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# Book sparks strange 'feud'

A curious feud — if not vendetta — seems under way over the unlikely issue of whether the Americans were guilty of something akin to war crimes against German prisoners after the end of the Second World War.

At the risk of being tedious, the issue strikes at the core of what journalism is all about. It involves allegations in a book by James Bacque, *Other Losses*, that after Germany surrendered in 1945, up to a million prisoners were left to die of exposure or disease and given no shelter, little food or water.

The CBC's *fifth estate* recently did a hatchet job on the thesis, which I thought verged on the corrupt and dishonest. What seemed to offend the CBC most was that anti-Semites and Holocaust revisionists were using Bacque's book to support their own prejudices. It was a case both of blaming the messenger and guilt by association — vintage McCarthyism.

Robert Fulford echoed the CBC theme in the *Financial Times*, but added a vindictiveness that seemed almost personal against Bacque: "Wretched. . . worthless. . . one of the most embarrassing books of this era. . . Anyone . . . involved in tolerating it should feel one emotion: shame. I know I do." And so on. Surely an overreaction?

Fulford sniped at *Saturday Night* for making Bacque's thesis a cover story, implying there was little effort to check accuracy. Such extremism is unusual for Fulford. Why now?

Responding to Fulford's accusations, *Saturday Night* editor John Fraser listed the extensive outside evaluations the magazine conducted before running the story.

What's excited the most controversy, is Bacque's contention that Gen. Dwight Eisenhower was behind the policy of letting Germans die by neglect. Prof. Stephen Ambrose, director of the Eisenhower Centre in New Orleans, is on record as saying that Bacque's discovery of the U.S. postwar acts is "a major historical discovery . . . and (will) have reverberations for decades, yea centuries, to come."

Ambrose has since called Bacque's book "worse than worthless," primarily because Eisenhower is depicted as a villain. Ike changed the designation Prisoners of War (PoW) to Disarmed Enemy Forces (DEF), possibly to avoid Geneva Convention rules for the treatment of prisoners. Britain and Canada refused to follow the American lead, and treated all surrendering German troops as PoWs.

Col. Ernest Fisher, retired historian for the U.S. army, also

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rejects allegations against Eisenhower, but endorses Bacque's discovery of the horrendous deaths of prisoners after the war, covered up in reports by the phrase "other losses." Despite the CBC's efforts to poison Fisher's trust, the old soldier remains more disturbed such a policy was implemented, than he is with who to pin blame on. They are separate issues.

As for the German soldiers, Fulford doesn't seem to care beans about the deaths. Fulford acknowledges "perhaps" 50,000 died, which he calls "a terrible but meaningless" figure.

The *fifth estate* didn't even bother interviewing survivors of the policy. When I first wrote about it in the *Financial Post* in 1989, there was a flood of mail from survivors, plus letters from Britons and Allies who witnessed it.

*Saturday Night* ran several pages of letters. Why wouldn't the *fifth estate* interview them? CBC Radio did a documentary that was much more fair.

Fulford deplores *Saturday Night's* journalism in this case.

I, on the other hand, applaud it. A reporter should go where the story takes him — not try to fit the story to preconceived notions. Fulford teaches ethics at Ryerson.

The CBC and Fulford were upset at those who have tried to exploit *Other Losses* to deny the Holocaust, or to promote neo-Nazi causes. Fair enough. But, ironically, the policy of letting German prisoners die by neglect may have been retaliation for what the Allies found when they liberated the death camps.

In other words, the policy is confirmation of the Holocaust.

I've never met Jim Bacque. When I first learned of his thesis, I didn't believe it and was offended. I caught the tail end of the Second World War in the Fleet Air Arm. My father was a professional soldier who commanded an armored division. I've known soldiers all my life. Until Bacque, I had never heard a whisper about Allied death camps. But his evidence seems undeniable.