike in horror at what they have done to each other. In this the enemy and the enemy become the same. Everything I have said here tonight is informed by this mutual horror that distorts the truth, no matter how we try to disinter it from the vast heaps of the people who died in vain. It is as if a paroxysm passed over the whole of humanity, like a hurricane over an island. Anyone who studies it might conclude that there is no point in studying it. The events are so vast, the cruelty so cruel, the ignorance so profound, and the inability to learn from history so often repeated through history, that we know we can do

nothing to learn, to warn, to preach, to teach, to avert, to prevent. In despair, we think that there is no point in going on. We go on.

As Samuel Beckett said, I can't go on, I'll go on.

Ich kann nicht weitergehen. Ich will weitergehen.

It is the concept of *the lesson* that stymies (baffles) us. In our despair we recognize that cruelty and waste are inexplicable and enduring, and this makes us abandon the effort, and avert our eyes from the catastrophe. The mistake is to concentrate on the catastrophic acts that men do. When we cease to contemplate the suffering of mankind, and we look elsewhere, what do we see? In Germany soon after the war we see writers and government officials searching for stories, and a few of them searching for truth. In a little while, six or eight months later, we see some of the enemy, bringing you food. We see Canadians and Americans bringing food, to you Germans. From Canada they came and from the United States they came, with shiploads of wheat, sacks of flour, truckloads of canned food. They came with smiles on their faces and food in their hands. They did not need to study history or to draw lessons. They saw only that there was suffering and need. For them was no blame, only kindness.

These people in the United States and Canada, helped by others in Argentina and Australia, were in churches and governments, the same churches that blessed the troops who blasted you, the same governments that tortured you in your defeat. The ships that brought the soldiers who killed you, now brought the relief workers who fed you. Side by side they worked, torturing and healing, starving and feeding. The merciful outlasted the vindictive, perhaps because they loved what they were doing. And nearly all the soldiers went home.

Who were these angels of mercy? Their names were Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary in the Department of External affairs of the Canadian government, Robert Patterson, Secretary of War of the United States government; Herbert Hoover, former President of the United States, and special assistant to President Truman, and Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada.

They with the help of the taxpayers of Canada and the USA, along with workers in relief campaigns from the churches, carried out the greatest act of collective mercy the world has ever known. When they were finished in 1948, they had saved the lives of over 500,000,000 people. Which is ten times as many people as died during the whole war around the globe through six years. They did this by rationing their own food supplies in Canada, by requisitioning surpluses in the USA, by rationing food consumption in the United Kingdom, and by transporting the food thus saved to the starving of the world. They spent the food very wisely, to bridge the starvation gap between the end of old supplies in the spring, and the arrival of new supplies in the summer.

I talked to one of the public servants in Canada who helped to administer this relief program for Germans. His name was Mitchell Sharpe and he became a cabinet minister later on. I wanted to know the rationale for this amazing charity towards our former enemies, and he answered me very simply. He said, "This is what we do," as if it were normal to do good in the presence of evil-doers.

Whatever is normal is whatever we make normal. There is a story told by the Indians of Canada about this. A young boy is talking to his grandfather about good and evil. The boy asks, "Why is there evil in the world and why is there good?" His grandfather replies, "In each of us a good spirit struggling with an evil spirit."

The little one asks, "Which one will win?"

"That depends on which one you feed."