

A DESERT CALLED PEACE

After the Reich

The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation

Giles MacDonogh

New York: Basic Books, 2007

Reviewed by Stephen J. Sniegoski

If ever the history of our times comes to be written by scholars free of national prejudices, the “crimes against humanity” committed by the victors of the Second World War of the twentieth century A.D., will appear as equal to those committed by the Nazis. For an objective observer of the “crimes, follies, and cruelties of mankind” cannot deny that the expropriations and expulsion from their homes of millions of people for the sole crime of belonging to the German “race” was an atrocity comparable with the extermination of the Jews and the massacres of the Poles and Russians by the Nazis. The women and children who died of hunger and cold on the long trek from Silesia and the Sudetenland to what remained of the German Reich, may have thought that a quick death in a gas chamber would have been comparatively merciful.

So wrote the irrepressible Freda Utley in her *The High Cost of Vengeance* published in 1949.¹

While many of the “national prejudices” of 1949 no longer exist for the bulk of the American and European populations, an objective presentation of what happened during World War II and its aftermath is still a taboo subject. In fact, it might even be more difficult to present a truthful picture today than it was in the early postwar era. For in the more than half-century that has transpired since Miss Utley penned these words, the Nazi genocide against the European Jews, now given the name “Holocaust,” has become interpreted as the greatest crime in history—a uniquely evil event, overshadowing eve-

¹ Freda Utley, *The High Cost of Vengeance* (Chicago: Regnery, 1949), 12-13.

rything else that took place in that conflagration. To imply that whatever suffering the German people underwent in the aftermath of World War II was in any way similar to the Holocaust is now designated as the great evil of "moral equivalence" – an actual crime in many European democracies.

But even if one does not go so far as to claim that the maltreatment of the Germans could approximate that of the Jews in the Holocaust, its very mention is considered an implicit effort to diminish the magnitude of the Holocaust or somehow show sympathy for Nazism. It is presumably essential to sustain the Manichaeian contrast of the Good War of the spotless Allies against the totally evil Nazi Germans. Because the German people were collectively evil as a group, this thinking goes, their suffering does not even deserve to be mentioned.

While there have been several good works on the subject of Allied war crimes against the Germans (and Allied war crimes in general), these have generally been ignored or, like the works of James Bacque or the late John Sack,² viciously lambasted. It should be said at the outset that *After the Reich* offers little significant information that has not been covered in these other, often little known, works. There is nothing wrong about this, however, because only by constant repetition can ideas enter the public consciousness.

In *After the Reich*, British author Giles MacDonogh acknowledges the taboo nature of the subject and thus provides his moral position in the preface of the book in an effort to protect himself from any intentional misinterpretation as pro-Nazi: "The book is not intended to excuse the Germans," he writes, "but it does not hesitate to expose the victorious Allies in their treatment of the enemy at the peace, for in most cases it was not the criminals who were raped, starved, tortured, or bludgeoned to death but women, children, and old men" (p. xiii).

MacDonogh covers the numerous crimes committed by the Allies against the Germans and, to a lesser extent, other peoples. In chronological terms, he begins with the advance of the Red Army in the last part of the war as it plundered, murdered, and raped its way through a vanquished Germany.

The mass rapes were perhaps the most appalling of these actions, in both the physical and psychological effects on the victims. All

² John Sack, *An Eye for an Eye: The Untold Story of Jewish Revenge Against Germans in 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

women, no matter of what age, faced rape, with gang rapes being commonplace. "Canny Berlin women," the author writes, "learned quickly that it was wisest to give in and receive Russians one at a time than to have to put up with terrifying gang rapes." The "wisest" gave themselves to Soviet officers, "as high-ranking as possible," who could provide protection from the worst types of treatment (p. 101). As a result of the forcible sex, ten percent of German women were infected by venereal diseases, and, because of the scarcity of medicines in the war-torn country, lacked antibiotics for treatment. Abortion was rampant, and was often self-performed. Nevertheless, 150,000 to 200,000 babies fathered by Soviet soldiers were born. The psychological trauma of the rapes was immense, not only for the women but also for German men, who felt emasculated because they were helpless to stop these barbarities. The only way for women to avoid rape altogether was suicide, an option many of them took.

The inhuman invasion of the Red Army was only the beginning of the nightmare for many Germans on the country's eastern periphery. For as the war ended, and for up to three years thereafter, they were forced to flee from their historical homelands, either from the eastern parts of Germany proper or from German-settled areas in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other neighboring countries. The alternative was the possibility of death from vengeful Russians, Poles, and Czechs.

Many Germans were arrested and incarcerated in the same concentration camps that had housed Jews and other victims of the Nazi state. In Czechoslovakia, the allegedly saintly Edvard Beneš directed the retribution against Germans and alleged Czech collaborators. MacDonogh provides numerous tales of the barbarity of the Czechs. For example, in the town of Landskron, as the fighting stopped in mid-May 1945:

All the male German inhabitants were hunted into the main square. By the early afternoon there were as many as a thousand. The Czechs amused themselves by drilling them, forcing them to lie down and get up, all the while walking among them, spitting and kicking them in the groin and shins. Those who fell during this humiliation were taken to a water tank and drowned. Any who bobbed up were shot. Meanwhile a "People's Court" had been established with a jury composed of local Czechs. The Germans had to crawl to the bench. Most of the men then had to run

a 50–60 metre gauntlet. Many fell and were beaten to pulp. The next day the survivors were reassembled. One man was strung up from a lamppost. (pp. 138–39)

Other brutalities involved tossing hand grenades among German refugees and the mutilation of sexual organs.

After this brutal mistreatment, the Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia. MacDonogh writes that in 1946, 586,000 Germans were shipped out of Czechoslovakia “packed in box cars like sardines” (p. 159). Ultimately, an estimated 240,000 Germans died as a result of their brutal mistreatment by the Czechs (p. 159).

The expulsions were sanctioned by Article 13 of the Potsdam Accord, although it stipulated that the expulsion of civilians should take place in the most humane manner possible. Such a stipulation was more honored in the breach than in the observance.

The treatment of the Germans by the Russians in East Prussia, which was made part of the Soviet Union, was equally horrendous. The author writes that there were “striking similarities between the way the population of East Prussia was handled and the deliberate starvation of the Ukrainian kulaks in the early 1930s” (p. 163). The author describes the condition of the German inhabitants of Königsberg as a veritable living hell: “As no water was available,” MacDonogh writes, “the Königsberger drank from infected wells and bomb craters and fed on sparrows and mice when they could, or on discarded potato peelings and trash from Russian kitchens; boiled ox bones and cattle pelts, glue and the carrion of dead and buried animals” (p. 164). Of the 73,000 Königsberger alive in June 1945, only 25,000 would survive (p. 167). In 1947 Königsberg’s remnant German population fled to Germany. Very soon there would be no Germans in that city which had been German for 700 years, and its very Germanism would be wiped off the map in the change of its name to Kaliningrad in 1946.³

The author writes that the Poles were even more ferocious in their mistreatment of the Germans than the Russians because of their desire for vengeance. Many were refugees from the eastern section of pre-war Poland that had become part of the Soviet Union, and they seized

³ The name was in honor of the Soviet leader, Mikhail Kalinin, who died the same year. Unlike Leningrad, and many other Russian cities, the name Kaliningrad remains still, and the city is still under Russian control, an isolated outpost now wedged between Poland and Lithuania.

the homes and property of the German inhabitants. The Poles moved to completely Polonize areas that had been historically German, changing German names to Polish. For instance, the old German city of Breslau was renamed Wroclaw.⁴ The German residents were ghettoized and treated in a genocidal manner.⁵ "As the Poles came in," writes MacDonogh, "Germans were evicted and resettled in the cellars of ruined houses in what were ghettos in all but name. Typhus and diphtheria raged, killing many children. Medicine to deal with the epidemic was made prohibitively expensive to the Germans." A Polish quasi-doctor "was injecting typhus cases with carbolic. When asked why, she said it was because they were going to die anyhow" (p. 179). Ultimately, the Germans would be expelled, but even in their effort to leave the Germans were not safe, often being attacked by groups of Polish militia who would rob and beat them (p. 191).

As prisoners of war, German soldiers also suffered untold misery in total violation of the rules of war. German prisoners of war were kept in terrible conditions, and it is not clear how many died from the lack of food and sanitation. And the United States was culpable here, as well as the Soviets. Americans, British, and Russians used old concentration camps to house prisoners. Prisoners captured by the United States were often sent to work in other countries. The Soviet Union kept large numbers of prisoners as slave laborers into the 1950s.

The West German government produced a study of the treatment of the German prisoners, which it refrained from releasing to avoid angering the Soviet Union and Poland. MacDonogh tends to agree with much of what James Bacque said in his controversial work *Other*

⁴ Although correct on the Polish takeover of historically German areas, MacDonogh is off the mark in one of his illustrations. In changing the German name of "Danzig" to the Polish "Gdańsk," MacDonogh refers to the latter "as a name so obscure it was new even to the most fanatical Polish nationalists" (p. 177). However, it would seem that Poles historically called it by that name and actually founded the city shortly before 1000 AD.

⁵ According to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the term "genocide" would apply to the treatment of the German population in the eastern regions. According to Article II of the Genocide Convention: "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

Losses about the maltreatment of German war prisoners.⁶ But like most of Bacque's critics, he questions his statistics, which indicated a staggering death total. MacDonogh contends that the American military's term "other losses" did not simply include deaths—"deaths, yes, but also deserters" (p. 396)—implying that Bacque greatly exaggerated the total losses of life. However, it should be pointed out that Bacque has offered more substantial proof than what MacDonogh acknowledges. Bacque has written:

The math is simple: about 1.5 million German prisoners alive in allied prison camps at the end of the war never came home, nor were their deaths reported to the German government, their families, the International Red Cross, or the UN. The figure was determined by the Adenauer government in Germany, submitted to the UN, and has never been disputed by anyone. Thus, when *Other Losses* came out in 1989, alleging deaths of about one million in French and American camps, that left about 500,000 to be accounted for. They could have died only in the KGB camps, because there were not half a million prisoners in any other camps in the world. Thus, in effect *Other Losses* was predicting that when the communists opened the KGB archives, they would show deaths of about 500,000. And lo and behold, when Gorbachev brought down the communist rule, and the archives were opened, I went there, and found the Bulanov Report which showed that 356,687 Germans died in Soviet captivity, plus another 93,900 civilians taken as substitutes for dead or escaped prisoners for a total of 450,587.⁷

One wonders how the evidence on that subject compares to the documentary evidence for the well-known genocidal activities of Nazi Germany.

From the American standpoint, the entire German population was considered collectively guilty for the war. JCS 1067, the directive guiding the American occupation, provided for a punitive peace in line with

⁶ James Bacque, *Other Losses: the Shocking Truth Behind the Mass Deaths of Disarmed German Soldiers and Civilians under General Eisenhower's Command* (New York: Prima Publishing, 1991).

⁷ James Bacque, "Why is Wikipedia Censoring Me?", http://serendipity.li/hr/bacque_on_wikipedia.htm, accessed April 4, 2008.

the Morgenthau Plan, the Carthaginian postwar plan for Germany put forth by Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau,⁸ which sought to de-industrialize Germany. MacDonogh writes that, "JCS 1067 was Morgenthau's last legitimate child and survived long after Truman formally relinquished the Plan. It proposed to tear down, rather than rebuild, and to help Germans only when it was necessary to avoid disease or disorder" (p. 344).

The author vividly describes the extreme shortages of food in postwar Germany, including instances of people subsisting on rats, frogs, and wild plants such as cattails. The food situation remained desperate even as late as the winter of 1948. However, MacDonogh does not go over the extent of the starvation in statistical terms, as James Bacque does in his *Crimes and Mercies*,⁹ where the latter claims that 5.7 million German residents died from Allied policies (this does not include the captured soldiers and expellees). MacDonogh does not mention this study by Bacque even to refute him.

It would seem that MacDonogh tends to ignore or downplay the claims of an immense German death toll. In fact, the work is meager on statistical analysis overall, while providing extensive anecdotes of Allied mistreatment of the Germans. This is not to say he uses no statistics, but they are used sporadically, and little real summarization or analysis is provided. It is likely that MacDonogh took this non-statistical approach in order to avoid any statistical comparisons with the much better known Nazi genocidal activities, which, if the figures for German deaths would be considered too high, could lead to considerable trouble.

MacDonogh's intent would seem to be to emphasize the gross moral injustice of collective punishment by showing that many innocent Germans suffered in the postwar period whether they had volun-

⁸ As Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, who was a friend and neighbor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's, sought to influence war policy. As an American Jew, Morgenthau might have sought retribution for the genocidal German treatment of his co-religionists. The major architect of the Morgenthau Plan was Harry Dexter White, later identified as a Soviet agent. See Anthony Kubek, "The Morgenthau Plan and the Problem of Policy Perversion," *Journal for Historical Review* 9 (Summer 1989), 287, http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v09/v09p287_Kubek.html, accessed April 4, 2008. In Kubek's view, the purpose of the draconian Morgenthau Plan was to drive the German people toward Soviet Communism.

⁹ James Bacque, *Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians under Allied Occupation, 1944-1950* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1997).

tarily served the Nazi government or not. In fact, he brings out cases of numerous anti-Nazi Germans, who had been punished by the Nazis, being mistreated by the Allies for the sole reason that they were German.

Since MacDonogh makes his living as a mainstream writer on topics from history to gastronomy, it is understandable that he would avoid treading on too many taboos. But while his reliance on anecdotes does well to set the tone for the brutal era, still it would have increased the understanding of the events to focus more on statistics. In any tragedy, natural or man-made, one wants to know not simply that people died or were otherwise injured, but the actual number so affected. It is the numbers of people involved that give any tragedy its importance. And such statistics have been analyzed much better in other works on this subject by Bacque and also by Alfred de Zayas.¹⁰

Another flaw in MacDonogh's account is his failure to sufficiently bring out the utter hypocrisy of the Allies—a hypocrisy of Orwellian proportions. For the full story should not simply point out how the Allies treated the defeated German people in a barbarous manner, but that the Allies did so while fighting in the name of the ideals of democracy, freedom, and racial harmony.

Ultimately, the United States and the Western Allies would stop their genocidal mistreatment of the Germans, not because of any moral scruples, but because of the realization that the United States was facing a new enemy—the Soviet Union. A strong Germany was seen as essential in preventing the Sovietization of Western Europe. It is interesting here that MacDonogh takes the questionable position that Stalin actually did not threaten to control Europe, but only sought limited security needs, and that hence there was no need for the Cold War. Of course, had the United States not seen an overriding need to resist the Soviet Union, the destruction of the German people could have continued unabated. In short, the Germans were saved by the Cold War.

All in all, MacDonogh has written a book that pushes the envelope within the confines of Political Correctness. However, he often espouses what are largely PC positions because he probably doesn't know the contrary views. Although the book really does not offer

¹⁰ Alfred de Zayas is the author of *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Expulsion of the Germans from the East* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989) and *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

much significant information that has not been presented better in previous books, it has the merit of presenting the full range of Allied crimes – rapes, expulsions, starvation, brutal treatment of prisoners – and not simply focusing on one type. And since the work is produced by a major publishing house, which enables it to be reviewed in the mainstream media, it brings a whole new picture to those “respectable” people who have grown up with nothing other than the “Good War” mythology.

Of course, some have vested interests in maintaining this mythology. Thus *After the Reich* has been smeared by the defenders of the “Good War,” largely on the grounds of its alleged failure to put the Allies’ brutal actions in context. In short, if one is to mention these things at all, it is necessary to diminish their significance, and even justify them, by constantly mentioning the Holocaust.

Returning now to Miss Utley’s “objective observer,” if such an individual has emerged (and some actually have), his or her writings have not reached the general public. Perhaps, if numerous books similar to *After the Reich* appear, the educated public could be prepared for even stronger stuff, and historians would be able to look at all the events of World War II in a more objective manner. And this is needed now more than ever, since the “Good War” paradigm is being used to justify an ever more expansive American war of aggression in the Middle East.

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