
Joachim Neander

The German Corpse Factory
The Master Hoax of
British Propaganda in the
First World War

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INTRODUCTION

A Dubious Legacy Of the First World War

Early in the morning of Wednesday, September 2, 1942, the teletypewriter at the Polish embassy in Washington, DC spewed out a telex sent from Switzerland. Its beginning read as follows:

“ACCORDING TO RECENTLY RECEIVED AUTHENTIC INFORMATION THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES HAVE EVACUATED THE LAST GHETTO IN WARSAW STOP BESTIALLY MURDERING ABOUT HUNDRED THOUSAND JEWS STOP MASS MURDERS CONTINUE STOP FROM THE CORPSES OF THE MURDERED SOAP AND ARTIFICIAL FERTILIZERS ARE PRODUCED STOP.¹”

It was the famous “Sternbuch cable” set up by Recha Sternbuch, Swiss representative of the Orthodox Jewish relief and rescue organization Va’ad Hatsalah, and directed to Jacob Rosenheim at the Agudath Israel office in New York. The communication channels of the Legation of the Polish Government-in-Exile in Bern had been used to circumvent U.S. censorship. The Sternbuch cable was not the first news about the ongoing destruction of Polish Jewry by the Germans which reached the U.S., but it was the first that told what was allegedly done with the corpses of the murdered.

Two days later, on September 4, 1942, Jan Ciechanowski, the Polish ambassador in Washington, visited his British colleague, Lord Halifax, and handed a copy of the Sternbuch cable over to him. With regard to the corpse utilization mentioned there, Lord Halifax confided to his diary: “I

¹ Quoted from Kranzler 2000:21. Sometimes Sternbuch is partially misquoted: “. . . how Jewish *babies* were being used to produce soap and fertilizer . . .” (emphasis added), which makes the crime appear still more heinous. See e.g. <http://www.aish.com/ho/h/48019462.html>, the Web site of AISH, an influential (Orthodox) Jewish organization, or the “educational” sites <http://www.datesinhistory.com/big.php?v1=sep02> and <http://hisdates.com/months/september-historical-events/02.html>. All last accessed November 6, 2010.

wonder whether this horror is true. A good deal more likely to be true, I fancy, than it was in the last war.”² He undoubtedly remembered the stories spread for months during the Great War about a “Corpse factory” - or factories - in which the Germans allegedly were boiling down their fallen soldiers for lubricants, soap, fertilizer and pigs’ food. It took seven years after the end of fighting until the British government publicly admitted that the whole story had had no foundation and was thought up by Allied propagandists, and formally apologized to the German people.

In the weeks and months following the Sternbuch cable, more ghastly news about the mass killings of Jews arrived in Great Britain and the U.S. from Poland. On the one hand, they were telling the bitter and horrible truth about the ongoing destruction of the European Jews, today known as “The Holocaust.” On the other hand, they were incorrect in many important details. What is more, most reports presented as facts atrocity legends such as the processing of human bodies into soap, lubricants, and fertilizer. “They incorporated stories which were obviously left over from the horror tales of the last war,” Paul C. Squire, American Consul at Geneva, Switzerland, critically remarked in a memorandum, forwarded to Washington on September 28, 1942.³

Still a year later the reports from Poland reminded Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, the chairman of the British Joint Intelligence Committee, “of the stories of employment of human corpses during the last war for the manufacture of fat, which was a grotesque lie.”⁴ Even in September 1944, after

² Quoted from <http://www.fpp.co.uk/History/antisemitism/HalifaxonJews.html>. Last accessed December 27, 2010. Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, First Earl of Halifax (1881-1959), British Conservative Politician, held several senior ministerial posts, Foreign Secretary from 1938 to 1940, during the war British Ambassador to the United States.

³ Quoted from Novick 2000:23.

⁴ Cavendish-Bentinck Minute, 27 August 1943, Public Record Office (now The National Archives), files FO 371/34551. Quoted from van Pelt 2002:127. Victor Cavendish-Bentinck (1897-1990), 9th Duke of

news from the recently liberated Majdanek camp had made headlines worldwide, *The Christian Century*, a conservative, Protestant periodical, expressed doubts as to the veracity of the reports: "The parallel between this story and the 'corpse factory' atrocity tale of the First World War is too striking to be overlooked."⁵

There can be no doubt that the reported commercial use of the corpses of the murdered Jews undermined the credibility of the news coming from Poland and delayed action that might have rescued many Jewish lives. It is ahistorical, however, to take, with the benefit of hindsight, the moral high ground and sweepingly accuse the decision makers of the time of "passivity."⁶ Syndicated columnists and staff writers of leading newspapers, as well as senior officials in the diplomatic and intelligence services vividly remembered how they, during the Great War, had been led astray through mendacious propaganda cooked up in their own and allied countries.

The shock that the debunking of the "Corpse factory" story as a hoax had created worldwide in December 1925 was still fresh in their memories and let them act cautiously. Who was able to sift the wheat from the chaff? As historian Walter Laqueur aptly remarked: "No one wanted to be misled for the second time within one generation."⁷ The general inclination among the professionals, therefore, was to dismiss the reports as "Polish-Jewish propaganda" and to refuse to take them seriously, frequently with reference to "lessons learned from

Portland, was a British diplomat, from 1939 to 1945 chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, after the war ambassador to Poland.

⁵ Charles Clayton Morrison, "Biggest Atrocity Story Breaks in Poland," *The Christian Century*, September 13, 1944, p. 1045.

⁶ This is, in short, a position held by the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Research in Washington, DC. See its home page, <http://www.wymaninstitute.org>. Main targets of the Institute are the U.S. media and the Roosevelt administration, reproached for a restrictive immigration policy and failure to bomb Auschwitz.

⁷ Laqueur 1982:9. Laqueur refers explicitly to the "Corpse factory" in this context. *Ibid.*, p 8.

history.” Precisely twenty-five years after, the “German corpse factory,” an Allied propaganda lie from the First World War, had fired back.

Nevertheless Rabbi Stephen Wise, head of both the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Congress and President Roosevelt’s advisor for Jewish affairs, in a press conference on November 24, 1942 pronounced the manufacture of “war-vital commodities as soap, fats, and fertilizer” from the bodies of the slain Jews as “a fact” vouched for by the U.S. State Department. The news quickly made the rounds of the media worldwide.⁸ Told and retold again and again and never officially denied, “Jewish soap,” allegedly made by the Germans in factories where they rendered down the corpses of their Jewish victims, became emblematic of the Holocaust.⁹ Although never credited by serious Holocaust scholars and long ago debunked as a myth, “Jewish soap” has become a stock phrase in Holocaust remembrance and a favorite subject of Holocaust related arts and literature, and year in year out it is told to millions of students worldwide as “a fact” in Holocaust education lessons.¹⁰

The Scope of the Study

Let us, therefore, cast a look at “the ‘corpse factory’ atrocity tale of the First World War,” which was so vividly remembered still a generation later and led diplomats and senior officials

⁸ To mention only a few newspapers: *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Hartford Courant* and *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune* of November 25, *The New York Times* and *The Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) of November 26, and *The West Australian* (Perth) and the *Canberra Times* of November 27, 1942.

⁹ For the reception history of the “Jewish soap” legend and its significance as an emblem of the Holocaust see Neander 2005.

¹⁰ For a study giving ample evidence for the worldwide appearance of “Jewish soap” (and “lampshades”) in Holocaust remembrance, in literature, and in the arts, see Neander 2008. Recently, “Jewish soap” appeared as “Holocaust soap” in a much-acclaimed book by Chicago slavist Božena Shallcross (Shallcross 2011:55-70; for a review, see

in Britain and the U.S. to be suspicious of the news they were receiving about the Holocaust. How and where did the “Corpse factory” story originate? Under which circumstances, how, when, where, and by whom was it spread, and how was its spreading correlated with events on the battle and home fronts? How was the story received among its target audience, and why was it firmly believed by millions of individuals who could easily have seen through it a monstrous fabrication? What led to its eventual debunking and even to an official British apology? Which role did its debunking play in the “Revisionist” movement of the late 1920s? Why did it not die off after its debunking? How has it been seen in post-World War II anti-“Revisionist” literature? And last but not least: is there anything that we can learn from it for the future? The study presented here aims at answering these questions, at least to a certain degree.

The book begins its first chapter with an analysis of the historical background on top of which tales of German war crimes, “atrocities stories,” later developed: real war crimes perpetrated by the German army during its invasion of Belgium and France in August and September 1914. This is followed by an overview of the use of these crimes in anti-German propaganda and an attempt to explain why Allied propaganda fell out of favor with the public during the “Pacifist turn” of the 1920s. Finally, it continues to address the recent re-examination of atrocity stories from the First World War in search of events in German history foreshadowing Wehrmacht crimes 1939-1945 and the Holocaust.

The second chapter deals with the “roots” of the “Corpse factory” story: a wealth of rumors circulating in the occupied territories and the Allied trenches and spreading from there to the respective home countries. There was the German system of exploitation of animal carcasses, introduced by the Germans in occupied territory, hitherto unknown and looked

Neander 2011). About “Jewish soap and lampshades” in teaching the Holocaust, see also Neander 2010:134.

at with great suspicion by the locals. In Belgium, rumors were circulating about German disposal of dead soldiers by burning them under disgraceful circumstances. In Britain and France, the German “fat gap” caused by the British sea blockade gave rise to rumors that the Germans used the body fat of dead soldiers for the manufacture of margarine or of glycerin, a substance needed in munitions making. British propaganda cast these rumors into a story that was spread in China and Australasia at the turn of March 1917. In the second half of this month, the Belgian exile press brought a horror story about a factory in Germany, near the Belgian border, where the Germans were allegedly processing dead soldiers from the Western theater of war to technical oils and fats.

In the third chapter it is shown how the Belgian and French corpse processing stories were combined with a deliberately mistranslated and de-contextualized passage taken from a German war correspondent’s report, in which a visit to a carcass utilization plant was mentioned. The result, henceforth referred to as the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story, premiered in two prominent Northcliffe papers, *The Daily Mail*, “the publishing phenomenon of its time” with a regular daily circulation of over a million copies,¹¹ and *The Times*, the flagship of British journalism. The same day, Reuters news agency - whose General Manager held an (unpaid) senior post in the British propaganda apparatus - spread the story worldwide. Within the next weeks it appeared in newspapers all over the globe.

The fourth chapter deals with the reception of the story in Europe, among Allied and neutral countries, and in Germany. The next two chapters are devoted to the spreading and reception of the story in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, and to the influence of the story on science, poetry, fictional literature, and the fine arts in wartime.

Chapter seven describes the life of the story after the hostilities had ended and more and more critical voices were

¹¹ Gregory 2008:47.

heard. The big sensation, however, came when (then retired) Brigadier-General Charteris, wartime Head of Intelligence at Headquarters, British Expeditionary Force, told in New York at the end of October 1925 that he invented the story by tampering with photographs found at dead German soldiers. He denied this, however, on return to Great Britain. The matter was lively discussed in the House of Commons, and on December 2, 1925, the story was officially debunked in Parliament by the British Secretary of State in the presence of the German Chancellor and Foreign Minister.

In the final chapter it is concluded that the “Corpse factory” story did not die off after December 1925, as those who in wartime were involved in its fabrication and spreading had hoped. Instead, it had developed a life of its own as an urban legend, told and retold in all countries once at war with Germany, transmogrifying into a “human soap factory” tale. Updated in the Second World War to a “Jewish soap” legend, it played again a role in anti-German propaganda since 1942. The interest modern anti-Revisionist scholars take in the “Corpse factory” story, and the ubiquity of “Jewish soap” in Holocaust remembrance, show that an end of history for the “German corpse factory” is not yet in sight.

The “Corpse factory” campaign of the First World War was a pioneer in the field of modern war propaganda. Recent successful campaigns have shown striking structural similarities to it, as Randal Marlin and the author demonstrated in 2010 by an analysis of the propaganda campaigns against Canadian premier Lucien Bouchard in 1997 and the campaigns associated with the U.S.-led Iraq wars of 1991 and 2003.¹² Contemplating the legacy of suffering, ill will, and mistrust generated by these wars, as well as the trickery preparing the way for them, humanity has good reasons to look for brakes upon deceptive propaganda for war.

UN resolutions against propaganda for war are helpful, but not sufficient. “Wars begin in the minds of men,” says

¹² Neander/Marlin 2010:77-78.

the UNESCO Constitution,¹³ and history shows that without proper engineering of the minds, some modern wars would have hardly been started and kept going on. Studying the history of the “Corpse factory” can teach people what goes to make up deceptive propaganda and how such propaganda works. It could sensitize them to detect it at an early stage and enable them to take counter-active steps in a timely way, especially with the possibilities offered today by social networks, such as Facebook or Twitter, and sophisticated mobile phones. “Propaganda thus exposed can be, it is our belief and hope, propaganda nullified.”¹⁴

Some Remarks on Propaganda and the Press in the First World War

Only a few cartoons and staged photographs, but neither films nor radio broadcasts were employed in the spreading of the “Corpse factory” story. The main medium that conveyed the story to its target audience was the press. When, at the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars began to re-examine the behavior of the German army during the invasion of Belgium and France in 1914 in the light of German war crimes perpetrated during the Second World War, they also re-examined the atrocity stories from the time. In this context, the notion of “atrocity propaganda” and the image of the role of the press in it, as developed by Harold D. Lasswell and Arthur Ponsonby in the second half of the 1920s¹⁵ - and henceforth generally accepted by the scholarly community - was also subject to re-assessment. Adrian Gregory, for instance, sees the press in the role of mainly passive recipients of impulses

¹³ *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, adopted in London on 16 November 1945.* On the Web: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002161/216192e.pdf#page=7>. Last accessed June 12, 2012.

¹⁴ Neander/Marlin 2010:79.

¹⁵ *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (Lasswell 1927); *Falsehood in War-Time* (Ponsonby 1928).

from below, rather than as active players in the game: “The attempt to consider atrocity propaganda as a “technique,” where stories are invented by identifiable agents with clear motives and then disseminated through the media is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. Rather than being imposed from above on a gullible public, most atrocity stories bubbled up into the media from [the] netherworld of rumour.¹⁶”

Gregory certainly has a point when he says that “the process was bottom-up more than top-down,”¹⁷ and that more often than not, particularly in cases of grossly exaggerated or false atrocity stories, “the public were misleading the press.”¹⁸ In a similar train of thought, Horne/Kramer see the spreading of atrocity legends by the press less as an attempt “to stoke up wartime passions” than as “a symptom of those passions.”¹⁹

It appears, however, that generally the matter was rather complicated, resembling more a feedback loop than a linear chain of cause and effect. Independently of whether the atrocity story was “imposed from above” - Gregory himself gives some fine examples - or “bubbled up” from the bottom, for example as “a letter to the press,”²⁰ the fact alone that it was printed earned it a veneer of respectability, especially if it appeared in a prestigious newspaper, such as *The Times* of London.²¹ The story was read and retold among the readership, their friends and families, was quoted by other press organs, and received approval or disapproval, which led to comments by readers or journalists from other papers, which triggered off follow-ups (articles or letters to the editor), which were

¹⁶ Gregory 2008:67.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 315, endnote 95. Subsumed with “the public” should be also certain Government institutions that issued reports containing dubious testimony to German atrocities. Gregory gives an example on p. 54.

¹⁹ Horne/Kramer 2001:369.

²⁰ Gregory 2008:67.

²¹ In this respect, Arthur Ponsonby was right when he wrote that “the public mind is always impressed by anything that appears in print”; Ponsonby 1928:160. Today, “in print” would have to be replaced by “on TV.”

printed, read, retold, quoted, and more often than not gave rise to still another article or letter to the editor, and so on.

In this process, the newspaper editor held a crucial position. First, he set the “start condition” by deciding whether to bring or not to bring the news for the first time, when to bring it, where to place it in his paper, and which headline to give it. Secondly, he controlled the process through the kind of feedback he decided to apply: either the process - and the passions involved - would die off gradually, or the process, together with the emotions evoked by the subject, would build up, more and more increasing and proliferating. The media history of the “Corpse factory” atrocity story is an illustrative example of a process of that kind.

A more extreme view than Gregory’s and Horne/Kramer’s is taken by Jeff Lipkes. His interest in false or exaggerated atrocity stories is focused on their treatment in postwar literature about propaganda, rather than on their spreading in wartime. Generally suspecting the authors of these books of “Revisionism” (or at least of having fallen victim to “Revisionist” myths), he maintains that they used the stories as “straw men,” as “red herrings,” to distract attention from the real crimes perpetrated by the Germans,²² and contends that “for the purpose of exposing wartime mendacity . . . such a story is only significant if it were to appear in a reputable newspaper or an official government communiqué.”²³

He discounts, for instance, a hardly credible atrocity story (in addition, obviously recycled from a previous war) with the argument that “the story does not appear, of course, in any official investigation.”²⁴

Having appeared “in a reputable newspaper,” however, did not improve the situation. An author who mentioned

²² Lipkes 2007:617 (“red herring”), p. 635 (“straw men”).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 621. Lipkes, regretfully, does not tell what he understands by “a reputable newspaper.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 633 (the wandering legend of the seven-year old boy who had pointed with his wooden toy gun at a patrol of invaders and was killed by them on the spot).

several obviously false atrocity stories that received ample press coverage is ridiculed by Lipkes with the argument that she “appears to believe that the Press Bureau ought to have censored references to German crimes.”²⁵ It was, of course, not the British censor’s business to prevent the publication of news detrimental to the image of the enemy. It is not the only instance in *Rehearsals* where Lipkes shows that he has neither understood the basics of propaganda itself, nor the role of the media in the propaganda business, nor their interaction with Government in conflicts such as war.²⁶

During the First World War, the great majority of the press voluntarily sided with their governments. This held particularly for Great Britain. As media researcher Alice G. Marquis has observed:

“In England each editor saw himself as a willing - indeed enthusiastic - partner in the government’s effort to win the war . . . The British government could trust the press because of the tight web of personal, political, social and professional relationships that bound newspaper owners, editors and politicians into one ruling elite . . . The ties between politicians and the press were so multifarious and so intimate that it is difficult to sort out who influenced (or corrupted) whom.”²⁷

On the one hand, editors who brought an anti-German propaganda story, however incredible it may have been, could rely on backing by the government. On the other hand, well aware that “official propaganda known to be such is almost useless,”²⁸ Government could rely on the press and the news

²⁵ Ibid., p. 652, against Haste 1977. Haste, of course, never explicitly nor implicitly makes this suggestion.

²⁶ See, e.g., his treatment of Lasswell’s *Propaganda Technique in the World War* on pages 633-635 of *Rehearsals*. As he obviously does not understand Lasswell’s analytical approach, he simply ridicules him.

²⁷ Marquis 1978:485, 486, 478. Sequence of quotes reversed.

²⁸ Lord Robert Cecil, in a note dated December 29, 1916, introducing a memorandum on British propaganda in foreign countries. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, p.9 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012. Quoted also in P. Taylor 1981:58. Edgar Algernon

agencies for distributing propaganda disguised as news. The *Morning Post*, for example, supplied propaganda news to “certain neutral countries,”²⁹ whereas *The Times*, the flagship of British journalism, not only purveyed news directly to UK and Dominion newspapers, but also supplied daily telegrams to leading Russian papers and even maintained “a kind of unofficial Press Bureau for the Foreign Office” in Madrid, Spain.³⁰ The proprietor of *The Times*, Lord Northcliffe, in turn served in the Department of Information as one of the three members of its Advisory Committee.³¹

The main purveyor of British propaganda material to the press of foreign countries - and another example of the close mutual ties between Government and the news business - was the Reuters news agency. According to Australian media researchers Peter Putnis and Kerry McCallum, Reuters “was agreeable to distributing news items based on hearsay which could serve a propaganda purpose. These included items which were strongly suspected of being fabricated, even at the time. The most notorious example in this regard was the corpse factory allegation.³²” Reuters delivered propaganda

Robert Lord Cecil (1864-1958), British conservative politician, served as Undersecretary of State and Minister of Blockade from 1916 to 1918, being responsible for devising procedures to bring economic and commercial pressure against the enemy. As one of the founding fathers of the League of Nations, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937.

²⁹ “British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries,” *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Marwick 1991:252. Alfred Harmsworth, later Alfred Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922), still later Viscount Northcliffe, was a British newspaper magnate (*Evening News*, *The Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Observer*, *The Times*, *The Daily Record*), known for his belligerency and his strong anti-German sentiments. His newspapers, particularly the right-wing, sensationalist tabloid *The Daily Mail*, never did shy away from spreading stories of dubious provenance as news. In 1918, Northcliffe served under Lloyd George as Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries.

³² Putnis/McCallum 2005.

news by cable to France, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Romania, Japan, China, South America,³³ and also to the Dominions, for example to Australia and New Zealand.³⁴ For this service, it received considerable subsidies from the British government.³⁵ Reuters cooperated closely with the News Department of the Foreign Office³⁶ and, since February 20, 1917, with the News Division of the Department of Information, into which the former had been integrated. Head of the News Division, in turn, was Roderick Jones, Reuters' General Manager.³⁷

British government agencies, therefore, could restrict themselves to "filling the gaps." As the News Department of the Foreign Office stated in December 1916, its services in the distribution of propaganda news to the foreign press were "intended chiefly to supplement the Reuter service in countries where . . . experience has shown that that service does not cover all the ground."³⁸ A special problem for British propaganda posed the U.S. press. Though many leading personalities in the news business were sympathetic to the Allies' cause, U.S. journalists were proud of their independence from government influence, be it from the own, be it from a foreign side. The major papers, such as *The New York Times*

³³ Memorandum "British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries," prepared by the News Department of the Foreign Office, December 20, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

³⁴ Putnis/McCallum 2005.

³⁵ Memorandum "British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries," prepared by the News Department of the Foreign Office, December 20, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Putnis/McCallum 2005.

³⁸ Memorandum "British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries," prepared by the News Department of the Foreign Office, December 20, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

or *The New York Tribune*, and the big news agencies, United Press and Associated Press, had their own correspondents in London, who made their own inquiries at the Foreign Office and other government and military institutions. They were, of course, fed by these with carefully prepared material for publication, without, however, being aware to which extent they were “guided.” As Lord Robert Cecil aptly remarked: “In American propaganda the only plan is to do good by stealth.”³⁹

Methodological Remarks and Acknowledgments

As previously mentioned, the principal medium that conveyed the story to its target audience was the press. Therefore, the main contemporary sources consulted for this study are newspaper articles. As in the propaganda business language and timing are of paramount importance, the sources are often quoted literally and in a certain length, and the newspaper articles consulted (though by far not always quoted) are listed in footnotes with dates of issue and headlines. The latter were an integral part of the campaign and give a vivid impression of the climate of public opinion in which the propagandists were working and which they were reinforcing with the news they spread. If not stated otherwise, dates and casualty figures of the battles and wars mentioned in this study, as well as biographical data about personalities of public life, were taken from the respective Wikipedia articles.⁴⁰

Complying with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, all quotations from foreign-language sources are given in English translation.

³⁹ Note dated December 29, 1916, introducing a memorandum on British propaganda in foreign countries. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, p.9 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

⁴⁰ As these data are not politically sensitive and the Wikipedia articles have already been on the Web for many years - possible errors, therefore, most probably having been corrected long ago - I do not see any problem in using them. What is more, with respect to casualty figures only their magnitude, not their exact number (which still may be disputed) is of interest here.

Being well aware that every translation is an interpretation, and never forgetting that the gist of the “Corpse factory” hoax was a mistranslation, the foreign-language original is additionally always presented in a footnote. Readers conversant in the respective language, therefore, have the possibility to consult the original text and to form an opinion by themselves. All translations are the author’s, and for all inaccuracies and mistakes only he is to blame. All quotations, in addition, are given in the original spelling and not adjusted to today’s spelling rules. Author’s comments and additions are set in square brackets, author’s omissions indicated by three dots.

As already mentioned, the main sources utilized are newspaper articles of the time. Especially productive were searches in the freely accessible digitalized newspaper collections of the National Libraries of France, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hongkong, Brazil and the United States, not to forget Google News Archive. Whereas in Switzerland, Portugal and Spain some of the leading papers of the time are freely accessible, most U.S. and British newspaper archives demand considerable fees for reading and even for searching, which restrict consulting them for individuals with a limited research budget.

Laudable examples are *The New York Times*, whose archive until 1920 is freely accessible, and the low-cost American paysite Newspaper Archive, containing a wealth of provincial U.S. newspapers, but also some issues of the *Daily Mail* from London, the *Gleaner* from Kingston, Jamaica, and the *North China Herald* from Shanghai, as well as a few Canadian papers. In addition, local initiatives in the U.S., Canada, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, mostly run by universities or public libraries, have digitalized local newspapers and made them freely accessible on the Web.

Most digital newspaper archives allow searching for articles containing given key words and published in a given period of time. As searching is based on Optical Character Recognition, search results depend to a large degree on the

quality of the original document. Unsurprisingly, it turned out that by relying on the search function alone, many possible hits were overlooked. The author, therefore, took the trouble to read, in addition, all issues from a given period of time page after page (a procedure also inevitable if the newspaper was not searchable). Though in principle such tasks are quite tedious, it was made easier by the fact that wartime shortage of paper had forced editors to limit the size of an issue to a few pages, mostly between four and six.

Readers should not be surprised at finding many secondary quotes in this book. Newspapers of the time were diligently borrowing from one another or from opinion-leading metropolitan papers, such as the *Morning Post* or *The Times* of London. It shows how news - in our case about corpse utilization - were spread outside the established news agency channels and allows, in addition, to draw conclusions about the news content of the quoted newspapers, which, in many instances, were not directly accessible.

The analysis of Russian-language and Chinese-language material would surely have contributed to a completion of the image, as both Russia and China had been important targets of British propaganda and their press undoubtedly also spread the “Corpse factory” story. At the time this manuscript was finished, however, contemporary Russian newspapers were (not yet) available in digital form, and an insurmountable language barrier stood between Chinese newspapers and the author. Nevertheless the author hopes to have shown with examples from all continents (except Antarctica) that the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign had encompassed the whole world, reaching into the farthest corners of the globe.

Though the vast majority of source material and some literature was available on the Web, many documents, as well as excerpts from books and scholarly articles, could only be obtained from the collections of university libraries across the world with the help of the reference librarians or of colleagues who had access to the library as members of faculty. It is impossible to list here all those individuals without whose

invaluable help this study would not have been completed. As *pars pro toto* Carol Singer, Head of the Library Teaching and Learning Department of Bowling Green State University, OH, shall be mentioned, who rummaged through the archives and provided the author with a wealth of source material.

The individual to whom the author feels most indebted, however, is media researcher Randal Marlin from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, with whom a very productive exchange of ideas and documents has taken place since 2009, resulting, among other things, in a common publication about the “Corpse factory.”⁴¹ In a certain sense, the author sees the study presented here as a continuation of the pioneering efforts Randal Marlin has made in researching the “German corpse factory” propaganda campaign in its broader context and highlighting its relevance for the study of deceptive propaganda in wartime.

⁴¹ Neander/Marlin 2010.

I.

ATROCITIES, DENIAL, AND ANTI-DENIAL

The “German Corpse Factory”: An Atrocity Inflicted on the Own People

When on July 28, 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, a spark was thrown into a powder keg that eventually set nearly the whole world on fire. On August 1, 1914 Germany declared war on Russia, and two days later, also on France. On the same day, German troops, in an attempt to attack France from northeast, marched into Belgium, violating this country’s neutrality. The invasion of Belgium, justified by “military necessity,” had disastrous political effects on Germany. It gave Great Britain the justification to enter the war on the side of Germany’s enemies on August 4, 1914 and it placed Germany, from the beginning of the Great War, morally in the wrong in world public opinion.

Belgian, French and - to a far greater extent - British propaganda adroitly exploited the German assault on Belgium, creating the feminized image of a helpless, little country - “Poor little Belgium” - “raped” by a ferocious aggressor.¹ French and British news agencies spread all over the world stories of real and alleged German atrocities committed against Belgian civilians.² Picture postcards, cartoons and posters showing babies bayoneted, soldiers crucified, children with hands chopped off, or women gang-raped to death found wide distribution. Germans and their Kaiser were often portrayed in these cartoons and posters as terrifying monsters

¹ During the war, the Belgian Government-in-exile tried to replace “Poor little Belgium” propagandistically by the masculine image of a strong, fighting Belgium. In vain - “Poor little Belgium” was already too deeply engraved in public perception. For details see Amara 2000.

² For a comprehensive analysis of British World War I propaganda, see e.g. Lasswell 1927, Ponsonby 1928, Read 1941, Haste 1977, Sanders/Taylor 1982, or Hayward 2010.

or savage animals,³ and even newspapers that wanted to be regarded as serious, for example *The Times* of London or *Le Temps* of Paris - and not only mass-circulation papers such as Lord Northcliffe's *The Daily Mail* - used to speak of them derogatorily as "Huns" or, in French, *Boches* (pigs).⁴

Atrocity propaganda was mainly targeted at the own population that had to be convinced that their government had taken the right decision to go to war. This was particularly important in countries such as Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which did not have conscription and relied on volunteers for military service.⁵ Next important targets were the citizens of neutral countries, such as the United States, Brazil, and China, which Britain and France wanted to drag into war with Germany.

Depicting the enemy as the incarnation of evil, attributing to him all sorts of atrocities, portraying him as barbarian and inhuman, even subhuman, has been a standard tool of psychological warfare from the crusades of the Middle Ages until today. In nations at war it serves to justify the fighting, incites hatred of the enemy and prepares the peoples for the sacrifice of material goods and blood. In friendly but neutral nations it creates an atmosphere favorable to dragging them into war. In combat it lowers the inhibition to kill. The soldier who kills an enemy has not only a clear conscience, but even the feelings of having accomplished a "good deed"; for he does not kill a human being, but a monster, a subhuman creature, and, moreover, contributes to the eradication of Evil on Earth.

From all the Allied anti-German propaganda stories spread during the First World War, the "Corpse factory" atrocity myth, launched worldwide by the British in the spring of 1917, stands out for its sheer magnitude, impact and durability. It was

³ See e.g. the pictures reproduced in Avenarius 1921, or Hiery 2000.

⁴ About the topos of the "Hun" in British World War I propaganda, see Gullace 2009.

⁵ Great Britain, New Zealand, and Canada introduced conscription not before the summer of 1916.

probably the most effective and certainly the farthest reaching, with ramifications lingering until today. In its core, it said that the Germans had established huge “Corpse exploitation, (or “conversion,” or “utilization”) establishments,” in short “Corpse factories,” in the rear of the front, where they were boiling down the corpses of their own soldiers killed in action for the manufacturing of lubricants, glycerin, soap, fertilizer, and pig food. The “Corpse factory” atrocity was different from all hitherto known atrocities - which were, in principle, primitive brutalities - insofar as it allegedly used cutting-edge technology in a fully mechanized manufacturing process, modeled after the most modern American production lines, and that it allegedly was inflicted on the own people.

To understand why the “Corpse factory” story was so shocking for everybody who heard or read about it, why it was more than a simple desecration of corpses (which has happened to enemy bodies in war since primeval times), let us remember that in all countries involved in the Great War, the own fallen soldiers were venerated as heroes and martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for their native country’s sake. They deserved a decent burial, at least temporarily. The places of their last rest were after the war to become sacred grounds at which, on the occasion of national holidays, the nation would solemnly remember their sacrifice.

The alleged behavior of the Germans, in contrast, was an offense against all rules of decency and humanity. The morality of a people that was utilizing the bodies of its own fallen heroes and martyrs as raw material for its chemical industry had obviously hit rock bottom. German society - so it was presented to the public in Allied and neutral countries - had excluded itself from the community of mankind. Fighting the “Hun body-boilers” had become a moral duty for every decent individual, man or woman, and “neutrality” in the conflict was no longer possible - such was the core message of the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign.

The “German Atrocities” Question

As already briefly hinted to, Allied atrocity propaganda was not completely unfounded. German troops did commit numerous crimes against the civilian population of Belgium and northern France in the course of the German invasion. Crimes included burning down villages - and even sacking the historic city center of Louvain - in reprisal for supposed partisan (*franc-tireur*) activities, summarily shooting hostages and uninvolved individuals suspected of espionage or firing from an ambush, looting private property, and last but not least, rape.

Nothing shall be excused here. A crime is a crime. Many of these misdeeds were, at the time, also frankly admitted by the Germans themselves, and rape and looting, in some instances, were even punished. German efforts to downplay killing and arson as “retaliatory acts” or “collateral damage,” or to justify them by “necessities of war,” however, were too transparent in their hypocrisy and did not even convince everybody in Germany proper. Since reporting from the fighting zones was either impossible or strangled by strict censorship, on both sides of the conflict the rumor mills were running full steam, spewing out horror tales about the enemy.⁶ Fact and fiction were mixed indistinguishably, and every time a story was retold, it was enriched with additional fictional elements, a phenomenon well known from folktale studies.

As of mid-September 1914, British authorities began to collect accounts of German atrocities, given by Belgian refugees in England. They were summarized and edited by a commission, established in December 1914 and headed by the distinguished scholar and diplomat Viscount James Bryce (1838-1922), on May 12, 1915 under the title *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*. The work, commonly referred to as “The Bryce Report,” was translated

⁶ For examples (German and Allied) see, e.g., Hayward 2010:73-87.

into thirty languages and spread worldwide by the War Propaganda Bureau, a British government agency.⁷

Main target was the U.S., to which alone 41,000 copies were shipped from London and where it, subsequently, was reprinted by the renowned publisher Macmillan & Company of New York. In the U.S. that just had lost 128 civilians in the *Lusitania* incident,⁸ at once a line was drawn from Belgium to the coastal waters of Ireland: “We Americans must inevitably see the tragedy of Louvain with the massacre of the *Lusitania* in the background,” demanded the *New York Tribune* in an editorial,⁹ as the first vociferous calls were heard urging the U.S. government to give up neutrality and enter the war on the Allies’ side.¹⁰

⁷ The *Bryce Report* is easily accessible on the Web. Facsimiles of the main report (61 pages, 2 maps) are on the Hathi-Trust’s site: <http://www.catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000445424>. An official Canadian reprint of the annexes, *Evidence and Documents Laid Before the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, Ottawa (Government Printing Bureau) 1916 (370 pages), can be found under <http://archive.org/details/evidencedocument00greauoft>. Both sites last accessed June 6, 2012. The report’s retail price was heavily subsidized. In Great Britain, e.g., the report was sold at one penny, the price of a daily newspaper.

⁸ The sinking of the British passenger steamer *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, a few miles off the Irish coast by a German submarine, an event that had shocked the world and caused outbreaks of anti-German grassroots violence at many places in Great Britain. Of 1,959 people aboard, 1,198 were killed, including almost a hundred children. At London, Manchester, Liverpool, and many other places the mob rioted against citizens of German extraction, demolishing their houses and looting their shops (“‘Intern All Germans,’ London Clamors; Mobs Riot . . . Teuton Shops Wrecked in Big Cities,” *Evening Ledger*, Philadelphia, PA, May 11, 1915, p. 1). Victims of violence were also individuals with German-sounding names, e.g. Russian Jews (“Britons Wreck Shops and Beat Germans . . . Jewesses Ask Protection,” *El Paso Herald – Home Edition*, El Paso, TX, May 12, 1915, p. 1). From the point of the propaganda business, the publication of the report on May 12, 1915 came at the right moment - whether that was by chance or choice is still discussed among scholars.

⁹ “The Bryce Report,” editorial, *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1915, p. 8.

¹⁰ The powerful impression the *Bryce Report* made in the U.S. and the

The *Bryce Report* was neither the first, nor the last Government report on German atrocities perpetrated during the first weeks of the Great War against Belgian and French civilians. Several French and Belgian official reports were issued, as well as a German “White Book” that denied the crimes and laid the blame at the Belgians’ door, accusing them of having started an “illegal” people’s war (*Volkskrieg*), to which the German army had only reacted in self-defense.

From the point of view of scholarship, the *Bryce Report* was seriously flawed methodically, a fact about which its editors were well conscious and which has been a point of criticism from the beginning.¹¹ The Committee did not examine a single eyewitness face-to-face, but built its report without due source criticism on depositions made by victims and bystanders before a third party, as well as on translated excerpts from diaries found on dead German soldiers. Much of the testimony was only from hearsay. In favor of the report it must be said, however, that it was not fabricated from whole cloth. It could and would never have been published if there had not been a considerable kernel of truth in it. On the other hand, in perpetuating a litany of ultra-violent and pornographic

devastating effect it had on the reputation of Germany surprised even its publishers. “Your report has swept America,” wrote Charles F. Masterman, Head of the British War Propaganda Bureau, in an appreciative letter to Viscount Bryce, “even the most skeptical declare themselves converted” (Gullace 2011b:111). The American press devoted pages to excerpts of the report. By dwelling extensively on the accounts of child molestation and sexually motivated crimes in the report’s annex, many a newspaper appealed to the hidden sadistic and voyeuristic instincts of a society outwardly displaying a puritan moral; see, e.g., “Murder, Lust, Pillage, Prevailed in Belgium,” *The Washington Herald*, May 13, 1915, p. 2; “Bryce Reports. German Crimes,” *The Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Lewiston, ID, May 13, 1915, pp. 1 and 3; “Outrages in Belgium. British Reports Against the Germans. Shocking Crimes,” *The Meriden Daily Journal*, Meriden, CT, May 12, 1915, pp. 1 and 9.

¹¹ “Much of the detail Bryce presented in his report he knew in his heart was unreliable and probably untrue,” Gregory 2008:68.

fantasies, the *Bryce Report* became an instrument of atrocity propaganda itself.¹²

¹² The outrages perpetrated in Belgium and northern France were not the only widely publicized “German atrocities.” Some were, in principle, consequences of innovations in warfare, such as submarines, sea mines, chemical weapons, flame-throwers, and airborne bomb carriers. All had been developed by the warring nations already in peacetime. Their possible use had been studied at the respective war academies and military planning staffs, and it was only a question of time and opportunity when, where, and by whom they would be deployed in battle. Chemical weapons, for example, were used by the French already in the first weeks of the war. Their use by the Germans, however, “was condemned as illegitimate by the British press” (Gregory 2008:60). As often the Germans were the first to use innovations, it became easy for the Allies to portray their subsequent use against Germany as mere “retaliatory acts.” There were also violations of the generally accepted rules of warfare, such as killing surrendering enemy soldiers or the wounded, bombing field hospitals, or using false flags or uniforms. They occurred occasionally during the whole period of fighting and on both sides of the frontline, often in the heat of the moment, sometimes inadvertently. Reports about them were, however, treated differently by the Allied press. If done by the own people, they were treated as something normal or even praised; if done by the enemy, they were presented as “atrocities.” Sometimes one could find in the same newspaper an uncommented report from the battle front, in which it was proudly stated that “we did not take prisoners,” and an editorial denouncing similar behavior by Germans as a crime (rightfully so). Or we find a glorifying report about a British shelling of German positions with poison gas (“Killing at a distance . . . This victory is due to the especially terrifying effectiveness of the new gas shells . . . Miraculous results have been attained”) and immediately next to it a condemning report about a German poison gas attack on Russian positions (“Appalling Story - Massacre by Gas”; both articles in *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, Australia, March 1, 1917, p. 7). Another example of double moral standards was the “Cavell case.” Edith Cavell (1865-1915), a British nurse, was a member of a resistance network in occupied Belgium and helped over 200 British soldiers escape from German captivity. She was court-martialed and, on October 12, 1915, executed. British propaganda, adroitly playing on gender stereotypes, stylized her as an innocent victim (“martyr”) of German cruelty. The British, of course, knew the law and would have acted the same way, such as the French who had already executed two German women, Marguerite Schmidt on March 22, 1915, and Otilie Voss on May 16, 1915 (“Women

It is difficult for us today to imagine how high the fever of hatred of the enemy was pitching in Allied countries in the days of the Great War. To get an idea of it - and to understand, why even a story as absurd as that about a “German corpse factory” was believed by millions - one should take a dozen successive issues of a contemporary newspaper addressing a mass readership, for instance *The Daily Mail* from England or *Le Petit Journal* from France. One does not need a sophisticated “discourse analysis.” It is sufficient to read them from the first until the last page and listen to the language in which they were conveying news about the war in general and about Germany and the Germans in particular - *c’est le ton qui fait la musique*.¹³

Atrocity Denial and the “Pacifist Turn” in Western Societies

“German atrocities” experienced heightened public attention when, in the first months of 1919, the peace treaty for Germany

Spies. Two Shot in France,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Ashburton, New Zealand, January 7, 1916, p. 3). German occupation policy gave also rise to accusations of crimes, such as confiscation of property and conscription into forced labor, including deportation for work into the Reich’s interior. Still other reports about German atrocities could be traced back to rumors that, however, were eagerly taken up and spread as “facts” by the Allied press and so gave additional color to the propaganda picture of the “vile Hun.” Lesser publicity received the “poisoned candies” and “exploding crayons” allegedly dropped by German airplanes behind the enemy lines for killing or maiming French children, or the stories about infecting prisoners of war and civilians from the occupied countries with deadly diseases under the guise of vaccinations. More coverage, however, found the story of the “Crucified Canadian” (Hayward 2010:103-114) and the rumors about ghoulish and cannibalistic behavior of the Germans.

¹³ Literally: “It is the sound that makes the music.” Adrian Gregory, interestingly, holds *The Daily Mail* in high esteem: “Most of what the *Daily Mail* presented was verifiably true and it seems a reasonable guess that most of what was false was to a large extent *believed* by a proprietor and staff who had or who developed a very low opinion of the German people” (Gregory 2008:68; italics in the original). It was, however, precisely this “low opinion of the German people” that led to the use of

was negotiated among the victorious powers. German war crimes became inextricably linked to the question of war guilt, which itself was fundamental to justifying the harsh punitive measures inflicted on Germany at Versailles, among other things, the reparations imposed on her - to pay for “all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected.”¹⁴

As a precaution, the German Foreign Office had established a War Guilt Department (*Kriegsschuldreferat*) already at the end of 1918. In close cooperation with the *Reichswehr*,¹⁵ it exerted influence on Reichstag decisions, suppressed the publication of compromising German documents, effectively silenced domestic dissident voices, and promoted publications at home and abroad that attempted to deny - or, at least, to minimize - German war guilt and crimes. With regard to German atrocities, the position of all Weimar governments - and that of the Nazis, of course - was denial, following the line already mapped out in May 1915 by the “White Book.” Denial pursued two goals: defending the “good name” of Germany and her army, and undermining the rationale behind the demands for reparations.

Among the victorious nations, the end of the war had led to a widespread disillusionment about the results achieved and let more and more people think of the Great War as a big failure, rather than a great success. There were first the immense human losses on the battlefields: millions of men killed in the primes of their lives, and additional millions maimed for lifetime. Secondly, the “war to end all wars” had not held its promise. Already in 1919 British soldiers were fighting again in Russia, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. Thirdly, though Great Britain and France had extended their rule to further parts of the world - former German colonies and

a language we, today, would denounce as “hate speech” and in which the news were presented to the readership.

¹⁴ Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty.

¹⁵ The small army Germany was allowed to have according to the Versailles Treaty.

large pieces of the dismantled Ottoman Empire - global power was shifting away from them to the U.S. and the emerging Soviet Union. And last but not least, the transformation of the national economies from wartime to peacetime exigencies did not go without serious social frictions. High unemployment rates struck hard at the masses of discharged soldiers. Was it that which we have been fighting for? - were asking those who had returned from the trenches.

The change of perspective on the Great War in general was accompanied by a change of the image of the enemy in particular. Britons and Frenchmen who served in the occupation of the Rhineland realized that the Germans were people like themselves and not the monsters wartime propaganda had made to be.¹⁶ The returning soldiers still earlier had experienced that the German *Landser*¹⁷ was neither a coward, nor a subhuman creature, as their media had presented him, but an equally brave fighter (and poor sod) as they had been. What is more, it gradually got around that the own side did not have the clean slate as war propaganda had pretended, that the Allies had also their skeletons in the closet.¹⁸

Such and similar considerations were gradually undermining the political axioms of German innate depravity and of German war guilt and crimes and paved the way for a revision of the hitherto generally accepted narrative about

¹⁶ Germany left of the River Rhine was divided into three zones of occupation. The occupation forces retreated between 1926 and 1930.

¹⁷ *Landser* was the name by which the German rank-and-file soldiers of both world wars were called by themselves and other Germans. The American equivalent is GI, the French - *poilu*.

¹⁸ "But neither had the Allies always been wholly innocent and, in any case, it was a far cry from these acts to the allegations . . . made with regard to German outrages" (Laqueur 1982:9). "Britain and its allies were in no position to take the moral high ground . . . The line separating 'good' from 'evil' in the First World War was not clearly drawn," *Spotlights on History - Alleged German 'War Crimes'*, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlights/alleged.htm>, last accessed December 1, 2010.

the Great War. Scholars and the public began to take interest in the means by which Allied propaganda had advertised German atrocities. As more media researchers studied propaganda techniques and their application and exposed the lies and distortions of wartime propaganda, the number of those individuals who were inclined to see “German atrocities” as myths, as mere products of Allied war hysteria and propaganda, also increased.

Today’s scholars see the causes of this shift of perspective in feelings that, “once the goal was attained, it was possible to disregard the pretext for the punishment meted out at Versailles”,¹⁹ in undercover activities of the *Kriegsschuldreferat* that bribed foreign journalists and scholars,²⁰ in a “gender bias” in postwar commemoration that emphasized male, soldierly suffering in opposition to female, civilian suffering,²¹ or simply in a general desire to draw a line under the war, in a “Pacifist turn” in society²² - “the heroism of the troops is enough for ordinary people who passionately want to return to normality.”²³

Though certainly all of these factors did play a role, an important point seems to have generally been overlooked in the discussion: with their way of reporting, the Allied media had completely undermined the credibility of the war-related news they had been serving up to the public in wartime.²⁴ From the beginning of the hostilities, movies and the press had been telling a pack of lies.²⁵ The cruel reality of war was

¹⁹ Becker 2008:72.

²⁰ E.g. Zuckerman 2004:267-268.

²¹ Gullace 2011b.

²² Horne/Kramer 2001, chapter 10.

²³ Becker 2008:71.

²⁴ For the Australian media, which were completely dependent on British news sources, see e.g. Williams 1999:175, or Anderson/Trembath 2011:44. For the French press, see e.g. Paddock 2004:56-58,60.

²⁵ To preclude being strawmanned by critics, I am stating here explicitly that, of course, Allied media coverage of war-related *facts* was truthful in most cases. But I contend that this should be self-evident and justifies neither omitting inconvenient facts, nor spreading distortions and obvious falsehood, nor packaging the news in hate speech against the enemy.

carefully hidden from the public. Instead, a kitsch portrait was presented: the war as a resounding and glorious success, the battles as “marvelous,” “pretty” and “thrilling duels.” The own troops were “super soldiers,” “gallant fighters,” whose morale was always excellent. Fear, pain, or agony was unknown to them.

Enemy losses were exaggerated and successes ridiculed, own losses or defeats concealed or downplayed. The own weapons were always technically and numerically superior to those of the “Hun.” Life in the own trenches was comfortable and happy, whereas mud, vermin, and filth were characteristic of (captured) German trenches. Small territorial gains were blown up out of all proportion and broadcasted as decisive steps to victory. What is more, for four long years newspaper readers were assured at least once a fortnight that Germany was at the end of her rope and that it would be a question of only a few weeks when she would have to give up and war would end.

It did not need a scholarly analysis to notice the lies and distortions spread by the media. “Can’t believe a word you read” had long been becoming a kind of catch phrase in the army.²⁶ The returning soldiers brought home this attitude of being suspicious about war-related news. Nobody should be surprised, therefore, that stories about German atrocities were treated with equal suspicion, all the more after some of the biggest lies, such as the “Corpse factory,” had been publicly debunked. Especially in the U.S., where Isolationist thinking had a long tradition, the belief gained ground that the naive Yankees had been tricked into the war by the clever Brits, and that the atrocity stories spread about the Germans had played a paramount role in the game. Books exposing deceptive propaganda used in the Great War, such as Harold Lasswell’s *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), Arthur Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928), or Robert Graves’

²⁶ Montague 1922:98.

Good-Bye to All That (1929), were exemplary of the “Pacifist turn” of the late 1920s and found a wide readership.²⁷

Two Generations Later: The Pendulum Swings Back

During the last decades of the twentieth century, considerable innovations took place in historiography. History was examined under gender and social aspects. Everyday life, minorities of all kinds, and victims of violence stepped out from the shadows of the “big” events and even received preferential treatment in research. Holocaust and genocide studies, memory and reception history originated as new sub-disciplines and developed their own tools of research and interpretation. All this did not only give impulses to the study of contemporary history, but led also to re-examine and revise hitherto generally accepted interpretations of the distant past.

One of the issues taken up again and re-examined was German war crimes perpetrated against civilians during the First World War on the Western front of the European theater of war. Though never completely forgotten, they had moved to the end of the agenda after 1945 in the face of the overwhelming magnitude of the Nazi crimes. They raised, however, interest again when scholars began to search the German past before 1933 for national traits and historic events

²⁷ For bibliographical information, see the “References” section of this book. Harold Dwight Lasswell (1902-1978) was a leading American political scientist and communications theorist, considered by his contemporaries as “the most original and productive political scientist of his time” (Wikipedia). Sir Arthur Ponsonby (1871-1946), British liberal, later Labour, politician with strong pacifist leanings, opposed Britain’s involvement in the First World War. *Falsehood in War-Time* has been reprinted many times until today. There are numerous copies, full or in part, freely accessible on the Web. Most of them seem to have been edited via OCR and contain lots of spelling mistakes. A facsimile of the 1928 U.S. edition is freely accessible, also outside the U.S., on <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015066446223>. Last accessed June 12, 2012. Robert von Ranke Graves (1895-1985) was an English poet, scholar specializing in Classical Greece and Rome, and novelist.

that could be interpreted as preconditions for or precursors of the Holocaust.²⁸ In addition, they became an object of interest for feminist scholars who studied rape as a war crime.²⁹

French, Irish, British, and American scholars took up the issue in the late 1990s and in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Among the wealth of publications, five books shall be mentioned here, as they received prestigious awards or have been frequently quoted in the literature: Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre* (1998), John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914* (2001, German edition 2004), Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium* (2004), Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals* (2007), and Annette Becker again, *Les cicatrices rouges 14-18* (2010).³⁰ Becker is focusing on the events in the invaded and occupied territories of France and devotes the major parts of her books to the occupation period. Horne/Kramer, Zuckerman and Lipkes are focusing on Belgium - Horne/Kramer and Lipkes on the invasion period, and Zuckerman on the occupation.

All authors express their conviction that German outrages took place roughly as described in the wartime French, Belgian and British government reports: that Allied media, in some instances, exaggerated or even brought a false story, but, in principle, reported truthfully about the atrocities; and that, therefore, the scathing criticism Allied wartime propaganda

²⁸ The trend was opened by Daniel J. Goldhagen with *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996). Goldhagen claimed an unbroken history of antisemitism in the German nation. His book made furor in the media, but his thesis was ultimately rejected by the scholarly community.

²⁹ See, e.g., Ruth Harris, "The Child of the Barbarian": Rape, Race and Nationalism in France During the First World War, *Past and Present*, 141 (1993):170-206. See also Gullace 2011b. An additional impulse may have been given by the "Wehrmacht Exhibition," produced by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. The exhibition debunked the myth of the German army's "purity of arms" in World War II. It traveled through Germany, Austria and Luxembourg from 1995 to 1999 and from 2001 to 2004.

³⁰ For bibliographical information, see the "References" section of this book.

was subjected to in Britain and the U.S. by Revisionists during the interwar period was not justified. They also see the invasion and occupation of Belgium and parts of France 1914-1918 as a prelude to - if not a rehearsal of - German occupation politics 1939-1945 and to the outrages perpetrated by Wehrmacht and SS and Police units in the occupied territories in general and in the Holocaust in particular.³¹

All authors agree on a certain view of the reception history of the “German atrocities.” They concede that obvious

³¹ Though widely acclaimed by the media, all books have received substantiated criticism from the profession. The critics are in principle sympathetic to the authors’ cause, but find, to various degrees, fault with the authors’ treatment of their sources: biased selectivity, using translations instead of originals, lack of thorough source criticism. E.g.: “Annette Becker sélectionne donc les réalités qu’elle veut mettre en scène comme elle sélectionne les témoignages qui confirment ses hypothèses de départ” [Annette Becker selects the realities she wants to exhibit like she selects the testimonies that confirm her starting hypotheses], Salson 2010 about Becker 2010. Becker, by the way, relies nearly exclusively on French-language sources. Zuckerman is criticized for using only English-language and no primary German sources (Crim 2005), and Lipkes for no meaningful use of German primary sources and for the use of other German sources only in English wartime translations (B. Campbell 2011:173-174). All authors, in addition, are criticized for lack of thorough source criticism. This holds also for Horne/Kramer whose book receives by far the best mark for complying with scholarly standards, see, e.g., the following reviews: Alon Rachamimow in <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9779>, September 2004, last accessed June 1, 2012; Peter Hoeres in *sehpunkte* no. 7/8, 2004; Christian Hartmann in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of June 14, 2004, p. 12. For reviews of Lipkes’ book, see also Maartje Abbenhuis in *American Historical Review*, vol. 113 no. 3, June 2008, pp. 930-931, and Dennis E. Showalter in *The Historian*, vol. 72 no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 229-230. Another fault the critics find with the books is that all authors show a more or less marked tendency to take incriminating testimonies at face value and to think little of exonerating documents. This is particularly striking in the books of Zuckerman - “Zuckerman describes the atrocities as remembered by Belgian bystanders, foreign reporters, and other unreliable sources with an uncritical eye” (Crim 2005) - and Lipkes, whose style of writing, in addition, makes the impression that he has an ax to grind: “Lipkes makes no attempt to conceal his general contempt for early-twentieth-

falsehood was spread in wartime about German atrocities; nobody defends the “Crucified Canadian,” the “Handless Belgian baby,” or perhaps the “German corpse factory.” But as a consequence of the “Pacifist turn” of the 1920s, they contend, the Revisionist view on history, which declared the crimes of 1914 vile inventions of anti-German propaganda, permeated Western societies and became the master narrative, dovetailing with the German policy of denial of war guilt and crimes, and eventually made the sufferers to “forgotten victims,” until the matter was taken up again around the turn of the third millennium. This view is also shared in principle by authors who have addressed the issue of the credibility of British propaganda in the First World War in general, such as Taner Akçam in the context of genocide denial (Akçam 2005), Adrian Gregory in his excellent study of British society in the First World War (Gregory 2008), or Nicoletta Gullace in several articles published in anthologies and scholarly journals from 2009 to 2011.³²

Within this argument, however, is a good deal of strawmanning. Western societies have never been uniform, and in the interwar period there was neither censorship, nor *Gleichschaltung* (voluntary or forced homogenization of thoughts and expressions). Even if the Revisionists of the 1920s and 1930s were a majority among politicians, influential

century Germany (as well as Germans)” (Smith 2008). A third point of criticism concerning all authors is the conclusions they draw about the German mindset in an effort to explain the indisputable fact that crimes did happen, in which so many different military units were involved that it is impossible to speak of “isolated acts.” Horne/Kramer take the most detached view; they see the atrocities as the result of a collective *franc tireur* hysteria among the German troops that rose from below, but was endorsed by the senior command. On the other side of the spectrum we find Lipkes, who contends that German officers deliberately provoked their men into believing that they were under attack in order to create massacres with the aim to terrorize Belgium into submission. The critics, however, see no water-tight proofs of these hypotheses, and recommend further research to find better founded explanations.

³² For bibliographical information, see the “References” section of this book.

writers and journalists, as well as in the scholarly community - a hypothesis that would have to be proven first - there was no unanimity in Western societies, no “historical consensus,” as Alan Kramer assumed.³³ As U.S. historian Bruce Campbell has remarked, “widespread ignorance or denial of German crimes in the U.S. and Britain” was not “the norm.”³⁴ It seems that today’s anti-Revisionists have succumbed to a similar temptation as their mental adversaries two generations earlier: to “throw the baby out with the bath water.”³⁵

³³ “Seitdem [1928] gehört es zum historischen Konsens, daß die “deutschen Greuel” einen Mythos, ein Produkt der Kriegshysterie und der Propaganda, darstellen”; Kramer 1993:85.

³⁴ B. Campbell 2011:173. For Great Britain and France, Adrian Gregory holds a similar view, pointing, e.g., to “the Michelin guides in English to the battlefields . . . [that] were unambiguous in blaming the Germans for deliberately devastating the region”; Gregory 2008:270.

³⁵ Becker 2008:74.

II.

THE ROOTS OF THE LEGEND

The Standard Narrative and Its Flaws

For a long time, the origins of the “Corpse factory” story have been shrouded in mystery, a fact that should not surprise us. Arthur Ponsonby reminded us that “such clever propagandists” as those who invented and spread the false stories, “are equally clever in dealing with us after the event as in dealing with the enemy at the time.”¹ He and Harold Lasswell were also the first to investigate the history of the “Corpse factory” story. Both relied primarily on revelations made in New York at the end of October 1925 by (then retired) Brigadier General John V. Charteris, wartime head of the British Army Intelligence Office.² As their version has become the “standard” narrative, it will be summarized in the following.

Great Britain had for long been trying to persuade China to declare war on the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies). At the end of February 1917, memories of old rumors about the German *Kadaververwertungsanstalten* and two captured German photographs inspired Charteris to a brilliant coup:

“One of them showed dead German soldiers being hauled away for burial behind the lines, and the other showed dead horses on the way to the soap factory. Knowing the reverence of the Chinese for their ancestors and the uncertainty of Chinese opinion towards the Germans, he thoughtfully

¹ Ponsonby 1928:17.

² Brigadier General John V. Charteris (1877-1946) served in the First World War under Sir Douglas Haig as Chief of British Army Intelligence Officer at the British Expeditionary Force’s headquarters from 1915 until the beginning of 1918. He retired from military service in 1922. From 1924 to 1929 he was Conservative Member of Parliament for Dumfriesshire.

interchanged the titles of the two pictures, and sent the edited material to Shanghai for release.³⁷

General Charteris, fully aware that the reverence of the Chinese for the dead amounted to worship, had the pictures sent to China to incite public opinion against the Germans. Chinese newspapers eagerly took up the “Corpse factory” story and spiced it up with detailed accounts from alleged eyewitnesses. China broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on March 14, 1917. The profanation of the dead ascribed to the Germans is said to have been one of the factors responsible for this decision. On August 14, 1917 China eventually declared war on Germany, and a few days later also on Austria-Hungary.

According to this narrative, in mid-April 1917 the “Corpse factory” story returned to Europe. It appeared first on April 10, 1917 in a Belgian newspaper produced and published in London, was allegedly officially corroborated by a German source on the same day, and went, as of April 16, 1917, into the columns of the British press, from where it spread like wildfire across the world. An important role in this process was played by the Northcliffe press with its flagship *The Times* and its mass-circulation tabloid *The Daily Mail*. Both papers were the first to bring the story, and they dealt with this matter for weeks, hammering it into the brains of their readership.

Despite being until recently accepted by mainstream historiography, the “standard” narrative has some crucial flaws that undermine its credibility. First, back in Great Britain, Charteris steadfastly denied that he had tampered with the photographs in question. He even had an alibi: at the period of time concerned, his office was located in France.

³⁷ Lasswell 1927/1938:207. Thanks to R. Marlin, who draw my attention to this quote. The same text, only slightly altered in the wording, appears in Viereck 1931:147. Lasswell gives as his source “New York Times, 20 October, 1925.” The *New York Times* article, however, mentions a *fat* factory, not a *soap* factory. Lasswell’s (and Viereck’s) slip points to the importance “soap” had gained in the meantime among the alleged products of the “Corpse factory.”

But, as Randal Marlin found out, he used to travel to London every now and then.⁴ The ominous photographs were never seen again, and it is quite possible that they never did exist. At any rate, either in New York, or on his return to Great Britain, Charteris did not tell the truth about the pictures.

Secondly, providing the press of foreign countries with propaganda material was not Charteris' business.⁵ It originally fell under the responsibility of the News Department of the Foreign Office. At the period of time concerned, however, this task had already been assigned to the News Division of the Department of Information, established on February 20, 1917 to coordinate British propaganda activities.⁶ Thirdly, the story, indeed, came back to Europe from China, but only sporadically and already in the first days of March 1917. It was overlooked by the Belgian refugee press that published "German corpse conversion" stories in the last week of March and the first week of April 1917, as well as by the Northcliffe press that mentioned a previous publication in China not before April 24, 1917.

Initial criticism of the hitherto generally accepted narrative was already expressed shortly after Charteris' confession. Investigative journalists suspected that the story originated at a colleague's desk.⁷ "The corpse factory tale has always been regarded as the skeleton in Fleet Street's cupboard," *The Evening Post* from Wellington, New Zealand, wrote on

⁴ Marlin 2002:74.

⁵ "The function of the General Staff was to supply material for military propaganda. Its distribution abroad and the policy (other than military) governing its supply was the function of the Foreign Office." Note by the General Staff on the Organization of Propaganda of December 23, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-103. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 26-28 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

⁶ Minutes of the War Cabinet meeting on February 20, 1917. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-23-1.pdf>, p. 518 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

⁷ Walter Littlefield, "How 'Corpse factory' Story Started," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1925, p. XX5.

December 23, 1925.⁸ This view is shared more or less by modern scholars, who took up the issue toward the turn of the twenty-first century. Arthur Marwick gives “credit for this invention” to *The Times*, Philip Knightley sees the hoax as “another war correspondent’s invention,” and according to Randal Marlin, “the real source for the story is to be found in the pages of the Northcliffe press.”⁹ A closer inspection of the available sources shows that they and the early critics are right to a large degree, but that the role the Reuters news agency, British Army Intelligence, the British Department of Information, the British War Office, and the *Office Belge Patrie et Liberté* of The Hague, Holland, played in the plot must not be underestimated.

It will be shown in the following that in the text of the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story - as published on April 17, 1917 in London by both *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* and on the same day spread worldwide by the Reuters news agency - three main strands of the narrative are discernible:

- a German strand about *Kadaververwertung* (carcass utilization),
- a Belgian strand about “German corpse disposal,” and
- a French strand about “Glycerin” and an “American consul.”

All strands originated at different places and at different times. The author(s) of the “Final version” - for whom we will have to look at an editorial office of the Northcliffe press - ingeniously drew them together in a way that they seemingly corroborated and complemented one another. Crucial in the undertaking were the de-contextualization of a passage from a German war correspondent’s report and the deliberate mistranslation of the German word *Kadaver* as “corpse.” It set the stage for spreading the slogans “The Germans are ghouls”

⁸ “War-Time Lies. Corpse factory Myth. Truth and Propaganda,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, December 23, 1925, p. 3.

⁹ Marwick 1991:252; Knightley 2002:111; Marlin 2002: 74. See also Marlin 2008.

- coined already three weeks prior in a propaganda campaign about the alleged plundering of French graveyards - and "The Germans are cannibals."

An independent British strand about "Margarine from corpse fat" joined the "Final version" a few days later, adding weight and color to the "The Germans are cannibals" motif. Another independent strand of British origin about "Glycerin" led to a "Beta version" of the "Corpse factory" story, which was widely spread in Eastern Asia, Australia and New Zealand about the turn of March 1917. Though not explicitly incorporated into the "Final story," it played an important role in the history of the "Corpse factory" campaign as a test run. In addition, it prepared the ground for the unopposed acceptance of the "Final version" of the story in these regions six weeks later.

The German Story: Kadaververwertung

Still until the last decades of the nineteenth century, people in Germany disposed of the bodies of dead animals in a rather primitive way. The carcasses of smaller animals were simply thrown into a river or a lake; those of bigger ones were collected by the local *Abdecker* or *Schinder* (knacker), who took them to the knacker's yard, the *Abdeckerei* or *Schindanger*. There he flayed them for their hides, which he sold to the tanner for making leather. He also excised fat from the carcasses and sold it to the soap- and candle-maker. The rest then was left in the open for decomposition and as prey for carrion-eating animals. Years later, the bleached bones were collected and burned to lime.

Knacker's yards were situated quite a distance away from human settlements. They were *unheimlich*, eerie. Horror tales were told about them, and they were associated with many taboos. For good reasons, too, since decomposing carcasses were not only producing a bad smell; they were also hotbeds of pathogens which were spread in the vicinity by insects and rodents. What is more, some dangerous animal diseases, such

as anthrax, tuberculosis, or influenza, could be passed on to human beings. All this resulted in the knacker himself and his profession being considered *unehrlich*, dishonorable. People avoided personal contact with him as much as possible, and folktales knew about his connections with sinister powers, with ghosts, witches, and the Devil.

Fundamental changes in society that occurred rapidly after the Reich Unification of 1871 made traditional knackery not only obsolete, but also a threat to the national economy and public health. The fast growth of German cities in the course of an industrialization boom, the appalling living conditions of the lower classes in overpopulated urban neighborhoods and the increased mobility of people and goods through the quickly expanding railway net provided favorable conditions for the outbreak and spreading of epidemic diseases among men and farm animals. It is not surprising, therefore, that the authorities took matters in hand. Among the measures they introduced for the prevention of epidemics there was veterinary control of horses and farm animals, as well as that of dairies and meat-processing plants, restraining home slaughtering in favor of municipal slaughterhouses and proceeding toward a hygienically satisfactory disposal of the carcasses of dead animals and slaughterhouse waste.

Early trials with deep burial or incineration, however, were quickly abandoned in favor of *Kadaverwertung*, carcass utilization by recycling: the hides for leather, the fat for grease or soap-making, the bones for fertilizer, cartilage and connective tissue for glue, and all the rest for *Kadavermehl*, a protein- and mineral-rich supplement to fodder for omnivores, such as pigs or poultry. Around the turn of the twentieth century, nearly all big and medium-sized towns in the German Reich were building factories to this purpose on their outskirts. They had well-defined catchment areas, from which all animal carcasses - including those from pets such as cats or dogs, from wild animals, and from animals from zoological gardens - and all slaughterhouse waste had to be delivered. A Reich law about the safe disposal of draught and farm animal

carcasses, promulgated on June 17, 1911, recommended the installation of carcass utilization establishments nationwide.¹⁰

As modern, industrial institutions, these plants did not call themselves *Abdeckerei* or *Schinderei* any more. The most common name used was *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* (carcass utilization establishment). So, for example, were called the plants at Chemnitz, Plauen, Stolp, Dresden, and Munich, which were all operating already in 1903.¹¹ The plant at Eckbolsheim, a suburb of Strasbourg in Alsace, set up in 1911, called itself *Thermochemische Vernichtungsanstalt* (Thermo-Chemical Destruction Plant).¹² On November 9, 1915 it placed a job offer for a technical and commercial manager in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.¹³ It seems that the plant had a recruiting problem, because it repeated the offer one year later in a professional journal of chemistry: “Gentleman free from military obligations wanted for commercial and

¹⁰ “Gesetz betreffend die Beseitigung von Tierkadavern. Vom 17. Juni 1911” [Law concerning the disposal of animal carcasses. From June 17, 1911]. *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1911, pp. 248-249.

¹¹ Flinzer 1904:472.

¹² Date of establishment taken from: Roger Wiltz, “Saria n’avait pas le choix – Les odeurs, c’est du passé” [Saria had no choice – The smell is passé], *Dernières Nouvelles d’Alsace*, Strasbourg, France, January 5, 2012. Spelling of the name from: “Registre de commerce de Strasbourg” [Strasbourg register of companies] of May 28, 1919, *Journal officiel de la République Française*, July 8, 1919, p. 7043. The plant, of course completely modernized, is operative still today as Saria Industries Sud-Est, 2, rue de Lingolsheim, F-67201 Eckbolsheim, France.

¹³ *Vollständig militärfreier Chemiker, der Apparat- und Kesselbedienung mit übernehmen müßte, zur kauf- [sic] u. technischen Leitung einer Abdeckerei zu sofort gesucht. Angebot und Lohnforderung an Thermochemische Vernichtungsanstalt G.m.b.H, Eckbolsheim-Strasbourg i. Els.* (Chemist completely free of military obligations, who would also have to operate devices and vats, urgently wanted for commercial and technical management of a knacker’s yard. Offer and wage demand to Thermochemical Destruction Plant Ltd., Eckbolsheim-Strasbourg, Alsace), *Frankfurter Zeitung, Erstes Morgenblatt*, November 9, 1915. The advertisement is reproduced for criticism as to the definition of “chemist” in *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Chemie*, vol. 29, p. 353, June 13, 1916.

technical management and operation of vats and devices for *Kadaververnichtungsanstalt*, as our managing director has been drafted into service. Thermo-Chemical Destruction Plant Ltd., Eckbolsheim, Strasbourg.¹⁴

As we will see later, this advertisement played an important role in the French strand of the “Corpse factory” narrative.

Another carcass utilization establishment that we will meet again later was the *Thermochemische Anstalt (Tierkörper-Vernichtungsanstalt)* at Anstois, a neighborhood of Kall, a small town in the Eifel hills, twenty-five miles southwest of Aix-la-Chapelle. It was established by a decree of the Head of the administration of the Schleiden Rural District (*Landrat des Landkreises Schleiden*) of December 19, 1913 and put into operation on January 1, 1914. Its catchment area stretched westward until the Belgian border.¹⁵ Closed down some time after the beginning of the war, it was reactivated by a *Landrat* decree of February 27, 1917 and resumed operation on March 1, 1917.¹⁶ We will meet it again in the Belgian strand of the “Corpse factory” narrative.

The ultra-modern plant at Rüdnitz near Berlin bore the pompous name of *Fleischvernichtungs- und*

¹⁴ *Wegen Einziehung unseres Geschäftsführers suchen militärfr[eien] Herrn zur technischen und kaufmännischen Leitung sowie Bedienung der Kessel u[nd] Apparate für Kadaver-Vernichtungsanstalt. Thermochemische Vernichtungsanstalt G.m.b.H., Eckbolsheim-Straßburg i.E.* In: *Chemiker-Zeitung – Fach- und Handelsblatt für Chemiker, Hüttenleute, Ingenieure, Fabrikanten, Apotheker, Großhändler*, vol. 40 no. 144, Cöthen, November 29, 1916, advertisement page II.

¹⁵ Kreis Schleiden (Eifel), *Verwaltungsbericht für die Jahre 1911 und 1912 nebst den Haushaltsplänen für das Jahr 1913* [Report of the administration for the years 1911 and 1912 and budget for 1913], p. 31; *Unterhaltungsblatt und Anzeiger für den Kreis Schleiden und Umgegend (Amtliches Kreisblatt)* (District gazette), vol. 82, no. 103, December 24, 1913, pp. 1-2 (decree) and 4 (advertisement announcing begin of operation). Thanks to Mrs. Heike Pütz, Euskirchen District Archivist, and Mr. Franz A. Heinen, Schleiden, for providing me with these and related documents.

¹⁶ *Unterhaltungsblatt und Anzeiger für den Kreis Schleiden und Umgegend*, vol. 86, no. 18, March 3, 1917, p. 3 (decree) and 4 (advertisement).

Verwertungsanstalt der Stadt Berlin (Meat destruction and exploitation establishment of the City of Berlin). It was built for the then enormous sum of one and a half million marks. It opened at the end of May 1908 and was, at the time, the most modern *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* not only in Germany, but in the whole world. An emblem of German technological pride, it was presented to the taxpaying public on “Open Days,” and also at international conferences, for example at the Ninth International Veterinary Congress, held at The Hague, Holland, from September 13 to 19, 1909.¹⁷

Moreover, the City Council of Berlin used to arrange guided tours of the plant for the resident domestic and foreign press correspondents, who were even encouraged to bring their “ladies” along.¹⁸ We can safely assume that the Berlin correspondent of the London *Daily Mail*, Mr. Frederic William Wile, a resident of Berlin from 1901 until the outbreak of the war, and his colleague from *The Times*, Mr. J. E. Mackenzie, received such an invitation, too. Both of them we will meet later on. We do not know whether they participated in a tour of the Rüdnitz factory or not, but it is hardly conceivable that they, fluent in German and “Berliners of choice,” did not know what was done in a German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*.

In 1912, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* from Rotterdam, Holland, and the *Sumatra Post* from Medan, Dutch East Indies, brought detailed descriptions of the Rüdnitz plant, submitted by their Berlin correspondents, who just had participated in a factory tour.¹⁹ These reports contain a lot of particulars worth mentioning, as they will appear again about five years later in the description of a “German corpse factory,” allegedly located in the rear of the Western

¹⁷ Zwick 1909:26-27.

¹⁸ *Dames zijn mede welkom*. “Duitsland. Een stedelijke vilderij” [Germany. A municipal knacker’s yard], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, Rotterdam, Holland, May 25, 1912, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; “Wetenswaardigheten. De kringloop der natuur” [Worth knowing. The cycle of nature], *Sumatra Post*, Medan, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, July 10, 1912, p. 5.

front. Therefore, a summary compilation of these reports will be given in the following paragraphs.

The whole establishment, we learn, has the appearance of a factory. It is off-limits to unauthorized persons, has a rectangular shape, and is located in a sparsely populated, wooded region, about twenty miles north of the city center of Berlin. It is surrounded by a huge wall so that nobody from outside it can see what is done inside, and it is connected by a special railroad link to the main line Berlin – Tangermünde - Stettin. In its close vicinity, living quarters for the factory staff have been built. All dead animals and all slaughterhouse waste from Berlin arrive at the plant by train in special wagons.

The factory is separated into a “dirty” and a “clean” side. On the “dirty” side, the wagons from the city arrive and are unloaded. The carcasses are flayed, dismembered and, together with the slaughterhouse waste, boiled under high pressure in “digestors.” Through sluices, the semi-finished products go to the “clean” side, where the final products are manufactured and made ready for dispatch. To prevent contamination, the separation between the two sides is strictly enforced. For example, no contacts between the workers of both sides are permitted on the premises, not even during breaks. A special department on the “dirty” side deals with animals that died from a contagious disease. Their carcasses are not flayed, but go directly into the digestors. The workers there are subject to a rigorous regime of disinfection, they wear protective clothing and are strictly isolated from their environment.

The factory is producing mainly fat, glue, and *Kadavermehl*. Though its main goal is a sanitary and hygienic one, the factory has shown to be also a profitable enterprise, yielding a three per cent annual return of the invested capital.²⁰ It may be of some interest to remark that the Rüdnitz plant, of course adapted to modern standards, is still operative as *Tierkörperbeseitigung und -verwertung Rüdnitz G.m.b.H.*²¹

²⁰ My calculation from the data given in the Dutch reports.

²¹ Address: Rüsternstraße 76, D-16321 Bernau, Germany.

It seems necessary, in view of the later disputes about the meaning of the German word *Kadaver*, to make a small digression into linguistics here. The German language has two words that denote the dead body of a human being or an animal. There is first the word *Leiche*. It is of Germanic origin, cf. Dutch *lijk*, Danish *lig*, Norwegian *lik*, or Middle English *lich*, which still appears in Modern English in compounds, such as *lichhouse* or *lichgate*. A variant is *Leichnam*, which is used in elevated speech and always denotes the corpse of a human being or of Christ. In standard German, *Leiche* is the word commonly used for a human corpse. Only as the second part of a composite, it can also refer to a dead animal, for example in the word *Tierleiche*.

The other word is *Kadaver*, the German spelling of Latin *cadāver*. In Latin, for centuries the language of science and scholarship in Europe, it denotes both human and animal dead bodies.²² It has, with the same double meaning, found entry into the Romance languages, the successor languages of Latin, for example as French *cadavre*, Spanish and Portuguese *cadáver*, Catalan *cadàver*, Romanian *cadavru*, or Italian *cadavere*.

In modern German, as spoken and written in the time of the First World War, the meaning of *Kadaver* was very restricted. Only in the medical profession, where Latin had remained *lingua franca*,²³ was *Kadaver* used in reference to a human corpse, for example in the dissection room of the anatomic institute of a medical school, or among pathologists. In all other contexts, *Kadaver*, in standard German, had only one meaning: the carcass of a dead animal, preferably of a big or a medium-sized creature.²⁴ This held for both everyday

²² In the plural, by the way, the ruins of an ancient settlement.

²³ I remember from personal experience as a patient that, still in the mid-1950s, doctors in hospitals used Latin when they were discussing matters in the presence of patients.

²⁴ Neither the use of *Kadaver* for a human corpse in dubious jokes among students, nor the fact that the German language has the word *Kadavergehorsam* (“blind obedience to superiors”) are counterexamples, as in both cases, *Kadaver* is used metonymically, and not factually. The

and administrative use in all German-speaking countries, as follows from the texts of the relevant laws and implementation decrees.²⁵ No native speaker of German at the time would have associated *Kadaververnichtung* or *Kadaververwertung*²⁶ with humans.

The semantic difference between *Leiche* and *Kadaver* can be best seen in compounds. Words such as *Leichenbegängnis*, *Leichenschmaus*, *Leichenhalle*, *Leichenpredigt*, *Leichenhemd*, *Leichenbittermiene*, *Leichenschändung*, *leichenblass*, etc.,²⁷ all refer to human beings, and the first part of these compounds can never be substituted by *Kadaver*. On the other hand, in a word such as *Kadavermehl*,²⁸ the first part cannot be substituted by *Leiche*.

Some confusion arose when British propagandists found out that some German carcass utilization plants offered both *Kadavermehl* (carcass meal) and *Tierkörpermehl* (animal bodies' meal) for sale. The underlying reason for using different words was that the relevant laws and decrees for the disposal of animal bodies, for administrative reasons,²⁹ distinguished between *Kadaver* on the one hand, and *Tierkörper* and *Tierkörperteile* (parts of animal bodies) on the other hand. *Kadaver* meant the carcass of an animal that had died (or had been killed) because of age, disease, or accident.

word *Kadavergehorsam* was an invention of Protestant anti-Catholic propaganda, quote-mining a passage from the Rule of the Order of the Jesuits.

²⁵ See, e.g., the already mentioned German law from June 17, 1911, or the Austro-Hungarian law concerning animal epidemics from August 6, 1909 (*Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreiche und Länder* 1909, pp. 577-595), or the Luxembourg decree about the utilization of fats and bones from knackeries from August 28, 1917 (*Memorial des Großherzogtums Luxemburg*, August 31, 1917, pp. 985-988).

²⁶ Carcass destruction, carcass utilization.

²⁷ Funeral, funeral meal, mortuary, funeral address, shroud, mournful expression, desecration of corpses, as pale as death.

²⁸ Carcass meal.

²⁹ For statistics, and for knowing who would have to pay for the disposal.

Tierkörper meant a whole animal that had been slaughtered, but was declared, after veterinary inspection, not suitable for human consumption. All other slaughterhouse waste was subsumed with *Tierkörpererteile*.

During the war, the German military established their own carcass utilization plants in the rear of the front, where the carcasses of horses wounded or killed in action, or which had died from disease, and the refuse from field slaughterhouses were processed. As military institutions, these plants were off-limits for civilians and guarded by military personnel. Operation of and trade with them was regulated by orders and instructions, of which the field units had to be reminded from time to time. This was, in general, done by *Tagesbefehle*, orders of the day, announcements relating to personnel and administrative matters issued by a higher command and distributed in a large number of copies. Often they did not contain anything that needed to be kept secret. Therefore most of them were not classified.

One of these, which would later become famous through a propagandistic mistranslation, was the Army Order of the Day (*Armee-Tages-Befehl*) from December 21, 1916, issued by the High Command of the Sixth Army. The second paragraph of its third last item referred to the delivery of dead horses to the military carcass utilization plants and reads as follows:

“5b) Einlieferung in die Kadaververwertungsanstalten:

*Es besteht Veranlassung, wiederholt darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass bei Einlieferung von Kadavern in die Kadaververwertungsanstalten in allen Fällen Ausweise mitzugeben sind, aus denen Truppenteil, Todestag, Krankheit und Angaben über etwaige Seuchen zu ersehen sind.*³⁰”

Translated into English:

“5b) Delivery to the carcass utilization establishments:

³⁰ Reproduced in facsimile by *The Times* of May 18, 1917 (“The Germans and the Dead,” p. 5). The following translation is mine, not that of *The Times*.

It has become necessary once more to lay stress on the fact that every case of delivery of carcasses to the carcass utilization establishments must be accompanied by documents that show the unit, date of death, disease, as well as information as to epidemics, if any.”

Though the German military carcass utilization plants were, not least for safety reasons, off-limits to unauthorized persons, they were not at all kept a secret. They were also shown to war correspondents from neutral countries, though the Germans obviously were aware that enemy propaganda could use their existence for dishonest purposes. An American journalist, for example, remembered that, at the end of a tour of German front-near installations, a General had said to the press people:

“You are welcome to tell all you have seen, except that I would rather you should not mention the Kadaver factory. If you do, the British are sure to say we use human corpses there.³¹”

Especially welcome at the military carcass utilization plants were German war correspondents, and they were encouraged to write about their visits. People at home who were being called upon to ensure that nothing was wasted, neither at home, nor at the workplace, should be shown that the military was willing to set a good example. In the first days of April 1917, two official war correspondents, Karl Rosner from the semi-official *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and Egon Kalkschmidt from Germany’s highly prestigious *Frankfurter Zeitung*, made in passing a visit to the military carcass utilization plant at Neufchâtel-sur-Aisne. They mentioned their impressions briefly in their reports from the battle front. Rosner’s account, as we will see later, would make history.

³¹ Quoted in Hapgood 1920:27.

The Belgian Story, Part I: Corpse Disposal by Burning

The first stories spread by Allied propaganda about a loathsome method the Germans allegedly used for dealing with the bodies of their dead soldiers were tales of burning them under disgraceful circumstances. Nearly all of them came from Belgian sources and were disseminated already in the first weeks of the war.

From August 13 to 18, 1914, Australian newspapers reported about the fighting before the forts of Liège, Belgium. In Holland, “fugitives” - allegedly German deserters, most probably, however, Belgian refugees - told that the Germans, due to the immense losses they were suffering, were clandestinely burning their dead on pyres in heaps of thirty.³² *The Straits Times* from Singapore even knew that they were throwing those corpses that they could not burn just “into the River Meuse to float seawards.”³³ In the course of the German retreat from the Marne in September 1914, the Allied press reported with a few lines about German corpse-burning at Meaux, where it allegedly was also done clandestinely at night,³⁴ and at Reims, where it was said to have polluted the air with its horrible stench.³⁵

³² “German Dead. Buried in Heaps of Thirty,” *The Mail*, Adelaide, August 13, 1914, p. 2, from Amsterdam; “Blocking the Enemy’s Path,” *The Queanbeyan Age*, Queanbey, NSW August 14, 1914, p. 2, quoting the *London Standard*; *The Horsham Times*, Horsham, VIC August 18, 1914, p. 6. New Zealand followed with a month’s delay: “Twentieth Century War. A Thing of Horror. German Tells of Fight before Liège. Men Mowed down in Hundreds by Artillery and Rifle Fire,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, September 18, 1914, p. 4, datelined “Maastricht, August 14.”

³³ “A German Funeral Pyre,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, September 18, 1914, p. 8.

³⁴ “Battle of Meaux. Horrors of War. British in Action,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 14, 1914, p. 9, datelined “London, Sept[ember] 12.” The same in *The West Australian*, Perth, September 14, 1914, p. 7.

³⁵ “Rheims still Assailed. Suburbs Shelled. Revolting Cremation Stenches,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, New Zealand, October 8, 1914, p. 5, datelined “Paris, Oct[ober] 7.”

A detailed description of the way the Germans supposedly were “disposing of their dead as well as of the rubbish of their camps” in France was given by a correspondent of the London *Morning Post*, who “came across one of their funeral pyres.” The *Boches*, he told, had piled up a gigantic structure from “timber well soaked in paraffin” and “over 1,200” corpses “to almost the height of a six-storey house.” The pyre was covering “about an acre of ground” and burned “beautifully for about three days,” after which it “was consumed with its grim contents to the very last cinder.”³⁶ A little bit of math, however, should have shown to an attentive reader that the brave correspondent obviously had overstretched his fantasy. A pyre of these dimensions would have held about 250,000 corpses,³⁷ and open air cremation would hardly have resulted in consuming the pyre “to the very last cinder.”³⁸

In Spain, the Madrid daily *La Correspondencia de España* brought on page one of its November 23, 1914 issue a short notice in its column “The Germans in Belgium”:

“Cremation of corpses. Amsterdam, [November] 20. (Delayed.) According to reports from persons who arrived from Belgium, the Germans are using blast furnaces for cremating the corpses of their dead. In all places where this is done, the stench is unbearable. The corpses are brought to the blast furnaces by special trains, consisting of a locomotive and several wagons for bulk goods.”³⁹

³⁶ “Cremation on the Field,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, Singapore, Malaya, December 12, 1914, p. 10.

³⁷ A grown-up person, lying, occupies not quite one square yard. An acre has 4,840 square yards. That means it holds about 5,000 corpses. A six-storied house, at the time, was about 20 yards high. 5 layers of wood and corpses have a height of approximately 2 yards. The pyre, therefore, would have had 50 layers at 5,000 corpses each, makes a total of 250,000 corpses.

³⁸ As is known from the burning of corpses on pyres at Dora concentration camp, Germany, in February 1945.

³⁹ *Los alemanes en Bélgica . . . Cremación de cadáveres. Amsterdam, 20. (Recebido con retraso.) Según cuentan personas llegadas de Bélgica, los alemanes utilizan algunos altos hornos en la cremación de sus cadáveres.*

On page two of the same issue, *La Correspondencia de España* brought under the headline “Aspects of the War” the report of an unidentified “famous Belgian writer who just came back to England after a trip to Belgium.” It had appeared first in *The Daily Mail*, of which ten thousand copies were delivered daily to the Western front by British military motor cars. The report depicted in great detail the plight of the Belgians under German occupation. At its end, we read about German losses at the Western front:

“Trains full of innumerable wounded [Germans] pass through Brussels night and day . . . A guard opened the door of one of the compartments, and a quick glance gave me a horrible and unforgettable sight. It was a wagon of the dead. They are so numerous that the Germans had to give up burying them on the battlefield. They tie the corpses together with ropes in bundles of four, at their feet and heads, and put them, feet first, into the wagons of the dead . . . This way they are carried to the crematory ovens of Wallonia, where they are incinerated.⁴⁰”

From the Lisbon, Portugal daily *A Capital* we learn where exactly in Wallonia (the southern part of Belgium, bordering on France) the Germans allegedly were burning “the majority of the corpses of their soldiers,” and by which methods:

En todos los puntos donde son efectuadas estas operaciones, el odor es inaguantable. Los cadáveres son transportados hasta los altos hornos en unos trenes especiales, compuesto cada uno de ellos de una locomotora y varios vagones bateas.

⁴⁰ *Visiones de la guerra. El Daily Mail publica un artículo de un escritor belga famoso que acaba de regresar à Inglaterra después de una excursión por Bélgica Trenes repletos de innumerables heridos pasan por Bruselas noche y día . . . Un guardia abrió una portezuela del tren, y de una rápida ojeada contemplé un espectáculo horrible y inolvidable. Era un vagón de muertos. Son tan numerosos, que los alemanes tienen que renunciar á enterrarlos en el campo de batalla. Amarran con cuerdas, por los pies y la cabeza, los cadáveres, en grupos de cuatro, y los ponen de pie en los vagones de los muertos . . . Asi se les conduce hasta los hornos crematorios en la Walonia, donde son incinerados.*

“[T]wo blast furnaces of the Montignies-sur-Sambre [iron and steel] works are running day in, day out, incinerating the many dead who are arriving in full trainloads from the Yser [front].⁴¹”

Three weeks later, the world was informed about other places of alleged German corpse-burning. On December 11, 1914 the Barcelona, Spain, daily *La Vanguardia* printed on page fifteen a short notice coming from - neutral - Holland:

“Amsterdam, 10 [December]. - We have received reports that the Germans have built, near the line Bruges-Ghent, a crematory oven for the incineration of dead soldiers.⁴²”

The pro-British Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* from Amsterdam apparently knew details:

“The trains [with the dead] are being switched to the marshalling yard, which is located in front of the big ‘La Brugeoise’ metal works. We can take for granted . . . that in this factory, an oven for the burning of corpses has been installed.⁴³”

Australians and New Zealanders heard about still another place of corpse-burning, this time within Germany. “Trainloads of corpses continue to be despatched from

⁴¹ *Os alemães . . . [q]ueimam a maior parte dos cadáveres dos soldados, para o que todos os dias funcionam dois altos fornos da fábrica de Montigny sur Sambre, incinerando os numerosos mortos de que chegam cheios comboios inteiros do Yser.* “A batalha nas Flandres”; *A Capital*, November 24, 1914, p. 2. Montigny-sur-Sambre (today’s spelling “Montignies”) was the cradle of the Belgian iron and steel industry. In 1977, it was integrated into the town of Charleroi.

⁴² *Noticias alemanas. Amsterdam, 10.* - *Se nos comunica que cerca de la linea Brujas Gante han construídos los alemanes un horno crematório para la incineración de soldados muertos.* The French news agency *Havas* is given as the source of the news.

⁴³ *Treinen rangeeren op die vage gronden. Deze liggen voor de reusachtige metaalfabriek “La Brugeoise.” En wat we wel aannemen kunnen, is . . . dat er in deze fabriek een oven voor lijkverbranding ingericht is.* “Buitenland. Oorlogs-indrukken” [From abroad. War impressions], *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch Indië*, Batavia, Java, January 20, 1915, p. 5. The news is datelined “11 December” and marked as taken from the *Telegraaf*.

Belgium eastward for cremation. Some are being taken to the German glass factories,” dozens of newspapers reported between December 11 and 19, 1914.⁴⁴ Four days later, we find again the “blast furnaces” as alleged means of disposing of dead German soldiers - “because they have no use for them any more” - in a British newspaper.⁴⁵

In the first days of January 1915, Belgian sources were spreading the news that the Germans were also using Antwerp iron foundries for burning their dead. Their activities were, of course, veiled in utmost secrecy.⁴⁶ Two months later, the German corpse-burning business apparently had upgraded to precious metals. “The silver smelting works in the suburbs of Antwerp have become one of the gruesome depots for the incineration of the dead brought from West Flanders,”⁴⁷ the press was reporting.

⁴⁴ E.g. in *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW (“Trainloads of Corpses Taken Eastwards for Cremation,” December 11, 1914, p. 2), *The Argus*, Melbourne (“German Dead Cremated,” December 12, 1914, p.17), *The Register*, Adelaide, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, etc. A reader of the *Morning Herald* used this news as an opportunity to recommend the use of Sydney’s glass furnaces as municipal garbage burning establishments (“Punting Garbage to Sea,” letter to the editor, December 12, 1914, p. 16). New Zealand papers brought the news on December 11, 1914, e.g. *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei (“Cremating German Corpses,” p. 5), *The Evening Post*, Wellington (“For Cremation. Trainloads of Dead,” p. 7), *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki (“Trainloads of German Corpses. Burned in Glass Furnaces,” p. 8), *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui (under miscellaneous news, p. 2), *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough (“Trainloads of German Dead,” p. 5), *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, and *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne (“Trainloads of Corpses,” p. 5 or 3).

⁴⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, December 15, 1914.

⁴⁶ “Oorlogstelegrammen. Uit België” [War telegrams. From Belgium], *Het Volk – Blad voor de Arbeiderspartij*, Amsterdam, Holland, January 5, 1915, p. 1; “De stilstand van den duitschen handel” [Stoppage of German commerce], *Tilburgsche Courant*, Tilburg, Holland, January 6, 1915, p. 3.

⁴⁷ “Antwerp under Germany. City of Mystery and Desolation. All the Approaches Mined,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, New Zealand, March 5, 1915, p. 8.

A year later, when fighting was raging before Verdun with appalling losses on both sides, a New Zealand newspaper reported that the Germans were taking the bodies of their dead “to Belgium for cremation.”⁴⁸ The Belgians apparently knew, where. An anecdote circulating in the country told about an individual whom the Germans had forced to work as a grave-digger for their dead. He did his job so well that he was promoted. “He is now supervising the cremation of the *Boches* in the blast furnaces of Seraing.”⁴⁹ In Seraing, a suburb of Liège, a big steel works was operating at the time. We will meet it again sometime later.

The story even crossed the Mediterranean Sea. On June 19, 1916 *AHEROUTH*, the only Hebrew-language newspaper published in Palestine in wartime, informed its readers about a news it had received from Denmark via Rotterdam, cautioning, however, that the German news agency Wolffs Telegraphisches Bureau had called it “absolutely baseless”:

“Rumors are circulating that the Germans are carrying the corpses of their fallen soldiers to big furnaces built behind the front lines, incinerating them and so avoiding the time-consuming burial of the slain.”⁵⁰

Propaganda depicting the Germans as a people that cremated - “burned” - their fallen heroes presented the Germans to the world as a nation that had abandoned commonly shared human values, as a people on the way back to darkest paganism.⁵¹ Imputing to them, in addition, that they

⁴⁸ “The War News. The Week’s Summary,” *Kaiparu and Waitematu Echo*, Helensville, New Zealand, March 2, 1916, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *C’est lui maintenant qui est préposé à l’incinération des Boches dans les haut-fourneaux de Seraing*. Massart 1917:95.

⁵⁰ “Shmu’ot kozvot” [Mendacious rumours], *AHEROUTH*, Jerusalem, June 19, 1916, p. 2; romanization of the journal’s title as given on its masthead. For practical reasons, the Hebrew text is not reproduced here. Thanks to Stephanie Rotem from Ramat Hasharon, Israel, who provided me with a copy. See also Rubinstein 1987:10.

⁵¹ In this wave of propaganda, the Northcliffe press was involved already in the first months of the Great War, as the example of *La Correspondencia de España* shows.

were burning their dead in unspecified “great ovens,” in the furnaces of glass works or metal foundries, or disgracefully in blast furnaces together with coke, lime and iron ore, or that they were treating them, as we will see later, like trash in “municipal waste incineration plants,” served to further vilify them in the eyes of all civilized human beings. Look here, said the Allied propagandists, that is the *Kultur* they are so proud of!

A Digression: Cremation on the Battlefield

It did not help the Germans much that they steadfastly denied these accusations.⁵² People are convinced that “where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” A necessary condition for a rumor to be believed, or for a propaganda hoax to reach the masses and, what is more, to make a lasting impression on them, is that the story must be plausible. Let us, therefore, take a look at its kernel of truth. First, the Germans tried to recover their dead after each battle. They tied them together in bundles of three or four - in this respect, the observations of the eyewitnesses are correct - carried them to a collecting point and buried them collectively behind the lines. In some instances, corpses of German soldiers killed in action were also sent to Germany for burial.⁵³

Secondly, the idea that “the Germans were burning their dead soldiers” achieved credibility because civilian crematories had already been operating in Germany for several decades.⁵⁴ Though the ratio of incineration to interment in

⁵² See, e.g., Rubinstein 1987:10.

⁵³ *Nur wenige, hochrangige, prominente oder vermögende Gefallene wurden - überwiegend in der ersten Kriegszeit - in die Heimat nach Deutschland überführt* (Only a few high-ranking, prominent, or wealthy dead were transferred home to Germany, mostly during the first phase of the war); E-mail from *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* to the author, March 31, 2009.

⁵⁴ The first crematorium in Germany opened at Gotha in 1878 (Fischer 1996:209), the second at Heidelberg in 1891, followed in 1892 by Hamburg (Fischer 1996:215).

Germany was less than 1:100 at that time, the world knew that “the Germans burn their dead.” Additionally, there had been precedents in history such as serious proposals for cremation on the battlefield made by individuals within and outside Germany, or cases in which this, indeed, had taken place in recent times - so that such events were still in living memory. Though as we will see not practiced by the Germans themselves, but by members of nations then at war with the Reich (Belgium, France, Japan, Russia), it was an ingenious idea to deflect from one’s own morally questionable behavior by attributing it to the enemy.

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 was one of those wars yet unforgotten in France, Belgium, and Germany. Though its death toll was by far not comparable to that of the Great War, there had been battlefields with tens of thousands of human dead, not to mention thousands of horse carcasses. (Horses and mules, at that time, were the only means of transport on the battlefield.) Their remains had been hastily interred in shallow mass graves immediately after the cessation of the hostilities. But the masses of decomposing corpses and carcasses had polluted the air and contaminated ground and surface water, thus posing a severe hygienic threat to the population living near these places and downstream.

A special problem with international ramifications was created by the battlefield of Sedan (September 1, 1870), upstream from Belgium and close to the frontier, with nearly 6,000 human dead (and a corresponding number of dead horses). In the beginning of 1871, the Belgian press urgently demanded from the Government to arrange its sanitizing. A “Committee for Battlefield Disinfection” was formed at Brussels in February 1871. One of its members was the Belgian chemist Créteur.⁵⁵

With the consent of the French civilian and German military authorities,⁵⁶ Créteur embarked on sanitizing the battlefield

⁵⁵ Frölich 1872:99-100.

⁵⁶ . . . fand hier seitens der französischen Behörden und des deutschen

of Sedan in the beginning of March 1871. He had the mass graves opened and poured tar over the corpses. The whole mass was set on fire with straw soaked in mineral oil, and after less than an hour - according to Créteur's own account - the contents of the mass graves were reduced to one quarter of the initial volume.⁵⁷ The remains were enveloped in a layer of pitch protecting them from exterior agents.⁵⁸ But already in the second half of March 1871, the Germans categorically forbade further cremations of human corpses:

“Disinfect our battlefields, but do respect the German corpses. We cannot tolerate that you uncover the mortal remains of our comrades-in-arms to commit them to the flames; those measures are against our customs, our religion.”⁵⁹

Créteur henceforth only sealed the graves off with a layer of coal-tar and quicklime. This way, he also achieved his goal. The mass graves were sealed and no longer posed a hygienic threat.

In the *Encyclopedia of Cremation* we read that “in the Franco-Prussian War, the Prussian army used portable cremators.”⁶⁰ This statement, however, could not be verified and is most probably based on a rumor. *La Vanguardia* of January 1, 1919, which the *Encyclopedia* gives as its source, does not say a word about the Franco-Prussian War, nor about cremators.⁶¹ German experiments, however, with cremation in

Platzkommandanten das freundlichste Entgegenkommen. Frölich 1872:99.

⁵⁷ Marre 1915:951.

⁵⁸ Frölich 1872:101-102; Nonnis Vigilante 2006:82.

⁵⁹ *Desinfiziert unsere Schlachtfelder, aber achtet wenigstens die deutschen Leichen. Wir können nicht dulden, dass ihr die Überreste unserer Waffenbrüder aufdeckt, um sie den Flammen zu überliefern; diese Maßregel widerspricht unsren Gebräuchen, unserer Religion.* Frölich 1872:102.

⁶⁰ Davies/Mates 2005:416.

⁶¹ *La Vanguardia* is completely on the Web, accessible by googling <“la vanguardia” hemeroteca>. Neither an in-depth inspection of its January 1, 1919 issue, nor a detailed search in its archive for the years from 1914 to 1920 yielded a result.

situ are documented from the battlefield of Metz, where about 30,000 men had died between August 14 and October 27, 1870. "On the grounds of respect for the dead," the Germans used only horse carcasses, no human bodies for their trial runs.⁶² The results seem to have been unsatisfactory; the experiments were aborted.⁶³

Though the results Créteur had achieved with his method of in situ incineration were already seen critically by his contemporaries, for example by Dr. Lante, a Belgian military physician and head of the aforementioned Committee for Battlefield Disinfection,⁶⁴ Créteur's activities at Sedan have been presented by advocates of in situ cremation on the battlefield as clear evidence of its technical feasibility.⁶⁵ They recently have also played a role in the debate between Holocaust "Revisionists," who question the extent of open-pit incinerations at Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibór and Bełżec, and their "anti-Revisionist" adversaries.⁶⁶

For the period of time following the Franco-Prussian War, a large-scale open-air burning of corpses is reported from

⁶² *Aux environs de Metz, ce procédé ne fut pas employé* [Around Metz, this procedure (incineration of human corpses, J. N.) was not applied]; Marre 1915:951.

⁶³ According to "Revisionist" Carlo Mattogno: <http://www.cwporter.com/sedanhoaxupdated.htm>. Last visited April 5, 2009.

⁶⁴ See Frölich 1872: 102-103.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Erichsen 1887:138, or Richardson 1893:39. In a certain sense, also Zimmermann 2000:245.

⁶⁶ Holocaust "Revisionist" Carlo Mattogno, for example, sees the results of Créteur's cremations at Sedan, as reported by Créteur himself and stressed by his contemporaries (the corpses were only charred, but not reduced to ashes), as a proof that open-pit burning of corpses could not have worked as described by perpetrators at war crimes trials and survivors of the camps (Mattogno in <http://www.cwporter.com/sedanhoaxupdated.htm>; last accessed April 5, 2009). John C. Zimmermann, however, quotes Erichsen 1887, who misquoted Créteur's results, and concludes: "If the Belgians could do this in 1871, Germany certainly had the capability to improve on the process 70 years later" (Zimmermann 2000:245-246). See also the exchange between Zimmermann and Mattogno in Zimmermann 1999 and Mattogno 1999.

the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) at a battlefield near Liaoyang at the end of July 1904: "The bodies of the Russian dead lie so thickly upon the field that the Japanese troops are cremating the bodies in order to save time and for sanitary reasons.⁶⁷"

The Japanese most probably did not have moral problems with this action (contrary to the Christian Russians, for whom the burning of their dead must have looked barbaric) - in Japanese culture, cremation has a long lasting tradition and is the favored way of body disposal. Buddhism and Hinduism both prefer cremation to burial, therefore cremation in societies shaped by these religions (Japan, parts of China, India) is not only socially accepted, but even the method of choice.

The outbreak of the Great War seemed to offer the "Cremationists" on both sides of the conflict a new field for propagating their ideas. Dr. med. Hugo Erichsen, a German-American and President of the Cremation Society of America, went public immediately after the beginning of the hostilities. *The New York Times* reported on August 10, 1914:

"Portable incinerators to be used for the cremation of the dead are to be used by the German Army in the present war, according to advices received yesterday by Dr. Hugo Erichsen of Detroit, President of the Cremation Society of America.

"Cremation as practiced in the conflicts of the past has been of the crudest possible description," said Dr. Erichsen. "The General Staff of the German Army, however, has adopted a portable cremator that will be used on the battlefield and is capable of incinerating twenty-five bodies an hour. The ash, whenever possible, will be returned to Germany for burial."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ "Latest Telegrams"; *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, Port Darwin, Australia; July 29, 1904, p. 3.

⁶⁸ "Portable War Cremators. Germans to Burn Dead on Field, Physician Hears"; *The New York Times*, August 10, 1914, p. 4. The same text appeared in *The Chicago Tribune* of August 10, 1914, on page 3, and in provincial newspapers, such as *The Fairport Herald*, Fairport, NY, of August 19, 1914, p. 5, or *The Genoa Tribune*, Genoa, NY, of September 18, 1914.

It seems, however, that for Erichsen, an ardent advocate of cremation, the wish was father to the thought. “Not a single document pointing to plans of the German General Staff to set up mobile crematoria does exist,” declares the Office of Military History Research, Potsdam, Germany.⁶⁹ It is also doubtful whether the device Erichsen had in mind did have the incineration capacity stated by him.⁷⁰

On the other hand, German engineers had, indeed, been experimenting with the construction of mobile crematoria already some time ago, and in 1887 the first German portable cremator saw the light of day.⁷¹ But portable cremators obviously were never used by the Germans on the battlefield,⁷²

⁶⁹ *Auch gibt es keinerlei Aufzeichnungen über eventuelle Planungen des deutschen Generalstabes für die Errichtung solcher mobilen Krematorien.* E-mail from *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* Potsdam, Germany, to the author, April 7, 2009.

⁷⁰ The state-of-the-art crematoria ovens built for Birkenau in 1942-1943 had a nominal cremation capacity of four corpses per hour and receptacle (see letter from the Central Construction Office (*Zentralbauleitung*) Auschwitz to the SS Economic and Administration Main Office (*SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt*) of June 28, 1943; facsimile in Piper 2000:158). Even if we assume that this state of technology was already achieved in 1914, a mobile crematorium with a capacity of 25 corpses per hour would have needed six receptacles. Together with its auxiliary apparatus and fuel storage rooms, it would have been quite an enormous installation.

⁷¹ Fischer 1996:225.

⁷² *Es gab keine Krematorien für Gefallene. Uns sind keine Ausnahmen bekannt.* (There were no crematoria for soldiers killed in action. No exceptions are known to us.) E-mail from the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, the official German organization that takes care of the graveyards of fallen German soldiers worldwide, to the author, March 31, 2009. *Die Vorschriften waren eindeutig und ließen keine Verbrennung zu. Unsere Umbetter, die an allen früheren Fronten Tote geborgen haben und noch heute bergen, haben nichts gefunden, was darauf hinweisen könnte.* (The regulations were unambiguous and did not permit cremation. Our people who, until today, have reburied the dead on all former fronts have never found anything that could have pointed to cremation.) E-mail from the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* to the author, April 1, 2009. *Nach einer intensiven Recherche in der uns*

for the same reasons that the French would abandon this idea some time later: too little throughput rates with regard to the masses of dead in modern battles, too complicated to operate, hampering combat activities, problems of fuel logistics, and last but not least: the rightfully feared negative impact that the sight of these installations would have on the morale of the soldiers in the trenches and their families on the “Home front.”⁷³

According to press reports, open-air, in situ mass cremation of fallen enemies - but never of the own dead - was practiced, in some instances, by the French and the Russians in the Great War. During the Battle of the Marne, in September 1914, the Allies liberated large parts of northeastern France. “Cremation was an option, of course, at least for enemy dead,” remarked Leo van Bergen, a historian of medicine.

“Philip Gibbs walked across the battlefield of the Marne in the autumn of 1914 accompanied by a member of a burial party and spotted several funeral pyres close to piles of German dead. “See there,” he said, “they take some time to burn.” He spoke in a matter of fact way, like a gardener pointing to a bonfire of autumn leaves.⁷⁴”

From Betz, a small town north of Meaux, the press reported that civilians, summoned to sanitize the nearby battlefield, collected about 1,000 British and French soldiers as well as 3,000 German dead. “Many of the latter have been cremated.”⁷⁵

zur Verfügung stehenden Literatur, können wir die Existenz mobiler deutscher Krematorien im 1. Weltkrieg nicht bestätigen. (After in-depth literature research, we cannot confirm the existence of German mobile crematoria in the First World War.) E-mail from *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* Potsdam, Germany, to the author, April 7, 2009.

⁷³ Nonnis Vigilante 2006:83.

⁷⁴ Van Bergen 2009:490, referring to Winter/Baggett 1996:85. “He” here refers to the “member of a burial party,” not to Gibbs. Philip Gibbs (1877-1962) was one of five officially accredited British wartime correspondents. Sometimes he got into trouble with the censors because he steadfastly refused to spread obvious falsehood.

⁷⁵ “Gathering the Bodies,” *The Brisbane Courier*, Brisbane, Australia, September 23, 1914, p. 8. The same on the same day in the following

About the same time, the Austrian army was suffering heavy losses on the Eastern front. On September 18, 1914 the correspondent of the *Morning Post* reported from St. Petersburg - at that time, the Russian capital - that in Galicia,⁷⁶ in terrain recently conquered by Russian troops, “masses of corpses” of slain Austrian and German soldiers were “waiting for cremation.”⁷⁷ Three months later, in the depth of winter, fighting raged in the Caucasus mountains between the Russians and the Turks. The battle of Sarykamysh (December 25, 1914 to January 15, 1915) ended with a devastating Turkish defeat.

“The Turkish losses were appalling. Dead and wounded lie on the ground for miles, and the narrow valleys and mountain roads are dotted with corpses. As the ground is frozen and too hard for burial, the dead are being cremated in heaps.”⁷⁸

It seems, however, that these were the only cases of large-scale cremation on the battlefield practiced during the Great War.

Australian papers: *The Argus*, Melbourne, p. 15; *The Sydney Morning Herald* (“Burying the Dead”), p. 11; *The West Australian*, Perth (“A Paralyzing Fire. French Artillery Reinforcements”), p. 7; *Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD (“The Days of Attila. Doings of the German Huns,” September 24), p. 5.

⁷⁶ “Galicia” was the southeastern part of the Kingdom of Poland. In 1772 it fell under Austrian rule. After the First World War, it became part of the newly established Polish Republic. Eastern Galicia was annexed by the USSR after the Second World War and is now part of the Ukrainian Republic.

⁷⁷ “Nagekomen oorlogsberichten” [Latest war news], *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch Indië*, Batavia, Java, October 17, 1914, p. 2. The news was datelined “September 18 [1914]” and was taken from papers from Malaya, which themselves had borrowed it from the *Civil and Military Gazette*, which had borrowed it from the *Morning Post*.

⁷⁸ “Turkish Debacle – Enemy’s Appalling Losses – Frozen Corpses Strew Roads”; *The Argus*, Melbourne, Australia, January 9, 1915, p. 15. The Digitized Newspapers collection of the National Library of Australia shows more than half a dozen papers that brought this news between January 7 and 9, 1915.

Cremation on the battlefield was also discussed in Great Britain. According to Stephen Southwold, in the early summer of 1918 the British High Command was considering incineration of the own dead and examined plans for field cremators.⁷⁹ Rumors were circulating among the soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force to the effect that, at the Étapes-sur-Mer training camp, a “destructor” was installed for the incineration of the bodies of executed soldiers and of body parts left over from autopsies.⁸⁰ In an article published in June 1917 in an American scholarly journal, a young Harvard scientist “could not help but join in the British lament over the unreasoning sentiment which thus far has prevented the incineration of dead bodies.”⁸¹ The author continued, praising the advantages of cremation over makeshift burial:

“If popular feeling were such that the bodies of those slain in battle could be incinerated, a vast deal of time and trouble would be eliminated, and much more sanitary conditions achieved.”⁸²

In France, cremation on the battlefield remained an issue during the whole period of fighting. In the beginning of June 1915, the French War Ministry instigated, on the advice of the Health Commission of the Parliament, experiments with the cremation of corpses on the battlefield.⁸³ A committee consisting of ten high-ranking personalities - Army officers, hygienists in State and university services, and members of Parliament - was set up. It conducted experiments with open-air, in situ cremation of human corpses and horse carcasses.

⁷⁹ Southwold 1931:116.

⁸⁰ Prüll 1999:146.

⁸¹ Saville 1917:529.

⁸² Ibid. Thorndike Saville (1892-1969) studied at the Laboratory of Sanitation and Hygiene at Harvard University and was graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Civil and Sanitary Engineering. He became one of America’s leading specialists in Hydrology and Water and Sewage Management and represented his country at various international conferences in the 1930s and 1940s.

⁸³ “Lijkverbranding op het slagveld” [Corpse cremation on the battlefield], *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, Rotterdam, Holland, June 15, 1915, p. 1.

Their final report closed with the words: “The Committee has convinced itself that in situ cremation of human corpses and animal carcasses is feasible and can be carried out with makeshift means.⁸⁴” The committee’s report gained international attention, too. *The New York Times*, for instance, summarized it on page three of its June 17, 1915, issue under the headline “French Try Incineration – Cremation on Field Expected to Follow Successful Test.”

But a legal basis for field cremation was still missing. Following the recommendations given by the aforementioned committee, the *Chambre des Députés*, the Lower House of the French Parliament, passed a law on June 18, 1915 permitting the incineration of those dead French, Allied, and enemy soldiers who could not be identified.⁸⁵ The law, however, never came into force. It was toppled by the Senate, the Upper House of Parliament, in January 1916.⁸⁶ French civilian and military hygienists, however, did not give up and continued until the end of the war with their attempts to convince lawmakers of the advantages (and the necessity) of cremation on the battlefield, but to no avail.⁸⁷

The Major British Story: Glycerin from Corpses

Glycerin, a.k.a. glycerol or, with its scientific name, propane-1,2,3-triol, is an integral component of natural fats and oils. They are split up into glycerin and alkali salts of fatty acids - which are the active ingredients of soap - when they are boiled with alkali hydroxides, a process called “saponification.” Such was the state-of-the-art method of making both soap and

⁸⁴ *La commission s’est rendu compte que l’incinération des cadavres de corps humains et d’animaux est une opération réalisable sur place avec des moyens de fortune.* “Autour de la bataille. L’incinération des cadavres sur les champs de bataille” [Around the battle. The cremation of corpses on the battlefield]; *Le Temps*, Paris, France, June 17, 1915, p. 3.

⁸⁵ “The Unidentified Dead. French Government Orders Cremation,” *The Colonist*, Nelson, New Zealand, June 24, 1915, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Capdevila/Voldman 2002:758.

⁸⁷ Nonnis Vigilante 2006:83.

glycerin before and during the war. One pound of natural fat or oil yielded about one and a half ounces of glycerin and, after conditioning for use, about twenty ounces of soap.

Glycerin was an important raw material for the armaments industry. Its nitro-derivative was indispensable - and irreplaceable - for the manufacture of cordite, the propellant explosive used in artillery and machine gun ammunition.⁸⁸ Germany that had imported about half of her needs for fat from overseas before the war, was suffering from a marked "fat gap" due to the British sea blockade, imposed already at the very beginning of the hostilities. Lack of fat, so the Allies hoped, would, among other things, result in lack of glycerin. This would gravely cripple German munitions production and, as a consequence, force the Germans to give up fighting soon.

But Great Britain had also her glycerin problem. As she had, for decades, largely neglected domestic agriculture in favor of cheap imports from her colonies, she was dependent on the influx of goods from overseas, in this case, of fatty raw materials.⁸⁹ Britannia was still ruling the waves, but in the face of the German submarine menace, shortage of glycerin for munitions production seemed imminent and became a matter of public concern. The glycerin problem was discussed in Commons, for example, on May 18, July 27, August 3 and 15, and November 8, 1916, and again on February 8 and 22, and on March 1, 5, and 14, 1917.⁹⁰ On March 13, 1917 it was also a major topic (one of four) at a meeting of the Imperial War Conference.⁹¹ On February 17, 1917, the press informed

⁸⁸ Cordite contained thirty per cent of nitroglycerin, sixty-five per cent of gun cotton, and five per cent of Vaseline. After the Second World War, cordite has been substituted by better propellants and is not produced any more.

⁸⁹ Great Britain imported all cash crops and eighty per cent of foodstuff.

⁹⁰ See the respective protocols of the sittings, on the Web under <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons>.

⁹¹ Imperial Conference Secretariat: Memorandum on Assistance in the War Rendered by the Dominions other than Naval and Military (Including

the public that, “owing to additional demands for glycerine for war purposes,” glycerin would no more be available for medical use, except in very special cases and only when sanctioned by the Ministry for Munitions.⁹²

Toward the end of 1916, the British began to adopt the German system of recycling fat from kitchen and slaughterhouse waste. About the turn of March 1917, they proudly announced in the press and in Commons that the glycerin produced from waste fat and bones collected in army kitchens and slaughterhouses and sold to soap-makers would suffice for the production of the cordite necessary to fire approximately 12.5 million 18-pounder shells annually.⁹³ In addition, a government agency was established which was to assume “control of all fats, oils, and oil seed and their products, including oil cake, soap, and margarine.” It took up work on March 8, 1917, as a branch of the Ministry of Munitions.⁹⁴

The British, however, had to acknowledge that the Germans obviously were not short of ammunition, in spite of the blockade. Where did they get the necessary glycerin from? There seemed to be only one explanation: they were using every ounce of fat they could grab for munitions making, with no consideration for the dietary needs of the population, covertly circumventing the British blockade.⁹⁵ From a Dutch

Munitions) or Financial Assistance, p. 4. *War Cabinet Papers*. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-8.pdf>, p. 17 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

⁹² “Glycerine Cut off. No More Supplies for Chemists,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, April 25, 1917, p. 3. The news is datelined “London, February 17.”

⁹³ “Cordite from Kitchens,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, April 9, 1917, datelined “London, 27th February”; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1917/mar/01/supply>, link to “Mr. Forstek’s statement.” Last accessed December 4, 2011.

⁹⁴ “Britain to Control Fats. New Branch of the Munitions Ministry Is Established,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 1917.

⁹⁵ “One Sardine in a Tin. How Germany Gets Oil. Evading the British Blockade,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, January 14,

newspaper we learn that already in February 1916 *The Daily Mail* wrote that German children are short of milk, as the milk fat is transformed into glycerin.⁹⁶ The press of the Antipodes quoted *The Times* of November 22, 1916, which had published a letter, dated November 14, from Berlin: “[A]n increasing quantity of milk [is used] for the manufacture of glycerine . . . for making explosives.”⁹⁷ In the next months, German milk and butter turned to glycerin became a stock phrase in Allied propaganda on both sides of the Channel.⁹⁸ After America’s

1916, p. 3. Sir William Ramsay, the famous scientist, publicly demanded to take drastic measures: “Fats are the only source for glycerine. I really can’t understand the incredible folly of going on providing these brutes with the means of killing our men.” Quoted in “Science and the War,” *The Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, New Zealand, February 16, 1916, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Als Duitschland het vet uit de melk haalt en dat omzet in glycerine . . . komt het melk tekort voor de eigen kinderen thuis*. “Melk voor de kleine Boches” [Milk for the little Huns], *Het Nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, Batavia, Dutch East Indies, February 15, 1916, p. 6, quoting *The Daily Mail*, without date. “The factories are using all lard and margarine for the manufacture of glycerin,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, February 29, 1916, p. 3 (“Germany from Within. Views of the Hun Press,” sourced “London Times and Sydney Sun Services”).

⁹⁷ “Babes Cry for Milk Used in Explosives. Food Situation in Germany,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, February 8, 1917, quoting *The Times* of November 22, 1916. See also: “Internal Germany,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, January 18, 1917, p. 4 and January 19, 1917, p. 1; “European War. The West Front,” *The Ararat Advertiser*, Ararat, VIC, Australia, January 20, 1917, p. 3; “In Germany,” *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Wanganui, New Zealand, January 25, 1917, p. 1.

⁹⁸ See, e.g.: “Internal Germany. Statement of the Position (‘The Times’ Message),” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, January 18, 1917, p. 4, and January 19, 1917, p. 2; Report on the sitting of the French Senate (Upper House of Parliament) of January 26, 1917, *L’Express du Midi*, Toulouse, France, January 27, 1917, p. 2; “German Soldiers Grumble,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, March 2, 1917, p. 5; “About the Next Move. A Sheaf of Opinions,” *The Register*, Adelaide, SA, March 31, 1917, p. 10; “Le manque de graisse est un fléau terrible pour l’Allemagne” [Lack of fat is a horrible plague for Germany],

entry into the war, U.S. propagandists joined in. "Officials . . . declare that Germany's fat shortage is largely due to the use of fats for the production of explosives," *The New York Times* told its readers, adding that "Germany has long since been forced to discontinue the manufacture of soap in order to conserve the fats for munitions making."⁹⁹

Had the public in Allied countries had an elementary knowledge of chemistry, it should, however, have begun to wonder. Politicians, scientists, and the press told them that glycerin is obtained by saponification of natural fats and oils - and this was, indeed, the only way glycerin was commercially produced in Allied countries until the end of the war. If, then, the Germans were able to fire about the same amount of shells, rockets, and bullets as the British on their sector of the front, not to mention that, on the French and Russian sectors, their artillery was not idle, too - how could it be explained that they had such a tremendous shortage of soap, which should have originated in masses as a by-product of the manufacture of glycerin by saponification? But luckily for the propagandists of all times, the general public is scientifically illiterate.

Indeed, in Germany and Austria, the British blockade had made soap a scarce commodity.¹⁰⁰ People were widely complaining about lack of soap and about the bad washing qualities of the ersatz soap they were supplied with. This, in turn, was eagerly exploited by Allied propagandists. They spread heart-rending stories about the plight of Allied prisoners of

La Croix, Paris, France, April 4, 1917.

⁹⁹ "Finds way to Make Glycerine from Sugar. Government Laboratory Discovery Will Cut the Cost More Than one-Fourth and Save Fats," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1917.

¹⁰⁰ Soap was rationed. In Germany, the average consumer could buy 50 grams (1 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz.) of toilet soap and 250 grams (8 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz.) of soap powder per capita and month. "Bekanntmachung, betr. Ausführungsbestimmungen zur Verordnung über den Verkehr mit Seife, Seifenpulver und anderen fetthaltigen Waschmitteln vom 18. April 1916 (RGBl S. 307). Vom 21. Juli 1916" [Announcement re. bringing into force the decree from April 18, 1916, re. the trade with soap, soap powder, and other fatty detergents], *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1916, pp. 766-771, here: § 2.

war and interned civilians who were suffering hard from lack of soap in German custody, and they never tired to tell their readers that diseases were spreading among German civilians due to the lack of soap for personal hygiene, and that Germans were even ready to trade in their meager food ration for soap. The writer of a lengthy article in an American provincial newspaper, probably vaguely remembering that someone once had called soap “the yardstick of civilization,”¹⁰¹ even assigned to the soap-free German nation a place “among the unwashed, uncivilized and heathen” folks on Earth.¹⁰²

The truth was that the Germans had found another way of producing glycerin than by saponification of natural fats.¹⁰³ As a small amount of glycerin originates as an (unwanted) by-product when sugar is converted into alcohol through fermentation, it suggested itself to try to modify this process toward an increase in glycerin output. Not long after the beginning of the war, the Germans had achieved a satisfactory result. The “Protol”¹⁰⁴ process, devised by Neuberg and his co-workers, was converting nearly one fifth of the sugar input into glycerin.¹⁰⁵ As Germany was producing plenty of

¹⁰¹ Attributed to Sigmund Freud.

¹⁰² “The German Corpse Fertilizer Factory,” *Clinch Valley News*, Tazewell, VA, May 18, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Though Friedel and Silva had already in 1872 discovered a method of synthesizing glycerin, its large-scale synthesis from simple organic material was still a long time off.

¹⁰⁴ Name derived from **PRO**pane**TriOL**, the scientific name of glycerin.

¹⁰⁵ Naoum 1922:461. A detailed description of the process is given by Duchenne 1942. A British chemical journal self-critically remarked in 1943 (!): “Germany was producing huge quantities of glycerol by fermentation, and the Allies were so far puzzled that it became possible to gull the British public into the belief that the Germans were distilling corpses from the battlefield!” “Moulds on War Production,” *The Chemical Age – The Weekly Journal of Chemical Engineering and Industrial Chemistry*, London, vol. 48, no. 1245, p. 493. For a critical assessment of fermentation processes vs. synthesis from mineral oil products, see Bentley/Bennet 2008:14-15.

sugar (from sugar beets), she never had a shortage of glycerin during the war.¹⁰⁶

There can be no doubt that British Intelligence long since had known about the way Germans obtained their glycerin. The principle was known since 1857, although most probably technical details of the “Protol” process were kept secret. The neutral press, for example, reported already at the end of 1915 about German methods to produce glycerin (and fat) through fermentation.¹⁰⁷ The already mentioned letter from Berlin, published by *The Times* of November 22, 1916, also gave a clue to attentive readers - “more and more sugar is used in the munition factories” - and on April 2, 1917 (a few days before the U.S. declared war on Germany, and press censorship was introduced), *The New York Times* wrote, “And as for sugar, well, Germany manufactures millions of tons of it every year. She used to export about 3,000,000 tons annually. Now she is using it for glycerine and the manufacture of munitions.”¹⁰⁸

British propagandists, however, decided to keep this fact a secret from the public. They found a much better way to explain to their audience where the “Hun” got his glycerin from: from the fat of the corpses of his soldiers killed in action. Rumors to that effect had been circulating in London already in 1915.¹⁰⁹ Lady Cynthia Asquith, for example, noted

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g. an official German statement repudiating rumors in the British press about a lack of crucial material for munitions production: “Kein Mangel an Munitions-Rohstoffen” [No shortage of raw materials for munitions-making], *Guhrauer Anzeiger*, Guhrau, Silesia, April 29, 1917, p. 1; “Deny Munitions Shortage. German Officials Insist They Can Meet All Demands,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 1917.

¹⁰⁷ “Vet-winning uit gist” [Fat-winning from yeast], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, November 1, 1915, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Oscar King Davis, “German Privation Next to Starving,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1917. As of May 1917, John R. Eoff and his co-workers began studying methods of increasing the glycerin output of sugar fermentation for the U.S. Internal Revenue Division (cf. Duchenne 1942:45; Eoff et al. 1919). The method devised by them, however, was not ready to go into production before the war ended.

¹⁰⁹ “The Kadaver Story,” *Manchester Guardian*, Manchester, UK,

in her diary under June 16, 1915: “We discussed the rumour that the Germans utilise even their corpses by converting them into glycerine with the by-product of soap.”¹¹⁰ It is said that the stories had also been offered to a London editor, who, however, rejected them, as being insufficiently supported by evidence.¹¹¹

In the spring of 1916, collections of cartoons by Louis Raemaekers, the famous Dutch artist and propagandist for the Allies’ cause, were issued by several renowned publishing houses in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and the U.S.¹¹² They were distributed in a large number of copies and had many reprints. The “Land & Water” and Doubleday editions even received a semi-official air through the foreword (with a signed portrait) by H. H. Asquith, the British Prime Minister (and father-in-law of Cynthia Asquith).¹¹³

The cartoon collections clearly bear the mark of the British War Propaganda Office, located at Wellington House, Buckingham Gate, London.¹¹⁴ Veiled in top secrecy - and even

October 25, 1925, p. 14. Quoted in “British War Office Awaits Gen. Charteris,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1925, p. 6. See also Clarke 2003.

¹¹⁰ Asquith 1969:44. Cynthia Asquith (1887-1960) was an English writer, famous for her ghost stories. The entry continues in a perhaps dismissive tone: “I suggested that Haldane should offer his vast body as material to Lloyd George.” Viscount Richard Haldane (1856-1928) was a British liberal politician, Lord Chancellor from 1912 to May 25, 1915, when he was forced to resign under the false accusation that he showed German sympathies.

¹¹¹ “Corpse factory story is faked,” *The Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, December 11, 1925, p. 13. “War-Time Lies. Corpse factory Myth. Truth and Propaganda,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, December 23, 1925, p. 3. The “London editor” has never been identified. Was he perhaps the same who declined to bring the “Margarine from corpse fat” story?

¹¹² Stopford 1916; Raemaekers 1916 a; Raemaekers 1916 b.

¹¹³ Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928), English liberal politician, served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1908 to 1916.

¹¹⁴ The commentators of the “Land & Water” and Doubleday editions, e.g., were members of the group of writers and journalists working for

kept secret from Parliament - about twenty-five well-known writers and journalists worked there under the leadership of Charles F. Masterman (1873-1927), a distinguished English writer and liberal politician. The material they produced - pamphlets, books, films, and illustrated newspapers - was directed at foreign targets.¹¹⁵ It was never published under the War Propaganda Bureau's own name.

One of Raemaekers' cartoons shows German soldiers tying the corpses of fallen comrades together for loading on a horse cart. "To the crematorium. German letter: 'We send them in bundles of four'," the caption reads.¹¹⁶ Commenting the cartoon, distinguished English writer Horace A. Vachell struck both the "blast furnaces" and the "glycerin" chord:

"I am told by an eminent chemist that six pounds of glycerine can be extracted from the corpse of a fairly well nourished Hun . . . These unfortunates, when alive, were driven ruthlessly to inevitable slaughter. They are sent as ruthlessly to the blast furnaces. One million dead men are resolved into six million pounds of glycerine . . . Time was when the enemy losses sent a shiver down our spinal columns. That time - thanks to the Hun methods - has passed.¹¹⁷"

Either the "eminent chemist" grossly miscalculated the yield of glycerin from a "fairly well nourished Hun" - as we will see later, experts from the scientific journal *The Lancet* calculated a more realistic amount of seven to eight ounces per Hun - or Mr. Vachell misunderstood his source. What is more, even with the most sophisticated "Hun methods," a

Wellington House. See also Wollaeger 2006:131.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum "British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries," prepared by the News Department of the Foreign Office, December 20, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

¹¹⁶ Stopford 1916:145. Without comment and titled "Cannon Fodder," also in Raemaekers 1916 b:24.

¹¹⁷ Stopford 1916:144. Horace Annesley Vachell (1861-1955) was a prolific English writer of novels, short stories, essays, and autobiographical works.

blast furnace would have been the worst possible device for “resolving” dead men into glycerin.

Fragments from France by “Captain” Bruce Bairnsfather, a British humorist and cartoonist who received fame as the creator of “Old Bill,” the archetype of the “Trooper from the Trenches,” was another collection of war cartoons published under the auspices of Wellington House. In one of the cartoons, the artist takes up the “glycerin” motif, portraying an elderly German munitions worker thoughtfully looking into a can used for filling cartridges for artillery shells. The can is decorated with the German Imperial Eagle and bears the inscription GLYCERINE. The caption reads: “Alas! My poor Brother!”¹¹⁸

In mid-February 1917, a worried citizen of Cairns, QLD, Australia, was racking his brains over the problems created for the Mother Country by the shortage of fertilizer for agriculture and of fat for glycerin-making. In a letter to the editor of the *Cairns Post*, he proposed to overcome these difficulties by utilizing the bodies of dead soldiers. Addressing the “sentimental side of the question,”¹¹⁹ he was convinced that “it will be comforting for combatants to know that they have not died in vain, and that their bodies after death will still do good by helping to grow food for the living . . . [and] that their remains will help make explosives and assist in carrying on the war”¹²⁰ to final victory.

Our concerned reader came back to the issue in the beginning of April 1917 with a lengthy letter to the editor, this time wondering “that Germany has not adopted some such plan,” though “we read that over there, there is such a shortage of fats and oils that the authorities are at their wits’ end to

¹¹⁸ Bairnsfather 1917:147. Cartoon reproduced in Hayward 2010, plate 20.

¹¹⁹ “Correspondence. War Wastage,” letter to the editor signed “R. W. Holloway, Cairns,” *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, Australia, February 15, 1917, p. 3. The letter was preceded by a disclaimer: “We do not hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

know what to do.”¹²¹ He listed the products the Germans could obtain from the corpses: neatsfoot oil (“a good dressing for leather”), lubricating oil, axle grease, fertilizer, and glycerin. Two weeks later, his newspaper could reassure him that the Huns, indeed, had got the idea and were producing such commodities out of their soldiers’ corpses.¹²²

Around mid-February 1917 at latest, British propagandists must have decided to project Britain’s own glycerin problem onto the Germans, bundling all old and current rumors about “Glycerin from German corpses,” and forging them into a weapon for psychological warfare. The target chosen was China, a country that hitherto had remained neutral in the conflict, and which the Allies wanted to drag onto their side. From experience, the Chinese, however, had good reasons to trust none of the imperialist powers, neither Central, nor Allied. All, in the past, had cut out parts of China as colonies or extraterritorial enclaves, had invaded the country during the Boxer Uprising¹²³, had imposed on her “unequal treaties,” or even were occupying parts of the country. As long as the imperialist powers were keeping one another in check, the “pro-neutral” party, sympathetic toward Germany, had the upper hand over the “pro-war” party that was in favor of China joining the Allies against Germany.

Things changed, however, to Germany’s disadvantage in the beginning of February 1917. Her resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare (February 1, 1917) also meant a threat to Chinese shipping and sea trade. It gave British

¹²¹ “War Wastage,” letter to the editor, signed “R. W. Holloway, West Cairns,” *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, Australia, April 2, 1917, p. 2.

¹²² “War Wastage,” *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, Australia, April 19, 1917, p. 5.

¹²³ A proto-nationalist uprising against foreign imperialism (“unequal treaties”) and increasing Christian influence, 1898-1901. An alliance of eight nations (Japan, Russia, Great Britain, France, U.S., Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) sent ships and troops and mercilessly quashed the rebellion. The victorious powers imposed on China decades-long payment of enormous sums (“Boxer indemnities”).

diplomacy a trump card for tipping the scales in favor of the pro-war party. From mid-February, the British, supported by the U.S. and Japan,¹²⁴ were applying a carrot-and-stick policy in persuading Government and Parliament of China to break off diplomatic relations with Germany and eventually declare war on her. On the one hand, they offered to postpone payment of the Boxer War indemnities until the end of the war (but not to waive them), to permit China to raise her customs tariff,¹²⁵ and, as a bonus, that all German and Austrian claims on China would be canceled and she would even receive a slice of the cake “Confiscated German property.” On the other hand, Japan threatened China with an ultimatum in case of non-compliance.¹²⁶

As supporting measures, British propaganda was spreading anti-German atrocity tales. But handless Belgian babies, raped French women, crucified Canadians, even Nurse Cavell and Captain Fryatt would not mean much to the Chinese.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ “In connection with the Peking situation Reuter’s Agency learns that the Allies are closely in co-operation in advising China.” “Situation in China. Allies Intervening,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, March 7, 1917, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Also: “China and Germany. Allies’ Offer and United States Expectations,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, March 9, 1917, p. 2.

¹²⁶ “Japan and China. Ultimatum to China. Must Join the Entente,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, March 8, 1917, p. 4. Though the Japanese government made a public denial, the British government (inofficially) appreciated “the fact that Japan has exercised strong pressure on the Chinese government to break with Germany.” Western and General Reports for the War Cabinet, Report no. 6 – Week ending 7th March [1917] (night), p. 7. *War Cabinet Papers*, on the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-146.pdf>, p. 67 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

¹²⁷ Charles Fryatt (1872-1916) was a British merchant marine captain who rammed (or attempted to ram, the sources are contradictory) a German submarine with his ship in 1915. For this bravery, he was awarded official praise in England. On June 25, 1916, Fryatt was captured by the Germans, tried as a “franc-tireur” and executed. British propaganda took up the case as “deliberate, cowardly murder.”

Such things do happen, war is war, and in Chinese eyes, they were not worse than the numerous atrocities committed against Chinese civilians and prisoners of war by the British and their current allies during the Boxer Uprising and in its aftermath, roughly one and a half decades ago, and by far not forgotten. A new, never heard of atrocity, therefore, had to be presented to the Chinese public to vilify the Germans in their eyes. Knowing that the reverence of the Chinese for the dead amounted to worship, it suggested itself to impute to the Germans that they had resorted to desecrating their own dead in a desperate attempt to avoid defeat in the Great War.

According to research done by *New York Times* staff writer Walter Littlefield after the war, already in January 1917 a document invaluable for propaganda use had found its way into the British War Office: the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916. Around Christmas 1916, says Littlefield, “the correspondent of a well-known Amsterdam paper”¹²⁸ had got hold of a copy of the order. In the new year, he brought it to his Amsterdam office. There

“his Chief . . . at once . . . observed its infinite possibilities. If [paragraph 5] (b) could be removed from its context and the German classical, or even medical, interpretation placed on “Kadaver,” the propagandists across the Channel would do the rest.¹²⁹”

The beginning of the order, its paragraph 5b and its end were copied and dispatched to the War Office via the paper’s London correspondent, together with a “covering note” recommending to use the “medical” translation of *Kadaver*.¹³⁰

And the propagandists did do the rest. Paragraph 5b of the Army Order, taken out of its context and adroitly mistranslated,

¹²⁸ “... whose outspoken, pro-Ally sentiments had caused Herr von Müller, the German Minister, to make frequent complaints to the Dutch Government,” Walter Littlefield: “How ‘Corpse Factory’ Story Started,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 1925, p. XX5. The paper mentioned undoubtedly was the strongly pro-British *De Telegraaf*.

¹²⁹ Ibid. In the article, the year “1917” is sometimes misspelled “1916.”

¹³⁰ Ibid. The original apparently remained in Amsterdam.

“proved” that the Germans were exploiting the bodies of their soldier dead. For what purpose, had been rumored for years: glycerin-making. One had only to combine both items, and the “Beta version” of the “Corpse factory” story was born, ready for going into action on the Chinese propaganda front. A people that was using the corpses of its own dead as raw material for its munitions industry rightfully deserved the utter contempt of every decent Chinese. And who in China would have known that shortage of glycerin was a British, not a German problem?

The attack was launched from Shanghai. Generously subsidized by the British government, a “War Propaganda Committee” under the chairmanship of the British consul was active in this town. It distributed propaganda material both directly and by “unveiling itself of the services of the Christian Literature Society, a missionary body with widespread ramifications throughout the interior,” which cared for the translation of the material into Chinese and its distribution among the indigenous population.¹³¹ In addition, Reuters supplied

“a full service of 32,000 words monthly to Shanghai, which is reproduced in English newspapers published in that port. Reduced services are transmitted to Peking and Tien-tsin and other of the more important Treaty Ports, and arrangements exist for the translation of this service into Chinese and its circulation to the Chinese newspapers.¹³²”

On February 26, 1917, *The North-China Daily News* from Shanghai, the most prominent foreign-language newspaper published in China, brought in its column “China’s Issue with Germany” an article, “from our own correspondent,” datelined “Peking, Feb[ruary] 22,” with the headline “How

¹³¹ Memorandum “British Propaganda in Allied and Neutral Countries,” prepared by the News Department of the Foreign Office, December 20, 1916. *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-102. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 10-25 of the pdf-file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

¹³² Ibid.

Feng Kou-Chang Was Converted.” The third part had the sub-headline “How Germans Alienated the Premier.”

“I have already mentioned the pressure that was put upon Tuan Chi-jui to seize China’s opportunity. The Premier, who had consistently believed until quite recently in German victory was, however, ripe for conversion to another view. Conviction came to him, it appears, not from the advocates of the other side, but out of the mouths of the Germans themselves. What first shook him was the proposals for peace. In his oriental mind that was a clear indication of weakness. Then one day the German Minister¹³³ told him the Germans were determined to win, and were prepared even to send their women to the trenches as soldiers.¹³⁴ Tuan thought to himself that the people that contemplated such a step must be in a pretty bad way.

But the matter was clinched when Admiral von Hintze was dilating upon the ingenious methods by which the German scientists were obtaining the chemicals necessary for the manufacture of munitions. The Admiral triumphantly stated that they were extracting glycerine out of dead soldiers! From that moment onward the horrified Premier had no more use for Germany, and the business of persuading him to turn against her became comparatively easy.^{135”}

¹³³ Paul von Hintze (1864-1941). He had retired from the Navy with the rank of rear admiral in 1911 to join the diplomatic service. He served as the German ambassador to Mexico (1911-1914), China (1914-1917), and Norway (1917-1918), and for a short time, from July 16, 1918, until October 7, 1918, as Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs.

¹³⁴ This was a propaganda lie, too (see, e.g., the cartoons reproduced in Avenarius 1921:71, 87, and 97), as women could neither enlist, nor be drafted for military service in Germany. On the other hand, there were many women from Slavic countries (Poland, Serbia, but first and foremost Russia) fighting on the Eastern fronts, and their bravery was highly praised in the Allied press. See, e.g. “Women in the Firing Line,” an item brought by nearly all Australian newspapers around the turn of July 1916, or “Women Warriors,” *The Western Mail*, Perth, Australia, December 1, 1916, p. 38 (taken from *The Daily Telegraph* of London).

¹³⁵ “China’s Issue with Germany. How Feng Kuo-Chang Was Converted.

The article was reprinted on March 3, 1917, in *The North-China Herald*, the weekend edition of *The North-China Daily News*.¹³⁶ These papers were also the source for the only two English-language newspapers from Eastern Asia that could be identified as having brought the von Hintze story. *The Hongkong Telegraph* of March 5, 1917 explicitly gave the *North-China Daily News* as its source.¹³⁷ The *Straits Times* from Singapore brought a literal quote (without giving a source) in an article datelined March 8, 1917. Revealing his suspicion that the story might be fabricated, the editor cautiously added: “The story may not be true, of course, but it is just the kind of boast that a German would indulge in to impress a Chinese.”¹³⁸

From a remark in the same paper of April 19, 1917 it can be concluded that the story about the Germans rendering down their dead for glycerin was also spread in the Chinese-language press. Among miscellaneous small news, the paper quoted “a private letter received at Kuala Lumpur, from a gentleman residing at the Chinese Treaty Ports.” Referring to “the Hun industry of boiling down dead bodies to get glycerine,” the writer remarks that this had “upset the Chinese more than an outsider would think unless he knew of their respect (or is it fear?) of the dead.”¹³⁹

Informal Messages from Berlin,” *The North-China Daily News*, Shanghai, China, February 26, 1917, p. 7.

¹³⁶ “China and the War,” *The North-China Herald*, Shanghai, China, March 3, 1917, p. 446.

¹³⁷ “China and Germany. How Feng Kuo-cheong Was Converted,” *The Hongkong Telegraph*, Hongkong, China, March 5, 1917, p. 4. The news is datelined “Peking, Feb. 22” and annotated “N.C. Daily News.”

¹³⁸ “Letter from China. Momentous Chapter In Her History. From Our Special Correspondent,” subheading “Converts to Truth,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, March 26, 1917, p. 10. The news is datelined “Shanghai, March 8.” The ambassador’s name is misspelled “von Huelze.”

¹³⁹ Untitled item, among a series of miscellaneous brief news, *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, April 19, 1917, p. 6.

Another confirmation was given by *The China Weekly Review* of June 14, 1930. Reviewing Ponsonby's *Falsehood in Wartime*, the author, a resident of Shanghai, remarked:

“[H]ad Mr. Ponsonby conducted his research still further he would have discovered how this particular story was embellished still further for Chinese consumption by stating that the Germans were converting the bodies of dead soldiers into soap.¹⁴⁰” Though not being an embellishment *sensu strictu* - soap and glycerin originate together in the process of saponification of natural fats - the emphasis on “soap” in the story served a double purpose: discrediting the Germans morally, and eliminating German competition from the Chinese soap market.¹⁴¹

It is absolutely inconceivable that von Hintze, a former Navy career officer and an experienced diplomat, should have boasted before the Chinese Premier with a story that could only provoke deepest contempt for his country, all the more that the story was completely unfounded. Johannes Hürter, who meticulously studied a wealth of sources in preparing his edition of von Hintze-related documents,¹⁴² did not find the slightest trace of this event.¹⁴³ The whole thing was obviously concocted by British propaganda professionals. One will have to look for them at the News Division of the Department of Information, the institution responsible for propaganda in the press of foreign countries.

Putting the story into von Hintze's mouth was a brilliant move. It hit two birds with one stone. First, it deeply discredited the Ambassador, the representative of the German Empire and its Kaiser, in Chinese eyes. Secondly, it set a precedent: it laid the blame for making public the alleged foul practice at the Germans' door. As *The Age* from Melbourne,

¹⁴⁰ “An Exposure of Some War-Time Lies,” *The China Weekly Review*, Shanghai, China, vol. 53, no. 2, June 14, 1930, p. 44.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Hürter 1998.

¹⁴³ In an e-mail to the author from January 3, 2012, Johannes Hürter said that he never before heard about this matter.

Australia, put it in retrospective: “The Chinese statesmen did not get their information through an Entente publicity bureau . . . It was the Germans themselves who gave the show away, not out of ignorance or carelessness, but to show how smart and resourceful they were.”¹⁴⁴ When the Northcliffe press launched the “Final version” of the story in mid-April 1917, the blame for the “disclosure” was put on the Germans. British government officials used the same arguments in the autumn of 1925 after Charteris’ revelations in New York. The Australian “Official War Historian” C. E. W. Bean followed in 1934. Nearly a century after the event, the accusation reappeared in publications about atrocities committed by Turks and Germans in the First World War.¹⁴⁵

There was no reaction from the German side to the articles in *The North-China Daily News* or *The North-China Herald*. It seems that they were simply overlooked. German diplomats in China, at that time, had other, more urgent problems. On the one hand, they desperately tried to counter the moves of the Entente.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, they did not have illusions any more about the rapidly deteriorating situation and were preparing for leaving. “Panic of Germans at Peking. Legation Archives Burnt, Guards Disappeared,” headlined *The China Mail* from Hongkong on March 3, 1917, referring to an item in *The North-China Daily News* of February 25.¹⁴⁷ Most probably von Hintze was already busy with packing his bags. China eventually broke off diplomatic relations with

¹⁴⁴ “Why China Broke with Germany,” *The Age*, Melbourne, July 5, 1917, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ Akçam 2005:24-25; Lipkes 2007:613-615.

¹⁴⁶ “The Legation officials are making frantic efforts among the military officers to get them to use their influence to restrain the Government from taking further steps.” “Panic of Germans at Peking. Legation Archives Burnt, Guards Disappeared,” *The China Mail*, Hongkong, China, March 3, 1917, p. 5. The Chinese military still kept good contacts with the Germans, as their army had been trained by German instructors.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

Germany on March 14, 1917. Two weeks later, von Hintze and his entourage with their families had left China.¹⁴⁸

On February 28, 1917 the Reuters news agency delivered the von Hintze story, as a short item of less than sixty words, to newspapers in Great Britain¹⁴⁹ and, “by cable from London,” to the Australian and New Zealand press. On the Fifth Continent, the news received wide coverage on March 1 and 2, 1917, sometimes even twice on consecutive days.¹⁵⁰ It always

¹⁴⁸ *The North-China Herald* reported on March 24, 1917 (datelined March 21 from Peking): “German Minister and staff of 20 leave Peking on Saturday to board the Dutch liner Rembrandt.” Because one safe-conduct was not in order, von Hintze’s departure was delayed for a week (ibid., March 31, 1917).

¹⁴⁹ It was published, e.g., on March 2, 1917 in the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Derby (“Reuter: Chinese Premier’s Disgust at German Methods,” p. 2), and *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh (“German Science,” p. 5), and on March 5, 1917 in the *Limerick Leader*, Limerick, Ireland (“Five Descendants,” p. 4). Neither the *Irish Times*, nor the *Manchester Guardian*, nor - most probably - the Northcliffe papers brought the news.

¹⁵⁰ The news from Reuters appeared in the following New Zealand newspapers on March 1, 1917: *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury (“Dastardly German Device. Glycerine From Soldiers’ Corpses. Chinese Premier Disgusted,” p. 5); *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough (“Disgusted Chinese Premier. Glycerine Extracted From Corpses,” p. 8); *The Evening Post*, Wellington (“The Ghoulish Hun. Glycerine Extracted From Dead Bodies,” p. 8); *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki (“A Disgusting Statement. Glycerine from Corpses,” p. 7); *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington (“China and Germany. Sample of Hun Kultur,” p. 5); *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne (“Huns Disgust Chinese,” p. 3); and on March 2, 1917: *The Evening Post*, Wellington (editorial, unsigned, p. 6); *The Colonist*, Nelson (“Excessive Economy. Utilisation of German Corpses. Chinese Susceptibilities Shocked,” p. 4); *The Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser*, Akaroa (“German Methods Disgust the Chinese,” p. 2); *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Wanganui (“Interesting Items,” p. 3); *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth (“Too Cultured. Revolting German Methods,” p. 3); and in the following Australian papers: *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW (“Chinese Premier Disgusted at German Minister’s Revelation. Glycerine From Dead Bodies,” March 1, 1917, p. 4, repeated March 2, 1917, p. 1); *The Ballarat Courier*, Ballarat, VIC (“Glycerine From Corpses. Huns’ Revolting Practice,” March 2, 1917, p. 3); *Warrnambool Standard*, Warrnambool,

bore sensational headlines, such as “Huns’ Revolting Practice Disgusts China’s Premier,” “The Ghoulish Hun – Glycerine Extracted From Dead Bodies,” or “Dastardly German Device – Glycerine From Soldiers’ Corpses.” The Reuters message did neither borrow from *The North-China Daily News*,¹⁵¹ nor mention a previous publication in this paper. The source of the news was given as “a Shanghai correspondent,” or more precisely, “Reuter’s Shanghai correspondent.” This fact should make one suspicious, as the alleged conversation between the Ambassador and the Premier must have taken place in Peking, quite a distance away from Shanghai. Putting two and two together, we can safely assume that not only the *North-China Daily News*’ unidentified “own correspondent,” but also Reuters’ equally unidentified “Shanghai correspondent,” with their von Hintze stories had their desks in London.

It is conspicuous that the von Hintze story was obviously disseminated by Reuters solely to Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. A thorough inspection of hundreds of internet-accessible Canadian, American, French, Swiss, Italian, Portuguese, and Dutch newspapers, as well as of the respective English-language newspapers from Malaya and Hongkong, for the time from February 20 to March 10, 1917, gave a negative result. With the exception of the two above mentioned papers from Hongkong and Singapore - which borrowed the story directly from the *North-China Daily News* - the von Hintze story is nowhere else mentioned with a single word. This does not mean that the von Hintze story died off. It appeared, for example in *The Times*, *The London and China Telegraph* (in both papers with reference to the publication in the *North-China Herald* of March 3, 1917), the *Twillingate Sun* from New Foundland, several provincial Canadian papers, and again in *The North-China Herald*, but

VIC (“Hun’s Revolting Practice Disgusts China’s Premier,” March 2, 1917, p. 3, repeated March 3, 1917, p. 9).

¹⁵¹ This follows from a comparison of both texts under linguistic aspects.

never before April 17, 1917, the day when the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story was launched.¹⁵²

Everything, therefore, gives rise to the suspicion that the spreading of the von Hintze story at the end of February 1917 was sort of a “trial run.” It showed that a story about the Germans utilizing their dead as raw material for their chemical industry, however dubious and incredible it may have been, was widely accepted by newspaper editors and their readership. The propagandists could set their minds at ease. The public undoubtedly would swallow still more gruesome, less credible stories about the ghoulish Huns hook, line and sinker.

An American Story: Glycerin from Battlefields?

Before the war, the U.S. had been the world’s biggest importer of glycerin. Figures given in the press spoke of annual pre-war imports of crude glycerin worth ten million dollars from Europe alone.¹⁵³ Small quantities went into the drug, food, and cosmetics industries. Everything else was converted into nitroglycerin. Some of it was used in the manufacture of munitions. The lion’s share, however, was absorbed by the country’s thriving mining, civil engineering and oil industries: as a component of solid explosives in the construction of roads and railways and in mining and quarrying, and pure, in its liquid form, for the “shooting” of oil wells, where it worked far better than all hitherto known (and safer to handle) explosives.

¹⁵² “The Germans and the Dead – To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, April 24, 1917, p. 5, and “Chinese and Germany’s Disposal of Dead,” *The London and China Telegraph*, London, April 30, 1917, p. 301, in both cases letters signed “E. H. Parker”; “Why China Broke with Germany,” *Twillingate Sun*, Twillingate, New Foundland, June 6, 1917; “The Foe Within,” *The North-China Herald*, July 14, 1917, p. 3. For the Canadian papers, which brought the story in the third week of May 1917, see Chapter Five.

¹⁵³ See, e.g., “Would Turn to War Dead for Glycerin. Shortage Likely to Cut Explosive Supply,” *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, May 25, 1915, p. 4.

“Shooting” was used to “stimulate” oil wells.¹⁵⁴ Liquid nitroglycerin was poured into cylindrical metal canisters called “torpedoes” and lowered into the borehole down to the oil-carrying stratum, where it was ignited. The explosion softened the rocks up and allowed the oil to flow freely into the borehole, from which it could be pumped to the surface. The amount of glycerin needed in the country for “shooting” oil wells alone can be seen from the fact that for a single “shot,” between sixty and eighty quarts (i.e. about 250 to 300 pounds) of nitroglycerin were needed, and that every week hundreds of oil wells were “shot” in the U.S.

With the outbreak of war, export of glycerin from Europe to the U.S. had suddenly ended. What is more, urgent demand from the side of the Allies, who were willing to pay nearly every price to increase - or at least to maintain - their level of munitions production, had reversed the flow of the glycerin trade across the Atlantic. On May 24, 1915 the Western Nitroglycerin Manufacturers Association met in Chicago, IL, to discuss the situation. It was estimated that “the war was necessitating the use of so much glycerin that the entire supply in the United States would be exhausted within ninety days.”¹⁵⁵ The exploration of oil wells being of special concern for the participants, fear was expressed that soon “the development of oil wells will be stopped” because of lack of nitroglycerin, with all foreseeable negative consequences for the U.S. economy.

Albert Oppenheim, representative of the Marietta Torpedo Company from Marietta, OH - one of the biggest dealers in and manufacturers of nitroglycerin explosives in the country with over twenty branch offices in Ohio and West Virginia¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ For details, see, e.g., the web site of “AnaLog”: http://logwell.com/tech/shot/shooting_overview.html, with many useful links, for instance to the history of oil well shooting. Last accessed May 20, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ “Would Turn to War Dead for Glycerin. Shortage Likely to Cut Explosive Supply,” *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, May 25, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ So they presented themselves on their letterheads. See facsimile of a letter from December 30, 1914, on the Web: <http://www.tumblr.com/>

and a leader in the oil well shooting business - saw only one solution to relieving the stress on the glycerin market caused by the war: "There is no way of increasing the production unless we can make use of the bodies of the horses and men killed on the field of battle."¹⁵⁷

Within the next week, newspapers across the country reported about the meeting, often on prominent pages.¹⁵⁸

tagged/marietta-torpedo-company.

¹⁵⁷ "Would Turn to War Dead for Glycerin. Shortage Likely to Cut Explosive Supply," *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, May 25, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; "Stock of Glycerine is Running Short. Manufacture of High Explosives May Soon Be Brought to Standstill," *The Salt Lake Herald – Republican*, Salt Lake City, UT, May 25, 1915, p. 1; "Supply of Glycerine for Explosives Lacking," *El Paso Herald*, El Paso, TX, May 25, 1915, p. 1; "U.S. Glycerine Nearly Out," *The Spokesman Review*, Spokane, WA, May 25, 1915, p. 1; "Would Use Men's Bodies to Make Nitroglycerin to Kill More Men to ...," *Indianapolis Star*, Indianapolis, IN, May 25, p. 6; "May Use Bodies of War Victims. Animal Sinews Are Needed For Manufacture of High Explosives," *Hamilton Daily Republican-News*, Hamilton, OH, May 25, p. 1; "Glycerine Shortage Will Effect the War," *Neosha Daily Democrat*, Neosha, MO, May 25, 1915, p. 2; "Shortage Appears in Nitroglycerine," *Ogden Standard*, Ogden, UT, May 25, 1915, p. 8; "Glycerine Famine Near. Supply in United States Will Be Exhausted in Ninety Days Owing to War Demand," *St. Joseph News-Press*, St. Joseph, MO, May 25, 1915, p. 10; "Supply of Glycerine Short. American Manufacturers Say War Will Exhaust Amount in United States Unless Production Increases," *Galveston Daily News*, Galveston, TX, May 25, 1915, p. 1; "Glycerine Supply About Exhausted," *The Daily Advocate*, Victoria, TX, May 26, 1915, p. 2; Untitled short notice, *The Washington Herald*, Washington, DC, May 26, 1915, p. 4; "Stock of Glycerine Is Running Short," *The Logan Republican*, Logan, UT, May 27, 1915, p. 3; "Glycerine Almost Exhausted," *The Hartford Republican*, Hartford, KY, May 28, 1915, p. 1; "Stock of Glycerine Short," *Iron County Record*, Cedar City, UT, May 28, 1915; "Bodies of War Victims Wanted for Glycerine," *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Portsmouth, OH, May 28, 1915, p. 7; "Human Bodies for Cannon Food. Sinews of Slain Bodies to Yield Glycerine to Make Shells to Slay more Bodies," *The Commerce Journal*, Commerce, TX, May 28, 1915, p. 4; "A Gruesome Suggestion. Has Scheme for Utilizing Unlimited Supply of Raw Material," *Tipton Tribune*, Tipton, IN, May 28, 1915, p. 3; "Stock of Glycerine is Short. Manufacture of High Explosives May Be Brought to Standstill," *The*

Among twenty-four of them that were analyzed, only five small provincial papers - *The Spokesman Review*, *The Ephraim Enterprise*, *The Wasatch Wave*, *The Grand Valley Times*, and the *Iron County Record* - did not mention Mr. Oppenheim's strange proposal. Perhaps their editors found it indecent and did not want to give it publicity. Taking into account, however, the storm of indignation that swept through the U.S. nearly two years later when Reuters and United Press told the public that the Germans were extracting glycerin from "the bodies of . . . men killed on the field of battle," it is at least surprising that no dissident voice was reported from the meeting, that fifteen among nineteen newspapers printed Mr. Oppenheim's words without any distancing comment, and that in none of the analyzed newspapers a letter to the editor expressing disapproval of Mr. Oppenheim's suggestion could be found.

Four papers implicitly expressed criticism through the headlines: "Gruesome Is Suggestion Made of Only Way to Meet the General Demand for Glycerine" (*Hopkinsville Kentuckyan*), "Would Use Men's Bodies to Make Nitroglycerin to Kill More Men to ..." (*Indianapolis Star*), "Human Bodies for Cannon Food. Sinews of Slain Bodies to Yield Glycerine to Make Shells to Slay more Bodies" (*The Commerce Journal*), and "A Gruesome Suggestion. Has Scheme for Utilizing Unlimited Supply of Raw Material" (*Tipton Tribune*). In an editorial, *The Washington Herald* took up an unequivocal position, calling the suggestion "inexpressibly horrible." With a sigh of resignation, the author, however, closed: "Of course it is easy to figure out that so long as the explosive is used for killing the material for its manufacture will always be

Wasatch Wave, Heber City, UT, p. 1, and *The Grand Valley Times*, Moab, UT, p. 2, both on May 28, 1915, and *The Ephraim Enterprise*, Ephraim, UT, May 29, 1915, p. 2; "Gruesome Is Suggestion Made of Only Way to Meet the General Demand for Glycerine," *Hopkinsville Kentuckyan*, Hopkinsville, KY, May 29, 1915, p. 4; "War's Dead for Glycerin? Bodies of Men and Horses Slain in Battle May Be Used," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 1915, p. 20; "Glycerin May be Made of Dead Men and Horses," *The Chillicothe Constitution*, Chillicothe, MO, June 8, 1915, p. 1.

available.” Most of the big city papers - for example *The New York Times*, the *New York Sun*, the *Washington Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* - did not report about the meeting at all.

With more distance in time, critical voices made themselves heard. *The Bemidji Daily Pioneer* from Bemidji, MN, reported about the meeting on July 9, 1915, pretty belated, but with an ironically distancing comment.¹⁵⁹ Toward the end of July, the news had also crossed the oceans. On July 23, 1915, the *Nieuwsblad van Friesland* from Leeuwarden, Holland, mentioned briefly the proposed utilization of human bodies for glycerin-making under “Miscellaneous war news” and asked rhetorically, if one could not call “somewhat cynical” the idea to be first killed by explosives and then, as a corpse, be used for the manufacture of new explosives?¹⁶⁰

A real storm of indignation, however, broke out in the leftist and liberal press overseas. Not the proposal alone - every nation has its screwballs - aroused fury and anger, but the fact that obviously “not a single person present [at the meeting] protested against the ghoul-like suggestion of this ghoulish gold-bug,” as the *NZ Truth* from Wellington, New Zealand, the country’s most influential liberal weekly, called the nitroglycerin lobbyist from Marietta, OH in its July 24, 1915 issue. The author continued, not mincing his words:

“There was no pretence about the nitro-gang’s suggestion: it was naked and unashamed desire to desecrate the dead for dividends, and grab for gold. The devilish desecration suggestion is as revolting in its callousness as it is typical of War Material Trusts. These Americans, as present-day manufacturers of war munitions to the warring world, are willing to crucify on the cross of commercialism the best instincts of civilisation, respect for the dead. Humanity

¹⁵⁹ Untitled short notice, *The Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, Bemidji, MN, July 9, 1915, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Eerst gedood door ontploffingsstoffen, dan als lijk gebruikt om weer nieuwe ontploffingsstoffen te fabriceren. Wil men zeggen, dat et wat cynisch is?* “Oorlogs-varia,” *Nieuwsblad van Friesland*, Leeuwarden, Holland, July 23, 1915, p. 2.

revolts at the idea of brave men, who fell fighting with the face to their foe, being torn to shreds to make profits for a gang of explosive-manufacturing thieves. The idea is too horrible to be calmly contemplated. In no other place than pork-packing Chicago, immortalised in Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," could such a ghoulish proposal be propounded, in louder tones than a whisper. Manufacturing glycerine from the thews and sinews of dead soldiers - heroes sacrificing their lives for civilisation - is the absolute limit of commercial immorality.¹⁶¹"

The news from Chicago had arrived at a time when Australian and New Zealand troops were suffering considerable casualties in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign.¹⁶² The mere idea that the bodies of their own gallant men - "heroes sacrificing their lives for civilisation" - might be rendered down for munitions production had touched a raw nerve in New Zealand's society. One need not stretch one's imagination to predict how those who shared the *NZ Truth's* views would react when, twenty months later, the world heard from authoritative sources that the "Huns" were doing exactly this with their (and other peoples') dead soldiers. *NZ Truth* returned to the topic on December 4, 1915, expressing deeply felt disapproval of "the minds of an American," for whom apparently

"there was nothing out of the ordinary in the suggestion. It was purely and simply a business proposition, which, if

¹⁶¹ "The Sinews of War. Slaughtered soldiers to be Turned to Account. A Ghoulish Suggestion," *NZ Truth*, Wellington, New Zealand, July 24, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁶² The Gallipoli campaign was a joint British-French offensive that took place on the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli (Turkish *Çanakkale*) from April 25, 1915 to January 9, 1916. Its strategic aim was to capture Constantinople (Istanbul), the capital of the Ottoman Empire, and to secure a sea route to Russia. The attempt failed, and the Allies began to retreat in mid-December 1915. According to official Australian statistics, Australia suffered 28,150 casualties in the campaign, among them 8,709 dead. The figures for New Zealand are: 7,473 casualties, among them 2,721 dead, about a quarter of those who had landed on the peninsula.

adopted, might have led to the saving of thousands of BLOOD-BESPATTERED DOLLARS.¹⁶³

The Maoriland Worker, a weekly published by New Zealand's Left, took up the matter in its November 10, 1915 issue, borrowing from *The Melting Pot*, an American socialist and anti-clerical journal ("A Magazine of Protest," according to its masthead). The author took a more satirical view, proposing to kill people over sixty, the handicapped, the unemployed . . . "if necessary, all the dead could be utilised."¹⁶⁴ At the end, he makes fun of flag-waving patriotism:

"When a patriot of one country killed a patriot of another country he would never know when the dead patriot's glycerine was going to get his goat. His happy consolation would be that if he was killed himself, his own glycerine would kill some other patriot. And then the other patriot's glycerine would kill some more patriots. And so ad infinitum."¹⁶⁵

Another leftist paper, the Dutch *De Tribune – Soc. Dem. Organ*, on March 1, 1916 devoted an editorial to the matter, borrowing from a Hungarian leftist publication, which itself was referring to (unidentified) American and Scandinavian newspapers as sources, an indication that Mr. Oppenheim's proposal had been doing the rounds of the world press. The author used it as an opportunity to fire a broadside against "the 'neutral' American capitalists," and, with a quotation from Karl Marx as his blockbuster gun, against "the Capital" in general.¹⁶⁶

On April 20, 1916, *The Worker* from Brisbane, Australia, borrowed from *Labor Call*, the official journal of New South Wales' Workers Youth, an article that linked the American

¹⁶³ "Hail Columbia!" *NZ Truth*, Wellington, New Zealand, December 4, 1915, p. 6. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁶⁴ "Nitro-Glycerine Manufacturers. Suggest Boiling the Bodies of Dead Patriots into Glycerine," *The Maoriland Worker*, Wellington, New Zealand, November 10, 1915, p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ "Lijkenschennis" [Corpse desecration], *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, Holland, March 1, 1916, p. 3.

proposal to the “German glycerin from dead soldiers” rumors that had been circulating long since in the British Empire. Since February 21, 1916 the Germans were fiercely attacking the ring of forts around Verdun in France, with high casualties on both sides.¹⁶⁷

The article in *The Worker* begins with a literal quotation of the news about the meeting of the Western Nitroglycerin Manufacturers Association, as published in the U.S. press at the end of May 1915. We then read that

“the utilising of the bodies of slaughtered soldiers to make more bombs and shells is said to account for the inexhaustible supplies of explosives with which the Germans are now bombarding Verdun. Every dead German, properly boiled down and mixed with nitric and sulphuric acids, may kill more men after he is dead than when he was alive. That’s German method.¹⁶⁸”

The author, at the end, ironically proposes that

“we ought not to be outdone in this stewed corpse business . . . What a hell of a war we can have if everybody will only consent to be chemicalised into explosives as fast as they die.¹⁶⁹”

As Australia and New Zealand received war-related news from the same (British) sources, it can be assumed that the rumors about German corpse utilization mentioned by *Labor Call* had also reached New Zealand. In the spring of 1916, the “glycerine theory”¹⁷⁰ was discussed among two

¹⁶⁷ The Battle of Verdun was fought between the German and French armies from February 21 to December 18, 1916. It ended with a French tactical victory. French casualties are estimated between 400,000 and 542,000, of which 362,000 were killed in action. The respective figures for the Germans: between 355,000 and 434,000 casualties, of which 336,000 were killed in action. A total of about forty million artillery shells were exchanged.

¹⁶⁸ “Glycerine and Glory,” *The Worker*, Brisbane, QLD, Australia, April 20, 1916, p. 17. *The Worker* does not say when the original article appeared in *Labor Call*, and under which headline.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Editorial, unsigned, *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand,

respected citizens of Wellington. As one of them, the editor of *The Evening Post*, remembered a year later, his friend, a chemist (and obviously a victim of British propaganda), “had been greatly impressed by the difficulty the Germans were in owing from the shortage of animal oils and fats, from which alone glycerine can be obtained.” Remembering “the numerous reports that the Germans . . . seemed regularly to send enormous numbers of dead back to Germany, ostensibly for cremation” - we here have the connection to the “corpse burning” strand of the “Corpse factory” story - and “putting two and two together, the chemist arrived . . . at the conclusion that the bodies were being boiled down for the recoverable fats.”¹⁷¹

From Australia, the article in *Labor Call* crossed the Pacific to British Columbia in Northwest Canada. *BC Federationist* from Vancouver, the official organ of the British Columbia Federation of Labor, brought it in slightly abridged form, preceded by an ironic remark:

“The following . . . is respectfully dedicated to all who may be enthused with patriotic fervor to the extent of being willing to lay down their lives in defense of “Kaiser and Fatherland” . . . If it is true that the German government is manufacturing explosives in the manner hinted at below, it affords added testimony to German efficiency.”¹⁷²

About two hundred miles further south, at Everett, WA, *The Northwest Worker* found the article from *BC Federationist* worth reprinting in its June 1, 1916 issue.¹⁷³ After twelve months, the news had circled the globe and came back to the country of its origin, substantially enriched, however, by a story about the Germans who apparently had taken Mr.

March 2, 1917, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² “Germans Are Fighting, Dying and Exploding for Fatherland. Chemical Science Offers New Opportunities for Patriots – May Do More After They Are Dead Than Before,” *The Northwest Worker*, Everett, WA, June 1, 1916, p. 1.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Oppenheim's suggestions to heart and were following his advice.

The Minor British Story: Margarine from Corpse Fat

Everyone who did his military service - or who read a book that honestly describes life in the military - knows that the rank and file use among themselves a jargon that has not only a lot of words incomprehensible to outsiders, because they refer to items specific to the military, but also many words with meanings different from those in standard, elaborate speech, and quite a few that others would consider inappropriate, vulgar, or even offensive.¹⁷⁴ This observation holds for all armed forces in the world, independent of their structure (professional or conscription) and of the political system into which they are embedded.

In the military, food has always been an object of complaint, typically expressed in pejorative names for foodstuffs. In the First World War, the German *Landser*, for example, called the dried vegetables in his daily ration *Drahtverhau* (barbed wire entanglement), and the margarine distributed to him - of pale white color and often stale - *Leichenfett* (corpse fat). Not nice, indeed, but life in the trenches and dugouts was anything but nice. The *Landser's* jargon only reflected, though broken and distorted, the dire straits in which he found himself. Of course the vegetable mush distributed by the field kitchen was not prepared from barbed wire, and the *Landser's* margarine was not "corpse fat," a wax-like substance originating from the body fat of corpses decomposing in the earth under anaerobic conditions and found at many old cemeteries.¹⁷⁵

People in Allied countries, however, being fed nearly daily with news about the enormous food - and especially, fat -

¹⁷⁴ For current German *Bundeswehr* jargon, see *Das Bundeswehr Lexikon*, on the Web: <http://unmoralische.de/bundeswehr.htm>, last accessed July 21, 2012. Somewhat outdated: Küpper 1986.

¹⁷⁵ The scientific name for "corpse fat" is "adipocere." About its origin, see e.g. Abercrombie 1885:32-33.

shortage in Germany,¹⁷⁶ were susceptible to take at face value the quips about “corpse fat” they heard German prisoners of war making among themselves. Misunderstanding the German compound noun, they interpreted *Leichenfett* as “fat excised or rendered from corpses” - most probably not a malicious mistranslation, such as *Kadaver* into “corpse,” but really a simple misunderstanding.¹⁷⁷ It was no accident that the “Margarine from corpse fat” story began to spread in England during the Battle of the Somme (July 1 to November 26, 1916), in which the Germans alone lost between 400,000 and 500,000 men, among them over 30,000 who went into British captivity and could tell about *Leichenfett*.

About the same time, a - still more unappetizing - “collateral line” of the corpse fat story appeared. Harold Cousins, “a middle-aged and married Oxford graduate . . . working for the ‘Alberta Land Company’ in London,”¹⁷⁸ confided to his diary on July 12, 1916:

“A story on the authority of a Jena professor is to the effect that the dead bodies of soldiers are being used to provide nourishment in the form of rissoles, etc. It is certain that these

¹⁷⁶ Though grossly exaggerated in details, the accounts were, in principle, true. They were spread to demonstrate the effectiveness of the British blockade. The “hunger weapon” was deployed to break the morale of the German “Home front” and so lead to Germany’s collapse. Though effective to a certain degree, it gave rise to the “Stab in the back” legend - for the old German elites a convenient excuse for their failure and for Germany’s defeat. Lack of foodstuffs was also affecting Allied countries. Domestic agriculture suffered from lack of fertilizer, of food for farm animals, but first and foremost from lack of manpower. Municipal parks turned into potato fields and “victory gardens” tilled by housewives were nothing more than a drop in the ocean.

¹⁷⁷ German compound nouns, indeed, are a crux for every learner (and translator). See, e.g. “Kirschkuchen,” a cake made from cherries, “Honigkuchen” (made from honey), “Apfelkuchen” (made from apples), etc. But beware - “Hundekuchen” are biscuits *for* dogs, not made *from* dogs!

¹⁷⁸ Gregory 2008:92.

bodies are not buried in the field, but sent back in bundles of five to be cremated - or otherwise dealt with.¹⁷⁹

Conditioned by anti-German propaganda to give credence to everything bad told about the Germans, the British had no problem with believing that the “Huns” were utilizing their own dead for alimentary use. In mid-April 1917, for instance, a reader of *The Daily Mail* remembered that she had “been aware for some considerable time that German prisoners called their butter ‘corpse fat’,” a fact she had attributed to “their inherent love of filthiness.”¹⁸⁰

At the same time another reader wrote that, in the autumn of 1916, a relative of his on sick leave had told him “that the Germans were extracting fat from the bodies of their dead collected on the battlefield.”¹⁸¹ London newspapermen to whom the reader had offered the story, however, rejected it as incredible, all the more when they heard that the young man on leave, the source of the story, was suffering from “shell shock,” a nervous disorder resulting from exposure to prolonged shelling by heavy artillery. “But it was not a story,” asserted the writer of the letter to the editor, “now every newspaper in the land is publishing the details gathered from the testimony of a Hun in Hunland.”¹⁸²

Down under in New Zealand, the editor of the *Wairarapa Daily Times* had less scruples with regard to “German corpse fat” stories than his London colleagues. On October 19, 1916, the paper surprised its readers with a veritable horror story, “received by a New Zealand merchant from an absolutely reliable source”:

¹⁷⁹ Quoted from Gregory 2008:42. Gregory mentions (endnote 8, p. 306) that *The Scotsman* of November 9, 1914, borrowing from *De Telegraaf* from Amsterdam, already reported about German corpse-burning at Louvain.

¹⁸⁰ “‘Corpse Fat’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 4, letter to the editor, signed “Mary Joly.”

¹⁸¹ “Corpse Fat. Incredible but True,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 5.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

“Enquiries show that the German authorities, in their extreme shortage [of fat], are piling the heaps of dead men from the hospitals into digestors, and drawing off the fat for the making of margarine supplied to their troops at the front.¹⁸³”

The news item has the structure of a “foaftale,”¹⁸⁴ characteristic of urban legends: the story-teller heard it from “a Friend Of A Friend,” who allegedly knew the individual(s) in question personally, or participated himself in the event, or obtained the news from another “absolutely reliable source.”

The *Wairarapa Daily Times* further assured its readers that an “analysis of samples of the margarine that have fallen into the hands of the Allies” showed “that the margarine is composed chiefly of human fat.”¹⁸⁵ How this was possible at a time when neither DNA analysis nor chromatography were known remains the editor’s secret. A year later the news was proudly remembered by the paper as “the first publicity given in the Dominion to the corpse-utilisation factories of the Germans.”¹⁸⁶

The rumors about Germans and *Leichenfett* even found entry into literature. They inspired Siegfried Sassoon, a distinguished British poet and writer, to a satirical poem.¹⁸⁷ A highly decorated officer, Sassoon was on convalescent leave in England in the autumn of 1916. Disillusioned with the way the war was fought, he wrote a cycle of war-critical poems

¹⁸³ “Palatable Butter. What Fritz Is Eating. Human Fat Converted into Margarine,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, New Zealand, October 19, 1916, p. 5.

¹⁸⁴ A specialist term from the scholarly discipline of folktale studies.

¹⁸⁵ “Palatable Butter. What Fritz Is Eating. Human Fat Converted into Margarine,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, New Zealand, October 19, 1916, p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ “The Inhuman Hun,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, New Zealand, November 28, 1917, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Siegfried Loraine Sassoon (1886-1967), English poet, soldier, and novelist. In his war poetry he describes the horrors of the trenches and satirizes the vainglorious “patriotism” of shirkers and war-profiteers on the “Home front.”

- “satires of circumstance,” as a literary critic called them - among them *The Tombstone-Maker*.¹⁸⁸

The poem’s eponymous hero, a war-profiteer, sheds crocodile tears about “scores of bodies” of fallen soldiers that do not get decent burials (with tombstones, of course, on which he is making money). The narrator reveals his hero’s hypocrisy in the final quatrain:

“I told him, with a sympathetic grin,
That Germans boil dead soldiers down for fat,
And he was horrified. “What shameful sin!
“O sir, that Christian souls should come to that!”¹⁸⁹”

Though not documented, it can be assumed that Sassoon was intelligent and critically minded enough not to believe in the ghoulish rumors.

The French Story: Glycerin, Eckbolsheim, and the American Consul

Not only had the British a glycerin problem, but also their French allies. If we can trust the French newspapers, Paris worried more about the way the Germans obtained the glycerin necessary for their armaments industry in spite of the British sea blockade, than about a real or perceived shortage of glycerin for France’s own production of ammunition.¹⁹⁰ One had, however, to be watchful. Not a single drop of French glycerin was permitted to fall into the hands of *les Boches*. In the first days of February 1916, for example, all newspapers published an earnest warning:

“A certain number of French soldiers, prisoners of war in Germany, have asked their relatives for glycerin. The families must absolutely abstain from sending this product. It enters into the manufacture of explosives and will certainly

¹⁸⁸ Campbell 1999:26, 122-123.

¹⁸⁹ First published in May 1917 in the book *The Old Huntsman*, London (Heinemann), p. 45. Quoted here from Sassoon 1918:45.

¹⁹⁰ The lack of respective remarks can also have been the result of censorship.

be confiscated by the German authorities before arrival at its destination.¹⁹¹

About the same time, French propagandists identified corpses of dead soldiers as an important source of glycerin for Germany. *Le Gaulois* from Paris, in its February 25, 1916 issue brought the following news received from its correspondent in Copenhagen, Denmark:

“In certain well-informed circles here, rumors are persistently circulating to the effect that our “supermen,” in order to obtain the glycerin of which they are short and which they urgently need for the manufacture of their explosives, have found a simple solution: utilizing the corpses of killed soldiers.¹⁹²”

The traditional close relations between England and Denmark and the mentioning of “glycerin” as the final product of the alleged corpse conversion give rise to the suspicion that the above mentioned “well-informed circles” had got their “information” from a London gossip factory.

Le Gaulois’ correspondent from Denmark, with the Latin nom-de-plume “Testis” (The Witness), closes with the remark:

“Supposing these macabre rumors are completely baseless, it has, however, been for too long a time that they could

¹⁹¹ *Un certain nombre de soldats français prisonniers en Allemagne ont réclamé à leurs parents de la glycérine. Les familles doivent s’abstenir absolument de tout envoi de ce produit, qui entre dans la fabrication des explosifs et qui serait certainement confisqué par les autorités allemandes avant d’arriver aux destinataires. “N’envoyez pas de glycérine aux prisonniers” [Don’t send glycerin to the prisoners], *Le Petit Parisien*, February 3, 1916, p. 4. The same on the same day, e.g., in *Le Gaulois*, Paris, p. 2 (column “Çà et là”).*

¹⁹² *Le bruit court, ici, avec persistance, dans certains milieux bien informés, que, pour se procurer la glycérine qui leur manque, et dont ils ont grand besoin pour la fabrication de leurs explosifs, nos “surhommes” ont trouvé très simple d’utiliser les corps des soldats tués. “Les neutres. En Danemark,” *Le Gaulois*, Paris, February 25, 1916, p. 2. The news is datelined “February 16.”*

circulate without raising a general feeling of disapproval, not even among the German people.¹⁹³”

“Testis” obviously saw this silence not as an expression of an unwillingness to discuss nonsense disguised as news, but as a tacit confirmation of the story by the Germans.

German imports of fats and fatty raw material from neighboring neutral countries, allegedly used for making glycerin, had always been a thorn in the Allies’ flesh.¹⁹⁴ Imported were first and foremost lard from Denmark, margarine from Holland, and bones and slaughterhouse waste from Switzerland. Since edible fats were urgently needed for feeding both the people at home and in the trenches, it was very improbable that the Germans were using imported margarine and lard for the manufacture of glycerin, whereas bones and other slaughterhouse waste could and would, of course, be used for the manufacture of soap, a really scarce commodity in Germany, yielding glycerin as a welcome by-product.¹⁹⁵

The French press never tired of calling for “filling the loopholes.”¹⁹⁶ The problem, however, was delicate. A military

¹⁹³ *A supposer même que ces bruits macabres soient dénués de tout fondement, c’est déjà beaucoup trop qu’ils puissent circuler sans soulever un sentiment général de réprobation, même au milieu de ce peuple allemand . . .*

¹⁹⁴ The matter was discussed, for instance, in Commons on December 2, 1915 (“Blockade a Success, Cecil Tells Commons. And Great Britain Is in No Serious Trouble with Any Neutral He Asserts,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 1915). In January 1917, the issue was also discussed in the French Senate. See, e.g., the report about a sitting of the Senate in *L’Express du Midi*, Toulouse, of January 27, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ From fresh bones, edible fat was also extracted. See, e.g., “Bone Fat Extraction in Germany,” *The Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry*, Easton, PA, vol. 9, no. 11, November 1, 1917, p. 1063.

¹⁹⁶ For example, Lucien Chassaing proudly stated in *Le Journal* that this newspaper “has widely contributed to limiting, if not causing to vanish, this disastrous leakage” (*a largement contribué à restreindre, sinon à faire disparaître, cette fuite désastreuse*). “Les morts eux-mêmes servent à la Défense” [The dead themselves are serving the defense], *Le Journal*, Paris, March 10, 1917, p. 1.

solution, such as practiced toward neutral Greece not long ago, was politically too risky in the case of Germany's neighbors.¹⁹⁷ Through diplomatic channels and economic sanctions, the Allies, therefore, tried to exert pressure on the neutrals in order to have them restrict their export of foodstuffs to Germany, but to little avail.

There can be no doubt that the responsible persons in France knew how the Germans produced their glycerin - it was Louis Pasteur, the famous French scientist, who in 1857 discovered that glycerin originates as a by-product of sugar fermentation, and French Intelligence was also not sleeping. Even the general public could know. On December 2, 1916, for instance, *Le Temps* printed a telegraph message from Berlin to the U.S. (either intercepted or retransmitted from America) about the new rules for food distribution issued in Germany. Among other things, one could read that the 1916 sugar crop would not only allow to increase the rations, but that, in addition, "the surplus will be used for the manufacture of glycerin."¹⁹⁸

At the end of February 1917 - at the same time, incidentally, when the British launched the Von Hintze story in China - a French-language, strongly pro-Entente Swiss newspaper, the *Gazette de Lausanne*, introduced a new figure into the maze of rumors about German corpse exploitation: the "American consul," another diplomat temporarily off-duty. He was to play an important role in the final version of the "Corpse factory" story a few weeks later.

As a reaction to Germany's resumption of indiscriminate submarine warfare, the United States had severed diplomatic relations with Germany on February 3, 1917. In consequence,

¹⁹⁷ The Allies had occupied part of the country, violating its neutrality, and through a staged coup d'état installed a government that eventually declared war on Germany and her Allies. Contrary to Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality, the violation of Greek neutrality never became a matter of international politics.

¹⁹⁸ "Allemagne. La réorganisation alimentaire" [Germany. The food reorganization], *Le Temps*, Paris, December 2, 1916, p. 2.

U.S. citizens in the diplomatic and consular service were recalled. Most American diplomats left Germany via Switzerland – France – Spain, from where they took a ship home. For weeks, the U.S. press was reporting about their exodus and all its concomitant circumstances nearly daily and in great detail. The first to leave Germany were Ambassador Gerard and his entourage, who arrived in Switzerland on February 11, 1917, followed by the majority of U.S. consuls, who crossed the Swiss border within the next two weeks.

In an article brought by the *Gazette de Lausanne* on February 27, 1917 on its front page, the anonymous author - obviously a staff writer - tells about a conversation he just had with an unidentified individual, called by him *mon interlocuteur*, “my interlocutor.” This person told him that he had recently come from Germany and shortly thereafter met with a small group (“three or four”) of newly arrived U.S. consuls from different German cities, who agreed to be interviewed by him about the present situation within Germany proper, and who were willing to report about their experience in great detail.

We learn from the narration of the writer’s interlocutor that the Germans are suffering from gnawing hunger, that women are forced to do work completely unaccustomed to them, that people, though afraid of the police, publicly show contempt for the ruling elites, that machines in the factories and rolling stock on the railroads are breaking down due to neglect and overload, that mysterious explosions destroy war material, and that a gloomy atmosphere of desperation is permeating society: “Germany is already defeated.”¹⁹⁹ About the food situation, we read in detail:

“Apart from bread, which is course though available in sufficient quantity, the people are reduced to eating dogs and cats. At the markets, one can buy rutabagas, celery ... and

¹⁹⁹ *L’Allemagne est vaincue*. “La situation en Allemagne” [The situation in Germany], *Gazette de Lausanne*, Lausanne, Switzerland, February 27, 1917, p. 1.

wreaths. One sees neither meat, nor poultry, nor fish, nor potatoes. Fats are lacking totally. In the hospitals, the fat from the dead is collected for soap-making.²⁰⁰

The article shows several features - apart from the soap story - that give rise to earnest suspicion. First, the description of the internal and food situation in Germany is grossly exaggerated, emulating current Allied propaganda tales. Secondly, no place, no date, no names are given, neither of the consuls, nor of their interviewer.²⁰¹ The author of the article, in addition, tells his readers that he will not distinguish between his interlocutor's proper testimony and that given by the consuls, which his interlocutor is only "echoing."²⁰² Leaving places, dates, and names unidentified and blurring sources is a standard tool of deceptive propaganda, as it makes verification nearly impossible. To assure the recipient of the veracity of the story, another typical propaganda tool is used here: giving reputable individuals - the consuls - as "credentials." All this leads to the conclusion that the story most probably was an invention of Allied propaganda, and that the *Gazette de Lausanne* was used (or let itself be used) for its spreading.

One and a half weeks later, staff writer Lucien Chassaing of *Le Journal*, a high-circulation Parisian daily, took up the story from the *Gazette de Lausanne* in an article titled "The dead themselves serve the defense" (of the German

²⁰⁰ *En dehors du pain, grossier mais suffisant, le peuple en est réduit à manger du chien et du chat. Au marché, on achète des navets, du céleri ... et des couronnes mortuaires. On n'y voit ni viande de boucherie, ni volaille, ni poisson, ni pommes de terre. Les corps gras manquent absolument. Dans les hôpitaux, on récupère, pour en fabriquer du savon, la graisse des cadavres.* Ibid. The three dots are in the original.

²⁰¹ Concealing the consuls' names could be explained by protecting them, because giving such an interview before debriefing at home would have been a violation of their official duties.

²⁰² *Dans ce qu'«il» me raconte, je ne discerne et ne distingue par conséquent pas ici son témoignage de celui de ces interlocuteurs dont il s'est fait l'écho.* "La situation en Allemagne" [The situation in Germany], *Gazette de Lausanne*, Lausanne, Switzerland, February 27, 1917, p. 1.

Fatherland, of course). In the beginning, he explains in great detail his thoughts about how the Germans get their glycerin to make nitroglycerin for munitions. As a former student of pharmacy, he had an elementary knowledge of chemistry, but was obviously ignorant of biotechnological syntheses. He so declares apodictically: “Glycerin can only be extracted from vegetable or animal fats. Nothing can replace them for this purpose. Up to now, no synthesis allows to prepare glycerin without them.”²⁰³

He then points to the ways Germany has hitherto used to get fats: circumventing the British sea blockade through imports from neighboring neutral countries (luckily now blocked through the efforts of the writer and *Le Journal*), and desperately tapping the last domestic fat reserves: maybugs, grape seeds, and everything fatty from slaughtered cattle and pigs. But all this, he says, “is insufficient and subject to exhaustion.”

So the Germans must have found another, seemingly inexhaustible source of fat for their glycerin production. “Here is the proof for it,” he says, triumphantly presenting a copy of the job offer for a technical and commercial manager, placed by the Eckbolsheim carcass utilization plant in the *Chemiker-Zeitung* in November 1916.²⁰⁴ That precisely this advertisement caught Chassaing’s eyes may be explained by the fact that he was an Alsatian and most probably knew about the existence of this factory, which was serving the metropolitan area of Strasbourg, the capital of Alsace, in the same way as the Rüdnitz plant was serving the Berlin metropolitan area.

He then gives a - correct - translation of the advertisement into French, followed, however, by a gross misinterpretation

²⁰³ *Or, la glycérine ne peut s’extraire que des corps gras, végétaux ou animaux. Rien ne saurait les remplacer pour cet usage. Aucune synthèse, jusqu’à ce jour, ne permet de la préparer sans eux. “Les morts eux-mêmes servent à la Défense”* [The dead themselves are serving the defense], *Le Journal*, Paris, March 10, 1917, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ *Tout cela est insuffisant et s’épuise. En voici la preuve:* Ibid.

of the French word *cadavres* as “corpses,” the dead bodies of human beings, and concludes:

“That means, the matter here is not only destruction by heat, but also chemical treatment and corpse exploitation. The statements made to the *Gazette de Lausanne* of February 28 [*sic*] by an American consul, who left Germany together with Mr. Gerard, completely corroborate this point of view. Look where our enemies have arrived in order to provide themselves with explosives, more necessary today for them than bread!²⁰⁵”

Chassaigne apparently did not carefully read the article in the *Gazette de Lausanne* to which he is referring. Apart from giving an erroneous date of publication, he merges the “three or four” consuls of the original text into one person, “*the American consul*,” to whom all testimony henceforth will be attributed. What is more, he changes the alleged collecting of fat from dead bodies in hospitals for soap-making to a processing of whole corpses in a carcass utilization plant in order to make glycerin. Note, however, that he does not speak of dead soldiers as “raw material.”

There can be no doubt that Chassaigne very well knew what kind of *cadavres* was treated at Eckbolsheim. The factory - and what was done there - was well known in the region from where he came. He had studied pharmacy, a natural science closely related to biology and chemistry. It can also be safely assumed that he, as an educated individual from traditionally bilingual Alsace, was conversant enough in German to know what *Kadaver* meant in this language.²⁰⁶ His treatment of the

²⁰⁵ *C'est-à-dire qu'il ne s'agit pas uniquement de destruction par la chaleur mais bien de traitement chimique et d'utilisation de cadavres. Les déclarations faites par un consul américain, qui a quitté l'Allemagne en même temps que M. Gerard, à la Gazette de Lausanne du 28 février, confirment pleinement cette manière de voir. Voilà où en sont nos ennemis pour se procurer les explosifs, plus nécessaires pour eux, à cette heure, que le pain. Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Alsace has always been bilingual, German and French. When it was part of the German Reich - from 1871 to 1918 - German was the official

matter, therefore, can rightfully be called falsifying. To give the story a veneer of credibility, he is quoting from the job offer in the *Chemiker-Zeitung* - giving, however, also a wrong date of publication - and makes a vague reference to a statement allegedly made by a reputable person, the "American consul." It is a technique called by Randal Marlin, who has pointed to its paramount role in modern propaganda, "the faking of credentials."²⁰⁷

In spite of the harsh criticism Chassaigne's article met already on March 11, 1917 in the left-pacifist *L'Œuvre* by the renowned geographer Jean Brunhes,²⁰⁸ it was taken up by the mainstream and lengthily (and approvingly) quoted, for example, in the reputable fortnightly *Mercure de France*, in *Le Journal du Jura*, and in *L'Echo Belge*.²⁰⁹ The Canadian French-language weekly *L'Autorité* reprinted the whole article on April 21, 1917.²¹⁰ A part of Chassaigne's text, beginning with the translated advertisement and ending with "more necessary today for them than bread," quickly crossed the Channel, with *cadavres* translated into "dead bodies," and appeared, for instance, already on March 10, 1917 in Lord Northcliffe's *The Evening News*.²¹¹ It could also be located in New Zealand newspapers, which brought it, however, with considerable delay, though datelined "Paris, March 12."²¹²

language and taught in all Alsatian schools.

²⁰⁷ See, e.g., Marlin 2002 and 2008, also Neander/Marlin 2010.

²⁰⁸ Jean Brunhes: "Le dernier bourrage de crânes: la graisse des cadavres" [The last brainwashing: the fat from carcasses], *L'Œuvre*, March 11, 1917, p. 1.

²⁰⁹ "Nil novi" [Nothing new], *Mercure de France*, March 16, 1917, pp. 374-375. The quotation in *Le Journal du Jura* is mentioned in "Les Nécrophages" [The corpse eaters], *L'Echo Belge*, Amsterdam, April 7, 1917, p. 1.

²¹⁰ "Les morts eux-mêmes servent à la défense" [The dead themselves serve the defense], *L'Autorité*. Montreal, Canada, April 21, 1917, p. 2.

²¹¹ Quoted in "Human Fat for Lubrication. Dead Bodies 'Rendered Down'," *The Amman Valley Chronicle*, Ammanford, Wales, April 19, 1917.

²¹² "Gruesome German Advertisement," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, May 1, 1917, p. 3, datelined "Paris, March 12"; "That Gruesome Story,"

Until today, the “American consul” has remained mysterious. None of the former U.S. consuls in Germany has ever come forward and identified himself as the person mentioned as a crucial witness in the story about a German “Corpse factory,” a story widely spread in the U.S. as of mid-April 1917, which could hardly be overlooked by an individual allegedly involved in it. What is more, a thorough examination of about one hundred U.S. newspapers, covering the period of time between February 15, 1917, when the U.S. consuls set out to leave Germany for Switzerland, and the end of March 1917, when the last of them already was back in the U.S., did not show even a trace of a respective statement made by a U.S. consul, neither in Switzerland, nor after return to America.

Though absence of proof is not proof of absence, there is, however, a strong argument to assume that Chassaing’s story of an “American consul” who,

“on leaving Germany in February [1917], stated in Switzerland that the Germans were distilling glycerine for nitro-glycerine from the bodies of their dead, and thus were obtaining some part of their explosives,²¹³”

was plain fiction, fabricated and spread to vilify the Germans.

The Belgian Story, Part II: Oil and Lubricants From Corpses

When, after the retreat of the Germans from the Marne in September 1914, warfare turned from mobile to positional, the Germans prepared themselves for a long-lasting stay in

The Colonist, Nelson, May 11, 1917, p. 2. Most probably the manuscripts were sent by mail, which may explain the delay in publication. With a year’s delay: “The German Dead. An Admission,” *The New Zealand Observer*, Auckland, March 9, 1918, p. 15.

²¹³ “The Huns and Their Dead. Callous Admission. Factory for Oils and Pig-Food. A Company Run for Profit,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 6, and “Germans and Their Dead. Revolting Treatment. Science and the Barbarian Spirit,” *The Times*, April 17, 1917, p. 5.

Belgium. They set up an entirely new administrative and economic structure, integrating the country into Germany's war economy. Various central offices for resource management were established. One of them was the *Schmierölzentrale* (Central Lubricants Office) at Antwerp, established by a decree of the General Governor for Belgium of June 3, 1915.²¹⁴ A decree of August 14, 1915 widely enlarged its competence, entrusting it with the control of the production and distribution of mineral, vegetable and animal oils and fats, of edible fats, soap products, varnishes, colors, petroleum, etc.²¹⁵ Its name was changed to *Ölzentrale* (Central Oil Office), and its headquarters transferred to Brussels, Anspachlaan 29/31. The Central Oil Office quickly expanded into a big organization that ran branch offices, collecting points, warehouses, and factories in all parts of the country.

A decree of October 11, 1915 made obligatory the delivery of all bones, fresh or boiled, to the Central Oil Office, which would pay for them.²¹⁶ The task of collecting was given to the guild of the "rag-and-bone men." They proved very efficient. From November 1, 1915, when the decree went into force, until June 1, 1916, they collected nearly 6,000 tons of bones, from which nearly 500 tons of fat were extracted.²¹⁷ The Central Oil Office also tried to increase the domestic oil production by motivating the Belgians to cultivate sunflowers on fallow. In spite of the good price offered for sunflower seed, there

²¹⁴ *Verordnung Nr. 82*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer III:93-96.

²¹⁵ *Verordnung betreffend die Zuständigkeit der Ölzentrale*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer IV:150-157.

²¹⁶ *Verordnung betreffend Verwertung von Knochen und anderen tierischen Stoffen*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer V:60-64. The Dutch press also reported about this decree. See, e.g. "Uit Brussel" [From Brussels], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, November 17, 1915, p. 6.

²¹⁷ "Tätigkeit der belgischen Ölzentrale" [Activities of the Belgian central oil office], *Tropenpflanzer – Zeitschrift für tropische Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, vol. 29 no. 6, June 1916, pp. 282-283, here p. 282. In addition to the fat, 460 tons of bone meal for use as fertilizer had been produced. Ibid.

was widespread passive resistance by the population.²¹⁸ The project, in the end, was abandoned as ineffective.

Another yet untapped fat source was animal carcasses, of which the Belgians still were disposing in *vilderijen* (in Flemish) or *clos d'équarrissage* (in French) in traditional manner. The carcasses were destructed, but not systematically exploited, and the remains were brought to special places for disposal, as a rule, by burying.²¹⁹ The Germans, therefore, introduced their system of *Kadaververwertung* in Belgium. On October 29, 1915 the occupation authorities issued a decree about "The utilization of animal carcasses and slaughtered animals not suitable for human consumption."²²⁰ Rules for implementation specified which of the existing *vilderijen* were to be converted to carcass utilization plants.²²¹ Until June 1, 1916, they had processed 1.5 million carcasses, which yielded 366 tons of *Kadavermehl* (for pigs' and poultry food), 93 tons of *Knochenmehl* (bone meal, for fertilizer), and 57 tons of fat.²²²

²¹⁸ See, e.g., Strenge 2007:69-70.

²¹⁹ A Royal decree from December 31, 1900, regulated the disposal of carcasses of animals that had died from epidemics. It was renewed and specified by a German decree from June 27, 1915. *Verordnung betreffend unschädliche Beseitigung der Kadaver seuchenkranker und seuchenverdächtiger Tiere*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer IV:2-4.

²²⁰ *Verordnung betreffend die Verwertung von Tierkadavern und von zur menschlichen Nahrung ungeeigneten geschlachteten Tieren*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer V:127-134.

²²¹ *Ausführungsbestimmungen zu der Verordnung betreffend die Verwertung von Tierkadavern und von zur menschlichen Nahrung ungeeigneten geschlachteten Tieren vom 29. Oktober 1915*. Ibid., pp. 134-136.

²²² "Tätigkeit der belgischen Ölzentrale" [Activities of the Belgian central oil authority], *Tropenpflanzer – Zeitschrift für tropische Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, vol. 29 no. 6, June 1916, pp. 282-283, here p. 282. The anonymous author of the article is quoting an article of one Dr. G. Wegner in the *Kölnische Zeitung*, which most probably was also the source for the detailed account in the *Nieuwe Gorinchemsche Courant*, Gorinchem, Holland, from April 1, 1917 ("De olie-centrale in België" [The Central Oil Office in Belgium], p. 1).

A decree of April 8, 1916 amended the decree of October 29, 1915 and made all carcass utilization plants subordinate to the Central Oil Office,²²³ thus highlighting their importance to the war economy as suppliers of fats. The decree was publicized countrywide through bulletin boards in every rural Belgian town and village. An implementation decree, issued by the German *Bundesrat*²²⁴ on May 26, 1916, and in force also in the occupied territories, ordered that all carcasses and all slaughterhouse waste had to be processed to carcass meal and fat. The decree was widely publicized, so that even the Dutch press reported on it.²²⁵

The central offices for resource management and their branches set up by the Germans should serve the fair distribution of scarce commodities among the indigenous population. So it was told. The locals, however, quickly realized that these institutions were serving first and foremost the interests of the occupant. Therefore, they met general mistrust from Belgian side,²²⁶ and it is not surprising that anecdotes and rumors about them began to circulate among the population. Let us not forget that occupied countries are hotbeds of rumors, and that even the most absurd tales told about the enemy will find their audience, because people “know” that the enemy “is capable of doing such things.”

Objects of general suspicion were the carcass utilization plants, especially those that the Germans had set up for themselves, for example the military plants at Heurne or at 117 Nijverheidslaan, Ghent,²²⁷ or the plant at Vaux-sous-

²²³ *Verordnung betreffend die Beseitigung und Verwertung von Tierkadavern und von zur menschlichen Nahrung ungeeigneten geschlachteten Tieren und Tierteilen*. Huberich/Nicol-Speyer VII:73-83.

²²⁴ The (Second) German Empire was a federalist state (*Bund*), the *Bundesrat* the parliament of the member states, comparable to the U.S. Senate.

²²⁵ “Gemengd nieuws – Het gebruik van afval van doode dieren” [Miscellaneous – The use of waste from dead animals], *Soldatencourant – Orgaan voor Leger en Vloot*, Amsterdam, Holland, July 7, 1916, p. 4.

²²⁶ Strengé 2007:22.

²²⁷ “Die Militär-Abdeckerei Heurne hat ihren Betrieb eingestellt. Dafür ist in Gent (Nijverheidslaan 117) eine grössere Kadaververwertungsanstalt

Chèvremont near Liège, run by the Central Oil Office itself.²²⁸ Like the *vilderijen* of bygone times, they were surrounded by an aura of eeriness, intensified by the fact that they were strictly off-limits to the general public. It is, therefore, not surprising that rumors were originating to the effect that the Germans, on the one hand so ingenious in saving and recycling every bit of raw material, and on the other hand showing such a ruthless disregard for human values in warfare, were extracting oil and lubricants from human corpses in their strange *Kadaververwertungsanstalten*.

Such or similar tales were current in the country and among expatriates, keeping in mind that, in spite of German countermeasures, there was a live exchange of information between occupied Belgium and the refugee communities in Holland. The rumors must have gotten new momentum when, in the beginning of March 1917, the carcass utilization plant at Anstois in the Schleiden Rural District was reactivated, an event widely publicized as the population had to be informed that, from now on, all animal carcasses coming from a vast region that stretched westward until the Belgian border had to be delivered to this and to no other facility.

In all probability we here have the origin of the “Gerolstein” story. It is a long narrative with a wealth of gruesome details

ingerichted worden” [The military knacker’s yard at Heurne has ceased to work. Instead a bigger carcass utilization plant has been established at Gent, Nijverheidslaan 117], *Der Landsturm*, Aalst, Belgium, March 21, 1916, p. 7. *Der Landsturm* was a German frontline paper. The Ghent facility was also mentioned in the Dutch press. The German authorities had permitted the citizens of Ghent to slaughter dogs for consumption. Dogs’ meat declared by the veterinary as not fit for human consumption had to be delivered to this institution. “Een officiele hondenslachterij” [An official dog butcher’s], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant – Algemeen Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, April 10, 1917, p. 1, datelined “Antwerp, April 7,” and *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, Tilburg, April 11, 1917, p. 3; “Hondenvleesch in België” [Dog meat in Belgium], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, Rotterdam, Holland, April 10, 1917, p. 2, and *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, Holland, April 12, 1917, p. 3.

²²⁸ Von Köhler 1925:103.

about a top secret factory hidden deep in a thick forest in the sparsely populated Eifel hills near the small town of Gerolstein, in which the Germans allegedly were boiling down their dead soldiers for oil and lubricants in a fully mechanized manufacturing process. According to a news item promulgated on April 27, 1917 by Wolff's Telegraphisches Bureau, the official German news agency, the "Gerolstein" story was spread by a circular issued by the *Office Belge* (Belgian Bureau) under the headline "The fat from the dead" and was first published on March 23 and 24, 1917 by Belgian expatriate papers.²²⁹ It appeared, for instance, right under the masthead on the front page of the March 24, 1917 issue of *L'Echo Belge*.²³⁰

The story was offered by the *Office Belge* to Dutch newspapers, too.²³¹ We will find it later, in April 1917, also in the French press. The *Office Belge de la Propagande* (Belgian Propaganda Bureau), the propaganda department of the Belgian Government-in-Exile that had taken up residence in Sainte-Adresse, an upper-class suburb of Le Havre, France, apparently did not spread the story,²³² most probably as it was

²²⁹ "Ekelhafte Verleumdungen" [Disgusting slander], *Bergische Wacht*, Engelskirchen, Germany, April 28, 1917, p. 1. The news item is sourced "WTB Berlin 27. April." See also Kalkoff 1919:265.

²³⁰ "La graisse de boches" [The Huns' fat], *L'Echo Belge – Journal quotidien du matin paraissant en Hollande*, Amsterdam, Holland, March 24, 1917, pp. 1-2. Thanks to Sabine Tolksdorf from the *Staatsbibliothek* of Berlin, who provided me with a copy.

²³¹ So mentioned in: "Gemengd nieuws" [Miscellaneous], *De Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, Tilburg, April 4, 1917, p. 6; "Een griezelige industrie" [A gruesome industry], *Leeuwarder Courant*, Leeuwarden, April 18, 1917, p. 2; "Verspreide Berichten – Tegenspraak" [Miscellaneous reports – A protest], *Amersfoortsch Dagblad/De Eemlander*, Amersfoort, April 20, 1917, p. 2; "De lijkenhistorie" [The corpse story], *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, April 21, 1917, p. 1; "De Kadaver-Verwertingsanstalt," *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 21, 1917, p. 5, and *De Sumatra Post*, Medan, Sumatra, July 2, 1917.

²³² This can be concluded from the fact that it is not mentioned in Amara 2000.

about German matters and did neither involve Belgium, nor Belgians.

The *Office Belge* resided at Lange Voorhout 88a, The Hague, Holland. It was also known under the name *Office Terwagne* for its head, the Belgian Socialist parliamentarian from Antwerp, Dr. Modeste Terwagne, or under its full name *Office Belge Patrie et Liberté* (Belgian Fatherland and Freedom Bureau). It was established immediately after the beginning of the war and was given

“the laudable task to contribute to keeping the government authorities informed as exactly as possible about the events in the occupied country,²³³ and to aid them in the defense of the country’s honor, as well as in affairs of Holland and beyond the Belgian border.”²³⁴

Two prominent Belgian writers, Louis Piérard and Charles Herbiet, “represented the literary element” at the *Office Belge*.²³⁵ Both collaborated closely with *L’Echo Belge* - Herbiet as a member of its editorial staff²³⁶ and Piérard as a regular correspondent.²³⁷ “The latter took great pains in spreading the ‘Kadaververwertung’ tale, one of the vilest pieces of wartime propaganda,” a Dutch newspaper remembered in 1934.²³⁸

²³³ Only a tiny part of Belgium in the utmost northwest, between the left banks of the River Yser and the French frontier, remained unoccupied during the whole war.

²³⁴ . . . *de loffelijke bedoeling ertoe bij te dragen, om de regeringsdiensten zo getrouw mogelijk op de hoogte te houden van de gebeurtenissen in het bezette land en haar in de verdediging van’s lands eer en belangen in Nederland en over de Belgische grens heen bij te staan.* Cauwelaert 1971:303.

²³⁵ *Herbiet en Piérard vertegenwoordigden het litteraire element*; “Twintig jaar geleden – De komst van de Antwerpsche vluchtelingen” [Twenty years ago – The arrival of the refugees from Antwerp], *Het Vaderland – Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, The Hague, Holland, October 12, 1934, p. 13.

²³⁶ This can be seen from the mastheads, where he is mentioned among the members of the editorial staff.

²³⁷ According to Cauwelaert 1971:268.

²³⁸ “Twintig jaar geleden – De komst van de Antwerpsche vluchtelingen” [Twenty years ago – The arrival of the refugees from Antwerp], *Het*

According to remarks in the Dutch and Belgian press, the “Gerolstein” story seems to have been brought by nearly all Belgian refugee papers in Holland. Undoubtedly it appeared also in *La Belgique* from Rotterdam.²³⁹ *La Belgique* and *L’Echo Belge* were important for the spreading of the story as they, among the expatriate newspapers, showed not only an outspoken anti-German attitude and maintained the best connections to the occupied country, but had also the highest circulation.²⁴⁰ The great majority of the Dutch press - by far not only those papers that were suspected of pro-German leanings - however, rejected publication of the “Gerolstein” story, most probably because they rightfully suspected it of being fiction.

Among the few Dutch newspapers that brought the story were *De Tijd* from s’Hertogenbosch of March 31, 1917 and *De Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* of April 4, 1917.²⁴¹ Both papers gave as their source “[Het] N[ieuws] V[an] D[en] D[ag],” a paper from the strongly pro-British *De Telegraaf* Group published at Amsterdam. In nearly identical texts, the newspapers gave a summary, quoting about one third of the original, French-language text - of course, in Dutch translation. The editors cautioned, however, that the story

Vaderland – Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad, The Hague, Holland, October 12, 1934, p. 13.

²³⁹ Quoted by *L’Indépendance Belge* from London of April 10, 1917, erroneously giving “Leyden” instead of “Rotterdam” as place of publication. An American source gives “April 3” as the date of publication in *La Belgique*; “A Ghastly Charge Against Germany,” *The Literary Digest*, New York, vol. 54, no. 21, May 26, 1917, p. 1585.

²⁴⁰ *La Belgique en L’Echo Belge, die vanuit Nederland de gemakkelijkste verbinding hadden met het bezette land, gingen van alle oderzochte vluchtelingsskranten het mees tekeer tegen de bladen die sich an de Duitsers onderwierpen*, Wils 1974:48.

²⁴¹ “Een fantastisch verhaal” [A fantasy tale], *De Tijd – Godsdienstigstaatkundig dagblad*, s’Hertogenbosch, Holland, March 31, 1917, p. 5-6; “Gemengd nieuws. Olie en vet uit ... lijken?” [Miscellaneous. Oil and fat from ... corpses?], *De Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, Tilburg, Holland, April 4, 1917, p. 6.

should be taken with a large pinch of salt. The publication of “German corpse utilization” stories in Holland did not escape the attention of German officials, who, however, kept a low profile. They did not want “to do the honor of a formal reply to this stupid rumor,” rightfully fearing that such a move would give more publicity to the story.²⁴²

From the French-language Belgian exile press in Holland, the “Gerolstein” story went to England, where it was brought by *L'Indépendance Belge*, one of the oldest and most prominent Belgian dailies, edited during the war by Belgian expatriates and produced and printed in London at 5 Dane Street, High Holborn, London WC 1. In the afternoon of Holy Saturday, April 7, 1917, at London news-vendors its April 10 issue was already on sale.²⁴³ On page three the paper brought a three-column article with the headline “A heinous industry – The Germans, for lack of fat, take it from their soldiers fallen on the field of honor.”²⁴⁴ Neither a dateline, nor a correspondent’s name was given.

²⁴² *Onder deze omstandigheten hield de Duitsche regeering het niet voor noodzakelijk, dit onzinnige praatje de eer van een formeele tegenspraak aan te doen, wardoor het bovendien nog maar verdere publiciteit zou hebben verkregen.* “De lijkenhistorie” [The corpse story], *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, April 21, 1917, p. 1. *Das deutsche Volk . . . hat diese Behauptungen als Ausgeburten eines wahnsinnigen Hasses zunächst nur mit der verdienten Verachtung behandelt* [The German people . . . first treated these claims, as monstrous inventions of mad hate, with the contempt they deserved], “Ekelhafte Verleumdungen” [Disgusting slander], *Bergische Wacht*, Engelskirchen, Germany, April 28, 1917, p. 1.

²⁴³ See masthead of the respective issue: *Mardi 10 avril 1917. En vente à Londres à 3 h. le samedi 7 avril* (Tuesday, April 10, 1917. On sale in London on Saturday, April 7, from 3 p.m.). *L'Indépendance Belge* was always on sale in London the day before its “official” appearance. This can be seen from the mastheads of other issues. April 9 was made a bank holiday in England by the Bank Holidays Act of 1871, April 8 was Easter Sunday. Therefore the April 10, 1917, issue went into print already on noon, April 7.

²⁴⁴ *Une industrie sacrilège – Les Allemands à court de graisse prélèvent celle de leurs soldats tombés au champ d'honneur.*

The article, except the two last short paragraphs, was presented as a reprint from “*La Belgique* from Leyden.” The mentioning of “Leyden” has been the reason for some speculations, as no *La Belgique* has been known from this town.²⁴⁵ Most probably, however, it was a simple confusion with *La Belgique* from Rotterdam, one of the first Belgian exile newspapers,²⁴⁶ and, as its subtitle said, “the daily organ of the Belgian refugees in Holland.”²⁴⁷ As all further publications about the German corpse utilization establishments were based on the text published by *L’Indépendance Belge*, and because Second World War rumors about German factories making soap from human corpses depict similar scenarios, it is reproduced in the appendix in full as a copy with a parallel translation.²⁴⁸

The article begins with retelling the story of German corpse-burning in occupied Belgium, spread since the first weeks of the war:

“We have known for long that the Germans strip their dead behind the firing line, fasten them tightly into bundles of three or four bodies with iron wire, and then dispatch these grisly bundles to the rear for incineration.”

The bundles of corpses, we read, were transported by train - in “box cars of the type used for the transport of lime”²⁴⁹ - and sent until recently “to the blast furnaces of the Cockerill

²⁴⁵ Neander/Marlin 2010:72-73. Interestingly, however, the Royal Belgian Library, Brussels, lists *La Belgique* as from “Bergen op Zoom, Rotterdam, Leiden” in its catalogue. Bergen op Zoom was the place where *La Belgique* first was published, before its offices moved to Rotterdam. It is, therefore, possible that the paper had also a subsidiary at Leyden.

²⁴⁶ Massart 1917:3.

²⁴⁷ *Organ quotidien des réfugiés belges en Hollande*. Information taken from the catalogue of the library of the Catholic University of Leuven (UCL).

²⁴⁸ Thanks to Randal Marlin, Ottawa, Canada, who provided me with a facsimile of the original article.

²⁴⁹ The drawing of a wagon of this type is shown in Gottwald 1990:114. Caption is on p. 115.

steel and iron works at Seraing,” a suburb of Liège,²⁵⁰ and to a municipal waste incineration plant “north of Brussels.”²⁵¹

But now, we learn, the corpse transports are going into the direction of the Eifel hills, a sparsely populated region in Western Germany not far from the Belgian frontier. There, near the small town of Gerolstein, in the middle of a thick forest and protected from inquisitive eyes, the *D.A.V.G. (Deutsche Abfall-Verwertungs-Gesellschaft)* has established the first (and up to now, the only) corpse conversion plant, “especially assigned to the Western front.” It is served by a side track that branches off from the local railroad line. Obviously the factory is quite new, because “if the results are as expected,” a “second one” will be set up on the Eastern front. The “sinister idea” to such a plant “could only originate in a German brain,” the reader is assured. The writer of the story was obviously inspired by a modern German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*, such as the Rüdnitz plant near Berlin, to which the “factory” shows striking similarities: in its overall design, its location in a sparsely populated, wooded region, in the way it is connected to the railway system, with the housing facilities for the staff close to it, and its model character.

A detailed description of the process of corpse treatment in the factory follows. Manual labor is only involved in the discharge of the trains and in dispatching the final products. The manufacturing process itself is highly efficient, rationalized and fully mechanized, making the plant appear as a cross of “Durham’s meat packing factory” from Chicago, as portrayed in chapters three and nine of Upton Sinclair’s 1905 novel *The Jungle*,²⁵² and the Rüdnitz plant. Like at the latter, those who

²⁵⁰ Remember the anecdote mentioned in Massart 1917:94-95.

²⁵¹ The Germans, according to the story, obviously had centralized corpse-burning, abandoning all other places of incineration mentioned in the press from 1914 to 1916.

²⁵² Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), prolific American writer with Socialist leanings. *The Jungle* was first published in serial form between February 25, 1905, and November 4, 1905, in *The Appeal to Reason*, a Socialist newspaper with a nationwide readership. First published as a

work on the “dirty” side, unloading the trains and feeding the autoclaves with the corpses, wear protective clothing.

After boiling the corpses in autoclaves for several hours, an intermediate product is obtained, “a paste looking like a kind of beef extract.” From this intermediate product, stearin and oils are extracted.²⁵³ The residues, together with the bones, are burned in an incinerator. We do not learn what is done with the ashes. “The stearin is sold as it is, but the oils give off such a stench that they must undergo an initial refinement.” This is made by “mixing the hot oily mass with sodium carbonate.” A by-product of this refining process is sold to “the soap-makers, who do not find any more the fatty acids necessary for their business.”

The refined oil “has a yellowish brown color and is nearly odorless.” It is packed in “barrels similar to those for petroleum” and shipped out by train. “Up to now it has not been possible to tell exactly what is made with these oils.” In the last paragraph,²⁵⁴ *L'Indépendance Belge* is addressing the German women:

“Mothers, wives, or sisters, you who mourn for a dear human being fallen on the Field of Honor in the service of your criminal Kaiser: here you have the fate destined for your heroes: industrial fats!”

book by Doubleday, Page & Co. in New York in 1906, it became within weeks an international bestseller, translated into every major language. In 1914, it had a film adaptation that was screened worldwide. Chapter nine foreshadows the “Corpse factory”: “. . . and as for the other men, who worked in tank rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting - sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!” *The Jungle* is still in print, e.g. by Penguin Books, 2006.

²⁵³ The French word *stearine* is obviously used here as a collective name for non-liquid fats. It has, therefore, been sometimes translated into “tallow.”

²⁵⁴ Not taken from *La Belgique*.

The emphasis on oils and fats points to a Belgian living in occupied territory (or having good connections to it) as the author of the “Gerolstein” story. Unlike the French and British propagandists, who projected their own countries’ needs onto the enemy, he knew what the Germans really were short of: industrial fats, not glycerin.

It is remarkable that the editor of the text published already a fortnight earlier in *L’Echo Belge* concludes the description of the corpse conversion factory not with an address to Germany’s bereaved “mothers, wives, or sisters,” but by predicting a bright future for such factories. In addition, he suspects that the fats produced there may already be used for alimentary purposes by the same Germans who once had been preaching civilization to the savages:

“The D.A.V.G., incidentally, plans to continue exploitation after the war and intends to eventually substitute the crematory ovens by buying up the corpses at a maximum price . . . Who knows, by the way, whether the Reich Fat Office has not already introduced these semi-finished products into the national diet as “Artificial Oil” or “Edible Fat.”

And it has not been a long time ago when the missionaries of the Good Old German God were wandering around everywhere, preaching civilization and the Gospel to the warrior and man-eater tribes.²⁵⁵

There is, however, still a point one might think about: Why did the author of the ghastly story choose just “Gerolstein” - and not another Eifel town - for the scene of the action? Was

²⁵⁵ *La D.A.V.G. se propose d'ailleurs de continuer son exploitation après la guerre et elle compte bien arriver à supplanter totalement les fours crématoires en achetant les cadavres aux plus hauts prix . . . Qui sait d'ailleurs si la Reichsfettstelle n'a pas encore reproduit ses sous-produits dans l'alimentation nationale sous la dénomination “Kunst-Öl” [sic] ou “Speisefett”. Et il n'y a pas bien longtemps, les missionnaires du Bon Vieux Dieu allemand allaient de par le monde prêchant aux peuplades guerrières et antropophages la bonne parole et la civilisation! “La graisse de boches” [The Huns' fat], *L’Echo Belge*, Amsterdam, Holland, March 24, 1917, p. 1-2, here p. 2.*

he inspired by Jacques Offenbach's well-known and much-acclaimed *opéra bouffe* "La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein," a waspish satire on militarism and ruling dynasties?²⁵⁶ Was his story, therefore, perhaps originally intended as a macabre satire on German militarism, thoroughness, and recycling mania, and was it only in a second step fashioned for propaganda purposes? We do not know and probably will never know, as the author has remained anonymous until today.²⁵⁷

The "Gerolstein" story made its way from the Belgian Diaspora to France. It was brought in abridged form by *L'Intransigeant* from Paris on April 12 and *L'Express du Midi* from Toulouse on April 13, 1917. The news item in *L'Express du Midi* is datelined "The Hague, April 12," which clearly points to the *Office Belge* as the source. Georges Montorgueil, news editor of the Parisian paper *L'Eclair*, dedicated to the story even an editorial on the front page of the April 13, 1917 issue.²⁵⁸

After some reflections about Germans and their recycling mania, Montorgueil gives a description of the factory and of the manufacturing process, closely following the Belgian account, but omitting many technical details. He then takes stock:

²⁵⁶ *Opéra bouffe* in three acts, music by Jacques Offenbach, libretto by Henri Meillac and Ludovic Halévy, premiered 1867 in Paris.

²⁵⁷ Interestingly, among the many hypotheses Adrian Gregory throws into the discussion about the origin of the "Corpse factory" story, he also speculates that it could have been started by "an unknown and rather sick 'satirist', who he, however, would rather locate "in the British Army" (Gregory 2008:306, endnote 10).

²⁵⁸ "On dit que ..." [They say ...], *L'Intransigeant*, Paris, April 12, 1917, p. 2; "Une hideuse industrie. Les cadavres allemands transformés en graisse" [A hideous industry. German corpses turned into fat], *L'Express du Midi*, Toulouse, April 13, 1917, p. 1; Georges Montorgueil, "Métamorphoses selon la Kultur," [Metamorphoses according to the *Kultur*], *L'Eclair*, Paris, France, April 13, 1917, p. 1. Georges Montorgueil was the nom-de-plume of Octave Lebesgue (1857-1933), a French writer and journalist. *L'Eclair* from Paris must not be confused with the paper from Montpellier of the same name.

“These are the products:

Stearin, used for the manufacture of soap, which, as we know, is urgently needed, and whose price is extremely high.

Refined and odorless oil . . . It is impossible to find out for which use it is intended. If its origins are kept secret, it could be used, in certain compounds, for alimentary purposes. It is, however, assumed that it belongs mainly to the category of industrial fats, of which enormous amounts are consumed in the war.²⁵⁹”

He continues and draws conclusions:

“In our soil, German military cemeteries have been dug nearly everywhere at the roadsides. It is, however, surprising that, taking into account our enemy’s losses, only a few graves were found when the abandoned villages were retaken. The *D.A.V.G.* gives us the answer . . .

Thanks to these skilful methods, the German soldier, dead, fallen on the Field of Honor, continues to serve: oil or soap, he greases or cleans.²⁶⁰”

Montorgueil was the first to lay stress on “soap” as output of the German “Corpse factory.” His article, however, found little resonance in the media. Only two references to it could be found in over twenty French-language periodicals analyzed: on April 14, 1917 *Le Gaulois* from Paris brought a review of the article, and on April 22, 1917 the *Gazette des Ardennes*, a collaborationist French-language newspaper

²⁵⁹ *Voici les sous-produits manufacturés. C’est de la stéarine: elle servira à la fabrication des savons, dont vous n’ignorez pas que le besoin est urgent et la prix élevée. C’est de la huile neutralisée et désodorisée . . . Il n’est pas possible de connaître l’usage auquel elle est destinée. Son origine dissimulée, il pourrait être, dans certains combinaisons, alimentaire. Mais on suppose qu’elle rentre surtout dans la catégorie des graisses industrielles, dont la guerre fait une formidable consommation.*

²⁶⁰ *Des cimetières de soldats allemands sont creusés sur notre sol, et presque partout au bord des routes. Cependant on a été frappé, en reprenant les villages abandonnés, du peu de tombes par rapport aux pertes de nos ennemies. La D.A.V.G. nous donne la clef de l’énigme . . . Le soldat allemand, tombé au champ d’honneur, grâce à ces procédés savants, mort, continue à servir: huile ou savon, il graisse ou dégrasse. Ibid.*

edited in occupied territory, quoted it in full, followed by a sharp reply.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ “Ils récupèrent même les morts” [They are even recycling the dead], *Le Gaulois*, Paris, April 14, 1917, p. 3; “Propagande civilisée” [Civilized propaganda], *Gazette des Ardennes*, Charleville, France, April 22, 1917, p. 1.

III.

A PROPAGANDA BLITZ: THE “CORPSE FACTORY” CONQUERS THE WORLD

“All Quiet on the Western Front”¹

On November 26, 1916 fighting had ceased on the Somme front. Though the Allies had succeeded in keeping the Germans in check and had even made minor territorial gains during the last six months, these achievements had been paid for with heavy losses. It is estimated that the Allies alone lost 624,000 men, among them 410,000 British troops, without achieving their strategic aim: to break through the German lines and engage the Germans in mobile warfare. The German losses, estimated at 465,000 men, were no less appalling. Knowing that they would never be able to recover from this blood-letting, the Germans used the period of time from December 1916 to March 1917 to straighten the front and to build, in the rear, a new system of fortifications defensible with far lesser men and material. On March 12, 1917 they began a “strategic retreat,” abandoning about 300 square miles of terrain they had been occupying for over two and a half years. They took with them everything that could be useful to them and destroyed everything that could be beneficial to the enemy, leaving behind a completely devastated country.²

¹ English title of a novel by German writer and World War I veteran Erich Maria Remarque, German title *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the most famous German-language novel about the soldiers’ extreme physical and mental stress during the war and their alienation from civilian life. Both the German original and the English translation appeared in 1929.

² That the Germans practiced a scorched earth policy, destroying far more as any retreating army might do to keep off rearguard attacks, shows the detailed report by a U.S. war correspondent: Wythe Williams, “Troops of France Amid Her Ruins Swear Vengeance. Times Correspondent Sees Effect of German Frightfulness in ‘Dawn of Defeat.’ A Picture Full of Pathos. Homeless, Starving People Sob with Joy as They Greet President

There was, however, a remarkable exception. The Germans did not touch the war cemeteries they had laid out in occupied territory. As a neutral - but by far not pro-German - observer noted down in surprise after a visit to such a cemetery in mid-March 1917:

“It was magnificently made, upon a magnificent site, overlooking a great valley. The graveyards I have seen behind the allied lines cannot compare with it . . . It contained monuments and crosses of engraved marble . . . I walked down another path, and before a gigantic marble block I halted in surprise. The inscription read: “Here lie French warriors,” and over the next grave was the inscription, “Here rests the body of a brave Frenchman.” . . . In the center of the graveyard . . . was a noble figure of a woman in a long robe . . . I read the inscription on the tablet: “Friend and enemy in death united.”³”

The Allied side, of course, did not remain idle. The French and the British were preparing for a big offensive to be launched in spring 1917. Their strategic aim was to break through the German lines at two distant sectors of the front simultaneously, to unite in the rear of the German lines, thus encircling and eliminating the German forces in between, and to march in a rapid advance toward the Rhine-Ruhr region, the industrial heart of Germany. At the same time, the Russians would launch a massive attack on the Eastern front, break through the German lines, and march toward Berlin. The French Supreme Commander, General Nivelle, promised before the offensive that it would cost France not more than 10,000 casualties and end the war within forty-eight hours.⁴

and Soldiers. Only One Spot Untouched. Germans Erected Elaborate Cemetery to Their Dead. Honoring Also French Fallen,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 1917, p. 1+3.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ Robert Georges Nivelle (1856-1924), French artillery officer, promoted General in October 1914, from December 1916 to May 1917 Commander-in-Chief of the French armies on the Western Front.

Russia, however, was the first to drop out of the scheme. Revolution had broken out on March 8, 1917.⁵ In its wake, chaos spread among the Russian troops. At the moment, a Russian spring offensive was out of the question, a fact that relieved the Germans from strain in the East and allowed them to focus on the West. So the Allied strategy was slightly modified. The British would start with a powerful attack on the northern sector of the front in the Arras region, thus forcing the Germans to detract forces from the southern sector, which would facilitate a massive breakthrough of the French in the region north of Reims shortly thereafter.

The Russians' virtual dropout was not the only problem the British were facing at the turn of April 1917. The French had lost much of their will to fight, and signs of unrest among their troops could not be overlooked any more. America having already severed diplomatic relations with Germany in February 1917 was about to declare war on her,⁶ but it would still take considerable time until the first American infantry divisions would arrive in the European theater of war. In the dominions, enlistment rates had dropped drastically, reducing the supply of manpower from overseas to a trickle. What is more, unrestricted submarine warfare, resumed by Germany on February 1, 1917, was successful insofar as it had crippled the influx of food and war material from abroad to Great Britain, causing serious unrest on the British Home front.⁷ England was bearing the brunt of the war virtually alone.⁸ A

⁵ "February Revolution." In Russia that still used the Julian calendar, it was on February 23.

⁶ On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson turned to the Senate in this matter. The official declaration of war followed on April 6, 1917.

⁷ "Our food situation is by no means as desperate as the Germans want to believe it, but, on the other hand, it is more serious than many of our own people realize." Admiral Sir John R. Jellicoe, First Sea Lord, according to *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1917, p. 1 ("Small Boat Float Best Protection Against U-Boats").

⁸ Shimon Rubinstein deserves the credit to have, probably for the first time, pointed to these facts in connection with the British propaganda offensive of April 1917. Rubinstein 1987:12-13.

propaganda offensive was necessary to bolster the morale of the own people at home and in the trenches and to motivate the people in the colonies and dominions to send more men to the front.

The Germans, of course, were aware that the enemy was preparing for attack and were busy getting themselves ready for D-day. Outwardly, they were trying to keep cool and maintain an atmosphere of “business as usual.” In the Easter week, two prominent war correspondents were shown around German positions north of Reims: Karl Rosner from Berlin, a journalist writing for the semi-official *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (and the only war correspondent who was a regular dinner guest of the Kaiser), and Egon Kalkschmidt from Munich, a literary and arts critic from profession, writing for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the flagship of German journalism, comparable in its position to *The New York Times* in the U.S. or *The Times* in Great Britain.

Though not explicitly mentioned, it can be concluded from their reports that they were traveling together, with a cavalry captain from Headquarters as their guide. Their route followed the northern banks of the River Aisne westward, crossing it between Evergnicourt and Neufchâtel-sur-Aisne, followed the river further west near Berry-au-Bac, a place held by the French, and then turned southeast to Fort Brimont, a stone’s throw away from Reims that was already on the other, French side of the frontline. Both submitted atmospheric pictures of more than thousand words, which were published after Easter and under nearly identical headlines: “The fighting north of Reims” (Rosner) and “Before Reims” (Kalkschmidt).

Right at the beginning, Kalkschmidt reported about the *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* operated in the region by the German military.

“In N[eu]fchâtel] a strange smell of glue was reaching our nostrils. The “carcass utilization establishment” was announcing itself in a lovely way. The cavalry caption from Headquarters, our guide, left a visit at our discretion. Courageously we decided to accept. In big steam boilers

the flayed carcasses (horses, inedible parts from the slaughterhouse, etc.) are being degreased. The yield: two barrels daily, each of about one hundred kilograms full of pure fat. All remains go to the bone mill, are ground and make an excellent pigs' food. Up to seventy hides are gained daily. They are salted, spread out for drying, rolled up, and brought by truck to the nearest railway station.⁹

In the German text, the word *Kadaver-Verwertungs-Anstalt* is emphasized in print and can by no means be overlooked. Kalkschmidt's report is datelined *Anfang April* (at the beginning of April) and was published on April 12, 1917 in the morning issue of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

Rosner also mentions the carcass utilization establishment, but with fewer words and only in passing, without emphasis, neither in print, nor by formatting, nor by a sub-headline.

"We pass through Evergnicourt. There is a sickly smell in the air, as if glue were being boiled. We are passing the great Carcass Utilization Establishment of this Army Group. The fat that is won here is turned into lubricating oils, and everything else is ground down in the bones mill into a powder which is used for mixing with pigs' food and as fertilizer. Nothing can be permitted to go to waste.¹⁰" Rosner's report is datelined

⁹ *In N. zog ein merkwürdiger Leimgeruch in unsere Nasen. Die "Kadaver-Verwertungs-Anstalt" kündigte sich also lieblich an. Der Rittmeister vom Stabe, unser Führer, stellte die Besichtigung anheim. Beherzt entschlossen wir uns dazu. In großen Dampfkesseln werden die enthäuteten Kadaver (Pferde, ungenießbare Teile aus der Schlächtereier, usw.) entfettet. Ertrag: täglich zwei Fässer reines Fett im Gewicht von etwa je zwei Zentnern. Alle Rückstände wandern in die Knochenmühle, werden gemahlen und ergeben ein vorzügliches Schweinefutter. Bis zu siebzig Häute werden täglich gewonnen, gesalzen, zum Trocknen ausgebreitet, zusammengerollt und zur nächsten Bahnstation gesandt. "Vor Reims," Frankfurter Zeitung, April 12, 1917, p. 2.*

¹⁰ *Durch Evergnicourt geht die Fahrt – ein fader Dunst, als ob da Leim gekocht würde, liegt in der Luft. Wir ziehen an der großen Kadaververwertungsanstalt der Armeegruppe vorbei. Das hier gewonnene Fett wird zu Schmierölen verarbeitet, alles andere in der Knochenmühle zu einem Pulver zerrieben, das als Beimengung*

“April 5” and appeared in the evening issue of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* on Tuesday, April 10, 1917, one and a half days earlier than Kalkschmidt’s.

The delayed publication of both war correspondents’ reports should not surprise us. April 6, Good Friday, as well as April 8, Easter Sunday, and April 9, Easter Monday, were holidays strictly observed in Germany. Even if the manuscripts had arrived in the evening of Maundy Thursday, April 5, 1917, at the newsrooms, they had no priority and could just wait for publication until the end of the holiday season.

Preparing the Ground - The “Grave Desecration” Story

As already mentioned, the only places the Germans had left untouched during their “strategic retreat” were their war cemeteries. Seeing everything around razed to the ground, the Allied soldiers who retook the territory saw red. For them, graves for French and German soldiers side by side and a statue with the inscription “Friend and enemy in death united” towering above them, was “an unparalleled atrocity,” a shameless “lie,” arousing their particular fury.¹¹ “These Boche monuments ought all to be abolished. They pollute the soil,”¹² were the general feelings, expressed not only by *The Observer* and *The Daily Mail*, but also by respected French intellectuals. In *L’Illustration*, the leading French illustrated weekly, renowned playwright Henri Lavedan, member of the *Académie Française*, called these cemeteries a “second occupation.” He rhetorically asked what to do with them and left “the duty to answer” to the soldiers. The corpses, he advised, may rest in French soil: “Let them fertilize it!

zu Schweinefutter und als Düngemittel verwendet wird. Nichts darf ungenutzt verkommen. “Der Kampf nördlich von Reims,” *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, Zentral-Organ für die Reichshauptstadt, April 10, 1917, p. 1.

¹¹ Becker 1998:277-278.

¹² British war correspondent for *The Observer* James L. Garvin (1868-1918), quoted in Ayerst 1985:160.

But nothing more! A simple little wooden cross . . . that's sufficient. And as far as the rest is concerned - down with it! Pickaxe, and the battering-ram!"¹³

It was not necessary to tell the soldiers twice. They had already taken the matter in their hands. "The soldiers of Right and Ideal could not tolerate the lie any longer; therefore, in the name of the truth of their case, they felt it necessary to desecrate the guilty graves."¹⁴ Kurt Baschwitz, a Dutch Jew of German origin, remembered in 1945:

"The French propaganda service flooded the world with photographs which, in order to demonstrate French territorial gains, also showed German soldiers' cemeteries occupied by French troops. One could see overturned German gravestones on which French soldiers had proudly placed their foot; one could see uprooted crosses and other signs of destruction, by which the French tried to impress the world with what was happening to these manifestations of German arrogance."¹⁵

At the war cemetery of Solente, for instance, the statue with the incriminated inscription "had been thrown from its plinth and is still lying on the ground, half destroyed," a French investigation report remarked.¹⁶ On May 21, 1917 *The*

¹³ *Qu'allons nous faire? . . . Je pose la question nécessaire en laissant aux soldats le devoir d'y répondre . . . Nous ne toucherons pas aux morts qui sont couchés là. Puisqu'ils sont venus s'échouer dans notre sol, nous le leur concédons. Qu'ils l'engraissent! Mais rien de plus! Une simple petite croix de bois, courte et bonne, suffira. Et quand au reste - à bas! La pioche et le bélier! "L'autre occupation" [The second occupation], *L'Illustration*, May 12, 1917, p. 439. Also quoted in *Gazette des Ardennes - Edition illustrée*, Charleville, France, June 16, 1917, pp. 4-5.*

¹⁴ *Les soldats du droit et de l'idéal ne sauraient supporter le mensonge; c'est d'ailleurs pour cela qu'il leur paraît nécessaire de profaner les tombes incriminées . . . au nom de la vérité de leur camp.* Becker 1998:279.

¹⁵ Baschwitz 1945:237. Siegfried Kurt Baschwitz (1986-1968), a journalist and media researcher, emigrated to Holland in 1933. Under German occupation he was arrested, but succeeded in fleeing from the Westerbork transit camp and hiding until liberation. After the war he held the chair of newspaper science at Amsterdam University.

¹⁶ "Depuis l'arrivée des troupes françaises, cette statue a été renversée de

Daily Mail proudly showed a picture with the caption: “The French Destroy Huns’ Monument to Their Dead,” taken at the devastated German military cemetery of Chauny. Among the ruins, an inscription is still legible: *Freund und Feind im Tod vereint* (Friend and enemy in death united).¹⁷

“We happened to be staying in Holland,” Baschwitz continued, “and we dared to predict that as a result of the popular desire for self-exoneration, some anti-German grave- or corpse-desecration tale would soon be launched.”¹⁸ He did not have to wait long. French civilian cemeteries had become a target of Allied artillery when, in the course of the Germans’ “strategic retreat,” rearguard units with their machine guns had taken cover in the vaults. British war correspondent Philip Gibbs, for instance, visited the village of Dompierre in mid-March 1917 immediately after it had been retaken by the French:

“It looks as if before Dompierre the trumpets of the Last Judgment had sounded, for at the cemetery the graves have been opened and the bones of the dead were thrown out. Family vaults have been ripped open by shell fire, and the remains of the dead are exposed to everybody.”¹⁹

son socle et elle est encore à terre, à moitié détruite,” *Rapport sur les cimetières allemands créés en France pendant l’occupation ennemie* [Report on the German cemeteries laid out in France during the enemy occupation], n.d. (1918), p. 8, quoted in Becker 1998:279.

¹⁷ Picture reproduced in *Gazette des Ardennes – Edition illustrée*, Charleville, France, July 1, 1917, p. 6. For other pictures of devastated German war cemeteries in liberated French territory see, e.g., Koshar 1998:96-98.

¹⁸ Baschwitz 1945:237. Baschwitz sees here the origin of the “Corpse factory” story.

¹⁹ *Het lijkt als of voor Dompierre de bazuinen van den jongsten dag geblazen hebben, want op het kerkhof zijn de graven geopend en de gebeenten der dooden er uitgesmeten. Grafkelders zijn door granatvuur opengescheurd en de geheimen der dooden voor iedereen opengeklegt. “De Oorlog,” *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, Rotterdam, Holland, 18 March 1917, p. 5; translated from the *Daily Chronicle*, no date given.*

These facts were passed over in silence by the Allied propagandists. Instead, they laid the blame at the door of the Germans and accused them of having vandalized French civilian cemeteries in search of non-ferrous metals and valuables. On March 28, 1917 Reuters told the world that the Germans, on their retreat,

“systematically pillaged graves for zinc, the lead linings of coffins, and possibly ornaments and jewels. Cemeteries were torn up, coffins broken open, and the remains of the dead scattered. Rubbish and filth were thrown into the graves.²⁰”

²⁰ “German Ghoul at Work. Graves Desecrated. Coffins Stripped of Metal. Scenes at Cemeteries,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Derby, England, March 28, 1917, p. 3; “German Ghoul Ruin French Graves in Search of Metal. Incredible Acts,” *Western Times*, Exeter, England, March 29, 1917; “Havoc. The Hun as a Ghoul,” *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, New Zealand, March 30, 1917, p. 3. The same news item appeared also in the following New Zealand papers on March 30, 1917: *The Evening Post*, Wellington (“An Army of Ghouls. German Outrages on the Dead. Systematic Pillage of Churchyards,” p. 7); *The Colonist*, Nelson (“German Ghoul. Cemeteries Desecrated. Graves Pillaged for Metals and Ornaments,” p. 5); *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury (“German Ghoul. Desecration of French Graves,” p. 5); *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki (“The Unspeakable Hun. Revelations of His Conduct in Occupied Territory. Horrible Desecration of Graves,” p. 5); *The Thames Star*, Waikato (“The Unspeakable Hun. Incredible Atrocities. Desecrating Graves,” p. 5); *The Bay of Plenty Times*, Bay of Plenty (“Germans’ Atrocious Conduct Revealed. French Graveyards Pillaged for Zinc and Lead,” p. 3); *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth (“Enemy Atrocities. Hun Ghouliness. Cemeteries Desecrated,” p. 3); *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui (“German Devilry. Shocking Desecration of French Cemeteries,” p. 5); *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington (“Western Front. Hun Atrociousness,” p. 6); *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough (“Atrocious Conduct of the Germans. Violation of the Dead. Systematic Pillage of Graves,” p. 5); *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne (“The Despicable Huns. Robbery, Pillage and Desecration. Stealing Relief Supplies,” p. 3). In Australia, the following papers joined in: *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW (“The War. The Latest. On the Western Front. Damage in the Cemeteries,” March 29, 1917, p. 4, repeated March 30, 1917, p. 1); *The Ballarat Courier*, Ballarat, VIC (“Hun Outrages. Graves Desecrated. Coffins Pillaged,” March 30, 1917, p. 3); *Warrnambool Standard*, Warrnambool, VIC (“Graves Desecrated. Work of German

With headlines such as “German Ghouls Ruin French Graves in Search of Metal,” “An Army of Ghouls - German Outrages on the Dead,” or “Havoc - The Hun as a Ghoul,” the “Grave desecration” atrocity story and the slogan “The German is a ghoul” did the round of the English-language press. Typical for atrocity propaganda, nothing that would enable verification was mentioned in the news item: neither a location, nor a date, nor names of witnesses.²¹

Of particular interest, however, are the last two sentences of the Reuters news item. To make the alleged desecration of French cemeteries by the Germans appear still more heinous, the correspondent is contrasting it with the reverence the Germans are showing to their own dead, as expressed in their military cemeteries: “The Germans show an almost exaggerated respect for their own dead. Their trim, gaudy cemeteries abound with pompous epitaphs to fallen German heroes.”²² Two and a half weeks later, however, Reuters was spreading exactly the opposite about the Germans’ “almost exaggerated respect for their own dead”: that they were boiling down their fallen heroes in “Corpse conversion factories.” Nobody in the editorial offices, nor among the readership

Ghouls Fully Revealed,” March 30, 1917, p. 3, repeated March 31, 1917, p. 8); *Camperdown Chronicle*, Camperdown, VIC (“Graves Desecrated. Work of German Ghouls Fully Revealed,” March 31, 1917, p. 1). Also: “The German Ghouls. Graves Torn Open and Pillaged,” *The Hongkong Telegraph*, Hongkong, China, March 29, 1917, p. 1; “The War. Reuter Reports,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, March 29, 1917, p. 7; “Marks of Kultur,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, Singapore, Malaya, March 30, 1917, p. 5.

²¹ Interestingly, only a few French newspapers reported about the devastation of cemeteries. They gave the names of locations, blamed the Germans for the destruction, but did not tell of grave robbery. See, e.g., *La Croix*, a Catholic daily: “Les Barbares. Profanation de sépultures,” March 27, 1917, p. 2, and “La barbarie allemande. Profanation de sépultures,” March 29, 1917, p. 3.

²² The Reuters correspondent not only omits that, at the German war cemeteries, also the fallen enemies were honored, but adds a dig at the Germans, alleging that the tombstones were “stolen from neighboring French cemeteries.”

seems to have noticed the contradiction. Not surprising at all, as newspapermen are used to focus on the latest news (“Nothing is older than yesterday’s news”), and the public’s memory is known to be short-lived.

A Precursor of the Story’s Final Version Appears in Holland

On the same day when the April 10, 1917 issue of *L’Indépendance Belge* went into print in London, and ten days before the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story was launched worldwide by Reuters and the Northcliffe press, a predecessor appeared in Amsterdam. It was a long article on the front page of the April 7, 1917 issue of *L’Echo Belge*, headlined “Les Nécrophages” (The corpse eaters). In the beginning, the author, writing under the nom-de-plume “Belga” (most probably Louis Piérard²³) reminds the readers that this and other newspapers in Holland recently published details of the “chemical-scientific processes” used by the Germans for corpse exploitation. He then lengthily muses about German depravity and national traits (“Nothing is permitted to go to waste”²⁴), which have made that an apparently unbelievable horror has become gruesome reality.

Belga next recapitulates the “Gerolstein” story, being brief with “the technical details, absolutely repugnant,” because “they have been published in great detail and with an utmost precision that does not leave anything to be desired.”²⁵

²³ A regular correspondent of *L’Echo Belge*, he was remembered still a long time after the war as an ardent propagandist of the *Kadaververwertung* tale; “Twintig jaar geleden – De komst van de Antwerpsche vluchtelingen” [Twenty years ago – The arrival of the refugees from Antwerp], *Het Vaderland – Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, The Hague, Holland, October 12, 1934, p. 13. The elaborated, “literary” style of the article points to an experienced writer of fiction as its author.

²⁴ *Il ne faut rien laisser se perdre, n’est-ce pas?* “Les Nécrophages” [The corpse eaters], *L’Echo Belge*, Amsterdam, Holland, April 7, 1917, p. 1.

²⁵ *Je vous épargne les détails techniques, parfaitement répugnants. Du reste, ils ont été publiés tout au long et avec un luxe de précisions qui ne laisse rien à désirer.* He obviously refers here to the publication of the

Obviously influenced by the French “Glycerin” story (as we will show in the next paragraph), he sees “the glycerin indispensable for the manufacture of high explosives” as the final product of the corpse conversion process - and not industrial fats, as told in the original “Gerolstein” story.²⁶ A paragraph follows with references to horror tales in literature: Edgar Allan Poe, Dante’s *Inferno*, and the meat-packing plants of Chicago. All of them, we read, are now surpassed by the wicked Germans, who are extracting the fat from the dead “to kill with it other human beings, always more, and ever more.”²⁷

The author, obviously well aware that neither repetition and paraphrasing of the “Gerolstein” story, nor evocation of loathing for the Germans will convince stubborn doubters, now plays his trump card: “The *Boche* himself confesses” his misdeed, he declares, and he does it “in a most cynical manner, by a classified ad.”²⁸ The smoking gun presented by Belga is the job offer for a commercial and technical manager, placed by the carcass utilization plant of Eckbolsheim in the *Chemiker-Zeitung*.²⁹ Quoting from a French-language *Journal du Jura* - which itself quotes from Chassaingne’s article in *Le Journal* from Paris - Belga assures his readers that *les cadavres* processed at Eckbolsheim and in similar plants are human corpses from which the Germans are extracting glycerin, and that this view is corroborated by the testimony of a former American consul who had left Germany in February 1917.³⁰

“Gerolstein” story in the same newspaper on March 24, 1917.

²⁶ *De tout quoi, en fin de compte, on extrait la glycérine indispensable à la fabrication des explosifs Brisants.*

²⁷ *En extraire la graisse afin de, avec cette chair, tuer d’autres hommes encore, toujours plus, et encore plus!*

²⁸ *Et voilà que le doute n’est plus permis: le boche lui-même avoue! Oui, il avoue, et de la façon la plus cynique encore, par la voie des petites annonces.*

²⁹ See Chapter 2.

³⁰ There are two French-language newspapers with the title *Journal du Jura*, a Swiss and a French one. *L’Echo Belge* did neither give the date nor the headline of the article from which it quoted. Though neither

Finally, Belga expresses his regret that the *Journal du Jura* does not tell “what the exploitation of the corpses of their comrades-in-arms brings in for the cannibals,”³¹ and closes with the hypocritical remark:

“In the interest of the honor of humanity, I would feel really lucky if I could deny such heinous deeds. Denial, however, probably won’t come - how else can the blunt confession of the “*Chemische Zeitung*” [*sic*] be explained?³²”

In an addendum, Belga portrays the Germans as ghouls. He quotes the Reuters news from March 28, 1917 about the desecration of French cemeteries by Germans pilfering the graves for zinc and lead and setting up machine-gun posts in the vaults. He omits, however, the paragraph that deals with the “almost exaggerated respect” the Germans show toward their own dead - it would have revealed the absurdity of the story he is telling - and concludes with a loathing for *les Boches*, alluding again to their alleged “cannibalism”:

“Desecrators of graves, defilers of coffins, or corpse exploiters - and this always under utility aspects! . . . Oh, those “corpse eaters,” as I have called them! What a horror!³³”

Comparison with the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story shows that “*Les Nécropages*” can be regarded as its precursor, because

Swiss nor French reference librarians were able to locate the respective article, there can be no doubt that it did exist. It must have been published in one of the papers between March 10 and April 6, 1917.

³¹ *C'est dommage. Il eût été intéressant d'apprendre ce que rapporte à ces cannibales l'exploitation des cadavres de leurs frères d'armes.*

³² *Pour l'honneur de l'humanité, j'éprouverais un réel bonheur à pouvoir démentir de pareils sacrilèges. Mais le démenti ne viendra vraisemblablement pas, car comment expliquer l'aveu sans détours de la “*Chemische Zeitung*”?*

³³ *Partout ils ont fracturé les caveaux funèbres, non seulement pour y mettre leurs mitrailleuses en batterie, mais encore, et cela systématiquement, pour en enlever le zinc et le plomb . . . Profanateurs de tombes, violateurs de cercueils ou exploiters de cadavres, et cela toujours dans un but utilitaire! Oh, les Nécropages, comme je les appelais, les “*Mangeurs de Morts*”! Quelle horreur!*

- in its core, it contains the “Gerolstein” story,
- it already presents both slogans around which the upcoming propaganda campaign will be centered: “The Germans are cannibals” and “The Germans are ghouls,” and
- it uses the same kind of faked credentials: an “admission of the crime” given by the Germans themselves - here: the misinterpreted classified ad from the *Chemiker-Zeitung* - and the “expert” testimony of an (anonymous) “American consul.”

Preparations for Attack

Scarcely had the German war correspondents Rosner and Kalkschmidt returned from their flying visit to the battle front north of Reims and set off home for holiday break, when the thunder of guns shattered the serenity of the hills and pastures through which they just had been traveling. As a prologue to the Second Battle of the Aisne - the French part of the Allied Spring Offensive - the French had begun, in the morning of Good Friday, April 6, 1917, to shell German positions north of Reims to soften them up for the attack to come.

In the northern sector of the front, east of Arras, the British had already begun shelling German positions on April 4, 1917. On Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, early in the morning they began to assault with twenty-seven divisions. Within the first two days, they made considerable territorial gains, pushing the front line eastward for about six miles, and caused the Germans, as planned, to withdraw reserve units from the French sector. But already about April 12, 1917 the front was stabilizing again. The planned breakthrough had failed. After a few unsuccessful attacks, for instance on April 23, 1917, the British broke off the offensive on May 16, 1917, counting in the end 159,000 casualties.

In the southern sector, the French attacked with one million men and 7,000 artillery guns on April 16 and 17, 1917. They were, however, repulsed under heavy losses by the Germans. Fighting ceased practically on April 20, 1917, with only

minimal territorial gains and no breakthrough achieved. The latent unrest among the French troops, erupting in some instances into overt mutiny, caused the leadership to break off the offensive on May 5, 1917, counting in the end 118,000 French casualties.

On the propaganda front, the Allies scored far better than on the battlefield, as will be shown soon. The offensive was led again by the British, with Lord Northcliffe's propaganda warriors acting as spearheads. Part of their routine work was screening German newspapers for compromising material that could be used propagandistically against the "Huns." For *The Times*, J. E. Mackenzie, and for *The Daily Mail*, Frederic W. Wile were performing this task in close cooperation.³⁴ Both knew Germany and the Germans well. They had been living for years, until the outbreak of the war, in Berlin as correspondents of their newspapers and knew one another from these times. As can be seen from the respective issues of *The Times* and *The Daily Mail*, among the German newspapers regularly analyzed by them were the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

From Wile's own testimony we can conclude that he received his material for analysis, as a rule, not later than three days after its appearance in print.³⁵ According to a

³⁴ Frederic William Wile (1873-1941) was a U.S. citizen. "In 1901 he worked as the *Record's* Berlin correspondent. He remained there and in 1906 left the Chicago paper to become Berlin correspondent for the *London Daily Mail*. When war came, Wile was arrested as a spy and expelled from Germany . . . He wrote the column 'Germany Day by Day' for the *Daily Mail* during the war years, summarizing the news that appeared in German papers" (Riley 1995:348; italics in the original).

³⁵ The Wednesday issues, e.g., arrived on Saturday. "Germany Day by Day – Arras Admissions," *The Daily Mail*, April 16, 1917, p. 7. Germany did not object to the export of German newspapers and even allowed the import of enemy newspapers: "In Berlin, and probably in other large cities, Dutch, French, English and even Russian newspapers remained on sale" (M. L. Anderson 2011:16, with numerous references). In England, however, possession of enemy publications was forbidden (and severely punishable) by virtue of the *Trading With the Enemy Proclamation of*

remark in an editorial in *The Daily Mail* of April 17, 1917, it was he who took the inconspicuous nine lines toward the end of the fourth column on page one of the *Lokal-Anzeiger* of April 10, 1917, in which Rosner said some words about a *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*, out of their context and presented them to the public with a tendentious mistranslation.³⁶ The result, published on Monday, April 16, 1917 in *The Daily Mail*, reads as follows:

“We are travelling in the district north of Rheims. Suddenly a stench offends our nostrils. We are passing one of the corpse-converting institutions of the local army group. The fat derived is made into lubricating oils. Everything else is sent to the bone-mill to be ground into powder, which is then mixed with food for pigs and also used as fertiliser. The theory on which our Army works, one sees, is that nothing must be allowed to get unused.³⁷”

Note that Wile speaks of “corpse-converting institutions” in the plural form. We will soon come back to this observation.

Wile obviously shared his findings with his colleague from *The Times*. This can be inferred from an article published about a month later in *The War Illustrated*, in which he wrote

September 9, 1914 and the *Defence of the Realm Regulations*. Exceptions were made for those who had to deal with them professionally, e.g. newspaper analysts. See, e.g., the treatment of the matter in Commons on November 21, 1917 (<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1917/nov/21/enemy-newspapers>; last accessed July 21, 2012), or - for the Regulations - Cook 1918:126-127.

³⁶ “When early in the war first reports circulated that the Germans were turning the bodies of their dead into glycerine, those who tried to believe that the enemy was human refused to credit the loathsome tale. The statement by a German Special Correspondent which Mr. F. W. Wile discovered in the Berlin *Local-Advertiser (Anzeiger)* and published yesterday in our column ‘Germany Day by Day’ proves that it is true,” “Hun Ghoul. Oil, Fodder, and Dividends from the Dead,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 4, Italics in the original.

³⁷ “Germany Day by Day. Rendering Down the Dead. Oils and Pig Food. By Frederic William Wile, Late Berlin Correspondent of ‘The Daily Mail’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 16, 1917, p. 7.

that the “discovery” was done “conjointly” by him and his “brilliant colleague” Mackenzie.³⁸ The *Times* translation of the Rosner account, most probably done by Mackenzie himself, reads as follows:

“We pass through Evergnicourt. There is a dull smell in the air, as if lime were being burnt. We are passing the great Corpse Exploitation Establishment (*Kadaververwertungsanstalt*) of this Army Group. The fat that is won here is turned into lubricating oils, and everything else is ground down in the bones mill into a powder which is used for mixing with pigs’ food and as manure. Nothing can be permitted to go to waste.³⁹”

It was also published on April 16, 1917 and has become the “reference translation,” quoted again and again until today.

Both texts contain a mistranslation of far-reaching consequences: the translation of German *Kadaver* into English “corpse,” thus presenting the German military carcass utilization plant at Neufchâtel-sur-Aisne to the readership as a “Corpse exploitation (or “converting”) establishment.” Whether or not Wile and Mackenzie borrowed the mistranslation from another source is of no importance. Since

³⁸ “Whatever credit or discredit attaches to it, my brilliant colleague of the ‘Times,’ Mr. J. E. Mackenzie, who, like myself, was stationed for many years in Germany as Berlin correspondent, shares with me the responsibility of having brought to public notice the activities of the Hun body-boilers. It was we who discovered conjointly in the Government-controlled ‘Lokal-Anzeiger’ of April 10th, 1917, the loathsome admission that the German armies in the field maintain Corpse Utilisation Establishments (*Kadaver-Verwertungs-Anstalten*), where soldier dead are ‘rendered down’ for lubricating oils, fats, and pigs’ food.” “Why I Believe the Germans Are Ghouls,” *The War Illustrated*, May 19, 1917, p. 308. Thanks to Randal Marlin, who provided me with a copy.

³⁹ “Through German Eyes. Use of Dead Bodies: Callous Admission,” *The Times*, April 16, 1917, p. 7. Italics in the original. *The Times*, as a rule, did not give the names of those who wrote the articles. With minor changes in the wording, the *Times*’ translation is reprinted in *The Daily Mail* of April 18, 1917 (“The Hun Corpse Factory. Facsimile of German Report. Universal Horror”).

they proudly accepted “the responsibility of having brought to public notice the activities of the Hun body-boilers”⁴⁰ by publishing the Rosner account in English translation, they must also be held responsible for having “brought to public notice” the mistranslation of the key word, *Kadaver*.

Both knew German well enough to know that, in the given context, *Kadaver* meant the dead body of an animal, never of a human being. What is more, Kalkschmidt’s parallel report in the April 12, 1917 issue of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* - which precisely said that horses and slaughterhouse refuse was processed in the *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* he (and Rosner) had visited - must have been known to them. But even if we assume in Wile and Mackenzie’s favor that they had not yet received Kalkschmidt’s report before the evening of April 15, 1917, when their articles went to press, they would have got it some time later and would have had the possibility to recant - what they, however, never did, not even after the war had ended. For contemporaries, allowances may be made for having thought that the translators had inadvertently fallen victim to a “false friend.”⁴¹ Nearly a century after the event, however, the truth need no more be hidden: presenting the translation of *Kadaver* as “corpse” was a falsification, deliberately made, and with slanderous intent.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Why I Believe the Germans Are Ghouls,” *The War Illustrated*, May 19, 1917, p. 308.

⁴¹ The “translator’s false friends” are similarly spelled or pronounced words that, in both languages, have different meanings, e.g. English “eventually” and German “eventuell” (maybe, perhaps), or French “clavier” (keyboard) and German “Klavier” (piano).

⁴² In an effort to excuse, at least partially, the falsifying mistranslation, the authors of a German standard textbook for interpreters write that “the *Times*, a week later, corrected its mistranslation and pointed to the fact that the word ‘Kadaver’ is never used for a human corpse” (*Obgleich die Times eine Woche später ihre Fehlübersetzung berichtigte und darauf hinwies, dass das Wort “Kadaver” niemals für eine menschliche Leiche gebraucht werde*; Hönig/Kußmaul 2003:88). This gives the impression that *The Times*, indeed, recanted, which did not happen at all, quite the contrary. The textbook authors obviously had misread their source

The attentive reader will have noticed another mistake in the *Times* translation: *als ob Leim gekocht würde* is translated into “as if lime were being burnt.” On the one hand, this does not make sense. The burning of lime does not give “a dull smell.” On the other hand, “lime” (which is pronounced exactly as German *Leim*) could lead readers to the association “lime ↔ dead bodies” (quicklime was widely used for battlefield sanitation), or, if they were well versed in the Bible, with God’s judgment upon Moab for having burnt a dead enemy’s bones to lime.⁴³ “Glue,” the correct translation of *Leim*, however, would have evoked associations (in the minds of older people at least) with knackered horses. Whether this mistranslation was deliberate, as Randal Marlin would not exclude,⁴⁴ or whether it was a mistake of “the translator’s false friends” type, shall be left open to interpretation. At any rate, *The Times*, a few days later, silently corrected this error.⁴⁵

The Northcliffe Press Opens Fire

On Monday, April 16, 1917 both *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* brought on page seven the mistranslated Rosner account. In *The Daily Mail*, the news appeared in the column “Germany Day by Day” with the sub-headline “By Frederic William Wile, Late Berlin Correspondent of ‘The Daily Mail’.” The Rosner account is preceded by two paragraphs. In the first, Wile states as “a fact already well known in Allied

(Rundle 1946:22), where there is only mention of the fact that *The Times*, on April 23, 1917, quoted a German *démenti* (“Germans and the Dead. The Meaning of ‘Kadaver’,” p. 7). Had they checked the primary source, they would have noticed that the German *démenti* in *The Times* is immediately followed by the remark “This statement is definitely and deliberately untrue,” and by a lengthy discussion to prove that *Kadaver* might as well mean “corpse.”

⁴³ Amos 2.

⁴⁴ <http://www.http-server.carleton.ca/~rmarlin/announcements.html>. Last accessed February 6, 2009.

⁴⁵ “The Germans and the Dead. A Prisoner’s Story,” *The Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5.

countries that the German Army converts the dead bodies of soldiers into oil.” This shows that the Belgian “Gerolstein” story was known to him. In the next paragraph he says that “every German army has one of these ‘institutions’,” which was, in principle, true.⁴⁶ It explains the use of the plural form in his translation of the Rosner account and indicates that he already knew quite a lot about the German carcass utilization plants, which in turn lets his mistranslation of *Kadaver* appear still more insidious.

The Times placed the Rosner account in its column “Through German Eyes” under the sub-headline “Use of Dead Bodies: Callous Admission.” The article begins:

“Herr Karl Rosner, the correspondent of the Berlin *Lokalanzeiger* on the Western front, who lately gave such glowing accounts of the devastation of France, published last Tuesday the first definite German admission concerning the way in which the Germans use dead bodies. In a description of the battlefield north of Reims he writes:-”

It follows the mistranslated account until “and as manure.” The news item ends with “Herr Rosner conveys this information with no comment but the remark that ‘nothing can be permitted to go to waste’.”⁴⁷ In the following, this news item will be referred to as the “Preliminary version” of the “Corpse factory” story.

Early in the morning of the sixteenth of April, *The Times* sent the text of its *Kadaver* news item, shortened and slightly altered - it has, for instance, “Champagne army group” instead of “this army group” - together with other news, to French and British newspapers and, via cable, to the Australian and New Zealand Press Associations.⁴⁸ In Australia and New Zealand it appeared on April 17, 1917 in many newspapers, often giving “The ‘Times’” as the source, and always under sensational headlines, such as “Germans and Their Dead. Fat

⁴⁶ “Rendering Down the Dead,” *The Daily Mail*, April 16, 1917, p. 7.

⁴⁷ “Through German Eyes. Use of Dead Bodies: Callous Admission,” *The Times*, April 16, 1917, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Mentioned in *The Northern Advocate*, together with “‘Times’ cable.”

Extracted from Bodies. Bones Crushed to Feed Pigs,” “The Awfulness of the Hun – ‘Boil down Corpses’,” or “Cremating Dead Germans. For Oil and Bonedust. ‘Nothing Must Be Wasted’.”⁴⁹ Note that, in some instances, the headline (usually worded by the newspaper’s editor) or the text itself already identify the corpses processed as “German.”⁵⁰ Another target country was Brazil, whose press received the news from *The Times* through Agence Havas or Agencia Americana, the first Brazilian news agency, established in 1913 by media pioneer

⁴⁹ See e.g. the following newspapers from New Zealand: *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth (“Germans and Their Dead. Fat Extracted from Bodies. Bones Crushed to Feed Pigs,” p. 3), *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui (“Economy. The Awfulness of the Hun. ‘Boil down Corpses,’” p. 4), *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury (“German Treatment of the Dead. ‘Nothing Must Be Wasted,’” p. 5), *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki (“Horrible Admissions – German Corpse Exploitation Establishment,” p. 5), *The Colonist*, Nelson (“Utilisation of Corpses. Revolting German Industry. A Correspondent’s Admission,” p. 15), *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui (“Germans’ Gruesome Charnel House. How the Dead Are Treated. ‘Nothing Must Be Wasted,’” p. 5), *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough (“German Corpse Exploitation. Bodies Rendered into Fat, Powdered for Pig’s Food and Manure,” p. 5), *The Thames Star*, Waikato (“A German Horror. Treatment of the Dead. Corpses Utilised for Oil and Pig Food”), *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne (“Ghoulish Huns. Treatment of the Dead,” p. 3), *The Evening Post*, Wellington (“Horrible Disclosure. Treatment of German Dead. German Paper’s Admission,” p. 7), and *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei (“Revolting Revelations. Human Bodies Boiled Down. Bones Fed to Pigs,” p. 3). For Australia, the following newspapers could be found: *Warrnambool Standard*, Warrnambool, VIC (“Cremating Dead Germans. For Oil and Bonedust. ‘Nothing Must Be Wasted,’” April 17, 1917, p. 3), *The Ballarat Courier*, Ballarat, VIC (“Latest Hun Horror. Awful Treatment of Dead. Fat Extracted from Corpses,” April 17, 1917, p. 3), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (“Latest German Horror,” April 18, 1917, p. 11), *The Warwick Examiner and Times*, St. Lucia, QLD (“Human Fats. The German Method. Bones for Pig Fodder,” p. 4), and *Portland Guardian*, Portland, VIC (under “Midnight Cables,” April 18, 1917, p. 3).

⁵⁰ *The Thames Star* from Waikato, New Zealand, e.g., has it in the body of the news item.

Cáspar Líbero in São Paulo.⁵¹ Both agencies had London representatives, for whom *The Times* was part of their daily compulsory reading matter.

Outside Brazil, Australia and New Zealand, appearances of the “Preliminary version” could be found only sporadically, for example, in Great Britain and France. The *Derby Daily Telegraph* brought it already on April 16, *The Scotsman* on April 17, and both *Le Gaulois* (in its headline identifying the corpses as “German”) and *Le Matin*, one of the big French dailies, on April 18, 1917.⁵² French rational thinking, however, seems to have had a problem with the alleged smell produced by “burning” lime. *Le Matin*, therefore, gave another mistranslation, “The air is filled with the pungent odor of quicklime being slaked,”⁵³ which, at least, was logically consistent and, in addition, directly evoked the image of “dead bodies.”

⁵¹ See, e.g.: “Nada se perde ... para os allemães. A nova industria dos cadaveres” [Nothing is wasted ... for the Germans. The new corpse industry], *A Noite*, Rio de Janeiro, April 17, 1917, p. 2 (sourced “Havas”); “Os allemães estão extrahindo a graxa dos soldados mortos nas linhas de fogo” [The Germans are extracting the fat from the soldiers killed in the firing line], *A Epoca*, Rio de Janeiro, April 18, 1917, p. 4, sourced “A[gencia]A[mericana]”; “Até os cadaveres! Uma industria de canibaeis” [Until the corpses! A cannibal industry], *O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, April 18, 1917, p. 3; “Os cadaveres fornecendo lubrificantes e pasto aos suinos” [Corpses providing lubricants and pigs’ food], *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, April 18, 1917, p. 3, sourced “A. A.”; “Industria lugubre. Nada se perde” [Lugubrious industry. Nothing is wasted], *A Republica*, Curitiba, PR, April 18, 1917, p. 2. All news items are datelined “April 17.”

⁵² “The German Ghouls,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Derby, England, April 16, 1917, p. 3; “Germans and Use of Dead Bodies,” *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, April 17, 1917, p. 6; “Les corps des Allemands tués – Ils servent à la nourriture des porcs” [The bodies of the killed Germans – They serve as pig food], *Le Gaulois*, Paris, April 18, p. 3; “‘Il ne faut rien laisser perdre’” [Nothing is permitted to go to waste], *Le Matin*, Paris, April 18, 1917, p. 3.

⁵³ *L’air est chargé d’une odeur pénétrante de chaux vive qu’on éteint*. Ibid.

The limited appearance of the “Preliminary version” of the “Corpse factory” story outside the Northcliffe papers and the absence of Reuters in its distribution lead to the conclusion that the publication of this news item on April 16, 1917, as well as its spreading by *The Times* on the same day to news agencies and other newspapers, were “solo efforts” of the Northcliffe press, most probably not (yet) made in arrangement with the Department of Information.

Forging the Sword

Neither *The Daily Mail* nor *The Times* published the Rosner account on a prominent page. The Times brought it among other news items in a regular, daily column, without particular emphasis put on it. The short item was certainly overlooked by many readers. The Daily Mail, at least, brought it at the beginning of its column “Germany Day by Day” and provided it with a big headline. Apparently, the editorial staff of both papers had regarded it as one of the many news about German atrocities that were turning up on their desks day by day and which to publish had become everyday routine for them.

The news item, however, must have attracted the attention of the propaganda professionals at the Department of Information. This institution was established by a War Cabinet decision of February 20, 1917 on the initiative of Prime Minister Lloyd George to coordinate British propaganda efforts and increase their efficiency.⁵⁴ Though housed at the Foreign Office, it

⁵⁴ The proposal for a Department of Information, including a detailed description of its function and structure, was made by John Buchan in a memorandum from February 3, 1917 (Propaganda – A Department of Information, *War Cabinet Papers*, paper no. G.-128. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-3.pdf>, pp. 291-294 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012). Buchan was appointed head of the Department on February 9, 1917 (Minutes of the War Cabinet meeting on February 9, 1917. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-23-1.pdf>, p. 423 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012). David Lloyd George (1863-1945), was a liberal British politician, one of Britain’s outstanding policy makers in the 20th century, Prime

was an independent body, answerable directly to the Prime Minister. It supervised four sections: a Cinema Division, a Political Intelligence Division, Wellington House, and a News Division. Head of the Department of Information was John Buchan (1875-1940), a Scottish novelist and historian. Before enlisting for military service, he had been writing for Wellington House and, as a war correspondent, for *The Times*. He was promoted to Colonel when he became Head of the Department of Information in February 1917.⁵⁵ Buchan was assisted by an Advisory Committee of three prominent newspapermen: Lord Northcliffe, Robert Donald (1860-1933), editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, and Charles Prestwick Scott (1846-1932), editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.⁵⁶ As already mentioned, Roderick Jones, Reuters' General Manager, headed the News Division.

In the days preceding the publication of the Rosner account by the Northcliffe papers, the "German corpse factory" had been a matter of discussion in the Department of Information. Since the end of March, the "Gerolstein" story was appearing in Dutch, French, and expatriate Belgian newspapers. Certainly the British knew about this - at the latest since April 7, 1917, when the April 10 issue of *L'Indépendance Belge* was on sale in London. For sure they also knew that the *Office Belge Patrie et Liberté* was behind the spreading of the atrocity tale. As Randal Marlin has shown, British and Belgian Intelligence and propaganda institutions for long had been closely collaborating with one another to guarantee a "constant interchange of views and information of every sort relating to actual or potential propaganda in the interest of Belgium"⁵⁷ - and not to forget, of Great Britain, too.

Minister from 1916 to 1922.

⁵⁵ Debate in Commons, June 5, 1917, "Foreign Office (Department of Information)." On the Web: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1917/jun/05/foreign-office-department-of-information>. Last accessed April 15, 2012.

⁵⁶ Marwick 1991:252.

⁵⁷ Quoted from the British War Propaganda Office's Third Report,

If we can trust the post-war memoirs of those once involved in the affair, the “Corpse factory” was discussed controversially in the Department of Information. The “Literati,” Charles Masterman (from Wellington House) and John Buchan, well-versed in dealing with texts, obviously had doubts as to the veracity of the story, especially as it was not corroborated by any other even half-way reliable source. They, therefore, tended to stay aside from disseminating it. On the other hand, Robert Donald from the Advisory Committee, a man with practical experience in influencing public opinion, realistically gauged the story’s propagandistic value and was pressing to go public with it in Great Britain and to exploit it also overseas.⁵⁸

The publication of the “Preliminary version” on April 16, 1917 and its distribution by *The Times*, however, put the Department of Information on the spot and ended all internal discussions about the “Corpse factory.” Going public with the story had become inevitable, all the more as both newspapers had left it open *whose* “dead bodies” were processed in the “corpse-conversion factories.” Did the Germans boil down only their own dead, or also the corpses of fallen Allied soldiers they got hold of? This was in fact a sensitive issue, and the answer could not be concluded from the Rosner account alone. With regard to the heavy British losses on the battle front - let us remember that the British, in the preceding week alone, had lost about 100,000 men in the Battle of Arras - the idea that the Germans might also turn Allied soldier dead into lubricating oil and pigs’ food would cut both ways. It could spur the soldiers in the trenches to fight harder, but it could also undermine public morale on the Home front.⁵⁹ The situation had to be clarified as quickly as possible.

The task fell upon the Northcliffe papers that had pressed ahead with the publication of the Rosner account. At least

September 1916, in Marlin 2008. See also Marlin 2002:72.

⁵⁸ Buitenhuis 1987:133, Scott 1996:16.

⁵⁹ Rubinstein 1987:12.

one of their columnists, Frederic W. Wile, knew the Belgian “Gerolstein” story. Just in case, a copy of the April 10 issue of *L’Indépendance Belge* could easily be picked up from this newspaper’s offices that were only a few minutes’ walk away. In addition, in the editorial offices of the Northcliffe press, the French story about Eckbolsheim, glycerin, and the American consul was known.⁶⁰ It suggested itself to combine all these in such a way that the “American consul” was apparently corroborating the “Gerolstein” story, whereas the Rosner account, presented as a quasi-official German document, seemingly authenticated both. As a useful by-product, the resulting story would dispel doubts as to the nationality of the victims.

The result of the ingenious compilation - and a prime example of faking credentials for propaganda purposes - was the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story, published by *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* on April 17, 1917 in the morning.⁶¹ Looked at from the point of propaganda, engaging *The Times* in the spreading of the story was a clever move. An inaugural publication in the most prominent British daily with a reputation of being a serious, balanced press organ, lent the story an appearance of seriousness and credibility, which enhanced its propagandistic value, especially in neutral countries. Obviously the Department of Information approved of the work, for it gave the green light for spreading the “Final version” also overseas.⁶² It was, therefore, the same

⁶⁰ This follows from an editorial “Hun Ghoul. Oil, Fodder, and Dividends from the Dead,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 4, in which the job offer of a *Kadaverwertungsanstalt*, placed in a journal of chemistry, is mentioned. The French story had been published in mid-March by *The Evening News*, a Northcliffe paper.

⁶¹ “The Huns and Their Dead. Callous Admission. Factory for Oils and Pig-Food. A Company Run for Profit,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 6; “Germans and Their Dead. Revolting Treatment. Science and the Barbarian Spirit,” *The Times*, April 17, 1917, p. 5.

⁶² Putnis/McCallum 2005.

day incorporated into Reuters dispatches for distribution worldwide.

Apart from some minor differences in the wording of the introductory paragraphs, the texts printed in *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* are identical. In the middle, the “Gerolstein” story - in English, of course - is placed, presented as a translation from *L'Indépendance Belge*. The matter-of-fact diction of the Belgian text and its (anonymous) author's apparent knowledge of intimate details lets it look like an eyewitness or insider report and gives it an additional aura of credibility. It is framed by the *Times* version of the mistranslated Rosner account in the beginning and the “American consul” tale at the end, both presented as credentials corroborating one another and the central “Gerolstein” story.⁶³

The translation of the French text from *L'Indépendance Belge* is overall rather loose, but this is within the translator's discretion and will not be a point of criticism here. It has, however, several factual flaws that deserve attention. There are, for instance, serious translation errors. In the French-language original, the width of the factory area is *une centaine de mètres*, which means “about 330 ft.” and not “110 ft,” and the living quarters of the workers are situated *près de la ligne principale*, “near the main railway,” and not “at the factory,” which, in the original, is located *un kilomètre*, i.e. more than 1,000 yards, distant from the main railway. “In charge of the work” the French-language original has *un directeur*, “a director,” and not “the chief chemist,” who is the director's subordinate in the original text. In military parlance - let us remember that “all the employees are soldiers” - *une infirmerie* is “a sick-bay,” maybe “a hospital hut,” but never “a sanatorium.” *Sous aucun prétexte* means “on no account,” not “under no pretext.”⁶⁴ The translation of *Abfallverwertung*

⁶³ Three days later, *The Daily Mail* silently corrected the mistranslation of *Leim*. “The Hun Corpse Factory. World-Wide Horror. German Prisoner's Account,” *The Daily Mail*, April 20, 1917, p. 4.

⁶⁴ A typical example of the “translator's false friends” error, pointing to a non-professional translator.

into “offal utilization” - and not “recycling,” which would be correct - is tendentious and shall undoubtedly evoke associations with “butchering” and “slaughterhouse.”⁶⁵

What is more, the translator added details not present in the original text, for example, that the branch railway to the factory is a “double track” line, that the personnel are “guarded as prisoners,” or that “the boiler furnaces are supplied with air by electric fans,” the latter resulting obviously from a misunderstanding of the function of the ventilation system as described in the French-language original. The translated text as a whole gives the impression that it was made under pressure and not by a professional translator, and that it was inserted into the article without prior editing.

In its April 17, 1917 issue, *The Daily Mail* brought, in addition to the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story, two supporting articles. One was written by Frederic William Wile. He claimed to have revealed the secret behind “the Huns’ . . . ‘rendering down’ the dead bodies of their soldiers for extraction of fats, oils, and pig food.” In the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* of April 11, 1917, he found an article dealing with German efforts to increase domestic fat production. In the preceding year, the German newspaper said, “more than 1,000,000 lb of domestic oils” were obtained “from fruit-stones, sunflowers, ‘and so on’ (*und so weiter*).” The vagueness of the expression “and so on” was used by Wile to allege foul practice to the Germans: “In these three words, it may be assumed, are hidden the ghoulish secret of the *Kadaver-Verwertungs-Anstalten* (corpse-converting institutions).”⁶⁶

The second article, an editorial, is unsigned. It is interesting insofar as it set the tone in the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign with its overt tendency to de-humanize the enemy

⁶⁵ “Offal” in everyday English means “everything of a butchered animal that is not meat or bones.”

⁶⁶ “Germany Day by Day. Huns’ Need of Fats. ‘Intensive Methods.’ By Frederic William Wile, Late Berlin Correspondent of ‘The Daily Mail’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 7. Italics in the original.

in general and its rulers in particular. In a sweeping blow, the writer swears at the Germans as greedy criminals, ghouls, and cannibals who, to crown it all, impudently boast of their horrible crimes, and to whom, therefore, the attribute "human" is rightfully denied.

"When early in the war reports first circulated that the Germans were turning the bodies of their dead into glycerine, those who tried to believe that the enemy was human refused to credit the loathsome tale. The statement by a German Special Correspondent . . . proves that it is true . . . Not only is it true; the Germans even glory in it . . .

So brutally callous have the Germans become, so entirely have they lost all the sacred emotions of civilised man, that, as the news which we publish to-day shows, they have established a . . . company . . . which turns the dead into dividends . . .

The civilised races of mankind have always classed the crime of dishonoring the dead with that of cannibalism. That the House of Hohenzollern, after using its subjects as fodder for British guns, should treat their bodies as "offal" is something more than an outrage on all our ideals and faith. The German losses must be extremely heavy to provide the ghouls of the Offal Company with their high profits. It will also be noted with satisfaction that Sir Douglas Haig's inexorable advance deprives these horrible criminals of the material for their sacrilege.⁶⁷"

The "Corpse factory" Attacks Along a Wide Front

As mentioned previously, the decision to spread the "Corpse factory" story worldwide was taken in the Department of Information - at latest on April 16, 1917, when the Northcliffe papers had pressed ahead with the publication of the mistranslated Rosner account. The "Final version" was

⁶⁷ "Hun Ghouls. Oil, Fodder, and Dividends from the Dead," *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 4. Sir Douglas Haig (1861-1928), Field Marshal, commanded from 1915 until the end of the war the British Expeditionary Force on the Western front.

translated into many languages and appeared within the next two days, i.e. April 18 and 19, 1917, in newspapers across the whole world, in Allied and pro-Entente papers together with exaggerated (and often false) news about glorious French victories in the course of the Nivelle offensive, and often on prominent pages. Its appearance is documented, for instance, in

- Australia (*The Ballarat Courier*; *The Sun*, Sydney; *The Herald*, Melbourne; *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill),
- Brazil (*O Paiz* and *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro; *A Republica*, Curitiba)
- Canada (*La Patrie*, Montreal; *L'Action Catholique*, Quebec),
- China (*The Hongkong Telegraph*; *The China Mail*, Hongkong; *The Hongkong Daily Press*),
- France (*Le Figaro*; *Le Matin*; *Le Temps*; *La Presse*; *L'Homme enchaîné*⁶⁸; *La Libre Parole*⁶⁹; *La Victoire*; *Le Petit Journal*; *Journal de Débats*; *L'Intransigeant*; *L'Action Française*; *Le Siècle*; *Le Gaulois*; *La Croix* - all from Paris),
- Holland (*Utrechts Nieuwsblad*; *Tilburgsche Courant*; *Leeuwarder Courant*; *Leidsche Courant*, Leyden; *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant-Algemeen Handelsblad*; *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*; *De Tijd*, s'Hertogenbosch),
- Italy (*La Stampa*, Torino),
- Malaya (*The Straits Times*, Singapore; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*),
- New Zealand (*The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth; *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne; *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury; *The Evening Post*, Wellington; *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki; *The Colonist*, Nelson),
- Portugal (*A Capital*, Lisbon),

⁶⁸ Quoted in "The Hun Corpse Factory. Paris Paper on Evidence of an American," *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

- The United Kingdom (*The Scotsman*, Edinburgh; *The Western Times*, Exeter; *The Evening News*, London; *The Derby Daily Telegraph*; *The Amman Valley Chronicle*, Ammanford), and
- The United States (*The Dallas Morning News*; *Denton Record Chronicle*; *The Galveston County Daily News*; *The Daily Bulletin*, Brownwood - all from Texas).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "The German Ghouls," *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, April 17, 1917, p. 3, and April 20, 1917, p. 4; "Germans and Their Dead. Revolting treatment," *The Scotsman*, April 18, 1917, p. 8; *The Evening News*, April 18, 1917 (Mügge 1920:103-104); "Gruesome German Oil factory. The Way of the Hun. German Human Oil. How Dead Bodies Are Treated," *The Grey River Argus*, April 18, 1917, p. 3; "Ghouls in Germany. Making Profit from Corpses. 'Kultur' undisguised," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, April 18, 1917, p. 3; "A Ghastly Business. How Germans Treat the Dead," *The Ashburton Guardian*, April 18, 1917, p. 6; "German Dead. Details Which Could Be Spared," *The Evening Post*, April 18, 1917, p. 7; "Enemy Countries. New German Socialist Party. Oil and Tallow from Dead Bodies. Horrible Details of German Corpse Exploitation," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, April 18, 1917, p. 5; "German Corpse Mill. An Abominable Enterprise. Details of the Business," *The Colonist*, April 18, 1917, p. 5; "Boiling down the dead - Huns Crowning Infamy," *The Ballarat Courier*, April 18 (?), 1917; "How the Germans Treat Their Dead," *The Barrier Miner*, April 18, 1917, p. 2; "Fat from the dead: Horrible German method," *The Sun*, April 18 (?), 1917; "Desecrating the dead" and "The German Beast: A nation dehumanised," *The Herald*, April 18 (?), 1917; "O que os Allemães fazem dos seus mortos" [What the Germans make from their dead], *A Capital*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; "Sur le front allemand. Les porcs engraisés avec les cadavres" [About the German front. Pigs fattened with corpses], *Le Figaro*, April 18, 1917, p. 2; "Germans Boil Human Dead to Get Oil," *The Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1917; *Denton Record Chronicle*, April 18, 1917; "General War News. Horrible Revelations. Germans Feed Pigs with Corpses," *The Straits Times*, April 18, 1917, p. 9, locating the factory at St. Vith; "Other War News . . . Apotheosis of Materialism. Human Corpse-Oil," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, April 18, 1917, p. 7; "How Germany Treats Her Dead. A Limited Company's Gruesome Activities," *The Hongkong Telegraph*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; "The Gruesome German Sensation. The Corpse Exploitation Establishment," *The China Mail*, April 18, 1917, p. 5; "Een lugubre industrie" [A lugubrious industry], *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, April 18, 1917, p. 2; "Diverse berichten – Smeerolie

For their description of the “Corpse factory,” *La Stampa*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Matin* and *Le Temps* did not (re-)translate from *The Times*, but apparently used the original text from *L’Indépendance Belge*. Some French newspapers, in addition, gave as the primary source of the story a “Journal de Belgique from Leyden.” *Le Temps* and *Le Journal de Débats* translated the German “*als ob da Leim gekocht würde*” by “*comme si l’on brûlait de la chair*” - “as if flesh were being burnt” -

uit lijken” [Miscellaneous – Grease oil from corpses], *Tilburgsche Courant*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; “Een griezelige industrie” [A gruesome industry], *Leeuwarder Courant*, April 18, 1914, p. 2; “Duitschland. Een afschuwelijke industrie. Vetten uit lijken” [Germany. A disgusting industry. Fats from corpses], *Leidsche Courant*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; “Een lugubere instelling” [A lugubrious institution], *De Tijd*, April 18, 1917; “Eene lugubre industrie” [A lugubrious industry], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant-Allgemeen Handelsblad*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; without title, very short: *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 18, 1917, p. 5; “Ils brûlent leurs morts pour en extraire les corps gras” [They burn their dead to extract from them the fats], *Le Petit Journal*, April 18, 1917, p. 3; “L’industrie de cadavres – une usine bien allemande” [The corpse industry – a typical German factory], *L’Intransigeant*, April 18, 1917, p. 2; “Revoltante industrie en Allemagne. Les Allemands soumettent les cadavres de leurs soldats à de répugnants traitements.- Ils s’en servent pour fabriquer la stéarine. Des horreurs” [Scandalous industry in Germany. Germans subject corpses of their soldiers to disgusting treatment.- Use them for making stearin. Horrors], *La Patrie*, April 18, 1917, p. 2; “Abominable industrie chez les Boches – La fabrication des huiles avec les corps de soldats allemands tués à la guerre. Des trains chargés de cadavres. Détails revoltants” [Disgusting Hun industry – Manufacture of oils from corpses of German soldiers killed in the war. Trains loaded with corpses. Outrageous details], *L’Action Catholique - Organe de l’Action Sociale Catholique*, April 19, 1917, p. 3; “L’officina tedesca per la utilizzazione dei cadaveri” [The German corpse utilization factory], *La Stampa*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; “Como os alemães aproveitam os cadaveres. Uma repellente industria” [How the Germans utilize the corpses. An abominable industry], *O Paiz*, April 19, 1917, p. 3; “Uma industria macabra” [A macabre industry], *Correio da Manhã*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; “Lugubre industria. O aproveitamento dos cadaveres alemães” [Lugubrious industry. The utilization of German corpses], *A Republica*, April 19, 1917, p. 2 (very short, in great detail on April 24, 1917, p. 2); *The Galveston County Daily News*, April 19, 1917; “German

another mistranslation that, at least, made more sense than the Northcliffe press' "lime-burning." Burning of flesh, indeed, gives an unpleasant smell.

The Daily Mail came back to the issue on April 18, 1917 with a long article on its front page, trumpeting that "universal horror has been aroused" by the paper's "revelations" about the Huns' body-boiling. Concluding, the author points to a major goal of the campaign: to arouse anti-German feelings in the Muslim world in general and to set Turkey against Germany in particular.

"If only the Huns' ally the Turk were informed that his dead who fall fighting in Europe are being turned into pigs' food it would create such a revulsion of feeling that the popu-

Vat of Honor. Corpse Exploitation," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, April 19, 1917, p. 3; "Germany's Dead. Gruesome Treatment," *The Hongkong Daily Press*, April 19, 1917, p. 5; "Human Fat for Lubrication. Dead Bodies 'Rendered Down'," *The Amman Valley Chronicle*, April 19, 1917; "Le Respect de la mort" [Respecting death], *Journal de Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; "Chez les barbares – les Boches nourrissent leurs porcs avec les cadavres de leurs soldats" [Among the barbarians – the Huns are feeding their pigs with the corpses of their soldiers], *Action Française – Organe du Nationalisme Intégral*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; "Choses d'Allemagne – Cadavres boches transformés en engrais. Procédé de fabrication inédit" [Things from Germany – Hun corpses turned to lubricants. A brand new process of manufacturing], *Le Siècle*, April 19, 1917, p. 1; "L'usine de la charogne. Comment les Allemands utilisent pour leurs engrais et la nourriture des porcs les corps de leurs soldats tombés au champ d'honneur" [The carrion factory. How the Germans use the corpses of their soldiers fallen on the Field of Honor for fertilizer and pig feeding], *Le Matin*, April 19, 1917, p. 1; "Chez nos ennemies. Les porcs mangent les cadavres en poudre" [At our enemies. The pigs eat powdered corpses], *La Croix*, April 19, 1917, p. 3; "Echos," *La Presse*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; "Autour de la bataille. Comment les Allemands exploitent les cadavres de leurs soldats" [Around the battlefield. How the Germans exploit the corpses of their soldiers], *Le Temps*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; *The Daily Bulletin*, April 19, 1917; *The Western Times*, April 19, 1917, p. 2. This paper came back to the subject on p. 4 of its April 23 and on p 6 of its April 24, 1917 issues.

lation would revolt. There could be no paradise for any of “the faithful” whose body helped to nourish a pig.⁷¹”

The story, however, does not seem to have had any influence on German-Turkish relations.

The main purveyor of the “Corpse factory” news outside Great Britain was Reuters. This should not surprise us if we remember that its General Manager was also Head of the News Division of the Department of Information, where the decision was taken to spread the “Final version” worldwide. Reuters delivered it directly to Holland, Asia, New Zealand and Australia and distributed it also to other news agencies, for example to the Agence Havas, which catered to the French-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking communities, or to the Australian United Service Limited and the New Zealand Press Association. This can be deduced from occasional source remarks accompanying the news in various papers across the globe. The importance of Reuters in the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign, therefore, cannot be estimated highly enough. Without its involvement, the campaign would never have reached global dimension.

Within the next days, the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story continued to appear worldwide, mostly in the period of time from April 20 to April 24, 1917 and on prominent pages. Outside the U.S., its appearance is documented, for instance, for:

- Argentina (*La Nación*, Buenos Aires),
- Australia (*The Albany Advertiser*; *The Euroa Advertiser*; *The Horsham Times*; *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*; *The Brisbane Daily Mail*; *Australian Statesman and Mining Standard*, Sydney),
- China (*The North-China Daily News*; *The North China Herald* - all from Shanghai),

⁷¹ “The Huns’ Corpse Factory. Facsimile of German Report. Universal Horror,” *The Daily Mail*, April 18, 1917, p. 1. The article was frequently reprinted at the Antipodes, however, with a considerable time delay of several weeks.

- The Dutch East Indies (*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*; *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch Indië* - all from Batavia),
- Holland (*Nieuwe Amersfoortsche Courant*; *De Nieuwe Koerier*, Roermond; *De Telegraaf*, Amsterdam; *De Tribune*, Amsterdam),
- Italy (*Informazione*, Rome; *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan),
- Spain (*La Correspondencia de España*, Madrid),
- Switzerland (*Gazette de Lausanne*; *Popolo e Libertà*, Lugano; *Gazetta Ticinese*, Lugano, *Le Confédéré*, Martigny), and
- The United Kingdom (*The Irish Times*, Dublin; *The British Journal of Nursing*, London; *Derby Daily Telegraph*; *The Manchester Guardian*; *Western Daily Press*, Bristol; *Tamworth Herald*).⁷²

⁷² Article in *Informazione*, April 20, 1917 (quoted by *The Daily Advocate*, Victoria TX, April 20, 1917, p. 1); "A Human Distillate. Oil From Corpses. Huns Establish Factory in Forest in Germany. Paper Describes Process," *The Euroa Advertiser*, April 20, 1917, p. 2; "Supreme Savagery. Corpses Boiled for Oil," *The Horsham Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5; "Bolletino politico. Officina tedesca per l'utilizzazione dei cadaveri?" [Political bulletin. German factory for the utilization of the corpses?], *Popolo e Libertà – Giornale del Partito Conservatore-Democratico Ticinese*, April 20, 1917, p. 1; "L'Allemand ne laisse rien se perdre" [The German allows nothing to go to waste], *Gazette de Lausanne*, April 20, 1917, p. 2; "Jock in Command," p. 5, and "German Ghouls. How They Keep Their Glycerine Supply," *Western Daily Press*, April 20, 1917; "Glycerine from the Bodies of Dead Soldiers. What Germans Gain from Ghoulish Practice," *Derby Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 1917, p. 4; "Echos. Il ne faut rien laisser perdre" [Echoes. Nothing is allowed to be wasted], *Le Confédéré*, April 21, 1917, p. 2; "German Dead as Pigs' Food and Manure," *The British Journal of Nursing*, April 21, 1917, p. 280; "Kadaververwertungsanstalt," *De Nieuwe Koerier*, April 21, 1917, p. 1, referring to a previous publication; "Latest German Horror," *The Albany Advertiser*, April 21, 1917, p. 3; "Waste not, Want not," *Tamworth Herald*, April 21, 1917, p. 5; "De Oorlog. Smeerolie, ontploffingsmiddelen en varkensvoer uit lijken" [The war. Lubricants, explosives and pigs' food from corpses], *Nieuwe Amersfoortsche Courant*, April 21, 1917, p. 1; "The Last Outrage," *The North China Herald*, April 21, 1917, p. 109; "The Last German Outrage" and "A Possible Explanation," *ibid.*, p. 110.

The Times' correspondent from Rome reported general indignation: "Italian newspapers call the practice 'Germany's last abomination'."⁷³ For *The British Journal of Nursing*, the leading general clinical journal for nurses, the moral of the story was evident: "As for the House of Hohenzollern, responsible for hell let loose, down, down with it into the nethermost inferno, and we British mothers must help to send it there." New Zealand's Prime Minister, William F. Massey, who was on a political tour through England, gave a speech at Manchester on April 23, 1917. He "expressed horror" about

In its April 28, 1917, issue, *The North China Herald* brought three letters to the editor, dated April 20 to 24, under the common heading "The St. Vith factory," on page 188, referring to a publication in *The North-China Daily News*; "Germany and the Dead," *The Manchester Guardian*, April 23, 1917, p. 4; "The Germans and Their Dead," *The Irish Times*, April 23, 1917, p. 4; "Siguen los combates en el frente occidental. Cadáveres y submarinos" [Further fighting at the West front. Corpses and submarines], *La Correspondencia de España*, April 24, 1917, p. 2; "Nagekomen telegramen" [Latest telegrams], *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch Indië*, April 24, 1917, p. 5, quoting from the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*; "German Boiling Down Establishment. No 'Cadavers' Reduced," *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, April 24, 1917, p. 5, quoting (without date) *The Brisbane Daily Mail*; "L'ultima nefandezza tedesca. L'utilizzazione industriale dei cadaveri" [The ultimate German dastardliness. The industrial utilization of the corpses], *Gazzetta Ticinese – Giornale Liberale Radicale*, April 24, 1917, p. 2, quoting *Il Corriere della Sera*; "De lijken der gesneuvelden verwerkt tot olie, zeep, veevoeder en mest?" [The corpses of the fallen processed to oil, soap, animal fodder, and manure?], *De Tribune*, April 24, 1917, p. 3, quoting in much detail from *De Telegraaf*; "Par le monde. L'industrie des cadavres" [The world. The corpse industry], *Le Confédéré*, April 25, 1917, p. 3; Philaton: "The War. Notes on the Position. Utilising the Dead" and "German Cannibalism," *Australian Statesman and Mining Standard*, April 26, 1917, p. 261. *La Nación* is indirectly mentioned in "Een onderhoud met minister von Stein" [An interview with Minister von Stein], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and *De Tribune*, Rotterdam, May 13, 1917, p. 2 or 3, respectively. In the interview with *La Nación*, von Stein repudiates the "Corpse factory" allegations as "slandorous."

⁷³ "The German Fat Factories. Comment in England and Italy ('The Times' Message)," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, April 23, 1917, p. 4.

“the German madness [that] had culminated in boiling down the slain soldiers for commercial purposes” and “trusted the German evil power would be broken for generations.”⁷⁴ A more radical view took his Australian colleague William M. Hughes, an ardent advocate of his country’s participation in the war. On his re-election tour in April 1917 - about which the Australian media were reporting in great detail - he used to shock the audience by reading a brief account “just received from London” (and “confirmed by private letters”⁷⁵) about the German “Corpse factories.”

“This, declared Mr. Hughes, is the coping-stone in an edifice of iniquity. A nation that will do that is barbarian. It has ceased to have the right to exist in the civilized world.”⁷⁶

As of April 20, 1917, a real flood of “German Corpse factory” stories began to inundate the U.S. *The Daily*

⁷⁴ “German Ghouls. The Corpse Factory,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, April 24, 1917, p. 3. The news item is datelined “The Times, London, April 23.” Other New Zealand papers that brought the same text on the same day were, e.g., *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki (“Corpse Exploitation Factories Nearest Approach to Cannibalism,” p. 5), *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui (“Premier Massey Speaks Up on the Corpse Factory. Lord Curzon Confirms. ‘Cannibalism,’ says Carlisle’s Bishop,” p. 4), *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough (“‘Kadavermehl.’ The German Corpse Factory. Allegations Reiterated. All the Facts Confirmed,” p. 5), or *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth (“Other Confirmation. Mr. Massey Horrified. Hopes Evil Power Will Be Smashed,” p. 3). William Ferguson Massey (1856-1925), founder of the Reform Party, was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1912 to 1925.

⁷⁵ “Melbourne News,” *The Portland Guardian*, Portland, VIC, Australia, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; also: “Federal Elections. Mr. Hughes’s North-Western Tour,” *Mercury*, Hobart, April 23, 1917, p. 4; “The Elections. Mr. Hughes, Tour of Tasmania,” *Argus*, Melbourne, April 23, 1917, p. 8; “An Edifice of Iniquity,” *The Register*, Adelaide, April 23, p. 8. William Morris “Billy” Hughes (1862-1952) was Australian Prime Minister from 1915 to 1923. According to a remark in Andrews 1993:135, Hughes “embarrassed the Colonial Office by inquiring whether there was any truth in the newspaper reports of a German ‘corpse factory’ in Belgium.” It seems that he got a positive answer; otherwise he would not have presented it as “true” in his speeches.

Advocate, Victoria, TX, headlined across all six columns of the front page of its April 20, 1917 issue: “Germans to Use Human Fat?” The same day the news was brought, always on front pages, by, for example, the *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Portsmouth, OH, the *Warren Evening Times*, Warren, PA, the *Trenton Evening Times*, Trenton, NJ, *The Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, Oshkosh, WI, and the semi-official *Wisconsin State Journal*, Madison, WI. The reports were based on a United Press dispatch from Rome, Italy, referring to an article from *Informazione*:

“Pope Benedict has been “horrified” and has expressed deep indignation over the reports of Germany’s plans to render fats and fertilizers from the bodies of soldier dead.⁷⁷”

Most U.S. newspapers that reported about the German “corpse factories” within the next days also mentioned the Pontiff’s “horror” and “indignation,” which, however, were never verified. But as the Italians say: *Se non è vero, è ben trovato* (If it isn’t true, it’s at least well invented).

More U.S. newspapers across the country, from Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York to the District of Columbia, were following.⁷⁸ Among

⁷⁷ “Germans Accused of Rendering Fats and Fertilizers from Bodies,” *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Portsmouth, OH, April 20, 1917, p. 1. Cardinal Giacomo della Chiesa (1854-1922) was elected Pope on September 3, 1914. He chose the name “Benedict XV” and is known as a gifted diplomat on the See of Rome. He successfully kept the Church out of the war conflict. His endeavors, in 1916 and 1917, to mediate peace, however, were rejected by the warring parties.

⁷⁸ “Germans Ship Dead to Oil Refineries. Bodies Sent From Front to Factories Where Fertilizers Are Made From Fats,” *The Washington Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 10; “Germans Ship Dead to Oil Refineries. Bodies Sent from Front to Factory, where Fertilizers Are Made from Fat. U.S. Consuls Tell Story. Assertion Borne out by Exultant Article in Berlin ‘Lokalanzeiger’,” *The Sun*, New York, April 20, p. 4; *The Chicago Tribune* (date unknown), quoted by *The Evening Record*, Greenville, PA, April 25, 1917; *The New York Tribune* (date unknown), quoted by *Manitoba Free Press*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, June 25, 1917; “Germans Render Bodies of Dead Troops for Oil and Fertilizer. Story of Awful Efficiency Verified by Publication in Berlin Newspaper.

these were widely respected papers, such as the metropolitan *The Sun* and *The Tribune* from New York, and *The Washington Times* and *The Washington Post* from the nation's capital. The article in *The Washington Post* begins with the Pope's "indignation" and with the slightly modified "American consul" tale:

"American consuls formerly in Germany who arrived here after their recall said the Germans were distilling nitroglycerine from the corpses and so obtaining the essentials of explosives."

A detailed description of the operation of the "Corpse factory" follows, obviously taken from *The Times* of April 17, 1917. The article concludes with assuring its readers of the story's trustworthiness:

"The case seems completely established by American, Belgian, Dutch and finally by German testimony. The London and Paris newspapers all accept the story after careful investigation and print editorials on it."⁷⁹

The Germans, who, of course, also read their enemies' newspapers, reacted somewhat helplessly to the massive Allied media attack of April 17 to 19, 1917. On the field of propaganda, they had been fighting a losing battle from the very beginning of the war, as the British had destroyed all

Pope Horrified at the Reports. factory Hidden in Remote Forest," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 1917, p. 3; *The Evening Tribune*, Albert Lea, MN, April 21, 1917; *Des Moines Daily News*, Des Moines, IA, April 21, 1917; *Fort Wayne News*, Fort Wayne, IN, April 21, 1917; *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Portsmouth, OH, April 21, 1917 (a follow-up); *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, Fitchburg, MS, April 21, 1917; *The Valley Sentinel*, Portsmouth, OH, April 25, 1917 (two articles); *The Evening Record*, Greenville, PA, April 25, 1917; *Logansport-Pharos Reporter*, Logansport, IN, April 26, 1917. Somewhat belated: "Story Brings Out Horror. Of the Efficiency of German Military Methods Disposing of Dead," *Keowee Courier*, Walhalla, SC, May 2, 1917, p. 2 (identical with the article in *The Washington Times*).

⁷⁹ "Germans Render Bodies of Dead Troops for Oil and Fertilizer . . .," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 1917, p. 3. The same text, but without the Pope, in *The Washington Times* and *The Sun* of April 20, 1917.

German transoceanic communication lines already in the first days of the hostilities.⁸⁰ The range of German propaganda and counter-propaganda, therefore, was limited to Central Europe and the steadily shrinking Ottoman Empire. Shocked, and in an effort to put the record straight, the Germans dispatched on April 20, 1917 a short wireless message to the international news agencies, repudiating “the loathsome and ridiculous” press reports. Their main argument was “that the use of the word ‘Kadaver,’ which appeared in the [Rosner] report, only applies in German to bodies of animals, and never to human bodies.”⁸¹ About the factory mentioned by Rosner they said: “Every rationally thinking individual knows that, in these factories, only animal carcasses are exploited.”⁸²

On April 21, 1917 *Wolffs Telegraphisches Bureau*, the official German news agency, followed up. It disseminated a short notice that appeared within the next days in the press of the Central Powers and was also quoted in Holland:

“English and French papers are spreading a news that has its origin in a morbid fantasy, to the effect that the Germans are chemically processing the corpses of their fallen soldiers for fat, whereas every sensible individual knows that the industry under discussion is the chemical processing of animal

⁸⁰ “The British cable ship *Telconia* cut her deep sea cables off Emden on August 5th 1914”; Hayward 2010:94.

⁸¹ “The Gruesome Story. Oil and Pig Food from Human Beings,” *Mercury*, Hobart, Tasmania, April 23, 1917, p. 6 (the article is dated “London, April 20”); “The Corpse Factory Tale Repudiated by German Authorities,” *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, New Zealand, April 23, 1917, p. 5; “The Berlin Strike. Many Munition Workers still out. Corpse Exploitation. Revelations Denied by German Authorities,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, April 23, 1917, p. 5; “The Loathsome Factory – Denial by Huns,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁸² *Tout homme sensé sait que dans cette industrie, ce sont des cadavres d’animaux qui sont utilisés*; “L’utilisation des cadavres d’animaux” [The utilization of animal carcasses], *Le Temps*, Paris, France, April 21, 1917, p. 3.

carcasses. We see the English and French press emanations as the epitome of wanton rabble-rousing propaganda.⁸³

German newspapers wrote far less about the “Corpse factory” than the English-language press did. Maybe German press censors thought that, among a people that made *Leichenfett* quips about its wartime margarine, it was better not to give too much publicity to the story; you never know, *semper aliquid haeret*, as the Latin saying goes.⁸⁴ On the other hand, toward the end of April it was impossible to ignore the world-wide Allied “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign any more. *Wolff’s Telegraphisches Bureau*, therefore, issued, on April 27, 1917, a long press release, sourcing the origins of the story in the Belgian refugee press and in France and pointing to the mistranslation of *Kadaver* as “the dirty spring from which this outrageous, disgusting attempt at spiritual well-poisoning is derived.”⁸⁵ The article closes with the remark that Germany had been silent for a long time, treating “such calumnies” with the “contempt they are deserving,” but that their spreading in Allied and even in respectable neutral newspapers is now forcing her “to pillory the enemy slanderers and to follow them into an area within which they are acting

⁸³ *Englische und französische Zeitungen verbreiten die einer krankhaften Phantasie entsprungene Nachricht, daß die Deutschen die Leichen ihrer Gefallenen zur Fettgewinnung chemisch verarbeiten, obwohl es sich bei dieser Industrie, wie jeder normale Mensch weiß, um die chemische Verarbeitung von Tierkadavern handelt. Die englischen und französischen Ausstreuungen scheinen uns das Äußerste an bewußter Verhetzung in der Presse darzustellen. „Erfindung einer krankhaften Phantasie“* [Invention of a sick fantasy], *Coburger Zeitung*, Coburg, Germany, April 24, 1917, p. 1. See also: “De lijken der gesneuvelden” [The corpses of the fallen], *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, April 27, 1917, p. 3, and “Het lijkenverhaal” [The corpse story], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁸⁴ “Always something sticks.”

⁸⁵ *Ein Übersetzungsfehler ist also die trübe Quelle, aus der dieser beispiellose, widrige Versuch geistiger Brunnenvergiftung herzuleiten ist. “Ekelhafte Verleumdungen”* [Disgusting slander], *Bergische Wacht*, Engelskirchen, Germany, April 28, 1917, p. 1.

with obvious pleasure.”⁸⁶ In general, the German press kept a low profile in the matter of the “Corpse factory.” It apparently took up the story only when need was felt to counter rumors that were diffusing into the country from outside. So, for example, did the provincial *Flörsheimer Zeitung* of April 28, 1917 in an article, the style of which did not differ much from the crudeness prevalent in Allied newspapers. It swore at the French mainstream press and the “obscene, brazen, vile, hideous” “newspaper lies”⁸⁷ about the commercial utilization of dead soldiers by the Germans, which, the paper said, the French were spreading.⁸⁸ It is striking that the *Flörsheimer Zeitung* did not refer to the far bigger British “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign with a single word. Instead, the paper mentioned two “dissident” voices from France: *Le Bonnet Rouge* et *L’Œuvre*. It may be supposed, therefore, that the *Flörsheimer Zeitung* reacted to rumors that had come to the Rhine-Main region from neighboring France.

In a more moderate tone, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* devoted its editorial of the April 29, 1917 issue to the matter, focusing on *British* “Corpse factory” propaganda. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* summarized the hitherto published *Times* articles and denounced the whole campaign as mere anti-German hate-mongering based on nothing but lies. Firing back, the anonymous author saw in it “a bitter sign of the waywardness and moral depravity of England today,” of the “moral insanity” of her elites.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *Erst die Verbreitung, die diese Lüge in allen Ententeblättern und selbst angesehenen neutralen Zeitungen gefunden hat, zwingt dazu, die feindlichen Verleumder an den Pranger zu stellen und ihnen auf ein Gebiet zu folgen, auf dem sie sich mit offenbarem Behagen bewegen.* Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Unflätig, schamlos, gemein, scheußlich; Zeitungslügen.*

⁸⁸ “Auf dem Gipfel der Gemeinheit” [Meanness at its peak], *Flörsheimer Zeitung*, Flörsheim on the Main, Germany, April 28, 1917, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Ein schlimmes Zeugnis für die Verwahrlosung und den Tiefstand des heutigen England.* “Moral Insanity” [title given in English!], *Frankfurter Zeitung* no. 177, April 29, 1917, pp. 1-2.

About the same time when the “Final version” of the “Corpse factory” story was being launched worldwide, British Army Intelligence set out to prepare an object that would give the conclusive, irrefutable “proof” and could be used if the propaganda campaign would not develop as expected. According to General Charteris’ own confession, as reported by *The New York Times* from October 20, 1925,

“an ingenious person in his office offered to write a diary of a German soldier, telling of his transfer from the front after two years of fighting to an easy berth in a factory, and of his horror at finding that he was to assist there in boiling down his brother soldiers. He obtained a transfer to the front and was killed. It was planned to place this forged diary in the clothing of a dead German soldier and have it discovered by a war correspondent who had a passion for German diaries.⁹⁰”

The plan, however, was not carried out, although “the intelligence officer had spent six months in preparing the diary.”⁹¹ Charteris said in 1925, the reason was that he had feared that any error discovered in the forged diary could expose the story, with unforeseeable damage to the British propaganda efforts in general.⁹² Though this explanation seems plausible, the scheme most probably was simply dropped as unnecessary. The propaganda campaign, with the never tiring support of Reuters, Havas, United Press and the Northcliffe papers, developed its own dynamics. Once put into motion, it kept running on its own and even did not stop when the war ended.

It is, however, not known at which stage the forged diary project was abandoned. Had a diary, indeed, been fabricated but was never used, or had the diary never got beyond the

⁹⁰ “Tells of British War Propaganda. Gen. Charteris Says He Started Story of Boiling Dead Germans for Fat”; *The New York Times*, October 20, 1925, p. 10. See also Read 1941:40-41.

⁹¹ As told by Charteris in October 1925 to a *New York Times* reporter; “Charteris Denies Propaganda Story,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1925, p. 24. The “six months” must be taken with a big pinch of salt.

⁹² *Ibid.* See also Ponsonby 1928:110; Clarke 2003.

planning phase? Charteris told the *New York Times* in October 1925 that the diary “is now in the war museum in London.”⁹³ About the same time, an unidentified “official of the Intelligence Department during the war” declared that he once had seen it.⁹⁴ This would mean that a diary, indeed, was fabricated. It is, however, suspicious that the search for the forged diary, begun immediately after Charteris’ “confession,” failed to reveal the *corpus delicti*,⁹⁵ and that, up to now, all efforts to locate it in the Imperial War Museum have been of no avail.⁹⁶

If the diary is not buried somewhere deep in the museum’s stock, nowhere to be found, it either must have been removed immediately after Charteris’ confession (as a possibly compromising object), or Charteris and the above mentioned “official” were mistaken, i.e. no diary was fabricated at all. At any rate, and independently from the stage at which it was eventually abandoned, the forged diary project was never denied by Charteris, and we can safely assume that something of that kind was sometime taken into consideration in his office.

The faked diary obviously was not the only hoax that should “prove” the “Corpse factory” story and in which Charteris’ office was involved. At the turn of November 1925,

“[a] correspondent of The New York World . . . declared positively that at the British General Headquarters in 1917, he was shown by a subordinate of General Charteris photographs of a huge cauldron choked with fragments of bodies, arms and

⁹³ “Charteris Denies Propaganda Story,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1925, p. 24.

⁹⁴ “War Office Silent. German Corpse Factory Story,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, October 24, 1925, p. 7, referring to a United Press message of October 23, 1925.

⁹⁵ “The Storm Bursts. Corpse Factory Story. Sensation Caused in England. Evidence from German Sources,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, October 26, 1925. The article is based on a United Press release.

⁹⁶ Marlin 2002:74.

legs. He was told that this picture was at the time being used in the East for propaganda.

An Australian explorer, formerly a staff photographer for an Australian corps, has come forward with the story that he piled fragments of German corpses into a captured German field kitchen cauldron, photographed the gruesome mess, and thus obtained the picture in question.⁹⁷

Corroboration of this account, however, is difficult, as neither names nor exact dates are given.

Charteris and his office most probably did not have a part in *creating* the “Corpse factory” story. It can, however, be safely assumed that they were actively involved in its spreading. According to postwar testimony given by Sir Herbert Russell, Reuters’ war correspondent at Allied Headquarters, Charteris was already in possession of a copy of the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916 “some time before April, 1917, when the Northcliffe papers started the cry.”⁹⁸ What is more, “he pointed out that this would make good propaganda and kept us well supplied with any sort of references to ‘Kadaver’ that came to the notice of the Intelligence Branch.”⁹⁹

It should not be surprising that the War Propaganda Bureau, which a year earlier already had done its bit to the “Glycerin” story, was also brought in on the “Corpse factory” campaign. Though its head, Charles F. Masterman, seems to have been reluctant initially, “it appears that it took only a very few days for Masterman’s scruples to be put aside.”¹⁰⁰ A four-page pamphlet, titled *A “Corpse Conversion” Factory. A Peep Behind the German Lines*, was produced at Wellington House and printed in London at Darling & Son.¹⁰¹ No author, no date

⁹⁷ “Candid Charteris,” *TIME Magazine*, November 2, 1925.

⁹⁸ *The Nation and The Athenæum*, November 28, 1925, p. 314.

⁹⁹ Walter Littlefield, “How ‘Corpse Factory’ Story Started,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 1925, p. XX5.

¹⁰⁰ Scott 1996:16.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous 1917. Thanks to Mrs. Maureen Watry, reference librarian at Liverpool University, who provided me with a copy. Parts of the

of publication is given. From the content, however, it can be deduced that the pamphlet was written between April 21 (it quotes an article in *The Lancet* from April 21, 1917) and May 16, 1917 (it does not yet mention the German Army Order of the Day).

A second, enlarged edition “for the purpose of English distribution abroad” was in preparation. Translations were being made into Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Danish, and a special Dutch and German edition was planned. The pamphlet was sent to Wellington House representatives in Italy and Switzerland, “to make the best use they can of it in those countries,” and distribution in India and China was given consideration.¹⁰² It is, however, not known to which extent the project was carried out. Most probably, both the enlarged English and the foreign-language editions did not leave the planning phase.¹⁰³ They were no more necessary, since the job was already well done by Reuters and the Northcliffe press.

To show the reader how small the difference was between the language of a gutter press publication such as *The Daily Mail* and that of a pamphlet produced by a team of highly respected intellectuals, the first two paragraphs of A “*Corpse Conversion*” *Factory. A Peep Behind the German Lines* shall be reproduced here:

“Out of their own mouths, the military masters of Germany stand convicted of an act of unspeakable savagery which has shocked the whole civilized world, including probably, now that the truth has come out, many of the German people themselves. Attila’s Huns were guilty of atrocious crimes, but they never desecrated the bodies of dead soldiers - their own flesh, as well as the fallen of the enemy - by improvising a factory for the conversion of human corpses into fat and oils, and fodder for pigs.

pamphlet are also quoted in Marwick 1991:253 and Rees 1993:42.

¹⁰² Scott 1996:16. See also Haste 1977:91; Sanders/Taylor 1982:147.

¹⁰³ According to Lipkes, who could not find a single copy, “it is unlikely these were ever published.” Lipkes 2007:763, endnote 58.

That is what the autocrats of Prussia have done - and admitted! "Admitted" is too mild a word. They have boasted of it. It is an illustration of their much-vaunted efficiency! A sign of their pious *Kultur*! Proof of the zeal to waste nothing! Further evidence of the Kaiser's self-imposed deification! "There is one law, mine!"¹⁰⁴

From the last two sentences of the pamphlet it can be seen that it was intended for distribution among the masses of the population. It ends with emphasizing "soap" as output of the "Corpse factory," the only product in which the average consumer was interested - who needs technical lubricants or nitroglycerin in everyday life? - and it mocks the Germans' pride in their *Kultur*: "Converting bodies of the dead into soap for the living! What a pastime for a Kultured nation!"¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous 1917:1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

IV.

“KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING”¹

Follow-Ups on the European Propaganda Front

Making *The Times* of London the vanguard of the “Corpse factory” press campaign certainly had a lot to do with the high esteem the paper still enjoyed among its readership worldwide. It was considered the most important British newspaper, with good relations to the Government, and it still enjoyed a reputation for being a serious press organ with a balanced opinion (though it had more and more fallen in with its proprietor’s anti-German line since its take-over by Lord Northcliffe in 1908). It is, therefore, not surprising that other newspapers did not hesitate to print the “Corpse factory” story - if it was in *The Times*, it must have been true.²

But not everybody in Allied and neutral countries was willing to believe the story. In Great Britain individuals conversant with German pointed to the obvious mistranslation:

“The word ‘Kadaver’ is never used in conversation, journalism, or literature (so far as we can discover) to mean a dead human body. Leichnam is the word for a human corpse, cf. our Lichfield, ‘the field of corpses.’ Kadaver is so used only by doctors and medical students, and in purely technical or scientific literature.”³ Chided as “friends of the Hun”⁴ or “pro-German,”⁵ they were, however, quickly silenced.

¹ Borrowed from the title of a book about British propaganda in the First World War, Haste 1977.

² With “We have the authority from the most reliable paper in Great Britain,” *The Syracuse Post Standard* from Syracuse, NY assured its readers of the truth of the corpse factory story. Quotation from *The Malone Farmer*, Malone, NY, May 10, 1917.

³ *Common Sense*, London, UK, April 21, 1917; quoted in Mügge 1920:105.

⁴ “The Hun Corpse factory. World-Wide Horror,” *The Daily Mail*, April 20, 1917, p. 4.

⁵ “Germans and pro-Germans in England have inundated the offices of the ‘Times’ and the ‘Daily Mail’ with assurances that the Huns mean only

Among the few British newspapers that expressed mistrust in the *Kadaver* story was *The Nation*, a liberal weekly. In an editorial in its April 28, 1917 issue, it explicitly stated that “the factory described by Herr Rosner is plainly concerned with animals only - the wording shows that clearly” and left it to its readers to think about whether the writer of the Belgian article had acted “in error or bad faith.”⁶ Another paper that did not go with the tide was the *Manchester Guardian*, by no means a pro-German paper. It dealt with the “Corpse factory” eleven times between April 23 and June 11, 1917, never concealing its doubts as to the veracity of the story.⁷ In an editorial, it cautioned against the use of the “Corpse factory” in propaganda. A crime falsely attributed to the Germans would not make the list of their proven crimes longer, but undermine the credibility of “those atrocities which they have in fact indisputably committed.”⁸

In France, the story was credited by the majority of the mainstream press, especially by papers edited in Paris, though occasionally brought with the reservation that further proof would be necessary.⁹ As “confirmed by the evidence of an American consul,” the story was endorsed by former Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau in *L’Homme Enchaîné*.¹⁰

‘animal dead’ when they speak of *Kadaver*, and not human corpses.” “Why I Believe the Germans Are Ghouls,” *The War Illustrated*, May 19, 1917, p. 308.

⁶ *The Nation*, vol. 21 no. 4, April 28, 1917, p. 89-90.

⁷ “Germany and the Dead,” April 23, 1917, p. 4, and April 26, 1917, p. 8; “Carcass Exploitation,” April 26, 1917, p. 4; “‘Kadaver’,” April 27, 1917, p. 4, and April 30, 1917, p. 6; “The ‘Kadaver’ Story,” May 1, 1917, p. 6; “House of Commons,” May 9, 1917, p. 6; “‘Kadaver’ Again,” May 31, 1917, p. 4, and June 11, 1917, p. 6; “Corpse Utilisation Controversy,” May 31, 1917, p. 6.

⁸ Quoted, without giving a date, in “A Ghastly Charge Against Germany,” *The Literary Digest*, New York, vol. 54, no. 21, May 26, 1917, p. 1586.

⁹ So, for example, the *Paris Midi*, according to *The New York Times* of April 20, 1917.

¹⁰ According to *The Daily Mail* of April 21, 1917 (“The Hun Corpse Factory. Paris Paper on Evidence of an American,” p. 3), and *The Literary Digest*,

Some papers brought the news only once, on April 18 or 19, 1917, and never mentioned the issue again. Among these there were *Le Gaulois*, *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Journal de Débats*, and *L'Action Française*. There were also respected newspapers that did not mention the matter at all, for example *L'Eclair* from Montpellier and *L'Ouest-Eclair* from Rennes - two provincial newspapers with a large circulation - or the metropolitan *L'Echo de Paris*.¹¹ Perhaps their editors had doubts as to the veracity of the story.

Other papers recanted a few days later, excusing themselves for having fallen victim to an erroneous translation, and put the record straight. Among them were *L'Eclair* (the paper that had brought the story already on April 13, 1917), *Le Siècle*,¹² whose columnist Maurice de Waleffe previously had staunchly defended the story, even accusing the Germans of “cannibalism,”¹³ *L'Intransigeant*, which informed its readers that in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of April 12, 1917 another visitor of the *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* had precisely described what was processed there, viz. horse carcasses and slaughterhouse refuse,¹⁴ or the nationalist *La Victoire*, which even made an about-turn: Alsatian novelist

New York, vol. 54 no. 21, May 26, 1917 (“A Ghastly Charge Against Germany,” p. 1586). Clemenceau obviously referred to Chassaing’s article in *Le Journal*. Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841-1929), was French Prime Minister from 1906 to 1909, and again from November 1917 to January 1920.

¹¹ All respective issues were thoroughly checked by inspection for the period from April 16 to 30, 1917. *L'Express du Midi* from Toulouse did not bring the “Final version” of the story, most probably because it had already published the Belgian story on April 13, 1917.

¹² “La K.V.A.,” April 21, 1917, p. 1, and again, very explicitly, on April 24, 1917 (“Nos échos – La K.V.A.” [Our feedbacks- The K.V.A.], p. 2).

¹³ “La K.V.A.,” April 20, 1917, p. 1. Maurice de Waleffe (1874-1946) was the founder and editor of the *Paris Midi* magazine, a French journalist and writer.

¹⁴ “ ‘Kadaver.’ L’utilisation industrielle des ‘cadavres’ par les Allemands” [‘Kadaver.’ The industrial utilization of ‘cadavers’ by the Germans], April 20, 1917, p. 2.

and sociologist André Lichtenberger deplored the violation of French patriotic pride by foreigners mocking the French for having believed in the sinister legend of the German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*.¹⁵ Novelist Michel Corday (1870-1937) noted in his diary on April 22, 1917:

“A striking example of the universal insanity: a story has been going round the newspapers that the Germans have been extracting glycerine out of fat boiled down from the corpses of their soldiers. The story appears to arise from a mistake in the translation of the word *kadaver*, which applies only to animals.¹⁶”

It seems that the French people, though their press had whole-heartedly embraced the cause of national propaganda and never tired to depict *les Boches* as dangerous criminals and intriguers, had not completely given up their traditional rational thinking.

Le Temps, the flagship of French journalism at the time, did not recant explicitly. It published, however, the official German *démenti* from April 20, 1917 without any depreciating comment and under the clarifying headline “L’utilisation des cadavres d’animaux” (The utilization of animal carcasses).¹⁷ It also printed on prominent position a letter to the editor from a renowned professor of medicine, who expressed serious doubts as to the veracity of the *révélations* in the Allied press about the “Corpse factories” of *les Boches*. He said that for years the Germans had successfully been exploiting the bodies of dead animals in carcass utilization plants, and that they were doing this behind the front, too, and he urged the French to act in the same way with “the countless horses that die in our lines.”¹⁸

¹⁵ According to “Viererverbands-Kulturblüten” [Flowers of Allied culture], *Der Champagne-Kamerad – Feldzeitung der 3. Armee*, Charleville, France, July 15, 1917, p. 11.

¹⁶ Corday 1934:246, italics in the original.

¹⁷ *Le Temps*, Paris, France, April 21, 1917, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Et nous, que faisons-nous des chevaux sans nombre qui meurent dans nos*

Interestingly, one and a half year earlier *Le Temps* had already reported about German “margarine factories,” to which the dead horses from the front were carried for the extraction of their fat “which is used for making glycerin.”¹⁹

Other newspapers recanted half-heartedly. *Le Matin*, for example, mentioned that the Germans said that *Kadaver* means “carcass.” Maybe, the paper argued, but Rosner’s account is ambiguous and permits equally the interpretation given by *The Times*.²⁰ *La Libre Parole* even brought an argument we will be meeting again and again until today: “After all, if the Germans didn’t boil down their soldiers - they were nevertheless very well able to do so, these monsters.”²¹

Of course quite a few papers, such as *Le Figaro* and *La Croix*, stuck to their guns and defended the story tooth and nail. They brought two main arguments. First, the Germans are always lying, so one cannot trust their *démentis*. Secondly, in view of the numerous crimes and disgraceful deeds the Germans have committed, the commercial utilization of

lignes? “L’utilisation des cadavres d’animaux” [The utilization of animal carcasses], *Le Temps*, Paris, France, April 23, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Les cheveux morts sont transportés par chemin de fer du front et conduits dans des fabriques de margarine, où l’on procède à l’extraction de la graisse, qui est employée pour la fabrication de la glycérine. “La misère en Prusse!”* [The penury in Prussia!], *Le Temps*, Paris, October 28, 1915, p. 3.

²⁰ “Une mise au point” [A clarification], *Le Matin*, Paris, France, April 21, 1917, p. 1.

²¹ *Après tout, si les Allemands n’ont pas fait cuire leurs soldats, ils en étaient tout de même capables, les monstres!* Quoted from *Le Midi Socialiste*, Toulouse, April 25, 1917, p. 1 (“Les bourreurs de crânes. Canards d’hier et aujourd’hui. Des forbans de Beaucaire à l’Usine-aux-Cadavres” [The brainwashers. Canards from yesterday and today. The monsters from Beaucaire at the corpse factory]). Also quoted in *Gazette des Ardennes*, Charleville, France, April 29, 1917, (“Les excuses de la ‘Libre Parole’ ” [The excuses of ‘La Libre Parole’]), p. 3, from *Le Bonnet Rouge* of April 21, 1917. Beaucaire is a small town in southern France on the banks of the River Rhone. A medieval legend holds that a dragon is living there in the river. From time to time the beast comes out to feed on human flesh.

human corpses is only a logical consequence of their way of organizing matters.²²

Among the defenders of the story as well as among those who rejected it were some who reminded their readers that “we must not forget that, in many instances, reliable testimony from Belgian sources has been given about the corpses of German soldiers . . . tied together and transported to strange cremation ovens,²³” and that this “has been told a hundred times and was never denied” by the Germans.²⁴ Defenders took this as an additional “proof” of the story, critics as an explanation for why so many people were willing to accept the “Corpse factory” yarn at face value.

There was, however, also a small group of strict “Corpse factory deniers,” who wrote in anarchist, left-leaning, or pacifist papers, such as *L’Humanité*, *L’Œuvre*, *Le Bonnet Rouge*, *Les Hommes du Jour*, or in the satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné*. These papers pointed to the correct meaning of *Kadaver* in contemporary everyday German and - more or less sarcastically - ridiculed the gullibility of the French mainstream press that had given credence to the story. *L’Humanité*, in its April 20, 1917 issue, in addition reminded its readers that in France, too, there were “facilities called ‘classified.’ In each of them one could see a *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*.”²⁵ François Lebon, in *L’Œuvre*

²² “L’utilisation des restes” [The utilization of the remains], *Le Figaro*, Paris, France, April 21, 1917, p. 2, and *La Croix*, Paris, France, April 22-23, 1917, p. 2.

²³ *Ajoutons en outre qu’il ne faut pas oublier qu’à diverses reprises des témoignages sûrs de source belge ont parlé de cadavres de soldats allemands . . . liés ensemble et emportés vers d’étranges fours crématoires.* “L’utilisation des restes” [The utilization of the remains], *Le Figaro*, Paris, France, April 21, 1917, p. 2, and *La Croix*, Paris, France, April 22-23, 1917, p. 2.

²⁴ . . . a été contée cent fois et n’a jamais été démentie. Jean Drault in *La Libre Parole*, no date given, quoted in “La K.V.A.,” *Le Siècle*, Paris, France, April 22, 1917, p. 3.

²⁵ *Nous avons à Aubervilliers des établissements dits “classés” dans chacun desquels on pourrait voir une “Kadaververwertungsanstalt,”* “Echos

of April 20, 1917, called the “Corpse factory” story a calumny and its spreading “stupid” (*imbécile*):

“Without difficulty the Germans will get rid of this unjust accusation, but they will profit from it by immediately sowing doubt about all accusations brought against them, however well these may be proven.²⁶”

On April 21, 1917 *Le Bonnet Rouge*, quoting from *L'Œuvre* of the same day and focusing on the mistranslation of German *Kadaver*, mercilessly shredded the story. Virtually siding with André Lichtenberger from the opposite end of the political spectrum, *Le Bonnet Rouge* concluded:

“A translation error - well, that’s not as important as all that.

But it is really a bad thing to make our proud and intelligent people a laughing stock of foreigners by having them believe that we thoughtlessly have accepted such monstrous stupidities.²⁷”

Le Bonnet Rouge came back to the issue on April 24, 1917, mentioning *l’usine aux cadavres* (the corpse factory) as an example of the many lies the French had been told by “the whole big press of Paris” since the beginning of the war.²⁸

Le Correspondant, a fortnightly journal from Paris, took up the subject in its April 25, 1917 issue, pointing to the meaning of *Kadaver* in everyday German and severely criticizing the mistranslation as deliberate: “The unfairness of the enemy does

– Bourreurs de crânes” [Echoes – Brainwashers], *L’Humanité*, Paris, France, April 20, 1917, p. 2.

²⁶ *Les Allemands qui se seront lavés sans trop de peine d’une accusation injustifiée, en profiteront pour jeter ensuite la suspicion sur toutes les accusations les mieux prouvées que l’on pourra produire contre eux.* Quoted (approvingly) in Griselle 1918:225-226, datelined “April 27, 1917.” Eugène Griselle was Secretary General of the Catholic Committee for French Propaganda Abroad.

²⁷ *Une erreur de traduction, ce n’est pas grave assurément. Mais ce qui est grave, c’est de rendre notre peuple fier et si spirituel, ridicule aux yeux de l’étranger en laissant croire qu’il accepte facilement des sottises aussi monstrueuses . . .* Quote in Marchand 1920:114.

²⁸ Marchand 1920:114.

not justify our unfairness.”²⁹ Two issues later, the journal came back to the theme, giving examples that *Kadaververwertung* meant the processing of dead animals, not human beings. Like François Lebon in *L'Œuvre* and the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, the author - by far not pro-German - pointed to the danger inherent in spreading false accusations: “The Germans have quite a record of crimes, we must not supply them free of charge with reasons for denial.”³⁰

In neutral countries, such as Argentine, Spain, Holland, or Switzerland, a part of the press eagerly brought the “Corpse factory” story as dispatched by the news agencies.³¹ In Holland however, some editors shortened the text. The (strictly neutral) *Algemeen Handelsblad* and the (moderately pro-German) *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, for example, only wrote that they received a respective dispatch from Reuters, but that they would spare their readers the details.³² In the Dutch press as a whole, the “German corpse factory” was widely discussed. Though pro-British newspapers, such as *De Telegraaf* from Amsterdam, firmly defended the story, most papers, even those that could not be considered pro-German in general, were looking critically at the strange story that had arrived at their newsrooms from Reuters, London.

Well knowing the meaning of German (and Dutch) *Kadaver*, especially in compound nouns, such as *Kadaververwertung*,

²⁹ *La déloyauté de l'ennemi ne justifierait la nôtre*. “Chronique politique,” *Le Correspondant*, Paris, April 25, 1917, p. 381, signed “Intérim” and datelined April 21, 1917.

³⁰ *Les Allemands ont trop de crimes à leur passif pour leur fournir gratuitement l'occasion d'une dénégation motivée*. “Chronique politique,” *Le Correspondant*, Paris, May 25, 1917, pp. 764-765, here: p. 765, signed “Intérim” and datelined May 21, 1917.

³¹ Some examples were given in the previous chapter.

³² *De bijzonderheden dezer industrie, die in het telegram uitvoerig wordt beschreven, zullen wij onzen lezers besparen*. “Eene lugubre industrie” [A lugubrious industry], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant – Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 18, 1917, p. 1; *Wij zullen onzen lezers de bijzonderheden van het telegram besparen*. “De Oorlog” [The war], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 18, 1917, p. 5.

and sensitized to propaganda lies from both sides, staff writers more or less sharply denounced the mistranslation of *Kadaver* as a deliberate manipulation, and clearly stated that the Germans did not process dead soldiers in the respective plants.³³ The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* called the story flatly “a fairy tale.” Regrettably, the paper said, it would survive long after the war’s end, like the mendacious propaganda tales invented by the British during the Second Boer War (1899-1902).³⁴ On April 24, the paper quoted Kalkschmidt’s report from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of April 12, 1917, as conclusive proof of the processing of animal, not human bodies in the German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*. Two days later, *De Tijd* followed.³⁵

Some papers that had brought the story immediately after having received it from Reuters kept silent afterwards.³⁶ Others declared that as long as Reuters did not bring a better proof they would regard the story as incredible.³⁷ *De Tribune* from

³³ “Een lugebere industrie” [A lugubrious industry], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant – Algemeen Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, April 19, 1917, p. 1; “Ingezonden stukken” [Letters to the Editor], *Leeuwarder Courant*, Leeuwarden, April 19, p. 2; “De geschiedenis van de lijken-bewerking” [The history of corpse-processing], *Leidsche Courant*, Leyden, April 20, 1917, p. 1; “Kadaververwertungs-Anstalt aan het Duitse front” [Corpse utilization establishment on the German front], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 20, 1917, p. 3; “Tegenspraak” [Dissent], *De Tijd*, s’Hertogenbosch, April 20, 1917, p. 1; “Een manifest,” *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 24, 1917, p. 5; “Laster” [Slander], *De Zeeuw*, Goes, May 21, 1917, p. 1.

³⁴ “De Oorlog” [The war], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 26, 1917, p. 5. The article is also quoted in: “La propagande ‘civilisée’, jugée par un neutre” [The ‘civilized’ propaganda, judged by a Neutral], *Gazette des Ardennes*, Charleville, France, May 20, 1917, p. 4.

³⁵ “Een Manifest,” *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 24, 1917, p. 5; “De Kadaver-Verwertungs-Anstalt,” *De Tijd*, s’Hertogenbosch, April 26, 1917, p. 5.

³⁶ E.g. the *Tilburgsche Courant* and the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad*.

³⁷ “Ingezonden stukken” [Letters to the Editor], *Leeuwarder Courant*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; “Kadaververwertungsanstalt,” *De Nieuwe Koerier*, Roermond, April 21, 1917, p. 1.

Amsterdam, a “Revolutionary-Socialist People’s Paper,”³⁸ was not quite sure - maybe there was, indeed, some truth in the tale? - and was asking,

“Anyhow, why should imperialism not lay hands on the dead – its own victims – when it does not spare millions upon millions of the living? It is only strange that we did not yet hear that the dead soldiers’ flesh is given to the living for consumption.”³⁹

It could already be heard; for example in *The Daily Mail*, which was busy spreading the image of the “Cannibal Hun” among its readers.⁴⁰

In Switzerland, the newspaper scene was similarly divided among supporters and critics of the “Corpse factory” story. Some brought it with a disclaimer, such as *Popolo e Libertà* from Lugano: “We refuse to think that the inhumane lack of respect for the dead from the battlefields has arrived at such monstrosities.”⁴¹ Others completely refused to bring the story. The *Intelligenzblatt*, the leading German-language paper from Bern, the Swiss capital, for example, mentioned in a short notice from April 28, 1917, “We never printed it.”⁴²

³⁸ *Rev[olutionair] Soc[ialistisch] Volksblad*, so presenting itself on its masthead.

³⁹ *Evenwel, waarom zou het imperialisme zich niet aan de dooden – zijn eigen slachtoffers – vergrijpen, waar het millioenen en millioenen levenden niet ontziet? Het bevreedt alleen nog maar dat men er nog niet van hoort, dat het vleesch der doode soldaten te eten wordt gegeven aan de levende.* “De lijken der gesneuvelden verwerkt tot olie, zeep, veevoeder en mest?” [The corpses of the fallen processed to oil, soap, animal fodder, and manure?], *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, April 24, 1917, p. 3.

⁴⁰ “The Letters of an Englishman. The Cannibals,” *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 2; Frederic William Wile, “A Denial That Denies Nothing – Cannibal Huns,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ci rifugge dal pensare che a tante monstrosità sia giunta l’inumana assenza di ogni rispetto ai morti in battaglia.* “Bolletino politico. Officina tedesca per l’utilizzazione dei cadaveri?” [Political bulletin. German factory for the utilization of corpses?], *Popolo e Libertà*, Lugano, Switzerland, April 20, 1917, p. 1.

⁴² *Wir druckten sie nie ab.* “Eine häßliche Verleumdung” [An ugly slander],

Another Swiss newspaper, the French-language *La Liberté* from Fribourg, explained to its readers that the *Kadavers* were horse carcasses, not human corpses. The paper then gave a summary of the text received from the news agency, placing, however, in front of it the ironic remark, “At once, reporters appeared who described the horrifying spectacle they hadn’t seen.”⁴³ Of course, the “Corpse factory” story had also its firm supporters in Switzerland, for example in the Italian-language *Gazetta Ticinese* from Lugano, which several times came back to the subject and defended the story vehemently.⁴⁴

On April 20, 1917, when the Germans published their *démenti*, a secondary theater of war in the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign was opened in Switzerland. Under the headline “The German allows nothing to go to waste,”⁴⁵ the French-language *Gazette de Lausanne* reprinted the respective article from *Le Journal de Débats* from April 19, 1917, preceded and followed by paragraphs denouncing German barbarism, which, according to the *Gazette de Lausanne*, had reached its peak in the “Corpse factory.” Other Swiss dailies also brought the gruesome news, as follows from a remark in the German-language *Freiburger Nachrichten*:

“Part of the Swiss press, referring to a detailed article in the *Gazette de Lausanne*, is spreading the claim, again and again refreshed by Allied newspapers, that the German authorities are using the corpses of German soldiers for industrial purposes.”⁴⁶

Intelligenzblatt für die Stadt Bern, Bern, Switzerland, April 28, 1917, p. 3.

⁴³ *Immédiatement, il s’est trouvé des reporters pour décrire le spectacle horrible qu’il n’avaient pas vu.* “Il y a cadavres et cadavres” [There are corpses and carcasses], *La Liberté – Journal politique, religieux, social*, Fribourg, Switzerland, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁴⁴ “Cronaca estera – La situazione” [Events abroad – The situation], April 24 and 26, 1917, both times on page 1, “L’ultima degenerazione tedesca” [The ultimate German degeneration], May 8, 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *L’Allemand ne laisse rien se perdre.*

⁴⁶ *Ein Teil der schweizerischen Presse verbreitet nach einem sehr ausführlichen Auszug der “Gazette de Lausanne” die von Ententeblättern*

Two days later, the *Gazette de Lausanne* devoted eight and a half lines to the German official *démenti*.⁴⁷ About the same time, the German embassy at Bern sent a letter of protest to the *Gazette de Lausanne*, denouncing the “Corpse factory” story as “a disgusting and again and again refuted lie” and asking for publication of this letter.⁴⁸ The *Gazette de Lausanne*, instead, reacted with an editorial, published on April 24, 1917, apologizing, tongue in cheek (“We made a big mistake”⁴⁹), for having fallen victim to a mistranslation taken in good faith from their French colleagues, and added with a touch of maliciousness:

“Our excuse is that we felt - and we still are feeling - that the reduction of human corpses to fat and soap is a venial sin in comparison with feeding the living cargo of the *Lusitania*, the *Glouster Castle*, and innumerable other neutral ships to the sharks.⁵⁰”

As a next move, the German embassy sent copies of its letter of protest to all other Swiss newspapers, with the remark that the *Gazette de Lausanne* had refused to print it. It was taken up by many newspapers, for example, by the German-language dailies *Berner Tagblatt* and *Freiburger Nachrichten*.⁵¹ The

immer wieder aufgefrischte Behauptung, dass die Leichen der deutschen Soldaten von den deutschen Behörden zu Industriezwecken verwendet werden. “Grobe Entstellungen” [Gross distortions], *Freiburger Nachrichten*, Freiburg/Fribourg, Switzerland, April 29, 1917, p. 1.

⁴⁷ “Un démenti,” *Gazette de Lausanne*, April 22, 1917, p. 3.

⁴⁸ . . . *eine ekelhafte, so und so oft widerlegte Lügengeschichte. Freiburger Nachrichten*, Freiburg/Fribourg, Switzerland, April 29, 1917, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Nous eûmes grand tort. “L’Allemand ne laisse rien se perdre”* [The German allows nothing to go to waste], *Gazette de Lausanne*, April 24, 1917, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Notre excuse est que la réduction de cadavres humains en graisses et en savons nous a semblé, et nous semblerait encore, péché véniel auprès de celui qui consiste à jeter en pâture aux requins les cargaisons vivantes des Lusitania, des Gloucester Castle et d’innombrables navires neutres. Ibid.*, italics in the original.

⁵¹ The article in the *Gazette de Lausanne* from April 29, 1917, refers to a publication in the *Berner Tagblatt*. See further “Grobe Entstellungen” [Gross distortions], *Freiburger Nachrichten*, Freiburg/Fribourg,

Gazette de Lausanne reacted immediately and angrily with an editorial in its April 29, 1917 issue, pointing to the fact that it had brought rectifications on April 22 and 24, 1917, and, therefore, had not felt obliged to publish the embassy's letter.⁵² The German embassy, the *Gazette* concluded, would have done better to inform the Swiss newspapers about the reasons given by the *Gazette* for its way of responding, implicitly alluding to the Germans' "feeding of living cargo to the sharks."

From the point of view of the propaganda business, in Switzerland the Germans scored an own goal. The interventions of their embassy, though well meant, not only kept the fires burning for about half a month, but also made the German "Corpse factory" known countrywide, a result Allied propaganda alone would not have achieved so quickly, if at all. Breaking "the cardinal rule of propaganda - never answer enemy charges, this only spreads the original lie,"⁵³ was a mistake the Germans made more often than once in this war.

The major Catalan newspaper, *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona, Spain did not bring the story, but devoted a whole article under the headline "Concerning a false information" in its May 4, 1917 issue to the argument between the (German) *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *The Times* of London about *Kadaver* and *Kadaververwertungsanstalten*.⁵⁴ It was part of a linguistic fight in which the British wanted to prove that their press had correctly translated the German word *Kadaver* as "corpse." To support their cause - as "confirmation" - British newspapers published letters to the editors from self-appointed "experts," who had pored over voluminous dictionaries, or who once had been studying medicine in Germany or Austria. Such letters

Switzerland, April 28, 1917, p. 1.

⁵² "Procédé incorrect" [Incorrect behavior], *Gazette de Lausanne*, April 29, 1917, p. 1.

⁵³ Marquis 1978:489.

⁵⁴ *Acerca de una falsa información. La Vanguardia*, May 4, 1917, p. 12.

appeared, for example, in the *Morning Post*⁵⁵ of April 23 and in *The Times* of April 23 and 26, 1917.⁵⁶ All writers stated that personal experience or their dictionaries showed that *Kadaver* was used in German to denote the body of a dead human being, too. This was, of course, not false, as it was one of the word's possible meanings. Those who employed the argument, however, overlooked the fact known to every translator that it is the context that decides which of the possible meanings of a word has to be chosen in a concrete case.

A new argument in the linguistic quarrel about *Kadaver* was introduced by *The Times* on April 23, 1917. In a price list published by the Union of German Farmers, *Tierkörpermehl* and *Kadavermehl* were listed separately. From this fact, *The Times* concluded that, as *Tierkörpermehl* obviously "is meal made from the bodies of animals," *Kadavermehl* must be something different, subliminally suggesting that it was made from corpses.⁵⁷ As already mentioned, both products were made from the bodies (or body parts) of dead animals. The different prices mentioned in the German price list did not refer to different articles, as was sometimes assumed, but to different ways of packaging ("bulk," of course, was cheaper than "sacks").⁵⁸

In addition, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* reacted by ridiculing the Germans and calling them liars every time when a German newspaper or politician pointed to the fact

⁵⁵ "Why I Believe the Germans Are Ghouls," *The War Illustrated*, May 19, 1917, p. 308.

⁵⁶ "To the Editor of The Times," not signed, April 23, 1917, p. 7; "The Meaning of 'Kadaver.' Evidence of a Berlin University Lecturer," not signed, April 26, 1917, p. 7; "Corpse or Carcass. To the Editor of The Times," April 26, 1917, p. 7.

⁵⁷ "Germans and Their Dead – The Meaning of 'Kadaver'," *The Times*, April 23, 1917, p. 7. The argument was widely borrowed by other newspapers.

⁵⁸ This wrong assumption can, e.g., be found in the Dutch papers *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* ("Het lijkenverhaal," April 23, 1917, p. 3) and *De Tribune*, Amsterdam ("De lijken der gesneuvelden," April 27, 1917, p. 3, referring to an article in *De Telegraaf* from Amsterdam).

that *Kadaververwertung* referred to dead animals, and not to humans.⁵⁹ The linguistic debate about *Kadaver* spread from Europe as far as Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., Canada, and Asia. It was fought out, for example, in the columns of *The North-China Herald* in mid-May 1917 with a flood of letters to the editor.⁶⁰

Reuters and the Northcliffe journalists did not hesitate to take up the gauntlet the German government had thrown down to them with its repudiation of the *Kadaver* story, issued on April 20, 1917. They found it “noteworthy that Berlin deliberated five days before challenging the *Times*’s translation of the *Lokal Anzeiger*’s admission” and claimed that “the facts” were “undeniable.”⁶¹ *The Daily Mail* ridiculed the German denial under the headline “A Denial That Denies Nothing.”⁶² *The Times* quoted the German wireless dispatch in full on April 23, 1917 and again elaborated on the semantic ambiguity of the German words *Kadaver* and *Leiche*. The gist of the *Times* article, however, was

“that this characteristic German *démenti* carefully abstains from denying the charge that matters - the charge that the German authorities do use the bodies of dead soldiers. The

⁵⁹ “A Denial That Denies Nothing,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 6, and *The Times*: “Through German Eyes,” May 3, 1917, p. 5; “Through German Eyes. The Germans and the Dead. Herr Zimmermann’s Defence,” May 17, 1917, p. 5; “Through German Eyes. The Germans and the Dead,” May 30, 1917, p. 5; “The Germans and the Dead,” June 5, 1917, p. 5.

⁶⁰ *The North China Herald* published on page 329 of its May 12, 1917 issue six letters to the editor under the headline “Kadaver.”

⁶¹ “Miscellaneous. German Corpse factory. Belated Repudiation. The Facts Undeniable,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, New Zealand, April 23, 1917, p. 5. The same: “The Loathsome Factory – Denial by Huns,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁶² “Germany Day by Day. Corpse Fat. A Denial That Denies Nothing. By Frederic William Wile, Late Berlin Correspondent of ‘The Daily Mail’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 6.

statement that the report is “loathsome and ridiculous” is not a statement that the report is not true.⁶³

This argument was continuously repeated, the fact notwithstanding that the Germans had stated the opposite - as everybody can see from the text of the dispatch without taking great pains in interpretation - and made it still more clear in the following days.

The Daily Mail put also much effort into providing its readers with additional “proofs” of the “Hun body-boiling” given by the “perpetrators” themselves, beyond those allegedly given by the *Lokal-Anzeiger* and the *Chemiker-Zeitung*. On April 21, 1917 the paper published a letter to the editor submitted by a reader who wrote that he had met in Holland some time ago a German gentleman who told him in great detail how the fat from dead bodies was extracted and “that he himself had worked in a factory converted to this purpose.”⁶⁴

A favorite theme for the Northcliffe papers was the Germans’ alleged cannibalism. “The civilised races of mankind have always classed the crime of dishonoring the dead with that of cannibalism,” *The Daily Mail* commented the first news of the German “Corpse factories.”⁶⁵ Ingeniously the Northcliffe journalists extended the meaning of “cannibalism,” hitherto understood as “man eats man,” by “man eats animals fed with human remains.” As the Germans allegedly fed their pigs and poultry with products from the “Corpse factories,” they had, in the end, human flesh on their plates.⁶⁶ Histories

⁶³ “Germans and Their Dead. The Meaning of ‘Kadaver’,” *The Times*, April 23, 1917, p. 7. Italics in the original. The German message was also reprinted on April 23, 1917, in the *Daily Chronicle*. Mügge 1920:106.

⁶⁴ *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 2, letter to the editor signed “Frederic Martyn.”

⁶⁵ “Hun Ghouls, Oil, Fodder, and Dividends from the Dead,” *The Daily Mail*, April 17, 1917, p. 4. Also quoted in “General War News. Horrible Revelations. Germans Feed Pigs with Corpses,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, April 18, 1917, p. 9.

⁶⁶ “The Germans and the Dead. A prisoner’s story,” *The Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5. “The Letters of an Englishman. The Cannibals,” *The Daily*

of (traditional, man-eats-man) cannibalism, reported from times many hundred years ago, were dug up to “prove” that cannibalism was nothing new to the Germans.⁶⁷ The Bishop of Carlisle also raised his voice. On April 23, 1917 *The Times* informed the world that the Right Reverend, referring to the “Corpse factory,” had “described the system as cannibalism, recalling the Prussians’ cannibalism during the Thirty Years War.”⁶⁸

A reader of *The Daily Mail* expressed her horror: “This German corpse business is too awful for words. Next year any German citizen who eats pork may be eating his father or brother.”⁶⁹ Another reader had heard about a British soldier who “found sausages in a Hun’s knapsack and took them.” He was wondering what the soldier “thinks now after reading of the ghoulish affair of turning the dead into pig’s food?” He and another reader, therefore, demanded from their government measures that would protect both Great Britain’s pig farmers from competitors on the market and her citizens’ stomachs from nausea: an embargo on pork from Germany and her neighboring countries “from now and after the war.”⁷⁰

On April 20, 1917 *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* added “Margarine from corpse fat” to the “Corpse factory” story. They brought the account of an anonymous British sergeant who said - though with a caveat regarding the reliability of his

Mail, April 21, 1917, p. 2. “Huns and Scientific Societies,” *The Daily Mail*, April 24, p. 4, letter to the editor signed “S.H.F.”

⁶⁷ “Corpse ‘Kultur’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 2, letter to the editor signed “Kathleen Streatfeild.” Frederic William Wile: “A Denial that Denies Nothing,” *The Daily Mail*, April 23, 1917, p. 6. “Corpse Fat,” *ibid.*, letter to the editor signed “C.P.”

⁶⁸ “German Ghouls. The Corpse factory,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 3; article borrowed from *The Times*.

⁶⁹ “Corpse ‘Kultur’,” *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, letter to the editor signed “Mary Challoner.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2, letter to the editor signed “Francis Maginn”; letter to the editor signed “G. H. Payne.”

source - that a German prisoner had told him the following about his comrades:

“Even when they’re dead their work isn’t done. They are wired together in batches then, and boiled down in factories as a business, to make fat for munition making and to feed pigs and poultry, and God knows what besides. Then other folks eat the pigs and poultry, so you may say its cannibalism, isn’t it? This fellow told me Fritz calls his margarine “corpse fat,” because they suspect that’s what it comes from.⁷¹”

From here on, “German margarine from corpse fat” became a favorite theme for the press.⁷²

The *Daily Express* even went further, imputing to the Germans that they were using every part of the human body for alimentary purposes, directly and on a commercial scale. A “special correspondent” allegedly wrote from Amsterdam:

“I will say no more, except this: I will guarantee that none of the present generation in Holland who personally know of these things will ever again purchase German-made sweetmeats, honey, jam, patés, margarine, or anything of that sort - not if they live a hundred years.⁷³”

The “Corpse factory” story received ample support by prominent British politicians. *The Times* reported on April 23, 1917: “Lord Curzon, speaking at Derby, confirmed the facts regarding the corpse factories, adding ‘No horror replies to the Germans’.”⁷⁴ The “Corpse factory” became also a point of

⁷¹ “The Hun Corpse Factory. World-Wide Horror. German Prisoner’s Account,” *The Daily Mail*, April 20, 1917, p. 4; “The Germans and the Dead. A Prisoner’s Story,” *The Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5. “Fritz” was the - non-derogatory - nickname used by British soldiers for the German soldiers, comparable to the German “Tommy” used for a British or “Ivan” for a Russian soldier.

⁷² E.g., in *The Western Times*, Exeter, UK, of May 29, 1917, p. 5. See also Australian and New Zealand papers.

⁷³ Quoted in “The Kaiser’s Ghouls. More Horrors of the Trade in the Dead,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, June 2, 1917, p. 9, and in “The Corpse Factory. Almost Beggars Belief,” *The Thames Star*, Waikato, New Zealand, July 13, 1917, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* George Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kendleston

discussion in the British Parliament. Conservative (Unionist) members J. D. Rees and Ronald McNeill each had a question put on the agenda for the April 25, 1917 sitting of the House of Commons, asking the Secretary of State for India and the Prime Minister, which steps they would take

“to make it known as widely as possible in Egypt, India and the East generally, that the Germans use the dead bodies of their own soldiers, and of their enemies when they obtain possession of them, as food for swine.⁷⁵”

“At the request of the hon. Members in whose names they appear,” the questions, however, were withdrawn for the moment.⁷⁶

On April 26, 1917 the “German corpse factory” appeared on the agenda of a Cabinet meeting. Lord Balfour, the Secretary of State, took the minutes:

“While it should not be desirable that His Majesty’s Government should take any responsibility as regards the story pending the receipt of further information, there does not, in view of the many atrocity actions of which the Germans have been guilty, appear to be any reason why it should not be true.⁷⁷”

It is the same argument already known from the French paper *La Libre Parole*. We will hear it repeated by Undersecretary

(1859-1925), was a British Conservative Statesman, from 1899 to 1905 Viceroy of India and after the war, Foreign Secretary. In April 1917, he was Leader of the House of Lords and Lord President of the Council. He is most notable for the “Curzon Line,” the demarcation between Poland and the Soviet Union proposed by the Allies during the 1919 peace treaties.

⁷⁵ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1917/apr/25/corpses-of-soldiers-german-action>. Last accessed January 12, 2010.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Sanders/Taylor 1982:147, who give as source “Public Record Office, Kew, file FO 395/147.” Quoted also in P. Taylor 1999:41. Arthur James Lord Balfour (1848-1930), British conservative politician, from 1915 to 1916 was First Lord of the Admiralty (Minister of Naval Affairs), and from 1916-1919 Foreign Secretary (Secretary of State). He is most notable for the issuance of the “Balfour declaration” of November 2,

of State Lord Robert Cecil in the House of Commons four days later.

On April 30, 1917, the “Corpse factory” was discussed in Commons for the first time. The cries and cheers from the floor, meticulously recorded by *The Daily Mail*, give a vivid impression of the degree of brainwashing to which the British nation had fallen victim within the last two weeks. Member of Parliament Ronald McNeill opened the debate, demanding “that steps should be taken to make the German corpse fat business known as widely as possible in Egypt, India, and the East generally.”

Lord Cecil began his answer with declaring that the government had no other information than that which British papers had published as extracts from the German press. He then repeated Lord Balfour’s argument: “In view of other actions by German military authorities there is nothing incredible in the present charges against them.”

Answering to Mr. McNeill, he added: “I think we could not take any steps (as to circulation in the East) other than those we have taken.”

By this he was implicitly acknowledging the British government’s involvement in spreading the story. Next, Member of Parliament John Dillon took the floor.⁷⁸

“[He] expressed his belief that the statement was absolutely false. (Cheers from two members.)”

He was followed by R. L. Outhwaite who pointed to the fact that the press reports had “caused anxiety and misery to British people who have lost their sons on the battlefield, and who think that their bodies may be put to this purpose,”

and asked Lord Cecil directly, if that “does not give a reason why he should find out the truth of what is happening in Germany?”⁷⁹

1917, a letter to Lord Rothschild promising the Jews a “national home” in Palestine.

⁷⁸ John Dillon (1851-1927), Irish nationalist politician, represented East Mayo in Parliament from 1886 to 1918.

⁷⁹ Quote from Hayward 2010:119.

Lord Cecil replied to both by reading aloud the mistranslated Rosner account, as published by *The Times*. “That, he added, is all the information we have.” Mr. Dillon insisted.

“[He] said that other German papers stated these factories are for the purpose of boiling down the dead bodies of horses - (cries of “Oh, oh”) - and of other animals which are lying on the battlefield. (Cries of “No, no” and “Human bodies.”) Would the Government obtain authentic information? “For the credit of human nature you ought to try to do it.” (Interruptions and cries of disapproval.)”

Lord Cecil had the last word, addressing Mr. Dillon and expressing his low opinion of the German government: “It is not the duty of the Government and it is not possible for the Government to institute inquiries as to what goes on in Germany. The hon. Member is really very unreasonable in making the suggestion. (Cheers.) I have seen statements made or said to have been made by the German Government, and I confess that I am not able to attach very great importance to any statement made by the German Government. (Cheers.)⁸⁰”

It seems that Lord Cecil did not yet know the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916, otherwise he would certainly have quoted it to bolster his argument. Most probably he did not learn about it before May 2, 1917, when it was mentioned in the meeting of the War Cabinet, of which he was a member.⁸¹ Under the entry “German Corpse Destructor,” the minutes say that General W. R. Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, “stated that he had obtained a copy of the German Order for their Sixth Army, giving details relative to the despatch of corpses, which indicated clearly

⁸⁰ All quotations, except Outhwaite, from “Corpse Fat. Lord Robert Cecil & the Hun Business,” *The Daily Mail*, May 1, 1917, p. 6.

⁸¹ As Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Cecil attended this meeting. PRO CAB 23/2/WC130, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Wednesday, May 2, 1917, at 11:30 A.M.*. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-23-2.pdf#page=301>. Last accessed March 7, 2012.

that the corpses in question referred to human beings.”⁸² We can safely assume that the British Army was keeping to the official channels, which meant that General Robertson received the copy of the Army Order via General Charteris’ office, a fact that again points to Charteris’ involvement in the “Corpse factory” affair.

Lord Cecil’s statement in Commons was widely spread in the first days of May 1917.⁸³ It brought the “Corpse factory” again into the headlines and caused the Germans to react on an equal level. On May 8, 1917 the news agencies reported that Reichstag member Heckscher from the *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* (Progressive People’s Party) had a question put on the agenda of the next sitting, asking the Chancellor about what he intended to do against “this calumny” from the British side.⁸⁴

The answer was given in the Reichstag sitting of May 11, 1917 by State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Arthur

⁸² Ibid. From Sir Herbert Russell’s testimony we already know that Charteris was - at least for some time - in possession of a copy of the Army Order. Maybe he got it from the Dutch newspaper editor, who no more needed it. It is, however, also possible that it was another copy. German Army orders were distributed in a great number of copies, and it is quite possible that more than one copy had fallen into British hands.

⁸³ See, e.g., the following New Zealand newspapers: “The German ‘Corpse Factory.’ Great Britain’s Attitude,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, May 1, 1917, p. 5; “British Parliament. Meatless Days and Bread Consumption. German Corpse Factory,” *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough; “Imperial Parliament. The Submarine Menace,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, May 1, 1917, p. 6; “The ‘Corpse Factories.’ No official Information,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, May 2, 1917, p. 7; “London News,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, May 2, 1917, p. 5; “German Corpse Mill. No Official Information Available,” *The Colonist*, Nelson, May 2, 1917, p. 5; “Various Items. German Corpse Factory,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, May 2, 1917, p. 6, or the Swiss *Le Confédéré* of May 2, 1917 (“Echos. L’utilisation des restes” [Echoes. The utilization of remains], p. 1), or from Hong Kong *The China Mail* (“The ‘German Corpse Factory,’” May 1, 1917, p. 5).

⁸⁴ “De ‘Kadaververwertung’ in den Rijksdag” [The ‘Kadaververwertung’ in the Reichstag], *Leidsch Dagblad*, Leyden, Holland, May 8, 1917, p. 3;

Zimmermann.⁸⁵ He categorically denied the accusations, remarking that the respective plants processed only animal carcasses, “a fact known to every sensible individual and, of course, also among our enemies,”⁸⁶ and added that the German government had taken legal action against those who are spreading “this calumny” in neutral countries. As “outrageous” Zimmermann characterized the fact that a member of the British government had given credence to the story, and accused Lord Cecil of lying:

“It is impossible that Lord Robert Cecil should have believed in this despicable legend, all the more as Member of Parliament Dillon explicitly had drawn his attention to the real facts of the case.”⁸⁷

Zimmermann’s answer in the Reichstag provided the Allied propagandists with another opportunity of reminding their target audience of the “Corpse factory.” The Northcliffe press and Reuters spread a short, uncommented notice. It

“L’utilisation des cadavres Boches” [The utilization of Hun corpses], *L’Express du Midi*, Toulouse, France, May 9, 1917, p. 1 (datelined May 8).

⁸⁵ Arthur Zimmermann (1864-1940), German career diplomat, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the German Empire from November 22, 1916 until August 6, 1917. His name is associated with the unfortunate *Zimmermann Telegram*, a proposal toward Mexico to enter war on Germany’s side against the U.S. The Mexican government, realistically gauging the balance of power, however, declined.

⁸⁶ *Darüber wird selbstverständlich auch bei unseren Feinden kein vernünftiger Mensch im Unklaren sein.* “Aus dem Reichstag” [From the Reichstag], *Luxemburger Wort*, Luxembourg, May 12, 1917, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Dass Lord Robert Cecil das niederträchtige Märchen geglaubt haben sollte, ist ausgeschlossen, denn der Ab[eordnete] Dillon hat ihn ausdrücklich auf den wahren Sachverhalt aufmerksam gemacht.* “Im Reichstag - Eine erbärmliche englische Verläumdung [sic],” [In the Reichstag - A wretched English slander], *Coburger Zeitung*, Coburg, Germany, May 13, 1917, p. 1. See also: “Aus dem Reichstag” [From the Reichstag], *Luxemburger Wort*, Luxembourg, May 12, 1917, p. 2; “Minister Zimmermann over het lijken sprookje” [Minister Zimmermann about the corpse fairy tale], *De Sumatra Post*, Medan, Sumatra, July 31, 1917, p. 7.

was published worldwide around mid-May 1917. Headlines such as “The Corpse Factory – Another German Denial,”⁸⁸ however, were intended to sow doubt as to the credibility of Zimmermann’s repudiation of the allegations.

Immediately after the appearance of the first revelations about a German “Corpse factory” in *The Times* and other Northcliffe papers, readers remembered to have heard similar rumors already long ago circulating in Romania,⁸⁹ as well as in Holland and Belgium - we here have an echo of the spreading of the “Gerolstein” story by the *Office Belge*.⁹⁰ The *Daily Express*’ “special correspondent” at Amsterdam apparently knew details. He reported that there was “not only one German factory for this damnable work . . . The factories are established in each army area, including Rumania.”⁹¹ An Italian newspaper revealed that in Austria, too, there are “factories for the treatment of human corpses, from which fats

⁸⁸ *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, New Zealand, May 14, 1917, p. 5.

⁸⁹ “In connection with our revelations as to the German institution for the disposal of the dead on the battlefield, it may interest your readers to know that this has been going on for many months past. It is well over a year since I first heard of it in Rumania”; “To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, April 24, 1917, p. 5. The letter is signed “J.H. Adeney, British Chaplain of Bukarest.” With regard to Romania, a remark in a Dutch newspaper must be seen. It quotes an Order of the Day issued by General Stratulescu, Commander of the First Romanian Army, on January 16, 1917 to all front commanders, urging the troops to fight bravely and not to surrender, as the enemy would work prisoners to death and render their corpses for glycerin-making: “De Oorlog – Van het Oostenrijksch-Hongarsche front” [The war – From the Austro-Hungarian front], *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, February 12, 1917, p. 5. The news is datelined “February 5.”

⁹⁰ “We have received other letters stating, as many other witnesses have stated before, that it has long been known in Belgium and Holland that the Germans do in fact dispose of their dead in the horrible manner indicated in Herr Karl Rosner’s message”; “The Germans and their dead. A prisoner’s story,” *The Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5. See also *The Daily Mail* of April 20, 1917, p. 4 (Belgium) and April 21, 1917, p. 2 (Holland).

⁹¹ “The Kaiser’s Ghouls. More Horrors of the Trade in the Dead,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, June 2, 1917, p. 9, referring to a publication in the *Daily Express*, no date given.

are extracted for military purposes and even for use as food.”⁹² As raw material, we read, the Austrians prefer “Italian bodies, the Italians, as a rule, being much fatter than the Austrians” - not much surprising, as Italy did not suffer from the British sea blockade, which had long since forced Austrian citizens to tighten their belts.⁹³

The story also reached Eastern Europe. On April 24, 1917 *La Correspondencia de España* brought on page two of its morning issue a lengthy article with many details about the “Corpse factories,” forwarded by its London correspondent and datelined “April 17, 1917.” Among other things, the author mentioned that “for many months the Germans have been accused of having done the same in Poland.”⁹⁴ This remark is corroborated by a news about an interview the Reverend W. T. Grenfell from Labrador had given to the New York *Outlook* magazine in July 1916, in which he stated that the Germans were collecting “the bones of the starved Russians in Poland . . . for making nitroglycerine,”⁹⁵ by a short notice in a German field paper, the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, published in Wilna, Lithuania, on May 12, 1917, about the statement Secretary of State Zimmermann made in the Reichstag when he sharply

⁹² “Corpse Factories in Austria, Too,” *The China Mail*, Hongkong, August 9, 1917, referring to an article in *Libertà* from Trente, Italy. The Austrians, following the German example, indeed, had set up carcass utilization plants in the rear of the front. See, e.g., the picture on the Web: <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/record/92060/650F29D26E22C5E36E92BD73911560DF54E4C22A.html>. Last accessed February 1, 2012. See also: “Unique Diversion. High Prices for Stock,” *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, New Zealand, August 21, 1917, p. 2; “Corpse Factory,” *Portland Guardian*, Portland, VIC, Australia, September 19, 1917, p. 2.

⁹³ “Corpse Factories in Austria, Too,” *The China Mail*, Hongkong, August 9, 1917, referring to the article in *Libertà* from Trente, Italy.

⁹⁴ *Hace ya muchos meses que se acusa á los alemanes de estar haciendo lo mismo en Polonia*. The article is headed “Cadáveres y submarinos” (Corpses and submarines).

⁹⁵ Quoted in “Questions Answered. Soul of the Allies. German Cruelty to Medical Men – Ghoulish Enterprise,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, July 29, 1916, p. 10.

criticized Lord Cecil's treatment of the matter in Commons,⁹⁶ and last but not least by a Polish comment made immediately after the end of the Second World War: "The rumor that the Germans make soap from human fat . . . already circulated widely among the occupied countries during the First World War."⁹⁷

As was mentioned earlier, together with the news about the German "Corpse factories," rumors were spreading that "the Huns" did not only boil down their own dead, but also the bodies of Allied soldiers. On the Western front war long since had become static, and an attack usually began with artillery laying down a barrage on the enemy's trenches. Therefore corpses often were dismembered to small pieces or buried meters deep in the earth and never recovered. This way people at home explained themselves the fact that often the bodies of soldiers killed in action were not found on the battlefield after an attack.

In letters to the editor, newspaper readers suspected the worst and called for action. *The Times* of April 19, 1917, for instance, published the letter of one Alfred E. Turner from Chelsea, dated April 18 and fiercely condemning the Germans who "have outraged humanity by their bestial desecration of the dead, among whom doubtless were those who had fallen

⁹⁶ "Ausguck- Die Heimat. Gegen Verleumdung" [Lookout – Home. Against slander], *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, Wilna (today Vilnius), Lithuania, May 12, 1917, p. 11. As will be shown later, field papers took up the "Corpse factory" issue when need was felt to counter respective rumors circulating in their area of distribution. Until the end of the First World War, Lithuania was part of the Russian Empire. Randal Marlin pointed to the fact that the British Department of Information supplied also Germany's enemies at the East front with propaganda material (Marlin 2002:65). In Russia, for example, propaganda "broadsheets were issued for distribution to soldiers and workmen at the rate of one million a day, despite the difficulties caused by the Russian Revolution" (ibid., p. 66).

⁹⁷ *Pogłoska o tym, że Niemcy robią mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu, nie jest nowa. Obiegła ona już szeroko po krajach okupowanych podczas pierwszej wojny światowej* (Strąbski 1946:15).

into their hands.”⁹⁸ The writer expressed full agreement with one C. E. Bunbury who, in a letter to the editor of *The Times*, published on April 18, 1917, had called for “prompt steps [that] should be taken by the Foreign Office, the India Office, and the Colonial Office, to give the widest publicity possible in neutral countries, and in our own Dominions, Dependencies, and Protectorates to the . . . subject of the “Corpse Exploitation Establishment.”⁹⁹

It was not necessary to tell them twice. On April 19, 1917 the *Evening News* could report that China already had received the message: “The “Corpse Conversion factory” strikes our friends the Chinese as an almost incredible abomination. His Excellency the Chinese Ambassador said to an “Evening News” representative: “I was much horrified; I could scarcely believe such a thing possible.”¹⁰⁰

The next day *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* quoted an official statement made by the Chinese Ambassador, ending with the words “We cannot but regard the German desecration with a very special horror.”¹⁰¹

Two days later, India followed through. On April 21, 1917 the *Evening News* and *The Times* printed a statement made by the Maharajah of Bikanir, newly appointed Member of the Empire War Council, about the German “Corpse factories”:

⁹⁸ “To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, April 19, 1917, p. 5.

⁹⁹ “To the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, April 18, 1917, p. 10. Bunbury’s letter was (somewhat belatedly) reprinted in full on May 16, 1917, by the semi-official *The Daily Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, p. 16, under the headline “Utilize Dead. Bodies for Extraction of the Fat. Bones Ground to Powder which is Converted Into Pig’s Feed.”

¹⁰⁰ “The Hun Ghouls. Disgust and Loathing Throughout the Civilized World. Chinese Ambassador Horrified,” *The Evening News*, London, UK, April 19, 1917. Quoted from Mügge 1920:105.

¹⁰¹ “The Germans and the Dead. A Prisoner’s Story,” *The Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 5; “The Hun Corpse Factory. World-Wide Horror. German Prisoner’s Account,” *The Daily Mail*, April 20, 1917, p. 4. If the Chinese Ambassador really was surprised, it would be another indication that von Hintze never boasted before the Chinese Premier in February 1917 with the utilization of the own soldier dead for making glycerin.

“We may be certain that the German authorities are not any more considerate, to say the least, to the remains of fallen foes than to those of their fighting men. It is therefore practically certain that the bodies of British and French soldiers removed from the field of battle by the Germans have undergone like indignities, and also that those of some Indian warriors have been used in the same loathsome way. This atrocity will never be forgotten or forgiven in India . . . I can speak not only for the Rajputs, or the Hindus, of which great people they form a part, but for every race and community in India, when I say that nothing can exceed the sense of horror and detestation with which this latest crime of Germany against mankind will be regarded in every part of India.¹⁰²”

The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* took a pitying glance at the Maharajah as a victim of British propaganda, taken in by the mistranslation of *Kadaver*, and concluded with deep resignation, “It is too sad to laugh about it.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, His Highness’ statement about the German “Corpse factory” was taken seriously in the dignitary’s home country, where the news, as expected, caused “horror and detestation.”¹⁰⁴

Even conscientious objectors who spent war-time in a military prison were treated with the story, perhaps because the prison authorities hoped that exposing the Germans as body-boilers would cause the refuseniks to change their minds and take up arms against the Huns. Irish Socialist Richard Fox, jailed at Wandsworth Prison until April 1919, remembered:

¹⁰² “The Germans and the Dead. Statement by the Maharajah of Bikanir,” *The Times*, April 21, 1917, p. 5; *Evening News*, April 21, 1917 (quoted in Mügge 1920:106). It should be remarked here that, at that time, today’s Pakistan and Bangladesh with their Muslim majority also belonged to British “India.”

¹⁰³ *Het is te droevig om er om to lachen*. “De Oorlog. De baal an het rollen” [The war. Keeping the ball rolling], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 21, 1917, p. 5. The same: *De Sumatra Post*, Medan, Sumatra, July 2, 1917, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ “German Corpse Factories. Horror and Detestation in India,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, May 24, 1917, p. 7, and *The China Mail*, Hongkong, China, June 6, 1917, p. 2.

“Each Sunday after the sermon the Chaplain gave us a résumé of the week’s news in a ten minutes’ talk. The news was carefully selected. He told us, with indignation, that the Germans had started a “corpse factory.”¹⁰⁵ “

Between May 16 and 18, 1917 the “Corpse factory” propagandists played their trump card: they released paragraph 5b of the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916. Apart from the common headline “Delivery to Corpse Utilization Establishments,” the newspapers gave the text in various, slightly different, (mis-)translations. *The Daily Telegraph* of May 16, 1917, and *The Times* of May 17, 1917, for example, had:

“It has become necessary once more to lay stress on the fact that when corpses are sent to the corpse utilization establishments returns as to the unit, date of death, illness, and information as to epidemics, if any, are to be furnished at the same time.¹⁰⁶”

Crucial is the well-known mistranslation of *Kadaver* into “corpse.” An additional “human touch” gives the translation of *Krankheit* as “illness” instead of “disease.”

The “human touch” is reinforced in the version given by *The Times* one day later, where “epidemics” is replaced by “(contagious) diseases.”¹⁰⁷ *The Daily Mail*, however, surpassed all in “humanizing” the text with the following translation, published on its front page on May 18, 1917 with a headline in capitals, running over all columns: “It is necessary again to call attention to the fact that when corpses are delivered to the Corpse Utilization Establishments details are to accompany as to which troop units they are from, the date of death, illness, and information as to any epidemics.¹⁰⁸”

¹⁰⁵ Fox 1938:250.

¹⁰⁶ “Corpse Fat. A German Army Order,” *The Daily Mail*, May 17, 1917, p. 5, quoting from *The Daily Telegraph* of the previous day; “Through German Eyes. The Germans and the Dead. Herr Zimmermann’s Defence,” *The Times*, May 17, 1917, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ “The Germans and the Dead,” *The Times*, May 18, 1917, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ “German Corpse-Fat Factory: Photograph of the Army Order. The

The translation was preceded by a facsimile of the German text.

The Times informed its readers on May 17, 1917 that the order “was recently found on the Western front” (which could have been true, as *Tagesbefehle* were issued in a great number of copies) and “that it will shortly be published in facsimile.”¹⁰⁹ The next day, the newspaper brought a copy of the German text of paragraph 5b, omitting, however, the word *darauf*.¹¹⁰ A new wave of publications followed worldwide, presenting the discovery as further evidence of the existence of “German corpse factories.” “Yet the Huns still deny that they are guilty of these dreadful practices,” *The Mail* from Adelaide, Australia, indignantly commented.¹¹¹ Typical for a pro-Allies newspaper from a neutral country is the closing remark in the *Gazette de Lausanne*: “Doubtlessly one might argue that nothing in this item is explicitly pointing to human corpses, but equally nothing points to the contrary.”¹¹² How widely the news was spread is vividly shown by the fact that a provincial Australian newspaper brought it as received from Vancouver, Canada, with reference to “a Washington message” which itself quoted “a Mesopotamian official despatch.”¹¹³

It is worth mentioning here that the British authorities, of course, long since had known the truth about the German Army Order of the Day. It was translated in the Foreign Office with

German Corpse Utilisation Scandal,” *The Daily Mail*, May 18, 1917, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ “Through German Eyes. The Germans and the Dead. Herr Zimmermann’s Defence,” *The Times*, May 17, 1917, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ “The Germans and the Dead,” *The Times*, May 18, 1917, p. 5.

¹¹¹ “Current Comment,” editorial, *The Mail*, Adelaide, Australia, July 21, 1917, p. 6.

¹¹² *On peut sans doute encore arguer que rien dans cette pièce n’indique formellement qu’il s’agisse de cadavres humains; mais rien non plus n’indique le contraire.* “L’utilisation des cadavres” [The utilization of corpses], *Gazette de Lausanne*, May 26, 1917, p. 2.

¹¹³ “The German Corpse Factories. Illuminating German Document,” *The Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, QLD, Australia, May 18, 1917, p. 5. Mesopotamia, today’s Iraq, had just been conquered by the British.

the observation that “this Army Order refers in all probability to carcasses of horses . . . chiefly for the reason that the word ‘Seuche’ (contagious disease) is only used in connection with animals.” The translated text was followed by the remark: “Obviously this would not refer to anyone killed in battle.”¹¹⁴

To keep the fires burning, *The Times* waited with “reviv[ing the] notorious horror”¹¹⁵ until June 5, 1917, when it published the whole document in facsimile, triggering off another wave of publications claiming that this German document was the irrefutable proof of the Huns’ body-boiling.¹¹⁶ *The Northern Advocate* from Whangarei, New Zealand, headlined triumphantly “A Lie Nailed Down,” and *The North-China Herald* hypocritically wrote:

“When Reuter first telegraphed the news that the Germans were rendering down the bodies of their own soldiers in order to use the oils and other products obtained for industrial purposes, we were inclined to believe - or to hope - that there was some misunderstanding . . . [B]ut this order compels us reluctantly to acknowledge that the Germans are guilty of this fiendish outrage on their own dead . . . [W]hen they realized the effect that the disclosures would have throughout the world, particularly among neutrals, they began, probably at official command, to turn the taps of indignation full on.”¹¹⁷

It is worth while studying how the clever propagandists of *The Times* presented the Army Order of the Day to their readers. They began with showing paragraph 5b in the well-known mistranslation. They then were sowing mistrust against the translation of *Kadaver* as “carcass” by “the Germans and their friends in other countries,” pointing to an erroneous

¹¹⁴ National Archives file FO 395/147; according to Lipkes 2007:763, endnote 56.

¹¹⁵ “German Corpse Factory,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, June 7, 1917, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ “The Germans and the Dead,” *The Times*, June 5, 1917, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ “‘Kadaver.’ A Lie Nailed Down,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 3; “Germans and the Dead,” *The North-China Herald*, Shanghai, July 21, 1917, p. 129.

interpretation of an abbreviation at the end of the document made by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* - both a red herring and a non sequitur of the “once a liar, always a liar” type.¹¹⁸ They next gave a summary of the first paragraphs of the document, which dealt with staff and personnel matters, and closed the article with the remark, “The other paragraphs of the Army Order are equally irrelevant to the subject of paragraph 5b - ‘Delivery to Corpse Utilization Establishments’.”¹¹⁹ They deliberately omitted that the preceding paragraph 5a extensively dealt with matters regarding horses: the supply of leather parts for repairing harnesses, and measures against sores from chafing.

In Holland, where people had learned to be suspicious of propaganda from all warring parties, it was immediately noticed that the way the German document was presented in *The Times* was intended to manipulate its readers. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* got to the point:

“Those Englishmen who do not know German shall get the impression that among a lot of reports about officers and soldiers, a notice about horse carcasses certainly would not have been placed.¹²⁰”

Giving a translation of the whole document (paragraphs 5c and 5d speak of carbide and sacks), the Dutch paper concludes:

“We do not understand how this piece shall prove that the ‘Kadaver,’ which are listed there under one item between

¹¹⁸ At the end of the document, the abbreviation “V.S.d.O.K.” appears. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which was only in the possession of paragraph 5b and the signature (more had not been published by *The Times*), erroneously interpreted this as “Veterinärstelle des Oberkommandos,” whereas the correct meaning was “Verordnungsstelle des Oberkommandos”; “Through German Eyes – The Germans and the Dead,” *The Times*, May 30, 1917, p. 5. This shows, by the way, that the Northcliffe journalists had a good knowledge of German and debunks their mistranslation of *Kadaver* again as a deliberate falsification.

¹¹⁹ “The Germans and the Dead,” *The Times*, June 5, 1917, p. 5.

¹²⁰ *Wie, onder de Engelschen, geen Duitsch verstaan, zullen dus onder den indruk geraken, dat te midden van allerlei berichten over officieren en soldaten een mededeling over paardenlijken zeker wel niet zal zijn opgenomen.*

leather for harnesses, carbide, and sacks, shall just be human corpses.¹²¹”

Additional “incriminating evidence” against the Hun body-boilers appeared in the second half of June 1917. A Tasmanian paper reported:

“London. June 22. A correspondent at British headquarters in France says that the Welshmen who participated in the savage fighting in Flanders . . . found many German corpses tied in bundles of threes, apparently ready for freighting to the boiling-down factory. Many loose limbs were included in the bundles. The British bombardment for several days prevented the removal of the bodies . . .¹²²”

The news had arrived at the Antipodes by cable from “Pirrie Robinson, the ‘Times’ correspondent,” and was widely spread across the British Empire.¹²³ As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the Germans, indeed, were bundling together their dead for transport. In Allied headquarters, of course, the truth was known: the corpses were bundled for being “packed on trains . . . and sent to German territory for burial” and not “for being used in some [other] way,” as Sir Talbot Hobbs, former commander of the Fifth Australian Division, clearly stated after the war.¹²⁴

In mid-September 1917, British air reconnaissance detected such German corpse transports by light railway.

¹²¹ *Het is ons niet recht duidelijk, hoe dit stuk zou kunnen bewijzen, dat die ‘Kadaver,’ die daar te midden van tuigleer, carbid en zakken onder één nummer staan, juist menschenlijken zijn.* “De Oorlog” [The war], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, June 13, 1917, p. 5. The same: “De ‘kadaver’-kwestie” [The ‘kadaver’ question], *De Sumatra Post*, Medan, Sumatra, September 17, 1917, p. 7.

¹²² “German Corpse factory. What the Welsh Troops Found,” *Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, June 23, 1917, p. 7. The same: “German Corpse factory. Incriminating Evidence Found,” *Argus*, Melbourne, June 23, 1917, p. 17.

¹²³ “War Items. The Corpse factory. Bundles of Bodies Found,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, June 25, 1917, p. 3. See also the next chapter.

¹²⁴ “The Alleged Corpse Factory. A General’s Denial,” *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, Australia, October 31, 1925, p. 13.

On September 17, 1917 the War Office sent respective photographs to the Ministry of Information. It seems, however, that these pictures were not used for internal purposes only, as John Taylor assumed.¹²⁵ French and Australian newspapers, for example, reported about them shortly afterwards, so *The Advertiser* from Adelaide, Australia, on September 25, 1917, quoting from the French daily *Le Petit Parisien*: “The enemy were seen piling their dead on waggons to be carried to the ‘corpse’ boiling-down factory.”¹²⁶ *The Times* brought the news belatedly on October 31, 1917.¹²⁷

In a propaganda pamphlet published in the autumn of 1917 and depicting horrors perpetrated by the Germans during their retreat from the Marne in August and September 1914, the reader learns that the Germans “several days” after a battle “remove the dead for cremation in the great kilns they are constructing, or . . . cart them back to the Corpse Factories which energetic commercial companies soon had in working order.” Most likely alluding to the early “German corpses to glycerin” rumors, the author remarks in a footnote that “these factories were in operation quite two years before their existence was discovered by an omniscient section of the English Press.”¹²⁸ Another “Corpse factory” propaganda pamphlet with the title *Outlaw the German Ghouls! A Corpse-Conversion Industry* was produced and distributed by the British Empire Union, a strongly nationalist, anti-German and anti-Socialist organization, which was especially active toward the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ J. Taylor 1991:19.

¹²⁶ “Advance Australia! The Great Battle in Flanders,” subtitle “Magnificent Airmen,” *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, Australia, September 25, 1917, p. 5. The article is datelined “Sep. 23, 1917.”

¹²⁷ “German Callousness to Their Dead,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, November 16, 1917, p. 5, giving *The Times* from October 31, 1917 as its source.

¹²⁸ Corbett-Smith 1917:159.

¹²⁹ Copies are in the collections of the Imperial War Museum, London. See <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/publication/4201> and <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/publication/80007210>. Both last

After mid-June 1917, the “German corpse factory” appeared only sporadically in the columns of the European press, with the notable exception of the Northcliffe papers. Every time when they mentioned the name of Karl Rosner, the *Lokal-Anzeiger’s* war correspondent, they reminded their readers that he “achieved special fame by his description of German atrocities - not only the corpse utilization factory,”¹³⁰ or they gave him the epithet of “the war lord’s [i.e. the Kaiser’s] press agent for the corpse utilization establishment.”¹³¹ Hence the Northcliffe press and the papers that quoted from it, such as *The Washington Post*, kept the fires burning. In the *Daily Mail Yearbook*, volume 18, published in January 1918, we find a summary of the “Corpse factory” story under the entry “Desecration of Corpses of German Dead in the War.”¹³² All these publications helped keep the “Corpse factory” story from fading from wartime memory.

But even in the country of its origin the story did not remain undisputed. Whereas ordinary British citizens had to fear criminal prosecution for publicly expressing doubts as to the veracity of Allied propaganda tales, Members of Parliament had more leeway. So Member of Parliament Arthur Ponsonby could, in the beginning of 1918, publish an article in the newspaper of the pacifist Union of Democratic Control about “First Class Lies,” in which he denounced, among other propaganda falsehood, “the Kadaver story” as a lie.¹³³

Scottish and Irish Members of Parliament also often expressed their doubts as to the story’s veracity (and about

accessed April 11, 2012. No exact date of the pamphlet’s publication could be found.

¹³⁰ *The Times* from August 12, 1917; quoted in “German Captives Penned Like Beasts,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1917, p. 3.

¹³¹ *The Daily Mail* from May 23, 1918; quoted in “Kaiser Greets U-Boat Pirates,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1918, p. 3. Also on May 17, 1918, in *The Ohinemuri Gazette*, Waikato, New Zealand (“The Coming of the Americans,” p. 3).

¹³² Williamson 1918:74.

¹³³ Quoted in detail in “First Class Lies,” *The Worker*, Brisbane, Australia, April 4, 1918, p. 11.

the sense of atrocity propaganda at all). On March 11, 1918, for instance, Member of Parliament David Mason, well aware of the role the Northcliffe press had played in creating and spreading this and other hoaxes, strongly opposed the nomination of Lord Northcliffe as Minister of Propaganda in Enemy Countries and Chairman of the American Committee: "We do not require a Lord Northcliffe to stimulate our hate by faked stories of German corpse factories and other absurd stories."¹³⁴

An anecdote from the last weeks of the war, which made it into the news (and which should have an astonishingly long-lasting effect), may show how deeply the "German Corpse factory" was engraved in the brains of the people, and that it had already become a typical urban legend, told and retold from friend to friend, at home and in the trenches. On September 29, 1918 the Allies, spearheaded by Australian units, broke through the German defense system ("Hindenburg line") at Bellicourt. In this attack, they captured the southern entrance of the St. Quentin Canal tunnel. The whole tunnel had been converted by the Germans into a huge, frontline-near and bomb-proof underground barracks. Sapper Harry W. Dadswell remembered:

"A chap came along and told us there was a corpse factory half a mile away. Harry Carroll said, "You're a liar" . . . "Alright," said the chap, "Go and see for yourself." When they returned I said to Harry, "Well, what is it?" He said, "My eyes tell me it is one, but my intelligence won't let me believe."¹³⁵

British wartime correspondent Philip Gibbs, who himself had entered the tunnel just after fighting, tried to set the record straight: "There were only dead Germans in the tunnel now, and dead in such a way that the sight of them revived that

¹³⁴ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1918/mar/11/government-and-press-relations-1#S5CV0104>. Last accessed January 12, 2010. David Marshall Mason (1865-1945), a Scottish Liberal, later Liberal National, politician, banker and businessman, MP for Coventry 1910-1918, connected to the Peace Society.

¹³⁵ Australian War Memorial 1998.

gruesome story of the German Kadaver Anstalt, or corpse factory, which some time ago deceived the credulous. A wild rumor spread among the English and Australian troops that they here had discovered the ghoulish work of burning down German bodies for their grease, and because it is likely to spread to tradition I must tell the truth of it.

In a cavern off the main tunnel were two boilers, and around about them I saw the bodies of German soldiers and inside the boilers were bits of bodies. What more was wanted as evidence of foul practice? To men of easy belief in the worst horrors of humanity such evidence would be good enough . . . [T]he truth is that by some explosion from within or without these German cooks and soldiers had been killed and blown to bits as they stood round their stewpans, and parts of their bodies had fallen into the boiling grease.¹³⁶

Gibbs' critical report appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* of October 5, 1918,¹³⁷ but not in *The Times*.¹³⁸ The British press limited itself to a short reference to the discovery in the Canal underground and to the remark that "this led to reports that a corpse factory had been found in full operation." The papers also said (correctly) that the corpses doubtlessly were strewn about by an explosion.¹³⁹ The "Hun body-boilers," however, were not let off the hook. Percival Phillips, war correspondent of *The Times*, whose report was spread worldwide by Reuters, tried hard to save the Northcliffe press' propaganda darling from refutation and added:

"At the same time, there is no explanation forthcoming for the presence elsewhere in the same tunnel of human remains carved up with the skill of a butcher. Surgeons and doctors

¹³⁶ "Enemy Fights Hard on Beaufort Line," subheading "Rumor of Ghouls Started," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1918, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Mentioned in *The Maoriland Worker*, Wellington, New Zealand, of January 15, 1919 ("Railwaymen's Troubles," p. 3).

¹³⁸ An archive search yielded no result.

¹³⁹ "Gruesome Sightings. Underground in St. Quentin," *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, October 8, 1918, p. 3. The news is datelined "London, October 6," and as its author "Mr. Percival Phillips" is named.

state they have been dissected for days, and possibly for weeks.¹⁴⁰

The “dissected bodies” story has never been corroborated. The “surgeons and doctors” - either characters from the urban legends circulating in the trenches and behind the lines, or phantoms from Fleet Street - were never identified. “The correspondent himself does not believe the story,” remarked one of Holland’s leading newspapers, the (strictly neutral) *Algemeen Handelsblad*. “Nevertheless, he carries on telling it. Always calumnies!”¹⁴¹ A more devastating judgment on a journalist’s work is hardly conceivable.

German Field Papers and the “Corpse Factory”

News, rumors and gossip that spread among the population of the German occupied territories or was brought by Allied propaganda leaflets and prisoners of war, reached the ears of German soldiers in front-near dugouts and behind the lines. They posed a serious problem for German propaganda and counter-propaganda. One of the measures the Army took to cope with this issue was seizing control of the *Feldzeitungen* (“trench papers” or “field papers”).¹⁴² These had originated spontaneously in the trenches already in the beginning of the war, “provid[ing] a diversion from the often monotonous everyday life at the front and at the same time [being] a forum for the worries and needs of the simple soldier.”¹⁴³ On March 11, 1916 the Army High Command established a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *De correspondent gelooft zelf niet an de verhalen . . . Echter hij vertelt ze dan toch maar verder. Calomniez toujours! “Walgelijke praatjes”* [Despicable rumors], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant – Algemeen Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, Holland, October 6, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁴² For a detailed analysis of the German field press of the First World War, see Nelson 2011.

¹⁴³ “‘Trench Papers’ (Feldzeitungen) from the 1st World War – online.” *Digital Library*, University of Heidelberg, Germany. On the Web: <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/Englisch/helios/digi/feldzeitungen.html>. Last accessed November 15, 2011.

“Field Press Office” (*Feldpressestelle*) that brought the field papers “into line” by exercising strict censorship over them and providing them also with own articles for printing.¹⁴⁴ “Because the ordinary soldiers had few sources to get a clear picture of the political circumstances and the situation at home, these army newspapers provided an ideal instrument for controlling opinion.”¹⁴⁵

The library of the University of Heidelberg provides free Internet access to twenty digitalized German field papers from the First World War, four of them, however, not intended for the trenches, but for the Home front.¹⁴⁶ Eight of the remaining sixteen cover the period of time from mid-April to mid-July 1917. Five of these deal with the Allied “Corpse factory” propaganda, an indication that, at the time when the papers were issued, this propaganda had reached the population and/or the German soldiers in the regions where the papers were distributed, and that the editors of these papers (or the *Feldpressestelle*) saw the necessity to take steps against these rumors.

The first reference to the “Corpse factory,” an indication that such rumors were circulating on the Eastern front, can be found in the already mentioned article in the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, Wilna, from May 12, 1917. The next three references come from the Western theater of war. On June 3, 1917 the *Kriegszeitung der 7. Armee*, published in Laon, France, is outraged at a satirical article published some time earlier in *Le Journal* from Paris,¹⁴⁷ and on July 15, 1917 *Der*

¹⁴⁴ Nelson 2011:36-37.

¹⁴⁵ “‘Trench Papers’ (Feldzeitungen) from the 1st World War – online.” *Digital Library*, University of Heidelberg, Germany. On the Web: <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/Englisch/helios/digi/feldzeitungen.html>. Last accessed November 15, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/Englisch/helios/digi/feldzeitungen.html#feldzeitungen>. Last accessed November 16, 2011. *Badener Lazarett-Zeitung*, *Daheim* (Berlin), *Deutsche Kriegszeitung – Illustrierte Wochenausgabe vom Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and *Kriegszeit: Künstlerflugblätter* were produced for the Home front.

¹⁴⁷ “Neues vom ritterlichen Frankreich” [News from chivalrous France],

Champagne-Kamerad, the field paper of the Third Army, published in Charleville, France, dwells on the fact that even a prominent French writer, in *La Victoire*, had called the “Corpse factory” story a “disgusting legend.”¹⁴⁸

Both papers mentioned only French sources in connection with the “Corpse factory.” This is not surprising, as their readership was not only stationed in occupied French territory, but had also battle contact with French troops alone. The readership of the *Liller Kriegszeitung* from Lille, France, on the other hand, was deployed in the northern part of the front, facing there first and foremost British and Empire troops. This may explain why the *Liller Kriegszeitung*, in its article on the “Corpse factory,” was mocking the mistranslation of *Kadaver* by “an *Englishman* not quite conversant in German,” identifying this as the origin of the “slander campaign of the *British* and French against us.”¹⁴⁹ From the date of issuance, June 16, 1917, it may be supposed that it was a reaction to the publication of the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916 by British newspapers in the first days of June 1917 and the subsequent wave of indignation that swept through the English-language press.

More than these four references could not be found in the set of German-language field papers analyzed for the period of time concerned. This and the fact that the press articles appeared relatively late, point to the low profile German military counter-propaganda kept in dealing with the Allied “Corpse factory” campaign. It seems that the matter was not considered of great importance for bolstering the morale of the German soldier on the front, the main issue German military propagandists were worrying about at that time.

Kriegszeitung der 7. Armee, Laon, France, June 3, 1917, p. 2. About the (tasteless) satire, see later.

¹⁴⁸ “Viererverbands-Kulturb Blüten” [Entente flowers of culture], *Der Champagne-Kamerad. Feldzeitung der 3. Armee*, Charleville, France, July 15, 1917, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ “Tierleiche = Kadaver” [Animal carcass = Kadaver], *Liller Kriegszeitung*, Lille, France, June 16, 1917, p. 4. Emphasis added.

A special role in the German propaganda efforts on the Western front played the French-language *Gazette des Ardennes*, published in Charleville, France, under the auspices of the *Feldpressestelle* four times a week and with a print of 160,000 copies. As a “newspaper of the occupied countries” - so its subtitle - *Gazette des Ardennes* was directed at the civilian population of the northern parts of occupied France and the adjacent parts of French-speaking Belgium, and at French prisoners of war, but not at German soldiers.¹⁵⁰ Contrary to the German-language field papers, the *Gazette des Ardennes* reacted both swiftly and repeatedly to the Allied “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign, always denouncing the story as slanderous and ridiculous at the same time. In most cases the paper quoted, often in great detail, articles that had appeared in the British, French, Italian, or neutral press, and commented them by vicious remarks. In the period of time analyzed (mid-April to mid-July, 1917), the *Gazette des Ardennes* took up the issue nine times: on April 22, 26, 28 and 29, on May 3, 20 and 27, and on June 9 and 19.¹⁵¹ Obviously the Allied “Corpse factory” propaganda had not only succeeded in quickly reaching the civilian population of the Ardennes region, but was also circulating there and in the French trenches for a long time.

¹⁵⁰ More about this newspaper in Pöppinghege 2004.

¹⁵¹ “Propagande ‘civilisée’ ” [‘Civilized’ propaganda], April 22, 1917, p. 1-2; “A propos de la ‘propagande civilisée’ ” [Regarding the ‘civilized propaganda’], April 26, 1917, p. 3; “Paroles raisonnables” [Words that make sense], April 28, 1917, p. 3; “Les excuses de la ‘Libre Parole’ ” [The excuses of *La Libre Parole*], April 29, p. 3; “Propagande civilisée” [Civilized propaganda], May 3, 1917, p. 3; “La propagande ‘civilisée’ jugée par un neutre” [The ‘civilized’ propaganda judged by a neutral], May 20, 1917, p. 4; “Soif de vérité” [Thirst for truth], May 27, 1917, p. 1; “Nouvelles diverses – ‘Moral Insanity’ ” [Various news – ‘Moral Insanity’]; June 9, 1917, p. 3; “Toujours l’utilisation des cadavres” [Always the exploitation of corpses], June 19, 1917, p. 3.

V.

THE “CORPSE FACTORY” GOES GLOBAL

The “Corpse Factory” in North America

Not everybody in the U.S. and in Canada was willing to believe the *Kadaver* story that came across the Ocean in the third week of April 1917. It sounded too fantastic. Moreover, there was no possibility to check its substance. In the favor of the American press it must be said that many of the leading urban dailies refused to print the “Corpse factory” story, in sharp contrast to the provincial press that eagerly grabbed at the sensation. A Web research in the relevant archives, covering the period of time between mid-April and the beginning of May 1917, with the search input <corpse AND German> and a subsequent critical examination of the hits obtained, yielded zero results for the following papers: *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The Boston Daily Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Hartford Courant*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. Equally nil were the results for four leading Canadian papers: *Le Canada* (Montreal), *The Quebec Chronicle*, *The Lethbridge Herald* and *The Toronto Daily Star*.¹ Some of the American papers later joined with the flock, for example *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*,² although both papers always left room for critical voices.

The “Corpse factory” story appeared not only in prestigious papers such as *The New York Sun*, *The Washington Times*, *The*

¹ As the Web archive search for all papers, except *Le Canada* and *The Quebec Chronicle*, was based on optic character recognition, it cannot be excluded that, in some instances, poor quality of the originals may have led to overlooking an article. The above mentioned zero results, therefore, must be taken with a certain caveat.

² For example: “German Glycerine,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1917, p. II4 (“The story is not a nice one, but so far remains unrefuted”); “Germany’s ‘Corpse Utilization’ Order,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, July 6, 1917, p. 5 (Sees the Army Order of the Day as proof of the story);

Washington Post, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Dallas Morning News* (which were already mentioned previously), but also in the columns of *The New York Times*, the uncontested flagship of the U.S. press. Its editors, however, showed serious doubts as to the story's veracity, suggesting it might have been an April fool's joke. They pointed to the fact that "[t]he expression 'Kadaver' is never employed in current German usage to mean a human corpse, which is invariably referred to as 'leichman' [*sic*]." ³

The propagandists, however, were not idle. Vilifying the head of the German state and members of his family as "Kadaver Kulturists," they provided the prestigious New York Yacht Club with a convenient pretext for striking Kaiser Wilhelm II and Prince Henry of Prussia off its member list, as *Flight* announced with satisfaction in its April 26, 1917 issue. ⁴ Similar to the situation that had developed earlier in the Dominions, anti-German hysteria, artificially fanned through spy and atrocity tales, led to violent attacks against Americans of German descent (who, in some parts of the country, made up one third of the white population), to their discrimination in public and commercial life, to the renaming of towns, streets, mountains, etc., to de-Germanizing of first and family names, and even to banning German from the classrooms and the music of Bach and Beethoven from the concert halls. ⁵

After the first wave of "Corpse factory" stories had faded away toward the end of April 1917, a second wave swept across the U.S. in May 1917. It certainly was not by chance coinciding with the beginning of the deployment of U.S. military personnel to the European theater of war on May 7, 1917, when the first Americans, doctors and nurses in the

"German Plague Plans," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1917, p. II4 (Refers to "cannibalism" and making soap from the bodies of dead men).

³ "Cadavers not Human. Gruesome Tale Believed to be Somebody's Notion of an April Fool Joke," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1917, p. 2.

⁴ *Flight*, April 26, 1917, p. 397 (untitled).

⁵ See, e.g., Work 2006, or Wells 2002.

military service, embarked for Europe. Whereas the first wave of “Corpse factory” articles had covered the Midwest and the East Coast, the second wave extended into the South (Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana), the West (Utah, New Mexico, Arizona), the North (Montana) and even into Canada.⁶ In some of these articles, “soap” was already mentioned as the most important output of these factories.⁷

⁶ “Germans Render Bodies of Dead Troops For Oil and Fertilizer Back of the Line,” *The Independent*, Helena, MT, May 7, 1917, p. 4; *Hamilton Evening Journal*, Hamilton, OH, May 9, 1917; *Wellsboro Gazette*, Wellsboro, PA, May 9, 1917; *New Castle News*, New Castle, PA, May 10, 1917; *Syracuse Post Standard*, Syracuse, NY, not later than May 10, quoted in: *The Malone Farmer*, Malone, NY, May 10, 1917; *The Indianapolis Star*, Indianapolis, IN, May 11, 1917; “Germans Making Oil and Pig-Feed From The Bodies of Dead,” *The Muskogee Times-Democrat*, Muskogee, OK, May 12, 1917, p. 3; “London Repeats Charge Germans Utilize Corpses. ‘The Times’ Quotes Berlin Message and Declares It Is not a Denial. Words Are Defined. Farmers’ Unions Price List Is Brought Forward as Further Proof,” *New York Tribune*, May 12, 1917, p. 8; “Kultur in Laboratory,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, NY, May 12, 1917, p. 4; *The Ogden Examiner*, Ogden, UT, May 13, p. 17, and 20, p. 16, 1917; *The New Mexican*, Santa Fe, NM, May 14, 1917; “Germans Ship Dead to Oil Refineries,” *The Lake Park News*, Lake Park, IA, May 17, 1917, p. 2; “The German Corpse Fertilizer Factory,” *Clinch Valley News*, Tazewell, VA, May 18, 1917, p. 2; *Adams County Free Press*, Corning, IA, May 19, 1917, p. 12; *The Syracuse Herald*, Syracuse, NY, May 20, 1917; “Last Word in ‘Efficiency’,” *Weekly Journal – Miner*, Prescott, AZ, May 23, 1917, p. 2; “Grewsome Use Made of Dead German Soldiers,” *Western Globe*, Lacombe, AB, Canada, May 23, 1917, p. 5; “Barbarous Germans! Making Oil and Pig Feed from Bodies of the Dead!” *New Era*, Fort Gibson, OK, May 24, 1917, p. 1; “German Thoroughness,” *The Tensas Gazette*, St. Joseph, LA, May 25, 1917, p. 7; “Kadaver-Verwendungsanstalt” [*sic*]. Germans Extract Oil for Commercial Purposes From Dead Soldiers,” *The Freeport Daily Journal-Standard*, Freeport, IL, May 26, 1917; *Morning Herald*, Hagerstown, MD, May 29, 1917; “Burn Dead Soldiers,” *Bedford Free Press*, Bedford, IA, May 30, 1917, p. 8. In the same period of time, *The Augusta Herald*, Augusta, GA, and *The Jeffersonian*, Thomson, GA, discussed the subject in detail (Watson 1917:4-6).

⁷ E.g. in *The Muskogee Times Democrat* of May 12, 1917, *New Era* of May 24, 1917, and *The Jeffersonian*.

Doubts as to the veracity of the “Corpse factory” story, however, did not die. The prestigious weekly *The Literary Digest* devoted to the “ghoulish story” one and a half page of its May 26, 1917 issue. The article begins with a review of the relevant publications in *The Times* until the end of April 1917. It follows a discussion of statements made by critics and “believers” from England and France. The journal, however, sides with those who see the story as “the imaginings of a disordered mind.”⁸ On June 3, 1917 *The Chicago Daily Tribune* printed on page D4 a letter to the editor, denouncing “in the name of common sense and everyday decency the preposterous charge against the Germans” that they process human corpses to war-vital commodities. On June 9, 1917 *Goodman’s Weekly – A Thinking Paper For Thinking People* from Salt Lake City, UT, frankly called the story a “repugnant canard,” and on August 15, 1917 *The Post-Standard* from Syracuse, NY printed a letter to the editor, in which the “Corpse factory” story was firmly denounced as “a lie.”⁹

Of course the linguistic battle about the meaning of *Kadaver* in German was also fought in the U.S. and in Canada. On June 25, 1917, the *Manitoba Free Press* from Winnipeg, MB, Canada, reported that “several German-Americans have written to leading journals in New York, Chicago and other cities” and declared that *Kadaver* never denoted the dead body of a human being. The *New York Tribune*, we read, however, refuted this argument by quoting German text-books in anatomy and a diploma from a German medical school.¹⁰ They prove, said the paper, that *Kadaver*, in German, is also used to denote a corpse. A copy of the famous paragraph of the German Army Order of the Day followed, together with

⁸ “A Ghastly Charge Against Germany,” *The Literary Digest*, New York, vol. 54, no. 21, May 26, 1917, pp. 1585-1586.

⁹ “Repugnant Canard,” *Goodman’s Weekly*, Salt Lake City, UT, June 9, 1917, p. 2; “‘Hoch der Kaiser!’,” letter to the Editor, signed “Mary Griffith,” *The Post-Standard*, Syracuse, NY, August 15, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰ See also “London Repeats Charge Germans Utilize Corpses . . . Words Are Defined . . .,” *New York Tribune*, May 12, 1917, p. 8.

a translation taken from *The Daily Mail* (with the notorious mistranslation). The *Manitoba Free Press* left it to its readers to decide, in view of this document, whether *Kadaver* should be translated as “corpse” or as “dead body of an animal.”¹¹ Another Manitoban newspaper, the French-language *La Liberté*, however, simply applied common sense and called the “Corpse factory” story uncompromisingly a “legend,” based on a mistranslation of the German word *Kadaver* in “the English newspapers, first and foremost Northcliffe’s, and a certain sensational and malicious French press.”¹²

Among the critics of the mistranslation of *Kadaver* as “corpse” was noted University of Chicago germanist J. J. Meyer. In the June 13, 1917 issue of *Viereck’s The American Weekly* (a pro-German publication), he shredded the linguistic nitpicking about *Kadaver* in the columns of *The Times* of London by pointing to the fact that comprehensive dictionaries contain not only the current use of a word, but also its historical use and the meanings it has in specialized disciplines, not to forget its use in colloquial or ironic speech. He stressed the well-known fact that it is the context which determines the meaning of a word. In addition, he showed by examples that, in German, *Leiche* and never *Kadaver* is used in compound nouns that refer to a human being.¹³

In the second half of June 1917, a new wave of press articles about the horrors of the “German corpse factories” was rolling across the U.S. from Texas to Alaska. It also reached Alberta and Manitoba north of the U.S. border.¹⁴ There was

¹¹ “Those Kadaververwertungsanstalten,” *Manitoba Free Press*, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, June 25, 1917, p. 9.

¹² *Les journaux anglais, surtout ceux de Northcliffe, et certaine presse française mal inspirée ou sensationnelle ont répété . . . cette légende . . . Ces journaux avaient pris le terme allemand Kadaver comme* (here the news item ends abruptly). “ ‘Kadaver’,” *La Liberté*, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, October 17, 1917, p. 4.

¹³ “The Ghoulish Germans,” *Viereck’s The American Weekly*, vol. VI, no. 19, June 13, 1917.

¹⁴ *Clearfield Progress*, Clearfield, PA, June 16, 1917; *The Lake County Times*, Hammond, IN, June 18, 1917; *Adams County News*, Gettysburg,

first United Press Staff Correspondent J. W. Pegler's report about German devastations in France, already written on May 15, 1917, but published more than a month later under headlines such as "Devastation of France Is Policy of German Army," or "Nothing Sacred to the Boche." "Battle tourist" (so he called himself) Pegler had visited Peronne, a small town just re-conquered by the British after heavy fighting. Its cemetery had been in the frontline and was, therefore, also badly ruined. At its edge, however, Pegler spotted "a row of wooden 'iron crosses' each inscribed 'Unser Kamerade'[sic]." Quite un sentimentally, he remarked that they "gave proof that the German cadaver factory lost some raw material through sentiment."¹⁵

At the same time, a new horror item appeared. On June 28, 1917 *The Pittsburgh Press* from Pittsburgh, PA, a large-circulation paper, informed its readers: "'Kadaver Soap' taken from a German prisoner captured on the west front and said to have been made from soldiers' bodies, was taken to Washington today by Dr. Georges Fourchet who will have it analyzed. Dr. Fourchet wants to establish the truth or falsity of the report that the Germans are grinding up bodies of their dead for the oils and fats they contain."¹⁶

PA, June 23, 1917; *The Lima Daily News*, Lima, OH, June 24, 1917; *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, TX, June 24, 1917; *Des Moines Daily News*, Des Moines, IA, June 24, 1917; *Manitoba Free Press*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, June 25, 1917, p. 9; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, Fairbanks, AK, June 29, 1917.

¹⁵ "Nothing Sacred to the Boche," *The Washington, Penn'a, Daily Reporter*, Washington, PA, June 16, 1917, p. 3; "Devastation of France Is Policy of German Army," *The Calgary Daily Herald*, Calgary, AB, Canada, June 16, 1917, p. 23; "Destruction Unnecessary. Nothing Sacred to the Boche. Claims United Press Correspondent in the Field. Tells of Ruthlessness. Difficult to Convince Battle Tourist that Some Sections Were Once Beautiful Woodlands," *The Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, June 16, 1917, p. 2; "Nothing Sacred to the Boche Gunner," *The Pittsburgh Press*, Pittsburgh, PA, June 17, 1917, p. 6; "How Boches Treat the Country," *The Bend Bulletin*, Bend, OH, June 19, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶ "U.S. to Analyze Soap Taken from Germans," *The Pittsburgh Press*,

The news crossed the U.S. border to Canada and even the Pacific Ocean, where it, however, arrived with considerable delay.¹⁷ In the U.S., it was widely spread in Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan.¹⁸ In these states, a considerable part of the population had German ancestry, and for them “establishing the truth or falsity of the reports” about the German “Corpse factories” might have been of particular interest. The results of Dr. Fourchet’s investigations are not known. With the analytical means of his time, he could not have decided whether the piece of soap in question was made from human fat or not.

Toward the end of June 1917, two provincial U.S. newspapers raised a critical voice. On page twenty of its June 24, 1917 issue, *The San Antonio Light* from San Antonio, TX, headlined: “ ‘Kadaver Factory’ Story Discredited. It Is Now Believed the Germans Render the Bodies of Animals Only.” The news is datelined “London, May 30 – (By Mail).” The writer of the article refers to the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916, published on May 18, 1917 by *The Times* of London. He clearly explains the meaning of *Kadaver* and *Seuche* in German military parlance and says that

Pittsburgh, PA, June 28, 1917, p. 10.

¹⁷ “To Analyze Cake of ‘Kadaver’ Soap Made from German Bodies. Dr. Fourchet to Establish the Truth or Falsity of Report,” *The Windsor Evening Record*, Windsor, Ontario, June 28, 1917, p. 1; “Local and General,” *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand, August 31, 1917, p. 2; “ ‘Cadaver Soap’,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, New Zealand, September 8, 1917, p. 3.

¹⁸ The news was distributed by the *United Press Agency* and appeared, for instance, also in the following newspapers: “Kadaver Soap to Be Analyzed by Chemist,” *The Lima Daily News*, Lima, OH, June 28, 1917, p. 1.; *Des Moines Daily News*, Des Moines, IA, June 28, 1917; *Evening Chronicle*, Marshall, MI, June 28, 1917; *Oelwein Daily Register*, Oelwein, IA, June 29, 1917; *Eau Claire Leader*, Eau Claire, WI, June 30, 1917; *The Sun Herald*, Lime Springs, IA, July 5, 1917; *Rock Valley Bee*, Rock Valley, IA, July 6, 1917; *Adams County Free Press*, Corning, IA, July 7, 1917; *The Stevens Point Journal*, Stevens Point, WI, July 7, 1917.

both words point to dead animals as “input” to the factories, and concludes:

“Now there are very few persons in England who believe the story of the “Kadaver factory.” There was skepticism even when the gruesome story was having its greatest circulation, but of late the accounts are generally discredited.”

The writer of the article probably drew from sources such as *The Nation* and the *Manchester Guardian*, which, as already mentioned, had expressed serious doubts as to the veracity of the “Corpse factory.” He was, however, too optimistic. Certainly some individuals in Great Britain had begun thinking. But those who controlled the mainstream media read just the opposite from the Army Order and unwaveringly stuck to their guns.

The same article appeared on the same day in *The Lima Sunday News* from Lima, OH.¹⁹ No other appearance of this news item, however, could be located, neither in provincial, nor in big-city papers. Sound reasoning was not in demand in the U.S. at the time. A public stirred up by anti-German atrocity propaganda favored terrifying stories about the enemy, such as those about “Corpse factories,” at the best spiced up with tales of “officially encouraged” sexual libertinism, however absurd they might have been.²⁰

In an article published on August 9, 1917, *LIFE*, a high-circulation, light entertainment magazine, used a crooked syllogism to “prove” the veracity of the “Corpse factory” story:

- Major premise, established by *LIFE*: “An indignant denial by the German press has come to be overwhelming proof of the correctness of that which is denied.”

¹⁹ “Report Germans Render English Dead Is Untrue. After Month of Horror Over Rumor, Britain Begins to Laugh at Fears. Source of Story Found to Come From Operation Teutons Perform on Animals,” *The Lima Sunday News*, Lima, OH, June 24, 1917, p. 6.

²⁰ “Captain Verifies Hun’s Atrocities. Corpse Factory and ‘Official’ Motherhood Stories Borne Out,” *Evening Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, PA, November 12, 1917, p. 2.

- Minor premise: The Germans deny with great indignation that human corpses are processed in their *Kadaververwertungsanstalten*.
- Conclusion: In the German “corpse factories,” human bodies are processed.²¹ *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

At any rate, the interest of U.S. newspaper publishers (and readers) in the “German corpse factory” story was already fading away. A search in *Newspaper Archive*, a Website containing several millions of articles, mostly from U.S. provincial newspapers, yielded only eleven hits between July 7, 1917 and the end of the war. Eight came from Iowa and Wisconsin, the last dated September 14, 1917.²²

From the U.S., the “Corpse factory” story spread to neighboring Mexico and to the Philippines, at the time a de facto U.S. colony. In a book published in 1917, travel writer Ethel Brilliana Tweedie reported about the impact of the horror story in Mexico. The heart-rending portrayal of a baby’s burial with the whole family gathered around, wailing and crying, let her draw far-reaching political conclusions: “Could such a country remain in alliance with the corpse-desecrators of Berlin?”²³ On the other side of the Pacific, the bilingual monthly *The Philippine Review* of September 1917 brought excerpts from the war diary of one John Foreman,

²¹ “The Kadaververwertungsanstalten,” *LIFE*, August 9, 1917, p. 230. The *LIFE* magazine of 1917 must not be confounded with the *LIFE Magazine* of the 1930s and later, a reputable illustrated weekly.

²² *Fayette County Leader*, Fayette, IA, July 5, 1917, p. 4; *North Adams Transcript*, North Adams, MS, July 14, 1917; *Daily Leader*, Grand Rapids, WI, August 17, 1917; *Evening Independent*, Massillon, OH, August 17, 1917; *The Petersburg Daily Progress*, Petersburg, VA, August 22, 1917; *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, TX, August 26, 1917; *New North*, Rhinelander, WI, September 6, 1917; *Rock Valley Bee*, Rock Valley, IA, September 7, 1917; *Sioux County Index*, Hull, IA, September 7, 1917; *The Stevens Point Journal*, Stevens Point, WI, September 8, 1917; *Bode Bugle*, Bode, IA, September 14, 1917.

²³ Alec-Tweedie 1917:293. Ethel Brilliana Tweedie (1862-1940) was an English travel writer and water colorist. She published her books under the name “Mrs. Alec-Tweedie.”

apparently an American citizen. The entry for May 4, 1917 is mainly devoted to the “Corpse factory” and its alleged major output, soap: “Can one imagine anything more barbarous? Fancy a mother washing her hands with soap made of the body of her son!”²⁴

In contrast to Europe, where propaganda was stressing war-vital commodities - glycerin and lubricants - as alleged “products” of the German “Corpse factories,” U.S. newspapers from the beginning put “soap” - in Europe at best a by-product, if mentioned at all - on prominent position among the alleged outputs of the “Corpse factories.” From everything that these plants allegedly were producing, only soap was important on the Home front. It was something which everybody needed every day.²⁵

But other priorities had been set for the use of the fat resources when the country entered into war. Citizens were urged to save soap, and scarcity of soap had become a matter of general interest.²⁶ In American public perception (and in the media), “soap” more and more superseded all other “products” of the “Corpse factories.” In the course of becoming a contemporary legend, the former by-product eventually became the main output. About the turn of the 1930s, the “Corpse factories” were already generally referred to as “Soap factories” in the United States.²⁷

“Fifth column” hysteria in the U.S. more often than not produced strange fancies, some of which even were not in lack of a certain comic element. We read, for instance, in

²⁴ “What John Foreman Tells Us,” *The Philippine Review – Revista Filipina*, Manila, vol. 2, no. 9, September 1917, p. 37.

²⁵ Before synthetic detergents conquered the market, soap was the main washing agent and the only one used for personal hygiene.

²⁶ As can be seen from contemporary newspapers (1917 to 1918). Scrap fat should no more be used for soap-making at home, but delivered at collection points for the production of glycerin.

²⁷ See the quotations from newspapers of the time and books such as Lasswell 1927 or Viereck 1931. Of course, there were also exceptions, especially in newspapers that catered to the educated classes.

the December 1917 issue of *Everybody's Magazine* about a "young, 'foot-lose' negro," who was horrified by the idea that the soap to be sold at the local grocer's shop after the war might be soap *Made in Germany*.

"'Nossuh!' vehemently declared the youth. 'Nossuh! Dey do' git me to enlis'. I'se go'n' to light out, I is'! And dey'll be plenty go with me.'"²⁸

The "ignorant black," refusing to do his patriotic duty and enlist, had fallen victim to "German-American propaganda," the writer of the article alertly diagnosed. "Some German agent," he found out, had been wandering through Missouri in the disguise of a travelling salesman.

"Turning the famous 'kadaver' rumor to local uses, [he] had been sedulously working upon the fears of the negroes . . . to this effect: "And when your old mother goes out to her washing after the war is over, she will pick up a bar of soap - and that will be *you*, her boy, that was killed!" Imagine the effect upon a ghost-ridden race!"²⁹

In his weekly *The Jeffersonian*, Thomas E. Watson, an Isolationist politician and prolific writer, more than once fell back on the *Kadaver* soap issue.³⁰ Firmly convinced that the Germans did boil down all soldier dead, friend or foe, he envisaged with horror "that our gallant young men, conscripted to fight the Germans, may be made into soap, oil, fertilizer, and hog-feed,"³¹ and asked rhetorically, "What about a carload of German soap, made out of our boys?" Some time later, he envisaged Germany "burning a few hundred thousand

²⁸ Samuel Hopkins Adams, "Invaded America," subsection "Scaring the Negro," *Everybody's Magazine*, New York, vol. 37, no. 6, December 1917, p. 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Thomas Edward Watson (1856-1922) was a writer and a Populist politician, who later went over to the Democrats. From 1920 to 1922 he was U.S. Senator for Georgia.

³¹ Watson 1917:5.

slain enemies [on the battlefield], and making soap-grease out of the others.”³²

In the Canadian press, “Corpse factory” news - nearly always long articles that more or less faithfully were reproducing the “Final version” as presented by *The Times* of London in mid-April 1917 - can be found in irregular intervals until mid-August 1917. As previously mentioned, metropolitan papers brought the news already in the third week of April. The provincial press followed with considerable delay. A first wave can be found in the third week of May, together with news paraphrasing the “Von Hintze” story.³³ In mid-June, readers of *The Brandon Daily Sun* were taught about German “cannibalism”: “These pigs in turn are used for human consumption, and therein lies the cannibalism.”³⁴ A second wave of “Corpse factory” stories appeared in July.³⁵

³² Ibid., pp. 6 and 22.

³³ The “Final version”: “The Germans and Their Dead Men. Striking Account of a New and Horrible German Industry in Heart of Forest,” *The Brandon Daily Sun*, Brandon, MB, May 17, 1917, p. 6; “Gruesome Story of Uses Made of German Bodies. London Times Describes Factory Where Bodies Converted into Oils and Fats,” *The Morning Bulletin*, Edmonton, AB, May 17, 1917, p. 11; “Grewsome Use Made of Dead German Soldiers,” *The Western Globe*, Lacombe, AB, May 23, 1917, p. 5; “Germans Making Oil from Dead Bodies,” *The Minnedosa Tribune*, Minnedosa, MB, May 24, 1917, p. 1. “Von Hintze,” always with the same text and headline “Making use of dead bodies - Why China Severed Relations with the Barbarious Huns”: *The News*, Oyen, AB, May 23, 1917, p. 7; *The Standard*, Strathmore, AB, May 23, 1917, no page no. given; *The Times*, Irma, AB, May 25, 1917, p. 7; *The Enterprise*, Blairmore, AB, *The Times*, Bellevue, AB, and *The Review*, Bow Island, AB, of May 25, 1917 and without pagination; belated *The Express*, Empress, AB, June 14, 1917, no page no. given.

³⁴ “Cannibals,” *The Brandon Daily Sun*, Brandon, MB, June 12, 1917, p. 4.

³⁵ Documented for the following newspapers, always under the headline “A Horrible Traffic - Dead German Soldiers Are Rendered down into Oil”: *The Leader*, Raymond, AB (June 29, 1917, p. 3), *The Munson Mail*, Munson, AB (July 5, 1917, p. 5), *Chinook Advance*, Chinook, AB (July 5, 1917, p. 3), *Didsburg Pioneer*, Didsburg, AB (July 11, 1917, p. 4), *Gleichen Call*, Gleichen, AB (July 21, 1917, p. 2), and *Crossfield Chronicle*, Crossfield, AB (July 27, 1917, p. 4).

The last appearance could be located in *The Times* of Irma, AB, on August 17, 1917: a short notice, borrowed from *The Times* of London about the discovery of the German Army Order of the Day, with the appropriate mistranslation.

Both “Corpse factory” waves coincided with propaganda campaigns launched by the Government in the context of the “Conscription crisis.” Canadian soldiers initially were recruited on a voluntary basis. The war, however, was dragging on, against the declarations of both the generals and the politicians who had promised a short war with a quick victory. What is more, Canada was suffering severe losses on the front. In the Battle of the Somme, the Canadians counted 24,029 casualties, in the Battle of Arras, 10,602.³⁶ Still more horrifying read the aggregated numbers. “From April 1916 to April 1917, the Canadians suffered 75,065 casualties; a further 43,837 were accrued during the remainder of 1917.”³⁷

The reason for the high casualty rates among the Canadians - and among the Australians and New Zealanders, too - was that the British High Command used to bring these “Colonials” into action as “shock troops” to spearhead the attacks on the German lines.³⁸ On the Western Front, therefore, “the success of the attack depended largely on . . . the Anzacs and the Canadians,”³⁹ paid dearly for, however, “with torrents of blood. The entire western front was littered with Canadian bones.”⁴⁰

As a consequence, enlistment rates in Canada were dropping drastically. “Monthly volunteer rates had plummeted from 28,185 in January 1916 to roughly 5,000 a month for August to December 1916 . . . In May 1917 . . . casualty rates were

³⁶ Tucker/Roberts 2006:415-416.

³⁷ Winegard 2012:151.

³⁸ Paris 2004:109, Andrews 1993:156.

³⁹ Ramsay 2005:222. “ANZAC” was the official abbreviation for “Australian and New Zealand Army Corps”; an “Anzac,” therefore, an Australian or New Zealand trooper.

⁴⁰ Hempstead 2011:830. Similarly: Milner 2010:37.

more than twice that of recruitment.”⁴¹ The harsh realities of war, which a glorifying propaganda could not conceal, had disillusioned the people and let men stop volunteering.

Under these circumstances, Government saw conscription as the only way out of the situation. It was made possible after August 29, 1917, when the Canadian Parliament had passed the *Military Service Act* after months of heated debates.⁴² Conscription, however, still met strong opposition within the country, all the more as Canada was not directly threatened by German military actions. Therefore the sacrifice of Canadian blood on the battlefields of Europe had to be justified by higher aims. Propaganda told the Canadians that they were fighting to defend the values of humanity against an enemy who had excluded himself from the civilized nations through committing innumerable atrocities, of which the “Corpse factory” was emblematic.

At about the end of September 1917, British Columbia’s Chief Geographer, Major G. G. Aitken,⁴³ who was serving as an artillery officer in France, brought to Canada a cake of soap allegedly manufactured in one of these factories from the corpses of dead German soldiers. A newspaper from the other side of the Pacific reported about the matter and gave a description of the find: “The soap is similar to ‘Mechanics’ soap sold in local stores, although heavier than the usual grade. It is a clear brown color, rough to the touch, with an unpleasant perfume.”⁴⁴ It is not known what happened to

⁴¹ Winegard 2012:151.

⁴² Date taken from the Internet version of *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/conscription>. Last accessed July 22, 2012.

⁴³ Listed with this title in Wrigley Directories 1922:17. He had his office in the British Columbia Department of Lands in Victoria, the capital of the province.

⁴⁴ “Soap From Corpses,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, November 7, 1917, p. 3. The news is datelined “Victoria, B[ritish] C[olumbia], Sept[ember] 27.”

Major Aitken's soap bar. No other reference to it could be found in the newspaper archives on the Web.

For curiosity's sake it should be mentioned here that in August and September 1917 United Press was spreading across the U.S. news about a Swedish rat-hunting campaign:

"The chief end is to secure an important addition to the stocks of fats available for the making of soaps and lubricants. The rat carcasses are treated in a "corpse utilization establishment" where, after the fat has been boiled out, what remains is converted into a poultry food.⁴⁵"

It is not known whether the project was ever realized, or whether it was nothing but a canard. At any rate, the use of the word "corpse" - instead of the linguistically and factually correct word "carcass" - in the news item is suspicious. Among a U.S. readership that knew a "*corpse* utilization establishment" only in connection with a German-made atrocity, it must inevitably have evoked associations with the German "Corpse factory."

At the end of November 1917, William James Heaps, a little known American writer, finished the manuscript of a maliciously anti-German pamphlet, *Autocracy vs. Democracy*, which was widely spread in 1918. In the long list of - mostly alleged - German atrocities and mean tricks, the "Corpse factory" was necessarily not forgotten:

"Only German *Kultur* could tie in bundles the cadavers of dead soldiers and send them to rendering plants that the fat might be converted into glycerine for making explosives and the waste into fertilizer to enrich the soil.⁴⁶"

⁴⁵ "Making Poultry Food from Rats," *The Day*, New London, CT, August 9, 1917, p. 5. The news appeared also in numerous provincial newspapers in the States of New York, Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa, Kansas, and California in the period of time from August 16 to September 14, 1917. See also: "Find a Use for Rats," *Manti Messenger*, Manti, UT, September 7, 1917, p. 3, and *The Tooele Transcript Bulletin*, Tooele, UT, September 7, 1917, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Heaps 1918:61.

Metropolitan U. S. papers still occasionally came back to the story in 1918. For example, *The Washington Times* informed its readers in an article published in mid-April that “Corpse factories” did not exist in Germany - “what does exist is the factory that makes oil from dead animals.” The matter, however, was downplayed by the writer, excused as a misunderstanding, “an unintentional mistranslation . . . an innocent enough failure to understand a German term.”⁴⁷ Looking at the devastating effect the - deliberate - mistranslation had on German reputation worldwide, it could hardly be called “innocent.”

Five weeks before fighting ended with the Armistice on November 11, 1918, the U.S. press brought the last references to the “Corpse factory” in war-time. An American soldier from Atlanta, GA, serving in a Canadian unit, wrote to his father from the battlefield:

“The most unique find we made, after our charge into the German lines, was a “melting pot” used for boiling down the German corpses, and also a bone-crushing machine. Consequently, there were not many bones around, but few skulls were here and there.”⁴⁸

What he saw was the alleged “German corpse factory” in the St. Quentin Canal underground. Philip Gibbs’ already mentioned critical report about the “discovery” appeared on October 5, 1918 in *The New York Times* and in the *Evening Public Ledger* from Philadelphia, and a day later, on October 6, 1918, in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*.⁴⁹

The “Corpse Factory” in Brazil

Brazil was the only Latin American country directly involved in the First World War. Though she had declared neutrality in

⁴⁷ “Just Back From Germany,” *The Washington Times*, April 18, 1918, p. 8.

⁴⁸ “American Soldier Writes of Finding Hun ‘Melting Pot’,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1918, p. 10.

⁴⁹ “No German Position Now Can Hold Haig,” *Evening Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, PA, October 5, 1918, p. 4; “Nothing to Stop British. Haig’s

the conflict on August 4, 1914, her economy suffered severely from the British sea blockade against Germany, which had cut Brazil off from an important export market. Contrary to the U.S. that was able to re-direct its flow of commerce from Germany - a major trading partner of the U.S. in Europe before the war - to Allied countries, Brazil was in an unfavorable position: she had little to offer to the Allies, and her main export article, coffee, did not contribute to the Allies' war effort. It was regarded as a luxury article, and its import underlay various restrictions.

Nonetheless, Brazil, the biggest South American country, offered favorable conditions for Allied propagandists. She shared not only history, but also the official language with Portugal, a country at war with Germany.⁵⁰ In addition, Brazil's national elites were traditionally francophile. Most important, however, was that the sector "War-related news" of the Brazilian news market was dominated by two agencies: the Brazilian *Agencia Americana*, whose correspondents operated from London and Paris, and the French *Agence Havas*. They provided the Brazilian press not only with news about Allied victories and German losses, but also with reports on German war crimes and other "Hun" atrocities.⁵¹ In addition, the British Department of Information flooded the country with propaganda films.⁵²

All this created a climate that made it more and more difficult for the country to keep neutral in the conflict. As in the case

Troops Prove Ability to Crush Any Resistance of Germans," *The Los Angeles Times*, p. 12; "Australians See German Tragedy Far Under Earth," *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 3; "Enemy Fights Hard on Beaufort Line," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1918, p. 2.

⁵⁰ From the beginning, considerable tensions had developed between Germany and Portugal. They eventually led to mutual declarations of war on March 9, 1916.

⁵¹ An inspection of the newspapers of the time shows that nearly all of the respective news items are sourced "A. H." (for Agence Havas) or "A. A." (for Agencia Americana).

⁵² "A report prepared in September 1918 listed the total number of films that had been despatched to 20 particular countries. These ranged from as few

of China, the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany on February 1, 1917 and its intensification in the following months began to tip the scales to Germany's disadvantage. The immediate cause for driving Brazil into the arms of the Allies, however, was the sinking of the *Paraná*, Brazil's most modern merchant ship, by a German submarine in neutral seas on April 5, 1917. The storm of indignation that this incident produced in Brazilian society caused the government to break off diplomatic relations with Germany on April 11, 1917. A wave of patriotic manifestations, supported and fanned by a considerable part of the media, swept through the country. It was accompanied by pro-Allies and anti-German rallies that, in some places, escalated into acts of violence against *Teuto-Brasileiros*, Brazilian citizens of German descent.⁵³

In some parts of the country, especially in the southern federal states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná, *Teuto-Brasileiros* made up a considerable part of the population. In their great majority, they were members of the Middle Class. As independent farmers or craftsmen, shop owners and private entrepreneurs, they played an important role in the economy of these states. It is not surprising, therefore, that they were also a preferred target of social envy.

The worst rioting took place in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost federal state of Brazil. In this town about twenty per cent of the city's population was of German descent. On Saturday, April 14, 1917, a crowd attacked the offices of the *Deutsches Tageblatt*, a German-language newspaper. The next day, in the afternoon, the attackers gathered at the Café Colombo and discussed assaulting a meeting of a German-Brazilian association someplace in town. Representatives of the local authorities tried to persuade those present to abstain from violence.

as 2 in the case of Iceland, to no less than 40 for both Brazil and Mexico." Reaves 1986:229.

⁵³ Similarities to the anti-German riots that broke out in Great Britain in mid-May 1915 after the sinking of the *Lusitania* cannot be overlooked.

However, as *O Paiz*, one of Brazil's leading newspapers (and by far not pro-German), reported on April 17, 1917, "a person who said that he was from São Paulo took the floor, praised the attack [on the *Deutsches Tageblatt*] and urged the people to use all violence" against the local Germans.⁵⁴

Quickly "a great mass of people, estimated at more than five thousand persons," gathered and moved off "by streetcar and other vehicles" toward the town center and the neighborhoods where Brazilians of German descent were living. In the course of two days, the mob looted shops, broke doors and windows of private homes, beat many people, killed some, and set several houses, among them the Norwegian consulate, on fire. A total of 270 buildings were severely damaged or completely destroyed. One of the houses set on fire was the *Hotel Schmidt*, whose proprietors tried to defend themselves and their property with firearms, wounding two attackers.⁵⁵

British and French newspapers brought the news in a quite objective manner on April 18 or 19, 1917 under headlines such

⁵⁴ *No café Colombo . . . falou um individuo, que se diz paulista, apoiando o attentado e pedindo a povo que use de toda a violencia.* "A America contra a Allemanha. Gravissimos tumultos em Porto Alegre. Foram assaltados pelo povo cerca de 270 casas allemãs, algumas das quaes o fogo destruiu" [America against Germany. Very serious disturbances at Porto Alegre. About 270 German houses were attacked by the people. Some of them were destroyed by fire], *O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, April 17, 1917, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* See also, from the same day: "Brasil-Allemanha. São da maior gravidade as noticias que chegam de Porto Alegre. A policia é impotente para conter a massa popular exaltada. 270 casas allemãs assaltados e apedrejados, entre as quaes a pensão Schmidt e o edificio de Bromberg, Hacker & Comp., incendiado" [Brazil-Germany. Very alarming news arriving from Porto Alegre. The police is unable to keep the masses of excited people in check. 270 German houses attacked and stoned, among them the Hotel Schmidt. The building of Bromberg, Hacker & Co. set on fire], *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, p. 1, and "Gravissimos successos em Porto Alegre. 270 casas allemãs atacadas pelo povo . . . Varios mortos e muitos feridos" [Very serious events at Porto Alegre. 270 German houses attacked by the people . . . Several dead and many wounded], *A Noite*, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, p. 4. Bromberg, Hacker & Co.

as “Anti-German Riots in Brazil,” “*Graves incidents à Porto Alegre*,” or “Brazilian Mob Wrecks 270 Houses.”⁵⁶ When sources of the news were mentioned, it was “Reuters” or “Rio de Janeiro,” at that time Brazil’s capital. Soon, however, a new chord was struck. The riots, it was spread, “were caused by a German provocation”: the attempt of the proprietors of *Hotel Schmidt* to defend their property.⁵⁷ It was overlooked, however, that the *Hotel Schmidt* incident took place on the second day of the Porto Alegre riots. Riots that had broken out earlier or at the same time in other - and often faraway - Brazilian towns could also hardly have been a reaction to the *Hotel Schmidt* affair.

The decisive propagandistic step, however, was taken by United Press in a news item released at Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, on April 19, 1917. Deliberately distorting the facts, the street riots were embellished and, what is more, portrayed as an attempted German armed revolt in Southern Brazil:

“Brazil’s great German population in at least three states has revolted. Dispatches from Montevideo, Uruguay, today asserted that the Teutons are well armed - even with some

was a big department store in downtown Porto Alegre.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., from April 18, 1917: “Anti-German Riots in Brazil,” *The Western Times*, Exeter, UK, p. 4; “The Anti-German Riots in Brazil,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, Derby, UK, pp. 2+3, sourced “Reuters Service”, and *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, UK, p. 5; “Anti-German Rioting in Brazil,” *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, Exeter, UK, p. 1 (continued on April 19, 1917, on p. 4); “Toute l’Amérique contre l’Allemagne. Au Brésil. - Graves incidents à Porto-Alegre” [Whole America against Germany. In Brazil. - Grave incidents at Porto Alegre], *Le Gaulois*, Paris, p. 2. See also from Canada: “Brazilian Mob Wrecks 270 German Houses,” *Brandon Daily Sun*, Brandon, MB, p. 1, and the following newspapers from Hong Kong: “Serious Anti-German Riots in Brazil. 270 German Houses Damaged,” *The China Mail*, April 19, 1917, p. 5, and “Riots at Rio de Janeiro. German Houses Burned” and “Anti-German Rioting Spreading,” *The Hong Kong Daily Press*, April 20, 1917, p. 5.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., “Au Brésil. Les événements de Porto-Alegre” [In Brazil. The events at Porto Alegre], *Le Figaro*, Paris, April 25, 1917, p. 2.

artillery - and plentifully supplied . . . The rebellion apparently centered in the Brazilian states of Rio Grande, Paraná, and Santa Catharina . . . The Germans had already attempted to dynamite the railway bridge at Santa Maria.⁵⁸

But countermeasures had allegedly also been taken. "The government of Rio Grande province was said to be concentrating the strongest and most loyal troops to oppose the Germans," we read, and "the Uruguayan government is massing its troops on the frontier, fearing that the Germans may invade Uruguay" on their way to conquer Chile, "which country is rich in nitrates and therefore desirable in war."⁵⁹

The Brazilian authorities, though by no means "pro-German," could not tolerate the riots and reacted swiftly, all the more as the spokespeople of the *Teuto-Brasileiro* community unequivocally had expressed, after April 11, 1917, their unconditional solidarity with Brazil which they considered their homeland. Small detachments of cavalry and infantry were deployed to the unruly cities. Their presence was sufficient to restore law and order. Some people were arrested, but no shot was fired. The Brazilian press reported in great detail about these events, but, of course, not about something that, in reality, did not happen at all: an armed revolt of the "Teutons." United Press, therefore, had to invent another lie:

⁵⁸ "Germans Revolt in South Brazil. Teuton Insurgents Well Supplied With Arms and Ammunition. Try to Wreck Bridge. By Charles P. Stewart, Special Cable Service of the United Press and Evening Ledger," *Evening Ledger*, Philadelphia, PA, April 19, 1917, p. 4. The same text under "Germans in Brazil Are in Rebellion. Three Provinces Are Affected, and Threat on Uruguay Is Made" in *The Washington Times*, April 19, 1917, p. 1. With considerable delay, the unabridged United Press news item was brought by two New Zealand papers: "Brazilian Huns in Three States Revolt. Teutons Well Armed even with Artillery," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, May 25, 1917, p. 3, and "Brazilian Huns Revolt," *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, May 31, 1917, p. 5, both datelined "April 19."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Nitric acid, indispensable for making explosives, was made in Germany from aerial nitrogen, whereas the Allies produced it from saltpeter, on which Chile had a quasi-monopoly.

“Brazil has a strict censorship in force now,” which made it allegedly “impossible to obtain complete verification of the revolt or of what steps the Brazilian Government had taken to quell it.”⁶⁰

The story, though fabricated from whole cloth, was nonetheless widely brought by the U.S. press between April 19 and 23, 1917, often on front pages.⁶¹ It traveled from the U.S. by Reuters to London and from there through the Australian and N.Z. Cable Association or United Service to Australia and New Zealand, where it was brought in abridged form by many newspapers between April 21 and 28, 1917.⁶² As of April 23, 1917, one could even read that “considerable fighting between rebels and government forces” was going on.⁶³

The heated anti-German atmosphere in Brazil of these days created favorable conditions for the spreading of the “Corpse

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Some more references: On April 19, 1917: “German Population in Brazil Revolts,” *The Daily Missourian*, Columbia, MO, p. 4; “German Revolt Reported from South America,” *The Evening Herald*, Klamath Falls, OR, p. 1; “Brazil Germans in Great Revolt,” *The Tacoma Times*, Tacoma, WA, p. 1; Germans in S. America Plan Huge Internal Revolt,” *The Day Book*, Chicago, IL, p. 3; “Germans in Brazil in Armed Revolt Against Republic,” *The Evening World*, New York, NY, p. 2; on April 20, 1917: “Germans in Brazil in Armed Revolt, Argentina Hears,” *New York Tribune*, p. 1; “German Revolt in Brazil is Growing,” *The Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, Bemidji, MN, p. 1 (headline banner over all six columns); on April 23, 1917, *The Day Book*, Chicago, IL, again (“Germans in Brazil Start Revolution”).

⁶² E.g. “German Rebellion in Brazil,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, April 21, 1917, p. 4; “Brazil. German Revolt,” *The Daily News*, Perth, Australia, April 21, 1917, 3rd ed., p. 10; “South American Republics. The German Plot in Brazil,” *The Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, Australia, April 23, 1917, p. 6; “The Revolt in Brazil,” *The Auckland Star*, Auckland, New Zealand, April 21, 1917, p. 4; “Revolt in Brazil. Germans lead the outbreak,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, April 21, 1917, p. 3.

⁶³ E.g. “Hostilities Begin,” *The Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, Australia, April 23, 1917, p. 6; “German Revolt in Brazil. Considerable Fighting,” *The Brisbane Courier*, Brisbane, Australia, April 23, 1917, p. 7; Fighting in Brazil. Near Uruguayan Border,” *The Auckland Star*, Auckland, New

factory” story and its acceptance by the general public. Most probably for this reason, Brazilian media were among the first to receive the news, even before it was spread worldwide by Reuters and the news agencies cooperating with it. The Rio de Janeiro evening paper *A Noite* premiered the news - in its “Preliminary version” - already on April 17, 1917. *A Noite*, however, never came back to the issue. Other papers, such as *A Epoca*, *O Paiz*, and *Correio da Manhã* from Rio de Janeiro and *A Republica* from Curitiba, PR,⁶⁴ which also had brought the “Preliminary version,” published follow-ups in the next days: the “Final version” of the story on April 19 (*O Paiz*, *Correio da Manhã*, *A Republica*), paraphrases of it on April 21 (*O Paiz*) and 22 (*Correio da Manhã*), and a cartoon mocking the Kaiser on April 21 (*A Epoca*).⁶⁵

O Paiz, in a column for women readers in its April 23, 1917 issue, critically imagined that Brazilian soldiers, deployed to the European front, would “increase the raw material for the corpse factory *L’Indépendance Belge* has just discovered in Germany.”⁶⁶ On April 27, 1917 *A Epoca* brought an interview

Zealand, April 23, 1917, p. 5, “German Revolt in Brazil. Considerable Fighting Reported,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, April 23, 1917, p. 3.

⁶⁴ At the time written “Coritiba.”

⁶⁵ “Como os alemães aproveitam os cadáveres. Uma repellente industria” [How the Germans utilize the corpses. An abominable industry], *O Paiz*, April 19, 1917, p. 3; “Uma industria macabra” [A macabre industry], *Correio da Manhã*, April 19, 1917, p. 2; “Lugubre industria. O aproveitamento dos cadáveres alemães” [Lugubrious industry. The utilization of German corpses], *A Republica*, April 19, 1917, p. 2 (a summary). The full text of the “Final version” followed on April 24, 1917 (“Uma industria satanica” [A satanic industry], p. 2); “O barbarismo germanico” [The Teuton barbarism], *O Paiz*, April 21, 1917, p. 2; “Os comunicados officiaes” [The official communiqués], subheading “Inglaterra” [England], *Correio da Manhã*, April 22, 1917, p. 3; “A industria da morte” [The death industry], *A Epoca*, April 21, 1917, p. 1.

⁶⁶ . . . para augmentarem a materia prima daquella usina de cadáveres que *L’Indépendance Belge* acaba de descobrir na Allemanha. “Palestra feminina – Ainda a questão do dia” [Women’s talk – Still a question of

with a Brazilian who had served as a volunteer in the French army and had a lot to tell about German atrocities, among other things that “the Germans utilize, on an industrial scale, certain substances extracted from the corpses.”⁶⁷ Somewhat belated, the *Diario do Povo* from Maceió, AL, joined the flock on April 29, 1917 with a summary of news about the “world-wide horror” caused by the revelations about the German “Corpse factory” published in England.⁶⁸ On June 16, 1917 the same paper reported on a public speech the politician and writer Coelho Neto (1864-1934) had given. Neto, hence the newspaper, had called Germany’s utilization of corpses for making explosives and pigs’ food “a declaration of war on the dead.”⁶⁹

The last mentioning of the German “Corpse factory” in the Brazilian press could be found on July 13, 1917 in *Pirralho*, a fortnightly “arts and humor journal,” presented as such on its masthead. It brought an abridged version of the “Final version” of the story, preceded by an introduction saying that many people would not believe what the Germans were doing with human corpses, but that it was absolutely true. The

the day], *O Paiz*, April 23, 1917, p. 3. Brazil had not yet declared war on Germany, but was preparing for this event.

⁶⁷ *Os allemães . . . fazem industrias extrahidas de certas materias existentes nos cadaveres*. “A vida nas trincheiras. Interessante palestra com um soldado recém-chegado do ‘front’” [The life in the trenches. An interesting talk with a soldier just returned from the ‘front’], *A Epoca*, April 27, 1917, p. 1.

⁶⁸ “Os cadaveres da guerra. Nada se deve perder” [The war corpses. Nothing must be wasted], *Diario do Povo*, Maceió, AL, Brazil, April 29, 1917, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *A Allemanha inaugurou o processo de guerrear os mortos . . . É o habito do cadaver servindo para explosivos . . . para a alimentação dos suinos*. “Esquadra americana. Um discurso de Coelho Neto” [The American squadron. A speech by Coelho Neto], *Diario do Povo*, Maceió, AL, Brazil, June 16, 1917, pp. 2-3. The spelling of the name obviously changed. In today’s Brazilian Portuguese, it is written with a single letter “t.”

(anonymous) writer commented the rendition with only one word: “*Safa!*” (Yuck!).⁷⁰

It is interesting that in all publications analyzed not a single word of criticism, of doubt or incredulity with regard to the “Corpse factory” could be detected, neither in articles nor in letters to the editors, neither from *Luso-* nor from *Teuto-Brasileiros*.⁷¹ Obviously the British propagandists had been lucky to meet exactly the “window of opportunity” for launching their campaign in Brazil. Their target audience had precisely been in the right mood to swallow the “Corpse factory” yarn hook, line and sinker.

The “Corpse Factory” at the Antipodes

Australia and New Zealand were linked to Great Britain by strong personal, historical, and political-administrative ties. Therefore they saw themselves, without hesitation, at war with the German Empire at the very moment when the “Mother Country” declared war on Germany. In both countries, thousands of young men volunteered for military service, seeing the war experience as a big adventure to prove their manhood and as an opportunity to flee from the routine of everyday life at home. Like their age cohorts in Europe, they believed in a short war with a quick victory, and their major worry was that they might come too late, that the war might have already ended before they had fired their first round at the enemy.

Neither Australia, nor New Zealand had an army of continental European type at the outbreak of the war. Australia had a part-time force of citizen soldiers with only a small regular component, restricted to service on Australian territory. In New Zealand, the situation was similar. Whereas New Zealand in August 1916 introduced conscription,

⁷⁰ “O aproveitamento dos cadáveres humanos pelos alemães” [The utilization of human corpses by the Germans], *Pirralho*, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, July 13, 1917, p. 4.

⁷¹ *Luso-Brasileiros* are Brazilians of Portuguese ancestry.

Australia relied on volunteers for service in the “Australian Imperial Force” (AIF). The AIF consisted initially of two infantry divisions. When it was transferred to the Western front in March 1916, it was expanded to five divisions. For the European theater of war, New Zealand provided an infantry division, which arrived at the Western front in April 1916. Integrated into the British Army, Australians and New Zealanders operated closely together under the common name “Australian and New Zealand Army Corps,” better known under its abbreviation, ANZAC.

On the Home front, the war was mainly fought with legal and administrative measures and with weapons from the arsenal of propaganda. On outbreak of the war, citizens of the Central Powers were interned as “enemy aliens,” a measure legal under international law and similarly practiced among all warring nations. In New Zealand, all nationals of non-British ancestry were summarily suspected of “disloyalty,” especially if they were using another idiom than English in conversation. They had to suffer from legal discrimination and grassroots violence. Their schools were closed, their homes and shops vandalized, and all Lutheran churches in the country except one fell victim to arson.⁷²

In Australia, the War Precautions Act was passed by Parliament in October 1914. It suspended *de facto* the citizens’ constitutional rights and allowed the government to set up a rigid press censorship. In a climate of artificially fanned hysteria, Australians of German or Austrian ancestry - who constituted a significant part of the population - were automatically suspected of “disloyalty.” They were discriminated against at the workplace and in business and lost their right to vote. German vanished from the school curricula and from geographical names, and Lutheran schools were shut down.⁷³

⁷² Burr 1998.

⁷³ There is a wealth of literature about this subject. A good overview is given by Williams 2003.

“Official war films” brought visual propaganda messages into the remotest parts of the country. *The Western Argus*, one of Australia’s big newspapers, reported about an incident during such a screening at the small town of Nhill, VIC, on April 30, 1917:

“When the picture showing the German atrocities was on the screen, a local resident tried to climb on the platform to fight the Germans shown in the pictures. He was wildly calling out: “Kill them! Kill the Germans!”⁷⁴”

The paper could report with satisfaction that, at the end of the show, eight men enlisted for active service. It did not tell, however, if the phantom fighter was among them.

A litmus test for “loyalty to the Empire,” apart from enlisting in the AIF (which, for natural reasons, was not possible for everybody), was steadfast belief in the propaganda tales about German atrocities, not least in the “Corpse factory” story. During the campaign that led to the closing of the Lutheran schools, a reader of *The Register* from Adelaide, firmly convinced of the innate disloyalty of all Lutherans, be they of German, Scandinavian, or British ancestry, rhetorically asked:

“Do they denounce Germany and all her villainies? . . . Let them give us something about Belgium, the Lusitania, Capt. Fryatt, the Arabic, *the corpse factory*, Zeppelins and child murder . . .”⁷⁵”

Not only individuals who publicly called the “Corpse factory” a falsehood were liable under the War Prevention Act 1914 to heavy fines for “disloyal utterances”⁷⁶ or to detention

⁷⁴ “Scene at Picture Show. Desire to Fight the Germans,” *The Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, WA, May 8, 1917, p. 23.

⁷⁵ “Lutheran Schools,” a letter to the Editor, signed “BILLJPM,” *The Register*, Adelaide, Australia, June 19, 1917, p. 3, emphasis added. The letter is a response to a letter by some Lutherans who presented themselves as “British.” “Arabic” refers to a British passenger liner sunk on August 19, 1915 by a German U-boat, “Zeppelins” and “child murder” most probably to the bombardment of London by German dirigibles and the shelling of British coastal towns by the German navy.

⁷⁶ “Misspent Energy. Disloyal Words Cost over £ 25,” *The Daily News*, Perth, May 12, 1917, p. 2. Also: “Disloyal Utterances,” *The West*

in an internment camp,⁷⁷ but also those who, though obviously believing in the story, used it for agitation against enlisting, which they contemptuously called “offering one’s bodies for a corpse factory.”⁷⁸

It seems that the Australian and New Zealand public and their elites swallowed the British anti-German atrocity propaganda hook, line and sinker. In Australia, public criticism of the “Corpse factory” story made itself felt not before the spring of 1918, and this only sporadically and for fear of legal consequences in veiled form, for example by quoting a British Member of Parliament⁷⁹ or a returnee from a German internment camp.⁸⁰ From New Zealand, not a single dissident voice from wartime has come down to us.

Only many years after the end of the war, Australian newspapers dared to write critically about “the ‘corpse factory’ lie” and the fear caused by it within Australian society in wartime:

Australian, Perth, WA, May 14, 1917, p. 8, and *The Western Mail*, Perth, WA, Australia, May 18, 1917, p. 44. The defendant, Nicholas John McMahon, a farmer, was fined £ 15 2s 6p.

⁷⁷ Australian writer Eric Otto Schlunke (1906-1960), in his autobiographical novel *Rosenthal*, tells about his grandfather, who as a young boy had emigrated from Germany and became an Australian citizen. Provoked by a neighbor with the “Corpse factory,” he had called it “an Allied lie,” for which he was sentenced to detention in an internment camp. “Rosenthal, chapter VI,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 2, 1939, p. 3.

⁷⁸ “War Precautions Act. Thomas Cherrington Convicted. Fined £ 50, or Six Months’ Gaol,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, Australia, September 7, 1917, p. 2.

⁷⁹ “First-class Lies,” *The Worker – Australia’s Pioneer Co-operative Labour Journal*, Brisbane, Australia, April 4, 1918, p. 11. The paper quoted in detail an article by Arthur Ponsonby, MP, published some time earlier in England. As a British Member of Parliament, Ponsonby had certain privileges of free speech.

⁸⁰ “Life in Germany. Mr. Walter Gibson’s Story. How the British Are Treated,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 18, 1918, p. 6. Gibson had been interned for three years as an “enemy alien” in Camp Ruhleben near Berlin, from which he was released because of his weakened health. With a person who had suffered hard under the Hun, society was forbearing.

“It is difficult, after this lapse of time, to imagine how anybody could have accepted it. And yet this monstrous fabrication was swallowed by millions; and those whose incredulity would not stretch so far, were sometimes afraid to admit their unbelief, lest they should be thought disloyal!⁸¹”

Although Australia, in the course of the war, gradually established her own system for distributing officially sanctioned news to the press - for example, by appointing an “Official War Correspondent”⁸² - for her citizens and those of New Zealand

“the main source of propaganda inspired war news was through institutionalised links with the British propaganda system via agencies such as Reuters and the two Australian cable service providers, the Australian Cable Association . . . and United Service Limited.⁸³”

As the Australian news providers often took material directly from *The Times* or *The Daily Mail*, the news in the press of the Antipodes was strongly influenced by the news policy of the Northcliffe press. This held all the more for New Zealand - a small country with, at the time, one million inhabitants - whose press was totally dependent on British and Australian news providers for war related news.

The result of this dependence on British sources was that the Australian and New Zealand newspapers reported about war events, as a rule, more or less congruent with the British press about the same topics, with the same words, and at

⁸¹ “War-Time Propaganda,” *The Register*, Adelaide, Australia, November 2, 1925, p. 6. The article is not signed.

⁸² Charles Edwin Woodrow (“C.E.W.”) Bean (1879-1968), studied law at Oxford, UK, reporter for the *Sydney Morning Herald* since 1908, 1914 accredited as Australia’s official war correspondent for the Australian Imperial Force. He had firsthand knowledge of the war, since he participated in all Australian infantry operations. After the war appointed Australia’s “Official War Historian,” he edited the twelve-volume *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, supported the establishment of the Australian War Memorial, and is regarded as the creator and propagator of the “ANZAC Legend.”

⁸³ Putnis/McCallum 2005:1.

about the same time. Comparison among articles dealing with the “Corpse factory” shows that the journalists on the Fifth Continent only rarely did change the wording of the news they were provided with. They often shortened, sometimes combined (“cut & paste”), and seldom commented. They made, however, as a rule, use of the editor’s prerogative to formulate the headlines. As the editors’ genuine work, the headlines deserve special attention. Of course the editor also decided whether he would bring a certain news item at all, and if so, at what time. By and large, the “Corpse factory” press campaign at the Antipodes mirrored the campaign in the Northcliffe press, however, with some significant differences due to idiosyncratic developments on the Australian Home front.

As previously mentioned, Australian and New Zealand newspapers were among the first to enjoy the privilege of publishing the “Corpse factory” story, and they were also among the last at the end of the war. A sample obtained by screening of the freely accessible Australian and New Zealand digital newspaper archives⁸⁴ in December 2011 showed about 240 articles for the period of time from mid-April 1917 until Armistice on November 11, 1918, with hardly a week without a news item about the “Corpse factory.” The news items were, however, not equally distributed over time. Four waves of massed appearance can be made out:

- a first from mid-April 1917 to the beginning of May 1917,
- a second in the second half of May 1917,
- a third in June 1917, and
- a fourth in the second week of October 1918.

The first wave was the most massed, the “Main attack.” Until the end of April 1917, the Rosner account in (mis-) translation from *The Times*, the “Final version” of the story, the German *démenti*, Premier Massey’s and Lord Curzon’s statements, and Mr. Hughes remarks on his re-election tour

⁸⁴ For Australia: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>, for New Zealand: <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>.

were published. They were immediately followed in the first days of May 1917 by reports about Lord Cecil's statement in Commons on April 30, 1917.⁸⁵

The second wave brought German Secretary of State Zimmermann's answer to Lord Cecil, the publication of

⁸⁵ Apart from the appearances already mentioned previously: "Injured Dignity," *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, April 23, 1917, p. 8; "German Ghouls. The Corpse factory," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 3; "Other Confirmation. Mr. Massey Horrified. Hopes Evil Power Will Be Smashed," *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 3. The news is dated "London, April 22" and as a "'The Times' cable." Also: "Enemy Countries. Extensive German Strikes. Corpse Exploitation Factories. Nearest Approach to Cannibalism ...," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 5; "Premier Massey Speaks up on the Corpse Factory. Lord Curzon Confirms. 'Cannibalism,' Says Carlisle's Bishop," *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 4; "'Kadavermehl.' The German Corpse Factory. Allegations Reiterated. All the Facts Confirmed," *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 5; "German Ghouls. The Corpse factory," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, April 24, 1917, p. 3; "Current Comment," *The Mail*, Adelaide, Australia, April 28, p. 6. See for Lord Cecil's statement the following New Zealand newspapers: "The German 'Corpse Factory.' Great Britain's Attitude," *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, May 1, 1917, p. 5; "British Parliament. Meatless Days and Bread Consumption. German Corpse Factory," *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough; "Imperial Parliament. The Submarine Menace," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, May 1, 1917, p. 6; "The 'Corpse Factories.' No official Information," *The Evening Post*, Wellington, May 2, 1917, p. 7; "London News," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, May 2, 1917, p. 5; "German Corpse Mill. No Official Information Available," *The Colonist*, Nelson, May 2, 1917, p. 5; "Various Items. German Corpse Factory," *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, May 2, 1917, p. 6, and for Australia: "The German Corpse Factory. Question in Parliament," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, May 1, 1917, p. 4; on May 2, 1917: "German 'Corpse Factory'. Minister's Statement in Commons," *The Argus*, Melbourne, p. 9; "The Corpse Factory," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 11; "German Corpse Factory," *The Brisbane Courier*, p. 7, "German Use of Corpses. Nothing Incredible in the Story," *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, p. 6; "German 'Corpse Factory,'" *The Register*, Adelaide, p. 7; "The Corpse Factory,"

paragraph 5(b) of the German Order of the Day in (mis-) translation, and again, in several instances, the “Final version.”⁸⁶ The third wave started with reports about the

The North Western Advocate, Devonport, TAS, p. 1; “Germany,” *The Western Mail*, Perth, May 4, 1917, p. 14; “The War Day by Day,” *The Sunday Times*, Perth, May 6, 1917, p. S1. From Asia, *The China Mail*, Hongkong (“The Corpse Factory. A Denial,” p. 5), *The Hongkong Daily Press* (“German Corpse Exploitation Denied,” p. 5), and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (“The Corpse Crushers,” p. 4) reported about the German denial on April 23, 1917. On May 1, 1917, *The China Mail* (“The ‘German Corpse Factory,’” p. 1), *The Hongkong Telegraph* (“The Corpse Factory. Nothing Incredible in the Stories,” p. 1), and *The Straits Times*, Singapore (“General War News. German Corpse Factory,” p. 7) brought Lord Cecil’s statement.

⁸⁶ “Corpse Factories. Widespread Loathing. Fears for Allied Dead,” *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, New Zealand, May 9, 1917, p. 6; “Corpse Factories. Widespread Loathing,” *The Bay of Plenty Times*, Bay of Plenty, New Zealand, May 11, 1917, p. 4; “German Corpse Factory. Further Denial at Berlin,” *Argus*, Melbourne, May 14, 1917, p. 7; “The Gruesome Story. Oil and Pig Food from Human Bodies,” *Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, May 14, 1917, p. 6. See also in the New Zealand press: “The Corpse Factory. Another German Denial,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, p. 5; “Corpse Factory Story Denied by German Foreign Minister,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, p. 7; “Commercial Corpses. Calumnious Allegations,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, p. 2; “Enemy Countries,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, p. 5; “German Corpse Factory. Another Denial,” *The Colonist*, Nelson, p. 7; “Herr Zimmerman,” *The Thames Star*, Waikato, p. 3; “German Corpse Factory,” *The Bay of Plenty Times*, Bay of Plenty, p. 3; “German Corpse Factory. Denial in the Reichstag,” *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui, p. 5; “The Corpse Factory Calumny,” *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, p. 5, and for Australia: “German Corpse Factory,” *The Brisbane Courier*, p. 7; “German Corpse Factory. Further Denials,” *The West Australian*, Perth, p. 7; “The German Corpse Factory,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, p. 2; “German ‘Corpse Factory.’ Another Denial,” *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, p. 5; “The ‘Corpse Factories,’” *The Register*, Adelaide, p. 8 (all of May 14, 1917); “The Corpse Factory,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, May 15, 1917, p. 3; “Prussian Horrors. Corpse Factories,” *West Gippsland Gazette*, Warragut, VIC, May 15, 1917, p. 7 (a long article). Belated: “Germany,” *The Western Mail*, Perth, May 18, 1917, p. 15; “Britons Hold on. The Battle for Bullecourt . . . Diary of War,” *The Queenslander*, Brisbane, May 19, 1917, p. 37. On May 17, 1917,

publication of the German Order of the Day in facsimile and brought, in the third week, the Welshmen's discovery of the "bundles." In the second half of the month, the "Final version"

the following New Zealand papers reported on the Army Order: "More About the Corpse Factory," *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, p. 3; "The Western Theatre. Enemy's Effort to Regain Initiative. Violent Attacks on British. Details for Corpse Factory," *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, p. 5; "Corpse Factory Story Confirmed by German Army Order," *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, p. 3; "The Corpse Factory. A German Army Order," *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, p. 5; "Germans Fighting for Initiative. Heavily Attack British Positions. Evidence as to Corpse Factory," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, p. 5; "German Corpse Factory. A Captured Army Order. Details of Raw Material," *The Colonist*, Nelson, p. 5; "German Corpse Factory," *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Wanganui, p. 3; "The Corpse Factories. Disclosures in German Army Order," *The Evening Post*, Wellington, p. 8; "Corpse Exploitation. Supporting Evidence Found," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, p. 7. On May 18, 1917, for example, the following papers reported on the "discovery": "Enemy's Utmost Efforts. British Heavily Attacked. Significant German Army Order," *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, p. 3; "German Corpse factory. Further Evidence of Existence," *Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, p. 7; "German Barbarism. Making Use of the Dead," *Mercury*, Hobart, Tasmania, p. 5, and from Australia: "The German Corpse Factories," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, p. 4, repeated May 18, 1917, p. 5. In addition, the following Australian papers on May 18, 1917: *The Argus*, Melbourne ("German Corpse Factory. Further Evidence of Existence," p. 7), *The Sydney Morning Herald* ("German Corpse Factory," p. 7), *The Brisbane Courier* ("German Corpse Factory," p. 7), *The West Australian*, Perth ("The Corpse Factory. Confirmation on Battlefield," p. 7), *Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD ("More Light on a Repulsive Subject," p. 5), *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, ("Utilisation of Corpses. A German Order," p. 5), *The North Western Advocate*, Devonport, TAS ("The Corpse Factory. Awful Evidence," p. 1). Somewhat belated: "The German Corpse Factory," *The Albany Advertiser*, Albany, WA, May 23, 1917, p. 3, and "Germany," *The Western Mail*, Perth, May 25, 1917, p. 13. As a latecomer: "Germans and the Dead," *The North China Herald*, Shanghai, China, July 21, 1917, p. 129. A long story, taken from *The Daily Mail*: "Huns and Their Dead. Great Corpse factory. Last Word in Barbarism," *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, May 30, 1917, p. 2; "Huns and Their Dead. Great Corpse factory," *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, New Zealand, June 1, p. 4

appeared again in massed form.⁸⁷ The detection of bundles of German corpses on light railway trucks was reported with great delay not before the end of November 1917 by several

⁸⁷ "German Corpse Factories. Army Order Reproduced," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, June 6, 1917, p. 2; "The Corpse factory. Official Proof," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, June 6, 1917; "The Corpse Factory. German Order Reproduced," *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 7; "The Corpse Factory Horror. German Denials Proved False," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 8; "The German Corpse Factory," *The Thames Star*, Waikato, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 1; "Miscellaneous. The Corpse Factory Horror," *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 2; "Hun Corpse Factory. Further Evidence," *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, New Zealand, June 6, 1917, p. 5; "German Corpse Factory," *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, June 7, 1917, p. 3; "German Corpse factory," *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, June 7, 1917; delayed: "Corpse Factories," *The North Western Advocate*, Devonport, TAS, June 12, 1917, p. 1. The "Final version" updated: "Huns and Their Dead. Great Corpse Factory," *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, New Zealand, June 8, 1917, p. 6; "Germans and Their Dead. Prussian Corpse factory," *Argus*, Melbourne, June 15, 1917, p. 7; "German Corpse Factory. Horrible Industry Described. Dividends from the Dead," *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, June 16, 1917, p. 9; "The Hun's Corpse Factory. The German Report. Universal Horror," *The Mail*, Adelaide, June 16, 1917, p. 6; "The Spirit of 'Kultur.' How the Germans Treat the Dead. What Materialism Brings," *Mercury*, Hobart, Tasmania, June 20, p. 6; "The Hun's Corpse Factory. Universal Horror," *The Thames Star*, Waikato, New Zealand, June 20, 1917, p. 1. *The Thames Star* returned to this theme on June 25, 1917 in an op-ed "The German Corpse Factory," p. 2; "German Corpse Factory. The Industry Described. Dividends from the Dead," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, June 24, 1917, p. 4; "German Corpse Factory. A Tale of Horror. Dutch and German Reports," *The Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, WA, June 26, 1917, p. 36; "Germans and Their Dead. Prussian Corpse Factory," *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, Townsville, QLD, June 26, 1917, p. 4; "The Huns and Their Dead. A Company Run for Profit," *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, QLD, June 29, 1917, p. 7. Belated: "Germans and Their Dead. Prussian Corpse Factory," *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, July 3, 1917, p. 3; "German Corpse Factory," *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, July 4, 1917, p. 4; "The German Corpse Factory. A Prisoner's Story. Statement from Berlin. Chinese and Indian Opinion," *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW,

New Zealand newspapers which did not conceal their deep disgust with this manifestation of “German callousness.”⁸⁸

July 11, 1917, p. 3; “Akin to Cannibalism. German Corpse Factory. Three Letters,” *The North Western Advocate*, Devonport, TAS, July 13, 1917, p. 4; “How the Hun Defiles His Dead. Bodies Boiled down for Oil and Pig Food. German Prisoner’s ‘Corpse Fat’,” *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, July 30, 1917, p. 2. About the Welshmen’s find see the following newspapers from New Zealand: “For the Corpse Factory. Gruesome Find at Messines,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, p. 7; “Commercial Corpses. Additional Corroboration,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, p. 3; “German Corpse Exploitation. Gruesome Discovery in a Captured Wood,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, p. 5; “Consigned to Corpse Factory,” *The Thames Star*, Waikato, p. 3; “The Western Theatre. A Gruesome Find. Bundles of Corpses for the ‘Factory’,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, p. 5; “Ready for the Corpse Factory. Bodies Packed in Bundles,” *Marlborough Express*, Marlborough, p. 5; “Corpse Factory. Further Evidence,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, p. 5; “Bundles of Corpses. Gruesome Find by Welsh Troops,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, p. 3, and from Australia: “German Corpse Factory. What the Welsh Troops Found,” *The Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, p. 7; “German Corpse Factory. Incriminating Evidence Found,” *The Argus*, Melbourne; “German Corpse Factory. Bodies for Boiling down Buried by Welshmen,” *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, p. 8; “A Gruesome Discovery,” *The Brisbane Courier*, p. 5; “German Dead. Prepared for Boiling down. Welshmen’s Gruesome Discovery,” *The West Australian*, Perth, p. 7; “Boiling down.’ Hun Cannibalism Proved,” *The Cairns Post*, Cairns, QLD, p. 5; “Corpses in Bundles,” *The Register*, Adelaide, p. 7; “The Great War . . . German Corpses for the Boiling down Factory,” *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, Townsville, QLD, p. 4; “Gruesome Bundles,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 13 (all from June 23, 1917); “German Corpses in Bundles,” *The Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, NSW, June 25, 1917, p. 4; “German Corpse Factory,” *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui, June 25, 1917, p. 2; “Feilding A. and P. Show,” *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, June 25, 1917, p. 2; “War Items. The Corpse Factory. Bundles of Bodies Found,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, June 25, 1917, p. 3.

⁸⁸ “German Callousness to Their Dead,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, November 16, 1917, p. 5, referring to *The Times* from October 31, 1917 as its source; “German Callousness to Their Dead,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, November 22, 1917, p. 6; “The Inhuman Hun,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, November 28, 1917, p. 4; a notice without headline and signature among advertisements in *The Ashburton*

The fourth, final wave carried the news about the “discovery” of a “German corpse factory” and of “dissected bodies” in the St. Quentin Canal tunnel.⁸⁹ It should become a matter of special interest for Australia, as the Fifth Australian Division under the command of Sir Talbot Hobbs had made the assault that led to the capture of the southern tunnel entrance. Preparing the attack, Australian artillery had bombarded the tunnel entrance, using delayed action fuses. One shot had penetrated through the cover of a former underground workshop the Germans had converted to a field kitchen and exploded at the very moment “when the Germans were crowding in to draw

Guardian, Canterbury, November 29, p. 7; delayed: “Fatherland Party Oppose Truce,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, December 3, 1917, p. 3.

⁸⁹ See the following Australian papers: “With the Bayonet . . . A Gruesome Discovery,” *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, p. 8; “The Tunnel Labyrinth. Gruesome Discoveries,” *The West Australian*, Perth, p. 7; “Attack Resumed. Ground Aimed at. Gained far ahead of Time,” *The Examiner*, Launceston, TAS, p. 5; “Beaurevoir Line. Enemy Fighting Hard,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 5; “A Gruesome Discovery,” *The Northwestern Advocate*, Devonport, TAS, p. 3 (all of October 7, 1918); “The Great War,” *The Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, WA, October 8, 1918, p. 20; “The War. Correspondents’ Reports,” *The Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, QLD, October 8, 1918, p. 4, and the New Zealand papers: “Corpse factory. Appalling Proof. Bodies Carved up,” *The Northern Advocate*, Whangarei, p. 3; “Gruesome Discovery. Human Remains in a Cauldron,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, p. 7; “Correspondents’ Stories,” *Hawera and Normanby Star*, Taranaki, p. 5; “The Correspondents’ Despatches. German’s Ghoulis Practices. Dissection in the Trenches. St. Quentin Labyrinth,” *The Colonist*, Nelson, p. 5; “Soldiers’ Bodies Dissected,” *The Thames Star*, Waikato, p. 2; “Hun Horrors in the Underground Area,” *The Feilding Star*, Manawatu-Manganui, p. 5; “German Corpse Factory. Partial Explanation. Finds in St. Quentin Tunnel,” *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui, p. 5; “A Gruesome Discovery,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, p. 6; “Corpse Factory. Gruesome Discovery,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Wellington, p. 6; “Gruesome Discovery. Dissected Bodies Found in Tunnel,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, p. 5 (all from October 8, 1918); “A Gruesome Discovery in a German Cookhouse,” *The Ohinemuri Gazette*, Waikato, October 9, 1918, p. 2.

their rations. The slaughter was terrible. Many fragments of human bodies were blown into the coppers,” Sir Hobbs later remembered.⁹⁰

A correspondent of *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported, on October 6, 1918, how the event was received among the soldiers.

“Our men . . . in their excitement narrated the story that they had found a boiling-down works in which the enemy conducted a process for the extraction of glycerine from dead bodies. There are few Australian soldiers who do not know this story, and thousands of them since have visited the place, which is now known as the Chamber of Horrors. Thousands of others have also visited the scene, many coming from far behind the lines, with the sole object of seeing for themselves the true situation. It has been the greatest topic of conversation for several days.⁹¹”

The report shows that the “Corpse factory” story had long since become an urban legend. It also shows that the scene of the event became an object of “atrocities tourism.” Though “thousands” of visitors seem to be exaggerated, we can trust Australia’s Official War Historian: “The place was visited by everyone that could get there.”⁹² As this was not possible without the consent of the military leadership, we have to ask, Why? Certainly not to let the rank-and-file soldiers see for themselves that there was nothing in the “Corpse factory” legend. The correspondent concluded with a sigh of resignation:

“The boiling-down story is not correct; there is no doubt in the world that it was a cook-house. I know that the story will live in Australia for ages, and that it will be narrated many

⁹⁰ “German Corpse Factory. A Groundless Report. Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs’ Version,” *Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, WA, November 3, 1925, p. 28.

⁹¹ “Hun Boiling-Down Factory. How a Story Originated,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 24, 1918, p. 7.

⁹² Bean 1942:57 (footnote 48).

thousand times . . . You will hear hundreds say: “I believe there is something in it. Old Fritz is capable of anything.”⁹³”

That his report had to wait for publishing until December 24, 1918, six weeks after the Armistice was signed, and that British war correspondent Philip Gibbs’ report about the capture of the St. Quentin Canal tunnel from October 4, 1918 with his observation about “men of easy belief in the worst horrors of humanity” was not brought by the Australian press at all, clearly shows that critical remarks about the “Corpse factory” story were far from being welcome in Australia in wartime. In New Zealand, an audacious editor dared to publish Gibbs’ report - not earlier, however, than on the eve of the Armistice.⁹⁴

Of particular interest are the appearances of the “Final version” within the first three “waves,” alone or completed by items that had already been published by the Northcliffe papers, such as “Margarine from corpse fat,” or the statement of the Maharajah of Bikanir, or the Eckbolsheim factory’s advertisement. In our sample, they are distributed as follows:

Appearance of the “Final version” in wave	Number of appearances
1 (April 18 – May 5, 1917)	20
2 (May 8 – June 1, 1917)	11
3 (June 8 – June 29, 1917)	10

The difference to Europe, Asia, and the U.S., where the “Final version” appeared only in the beginning of the propaganda campaign, i.e. within the second half of April 1917, can be explained by different situations on the Home fronts. On the eve of the Allied Spring Offensive, things

⁹³ “Hun Boiling-Down Factory. How a Story Originated,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 24, 1918, p. 7.

⁹⁴ “Men Who Took Scheldt Canal Are Unbeatable,” *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, November 9, 1918, p. 3. The article is datelined “October 4.”

“Down Under” were looking really bad. People had become increasingly war-weary. The battles of the previous year had demanded a high toll of lives - in the Battle of the Somme, the Australians lost about 33,000, the New Zealanders about 7,000 men - without having resulted in substantial victories. The economic costs of the war continued to hurt many in the community, and recruits only trickled in where they had flowed in the previous years. Nevertheless Australian Premier Hughes, who had lost, in October 1916, the referendum for conscription, was preparing for a second attempt, planned to be held in autumn.⁹⁵ Only a massive propaganda operation could improve the situation on the Home front.

The first wave of “Corpse factory” propaganda was part of the worldwide launching of the story, which itself could be correlated with the general course of events in the Allied Spring Offensive. The second wave can be seen in connection with specific developments on the battle front, which affected Australia and New Zealand. On the one hand, there were the many casualties - over 10,000 - the Australians had suffered in the Battle of Arras, where their divisions were brought into action as “shock troops.” On the other hand, Field Marshal Haig, the British Supreme Commander, was already planning the next offensive, the Great Battle of Flanders, to begin at the end of July 1917.

As a prelude, the British prepared the capture of the Messines Range in the second week of June, again sending the ANZACs first into action. The Battle of Messines (June 7-14, 1917) was accompanied by the third “Corpse factory” propaganda wave. It was a success for the British, at the cost, however, of about 7,000 Australian and nearly 4,000 New Zealand casualties. The only comfort for the bereaved relatives “Down Under” was the firm belief that their men had died in combating a depraved enemy that boiled its own

⁹⁵ The second referendum was held in December 1917, with a still worse result for Hughes.

fallen heroes down in “Corpse factories” for glycerin, soap, lubricants, and pigs’ food.

VI.

THE “CORPSE FACTORY” IN SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

The Hour of the “Engineers of the Human Soul”¹

Writers, artists, and scientists also took up the “German corpse factory.” It became a favorite subject of satirists, making “fun of the Hun” in often tasteless effusions. *The Daily Mail* of April 24, 1917, for example, published a letter to the editor by the famous British theater producer and actor Louis Nethersole. He referred to the recent death of Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia, a German Army pilot, who was wounded in action and had died in British captivity.² The Hohenzollerns had asked for the return of the Prince’s remains for burial in Germany. Nethersole commented this demand with, “May one presume that the Kaiser is anxious to extract from the carcase of the Prince all the essences that it contains for the exclusive use of his piggery of Potsdam?”³ Equally tasteless commented *Flight – Official Organ of the Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom* the death of German aviation pioneer Count Zeppelin: “Wonder if the Count had any ‘Kadaver’ shares, and if he managed to pass them on in time to meet St. Peter with a whitewashed conscience.”⁴

Flight carried its dehumanizing of the German enemy to extremes in its May 24, 1917 issue with a remark evidently intended as “humor”:

“The discovery of that Kadaver business has even upset the barbarian mind of the crime soddened Hun. In defence it is claimed . . . that *Kadaverwertungsgesellschaften*

¹ “Engineers of the human soul” (*Инженеры человеческих дуи*) was a term applied by Joseph Stalin to writers.

² The British buried his corpse, with full military honors, on a war cemetery in France.

³ “Corpse Fat – To the Editor of the ‘Daily Mail,’” *The Daily Mail*, April 24, 1917, p. 4.

⁴ Untitled. *Flight*, London, UK, April 26, 1917, p. 400.

[sic] does not mean what it says. This only refers to animals' bodies. Anyway, that may be right, as no doubt the majority of the "bodies" are Germans.⁵"

Similarly, *O seculo comico*, the weekly fun supplement of *O seculo*, one of the leading Portuguese newspapers, on May 28, 1917 cheek in tongue acknowledged that in German *Kadaver* means "the mortal remains of some animal and not only of man," adding, however, that "the confusion is justified: with regard to those friends, you never know whether the words refer to human beings or to beasts of prey."⁶

In an essay titled "L'Allocution" (The speech) and published on May 4, 1917 in the French daily *Le Journal*, Camille Mauclair⁷ developed the "The Germans are ghouls" motif into a grotesque anecdote. The Kaiser has decided that the corpses of dead German soldiers shall be processed to "useful machine oil and nutritious cookies for our piggies."⁸ For formal reasons, the city councils must give their consent. The mayor of a small Swabian town, therefore, summons the council to a sitting. All, from the local priest to the representatives of the families that lost a member on the battlefield, greet the suggestion with delight. The mayor's wife, who had secretly listened to the sitting in an adjacent room, however, bursts into tears - she is thinking of her nephew who recently was killed in action. No more, she tells her husband, will she eat anything made from pork.⁹

⁵ Untitled. *Flight*, London, UK, May 24, 1917, p. 509. Italics in the original.

⁶ *Revela-nos um jornal, mestre na lingua alemã, que o que deu causa á confusão foi a palavra Kadaver significar em alemão os restos mortaes de qualquer bicho e não só do homem. Ainda bem que estão rehabilitados os boches, mas hão-de concordar que a confusão é legitima: tratandose daqueles amigos sabe-se lá nunca se as palavras se referem a entes humanos ou a feras!* "Confusão kadaverica" [Kadaverish confusion], *O seculo comico*, Lisbon, Portugal, vol. XX, no. 1020, p. 3, May 28, 1917.

⁷ Nom de plume of Séverin Faust (1872-1945). His oeuvre, however, has sank into oblivion after the Second World War.

⁸ *Zu nützlichem Maschinenöl und nahrhaften Kuchen für unsere Ferkel.*

⁹ Summary and review (in German) under "Neues vom ritterlichen

Columnist “St. Vigeans” from *The Western Mail*, one of Australia’s big dailies, remembered from school a poem by the famous Scottish poet Robert Burns.¹⁰ It is about a deceased eccentric gentleman and ends with a warning to the youth of the neighborhood:

“Tread lightly o’er his grave,
Perhaps he was your father!”

The poem gave St. Vigeans the idea to take up the “The Germans are cannibals” motif in a satirical outpouring, published on May 11, 1917:

“Some German poet, inspired by memories of the great Hun corpse factory at St. Vithy [!], may, in post-war days, vary Robert Burns’s theme, and in rhythmic stanza caution the rising generation of Boches against undue familiarity with fatty substances.

It requires little imagination to picture the German housefrau chiding her careless child, “Now then, Gretchen, you young limmer, steady on that soap, perhaps it was your father!”

Or the frugal and sentimental father to his phlegmatic son, “What the dachshunds are you after with that axle-grease, Heinrich? Go gentle on it, it may be your uncle Fritz!”

Or, in a fashionable restaurant on the Unter den Linden, such an interlude as this may be frequent.

Haughty Officer: “Waiter! Butter!”

Waiter: “Yes, Excellency. What brand does it please your Excellency to be so condescending as to prefer? Prime Prussian Guard, best machine-gun section, or fresh Pomeranian private?”¹¹

Returning to the *Kadaver* topic, *Flight* took up the “Margarine from corpse fat” strand in its May 17, 1917 issue,

Frankreich” [News from chivalrous France] in *Kriegszeitung der 7. Armee*, Laon, France, June 3, 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰ Robert Burns (1759-1796), Scottish poet, pioneer of the Romantic movement, regarded in Scotland as the country’s greatest poet.

¹¹ “Dots and Dashes. By ‘St. Vigeans’,” *The Western Mail*, Perth, WA, Australia, May 11, 1917, p. 32.

commenting a report in the *Vossische Zeitung*, which said that new methods of winning oil and fat by recycling and from vegetable refuse, combined with sophisticated purification processes, had made it possible to increase the edible fat ration of the German population. *Flight's* "humorous" comment: "Ugh! but it makes one shudder with the odour of the 'Kadaver' factory revelations still in one's nostrils."

The illustrated weekly *The New Zealand Observer* from Auckland, in its satirical column on page seven "They Say," made fun of the Germans and their "Corpse factory," for example on May 19, 1917, alluding, most probably, to the high German death toll in the Battle of the Somme: "The Germans deny they have a corpse factory. Liars! It's on the Somme." On June 30, 1917, we find an indication of the factory's alleged output, soap: "For the German corpse factory the management wires them together in bundles of three. A gentle push into the vat of a disliked workman produces more soap for Gretchen's complexion."

America, of course, could not lag behind. In its October 25, 1917 issue, the light entertainment magazine *LIFE* lets the Chief of Staff of a German army corps refuse to order the bombing of Allied field hospitals with bubonic plague germs. For this "weakness," he is demoted: "Report to the Corpse Utilization Establishment for duty tomorrow!"¹²

Writers of poetry and fiction also took up the "Corpse factory" motif to bolster the morale on the British Home front. For example, one "Mr. Herbert Shaw, the novelist, now soldiering in Ireland," heard the most notorious criminals of history, from Nero to the Marquis de Sade, asking for leave from Hell, eager to join the Hun body-boilers: "They are all crazy with jealousy to think there were no such doings in their times."¹³

¹² "The Weakness of the Chief-of-Staff," *LIFE*, October 25, 1917, p. 689. Nothing new under the sun: in the Korean War (1950-1953), the U.S. were accused by Communist propaganda of spreading bubonic plague germs behind the enemies' lines.

¹³ "Corpse 'Kultur'," *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 2, letter to the

Dorothy “Lady” Stanley, a quite talented painter, tried her hand also at a spy novel. The book’s heroine, Miss Pim, sneaks behind the German lines. One evening, she is observing a group of German soldiers in a beer hall:

“[M]en with the characteristics of droves of cattle; men who could be trusted neither to think nor to ask questions; men who would fight, murder, sack, loot, or violate, as occasion arose, and, dead, would produce glycerine and engine grease in the Corpse Fat Factory.¹⁴”

Sir George Scott, better known as the author of books about Burma, sarcastically “almost pitied” the Germans:

“Poor, innocent Germany is being very sadly put upon by the world just now. The Boches cannot convert their cannon-fodder into glycerine and hogwash without being told that it is devil’s broth . . . Patient persistence for so many years deserved a better fate. One could almost pity them . . .¹⁵”

Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, was drafted for service, too. One of her British disciples wrote a poem about “The black Hun,” titled *Kadaververwertungs-Anstalt*:

Here glorious Kultur doth refine
Her warriors in strife laid low
To food from which the very swine
Might turn in loathing did they know.

The poet, however, did not turn away, but got to the bottom line:

“No single thing shall go to waste.”
There, in the motto of her trade,
Inhuman, hideously debased,
The soul of Hundom is displayed.¹⁶

editor signed “W. Blackwood.”

¹⁴ Stanley 1918:104-105.

¹⁵ Sir George Scott, K.C.I.E.: “Good, guileless Germany,” *Chambers Journal*, London, 7th series vol. 7, no. 358, October 6, 1917, p. 708. James George Scott (1851-1935) was a Scottish journalist and British colonial administrator of Burma (now: Myanmar).

¹⁶ “Kadaververwertungs-Anstalt,” signed “Touchstone”; *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 3.

Another amateur versifier from the British Isles struck the “Cannibal Hun” chord in the following “funny” quatrain, published in *The Daily Mail* under “Corpse Fat”:

Imperial Kaiser’s man, re-turned from clay,
 May stop a hole and hunger keep away.
 Come, children, gather round the festal meat,
 Hoch, hoch, der war - ‘tis grandpapa we eat!¹⁷

A Dutch amateur poet discussed the matter in a poem titled *Moderne industrie*.¹⁸ The Germans, he says, say that they are only using animal carcasses. But can one trust them? They are conducting the war with all means, would they really abstain from utilizing human corpses? He has his doubts and closes the poem with the quatrain:

*Laat dan van uw edele dooden
 Dit gelden te hunner eer:
 “Ze gaven voor’t land hun leven

 En daarna nog hun smeer.”*

So may it be said in the honor
 of y’r noble and gallant dead:
 “Their lives did they give for their
 country
 And after that also their fat.”

Canada made also her poetic contribution to the “Kadaver factory” with “Forty Years After,” a poem of nine six-verse stanzas.¹⁹ Forty years after the end of the war, Old Kaufmann is sitting in the sun before his cottage door when his grandchildren Gretchen Wilhelmine and her little brother Hindenburg approach him with an old bone the boy had found digging in the garden. Granddad tells the children that it is a

¹⁷ “Corpse Fat,” *The Daily Mail*, April 27, 1917, p. 4, letter to the editor signed “Reginald Bacchus.”

¹⁸ “Moderne industrie,” *Het Volk – Dagblad voor de Arbeiderspartei*, Amsterdam, Holland, April 27, 1917, p. 16.

¹⁹ “Forty Years After (And Still Long After Southey) From The Passing Show,” *The Brandon Daily Sun*, Brandon, MB, Canada, July 27, 1917, p. 5. The text is introduced by an editor’s remark: “From an army order found on a German officer it is now established that the story of the German Corpse Utilization Factory is an undoubted fact.”

leftover from the big corpse factory that once was operating here.

“It was the English,” Kaufmann cried,

“who spread the tale about.

At first, of course, it was denied.

but soon the truth leaked out.”

He further tells the kids about the “special trains” with the corpses of “the slain,” and that the “Kadaver factory” was Kaiser Wilhelm’s idea:

“And everybody praised the Prince

Who kept it well supplied.”

“Was it for that,” said Wilhelmine,

“So many Germans died?”

“Why, that, I cannot say,” said he,

“But ‘twas a splendid factory!”

Not only scribblers used the “Corpse factory” as an opportunity to express loathing at the Germans. Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling,²⁰ one of the most popular English poets and writers of the time, since the beginning of the war had been collaborating with his colleague Charles Masterman at Wellington House. He did his bit for the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign by using the “Germans are cannibals” motif in poetry. He “gleefully wrote his supreme denunciation of Hunnery”²¹ down in a quatrain of trochaic pentameters, alluding to the “Margarine from *Leichenfett*” yarn:

Charlotte, when she saw what Herman

Yielded after he was dead,

Like a well-conducted German,

Spread him lightly on her bread.²²

The little poem, a parody of William Makepeace Thackeray’s (1811-1863) “Sorrows of Werther,”²³ itself a

²⁰ Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), English poet and writer, famous for his celebration of British imperialism (“The White Man’s Burden”) and his tales for children (“The Jungle Book”), Nobel laureate 1907.

²¹ Eby 1988:175, with a good pinch of sarcasm.

²² Quoted in Eby 1988:175.

²³ The respective quatrain, the last stanza of “Sorrows of Werther,” reads:

parody of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Leiden des jungen Werthers*, an early nineteenth century cult novel, does not appear in scholarly editions of Kipling's poetry. The author mentioned it first in a letter to the historian C. R. L. Fletcher, dated April 29, 1917, with the remark that he wrote it after he had read the news about the German "Corpse factory" - news he found "very interesting and wholly logical."²⁴ Kipling used to recite the poem among friends who spread it further.²⁵ It made its way around the globe until New Zealand, where it appeared in the August 14, 1917 issue of *The Poverty Bay Herald* from Gisborne. The newspaper's editor, obviously ignorant of Thackeray's poem, introduced it with an own interpretation: "Charlotte was a German girl and Herman her soldier lover, who died, and, according to a wandering poet on the western front, was turned into 'kadaver'."²⁶

Harold Owen, a distinguished journalist, did not consider himself too good for delivering a broadside at the Hun body-boilers in the *Evening News* of April 25, 1917:

"Do I hate the Germans? I hope so, for my soul's sake, I hope so, if it is my only title to Heaven. Unless the cannibalistic Hun is defeated to the physical level of his own moral degradation, unless he is vanquished beyond any hope of recovery as a

"Charlotte, when she saw his body / Borne before her on a shutter / Like a well-conducted person / Went on cutting bread and butter." Taken from <http://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/html/1807/4350/poem2194.html>. Last accessed May 8, 2012.

²⁴ Pinney 1999:444.

²⁵ According to *Kipling Journal* no. 062 of July 1942. On the Web: <http://www.johnradcliffe.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/textfiles/KJ062.txt>. Last accessed June 10, 2012.

²⁶ "Fatalistic," *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, August 14, 1917, p. 7. Some lines above, on the same page, there is a report about a recital of Kipling's poems in the course of a commemorative ceremony in honor of the fallen Brothers of the Oddfellows Lodge. It is, therefore, quite possible that "Charlotte and Herman" was recited by a participant, of course outside the official ceremony, and so wandered into the newspaper's pages. The last line in the New Zealand edition has "thickly" instead of "lightly."

menace, unless he is left to find his own redemption through suffering and impotence, there is no hope for mankind on earth . . . [T]he only corpses now plentiful enough . . . to feed a factory are the corpses of friend and foe gathered on the field of battle by the bestial Hun, and roped like foul merchandise . . . The Teuton race is verily the offal of mankind.²⁷

Such and similar tirades of hatred were not disapproved of as “hate speech” - as it would be the case today - but heartily welcomed by society. Only a tiny minority realized that sowing the seeds of hate poisons the sower, too.

The “Corpse Factory” - A Favorite Cartoon Motif

The Knights of the Drawing-Pen also took up position on the Home front. The motif connecting “the Kaiser” with “pigs’ food ” from soldiers’ corpses, for example, appeared on April 25, 1917, in *Punch, or The London Charivari*. A cartoon that went around the world shows the Kaiser standing at a window of his palace, near him a young recruit. Through the window we see a huge *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* factory with chimneys belching smoke. The caption reads: “Cannon-fodder - and after. Kaiser (to 1917 recruit): ‘And don’t forget that your Kaiser will find a use for you - alive or dead.’”²⁸ Another “Corpse factory” cartoon appeared in these days in the satirical magazine *John Bull*. It showed the Kaiser holding a newspaper with the headline “Thousands of Germans Dead,” exclaiming: “Never mind, they will make good pig food.”²⁹

Cartoonist B. Hall, in the Sunday supplement of *Le Petit Journal* from May 20, 1917, presented a comic strip under

²⁷ Quoted from Mügge 1920:106.

²⁸ The caricature is in the public domain on the Web: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15064/15064-h/15064-h.htm>. Last accessed April 20, 2009. In brackets, the caption has an addendum: “At the enemy’s ‘Establishment for the Utilization of Corpses’ the dead bodies of German soldiers are treated chemically, the chief commercial products being lubricant oils and pigs’ food.”

²⁹ Turner 1980:186.

the headline “Le matériel humain” (The human material). The Kaiser is asking Hindenburg, why the Allies are capturing so many German guns. Hindenburg answers that they cannot move for lack of grease for smearing their axles. Thereupon the Kaiser orders that two divisions shall assault the enemy lines. After a while Hindenburg reports that all German soldiers have been killed, mowed down by enemy artillery. “Good,” the Kaiser replies, “have them sent to the refinery, they will yield the grease for the axles of your guns. And when some of them are left over, feel free to have soap made out of them.”³⁰

Soap and the Kaiser were also the motif of the cartoon “The death industry” brought by the Brazilian daily *A Epoca* on April 21, 1917 on its front page. A servant with the proverbial Prussian spiked helmet on his head and clothed in rags offers a wash-bowl to the Kaiser, unkempt and equally clothed in rags. The caption reads: “The Hun – Judging by the lather ... the Kaiser is washing His hands with the leg of the ‘49’ of the 2nd ... The ‘49’ of the 2nd had a light complexion.” In the upper right corner of the picture the reader is informed that “Germany utilizes the corpses for the manufacture of stearin and soap.”³¹

The already mentioned famous Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers dealt with the subject several times. *The New York Times* reported about an exhibition of his cartoons at the Ehrich Print Gallery, New York, NY, in July 1917:

³⁰ *Envoie tes deux divisions à la fonderie, elles te donneront le kambouis [sic] nécessaire pour graisser les essieux de tes kanons [sic]. Et si l'en reste un peu tu pourras tout à ton aise en faire fabriquer du savon. “Le matériel humain,” Le Petit Journal – Supplément du Dimanche, Paris, France, May 20, 1917, p. 155.*

³¹ *A Alemanha aproveita-se dos cadaveres para fabricar stearina e sabão. O Boche – Pela espuma ... o Kaiser está lavando as mãos com a perna do “49” da 2ª ... O ‘49’ da 2ª era muito claro. “A industria da morte,” A Epoca, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, April 21, 1917, p. 1. The three dots are in the original.*

“One [of the cartoons] flashes out a message of scorn and loathing that burns itself permanently into the memory. Such is the ghastly design in which a German professor (the characterization here is excellent) stands near a door over which is the sign, “Kadaver Verwertung Anstalt,” (“Corps Conversion Institute.”). Corpses are being carried in, and the professor explains to the Kaiser with a smirk of satisfaction: “Each soldier that has fallen for the Fatherland is here returned into glycerin, &c.”³²”

The cartoon was already published on April 19, 1917 by *The Daily Mail* and reprinted on June 20, 1917 in *Puck*, a fortnightly satirical magazine from the Northcliffe Group.³³ Raemaekers’ original caption also addresses the profit motive and reads exactly: “Each soldier fallen for the Fatherland is turned here into glycerine, pig-fodder and menure [*sic*], giving us large dividends as the raw-material costs us nothing.”³⁴

On April 30, 1917, *The Daily Mail* published “Neglected Opportunities,” another Raemaekers cartoon referring to the “German corpse factory.” In the background, a barren, undulating landscape with an enormous burial ground is stretching to the horizon. In the foreground, two senior German officers (Hindenburg and Ludendorff?) are talking to

³² “New Cartoons by Raemaekers,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1917, p. 56.

³³ *Puck*, vol. 81, no. 2101, June 20, 1917, p. 5, with the caption “German chemist of the corpse conversion factory: All Highest, every German who is killed means a bigger dividend. The raw material costs us nothing.” On page 4 a comment is given under the headline “Human Pig Fodder,” assuring the reader that “the terrible indictment in the Raemaekers cartoon . . . is based on fact.” The cartoon is also mentioned in “De Oorlog” [The war], *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, April 26, 1917, p. 5. There the date “April 19” is given for its publication in *The Daily Mail*. Referred to also in *Gazette des Ardennes* from May 20, 1917. The sign over the door reads exactly “KADAVER-VERWERTUNG ANSTALT” [!].

³⁴ Original color drawing reproduced at *Online databank von de Atlas Van Stolk Collection*, http://cardweb.hmr.rotterdam.nl/collectie/vrij_index_nl.html, search for “Raemaekers” & “Kadaver.”

one another: “A field of honour? I call it a field of stupidly wasted corpse-fat.”³⁵

A famous early Raemaekers cartoon shows a closed railway goods truck. Through gaps of its walls, blood is trickling down onto the running board. The caption reads: “From Liège to Aix-la-Chapelle.”³⁶ In the section “Arts chronicle” of the April 1917 issue of the prestigious Italian arts journal *Emporium*, the cartoon is interpreted and commented by art critic “A. L.” as follows:

“In these wagons, German corpses were collected for transport to Aix-la-Chapelle, where they were meant for ... rendering for the extraction of Vaseline! The epitome of the utilization of their remains. What can we expect from a people that arrived at such a profanation of its own dead?³⁷”

The French pacifist arts weekly *Les Hommes du Jour* picked up the story from its Italian counterpart, quoting from it and commenting with a pinch of sarcasm:

“We can, dear chronicler, indeed expect everything from the outstanding genius of a people that succeeded in extracting, from human corpses, Vaseline, a mineral grease, until now made from petroleum!³⁸”

³⁵ “Neglected Opportunities,” *The Daily Mail*, April 30, 1917 (page number illegible).

³⁶ Stopford 1916:15; Raemaekers 1916 a:17. Reprint in Hayward 2010, plate 19.

³⁷ *In quei vagoni venivano raccolti i cadaveri tedeschi per trasportarli ad Aix-la-Chapelle, dove si provvedeva a ... bollirli per estrarne la vasellina! Da un popolo che giunge a profanare in simile maniera i proprii morti, che cosa possiamo sperare?* “Cronachetta artistica. Le impressioni di guerra di un artista olandese (Louis Raemaekers)” [Arts chronicle. War impressions of a Dutch artist (Louis Raemaekers)], *Emporium – Rivista mensile illustrata d'arte, lettere, scienza e varietà*, Bergamo, Italy (Istituto Italiano di Arte Grafiche), vol. XLV, no. 268, pp. 303-310, here: p. 310.

³⁸ *Mais non, éminent chroniqueur! Il y a tout à espérer du génie prodigieux d'un peuple qui parvient d'extraire du corps humain de la vaseline, graisse minérale que l'on tirait jusqu'ici du pétrole!* Quoted under “Toujours l'utilisation des cadavres” [Always the corps exploitation] in *Gazette des Ardennes*, Charleville, France, June 19, 1917, p. 3.

Science and Humanity Scholars Join the Ranks

Scientists obviously looked at the “corpse factories” in a more detached way than artists and the writers of satire did. Not all of them followed the Royal Chemical Society that, though reluctant and only with a small majority vote, “removed their ‘honorary’ Hun chemists . . . that poisonous horde of super-body-snatchers” from their list of Fellows,³⁹ or who reprinted in their professional journal the article from *L’Indépendance Belge* in slightly abridged form and with the preceding remark that Rosner’s account allows both interpretations: *Kadaver* as animal carcass or human corpse.⁴⁰

The *Buffalo Medical Journal* of July 1917 also took up the “Corpse factory” issue. It referred to “certain utterances of German officials, as that accredited to Admiral von Hintze,” further to “circumstantial evidence” about corpses, bundled together and sent “from the war fronts to rendering works,” and finally to voices giving, with regard to the meaning of *Kadaver*, the Germans “the benefit of the doubt,” but avoided to make a clear-cut statement on the matter.⁴¹

The already mentioned Harvard hygienist, Thorndike Saville, referring to the rumors about the German *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* to which “the horrified American press has devoted considerable space,” remarked:

“In any event such a method of disposal would seem as satisfactory as burial of the dead in a common grave where the bodies may not only decompose and render foul the ground and water supply, but also interfere with subsequent military operations.⁴²”

³⁹ “Corpse Fat. Huns and Scientific Societies. To the Editor of the Daily Mail,” *The Daily Mail*, April 24, 1917, p. 4.

⁴⁰ “L’utilisation industrielle des cadavres par les Allemands” [The industrial exploitation of corpses by the Germans], *Recueil de médecine vétérinaire*, Paris, vol. XCII, no. 10, May-June 1917, p. 255.

⁴¹ “Kultur,” *Buffalo Medical Journal*, vol. 72, no. 12, Buffalo, NY, July 1917, pp. 549-550; here: p. 550.

⁴² Saville 1917:529-530.

According to *The Times* of May 4, 1917, a “German Army doctor” taken prisoner by the British

“discussed the subject reasonably, saying that it was an entirely natural thing to do to convert human bodies, but of course not horses, as these were too valuable for food purposes . . . He was of opinion that probably the censors did not permit the German people to know too much about it. The doctor was quite serious, and took a more scientific and utilitarian view of it.”⁴³

British scientists, however, deserve the laurels of having been the first to take “a more scientific and utilitarian view” of the “Corpse factory.” On April 21, 1917 *The Lancet*, one of the world’s leading medical journals with a wide international range of contributors and readers, brought a short notice under the heading “The Chemicalising of Corpses,” which is quoted here in full:

“There appear to be good reasons for believing that the Germans are utilizing the bodies of their dead by committing them to a chemical treatment which, for one thing, yields fat, and, for another, a nitrogenous powder which serves, so it is stated, to enrich pig-feed, and, yet for another, the mineral phosphate of the bones to be used as a fertilizer in the field.

The recovery of fat by what may appear to be a gruesome policy means, of course, a source of material for the making of glycerin and its nitro-derivative. The total amount of fat in the human body varies immensely, but it may be said from 2.5 to 5 per cent of the body weight.

It is easy to see that in a period of heavy casualties this method for the disposal of the dead will yield a very material amount of glycerin. Thus, a thousand bodies at an average weight of 10 stone (140 lb.) would yield on an average of a 3 per cent basis of fat per body weight about 2 tons of fat capable of being turned into a tenth of its weight of glycerin - i.e., 4 cwt. [about 200 kg or 450 lbs.] As the published number of killed far exceeds this, the output of glycerin may

⁴³ “German Doctor on ‘Corpse Conversion’,” *The Times*, May 4, 1917, p. 6.

have been increased proportionately, not to mention the soap incidentally produced. The dividends of the enterprising company known as the *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* (Corpse Utilization Establishment) may, according to this calculation, be quite satisfactory to the directors and shareholders, enabling them to face criticism with complacency.⁴⁴

The author of the article remains anonymous. His emphasis on the production of glycerin as the main objective of “the enterprising company” points to his connection with the creators of the “Glycerin” story. He must have written the article not later than on April 19, 1917, because both *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* brought preprints on April 20, 1917.⁴⁵

The publication in *The Lancet* opened the door for the spreading of the “Corpse factory” story within the scientific community. As an example may serve the June 23, 1917 issue of the *South African Medical Record*, a professional journal for physicians, edited fortnightly at Cape Town. At first, we read, the paper’s editorial staff was “inclined to take *cum grano salis*” the relevant reports in “the lay papers.” Things, however, have changed: “We now find that the *Lancet* confirms this, so, repulsive as is this grossly material treatment of the bodies of men who have died for their country, we have no option but to believe it.”⁴⁶

Amateur and professional social anthropologists also did their bit for the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign. Their favorite theme was the German “national character.” *The Daily Mail*’s Frederic W. Wile was reflecting upon the German mindset in *The War Illustrated* of May 19, 1917. Referring to

⁴⁴ *The Lancet*, vol. 189, no. 4886, April 21, 1917, p. 635. Italics in the original. See also *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, May 8, 1917, p. 9.

⁴⁵ “The Germans and the Dead. A Prisoner’s Story,” *The Times*, April 20, p. 5; “The Hun Corpse Factory. World-Wide Horror. German Prisoner’s Account,” *The Daily Mail*, April 20, 1917, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Untitled item among miscellaneous news, *South African Medical Record*, Cape Town, South Africa, vol. XV, no. 12, June 23, 1917, p. 192. Italics in the original.

his year-long experience as a resident of Germany, he made a devastating appraisal of his former host people:

“Not all Germans are thugs and murderers. *But the national point of view towards the work of thugs and murderers is such as to make body-boiling and corpse factories not only possible but almost inevitable.*”⁴⁷

In an editorial, *The Straits Times* of July 3, 1917 is supporting this view. The author sees boasting of one’s own criminal deeds - lies, intrigues, and murder - as typical of the German national character. Exemplary, in his eyes, are “those obscene factories hidden in thick woods,” where the Huns are exploiting “corpses from the battlefield - and perhaps from elsewhere - for the purpose of munition material, foodstuffs and so on.” They might have been kept a secret, but

“then in the calmest, most matter-of-fact way, they are confirmed and supplemented by a responsible newspaper correspondent of a well-known German paper, having passed the official censorship without modification, and the world now knows and believes. It is inconceivable that the story was allowed to get out by a mere mistake.”

Germany had “made a law to herself,” alienated herself from the civilized world. “From such conditions only could this treatment of her dead and her bland confession of it have arisen.” Her mental state is “not far removed from madness,” the author concludes.⁴⁸

Another “physiological and psychological” study about the German national character, titled “The German Beast,” was published in Australian newspapers in the beginning of

⁴⁷ “Why I Believe the Germans Are Ghouls,” *The War Illustrated*, May 19, 1917, p. 308. Italics in the original. Referring to an article in *The Daily Mail*, *The Poverty Bay Herald*, Gisborne, New Zealand, mused on May 8, 1917, p. 9, that “the use of soldiers’ corpses revolt, but does not surprise those who have lived in Germany, where the whole atmosphere is one of repressive, merciless force.”

⁴⁸ All quotations in this paragraph from “The Car of Death. German Revelations and the German Mind. Hun Treatment of the Dead,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, July 3, 1917, p. 3.

May 1917. The (anonymous) author emphasized atrocities against the Catholic Church in Belgium and made frequent allusions to sexually deviant behavior of Germans, allegedly from time immemorial condoned or even encouraged by their (Protestant) clerics.⁴⁹ The article culminates in denouncing “The German” as an “entirely dehumanised” cannibal, exemplified by his corpse factories: “The German Beast feeds his pigs” with their products, “and afterwards he eats the pigs! . . . No one in Germany shudders at the thought of what their sausages are made of.” The article ends with an appeal to enlist and join the “fellow countrymen [who] are fighting with might and main, each one of them a Saint George, to slay this object of universal horror,” the “German Beast.”⁵⁰

In *The Daily Mail* of April 21, 1917, an anonymous “Englishman” was trying to show that cannibalism is an inherent trait of the German national character and stands behind the establishment of “Corpse factories.”⁵¹ A more scholarly air assumed one “Lieutenant-Colonel L. A. Waddell, C.B., traveler, explorer, archaeologist, ethnologist, philologist, and author of many learned books,” so presented by *The Daily Mail* in its April 26, 1917 issue.⁵² He claimed to have shown in his latest (yet unpublished) work that the Germans are nothing but “squatters” among the civilized nations of Europe, that they are neither European, nor Aryan, but a different race, the “Wolf Tribe,” of the same Inner Asian descent as the Huns and the Turks, Germany’s allies in the ongoing war. Referring

⁴⁹ These features, and the invocation of St. George, the dragon-killer and a saint of the Catholic Church, point to a Belgian source.

⁵⁰ “The German Beast,” *The Euroa Advertiser*, Euroa, VIC, p. 5, and *The Horsham Times*, Horsham, VIC, p. 1, both from May 4, 1917.

⁵¹ “The Letters of an Englishman. The Cannibals,” *The Daily Mail*, April 21, 1917, p. 2.

⁵² “Corpse Factories Explained. The German Worship of the Wolf,” *The Daily Mail*, April 26, 1917, p. 4. With insignificant alterations reprinted as “The German Worship of the Wolf” in *The Wanganui Chronicle*, Manawatu-Manganui, New Zealand, July 10, 1917, p. 6, and in “The German Race. The Worship of the Wolf” in *Mercury*, Hobart, TAS, July 30, 1917, p. 3.

to “the terrible ‘corpse factories’,” he said, among other nonsense, that the Germans’ forefathers “disposed of their dead by throwing the corpses to dogs,” and that at “the famous banquet of German heroes in Valhalla . . . evidently human corpses” were eaten, “pointing to cannibalism of the heroes while on earth.”⁵³

History was called into play to prove a tradition of body-boiling and cannibalism in Germany. In a journal published in New York in 1880, the following short news had appeared: “A Prussian gravedigger has been arrested for roasting bodies and selling their fat.” It was reprinted and presented as a clear proof of a German tradition of body-boiling: “This indicates that the idea of the Germans’ present-day horrible commercial utilisation of dead bodies for the extraction of fat is not new.”⁵⁴

Everywhere in Great Britain amateur historians were poring over history books, bringing up reports on cases of cannibalism in Germany during the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648) to “demonstrate” that man-eating had a long tradition in Germany. The Thirty-Years War had cost the lives of one third of Central Europe’s population. Large regions were totally devastated, particularly those in the Southwest, where French, and in the North (Prussia), where Swedish soldier gangs had ravaged. Exactly from these regions the quoted cases of cannibalism were reported. This is not surprising. Cannibalism in situations of deprivation and extreme hunger is a phenomenon well known to historians and has occurred everywhere and every time.

Had all those pundits, for example, looked into their own people’s history, they would have found many more - and well-documented - examples of cannibalism: the “Attacotti” (Scotsmen) of the fourth century, King Æthelfrith of Northumbria and his court (seventh century), the Scottish

⁵³ Ibid. See also “The Cult of the Wolf,” *The Daily Mail*, April 28, 1917, p. 2, letter to the editor, signed “G. H. Paelian.”

⁵⁴ Under miscellaneous news: “Local and General,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, June 4, 1917, p. 6, and “A Marching Record,” *The Ashburton Guardian*, Canterbury, New Zealand, June 9, 1917, p. 2.

cannibal gangs of the fifteenth century, the British colonists of Jamestown, VA (1609-1610), starving peasants during the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852), and last but not least the widely publicized cases of cannibalism among shipwrecked British seamen in the nineteenth century. Only spiteful propaganda, however, would have concluded from these cases that cannibalism was a British national trait.

The “cannibalism” accusation was also taken up by the highly respected *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*. Under the headline “Hun Brutality” it reprinted in its September-October 1917 issue an article from the British semi-official *United Service Gazette*, presenting the “Corpse factory” as the epitome of German war atrocities.⁵⁵ Reference to cannibalism in Germany “in the later stages of the Thirty Years’ War” let the anonymous author deduce that “it would be no new thing if he [the German, J.N.] indulged in an orgy of cannibalism,” because “the fork of external culture and scientific attainment has not succeeded in expelling from the German instinct its more revolting bestial attributes.”⁵⁶ Striking the religious chord, the author saw collective guilt on the Germans’ side and demanded collective punishment: “Meanwhile it is eminently desirable that responsibility for

⁵⁵ “Hun Brutality,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* vol. 61, no. 209, September-October 1917, pp. 224-225, without giving the date of the British original’s publication. The Military Service Institution of the United States was a “think tank” under the auspices of the War Ministry and had its headquarters at Governor’s Island, NY. In its *Journal*, a bi-monthly publication and regarded as the semi-official voice of the U.S. military, high-ranking military leaders discussed basic problems of war and warfare. The *United Services Gazette*, subtitle *The Journal of His Majesty’s Forces*, was a weekly published in London under the auspices of the War Office.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224. The author shows his classical education by alluding to Horace: *Naturam expellas furca tamen usque recurret* - You may drive nature out with a pitchfork, but she will keep coming back (Epistles, book I, epistle ii, line 56).

offenses against the laws of God and man should be brought home to the whole German people.”⁵⁷

Of course deeper theological reflections on collective guilt and the “Corpse factory” were also not missing. Correspondents to *The North-China Herald* and *The Daily Mail*, quoting the biblical Prophet Amos, reminded the readers of the fate that awaits those who profane the dead.⁵⁸ The Moabites had burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime,⁵⁹ such as the Germans allegedly did with human bones in their “Corpse factories.”⁶⁰ The Moabites, for this sin, were punished collectively by God with total extinction:

“I will send a fire upon Moab and it shall devour the palaces of Kir’i-oth, and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet . . . saith the LORD.”

The king of Moab and “all the princes” were not to be spared.⁶¹ Who this time would await the fate of the Moabites and their ruler did not need explanation.

In *The Sabbath Recorder – A Seventh Day Baptist Weekly* of July 2, 1917, a paper full of patriotic calls for supporting America’s war efforts, the Reverend W.C. Daland shed crocodile tears about the poor bodies of those fallen on the battlefields and “tied in bundles to be made into glycerine for explosives, grease for the axles of cannons, or food for hogs.”⁶²

Religiously motivated anti-Cremationists used the “Corpse factory” as a means to influence public opinion in their

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

⁵⁸ “The St. Vith factory,” *The North China Herald*, April 28, 1917, p. 188, letter to the editor signed “Y.Z.” “Corpse Fat,” *The Daily Mail*, May 2, 1917, p. 6, letter to the editor signed “A. Humphrey Davy, M.D.”

⁵⁹ Amos 2,1.

⁶⁰ Remember the mistranslation of the Rosner account in the Northcliffe press and spread by Reuters: “There is a dull smell in the air, as if lime were being burnt.”

⁶¹ Amos 2,2-3. English translation taken from the American Bible Society’s King James Version.

⁶² From a sermon held by Rev. W. C. Daland, President of Milton College, Milton, WI, no date and no headline given. *The Sabbath Recorder*, A

favor. In *The Month*, a monthly journal edited by British Jesuits, the author "H. T." saw the steadfast opposition of the Catholic Church to cremation once more justified "by the uncomfortable paragraphs with which the papers have lately been filled regarding the measures taken by the German Government for disposing of the bodies of the undistinguished rank and file slain in battle." The author has not yet decided if he will believe the story or not. At any rate, he concludes, "if the rumors were true, it is quite certain that the hideous reality would be cloaked by some pretence of a crematorium for destroying animal remains."⁶³

With Bible and Tradition, the (Anglican) Reverend Canon Murphy from Adelaide campaigned against a Cremation Bill that was being discussed in the Australian parliament in September 1918. Rejecting cremation as unchristian, as "pagan," he saw behind the bill the greed of cemetery administrators who "wish to turn the bodies of our sons and daughters, our relatives and friends, into a source of profit . . . after the style of the German corpse factories."⁶⁴ That Mr. Murphy, in his campaign, could use the "German corpse factories" (in the plural form) as a classic example of wantonness, shows that they were well known in his home country, that they already had become "common knowledge."

Seventh Day Baptist Weekly, Published by The American Sabbath Tract Society, Plainfield, NJ, vol. 83 no. 1, July 2, 1917, p. 6.

⁶³ "Miscellanea. I. Critical and Historical Notes. 'Detestable Savagery,'" *The Month*, London, vol. CXXIX (January-June 1917), pp. 446-450, here: p. 446.

⁶⁴ "Notes and Queries. Cremation," *The Register*, Adelaide, SA, Australia, September 20, 1918, p. 3.

VII.

THE “CORPSE FACTORY” BETWEEN THE WARS

After the Armistice

When peace negotiations began in Paris at the end of 1918, “anti-German atrocity propaganda reached a new peak - the world public was again inundated with horror stories about disgraceful German deeds.”¹ “Corpse factory” stories came into vogue again. The French, for example, officially demanded the extradition of the former commandant of a forced labor camp for French prisoners of war at Sedan, accused of having delivered dead prisoners’ corpses “to a so-called *Kadaververwertungsanstalt*,” as a war criminal.² *Under Four Flags for France*, an American soldier’s memoirs, told in much detail about German “foul materialism which used its science to extract by-products from the bodies of its heroes.”³ Advocates of a harsh peace for Germany reminded the public of the mindset of “The German,” who allegedly was “not at all shocked at the monstrously barbarous practice which consigns his body slain on the battlefield to some ‘corpse factory’.”⁴

¹ Hiery 2000.

² *On sait que le commandant du “camp de concentration d’Empire des prisonniers punis de travaux forcés,” sis à Sedan, figurait sur cette liste pour avoir fait subir une captivité atroce à ses détenus. Il était soupçonné d’avoir livré des cadavres humains à un établissement dit Kadaververweungsanstalt [sic];* Becker 1998:372. See also Hervet 1987:109. Articles 228-230 of the Versailles Treaty demanded that Germany should hand over individuals accused of war crimes to the Allies for trial before a military court. Lists of suspects had been prepared already in wartime. Successful German delaying tactics, however, made that the lists were more and more reduced and that the matter eventually was dropped. See, e.g., Matthäus 2008.

³ Musgrave 1918:246.

⁴ “Notes and Comments,” *The Fitzroy Press*, Fitzroy, VIC, Australia, January 25, 1919, p. 2.

“Eyewitnesses” received wide attention, for instance one Sergeant Robert Gamble, an Australian, who allegedly had visited a German underground corpse factory with corpses scattered around in various stages of dissection and treatment. Luckily, “the work of rendering the remains [was] stopped by the Allied advance,” he assured the reader.⁵ Newspapers around the globe quickly followed with “Corpse factory” stories and more eyewitness accounts. So, for example, in Australia the *Morning Bulletin* from Rockhampton, QLD and the *Brisbane Courier*, in the U.S. *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The Providence News* from Providence, RI, and *The Reading Eagle* from Reading, PA, and in Malaya *The Straits Times* from Singapore. All of them retold with various degrees of embellishment the well-known story of the “discovery” of a German “corpse factory” in the St. Quentin Canal tunnel at the end of September 1918.⁶ Convinced of its veracity was also *The Maoriland Worker* from Wellington, New Zealand. With a side-swipe at Phlipp Gibbs’ debunking of the story, the paper cryptically remarked that “unfortunately there are large numbers of people who know more about it than he does.”⁷

Widely disseminated in the U.S. within the first months of 1919 was the story of former British prisoner of war

⁵ “A Corpse factory. Gruesome Details,” *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, Australia, December 30, 1918, p. 7.

⁶ “Hun’s Corpse Factory. Seen by a Queenslander. A Gruesome Sight,” *Brisbane Courier*, Brisbane, Australia, January 3, 1919, p. 7; “Chaplain Tells How Hindenburg Line Was Broken,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Atlanta, GA, January 5, 1919, p. A12; “Hun Corpse Factory. A Visit Described,” *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, QLD, Australia, January 17, 1919, p. 6; “German Dead Used in Making Fats and Ammunition,” *The Providence News*, Providence, RI, January 20, 1919, p. 1; “Saw how Germans Boiled Their Dead,” *The Reading Eagle*, Reading, PA, January 21, 1919, p. 3; “Hun Corpse factory. Sergeant Verifies the Ghastly Allegations,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, February 17, 1919, p. 11.

⁷ “Railwaymen’s Troubles,” *The Maoriland Worker*, Wellington, New Zealand, January 15, 1919, p. 3.

Fred Rugg.⁸ He had been employed in a factory at Bitterfeld south of Berlin, where bones were processed to fertilizer: "I didn't need a surgeon's eye to tell that they were human bones . . . Larger consignments always arrived shortly after heavy fighting at the front."⁹ All horror stories, however, were surpassed by the *Los Angeles Times*, presenting - somewhat belatedly - in the spring of 1921 the ultimate "eyewitness" to the German "Corpse factories." On March 21, 1921 the newspaper shocked the readers of its Sunday morning issue with the following headline on its front page:

"Truth About Hun "Human Soap." Famous War Mystery is Authoritatively Cleared up Here by Prisoner Who Served for Years as "Butcher" in German factory Fed by Corpses of Men."

The article continued on page eight with a new headline:

"Bodies of Dead Babies Made Into Cooking Fat. Horrible Experiences of "Butcher" in German Human-Soap factory are Described by Him."

The sensational story was based on the testimony of one Arthur Vanderbilt Post, a Canadian citizen and alleged survivor of several German internment and forced labor camps. The whole story told by Mr. Post is so far-fetched that it is not worth the trouble of reproducing and discussing it in detail. From the newspaper article we learn, however, that Mr. Post was the bearer of the Victoria Cross, a high British decoration, a "one-time Victory Loan lecturer" and a "witness

⁸ For example, on February 5, 1919 in the *Washington Times*, the *New Castle News*, New Castle, PA, *The Syracuse Herald*, Syracuse, NY, *The Janesville Daily Gazette*, Janesville, MI, the *Geneva Daily Times*, Geneva, NY; and the *Logansport Pharos-Reporter*, Logansport, IN, always on pages one or two. On April 7, 1919 *The Tyrone Daily Herald*, Tyrone, PA, and the *Commercial Advertiser*, Canton, NY, followed, on April 9, 1919, the *Oswego Daily Times*, Oswego, NY, on April 16, 1919 *The Marshfield Times*, Marshfield, WI, on April 23, 1919, the *Middletown News-Signal*, Middletown, PA, and finally on May 3, 1919 *The Kingston Daily Freeman*, Kingston, NY.

⁹ "Human Bones Used by Germans in Fertilizer Factory," *The Syracuse Herald*, Syracuse, NY, February 5, 1919, p. 1.

in the Allies' case against the Hun leaders," that he had been traveling across the world telling his story, and that he was about to start, "under the auspices of the American Legion, a lecture tour in Mexico and South America to combat German propaganda."

Naturally Hollywood did not miss its shot. Filmmaker Bud Fisher, for example, alluded to the "Corpse factory" atrocity in an advertisement for his "Mutt and Jeff Animated Cartoons" series. The ad was placed by the Fox Film Corporation in the March 29, 1919 issue of *Moving Picture World* and shows the Kaiser cranking sausages out of a huge meat grinder into a container marked "Bill Hohenzollern and Son – Sausage Makers." The Kaiser's son is holding Mutt's friend Jeff, a nice little pig, head down on its hind feet, offering it up to his father. Pointing from above with his revolver at the Kaiser, Mutt, however, is about to rescue his friend.¹⁰

In France, of course, *l'usine aux cadavres* was also not forgotten. In a book published in 1920, Louis Marchand, a wartime employee of the *Deuxième Bureau*, the French military Intelligence agency, imputes to the Germans that they "did not clarify the matter at all."¹¹ Repeating the linguistic nitpicking of the Northcliffe papers and adding a quote from a medieval German source as final "proof" that, in German, "Kadaver" mainly means a dead human body, he rejects the German denials and calls them lies. For him, a member of the ultra-nationalist *Action Française*, the critical position toward the "Corpse factory" story taken by some French papers in wartime was not only "defeatist," "Hun-toadying" (*bochisant*), but much worse: part of an attempt to "brainwash" the souls of the French people in favor of the enemy, plain "moral treason."¹²

Anti-German atrocity propaganda found its way also into the newly constituted states in East Central Europe that were

¹⁰ Latham 2008:163-164.

¹¹ *Les Allemands eux-mêmes n'ont apporté aucune précision.*

¹² Marchand 1920:113-116.

established on the ruins of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires.¹³ They fell on fertile ground especially in Poland, where best-selling novels, such as Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* (The Knights of the Teutonic Order), long since had created an image of "The German" as the eternal brutal aggressor,¹⁴ and where - as already mentioned - rumors about the German "Corpse factories" had reached the country through formal and informal channels already in wartime.

Some people in Poland, however, expressed doubts whether German "Corpse factories" - because of their alleged main output known as "Soap factories" - really had existed, but others reminded them that "there is no smoke without a fire."¹⁵ The fact that never "anybody was able to give even the slightest proof"¹⁶ could, however, easily be explained:

"At the end of the war, neither Germany proper nor the territories that she had occupied were suddenly taken by the Allies. The German pseudo-Socialist revolution went off gently. For example, in 1918 the German gendarmerie defended itself in the town-hall of Warsaw for a couple of days and destroyed all compromising documents. It is therefore possible that a soap factory that had existed somewhere was so silently liquidated that nobody learned anything about it, neither at that time, nor later.¹⁷"

¹³ Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Together with Romania, they constituted the *cordon sanitaire* against the Soviet Union, "a chain of nations designed as a protection or buffer against a nation considered potentially aggressive or ideologically dangerous" (Gove 1993:506).

¹⁴ Neander/Dąbrowa Szatko 2004:105-106.

¹⁵ *Nie ma dymu bez ognia* (Strąbski 1946:15).

¹⁶ *Nikt nie umiał nie tylko dostarczyć dowodów, ale nawet ich cienia* (ibid.).

¹⁷ *Same Niemcy po zakończeniu wojny, jak i tereny przez nich okupowane, nie były zajmowane przez sojuszników w sposób nagły. Niemiecka rewolucja pseudo-socjalistyczna miała łagodny przebieg. Tak np. w roku 1918 niemiecka żandarmeria broniła się w ratuszu warszawskim przez szereg dni i zniszczyła wszystkie kompromitujące dokumenty. Możliwym więc jest, że istniejącą gdzieś fabrykę mydła zlikwidowano tak bezgłośnie,*

Critical Voices

Some time after the fighting had ended those who had felt doubtful about the “German corpse factories” were no longer afraid of ostracism or even prosecution for “disloyalty” and could speak out. For example, on June 18, 1919, *The Ohinemura Gazette* from Waikato, New Zealand, quoting the *Manchester Guardian*, listed “the story of the German ‘Corpse Factory’ ” among the “horror curiosities” of the past war.¹⁸ Sir Raymond E. Priestley, in a book about the 46th (North Midland) Division in war, published also in 1919, touched the alleged *Kadaver* factory in the St. Quentin tunnel and clearly stated that “a close examination” showed “nothing to uphold this view.”¹⁹

Another critical voice was raised within the British Foreign Office, where doubts as to the veracity of the “Corpse factory” story had been expressed in a memorandum for internal use already in wartime.²⁰ When, in the spring of 1919, a “News Department” was established to counter anti-British propaganda in foreign countries (the whole big and costly propaganda apparatus had been dismantled immediately after the cessation of the hostilities²¹), the Foreign Office felt the necessity to disclaim “all intention of conducting propaganda of the ‘Corpse factory’ type.”²² The remark shows that the Foreign Office was well aware not only of the untruth in the “Corpse factory” story, but also of the risks inherent in spreading such and similar falsehood.

że nikt ani wtedy, ani później niczego się o niej nie dowiedział (ibid.).

¹⁸ “The Supernatural in Wartime,” *The Ohinemuri Gazette*, Waikato, New Zealand, June 18, 1917, p. 1.

¹⁹ Priestley 1919:77.

²⁰ See Lipkes 2007:763, endnote 56.

²¹ See John Buchan: Report on the Liquidation of the Ministry of Information, December 20, 1918. *War Cabinet Papers*, on the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-5.pdf>, pp. 320-322 of the file. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

²² Minutes of a Treasury conference held on May 14, 1919, to discuss the financing of the News Department. Quoted in P. Taylor 1981:53.

With growing distance in time to the events, criticism of the wartime “Corpse factory” propaganda was expressed more clearly. On January 20, 1920, for example, the Left-leaning *Grey River Argus* from Greymouth, New Zealand, mused about the “sinister” influence of propaganda in the war, mentioning, among other things, “the corpse factories . . . attributed to the Germans by the Northcliffe press and such like organs.”²³ In November, the paper came back to the issue. In a verbal exchange with one “Britisher” from the Conservative-leaning competitor paper *The Greymouth Evening Star*, a journalist with the pen-name “Hiki” reminded his adversary:

“During the war the Press told us many tales such as . . . the “corpse utilisation factories,” in which the intelligence of the British people was appealed to give credence to the tale that these factories were used for manufacturing explosives, etc., “from human corpses.” Official investigations have since proved that these, and many other stories, which were propounded to stir up and intensify racial hatred, were utterly false and without the slightest foundation.”²⁴

Six years after the end of the Great War, *The Northern Standard* from Darwin, NT, Australia, noticed a complete reversal of attitudes toward propaganda stories from wartime in Australian society:

“Who nowadays believes . . . that there was a German corpse factory in which the bodies of dead soldiers were somehow or other turned into high explosives? . . . A few years ago there were thousands of people who could scarcely have borne to stay in the same room with you if you expressed a doubt about these myths. Today the very same people would be afraid to stay in a room with you if you believed in even one of them. They would suspect you of being a lunatic for believing what

²³ Untitled op-ed, *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, January 20, 1920, p. 2.

²⁴ “The C[ontentious] O[bjector]’s,” *The Grey River Argus*, Greymouth, New Zealand, November 3, 1920, p. 6.

they themselves believed so fanatically, so fiercely, only the day before yesterday.²⁵”

The alleged German “Corpse factory” in the St. Quentin Canal tunnel and the propagandistic use of this “discovery” also found entry into the war-critical literature of these years, for example, into Philip Gibbs’ war memoirs *Now It Can Be Told*, published 1920. Gibbs did not mince his words and called the “Corpse factory” story one of the worst propaganda lies he experienced during his service as an officially accredited British war correspondent.²⁶ In 1922 Charles Edward Montague’s no less critical essay about the way the Great War was fought, *Disenchantment*, appeared in the bookstores. The author had been visiting the bombed former German army cookhouse in the St. Quentin Canal tunnel when an Australian sergeant joined him. Visibly disappointed by “the hopelessly normal nature of all the proceedings that had produced it,” the sergeant broke the silence. “‘Can’t believe a word you read, sir, can you?’ he said with some bitterness . . . The Press had lied again. The propagandist myth about Germans had cracked up once more.”²⁷

In the beginning of 1923, Australian and New Zealand newspapers - which a few years earlier had heartily joined the flock - cast a critical look on wartime propaganda in the Northcliffe press, particularly on the “Corpse factory” campaign. Whereas the *Northern Standard* from Darwin, NT, judged Lord Northcliffe harshly - “he touched the lowest depths to which journalism has fallen in history” - the editor

²⁵ “War Myths,” *The Northern Standard*, Darwin, NT, Australia, December 12, 1924, p. 1.

²⁶ Gibbs called it “the foul absurdity of the ‘corpse-factory’ ” (Gibbs 1920:521).

²⁷ Montague 1922:120. Charles Edward Montague (1867-1928), English journalist and writer, volunteered for the Army in the First World War, was eventually promoted captain and served during the last years of the war as an armed escort for VIPs visiting the battlefield. *Disenchantment* is considered a pivotal text in the development of literature about the First World War.

of *The Evening Post* from Wellington, New Zealand, practiced self-criticism: “Nothing but the fact that we were all seeing red prevented us from perceiving” the obvious: that the story was a hoax.²⁸

Let us, however, not forget that newspaper editors were at the time not only inundated with German atrocity stories from official sides and had to fear being labeled “disloyal” if they refused to bring them, but that they also had to sell their product. As Norman Angell reminded us already in 1923:

“A paper which during the war refrained from printing dubious German atrocity stories could not hope to do as well as one which appeared with alluring tales of German corpse factories . . . Public taste calls for corpse factory stories!”²⁹

The Charteris Revelations

For a last time, the “Corpse factory” made headlines worldwide at the end of 1925. On October 19, 1925 the National Arts Club of Manhattan, New York, had (then retired) General Charteris as a guest of honor at its Wednesday dinner party. Obviously in a particularly relaxed mood, Charteris elaborated about what to do and not to do in the propaganda business in wartime. Among other examples he mentioned the “Corpse factory,” frankly admitting that it was nothing but a hoax, although very effective as a propaganda tool, and that it was he himself who started the yarn by tampering with captured German photographs. He also mentioned the fake diary project, conceived in his office, but abandoned on his order, as an example of the dangers inherent in forgery of propaganda material.

²⁸ “The Propagandist of Hate,” *Northern Standard*, Darwin, NT, Australia, February 16, 1923, p. 3. “After Three Thousand Years,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, February 17, 1923, p. 6.

²⁹ *The Nation & The Athenæum*, October 20, 1923, p. 114. Also: Angell 1927:125. Sir Ralph Norman Angell (1872-1967) was an English lecturer and writer, co-founder of the Union of Democratic Control, Nobel Peace Prize 1933.

The very next day, *The New York Times* brought Charteris's revelations.³⁰ Other U.S. papers followed, so for example *The Atlanta Constitution* on October 31 and November 1, 1925,³¹ or *The Washington Post* on November 1, 1925.³² The news quickly spread across the Ocean. The Dutch press, for instance, reported about it already on October 23, 1925, mostly on front pages.³³ In Great Britain, the news came as a real bombshell. Nearly all British newspapers took it up - an indication of how deeply ingrained the "Corpse factory" legend was in public consciousness. The reaction always was indignation.³⁴ Not because the "Corpse factory" now was publicly debunked as a propaganda lie, but because the retired General had "told tales out of school." With genuine British understatement, *The Times* complained on October 22, 1925 that "a painful impression has been produced here by an unfortunate speech."³⁵ First voices were heard demanding an official investigation into the matter.

³⁰ "Tells of British War Propaganda. Gen. Charteris Says He Started Story of Boiling Dead Germans for Fat. Switched Picture Labels. Published Tale First in Chinese Newspaper, but It Later Got Out of Bounds," *The New York Times*, October 20, 1925, p. 10.

³¹ Pierre van Paassen: "The World's Window - It Wasn't Cricket," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 31, 1925, p. 6. "British Laborites Demand Probe of 'Corpse Mill'," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1925, p. 12.

³² "Laborites to Demand 'Corpse Mill' Inquiry. Charteris' Speech May Cost Him Seat in Commons, Is Prediction. Abominable, They Say," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 1925, p. 13.

³³ E.g. "Een oorlogsverzinsel" [A war invention], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant - Algemeen Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, p. 1, and *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, Leeuwarden, p. 1; "Weer een orlogsfabelte niet - Het beruchte 'Lijkenvet'" [Another war tale less - The infamous 'Corpse fat'], *Limburger Koerier*, Heerlen, p. 1; "De 'Kadaververwertung'," *Het Vaderland*, The Hague, p. 9.

³⁴ "Corpse factory 'Plot' Charges Arouse British," *The Syracuse Herald*, Syracuse, NY, October 25, 1925, p. 2.

³⁵ "War Propaganda. General Charteris on His Methods," *The Times*, October 22, 1925, p. 11 (a short article of 33 lines).

British Government circles and politicians at once saw the danger for the country's foreign relations. From October 5 to 16, 1925, an international conference had been held at Locarno, Switzerland. Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, France, and Italy concluded an agreement ("Rhine Treaty") that guaranteed the borders of France and Belgium with Germany, as established by the Versailles Treaty. For Germany, Locarno was a political break-through bringing her back again into the international arena as a respected partner and paving the way for her membership in the League of Nations (effective May 1926). The treaty, however, was not yet signed by all partners. It was, therefore, contrary to Britain's interest "to revive a controversy on one of the most unsavory stories of the war" just at this moment.³⁶ As strategy of defense, the British chose denial: since British official propaganda was not allowed to lie, it had not lied, at least never consciously.³⁷

Charteris was called back to Great Britain. He obviously had also received precise instructions, because on the eve of his departure from New York (October 24, 1925) he publicly declared that he had been misunderstood by the *New York Times* correspondent, that his remarks had been taken from the context of the talk, and that "any report that any pictures were used is entirely fictitious." He added that had he known that the press would report about his speech, he would have kept silent.³⁸ According to an "exclusive dispatch to The [Syracuse] Herald" from October 24, 1925, Charteris, asked to explain what he did say about the German corpse factory,

³⁶ "Charteris Shocks British. General's Admission of Propaganda Forgery Is Called Incredible," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1925, p. 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Charteris Denies Propaganda Story. Says He Did Not Admit Manufacturing 'Evidence' That Germans Burned Their Dead. Thought Dinner Private. But Times Reporter Was Present by Arrangement and General Himself Agreed to Publication," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1925, p. 24.

said: "I think the best thing to do is drop the subject entirely. I hope the whole thing will die off."³⁹

The genie, however, was already out of the bottle. The *New York Times* correspondent steadfastly stuck to his version. He said that he had spoken with Charteris at the end of the dinner and had obtained permission by him "to use the story how the 'corpse factory' yarn started."⁴⁰ He was supported by a correspondent of the *Daily News* from London, who rang up Charteris immediately after the *New York Times* had reported about his speech on October 20, 1925, and asked him about the truth of the report. Charteris told him "that the report was 'not quite accurate'," but that "he could not think of challenging the report, as the defects were of only minor importance."⁴¹

In the days before Charteris's arrival at Glasgow (November 1, 1925), Great Britain speculated first and foremost about the truth or untruth of the "Corpse factory" story itself. "Eyewitnesses" raised their voices:

"Brig. Gen. J. V. Campbell and other officers have come forward with the information that they actually saw bodies of men laid out by the Germans apparently for the purpose of refining them down,"⁴²

and *The Morning Post* remembered its readers that the story "was current throughout Northern France, Holland and Belgium and rested on some very definite evidence."⁴³ Other

³⁹ "Corpse factory 'Plot' Charges Arouse British," *The Syracuse Herald*, Syracuse, NY, October 25, 1925, p. 2.

⁴⁰ "Charteris Denies Propaganda Story . . .," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1925, p. 24.

⁴¹ "Asks 'Truth' of Charteris. London Daily News Not Satisfied With 'Corpse factory' Denial," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1925, p. 10; "Denial Does Not Satisfy London Paper," *The Daily Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, November 19, 1925, p. 1.

⁴² "Charteris Story Finds Defenders. War Office Is Expected to Hold Inquiry and Call General to Give Evidence," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1925, p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

papers focused on the use of the story in British propaganda and Charteris's possible involvement in it.⁴⁴

In these days, fierce fights between "Corpse factory believers" and "Corpse factory deniers" raged in the columns of the Australian press. Every day every newspaper brought at least one article about the issue. The majority of the believers were veterans from the St. Quentin Canal tunnel who firmly insisted that they had seen there a "boiling-down factory" with their own eyes. The deniers insisted upon the cookhouse version and in their majority rejected the story as a whole. They received support from the former commander of the Fifth Australian Division, Sir Talbot Hobbs, who had been entrusted with official investigations in the matter in October 1918. He declared publicly that the report about a German corpse factory in the tunnel "was found to be utterly groundless."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "The Kadaver Story," *Manchester Guardian*, Manchester, UK, October 25, 1925, p. 14; "British War Office Awaits Gen. Charteris. His Version of 'Corpse factory' Story Is Sought - Press Indignant or Incredulous," *The New York Times*, October 27, 1925, p. 6; "German 'Corpse factory' - Sir Herbert Russell's Version," *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, UK, October 28, 1925, p. 9; "Backs Charteris's Story. Reuter Correspondent Tells About Captured German Order," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1925, p. 30. Some time later: "Further Evidence on the War Propaganda Story," *Manitoba Free Press*, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, November 28, 1925, p. 46, letter to the editor, signed "J. Creighton-Williams"; "Het Britsche Rijk. Oorlogspropaganda" [The British Empire. War propaganda], *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant - Algemeen Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, Holland, October 24, 1925, p. 6; "De leugens uit den wereldoorlog. Nog een ergerlijk staaltje" [The lies from the World War. Another annoying tale], *Limburger Koerier*, Heerlen, Holland, October 26, 1925, p. 1; "Het mest helsche wapen - Oorlogspropaganda" [The most hellish weapon - War propaganda], *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, Holland, October 26, 1925, p. 3.

⁴⁵ "German Corpse Factory. A Groundless Report. Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs' Version," *Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, WA, November 3, 1925, p. 28. See also e.g. "The Alleged Corpse Factory. Further Testimony," *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, October 31, 1925, p. 13; "No Truth in the Story," *The Register*, Adelaide, October 31, 1925, p. 11; "Corpse Factories. Comments by Sir Talbot Hobbs," *The West Australian*, Perth, October 31, 1925, p. 13.

The discussion showed, however, that the believers were not willing to change their views. The anonymous correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald* had been right in his report from the battle front of October 6, 1918: "The story will live in Australia for ages . . . You will hear hundreds say: 'I believe there is something in it. Old Fritz is capable of anything.'"⁴⁶

Individuals who in wartime held Government office in Britain were interviewed. Charles Masterman, former head of the British War Propaganda Bureau, was quoted: "It was quite well known in official circles at the time that there was nothing in the corpse story."⁴⁷ The press reported that former Prime Minister Lloyd George frankly admitted, "We knew it could not be true," whereas Ian MacPherson, Undersecretary of War at that time, was quoted as having said, "I had no cause to doubt its accuracy. The thing would never have been touched had we not believed it true."⁴⁸ On October 31, 1925 the German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann recalled the prompt German denial that followed the accusations at that time, and added that the "Corpse factory" story "was regarded by the German nation . . . as one of the most cruel and poisonous forgeries of war-time propaganda."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "Hun Boiling-Down Factory. How a Story Started," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 24, 1918, p. 7.

⁴⁷ "War-Time Lies. Corpse factory Myth. Truth and Propaganda," *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, December 23, 1925. Similarly: Ponsonby 1928:108.

⁴⁸ "Charteris Story Finds Defenders. War Office Is Expected to Hold Inquiry and Call General to Give Evidence," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1925, p. 2. James Ian Macpherson (1880-1937), a liberal British politician, from 1916 to 1919 was Undersecretary of the War Office.

⁴⁹ "Denies War Corpse Story. Stresemann Says Germany Knew It to Be a 'Poisonous Forgery,'" *The New York Times*, November 1, 1925, p. 29. Gustav Stresemann (1878-1929), was a German liberal politician, Foreign Minister in various cabinets from October 1923 until his death in October 1929. He was one of the "Architects of Locarno" and was awarded, together with Aristide Briand and Austen Chamberlain, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926.

Immediately after his return to Great Britain, Charteris was summoned to the War Office for an interview with Sir Henry Laming Worthington-Evans, the Secretary of State for War, on November 3, 1925.⁵⁰ Following the conversation, Charteris publicly denied his statement made in New York. He said that the press had distorted his speech, that he neither invented the “Corpse factory” story nor altered the captions of any photographs, and that he had personally prevented the use of the faked diary.⁵¹ Sir Laming Worthington-Evans “was perfectly satisfied” by this denial.⁵²

Charteris’ statement of disavowal, however, did not convince everybody. As already mentioned, the *Daily News* of London insisted that the *New York Times* had reported correctly. On the other hand, Charteris was backed not only by an English lecturer and editor, who sweepingly accused the American press of superficiality and unreliability in reporting, of which, he said, he also had been a frequent victim,⁵³ but also by the prestigious British weekly *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, pointing to the fact that, in U.S. journalism,

“the reporters seldom write shorthand . . . Custom allows a reporter, who is chiefly concerned with the scene and the “high spots,” not only to paraphrase the speaker, but to put within quotation marks the reporter’s own version of the passages he chooses to print in the first person singular.⁵⁴”

⁵⁰ Sir Henry Laming Worthington-Evans (1868-1931) was a British Conservative politician. From 1921 to 1922 and again from 1924 to 1929 he served as Secretary of State for War (Minister of Defense).

⁵¹ “Charteris Satisfies War Secretary. Repeats in Glasgow Denial of the ‘Corpse factory’ Story After Interview With Chief,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1925, p. 26; “‘Kadaver Story’ - Denial by General Charteris,” *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, UK, November 4, 1925, p. 9; “Corpse factory Fiction,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, November 4, 1925, p. 9.

⁵² Ponsonby 1928:109-110.

⁵³ “Cecil Roberts, English Lecturer, Says American Newspapers Always Misquote,” *The Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, November 19, 1925, p. 1.

⁵⁴ “‘Kadaver’,” *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, October 31, 1925, pp. 171-174; here: p. 174.

The matter, however, was by far not clinched. After its autumn recess, the British House of Commons was about to open its next series of sessions on November 16, 1925. Members from the opposition announced that they would put the “Corpse factory” on the agenda. “The good name of our country is far too important to allow this matter to go unchallenged.”⁵⁵ Though several times asked during the sitting,⁵⁶ “Prime Minister Baldwin and Foreign Secretary Chamberlain adroitly dodged getting mixed up in debate” on this question, as the London correspondent of the *New York Times* reported.⁵⁷

The opposition, however, did not give up. On November 24, 1925 the matter was again discussed in Parliament. More questions were asked. Members wanted to know the truth. They reminded the House of “the feeling aroused in Germany by the recrudescence of the rumors of the so-called corpse conversion factory behind the German lines in the late War” and addressed the harmful influence that the “Corpse factory” myth still had on British-German relations, “in view of Locarno and other things.”⁵⁸

Unwilling to disavow its own propagandists, the British government still avoided issuing a complete denial and

⁵⁵ “ ‘Corpse factory’ an issue. Labor Leader Threatens to Bring Matter Before Commons,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 1925, p. 2.

⁵⁶ See <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1925/nov/16/government-business>. Last accessed November 10, 2011.

⁵⁷ “Commons Opens for Busy Session. Members Eager to Tackle Big Questions Due for Airing in Parliament. ‘Corpse factory’ Yarn Up. Opposition Bent on Sifting Charteris Indictment - Locarno to Be Debated Tomorrow,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1925, p. 2. Earl Stanley Baldwin of Bewdley was a British Conservative politician, 1923-1929 and 1935-1937 Prime Minister. Sir Joseph Austen Chamberlain (1863-1937) - not to be confounded with his half-brother, Neville Chamberlain, of the Munich Agreement - was a conservative British politician. From 1924 to 1929 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Nobel Peace Prize in 1926.

⁵⁸ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1925/nov/24/kadaver-factories>. Last accessed November 10, 2011.

reacted with evasive answers.⁵⁹ The Secretary of State for War again put the blame on the Germans:

“The terms of this order [the German Army Order of the Day from December 21, 1916; J.N.] were such that, taken in conjunction with the articles in the “Lokalanzeiger” and in the two Belgian papers and the previously existing rumours, it appeared to the War Office to afford corroborating evidence of the story. Evidence that the word “Kadaver” was used to mean human bodies, and not only carcasses of animals, was found in German dictionaries and German anatomical and other works.⁶⁰”

Implicitly he admitted that the War Office not only had believed the story to be true, but had also used it propagandistically.

Concluding his reply, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans tried to sweep the matter under the rug: “He did not think that public interest would be served by further questions on the subject,” Reuters quoted him.⁶¹ It is striking that *The Times* of London, in 1917 the spearhead of the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign with dozens of - sometimes very long - articles and shrill headlines, was this time very economical with news related to the discussions around the “Corpse factory” and mentioned them, for example, only with one or two sentences hidden deep in the general reports of the parliamentary sessions.

The end of the “Corpse factory” story - as time would show, only a provisional end - came on December 2, 1925.

⁵⁹ “ ‘Corpse factory’ - War Office Statement,” *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, UK, November 25, 1925, p. 9; “ ‘Corpse factory.’ Questions in Commons. ‘No Corroboration’,” *Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria, November 26, 1925, p. 11; “German Corpse factory,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, November 25, 1925, p. 9.

⁶⁰ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1925/nov/24/statement-by-secretary-for-war>. Last accessed November 21, 2011.

⁶¹ “German Corpse factory (Reuter Telegram),” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, November 25, 1925, p. 9. The same in “Old Propaganda Story. Corpse factory. Questions in the House,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, Singapore, Malaya, November 26, 1925, p. 9.

“With Chancellor Luther⁶² and Foreign Minister Stresemann in the Distinguished Visitors’ Gallery of the House of Commons, noted Scotch Laborite Arthur Henderson⁶³ created a sensation by demanding to be told once and for all whether the dead bodies of German soldiers were ever “boiled down” by their comrades in “corpse factories” during the War, or whether the story . . . was faked British propaganda, as was recently hinted in Manhattan by General Charteris . . . Amid an awkward pause, Dr. Luther and Herr Stresemann arose and quitted the gallery.⁶⁴”

A few minutes later both German politicians returned together with British Foreign Secretary Sir Austen Chamberlain, who solemnly declared:

“The Chancellor of the German Reich has authorized me to say, on the authority of the German Government, that there was never any foundation for it. I need scarcely add that, on behalf of his Majesty’s Government, I accept this denial, and I trust this false report will not again be revived.⁶⁵”

“This hope all lovers of humanity and fair play will heartily endorse,” commented *The Washington Post*.⁶⁶

The “modicum of applause”⁶⁷ that Sir Chamberlain received for his statement, however, showed that only a minority in the House agreed with it. The “Corpse factory” myth was too deeply rooted in the minds of the people. *The Worker* from

⁶² Hans Luther (1885-1962), independent German politician, was Chancellor of the Weimar Republic from January 15, 1925, to May 12, 1926.

⁶³ Arthur Henderson (1863-1935), British Labour politician, as of December 1916 until August 1917 one of the five members of Lloyd George’s war cabinet as Minister without Portfolio. In 1925, Member of Parliament for the Labour Party.

⁶⁴ “Parliament’s Week,” *TIME Magazine*, December 14, 1925.

⁶⁵ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1925/dec/02/kadaver-factories>, last accessed November 10, 2011. See also: “The ‘Kadaver’ Story. ‘No Foundation’,” *The Times*, December 3, 1925, p. 7.

⁶⁶ “The ‘Corpse Factory’ Canard,” *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1925, p. ES1.

⁶⁷ “Parliament’s Week,” *TIME Magazine*, December 14, 1925.

Brisbane, Australia, already a month prior had pessimistically predicted:

“If another Bloody War must be fought . . . it will be necessary to teach the British and the German peoples again to hate each other; and the corpse-factory lie will do effective preliminary work in that direction.⁶⁸”

Time would show that *The Worker*, regretfully, was right.

Reverberations

The news that the British Government had officially admitted that the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign of the Great War had been built on lies and forgeries, brought the story back to the headlines.⁶⁹ It received special attention in the United States where Isolationist thinking never had lost its supporters. It was grist to the mills of those who not without reason felt that the naive Yankees had been tricked into the war by the clever Brits - “The only way in which the war can be made popular in the United States is to represent it as an American war for American ideals and purposes”⁷⁰ - and that tall tales, such as those about the “German Corpse factories,” had played an important role in the game.⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Smoke Ho. The Corpse Factory Lie,” *The Worker*, Brisbane, QLD, Australia, November 5, 1925, p. 7.

⁶⁹ To name only a few examples: On December 3: *The New York Times*, *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh, UK, *The Straits Times*, Singapore. On December 4: *The Argus*, Melbourne, *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Brisbane Courier*, *The New York Times* again, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, FL, *The Times Recorder*, Zanesville, OH, *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Portsmouth, OH, *Hutchinson News*, Hutchinson, KS. On December 6: *The Washington Post* again. On December 15: *The Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica.

⁷⁰ Western and General Report for the War Cabinet, Report no. 19, week ending 6th June 1917, p. 16. On the Web: <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-146.pdf>. Last accessed October 15, 2012.

⁷¹ So Walter Millis, *Road to War - America 1914-1917*, reviewed in *TIME Magazine*, May 6, 1935; “Assault of U.S. Neutrality, 1914-1917. The Cavell and Other Cases,” *The Greeley Daily Tribune*, Greeley, OH,

The Richmond, VA *Times-Dispatch* of December 6, 1925 took the occasion to address the matter of credibility of statements made by governments in war:

“A few years ago the story of how the Kaiser was reducing human corpses to fat aroused the citizens of this and other enlightened nations to a fury of hatred. Normally sane men doubled their fists and rushed off to the nearest recruiting sergeant. Now they are being told, in effect, that they were dupes and fools; that their own officers deliberately goaded them to the desired boiling-point, using an infamous lie to arouse them.”⁷²

The article ended with the prophetic words: “These frank admissions of wholesale lying on the part of trusted Governments in the last war will not soon be forgotten.”⁷³

The story itself, though quickly again having disappeared from the front pages, had not “died off,” as General Charteris once had hoped. A remark about its British origin, made in public in the autumn of 1926 by the Marquis of Tavistock, caused Charles Masterman to issue an “official denial”: “The corpse factory story . . . originated on the continent and was turned down by the British propaganda board.”⁷⁴ As was previously shown, the story’s “origin on the continent” is only a half-truth, and the truth content of the claim “It was turned down by the British propaganda board” is near zero: at least through the publication of Raemaekers’ and Bairnfather’s cartoons and the production, distribution, and translation of the pamphlet *A ‘Corpse-Conversion’ Factory. A Peep Behind the German Lines*, Wellington House had been directly involved in the affair.

On November 6, 1926, Graham Wallas, in *The Nation & The Athenæum*, demanded, in the interest of the trustworthiness of

October 28, 1939, p. 4; Secunda/Morgan 2007:29.

⁷² Quoted in Ponsonby 1928:112-113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁴ “Corpse Factory Story Disowned. British Propaganda Chief Denies Tale on Germans Was Fabricated by His Force,” *The Miami News*, Miami, FL, October 31, 1926, p. 1.

future Government statements, “that we and the rest of the world should know the exact facts as to who was responsible for sending the Kadaver story to China.”⁷⁵ In a letter to the editor, published in the next issue of *The Nation & The Athenæum*, Charles Masterman carried denial to extremes by expressing doubts as to whether the story “went to China at all” and claimed that both the Foreign Office and the Department of Information, “the only two Government departments which circulated information in China . . . definitely refused to circulate that story in any country of the world.”⁷⁶ Masterman most probably suffered from loss of memory. First, it is proven that the story was spread in China in February and March 1917. Secondly, the story was circulated in many countries of the world through the War Propaganda Bureau (that he himself had headed) and Reuters, whose General Manager had been head of the News Division of the Department of Information, where the decision was taken to go public with the story worldwide.

Time and again the “Corpse factory” was also mentioned in the context of old rumors or of propaganda in an ongoing war. *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, for example, in 1926 wrote about tales told in the 1830s to the effect that clever businessmen had sent whole shiploads of bones gathered from battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars to England, where they were ground down and sold to farmers as fertilizer. The paper concluded: “It was probably an idle forerunner of the ‘corpse factory’ legend, but it created some little stir at the time.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “Authority in Politics,” *The Nation & The Athenæum*, vol. 40, no. 5, November 6, 1926, p. 172. Graham Wallas (1858-1932) was an English socialist and social psychologist, a leader of the Fabian Society and co-founder of the London School of Economics.

⁷⁶ Letter to the editor, *The Nation & The Athenæum*, November 13, 1926, p. 212.

⁷⁷ “‘Buried Caesar’,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, Singapore, Malaya, January 19, 1926, p. 3.

Toward the end of the 1920s, Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927) and Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in Wartime* (1928), which both extensively dwelt upon the matter, found a large readership and received respectful reviews in many newspapers and journals. Through these publications, the "Corpse factory" story became famous as a prime example of mendacious, but highly effective propaganda in wartime, discussed still today in scholarly and popular treatises.⁷⁸

On March 26, 1930, in the face of tensions between Great Britain and the Soviet Union accompanied by a mutual

⁷⁸ See, e.g., recently Hayward 2010:114-129, Manz 2003:240, Robertson 2003:123, Wittek 2005:95, Akçam 2005, Lipkes 2007:611-615, Gregory 2008:41-42, Kingsbury 2010:51, Neander/Marlin 2010, Marlin 2011 (n.p.), Jowett/O'Donnell 2012:167. *Falsehood in War-Time* has recently met quite a lot of harsh criticism. Some of it results from a misunderstanding of the author's intention. Ponsonby was not an historian, but a politician, deeply engaged in pacifist politics. His aim was not to write a scholarly treatise, but to warn his own people against being dragged into another war. This explains why he focused on *British* propaganda (a fact for which the book has been accused of being biased (Gregory 2008:41)), why he did not mention many things he could take for granted among his target audience (for example, that they knew that it was the Germans who had set downtown Louvain on fire ("He did not explain how the fires started," Zuckerman 2004:268)), and why he seldom tried to do source research (which brought the book the accusation of being "under-documented" (Gullace 2011a:690. Similarly, Lipkes 2007:615, and Gregory 2008:41)), but instead relied on secondary literature and newspaper reports of the time, with foreseeably bad consequences. For example, already in 1941 James Morgan Read showed that Ponsonby had been taken for a ride by the story of the "Antwerp bells," a German satire on Allied propaganda: how a harmless news item can be distorted and, through consecutive retelling, eventually become an atrocity tale (Morgan 1941:25; Ponsonby 1928:161 ("The Manufacture of News")). Another example is the "Baby of Courbeck Loo" about an English newspaperman who "confessed" to have fabricated a heart-rending story about a Belgian baby "rescued from the Hun" (Ponsonby 1928:90). It was, in all likelihood, also nothing but a parody. Lipkes sees, with good reason, the story as a "persiflage" (Lipkes 2007:619). My search (June 2012) in the archives of the *New York Times*, where the story allegedly appeared first, gave a negative result.

propaganda offensive, Member of Parliament Alexander Haycock advised the House to be more cautious than believing all that was told in the British press about the Soviet Union, reminding the Members of propaganda lies from the First World War:

“When the wicked Germans were short of glycerine, they boiled down their corpses to get it . . . Just as we were told lies about the Germans . . . so we are now told lies about Soviet Russia.”⁷⁹

In 1932, in the context of rising tensions between Malayan and Chinese citizens, provoked and stirred mutually by atrocity rumors, *The Straits Times*, Malaya’s leading daily newspaper, condemned these as lies and compared them to “the ‘corpse factory’ story.”⁸⁰ In 1936, in an editorial about the British newspaper magnate Lord Rothermere,⁸¹ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* severely criticized the latter’s openly Fascist leanings, focusing on his press support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The article reminded its readers about “the flood of lying propaganda,” for which his late brother, Lord Northcliffe, had been responsible, mentioning especially “the classic ‘Corpse factory’ story.” “Today,” the author says, the Rothermere press is rehashing “all those Great War atrocities,” now not directed against the Germans, but against the legitimate Spanish Government, and predicts that “it is only a question of time before some variant of the Corpse factory appears.”⁸²

⁷⁹ <http://hansard/millbanksystems.com/1930/mar/26/private-business-1>. Last accessed November 10, 2011.

⁸⁰ “Sensation Mongers,” *The Straits Times*, Singapore, Malaya, March 7, 1932, p. 10.

⁸¹ Harold Sidney Harmsworth (1868-1940), Lord Rothermere, British newspaper magnate, younger brother of Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), inherited after his brother’s death *The Daily Mail*. He was an admirer of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, supported the British Fascist movement.

⁸² “Lord Rothermere,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, Singapore, October 31, 1936, p. 8.

As time continued to pass, more individuals involved in the “Corpse factory” plot came forward with revelations. On September 8, 1929, for instance, the *Oakland Tribune* disclosed that U.S. authorities had been well aware of the falsehood of the story:

“Whatever may have been believed generally in England where the story originated, the American secret service knew the truth . . . The bodies that were used were those of dead horses, not of dead soldiers.⁸³”

On the other hand, believers in the veracity of the story and voices that tried to exculpate those who invented and spread the tale, putting the blame on the Germans, did not keep silent either, as the example of an exchange of letters to the editor, published in the beginning of July 1934 in *The Sydney Morning Herald* shows.⁸⁴ C. E. W. Bean, Australia’s “Official War Historian,” was given the last word:

“Actually, the “corpse-factory” statement . . . received no credence in England until “The Times” published on April 16 . . . a description . . . in the Berlin “Lokalanzeiger” . . . of a “corpse conversion” factory . . . The story, therefore, was current in Switzerland, Belgium and Holland before it reached “The Times,” and I know of no evidence whatever to show that it was not believed by those who first published it.⁸⁵”

The Dark Side of Success

The “Corpse factory” and other anti-German atrocity propaganda certainly were helpful to the Allies in their efforts to win the war. As a New Zealand daily remarked in 1926:

“The final victory has been ascribed largely to the successful propaganda carried out by the late Lord Northcliffe . . . The “corpse factory” story was an example of the worst form of

⁸³ “Part Played By Naval Intelligence Organization During World War,” *Oakland Tribune*, Oakland CA, September 8, 1929, p. 42.

⁸⁴ “Atrocity Stories,” July 3, 1934, p. 15; July 5 and 6, 1934, p. 11; July 7, 1934, p. 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, July 7.

propaganda, but everything was deemed fair in a fight for very life.⁸⁶

“Largely,” however, should be taken with a pinch of salt. Postwar memorialists, from former German General Quarter-Master Ludendorff - in an attempt at self-exculpation - to former Allied propaganda professionals - in attempts at self-aggrandizing - most probably overestimated the influence of propaganda in general and atrocity propaganda in particular on the outcome of the war.

On the other hand, the year-long spreading of hate, making the very devil out of the enemy, had brought about negative side-effects on the victorious as well as on the defeated nations. In the field of politics, it had forced the Allies to fight for total victory and so prevented them from negotiations with the enemy that might have stopped the bloodshed earlier.⁸⁷ In addition to this, it had poisoned the international climate and made it difficult to return to normalcy after the war. And last but not least, among the defeated it was grist to the mills of those who called for revenge.

Already in wartime, atrocity propaganda had lowered moral standards at home and in warfare.⁸⁸ At home, it had not only given the pretext for taking discriminatory measures against citizens of foreign ancestry, but also fanned grassroots violence against them.⁸⁹ On the front, it had set off mutually escalating reprisals.⁹⁰ In some instances, it may even have given the idea of committing real atrocities. There were reports in the Allied press about Canadian, Scottish, and American troops shooting down Germans in preference to taking prisoners in reaction to

⁸⁶ “Abuse of Propaganda,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, April 29, 1926, p. 8.

⁸⁷ Hiery 2000.

⁸⁸ “Atrocity propaganda plays a considerable suggestive part in the production of certain types of delinquency, both in civilians and in armies.” Comfort 1950:40.

⁸⁹ For the U.S., see e.g. Wells 2002; for New Zealand, Burr 1998.

⁹⁰ Hiery 2000.

rumors about the crucifixion of fellow soldiers,⁹¹ a behavior an Indian newspaper suspected in 1941 as also caused by “the mythical story of the German corpse factory.”⁹²

The peace treaties at the end of the First World War did not solve the conflicts that underlay its outbreak. On the contrary, they created new trouble spots, some of which have been “hot” until recently, such as (former) Yugoslavia, or which are still conflict zones, such as the Middle East. A special problem remained unsolved: the “German question,” particularly its political dimension, “How Germany can fit into any system of states without threatening, or being perceived as threatening, its neighbors?”⁹³ The solution decided upon in the Treaty of Versailles turned out to be unstable. Demanding a “Revision of Versailles” was the common denominator of all political parties and factions in Weimar Germany that were otherwise heavily fighting each other.

“Revision” was by far not only thought of in terms of territory and finance. Germans felt particularly humiliated by having to accept the sole responsibility for the outbreak of the war and the guilt for war crimes of which they did not feel culpable. Whether these feelings were justified or not, shall not be discussed here. At any rate, they were real, and German nationalist writers and politicians made ample use of them. Turning the knife in the wound, they incessantly denounced Allied atrocity propaganda in general and obvious lies in

⁹¹ See, e.g., “Americans Tell of Hun Atrocities,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 1917, or “Charge Germans Crucify Captives,” *The Gettysburg Times*, Gettysburg, PA, January 18, 1918, p. 4: “Certain Canadian and Scottish battalions take no prisoners . . . The reason is that the Boche has several times crucified the Canadian and Scotch prisoners.” The Americans also joined in. Under the headline “Sure Huns Crucified American Soldiers,” *The New York Times* reported on June 3, 1918 on rumors about two American soldiers found crucified, which made “that Americans were shooting down Germans in preference to taking prisoners.”

⁹² “Victory by Propaganda,” *The Indian Express*, Madras, India, July 5, 1941, p. 4.

⁹³ Cordell/Wolff 2005:4.

particular, focusing on the “Crucified Canadian,” the “Corpse factory,” or other falsehoods that were spread in wartime and often still afterwards in the British and American press and in Hollywood films.⁹⁴ Memories of the atrocity stories so outlived the Great War and helped to pave the way for the next one.

The “Corpse Factory” in the Beginning of the Second World War

Germany’s attack on Poland on September 1, 1939 triggered off the Second World War. Like in the previous one, all warring parties immediately brought their propaganda guns into position. As was to be expected, stories about enemy atrocities were again widely used in propaganda and were already spread in the first days of fighting.⁹⁵ In the U.S. “lessons learned from history” let concerned voices caution against uncritically believing the atrocity tales coming from Europe. Associated Press Foreign News Analyst, Dewitt MacKenzie,⁹⁶ for example, assured his readers already in mid-September 1939:

⁹⁴ With regard to the “Corpse factory,” see e.g. *Historisch-Politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland*, Munich, vol. 164, 1919, pp. 428-429; Avenarius 1921:146, 195; or the statement made in 1933 by a German Jewish community leader, quoted in Scheidl 1967:164; or Wanderscheck 1936:139.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Goebbels’ propagandistic use of the atrocities perpetrated against ethnic Germans by local Polish militias in Bydgoszcz/Bromberg and its vicinity on September 3, 1939 (“Bloody Sunday” - *Bromberger Blutsontag*). “Polish Atrocities Charged by Nazis,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 1939, p. 2. Allied propaganda, of course, fired back, which follows from a repudiating remark in *The Atlanta Constitution* of December 21, 1939: “The victims were actually Germans – not Poles slaughtered by the Germans as has been ignorantly suggested by biased American writers” (“White Collects Propaganda, Believes It in Main True,” p. 11).

⁹⁶ In the 1930s, D. MacKenzie, a syndicated columnist, was head of the London bureau of Associated Press (AP). At the outbreak of war in 1939, he settled in New York as a Foreign News Analyst for AP.

“From long experience on the battlefronts of the World War, I am convinced that ninety per cent of the atrocity stories are pure propaganda manufactured from whole cloth.⁹⁷”

As a prime example he mentioned “the story of German ‘kadaver factories’ ” and its later debunking as a propaganda hoax.

Two months later, on November 14, 1939, Raymond Lawrence, another U.S. syndicated columnist, listed ten of the best known atrocity tales from the First World War, among them “the corpse factory,” and remarked with a prediction of the future:

“Some of them are current once more. Winston Churchill, in his game of exchanging epithet barrages with the Nazis, already has revived “Hun,” but you can expect lots more in the days to come.⁹⁸”

Nearly two years later - the U.S. was officially still neutral in the European conflict - Dewitt MacKenzie gave an analysis of contradictory news from Germany proper and the Russian front in an article published by various U.S. newspapers on September 26, 1941. Again he cautioned his readers against uncritically believing either side, and reminded them of propaganda lies once put out by all warring parties, such as

“the alleged German Kadaver factory. This horrible concoction was to the effect that the Germans, being hard pressed for fats, had built plants where they were making soap and so on from the bodies of their dead soldiers . . . There wasn’t a word of truth in it.⁹⁹”

⁹⁷ Dewitt MacKenzie, “Monumental Lies Mark Hostilities. War Atrocity Tales Branded 90 Per Cent Pure ‘Humbug’,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston, WV, September 12, 1939, p. 4. Within the next two weeks, the same article appeared in numerous newspapers across the U.S., among them in the *Oakland Tribune*.

⁹⁸ Raymond Lawrence, “Propaganda and Politics - Little Alf’s Stamps,” *Oakland Tribune*, Oakland, CA, November 14, 1939, editorial page.

⁹⁹ “Little can be determined about truth of war claims,” *The Kokomo Tribune*, Kokomo, IN, p. 16; “Not much change on Red front,” *Monitor-Index and Democrat*, Moberly, MO, p. 4; “Analyst tells significance of Crimea drive,” *Alton Evening Telegraph*, Alton, IL, p. 2; “Russians in

German radio and press, strictly controlled by the Ministry for People's Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Ministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*), led by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, were not idle at all. Among other things, they reminded their readers and listeners again and again of faked (or grossly exaggerated) atrocity stories spread by the British during the First World War. By presenting the British as notorious liars, Goebbels tried to kill two birds with one stone: to instill hatred of England, "the perfidious Albion," among the German *Volksgeossen*, and to undermine the credibility of the news BBC was broadcasting for a German audience.¹⁰⁰

In their "game of exchanging epithet barrages" with the British, Goebbels' footmen did not hesitate to draw upon the "Corpse factory" story and - metaphorically speaking - to throw the hand grenade back into the British trenches, taking into account, however, that the "Corpse factory" in the meantime had transmogrified worldwide into a "Human soap factory." On Sunday, December 17, 1939 the *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, a Nazi party daily, brought a three-column article by one Robert Schmelzer with the headline "Hun soap out of corpse fat. How, in the World War, England created hatred of Germany and disgust at her":

danger of tired men giving way suddenly," *The Ada Evening News*, Ada, OK, p. 1; "Hitler says four Red armies are impounded," *Oakland Tribune*, Oakland, CA, editorial page; "The war today": *The News-Palladium*, Benton Harbor, MI, p. 8, *The Clearfield Progress*, Clearfield, PA, pp. 1&3, *The Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, MS, p. 2, *The Portsmouth, N.H., Herald*, Portsmouth, NH, pp. 1&2, *Big Spring Herald*, Big Spring, TX, p. 6, *Evening Times*, Cumberland, MD, p. 2, *Fitchburg Sentinel*, Fitchburg, MA, pp. 1&6; all newspapers from Friday, September 26, 1941.

¹⁰⁰ The last mentioned aspect became more and more important toward the end of the war, when the population felt that its own leadership was lying, not least about the situation on the fronts, and sought information abroad. British propaganda had learned from mistakes made in the previous war. BBC news for Germany, to a large extent, refrained from exaggerations, hate speech and lies. It made BBC the most trusted source of information in Germany and German occupied countries during the war.

“To make crystal clear the hardly conceivable British art of lying and rabble-rousing, we asked our correspondent to write down the history of . . . the lie about the utilization of the corpses of soldiers for soap-making.¹⁰¹”

The author then retells, in dramatic fashion, the history of the “Corpse factory” myth, obviously drawing upon Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in War-Time* (but without giving any reference). He ends with swearing at the British:

“Nobody in the English government believed in this villainous invention. But the noble lords in the Most Christian Kingdom needed Indians and colored people as cannon fodder. Therefore: lies upon lies! In those days, and again today!¹⁰²”

About the same time, Nazi anti-British propaganda obtained support from Germany’s temporary ally, the Soviet Union.¹⁰³ On December 10, 1939 *The New York Times* reported about an ongoing anti-British, anti-American campaign in the Soviet Union. The state-controlled press, we read, reminded the citizens - among them those in the newly incorporated former Polish territories - of exposed Allied propaganda fakes from the First World War, giving as a prime example the “German corpse factory.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ *Hunnen-Seife aus Leichenfett. Wie England im Weltkrieg Haß und Abscheu gegen Deutschland erzeugte . . . Um die kaum faßbare britische Hetze und Lügenkunst bis zum letzten zu verdeutlichen, haben wir unseren Mitarbeiter beauftragt . . . die Geschichte der Lüge von der Benutzung von Soldatenleichen zur Seifenherstellung [aufzuschreiben].* I am grateful to Ralph Klein, Witten, who drew my attention to this source and provided me with a copy. See also Schaeffer 1941.

¹⁰² *Niemand in der englischen Regierung glaubte dieser Schurkenerfindung. Aber die edlen Lords im allerchristlichsten Königreich gebrauchten Inder und Farbige als Kanonenfutter. Darum Lügen auf Lügen! Damals wie heute!*

¹⁰³ The alliance lasted from August 23, 1939 (signing of the German-Soviet non-aggression treaty), to the joint attack on Poland (September 1 to 17, 1939), until June 21, 1941 (eve of the German attack on the Soviet Union).

¹⁰⁴ “Soviet Publicizes Reich Aid to Finns,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 1939, pp. 1,53.

On May 10, 1940 the German war machine began its attack on France, again sweeping through Belgium. In both countries, tens of thousands of refugees from the Greater German Reich, Jews and non-Jewish opponents of National Socialism alike, had found asylum. Overnight these refugees had become “enemy aliens.” They were arrested and deported by train in box cars to camps in southern France.¹⁰⁵ One group arrived on May 20, 1940 at Saint Cyprien, an assembly of dilapidated wooden huts surrounded by barbed wire in the coastal dunes of the Mediterranean sea.¹⁰⁶ The French who ran the camp did not quite know what to do with the internees, who, therefore, most of the day half-nakedly loitered in the dunes. Macabre jokes went around, such as, “When we die, they will make soap out of us,”¹⁰⁷ but probably nobody took this seriously. It points, however, to the fact that the “Corpse factory” myth - or at least reverberations from it - was not at all forgotten, not even among German anti-Nazi emigrants.

In those years, Germans did not only associate British propaganda and French internment camps, but also American utilitarian thinking with soap-making from human bodies. In a booklet written for police and insurance personnel from 1942 we read:

“In addition, and for the sake of curiosity, it should be mentioned here that irreverent Americans wanted to extract all useful “material” from corpses: initially they considered to utilize human corpses for the manufacture of soap.¹⁰⁸”

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed description of their life of suffering - that for the majority of them ended in Auschwitz - see Eggers 2002.

¹⁰⁶ An abandoned former internment camp for Spanish Republican refugees.

¹⁰⁷ Ernest Abel, ex-Mittelbau prisoner, interviewed by the author; Brussels, Belgium, January 6, 2004.

¹⁰⁸ *Anhangsweise sei der Kuriosität halber hier noch erwähnt, daß pietätlose Amerikaner aus Leichen noch herausholen wollten, was an “Material” noch brauchbar sei. Zunächst habe man überlegt, ob man menschliche Leichen nicht zu Seifenfabrikation verwerten sollte.* Brack 1942:73. Brack obviously took the matter seriously. He further elaborates in great detail about retrieving the dental gold from the dead, proposals allegedly made in the U.S. together with calculations of the profit to be gained.

No source is given. Maybe the idea imputed to the enemy was an invention of Nazi propaganda, a kind of “throwing back the hand grenade into the enemy’s trenches.” It should, however, not be excluded from the outset that, indeed, somebody in the U.S. once had made such a proposal. Let us remember Mr. Oppenheim from Marietta, OH and his suggestion, made quite seriously in May 1915, to use the bodies of soldiers killed in battle for the manufacture of glycerin.

To conclude this chapter, another observation shall be added. It concerns the shift from Germans toward non-Germans in the alleged “input” of the “Corpse factory.” In the initial version of the story, spread in mid-April 1917, only German soldiers were processed. Soon, however, the story was expanded by adding Allied soldiers as “raw material.”¹⁰⁹ In the course of becoming a folktale between the wars, they more and more replaced the Germans. And when toward the end of the Second World War the “Corpse factory” of bygone days was recalled, German soldiers had vanished completely from its “input.”

In the London edition of the official U.S. Army newspaper *The Stars and Stripes*, for instance, staff writer Ed Wilcox reminded his readers in September 1944 of the “‘Corpse factory’ legend” from the First World War:

“It told in vague, indefinite terms, the story of a factory which the Germans were said to have established someplace behind their lines for the purpose of extracting fats and grease from the bodies of fallen Allied soldiers. People shuddered at the thought and the Allied armies fought with renewed resolution.¹¹⁰”

¹⁰⁹ See the examples given in the previous chapters: the Maharajah of Bikanir, Harold Owen, Thomas Watson, and others.

¹¹⁰ “Most ‘Atrocity Tales’ Faked. But Hitler Gang Provided Facts In This Systematic Slaughter Era Which Was Called ‘New Order’,” *The Stars and Stripes*, London, UK, September 7, 1944, p. 32.

The story about an atrocity inflicted by the Germans on their own people had become a story about an atrocity inflicted by the Germans upon their enemies.

We find this “change of input” reflected in recent scholarly publications that make, in passing, reference to the alleged “German corpse factories” of the First World War: “The Germans were using the corpses of *allied* soldiers for such purposes,”¹¹¹ “[E]nemy corpses were allegedly turned into soap and other products,”¹¹² or “[The] Germans used *British* corpses to make glycerine for munitions (or for lubricants, pig food, and manure).”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Stevenson 1984:76.

¹¹² Latham 2008:173, endnote 13, quoting Julian Putkowski.

¹¹³ Moorcraft/Taylor 2008:36. Emphasis added in all three quotations.

VIII.

NO “END OF HISTORY” FOR THE “CORPSE FACTORY”

The “Corpse Factory” - A Prime Example of Modern Propaganda¹

Writing in 1938, A. J. Mackenzie set down a list of features characteristic of successful propaganda.² These were:

- Repetition
- Color
- A kernel of truth
- Building the propaganda around a slogan
- Directedness toward a specific objective
- Concealment of the motive
- Use of appropriate timing.

In 2002 Randal Marlin added another two features important for success in modern propaganda:

- Endorsement by reputable public figures
- Faking of credentials.

A tenth feature shall be added to the list here, as it greatly favors success:

- Finding the ground prepared.

Looking back we can see that the “Corpse factory” propaganda campaign of the First World War showed all these features, some of them even in a particularly distinct manner:

- Finding the ground prepared: A public bombarded for years with horror tales about German atrocities - independent of their content of truth - was willing to believe everything bad told about the “Huns.” What is more, rumors about loathsome treatment of the Germans’ own dead had been circulating since the beginning of the war.
- Repetition: From April 16, 1917 until the end of May 1917, the story was brought almost daily in the Northcliffe press

¹ This sub-chapter relies largely on Neander/Marlin 2010:76-77.

² Mackenzie 1938:50-71.

and distributed by the Reuters news service. It continued to appear in the media in irregular intervals until the early 1920s.

- Color: The vivid description of the “factory” recalled the gruesome depiction of a Chicago meat packing plant and catered to public taste that wanted horror stories about the enemy.
- A kernel of truth: Carcass utilization plants did exist behind the German lines.
- A slogan around which the campaign was built: Though not exactly slogans, the phrases “The Germans are ghouls” and “The Germans are cannibals” had sticking-power.
- Directedness toward a specific objective: The objective of the campaign was to increase hatred and disgust of Germans, thereby strengthening the will to fight against them until total victory.
- Concealment of the motive: The sourcing of the story in both a Belgian exile newspaper from Holland and a semi-official German publication concealed the involvement of British propagandists.
- Use of appropriate timing: The campaign was launched in “Britain’s darkest hour,” when bolstering the morale on the home front and in the trenches, mobilizing the Empire’s human resources, and speeding up the entry of the U.S. into fighting were badly needed.
- Endorsement by reputable public figures: The Bishop of Carlisle, the Maharajah of Bikanir, Australian Premier Hughes, New Zealand’s Premier Massey, French ex-Premier Clemenceau, high-ranking British politicians - Lord Curzon, Lord Balfour, Lord Cecil - and the renowned medical journal *The Lancet* all gave credence to the story.
- Faking of credentials: The “American consul’s” testimony apparently corroborated the Belgian story, whereas the deliberately mistranslated *Lokal-Anzeiger* article, presented as a quasi-official German document, seemingly authenticated both. As an additional faked credential, the

mistranslated German Army Order of the Day was brought into play.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the “Corpse factory” became one of the greatest successes of Allied propaganda in the First World War. It was remarkable also insofar as the campaign was financially self-sustaining and did not need government funding - it was paid for by the clients of the news agencies and, in the end, by the consumers: the readers of the newspapers that spread the story.

The “Corpse Factory’s” Alleged Characteristic Features

As already shown in the introduction to this book, the first news about the Holocaust which reached Great Britain and the U.S. in the late summer of 1942 together with reports that the corpses of the slain Jews were processed to soap, lubricants, and fertilizer, found widespread disbelief. The “Nazi human soap factories,” where Jewish corpses allegedly were turned into war-vital commodities, had too much in common with the “German corpse factories” of the First World War, debunked as a propaganda hoax less than two decades prior. Doubts as to the alleged corpse processing - not, however, as to the slaughter of the Jews in general - were expressed also in Jewish circles, for instance, by a member of the American Jewish Congress on November 30, 1942,³ or by the noted French economist Étienne Mantoux in a letter from December 2, 1942 to the American Jewish Committee.⁴

³ In a meeting of one of the sub-committees of the Jewish Congress on November 30, 1942; *Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee of Special Conference on European Affairs, Held at the Office of the American Jewish Congress, Monday, November 30, 1942*, p. 3. On the Web: http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/BR11.PDF. Last accessed June 1, 2008.

⁴ Quoted in Novick 2000:287, endnote 8. Mantoux even pointed to the possibility that the corpse processing story might be Nazi disinformation, spread to “sow the seeds of disbelief” about the larger truth of the Holocaust; *ibid.*

Let us, therefore, look for the characteristic features of the mythical “German corpse-conversion” - or “utilization” - plant(s), features that can be deduced from the stories spread about these factories by Allied media during the First World War:

- Common knowledge: Everybody knew that the Germans had a factory (or factories) where they processed human corpses.
- Disappearance of persons involved: Dead German soldiers, as well as non-German soldiers who disappeared without leaving a trace, ended up in a German corpse factory.
- Secrecy: The corpse processing plants were veiled in secrecy. This statement obviously contradicts the assertion that “everybody knows about.” Such contradictions, however, are typical for legends, fairy tales, and myths and use to worry neither the narrator nor the listener.
- Use of cutting-edge technology: The processing of the corpses was done scientifically and on an industrial scale.
- Economic importance: The corpses were processed to goods urgently needed in the German war economy: lubricants, glycerin, soap, fertilizer, and pigs’ food.
- The profit motive: The corpse processing plants operated on a considerable profit.
- German thoroughness: The processing of the corpses was total - “nothing can be permitted to go to waste.”
- Perpetrators’ admissions: German sources and captured German documents proved the veracity of the story.
- Eyewitness testimony: Many individuals who had either seen a corpse processing plant or worked there as forced laborers came forward and told about their experience.
- Forensic proof: Allied troops detected an abandoned corpse factory where body parts still were boiling in a cauldron or had been prepared for processing.
- Rescue by the Allies: Only the victorious advance of the Allied armies made an end to the body-boiling.

- Silencing of critics: “There does not, in view of the many atrocity actions of which the Germans have been guilty, appear to be any reason why it should not be true.”

All these features can be found again in the stories that have been told and retold about the “Nazi human soap factories” from the times of the Second World War until today.⁵ There are, however, two remarkable differences. The first, a major one, concerns the “raw material.” It was no more soldiers killed on the battlefield, but Jewish civilians killed at the factory site or in an adjacent extermination camp.⁶ The second, a minor one, concerns the “output” of the factories. In the Second World War story, glycerin and pigs’ food had vanished from the product spectrum. After the war the vacancy was taken up by lampshades (from skin) and mattresses (from hair) - “nothing was permitted to go to waste.”⁷

The “Corpse Factory” in Modern “Anti-Revisionist” Literature

Those scholars who, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, took up again the question of “German atrocities” from the First World War, could hardly avoid mentioning the most famous atrocity story of the time, the “German corpse factory.” Whereas writers such as Zuckerman or Horne/Kramer give little attention to it and mention it only with a few words as an example of a fabricated myth,⁸ Gregory devotes

⁵ I hope to be able to publish, in the near future, a monograph under the (draft) title “Soap, lampshades, and the Holocaust – A study in media-generated folktales,” which will deal in great detail with the origin and the reception history of the “Jewish soap” and “Lampshades” myths.

⁶ An intermediate step took Soviet propaganda which told that the “raw material” was prisoners of war or political prisoners, whose “racial” affiliation, however, was usually not mentioned.

⁷ Between 1942 and 1944, in some instances also “glue” was mentioned as a product of the corpse-processing. “Glue” vanished, however, completely from the story after the end of the war.

⁸ Zuckerman mentions the “Corpse factory” twice in passing, first quoting Montague 1922 (the “discovery” in the canal underground), then in

three pages (together with endnotes) to it, and Lipkes even seven, endnotes included. Both use Ponsonby's treatment of the story - not the story itself, which they, of course, do not believe to be true - to attack *Falsehood in War-Time*, a book that played an important role in the "Revisionist" movement of the interwar period and which has been reprinted many times and repeatedly quoted (mostly approvingly) right down to the present.

Adrian Gregory, who rejects *Falsehood in Wartime* lock, stock and barrel as "a propaganda lie,"⁹ sees Ponsonby's

the context of Cavendish-Bentinck's doubts as to rumors coming from Poland (Zuckerman 2004:268, 270). Horne/Kramer mention the story also only in passing, in the context of Ponsonby's book, emphasizing that the story's debunking in 1925 "helped discredit British wartime propaganda, especially in the USA" (Horne/Kramer 2001:369).

⁹ Gregory 2008:41. Though Ponsonby exposed much real falsehood spread in wartime, be it by mouth, be it in print, his treatment of the reports about the German atrocities perpetrated during the invasion of Belgium ("Atrocity Stories," Ponsonby 1928:128-134) deserves serious criticism. He gives a few examples of atrocity tales that, in all likelihood, were invented and subsequently debunked. That such things did happen is conceded even by Ponsonby's harshest critics. Ponsonby, however, convinced that "where bias, sentiment, passion, and so-called patriotism disturb the emotions, a personal affirmation becomes of no value whatsoever," throws the baby out with the bath-water and rejects all Belgian reports on German atrocities as unsubstantiated (Ponsonby 1928:128). To support his view, he quotes the account of five U.S. war correspondents who, as guests of the German General Staff, were shown around in occupied Belgium and thereafter declared that they did not notice "one single case of undeserved punishment or measure of retribution," but that "refugees who told about cruelties and brutalities, could bring absolutely no proof." He further quotes an article in the *New York World* of January 28, 1915 - most probably a canard - on an investigation among Belgian refugees in England about German atrocities, conducted by "agents of the British Government," with the result "that the charges appeared to be based upon hysteria and natural prejudice" (Ibid., p. 130-131). Ponsonby here falls victim to his own preconceived notions and abandons sound reasoning. The American guests certainly were only shown what their German hosts wanted them to see, and the "agents of the British Government," who collected testimonies among Belgian refugees in England at that time, came to a diametrically opposite conclusion, as the *Bryce Report*

treatment of atrocity stories as a “contentious interpretation.” “To exemplify” his verdict, he chooses the “Corpse factory,” to which Ponsonby devotes a whole chapter of his book.¹⁰ Ponsonby sees Charteris as the originator of the story, giving credence to the ex-General’s revelations made in New York on October 19, 1925, and discarding his later denial. Against this view Gregory objects that the story was already current in 1916, for which he offers as proof items as Siegfried Sassoon’s poem *The Tombstone Maker*, a Raemaekers cartoon, and Harold Cousin’s diary entry. In accord with his “bottom-up” theory of the origins of (false) atrocity stories, Gregory, therefore, concludes:

“The corpse-rendering factory was not the invention of a diabolical propagandist; it was a popular folktale, an ‘urban myth’, which had been circulated for months before it received any official notice.”¹¹

As was shown in Chapters Two and Three, Charteris must, indeed, be acquitted of the charge of having *invented* the story. Here Ponsonby, supporter of a “top-down” theory of the origins of false atrocity stories, was mistaken. But Gregory himself commits the same sin of “contentious interpretation” of which he accuses Ponsonby: he omits the crucial fact that the “Corpse factory” would have remained in the netherworld of rumor and never have “received any official notice,” nor become famous worldwide, had the story not been published by the Northcliffe press, spread by Reuters, and backed by reputable public figures.

Jeff Lipkes ascribes to the “Corpse factory” a key role in the origin of Revisionist atrocity denial. He holds that three events were “largely responsible for [a] development” in the course of which “the notion that massacres of innocent civilians

clearly shows. *Falsehood in War-Time* can rightfully be called “a work of propaganda” (Field 1945:24), and as the few examples given above show, it has serious flaws, which should urge the reader to exercise caution in quoting and interpreting.

¹⁰ Ponsonby 1928:102-113.

¹¹ Gregory 2008:42.

had not taken place became the prevailing orthodoxy by the 1930s”: the appearance of Lasswell’s and Ponsonby’s books in 1927 and 1928, and “the revival in 1925 of a controversy over allegations about German corpse conversion factories that had been resolved eight years earlier.”¹²

In his criticism of *Falsehood in War-Time*, Lipkes tries to show that the examples of “falsehood” given by Ponsonby - apart from a few exceptions - are either undocumented or false themselves, or dealt with by Ponsonby in a biased manner. As a prime example he takes Ponsonby’s treatment of the “Corpse factory” story. First, he is convinced that Charteris was telling the truth when he denied having tampered with captured German photographs. From this he concludes that the General was not the originator of the story - a statement that is correct; independent, however, of whether Charteris had or had not tampered with the pictures in question. Secondly, he is firmly convinced, against Ponsonby, that “the story was not a British invention.”¹³ He contends, instead, that the Germans are to blame for both the origins of the “Corpse factory” story and its use in Allied propaganda. To that effect, he tells his own story of how the yarn originated and was spread.

He starts with the assertion that “it was the German newspaper story . . . that began the controversy.”¹⁴ “The German newspaper story” is the Rosner account that Lipkes uncritically quotes in the English rendering given by *The Times* of April 16, 1917 with both gross mistranslations: *Kadaver* as “corpse” and *Leim* as “lime.”¹⁵ In the next step, he finds it suspicious that

¹² Lipkes 2007:603. This, however, did not happen at all - the “controversy” had not “been resolved eight years earlier,” i.e. already in 1917, as was shown in much detail in the preceding chapters of this book.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 613. Gregory, for instance, is less radical than Lipkes and does not exclude a “British origin,” as his examples from the “netherworld of rumors” show.

¹⁴ Lipkes 2007:613.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

“the Germans never adopted the simple expedient of allowing Dutch or American journalists to visit the plant at Evergnicourt and witness for themselves that it was processing the bodies of horses.¹⁶”

He finally comes to the conclusion that the Germans “may have wished to see the accusations repeated” - a statement that neither makes sense, nor is backed by the known facts, nor for which he gives grounds.¹⁷

It is naive to assume that those editors whose papers had brought the story several times and often on prominent pages and those influential Allied statesmen and politicians who had publicly supported the story would have beaten their breasts and recanted, if some “Dutch or American journalist” presented a refutation. What is more, for those in the propaganda business, a visit of a group of journalists from neutral countries would have proven nothing. They simply would have claimed that the “Huns” had made a show to deceive the neutral observers, replacing human corpses with horse or other animal carcasses for the time of the delegation’s visit.¹⁸ The duped neutral observers’ report, the propagandists

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 615. The same argument, incidentally, was made by Shimon Rubinstein, an Israeli scholar, in an interview given to *The Jerusalem Post* in 1989; “German Crematoria Predated the Holocaust,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 10, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁷ Lipkes 2007:615. Lipkes pursues a strategy of argumentation similar to that of denial mapped out by British government circles immediately after the Charteris revelations and summarized on October 25, 1925 by United Press: “The report that the Germans were utilising human corpses arose from statements in Germany’s own newspapers,” and “The question was never settled, because the Germans refused to allow neutrals to examine the fat from the corpses”; “The Storm Bursts. Corpse-Factory Story. Sensation Caused in England. Evidence from German Sources. United Press dispatch from October 25,” *The Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, October 26, 1925, p. 7. See also the statement made by the British Secretary for War in Commons on November 24, 1925: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1925/nov/24/statement-by-secretary-for-war>. Last accessed November 21, 2011.

¹⁸ In the Second World War, the Germans, in fact, applied these tactics - making a show - when a delegation from the International Red Cross was

would have said, is not worth the paper it is written on. The propaganda wheel would have turned full circle. Incidentally, since April 16, 1917, when the French launched their Spring Offensive, the “plant at Evergnicourt” was within the battle zone, and a visit to it was no more possible.

Much more important, however, was the fact that the world had been told by Reuters and the Northcliffe papers that the mysterious German corpse processing plant was located somewhere near Gerolstein in the Eifel hills, about 150 miles off Evergnicourt, as the crow flies. This “Corpse factory,” however, did not exist in reality. Therefore, the Germans could not have shown it, neither to “Dutch or American journalists,” nor to anybody else. Of course the propagandists would have exploited this as “dodging” by the Germans, as “hiding the horrible secret from the world’s eyes.” Again the propaganda wheel would have turned full circle. Last but not least, since April 6, 1917 the U.S. was already formally at war with Germany, a fact that excluded inviting “American journalists” to a tour of a German “Corpse factory.” To sum up: The way Lipkes treats the “Corpse factory” hoax shows his ignorance not only of the facts and circumstances of the case, but also of the way propaganda operates in wartime.

For curiosity’s sake it shall be mentioned here that in 2005 the “German corpse factory” was confused with the *Bryce Report* at the highest diplomatic level in Turkish-British relations. In an open letter from April 13, 2005 to the British Parliament, co-signed by the Turkish Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader, the Turkish Parliament demanded that Government and Parliament of Great Britain follow the example of their predecessors who, on December 2, 1925, “distanced themselves publicly from the slanderous *Bryce Report* about alleged German outrages,” and that they apologize to Turkey for the publication, in 1916, of a *Blue Book* “rife with similar falsehoods about alleged Turkish

atrocities perpetrated against Armenians.”¹⁹ One can only agree with Taner Akçam who wondered why nobody in Turkey had felt the need to check the facts before signing and dispatching such a document.²⁰

The “Corpse Factory” - A “Rehearsal” for the Holocaust?

“A number of fantasies of the first World War, such as the ‘corpse factory,’ were actually realized by the combatants of the second World War,” wrote Alexander Comfort in 1950.²¹ Was the “Corpse factory” of the First World War, therefore, not only “foreshadowing later Nazi practices,”²² but even inspiring the Germans when they set about mechanizing body disposal at the death camps of the Second World War and collected dental gold and hair from the victims? “Disinclined to pass the episode off as British propaganda,”²³ Shimon Rubinstein, an Israeli scholar, sees the “Corpse factories” of the First World War as “possible pilot-plants for the extermination centers the Nazis built during World War II.”²⁴

According to him, “the question of whether the German ‘Corpse Utilization Establishments’ built during the First World War processed dead humans or dead animals is still unresolved today.”²⁵ French historian Pierre Hervet

¹⁹ Akçam 2005:3-4. Scare quotes added. The “Blue Book” mentioned here was a report about the Armenian genocide, edited by Viscount Bryce and Arnold Toynbee.

²⁰ Ibid. Akçam, by the way, also shows lack of knowledge of the facts about the “Corpse factory” hoax: “This story cannot in any way be said to have been fabricated by the British: the first mention of it came in a German newspaper during wartime . . . One month later, similar reports were published in expatriate Belgian papers in France and the Netherlands, as well as in the London *Times*” (ibid., p. 25, italics in the original).

²¹ Comfort 1950:40.

²² Latham 2008:173, endnote 13.

²³ So in an interview given to *The Jerusalem Post*; “German Crematoria Predated the Holocaust,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 10, 1989, p. 8.

²⁴ Rubinstein 1987:9.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

shares this view. Referring to Rosner's description of a *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* at Evergnicourt, he states: "We do not really know what kind of dead bodies were treated in this plant: animals, corpses of Russian soldiers, of Belgian or French deportees, or all at the same time?"²⁶

The absence, however, of any reliable evidence from the German side that the "Corpse factory" establishments of the First World War were real, completely undermines Hervet's and Rubinstein's claims. Let us call a spade a spade: the mythical "Corpse factory" of Allied First World War propaganda was neither a pilot plant for Auschwitz and Treblinka, nor a rehearsal ground for German outrages perpetrated in the Second World War, and it was the public debunking of the "Corpse factory" as a hoax in 1925 - and not "the triumph of Revisionism in the 1930s"²⁷ - that let diplomats and politicians in 1942/1943 discount reports about Jews being boiled down by the Germans for soap, lubricants, and fertilizer.

Bubbling up from the netherworld of rumors, taken up by Allied propaganda, streamlined and spread worldwide, the "German corpse factory" had become the subject of urban legends already in wartime. It had quickly made the way to all the fronts, told and retold in the trenches, and was brought from them into the soldiers' home countries. At the turn of 1930 the story had already become common knowledge: "There can be but few people now who have not heard it."²⁸

Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the "Corpse factory" had transmogrified into a "Soap factory" where the Germans had been processing their dead enemies, and about which urban legends were circulating in all countries once at war with Germany. In German occupied Poland these legends merged with age-old folktales about killers who used the body

²⁶ *On ne sait quels cadavres traitait au juste cet établissement: animaux, corps de militaires russes, de déportés belges ou français, ou tous à la fois?* Hervet 1987:109.

²⁷ So Lipkes 2007:661, against Laqueur 1982.

²⁸ Southwold 1931:116.

fat of their victims for soap-making and so gave rise to the “Jewish soap” legend which started to conquer the globe in the autumn of 1942. In 1945 the “Nazi human lampshade” story from Buchenwald followed suit, gradually transmogrifying into a “Jewish lampshades” legend alongside the “Jewish soap” myth.

As alleged final products of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” (a Nazi euphemism for the Holocaust), “soap and lampshades from the Nazi extermination camps” have become icons of the Holocaust, deeply engraved on the collective memories of the peoples of the Western World and Israel.²⁹ They are the apparent heirs to “glycerin, lubricants and pigs’ food from the German corpse conversion factories” of the First World War. Their omnipresence in the public space and the media, as well as their incessant proliferation worldwide prove that for the “German corpse factory,” which soon will celebrate its hundredth anniversary, no “end of history” is in sight.³⁰

²⁹ For a detailed analysis, see, e.g. Neander 2008.

³⁰ Alluding to the title of a bestseller by Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1992.

APPENDIX

From
L'INDÉPENDANCE BELGE,
Tuesday, April 10, 1917, p. 3

En vente à Londres à 3 h.
le samedi 7 avril

UNE INDUSTRIE SACRILEGE

*Les Allemands à court de graisse
prélèvent celle de leurs soldats
tombés au champ d'honneur*

Nous lisons dans "La Belgique" de
Leyde:

"Nous savon depuis longtemps que les Allemands déshabillent leur morts derrière la ligne de feu, enroulent les cadavres par paquets de 3 ou de 4 dans du fil de fer qu'ils serrent fortement et évacuent ensuite ces lugubres colis vers l'arrière pour y être incinérés. Jusque maintenant les trains chargés de soldats tués sur le front français ne dépassaient jamais la région de Liège. Ils étaient dirigés sur les hauts-fourneaux de l'usine Cockerill à Seraing et vers le Nord de Bruxelles où la ville a installé des fours pour brûler les immondices.

"Ces trains composés de wagons, genre wagons à chaux, avec porte ouvrant vers le haut, laissaient derrière une odeur épouvantable. On a été très surpris dernièrement de constater

On sale from 3 p.m. on
Saturday, April 7

A HEINOUS INDUSTRY

*The Germans, for lack of fats,
take them from their soldiers
fallen on the Field of Honor*

We read in *La Belgique* from
Leyden:

"We have known for long that the Germans strip their dead behind the firing line, fasten them tightly into bundles of three or four bodies with iron wire, and then dispatch these grisly bundles to the rear for incineration. Up to now, the trains with soldiers killed at the French front have never gone farther than Liège and its surrounding area. They were sent to the blast furnaces of the Cockerill steel and iron works at Seraing and to a point north of Brussels, where the city has established ovens for incinerating garbage.

"These trains consist of box cars of the type used for the transport of lime, with lids opening upwards. They leave behind them an unbearable stench. Much surprise was

que ce trafic prenait le chemin Cambrai-Tournai-Gand, faisant sans doute un détour pour éviter les transports de troupes, puis se dirigeait vers Malines, Louvain et de là sur Gerolstein. Cela a éveillé l'attention, attendu que l'Eiffel ne compte aucune installation d'incinération ou de hauts-fourneaux. De plus on a remarqué que chaque wagon portait la mention à la craie D.A.V.G. et comme le trafic était assez intense pendant la dernière semaine, on fut amené à se demander si la construction de la nouvelle ligne Vielsalm-Saint-With, n'avait pas pour but de raccourcir le trajet par ces nombreux transports.

“Après avoir constitué des organismes officiels pour la récupération des eaux de vaisselle et résiduaires pour en extraire les matières grasses, la “Science allemande” vient de faire un nouveau pas vers la récupération industrielle des sous-produits, et, cette fois, le corps humain a fait l'objet de son étude. Pareille idée scientifiquement lugubre ne pouvait germer que dans un cerveau allemand. Le résultat a amené la constitution de la D.A.V.G. (Deutsche Abfalverwertung Gesellschaft M. b. H. [sic]), société au capital de 5 millions de mark, dont la première usine a été construite à un kilomètre de la voie ferrée

caused by the fact that of late this traffic has taken the Cambrai-Tournai-Ghent route, undoubtedly making a detour to avoid the troop transports, and then proceeded via Mechelen and Louvain to Gerolstein. This has attracted attention due to the fact that, in the Eifel, there is neither a waste incineration plant nor are there blast furnaces. What is more, it was noted that on each wagon was written with chalk “D.A.V.G.” Since last week, traffic has been very intense, and one has to ask oneself whether the construction of the new railway line Vielsalm-St. Vith was not intended as a short cut for all these numerous transports.

“Having established authorities for the recycling of fats from dishwater and other effluents, ‘German Science’ has taken another step toward the industrial recycling of waste, and this time, the human body has been its study object. Such a scientifically sinister idea could only originate in a German brain. The result was the formation of the D.A.V.G. (German Waste Utilization Company (Limited)), a society with a capital of five million marks, whose first plant was built one kilometer from the railroad connecting St. Vith with Gerolstein. This factory is especially assigned to the West front, and if the results are such as it can

reliant St. With à Gerolstein. Cette usine est spécialement affectée au front ouest, et si les résultats sont ce qu'on a tout lieu d'espérer, un deuxième établissement sera bientôt installé pour être spécialement affecté au front est.

“Les bâtiments de cette usine sont situés dans un terrain boisé, au milieu d'une grande futaie, qui les rend invisibles aux rares voyageurs de cette ligne peu fréquentée. Des fils de fer électrifiés entourent le logement du personnel qui se trouve près de la ligne principale: simples habitations ressemblant à des baraquements militaires. Les fils électriques encadrent la voie de raccordement qu'ils suivent jusqu'à six cents mètres de l'usine, où commence un immense double réseau qui isole complètement l'exploitation. L'usine a environ 210 mètres de longueur et une centaine de mètres de largeur, les petits côtés de ce rectangle étant dans la direction du N.N.E. La voie ferrée fait le tour de l'usine et est utilisée sur les côtés ouest et nord pour amener le combustible et les cadavres.

“C'est dans le coin nord-ouest du terrain que s'opère le déchargement des wagons. Ceux-ci arrivent chargés de cadavres nus, que déchargent des ouvriers, le corps enveloppé dans une combinaison de toile huilée et la

rightfully be expected, a second plant will be constructed serving the East front.

“The buildings of this factory are situated in a wooded area, in the middle of a big forest, which makes it invisible for the few passengers of this lowly frequented line. Live barbed wire surrounds the quarters of the personnel which are situated next to the main railroad: simple lodgings that resemble military barracks. On a length of six hundred meters, the electrified wires frame the railroad link leading to the factory, where a huge double grid begins that completely isolates the works. The factory is about 210 meters long and one hundred meters large, the small sides of the rectangle pointing to North-North-East. The railroad tracks surround the factory, and at its western and northern sides, the railroad is used for the delivery of fuel and corpses.

“The trains are discharged in the northwestern corner of the area. They arrive full of bare corpses and are unloaded by workmen, who wear oilskin overalls and a head mask with mica eyepieces. These men

tête couverte d'un masque avec plaque de mica. Ces hommes sont armés de longues tiges avec crochets et poussent les paquets humains vers une chaîne sans fin qui entraîne les cadavres un à un grâce à d'énormes crampons attachés à 60 centimètres l'un de l'autre.

“Leurs corps entrent par une sorte de tambour dans un local long et étroit où pendant tout leur parcours ils sont plongés dans un bain destiné tout à la fois à les dégraisser et à les désinfecter. La chaîne sans fin les fait passer ensuite dans un séchoir, aménagé également en forme de couloirs longs et étroits. Les corps y sont soumis à un courant d'air sec et chaud et il sortent de cette étape en ayant perdu par évaporation une partie considérable de leur poids initial. Enfin la chaîne les entraîne jusqu'à l'autoclave, énorme construction métallique dans laquelle les corps sont jetés automatiquement, grâce à un ingénieux dispositif servant au décrochage. A l'intérieur de l'autoclave des malaxeurs-agitateurs peuvent, au moment opportun, remuer la masse. Les trois bâtiments contigus, bain séchoir et cuve occupent les 2/3 du terrain du côté nord, tandis que les dépendances, dont nous parlerons plus loin, occupent l'autre tiers et la partie sud du terrain.

are equipped with long hooked poles. They push the human bundles to an endless chain, which carries the corpses away one after the other by means of huge cramps attached to it every sixty centimeters.

“The bodies enter, through a kind of a drum, a long and narrow compartment where they all their way long are submerged in a bath that cleans and disinfects them at the same time. Then the endless chain passes them through a drying device, also in the form of long and narrow corridors. Here the bodies are exposed to a stream of dry and hot air. On leaving this stage, they have lost a considerable part of their initial weight by evaporation. Finally the chain carries them to the autoclave, a huge metal construction, into which the bodies are thrown automatically by means of a smart device that removes them from the cramps. Within the autoclave there are mixers that can stir the contents, if wanted. The three adjacent buildings - bath, dryer, and tub - occupy two thirds of the northern part of the area, whereas the annexes, about which we will speak later, occupy the other third and the southern part of the area.

“Toutefois il faut noter que la désinfection des wagons ayant amené les cadavres se fait immédiatement après leur déchargement au moyen de vaporisations au formol suivies de jets de vapeur surchauffée.

“La véritable utilisation et la transformation des cadavres en sous-produits précieux commence seulement après leur arrivée à l'autoclave. Après une cuisson de 6 à 8 heures dans la vapeur les chairs séparées des os ne forment plus qu'une bouillie assez semblable comme aspects aux extraits de viande mais d'une couleur presque noire. Lorsque la masse est reposée les os tombent au fond et la “pâte” est envoyée par des pompes dans l'installation spécialement affectée à l'extraction de matières grasses par le procédé à la benzine.

“D'autre part les os et les résidus de l'extraction des huiles sont déversés dans un four situé immédiatement à l'est des chaudières et incinérés. Les graisses extraites sont envoyées par des pompes dans un autre bâtiment où l'on sépare par des procédés connus les éléments stéariques des éléments oléiques. La stéarine est vendue telle quelle mais les huiles répandent une telle odeur qu'il est nécessaire de leur faire subir un commencement de

“It should, however, be mentioned here that the disinfection of the wagons which brought the corpses is done immediately after their unloading by spraying them with formalin followed by jets of overheated steam.

“The real exploitation and the transformation of the corpses into valuable raw material only begins after their arrival at the autoclave. After boiling for six to eight hours under steam, the flesh separated from the bones is nothing more than a paste looking like a kind of beef extract, but with a nearly black color. When the mixture is allowed to rest, the bones sink to the bottom, and the “paste” is pumped to a device specially designed to extract fats by means of benzine.

“On the other hand, the bones and the residues from the oil extraction are poured into an oven, situated right east of the boilers, and incinerated. The extracted fats are pumped into another building, where the stearic elements are separated from the oleic elements by well-known methods. The stearin is sold as it is, but the oils give off such a stench that they must undergo an initial refinement.

raffinage.

“Cette opération se fait simplement par le mélange de la masse huileuse chaude avec du carbonate de soude. L’huile neutralisée est envoyée alors à la désodorisation, où elle est distillée tandis que les sous-produits de la neutralisation sont utilisés comme on croit savoir par les savonniers qui ne trouvent plus les acides gras nécessaires à leur industrie. L’huile neutralisée et partiellement désodorisée est envoyée au réservoir des “produits finis” d’où elle est expédiée en fûts de genre des barriques de pétrole. Jusqu’au présent il n’a pas été possible de préciser l’usage que l’on faisait de ces huiles qui avaient subi un commencement de raffinage. Cette huile à la température ordinaire est liquide, d’un couleur jaune-brun et à peu près sans odeur. L’huilerie et la raffinerie occupent le coin S-E du terrain et l’expédition de l’huile se fait par la voie ferrée qui passe à l’est du bâtiment.

“Il est intéressant de retenir de cette exploitation quelques détails techniques. La chaleur produite par les chaudières sert successivement à la production de la force motrice, au chauffage du four à incinérer les os et les déchets, à la production de la vapeur nécessaire à l’autoclave, aux besoins de l’huilerie,

“This is simply made by mixing the hot oily mass with sodium carbonate. The neutralized oil then undergoes a process of deodorization, in which it is distilled, whereas the by-products of the neutralization - as we hold - are used by the soap-makers, who do not find any more the fatty acids necessary for their business. The neutralized and partially deodorized oil goes to the “Final Products” department, from where it is shipped out in barrels similar to those for petroleum. Up to now it has not been possible to tell exactly what is made with these oils that have been partially refined. At normal temperature, this oil is liquid, has a yellow-brown color, and is nearly odorless. The oil making department and the refinery lie in the southeastern corner of the area, and the oil is dispatched via the railroad that passes east of the building.

“It is interesting to note some technical details of this utilization. The heat produced by the boilers is used for providing kinetic energy, for the oven, where the bones and the waste is incinerated, for making the steam for the autoclave, for the needs of the oil making department, and for heating the bath and the

au chauffage du bain et du séchoir. La cheminée de l'usine n'est que de faible hauteur, l'élévation de la fumée et le réglage du tirage se faisant par ventilateurs électriques. Un seul groupe de chaudières produit toute la chaleur nécessaire au fonctionnement des appareils et cette chaleur est utilisée et répartie rationnellement dans l'ensemble du bâtiment. La chaîne sans fin supprime les manipulations désagréables et le personnel est très restreint par l'utilisation à outrance des procédés mécaniques. Enfin les odeurs de toute l'usine sont aspirées par des ventilateurs électriques, condensées dans un vaste serpentin situé dans le coin N.E. du terrain et envoyées à l'égout avec les eaux résiduaires.

“Un laboratoire se trouve sur le terrain même de l'usine. Le personnel se compose d'un directeur, d'un conseiller commercial, d'un chimiste en chef assisté de deux auxiliaires et de 78 ouvriers. Tout ce personnel est militarisé et ravitaillé par le VIII^e corps. Une infirmerie est établie près des baraquements, et sous aucun prétexte un ouvrier ne peut être évacué sur l'extérieur.

“On a toujours dit que le besoin rend ingénieux, et il est curieux en effet de constater non seulement la nouveauté de l'idée, mais encore la manière

dryer. The factory chimney is not very high. Smoke exhaust and the control of draft is made by electric fans. A single group of boilers produces all the heat necessary for the functioning of the equipment, and this heat is used and distributed rationally in the whole complex. The endless chain avoids unpleasant manual work, and the workforce is very limited due to utmost mechanization. At the end, the fumes of the whole factory are exhausted by electric fans, condensed in a huge coil in the northeastern corner of the area, and discharged into a sewer together with other effluents.

“There is a laboratory on the premises of the plant. The factory staff consists of a director, a commercial advisor, a chief chemist with two assistants, and seventy-eight workers. The whole personnel is under military command and is supplied by the 8th Army Corps. A sick-bay is next to the barracks, and on no account a worker is granted furlough.

“It has always been said that necessity is the mother of invention, and it is, indeed, remarkable to realize not only the novelty of the idea, but also

rationnelle qui a présidé à l'installation de l'usine."

Et oilà la sépulture que réservent les sauvages scientifiques d'Outre-Rhin aux soldats, défenseurs de la Kultur!

Mères, épouses ou sœurs, qui pleurez un être cher tombé au champ d'honneur pour servir votre Kaiser criminel, voilà le sort réservé à vos héros. De la graisse industrielle!

the rational manner that guided the establishment of the factory."

And here we have the funeral that the savage scientists from the other side of the Rhine have prepared for the soldiers, the defenders of the Kultur!

Mothers, wives, or sisters, you who mourn for a dear human being fallen on the Field of Honor in the service of your criminal Kaiser: here you have the fate destined for your heroes: Industrial fats!

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