

MESSAGING, MISSIONS, AND MINDSETS: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF NATIONAL MESSAGING AND POLICY WHEN TRANSLATED INTO OPERATIONS AND SOLDIER ACTIONS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A Monograph

by

MAJ Jess Harris
U.S. Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: MAJ Jess K. Harris

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Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
G. Stephen Lauer, Ph.D.

_____, Seminar Leader
Darrel Benfield, LtCol, USMC

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Thomas C. Graves, COL

Accepted this 23rd day of May 2013 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

MESSAGING, MISSIONS, AND MINDSETS: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF NATIONAL MESSAGING AND POLICY WHEN TRANSLATED INTO OPERATIONS AND SOLDIER ACTIONS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR, by MAJ Jess K. Harris, 52 pages.

The US Army entered WWII with the declared intention of adhering to the Laws of War and the Hague and Geneva Conventions. The reality of working with allies and against an enemy who were not committed to the same ideals, created internal dissonance. Operations which apparently devalued civilian life, coupled with harsh strategic messaging, led to an erosion of the values America had proclaimed at the beginning of the war. This led to actions by individual soldiers and units, at times with the approval or even at the direction of their officers, which violated American values and the laws of war.

This monograph will use a chronological examination of events and trends, coupled with official communications and biographical information, to determine the evolution of attitudes and actions before, during, and after the war. It then considers the strategic impact at that time.

This monograph does not judge the Soldiers or leaders of 1945 through the social lens of 2013. It seeks to understand how and why the soldiers and leaders of that war failed to live up to their own standards. It concludes that Americans did commit war crimes, by modern standards and the standards of their own day, although at a rate lower than nearly any other participant. This paper also concludes that national propaganda had a detrimental effect on the information environment, and that some decisions at the most senior levels also contributed to that negative information environment.

In the Second World War, the U.S. Government was able to tightly control the flow of information, preventing news of unlawful soldier actions from having a negative strategic impact. That kind of control is not possible in modern operations. Leaders and planners cannot significantly reduce the likelihood of the dissemination of unhelpful information, nor should that be their focus. Instead, the focus should be on understanding, educating, and leading soldiers, in order to prevent war crimes from occurring. Finally, this paper takes lessons from the experiences of the war's soldiers and leaders which are applicable to the current era, suggesting ways to better prepare today's leaders and soldiers for ambiguous moral environments in the future.

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I must also acknowledge the lifetime of guidance from my father, a member of that “greatest generation,” the veterans of the Second World War, who are the subject of the majority of this paper. The war cost him his hearing, many of his friends, and his brother; to this day he says he would do it all again. It was the right thing, and that is reason enough.

Finally, I would be remiss if I neglected to give great credit to my long-suffering wife, Nancy, whose encouragement, support, and patience have been critical to any success I have enjoyed in my adult life, including this year at SAMS.

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ACRONYMS

DEF	Disarmed Enemy Forces
DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic (instruments of national power)
MOI	Ministry of Information (British official agency for information control)
OWI	Office of War Information (American counterpart to the MOI)
POW	Prisoners of War
USAAF	United States Army Air Force

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War and for several years following, American Soldiers committed acts against that violated their own standards. These actions can, in part, be traced back to the messaging and policies of the most senior levels of government and the military. During the war, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations maintained tight controls over information. These censorship efforts included, but were not limited to, news media (including the “management” of journalists) service members’ personal communications, military reports, and entertainment. The result was a highly sanitized image, which persists to this day in the “Good War Mythos,” and the “Greatest Generation Narrative.”¹ While a falsely positive view of the Allies was one side of American propaganda, the other was a dehumanizing characterization of the Germans. Verbal, and occasionally written, direction from senior military leaders reinforced this anti-German bias. These attitudes drove operations and missions, some of which demonstrated a callous disregard for civilian lives and the laws of war, resulting in war crimes. We could attempt to explain their actions by pointing out that those Soldiers were products of a different era in which the rules of war were viewed differently or even ignored. This argument fails, however, when we judge their actions by the same standards they used in judging the enemy. As General Curtis LeMay later said, "I suppose if I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal...."²

We judge individuals for individual crimes. If crimes are common within a given unit, we question the command climate, and assign at least part of the blame to the leadership. When

¹ Justin Harris, “American Soldiers and POW Killing in the European Theater of WWII”, (M.S. thesis, University of Texas-San Marcos, 2009), 3.

² Public Broadcasting Service, “American Experience: Curtis Lemay, 1906-1990” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/peopleevents/pandeAMEX61.html> (accessed 14 December 2012).

military formations under duly appointed leadership commit criminal acts as a group, the entire unit is understood to be compromised, and leadership bears the majority of the responsibility. If units at all levels of an Army in Europe exhibit egregious unlawful behavior, we must conclude that it is a systemic problem, enabled, encouraged, or even commanded by senior leaders. In the Second World War, that is precisely what happened.

When we consider the environment the soldiers operated in, we can easily overlook their ethical failings. The war immersed them in mental, emotional, and physical stressors. Many served in an expeditionary (and almost continually offensive) combat environment for years, with little or no leave. They operated in an information environment of hate-filled propaganda, designed to build rage. In spite of these issues, American moral and ethical lapses were fewer and less severe than those of most of the other nations involved in the conflict. Their actions never approached the willful atrocities, among the most horrific in the modern world, directed by the Nazi leadership carried out by German soldiers. Soviet actions near the end of the war and for several years afterward were intentionally brutal. The French also severely mistreated German prisoners and civilians, causing tens of thousands of deaths, and incalculable suffering. Many Eastern European nations not only took illegal and immoral actions, but enacted policies that were at least as brutal as the French and the Soviets, at times rivaling the actions of the Nazis themselves.³ Statistically speaking, only Great Britain and Denmark treated the vanquished Germans more humanely than America. Yet for our purposes, we must consider American Soldiers' actions on their own merit, apart from what others did or did not do. Americans committed direct and indirect actions against civilians, prisoners, and surrendering troops that we recognize as war crimes today. Understanding the reasons for their deeds does not require us to excuse them, and when we learn that America's senior leadership was aware of, and at times

³ Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press 2012), 121.

encouraged those atrocities, we must adjust our understanding of their story. This monograph neither condemns nor excuses the actions of the past. We cannot fairly judge the Soldiers or leaders of 1945 through the moral lens of 2013, but we can seek to understand how and why their actions failed to live up to their own standards. They were soldiers of a great generation, but not infallible. They were neither more nor less prone to moral failure than any generation before or since. We must avoid idealizing their experience and learn the unpleasant lessons from the past if we hope to avoid those mistakes in the future. In our modern information environment, we cannot afford the kind of battlefield behavior today that this paper will describe as having occurred in World War II. Apart from the moral and ethical ramifications and harm to individuals on both sides of these acts, in today's environment of the "strategic corporal," where soldier actions can reach the world stage in living color and near-real-time, the potential for damage to the nation's strategic objectives and diplomatic leverage is immeasurable.⁴

Research Question

How did the national messaging and policies that shaped the information environment before and during the Second World War impact operations and soldiers' actions in the field?

Literary Review

The research for this monograph utilized dozens of books and scholarly articles, many dozens of examples of entertainment media of the period, hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, and over two thousand pages of source documents from the archives of the Truman and Eisenhower Presidential Libraries. Most of these documents are not directly quoted and therefore do not appear in the bibliography. The idea of American war crimes, in any period, is extremely politicized, which leads to exaggerations and extreme analyses. Many books and articles on the

⁴ Major Lynda Liddy, "The Strategic Corporal: Some Requirements in Training and Education" *Australian Army Journal* Volume II no. 2 (2005).

topic were unusable, even though they had academic merit and most of their information was correct, because the author or title has been so tainted by controversy as to make them disreputable and therefore not suitable for referencing. James Bacques' books, for instance, utilize extensive research, but his numbers can scarcely be used even for comparison or to demonstrate the extreme limits of estimates, because so many of his claims were obviously sensational and unrealistic. At one end of the spectrum on papers and articles, there is a shockingly large body of Nazi apologists who exaggerate American war crimes to diminish those of the Germans. At the other end of the spectrum, a significant number of academics works, especially those closer to the events described, overlook or actively excuse any American misbehavior in the war. In addition, intriguing and generally logical assertions spring up from across the spectrum which, unfortunately, demonstrated poor scholarship or did not properly list their sources, and so their findings or claims could not be verified. Except where specifically noted, this monograph utilizes only those books and documents considered mainstream, with demonstrated academic rigor and little or no perceptible ideological prejudice.

Significance

Due to successful information control by the Roosevelt and Truman administrations and senior military leaders (assisted by an attitude prevalent in most of the press and the American population which had no interest in hearing negative thoughts about the conduct of the war) American war crimes did not impact the strategic environment or the social narrative. For some time, these accounts served as the historical narrative as well. Today's environment is very different. Journalists, abundant in today's combat zones, sometimes seem intent on finding and reporting stories which cast American soldiers and activities in the worst possible light. Whatever the reporters' reasons, stories of this type can have devastating effects on Soldier morale, the Army's reputation, and the Nation's strategic objectives. Soldiers can rapidly disseminate counterproductive images from digital cameras and smart phones. The Abu Ghraib photos, for

instance, did immeasurable harm to America's strategic goals and international reputation. Thousands of stories, paintings, drawings, editorial cartoons, etc., depicted America, the Army, and the soldiers, as depraved and lacking moral authority.⁵

ADRP 3-0 defines Operational Art for land forces as "the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose."⁶ While this language speaks primarily to theater strategic objectives, we can also recognize the importance of operational art in supporting national strategic objectives as well.

In the current environment, national strategic objectives may be profoundly enhanced or damaged by messaging that is completely outside U.S. Government control. Actions by today's Soldiers therefore have the potential to severely damage American strategic objectives. Army Leaders must consider these factors when developing and implementing training. They must also recognize and account for the effects of national messaging and social influences (peer and media) in the development of their subordinates' moral framework for decision-making. When stress is high, time is short, and leadership is unavailable, a Soldier's individual moral framework may be the only thing guiding his decision-making. Leaders must consciously seek to build, through active direction and personal modeling, a moral framework in their subordinates. Soldiers must be trained, and held as accountable for their ethical and moral decision-making as they are for basic soldier skills. Additionally, planners must understand that the operations they develop send messages, not only to the enemy and the international community, but also to our own troops in the field. Whenever possible and reasonable, orders should remind leaders at all levels of the necessity to respect civilian lives and property, the Laws of War, and personal

⁵ A Google search of "Abu Ghraib" yields hundreds of photos, cartoons, and articles condemning U.S. policy, the Iraq War, the war on Terror, the Army, and the Bush Administration.

⁶ U.S. Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2011), 4-1.

accountability.

Claim

Prior to the Second World War, the Roosevelt administration employed anti-German propaganda to generate support for military action in Europe. The program dehumanized the German people and fostered harsh sentiments among the American population and military. The reality of fighting in a war where, often, neither the allies nor the enemy adhered to the laws of war, created a cognitive dissonance between official rhetoric and the conduct of operations. The result was a, presumably unintended, message to combat troops that the former rules did not apply. These factors intensified over the course of the war, and resentment against the German people peaked when the horrors of Nazi concentration camps were revealed at the close of the war. As a result, the post-war suffering of the German people was not only allowed to a greater degree than was necessary, but in some cases encouraged as retribution.

The following section of this paper, “THE ENVIRONMENT,” briefly describes the physical and information environments that soldiers of the Second World War experienced. The segment concerning the information environment also explores communication and influence models. The second section, “WHAT HAPPENED?” begins with a discussion of pre-war propaganda, goes on to discuss the events that occurred during the war, and concludes with events that followed the war. The next section, “WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?” puts the events of the previous section into context. The final section, “CONCLUSION,” presents leaders and planners with recommendations for countering the identified problems.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The minds of American troops in the Second World War were being shaped long before contact with the enemy. The late 1930’s and early 1940’s saw a dramatic increase in mass information. Printed materials were cheap and abundant, and nearly every American had regular

access to radios and the cinema. For the first time, messages could reach nearly everyone in America within hours. National messaging was delivered through formal statements and informal remarks. It was distributed by official means (such as the Office of War Information's (OWI) briefings, films, posters, etc.) and unofficial means such as Hollywood films, entertainment radio broadcasts, popular literature, and comic books. By the time American soldiers arrived on foreign soil, they had been influenced by years of propaganda, which had endlessly reiterated that the enemy was evil, vicious, and subhuman.

The Physical Environment

During the war, American Soldiers in Europe faced a grueling operational environment. The majority of Soldiers who deployed to Europe in 1943 and 1944 were still there through 1945. Casualties rose daily, from physical injury and psychological stress.⁷ The high operational tempo and expeditionary environment allowed for few physical comforts. Although American troops fared significantly better than any of their counterparts, the conditions were very difficult by today's standards. Troops suffered from a lack of adequate clothing, food, and shelter during harsh seasonal weather. These conditions and the additional stressors of a tenacious enemy, high casualty rates, and diminishing expectations for survival, led to frustration and resentment.

The Information Environment

In Stephen Littlejohn's discussion of message interpretation, he describes the impact of experience and immediate environmental conditions on the receiver's understanding of a message's meaning, the perception of its intent, and the proper application of its understood

⁷ Eli Ginzberg, *The Lost Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). "Shell Shock" or "Battlefield Fatigue" (understood today as Post Traumatic Stress) was a tremendous drain on the U.S. Army in Europe. Psychiatric and behavioral reasons were cited in the discharge of some 389,000 soldiers from 1942-1945, according to official records.

information into actions.⁸ Soldiers in the field would need to interpret a senior military or political leader's words in the context of the immediate danger, their understanding of their orders, and the decision-making framework they had developed for their situation.

The soldiers' information base was a product of media, political and military leadership messaging, family messaging, and peer messaging. The information base is interpreted through individual experience and is affected by circumstances of the immediate environment (stressors.) Together, these factors affected soldiers' ability to assess their options and the possible consequences.

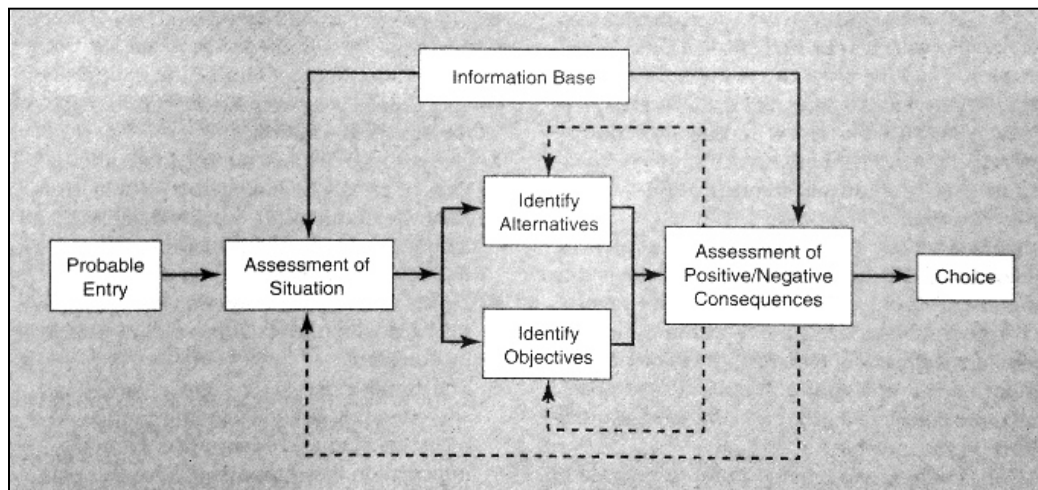


Figure 1: LittleJohn – General Model of the Group Decision-Making Process

Source: Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*, 267.

Of the many influences on soldiers' assessments of their situation and available choices, leader messages (direct/intentional or indirect/unintentional) are among the most powerful. In World War II, the soldier information base began with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. President Truman acknowledged the power of his presence and words as President of the United States when he said, "There is something awesome about the head of the United States – not me,

⁸ Stephen W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 2002), 118-123.

but the Presidency itself – that causes people to become disturbed and rattled when they are around him.”⁹ Truman’s wartime rhetoric, while not as overtly anti-German as that of Eisenhower, Patton, or Roosevelt, was nonetheless decidedly harsh. In an address to congress on April 19th, 1945, President Truman stated that, the Allies must impose conditions after the war that would force Germany to “make amends for the immeasurable destruction for which her war leaders have been responsible.”¹⁰ He advocated economic conditions intended to inflict suffering on the German people. As President of the United States, his words carried tremendous weight with the military leaders giving orders and planning operations, as well as with the Soldiers who would execute those operations. The ideas expressed by the Commander-in-Chief build Soldiers’ framework of understanding their mission, the priorities of execution, and the parameters within which they are to operate. When the President speaks, his words become foundational ideas in the minds of Soldiers. Ideas become attitudes, attitudes become decision-making frameworks, and frameworks guide choices. Those soldiers became the enforcers of Truman’s direction that the Germans would “make amends.” Certainly, none of them expected those retributions to be expressed as war crimes, but we can easily see how a message of animosity and revenge-seeking can have unintended consequences in a dangerous and stressful environment.

Churchill’s history of the Second World War relates a story in which Stalin suggested executing 50,000-100,000 Germans at the end of the war. When Churchill objected, Roosevelt, in what is deemed a poorly-considered attempt at lightening the tone, suggested that perhaps only 49,000 needed to be shot.¹¹ During the war, callous attitudes toward the Germans permeated the

⁹ William Hillman, *Mr. President* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young 1953), 23. *Mr. President* was the first publication from the personal diaries, private letters, papers, and revealing interviews of Harry S. Truman. It was an official biography, and gave a decidedly positive portrayal of Truman.

¹⁰ “Truman Addresses Congress”, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio) on April 19, 1945.

¹¹ “FDR and the Reshaping of Europe,”

leadership at every level. It is unrealistic to blame actual killings on an imprudent dinner jest, but the fact that a world leader, with the power to make life or death decisions affecting entire nations, was willing to joke about killing tens of thousands of prisoners, generates concern. To what extent was this attitude reflected in his subordinates, the most senior leaders in the military? If Roosevelt had taken a serious tone about respecting civilians and the rights of the defeated soldiers, would Eisenhower have felt as free as he apparently did in using harsh language concerning the fate of the Germans? If Eisenhower had been more cautious and conciliatory in his language, would Patton and Bradley have been willing to openly call for killing prisoners? We cannot know how men might have acted, but we do know that Roosevelt's attitude was, at the very least, permissive of the virulent anti-German attitudes among his senior military leaders. We must also acknowledge that the attitudes of senior leaders are passed down the chain of command.

If the soldier derives his understanding of moral and ethical responsibilities at least in part from the orders and messaging of his leadership, then the more influential the sender, the more the impact. Elements affecting a sender's influence include relative position, esteem, proximity, and level of direct control over the receiver. While a Soldier's squad leader may have the closest proximity, and his company commander may have the highest direct control, the Commander-in-Chief holds the highest position in the Soldier's Chain of Command. The words of the President and the Senior Military Leadership are likely to have a profound impact on Soldiers.

In war, Soldiers make moral and ethical decisions with irreversible consequences. Some decisions are simple, with answers easily derived from orders and situational awareness. Other problems can create internal conflict by pitting an apparent operational good against a social

http://ww2history.com/key_moments/Western/FDR_reshaping_of_europe/

norm. Some of these conflict-bearing problems require immediate action, and Soldiers must make decisions with little or no time to consider ethical implications or long-term consequences. The more ill-defined the question at hand and the shorter the time for making a decision, the more the soldier's pre-existing decision-making framework influences the process. It is in these situations that a decision-making framework based on perceptions of senior leader attitudes has the most potential impact. These frameworks can be altered through explicit orders, such as orders to respect and protect civilian life and property (as are sometimes present in today's operation orders.) World War II-era Field Orders were usually bare-bones documents, providing little or no instruction as to ethical considerations, Laws of War, or concern for civilian considerations.¹² Instruction in these topics, if addressed at all, was the responsibility of the officers in the Soldiers' immediate chain of command. In that time-constrained environment, however, subordinate leaders apparently allotted little if any training for teaching the Laws of War. They either thought it unimportant, or believed that it had been, or would be, taught at some other level. These factors created a vacuum of official ethical and moral guidance.¹³

Keith Lowe notes that, "Official attitudes can affect conditions as much as official policies. A constant stream of bitter words from above can give the impression at the lower levels that harshness towards prisoners will not only be tolerated but encouraged...it remains a very real possibility that when Roosevelt joked about killing prisoners of war, his words, however humorously meant, ended up having exactly that effect."¹⁴ During the war, the soldiers' most

¹² The author of this paper reviewed dozens of official Field Orders from the Truman Library and the Eisenhower Library (most of the latter from the Walter Bedell Smith collection) to make this assessment.

¹³ Kenneth Condit, Gerald Diamond and Edwin Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947). Also, U.S. Army Basic Training During WWII, http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/THE_WAR_Camp_Wheeler_Georgia_during_world_war_two_pdf (accessed 1 March 2013)

¹⁴ Lowe *Savage Continent*, 123-124.

senior leadership gave regular indications of hatred and disrespect for the Germans. In his book, *Werewolf!*, Perry Biddiscombe states, “From the beginning, General Eisenhower considered the Germans a warlike race that would never surrender.”¹⁵ In Eisenhower’s own memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, he says, “In my personal reactions, as the months of conflict wore on, I grew constantly more bitter against the Germans.”¹⁶

All military operations should be cognizant of national objectives, just as Soldiers’ decisions are expected to reflect the perceived commander’s intent. Soldiers’ understanding of commanders’ intent therefore has a profound impact on their decisions. When a soldier’s leaders, from his squad leader up the chain of command to the President of the United States, express hatred and the desire to punish the enemy, the soldier’s decisions are likely to reflect that attitude. In wartime, the ultimate executors of policy are the troops.

WHAT HAPPENED?

For many Americans, the Second World War did not begin with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Key entertainment, academic, and political figures had been working toward an American commitment to eliminating the Fascist threat to Europe since the early 1930’s. For some, this rose from a genuine fear of the extremism they saw in Nazism and its fascist cousins,

¹⁵ Perry Biddiscombe, *Werewolf!: The History of the National Socialist Guerilla Movement 1944-1946* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 252. Eisenhower’s anti-German views have received a great deal of attention, all the more interesting because of his own family’s German heritage. Biddiscombe’s “Werwolf” spelling is used throughout this paper.

¹⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1952), 470. In the Eisenhower Diaries, edited by Robert H. Ferrell, Eisenhower not only demonstrated antipathy toward the Germans, he showed indifference to civilian casualties in general. The April 12th, 1944 entry in his journal reads: “I immediately got in touch with Tedder and Portal. The difficulty is that the original agreement stated that as soon as we had agreed upon a plan of operations, this agreement was to take effect, and it now develops that our plan for bombarding certain transportation centers may involve such a loss of French life that the British cabinet is objecting to part of the plan. Under strict wording of the agreement, this prevents the CAS from placing the two bomber forces under my command. I protested bitterly at allowing details of a few targets to interfere with the operation of a whole plan.”

particularly with regard to “undesirable” ethnic, social, and political groups. Others were concerned that National Socialism could weaken the communist movement, due to its similar “common man” appeal and union focus.¹⁷

Before the Beginning: The Propaganda War

Ethnic tensions grew throughout Europe as Hitler’s National Socialist German Worker’s Party (Nazis) increasingly demonized ethnic “undesirables” in the early 1930s. The Nazis, like the communists, disparaged capitalism and capitalist governments.¹⁸ Popular discontent with the existing political authorities in Europe, economic hardships due to the depression, and rhetoric about ethnic purity, created alarm among many political, military, and information media leaders in the U.S. and England. The 1935 invasion of Ethiopia signaled an alarming rise of fascist aggression, yet when 1939 Gallup polls asked about “joining the European War,” 96% of Americans were opposed.¹⁹ 77% said that America should stay out, even if it meant that England and France would be conquered. In July 1941, 79% continued to oppose any direct American involvement in the war.²⁰ The interventionist minority was a powerful group, however, and

¹⁷ Matthew Blake, “Woody Guthrie: A Dustbowl Representative in the Communist Party Press” *Journalism History Magazine*, Winter 2010, 185. A significant part of the Communist Party USA’s membership left the party to join anti-Nazi efforts when Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact was signed in 1939.

¹⁸ Joseph W. Bendersky, *A History of Nazi Germany: 1919-1945. 2nd ed.* (New York: Burnham Publishers, 2000), pp. 58-59. Communist railing against the capitalist west had been a concern for some time. The Nazis expressed disdain for both capitalists and communists, although their particular hatred for communists was probably fueled by their belief in Russian racial inferiority.

¹⁹ Adam J. Berinsky “America at War: Public Opinion During Wartime, from WWII to Iraq.” <http://web.mit.edu/berinsky/www/aaw.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2012). The Italian regime’s ties to fascist Germany were still somewhat loose, but the idea of an association between them was strong in the minds of most Americans.

²⁰ William C. Adams, *Foreign Service Journal*, May 1984. <http://www.gwu.edu/~pad/202/readings/foreign.html> (accessed on 1 February, 2013).

included Roosevelt, the power brokers of the Democratic Party, and many of the most influential people in Hollywood. America's first battles of the Second World War were not fought in Europe, but in the political, entertainment and news arenas. Together, the Roosevelt administration and the entertainment media created an image of the Axis powers as ruthless, aggressive, evil, and monstrous.²¹ American interventionist propaganda was initially insufficient to cause Americans to support the war, but sought to arouse anti-German sentiments and pave the way for a rapid reversal following an inciting incident that would serve as a call to war.

Even with administration top cover, Hollywood had to be careful in the beginning. Fears over anarchist and communist movements in the 1930's had caused Western governments to actively censor hot political topics. Although the entertainment industry still enjoyed significant freedom in both England and the U.S., the threat of increased government control or sanctions lurked in the background. As a result, the American film industry self-imposed a ban on films commenting on European politics.²² Still, many in the film industry remained openly political. Frank Borzage, one of the most important directors of the period, produced a trio of strident anti-Nazi films; *Little Man, What Now* in 1934, *Three Comrades* in 1938, and *The Mortal Storm* in 1940.²³ The first two films in particular set precedents for increased Hollywood studio activism, much of which was discreetly supported by the Roosevelt administration.²⁴ Other anti-Nazi films

²¹ Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 232-233.

²² Ibid., 228.

²³ Benjamin L. Alpers, *History and Controversy in 1930s Hollywood: The Case of Borzage's Weimar Trilogy*. Paper from a presentation to the Film and History Conference, Cape Town, South Africa, July 2002. www.uct.ac.za/conferences/filmhistorynow/papers/balpers.doc (accessed January 28, 2013).

²⁴ Ezaki Michio, *The Roosevelt Propaganda Drive*. http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/38_S4.pdf (accessed December 20, 2012). Despite this paper's biased tone, it provides a sound argument that the Roosevelt administration orchestrated propaganda efforts, even before the President began speaking openly about the dangers of fascism.

were soon added to the repertoire, beginning with 1938's explicitly anti-Nazi series, *The March of Time*.²⁵ That series used a combination of actual footage and staged material to depict Nazi brutality, and were so blatantly propagandist that they were banned by many American movie houses.²⁶ Many in Hollywood were willing to risk censorship to increase public awareness and build support for American intervention. By 1938, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League had over 5,000 members.²⁷

The brutal Kristallnacht attacks on Jewish civilians marked a significant turning point for American interventionism. A writer for *The New York Times* wrote, "No foreign propagandist bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenseless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday."²⁸ As professionals in the art of shaping emotions with stories and images, Hollywood answered the challenge, developing unique and powerful propaganda, intensifying their already deeply negative image of Germans.²⁹ In 1939, Warner Brothers made *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, produced by Michael Curtiz, who later went on to make the classic, *Casablanca*. *Confessions* was a quasi-documentary that spared no expense, using top-quality production techniques and a big-name cast, including the hugely popular Edward G. Robinson.³⁰ *Confessions* and other films of

²⁵ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 227. The film series was a direct offshoot of the highly respected radio news series, *March of Time*, which dated back to 1928. While the radio series was legitimate journalism, attempting to bring realism to actual news, the film series was designed as propaganda.

²⁶ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 228.

²⁷ Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1995), 17.

²⁸ "A Black Day for Germany," *The New York Times*, 11 November 1938.

²⁹ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 228.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

the period were explicitly designed to influence public political opinion, doing so with direct approval and assistance from the administration.^{31 32} Increasing tensions in Europe fueled Roosevelt's urgency, and Hollywood came to the President's aid, producing movies designed to transform American indifference into anti-Axis fervor, while films featuring English daring and courage, such as *The Sea Hawk*, sought to solidify support for Great Britain.³³

In 1939 and 1940, the BBC overseas service had made a series of broadcasts which took up Chamberlain's "evil things" theme, depicting Nazism as only the latest expression of a historically violent and aggressive German character. The British Ministry of Information (MOI) developed an "Anger Campaign" with such slogans as "The Hun is at the gate. He will rage and destroy. He will slaughter the women and the children."³⁴ UK Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden wrote: "I have no confidence in our ability to make decent Europeans of the Germans, and I believe that the Nazi system represents the mentality of the great majority of the German people." Noel Coward made fun of the notion of kindness toward Germans with his song, "Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans."

"Let's let them feel their swell again
And bomb us all to hell again
But don't let's be beastly to the Hun."³⁵

³¹ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 227.

³² Nancy Snow, *Confessions of a Hollywood Propagandist: Harry Warner, FDR and Celluloid Persuasion*. The Lear Center. <http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/WWSnow.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2013). While we cannot know for certain when the official relationship between F.D.R. and Hollywood began, ample evidence exists of at least an informal one from the very beginnings of Roosevelt's presidency. Jack Warner, the public face of Warner Brothers, used to say that Roosevelt had offered him a diplomatic post immediately after the inauguration. While that was probably not true, the fact that it was taken seriously indicates a pre-existing relationship between the President and the movie moguls.

³³ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

In spite of Germany's invasion of Poland in September of 1939, Americans were still not favorable to entering the war on behalf of the British or French, whom they viewed as passive, or Stalin, whom they distrusted scarcely less than Hitler.³⁶ Their only real sympathies seemed to lie with the Czechs, Poles, and Finns, whose situation was beyond hope from military intervention.³⁷ On May 20, 1940, Harry and Jack Warner, sent an impassioned telegram to the White House, informing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that they and other Hollywood studios could not "contentedly sit still out here and do nothing while the world echoes with the march of savages to destroy everything we hold dear. We would rather die in an effort to be helpful than live to see barbarianism triumph. Will you please tell us, Mr. President, what you think we should do?"³⁸ We cannot now know how much Roosevelt led the filmmakers and how much they led him, but together, they turned American sentiments against the "German war machine," and the German people. Public passions are often much harder to quench than to arouse, and these passions almost certainly contributed to the American prejudices that allowed Allied atrocities against German civilians and POWs over the next half-decade.

In *The True Believer*, Eric Hoffer points out that, while an "ideal deity" is a highly unifying force for a mass movement, an "ideal devil" – someone to collectively hate – is at least equally unifying. Hoffer quotes a man he calls "the foremost authority on devils" who said that "the genius of a great leader consists in concentrating all hatred on a single foe, making even

³⁶ Blake, "Communist Party Press", 185. Although the Communist Party USA and other sympathetic groups at America's far left were relatively strong, popular, and well-connected at this time, and were still overwhelmingly favorable to the Soviets, Stalin's non-aggression pact was deeply troubling to American Communists, and at least muddled the issues of whom and how much to support militarily.

³⁷ Cull, *Selling War*, 62.

³⁸ Snow, "Hollywood Propagandist".

adversaries far removed from one another seem to belong to a single category.”³⁹ Hoffer’s warning is a chillingly accurate description of the Roosevelt administration’s propaganda effort.⁴⁰ They sought to create a collective hate for Nazis among the American population and soldiers. In doing so, they created hatred for the German people as a whole. Interestingly, the “foremost authority on devils,” Hoffer quotes in making this observation was Adolf Hitler.⁴¹

The Propaganda Partnership

The coordinated propaganda efforts increasingly eroded American opposition to war by the end of 1941, but an inciting incident was still required for full support. On December 7th, 1941, the Japanese provided it.⁴² On December 11th, 1941, Hitler declared war on the U.S., without provocation. The Roosevelt administration, while trying to keep government direct involvement invisible to the public, accelerated propaganda and censorship. They followed the British model, where government censors gave journalists the impression of journalistic freedom by exercising little or no control over the editorial content of the reporting, while controlling information at its source. The papers were free to say whatever they wanted about the information coming to them. The MOI simply made certain that only the “right kinds of information” got to

³⁹ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 92.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, Chapters 22 and 23. American propaganda, like American war excesses, paled in comparison to that of the other nations. Nazi propaganda was vicious, intensely derogatory, and often based on absolute falsehoods. Soviet propaganda was iconic in its use of visceral images of Nazi evil, the glorified motherland, and Soviet soldiers depicted in the act of killing Germans. Both the Nazis and Communists exploited ethnic/racial prejudices extensively.

⁴¹ Hoffer, *True Believer*, 92.

⁴² When Americans first viewed the Michael Curtiz film, *Casablanca*, in late 1942, America was officially at war. The film was already in pre-production in 1941, however, before the attack on Pearl Harbor. One of the great films of all time, *Casablanca* was also one of the most important World War II propaganda films, not only depicting unscrupulous and barbaric Nazis, but also intimating that, given the opportunity, the Vichy French were willing to change sides.

the news services. According to Philip Taylor, “The system operated so effectively on a day-to-day basis that many observers were unaware that a compulsory pre-censorship system was in fact operating and it helps to explain why Britain’s wartime propaganda gained its reputation for telling the truth when, in reality, the truth was rarely being told whole.”⁴³ Implied coercion became another aspect of this censorship. While the government rarely sanctioned anyone, the threat of sanctions, as well as of being labeled un-patriotic in a time of war, was generally enough to keep journalists in line.⁴⁴

The OWI was at least as successful as its British counterpart. Information going in and out of Europe was carefully controlled. Journalists’ access was limited to the specific information the administration wanted them to have. Soldiers’ letters home were censored. The opinions of America’s population, and through them, the attitudes of Soldiers, were being forged in Washington policy rooms.⁴⁵ The Administration harnessed every propaganda asset available. Roosevelt said, “The motion picture industry could be the most powerful instrument of propaganda in the world, whether it tries to be or not.”⁴⁶ With the advent of war, Hollywood dove into propaganda mode. All of the key studios (especially Warner Brothers) became direct participants in the war effort, “enlisting” such characters as Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Batman, Secret Agent X-9, Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, and many others, to spread messages of Allied righteousness and Axis dastardliness. Nearly every major star leapt at opportunities to support the war effort. Films such as *Hitler’s Children* (1943), *Women in Bondage* (1943), and *Enemy of Women* (1944) depicted the Germans as depraved criminals. Most of the 400 feature films

⁴³ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 213.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁵ See appendix A. Propaganda posters, produced and distributed by the U.S. Government.

⁴⁶ Snow, “Hollywood Propagandist”.

Hollywood produced per year during the war years were not overtly about the war, but almost all made statements supporting patriotic sentiments or reinforcing antagonism toward the Axis states.

While the U.S. Government did not mandate content to Hollywood, it exerted great influence. Since celluloid was classified as a vital war material, any studio less than fully supportive of administration policies could have found itself without film.⁴⁷ Roosevelt classified the film industry as “an essential war industry,” stating, “I want no restrictions placed thereon which will impair the usefulness of the film other than those very necessary restrictions which the dictates of safety make imperative.” The OWI provided Hollywood with a manual to guide their support, including a list of five themes: “(1) to explain why the Americans were fighting; (2) to portray the United Nations and their peoples; (3) to encourage work and production; (4) to boost morale on the home front; (5) to depict the heroics of the armed forces.”⁴⁸

Hollywood was further enlisted into a “public education campaign” which required a documentary approach. Frank Capra, one of America’s greatest filmmakers, was commissioned as a Major in the Army. When Marshall asked him to make the documentary series, *Why we Fight*, he complained that he had never made a documentary film before. Marshall is reported to have replied, “I have never been Chief of Staff before. Boys are commanding ships today who a year ago had never seen the ocean before.” Capra apologized and said, “I’ll make you the best damned documentary films ever made.” Those seven films (*Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike*, *Divide and Conquer*, *The Battle of Britain*, *The Battle of Russia*, *The Battle of China*, and *War Comes to America*) were probably some of the most effective propaganda in history.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 218.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 230.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 231.

Roosevelt did not limit his reach to Hollywood. Most Americans thought newsreels presented unbiased information, because of their perceived relationship with radio news programming, which had a reputation for fairness and accuracy. Yet newsreels may have been the most thoroughly propagandized information outlets of the day.⁵⁰ The OWI coordinated newsreels, newspaper articles and radio news reports. A typical American might listen to a radio broadcast (highly propagandized, unbeknownst to them) and discuss a reinforcing newspaper article over dinner. Then they might go to the movies where they would watch a newsreel that incorporated images, both real and contrived, to drive the lessons home. The feature film might or might not include overt references to Nazi evils, but nearly always included references to other relevant issues intended to increase support for the war.⁵¹

Literary publishing also entered the propaganda effort. Many books in the late 1930's and early 1940's put an academic stamp on anti-Nazi, anti-German views. In 1940, Putnam of New York published, "The Voice of Destruction," notes by Hitler physician, Dr. Herman Rausching. Dr. Rausching was a former confidant of Hitler, with policy knowledge and personal insights. His depiction of Hitler as a depraved, remorseless, power-mad force of sheer evil served the administration's propaganda needs. Dr. Rausching wrote, "But Germany's Fuhrer is not only sensitive as a mimosa: he is brutal and vindictive. He is entirely without generosity. He lives in a world of insincerity, deceiving and self-deceiving. But hatred is like wine to him, it intoxicates him. One must have heard of his tirades of denunciation to realize how he can revel in hate. Brutal and vindictive, he is also sentimental – a familiar mixture. He loved his canaries, and could cry when one of them sickened and died. But he would have men against whom he had a grudge tortured to death in the most horrible way. He...has the instinct of the sadist, finding sexual

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 218.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

excitement in inflicting torture on others.”⁵² Through sheer force of repetition, the image of Hitler was conflated with the Germans as a whole: twisted monsters, depraved madmen, vicious, pitiless, and godless.⁵³

Roosevelt’s harnessing entertainment for political propaganda is often rationalized as a necessity, noble in intent. Considering what we now know about the Nazi regime, demonizing the Nazis, and perhaps even the Germans, may seem warranted. Anti-Nazism (and by extension anti-Germanism) became a kind of mass movement, however, not unlike America’s anti-communist movement in the 1950s. Insofar as they all manipulated media to inflame hatred for political purposes, this propagandizing had much in common with communist anti-bourgeoisie rhetoric and Nazi anti-Jewish, anti-slavic, anti-Soviet, and anti-gypsy indoctrinating propaganda. Nazi public festivals and theater, contextually similar to the American cinema experience, contributed heavily to the successful rise of Nazism in Germany.⁵⁴ Eric Hoffer said, “In the eyes of the true believer, people who have no holy cause are without backbone and character – a pushover for men of faith.”⁵⁵ The American anti-Nazi movement developed its own articles of faith, including a belief in the fundamental evil of all Nazi Party members, and the inborn aggressiveness and warlike tendencies of the German people.

⁵² Hermann Rauschning, *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940), 262.

⁵³ See the propaganda posters in Annex B. The point of all this is that the demonization of the Nazis was cumulative, and songs, jokes, films, and posters that today seem quaint or silly worked together to harden American attitudes against the Germans, and to promote fear and anxiety.

⁵⁴ George L. Moss, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political symbolism & Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Howard Fertig, Inc. New York, 1975), 100.

⁵⁵ Hoffer, *True Believer*, 162.

Here is our dilemma: as Hoffer said, the world received a malady in the development of mass movements, but also “a miraculous instrument for raising societies and nations from the dead – an instrument of resurrection.”⁵⁶ Anti-Nazi propaganda played a significant role in enabling the American public to make the sacrifices required for defeating the Axis Powers. This was undeniably a good thing for Americans, and for the world. Inflamed public passions can be difficult to control, however. The propaganda that helped win the war also helped create a raging hatred that fueled atrocities and contributed to Soldiers losing sight of their critical values.

Operations as Messages

Even with America fully in the war and American goods pouring in, England was struggling to survive in 1942. Desperate for a new direction, General Arthur T. “Bomber” Harris led the effort to change the air strategy from bombing military targets to the strategic bombing of population centers. On May 30th, 1942, the British bombed Köln (Cologne), bringing the war home to Germany for the first time. Over the next three years, Anglo-American bombing reduced urban Germany to rubble. Estimates range from 305,000 (USAAF minimum estimate) to 600,000 civilian deaths from allied bombing in Germany.⁵⁷

Michael Walzer, eminent philosopher on the subject of jus in bellum, wrote:

It was in late 1940 that the decision to bomb cities was made.⁵⁸ A directive issued in June of that year had ‘specifically laid down that targets had to be identified and aimed at. Indiscriminate bombing was forbidden.’ In November, after the German raid on

⁵⁶ Hoffer, *True Believer*, 168.

⁵⁷ Paul Johnson, “Modern Times,” *London, The Guardian*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/oct/22/worlddispatch.germany> (accessed on December 29, 2012).

⁵⁸ Michael Walzer, *War and Moral Responsibility* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 93-94. Walzer’s date of 1940 for Bomber Harris’ decision differs from “early 1942,” as is given in other books. The specific date is not relevant to the point.

Coventry, ‘Bomber Command was instructed simply to aim at the center of a city.’ What had once been called indiscriminate bombing was now required, and by [the middle of] 1942, aiming at military or industrial targets within cities was barred: ‘the aiming points are to be the built-up areas, not, for instance, the dockyards or aircraft factories.’ The purpose of the raids was explicitly declared to be the destruction of civilian morale. Following the famous minute of Lord Cherwell in 1942, the means to this demoralization was further specified: working-class residential areas were the prime targets. Cherwell thought it possible to render a third of the German population homeless by the middle of 1943.⁵⁹

Article XXII of the Hague draft of February, 1923, stated that “Aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population, of destroying private property not of military character, or of injuring non-combatants is prohibited.” Article 25 of the 1907 Hague Agreement prohibits “the attack or bombardment of towns, villages, habitations, or buildings which are not defended, is prohibited.”⁶⁰ In 1939, Franklin Roosevelt made the following appeal:

The President of the United States to the Governments of France, Germany, Italy, Poland and His Britannic Majesty, September 1, 1939

The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the past few years, which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women, and children, has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of the tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives. I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every government which may be engaged in hostilities publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event, and under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities, upon the understanding that these same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all of their opponents. I request an immediate reply.
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT⁶¹

⁵⁹ Walzer, *War and Moral Responsibility*, 93-94.

⁶⁰ ICRC, “Humanitarian Law, Hauge Convention of 1907,” <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/intro/195?OpenDocument/> (accessed 10 MAR 2013).

⁶¹ “The American Presidency Project” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15845> (accessed 30 March 2013).

The bombing of Dresden on February 14th, 1945, was particularly heinous, not only because of the extraordinary devastation caused, but because of the obvious futility in destroying a city with no significant military value. Dresden was often called “the Florence on the Elbe” for its beauty and artistic riches. Countless irreplaceable artistic and historical artifacts were lost in the bombing.⁶² Fires spread and merged, creating man-made tornadoes that uprooted trees, destroyed buildings, and tossed human beings through the air. The fires and scorching winds depleted oxygen, suffocating a great many of those who survived the explosions, fire, and tornadoes.⁶³ Despite public outrage at the needless destruction, even in the midst of the war, barely over a week later a massive air raid dropped 1,551 tons of bombs on Pforzheim. The massive bombardment took only 22 minutes, turning the small city into a furnace, killing a fourth of the city’s citizens, some 17,600 people.⁶⁴

Estimates vary, but the Allied bombings of German cities probably caused around 500,000 civilian deaths.⁶⁵ When talking about deaths and injuries in such great numbers, we can easily forget that each one is a singular event of human misery. A German woman named Anna Mittlestadt describes running in panic after her house was destroyed. “The people behind me were screaming at me, ‘Frau Mittlestadt, your feet are on fire!’ Everywhere I stepped, I stepped in phosphorus, in flames. But I didn’t care. I just kept running.”⁶⁶

⁶² Don McCombs and Fred L. Worth, *THE WAR: 4,139 Strange and Fascinating Facts* (New York: Wings Books/Random House, 1983), 155.

⁶³ Leo Mckinstry, "Did Lancaster bombers that killed 600,000 in German cities deliberately target civilians? A new book says YES...", <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1216788/Did-Lancaster-bombers-killed-600-000-German-cities-deliberately-target-civilians-A-new-book-says-YES-.html> (accessed 9 December 2012).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kershaw. p. 235.

⁶⁶ Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich* (Washington: Da Capo Press, 1994), 458.

With about a third of German homes and farms destroyed, exposure and starvation would claim millions of additional victims after the war, and exacerbate food shortages throughout Europe. While the human costs were catastrophic, any military benefit from the campaign of bombing civilians was probably minimal. We can say with near certainty that no thought was given as to how this utter callousness toward the suffering of civilians, executed under official orders, would affect the moral framework of the soldiers who would later be receiving surrenders, guarding POWs, and managing German civilians.

From Messaging to Atrocities?

Germany's dependence on imported oil preceded the war, and by 1943, shortages limited German operations.⁶⁷ Heavy losses on the Eastern Front, coupled with Allied success in Africa and Italy and the USAAF's continued destruction of the Luftwaffe, probably eliminated any legitimate hopes the Germans might have had for victory. Their persistent resistance therefore frustrated American Soldiers. After watching infantrymen of the 4th Division shoot three wounded German prisoners, Lieutenant Philip Reisler claimed that another officer said, "Anything you do to the krauts is okay because they should have given up in Africa. All of this is just wasted motion."⁶⁸ Similar expressions would be common over the next two years. According to Philip Taylor, "...after the policy of unconditional surrender was announced at the Casablanca conference of January 1943, it was no longer easy to distinguish between Germans and

⁶⁷ Peter W. Becker, "The Role of Synthetic Fuel in World War Two Germany", Air University Review, July-August 1981.
<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1981/jul-aug/becker.htm> (accessed 21 January 2013).

⁶⁸ Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day, June 6, 1944* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 212.

Nazis...the underlying message of all this material was that Nazism itself was an atrocity and all Germans were guilty of it.”⁶⁹

Most of today’s commentators gloss over American atrocities in the Second World War, or attribute “excesses” to outrage over the Nazi death camps, but difficulties began much earlier. On July 14, 1943, Americans massacred 72 Italian and German POWs near Biscari, Italy, in two separate incidents. A captain and sergeant received courts-martial, but each claimed they were following orders not to take prisoners. The captain was found not-guilty. The Sergeant was sentenced to life in prison, but released a year later. General Patton, referring to the events, instructed General Bradley to tell his men to “say that the murdered soldiers were snipers.”⁷⁰ Apart from the obvious deceptiveness, killing surrendering soldiers, even snipers, was still a violation of the laws of war, so we can only wonder why he gave this direction.

While atrocities on both sides in the German-Soviet conflict were far more vicious and widespread than on the Western Front, these problems did not escape Americans, who were exposed to increasing stress and escalating propaganda as they neared Germany. Stories of Germans executing Allied prisoners were widely disseminated through official and unofficial channels. Most accusations were specifically directed against the feared and hated SS, but guilt was also broadly assigned to the whole German Land Army, *das Heer*.⁷¹ Yet, as Max Hastings wrote in his highly respected history, *Overlord*, “it must be said that propaganda has distorted the balance of guilt. Among scores of Allied witnesses interviewed for this narrative, almost every

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 221-222.

⁷⁰ James J. Weingartner, “Massacre at Biscari: Patton and an American War Crime.” *The Historian*, Volume 52, Issue 1, November 1989. 24–39.

⁷¹ Killing POWs, as well as civilians, was far more common between the Germans and Soviets than between Germans and either Americans or British. On the Eastern Front, both in the Soviet Union and later in Eastern Germany, murder, rape, and other violent crimes were the norm, and in many cases officially sanctioned.

one had direct knowledge or even experience of the shooting of German prisoners during the campaign. In the heat of battle, in the wake of seeing comrades die, many men found it intolerable to send prisoners to the rear knowing that they would thus survive the war, while they themselves seemed to have little prospect of doing so.”⁷²

Questionable Guidance

According to Hastings, American troops shot surrendering German snipers, including uniformed soldiers, as a matter of policy. “Lt. Col. Chester B. Hansen, an Assistant Division Commander in Omar Bradley’s First Army, wrote, “Brad says that he will not take any action against anyone who decides to treat snipers a little more roughly than they are being treated at present....A sniper cannot sit around and shoot and then surrender when you close in on him. That’s not the way to play the game.”⁷³ Patton described an event when a German soldier blew up a bridge: “He then put up his hands...The Americans took him prisoner, which I considered the height of folly.” As the allies raced toward Paris, there was still a significant distinction between SS and regular German troops, in the Americans’ eyes. According to some of the surviving German POWs, the Americans sometimes shot SS prisoners, while sparing regular *Heer* troops. Unfortunately, the German soldiers did not understand the difference and related surprise that the SS were singled out to be shot, while they themselves were sent to the rear.”⁷⁴

One American military report on the Ardennes admitted that “it may unequivocally be stated that pillage of Belgian civilian property by US troops did in fact take place on a considerable scale”⁷⁵ and Hastings says that “...many French families were shocked and appalled

⁷² Hastings, *Overlord*, 212.

⁷³ Hastings, *Overlord*, 210.

⁷⁴ Steinhoff, Pechel, and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, 259 & 268.

⁷⁵ Anthony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 192.

by the cost of liberation to their own homes, which if anything were looted more thoroughly by the Allied than the German armies.”⁷⁶ Charges of more violent crimes, especially rape, also rose steadily. Rapes increased from 25 per month in January to over 500 per month by April. During this time, resistance declined dramatically: the increase in rapes was indirectly proportionate to the levels of resistance during the same timeframe.⁷⁷ These crimes appear to have increased with opportunity, not frustration or fear. We must also note, however, that the U.S. Army court-martialed its soldiers for these infractions at a higher rate than the British, the Germans, or the Soviets, and the rates of these crimes were significantly lower among the Americans than their counterparts.⁷⁸

One incident, documented by American and Italian sources, involves the killing of at least 8 Italian civilians near a bombed soap factory in Canicatti, Sicily. The civilians were being held as prisoners by American forces after being accused of looting. Accounts say the Lieutenant Colonel in charge flew into a rage. He pulled out his service pistol and began firing into the unarmed and unresisting civilians, killing at least eight, including an eleven-year-old girl. According to witnesses, he fired into the group, reloaded, and emptied a second clip in the same manner.⁷⁹ In spite of the presence of many witnesses, there is no record that the officer received any disciplinary action. In another incident, Lindley Higgins of the U.S. 4th Division saw a

⁷⁶ Hastings, *Overlord*, 109.

⁷⁷ Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of Allied Occupation* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books), 240.

⁷⁸ Dr. G. Stephen Lauer, interview, 26 March 2013.

⁷⁹ This story is related by Dr. Joseph Salemi of New York University, who learned the story from his father who witnessed it. Dr. Salemi related the story to Dr. Stanley Hirshson, who in turn included it in his biography of Patton. According to Salemi, although the story was not officially recorded by the Americans, it is well-documented in Italy, including the names of the deceased and the American officer responsible for the atrocity.

lieutenant shout at a soldier who was escorting a prisoner: “You going to take that man to the rear?” The lieutenant then shot the German in the head.⁸⁰

Some stories of Americans killing German prisoners were well known among the troops at the time. Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and reporter, Bill Mauldin, related the following:

“In a deep crater in a forest, someone had come upon a squad or two of Germans, perhaps fifteen or twenty in all. Their visible wish to surrender—most were in tears of terror and despair—was ignored by our men lining the rim....Laughing and howling, hoo-ha-ing and cowboy and good-old-boy yelling, our men exultantly shot into the crater until every single man down there was dead. A few tried to scale the sides, but there was no escape. If a body twitched or moved at all, it was shot again. The result was deep satisfaction, and the event transformed into amusing narrative, told and retold over campfires all that winter. If it made you sick, you were not supposed to indicate.”⁸¹

German officers had long been telling their soldiers that Americans would shoot them if they tried to surrender, as a means of making them fight to the end, so we cannot know for certain whether Americans actually shooting German prisoners had any impact on German surrender rates. By the time of the breakout from Normandy, however, most of the German forces in France were desperately low on critical supplies, including ammunition. The outcome was evident to all but the most ardently fanatical Nazis. Morale was low, and there was little preventing them from surrendering en masse, so it is possible that if the Americans had accepted surrenders without exception, they may not have fought as tenaciously as they did. In short, shooting German prisoners may well have cost American lives.

Slow Attrition

Giles MacDonogh states that “American GIs had been fed a good deal of propaganda at home and on the way. They had drunk deep from the films of Frank Capra, and had read the articles of Emil Ludwig, Louis Nizer and Siegrid Schultz; they had heard Dorothy Thompson.

⁸⁰ Hastings, *Overlord*, 212.

⁸¹ Bill Mauldin, *The Brass Ring* (New York: Penguin-Putnam, 1971), 200-201.

From the first moment they walked on German soil, they expected to be attacked by Werewolves.”⁸² He further notes that “propaganda had taught the soldiers that Germans – particularly German soldiers – were subhuman.”⁸³ According to MacDonogh, American Soldiers burned down the Village of Wallenberg, shortly after crossing the Siegfried line into Western Germany in the autumn of 1944, due to signs of German resistance in the area.⁸⁴ From early 1945 through the summer of 1946, Volksturm, Hitler Youth, Werewolves, SS holdouts, etc. operated throughout Germany, killing locals and attacking Allied soldiers.⁸⁵ While the Werewolves and other elements of the German National Resistance movement are easily dismissed today, in late 1945 they posed a threat to soldiers and planners that could not be dismissed. Werewolves killed 3,000-5,500, a small number, tactically speaking, when compared to the millions in service at that place and time.⁸⁶ But the threat of the Werewolf, amplified by Hollywood and other American propaganda, caused over-reactions, created friction, and slowed reconciliation. As Biddiscombe said, “Seen in dialectical terms, it might thus be concluded that it was the antithesis to the Werewolf that gave the Nazi guerilla movement its greatest historical significance: the Werewolf had an impact, not because it succeeded, but merely because it existed.”⁸⁷ Eisenhower said, “I have told my Army Commanders that resistance...will be dealt with sternly and on the spot. I will

⁸² MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 234.

⁸³ MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 235.

⁸⁴ MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 235. The author of this paper was unable to independently verify MacDonogh’s claim, but did locate a small town in Western Germany that would have been in the vicinity of advancing American troops at that time.

⁸⁵ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 189.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

not tolerate civilians, people out of uniform, bearing arms, firing on our troops.”⁸⁸ According to Biddiscombe, American commanders took this as permission for dispensing “frontier justice” and killed many German civilians without benefit of a trial.⁸⁹ On December 21st, 1944, the 328th Infantry, 26th Division issued Fragmentary Order 27, stating, “No SS troops or paratroopers will be taken prisoners but will be shot on sight.”⁹⁰ After an American element was ambushed by civilian guerillas on April 7th, 1945, near the town of Ohrdruf, “General Patton himself arranged for retaliation, noting in his diary that ‘the town where [the attack] took place has been removed altogether with, I hop, a number of the civilians.’”⁹¹ In yet another instance, the entire town of Amberg was sealed off and raided after an American was shot there.⁹² When “two U.S. soldiers were garroted...American authorities mistakenly believed that surly local civilians were responsible, and on April 18th, 1945, they conducted a brutal security sweep, arresting the entire military-age, male populations of villages such as Bruchlingen.” In northern Baden, combat troops destroyed the town of Bruchsal, apparently in response to some unnamed atrocity by the SS.⁹³ Also on April 18th, 1945, in Quedlinburg, GE, Americans reacted to a Hitler Youth attack by killing the boy, then shelling the town all night. In the morning, they came back to what was left of the town and threatened to burn it to the ground if any more incidents occurred.⁹⁴ At

⁸⁸ Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 254.

⁸⁹ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 254.

⁹⁰ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1965), 263-4.

⁹¹ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 167.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

Tresburg, an American officer was killed by a Hitler Youth. The Americans retaliated by shooting a dozen German POWs.⁹⁵

In a well-documented account from a man named Gustov Schutz, American troops captured, disarmed, and then killed a small element of Labor Force Germans. The Labor Force had been rapidly absorbed into the German Army and given minimal training, as part of Germany's final efforts to fend off the Allied advance. They continued to wear their brown Labor Force uniforms, with the addition of yellow armbands to designate themselves as soldiers. Schutz' account describes an event he witnessed while trying to escape with his wife:

“We hadn't gone far when we were confronted with a hideous sight. Shredded tents, equipment strewn about, dead men with bloated stomachs, and the repulsive sweet smell of decay were everywhere. They wore the brown Labor Service uniforms with Yellow armbands: *Deutsche Wehrmacht*. But there were no weapons lying about. This was a labor service camp that was torn to pieces.

On a field we saw traces of tank treads and several knocked-out American tanks. So there'd been fighting here too. We didn't see any dead near the guns and tanks on our side, but on the other side of the road more than a hundred dead Labor Service men were lying in long rows – all with bloated stomachs and bluish faces. We had to throw up. Even though we hadn't eaten in days, we vomited.

So after the Labor Service men had been taken prisoner, the Americans shot them as partisans and put their corpses by the roadside as a deterrent.”⁹⁶

By the time Hitler committed suicide, on April 30th, 1945, the war was essentially over.

The German resistance, the Werewolf and Freikorps “Adolf Hitler” continued to create morale problems, but their efforts had little tactical effect. Yet on May 6th, after a few isolated exchanges between Americans and Hitler Youth/Werewolves, “twenty Wehrmacht [prisoners] were lined up against a wall and shot, and all the towns of the surrounding district...were placed

⁹⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁹⁶ Steinhoff, Pechel, and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, 497-498. Also, Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 161.

under a severe curfew.”⁹⁷ As Ian Kershaw says in *The End*, “[The Werewolves’] main capacity was to terrorize, and this they did to the very last days of the war...”⁹⁸ The threat of the German National Resistance, amplified by propaganda, hardened American attitudes against Germans, while American over-reaction hardened German attitudes against Americans. One German who had abandoned the Werewolves reported that, even though he had not witnessed or even heard reliable reports of effective Werewolf attacks, he was confident that they were having an effect, because “the enemy still reacted violently to the Werewolf, and that it became grounds for murders and killings of [German] innocents.”⁹⁹ In any analysis, we can be certain that American over-reaction to German National Resistance was due at least in part to propaganda that overstated the threat.¹⁰⁰

Tragedies After War

When Buchenwald was liberated, the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis were, in the strictest sense, beyond belief. The horrifying maltreatment of the camp’s inhabitants was undeniable. “Racial inferiors” and political prisoners had been worked to death, or to the point of uselessness and murdered in cold blood. The dead accumulated at such a rate near the end that a great many bodies had not been disposed of, and were left, decaying in heaps. The skeletal-looking survivors were near death from malnutrition, disease, and exhaustion. Many died in the first days after liberation. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the American Soldiers who liberated the camp treated the captured German guards brutally. We cannot forget,

⁹⁷ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 185.

⁹⁸ Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 280.

⁹⁹ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 236.

however, that it is unlawful to kill unarmed prisoners, no matter how horrific their own prior actions may have been. Eyewitness reports describe prisoners pinning guards to the ground with stakes. Accounts vary only slightly, describing about eighty guards being killed, “sometimes with the aid and encouragement of the Americans.”¹⁰¹ Lowe says that, “as the news of such discoveries became better known, American troops became increasingly disgusted with the Germans...It was precisely to drum this [loathing for Germans] home that Eisenhower ordered all nearby units who were not on front-line duty to visit the camps at Ohrdruf and Nordhausen...The newsreel footage from these visits, which finally reached American cinema screens on 1 May, shocked the nation to its core.”¹⁰² Reports of killings like these are among the most widely documented of the war. At Dachau, a Lieutenant named William Walsh took four German POWs into a boxcar and shot them, after which a Private from his platoon climbed into the car and shot them all again. Other Germans were lined up against a wall and machine gunned, killing at least twelve. In this case, there was an official report, which stated in part that “The medical officer who came on the scene shortly afterwards...was also criticized for failing to administer any aid to the German soldiers, some of whom were still alive.” Another seventeen were shot in a tower as they were surrendering, unarmed. Another 25-50 were killed in other locations around the camp, including some who were intentionally wounded, and then turned over to prisoners who were encouraged to take their revenge. The U.S. Army commissioned a report, and the incidents were well documented, including on film, but no American Soldiers ever faced trial, even though these were clearly in violation of the Geneva Conventions.¹⁰³ An American Lieutenant presented a

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰² Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 83-84.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 83-84.

Polish Jew named Kurt Klappholz with a German soldier who was already badly beaten. The lieutenant told him, “here is one of your torturers, you can take your revenge.”¹⁰⁴



Figure 2. American Soldiers Shooting German Prison Guards in the Coalyard

Source: U.S. Army Signal Corps Photograph

Herrman Blocksdorff, a German POW captured by American forces, claimed,

“I was taken prisoner by the Americans and brought to Sinzig POW camp. There were 1,000 men to a camp. They were split into groups of 100, and then into groups of ten. Each group of ten was given the outdoor space of a medium-sized living room. We had to live like this for three months, no roof over our heads. Even the badly wounded only got a bundle of straw. And it rained on the Rhine. For days. And we were always in the open. People died like flies. Then we got our first rations, and I swear to God, I’m telling the truth: We got one slice of bread for ten men. (Each man also received) a tablespoon of milk powder, coffee, grapefruit powder, and one tablespoon of sugar. And this went on for three long months. I only weighed 90 pounds. The dead were carried out every day. That was the end of April. We looked like the concentration camp victims in the films they showed us later on.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁵ Steinhoff, Pechel, and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, 505.

We must again be clear that the Americans were not the worst of the offenders, even among the allies. The Russians, upon “liberating” Berlin after German Field Marshall Keitel signed surrender terms on May 9th 1945, raped German women in organized masses, either as a matter of policy, or because officers were simply unable to control the troops. “Berliners remember that, because all the windows had been blown in, you could hear the screams every night. Estimates from the main Berlin hospitals ranged from 95,000 to 130,000 rape victims. One doctor deduced that out of approximately 100,000 women by the Soviet soldiers in Berlin, some 10,000 died as a result, mostly from suicide.”¹⁰⁶

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes one such scene in the poem, *Prussian Nights*:

“The little daughter’s on the mattress,
Dead. How many have been upon it
A platoon, a company perhaps?
A girl’s been turned into a woman.
A woman into a corpse.”¹⁰⁷

Over a third of the Soviet Union’s German prisoners died, and in Yugoslavia, about 40% died in captivity. Russian writer Ilya Ehrenberg was perhaps the most widely read by Soviet soldiers, many of whom could recite passages of his work, peppered with lines like “there is nothing more joyful than a pile of German corpses.” In 1942 he described his attitude toward Germans – not Nazis – in this way: “One can bear anything; the plague, and hunger and death. But one cannot bear the Germans...We cannot live as long as these grey-green slugs are alive...today there is one thought: kill the Germans. Kill them all and dig them into the earth.” Of the Soviets’ German prisoners who were not immediately killed, nearly all were kept in the Soviet Union as slave laborers, the last not returning to Germany until 1957, twelve years after

¹⁰⁶ Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 410.

¹⁰⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Prussian Nights*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1977), 41.

the war ended.¹⁰⁸ Even in Soviet guilt, however, the U.S. was at least partially complicit. The American Army turned tens of thousands of German soldiers over to the Soviets, who had been plain about their intentions for revenge and retribution.

Table 1: Deaths amongst prisoners of war ⁴²			
Holding Country	POWs	No. of deaths	%
Britain*	3,635,000	1,254	<0.1
USA*	3,097,000	4,537	0.1
France*	937,000	24,178	2.6
USSR*	3,060,000	1,094,250	35.8
Yugoslavia	194,000	80,000	41.2
Poland	70,000	5,400	7.7
Czechoslovakia	25,000	1,250	5.0
Belgium, Holland, Lux	76,000	675	0.9
<i>Totals</i>	<i>11,094,000</i>	<i>1,211,544</i>	<i>10.9</i>
<i>Note: *Figures include camps run in mainland Europe.</i>			

Table 1: Deaths amongst prisoners of war

Source: Lowe, *Savage Continent*, page 122.

The number of German prisoners thought to have died in American POW camps varies wildly. James Bacque claims that 800,000 died, while some documents put the number at less than 5,000 (see the table above.) Most academics agree that the number was about 50-60,000, which would be about 1.8% of the total, significantly better than the French, and vastly better than the Soviets.¹⁰⁹ Some American veterans who worked in the camps verified the deplorable conditions, describing a culture of neglect and revenge.¹¹⁰ German POWs were re-designated Disarmed Enemy Forces (DEF) so that they would not have to be afforded the Geneva Conventions protections for POWs. They received much smaller food rations than were required

¹⁰⁸ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 117-119.

¹⁰⁹ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 116.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

by the Geneva Conventions, but to be fair, in the first years after the war, almost no one in Germany and very few in all of Europe received the caloric allotments prescribed by the Geneva Conventions. Food was simply not available. That said, it is also clear that Germans in general, and German prisoners in particular, received far less food than the average. DEF status also meant they could be used as unpaid or very low-paid labor. Most of the 425,000 German prisoners in the U.S. remained through 1946 as forced laborers, during a period when Germany suffered from such a lack of workers that it could not feed itself, and the U.S. was entering a period of post-war unemployment.¹¹¹

Orderly and Humane

After the war, the Allies executed the largest forced population transfer in history. In total, some 16.5 million German-speaking people were uprooted from their homes. The majority of these were women and children, expelled from homes their families had lived in for generations. Tens of thousands died in the expulsion trains where they were often packed in unheated railroad cars without food, water, or toilet facilities. Many more died of disease or malnutrition in the post-war camps set up by the Allies.¹¹² Others died along roads where they were being marched on foot. The total deaths are extremely difficult to tally, but well-respected estimates range from 500,000 to 2.25 million.

¹¹¹ R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), 262. Also, a *New York Times* article from 10 June 1945 proudly proclaimed, “600,000 Germans to Labor for U.S.” The article goes on to explain that those are the German prisoners in Germany – 350,000 still remained working in the United States.

¹¹² The Allies’ camps for the Germans went by a variety of names, including Detention camps, POW Camps, and Labor camps. Since most of them were located on the sites of the camps used by the Nazis to contain political and ethnic prisoners during the War, which the Allies quickly dubbed, “Concentration Camps,” that moniker was often used as well.

The 1941 Atlantic Charter promised not to make territorial changes “that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.” By accepting Soviet demands for control of Eastern European lands at the Yalta and Tehran conferences, Churchill and Roosevelt broke the Atlantic Charter’s promise.¹¹³ When they moved Poland’s borders westward, the Soviet-controlled Poles deported the people by the hundreds of thousands from the only homes they’d ever known to a “homeland” they may not have ever even visited. The expulsions were not only cruel, they worked against critical requirements. While Germany suffered from starvation, and all of Europe from food shortages, the crops the displaced Germans had planted rotted in the fields for want of workers to harvest them.¹¹⁴ This forced expulsion nevertheless set off a frenzy in Eastern Europe to rid themselves of Germans (the states claiming ownership of the lands and whatever possessions the expellees could not carry by hand with them). In just the last two weeks of June, 274,206 Germans were unlawfully deported from Poland.¹¹⁵ In July and August of 1945, the British, Americans, and Soviets met in Potsdam and agreed that all expulsions from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary would stop immediately, and not resume until they could be done “in an orderly and humane manner.”¹¹⁶

Descriptions of the hardships endured by the new German refugees vary only slightly, and all are unimaginably harsh to a modern reader.¹¹⁷ A German priest who met trainloads of incoming expellees said, “The people, men, women, and children all mixed together, were tightly packed into the railway cars, these cattle wagons themselves being locked from the outside. For

¹¹³ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 221.

¹¹⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 262. This also resulted in a pestilence of mice whose population exploded as a result of the vast quantity of grain left standing in the fields.

¹¹⁵ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 233.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 235-237.

days on end, the people were transported like this, and in Gorlitz the wagons were opened for the first time. I have seen with my own eyes that out of one wagon alone ten corpses were taken and thrown into coffins which had been kept on hand. I noted further that several persons had become deranged...The people were covered in excrement, which led me to believe they were squeezed together so tightly that there was no longer any possibility for them to relieve themselves in a designated place.”¹¹⁸

The German refugees – 11,730,000 according to official records at the time – were being packed into lands already devastated by war.¹¹⁹ Allied bombing had left available housing 4 million short of the needs of the existing population.¹²⁰ Adding nearly twelve million people to a country already facing severe shortages created homelessness and starvation on a scale unlike anything Europe had ever seen. In all, Allied policies, first endorsed by Roosevelt then reaffirmed by Truman, uprooted some 16.5 million Germans from their homes, resulting in the deaths of as many as 2.25 million during the expulsions.¹²¹ The overwhelming majority of these were women, children, the elderly, and those too infirm to have participated in the war.

The history of the expulsions puts all of the participants in very a poor light. It was a “messy, complex, morally compromised, and socially disruptive episode that remains to this day a political hot potato.”¹²² The understanding that millions of Germans in transit would die of disease, starvation or exposure, was shrugged off by officials. A British officer named Goronwy

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 238.

¹¹⁹ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 243.

¹²⁰ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 76.

¹²¹ MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 1. Other sources, such as James Bacque’s books on the subject, estimate up to six million, but the larger numbers are highly suspect.

¹²² Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 3. Douglas’ findings came not only from German records, but from non-governmental agencies such as the Red Cross, from diplomats, officials, journalists, and other eye witnesses, and from the archival records of the expelling governments.

Rees, who was attached to the Allied Military Government in Germany, wrote in the British periodical, *The Spectator*, “The real danger at the moment is not that millions of Germans must starve, freeze, and die during the winter; it is that out of their misery the Germans should create an opportunity for destroying the unity of the Allies who defeated them.”¹²³ In another case, the American military government in Hesse declared that people “rioting over food shortages would be subject to the death penalty.”¹²⁴

These events are not well known today, but they were common knowledge in their own time. The news of German starvation and prisoner mistreatment spread to America, around the beginning of the Nuremberg Trials. The obvious hypocrisies caused philosopher Bertrand Russell to write, in a letter to the New York Times, that one of the accusations against the Nazis was their “deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population.” He asked, “Are mass deportations crimes when committed by our enemies during war and justifiable measures of social adjustment when carried out by our allies in time of peace? Is it more humane to turn out old women and children to die at a distance than to asphyxiate Jews in gas chambers? Are the future laws of war to justify the killing of enemy nationals after enemy resistance has ceased?”¹²⁵ Victor Gollancz, a British publisher of Jewish heritage, said, “if every German was indeed responsible for what happened at Belsen, then we, as members of a democratic country and not of a fascist one with no free press or parliament, were responsible individually as well as collectively.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 287.

¹²⁴ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 101.

¹²⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 288-289.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

William Hillman's biography of Truman quotes the President as saying, "Of course, you must remember, Germany is a conquered enemy country and I don't think there is any reason for giving them any special privileges. In fact it is the policy to see to it that Germany gets no better treatment than our Allies, which she ruined."¹²⁷ The former Nazi, Albert Speer, provided a profound and more than slightly ironic insight in his book, *Inside the Third Reich*: "The build-up of negative impulses, each reinforcing the other, can inexorably shake to pieces the complicated apparatus of the modern world. There is no halting this process by will alone. The danger is that the automatism of progress will depersonalize man further and withdraw more and more of his self-responsibility."¹²⁸ Speer's observation was directed toward the Nazi regime, but it can serve as a warning to us all.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Neither the American soldiers who fought the Second World War, nor their leaders, were morally flawed on a fundamental level. We can say with absolute certainty that the overwhelming majority were honest and decent, and did the best they could to live up to their values, and "do the right thing" in the context of the moment. The problem is that context. Propaganda, even when done with the best of motives, can lead to a self-fueling spiral of violence in wartime. Many factors have combined by the time a soldier makes the decision to pull a trigger.

The Peer Environment

Upon discovery of the Nazi "death camps," American Soldiers were understandably appalled. They asked themselves how German civilians living a few miles away could have been

¹²⁷ Hillman, *Mr. President*, 214. We should note that, in full context, these remarks were intended to defend, not criticize the President's actions.

¹²⁸ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Macmillan Publishing CO., Inc., 1970), 524.

unaware of the goings-on there. When national media and the President himself began to ask the same questions as direct accusations, American anti-German sentiments, as measured by opinion polling, increased dramatically.¹²⁹ Soldiers murdered guards, or threw them, bound, to be beaten to death by furious inmates. We may believe that the German guards who oversaw such atrocities deserved the death penalty, but allowing soldiers to become judge, jury and executioner was not only an injustice to the German guards, it was a terrible disservice to the American soldiers in that situation. Killing in combat is justified by natural, moral, and international law. When killing defenseless people, however, a moral line is crossed. Everyone in the unit participates, by action or acquiescence, in an act of murder. We may assume, both from logic and the words of convicted criminals, that when a man has one murder on his conscience, it is easier to commit another. We may also assume that when a man is guilty of a great crime himself, it is easier to look the other way when a comrade-in-arms commits another crime, perhaps a different one such rape, or a lesser one, such as theft. An atmosphere of conspiratorial silence can develop, in which violence escalates and remorse is repressed. Every incident of military units committing crimes contains similar testimony. LT Calley's soldiers at My Lai, spoke of the isolation of their unit from the "laws of the civilized world."¹³⁰ In a March 2012 interview, Lynndie England, former guard at the center of the Abu Ghraib controversy expressed no remorse for her actions, only for

¹²⁹ Gallup Polls in May and June 1945 revealed that 84% of Americans believed that the Germans had killed or intentionally starved millions in concentration camps, and over 59% thought pictures and footage of the evidence should be shown in theaters across America. In a sampling of articles from a variety of U.S. newspapers (including The Dallas Morning News, The Seattle Daily Times, The Oregonian, Associated Press (London press release), The Seattle Daily Times, and The Wellsboro Agitator, Wellsboro, PA) from late April, stories about Nazi atrocities dominated the news, with editorials, columns, and quotations from key leaders up to and including the President, calling for harsh, retaliatory treatment of the Germans, and using explicit terms such as "monsters" and "inhuman."

¹³⁰ Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam in Me", *The New York Times Magazine* (2 October 1994): 23.

the fallout.¹³¹ Likewise, the “Black Hearts” of the 502nd PIR describe an environment of escalating consent.¹³² SPC Jeremy Morlock of the Maywand District twelve, when provided the possible explanation of an accidental escalation that resulted in the deaths of Afghan civilians, refused that explanation, saying under oath, “The plan was to kill people, Sir.”¹³³ His testimony described a conspiratorial attitude in the unit, and the idea that they were above the law, as evidenced by their sharing photos of themselves posing with the civilians they had killed. For perspective, we must remember that there have been incidents of extreme violence and lawlessness in every war. LT Calley and his platoon do not represent the whole of American troops in Viet Nam, the soldiers at Abu Ghraib and the “Black Hearts” do not represent the many thousands of American who served in Iraq, nor do the dozen soldiers involved in the Maywand District murders do not represent the troops who have nobly served in Afghanistan. These, like the previously cited examples from the Second World War, are aberrations.

Dr. Gerald F. Linderman describes a four-stage process wherein soldiers become capable of illegal killing, which he calls numbing, toughening, coarsening, and brutalization.¹³⁴ We can also break prisoner killings into two kinds; militarily motivated (done for a specific purpose such as inability to transfer, feed, secure, or otherwise manage prisoners) and “cold-blooded” killing (often revenge-driven or emotion-driven, conducted with the belief that one will avoid repercussions, or as an attempt to cover-up some other crime.) Of these two, the militarily

¹³¹ “Lynndie England Interview: Personal Life Of An Abu Ghraib Felon, 8 Years Later” *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.com/lynndie-england-interview-personal-life-abu-ghraib-felon-8-years-later-428378> (accessed 3 February 2013).

¹³² Jim Frederick, *Black Hearts: One Platoon’s Descent into Madness in Iraq’s Triangle of Death* (New York: Crown, 2010).

¹³³ William Yardley, *New York Times*, published 23 Mar 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/us/24morlock.html> (accessed 21 January 2013).

¹³⁴ Gerald F. Lindeman, *The World Within War: America’s Combat Experience in World War II* (New York, the Free Press, 1997), 90.

motivated killings can occur at any time from the numbing stage on, but are most likely to occur in the coarsening and brutalization stages. Cold-blooded killings are closely associated with the brutalization stage.¹³⁵ Among the reasons given by perpetrators of war crimes, revenge is by far the most common. They also frequently described a process of dehumanizing the enemy. The “other” somehow becomes fundamentally unlike oneself and one’s comrades. When a fellow soldier is killed or wounded by a person they have already mentally classified as “subhuman,” soldiers may feel not just a right, but a responsibility to exact revenge on a member of the enemy’s forces, or someone from the enemy’s people-group.

While it is impossible to fully understand the influence of national messaging and propaganda on developing the dehumanization mindset, we can make a logical connection. The more the enemy has been dehumanized in the soldiers’ minds before they are in combat, the easier it is for them to make that psychological leap in brutalization.

The Petri Dish

The unrelenting expeditionary nature of the Second World War placed enormous strains on troops and leaders alike. Soldiers watched friends die, and not only desired revenge, but also bore the unspoken fear that they would be next. Years of anti-German propaganda had fueled their disdain, which was then enflamed by rumors and evidence of German atrocities. The demonstrated evils of the enemy, permissive attitudes of senior leadership, and dehumanizing rhetoric of the government and media combined to create a petri dish of moral ambiguity. When coupled with intense emotional and physical strains, some soldiers made immoral or unethical choices. Stretching the laws of war in one situation allowed for stretching them in another. Strategic bombing operations killed civilians by the tens of thousands. World War Two Field Orders were often vague, by necessity and design, and gave little or no guidance as to civil

¹³⁵ Harris, *POW Killings*, 69-92.

considerations or ethical concerns. All this fed the information environment in a world in which soldiers made individual decisions as to whether to take or preserve life. This increasing moral and mission ambiguity led, perhaps inevitably, to tragedies.

In today's drama-fueled media environment, where journalists (and some politicians) are likely to jump on any negative story, we cannot afford the kind of ambiguity that makes it difficult to judge between right and wrong. Today, even a single ethical lapse can significantly impair the strategic mission.

CONCLUSION

We can acknowledge the failures of the Second World War's Soldiers without condemning them, just as we can understand their reasons without excusing their actions. Today's Soldiers can take pride in, and take lessons from, their predecessor's courage and tenacity, while still being shocked at instances of criminal brutality. We cannot properly apply the lessons of that war's successes, unless we also take into account the sobering lessons from their failures.

Modern analysts and leadership theorists tend to look at the situations described in this paper and place most or all of the blame on misguided soldiers, or the peer environment. In every situation, however, we might also find, as this monograph suggests, national, familial, and peer messaging that implies a less-than-human enemy. We might also find missions that seem to demonstrate a lack of concern for the laws of war, giving higher priority to tactical successes than to social considerations, even though those concerns might have a greater strategic impact. We might find orders that provide little or no mention of the principles described in *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*. We might find that the failure of the Soldiers was a failure of leadership to provide them with the positive modeling and moral framework for making ethical decisions in stressful and ambiguous situations.

When we train and equip Soldiers to be instruments of national power, lethal in the

extreme, we bear the responsibility of also preparing them to align their deeds with the values of the nation. In the “DIME” of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) previous era’s soldiers only affected the “M,” and only as a tiny fragment of the application of Military power. Today, every soldier carries a big “I” in his rucksack. Journalists may report anything he does. Camera phones and internet links send images around the world in seconds, to a watching world. Today’s soldier carries a burden of power unlike any before him, not only in his increased lethality, but in his ability to impact the national image. Today, more than ever before, our soldiers are instant ambassadors, purveyors of American values. They wear the American uniform, and bear the American flag. Every soldier represents every American, whether that is fair or not.

What Leaders Can Do

First, leaders must recognize and check their own prejudices. No one in a modern, information-driven society comes to the battlefield without biases. Preconceptions are reinforced by events. Sometimes events genuinely reinforce the bias, and sometimes otherwise neutral events are interpreted through the lens of the bias. Any leader who claims to be without prejudice lacks self-awareness. Leaders who recognize their biases are better prepared to guard against the effects of those biases on their soldiers. Most critically, leaders who are aware of their own attitudes can take care not to reinforce the biases of subordinates, or impose new ones.

Second, leaders must know their subordinates, and understand their Soldiers’ moral and ethical framework. The better the leader knows his or her subordinates and the information environment in which they live, the better he or she is able to recognize potential problems and begin training and messaging to target those potential issues in advance. Leaders must be actively involved in building the moral and ethical framework their soldiers will rely on when in critical situations, when leadership is not immediately present. The foundation for moral decision-making must be built long before the individual is faced with a moral decision. Inclusion of seemingly

obvious language reinforcing our standards for *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*, respect for civilian lives and property, and other moral issues should be part of the leader's pre-deployment briefings and training. Leaders must understand and unequivocally communicate legal, moral, and ethical standards to their subordinates. As part of recognizing their subordinates' information environment, leaders must recognize messaging (and perceived messaging) from higher authorities, especially political leaders, in order to address these issues with their Soldiers. Political messages intended to bolster public support for military actions can be over-read by military members, unintentionally dehumanizing the enemy, and civilians from the enemy's people-group.

Leaders must emphasize the moral and ethical boundaries *in advance*, before soldiers are faced with difficult moral or ethical decisions. These difficult decisions occur wherever moral and ethical standards actually or apparently conflict with other values, such as mission accomplishment or unit security, or when urgency allows little time for introspection, reflection or further guidance. This is important in all combat situations, and is especially critical in non-contiguous AOs, where civilians and enemies may intermingle and be difficult to differentiate. In these situations, commanders often must push control down to very low levels. This places a high degree of responsibility upon relatively inexperienced leaders, and forces them to operate in an environment of extraordinary autonomy.

Third, leaders must hold subordinates, especially subordinate leaders and the "natural leaders" from within the ranks, to the highest standards of battlefield morals and ethics. Any cover up of unlawful, immoral, or unethical actions by members of the unit are likely to be perceived as *de facto* permission for similar actions in the future. When Patton, Bradley, and Eisenhower made statements indicating a willingness to ignore the shooting of prisoners or surrendering enemy troops, their statements became the basis for subordinate commanders' attitudes, which were passed on to troops who took actions that violated the laws of war. The

result was probably far more severe than those esteemed Generals had in mind.

Finally leaders must bear in mind that violence tends to escalate, and professional Soldiers must actively keep it under control. Leaders must develop in themselves, and instill in their subordinates, a genuine respect for the civilian population wherever they are. They must also develop and instill this respect for the enemy, even when the enemy is not behaving respectably by our standards. Emotions in combat situations naturally run high; leaders must do their best to maintain professionalism and the highest standards, no matter what standards the enemy holds.¹³⁶

Some leaders may, upon reading this monograph, think that the above paragraphs place undo emphasis on them and their ability to control their troops. In reality, leaders are held responsible for Soldiers' actions whether they prepare for them or not. Leaders are better off recognizing this fact and doing everything in their power to mitigate the dangers in advance, before mistakes in judgment damage the mission, the nation's strategic position, and the lives of all concerned.

What Planners Can Do

World War II Field Orders gave little if any guidance on the subject of ethics and morality. While mandatory training on the Laws of War should, theoretically, cover those areas without the need to specifically enumerate them, inclusion of these factors in written orders is logical and prudent. Planners are taught to weigh civil considerations and strategic impacts as part of their design and assessment of operations. Actions which unnecessarily harm civilians, their property, captives, or surrendering combatants, damage the unit's credibility and put the mission

¹³⁶ In researching this topic, the author consulted U.S. Army FM 7-0 and FM 6-22, and John Maxwell's *21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, MG John Meyer's *Company Command: The Bottom Line*, and Roger Nye's *The Challenge of Command* to find references to training troops in the Laws of War, concern for civilians in the Area of Operations, and so on. None were found. References to ethics were relegated almost exclusively related to matters such as monetary and property concerns. Morality was not mentioned, except in Maxwell's business leadership book.

at risk.

Planners must also recognize that the operations they develop are messages. These messages will be received and interpreted differently by the various audiences, including the American public, the international community, the population in the Area of Operations, and our own troops. Missions that disregard civilian life and property or fail to protect vulnerable people will deliver the message that “people are unimportant.” More dangerously, they may convey to our own troops that tactical missions take precedence over the laws of war.

In order to develop operations that deliver the right messages, planners must take these issues into consideration at all phases of development and planning, and provide commanders with valid options that simultaneously allow for moral choices and mission success.

Summary

No generation of soldiers was ever collectively as faultless as advocates imagined, or as guilty as detractors charged. Soldiers are human, flawed, and fundamentally unchanged from generation to generation. The popular impulse may be to remember the American soldiers who fought in the second World War as supremely noble, but in the final analysis, they were no less inclined to human frailties than any other. Attempts to gild-over their shortcomings may cause us to miss important lessons and draw incorrect conclusions from their experiences. If viewed with honest detachment, the lessons from their failings may provide important insights for today’s conflicts, and conflicts yet to come.

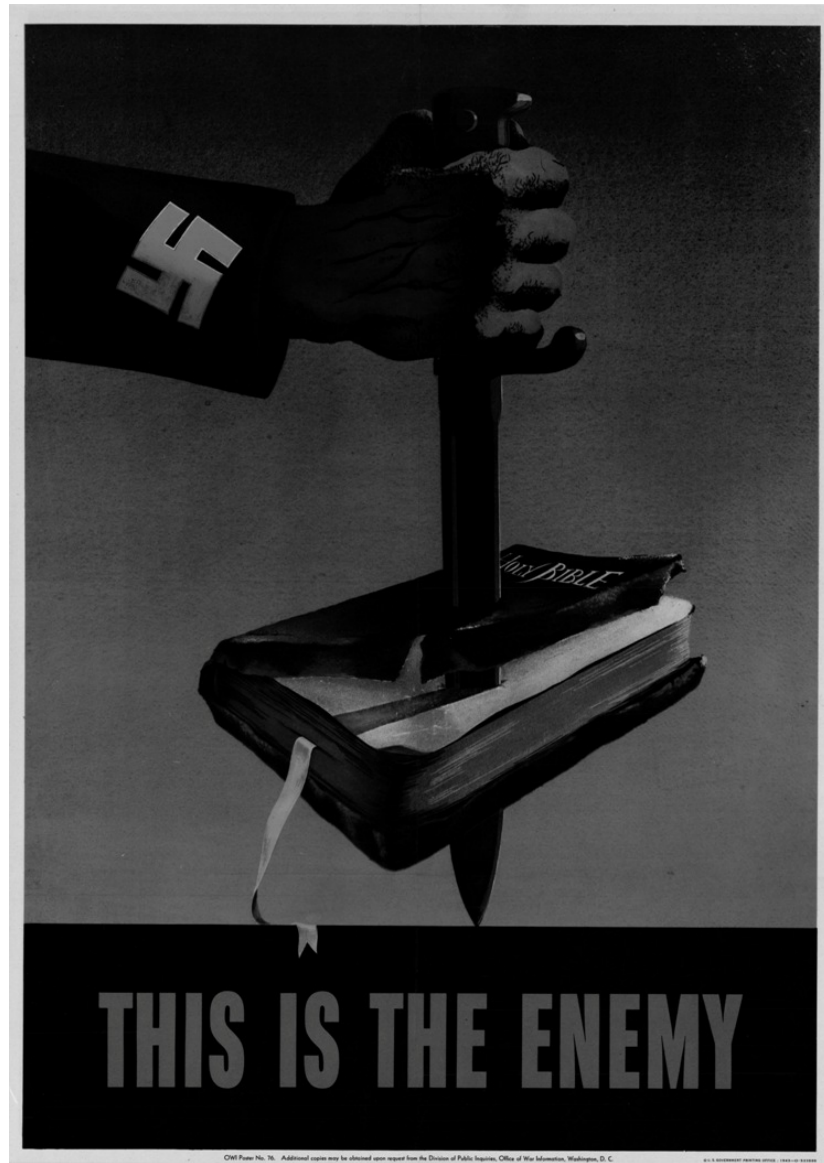
Tactical and operational success is meaningless without strategic success.¹³⁷ In the modern environment, strategic success depends heavily on the “information war.” Today’s

¹³⁷ In the 1973 Arab-Israeli “Yom Kippur” War, analysts widely ascribe tactical victory to the Israelis who performed impeccably at a tactical and operational level, but the strategic victory to Egypt, who, even though they lost far more men and equipment than the Israelis without gaining any land, achieved the end for which they began the war – international recognition of their rights in the Sinai.

soldiers bear far more power than they realize, and leaders must be acutely aware of that power's potential. Leaders have always been the key to controlling military power. Today, they are responsible for controlling information power as well. Leaders must know their troops. They must understand the physical, information, and peer environments in which their troops exist. They must fill moral vacuums with unambiguous guidance. They must understand messaging and communication, recognize its influence at all levels, and take control of it in their own formations. They must provide morally sound orders. They must develop relationships with subordinates, which foster mutual understanding of the moral and ethical underpinnings of their orders, so that when troops finds themselves in situations in which they must improvise, they will align their actions with national values. In doing these things, leaders protect their soldiers, their own reputation, the honor of the Army, and the security of the nation.

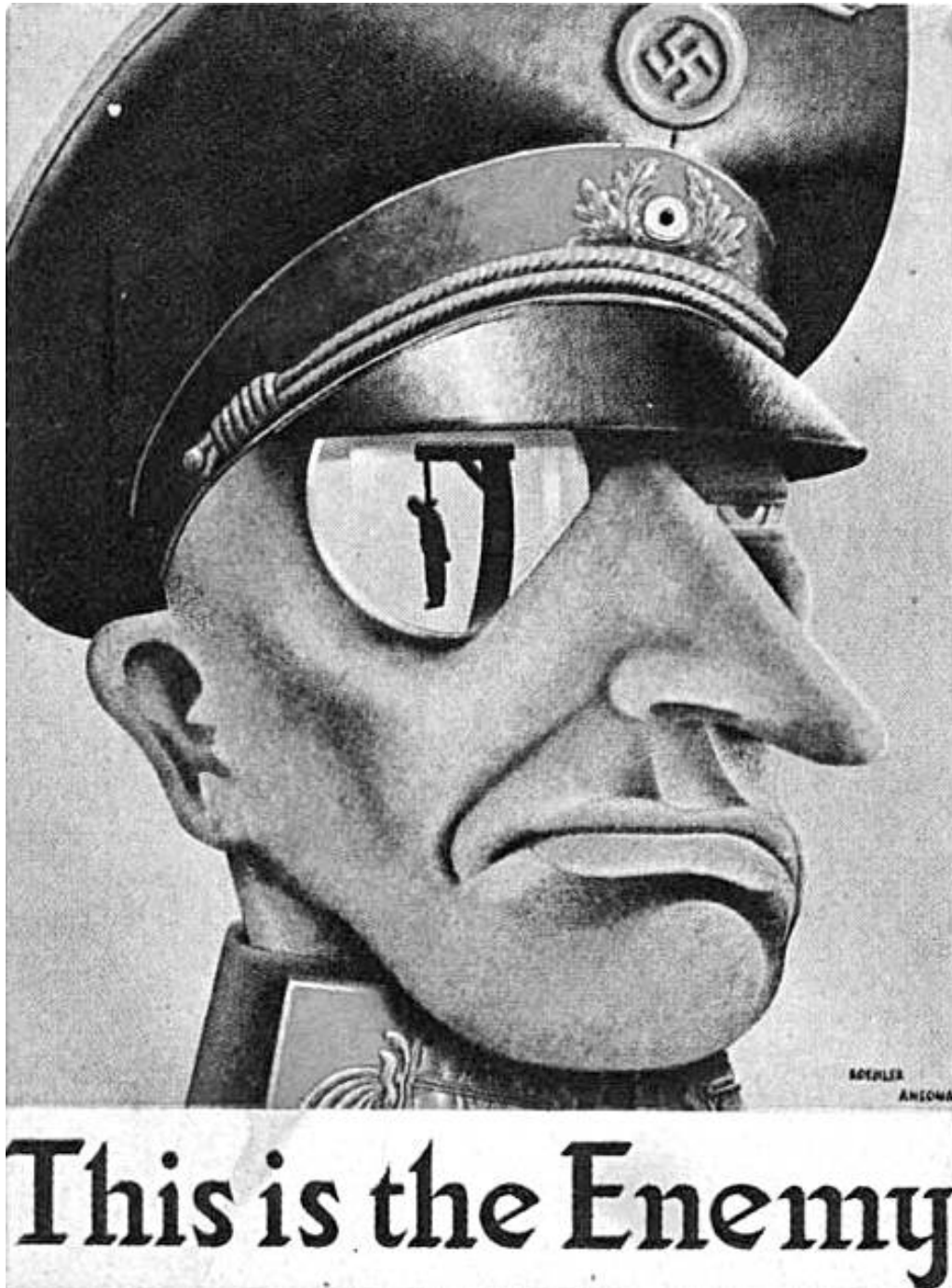
APPENDIX A: PROPAGANDA POSTERS

The OWI created a lengthy series of propaganda posters depicting the Nazis (and the German people by extension) as cruel, ungodly, subhuman, blood-thirsty monsters.



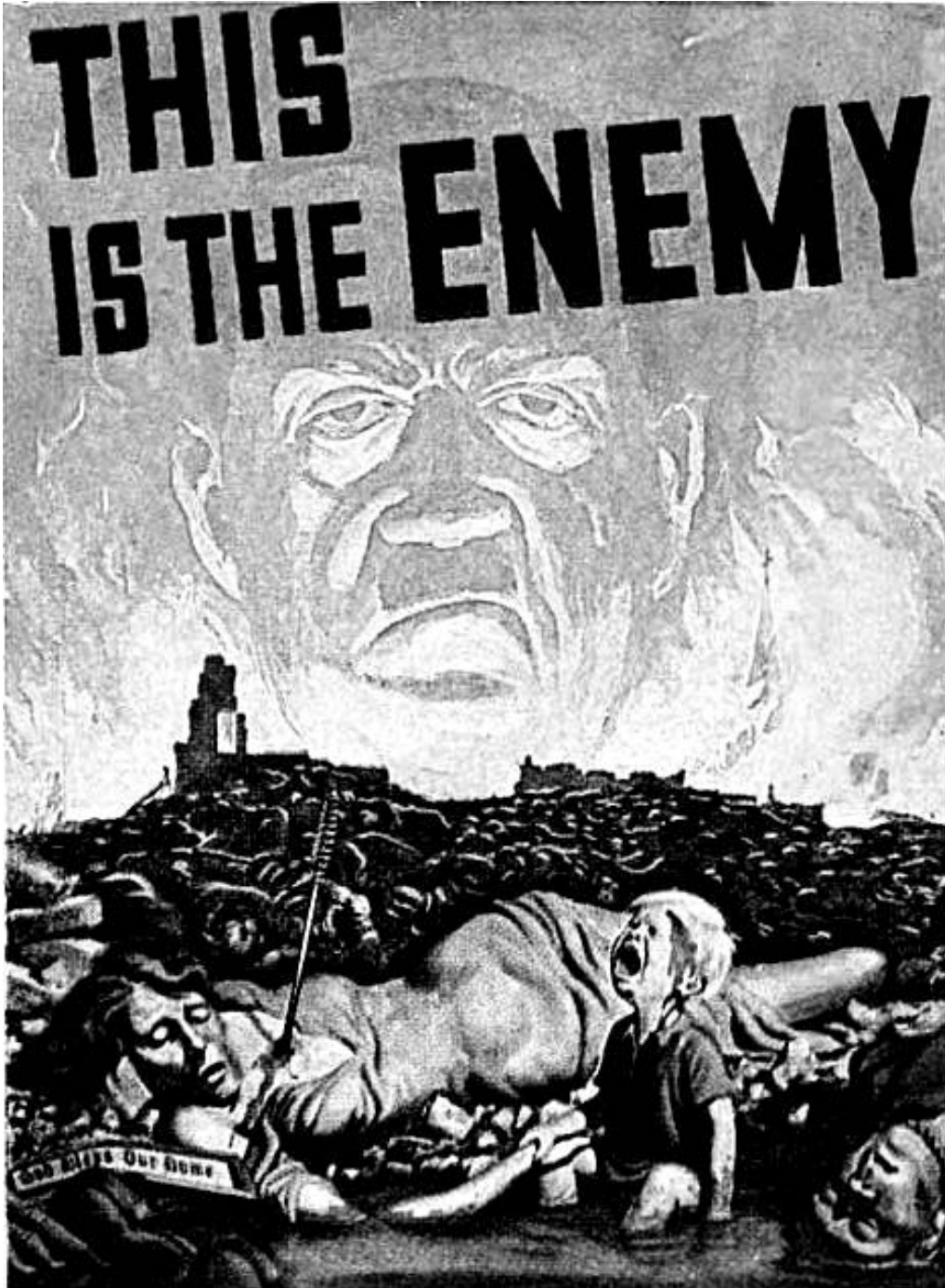
Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. The OWI released a series of posters entitled, “This Is the Enemy” in their threat series.

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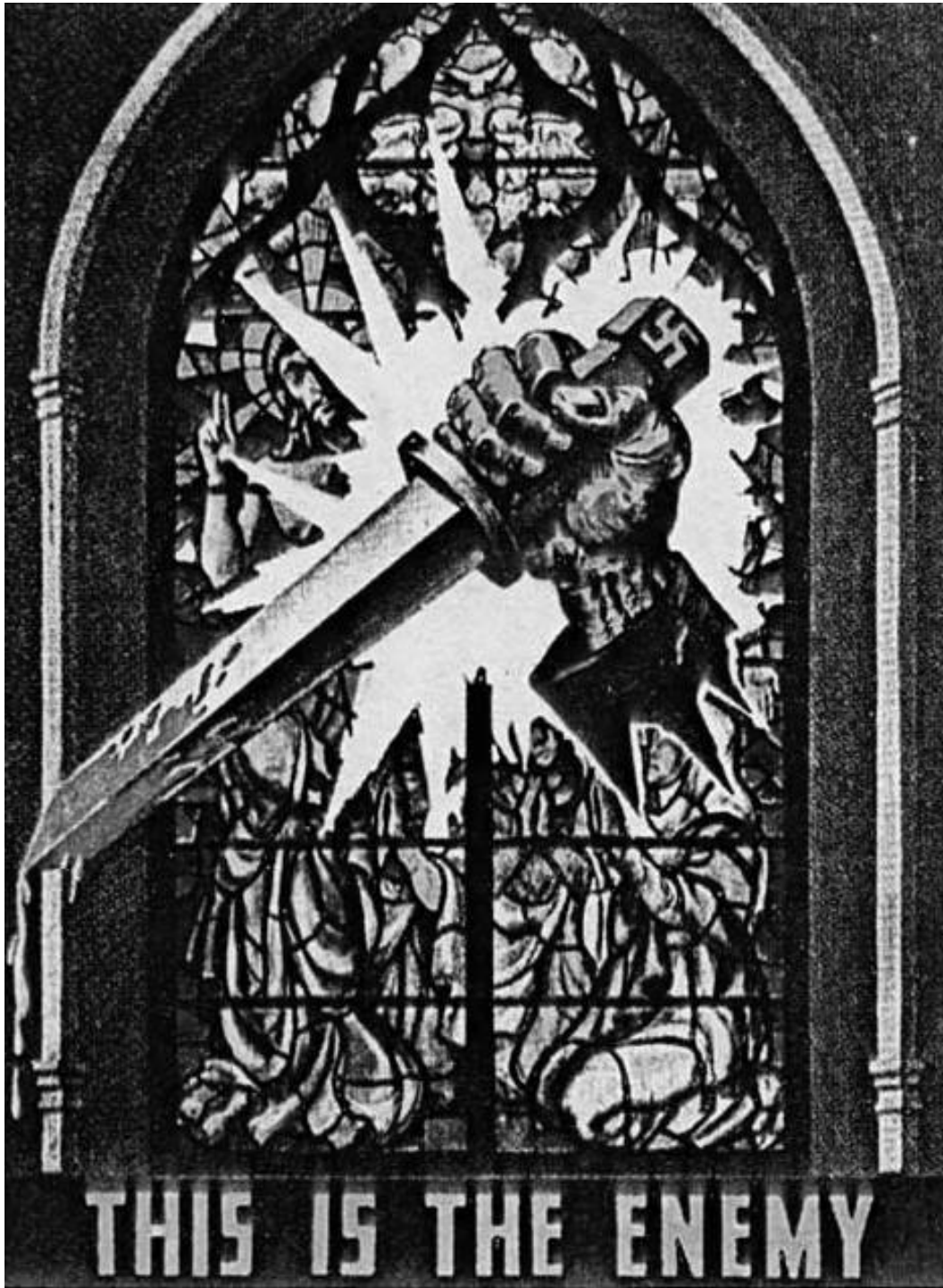
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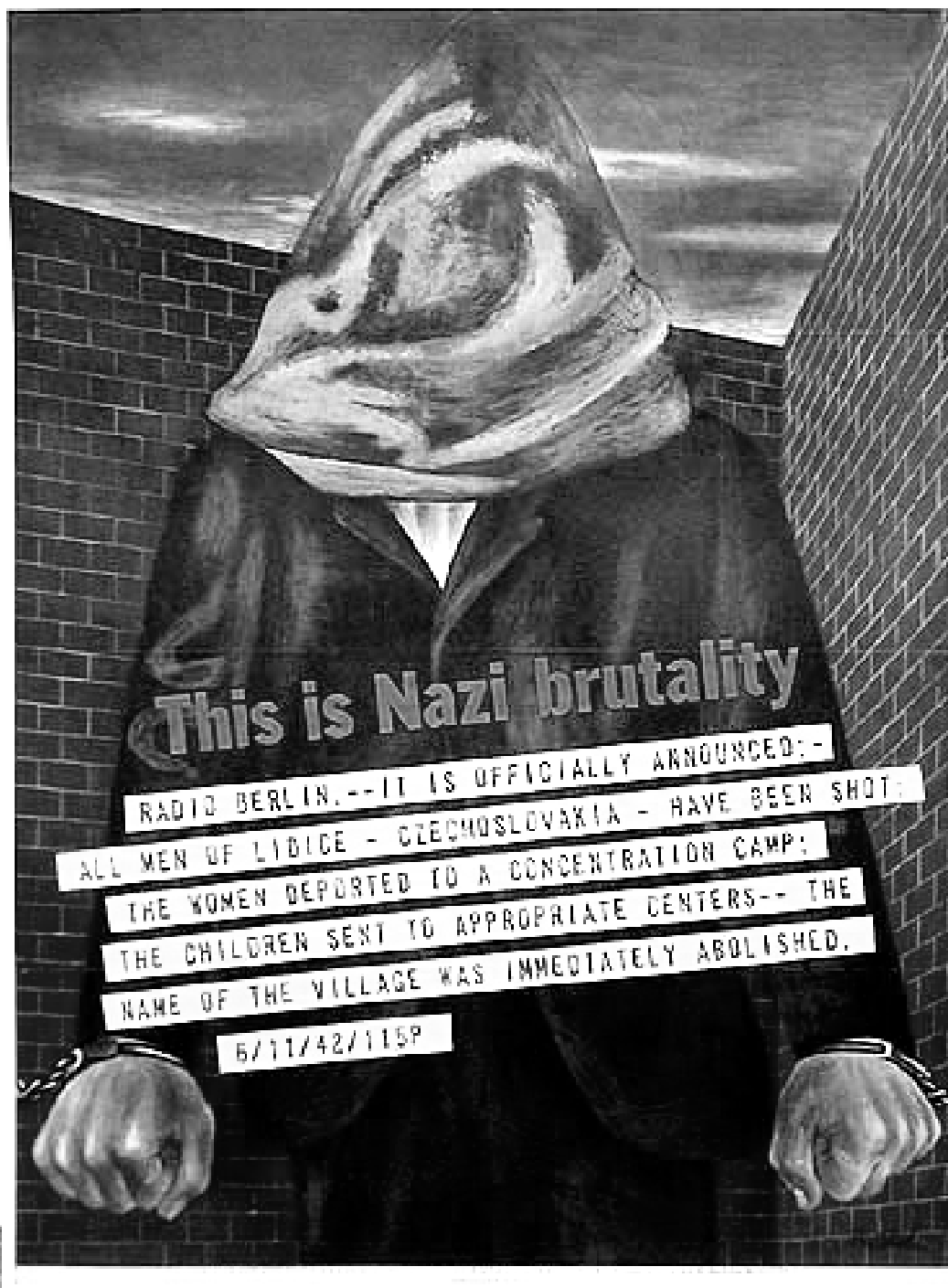
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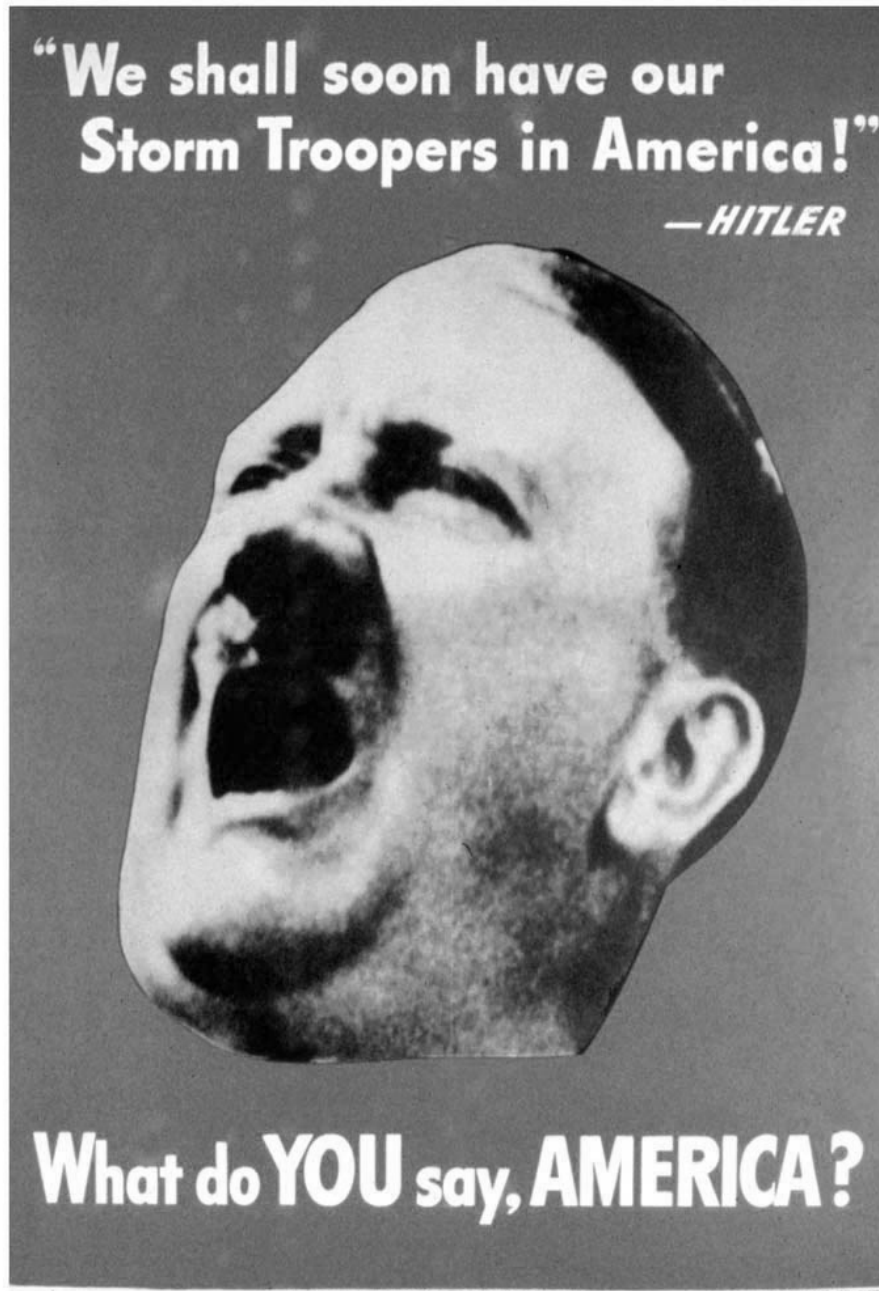
Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. Bureau of Special Services. (03/09/1943 - 08/31/1945).

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Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. Bureau of Special Services. (03/09/1943 - 08/31/1945).

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Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Another poster from the OWI threat series.

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Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Images of children murdered or threatened by Nazis or Nazism was another popular OWI theme.

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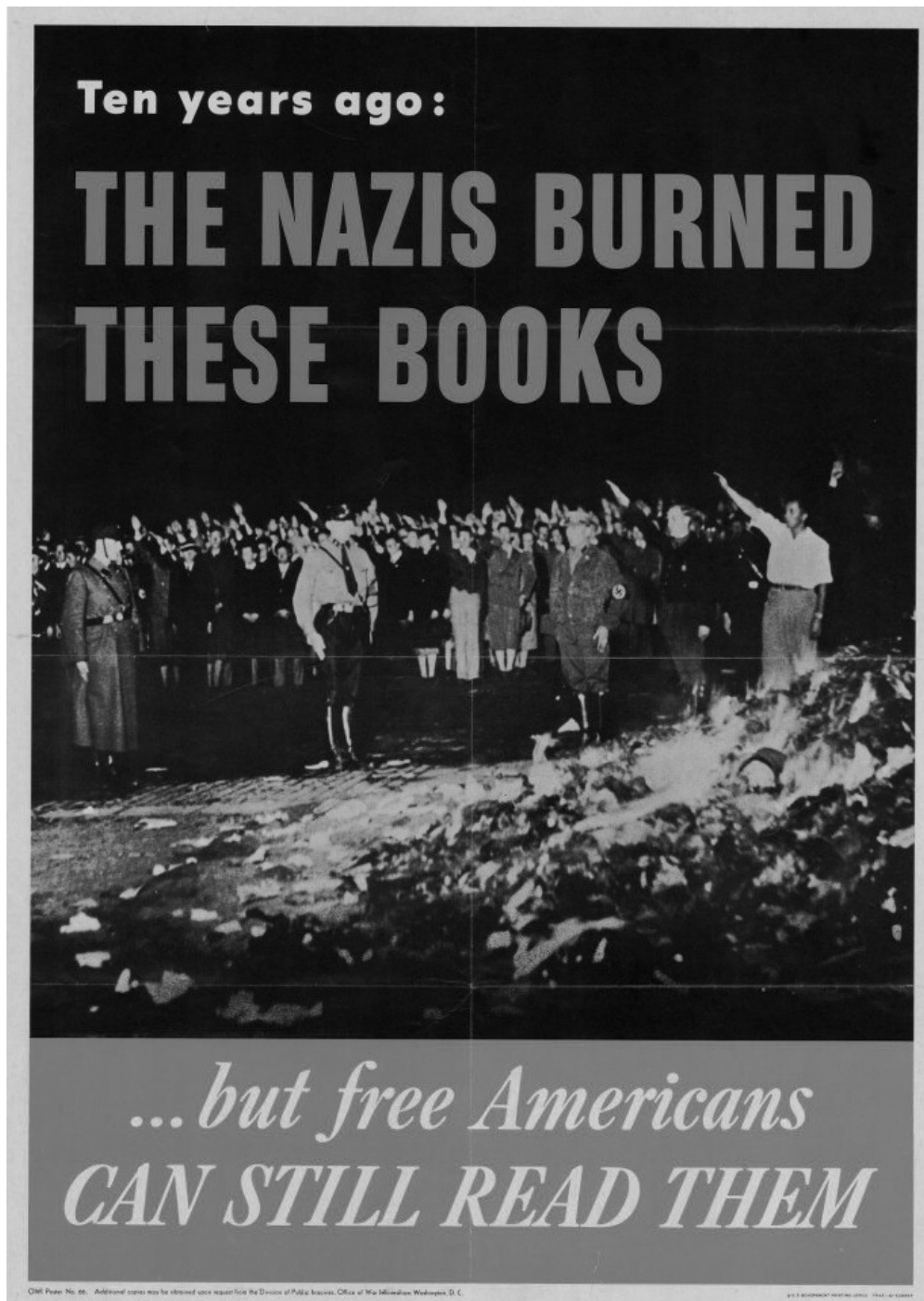
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Creator: Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. The OWI also utilized the theme of Nazi book-burning.

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