
Book Review

Two wrongs don't make a right

by John Morrison

Other Losses

by James Bacque

Prima, Rocklan, Calif., 1991

296 pages, hardbound, \$22.95

The author of this review is an anti-war activist from Scotland, one of the first members of the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq.

"It is *beyond doubt*," states James Bacque in his introduction to this astonishing book, "that enormous numbers of men of all ages, plus some women and children, died of exposure, unsanitary conditions, disease and starvation in the American and French camps in Germany and France starting in April 1945, just before the end of the war in Europe. The victims undoubtedly number over 800,000, almost certainly over 900,000, and quite likely over a million" (emphasis added).

Bacque's research for this book began in 1986 following remarks made by Hans Goertz, formerly a POW, who had been imprisoned in a French camp in 1946. Goertz claimed that Raoul Lapoterie, a French resistance hero, had saved his life by removing him from the camp to work in his tailor store "because 25% of the men died in one month" of "starvation, dysentery, and disease."

Four years of intensive research later, Bacque alleges that as a matter of deliberate policy, a large proportion of disarmed German soldiers and some civilians, including women and children, were condemned to an early grave.

Denied POW status, and re-classified as DEF (Disarmed Enemy Forces), the prisoners were stripped of all rights and humane legal representation. They were channeled for the most part into wire-enclosed compounds, often sorely overcrowded, where they were exposed to the elements continuously without adequate sanitation, with meager or nonexistent food rations, and even denied potable water in some cases.

Lest anyone think that these deaths were unavoidable and inevitable in the chaos of postwar Europe, Bacque goes to great lengths to point out and document that ample food

stocks were available from a variety of sources, but that these were willfully denied to the prisoners as part of a policy largely dictated by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, commanding general of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). Impartial help from relief organizations that wanted to help the prisoners in the American camps was also blocked by the Army.

Great efforts have gone into debunking Bacque's charges by the American and French governments, which in a way lends even more credibility to this meticulously researched book that carries many eyewitness accounts of the atrocities that took place in the prison camps.

No one should try to equate the horrors detailed in this book with the slaughter implemented as policy by the depraved Third Reich. However, the feelings of hatred that motivated those who deliberately wrought brutal revenge on disarmed enemy forces including civilians, resulted in enormous and unnecessary suffering for the German people. Two wrongs never made a right, and truth should never be suppressed, because truth is the only forward to a world in which mass slaughters will be a thing of the past.

This slaughter took place in 1945 and 1946. Forty-five years later, in 1991, we witnessed in Iraq the decimation of the civilian population as a result of policies implemented as retribution by western governments, for the crimes of an uneducated despot, Saddam Hussein. Some things never change.

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