

Stiftung ...
JAMES BACQUE



DER GEPLANTE TOD

Deutsche Kriegsgefangene
in amerikanischen und
französischen Lagern
1945-1946

Ullstein

Daß ein beträchtliche von deutschen Gefangenen 1945/46 in amerikanischen und französischen Lagern ihr Leben lieb, ist unbestritten und durch zahlreiche Zeugnisse und Dokumente belegt. Dies schien ein abgeschlossenes Kapitel der Zeitgeschichte zu sein, angesichts der über 50 Millionen Toten des Zweiten Weltkriegs allenfalls eine Fußnote wert.

Doch nun, mehr als 40 Jahre nach jenen Ereignissen, wartet der kanadische Journalist James Bacque mit einer Sensation auf. Nach gründlichen Recherchen in den Archiven und der Befragung zahlreicher Zeitzeugen weist er schlüssig nach, daß in den amerikanischen und französischen Lagern nicht, wie bisher angenommen, einige zehntausend Gefangene umkamen, sondern nahezu eine Million. Sie erlagen winterbedingten Krankheiten, sie starben an den Folgen mangelhafter Hygiene, an Seuchen und vor allem an Unterernährung. Neu und sensationell an Bacques Enthüllungen ist nicht allein die Zahl der Opfer, sondern vor allem die Tatsache, daß nicht das Chaos der unmittelbaren Nachkriegsverhältnisse schuld war an den Todesfällen, sondern eine von General Eisenhower zu verantwortende gezielte Politik. Bacque weist nach, daß die US-Armee über genügend Lebensmittel zur ausreichenden Versorgung der Gefangenen verfügte, daß Hilfe seitens des Roten Kreuzes und anderer Organisationen planvoll unterbunden wurde und daß die Gefangenen trotz der katastrophalen Zustände in den Lagern ohne Not über Monate und Jahre hin festgehalten wurden.

Die Akten, die diesen Skandal bekunden, sind vernichtet, verfälscht oder als Geheime unter Verschluss gehalten worden. Mit dem beginnenden kalten Krieg und dem neuen Kontakt der Bundesrepublik mit den USA und Frankreich ließen es als inopportun erscheinen, an dieser Sache zu rühren. In mühevoller Kleinarbeit hat Bacque die Mosaiksteine dieses erschütternden Bildes zusammengetragen. Weit davon entfernt, in alten Wunden wühlen oder neue Gräben zu graben, geht es ihm allein darum, der historischen Wahrheit zu ihrem Recht zu verhelfen.

James Bacque, geboren 1929 in Toronto/Kanada, Studium der Geschichte und Philosophie an der University of Toronto. Tätigkeit als Redakteur mehrerer kanadischer Zeitschriften und als Verlagslektor bei Macmillan-Kanada. Zahlreiche Buchveröffentlichungen (Fiktion und Nonfiction), für die er eine Reihe von Auszeichnungen erhielt. Lebt in Toronto.

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JAMES BACQUE DER GEPLANTE TOD

Scherzschlag: Hansbernd Lindemann
Foto: Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz



HISTORICAL NOTES

Shameful Secret

Did thousands of German POWs die in U.S. Army camps after World War II?

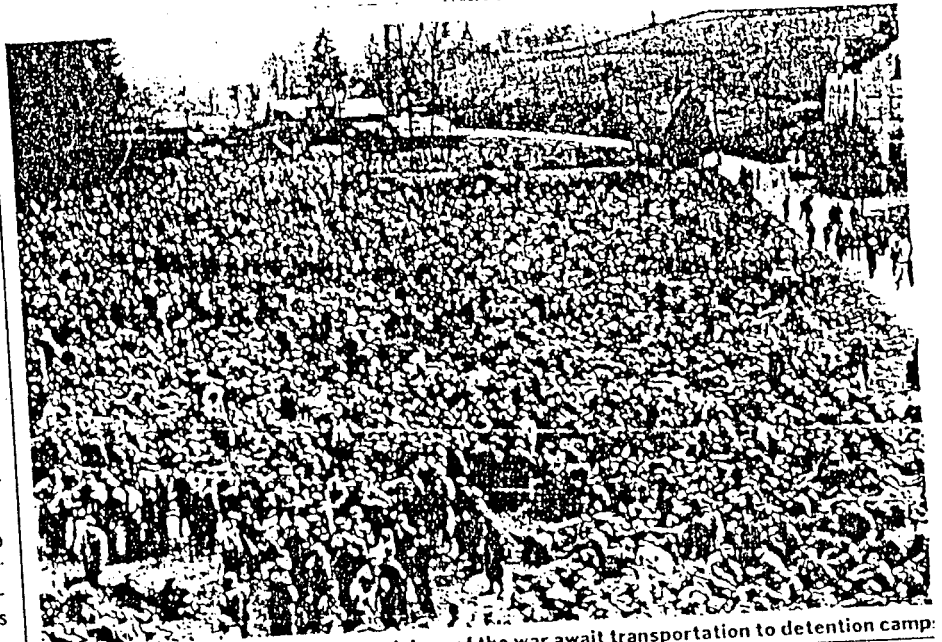
BY JAMES L. GRAFF TORONTO

Along the Rhine, barbed-wire fences are thrown up around meadows that are soon churned to mud by tightly packed masses of German prisoners of war. With no tents available, they dig fox-holes and hoide scraps of cardboard to protect themselves against the bitter spring weather. Ill fed, some of them resort to eating grass and drinking urine. As the months pass and disease and starvation take their toll, they die in droves.

That is just a fragment of the tale told in *Other Losses*, a controversial Canadian best seller. Author James Bacque charges that German prisoners held by French and U.S. forces in the wake of Germany's World War II defeat died en masse as a result of deliberate neglect. In a stunning claim, Bacque contends that at least 793,239 German soldiers perished in U.S. camps in 1945, while in French camps, which received many transferees from American custody in the summer of that year, at least 167,000 died.

The numbers alone are enough to fuel a furor. But Bacque also charges that the deaths resulted from cruel neglect and were avoidable—the consequence of a decision by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, to withhold sustenance from enemies he had come to despise. “Had Eisenhower wanted to provide these men with rations, they were [available] in the European theater,” says Ernest F. Fisher Jr., a retired colonel and former U.S. Army historian who aided Bacque in his research and wrote the foreword to the book. “It’s an interlude in our postwar history that is a shameful thing.”

The U.S. Army has declined to comment, but its Center of Military History, based in Washington, has disputed Bacque’s findings after a partial review of the book, charging the author with “highly speculative” use of statistics and asserting that his indictment of Eisenhower is “unsupported by the evidence.” Stephen Ambrose, professor of history at the University of New Orleans and a distinguished Eisenhower biographer, while disagreeing with Bacque on several points, concedes that the book contains a “major his-



German troops rounded up in the final days of the war await transportation to detention camp. The designation “disarmed enemy forces” was allegedly used to deny them humane care.

torical discovery.” Says Ambrose: “We as Americans can’t duck the fact that terrible things happened. And they happened at the end of a war we fought for decency and democracy and freedom, and they are not excusable.”

Bacque, 60, whose past books have all been novels, happened upon anecdotal evidence of widespread camp deaths while researching a book in 1986 on a French Resistance hero. Subsequent investigation in the U.S. and Europe convinced him that large numbers of Germans had perished in some 1,800 French and American camps.

In March 1945, Eisenhower got permission from the Combined Chiefs of Staff to redesignate various groups of German prisoners as “disarmed enemy forces” (DEFs) rather than prisoners of war. That act effectively denied them humane treatment mandated by the Geneva Convention and gave them what Bacque calls “lethal DEF status.”

The U.S. also refused to allow the Red Cross to inspect the camps to ensure convention compliance. Bacque writes that 13.5 million Red Cross food parcels available for distribution by the U.S. Army in May 1945 were still in its warehouses in November. Had they been distributed, they would have provided an additional 1,000 calories per man per day to the more than 700,000 prisoners who Bacque contends died in the meantime.

Bacque’s recounting of American policy decisions may hold up to historical scrutiny better than his body count. That depends largely on incomplete and often contradictory U.S. Army records. Key to

his calculations is a six-week study of hospital admissions and death rates among German POWs conducted by the U.S. Army Medical Corps in May and June 1945. Bacque interprets these reports as arriving at a weekly death rate of 0.6% from which he extrapolates the death toll for periods not covered by Army data.

That methodology has some historians shaking their heads. Says Gabriel Kolko, senior research professor of history at Toronto’s York University: “I don’t think the data are completely fallacious. No historian could have written this book—it’s the work of a novelist.” Professor Arthur Smith of California State University Los Angeles, who has written about former German soldiers in the postwar years, is unconvinced. “How do you rid of a million bodies?” he asks. “If you could you not have a single G.I. come forward, and what about the widows?”

In West Germany, where the book is to be published next month under the more lurid title *Planned Death*, Bacque’s thesis will land in a semivoid of research on the subject. Since the war, West German historians have concentrated on Germany’s failings rather than those of current allies. Historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler of the University of Bielefeld is skeptical that such massive mistreatment could have been concealed for so long. He welcomes Bacque’s book anyway. “Let him publish wherever he wants, and we can debate his sources. No doubt former German prisoners will come forward to corroborate claims of harsh treatment at the hands of the A.S. but only academic historians will corroborate whether the losses were as colossal as Bacque contends. The job still out.

With reporting by Jay Peterson
Washington and Rhea Schoenthal/Born



Author Bacque