Belsen, Dachau, 1945: 
Newspapers and the First Draft of History

by

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I am the author of the thesis entitled

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Nazi concentration camps were first presented to the British and American general public. It focuses on the nature of press coverage in 1945, identifying themes that emerged in British and American newspaper reportage of two Nazi concentration camps, Belsen and Dachau, in the immediate aftermath of liberation and during the subsequent trials of camp personnel. In examining the two historically critical events of liberation and military trials and focusing on two major Nazi camps, this thesis grapples with the links between early reporting and ongoing misunderstandings about the concentration camp system. Recognising the pivotal role journalists play in forming the “first rough draft” of concentration camp history, it is argued that the way liberation is remembered today and what concentration camps are seen to represent is linked closely to the contemporary framing of camps. The thesis identifies how the press portrayed key themes in the camps and structured these to create, in some cases, a highly problematic discourse reflective of the values of correspondents and photographers, the conventions of the time, and national ideals and desires.

Through close analysis of reports and the presentation of photographic images, relationships and trends in newspaper reportage are probed. Section One, “Correspondents and Photographers”, considers the contexts that shaped reportage of concentration camps in 1945 and explores correspondents’ and photographers’ initial responses to Belsen and Dachau. Section Two, “Victims”, analyses descriptions of camp inmates and draws attention to the image of victims that developed in the press. Focusing on the dominance of camp personnel, Section Three, “Perpetrators”, examines four individual perpetrators who were singled out and demonised. Thus, this thesis determines the tropes that proliferated in reportage and determines early representations of victims and perpetrators.
On 21 April 1945, American war correspondent William Frye’s account of Bergen-Belsen, a Nazi concentration camp encountered by British forces, appeared in a number of American newspapers. The British had liberated the camp, commonly referred to simply as Belsen, on 15 April 1945 and Frye entered several days later. Frye concluded:

What I saw and heard at Belsen is something never seen or heard of in the world before the Nazis created concentration camps of their own bestial, incomprehensible kind... here in Belsen there was a deliberate, calculated effort, in most cases successful, to force mankind down the ladder up which he climbed painfully through millennia. That is the frightful thing beyond normal understanding.

Frye’s account reveals the difficulties of reporting and recording mass death and atrocity. Unprecedented brutality and horrific crimes were discovered in Nazi concentration camps in the spring of 1945. It is difficult to grasp just how shocking the camp revelations would have been. How did correspondents and photographers go about describing concentration camps and capturing the horror? Can words or photographic images appropriately or adequately express the suffering inmates endured, perpetrators’ cruelty or the violence that characterised daily life inside camps? What factors influenced correspondents’ and photographers’ responses to Nazi atrocities? Did a stereotype of victim and perpetrator emerge from early reporting? These questions are the focus of this thesis as it examines the nature of press coverage in 1945


2 Frye worked for the Christian Science Monitor. Between 1941 and 1946 he served in the army and for part of that period he was on staff for Stars and Stripes.

and identifies themes that emerged in British and American newspaper reportage of two major Nazi concentration camps, Belsen and Dachau, in the immediate aftermath of liberation and during coverage of the subsequent trials.

Such questions are pertinent as reports and photographs of liberated camps published in newspapers in 1945 formed the first “rough draft” of concentration camp history, a phrase often attributed to former *Washington Post* editor Philip Graham. Newspapers are an invaluable primary source since they contribute to the historical record by covering news events. This thesis is important because it analyses contemporary reportage of liberation and military trials. It also recognises and emphasises the pivotal role journalists play in developing history. The work of pre-eminent war correspondent Martha Gellhorn epitomises the trend of journalists chronicling history. Gellhorn and her contemporaries witnessed history as it happened and gave shape and an interpretation to events during the Second World War. Journalists valued the integrity and truth of their reporting and showed a personal commitment to objectivity during the conflict.

Journalists and historians take a similar approach to compiling, documenting and interpreting information and they share a commitment to facts and a focus on key actors and critical events. But questions are often raised about correspondents’ capacity to be credible, reliable authors of history. Correspondents’ work is dictated by a number of demands such as editorial pressures, technological capacities, deadlines and audience expectations. Whereas historians assemble all information and assess significance and consequence, correspondents’ reflexivity is

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limited due to their proximity to events. War correspondent Fred Friendly reflected on Edward R Murrow’s broadcast from Buchenwald concentration camp at the International Liberators Conference in 1981:

But there is nothing like that first draft of history. Murrow didn’t write that report a month later, 10 months later, 10 years later, or in his memoirs 35 years later. He was a very young man, and he wrote what he felt in his gut and his heart, which is what others of us tried to do.

The first “rough draft” of history is bound to be imperfect and incomplete. The true scale and significance of an event can be only understood with time and distance. Nonetheless, what journalists write sets the agenda for future historians and therefore influences subsequent historiography. Journalists “get the jump” on historians who have to “follow the contours of what they define”. Examining contemporary reports and photographs, then, offers a snapshot into the state of news available at the time each report was published and the tropes that dominated press reporting of Nazi concentration camps in 1945.

Between 1933 and 1945, Germany created a vast network of camps across Europe that served various functions in the Nationalist Socialist state. Concentration camps were institutions of persecution used by the Nazis in order to detain perceived and actual threats and to intimidate the public. Concentration camps were an integral part of the Nazi regime of terror and estimates are that some 2.3 million men, women and children were imprisoned in concentration camps between 1933 and 1945 and over 1.7 million lost their lives. The Nazis also designed and built four extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Poland during the

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8 ibid.
Second World War; however, these camps had a different function. Extermination camps were to be sites of the mass systematic extermination of European Jewry. Using gassing facilities, it is estimated that approximately 2.7 million people were murdered in Nazi extermination camps.\textsuperscript{12}

The Soviets and the Western Allies encountered Nazi camps in 1944-1945 as they moved across Europe following a series of offensives led by Allied troops against Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{13} The Western Allies’ first direct encounter with Nazi atrocities occurred with the liberation of concentration camps in western Germany in the spring of 1945. Belsen was the first and only major concentration camp liberated by the British on 15 April 1945. Established in 1943, Belsen was not a typical concentration camp and its function changed several times between 1943 and 1945. Established in 1933 Dachau, a model concentration camp, was one of the last concentration camps to be liberated by American forces on 29 April 1945. The appalling camp conditions grabbed the attention of the British and American press. Correspondents detailed their disgust and outrage in written accounts and photographers captured the atrocious scenes. The \textit{Jewish Chronicle} suggested “murder camps” were evidence of the barbarity of Nazism in April 1945:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{The Observer} reflected on what effect reports and photographs emerging from camps were having on the general public:
\end{quote}

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\begin{flushright}
\textit{14 “The Lesson of the Murder Camps”, \textit{Jewish Chronicle}, 27 April 1945, p. 10.}
\end{flushright}
Many of the facts were known: what the reports do is to drive home the full depravity of the horror. Who shall be held responsible for this abyss of perverted cruelty—scarcely believable, scarcely paralleled in the whole history of human inhumanity?\textsuperscript{15}

Allied war correspondents and photographers visited Belsen and Dachau, sometimes within hours of liberation. Many of these individuals had been covering the war for some time, following British and American forces on the Western Front.

By examining newspaper reports and photographs, this thesis identifies how the press portrayed key themes in the camps and structured reports to create, in some cases, a highly problematic discourse reflective of the values of correspondents and photographers and the conventions of the time. The way liberation is remembered today and what concentration camps are seen to represent are linked closely to the contemporary framing of camps. Belsen and Dachau, for instance, remain synonymous with the liberation of Nazi camps because of the role played by the press in reproducing photographs of camp atrocities and publishing accompanying written reports.\textsuperscript{16} Correspondents and photographers provided a fundamental link between the home population and the Allied war efforts abroad. Defeat of Germany brought the Western Allies “instant and almost total control of the representation of the camps such as Belsen to the free world, initially through media coverage and then, war crimes trials”.\textsuperscript{17} Liberation and military trials were critical historical moments as photographs and words reinforced each other and combined to present a picture of Nazi atrocity to the Allied public.

\textsuperscript{15} “The Guilt”, The Observer, 22 April 1945, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{17} Kushner, “The Memory of Belsen”, p. 184.
One of the misunderstandings that emerged immediately following liberation was that the camps encountered by British and American forces were extermination camps. As Dan Stone points out, Belsen and Dachau were described as the worst of Nazi camps in 1945 and thus came to represent Nazi camps as a whole. Although an understandable miscomprehension, this had important ramifications for subsequent historiography as it contributed to confusions about the distinctions between different types of camps and the relationship between concentration camps and the Holocaust.\(^{18}\) For many years after the war, for instance, it was widely assumed all concentration camps were sites of genocide. Misunderstandings about Nazi camps and their victims, both popular and academic, were shaped by early press reports of concentration camps and took many years of research to put right.\(^{19}\) Deborah Lipstadt provides examples of particular American press reports in 1945 that contributed to the development of misperceptions about what occurred in camps.\(^{20}\) In the 1990s Joanne Reilly detailed how Belsen still gets confused with extermination camps in contemporary Britain giving examples from an encyclopedia of the Second World War, a report from newspaper *The Observer*, and a British Higher Education Supplement.\(^{21}\) Furthermore, the liberation of concentration camps has been inextricably linked to the Holocaust in public memorialisation and commemoration.\(^{22}\)

This thesis focuses specifically on British and American responses to concentration camps. The Western Allies liberated many of the most populated camps in 1945 and thus had a direct link to liberation. The British and American press had significant international influence.

\(^{19}\) ibid. p. 32.
During the Second World War Britain was a world leader and the United States was an emerging superpower and each nation had enormous international sway. The Soviets also encountered Nazi camps, although many had undergone large-scale evacuations before the Red Army arrived. The Soviet liberation of camps received hardly any coverage in the west whereas the liberation of concentration camps by British and American forces dominated the Allied press and indeed the international media. This work analyses reportage from a wide range of British and American newspapers including national and local, liberal and conservative newspapers, working-class and communist newspapers, as well as Jewish and military newspapers.

Liberation was only one juncture when camps featured in the British and American press. Camps were again a focus during military trials of camp personnel. Following wartime discussions and agreements between the Allied powers relating to the punishment of Nazi criminals, a number of war crimes trials were held in the post-war period. Most notably, the International Military Tribunal (IMT) Trial of 1945-1946 tried surviving “major war criminals” of the Nazi state. British and American occupation forces also administered military trials of camp personnel in their respective zones of occupation. The Belsen and Dachau trials were key events where camps re-entered public consciousness in Britain and the United States. These trials of camp personnel were held within months of liberation. The Belsen Trial and Dachau trials commenced even before the IMT Trial (20 November 1945-31 August 1946). The Belsen Trial (17 September-17 November 1945) was the first camp trial, beginning just four months after the camp had been liberated. The Dachau Trial ran for six weeks from 15 November to 13 December 1945. Other camp trials such as the Neuengamme Trial (18 March 1946-13 May 1946), the Flossenbürg Trial (12 June 1946-22 January 1947) and the Buchenwald Trial (11 April 1947-14 August 1947) did not proceed until well into the post-war period. The Belsen and Dachau trials act as case studies because of their immediacy to liberation. Camp revelations were
still relatively new and trial reportage was an essential part of the first “rough draft” of the concentration camps.

British and American press coverage of liberation and the Belsen and Dachau trials helped determine the history of camps: their functionality, who the inmates were and why they were imprisoned, the nature of the enemy, and the crimes of individual perpetrators. Newspaper reports also dealt with questions relating to punishment and the Allies’ relationship to the camps. The essence of this “first draft” of concentration camp history was the representation of victims and perpetrators. Inmates were presented as an unidentifiable mass with individual victims absorbed into the story of mass atrocity. Initially camp personnel collectively were the focus. Due to the individualisation in coverage of the trials, however, key perpetrators were singled out and became emblematic of the brutality of the concentration camp system. This thesis examines the development of these themes from liberation to military trials, and the substantive sections of this thesis explore how the press responded to camp crimes and portrayed victims and perpetrators.

Belsen and Dachau act as focal points of press coverage for the thesis as not only did the Western Allies liberate these camps but the corresponding trials of camp personnel also took place in the immediate aftermath of liberation. Examining these camps in isolation is appropriate as they occupy a unique place in terms of British and American national memory of the Second World War. Particularly in Britain, Belsen has long remained synonymous with the liberation of Nazi concentration camps and is part of the British story of the Second World War. Belsen was one of the most filmed, photographed and discussed camps of the war. Photographic images of Belsen and written reports were reproduced in the media and became “widely known, recognised and employed”. Dachau is perhaps less significant in terms

23 Stone, *The Liberation*, p. 82.
of national memory in the United States, but its importance relates to the especially prominent place Dachau occupied in the Nazi camp system. Its existence almost exactly coincided with that of the Third Reich. The camp was not destroyed nor did large-scale evacuations take place and this further ensured Dachau’s prominence. It was not the first camp liberated by American forces but it received significant press attention because of Allied efforts to publicise Nazi atrocities. Michael Selzer also points out that the value of studying Dachau lies in the fact that it came to symbolise the discourse surrounding the role of the US armed forces as the world’s principal defence against tyranny and inhumanity and the image of Americans as liberators.

Moreover, Susan Sontag’s reaction to seeing images of Belsen and Dachau in July 1945 highlights how representations of these two camps have contributed to ongoing confusion about concentration camps and their relationship to the Holocaust. After viewing photographs of Belsen and Dachau in July 1945, Sontag did not understand the images to be of two separate camps with distinct histories, but rather as representations of Nazi camps more generally.

It is first necessary to set up the conceptual and methodological frameworks of the thesis. Included in the discussion of the conceptual foundations and methodology, is a summary and justification of the newspapers examined throughout the thesis. Key themes developed in the relevant historiography are addressed also in order to place the research within the existing scholarship. In examining contemporary newspaper reports and photographic images, it is important also to understand the development of the Nazi camp system, and the wider

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26 ibid. p. 52.
Introduction

context of the war, liberation and military trials of camp personnel. Thus an overview of the Nazi camp system, the liberation of camps, and the war crimes trials held within the immediate post-war period comprises the second part of this Introduction. A short overview of the thesis structure concludes this Introduction.

Analysing Press Responses to Concentration Camps

Correspondents and photographers produced some of the first representations of Nazi atrocities and had a direct influence on how readers viewed concentration camps. The reproduction of photographs and eyewitness accounts by respected Allied journalists helped convince readers conditions in camps were real. Stereotypes of victims and perpetrators also were established at this point and are explored in this thesis. Victims were presented as a dehumanised, anonymous mass and perpetrators were portrayed as monsters and beasts.

Several issues arise when considering liberation, military trials and the press’s response to these events. Foremost was the situation in camps at the time of liberation, including the chaotic and confusing conditions in which reporting was carried out. Factors that influenced press reporting of Nazi camps in 1945 must be addressed. Another issue is how existing cultural paradigms moulded understanding of the liberation process and of concentration camps themselves. Moreover, how national experience of the war and national ideals and desires shaped responses to camps also is central.

The research underpinning this thesis deals predominantly with qualitative data, specifically content and textual analysis. Focusing on Belsen and Dachau, it examines British and American newspaper reportage in 1945 to identify how the press reported and recorded concentration camps during two critical historical moments: the liberation of concentration camps; and subsequent military trials.

30 Reilly, Belsen, p. 63.
Liberation covers the two-month period of April and May 1945. Reportage of military trials is examined from September through to December 1945. The thesis identifies what was included, or excluded, what was seen as important, or not important, what was emphasised, and what was overlooked. The way in which certain themes emerged also is analysed. The research that forms the basis of this work is interpretive, aiming to identify relationships and trends in newspaper reportage.

Different layers of reporting appear in newspapers. First-hand accounts from war correspondents can be regarded as eyewitness reports. These individuals were at concentration camps and military trials and their interpretation is immediate and responsive. Other reports came from journalists based in Britain and the United States who wrote about liberation and military trials. Photographs, especially those taken at the time of liberation, were used as “witnesses to atrocity”. They were both a documentation and presentation of Nazi camps that were made instantly available. This thesis considers how photographs were used in newspapers, where they were positioned, the stories they accompanied and how captions were used to contextualise information.

Newspapers offer a glimpse into contemporary perceptions of Nazi concentration camps and the discourse employed during this period. Although newspapers may be seen as responding to reader interests did they offer only a reflection of popular conceptions at the time? A popular primary source, newspapers have formed the basis of various historical studies. Deborah Lipstadt’s *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* is one of the most comprehensive and well regarded analyses of press reporting during the war years. Lipstadt focuses on the Holocaust and she limits herself to the American press, but her work is helpful in suggesting how to approach an analysis of press responses and how to document press treatment of an event. Studies like Lipstadt’s highlight how the
newspaper itself may influence what is published as well as national and political forces. Individual correspondents write a report but this is scrutinised and revised by editors. Reports are subject to a range of influences including ideology and political orientation. In 1945, many reports were credited to specific correspondents but there were cases where no author was provided by the newspaper. Stories commonly were credited to “our special correspondent” or “our foreign correspondent”. Reports often were syndicated in a number of newspapers and sometimes were sourced from international news services such as Reuters and United Press.³²

Media discourse analysis is a beneficial tool for examining newspapers as text because the purposes, motives and other characteristics of journalists and indeed newspapers are reflected in the content of reports.³³ As Donald Matheson points out, language is central in social life and professional journalists are able to write in an authoritative way about the world.³⁴ Media discourse analysis allows us to see how ideas emerge differently in different contexts. Crucially, patterns of meaning can be also identified across a large sample of text. Whilst this thesis does not quantify or count the frequency of words or features of text, it offers interpretations of the meaning of text.³⁵ Thus, the focus is on the recurring and/or dominant tropes, conventions, themes, perspectives, positions and metaphors that shaped understanding in 1945. This thesis considers the concepts or issues that were emphasised or foregrounded and those that were played down or placed in the background to assess the nature of newspaper reporting of concentration camps in 1945.³⁶ To the extent that photographs also prioritise certain

³⁵ Richardson, Analysing Newspapers, pp. 15, 21.
lines of interpretation and marginalise alternative interpretations, newspapers’ photographs relating to reporting of liberation and trials also form part of the analysis.

In the early twentieth century the newspaper press was the principle medium by which news was disseminated. Newspaper coverage of the First World War was most extensive and there was also huge growth in conglomerates, which meant fewer newspaper titles and fewer owners. Proprietors known as “press barons” dominated the British press. Individuals such as Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964) had great influence over their newspapers’ coverage of issues. Beaverbrook, for example, was against appeasement in the 1930s and thus his newspaper the Daily Express espoused a similar sentiment. Yet, proprietors did not usurp the sovereign role of editors. Moreover, not all proprietors were interventionist and they did not exercise a uniform degree of control. The interwar period saw an emphasis on popular journalism as newspapers became more business-focused and competition for circulation intensified. Content shifted away from investigative journalism and serious political, economic and social issues. Quality newspapers, however, generally remained faithful to the traditional concept of the newspaper and continued to give high priority to public affairs. Journalism also became increasingly professional due to improvements in training for reporters.

Newspapers remained the principle medium of news distribution and played a central role in British and American life during the Second World War. Despite a decline in the number of newspapers in the United States from the 1920s, circulation steadily increased and by the

37 ibid. p. 3.
41 ibid. p. 44.
end of the 1940s, American newspapers circulated almost 54 million
daily copies, 13 million more than 10 years earlier.42 Engagement with
newspapers remained strong in Britain and by 1939 nearly 80 percent of
families read one of the popular London dailies.43 Mick Temple
elaborates on the diverse range of newspapers in Britain:

The thirst for news, and the much-reduced size of papers,
meant people often bought two or three newspapers from
across the ideological spectrum and radical ideas reached a
wider audience.44

Furthermore, changes in the presentation of news content helped to
keep readers interested. The addition of livelier styles of newspapers in
the 1930s and the inclusion of more photographs made newspapers
more appealing.45

By the 1950s, the advent of television, adding to the popularity of film
and radio, started to undermine the prominence of the newspaper press.
The 1940s, then, is in many ways the end of the era of print journalism
or what Benedict Anderson terms “print capitalism”.46 Newspapers lost
their ascendancy over mass communication in Britain and the United
States following the Second World War. The coming technological
revolution plus escalating costs slowly changed the newspaper industry
and led to a gradual decline in newspaper circulation.

42 William H Young and Nancy K Young, World War II and the Postwar Years in America: A Historical
45 ibid. p. 37.
46 See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,
According to Anderson “print capitalism”, or mass communication, is a pre-condition for the
development of imagined communities. In other words, newspapers allow readers to imagine they are
part of a broader national community.
This thesis focuses on mostly an English-speaking popular press because this is where a response to liberation was expected. The British and American population looked to the popular press for news about Nazi atrocities. As outlined, demand for newspapers was still strong during the Second World War and newspapers had enormous power and reach. A variety of newspapers were chosen as different newspapers target different audiences and sections of the population. In Britain and the United States the newspaper press covered a whole spectrum of society. The sources cover a range of political leanings, regions and readerships and over a representation of British and American society. A mix of “quality” and “popular” newspapers are analysed and attempts were made to ensure a balanced representation of various regions and social classes within both countries.

There were important differences between newspapers in Britain and the United States in 1945. British newspapers were predominantly printed in London because political, economic and cultural power was concentrated in the British capital. There were fewer regional newspapers but London-based newspapers were read the length and breadth of the land. The British press was also distinguished from the United States by the fact that Sunday newspapers sold in large numbers and were traditionally separate publications from the daily press. There is also a strong correlation between newspaper reading and social class in Britain. The United States did not print a true “national” newspaper during the Second World War. Geographically, Britain is comparatively tiny so it is feasible for newspapers to have national reach. The United States is so large that it would be difficult for a newspaper to cover the news from both New York and Los Angeles for example. Regional American newspapers addressed city and state news but many still had

47 Williams, Read All About It!, p. 7.
48 ibid. p. 8.
national reach. Whilst local and state news differed, generally national and international news stayed the same.\footnote{ibid. pp. 7-8.}

The newspapers that form the basis of the research reflect a wide variety of political orientations. More liberal newspapers include the *Manchester Guardian*, Sunday newspaper the *Observer*, *News Chronicle*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Founded in 1821, the liberal *Manchester Guardian* was the closest thing Britain had to a regional newspaper. It was originally a local newspaper but grew to be national, establishing itself in London. The world’s oldest Sunday newspaper, the *Observer* adopted a more moderate liberal political stance. Founded in 1791, the *Observer* defended Hitler’s policies and favoured appeasement during the 1930s. *News Chronicle* was one of Britain’s most popular liberal national newspapers. Formed by the merger of the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle* in 1930, *News Chronicle* was an early opponent of fascist Germany and argued for the need to prepare for war. Established in 1851, the *New York Times* was internationally respected. Known for excellence in foreign news, the *New York Times* was generally seen to be quite restrained in its reporting. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* were also liberal newspapers. Established in 1881, The *Los Angeles Times* was under the management of the Chandler family during the war. Founded in 1877, the *Washington Post* had a strong editorial page and an understandable emphasis on national politics. The *Post* was known to be objective and accurate in its reporting.

Conservative newspapers include the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*, and the moderately conservative *The Times*, including the *Sunday Times* edition. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* was right-wing and isolationist in this period. Founded in 1847, the conservative and nationalistic *Chicago Daily Tribune* was considered the voice of the mid-west. *The Times*, one of
the best-known newspapers in the world, was recognised for its high quality journalism. It was the “newspaper of record” in Britain, with a reputation for integrity. Founded in 1785, it is traditionally a moderate newspaper but between 1941 and 1946 left-wing British historian Edward H Carr was assistant editor. *The Times* was pro-appeasement during the 1930s and was more outspoken and controversial during the Second World War.\(^50\) The *Sunday Times* had separate editorial staff but was generally right-leaning. The *Daily Telegraph* took a politically conservative slant. A quality newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph* printed more pages than any other paper in Britain in the 1930s.\(^51\) The populist *Daily* and *Sunday Express* were also conservative. Founded in 1900, the *Daily Express* was bought by Beaverbrook in 1916. Under Beaverbrook the paper was bright, eye-catching, exciting, direct and fiercely patriotic. It appealed to mass readership and was known as a newspaper for the “common man”.\(^52\) The *Sunday Express* was similarly lively.

British newspapers the *Daily Worker* and *Daily Herald* offer a different slant on reportage. Founded in 1930, the *Daily Worker* was the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and, despite being suppressed for supposedly undermining the war effort in January 1941, from 1942 onwards it strongly supported the British war effort. Despite relatively small circulation, the *Daily Worker* was the only British daily paper both to be established in and to survive the inter-war years.\(^53\) The leftist *Daily Herald* represented the British working class and was known to be trade unionist. Backed by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and published in London between 1912 and 1964, the *Daily Herald* was committed to serious war news and espoused


\(^{51}\) ibid. p. 188.

\(^{52}\) Williams, *Read All About It!*, p. 156.

strong left-wing sentiments during the Second World War. It was the only British newspaper not to carry horoscopes and comic strips.54

American Jewish newspaper the Jewish Advocate and Britain’s Jewish Chronicle are key sources as they addressed a Jewish audience with an emphasis on Jewish identity. The Jewish Chronicle, the oldest continuously published Jewish newspaper in the world, published on a weekly basis. Founded in 1841, the Chronicle was a supporter of the Zionist movement. Likewise, the Jewish Advocate was a weekly newspaper that served the greater Boston and New England area but with nationwide subscription. Established in 1902, the Advocate was popular among the large Jewish population in Boston. During the 1930s, it warned of the coming of Hitler and the dangers it would pose for Jews.

American military newspaper Stars and Stripes is examined to offer the perspective of a newspaper reporting to military personnel. A leading GI newspaper, Stars and Stripes was aimed at troops across Europe and gave prominence to front line and on-going battles and matters affecting the members of the United States armed forces. Created in 1861 during the Civil War, Stars and Stripes was an organ of the Department of Defence and during the Second World War it had dozens of editions in several operating theatres with many of the editions published close to the front line. Soldiers and correspondents contributed to the paper. Stars and Stripes disseminated timely war news and included entertainment for troops. There was no British equivalent to Stars and Stripes with the British only producing Blighty, a humorous magazine for its servicemen, which was not concerned with serious war news.

**Key Themes in the Historiography**

There is a general contention by scholars that national and political forces shaped how concentration camps were depicted. These studies

54 Williams, *Read All About It!,* p. 155.
mostly concentrate on newspaper coverage of liberation and have very little to say about reportage of military trials. Both legal scholars and historians have undertaken research on press reportage of war crimes trials. The IMT Nuremberg Trial has dominated and there are no systematic studies of British or American newspaper reportage of other military trials. There has been a comparative lack of interest in trials of camp personnel in the English language. When military trials have been afforded scholarly attention, interest is directed towards how trial structures impacted on the presentation of camp crimes and any research on press reporting of military trials has been within a more general study of the trial itself.

Several scholars have explored the role the press played in interpreting events in 1945. Andrew Sharf was one of the first to examine British responses to Nazism. His book *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule* was a starting point for research on media responses to the Nazi regime. Although press coverage has been the subject of a number of academic works, they primarily focus on Jews and how the “Final Solution” was understood. Taking a comparative approach, Antero

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Holmila considers representations of the Holocaust and the mediation of Jewish suffering in the British, Swedish and Finnish press. Holmila concludes that liberation had nationally shaped meanings for each state. The British public were receptive to a dominant “us versus them” narrative leading the British press to focus on perpetrators rather than those who had suffered. His work outlines how the Holocaust was fed into national contexts and conceptual frameworks and highlights the importance of context and culture for grasping the ways in which the press depicted camps.

Holmila’s insightful study is a more recent contribution to one of the most popular areas of contemporary historiography: the memory of liberation and the Holocaust in the post-war period. Much of this literature is concerned with how memory is structured by particular social, cultural, political and national contexts. This study examines newspaper reportage in order to better explain how the history and functionality of concentration camps were first constructed and what camps meant for liberating nations. Rather than focusing on how the press interpreted the Holocaust this thesis explores how key themes were developed and structured in the press and how reports and photographs reflected correspondents’ and photographers’ values, conventions of writing and national ideals and desires.

Tony Kushner similarly focuses on factors that shaped responses to concentration camps and attempts to account for the western media’s lack of reference to Jewish victims in accounts of liberation. In his ground-breaking comparative study The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, Kushner tries to come to terms with the lack of focus on

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61 ibid. p. 194.

Jewish suffering through the concept of the “liberal imagination”. Kushner argues that liberal values single-handedly account for British and American failure to grasp or acknowledge Jewish victimisation. His approach encouraged further investigation into British and American press coverage of the Holocaust. As is explored further in Chapter 5, however, Kushner’s work does not necessarily get us any closer to understanding the conditioning factors in press’ responses to concentration camps in 1945.

Other scholars are concerned with specific camps or media coverage from a particular nation. In perhaps the most comprehensive study of how Belsen is remembered in Britain, Joanne Reilly considers how images of liberation came to symbolise Nazi atrocities in British consciousness. She concentrates on how ordinary Britons interpreted the news by examining mass observation entries and surveys. Reilly concludes that Belsen became a key part of post-war perceptions of Nazism, becoming a symbol for the British war effort and its righteousness and even a justification of “saturation” bombing of German cities. According to Reilly, how liberation was portrayed and interpreted contributed to the formation of what she terms the “Belsen myth” in British society, that Belsen was a camp with a gas chamber on a par with Birkenau. The publicity surrounding liberation did not succeed in delineating the exact purpose of the camp and as a result Belsen became synonymous with extermination centres. Reilly’s work is somewhat limited in terms of actual analysis of press reporting and the treatment of victims and perpetrators.

This work picks up on the lead taken by scholars such as Holmila and Reilly and adds richness to research on how correspondents and

65 Reilly, *Belsen*.
66 ibid. p. 33.
photographers shaped contemporary perceptions of Nazi concentration camps. It reveals more detail on how liberation was initially written about and presented and examines the links between early press coverage of concentration camps and the ways in which camps continue to be thought about, understood and represented in British and American historical writing.

Scholars have analysed newspaper coverage of liberation in depth. Newspapers are the primary source in Paul Mosley’s 2002 Masters thesis. His study of four London-based newspapers investigates press treatment of liberation and the extent of coverage. Mosley surmises that the press showed little interest in the Holocaust in 1945; Jews were mentioned infrequently and the connection between concentration camps and extermination camps was not clearly established. Moreover, he argues liberation symbolised the ultimate reality of Nazi tyranny and camps represented the end of the war and justification for having fought it. He takes a systematic approach but concentrates only on British newspapers and is concerned with how the press treated the extermination of Jews at the time of liberation.

Other related research on Allied correspondents’ confrontation with liberation takes a national approach. Aimée Bunting has conducted important research into themes in British reporting of liberation and responses to the Holocaust. Bunting concludes that in 1945 Britain saw itself as a liberating nation and this perceived role shaped how individuals and the press responded to victims, survivors and perpetrators. She specifically examines the dispatches of three British war correspondents. Bunting’s work moves us closer towards realising how correspondents responded to and recorded liberated camps but she

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68 ibid. pp. 68-70.

has an exclusively British focus. Not dissimilar is Laurel Leff’s research on American newspaper coverage. She analyses three American newspapers to examine how each dealt with the liberation of concentration camps and war crimes trials. Leff concludes that events were seen through an American prism with Americans placed at the heart of almost every story whether it made sense for them to be there. Consequently, the Holocaust was obscured and distorted. Bunting and Leff provide insight into either a British or American mind-set. These studies aim to determine responses to the Holocaust as opposed to specifically concentrating on press treatment of concentration camps. The focus is on how the press presented Jewish suffering rather than the more general experience of camps. This thesis, however, draws inspiration from Bunting’s research and attempts to explore the discourse that developed specifically on victims, survivors, and perpetrators in the British and American press and the stereotypes that have endured. This is a theme that is largely absent from current scholarship, especially in terms of reportage of the Belsen and Dachau trials.

Theories of representation relating to photographs are also relevant. Research in this field needs to take into account possible factors that influence the act of mediating. Over the last few decades, research has been increasingly directed towards examining photographs of concentration camps and what they were used to signify. There is a general consensus that the photos taken at liberated camps have come


to symbolise Nazi atrocities in both Britain and the United States. Liberation photographs have been widely reproduced in the media and popular culture since 1945.

Toby Haggith’s examination of the film shot at Bergen-Belsen by British Army cameramen raises intriguing questions about how the media frames images. Haggith discusses how images of Belsen contributed to wider public awareness and comprehension of the concentration camp system. His work provides insight into the cultural impact of liberation footage and whilst Haggith acknowledges the benefits of publicising scenes from Belsen he warns of the dangers in re-using images, arguing this can lead to a misappropriation and confusion about camp history. Similarly, Hannah Caven’s study of the use of camp images in the British media takes us closer to understanding the response of photographers who captured concentration camps and the impact photographs had on public consciousness in 1945. Analysing both newspapers and newsreels, Caven concludes that certain themes such as authenticity, the nationality of inmates, and the work of the British Army were emphasised more than others.

There also are an increasing number of publications that analyse the connection between words and photographs specifically in newspapers. Barbie Zelizer, for instance, analyses the use of photographic images in the press and how they accompanied news stories. Zelizer details the
documentary impact and history of liberation photographs and draws attention to the effect this had on Holocaust memory and the presentation and perception of history’s subsequent atrocities. Zelizer concludes that images from liberation were used as representations of a general camp experience and Nazi atrocity more broadly. Furthermore, the inaccuracies that were initially reported were perpetuated rather than clarified in the post-war years in historical and popular accounts. Zelizer’s work has highlighted the critical role photographs play in remembering atrocities.

Current scholarship does not grapple with the relationship between reportage of liberation and of subsequent trials of camp personnel. This thesis uniquely examines the nature of press reporting of both the liberation of concentration camps and trials in a systematic and coordinated way. It assesses contemporary newspaper reports from a broad range of both British and American newspapers and considers in detail two leading concentration camps. Rather than examining the press as a source of information, this thesis analyses correspondents’ and photographers’ responses to concentration camps and the factors that influenced coverage thus revealing themes and patterns in reportage. It does not assume that the experience of the camps related exclusively, or even predominantly, to that of Jews and aims to highlight how the Anglo-American press first came to terms with Nazi camps.

**Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany**

Located approximately sixteen kilometres northwest of Munich, the small town of Dachau was the site of the first concentration camp established by the Nazis in 1933. Located on the outskirts of Munich, the birthplace of Nazism, Dachau was the only camp to exist from the beginning until the end of Nazi rule. Set up on the grounds of an images of violence and war could cause atrocity to become familiar and ordinary. The suggestion that viewers become desensitised to atrocity was developed and amended in her more recent work *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Sontag examines how we perceive images of war and questions if photographs can have any such impact. See Sontag, *On Photography; Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York: Picador, 2003).
abandoned munitions factory, the initial purpose of the camp was to intern political enemies, especially communists and Social Democrats.

Dachau was completely rebuilt in 1937-1938 to reflect a new modern design. It was the first camp under direct control of SS Chief Heinrich Himmler and it became a model for other concentration camps due to its organisation and routine. It was also a training centre for violence with eighteen of the top concentration camp commandants and Lagerführer (head of the prisoner area of the camp) receiving their initial training there. Dachau held some of the most well-known political and religious prisoners in a section for “privileged” prisoners including ex-chancellor of Austria Kurt Schuschnigg, former premier of France Leon Blum, and German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller. Except for the days following Kristallnacht and in the last months of the war, the Jewish population was never large. Kristallnacht, (or the “Night of Broken Glass”), the nation-wide pogrom instigated by the Nazis on 9 November 1938, was the first time that Jews were targeted for incarceration for being Jewish.

Dachau had dramatically transformed by 1945, as it became a dumping ground for prisoners from eastern camps. Evacuation of the camp began on 26 April 1945. This included some 7,000 prisoners, mostly Jews, who were marched southward. Many “privileged” prisoners were part of evacuations. It is somewhat unclear what were the motives for these last violent marches. Perhaps the SS (Schutzstaffel: Protection Squadrons—the elite guard of the Nazi Party) intended to hand over as few prisoners as possible or intended to use them as hostages in last-minute

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77 Marcuse, Legacies of Dachau, p. 2.


79 Selzer, Deliverance Day, pp. 35-36.


negotiations. Over the course of twelve years, some 188,000 prisoners passed through the camp and estimates put deaths in Dachau and its sub-camps at around 25,000 from January 1940 to May 1945. This figure does not include those who perished between 1933 and 1939. It is unlikely the total number of victims ever will be known due to the large number of unregistered prisoners.

Unlike Dachau, which was a model camp, Belsen had a unique and specific function. Established in the spring of 1943 in north-western Germany near the towns of Celle and Bergen, it was to be a holding camp for Jewish prisoners with the possibility that they would act as exchanges for German citizens who were interned by the Allies. In June 1943, Belsen was designated as a holding camp (Aufenthaltslager) and the first potential “exchange Jews” (Austauschjuden) arrived in July. The exchange of prisoners never eventuated. At first, living conditions at Belsen were better than most other concentration camps. Belsen’s function was transformed in late 1944 as sick and injured prisoners were increasingly sent to the camp. They were to recuperate and recover at Belsen before being sent back to various concentration camps. In the last six months of the camp’s existence conditions spiralled out of control as Belsen received prisoners from evacuated concentration camps. In February 1945 there were some 22,000 prisoners in the camp and by April this had soared to over 60,000. Continual deportations to Belsen in 1944-1945 caused a rapid deterioration in conditions. A typhus epidemic, coupled with severe overcrowding, left Belsen in a terrible state. During its existence some

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50,000 prisoners died in the camp.\textsuperscript{85} Since Belsen was only established in 1943, and considering the camp’s unique and changing functionality, the Western Allies knew relatively little about Belsen compared to other concentration camps.

As stated, Belsen and Dachau were not actual extermination facilities but rather part of the Nazi concentration camp system. Concentration camps (\textit{Konzentrationslager}) were first run by the SA (\textit{Sturmabteilung}; Storm Detachment—the original paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party) but transferred to the SS after Ernst Röhm’s assassination during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934. The SS administered concentration camps under the Concentration Camps Inspectorate, or the IKL (\textit{Inspektion der Konzentrationslager}), and from 1942 onwards under the jurisdiction of the Economic and Administrative Main Office, or WVHA (\textit{Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt}). While camps initially were used for detaining opponents of the Nazi state, over the twelve years of Nazi rule, concentration camp functions expanded and developed as they mutated and constantly changed, responding to the directives and demands of the regime. Camps became central components in the Nazis’ political, ideological and racial plans. They were used as sites of incarceration, forced labour, production, execution, SS training and scientific and medical experimentation. In the last months of the war they acted as holding camps for prisoners evacuated from camps in the path of advancing Allied forces.\textsuperscript{86}

Extermination camps differed greatly from concentration camps, in functionality, character and prisoner population. In the summer of 1941, the Nazis realised the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” and over the next years six extermination facilities became operational throughout Nazi-occupied Poland: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor,

\textsuperscript{85} ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} This discussion is based on United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, \textit{Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945}, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Wachsmann, “The Dynamics of Destruction”.
Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz. Extermination camps (Vernichtungslager), also referred to as death camps (Todeslager), were instrumental in the Nazis' attempt to systematically annihilate European Jewry. Extermination camps were located in isolated and scarcely populated areas of Poland to maintain secrecy. Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, the three Operation Reinhard camps, were established in 1941 and 1942 for the purpose of liquidating all Jews from the General Government (Generalgouvernement) in Poland. These three camps utilised stationary gassing facilities and operated for a relatively short time. Once the camps had ceased operations they were destroyed as attempts were made to hide their existence. Auschwitz and Majdanek developed into dual-function camps, acting as concentration and extermination camps simultaneously. Majdanek’s purpose transformed various times between 1941 and July 1944, when it was evacuated, but from mid 1942 onwards it functioned as an extermination camp. Auschwitz was established on 20 May 1940 to solve the problem of overcrowding in Polish prisons and as a response to Polish resistance after Nazi occupation. Construction of the Birkenau camp began in October 1941 and by late 1942 the camp’s function had shifted to mass extermination of Jews. 87

In the early years of the Third Reich concentration camp inmates were predominantly German political opponents such as communists, socialists, and Social Democrats. Many of these inmates were German Jews. Criminals were also imprisoned in camps. By the late 1930s Roma (“Gypsies”), Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and persons accused of “asocial” or socially deviant behaviour had become targets for incarcrration. As the Nazis continued their territorial gains, especially from 1938 onwards, political prisoners from occupied countries were placed in camps. Slave labourers were also among those interned. Slave labour began with the establishment of the first

87 This discussion of the evolution and purpose of extermination camps is based on United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos; Wachsmann, “The Dynamics of Destruction”.
concentration camps in 1933 when inmates were exploited for economic reasons and to meet labour shortages. After the outbreak of the Second World War slave labour also included occupied peoples who were forced to work in war industries. Sub-camps of concentration camps were established near coalmines and factories and by August 1944 more than 7.5 million non-German workers were registered as working in the Reich; the overwhelming majority were forced labourers.

After the tide had turned, in late 1944-early 1945 with the Red Army advancing westwards, the Nazis began large-scale evacuations of eastern camps. Following a massive Soviet offensive in summer 1944, Himmler ordered prisoners in all camps and sub-camps to be evacuated toward the interior of the Reich. Inmates from across Nazi-occupied Europe were sent on “death marches”. Thousands died from exhaustion, exposure and starvation.

Due to the influx of prisoners from the east, conditions in concentration camps in western Germany were particularly terrible in 1945 when British and American forces arrived. The Western Allies, therefore, liberated camps typically overflowing with prisoners. In January 1945, there were over 700,000 inmates in concentration camps (511,537 men, and 202,674 women). Conditions, which had been dreadful, deteriorated even further. Camps encountered upon liberation barely resembled Nazi camps of the 1930s. Whereas camp conditions during the pre-war period were certainly harsh, during wartime camps became increasingly brutal and by 1944-1945 overcrowding, starvation, and disease intensified. The

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satellite camp system expanded dramatically in this last phase of the war and most camp inmates were held in satellite camps in early 1945.\textsuperscript{91}

In April and May 1945, reports on concentration camps were written with limited knowledge of the camps’ history but today we know far more about the complexities of the Nazi camp network. It was not until the early 1960s that the Nazi camp system became an established area of historical research. Some important works had been published in the 1940s and 1950s but had limited impact.\textsuperscript{92} Early on, survivors, through memoirs and testimony at war crimes trials, played critical roles in informing the public about camps.\textsuperscript{93} It was not until 1965, with \textit{The Anatomy of the SS State}, a highly influential historical study of the power structures of the Nazi regime, that the organisational history of the concentration camp system was detailed for the first time.\textsuperscript{94} The book, drafted as expert witness reports for the Auschwitz Frankfurt Trial (1963-1965), included a chapter by Martin Broszat based on documentary evidence that traced the development of the concentration camp system. Broszat highlighted the changes camps underwent at the end of the war and provided fundamental information about the state of camps in their last terrible phase. General histories of the Nazi camp system and histories of specific camps have now

\textsuperscript{91} Wachsmann, \textit{KL}, p. 577.

\textsuperscript{92} See, for example, Léon Poliakov, \textit{Harvest of Hate}, (London: Elek, 1956); Gerald Reitlinger, \textit{The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945}, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1968). Poliakov’s work was one of the first comprehensive narratives of the Nazis’ extermination plans.

\textsuperscript{93} Some survivors went even further than recounting personal stories and attempted to examine camps in a wider historical setting. For instance, Eugen Kogon, \textit{The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them}, trans. Heinz Norden, Reprint ed., (New York: Octagon Books, 1973). Kogon (1903-1987), a former political prisoner, spent six years in Buchenwald. His work on the camp system draws on testimonies from fellow survivors and original documents. First published in 1946, 135,000 copies of the German edition had sold a year later and the book was soon translated into other languages (See Wachsmann, \textit{KL}, p. 12).

\textsuperscript{94} Helmut Krausnick et al., \textit{Anatomy of the SS State}, (London: Flamingo 1970). A comprehensive history of concentration camps over the twelve years of the Third Reich, Broszat’s research has served as the standard for subsequent work on Nazi camps. For a recent work on how Broszat’s research arose from the Frankfurt-Auschwitz Trial see Mathew Turner, 2016 (forthcoming), Experts’ History: The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and Anatomie des SS-Staates, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Deakin University).
proliferated. Scholars continue to reveal the complexities of Nazi camps, in particular the dynamic transformations the system underwent. Research importantly adds more human textures and reveals a more vivid picture of the camp experience.

The Western Allies’ Liberation of Concentration Camps

Following D-Day, 6 June 1944, the Soviets and the Western Allies moved closer to many of the Nazis’ most populated Nazi camps. Liberation mostly occurred over a four to six week period in April-May 1945. Soviet forces had already encountered the dismantled extermination camps of Treblinka, Chelmno, Belzec and Majdanek in 1944 and the Red Army liberated Auschwitz in January 1945. British forces liberated only two Nazi concentration camps: Belsen on 15 April; and Neuengamme, situated in the southeast outskirts of Hamburg, on 4 May. The British Armoured Division liberated Belsen after the Wehrmacht and SS surrendered the camp peacefully in a local truce to prevent the spread of disease. Scenes at the camp included some 13,000 unburied corpses and around 60,000 extremely sick and starving inmates. Estimates are that some 37,000 prisoners perished in the camp and a further 13,000 died in the ten weeks following liberation.

American forces liberated a number of concentration camps including: Buchenwald, near Weimar in central Germany, on 11 April 1945; Flossenbürg, located in the Oberpfalz Mountains of Bavaria 65 kilometres east of Nuremberg, on 23 April; and Mauthausen, located near a stone quarry in upper Austria approximately 20 kilometres east

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95 Most notably, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos. With over 150 historians contributing to its development, the encyclopedia charts the development of every Nazi camp and satellite camps.

96 For a recent complete history of Nazi concentration camps, see Wachsmann, KL. Wachsmann’s integrated history weaves together different strands of life inside and circumstances outside of camps. He draws attention to daily life inside camps, the wider political context and the organisation of the camp system.


98 ibid.
of Linz, on 5 May. Dachau was liberated on 29 April. As elements of the 45th Division of the United States Army moved into the town of Dachau they came across abandoned train cars full of corpses. At the same time other units of the 45th Division were making their way to the gates of the camp. SS guards in watchtowers fired upon the advancing American soldiers but these guards were quickly overcome. American forces found approximately 60,000 living prisoners and piles of corpses stacked in front of the crematorium. At the time of liberation, there were 67,665 registered prisoners in Dachau and its sub-camps with more than half of these in the main camp.99

Correspondents, photographers and Allied soldiers were largely unprepared for what they encountered in German concentration camps.100 Richard Dimbleby, one of the first correspondents to reach Belsen, made clear in his British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcast that he had no idea of the role of camps and that he had been totally unprepared for what he saw.101 The Western Allies were “focused on war strategy—charting the fastest route to victory—not on humanitarian missions”.102 Although the brutal nature of the regime had been alluded to in earlier accounts in the British, American and Soviet press, particularly in relation to war crimes and treatment of POWs, a sense of disbelief seemed to remain among the British and American public in 1945.

Today, with the proliferation of reports, books and documentaries on Nazi atrocities, it is hard to imagine the impact reports and photographs would have had at the time, and just how terrifying the first revelations of camps would have been. Photographs illustrated the unspeakable

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conditions in camps in a way words could not and were instrumental in convincing the world of Nazi atrocities. In April 1945, newspaper editor John Gordon declared in the conservative but lively *Sunday Express*:

> I am sure that within living memory British people have never been so horrified and moved as they have been in these last few days by the descriptions of the German concentration camps.\(^{103}\)

Gordon’s editorial suggests just how profound camp discoveries were in 1945. Newspapers needed to be sensitive to the fact that the public may have found reports distressing and confronting. They had to be mindful of readers’ reactions and ensure they maintained credibility whilst doing justice to the story.

For several decades after the Second World War, the final days of camps and liberation were relatively neglected areas of study. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that liberation was studied in its own right. A key turning point came with a conference held in the early 1980s on liberation.\(^{104}\) The fiftieth anniversary of liberation, in 1995, encouraged further interest. Several studies provide histories of individual camps.\(^{105}\) These publications address liberation within a much broader history, chronicling camps from their establishment, through to their use in the post-war period. Since the 1990s there have been various studies that examine the liberation of some of the most infamous concentration camps, further adding to knowledge of the final

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104 In 1981, the United States Memorial Council organised a conference bringing together liberators, medical staff, military personnel, correspondents and survivors to promote discussion on the liberation of concentration camps. The proceedings of this conference were published in 1987. See Chamberlain and Feldman, ed., *The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps 1945*.

moments inside these camps.\textsuperscript{106} Certainly the aftermath of liberation is gaining more attention but gaps remain in the literature. As Dan Stone points out in his recent work, liberation is crucial since it constitutes a bridge between the war years and the post-war period.\textsuperscript{107} This thesis builds on recent works that acknowledge and elevate the role liberation reportage had in shaping dominant, popularised understandings and misunderstandings of concentration camps and the Nazi camp system. In order to appreciate the extent to which dominant tropes, images and associations took hold among the British and American press, and indeed the wider Allied public, reporting of military trials also must be taken into consideration. Trials of camp personnel were a key part of early-newspaper conveyed responses.

**Military Trials of Concentration Camp Personnel**

In the early 1940s, the Allied powers started to discuss the best ways to deal with Nazi crimes and how they would hold war criminals to account. Formalisation came with The Moscow Declaration in 1943. Signed by the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, the declaration included the “Statement on Atrocities” outlining a joint intention to punish Nazi criminals. This sentiment was reiterated at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 as the Allies pledged to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. In 1945, with German defeat virtually guaranteed, the Allies needed to reach an agreement so they could begin necessary preparations. It was decided at Yalta to hold a war crimes trial.\textsuperscript{108} The desire for punishment was further propelled as the terrible nature of Nazi crimes became increasingly evident.


\textsuperscript{107} Stone, *The Liberation*, p. 3.

High-level Nazi officials were the priority but concentration camp personnel also were targeted. The Allies decided in June 1945, under the London Charter, that national courts would be responsible for trying lesser criminals. Part of an agreement reached in August 1945, the London Charter specified the powers and duties of the IMT. The charter also set up the scope of the tribunal and its judicial characteristics. Held jointly by the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union in Nuremberg in 1945-1946, the IMT Trial is the most infamous war crimes trial. British and American forces tried lower ranking Nazi officials before military tribunals in their respective zones of occupation. Unlike the IMT Trial, British and American military courts could only prosecute war crimes defined under the Geneva and Hague Conventions.\(^\text{109}\) Military trials were to hear charges against violations of the laws of war and atrocities.\(^\text{110}\) War crimes trials worked to expose Nazi brutality but at the same time they celebrated and reinforced the Allies’ position as liberators and victors.

War crimes trials occurred against the backdrop of deteriorating relations between the wartime Allied powers, in particular between the Western powers and the Soviets. Escalating tensions over time and serious differences of opinion relating to the future of Germany impacted Allied commitment to, and interest in, pursuing trials. Newspaper reports undoubtedly reflected such attitudes and perceptions. The Belsen and Dachau trials were conducted before tensions reached their height and when enthusiasm for trials was still relatively strong. The national and ideological agendas of the Allied powers, however, played out significantly during the IMT Trial.\(^\text{111}\)

Some 60,000 or more men and women served in SS concentration camps

\(^{109}\) Michael Bryant, “‘Only the National Socialists’: Postwar US and West German Approaches to Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Crimes, 1946-1953”, *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 6 (2009), pp. 30-31.

\(^{110}\) Yavnai, “Military Justice, p. 194.

\(^{111}\) See Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial*, pp. 76-79.
at some stage.\textsuperscript{112} A range of individuals were involved in the running of concentration camps including commandants, guards, administrative staff, doctors, nurses and prisoner functionaries (\textit{Kapos}). Most of the personnel were made up of SS men; yet females also played a key role in the camp system, especially from 1938 onwards as the inmate profile expanded and forced labour became a crucial part of the war effort. Around ten percent of all camp guards were female.\textsuperscript{113} Women served in a variety of capacities at camps including as nurses, doctors and in administrative positions. Allied forces captured many of the camp personnel and imprisoned them following liberation, although some had already fled the camps. A number of the individuals captured had spent time at other camps, and in the case of Belsen many of the guards had been stationed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. These individuals were tried at military courts at the Dachau and Belsen trials later in 1945.

British Military courts functioned under the Royal Warrant of 14 June 1945 and concentration camp staff made up the majority of defendants. The Royal Warrant provided that “minor” German war criminals who had breached the “the laws and usages of war” could be tried.\textsuperscript{114} The Belsen Trial, officially known as the “Trial of Josef Kramer and 44 others”, was held in the gymnasium of the cavalry barracks in Lüneburg, approximately 80 kilometres from the Belsen concentration camp. In the first concentration camp trial, twenty SS men, sixteen female camp guards, and twelve \textit{Kapos} were put on trial for crimes committed at both Belsen and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Charges related to the violation of international agreements signed by Germany regarding the treatment of inhabitants of occupied countries. More specifically, the defendants were accused of involvement in a system of murder, brutality, cruelty and criminal neglect. Count One of the indictment

\textsuperscript{112}Wachsmann, \textit{KL}, p. 17.


related to crimes committed at Belsen including systematic starvation, inhuman punishment, beatings and the shooting of prisoners. Defendants charged on Count One were alleged to have been in “violation of the law and usages of war” and responsible for the “ill-treatment” and deaths of several Allied nationals at Belsen and the “physical suffering of other persons interned there”.\footnote{United National War Crimes Commission, \textit{Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals}, English ed., vol. II \textit{The Belsen Trial}, (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1947), p. 4.} Count Two applied to crimes at Auschwitz-Birkenau and mostly concerned cases of selections (\textit{Selektionen}) for the gas chambers. The second count read identically to the first except the charges applied to conduct at Auschwitz-Birkenau. On 16 November 1945, the court adjourned and verdicts were delivered.\footnote{Shephard, \textit{After Daybreak}, p. 175.} The trial concluded on 17 November, when fourteen defendants were acquitted, eleven were sentenced to death, and nineteen received prison terms varying from one year to life.\footnote{United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Bergen-Belsen”, \texttt{<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005224>}.} Long-serving British hangman Albert Pierrepoint carried out the executions on 13 December 1945 at Hamelin prison.\footnote{Donald M McKale, \textit{Nazis after Hitler: How Perpetrators of the Holocaust Cheated Justice and Truth}, (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), p. 68.}

The Belsen Trial received significant press attention. On the opening day of the trial, the four-hundred-seat gallery was packed and 100 journalists were crammed into another section.\footnote{Tom Bower, \textit{Blind Eye to Murder: Britain, America and the Purging of Nazi Germany—a Pledge Betrayed}, (London: Granada, 1981), p. 197.} At times there were up to 150 representatives of the international press in attendance and the trial was often front-page news. It was the first trial of camp personnel and the proceedings lasted for eight weeks. As proceedings progressed, press interest gradually declined. William Frye reflected: “There is nothing obviously dramatic…about the entire trial”.\footnote{William Frye, “Nazi Terrorism Record Grows at Trial of 45”, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 24 September 1945, p. 7.} According to Frye, “except for the shockingly incredible things related in matter-of-fact tones by the succession of witnesses” the proceedings
were quite dull. The public interest in the trial reignited when the verdicts were announced and sentences were handed down.

American personnel also conducted a number of military trials, most notably the Dachau Trial or “US vs. Martin Gottfried Weiss et al.”. Beginning on 15 November 1945 and concluding on 13 December 1945, the Dachau Trial was held within the walls of the former concentration camp. The forty accused were charged with war crimes pursuant to the Hague and Geneva Conventions and for “participating in a ‘common design’ to commit war crimes (killings, beatings, tortures, starvation, abuses and indignities) on thousands of foreign civilian nationals and military members of belligerent nations”. The trial was mainly concerned with daily criminality within the camp including killings, mistreatment and medical experiments. Whilst the British brought charges against the Belsen defendants for the murders of specific individuals, the American military court charged defendants with participating in a common plan or conspiracy and therefore no individual victims’ names were included in the indictment. Thirty-six defendants were sentenced to death. Whereas the IMT Trial favoured a document-based approach, at Dachau witnesses took centre stage.

After initially covering the Dachau Trial, correspondents soon deserted the courtroom due to the apparently tedious nature of proceedings and the monotony of the endless translations. American journalist Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) came for three days to cover the trial, but left after one day. Marguerite Higgins (1920-1966) was supposed to stay for a week, but apparently left after only two hours. Newspaper reports described the change in atmosphere from the first to the second day of

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121 ibid.
122 Greene, Justice at Dachau, pp. 2-3.
124 Greene, Justice at Dachau, p. 54.
125 ibid.
proceedings commenting: “gone were the theatrical touches of yesterday—the cinema spotlights; the host of photographers, the crowds that crammed the courtroom”.\textsuperscript{126} The last three weeks of the Dachau Trial ran simultaneously with the IMT Trial. Dachau was relegated to the back pages as media attention was drawn towards the trial that sought to indict the National Socialist regime and all the important major sections of the party and state structure.

\textbf{Thesis Structure}

The thesis is divided into three sections. Section One, entitled “Correspondents and Photographers”, examines the contexts that shaped reportage of concentration camps in 1945. This section provides contextualisation for the more detailed coverage of specific themes that follow in subsequent sections. Chapter 1 focuses on issues that arise when reporting war by examining journalistic and photographic practices in the broader context of the Second World War. It also introduces some of the key correspondents and photographers who appear throughout the thesis and explores the important implications their previous experience and personal values may have had on their response to Nazi atrocities. Chapter 2 identifies themes in correspondents’ first accounts and highlights the issues the press faced in covering and capturing mass atrocity. Chapter 3 examines the portrayal of Allied soldiers in the camp narrative and how liberation was linked to the war effort. It considers also what Belsen and Dachau were seen to represent. Chapter 4 analyses how newspapers presented the issues of punishment, responsibility, and guilt. It draws attention to the connection between camp revelations and the Allies subsequent re-education and denazification programs and how these post-war aims were addressed in reportage.

Whereas Section One uncovers the dominant tropes in press coverage of concentration camps Sections Two and Three consider how the press

\textsuperscript{126} Mea Allan, ‘‘Beast’’ Dozes and Blonde Irma Titivates”, \textit{Daily Herald}, 19 September 1945, pp. 1, 4.
reported on two groups, victims and perpetrators. The experience and suffering of victims and the behaviour and crimes of perpetrators were key aspects in the reporting of concentration camps. The style of reporting, the terminology used, and how the discussion on victims and perpetrators were structured all contributed to the British and American public’s picture of not only these groups but knowledge of concentration camps and Nazi atrocities more generally.

Section Two, entitled “Victims”, analyses descriptions of camp inmates following liberation and during military trials, therefore, addressing the image of victims that was established in early reporting. Chapter 5 examines how correspondents identified and categorised inmates in liberated camps and how specific victim groups were prioritised in the camp narrative. In scrutinising the presentation of victims, Chapter 6 considers the de-individualisation of camp inmates and reflects on reasons why victims were presented as an unidentifiable mass in April and May 1945 and during the Belsen and Dachau trials. It also examines why Allied victims and prominent inmates were exceptions. Chapter 7 investigates the metaphors, tropes, and imagery that were employed by the press in descriptions of victims as well as the themes emerging in photographic images of victims.

Offering an insightful contrast to the presentation of victims, Section Three, entitled “Perpetrators”, deals with the dominance of perpetrators in liberation accounts and examines closely how four individual perpetrators were singled out in the press. Chapter 8 analyses the press’s fascination with Nazi doctors and specifically examines how the crimes of Belsen camp doctor Fritz Klein and Klaus Schilling from Dachau were explained once they were put on trial. Chapter 9 focuses on the monstrous discourse that developed in press descriptions of perpetrators and how former Belsen commandant Josef Kramer was portrayed as the “beast” and framed as the worst male camp guard. It also scrutinises why Kramer dominated the camp narrative and yet his Dachau counterpart Martin Weiss, was largely overlooked. After tracing the established
stereotypes of female criminality that influenced press responses to female perpetrators, Chapter 10 analyses press treatment of key female Belsen guard Irma Grese. It examines her prominence in coverage of the Belsen Trial and asks why she was portrayed in an exemplary manner. Section Three scrutinises the representations of perpetrators in early press reporting, and draws conclusions based on the case studies and press coverage analysed in the thesis.

Through close analysis of reports and the presentation of photographic images this thesis highlights relationships and trends in newspaper reportage of liberation and subsequent military trials. Taking into consideration how national ideals, cultural frameworks, and tropes and conventions of reporting are reflected in reports and photographs, it draws attention to early representations of victims and perpetrators. It identifies also the discourses that developed on liberated camps in 1945 and grapples with the links between reporting and ongoing misunderstandings about the concentration camp system.
SECTION ONE
Correspondents and Photographers

Reports on Nazi camps and atrocities had appeared in the British and American press in the 1930s and during the war.\(^1\) By 1945, a substantial amount of detailed information was available to Allied policy makers regarding concentration camps and conditions in them.\(^2\) Reports came from Jewish groups, governments in exile, and the Polish underground. Accounts from ex-inmates, escapees and relatives of former inmates had circulated, too, and the Allies had received vital intelligence after cracking one of the Nazis’ advanced enigma codes in late 1940.\(^3\) Historians generally agree that, despite the amount of information available and however revealing the material may have been, the Allies still did not have a clear picture of the Nazi camp system.\(^4\) There is a crucial difference, furthermore, between having this knowledge and believing the information was accurate.\(^5\) Correspondents who visited camps in spring 1945 remained suspicious.

This section addresses issues arising from responses to describing camps, and examines how reports were influenced by specific contextual factors. It questions the immediate and more enduring legacy of correspondents’ initial coverage of Nazi concentration camps. Chapter 1 considers the journalistic practices that guided reportage in 1945 and how the broader historical context profoundly influenced press accounts. Correspondents’ and photographers’ initial responses to

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concentration camps are analysed in Chapter 2. Taking into account the larger aim of winning the war, Chapter 3 questions how the efforts of Allied soldiers were portrayed and especially the significance of the liberation process. Chapter 4 examines how the press dealt with questions of punishment, responsibility, guilt, and the re-education and denazification of Germany.
CHAPTER 1
Correspondents and Photographers in the Second World War

Taking into consideration editorial policy, audience interests, and journalistic biases and techniques, this chapter considers the strengths and limitations of newspaper reporting in the context of the Second World War and more specifically the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. The relationship between the government, military and the press during wartime also is examined. The British and American press played a central role in generating representations of the enemy. How did wartime censorship affect what was reported and how did Allied propaganda, in particular anti-German sentiments and images, contribute to public perceptions of Germany?

Correspondents contributed to the historical record of the war and photographers took some of the most iconic and enduring photographs of Nazi atrocities. This chapter examines the issues correspondents and photographers dealt with in writing about and capturing atrocity and how previous experience and personal values guided their work. A number of key correspondents and photographers are introduced also as their biographies help reveal how camps were written about and photographed in 1945.

Journalistic Practices and Press Coverage of War

The press, as a disseminator of news, has enormous influence over how an audience responds to and understands events. How an event or issue is framed is important because “the press may not determine what the public thinks, but it does influence what it thinks about”.\(^1\) Public engagement with the material can depend on where stories appear in

newspapers. Editors largely determine placement of news items. Naturally the most shocking and attention grabbing stories are printed on the front page but, as stories become “old news”, they disappear into inside pages. Issues are also framed in specific ways depending on the media outlet, its agenda, its editorial policy and its audience. The Times was quite restrained in its reporting of liberation, for instance, and the Daily Express was more prone to sensational headlines. Journalists and editors decide what is newsworthy but they must print what sells best. Newspapers try to provide the best angle and be the first to get the “scoop”. This sometimes means there is an emphasis on the dramatic with vivid accounts favoured. Newspapers reflect national interests and concerns. Readers must be able to connect with stories and newspapers have to contain stories that have meaning or relevance to readers. For example, British victims of war were a focus of British wartime reporting. Journalists also use precedents to guide their work by drawing on previous treatments of stories.

War is good business for newspapers. During the Second World War newspapers in Britain and the United States were affected by wartime shortages of newsprint. Newspapers were generally smaller and news had to be compressed. But this did not hinder sales. In Britain, demand for newspapers during wartime was above the pre-war level and at peak it was estimated three quarters of men and two thirds of women read at least one newspaper each day. In times of war governments generally try to maintain a good relationship with the press. During the Second World War, American war correspondents were accredited as part of the armed forces. The American press was heavily invested in coverage of the war and nearly 1700 correspondents were accredited over the course of the war. The work of correspondents and photographers, however, was subject to military and government influence.

Wartime Censorship

Censorship, “the review, editing, and/or suppression of information to some degree”, is an important and indeed necessary part of fighting a war. Generally the media accepted the need for censorship with newspapers operating under a voluntary system. Not all correspondents liked censorship. Ray Daniell (1901-1969), New York Times London bureau chief from 1940 to 1945, made clear his frustrations writing:

> And always there is a censor to deal with. He often is a well-intentioned blunderer who either hopelessly slows things up or is so obtuse about differentiating between military information and harmless speculation that he drives correspondents to the verge of nervous breakdown.

Correspondents were subject to official controls by national censorship and information bodies. Restrictions related to information about movement of troops, armour, possible military operations and other sensitive information.

The American system of censorship was separated into two spheres: domestic and military. Military censors reviewed correspondents’ reports and if they gained approval the reports were transmitted to home offices. The Office of Censorship was also created to apply censorship codes. The code, however, was deliberately vague. Official censorship organisations aimed to regulate news coverage but mostly did so in a discreet manner to maintain the image of freedom of the press. In Britain a similar system operated. The Office of Censorship and the Ministry of Information Office (MOI) were responsible for releasing and interpreting official news. The Office of Censorship was

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4 ibid. p. 504.


7 See Wyatt and Manning, Encyclopedia of Media and Propaganda, p. 505.

8 Donnelly, Britain in the Second World War, p. 72.
established in 1941 and its role was to monitor war news on the home front. Headed by ex-reporter and radio commentator Elmer Davis (1890-1958), the MOI decided what news was to be aired and when.\(^9\) In the first years of the war, censorship in Britain was particularly tight and restrictive but became more relaxed toward the end of the conflict.\(^10\) The MOI was wary of critical public opinion and criticism of military leadership fearing that this could undermine public morale. The *Daily Worker* was suppressed in 1940 and then again in 1941 after it was charged with undermining the war effort. This was at the height of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, so it was presumably soft-pedalling on Hitler. The newspaper was avowedly anti-fascist, however, it was obliged to follow Communist Party policy in opposing the war.\(^11\)

Coverage of liberation was subject to censorship controls, although these were significantly more relaxed by 1945. Nonetheless, correspondents still had to be mindful that the war was not yet over. Reports and photographs emerging from liberated camps were graphic but they had to adhere to censorship restrictions and pass the scrutiny of editors. Certain perceptions about what should be printed or shown to the public were circulating at the time and these may have been even more influential in decisions about what to include in reports. Concern related to the impact the potentially upsetting camp photographs could have on adults and particularly children. Moreover, it was thought that certain photographs may be too graphic and this may turn readers off from reading liberation stories. In response, newspapers sometimes withheld the more horrific photographs and instead described the scenes in the accompanying report.\(^12\) The reluctance to print the worst

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camp atrocities also extended to written reports. American newspaper editors who toured several Nazi concentration camps declared in the *Los Angeles Times* the “sadistic tortures” were “too horrible and too perverted to be publicly described”.\(^{13}\) This statement suggests that accounts from liberated camps, albeit shocking, did not always include the worst atrocities.

As Chapter 3 reveals, correspondents were responsive to the general guidelines of censorship authorities as liberation was presented in the press as a justification for the war effort. Accounts of camp atrocities adhered to the underlying aim of British and American censorship to promote the war effort and maintain public morale during the conflict.

**Allied Propaganda**

In times of war, propaganda is a powerful psychological weapon. It is aimed at the domestic population to encourage support for the war and also directed against opponents to create a hatred for the enemy. Propaganda was first systematically applied during the First World War; by the Second World War more modern media forms had developed.\(^ {14}\) The propaganda of the First World War portrayed Germans as barbaric “Huns” and German soldiers were commonly referred to as “Krauts”, a derogatory term used by American forces. Propaganda perpetuated the idea that Germans were intent on conquering the world and they were seen as militaristic and aggressive. Notably, Lord Vansittart’s concept of the “butcher bird” and the idea of German war guilt dominated wartime propaganda.\(^ {15}\)

Second World War propaganda relied on long-held assumptions about Germany but also was responsive to the legacies of exaggerated propaganda used during the First World War. American and British

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\(^{13}\) “Editors Find Nazis Planned Brutality”, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1945, p. 8.


policy-makers were anxious to avoid sensational propaganda. Wartime propaganda, particularly the portrayal of Germany as brutal and aggressive, influenced correspondents’ responses to camps as the atrocities confirmed what the Allies had been thinking for years. As discussed in Chapter 3, the liberation of Nazi camps added new dimensions to the enemy image of Germany.

The press plays a key role, too, in representing war as just and necessary. Phillip Knightley contends that every government realises that to wage war effectively it needs a certain amount of support from its citizens and, whilst nationalistic fervour and patriotism help, the government also must actively try to persuade the public. This is achieved far more easily if the war can be presented as one of “right versus wrong”.17

By 1945, the British and American public had been subjected to years of anti-German propaganda. The Western Allies believed the evil enemy must be stopped at all costs and ultimately the total defeat of Germany and unconditional surrender were the only means to ensure future peace. Liberation reports emphasised how imperative it was to oppose Nazism. An American newspaper report from April 1945 titled “Barbarism Vs. Civilization” asked:

Is there still any doubt that if we had let Germany triumph in Europe the Nazis would have stopped there and let us live in the splendid isolation of which so many false prophets used to speak so glibly.19

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Allied correspondents were acutely aware of the ideological importance of the war. Democratic values and ideals frequently appeared in accounts as camp crimes apparently illustrated the corrupt nature of National Socialism.

Britain placed emphasis on winning the war as a nation. The idea of the “people’s war” emerged and persisted for years after the conflict ended. This sentiment was based on democratic principles and espoused inclusiveness where the entire nation put aside class, social and political differences and united to defeat the threat of Nazism. Homegrown propaganda celebrated national character and the resolute British spirit and contrasted this to the evil, militaristic and tyrannical Nazis. 20 This was evident in reportage when the press stressed the distinctions between Allied soldiers and the enemy (see Chapter 3).

The belief that Britain would win the war because democratic values would prevail and their cause was morally just also characterised British propaganda. Britain emphasised they had gallantly stood up against Nazism and fought the war from the beginning. They had “resisted capitulation and collaboration” and had “marched triumphantly through northern Europe liberating the oppressed people they found there”. 21 A British newspaper report on Nazi “death camps” from April 1945, for instance, wrote: “All that happened there could have happened here if the British people had failed to rise in their full strength against the destroyers of world civilisation”. 22 Britain and the United States both underwent the rationing of food, clothing and other commodities during the war but the British not only fought the war from the beginning but also faced the real threat of invasion and experienced the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

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When war first broke out the MOI was far less critical of the German people, but as the war progressed there was little distinction made between Nazis and “good” Germans. The MOI pursued a policy whereby “Nazism was to be portrayed as but the latest manifestation of the inherent wickedness of the German race”. 23 This gradual shift reflected a change of attitude toward the enemy with public attitudes hardening. Statistics taken by the British Institute of Public Opinion show:

In September 1939 only 6 per cent of those questioned thought the war was being fought against the German people as a whole rather than their leaders, by the time of the Blitz this had risen to 50 percent. 24

Such attitudes were evident in letters to the editor published after liberation. One woman stated: “It is surely obvious that no discrimination is possible between the German military, intellectual, or Nazi mentality”. 25 Similar sentiment can be found in letters to the editor published in American newspapers, with one letter titled “Germans are Nazis”. 26 The idea of German “collective guilt” that had gained momentum during wartime repeatedly appeared in reports of concentration camps (see Chapter 4).

American propaganda was disseminated through the Office of War Information (OWI), established in 1942. American propagandists did not want to rely on enemy stereotypes and instead emphasised the dangers of Axis ideologies and their disregard for human rights. 27 In this way, the aggressive nature of Nazism and the violence that typified the regime was made evident at the same time as democracy was promoted. Propaganda justified the war as a fight for freedom emphasising

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26 Margaret Ascheson, “Germans Are Nazis”, The Washington Post, 6 May 1945, p. 4B.

27 This discussion of American propaganda is based on Brewer, “Fighting for Freedom”, pp. 218-235.
President Franklin D Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” that he identified in an address to Congress on 6 January 1941. FDR foresaw a world founded upon: freedom of speech; freedom of worship; freedom from fear; and freedom from want. In wartime media the United States positioned itself as a good society defending these four freedoms. Roosevelt attempted to rouse the population and a reluctant Congress to make a break with the American tradition of non-intervention. Made less than a year before the United States entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt’s address committed the nation to upholding what were distinctly American democratic values internationally. American press reports championed democracy as correspondents reacted with disgust to National Socialist crimes.

Nazi Germany was portrayed as an even worse threat than the Japanese in American propaganda. The “beat Hitler first” policy presumably had implications in this regard. The British and Americans agreed upon this strategy whereby Pacific problems were relegated “to a lower strategic priority than Europe”. In the United States, the war was seen as a struggle between liberty and tyranny with Americans the defenders of freedom. As examined in Chapter 3, the United States populace took pride in their role as “liberators” fighting to free oppressed peoples. Homefront propaganda focused on promoting patriotism and emphasising the sacrifices necessary to win the war.

Correspondents, Photographers and the Liberation Experience
The Allied press faced a serious challenge in covering the story of liberation. There was an adjustment in the practice of news-making generally whereby resources were pooled, correspondents ignored scoops, avoided competition and portrayed part of the story repeatedly

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to confirm other reports.31 Fighting was yet to cease, however, and other important events demanded press attention including the Allied push into Germany, the Russian advance, Allied victories and FDR’s death. For the United States, the war in the Pacific became increasingly prominent. The liberation of Belsen on 15 April 1945 and Dachau two weeks later on 29 April, then, were just two events among many that occurred in the spring of 1945.

Many correspondents and photographers covered liberation and military trials in 1945. Individuals referenced in this section are just some of the key agents whose reports and photographs feature throughout the thesis. All correspondents discussed either wrote on liberation and/or military trials and their experiences shaped the construction of their reports. Several photographers also are introduced. Their biographies help to explain how camp scenes were captured.

The Role of the War Correspondent
Arguably, the establishment of war journalism dates from the Crimean War in 1854; however, the American profession of war corresponding is most accurately dated from the Mexican War of 1846-1847.32 Journalists started to write dispatches from the front line during the Crimean War and newspapers no longer solely relied on soldier writers.33

War correspondents typically are the first eyes and ears to tell the story of war. War zones are chaotic and can be places of confusion. Consequently, there is limited time for war correspondents to form judgments and make interpretations. In her book Portrait of Myself (1964) American photographer Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971) provided insight into her thinking while visiting Buchenwald. Bourke-

White described the chaotic conditions after liberation and how little time she had to consider what she was witnessing:

No time to think about it or interpret it. Just rush to photograph it; write it; cable it. Record it now—think about it later. History will form the judgments.34

Correspondents work to tight deadlines, with time pressures and disorganisation going on around them. This can mean that fewer established details, or eyewitness accounts are included in reports and consequently what is produced can be imprecise.35 The nature of reporting means that certain details are prioritised or emphasised while others are omitted. Nonetheless, the immediacy of correspondents’ reports gave the British and American public a sense of proximity to events overseas. Accounts were transmitted by wire services and during the Second World War teletype machines delivered typed news reports to newspapers at about sixty words per minute.36

By being there it is assumed war correspondents can provide a comprehensive and reliable account, but it is questionable if correspondents can remain objective when reporting war. They witness horror, violence and human suffering. It is easy to understand how they become involved in what is happening around them. Trauma and shock also affect correspondents’ work. Ray Daniell, director of the New York Times London bureau, recalled how he was unable to forget the weary procession of concentration camp victims he witnessed in Berlin.37

Although objectivity is problematic, as one scholar reassures us, even if a correspondent is not neutral it does not necessarily mean their

coverage is inaccurate or false but it shapes the perspective or framework within which the reporting is carried out. 38 Ivor Montagu (1904-1984), whose reports were published in the *Daily Worker*, is an excellent example of how those who covered the war brought to their work a range of beliefs. Montagu was a public figure, filmmaker, screenwriter producer and film critic. Born into an elite Jewish family, his own political opinions and the communist audience he was writing for shaped his accounts. Montagu joined the Fabian Society in his youth, then the British Socialist Party, and later the Communist Party of Great Britain. 39 Interestingly, Montagu was identified as a Second World War spy for the Soviet GRU, code name “Intelligentsia”, after the decryption in the 1960s of Venona telegraphs from March 1940 through April 1942. 40

An individual’s attitudes and beliefs may have an influence. On the other hand, war correspondents must work within the conventions of the industry. Editors approve stories and correspondents follow military codes of censorship. They do not generally have the freedom to write whatever they want. There is an assumption correspondents sometimes are more concerned with getting the story than getting it right. The role of a war correspondent has long been romanticised but “in actuality it is beset by an array of problems associated with allegiance, responsibility, truth, and balance”. 41 Patriotism, in particular, suffuses correspondents’ reports. Foreign correspondent Lawrence Wilkinson celebrated his patriotism when he wrote on 4 May 1945: “it makes you proud to be British to go to a concentration camp like Dachau”. 42

38 Williams, “War Correspondents as Sources”, p. 351.


Wilkinson’s response suggested that the British should be proud of their national values. Correspondents are emotionally invested in the outcome of the conflict and, whilst this is considered a strength, it also constrains their work.

War correspondents are celebrated figures and especially during the Second World War some gained star status such as Sigrid Schultz (1893-1980) and Alan Moorehead (1910-1983). The dangers they encountered contributed to the romanticism associated with their role. Two correspondents’ experiences in particular illustrate what members of the press faced in conflict zones during the Second World War. Edmund Townshend (1912-2008) worked briefly for the Daily Mail before joining the Daily Telegraph in 1944. An experienced correspondent, Townshend was shot down during the battle of Arnhem.43 He evaded capture for four days before reaching British lines. American Harold Denny (1899-1945) was not so lucky. In 1941, Denny was captured by German field marshal Erwin Rommel’s forces in North Africa. Although initially he was considered a neutral reporter, Denny’s status changed to enemy correspondent when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and he was subsequently moved to a Berlin prison.44 Following a prisoner exchange in June 1942, Denny returned to the United States and became the New York Times correspondent in Spain. He wrote in July 1943: “to report this war adequately, correspondents must go into the field and take their chances”.45 Whilst Denny acknowledged the risks, he never expected to be captured as he later reflected:

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44 For information on Denny see Mitchel P Roth, Historical Dictionary of War Journalism, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), p. 85. After working at several Midwest American newspapers, Denny joined the New York Times in 1922.
We correspondents... had all accepted the possibility of being killed or wounded, though the mathematical chance of being hit was small. But we hardly thought of being captured.46

Denny went on to cover the invasion of France and the Battle of the Bulge but left Europe once the war ended.

It has been suggested that correspondents’ status as witnesses generates a “heroic self-image”.47 Their image as adventurer, risk-taker, daredevil, fortune hunter, or rogue “helps to fuel their celebration in novels, films, plays and other fictional treatments”.48 In 1954 at an address in Toronto, Canada, Ray Daniell spoke of the romanticism associated with the profession and a common misperception associated with life as a war correspondent:

Somehow the idea has grown up that a foreign correspondent leads a glamorous and exciting life... it isn’t quite like that. It is usually an interesting and busy life but hardly glamorous.49

Daniell clearly downplayed the profession’s excitement and allure. Still, some individuals seemed to enjoy the notoriety they received. So to what extent did correspondents subscribe to, or believe in, their own mythology? Correspondents surely recognised the importance of “being there” acting as a mediator between audience and events. After visiting Belsen, Sunday Times correspondent Reginald William Thompson (1904-1977) asked readers to respect and recognise his writing’s authority: “We few who have had the opportunity to view this atrocity against mankind have the right to demand your attention”.50 Thompson acknowledged that he had a responsibility to serve the public and report

48 Allan and Zelizer, ed., Reporting War, p. 4.
the truth noting: “It was my duty to describe something beyond the imagination of mankind”.

Whilst the romanticism of war possibly seduces many, and the life of a correspondent can be exciting, this generally gives way to the realities of war and the dangers of everyday life on the battlefront.

During the Second World War, correspondents were an integral part of the Allied war effort and functioned as an extension of the armed services. They were allowed unprecedented access to conflict zones and this reinforced their status as witnesses and authoritative figures. General Dwight D Eisenhower even described them as “assimilated officers” and “quasi staff officers”.

Correspondents become a familiar and reassuring presence to audiences mediating horrifying events for readers. Not all correspondents became well-known, however, because often newspaper reports were not attributed to specific individuals.

Correspondents were aware of the significance of the liberation story and how imperative it was for the general public not only to read their accounts but also believe them. On 6 May 1945, in a letter from Kevelaer, war correspondent Mea Allan (1909-1982) pleaded to her parents to see the newsreels of concentration camps:

The Belsen and Buchenwald revelations have shaken us all. I saw the newsreel films of the 2 camps last night. I do beg you to go and see them for the sake of seeing what the Germans are capable of and for telling other people.

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Allan informed her parents that she was going to Belsen to report on the relief of the camp. She went on to cover the beginning of the Belsen Trial proceedings.

Female correspondents, such as Allan, faced their own set of challenges. Newspaper women were mostly relegated to desk roles, barred from press briefings and banned from going to the front.\(^\text{55}\) Despite this, an increasing number of women witnessed battle first-hand and reported from the front line. It was not until 1944 that the British Army accredited Allan, its first female correspondent. Born in Scotland, Allan started her career at the *Glasgow Herald* before later working at the *Daily Herald*. It was a rather different story in the United States. After the Americans entered the war in December 1941, 127 women correspondents managed to obtain official accreditation from the US War Department.\(^\text{56}\) Sigrid Schultz was a pioneer for female correspondents, serving as the first woman foreign correspondent in Europe and the first woman to head a foreign bureau for a major American newspaper.\(^\text{57}\) Arguably the highest profile female correspondent of the Second World War, Schultz joined the *Chicago Tribune* Berlin bureau as an interpreter in 1919 and in 1926 was appointed Bureau Chief.\(^\text{58}\) She received shrapnel wounds in August 1941 and for a short period embarked on a nationwide lecture tour in the United States where she spoke out against the evils of Nazism. Returning to Europe in 1944 to cover the rest of the war, Schultz was one of the first correspondents to enter Buchenwald.\(^\text{59}\) She was among a group of journalists accompanying the townspeople of Buchenwald on a forced tour through the camp. When a group of women


\(^{57}\) Catherine Cassara, February 2000, “Schultz, Sigrid Lillian”, American National Biography Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 16/04/2015, [http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-03218.html?&a=1&n=sigrid&d=10&ss=0&q=1](http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-03218.html?&a=1&n=sigrid&d=10&ss=0&q=1).


\(^{59}\) ibid. pp. 53-56.
looked at the sky instead of the horror in front of them Schultz reportedly demanded they pay attention.\textsuperscript{60} She later covered the Belsen and Nuremberg trials. Women like Allan and Schultz challenged the idea that the battlefield is no place for a woman.

**Capturing Nazi Atrocity**

News photography gained prominence during the Second World War. The rise of photojournalism resulted from advances in photography including improved camera technology, increased movement capabilities and better lenses. Cameras were more compact and portable.\textsuperscript{61} Photographs were easily transmitted back to news services by the 1930s with the invention of wire photo services that allowed photographs to be sent by telegraph. Transmission took anywhere between four to fifteen minutes.\textsuperscript{62} The immediacy of photographs dramatically influenced their use in the press. The rise in photojournalism is evidenced by the prominence of magazines such as *Life* and *Time* and the popularity of Margaret Bourke-White and Lee Miller (1907-1977), who took some of the most iconic photographic images of liberated concentration camps. Bourke-White became an accredited war photographer assigned specifically to the United States Air Force.\textsuperscript{63} Along with Bourke-White, Miller was one of the most respected photographers of the Second World War. In 1944 she became an accredited war correspondent and was the only combat photographer to follow the Allied advance across Western Europe.\textsuperscript{64} Miller photographed Hitler’s Munich apartment, Buchenwald and Dachau, arriving at Dachau only one day after liberation.

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\textsuperscript{60} Blake, “Women War Correspondents”, \textless http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/7872900/Women-war-correspondents.html\textgreater.

\textsuperscript{61} See Voss, *Reporting the War*, pp. 41-42.


\textsuperscript{63} Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, p. 197.

Due to the massive task they faced in capturing Nazi atrocity, regardless of the country they came from, photographers shared a pool arrangement that meant their photographs appeared in both British and American newspapers.\textsuperscript{65} The use of photographs, however, raises issues about what images actually depict, how they are used, where they are placed in newspapers, how the photograph is credited, if at all, and the connection between photographs and accompanying text. In 1995, following criticisms about incorrect attribution and captioning of photographic images, a travelling exhibition produced by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung) titled “War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht” (\textit{Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, 1941-1944}) was suspended. According to some historians, these photos showed victims of the Soviet secret service (NKVD), rather than Jewish victims of a pogrom as stated in the exhibition. A committee of historians subsequently reviewed all the photographs and texts and concluded that the documentation included errors and that a number of the arguments presented were too sweeping.\textsuperscript{66} The exhibition was later revised and renamed “Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation, 1941-1944” (\textit{Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944}). It is now housed permanently in the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum) in Berlin. The controversy surrounding this exhibition highlights how problematic the presentation of atrocity photographs can be. Issues relating to authentication and sourcing arise in the use of atrocity photographs. Bourke-White, for instance, was a respected photographer and a pioneer in photojournalism yet she had a reputation as an “uneven

\textsuperscript{65} Zelizer, “Gender and Atrocity”, p. 249.

There are even suggestions some of the photographs she took at Buchenwald may have been staged.\footnote{David Campbell, “Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia—the Case of ITN Versus \textit{Living Marxism}, Part 1”, \textit{Journal of Human Rights} 1, no. 1 (March 2002), p. 6.}

Despite innovations in war photography, the role of photographs in newspapers remained somewhat uncertain in 1945. It was still assumed photographs required reporters to make sense of them and explain what they depicted and their significance. It was not commonplace for a photograph to be accredited to the actual photographer, captions were not always present and the positioning of images was uneven with photographs at times depicting events unrelated to adjacent texts.\footnote{ibid. pp. 5-6.}

During wartime photographs generally accompanied a news story and were used to complement a report. They were not seen as a piece of news itself.\footnote{Barbie Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 25-28. Zelizer considers memory’s role in representing war atrocity, specifically British and American media coverage of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. She examines the photographic record of the camps’ liberation and how they have become the basis of our memory of the Holocaust.}

When Allied forces overran Nazi camps images became a feature of reporting with photographs standing alone in newspapers. The press foresaw the role images would play in convincing the general public that the atrocious scenes were real. In the cable she sent to her editors at \textit{Vogue} that contained photographs from Buchenwald, Lee Miller included the message: “I implore you to believe this is true”.\footnote{Barbie Zelizer, “From the Image of the Record to the Image of Memory: Holocaust Photography, Then and Now”, in \textit{Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography}, Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 99.}

Photographs capture a scene “as it was” and are considered to be a form of witnessing. Whilst it is assumed they capture scenes “as they are” photographs lack context. They cannot tell us who the subjects are or what the scenes actually indicate.

Although the importance of film and photography for both morale and historical purposes had been recognised after the First World War, it
was not until 1941 that the British Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) was formed.\textsuperscript{72} Established under the control of the Directorate of Public Relations at the War Office, AFPU aimed to offer a visual record of the Army’s military manoeuvres and provide footage to commercial newsreels.\textsuperscript{73} AFPU cameramen and photographers were experienced soldiers given training in the fundamental principles of photography and filming. They were taught how to use equipment, the value of news and propaganda and how to film on the front line. They did not, however, receive formal guidelines on how and what to cover in liberated camps and therefore “any guideline observed often related to a particular individual’s own set of judgments, principles and moral compass”.\textsuperscript{74}

The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), under General Eisenhower, was tasked with documenting Nazi crimes and gave directives to photographers advancing with Allied forces in Europe. Detailed directives suggested photographs should be of: recognisable landmarks to show how close camps were to residential areas; the living and working areas; where bodies were cremated; killed inmates; and inmates in various stages of malnutrition and disease.\textsuperscript{75} George Rodger (1908-1995) visited Belsen five days after liberation. He shot a series of overviews of the camp, its surroundings and the dead lying beneath trees. Carole Naggar argues these photographs have a greater impact on account of being taken from a distance:

The images’ hushed, contemplative spirit conveys the otherworldly silence of the camp, the silence that follows calamity. The photographs are strangely peaceful. Their

\textsuperscript{72} Discussion on the history of the AFPU is based on Kay Gladstone, “The AFPU: The Origins of British Army Combat Filming During the Second World War”, \textit{Film History} 14, no. 3/4 (2002), pp. 316-331.


\textsuperscript{74} ibid. p. 159.

detached stance and classic compositions make them stronger than any dramatic close-up could be.\textsuperscript{76}

The sense of distance in Rodger’s photographs possibly added a contextual horror. Photographing mass atrocity differs considerably from capturing other wartime stories. Bourke-White, for instance, had invented the techniques of soft focus and special lighting to dramatise her subjects, but she cast these aside when photographing at Buchenwald.\textsuperscript{77} Bourke-White presumably felt these techniques were inappropriate. Perhaps the scenes photographed did not need dramatising and she did not want to detract from the horror being captured. The power of many concentration camp photographs was that they were understated and simple. Photographs also appeared in black and white and this enhanced their impact.

Photographers accompanying liberating forces had few instructions concerning which camps they were entering or what they should do once they arrived. They struggled with “their own necessary intrusion on the dignity of their camera’s targets”.\textsuperscript{78} Directives often came too late, and photographers struggled to capture the vast number of camps and sub-camps liberated.\textsuperscript{79}

For some, photographing liberated Nazi camps was traumatic. Photographing Belsen was a personal disaster for Rodger.\textsuperscript{80} His photographs reflect the sense of detachment photographers tried to maintain. He felt guilty for making beautiful photos and was left traumatised by his experience.\textsuperscript{81} Later in life, Rodger reflected on his


\textsuperscript{78} See Barbie Zelizer, “Covering Atrocity in Image”, \textit{Annenberg School for Communication Departmental Papers (ASC)}, University of Pennsylvania (1998), p. 87.

\textsuperscript{79} Weckel, “Does Gender Matter?”, p. 542.

\textsuperscript{80} Naggar, \textit{George Rodger}, p. 140.

\textsuperscript{81} Celinscak, At War’s End, p. 176.
time at Belsen in one of his few interviews on the subject:

The natural instinct as a photographer is always to take good pictures, at the right exposure, with a good composition. But it shocked me that I was still trying to do this when my subjects were dead bodies. I realised there must be something wrong with me. Otherwise I would have recoiled from taking them at all. I recoiled from photographing the so-called “hospital”, which was so horrific that pictures were not justified... From that moment, I determined never ever to photograph war again or to make money from other people’s misery. If I had my time again, I wouldn’t do war photography.82

Bourke-White experienced a similar sense of detachment. She revealed years later how using her camera was almost a relief as it “interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me”.83 She noted how people often ask her how she took photographs of Nazi atrocities to which she responded:

I have to work with a veil over my mind. In photographing the murder camps, the protective veil was so tightly drawn that I hardly knew what I had taken until I saw the prints of my own photographs. It was as though I was seeing those horrors for the first time. I believe many correspondents worked in the same self-imposed stupor. One has to, or it is impossible to stand it.84

This “self-imposed stupor” proved more successful for Bourke-White than Rodger, as she continued to cover war torn areas for years after the Second World War.85 Some photographers possibly lost themselves in the technical aspects of their work and focused on capturing history. Others struggled to deal with the trauma of what they witnessed.

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82 Naggar, George Rodger, p. 140.
83 Bourke-White, Portrait of Myself, p. 259.
Prior Professional Experience and Individual Circumstances

Whilst a number of correspondents and photographers entered camps immediately after liberation, others arrived days and even weeks later once relief efforts commenced. Many visited camps as part of a strategy to document Nazi atrocities but there were sometimes limitations and restrictions relating to access. At Belsen, for instance, the outbreak of typhus meant certain sections of the camp were quarantined. For the most part, however, it appears correspondents and photographers had wide latitude in exploring camps and many were even given tours by Allied soldiers and officials. Photographers captured camps from a distance and took close-ups of barracks, crematoria, and perpetrators.

Other correspondents and photographers visited several camps in April and May 1945 and this may have affected how they experienced the liberation process. Disbelief and shock possibly dissipated somewhat with each camp as they had some idea of what they were going to encounter and how best to cover the story. There were members of the press who visited and reported on camps at the time of liberation and also covered military trials. Therefore, their trials reports were informed by their own first-hand experience of Belsen and Dachau. A number of correspondents covered the rest of the war and remained in Europe even after the conflict ended.

Individuals reporting on Nazi concentration camps in 1945 included correspondents and photographers accustomed to covering military battles. Others were simply foreign correspondents stationed in Europe and tasked with covering a range of news stories. Sydney Gruson (1916-1998), for instance, was a *New York Times* foreign correspondent during the Second World War and he later became foreign editor in charge of international news.86 After joining the *Times* in 1944 he won renown for his informed and energetic reporting from overseas.87

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Many of the individuals writing on concentration camps in 1945 came from non-journalism backgrounds with little experience covering warfare. Lack of formal training or experience, for instance, meant that some correspondents lacked insights into how the military worked or how to work within combat zones. Correspondents who reported on the trials were not necessarily experts in legal procedure, military tribunals or crime. An exception was Kathleen McLaughlin (1898-1990) who started at the Chicago Daily Tribune in the early 1920s and for a time specialised in crime reporting before becoming women’s editor. Wanting to cover the war, she moved to the London Bureau. McLaughlin did not reach the front until 1944, but during the war she travelled with a group of correspondents following the United States Armed Forces. Her most memorable experience came after the war with the Nuremberg Trial. Despite reporting on crime early in her career, the trials were unlike anything she covered before. Norman Clark (1910-2004) also worked as a crime reporter in the 1930s, but after the war broke out he became a News Chronicle correspondent. Clark reported on the Nuremberg Trial where he sat close to the dock and observed the defendants. Despite McLaughlin’s and Clark’s prior experience, there were no precedents to help guide their coverage of the Belsen and Dachau trials. They knew little of the military framework that the tribunals were established under or the rules of law and procedure.

Several correspondents, however, approached the Second World War and liberated camps with years of experience reporting on conflict. Harold Denny had covered many foreign wars beforehand. With the outbreak of war in Europe, he was accredited to the British Expeditionary Force in

87 For biographical details on Gruson see ibid. Gruson covered affairs in Eastern Europe, Central America and the Middle East for twenty years after the Second World War and rose to become a corporate executive of the Times Company and eventually director and chairman.

88 For details on McLaughlin see Wagner, Women War Correspondents, pp. 53-56.

One of the most prolific correspondents of the Second World War was Australian Alan Moorehead, who was born and educated in Melbourne. He joined the *Daily Express*, working as a stringer and courier during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) before becoming a correspondent during the Second World War. Moorehead gained recognition for his work in North Africa where he accompanied the Allied invasion. A number of Moorehead’s reports on Belsen appeared in the press in April and May 1945. He retired from the *Daily Express* immediately after the war to write books. Even experienced war correspondents like Denny and Moorehead generally were not equipped to cover mass atrocity. They witnessed the brutality and violence of battle but still were left shocked and horrified by camp crimes. Carl Sutton, part of the AFPU team tasked with filming Belsen, described how he was “physically and mentally so deeply revolted that the long succession of battlefields they had photographed on the push from Normandy seemed almost clean by comparison”.

Several correspondents had spent large periods of their childhood in Europe and the Middle East and closely observed the Nazis during the pre-war period. Dana Adams Schmidt, for example, was a *New York Times* correspondent for three decades and he spent his childhood in both Cleveland and Europe. He went to boarding school in Switzerland and from 1938 to 1943 Schmidt worked in Berlin, Turkey and Cairo and covered the Allied campaign in North Africa and the invasion of Sicily. Pioneering correspondent Sigrid Schultz also spent a significant part of her childhood in Europe. She was born in Chicago but moved to Europe when she was seven years old, living in Berlin and France. She spoke five languages: French, German, Polish, Dutch and English. Her

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91 For details on Moorehead see ibid. p. 208.
language skills helped give her an advantage over many of her peers. Schmidt and Schultz were in a unique position to observe the Nazis’ rise to power and this influenced their reporting of subsequent events.

There is an obvious danger in covering the front lines but correspondents residing throughout Europe in the 1930s and during the Second World War faced additional threats. Schultz, a long-time opponent of Nazism, was known for writing unfavourable reports about the Nazis and even began to write under a pseudonym, John Dickson, in order to avoid arrest by the Gestapo. She interviewed several top Nazi leaders and met several times with Hermann Goering who called her “the dragon lady from Chicago”. Schultz interviewed Hitler three times and he reportedly disliked her so much that he refused to deal with any female correspondents. Journalists living in Nazi-occupied Europe had to be cautious but they also had a unique insight into the Nazis’ actions. During the 1930s, Schultz observed Nazi plans and preparations for war and reported on the introduction of antisemitic laws and the opening of Dachau. Convinced of Hitler’s intention to go to war, she predicted war and acquired a reputation as one of the most astute observers of Germany. Her time in Germany shaped her outspoken opposition to Nazism.

British correspondent Anthony Mann (1914-2000) also captured the Nazis’ attention. Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, warned in a cable that he was “anti-German”. The son of a chief inspectorate of schools, Mann spent a year at university in Graz, Austria, before attending Oxford. The Daily Telegraph employed Mann as a foreign correspondent, and he spent time in Austria during the

94 See Voss, Reporting the War, p. 4.
95 ibid.
96 Cassara, “Schultz, Sigrid”, <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/1603218.html?a=1%n=sigrid%d=10&ss=0&q=1>
1930s where he witnessed the *Anschluss*. Eventually sent to the Berlin office, Mann and his family fled to Copenhagen just before the war but he was arrested in 1940. Mann spent the rest of the war in Denmark during the period of Nazi occupation and famously smuggled out of Denmark a remarkable eyewitness report of its last hours under German rule. This report was the first from a British journalist to come out of Denmark after occupation ended. Regardless of immense difficulties, correspondents like Mann, covered news from occupied territories across Europe throughout the war.

Many correspondents located within occupied Germany remained there after the war ended. Ray Daniell, for instance, married fellow correspondent Tania Long in 1941 and they became a prominent husband-wife journalistic team, covering the Nuremberg trials and post-war Germany. They opened the *New York Times* Paris office in August 1944 and the Berlin office a year later. Correspondents who stayed in Europe covered the aftermath of war and other significant political developments.

Following defeat, Germany was divided into four military zones of occupation. British, American, French and Soviet forces took over the administration of their respective zones and began a process of re-education, denazification and de-militarisation. Trials of Nazi war criminals and camp personnel were key events during this period of occupation. Not all correspondents were enthusiastic about Allied plans in occupied Germany. Anthony Mann maintained doubts about the war crimes trials, but also saw the benefits of the Belsen proceedings:

> As to the conditions in the [concentration] camps, I know from personal experience as correspondent in Berlin up to the outbreak of the war how difficult it was to obtain authentic

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information. The few who ever left these hells were too petrified with terror to breathe a word about the conditions. This makes it all the more desirable that the details of the trials at Lüneburg and elsewhere should be given the fullest publicity in Germany. Only thus can Germans be made to realize adequately the results of entrusting the future of their nation to a sadistic group of monomaniacs.99

Mann covered the Belsen Trial for the *Daily Telegraph*. Despite some reservations he believed the trials were an important part of re-education. Mann also revealed his thoughts on the responsibility of Germans more generally for Nazi crimes (see Chapter 4). The trials’ significance in terms of international law and the prosecution of war crimes ensured widespread press coverage. The shock and outrage generated after liberation meant the Allied public were intent on seeing those responsible for atrocious crimes held to account.

**Conclusion**

Advances in technology meant that war correspondents and photographers had an unprecedented ability to inform readers of the conflict as it happened. As subsequent chapters will show, industry standards and conventions provided a framework that they worked within but correspondents’ and photographers’ prior professional and wartime experience undoubtedly shaped their response to concentration camps and military trials. These individuals brought their own perspectives and values to reporting and patriotism, national sentiment, and government and military controls also influenced their work.

CHAPTER 2
Setting the Parameters for Understanding Press Coverage of Belsen and Dachau: Correspondents’ and Photographers’ Initial Responses

Inside this hut I saw and heard something else. Inside this hut I choked and cried... I heard more but I can’t go on...what I saw and heard at Belsen is something never heard of in the world before the Nazis created concentration camps of their own bestial incomprehensible kind.


We few who have had the opportunity to view this atrocity against mankind have the right to demand your attention. There are, perhaps, three or four hundred of us, war correspondents perhaps 20, the rest soldiers, and our words, our honour must suffice that this terrible deed against the human spirit may be known to all the world.


The way in which the press reported on concentration camps in the immediate aftermath of liberation set the tone for subsequent coverage of camps. This chapter considers how correspondents and photographers confronted camps following liberation by analysing the first reports and photographs that emerged from camps and the themes evident in these works. It analyses the importance of authenticity in accounts of liberation, the emphasis placed on bearing witness and documenting
camp atrocities, and scrutinises the language correspondents employed. The relationship between written accounts and photographs is examined, too, in order to determine what photographs were used to represent and assess the role photographs played in illustrating camp atrocities.

**Shock, Disgust and Anger**

The first reports from concentration camps were characterised by a sense of uncertainty along with shock and horror. As each new camp was encountered disbelief dissipated. Correspondents conveyed their disgust by providing intimate details of Nazi torture methods and by giving lurid descriptions of corpses and victims’ bodies. William Frye’s account of Belsen was vivid. Frye informed readers that he saw “piles of lifeless dead” and “aimless swarms of living dead”. ¹ A number of reports referred to cases of cannibalism in Belsen, which grotesquely symbolised inmates’ utter desperation. ² In the case of Dachau, reports detailed the boxcar full of corpses encountered by American forces outside the camp compound or the gas chamber and crematorium. ³ Howard Cowan’s report on Dachau included a subsection describing the boxcar and the bodies of victims inside. ⁴

But did this focus on the most appalling and incredible details detract from the credibility of an account? The language had to do justice to the horror without at the same time threatening the integrity of the reports. Joanne Reilly addresses this tension between producing a credible and measured report while including the astonishing and startling discoveries. Reilly argues that newspaper reports “represented a serious attempt to inform the reader although at the same time there


was also a tendency to exploit and sensationalise the material”.

Correspondents relied on colourful language to engage readers, but sensationalism was not necessary. Early reportage was characterised by raw emotions; however, there was a quick shift from visceral accounts to measured reports with more analysis in the ensuing weeks. As correspondents became inured to the horror and more skilled in their reporting, they focused on investigating the camps more thoroughly. The story of liberation became less about the appalling nature of camp atrocities and more about documenting the scenes, determining those responsible and detailing the relief efforts. Thus, correspondents worked to chronicle history and provide an explanation for events.

Obtaining extensive details about the camps was difficult in the chaotic days after liberation. It was not only time pressures that acted as a hindrance. Frye referred to a conversation he had with an unknown female inmate from Belsen and emphasised to readers "there are times when even a reporter may not ask questions". His account suggests how correspondents were overwhelmed by what they confronted and sometimes abandoned normal journalistic practices in their initial coverage of camps. Few interviews were conducted and reports contained minimal facts and details.

Sensational headlines certainly grabbed readers’ attention. “Cut the talk, hang the gangsters” appeared in the direct and lively Daily Express and a headline from the left-leaning Washington Post was titled “Eyes of breathing cadavers reflect grotesque flicker of hope in Nazi-made hell”. Correspondents were at risk of exaggeration in their reports by focusing on the most graphic and shocking details. This was the case in reports

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5 Reilly, Belsen, p. 186.
6 Stone, The Liberation, p. 76.
that concentrated on the gas chamber at Dachau. The gas chamber existed, but there is conjecture over the extent of its use. General consensus today is that it operated only on a small scale, if at all.9 Focusing so heavily on the gas chamber and mentioning it in so many reports may have led readers to believe that the chamber was used regularly or that inmates were systematically gassed. This contributed to the mistaken idea that Dachau functioned as an extermination camp. Cowan detailed the chamber in his account of Dachau:

It really was a gas chamber, a low ceilinged room about 30 feet square. After 15 or 20 persons were inside, the doors were firmly sealed and the faucets were turned on and poison gas issued. Then the bodies were hauled into a room separating the gas chamber from [the] crematorium. There were four ovens with a huge flue leading to a smoke-blackened stack.10

Cowan provided a description of the chamber and how it operated but he did not give important contextual details such as the extent of its use or where the information was sourced. Published only two days after Dachau's liberation, the report understandably lacked detail. Readers were left to speculate how many people were killed in the gas chamber and there was little explanation in his report of the differences between a gas chamber and a crematorium. Gas chambers were an apparatus the Nazis used to kill inmates involving a sealed chamber where poisonous gas was introduced and crematoria were used to dispose of bodies. Prisoners who had died from malnutrition, disease and poor living conditions inside concentration camps also were cremated. Reilly makes a similar argument about Belsen pointing to reports that emphasised the terrible conditions in the camp. She contends that the horrors of the camp were in some cases exaggerated and “in the long term, perhaps, it served to foster the ‘Belsen myth’: that Belsen was a camp with a gas


10 Cowan, “39 Carloads”, pp. 1, 2.
chamber and on par with Birkenau". Belsen was a camp of degradation, disease and brutality but it was not an extermination camp.

**Belsen and Dachau as Camps Par Excellence**

Both Belsen and Dachau were presented as being sites of the most terrible Nazi atrocities. Shocked by what they observed correspondents immediately characterised what they saw as “the worst”. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, outlined the findings of General Dempsey, a senior medical officer at the camp, noting Belsen was “the most terrible, horrible, frightful place he had ever seen”. Belsen was described as “this most terrible of all Hitler’s concentration camps” in *The Times* and American foreign correspondent Henry J Taylor (1902-1984) wrote that of the eighteen camps he had visited Belsen was “the largest and the most terrible”. Similar statements were published about Dachau when it was liberated two weeks later. Reports proclaimed Dachau to be the worst camp with Cowan writing that American troops found horrors “worse than those of Buchenwald and Belsen”. Gene Currivan (1904-1978), who visited several liberated camps including Buchenwald where he witnessed Weimar residents touring the camp, referred to Dachau as “the worst atrocity center” and even compared it to Buchenwald as though there was a need to rank the camps in terms of their brutality and horror. Los Angeles Times editor Norman Chandler (1899-1973) toured several camps and claimed Dachau was “worse than any atrocity story ever published”. Correspondents alleged that each new revelation was more shocking than those made previously.

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12 “Cannibalism in Prison Camp”, p. 5.
Some reports claimed Belsen was not the worst site. The *Jewish Chronicle* claimed atrocities committed at Majdanek were infinitely more gruesome than those at Belsen. A prescient report from the *Daily Herald* made a similar statement noting Auschwitz is “a name civilised people will in the future hear with more horror than Belsen”. There was some recognition by the press that camps in the east, and specifically extermination camps, differed. Such reports were rare, however, and readers were left with the impression that Belsen and Dachau were camps of atrocity *par excellence*.

Describing Belsen and Dachau as the worst following liberation meant that these camps gained notoriety in the press and overshadowed extermination camps. The Soviet liberation of Majdanek and Auschwitz received minimal coverage in the British and American press compared to concentration camps located in western Germany. This is despite the fact that they functioned as extermination centres and the atrocities committed in them were just as horrifying as those in camps throughout Germany. In the case of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, much of the camp compounds had been destroyed by the time Soviet forces arrived. There were very few survivors or witnesses to explain what had taken place. Historians conclude that a distrust of information coming from the Soviet press and the experience with propaganda from the First World War meant that prior to April and May 1945 reports from camps were typically labelled as false. Allied correspondents naturally tended to concentrate on what they and their colleagues had seen first hand as opposed to reports coming out of extermination camps.

The role the press played in contributing to misperceptions about Nazi camps can be seen also in reportage of the Dachau Trial. Before the trial a sign was put up on a tree at Dachau that read: “This area is being

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17 *“The Lesson of the Murder Camps”, Jewish Chronicle*, 27 April 1945, p. 10.
20 See, for example, ibid. p. 268; Stone, *The Liberation*, p. 68.
Setting the Parameters for Understanding Press Coverage of Belsen and Dachau

retained as a shrine to the 238,000 individuals who were cremated here. Please do not destroy”.  The number was an error, actually an approximation of the number of inmates who were processed in the camp over its history. The error was corrected quite quickly as Harold Marcuse points out, but some newspapers had reported this figure already, and the sign became widely known. Marcuse argues “the erroneous figure reflects the image of Dachau held by the Allies: it was a site of genocide, and no number could adequately reflect its horror”.  Erroneous reporting continued for months after liberation.

Ranking camps in terms of their depravity is highly problematic. The terrible deterioration in conditions in the last months of the camps in Germany, especially Belsen, meant concentration camps were indeed horrible places. Interviews with survivors who experienced multiple camps often suggest that conditions in Belsen were the worst they had experienced, including Birkenau. Of course this does not include instant death and presumably survivors’ most recent memories may be the strongest, but nonetheless, how were correspondents to determine which camps were the worst?

The Inadequacy of Words

Correspondents struggled to find the appropriate language to describe Nazi concentration camps. How could correspondents possibly do justice to what victims endured? Reports declared camps were “indescribable” and made sure readers understood language could not adequately express what had taken place at Belsen and Dachau. A Jewish chaplain wrote of his difficulties:

I feel that I owe it to the Jewish community at home to give them some idea of the scenes in this horrible camp, but I cannot describe the indescribable. There are no words to

22 ibid.
convey the tragedy and misery of those tens of thousands of hapless victims.²⁴

Proclamations about the inadequacies of language characterise other first-hand accounts including those of soldiers. A similar response is evident in US Army medical officer Marcus J Smith’s first-person account of his arrival at Dachau:

An incredible sight, a stench that is beyond experience. Horror-stricken, outraged, we react with disbelief. “Oh God?” says Rosenbloom. Ferris is silent, and so is Howcroft, his vocabulary inadequate to describe this circle of evil.²⁵

War correspondents were expected to be proficient in their use of language. Even so, they struggled to translate atrocities into words.

Correspondents claimed camp atrocities challenged “existing standards of language appropriateness” and therefore normal journalistic practices fell short in helping them bear witness.²⁶ Apparently scenes at Belsen and Dachau lay beyond their capacity to communicate. Terminology such as “unbelievable crimes” and “unspeakable atrocities” were common. Correspondent R W Thompson began his report on Belsen by declaring:

It is my duty to describe something beyond the imagination of mankind. I do not know how to begin except to say that I have been told that the women S.S. guards for their pleasure tied a live body to a dead body and burned them as a faggot while dancing and singing around the blaze.²⁷

Thompson struggled to articulate what he had seen and heard but through his account he still was able to convey at least some of the horror.

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²⁶ Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 84.
²⁷ Thompson, “SS Women”, p. 5.
Acknowledging the inadequacies of words, in fact, helped correspondents communicate what they witnessed, alluding to the scale of the horror. Veteran war reporter Harold Denny made reference to the explicit nature of camp atrocities noting: “Writers have tried to describe these things, but words cannot describe them and, even if they could, there are details too filthy to be printed anywhere”. 28 Newspaper editor and communist activist William Rust (1903-1949) also told readers “there are no words in the human vocabulary to describe this obscene savagery”. 29 Photographic captions suggested the torture prisoners endured at Belsen was “unspeakable” and that the inmates had “lived through horror that can scarcely be put into words”. 30

To combat the inadequacies of language, reports concentrated on documenting particular incidents of inhumanity and horror. This gave reports a focus. Correspondents emphasised that no words could describe camps but they went on to describe atrocities at length. This phenomenon is what one scholar terms “proclamations of speechlessness” or the inability to describe whilst describing; a technique used to reinforce the sheer degradation and awfulness of camps. 31 American newspaper editors who visited Nazi camps declared that they had found convincing proof of “sadistic tortures too horrible and too perverted to be publicly described” but their reports gave shocking details about Nazi atrocities. 32 The horrible acts the public read about in April and May 1945 apparently were not even the worst of what took place.

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Correspondents’ acknowledgement of the failure of language in dealing with the camps raises the issue of the limits of representation. Scholars, most notably Saul Friedländer, have discussed this subject at length. Friedländer asks if the Holocaust and Nazi horror can be compellingly described or represented. There are no words that can communicate what victims endured. American literary critic Lionel Trilling coined the term the “incommunicability of man’s suffering” arguing: “there is no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald”. Because camps were beyond comprehension and verbal description, newspapers came to heavily rely on visual representation.

**Convincing the Public of Nazi Atrocities**

Presenting reports in a factual manner backed up with evidence is common practice in newspaper reporting. In spring 1945, correspondents employed this as a strategy to ensure the public believed what they were reading. A Chicago Daily Tribune report began by attesting to the veracity of a report on camps stating it was “a shocking document, but it is factual, comprehensive, judicious, and entirely convincing”. Newspapers presented stories whose authenticity could not be questioned.

Normal standards for newsgathering were difficult to follow as correspondents were faced with language barriers and time pressures. They were not always able to give inmates’ background or locate high-ranking officials to quote. In the first few weeks following liberation, correspondents were heavily dependent on information provided by Allied officials and military officers. Including information from official sources gave accounts a sense of authority but also allowed correspondents to distance themselves from horrifying claims. Detailing

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35 Fenrich, Imagining Holocaust, p. 2.

the words and accounts of officials and other witnesses “concreted them in reality”. 37 A *Chicago Daily Tribune* report claimed that the findings included in its report were from a senior medical officer in the British Army. 38 Frye was quite cautious in his report on Belsen by attributing most of the details to inmates. 39 Photographs also were used to help authenticate reports.

Eisenhower was deeply affected by what he witnessed at Ohrdruf, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, and even ordered every nearby unit that was not on the frontline to tour the camp. He famously stated: “We are told that the American soldier does not even know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against”. 40 Eisenhower deliberately visited the camp so he could give first-hand evidence of Nazi atrocities “if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda”. 41 On 19 April, in a cable to General George C Marshall, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, Eisenhower requested to bring members of congress and journalists to newly liberated camps in Germany. The purpose of the tours was so more first-hand accounts of Nazi concentration camps would be produced. He wrote:

> I will arrange to have them conducted to one of these places where the evidence of bestiality and cruelty is so overpowering as to leave no doubt in their minds about the normal practices of the Germans in these camps. I am hopeful that some British individuals in similar categories will visit the northern area to witness similar evidence of atrocity. 42

37 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 68.
38 “2D Army Frees 29,000 in Nazi Horror Camp”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 April 1945, p. 5.
42 ibid.
In response, ten members of British parliament inspected concentration camps and an American congressional delegation arrived at Buchenwald on 24 April and visited Dachau on 1 May. Influential Americans who helped shape public opinion such as editors and publishers were sent to camps, too.\(^{43}\)

The tours themselves signalled to the press that camp atrocities were to be top news items and the delegations’ itineraries were also newsworthy.\(^{44}\) Subsequent reports produced by these delegations featured in the press and further authenticated and confirmed correspondents’ accounts.\(^{45}\) Prior to the parliamentary delegation visits, reporting had been quite tentative.\(^{46}\) These reports, then, lent a sense of gravity to the overall reporting.

The incomprehensibility of camp revelations was a recurring theme in liberation reports. Correspondents commented on the fact the Allied public was finding it difficult to believe camp revelations, while also expressing disbelief. Camp atrocities, according to conservative newspaper *The Times*, were “beyond anything thought possible”.\(^{47}\) The *Jewish Advocate* stated: “It will be hard for history to believe that human depravity could reach such a degree”.\(^{48}\) A Belsen inmate was even quoted saying he doubted whether the people of Britain and the United States would believe the things inmates endured.\(^{49}\) Correspondents knew that they would face difficulties in convincing readers of the shocking scenes. How could they recount the horror in a plausible fashion and present a narrative readers would understand?

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\(^{43}\) For details and dates of tours see Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, p. 54.

\(^{44}\) ibid.

\(^{45}\) For example, “Editors Find Nazis Planned Brutality”, p. 8.

\(^{46}\) Caven, “Horror in Our Time”, p. 230.

\(^{47}\) “Overrunning of German Camps”, *The Times*, 24 April 1945, p. 3.

\(^{48}\) “Master Murderers”, *Jewish Advocate*, 3 May 1945, p. 8.

Prior to liberation, the press often attributed reports of concentration camp atrocities to propaganda.\textsuperscript{50} Before her arrival at Buchenwald, for instance, war correspondent Marguerite Higgins had assumed the atrocity stories were fabrications and so she “questioned and cross-questioned the miserable inmates with a relentless insistence on detail that must have seemed morbid”.\textsuperscript{51} In April 1945, Higgins famously went through territory not yet occupied by American forces to enter Dachau. She won a Pulitzer Prize for her subsequent report on the liberation of the camp.\textsuperscript{52} Other correspondents and photographers, no doubt, were similarly sceptical. Fearing the public would have reservations and their reports would be dismissed as propaganda, correspondents urged readers to believe their accounts. A Gallup Poll from 5 May 1945 asked Americans if they believed “reports that the Germans have killed many people in concentration camps or let them starve to death”. Only 40 percent of responders said they believed reports and 52 percent did not answer or said they did not know.\textsuperscript{53} The general public was still not entirely convinced by reports of camp atrocities even weeks after liberation. Scepticism was difficult to overcome. Covering concentration camps, then, became a “truth-telling exercise” that needed proof.\textsuperscript{54}

The way atrocities had been reported during wartime influenced press responses to liberation. Whereas moderation had been emphasised in previous accounts of Nazi atrocities, correspondents now had to produce reports that were powerful enough and persuasive enough to overcome earlier coverage.\textsuperscript{55} Correspondents visiting Belsen faced a

\textsuperscript{50} See Lipstadt, \textit{Beyond Belief}, pp. 267-268.
\textsuperscript{52} After only becoming accredited in 1944, the \textit{Chicago Herald Tribune} correspondent spent time at Buchenwald and Dachau. Higgins stayed at Dachau for a short time, leaving to cover the liberation of Munich and the Allied advance into Germany. See Colman, \textit{Where the Action Was}, pp. 94-99; Higgins, \textit{News Is a Singular Thing}, pp. 89-97.
\textsuperscript{55} Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to Forget}, p. 62.
greater challenge than those at Dachau. In all likelihood reports on
Dachau were believed more easily as the public had heard about this
camp throughout the pre-war years and at least partially understood it
was a horrible place. 56 In the case of Belsen, very little had been
reported about the camp prior to liberation and therefore it was possibly
harder for the public to come to terms with what was found there.
Correspondents insisted readers believe them and used first person to
describe what they witnessed. This style of reporting was evident in a
*Sunday Times* account that stated: “Now if the words of Christ are to
mean anything, if all the aims of humanity are to be more than just
idealistic clap-trap, you must read and you must believe”. 57

There was a collective effort by newspapers to verify and support other
reports emerging from concentration camps. *The Observer* declared the
terrible reports and photographs that had come from concentration
camps had driven home the “full depravity of the horror”. 58 The *Jewish
Chronicle* wrote that military officers, members of parliament and
newspaper correspondents all had examined the evidence and confirmed
reports in an effort to convince readers. 59 Newspapers pointed out the
weight of the evidence, too, as a further means of dispelling doubts.
The *Daily Telegraph* stated on 20 April that fresh evidence was
“accumulating from day to day”. 60 Five days later the *Telegraph*
reported the facts have been “established a hundredfold”. 61 This trend
was evident in photo captions, too, with the *Washington Post* stating
underneath a photograph that it provided “irrefutable evidence of Nazi
degradation and brutality” (Figure 2.1). 62

57 Thompson, “SS Women”, p. 5.
60 “Brand of Cain”, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 1945, p. 4.
61 Christopher Buckley, “Burgomasters at Belsen Say ‘We Didn’t Know’”, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 April
1945, p. 5.
Reports were quick to point out that congressional and parliamentary delegations were to tour the camps and official reports would be produced. Many of these reports were to be used as evidence at the IMT Nuremberg Trial further underscoring the importance that was placed on accumulating evidence of Nazi crimes and recording camp atrocities. Reports informed readers of the tours and the work of the War Crimes Commission (WCC), as well as the efforts of photographers and correspondents in writing about and photographing camps.

British correspondents in particular claimed that it was their role to inform the public of Nazi crimes. A *Daily Telegraph* editorial stated it was the “duty of a responsible press” to cover the camps. The report further argued: “The facts disclosed must be brought before the tribunal

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63 “MPs to Visit Nazi Camps”, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1945, p. 5.
of public opinion in every land so that they shall never be forgotten”. 65

It was not just the Allied public who were to be informed of Nazi crimes but people from all countries. Making a lasting record of Nazi brutality was part of efforts to ensure atrocities could not be denied. This meant that sections of the camps were left untouched so as to allow more people to tour them. Marcus J Smith was among the medical staff sent to Dachau. At first he was frustrated that parts of the camp were left intact but realised “mankind can best be served by knowing about the atrocities committed here”. 66

Headlines such as “The World Must Not Forget” and “Lesson of the Camps” reflected the importance the press placed on recording and documenting Nazi crimes particularly in Britain. 67 British newspapers emphasised the need to collect evidence and the important role the press played in this process more so than American reports indicating that there were still lingering concerns in Britain that Nazi atrocities would be labelled as propaganda. Hannah Caven concludes that many British reports carried headlines or messages that stressed such scenes had to be witnessed and remembered for future generations. She argues the camps “were such an extraordinary phenomenon they were viewed as a problem that the whole of the civilised world had to confront”. 68 American newspapers did not appear to convey quite the same message with far fewer explicit references to this process.

Photographs as Evidence of Camp Atrocities

Photographs documented camp scenes showing the emaciated bodies of survivors, piles of corpses, mass graves, the inside of huts and barracks, and camp guards. The impact photographs could have was recognised as soon as camps were liberated. They were an immediate form of evidence and became important, too, due to the delays in

65 “Brand of Cain”, p. 4.
obtaining survivor accounts. Newspapers proclaimed their significance and photographs not only accompanied written accounts but also became a story in themselves, standing alone as news items. At first, photographs were printed in newspapers without much concern over the content of adjacent stories. Captions, headlines, boxed in notes from the editor and the accompanying reports suggested their significance. Headlines such as “Indisputable Truth” and “Grim Truth in Pictures”, for example, appeared in the British press.

Words produced a concrete and grounded chronicle of the liberation of camps but photographs helped readers visualise the scenes and were in many ways more powerful. Photographs were used to prove conclusively the authenticity and truthfulness of liberation reports. Reports mentioned that photographs were evidence of Nazi crimes and also that a photographic record had been made of camps. The Jewish Chronicle noted accounts of the camps had been “supplemented by official photographs of scenes so utterly revolting as to shock the conscience of mankind”.

Several British reports commented on the effect photographs had on the Allied public. The Observer claimed pictures from Belsen sickened people in Britain and The Times stated photographs had removed “any last possibility of doubt”. The ongoing importance of concentration

69 See Zelizer, “Covering Atrocity”, p. 95.
71 Jeffrey Shandler, “The Testimony of Images: The Allied Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps in American Newsreels”, in Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust, Robert Moses Shapiro, ed., (Hoboken: Yeshiva University Press in Association with KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 2003), p. 115. Shandler examines documentary film footage of liberated Nazi camps shown in newsreels in the United States in the spring of 1945. He considers the transformative power of witnessing these images arguing that they had a lasting impact on Americans and have helped shape their relationship to the Holocaust. He refers to witnessing the Holocaust through film and television as an “emotionally galvanizing and morally transformative act”.
74 “The Victims”, The Times, 20 April 1945, p. 5.
camp images can be seen by their use in a judicial context at the Belsen and Dachau trials. Several newspaper reports commented on the showing of a film at the Belsen Trial. Reports also detailed how photographs were used as evidence of Nazi criminality during proceedings at the Belsen and the Dachau trials. Photographs were accepted as “the ultimate witness—impartial, unaffected by prejudice and errors of memory”. Photographs, however, “cannot bring home the true horrors” as a witness at the Belsen Trial stated. As much as the press relied on photographs, they were unable to capture the actual suffering inmates endured and could not truly depict the horror or the smell of camps. They do not provide the full story since they captured the effects rather than the cause of suffering. Photographs show the aftermath of atrocity and camps in their last stages, at the moment troops entered and act only as representations of Nazi atrocity. Furthermore, just because the public viewed images from camps this does not mean they instantly understood them. Nonetheless, photographs were a key part of convincing readers of the veracity of liberation reports.

Bearing Witness

The first thrust of reportage focused on the correspondents’ roles as eyewitnesses. Correspondents described how they toured the compounds, spoke to victims and viewed atrocities. Readers could visualise the camps and follow eyewitnesses’ experiences. Correspondents used first person in their prose with phrases such as “I saw Belsen”, “I saw these dead” and “Belsen is the nearest thing I know to a spectacle of absolute evil”. They provided meticulous detail relying on having been at a camp and their reports reassured readers that they would bear witness

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75 Mea Allan, “‘I Saw Belsen from Inside’”, Daily Herald, 21 September 1945, pp. 1, 4; “Cannibalism at Belsen Related by Survivor”, Los Angeles Times, 21 September 1945, p. 5.
77 Goldstein, Capturing the German Eye, p. 36.
for them since they could not visit camps themselves. Newspapers acknowledged the scenes may be difficult for readers to believe without seeing them first-hand and this strengthened correspondents’ position as eye-witnesses.

The British press were more focused on liberation images and their value than American newspapers. This is evidenced by the amount of publicity a *Daily Express* exhibition received. The exhibition of photos from Nazi camps titled “Seeing is Believing” was held in Trafalgar Square, London in early May 1945. Newspapers promoted the exhibition and encouraged the public to attend.80 The *Daily Express* wrote: “A duty is imposed on citizens everywhere to investigate and to see for themselves the overwhelming mass of evidence that has been accumulated”.81 The British literally subscribed to the idea of “seeing is believing” and exploited this approach in an effort to convince the public of Nazi atrocities.82 Photographs were presented with a sense of legitimacy that allowed readers to bear witness. Visual representations of liberated camps became the “principle vehicle by which Nazi atrocity was remembered”.83

A second thrust in liberation reporting came with the delegations that toured the camps and these reports became additional instances of witnessing. British parliamentarians were allowed to “see for themselves” as the *Daily Telegraph* described it.84 These visits did not necessarily reveal anything new but were used to confirm earlier reports. Visits by American troops to concentration camps were an important part of this process, too, representing a military response to the scenes.

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80 “Records of the Horror Camps”, *Sunday Express*, 29 April 1945, p. 5.
83 Fenrich, *Imagining Holocaust*, p. 175.
84 “Brand of Cain”, p. 4.
Newspapers were at risk of presenting an incomplete narrative of liberated camps, however, with correspondents concentrating so heavily on detailing what they saw and heard. Barbie Zelizer suggests that one of the consequences of framing coverage of liberation around the act of bearing witness was that reports failed to provide an assessment of the camp system as a whole. Zelizer is critical of the emphasis on “liberation” even though it offered a grounded way to authenticate scenes. 85 The evolution of the Nazi camp system certainly went unexamined in early reporting and this made it incredibly difficult for correspondents to interpret the shocking events they witnessed.

**Concentration Camps as Generalised Sites of Atrocity**

In liberation reports the relationship between text and photographs was not always straightforward. Photographs commonly depicted events not represented in accompanying texts. A Belsen photograph illustrated a story about Dachau in the *Daily Telegraph*, for example. 86 Accreditation, captioning and positioning were not standard at the time and this became problematic in coverage of liberation. It appears photographs were not seen to be representative of a particular scene from a specific camp. This was not necessarily deliberate but an unintentional consequence of the press’s presentation of the concentration camp narrative whereby the focus was on the nature and prevalence of Nazi atrocities as opposed to the differences between camps. Zelizer calls this process “generalising atrocity” and argues concentration camps were used as generalised markers and became representative of atrocity and war. She suggests “each concentration camp was interchanged with other localised sites to tell a broader story about suffering under the Nazis”. 87 There was a strong desire to universalise Nazi atrocities and proclaim they were “a crime of mankind”. 88 In using terms such as “crimes against humanity” correspondents were referencing the desire for war crimes trials.

85 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 79.
87 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 100.
88 Thompson, “SS Women”, p. 5.
Several reports in April and May 1945 included photographs that did not correspond to the accompanying report.\textsuperscript{89} Three tagged photographs appeared next to a Belsen report in the \textit{Daily Worker}: one showed Eisenhower listening to a slave labourer at Ohrdruf; another depicted German civilians being shown through Buchenwald; and the third showed a corpse from Nordhausen.\textsuperscript{90}

Many of the photographs that appeared in newspapers were printed with very little detail in the captions, which further confounded the issue. Sometimes there were no details at all and it was left for the reader to draw the connection between story and photograph. This occurred in both British and American newspapers indicating how all concentration camps were lumped together. Allied correspondents focused on reporting the broader story of liberation rather than the unique story of each camp and inmates’ individual experiences. A \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} story focused on Dachau but an adjacent photograph depicted a pile of bodies waiting to be cremated at Belsen. The vague caption underneath read: “Victims of German atrocities”.\textsuperscript{91} Newspapers presented photographs without contextual details possibly because photographers did not always provide them with information such as the camp the photograph was taken at, the date or what the photograph depicted. These details were less important than what the photograph represented and its importance in convincing readers of camp scenes. This may have occurred, too, as a consequence of correspondents’ and editors’ efforts to present the story in a way that readers could comprehend. By focusing less on the distinctive differences between camps newspapers avoided having to complicate the story with details about the histories of each camp and victims’ varied experiences.


\textsuperscript{90} McMillan, “The Black Hole”, pp. 1, 4.

\textsuperscript{91} “Yanks’ Attack Surprises SS”, p. 1.
In generalising atrocity reports also continued the trend of universalising the victims. The finer details were often overlooked, for example, the identity of the victims or the unique functions of Belsen.\textsuperscript{92} Susan Sontag’s reaction to seeing photographs of the camps when she was twelve years old indicates how easy it was to overlook the differences between camps and instead view them as representations of Nazi camps generally. In \textit{On Photography} (1977), Sontag described them as “images of horror”:

\begin{quote}
When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

Despite viewing photographs of two separate camps (Belsen and Dachau) Sontag understood them together as “Nazi camps”, emblematic of all, rather than two concentration camps with very different histories at the time of their liberation.\textsuperscript{94} She did not distinguish between Belsen and Dachau suggesting how months after liberation, there was still confusion over camps and what had occurred in them. The press’s presentation of concentration camps in the aftermath of liberation influenced public understanding of these camps for months afterwards.

\textbf{Belsen and Dachau in Public Discourse}

Following liberation, several reports compared other events and atrocities to Nazi camps. Belsen and Dachau were compared to Japanese prisons and POW camps, for instance.\textsuperscript{95} This became more common later in 1945 as camps were accepted into public discourse.

\textsuperscript{92} Zelizer, “Gender and Atrocity”, pp. 267-268.
\textsuperscript{95} “Torture at Infamous Bridge House Related”, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 18 September 1945, p. 6; Christopher Buckley, “Japanese Forced Dying Prisoners to Work”, \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 10 September 1945, p. 5.
Belsen and Dachau came to represent the worst of Nazi atrocity in British and American culture and more broadly of horror in any form.

In particular, Belsen was seen as the benchmark of brutality and something against which other atrocities could be compared. A *Sunday Times* report argued the situation in Holland was like Belsen but on a vast scale and Belsen was compared also to a prisoner of war (POW) camp and to camps in Spain under General Franco.\(^\text{96}\) In this way, Belsen became an emblematic camp, the epitome of brutality. A *Sunday Times* report about a rescue effort in the Far East, for instance, stated the rescued men looked like victims of Belsen and described their “fleshless skin stretched tightly over their bones and sunken eyes incapable of expression”.\(^\text{97}\) But Belsen was used also in unrelated and inappropriate contexts. In a report about housing shortages in Britain, the left-leaning *Manchester Guardian* claimed sanitation and housing in rural areas of Wales could only be compared with Belsen.\(^\text{98}\) Belsen entered the public lexicon and was used to describe anything considered atrocious. Scholars have identified similar examples suggesting that these were not isolated cases.\(^\text{99}\)

Concentration camp imagery was exploited with Belsen becoming a term used in popular culture and everyday life in Britain. It has been argued that the repercussions of using Belsen out of context continued to be felt for years after the camp was liberated.\(^\text{100}\) Even in the late 1940s and 1950s writers were using Belsen as a general-purpose term for a scene of destruction.\(^\text{101}\) There were far fewer examples of such exploitation in the

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\(^{97}\) Victor Lewis, “Rescuers Fly to Sumatra”, *Sunday Times*, 16 September 1945, p. 5.

\(^{98}\) “Mr. Bevan Appeals to Householders”, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 October 1945, p. 6.


\(^{101}\) ibid.
case of Dachau. It is possible that Dachau did not gain the same level of currency in American public discourse because it was one of several major Nazi concentration camps liberated by American forces. It is clear how Nazi concentration camps were “detached from their historical context” and easily “conflated with each other”. ¹⁰²

**Conclusion**

Correspondents could not find words to convey what they saw in liberated camps and their reports underlined the inadequacies of language. Reports concentrated on the most repulsive scenes and used vivid language to engage readers. Correspondents were responsive to the way atrocities had been previously downplayed or attributed to propaganda. Verifying specific instances of inhumanity, then, became a focus and a documentary style of reporting was favoured. This became problematic, however, when correspondents focused on the gas chamber at Dachau or the mass graves and degradation at Belsen giving the impression that these scenes represented daily life inside the camps throughout their entire history.

Particular attention was given to authenticating the first reports from camps. Correspondents wanted to sound as credible as possible for they were reporting on “unbelievable” events. They relied on witnesses including high-ranking soldiers and medical experts to ground their reports in reality. The first accounts of liberation also were written predominantly from the perspective of an eyewitness. Both the forced tours of camps and the delegation tours again reinforced how central bearing witness was to the camp narrative.

Photographs of concentration camps were in many respects more powerful than written reports. Words helped produce a grounded and concrete chronicle of the camps’ liberation but photographs not only confirmed written reports but also depicted scenes words had failed to

¹⁰² Fenrich, Imagining Holocaust, p. 181.
adequately describe. Liberation imagery helped shape public perceptions of camps and what had occurred in them. The British press in particular drew attention to images and their importance. Yet, there were questionable linkages between photographs and text in newspapers. Photographs from one camp were in many instances attached to stories of another camp. It became irrelevant which photographs were used to depict Nazi atrocities as photographs often were used to illustrate the broader atrocity story. Consequently, crimes committed in Belsen and Dachau represented Nazi atrocity more generally and there was little acknowledgement of the distinct histories of the camps and the important differences between them.
CHAPTER 3

Allied Soldiers, the Second World War and the “Us versus Them” Narrative

Dachau, Germany’s most dreaded extermination camp has been captured and its surviving 32,000 tortured inmates have been freed by outraged American troops who killed or captured its brutal garrison in a furious battle.


He was hoisted to the shoulders of the seething crowd of Russians, Poles, French, Czechs and Austrians, cheering the Americans in their native tongues.


Correspondents’ accounts of concentration camps in 1945 contributed to the special place camps hold in British and American national memory of the Second World War. This chapter examines how liberation was understood and presented in British and American newspapers in relation to the larger narrative of defeating Nazism and liberating Nazi-occupied Europe. The ways in which the press assigned meaning and significance to camp atrocities is analysed. This chapter further asks how correspondents portrayed the efforts of Allied soldiers and the fighting conducted to liberate camps. Soldiers arguably featured prominently in coverage of war since the figure of the soldier acts as a symbol of national identity. An “us versus them” mentality characterised reportage of the war and from the outset the story of liberation was given an Allied focus.
Liberating Forces and Allied Soldiers

Reports emphasised the army's role in saving the lives of concentration camp inmates. Use of the phrase “liberating United States armies” in a Chicago Daily Tribune report suggests how the United States was portrayed as a force that swept through Germany with the intention of liberating Europe and specifically Nazi camps.¹ The phrase “liberating forces” appeared below a photograph in the Manchester Guardian, indicating how the British press also viewed their forces as liberators.² The liberation of Nazi concentration camps, however, was not a stated aim of the advance into Germany.

Prior to liberation, concentration camps were a minor news story in the context of Allied advances into Germany. Reports focused on the capture of Munich, for instance, as opposed to the fact troops were advancing towards Dachau. This is unsurprising considering Munich was the birthplace of Nazism. A Los Angeles Times report only briefly mentioned that the 45th Infantry was closing around Dachau and instead concentrated on the forces taking over Munich and the freeing of POWs from Moosburg.³ A similar report appeared in The Times.⁴ The press were aware Allied forces were approaching camps in Germany. Journalist Drew Middleton (1913-1990) wrote a lengthy report on Allied advances across Europe and noted:

The Fifteenth Division is nearing Belsen, twelve miles north of Celle, where there is a concentration camp of 60,000 prisoners guarded by about 1,000 German and Hungarian troops. There are 1,500 typhus and several hundred typhoid cases in the camp.⁵

Middleton knew of Belsen’s existence and had information relating to

² “The Belsen Concentration Camp”, Manchester Guardian, 21 April 1945, p. 3.
³ “Yanks Take over Munich; Free 27,000”, Los Angeles Times, 30 April 1945, p. 1.
⁴ “Americans Enter Munich”, The Times, 30 April 1945, p. 4.
the number of inmates, guards and cases of disease at the camp. Some correspondents had knowledge of Belsen’s purpose and the disease and overcrowding there, but this information did not reach soldiers who liberated the camp.\(^6\) This highlights correspondents’ special status during the conflict. Whereas soldiers are focused on the front line and their assigned tasks, correspondents can observe and reflect upon the broader context of war.

One of the Allies’ war aims was to liberate the people of Europe from Nazi tyranny. The liberation of camp inmates ultimately became part of the larger effort to liberate Europe. Alan Rose, a member of an Armoured Division who entered Belsen, alerts us to the fact that the liberation of Nazi concentration camps was not at the forefront of the Allied forces’ minds and in fact they remained largely ignorant of camps’ existence:

> It just happened in the course of our advance that we came across it. Nobody set out to liberate a concentration camp. So the word “liberator” is a misnomer, in a sense. Either we were all liberators or we were not liberators, but nobody specifically spent his or her time thinking, “How am I going to liberate a concentration camp?” First of all, we hardly knew that they existed. I didn’t.\(^7\)

Soldier William McBurney was involved in the liberation of Dachau and he gives further insight writing: “Dachau wasn’t an objective” but “an obstacle”.\(^8\) He viewed concentration camps as a hindrance to soldiers’ primary aim of defeating Germany. He further claimed: “I

\(^6\) After becoming the youngest reporter with the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium (1939-1940), Middleton was hired by *The Times* in 1943. He covered the Nuremberg Trials after the war and went on to write a number of books on the military conflict including *The Struggle for Germany* (1949). See Ralph Kirshner, February 2000, “Middleton, Drew”, American National Biography Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 16/04/15, [http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-02717.html?a=1&y=drew%20middleton&d=10&ss=0&q=1].

\(^7\) Celinscak, *At War’s End*, p. 28. Alan Rose was part of the 7th Armoured Division and a former Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

didn’t know where the hell I was... I was just going through the place”. The discovery of concentration camps impeded the Allied armies’ advances as efforts were redirected towards relieving camps. Young Australian correspondent Alan Moorehead’s account of the Belsen truce was even entitled “Typhus Camp Holds Up War”.9 In April 1945, The Times commented that the large numbers of displaced persons were “placing a great strain on the whole war effort”.10

Liberation of Nazi camps was not a strategic military mission, yet encounters with camps were of vital symbolic importance. Britain and the United States’ status as liberating nations was further reinforced after entering camps. The liberation of Belsen was symbolic as it represented the “restoration of freedom to Europe and all her citizens”.11 The liberation of Belsen, Dachau and other camps, then, came to represent the larger effort to free European peoples.

Photographs showing inmates apparently “waiting to be freed” by the Allies were published in the wake of liberation. A photograph appeared in the New York Times depicting a group of prisoners at Dachau posing for the photographer in their striped camp uniform and looking cheerful (Figure 3.1).12 The caption stated prisoners were “awaiting freedom at the hand of our 7th Army”, suggesting that liberating concentration camps was one of the Allied forces’ significant accomplishments during their advance into Germany. This was the case, too, in a number of reports on Belsen. The war was not yet over, but there were important achievements to be acknowledged according to the Manchester Guardian. A report presented the concentration camp story in a positive light when it described children playing on swings at Belsen and stated

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9 Alan Moorehead, “Typhus Camp Holds up War”, Daily Express, 14 April 1945, pp. 1, 4.
10 “Overrunning of German Camps”, p. 3.
11 Reilly, Belsen, p. 2.
liberation was an example of how the "onrush of evil" had been stopped.¹³


Correspondents emphasised the deeds of soldiers and their courageous efforts to free camp inmates. Reports detailed the fighting that took place in order to capture Dachau and presented this as the most important part of the discovery of the camp. This is seen in headlines such as "Catching Up with the SS: Yanks Free 32,000 at Dachau Death Camp" and "Dachau Captured by Americans Who Kill Guards, Liberate 32,000".¹⁴ A war correspondent's job is to report on the activities of the army and the dramatic liberation of Dachau made for interesting reading. But, reports clearly prioritised the "heroic" activities of the

¹³ "First Light", Manchester Guardian, 8 May 1945, p. 4.

soldiers above other aspects of the story. The *New York Times* described the “furious battle” that took place and detailed how soldiers dashed to the camp “atop tanks, bulldozers, self-propelled guns”. Apparently “dozens of German guards fell under withering blasts of rifle and carbine fire”. Dachau’s liberation was first presented as a story about American forces’ efforts to capture the camp as opposed to a story about inmates and what they endured. Correspondents covering the liberation of Belsen also framed many of their first accounts around British forces. Although Frye’s report of Belsen included extensive details about inmates, he made sure to point out that at least some victims would see friendliness before they died, implying British soldiers were kind to inmates in contrast to the brutal treatment they endured at the hands of the Nazis. Aimée Bunting argues that one of the reasons Belsen became part of the story of the Second World War was through frequent references to soldiers’ efforts to capture camps. The capture of Dachau and Belsen were both presented as military successes on the road to victory.

Liberation was portrayed as a joyous event in American newspaper reports. Correspondents described how inmates cheered Allied soldiers as they walked through camps. A report from the conservative and nationalistic *Chicago Daily Tribune* gave the impression the liberation of Dachau was a jubilant event, with descriptions of American soldiers hoisted off the ground and cheered by inmates. Another report from the *New York Times* emphasised inmates’ joy and detailed how they smothered “their liberators with embraces”. Whilst these descriptions may have been accurate they projected a very specific image of

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17 See Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust. Bunting explores the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust from 1933 until today and Britain’s search for a means to respond to, understand, represent, and remember the Holocaust. She argues British people have always drawn the Holocaust within the reassuring parameters of their own national narrative.
liberation. For most inmates, liberation was not joyous at all as they were too ill to even comprehend what was happening and the arrival of Allied forces did not end their suffering. In fact, many inmates were liberated in hiding or on death marches, not in concentration camps.\textsuperscript{20} Camp inmates were starving and riddled with disease and their physical recovery was slow. Large numbers died in the post-liberation period and those who did survive had lost years of their lives and were left without any family, homes or jobs to return to.\textsuperscript{21} Many inmates remained in Displaced Persons (DP) camps for months afterwards as the process of recovery and repatriation commenced. Liberation did not end their emotional and mental trauma.

Stories focusing on the jubilant scenes after liberation tended to give a false impression of what liberation was like for the majority of inmates. Descriptions of survivors cheering and welcoming soldiers were favoured in order to emphasise the brave actions of soldiers who were represented as rescuers. This theme was reinforced throughout Frye’s account of Belsen with his assertion the British soldiers brought “deliverance” to inmates.\textsuperscript{22}

Liberation was a paradoxical process. It was both jubilant and filled with sorrow. In the popular imagination the liberation of concentration camps continues to be portrayed as “a joyous affair, bringing an end to the inmates’ torments”.\textsuperscript{23} Dan Stone has recently argued that in films such as \textit{Life is Beautiful} and \textit{Schindler’s List} and in museum displays and books, liberation is simplistically presented as “a single rapturous moment in time”.\textsuperscript{24} This enduring image of liberation can be traced back to the press reporting in 1945 and the emphasis placed on scenes of euphoria.

\textsuperscript{21} See the discussion of inmates’ experience of liberation in Stone, \textit{The Liberation}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Frye, “SS Forced”, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{23} Stone, \textit{The Liberation}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid.
Reports also focused on relief efforts conducted at newly liberated camps and the interaction between inmates and Allied soldiers.\(^{25}\) Again, Allied soldiers were the central focus. Two photographs from the *Manchester Guardian* fixated on the positive aspects of the soldiers’ presence at camps. One photograph depicted British soldiers playing with smiling children from Belsen (Figure 3.2).\(^{26}\) The other showed prisoners at Dachau looking happy as they stood with American soldiers (Figure 3.3).\(^{27}\)

\(^{25}\) “Red Cross in Belsen”, *The Times*, 16 May 1945, p. 3; “Belsen Deaths Cut 80% in One Month by Allies”, *New York Times*, 22 May 1945, p. 4; “Odor of Death Still Pervades Dachau Camp”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 May 1945, p. 3.

\(^{26}\) “Happier Times in Belsen Camp”, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1945, p. 3.

\(^{27}\) “Prisoners from Dachau”, *Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1945, p. 3.
her memoir of her experience touring Belsen several days after it was liberated. She described how Gluck, a Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) captain, guided her through the compound and explained to her how the clean up operation had begun and a “sort of smile had spread through the camp”.  

Gluck also stated, according to Allan, that “a vision was born... of freedom”.

![Liberated Dachau inmates](http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/3066864)

**Figure 3.3:** Liberated Dachau inmates. Photograph appeared in: “Prisoners from Dachau”, *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1945, p. 3.


Allied personnel sent to camps to aid in relief and clean up efforts featured in reportage. Readers followed closely the story of British medical students sent to Belsen to stop the spread of typhus and treat cases of starvation.  

Descriptions of soldiers and personnel and their on-going work at camps ensured Allied individuals continued to be a focus of liberation reports.


Correspondents showed a keen interest in documenting Allied soldiers’ perceptions of liberated camps and their responses to Nazi atrocities. The presence of soldiers who fought for inmates’ freedom made the story of Nazi atrocities relevant to readers back home. As a general strategy, the focus on soldiers meant that the liberation of concentration camps was drawn into the reassuring national narrative of the Second World War.30

British broadcaster Richard Dimbleby’s radio broadcast on Belsen emphasised soldiers and their experience. It has been suggested that he used the image of the British soldier to convey the moral outrage of the camp. Dimbleby valued, above all, the “very ‘ordinariness’ and quiet resolve” of the British soldiers in the face of the horrors of the camps and the conditions that confronted them.31 Indeed, soldiers’ outrage was emphasised in reports that claimed British soldiers were “sick with disgust and fury” and American forces were in a “tearful rage” or “revolted” by what they saw at Dachau.32 One report even pointed out that the troops that overran Belsen, hardened from months of battle, were “aghast” at what they witnessed.33 Correspondents presumably wanted to focus on how the military reacted. There may have also been an assumption that the British and American public would be interested in the perspective of soldiers.

Allied soldiers appeared in photographs alongside camp guards and other Germans. Photographs of German civilians forced to bury the dead or photographs of perpetrators under arrest showed Allied soldiers in a supervisory role. A photograph of Belsen camp doctor Fritz Klein

30 See Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust.


published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* showed him in the foreground with a British officer standing behind, guarding him (Figure 8.1). Belsen commandant Josef Kramer also appeared under the guard of a British soldier in a photograph published in a number of newspapers. These photographs suggest the prominence of individual perpetrators in the press, a theme developed in Section Three.

Soldiers featured, too, in photographs showing Germans burying victims. A photograph from the *Sunday Express* depicted just this at Belsen and the caption underneath reinforced Allied soldiers’ status and their role by stating: “S.S. men who carried out the tortures were compelled by the British liberators to load corpses into lorries, for burial”. Presenting soldiers in a supervisory capacity further emphasised the importance of the Allied forces. As authoritative figures they liberated inmates and participated directly in the punishment of perpetrators and civilians. Photographs that depicted Germans disposing of bodies helped to confirm the Allies’ status as liberators according to Carol Zemel. She comments on the viewer’s position:

> We stand behind with the uniformed soldiers, cushioned by their backs from the full force of the shocking sight, but at the same time, sharing their identity—and heroism—as liberators.

A contrast between liberator and perpetrator was established and this contrast was further reinforced when the press demonised perpetrators (see Chapter 8).

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34 “Photo Standalone”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 May 1945, p. 36.
It also is argued that an American mind-set pervaded press coverage of liberation in American newspapers and that is why Americans were placed at the heart of almost every story. This was the case in many accounts of liberation. The British press similarly responded to Belsen in a way that placed British identity at the centre of the narrative. It made sense for correspondents to draw links between camps and their readership. The actions of the Allied forces appeared as the central aspect to accounts. Chapter 6 considers how, subsequently, victims’ experiences were marginalised in coverage of concentration camps.

It has been argued that camps like Dachau are seen through the lens of the liberators even to this day. Likewise, it has been suggested that Belsen occupies a distinct position in remembrance of the Second World War in Britain, featuring prominently in different aspects of popular culture and memorialisation. The image of Britain and the United States as liberating nations and rescuers indeed continues to play a key role in memory of the war. Tim Cole contends the Holocaust is presented through the framework of “liberation” at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The very first photographic image you witness when you arrive at the upstairs exhibition in Washington DC is that of liberation. Rainer Schulze similarly points out images of Belsen assume a special place in British official memory with the camp and its liberation featuring in national Holocaust

39 Leff, “‘Liberated by the Yanks’”, p. 407.
40 Wachsmann, KL, p. 3.
41 Celinscak, At War’s End, p. x.
42 Tim Cole, Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold, (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 152-155. Cole attempts to explain what he terms “the myth of the Holocaust” and the implications of marketing remembrance. Focusing on three emblematic figures—Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann and Oskar Schindler—and three of the Holocaust’s most visited sites—Auschwitz, Yad Vashem and the USHMM—Cole shows how the Holocaust has become a mass marketed product. He argues the USHMM represents the official face of the myth within the contemporary United States.
43 This statement is based on my own observations when visiting the USHMM during a field research trip in July 2013.
ceremonies and television programs. This also is the case at the British Imperial War Museum (IWM) exhibition. Victims appear secondary to the liberators and their efforts in liberating Belsen. The emphasis is on the struggle liberators went through and survivors and victims exist at the margins of representation. In contrast to the USHMM where a discourse of liberation greets visitors, the liberation section appears at the end of the British exhibition. The freeing of Nazi concentration camps and the Allies’ experience of Belsen and Dachau are key themes of both displays.

The enduring image of British and American forces as “liberators” is popular because, just like in 1945, emphasising their status as “liberators” allows the Allies to cast the war in a positive light and overlook any questionable actions like the bombing of German cities. The focus on liberation possibly may serve to deflect attention on the Allies’ failure to intervene during the war to save victims of Nazi atrocity. Historians have debated the question of whether the Allies did enough to save Jews during the war at length. American reports in particular focused on the heroic exploits of its forces due to the dramatic capture of the Dachau. British newspapers, however, also made a point of detailing Belsen relief efforts which also worked to reinforce the image of the British Army as rescuers and saviours. The courageous efforts of British and American forces were a focus following liberation and this remains the case today. In this way, the liberation of Nazi camps continues to be linked to the validity of the war effort.


45 The IWM was visited whilst conducting field research in September 2014.

46 See Chapter 5 in Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust.

Justifying the War

The timing of liberation was crucial in forming a link between the end of the war and the Allied liberation of concentration camps. For the press, liberation neatly rounded off the narrative of the war and was part of the symbolic finale in the fight against Nazism. “The curtain will soon be rung down on one of the world’s most savage scenes of butchery,” wrote the conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune*.48 F A Voigt (1892-1957), renowned for his criticism of totalitarianism, praised Allied efforts by remarking that he did not realise the terror would grow to be so bad and concentration camps would “endure until invading armies brought it to an end”.49 Moorehead believed Belsen reports had such an impact for reasons other than the sheer awfulness of the scenes at the camp:

A shudder of horror went around the world when news of the concentration camps was published. But only I think, because of the special interest and the special moment in the war. We were engrossed with Germany and it is perhaps not too subtle to say that since Germany was manifestly beaten, people wanted to have a justification for their fight, proof that they were engaged against evil.50

Timing was crucial according to Moorehead with the liberation of camps acting as a justification for the war effort. Correspondents also could conveniently claim that soldiers did not die in vain and the liberation of Nazi concentration camps was an indication of the moral righteousness of an Allied war effort whose aim was to end Nazi atrocities.

Reports sometimes explicitly stated camp atrocities were another reason why Allied forces had been fighting Nazi Germany. This was most

evident in British reports. It appears the British were especially keen to validate what was a long and costly war. *The Times* claimed it was imperative people see pictures from camps “in order that the world may comprehend the exorbitance of evil against which the United Nations have been fighting for”.\(^{51}\) Likewise, conservative newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* linked Nazi camps to the war effort in an editorial:

> The people of the United Nations now know what was the evil, which they set out to fight; and why strength has been vouchsafed to them to carry through to victory a struggle in whose early days the power of darkness often seemed to be on the verge of triumph.\(^{52}\)

Such reports gave a sense of meaning to the British war effort and the struggle the nation endured. *The Times* stated: “For many unquestionably the end of rule by the S.S. and Gestapo is liberation”.\(^{53}\) The report entitled “The End of Tyranny” implied liberation of concentration camps was closely linked to the end of Nazi tyranny in Europe and the triumph over evil. For the British, the liberation of Belsen justified the sacrifices made over the course of the conflict.

Camp revelations also created a new impetus for the last efforts to defeat Germany. On 29 April 1945 the 45th *Division News*, the first American military newspaper published in invaded European territory, included the headline “We Have Seen Dachau, Now We Know What We Are Fighting For”.\(^{54}\) Moreover, a newsmap prepared and distributed by the United States Army Signal Corps presented camp revelations as evidence of Nazi criminality.\(^{55}\) Titled “This is Why We Fight”, the pamphlet justified the war retroactively. Several reports claimed camp atrocities motivated British and American soldiers to keep fighting. The

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51 “The Victims”, p. 5.
52 “Brand of Cain”, p. 4.
53 “The End of Tyranny”, *The Times*, 18 May 1945, p. 5.
55 Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye*, pp. 21-23.
Daily Express wrote soldiers were “enraged by the horrors” and described how they “raced through the camp”. Denny remarked how “thousands of our soldiers have seen these things and have gone on to further battles with a cold hatred they had not had before”. Correspondents presented liberated Nazi camps as a new and powerful motivation for the war.

Other correspondents used a rather different strategy. Sunday Express editor John Gordon (1890-1974) discussed at length what the Nazis could have done in Britain “if we had been defeated”. He played on British fears of invasion by claiming what happened in concentration camps was likely to be replicated in Britain. The Observer claimed: “what the world had been saved from, Belsen and Buchenwald show” and the New York Times pointed out the newsreels act as a reminder that this may have happened in Britain. The fight against Nazism, then, was portrayed as not only about saving the people of Europe but also a fight to protect citizens abroad.

Those tasked with documenting Nazi camps recognised the significance of Nazi atrocities in terms of justifying the war. Paul Wyand was asked to film interviews at Belsen and he later recalled why he accepted the job stating: “As we feel it is the duty of everybody to see it, as it is the most revolting proof of what we are fighting for”. Wyand’s attitude is

56 “Dachau Nazi Guards Hunted Down”, Daily Express, 1 May 1945, p. 4.
58 “The Beasts of Europe”, Sunday Express, 29 April 1945, p. 3.
likely indicative of many correspondents and photographers who visited concentration camps.

The concept of just and unjust wars is central to understanding the press’s framing of the Second World War. War is judged in two ways, according to Michael Walzer: the reasons states have for fighting or if a particular war is just or unjust (jus ad bellum); and the means adopted, or if the war is being fought justly or unjustly (jus in bello).62 There are two underlying tensions central to the morality of war that relate to how we make judgments about the conflict: the circumstances under which it is permissible to wage war and what is permissible to do in the conduct of war.63 These judgments cannot always be reconciled, for those who have the best reasons for waging war sometimes believe the only way to win is to fight in ways that are not permitted. Britain and the United States believed they were fighting a just war par excellence against Nazi tyranny and therefore their cause took on an increased moral significance. According to Walzer, “the conviction that victory is morally critical plays an important part in the so-called ‘logic of war’”.64 Winning was paramount if evil was to be overcome. The liberation of concentration camps reinforced the importance of not just ending the war but of complete victory.

Correspondents and editors used concentration camps to represent both the brutality of the enemy and the heroic acts of the liberators. As will be discussed in the next chapter, camp revelations confirmed Germans’ supposed inherent brutality and consequently all Germans were portrayed as responsible for camp atrocities. In linking liberation to the moral and ethical Allied war effort correspondents were trying to give meaning to


64 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, p. 32.
the war. The subject matter of an episode from the ten-part American miniseries *Band of Brothers* indicates how the liberation of Nazi camps still is inextricably linked in popular memory to perceptions about why the Allies were fighting. The series dramatises the history of one company of American paratroopers in the Second World War known as “Easy Company”. The episode titled “Why We Fight” focuses on the Company’s entry into Germany and its encounter with an abandoned Nazi concentration camp. Soldiers’ bitterness at the war is explored in the first half of the episode asking why they are fighting whilst the second half of the episode offers an answer to this question when the men encounter the camp. Correspondents tried to show readers why the war had been worthwhile. Claiming the war was fought to end concentration camps was misleading but this narrative was prioritised because it celebrated the British and American involvement in liberation and the freeing of inmates.

**The “Us Versus Them” Narrative**

A clear “us versus them” narrative emerged in reportage of liberation and this continued during coverage of the trials. In British and American reports the entire German nation was portrayed as inherently evil and characterised by brutality and aggressiveness. The Allied public had been exposed to years of propaganda about Germans and the war was promoted as a battle between “good” and “evil”, democracy and fascism. Camp revelations served to reinforce convictions that Germans were a barbaric “race”. The wartime framing of the conflict played a key role in shaping press responses to camps in 1945. Correspondents and photographers heard stories of Nazi brutality but only after visiting Belsen, Dachau and other camps did they confront the horror first-hand. The British and Americans may have been receptive to dominant “us versus them” portrayals because they were conditioned by years of anti-German propaganda. The pocketbook

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given to British soldiers in late 1944 and early 1945 is a contemporary example of the British mind-set. The British Foreign Office gave the guide to soldiers to prepare them to conquer and occupy Germany. Guides contended Germans fundamentally differed from British people: “The likeness, if it exists at all, is only skin-deep. The deeper you dig into the German character, the more you realise how different they are from us”.67

Correspondents defined the categories of “us” and “them” by describing their horrified reaction to camps and soldiers’ shock. Correspondents claimed camp scenes showed the depravity that was practised daily in Germany. In response they expressed their moral outrage at Nazi crimes. Photographs were used to illustrate the abhorrent nature of the enemy. A photograph that appeared in the Daily Worker showed a mass grave at Belsen filled with bodies and the accompanying caption stated: “Allied soldiers looked upon the reality—the bestial, grim reality of what fascism means”. It further proclaimed: “The perverted, blood-crazed criminals who perpetrated such crimes against humanity must be brought to justice”.68 Reports mentioned British soldiers since they represented the moral liberators (“us”) whilst the image showed the horrible crimes of the enemy (“them”).

Correspondents also commented on the indifferent attitude of local civilian populations, which worked to create a distance between the Allies and Germans, the readers and German civilians. A similar “us versus them” mentality was used in relation to the dehumanisation of victims (see Chapter 7).

Arguably, correspondents were trying to take comfort in the fact that they were somehow different from Nazis. Reports stated concentration

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68 “MPs to Visit Hell Camps”, Daily Worker, 20 April 1945, p. 1.
camps “sent a shudder through every civilised heart” or shocked “civilised” people throughout the world.69 A Times report referred to Nazis as “primitive savages” and references were made to their “moral perversion”.70 Henry Standish made a clear distinction between the Allies and Nazi perpetrators when he wrote: “Why alleged human beings should kill people in this way beats me”.71 Correspondents implied they were incapable of committing such acts by emphasising their inability to understand atrocities. Constantly pointing out German wickedness meant the press could hold onto a honourable image of the Allied forces’ conduct during the conflict.

This again relates back to concepts of a “just war” versus “just means” discussed by Walzer. The Allies may have fought a “just war” but questions surround the means they used to achieve victory. Belsen was framed in this manner. Focusing on the evil nature of the enemy so heavily meant the less glorious and more ambiguous, controversial, or questionable aspects of the British war effort were “easily laid aside”.72 The positive aspects of the British war effort, such as liberation, were emphasised and the Allies attempted to avoid any guilt relating to alleged war atrocities. American occupation propaganda exploited camp atrocities in a similar way emphasising the apparent differences between Americans and Germans. Cora Sol Goldstein determines in her research on American visual propaganda that in 1945 in the wake of liberation, camp revelations were used to “expose the evilness of Nazism, to prove the collective guilt of the German people, and to establish the moral superiority of the Allies”.73 The concept of “collective guilt” mentioned by Goldstein is discussed in Chapter 4.

69 “The Lesson of the Murder Camps”, p. 10.
70 “The Victims”, p. 5.
72 Reilly, Belsen, p. 2.
73 Goldstein, Capturing the German Eye, p. 28.
Demonising the Nazi political system fed into the “us versus them” mentality. The conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune* denounced totalitarianism describing concentration camps as “indices of the sickness of the soul that afflicts the totalitarian system”. Reports focused on the corrupt nature of the Nazi regime. Communist newspaper editor William Rust commented that British people were “horror-stricken” at the “foulness of Fascism [as] Fascism is a state of complete moral rottenness”. Newspapers portrayed Nazism as evil, using camp revelations as evidence of the excesses, moral perversion and degradation it fostered. An *Observer* report exclaimed:

No punishment of Nazi Germany however grimly earned and justly executed will suffice without a full and general admission that Nazism and Fascism are evil beyond endurance wherever they appear.

By condemning the enemy in this way, correspondents justified the Second World War.

In addition to demonising fascism, correspondents championed the democratic political system and its values. A report featured in the *Daily Express* opinion section highlighted Allied dedication to the war effort and claimed the British “decided to fight for the freedom of the individual”. It further stated that they had exposed “the ultimate horror in the concentration camps”. Even more emphatic in its support for individual rights the communist *Daily Worker* declared that Dachau was a “synonym for the Nazi policy of ruthless suppression of all democratic and liberal elements”. Nazi atrocities were understood as evidence of what happens when democracy is rejected. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, for instance, argued concentration camps and the Nazi

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75 Rust, “The Death Camps”, p. 2.
76 “The Guilt”, p. 4.
78 “Dachau (No. 1 Nazi Terror Camp) Taken”, *Daily Worker*, 1 May 1945, p. 3.
regime acted as a reminder to the United States of the importance of representative government and upholding democracy. 79

During military trials newspaper reports continued to legitimise the Allies’ cause and highlighted the fundamental differences between “us” and “them”. Prioritising the persecution of Jews, the Jewish Chronicle described the Belsen Trial as “a powerful indictment of Fascism, Nazism and anti-Semitism”. 80 The New York Times made clear the fundamental differences between the Belsen and Dachau defendants and Americans claiming: “democratic man, who doesn’t like to kill in cold blood, even when justice requires it, recoils from this spectacle”. 81 Likewise, the Sunday Times published a report about the British convictions stating the trial was about upholding the “belief in the sanctity of the individual [and] justice and liberty”. 82 Belsen, the report stated, represented everything Britain opposed.

Nationalistic sentiment was another way the Allies projected a noble self-image. Daily Express foreign correspondent Laurence Wilkinson stated it made him “proud to be British to go to a concentration camp like Dachau”. 83 Wilkinson highlighted the British spirit and character by noting how British prisoners did not cower to the SS guards but kept their moral superiority and demonstrated their resilience. British forces were referred to as “hard-hitting” in the New York Times. 84 Newspapers ensured the “us versus them” mentality that emerged during coverage of the war continued long after liberation by focusing on the positive attributes of Allied forces, their courageous efforts and championing of democratic values. At the same time, they emphasised the brutality of the Nazis, their crimes and the morally corrupt nature of fascism.

80 “Belsen Beasts’ Trial”, Jewish Chronicle, 21 September 1945, pp. 1, 7.
83 Wilkinson, “British Cowed”, p. 3.
Conclusion

Liberation was portrayed as a heroic act and the freeing of camps was seen as a military success. Due to the timing, a link was made between camps and the end of the war. The image of the Allies as “liberators” endures and continues to play a key role in memory of the war. The liberation of Dachau in particular was portrayed as joyous and jubilant. Soldiers were often placed at the centre of stories since readers could identify with them and because they offered a national link to concentration camps. This Allied focus is evident also in the attention given to official tours of camps and the recovery efforts.

Reports reinforced Nazi brutality and liberation was presented as a story of good triumphing over evil. The British and American governments used camps as evidence of what they had fought for and correspondents similarly suggested liberated camps vindicated Allied efforts. Liberation gave the war a new sense of meaning and significance. Wartime enemy images and propaganda shaped responses to liberation with camp atrocities merely confirming the Allies’ views on Germany. Accounts contrasted democracy and fascism, the virtuous Allied soldiers and the brutal perpetrators, the liberating Allied forces and the culpable German people.
Who shall be held responsible for this abyss of perverted cruelty scarcely believable, scarcely paralleled in the whole history of human inhumanity? First the Nazi leaders and the Gestapo and S.S. men who ordered and inflicted the tortures... A harder question is how far the indictment should extend to the German people at large. They cannot escape responsibility; history will see to that. But what exactly is the general, as opposed to the particular guilt?

Report on Nazi concentration camps:

These people must be made to realise the full enormity of Hitlerism... They must learn something of what others have suffered. Nor must any of them escape their full share of drudgery because they have been important or well-to-do. No German in prosperous circumstances can disclaim responsibility for Hitler... The nationhood of Germany must not be given back to her till the Germans have shown by their actions that they are ready to accept a new way of life.

*Belsen report: “Celle”, News Chronicle*,
15 April 1945, p. 2.

After first expressing their shock and horror at Nazi atrocities, correspondents quickly turned their attention to questions of responsibility, guilt and punishment. The extent of German civilians’ knowledge of camp atrocities was a strong theme of press coverage along with German national guilt. This chapter analyses how German
civilians and the German nation were presented in the press following liberation and during the Belsen and Dachau trials. It also considers the relationship between camps and the on-going treatment of Germany, specifically the re-education program and denazification process, to assess the role the press played in promoting post-war aims.

**Punishment**

Correspondents expressed outrage at Nazi crimes. Their anger, combined with that of the Allied public, translated into demands for harsh punishment. Following war it is natural for the victor to harbour strong desires for passionate retribution and reckoning.\(^1\) A number of *New York Times* reports from April and May 1945 referred to the war crimes investigations taking place.\(^2\) The *Daily Worker* stated: “The perverted, blood-crazed criminals who perpetrated such crimes against humanity must be brought to justice”.\(^3\) This was indicative of wider public concern as to whether any camp personnel would be held accountable for crimes committed in Nazi camps. Press coverage reflected the importance of determining perpetrators’ and bystanders’ complicity and guilt (the intense focus on individual perpetrators is explored in more depth in Section Three). Newspapers discussed what action should be taken in regards to Nazi criminals as liberation added new impetus to debates about guilt and punishment. Discussions not only focused on camp personnel but also Germans more broadly.

Correspondents asserted Britain and the United States had a responsibility to bring perpetrators to justice, proclaiming it was their moral duty as world leaders to set an example. This mentality was

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mirrored in British and American policies that were based on notions of Allied responsibility to safeguard peace. Issued on 14 August 1941, the Atlantic Charter was drafted by leaders of Britain and the United States and defined Allied goals in the post-war world. Importantly, it clarified the role of human rights objectives as part of Western Allied war aims. Principles relating to self-determination, advancing social welfare and a world free of want and fear are outlined in the Charter. Correspondents were both shaping and reflecting this view. While reports were responsive to Allied post-war aims, correspondents also were possibly emphasising the importance of bringing Nazi perpetrators to account and the need to protect human rights.

Punishment of war criminals had been discussed prior to liberation. Notably, Franklin Roosevelt’s statement on War Crimes in October 1942 outlined a strong commitment to punish war criminals. Roosevelt stated: “when victory is won the perpetrators of these crimes shall answer for them before courts of law”.⁴ He further remarked that the United States government was “prepared to cooperate with the British and other Governments in establishing a United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes”.⁵ As mentioned, these sentiments were echoed in the Moscow Declaration in 1943 and in 1945, the powers and duties of the IMT were established under the London Charter.

**Responsibility and “Collective German Guilt”**

Correspondents frequently questioned what Germans knew about Nazi camps and if they had supported what happened inside camps. In April The Times, for instance, stated: “How far the responsibility for these abominations extends is a question that must be fully investigated hereafter”.⁶ Such questions were naturally prioritised. Correspondents were keen to identify those who were not only directly involved in

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⁵ ibid.

⁶ “The Victims”, p. 5.
camp atrocities but also wanted to spread responsibility further to German nationals. An editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* proclaimed: “Responsibility for these barbarities rests with the whole German people, who were ready enough to applaud Hitler and his gangsters in the hey-day of success”. Other reports included similar statements, attributing responsibility for concentration camp crimes to the German people as a whole.

The idea that all Germans must accept responsibility for Nazi crimes was evident in official government documents. The Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) 1067 Directive set out basic military objectives in Germany in October 1945:

> It should be brought home to the Germans that Germany’s ruthless warfare and the fanatical Nazi resistance have destroyed the German economy and made chaos and suffering inevitable and that the Germans cannot escape responsibility for what they have brought upon themselves.\(^8\)

The directive was heavily influenced by Henry Morgenthau’s thesis of “collective guilt” proposed in the 1944 Morgenthau Plan. As FDR’s Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau was an influential figure, but the plan was never implemented due to lack of public support.\(^9\) It was not only the Western Allies who subscribed to the idea that all Germans were responsible for Nazi crimes. Konstantin Simonov (1915-1979) was the first Soviet war correspondent to write about Majdanek following its discovery and his serialised article “The Extermination Camp” was published in *Red Star* on 10, 11 and 12 August 1944. He reminded readers that all Germans would answer for their atrocious crimes and

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\(^7\) “Murder Camps”, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1945, p. 4.


\(^9\) Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye*, p. 22.
warned they should not “be allowed to blame each other, and shift all the responsibility to Hitler and the Nazi authorities”.10

Correspondents framed liberation in such a way that camp atrocities became evidence of the uncivilised nature of not just the perpetrators but also the German people and their “sadistic cruelty”.11 The Jewish Advocate claimed camps left Americans with no doubt that “in the matter of sadism and practice of brutality, the Germans are indeed a master race”.12 British and American reports suggested all Germans were responsible for concentration camp crimes. A photograph of a German sergeant major appeared in a Sunday Express spread of photographs and the caption underneath read: “The pictures on this page were taken in the Camp of Death at Belsen”.13 It further stated: “This thug was not here—but he typifies the Huns who were”.14 This man had not been in Belsen but he was used to represent perpetrators from the camp as though all Nazi perpetrators, and all Germans, were alike. Correspondents struggled to understand German civilians’ behaviour and could not reconcile their claims that they did not know what was happening inside Nazi camps. The Daily Worker's William Rust made his view clear:

The mark of its filth is borne by all Germans who have closed their eyes to the shame and horror in their midst, by all Germans whose minds have been dulled and degraded by the monstrous doctrines of racial superiority.15

According to Rust, no German could escape culpability for concentration camp crimes.


12 “Master Murderers”, p. 8.


14 ibid.

Correspondents detailed local Germans’ responses to scenes at Belsen, Dachau and elsewhere. They described how close they resided to the camp compounds, their attitude to the atrocities and their responses to questioning. Issues of complicity dominated Christopher Buckley’s (1905-1950) account of Belsen.\textsuperscript{16} He wrote that he had been “trying to find some clue to the problem of the German people” and admitted that he had failed to “discover any adequate explanation for the fiendish cruelties and inhuman callousness that have been uncovered in places like Belsen”.\textsuperscript{17} Correspondents also rushed to nearby towns to question locals, wanting to investigate what they knew about camps. The Observer’s Eric Wigham (1904-1990) noted how he “drove straight to the nearest German village and sought out the pastor”.\textsuperscript{18} A Times report mentioned a farmer who lived opposite Belsen and outlined his claims of ignorance and fear:

Nobody outside the camp had any idea of what went on, though they had a pretty good idea that any display of curiosity would result in their going to the camp to stay.\textsuperscript{19}

Colin Wills similarly detailed how locals ignored Belsen as they strolled past the camp in “sunlit streets, well dressed and well fed”, implying they were both complicit in and indifferent to inmates’ suffering.\textsuperscript{20} Apparently, correspondents had no trouble passing judgment on the civilian population.

\textsuperscript{16} Having studied military history at Oxford, Buckley used his knowledge to report on multiple battles during the war. In 1944 he landed with the first wave at Normandy and accompanied the British Second Army into Belgium and Holland. See Roth, \textit{Historical Dictionary}, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{17} Buckley, “Burgomasters”, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{18} Eric Wigham, “SS Regime of Terror at Belsen Camp”, \textit{The Observer}, 22 April 1945, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{19} “Burgomasters Inspect Belsen”, p. 3.

Several reports juxtaposed the everyday and mundane with horrors inside camp compounds.\(^{21}\) This was a strategy correspondents possibly used to indicate to readers how close local citizens resided to the camps and how they ignored what occurred a short distance away. The German population was a focal point in a *Chicago Daily Tribune* report, for instance, which detailed how local Bavarians passed the Dachau camp daily.\(^{22}\) This gave the impression that they were somehow responsible because at the very least they knew of the camp’s existence and could see inside the compound. Their apparent disregard for atrocities committed in the camp was outlined in a description of local children who rode past the Dachau death train. The report stated: “Children pedalled past the bodies on bicycles and never interrupted their excited chatter”. The absence of any reaction by the children indicated how Germans had become desensitised to violence and brutality and accepted concentration camps as part of everyday life. In addition, it presumably strengthened perceptions of Germany as morally bankrupt.

The military also were keen to determine the complicity of civilians who resided close to camps. A report by the United States Seventh Army issued just days after Dachau was liberated included a section titled “The Camp and the Town” that concentrated on what local Germans knew of the camp. The report stated: “No citizen of Dachau is without a deep sense that something was wrong, terribly wrong, on the outskirts of their town”.\(^{23}\) Suspecting or even knowing about Dachau, however, was quite different from sharing in the guilt.

Only a small number of reports offered a more nuanced view and recognised it was not a case of “all” Germans being culpable. Liberal newspaper the *Manchester Guardian* argued for the need to bring the

\(^{21}\) See Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 66.

\(^{22}\) “Yanks’ Attack Surprises SS”, p. 1.

German people to repentance without charging every German with guilt for the horrors. It stated: “We shall not help Germans to repent by telling them that they are a nation of savages and every one of them is as bad as the rest”. Instead, the editorial urged that Germans “must work for a restored Europe”. The report pointed out that people who resided near Dachau lived in fear and this no doubt influenced their decisions not to protest. Those who spoke out against the Nazis faced the threat of being incarcerated themselves or being harassed by the *Gestapo*. Many Germans may have disagreed with concentration camps but prioritised their own safety and that of their family before that of camp inmates.

Other reports insightfully argued that Germans had been the first concentration camp victims. Germans made up the majority of inmates in camps like Dachau during the 1930s. Germans suffered under Nazism, too, and some observers, including readers with Germanic names, were quick to criticise generalisations that all Germans were Nazi supporters. Letters to the editor that appeared in *The Times* made such arguments.

Whilst some correspondents acknowledged the complexities of Germans’ circumstances under Nazism, they generally rejected the idea that German civilians remained ignorant of atrocities committed inside concentration camps. The overwhelming assumption in British and American reports was that Germans knew what was happening. *Sunday Express* editor John Gordon, for instance, claimed that the German public was aware of crimes in concentration camps but did not want to know about them. He asserted Germans who lived near camps were

25 ibid.
27 Irmgard Litten, “Germany and the Camps”, *The Times*, 4 May 1945, p. 5; F Seidler, “Letters to the Editor”, *The Times*, 23 April 1945, p. 5.
“smug and complacent”. Gordon went on to indict the entire nation stating: “I refuse to accept all this nonsense that these iniquities are the work merely of a small section of the German nation”. 28 Alan Moorehead’s account “Not One German Has Any Feeling of Guilt” included a similar sentiment.29 The predominant view in newspapers was that support for Nazism, lack of objection and perhaps even tacit approval of concentration camps implied criminality.

Although there was a strong press focus on the mind-set of the German people and how far responsibility should be spread among the civilian population, more serious questions were raised, too, over the guilt of the German nation. Correspondents questioned individual versus collective culpability for concentration camp atrocities. As the Observer so aptly asked in April 1945: “What exactly is the general, as opposed to the particular guilt?”30 The theme of “collective guilt” is evident in a number of liberation reports. Correspondents made blatantly clear their views. Experienced correspondent Harold Denny argued: “The German people as a whole share Hitler’s guilt though already they are hastening to disclaim it”.31 Germans “collective guilt” was a controversial issue and discussions were conducted in an emotional atmosphere reflecting Allied anger at camp revelations.

Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung introduced the term “collective guilt” (Kollektivschuld) in an influential essay he wrote in 1945. Debate over the guilt of the German nation and the fate that should befall Germany, however, had already gained momentum in late 1944.32 Jung wrote:

The world sees Europe as the continent on whose soil the

29 Alan Moorehead, “Not One German Has Any Feeling of Guilt”, Sunday Express, 22 April 1945, p. 4.
shameful concentration camps grew, just as Europe singles out Germany as the land and the people that are enveloped in a cloud of guilt: for the horror happened in Germany and its perpetrators were Germans.\textsuperscript{33}

In other words, Jung argued that “all Germans were either actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously, participants in the atrocities”.\textsuperscript{34} Germany was considered guilty for starting the war and for crimes committed throughout occupied Europe. Jung went on to assert: “If the German intends to live on good terms with Europe, he must be conscious that in the eyes of Europeans he is a guilty man”.\textsuperscript{35}

Even before 1945 there was an assumption the German nation was responsible for war crimes. There was a general belief in Britain, for instance, that Germany had started both world wars. According to Captain Russell Grenfell, British naval officer and author, this was a view held by the bulk of the British people and was supported by politicians, lawyers, dignitaries, and editors.\textsuperscript{36} It was a dominant theme in wartime propaganda and Winston Churchill espoused such sentiment throughout his time in office. The image of Germany as aggressive and militaristic also had been perpetuated by propaganda during the conflict. For example, Lord Vansittart’s characterisation of Germany as a “Butcher Bird” was highly publicised in Britain. Vansittart, a career diplomat, was acting as Chief Diplomatic Advisor in the British Foreign Service at the time he wrote the pamphlet “Black Record” in 1941. The main theme of Vansittart’s work was that Germany had been the main constant international troublemaker from the beginnings of European history onwards and the rest of the world was a victim of


\textsuperscript{34} Quoted in Jeffrey K Olick, “The Guilt of Nations?”, Ethics and International Affairs 17, no. 2 (2003), p. 110.

\textsuperscript{35} Jung, “After the Catastrophe”, p. 197.

Germany’s trickery and villainy. Vansittart used a graphic illustration of a “butcher bird” to make his point since the bird was fierce, heavy beaked and had murderous characteristics and this reminded him of Germany. 37 Grenfell claimed the pamphlet was a worthy example of what the British public was “encouraged to believe during the war”. 38

German “collective guilt” was closely linked to the Allied pursuit of German war guilt. There were efforts prior to the end of the war to establish an official narrative of guilt and this was strengthened in the wake of victory. 39 Debates had taken place during wartime about how to deal with Germany and there was an agreement between the Western Allies that harsh punishment was necessary. “German guilt” was prioritised following the Potsdam Agreement. Signed in July and August 1945, the agreement between Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union related to the military occupation and reconstruction of post-war Germany and the prosecution of war criminals. A core principle was:

To convince the German people that they have suffered a total military defeat and that they cannot escape responsibility for what they have brought upon themselves, since their own ruthless warfare and the fanatical Nazi resistance have destroyed German economy and made chaos and suffering inevitable. 40

The concept of “collective guilt” linked also into the IMT’s notion of conspiracy in the charges against alleged war criminals at Nuremberg. The charge of a general conspiracy to “wage a war of aggression” focused on the idea of a common criminal plan. 41

37 ibid. p. 27.
guilt” the prosecution aimed to prove defendants’ individual guilt.42

The American occupation forces’ propaganda campaigns are one of the clearest demonstrations of the notion of German “collective guilt”. Forced tours of Nazi concentration camps by local populations were part of the United States’ psychological warfare operation in occupied Germany and were designed to be “an exercise in politics and punishment through visual means”.43 Visits were “regimented, supervised, and mandatory”.44 For Cora Sol Goldstein the purpose of forced tours organised by American forces was to implement “collective punishment” for German “collective guilt”:

The Americans wanted Germans, irrespective of gender, age and social status, to see the camps. They regarded all Germans as accomplices of the Nazi criminal project—a hypothesis of collective guilt with a corollary concept of collective punishment.45

Reports underlined the importance of forced tours in terms of punishing the German population.46

Newspapers further supported Allied forces in their efforts to indict the entire German nation by pointing out that civilians were being compelled to help bury corpses and assist in the cleaning of camps.47 Headlines such as “Women Burying Belsen Dead”, “SS Men Had to Bury Slaves” and “Nazi Death Factory Shocks Germans on Forced Tour” reflected the

42 ibid.
43 Goldstein, Capturing the German Eye, p. 3.
44 ibid. p. 30. Goldstein traces the development of American visual propaganda in occupied Germany from 1945 to 1949 and argues it remained essential to American re-education and denazification efforts.
45 ibid.
interest in Germans’ encounters with atrocities. The *New York Times*, for example, printed a photograph showing SS women who were “put to work under guard carrying to a communal grave victims who were starved to death” (Figure 4.1). The *Daily Worker* published a similar photograph with the accompanying caption: “Today we print this picture of Germans from this village being forced to dig graves for the decent burial of these victims of filthy German brutality”.

![Figure 4.1: Female SS guards burying Belsen victims in a mass grave.](image)


Photographs showing German civilians’ encounters with atrocities also reinforced the premise of German “collective guilt”. In presenting such photographs to readers, newspapers highlighted how civilians were being

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50 “Germans Forced to Dig Victims Graves”, *Daily Worker*, 23 April 1945, p. 4.
forced to confront atrocities and were being “collectively punished”. A photograph in the *Manchester Guardian* showed two SS men under British guard at Belsen removing bodies and piling them onto a truck to be buried (Figure 4.2).\(^51\) In these photographs the subjects—civilians—are designated as guilty bystanders to camp atrocities. These photographs “invite the viewer to judge these ordinary men and women from a place of victory and difference”.\(^52\) Newspapers first introduced the Allied public to these “ordinary” Germans in a prejudicial situation. Victims often are at the centre of the photograph but as anonymous victims of atrocity (see Chapter 6).

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**Figure 4.2:** German civilians load dead bodies onto a truck at Belsen. Photograph appeared in: “The Belsen Concentration Camp”, *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 April 1945, p. 3.


\(^{51}\) “The Belsen Concentration Camp”, p. 3.

\(^{52}\) Zemel, “Emblems of Atrocity”, p. 206.
The issue of responsibility dominated early reporting. Some correspondents concentrated on determining Germans’ knowledge of camp crimes and their support for Nazism. Others defended the German population and took a more nuanced approach to civilians. Overall, however, blame was spread across the German population. The press reflected the importance the Allied occupation forces placed on stressing the doctrine that all Germans were implicitly guilty for Nazi atrocities by focusing on forced tours, local populations, and using a rhetoric of “German guilt” in reports. Later in 1945 it appears this mentality shifted as atrocities were attributed more so to individuals. A similar departure from the notion of “collective guilt” has been identified in American propaganda.\(^{53}\) As will be seen in Chapters 9 and 10, later in 1945 the press singled out perpetrators and the concept of individual guilt dominated reports. Individual responsibility supplanted the premise of “collective guilt” during the IMT Nuremberg Trial, too.\(^{54}\) Presumably re-education and denazification further encouraged a shift. The destructive and divisive nature of National Socialism was emphasised along with the need to reform Germans.

**Re-education and Denazification**

Discussions about Germany’s future, in particular re-education and the process of denazification, had taken place in Britain and the United States well before liberation. Camp revelations strengthened any existing hatred and disgust for Germans and reinforced how imperative it was to rehabilitate Germany. In May 1945, a report included the by-line: “What was done in the German prison camps emphasizes the problem of what to do with a people who are morally sick”.\(^{55}\) Indeed re-education was used as a tool to control and rehabilitate Germany and “in the days after liberation, Britain and its allies had begun to carve out for themselves a new role as the moral teachers of a defeated

\(^{53}\) Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye*, p. 37.


Correspondents also anticipated Allied future policy. They questioned if Germany could be reformed and how this was to be achieved. Not only did reports reassure readers that re-education was a primary concern but correspondents asserted also that the Allies were the ones who must carry out this task. They stressed that Nazism had to be destroyed completely and German society must be purged of all National Socialist elements. The left-wing *Manchester Guardian* claimed that Nazi influence first must be eliminated before the free press could be restored in Germany. An *Observer* report even stated that the “reconstruction of Germany as a civilised neighbour gravely concerns all men”.

Once the tours of camps concluded, occupation forces turned their attention to other aspects of the atrocity publicity campaign. Posters were displayed throughout Germany with photographs from concentration camps and slogans explicitly stating the German people’s guilt. A number of reports asserted Germans had to be forced to view photographs from the camps and the inhumanity that was practised on prisoners. *The Times* commented on the larger significance of making Germans view concentration camps claiming: “It is the beginning of the re-education of Germany”. This was mentioned in reports as early as April 1945 with the *Chicago Daily Tribune* informing readers that pictures were being compiled and would be placed in public places where German citizens “would be compelled to view them”. Correspondents detailed various ways Germans were being re-educated. The *Manchester Guardian* reported in May that SHAEF printed a booklet for distribution in Germany illustrating the horrors of concentration camps and also mentioned documentary films were to be shown in

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56 Bunting, “‘My Question Applies to This Country’”, pp. 65-66.
58 “Japan”, *The Observer*, 30 September 1945, p. 4.
59 “The Victims”, p. 5.
German cinemas. Prepared by the OWI as part of the United States’ atrocity propaganda campaign, the booklet titled “KZ: A Pictorial Report From Five Concentration Camps” (KZ: Bildbericht Aus Fünfkonzentrationslagern) used photographs from Buchenwald, Belsen, Gardelegen, Nordhausen and Ohrdruf. The 32-page booklet includes over 40 black and white photographs depicting American and British soldiers at camps, dead inmates and survivors, forced tours of local Germans and Germans helping with the disposal and burying of corpses. Minimal text accompanies the photographs. Newspaper reports supported re-education strategies by emphasising the importance of such programs.

Assumptions about German “collective guilt”, responsibility and German mentality shaped how the press portrayed Germans and the importance of their re-education. A Times report suggested that camp revelations “have shown only too clearly the depth to which the national debauchment has gone”. According to the report, atrocities committed at places like Belsen indicated “the difficulty of transforming the mentality which made the concentration camps possible”. Harold Denny claimed camp atrocities needed to be remembered because the world must “keep these things in mind as it attacks the problem of what we are going to do with this mentally and morally sick people we are conquering”. Concentration camp discoveries helped justify the re-education of Germany and indicated the immense task that faced the Allies.

Re-education was linked closely to denazification, the process of making “normal” people out of Nazis and ridding Germany of Nazism. Assuming that every man and woman in Germany was at least indirectly responsible for crimes committed in concentration camps was the basis behind the program. This sentiment was evident in official Allied

61 “Facts for Enemy Prisoners and Civilians”, p. 5.
63 “Lesson of the Camps”, p. 4.
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One section of the Potsdam Agreement stated:

The Allied armies are in occupation of the whole of Germany and the German people have begun to atone for the terrible crimes committed under the leadership of those whom, in the hour of their success, they openly approved and blindly obeyed.65

The process of denazification had a second aspect: “the more positive assignment of making the Germans into believers in democracy”.66 The failed “experiment” of Weimar, however, acted as a cautionary example of the difficulties involved in convincing Germans of the benefits of democracy. Denazification involved the Allies determining which Germans bore direct responsibility for Nazi crimes and excluding them from future government. This process was highly problematic and ultimately unsuccessful. Der Fragebogen (The Questionnaire), for example, was issued by the Allied Military Government in Germany at the end of the war and was “served on all Germans who were suspected of having assisted, directed, or collaborated with the National Socialist Regime”.67 Newspaper reports reflected the importance of promoting democracy and re-educating Germans along democratic lines. This can be seen most clearly in reportage of the Belsen and Dachau trials.

Despite reservations about the efficacy of the post-war justice system, the trials themselves were considered valuable exercises in re-education, acting as examples of impartial and democratic justice. Newspaper reports emphasised these aims. The leftist Daily Herald commented on Germans’ reactions to the Belsen Trial verdicts, claiming: “they found a justice which can let a man free after once

putting him in the dock, something new to them”. 68 The Los Angeles Times proclaimed the Belsen Trial was “the first time the Allies sit in judgment of the Nazi horror camps”. 69 A legal observer even referred to the Belsen Trial as an “object-lesson in British judicial methods for the re-education of the Germans”. 70

In order for the trials to be an effective re-education tool, proceedings had to be widely publicised. Correspondents informed the Allied public of the press interest in the trials in order to reassure them of the effect proceedings were having on the German population. Correspondents reported that Germans were attending the trial and witnessing first-hand democratic justice. The Los Angeles Times mentioned the packed gallery at the Belsen Trial on two consecutive days and the Chicago Daily Tribune pointed out that hundreds were to attend the trial. 71 Reports commented that the courtroom was filled to capacity at the beginning of the Dachau Trial and again when the verdicts were announced. 72 The level of foreign press interest was also newsworthy. Sigrid Schultz reported that over 200 foreign correspondents had gathered for the Belsen Trial, again indicating how central the press was in not only promoting the re-education of Germans but also educating the world of Nazi crimes. 73

Newspapers displayed a keen interest in the effect the proceedings were having on civilians, too. A Manchester Guardian report included the sub-heading “Court’s Effect on German People”. The report asserted

one of the main functions of the trial was to “make an impression on Germans”. 74 Anthony Mann, the British journalist smuggled out of Denmark after Nazi occupation ended, similarly devoted a section of his report to “Germans’ impressions” of the Belsen Trial. 75 Correspondents drew attention to the educational purposes of the proceedings but observed that Germans were “deserting” the trial. 76

The press helped promote democratic principles by emphasising the fairness of the Belsen Trial in particular. Correspondents paid close attention to the legal procedures and the rights afforded to the accused in the first camp trial. William Frye outlined that defendants were given every opportunity to defend themselves during the Belsen Trial, and Mann commented on the objective and impartial nature of the proceedings. 77 The adherence to strict standards of justice was detailed in a Chicago Daily Tribune report that informed readers the trial was fair and that the correct legal processes were being followed. 78 Not all newspapers, however, were satisfied with the process of justice. The Jewish Chronicle was critical of the way that the defendants were being tried and that they were even afforded the right to have a defence. 79 The Belsen Trial dragged on for weeks as the British were intent on ensuring the trial was conducted in accordance with military rules and procedure.

The fairness of the trial was a topic that again dominated reportage following the Belsen verdicts in November 1945. The New York Times stated that the sentences left “a satisfying sense of stern yet impartial

76 “Public Deserts the Belsen Trial”, Manchester Guardian, 6 November 1945, p. 5.
Allied justice”. A *Times* editorial praised the impartiality of the Belsen Trial and the British for its commitment:

A case, which it would have been human to prejudge out of hand, has been tried in substantial accord with the processes of law as practised in British courts of justice.

Vincent Evans, the first correspondent to enter Belsen after liberation, described the announcement of the verdicts as “five minutes of the coldest and most precise administering of justice that can ever have taken place in any court of law”. Such reports ensured the trials symbolised the fair and just conduct of the Allies, once again reinforcing the morality of the Allied war effort.

**Conclusion**

The desire for swift and expedient punishment was a post-war desire that played out in British and American newspaper reports. The question of collective responsibility, in particular, dominated coverage of Nazi camps. German “collective guilt” had been debated during the war and was a theme of wartime propaganda but was reignited after the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. Germans either directly or indirectly were portrayed as responsible for camp atrocities. Reports that concentrated on German national character and photographs of forced tours further emphasised accusations of “collective guilt”. Correspondents were fascinated by Germans’ encounters with atrocities. Such scenes highlighted their complicity.

Linked to the concept of “collective guilt” was the idea that Germany had to be rehabilitated. Correspondents commented on its necessity and reports debated how this was to be achieved. Instilling democratic values into German civilians was a central aspect of the re-education

82 Vincent Evans, “Kramer, Irma Grese and Nine Others to Die by Hanging”, *Sunday Express*, 18 November 1945, pp. 1, 8.
program and the process of denazification. Newspapers played a key role in convincing readers not only of the importance of promoting democracy in Germany but also publicising attempts to reform the nation. Correspondents concentrated on detailing the effect the trials were having on Germans and the fair manner in which proceedings were conducted. This ensured the trials became symbolic of the defeat of Nazism and the supposed triumph of democracy.
SECTION TWO

Victims

Section One uncovered dominant tropes in coverage of concentration camps. It also pointed out how the role of the Allies as “liberators” shifted the perspective of reporting away from victims. Section Two examines the presentation of camp inmates. Correspondents’ responses to victims were shaped by preconceptions and conventions of reportage. The categorisation and identification of inmates had immediate and more enduring consequences on popular understandings of concentration camps’ purpose and prisoner profile.

This section considers how victims were identified and described in press reports and analyses the overriding themes in textual as well as pictorial representations of victims. Focussing on correspondents’ identification and categorisation of liberated camp inmates, Chapter 5 examines the types of inmates who were prioritised in reportage and what this then meant for other victim groups, specifically Jewish prisoners. Chapter 6 probes why victims remained voiceless in reportage of Nazi camps with the exception of Allied soldiers and prominent inmates. Chapter 7 analyses the terminology employed to describe survivors and victims and the visual imagery used in reports. Taking into consideration the issues photographers face in capturing mass atrocity, it also examines how victims appeared in photographic images.
The largest political prison camp in Germany has just been liberated. Sixty thousand captives, mostly Russians and Poles, were set free.

_Belsen report: Henry Wales, “60,000 Liberated in Prison Camp; Typhus Kills 600”, Chicago Daily Tribune, 20 April 1945, p. 4._

During the advance from the north the concentration camp of Dachau, perhaps the most notorious of them all, was liberated with about 32,000 political prisoners.

_“Dachau Camp”, The Times, 1 May 1945, p. 4._

The preconceptions held by correspondents that prisoners were held for political reasons influenced responses to concentration camp inmates. Reports referred to victims firstly in terms of their nationality and secondly by their status as criminal and political internees. This chapter considers why victim discourse was predominantly conducted along national lines and how this shaped the portrayal of victims in Britain and the United States. It draws attention to the serious implications the focus on nationality had for other victim groups, particularly Jews, by probing the press’s treatment of Jewish victims. Although correspondents were forced to adjust their understanding of victims later in 1945, once military trials commenced and more had been learned about prisoners and their experience inside Nazi camps, there was a tendency to continue to present camp inmates almost exclusively in political terms and Nazi racial policy was left largely unexamined.
Victims’ Nationality

Especially once the war began, the Allies viewed inmates in German concentration camps predominantly in terms of their nationality.¹ When camps were liberated, the press continued this trend. Correspondents were quick to identify inmates by their national status reporting that inmates came from a range of European countries. Concentration camps “held millions of victims of every European nationality” according to the Chicago Daily Tribune.² Determining an individual’s nationality was a key part of identifying victims and common journalistic practice. It was a detail that correspondents could easily and quickly ascertain since many survivors were in no state to talk and language barriers limited communication. Correspondents, moreover, faced difficulties in individualising mass victims and had to rely on simple forms of categorisation in their first accounts.

Rather than reporting on the reason they had been imprisoned or their personal experience, correspondents listed the nationalities of victims as though this was what readers needed to be informed of first and was the most important detail. Jewish Advocate readers learned that American soldiers saw “Russians, Poles, French and even many American soldiers at Dachau”.³ Inmates were categorised by nationality in nearly every report that appeared about the camp’s liberation and this was true, too, in reports on Belsen.⁴ Recent research on Nazi camps likewise concludes, “Victim discourse was predominantly conducted along the lines of victims’ nationalities”.⁵ Inmates were those who had “suffered as the Nazis had invaded their countries”.⁶

⁵ Holmila, Reporting the Holocaust, p. 33.
Figure 5.1: Corpses found in a train car at Dachau. Photograph appeared in: “Dachau—a Grisly Spectacle”, *The Washington Post*, 2 May 1945, p. 3.

When photographs of victims appeared in newspapers, their name was rarely published, yet the subjects’ nationalities appeared. In the description that appeared directly underneath a photograph of bodies from Dachau, victims were identified simply as “hundreds of Poles” (Figure 5.1). The caption to another photograph described three prisoners who were looking directly at the camera as being of “many nationalities” (Figure 5.2). The caption further read: “Among the 32,000 prisoners of many nationalities liberated by American troops from Dachau, 10 miles northwest of Munich Germany, were these three half-starved victims of Nazism”. Nationality was an important aspect to the identification of victims since it demonstrated to readers the diversity of camp inmates.

During the Belsen Trial, nationality again was prioritised. Several newspapers published extensive reports on the start of the trial that outlined the proceedings, charges and defendants. In these reports victims were listed by nationality. Respected correspondent Sigrid Schultz reported that victims included:

A British national... Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Belgians, a British woman from Honduras, a Russian and two Hungarians, and nine Polish men and women who represent tens of thousands of other nameless dead.\(^8\)

The *Manchester Guardian* did not list specific countries but observed “the persons who suffered belonged to ten different nationalities”.\(^9\) This


continued as the trial progressed despite more detail being uncovered about various prisoner groups.  

This was also the case in the American press once the Dachau Trial commenced. “Civilian inmates of Dachau and its satellite camps were of almost every nationality”, wrote the Chicago Daily Tribune, continuing, “Hundreds of Russian, French, and Polish prisoners were tortured to death”. Dachau defendants were charged with crimes against “thousands of foreign civilian nationals and military members of belligerent nations”. When victims played a key role in the trial, such as acting as prosecution witnesses, correspondents almost always listed their nationality first.

Newspaper discourse highlighted the nationality of victims for several reasons. Pointing out that victims came from all across Europe emphasised the extent of Nazi brutality. It acted as a warning of how ruthless the Nazis were in pursuing their goals and how close they had come to dominating all of Europe, thus reminding readers of the importance of the Allies’ fight against Nazism.

Moreover, correspondents’ responses were based on preconceived and unsophisticated ideas and judgments about the camps based on pre-war knowledge. During the Second World War, British policy was to refer to victims of Nazi persecution according to their European nationality, rather than their religious or cultural background, a convention evident in American reports, too. By mentioning the nationality of victims, correspondents avoided having to go into detail about individual inmates but still were able to highlight the diversity among victims.

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13 Reilly, Belsen, p. 51.

14 See ibid.
It is possible correspondents’ accounts not only reflected the Nazis’ classification of inmates but relied on it. Harold Marcuse suggests American soldiers “found it expedient to enlist the leaders of the national groups that had organized secretly during the final days before liberation in their effort to run the liberated camp”. A system of prisoner marking was used inside concentration camps. Coloured badges designated the type of inmate. For example: political prisoners wore red triangles; common criminals wore green; homosexuals wore pink; and Jehovah’s Witnesses wore purple. Letters indicated nationality: “P” stood for Polish; “SU” for Soviet inmates and “F” was for French internees. Inmates were already categorised by national status. Correspondents identified victims’ nationalities just by looking at badges rather than talking to inmates.

Hannah Caven gives a further reason for the frequent reference to nationality in reports. She argues that nationality appeared repeatedly in the British media, specifically newsreels and newspapers, as it highlighted victims’ innocence and this underlined two important messages:

First, that these individuals were clearly not political activists or criminals and secondly, that the inmates were indeed ordinary human beings, which was not always easy to relate to when the majority of images showed people with... “No vestiges of humanity left”.

Although correspondents were sensitive to inmates’ suffering, at least initially, references to victim nationality appear to have been motivated by practical considerations.


Types of Camp Inmates

In the 1930s, the British and American public generally believed inmates were held in German concentration camps for political reasons or they were criminals.\(^{18}\) Even though the inmate profile expanded considerably once war broke out in 1939, there was still a general consensus among the British and Americans that camps targeted individuals primarily for political reasons.\(^{19}\) Correspondents relied on this pre-war understanding of inmates in their coverage of liberation. A *New York Times* report exemplifies the importance placed on the political dimensions of camps. It categorised prisoners in Dachau as including Jews, “gypsies”, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs and Germans but stated that they all were imprisoned as political suspects.\(^{20}\) Newspaper accounts after liberation and again during military trials reiterated that they were the two main types of inmates.

Before the British reached Belsen, newspaper reports were claiming it was a camp of political and criminal prisoners. *Daily Herald* correspondent Charles Bray (1898-1993) described Belsen in this way when he reported on the British advance towards the camp: “At Belsen, which is only 10 miles north of Celle, there is a huge concentration camp said to contain more than 60,000 political and criminal prisoners”.\(^{21}\) David Woodward likewise described prisoners as “criminals” and “anti-Nazis” in a report published the day before liberation.\(^{22}\) German authorities, in fact, informed the British regiment instructed to take over Belsen in April 1945 that inmates were mostly


political criminals. Referring to inmates as political internees and criminals was the case once Belsen was liberated. “In a new thrust, which also overwhelmed Bergen, the British tank columns bypassed a big concentration camp containing 60,000 typhus-ridden political prisoners”, wrote the New York Times. There was no mention of the diverse prisoner profile or the camp’s function.

Following the liberation of Dachau, most newspaper reports stated that inmates were in the camp for political reasons. Howard Cowan, whose reports featured in the Los Angeles Times and the Chicago Daily Tribune, claimed that Dachau was the most notorious concentration camp set up immediately after the Nazis seized power in January 1933. Cowan also noted that “all their most dangerous political opponents” were imprisoned there. This statement was incorrect. Ernst Thälmann, for example, the leader of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) spent over eleven years in solitary confinement in Bautzen, a sub-camp of Groß-Rosen concentration camp.

Correspondents were attempting to rationally explain camps’ existence and they had little time to consider the whole situation. Understandably their accounts were “anchored to familiar and conceptually acceptable narratives”. It was logical that victims were opponents of Hitler. Correspondents also may have written about political and criminal prisoners after observing inmates’ identification badges.

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27 Cowan, “U.S. Troops”, p. 3.
28 Holmila, Reporting the Holocaust, p. 32.
Occasionally, reports acknowledged inmates such as slave labourers and “gypsies” and commented on the racial aspects to camps. Correspondents, however, still placed most emphasis on the political dimensions of camps. Other prisoner groups were mentioned inconsistently and reports lacked context and depth. Limited explanation was given about the reasons for imprisonment, or for experiences inside concentration camps. The Times mentioned that Belsen housed political prisoners and “inferior races”. The report acknowledged that race was a factor in the imprisonment of some inmates but did not elaborate further. Likewise, a report entitled “Story of Dachau” described the camp as a “name whispered among the families and friends of those who mysteriously disappeared for racial, religious or political reasons”. In a detailed report, the Chicago Daily Tribune referred to four prisoner groups in concentration camps including political prisoners, habitual criminals, religious prisoners and those who refused to work. While newspaper reports may have pointed out that there were other types of inmates in concentration camps political inmates received the most attention and ultimately the changing profile of camp inmates went unexamined in newspaper coverage.

As mentioned, large numbers of short-term internees arrived in Dachau as a result of the emptying out of eastern European concentration camps. Many of the most recent prisoners had been slave labourers but were not in Dachau as part of any organised slave labour process. Differentiating between those who had been in camps for longer periods of time as opposed to recent arrivals was difficult considering the large number of inmates in camps. The scale of camp atrocities and shocking nature of Nazi crimes possibly inhibited observers’ ability to understand inmates’ exact circumstances, their specific background and the distinction between different categories of deportees. Many

correspondents visited camps for a couple of days and had little time to carry out thorough investigation or speak to large numbers of inmates.

Reports of military trials also frequently described former inmates in political terms. Belsen, according to the *New York Times*, was where thousands of persons “interned by the Nazis for political or ‘criminal’ offenses, passed to their deaths”.33 There was little consistency, however, as some accounts stated that victims were political and criminal prisoners whilst others mentioned groups targeted by the Nazis such as slave labourers, work-shy, homosexual, “gypsies” and Jews. As more information about camps emerged, correspondents increasingly acknowledged the wider range of inmates but still provided little background. A report from *The Times* stated that “gypsies” were among inmates in Dachau and were supplied as subjects for medical experiments.34 The relationship between camps and “gypsies” was not explored further. Another report from *The Times* not only listed habitual criminals and political detainees among inmates at Belsen but also included homosexuals.35

There was a recognisable shift in understanding as correspondents uncovered more information about concentration camp victims between May and September 1945. Correspondents did not immediately understand or acknowledge slave labourers as a key victim group, but this changed somewhat in the weeks following liberation. An official report on Nazi concentration camps was released in May 1945 and this acted as a catalyst for further recognition of the connection between camps and slave labour. The report produced by newspaper editors who had toured camps was mentioned in the *Sunday Express*.36 It informed readers that editors had interviewed many inmates including “political

34 “Tests on Dachau Inmates”, *The Times*, 28 September 1945, p. 3.
36 “Master Atrocity Plan”, *Sunday Express*, 6 May 1945, p. 5.
prisoners, slave laborers and civilians of many nationalities”.\(^{37}\) Two weeks later newspapers informed the public of the report produced by American congressmen that concluded the camps were used for “slave laborers and political prisoners”.\(^{38}\) More investigative reports appeared in May 1945 including an extensive account by Ray Daniell that scrutinised slave labour in Germany in depth.\(^{39}\) A few days later Daniell again wrote that Dachau was “where slave labor was kept”.\(^{40}\) The \textit{Jewish Advocate} similarly claimed that Belsen was a camp where “thousands of Jews, slave laborers and political prisoners of other nationalities were tortured and killed”.\(^{41}\)

Slave labourers continued to be recognised as among camp inmates in coverage of the trials. One report stated the accused were charged with “conspiracy to murder thousands of Germany’s slave workers in the Belsen concentration camp”.\(^{42}\) Sigrid Schultz, one of the most astute observers of Nazi Germany, wrote that concentration camps “provided a giant market for German war production”.\(^{43}\) Another report even mentioned that many Spanish men who fought in the French forces were sent to Dachau and other camps as involuntary workers.\(^{44}\)

Additionally, some trial reports hinted at the racial and religious aspects to camps. A report on the start of the IMT Nuremberg Trial provided details on the first Nazi camps including Dachau. It pointed out that “protective custody” was directed towards Jews and other persons whose political beliefs or “spiritual aspirations” conflicted with


\(^{41}\) “From the Wires: The Week in Review”, \textit{Jewish Advocate}, 24 May 1945, p. 15.


\(^{44}\) Nancy Cunard, “Spanish Exiles in France”, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 18 September 1945, p. 6.
Similarly, a report about the commencement of the Dachau Trial confirmed that people confined in the camp were “criminals, political and religious prisoners”.

Correspondents heavily relied on information provided by the military and this influenced their understanding of the prisoner profile. As the war drew to a close, correspondents were less likely to contest military information. Eisenhower’s plea to General Marshall for legislators and editors to view concentration camps described inmates in political terms. In his cable on 19 April 1945, Eisenhower wrote of “German camps for political prisoners”. By relying on military information correspondents were able to give their accounts a sense of authority and it allowed them to take comfort in military officials’ information.

It is not surprising that correspondents identified inmates as political and criminal internees before liberation and immediately thereafter. But correspondents chose to concentrate on inmates who had defied the Nazis and opposed the regime even after they had the opportunity to investigate and speak to victims. Concentration camps continued to be considered by the press primarily as camps for political prisoners later in 1945. That inmates were predominantly political prisoners provided a much-desired explanation for the camps’ existence. It made sense that camps were used to imprison those considered a political threat since Nazism was viewed as a political ideology and the Nazis had been brutal in crushing any political opposition. The political aspects of the regime were given attention possibly as this fitted neatly into long-held perceptions of the Nazi totalitarianism.

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46 “Dachau Trial Opens”, Daily Telegraph, 16 November 1945, p. 5.

One of the consequences of this reliance on pre-war understandings of camps was that the unique purpose of Belsen went largely unnoticed. Little was known about Belsen as it was established during wartime and its purpose changed several times. The Western Allies naturally assumed it was the same as other concentration camps. Readers, then, were left with a partial understanding of Belsen’s history and prisoner profile. This was problematic for one group in particular, those who had been targeted for being Jewish.

**Jewish Victims**

In April 1945, Jews made up about ten percent of the concentration camp population in Germany. Thousands of Jews, however, arrived at Belsen in the late stages of the war and it is estimated that perhaps two thirds of those liberated at Belsen were Jewish. In April 1945, as American forces approached, there were 67,665 registered prisoners in Dachau and its subcamps. Of these, 43,350 were categorised as political prisoners, while 22,100 were Jews and the remainder fell into various other categories.

Despite the significant number of Jews in Belsen and Dachau at the time of liberation correspondents’ accounts only occasionally specified that they were among the victims. Newspaper reports acknowledged the Jewishness of victims much more during coverage of military trials; however, limited detail was provided about their experience inside camps or why they had been targeted. That Jews did not feature prominently in reports of liberation or during coverage of the Belsen Trial is quite surprising because of all concentration camps liberated by the Western Allies, Belsen held the most Jews. The absence of Jews from liberation accounts was not exclusive to the Western Allies but also occurred in the Soviet Union. Anita Kondyanidi concludes that

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the Soviet government concealed the number of Jewish deaths in Auschwitz. Jewish victims were intentionally left out of reports because Josef Stalin wanted all attention focused on the final goal of reaching Berlin and he desired the “crown” of victimhood for the Soviet Union.\footnote{Anita Kondoyanidi, “The Liberating Experience: War Correspondents, Red Army Soldiers, and the Nazi Extermination Camps”, \textit{Russian Review} 69, no. 3 (2010), p. 458.}

Jewish Victims in Liberation Reportage

Many historians are critical of how little attention was given to Jewish victims in press coverage of camps in 1945. Laurel Leff argues correspondents knew why Jews were in concentration camps but failed to give this any recognition. She finds that the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{New York Herald Tribune} and the \textit{Washington Post} all failed to tell the story of a single Jewish survivor in 1945.\footnote{Laurel Leff, “‘Liberated by the Yanks’: The Holocaust as an American Story in Postwar News Articles”, \textit{Journal of Ecumenical Studies} 40, no. 4 (2003), p. 414.} Joanne Reilly is critical that the Jewishness of many of the Belsen inmates did not feature heavily in reportage. She argues that the Jewishness of inmates was recognised but not seen as significant. Responses to liberation were relevant to British concerns at the time and this did not include the Jewish population. British and American newspapers presented an imperfect picture of concentration camp victims and correspondents seldom focused on Jewish victimisation. Leff and Reilly, however, overlook important reasons for Jews not featuring prominently in press coverage.

Coverage of Jewish victims was inconsistent and lacked depth. Indeed, sporadic references to Jews occurred in other forms of media. Edward Murrow’s broadcast to Britain about the liberation of Belsen did not mention the words “Jew” or “Jewish” and Eisenhower’s plea to legislators and editors to visit the camps did not refer to victims as Jews but as “political prisoners”.\footnote{Novick, \textit{The Holocaust in American Life}, p. 64.} This was not necessarily a deliberate strategy, though, considering that all camp victims were absorbed into
the story of mass atrocity. It was not only Jews who were treated this way in the press but other victim groups such as slave labourers and POWs. “Racially” targeted groups such as “Gypsies” or the mentally ill did not feature in reportage either. And whilst there was an absence of references to Jews in photo captions lack of differentiation was not exclusive to Jewish victims. Photographs of inmates were rarely accompanied by a description explaining who were the individuals in the photographs.

The uniqueness of the Jewish experience was not immediately recognised. But, at this early stage was this surprising? Jews constituted one of many groups whom the Nazis targeted. Inmates’ Jewishness was secondary to their national status but this was true of other victims. That the Jewishness of many camp inmates did not figure predominantly in reports following the liberation of Belsen is particularly problematic, however, because of the large number of Jewish inmates discovered in the camp.

Tony Kushner argues that Jews did not feature in early reports of Belsen because “emphasising minority particularity, even in mass death, was seen as dangerous leading to the risk of further anti-Semitism”. According to Kushner, three interrelated factors explain why there was little focus on the Jewish experience: first, the difficulties journalists and eyewitnesses faced in understanding what they saw at concentration camps; second, the very awfulness of camps located in western Germany initially acting as a barrier to an understanding that these were not the worst Nazi camps; and finally, a reluctance to present Jewish separateness since it was more important

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to show justification for the war effort and highlight German guilt.\textsuperscript{55}

As Kushner acknowledges, the scale and immediacy of the camp horrors precluded a full understanding of what had taken place and to whom. The awful nature of camps made it particularly difficult to comprehend the connection between survivors and the wider Nazi extermination programme. The absence of Jews from newspaper reports in 1945 was not necessarily an intentional or insensitive oversight but can be partly explained by the inability in the chaotic context of liberation to grasp that the experience of Jews was different to other victims. Correspondents who reported on the liberated camps still were coming to terms with the scenes themselves and struggled to understand exactly who victims were and why they were in camps. In the immediate days after liberation they had limited opportunities to speak with victims. Survivors were hungry, feeble and sick and conversations were short as they were in no condition to communicate. There were limited conceptions of Nazism at the time and individual victims were not the focus. Jews were not recognised or singled out, at least initially, due to pragmatic considerations. As noted, a preference was given to victim nationality and as Chapter 7 reveals victims were simply presented as devastated people lacking individuality.

Due to rivalries between groups within camps, Jews often were not in a position to be the ones who held tours of the camps and speak to correspondents.\textsuperscript{56} The system of prisoner functionaries designed to help with the day-to-day organisation of camps and the prisoner hierarchy implemented by the Nazis prevented solidarity between inmates and created rivalry between prisoner groups and nationalities.

It is possible that correspondents recognised that some victims were Jews but this information was not understood as being important at the


\textsuperscript{56} Leff, \textit{Buried by the Times}, p. 309.
time. When it was included in reports censorship may have prevented it from being published. There was a long-term policy in Britain to not single out Jews but treat them as nationals of existing states.\footnote{Tony Kushner, “Belsen for Beginners: The Holocaust in British Heritage”, in \textit{The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945}, Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer, eds, (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 228.} The refusal to highlight Jewish victimisation stemmed also from the idea that, in treating Jews differently, the Allies were using Nazi tactics.\footnote{Reilly, \textit{Belsen}, p. 51.} There are also suggestions that the Allies, aware of the political implications of Jewish suffering, did not want to encourage the exodus to Palestine and, what is more, Jewish victimisation may have been strategically downplayed because of strong anti-Semitism in Britain and the United States.\footnote{Holmila, \textit{Reporting the Holocaust}, p. 147; Barbie Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s Eye}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 80.}

In fact, many photographers were quick to realise that many inmates were Jews and they did not try to conceal it.\footnote{Toby Haggith, “Filming the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen”, in \textit{Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933}, Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman, eds, (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), p. 44. Haggith examines the liberation footage of Belsen, specifically the images and dope sheets of British photographers who visited Belsen.} Within the confines of camps, it seems the Jewishness of victims was discussed but this did not always make it into the newspapers and therefore a partial and de-Judaised account of Belsen was presented to readers.\footnote{ibid. p. 45.} Both “informal censorship and self-censorship” influenced the downplaying of victims’ Jewishness.\footnote{Kushner, “Belsen for Beginners”, p. 229.} Correspondents possibly mentioned Jews in their accounts but such details were excluded in the published report.

There were exceptions where Jewishness was prioritised and linked to the larger program of Jewish extermination not only in the Jewish press but also in a number of British and American newspapers. The \textit{Washington Post} acknowledged Jewish victimisation by alluding to the significance of Jewish prisoners in Belsen. It stated that there was “not
yet any indication of the proportion of prisoners who were Jewish” in Belsen but understood them to be an important population group inside the camp.\textsuperscript{63} When reports mentioned Jewish victims, they commonly acknowledged that they received the worst treatment inside concentration camps.\textsuperscript{64} Gideon Seymour, executive editor of The Minneapolis Star Journal, was among a delegation that visited liberated camps. Seymour was quoted throughout a New York Times report. He claimed that “inferior races” were treated in precise order “with Russians and Poles at the bottom of the scale [and the Nazis] just didn’t waste any time on the Jews... they put them to death”.\textsuperscript{65}

There was little appreciation, however, that Jews were in camps simply because they were Jewish. Some accounts hinted that this was the case. Daily Telegraph correspondent Christopher Buckley declared that German racial theory was an important factor in the camps when stating: “The reason for the brutality and callousness might be the German theory of racial superiority run mad”.\textsuperscript{66} Just as insightful was a report from May 1945 dedicated specifically to Jews and the number that had survived in Europe.\textsuperscript{67} It pointed out that many were saved in Belsen. This indicates that Jewish victimisation could be incorporated into liberation accounts. Such reports were exceptional. And whilst these reports listed Jews among victims, highlighted that they were treated the worst and even occasionally recognised that Jews were targeted on racial grounds, they were bereft of any further substantive details on Jewish victimisation.

The Manchester Guardian and News Chronicle were exceptional in highlighting the specific plight of Jews during the war. Following

\textsuperscript{63} “British Free 29,000 Survivors from German Horror Camp”, The Washington Post, 19 April 1945, pp. 1, 2.

\textsuperscript{64} “Editors Find Nazis Planned Brutality”, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{66} Christopher Buckley, “Burgomasters at Belsen Say ‘We Didn’t Know’”, Daily Telegraph, 26 April 1945, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{67} “1,500,000 Jews Survive”, New York Times, 24 May 1945, p. 7.
liberation these newspapers again were quick to identify Jewish inmates in Belsen and Dachau. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that Jews were targets of concentration camps and a *News Chronicle* report about the liberation of Belsen described a number of inmates discovered in the camp, several of whom were noted as being Jewish.\(^{68}\) Even more detailed was the report by correspondent Henry Standish that featured in the *Chronicle*. Standish understood and acknowledged that Jews had been targeted writing: “Here men and women and children, most of them with no other crimes than Jewish ancestry, have been collected and elaborately starved to horrible and insanitary death”.\(^{69}\) Although these two long-standing liberal newspapers recognised and reported the Jewishness of many camp victims, information appeared inconsistently in the pages of the *Guardian* and the *Chronicle* more broadly and Jewish suffering was not necessarily treated as the most important aspect to reports. Furthermore, there were just as many reports that failed to mention Jews and did not highlight the Jewish plight.

Incorrect information appeared in the press also making it difficult for readers to understand and appreciate the Jewish experience. Correspondents at times misunderstood concentration camps’ function and the importance of Jewish inmates in the camp system. Foreign correspondent Henry J Taylor claimed that Dachau was a camp “principally for Jews”.\(^{70}\) Dachau, however, never functioned as a Jewish camp. This report recognised that Jews were among the victims but it painted a distorted picture of Dachau. Correspondents’ first accounts understandably included erroneous reporting. A measure of confusion among readers played out in the pages of newspapers.

Jewish newspapers offered a slightly different perspective and this was especially true in their presentation of victims. Predictably, the Jewish

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press highlighted Jewish victims and gave them a voice.  

71 A Jewish Chronicle report on Dachau provided personal details about a Jewish survivor: “A newcomer to this model starvation camp, Feliks Gurewicz, from Kielce, arrived from Flossenbürg after an eight-day march”.  

72 The Chronicle provided further details about Jewish inmates in Dachau a week later informing readers: “The youngest inmate is 14 year old Moshe Centner from Kaunas [who had] lost his parents and has no relatives”. The report included more detail on other Jewish victims noting: “Among the Jews from Lithuania in Dachau are Dr. Moses Brauns and his son Jacob, who have a relative Mrs. Levy living in Great Titchfield”.  

73 The Jewish press’s focus on Jewish victims is a revealing contrast to most other British and American newspapers. Individuals were identified within days and weeks of liberation and this shows that it was possible to include victims in reports.

Several correspondents recognised the importance of Jewish prisoners’ presence in camps and some liberal newspapers highlighted Jewish victimisation. Overall, though, most non-Jewish newspapers did not bother to identify victims and, moreover, Jewish victimisation was not presented as an important or relevant detail in the story of liberation. Newspapers with a specific interest in Jews themselves recognised the unique Jewish experience and made some initial connections between Jews in concentration camps and the wider Nazi extermination policy. Whereas the Jewish press were interested in the Jewish dimension to camps, non-Jewish newspapers gave prominence to Allied victims and prominent inmates (see Chapter 6). It was not necessarily the case that non-Jewish newspapers overlooked Jewish victimhood due to malice, insensitivity or latent ant-Semitism but rather their focus was on stories of victimhood relevant to their readers.


Jewish Victims in Coverage of Military Trials

Jews appeared more frequently in press coverage of the trials. The Belsen Trial encouraged discussion on the treatment of Jews in Nazi camps as a significant amount of evidence presented at the trial related to Birkenau and several of the key prosecution witnesses were Jewish. Research suggests that the Belsen Trial certainly offered cumulative support to the theme of extreme Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis.\(^{74}\) Leff, however, is harsh in her assessment of reportage of the Belsen Trial. She is critical of the *New York Times* since it was the closest thing the United States came to having a national newspaper. Leff found that the newspaper’s three front-page stories, which coincided with the trial opening, sentencing and hangings of the convicted, never mentioned the word Jew.\(^{75}\) Furthermore, she concludes that the newspaper’s inside stories only mentioned Jews when they appeared as witnesses. She argues that “only rarely were the living or the dead described as Jews, and never were their stories told except in the most truncated and fragmentary fashion”.\(^{76}\) The press is not fully to blame for these omissions. The proceedings themselves did not single out Jews as victims. Although the trial focused on crimes perpetrated at Auschwitz and Belsen, “the uniquely Jewish aspect of both was sidetracked”.\(^{77}\) It is not surprising correspondents did not address Jewish victimisation when the trial itself largely prioritised the political aspects of Belsen and another tendency was to specify nationality first rather than other identifying details such as race, ethnicity or faith.

Jews featured much more in reportage of the trials than for which Leff gives credit. She is correct in pointing out that a full exploration of Jewish victimisation did not occur, but reports at the very least

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\(^{74}\) Holmila, *Reporting the Holocaust*, p. 132.


\(^{76}\) Leff, *Buried by the Times*, p. 296.

\(^{77}\) Reilly, *Belsen*, p. 74.
acknowledged Jews’ presence in camps. Communist writer Ivor Montagu commented on the fact that the Belsen Trial was to open on the Jewish Day of Atonement: “This is not inappropriate, for the great majority of victims in the hell-hole of Belsen were Jews”. Correspondents demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge of Nazi racial policies.

Much of the attention given to Jewish victims during the Belsen Trial related to Jewish survivors who gave evidence. Reports on the trials often noted Jews received the worst treatment. Anthony Mann mentioned how “the Nazis graded their prisoners [and] Jews received least consideration”. The Chicago Daily Tribune dedicated a report to informing the public that Jewish witnesses from the Belsen Trial had received threatening letters:

Several of the Jewish witnesses in the trial of 45 Belsen prison guards have received letters threatening them with death if they testify against the No. 48 defendant, Stania Staroska.

The report further surmised that, “the threat came from a Polish group which still is in or near Belsen”. Anti-Semitic elements at Belsen and a Jewish displaced persons group that had been set up also featured in the report. Such accounts referenced Jews and hinted at the importance of anti-Semitism. An even bolder statement appeared in the liberal Washington Post. It was reported that Prosecutor Backhouse charged that “that the slaughter of camp inmates was an attempt to wipe out the Jewish race and destroy the strength of Poland, a war crime which has never been equalled”. Whilst Jewish victims figured more frequently in reportage of the Belsen Trial they were certainly not the focus. Correspondents did not realise the full implication of the Nazis’

policies against Jews and were unable to present a complete picture to the general public. The exception was the Jewish press, which once again drew attention to Jewish victims. Reports from the Jewish Advocate and Jewish Chronicle concentrated on Jewish inmates. 82

The trials were not about Jewish suffering, but rather revealing Nazi crimes and punishing those responsible. With correspondents’ attention similarly fixated on perpetrator guilt, reports predictably provided a very basic examination of the Jewish experience. Kushner observes that during the Belsen Trial there was “only passing reference to the testimony of Jewish survivors”. He argues the evidence of British liberators was valued over that of victims and therefore Jewish witnesses received minimal coverage. 83 British witnesses certainly led the prosecution’s case in the Belsen Trial. At the Dachau proceedings American liberators and officials were among the first to testify and were given significant press attention.

At the very least, the Belsen Trial gave a select few the opportunity to speak about their experience. Notably Dr. Ada Bimko (1912-1997), a key prosecution witness, provided shocking testimony at the Belsen Trial relating to selections, gassings and the use of crematoria at Birkenau, and the terrible conditions in Belsen. She received the most comprehensive newspaper coverage of any Jewish witness. Reports always pointed out her Jewishness. 84


Bimko even featured in a photograph that accompanied a newspaper report (Figure 5.3). Another female witness Helen Klein, a Polish Jewess, featured in the *Jewish Advocate* and in a photograph in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. The nationality of these two women was mentioned again underlining the continued importance of victims’ national status. Even when a witness’s Jewishness was mentioned, nationality was prioritised. This is in part due to the nature of the trial according to Ben Flanagan and Donald Bloxham:

The importance to the British of the question of nationality as opposed to ethno-religious identity ramified throughout the British trial programme in its official depiction of Jewish victims not as Jews as such, but rather as “nationals” of given countries.

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Flanagan and Bloxham point out that at one point in proceedings Jews were identified as the main victims and other reports failed to acknowledge that they were specifically sent to the Birkenau gas chambers. Such inconsistencies cannot be attributed solely to the insufficiencies in press reportage of the trial. Correspondents merely reflected Jewish victims’ importance in the trial process itself.

Several Dachau Trial reports recognised that Jews were among inmates in the camp. References were made to Jews and information was given on how many were killed and the ways in which they were murdered. A New York Times report, one of the most detailed in relation to Jewish inmates, claimed: “Thousands of those who died at Dachau were German Jews or Communists… 5,000 Jews were killed at the Landsberg section of Dachau”. The report went even further by providing details on a trial witness who stated:

Jews had been “ruthlessly wiped out” by hanging and firing squad and gas chambers at Dachau... frequently they were paraded into a gas chamber, told to strip for shower and then left to die when the gas was turned on.

Another account of the Dachau Trial quoted a chief of the Third Army. The chief claimed that the Landsberg subsidiary camp of Dachau was a camp “where mostly Jews were mistreated and killed”. These reports both gave insight into Jewish identity within camps but at the same time provided misleading information. It is disputed whether the gas chamber at Dachau was used at all and Dachau did not function as a camp principally for Jews. Jews appeared in reports, but information was not always correct. The complexities of the camp experience were

90 ibid.
91 “U.S. Will Try 42 for Atrocities at Dachau Camp”, Chicago Daily Tribune, 3 November 1945, p. 3.
difficult for observers to grasp. Reportage in 1945 was imprecise and this confounded confusion over what had occurred.

There were more references to Jews in coverage of military trials but this was scattered throughout various reports and newspapers. Furthermore, the information about Jews presented at the Belsen Trial was mostly about crimes that occurred at Auschwitz, not Belsen, and possibly left readers confused about the important differences between the two camps. The New York Times detailed how a witness testified that one of the defendants “selected Jewish inmates of the Belsen and Oswiecim camps for death or prostitution”. Arguably, since details about crimes at Auschwitz were the most shocking, this information dominated reportage of the trial. Failing to indicate to which camp the information related meant camps were easily conflated.

The absence of Jews from early liberation reports was not necessarily deliberate or malicious but speaks more to correspondents’ incomplete understanding of camp inmates’ identity and the confusion that characterised coverage of liberation. Some correspondents may have suspected why Jews were in camps and recognised that Jewish persecution was unique. Perhaps these correspondents were influenced by political motives and national concerns, and chose to omit such details. By the time trials of camp perpetrators commenced, correspondents had learnt more about victims’ identity. Jews were among those who testified at the Belsen and Dachau trials and individual victims were given a chance to share their story in a public forum. The Western Allies, however, still were coming to terms with Jewish persecution under Nazism and the trials were not specifically about crimes against Jews. If anything, correspondents evaded deeper analysis of victims’ experiences since it was easier to individualise and report on particular perpetrators.

93 “Belsen Survivor Picks out Nazis”, p. 5.
Conclusion

The legacy of newspaper reporting of concentration camps in the 1930s was evident in coverage of liberation and the trials. Nazi camps were presented to be consistent with the western perception of concentration camps as targeting political opponents and criminals. Reportage continued the practice of emphasising the political aspects of the regime and the downplaying of racial policy.  

94 Pointing out that victims came from all across Europe ensured that the extent of Nazi brutality was emphasised. National depictions of inmates dominated and as a result the different groups within camps were not addressed. Crucially, the Jewishness of many victims was obscured as their suffering was grouped with all victims of Nazi persecution. The absence of Jews from press reports, however, is indicative of the wider trend whereby victims were absorbed into the larger story of mass atrocity. During military trials, nationality was again an important detail in reports and newspapers continued to claim that inmates were predominantly political and criminal prisoners. Other prisoner groups, notably Jewish inmates and slave labourers, did receive more attention. A shift in understanding occurred between May and September 1945. Yet, correspondents still did not fully grasp the diverse prisoner profile and the changing functionality of camps.

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94 Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust, p. 115.
CHAPTER 6
Voiceless Victims and “Privileged” Prisoners

The camp contained 29,000 persons still alive and uncounted dead. It contained typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis, nakedness, starvation, heaps of unburied corpses, mounds covering great burial heaps, and one cavernous pit half filled with blackened bodies.


Reports on liberated Nazi concentration camps, such as this example from the conservative Chicago Daily Tribune about Dachau, made it seem as though victims were just another horror found in the camp, something to be listed among a number of atrocities. This chapter considers why victims’ identities and personal histories were largely absent from reportage of liberation and again during the trials. Instead of detailing individual circumstances, victims were dealt with as an amorphous mass as they were absorbed into the story of mass atrocity. The exceptions were Allied victims who had spent time in Nazi camps and “privileged” prisoners. For better or worse, the press focused on stories that seemed “relevant” to readers. This chapter also scrutinises the role national interests played in decisions to concentrate on these two groups of victims and the effect this had on the presentation of the camp experience.

Anonymous Victims
Camp victims were described in a manner that stripped them of identity or any sense of individuality. Even when victims were quoted in the press they were seldom identified. A Chicago Daily Tribune report, for
instance, mentioned a Polish woman, but did not provide her name.¹ Correspondents relied on information that “came from the lips of the living” according to the report. Information also was credited as coming from correspondent William Frye. In this case, Frye was identified but victims who provided details on camp atrocities remained anonymous. Referring to a survivor, the same newspaper stated: “One man’s neck was so small and shrunken it scarcely seemed capable of holding a head, but he was alive.”² Readers were not told the man’s identity but were given a detailed description of his physical state. During the Belsen and Dachau trials victims were given a unique opportunity to share their experience, with several appearing as witnesses. Trial reports commonly named witnesses and provided other important background information. Ultimately, though, their testimony was important not only for what it revealed about victims themselves but also how it proved the guilt of the accused.

Liberation Reportage

Describing conditions inmates were forced to endure was a key part of communicating to readers the horror of life inside Nazi camps. But victims were not necessarily the focal point. As Chapter 3 noted, Allied soldiers were a focus of reporting, and as Section Three reveals there also was an intense fascination with individual perpetrators. Victims’ experiences seldom made up the bulk of reports. As previously stated, there were difficulties in conducting interviews with survivors. Correspondents may have been hesitant to approach them because of their physical state and because they felt they were intruding at what was a very sensitive time. In some cases, correspondents did not have access to survivors. Moreover, inmates often had shaved heads and uniforms that were designed to remove any sense of individuality and even gender identification. Distinguishing between victims was made difficult since camp inmates were in various stages of starvation. The

omission of victims is understandable in many of the first accounts coming out of the camps.

Observations of those who had witnessed first hand the scenes in liberated camps, including correspondents and Allied soldiers, were valued more than information coming from individuals who had been imprisoned. This may have been due to correspondents’ reliance on interviews with soldiers. First-hand accounts of camps were prioritised due to the importance placed on the act of witnessing and soldiers’ status as “liberators”. Given language barriers and health problems, moreover, victims were in no condition to recount their stories so soon after liberation. As victims recovered and disease was treated, many survivors moved off-site and this made it harder for correspondents to talk to them. But even once survivors’ condition improved they were rarely featured in reports. The practice of ignoring the experience of victims persisted in the weeks following liberation since correspondents were more interested in what they could reveal about camp conditions, daily life and the SS guards. Little information was provided about victims’ life before imprisonment.

Correspondents did not generally identify victims they observed in camps. The Chicago Daily Tribune referred to victims several times throughout a report on Belsen but not once identified anyone. They were known by very general terms such as “children”, “the living”, “victims of starvation” and “persons”. This type of vague terminology appeared frequently in the press. Correspondents were not intentionally insensitive to victims. The use of such language was a response to the circumstances correspondents found themselves in and the horrific scenes they witnessed.

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3 “2D Army Frees 29,000 in Nazi Horror Camp”, Chicago Daily Tribune, 19 April 1945, p. 5.
A *Times* report shows just how little victims featured. The report was titled “The Victims” yet individual prisoners were barely mentioned.\(^4\) Readers were not informed of the identity of any inmates and the report concentrated instead on the importance of delegations visiting camps and the “collective guilt” of the German nation. The only time victims appeared, they were described as both “German and Jewish”. Germans, Jews and German Jews all were imprisoned in concentration camps but there were many other types of inmates, too. Such brief descriptions hindered any deeper understanding of the camps’ prisoner profile. Another *Times* report referred to victims in Belsen as “bodies” and “corpses”, but thought it important to mention in the last sentence that the strongest gravediggers were SS men.\(^5\)

The use of terminology such as “victims of starvation” and “persons” indicates how correspondents, unable to identify corpses, bodies or survivors, were possibly referencing all camp inmates’ suffering and all unknown victims. This is not dissimilar to the Unknown Soldier and the way in which an unidentified soldier symbolises and represents all unknown dead. Within the New Guard House (*Neue Wache*) in Berlin the remains of the Unknown Soldier and an Unknown Concentration Camp Prisoner are buried. Such monuments exist all over the world including at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and at Dachau.

As mentioned previously, in a report on the Belsen Trial by Sigrid Schultz, Belsen victims were said to “represent tens of thousands of other nameless dead”.\(^6\)

Captions to photographic images also used general and vague terms to identify victims. Underneath a photograph in the *Los Angeles Times* Belsen victims were described as: “Bodies of prisoners of Nazi government”. The headline referred to them as “horror victims”.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) “The Victims”, *The Times*, 20 April 1945, p. 5.

\(^5\) “Burgomasters Inspect Belsen”, *The Times*, 25 April 1945, p. 3.


\(^7\) M E Walter, “Nazi Horror Victims at Belsen Await Burial”, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 1945, p. 3.
Descriptions accompanying photographs rarely identified victims or provided their personal history. A caption from a Manchester Guardian photo stated: “Over 30,000 people died at Belsen”. No further detail was provided.\(^8\) The caption underneath a photograph of head Belsen doctor, Fritz Klein, claimed that he was responsible for the death of thousands of “men, women and children” but again readers were left to wonder who these people were.\(^9\) Repeated use of vague language meant that readers were left to discern for themselves a photograph’s significance. Whilst newspapers published photographs of victims they were not necessarily the focal point. One of the most common photographic images that circulated after liberation was of SS soldiers loading bodies onto trucks or into graves (see Figure 4.3).\(^{10}\) Victims appear in these photographs but they appear on the periphery.

In photographs, survivors were commonly identified simply by the concentration camp at which they were liberated. Their identity was secondary to what they indicated to readers about the horror of Nazi camps. A photograph from the New York Times showed a group of female inmates inside a hut at Belsen, some were standing, others lying down but many of them look at the camera.\(^{11}\) The women were not identified other than by the caption stating that they have been found in Belsen. If photographers recorded survivors’ details, this information did not make it to print.

Two photographs appeared in the Chicago Daily Tribune in May showing victims from Dachau.\(^{12}\) One was of dead bodies inside a freight car, the other of three survivors from the camp (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). The subjects were not identified in either photograph and the report merely stated that they were “three of the 32,000 prisoners liberated by

\(^8\) “The Belsen Concentration Camp”, Manchester Guardian, 21 April 1945, p. 3.


\(^{10}\) “The Belsen Concentration Camp”, p. 3.


\(^{12}\) “Camp Liberated Too Late”, Chicago Daily Tribune, 2 May 1945, p. 11.
the 7th army”. As discussed in Chapter 2, by only listing the camp at which a victim was liberated, Nazi atrocities were generalised. The photograph of Dachau victims came to represent all camp victims.

Photographs of victims that appeared in daily newspapers were part of wider atrocity material circulated by the Western Allies in 1945. In “Lest We Forget”, a collection of photographs compiled by the Daily Mail and circulated in early summer 1945, victims were identified by the camp at which they had been liberated and no further information about the survivors—names or personal histories—appeared. The booklet was produced in a limited first edition within days of liberation, and then in a mass-circulated form in the weeks following. Joanne Reilly and David Cesarani argue victims were presented in the booklet as illustrative of the true nature of Nazism:

The hundreds of photographs of the victims were accompanied by captions such as “Wrecks of Humanity”. The survivors were contrasted with the demonic SS men and women of the camp and were represented as merely “an example of their brutality”. Even the penultimate page of photographs, which was accompanied with the question “CAN THEY FORGET?” presented two survivors looking terrified and without any hint of individuality.13

The booklet is indicative of the wider trend whereby camp inmates were treated as a collective with little emphasis placed on their distinguishing features or their unique experiences within Nazi camps.

Victims were rarely quoted and were given little opportunity to contribute to reports. Perhaps readers were not interested in individual prisoners and their stories but rather the experience of victims more generally. This information may have been seen as irrelevant once inmates had been liberated or immaterial in telling the broader story of

Nazi atrocity. Aimée Bunting identifies a similar trend in Jewish newspapers. She argues that even the Jewish press was more concerned with the future of Jewish victims than in their time in camps. Bunting points out that in reports from the *Zionist Review* in 1945, details regarding survivors related to what they needed and their future rather than their previous experiences.14 Zionism, the movement for the return of the Jewish people to Israel, influenced the intense focus on the future. The desire to look forward also relates to the ideology of nation building and the denial of past European Jewish existence in Europe, which in Zionist eyes contributed to the fate of Jews under Hitler.

William Frye’s report entitled “Polish Woman Tells Horrors of Belsen Camp” stood out since it heavily centered on one woman’s experience.15 Frye mentioned how “correspondents were received in her miserable little room in the cookhouse” to hear her story. He wrote: “She spoke English—brokenly, cautiously—but without bitterness”. The survivor’s capacity to speak English was key in the interaction she had with correspondents. Frye further described when she became upset: “Then she broke silently. Tears streamed down her face. Correspondents left silently”. This suggests there was an organised effort for select survivors to speak with members of the press. Although Frye dedicated the story to the Polish woman and her time in Belsen and Auschwitz, he remarkably never identified her by name. Likewise the *New York Times* made clear in its headline “Victims Describe Belsen Tortures”, that survivors had provided the details that appeared in the account.16 Not only did the report rely on victim testimony but also several of the individuals were identified. Mrs. Irene Goldberg and Alexandra Dutiewic of Warsaw gave details of their time in camps. Victims could be incorporated into reportage but these examples were the exception. In most cases, victims

14 See Chapter 4 in Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust.
appeared in the background of accounts as other individuals dominated.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, when victims were identified the sole intention was not necessarily to give them a voice. Victims further authenticated photographs of the camps. The Western Allies may have wanted to make people understand that Nazi war crimes were not just a problem for the countries that had been under Nazi occupation, but rather these were crimes against humanity.

In any case, correspondents were trying their best, under difficult circumstances, to tell the story of liberation. Deeply affected by the atrocious scenes at Nazi camps, correspondents were shocked, confused and traumatised. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in order to cope some individuals intentionally chose to distance themselves from what they witnessed. As will be developed in Chapter 7, the enormity of camp atrocities left correspondents grasping for appropriate imagery, unable to express victims’ appalling condition.

What is more, the situation at liberated camps precluded correspondents from identifying or individualising victims. It was simply not possible to identify or publish the personal stories of thousands of inmates. There was limited time to make judgements or converse with survivors. It is possible that some victims may not have wanted to be named and requested that they not be identified in reports.

Other correspondents visited camps several days after their liberation and once relief efforts had commenced. Such individuals had better opportunities to speak with survivors. Even so, individual victims’ stories still did not appear in the press and instead the emphasis remained on victims as a collective. In the following weeks and months, the mass continued to take precedence over the individual possibly to emphasise the scale of the event.

Journalistic practices and the context of reporting at the time may further help explain the absence of individual victims from reportage. After the immediate shock of liberation wore off, other events took precedence in newspapers such as the death of Roosevelt, the Russian advance into Germany, Allied victories and the war in the Pacific. Gradually stories from liberated camps were relegated to the inside pages and occupied less space. It is possible, too, that correspondents were responsive to what audiences wanted to read about. Victims’ experiences may not have grabbed readers’ attention in the same way stories on individual perpetrators did.

Revealing victims’ identities was not essential for highlighting the brutality of Nazism. A photo appeared in the Washington Post of dead bodies at Belsen with emaciated corpses lined up on the ground. The caption described victims’ bodies as “irrefutable evidence of Nazi degradation and brutality”. Newspaper editors may not have thought to identify individuals since the purpose of printing the photograph was to indict the Nazi state. Similarly, the Daily Express reported that the “piles of corpses” and “walking skeletons” were seen to be a “testament to the horror”. Colin Wills’ account of the liberation of Belsen is another pertinent example. Wills worked on the commentary for a Belsen documentary film and reported on the camp’s clearing and rehabilitation. A camp inmate provided Wills with several key details about Belsen yet Wills did not identify the individual in his report. He described another survivor: “One man, unable to stand up, sprawled on his belly across a pile of rubbish, cup to lips. He looked like a yellow stick wrapped in grey rag”. How was Wills supposed to determine this man’s name when he did not even have the energy to stand? But when Wills obtained information from another survivor with whom he had spoken, the individual again remained anonymous. Unlike other liberation accounts,

19 Ernest Betts, “Newsreel on Monday”, Daily Express, 28 April 1945, p. 3.
however, Wills mostly concentrated on victims and at the very least showed interest by speaking to survivors and detailing individual stories.

In press coverage of concentration camps emphasis was placed on Nazi crimes, not victims. This trend was presumably connected to the Western Allies’ post-war goals. The objective was to reveal the extent of Nazi crimes, the brutality of the enemy and to justify the war effort. As shown in Chapter 3, liberation itself was presented as a heroic act and victims were not the most important aspect to this story. The liberation of Dachau, for instance, was dramatic and newsworthy whilst victims initially appeared as a side note.

**Belsen and Dachau Trial Reportage**

Due to the nature of the Belsen and Dachau proceedings, victims featured much more in press reports than they had following liberation. Former inmates of Belsen and Dachau acted as key witnesses and their testimony was widely covered by the press. The trials were in some cases the first time victims shared their experience of concentration camps. In almost all accounts of the trials, when witness testimony appeared, newspapers identified the individual, stated their name, and nationality and sometimes included details about their capture and the reason why they were imprisoned.21 The *Daily Herald* observed that four Jewish girls had given evidence at the trial and identified them by name.22 The report named Zofia Litwinska, mentioned that her husband, a Polish officer, had died at Auschwitz and noted that she “was put into the gas chamber”. A photograph of Litwinska was published alongside. Other witnesses included: “Anni Jonas, aged 25 from Breslau”; “Cecilia Fromer, fresh-complexioned from Cracow”; and “attractive, dark-haired Dora Szafran, aged 22”.23

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23 ibid.
Survivors shared their horrifying experiences at camps and their accounts of atrocities interested correspondents. They gave evidence on gassings, beatings and cannibalism. Reports notably provided other details about witnesses’ backgrounds and past experiences. Prosecution witness Charles Bendel featured in a *Manchester Guardian* report.\(^{24}\) Before describing in detail the evidence Bendel gave at the Belsen Trial, the following details appeared:

The prosecution put forward an unexpected witness in Charles Bendel, a Rumanian doctor resident in Paris for many years, who was arrested there in 1943 for not wearing the yellow star and was sent to Auschwitz. Here he worked at a crematorium as doctor to the special Kommando of prisoners required to dispose of bodies from the gas chamber and who were kept under lock and key lest details of what went on became known in the rest of the camp.\(^{25}\)

This was important information that was now being shared. The different types of inmates and the various tasks they were forced to perform in camps were gaining more attention.

Several witnesses from the Belsen Trial were in fact quite prominent in the press. As previously mentioned, Dr Ada Bimko testified at the Belsen Trial. A Polish Jewess, Bimko was a dental surgeon from Sosnowiec, Poland. Deported to Auschwitz in 1943, her parents, husband and five-and-a-half year old son were immediately sent to their death in the gas chambers.\(^{26}\) Bimko was assigned to work in the Birkenau infirmary. Here she performed rudimentary surgery on inmates until she was transferred to Belsen in November 1944.\(^{27}\) After

\(^{24}\)“Doctor Describes Routine of Gas Chambers”, p. 6.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.


\(^{27}\) Ibid.
liberation she worked alongside British Army medical personnel to care for former prisoners and became a leading advocate for liberated Jews in the British zone of occupied Germany, along with her husband Josef Rosensaft. Between 1978 and 1994, she played a key role in the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Bimko acted as a chief prosecution witness at the Belsen Trial. In her affidavit she recalled how she witnessed a selection at Birkenau:

First of all, the children and the old people were picked out, then those who looked ill, and after that anyone was picked out until 4500 people had been selected. These went to the gas chamber and were never seen again.

Bimko gave key eyewitness testimony about gassings at Auschwitz, the use of crematoria and the deterioration of conditions at Belsen in late 1944 and early 1945. She said of Josef Kramer’s arrival at Belsen:

We had suddenly the feeling that Belsen was going to become a second Auschwitz... they started with roll calls, Appelles, and those SS men who previously did not hit the prisoners started now to do so.

Importantly, Bimko identified several Belsen defendants, including Kramer, Irma Grese and Fritz Klein, tying them directly to camp crimes.

Lengthy newspaper reports detailed Bimko’s testimony. As a female doctor who had been imprisoned at Belsen and Auschwitz, Bimko’s story appeared to fascinate observers. The New York Times wrote: “A black-haired Polish Jewish woman, her concentration camp number

tattooed on her left forearm, today dramatically pointed out fifteen of forty-five Nazis on trial for mass murder”. Correspondents commented on her composure under questioning by the defence council and how well she rebutted accusations that she fabricated her testimony. The Sunday Times stated that Bimko was “under the fire of the defense counsel today” and further detailed how another lawyer tried to “shake her statement”. Reports emphasised her truthfulness and her strength. She was the quintessential stoic survivor.

Dr Franz Blaha’s testimony at the Dachau Trial also featured in the press. Stars and Stripes summarised his testimony:

Franz Blaha, an eminent Czechoslovakian pathologist and physiologist, gave a detailed description of the various means of torture that he said were enacted against the inmates of the Dachau concentration camp during the six years he was a prisoner there.

The report also outlined Blaha’s evidence relating to the processing of inmates at the camp and public hangings. A 50-year-old Czech physician, Blaha (1896-1979) was required to perform autopsies on inmates who had died during medical experiments conducted at the camp. Before being brought to Dachau in 1941, he had survived two years of imprisonment in twenty-three different jails, several months of solitary confinement and numerous interrogations by the Gestapo.

32 “Belsen Survivor Picks out Nazis”, p. 5.
33 “Belsen Trial Incident”, Sunday Times, 23 September 1945, p. 5.
Blaha was a member of the International Committee at Dachau, which consisted of prominent and “privileged” Communist prisoners. During the Dachau Trial he testified about malaria tests conducted by physician Klaus Schilling whom he described as a “rough and inconsiderate experimentalist”. Evidence relating to air pressure and cold-water experiments formed a considerable part of his testimony along with the different forms of punishment used at Dachau between 1942 and 1945. These included: “The mildest was taking away special rations. Then hanging up—for example, on a tree—beating, standing bunker, then death penalty”. Blaha stated under oath that Martin Weiss was commandant during the time medical experiments were conducted and identified Weiss in the defendants dock. He testified that many subjects died during the experiments and described the autopsies he was ordered to perform and the tortures he personally had undergone during his imprisonment at the camp. Like Bimko, Blaha’s position as a doctor made him an especially credible witness. He provided details about some of the worst atrocities at Dachau including medical experiments conducted on inmates and the decapitation of human bodies. Moreover, he was one of the first survivors to testify and therefore interest in proceedings still was high.

The increased attention given to victims during post-war trials is evident in reports that detailed witnesses identifying the defendants. Newspapers described how victims walked up to the dock and pointed out defendants at the Belsen Trial. Former crime reporter Norman Clark covered the Belsen proceedings and the testimony of Ilnoa Stein, a 21 year-old Jewess from Hungary, writing: “First Kramer, then Klein had her unwavering finger of accusation pointed at them”. These scenes were a theatrical part of proceedings and an exciting news item. Newspaper

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39 For details about Blaha’s testimony see ibid. pp. 46-52.
40 ibid. p. 48.
reports described it as “dramatic”.42 A witness who identified Grese was said to have “sighted her with a shaking finger as if with a rifle, and her nostrils quivering”.43 Another report mentioned how Sofia Litwinska “leaped to her feet in the witness box and pointed straight to Franz Hessler, Elite Guard Untersturmfuehrer and Oswiecim official”.44 That such scenes appeared frequently in accounts of the trials indicates the important role that victims played in proving perpetrators’ guilt. Interest in victims’ testimony mostly related to what they indicated about Nazi crimes and how they could help prove the guilt of the accused.

Furthermore, the lead witnesses tended to be British officials and soldiers or medical personnel. Such witnesses were to testify to conditions at the camp at the time of liberation, provide important contextual details and determine the nature of defendants’ crimes. Captain Derek Sington (1908-1968), a colonel from the British Army Medical Corps, who testified at the Belsen Trial before any survivors, was the first prosecution witness at the Dachau Trial.45 Part of the psychological warfare No. 14 Amplifying Unit, Sington described the handing over of the camp and Commandant Kramer’s “generally confident” attitude in his testimony.46 He recalled conditions at Belsen at the time of liberation:

There were masses of dead, placed for the most part away from the main thoroughfare of the camp. I used to see people walking about, and then, one by one, they would lie down, and the verges of the footpaths were littered with people, still living, but who never appeared to move.47

45 “Dachau Camp Trial”, The Times, 16 November 1945, p. 3.
47 ibid.
Sington further stated that, with few exceptions, inmates’ general appearance was “one of extreme weakness and in the majority of cases an almost unbelievable lack of flesh on the bones”. Evidence provided by Sington featured in several reports.\(^4\) He was one of the first witnesses and at that time press interest in the trial was strong. But, he also testified about the terrible state of the camp and inmates. He was a soldier and arguably British and American readers were eager to hear of his experience.

The primary aim of coverage was to explore what the meaning of the camps was to the Allies. Even when correspondents had the opportunity to investigate and tell the stories of individual victims, their focus was elsewhere. Several victims were given the opportunity to share their experience by testifying and reports generally identified these witnesses by name. Their experience and suffering, however, was relevant because it proved the guilt of perpetrators.

**Allied Victims**

Whereas camp inmates were treated as a nameless and undistinguished mass in coverage of liberation, the few British and American individuals imprisoned at the camps were identified and became a focus of reportage. Allied victims spoke the same language as correspondents and this helped to ensure that their stories were prioritised. Emphasising Allied individuals who had suffered under the Nazis also was a way to gather support for the continued war effort and reinforce the evils of Nazism. British and American victims symbolised each nation’s sacrifice to defeat Nazism. The few Allied victims provided readers with a direct link to liberated camps.

Among the 1,875 death certificates reported at the Belsen Trial only fifteen of these were down as English and only one British national was

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included on the Belsen Trial indictment.\textsuperscript{49} There were fewer Americans imprisoned in Dachau and no individuals were named in the trial indictment. Consequently, newspapers were unable to emphasise American victimisation to the same degree. Nonetheless, correspondents showed a general interest in British and American victims. The \textit{New York Times} outlined that the Allies had rejected suggestions they take “retaliatory measures against German prisoners for what had been done to the Allied prisoners in German camps”.\textsuperscript{50} The report did not single out any other inmates. Correspondents turned their attention immediately to American victims in order to create a connection between readers and the story of Dachau. In one of the first reports published on the liberation of Dachau the \textit{New York Times} claimed that an American citizen had been imprisoned in the camp.\textsuperscript{51} The report stated the American was “a major from Chicago captured behind German lines when he was on special assignment for the Office of Strategic Services”. A week later the \textit{Los Angeles Times} published a report that made a point of stating that no American victims were found at Dachau.\textsuperscript{52}

Reports rarely included the name of victims who appeared in photographic images. For example, British photojournalist George Rodger described Belsen in detail but never gave the names of victims.\textsuperscript{53} Yet, this was not the case when the \textit{Daily Worker} published a photograph of a British inmate from Belsen (Figure 6.1). The caption underneath identified the individual by name and made clear that he was British stating: “A Londoner, Louis Bonerguer, one of the starving prisoners found in this camp, tells his ghastly story to a British soldier”.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{49} Reilly et al., ed., \textit{Belsen}, p. 214.
\bibitem{50} “War Crimes Group to Inspect Camps”, \textit{New York Times}, 25 April 1945, p. 3.
\bibitem{52} Taylor, “The Walking Dead”, p. 1.
\bibitem{53} Carole Naggar, \textit{George Rodger: An Adventure in Photography, 1908-1995}, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 138. In her in-depth look at Rodger’s life and contribution to photojournalism, Naggar argues that photographs from liberated camps were not comprehensively informative in their presentation in the press. During the Second World War Rodger covered sixty-one countries for \textit{Life} and was one of the first photographers to capture Belsen.
\bibitem{54} “Germans Forced to Dig Victims Graves”, \textit{Daily Worker}, 23 April 1945, p. 4.
\end{thebibliography}
The singling out of British victims also was evident in photographs that appeared in newspapers during the Belsen Trial. Former British inmate of Belsen Harold Le Druillenee was identified in the *Daily Express*.55 The caption accompanying a photograph of Le Druillenee read: “Oxford graduate, former Jersey schoolmaster and former Belsen captive: flown from Britain to Luneburg yesterday to be a witness” (Figure 6.2).
British inmates were prioritised over other victims in reports of the Belsen Trial. Reports linked concentration camps to the British triumph over Nazism and the morality of the cause. Allied victims represented the sacrifices Britain had made to win the war and how the nation had exhausted itself to defeat the Nazis. Even before the proceedings commenced, British victims appeared in reports about the upcoming trial. The experience of one British victim in particular was presented as heroic and his suffering was highlighted. British sailor Keith Meyer was listed on the Belsen Trial indictment. Meyer was captured in April 1943 whilst undertaking a commando raid in Norway.

56 “Kramer Says They Died Naturally”, Daily Worker, 3 October 1945, p. 3; Norman Clark, “Belsen Camp Deaths ‘Due to Natural Causes’”, News Chronicle, 3 October 1945, p. 4.

He was sent to Sachsenhausen where he was presumed Jewish on account of his surname and put into solitary confinement. Meyer was transferred to Belsen in February 1945 where he subsequently contracted typhus. Witnesses claim Belsen guards shot him.\(^{58}\)

Meyer featured in a number of trial reports. He was the only individual named in a report on the start of the Belsen Trial by Sigrid Schultz.\(^{59}\) While Schultz specifically identified Meyer, other Belsen victims were listed by nationality. *The Times* referenced Meyer by remarking that the defendants were charged with causing the deaths of certain “Allied nationals and one British national” at Belsen.\(^ {60}\) A similar report was published in the *Manchester Guardian* and his name even appeared in headlines.\(^ {61}\) Another report from the *Daily Telegraph* outlined evidence at the trial pertaining to the killing of the British commando.\(^ {62}\) Not only did the report outline details about Meyer’s time in concentration camps and his death, it also mentioned he wrote a letter to his parents, Mr and Mrs John Meyer of Lancashire, the night before he died. References to Meyer went on as the trial continued indicating the intense interest in his suffering.\(^ {63}\) In singling out Meyer, correspondents ensured the general public maintained a close connection to the trial.

The newsworthiness of British testimony is evidenced further by a *Daily Herald* report on a British inmate’s testimony that stated: “The only British internee to survive the bestial horrors of the Belsen camp is to give evidence in the trial”.\(^ {64}\) British spirit and character was highlighted

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\(^{60}\) “Belsen Trial To-day”, *The Times*, 17 September 1945, p. 3.


\(^{63}\) Mann, “Kramer Denies”, pp. 1, 5; “Englishmen at Belsen”, *The Times*, 5 October 1945, p. 3.

\(^{64}\) Ivor Montagu, “British Victim to Accuse the ‘Beast’”, *Daily Worker*, 18 September 1945, pp. 1, 4.
in popular newspaper the *Daily Express* when it stated how British nationals in Belsen “did not cower to the SS guards”. The report celebrated resilience while still emphasising British victimisation. The emphasis on Allied victims linked closely to promoting the righteousness of the Allied war effort. British citizens who had been imprisoned in the camp were portrayed as heroes in the press. British victimisation became a prominent theme of Belsen Trial coverage, but the American press were unable to highlight American victimisation to the same degree because there was no national equivalent to Meyer.

**Prominent Inmates**

Along with Allied victims, prominent individuals such as political and religious identities were identified and their experiences in Nazi camps were covered in detail. For example, a *News Chronicle* report was devoted solely to a renowned artist imprisoned in Belsen. Colin Wills wrote: “Josef Capek, brother of Karel Capek, the famous author, and co-author with him of several plays and novels, died three weeks ago from typhus in Belsen camp”. Czech artist Josef Čapek (1887-1945) was an opponent of Hitler. He was arrested after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia and died in Belsen in April 1945. This was the only time that a victim was actually named in any *News Chronicle* reports from April or May 1945.

Unable to concentrate on all victims, correspondents instead chose to highlight specific identities that were known to the Allied public already. Many of these individuals were “privileged prisoners”. Among the inmates liberated at Dachau were approximately 1,000 “privileged” German and Austrian political prisoners who survived in relatively good conditions inside the camp. The “privileged” section of Belsen

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68 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, p. 64.
housed long-term political prisoners and exchange Jews whom the Nazis thought could be beneficial in negotiations with the Allies.69 “Privileged” sections were separate from the main parts of the camps, and inmates were afforded conditions that other prisoners did not enjoy.

Although American reports did not fixate on a key Allied victim, as was the case with the British press and Meyer, American correspondents were keen to focus on prominent inmates imprisoned at Dachau. In one of the first reports from Dachau, Howard Cowan collectively grouped victims together but also singled out and named several well-known individuals including Martin Niemöller and Kurt Schuschnigg.70 On 17 April 1945 the New York Times reported: “Neither Chancellor Dr. Kurt Schuschnigg of Austria, nor the Pastor Wilhelm Niemoeller, the German cleric who resisted Nazism, has been liquidated by the Nazis”.71 Simply titled “Niemoeller”, an editorial appeared in the Washington Post in May that concentrated on Niemöller and his experience.72 There was a particular focus on prominent individuals who resisted the Nazis. Such stories of victimisation fitted into the Western Allies’ perceptions of the camps as driven by political motives.

Former Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg received significant press attention. As established previously, the press tended to emphasise political inmates in reportage of concentration camps and Schuschnigg was a high profile political opponent of Nazism. In the 1930s he was opposed to Austria becoming part of the Third Reich. His attempts to keep Austria independent failed and he resigned.73 Schuschnigg was arrested in March 1938 following the Anschluss. At first under house arrest, he was later locked into a room in the servants’ quarters of the

70 Howard Cowan, “39 Carloads of Bodies on Track in Dachau”, The Washington Post, 1 May 1945, pp. 1, 2.
72 “Niemoeller”, The Washington Post, 13 May 1945, p. 4B.
Hotel Metropole, *Gestapo* headquarters in Vienna. Schuschnigg was transferred to a *Gestapo* prison in Munich in 1939 and two years later sent to Sachsenhausen. In 1942, his wife and daughter were given permission to stay with him and in early 1945 they moved to Flossenbürg. In April Schuschnigg was transferred to Dachau with several other notable special prisoners. His cell contained two metal beds, stools, a water basin and a table. Schuschnigg was able to converse with other prisoners and he received passable food. American soldiers eventually found him in May 1945.75

Several reports that concentrated on Schuschnigg in April and May 1945 mentioned he had been incarcerated in Dachau. Prior to his discovery, newspapers questioned if he had been killed and wondered about his whereabouts.76 He even featured in widely disparate headlines including “Say Schuschnigg Lives”, “Kurt Schuschnigg Hanged”, and “Schuschnigg was in Dachau”.77 Speculation over his fate was intense because Schuschnigg was well renowned in Britain and the United States. Correspondents understood he was a “privileged” inmate and detailed his experience inside Nazi camps. Correspondent Hal Foust wrote of Schuschnigg’s time in Flossenbürg:

Schuschnigg, his wife, and their 6-year-old daughter were billeted in a private house in the camp enclosure for six months. The former chancellor was well known in the camp as a privileged character, the countess being permitted to shop daily in a near-by village.78

Schuschnigg’s imprisonment indicated that not even prominent political figures were exempt from Nazi persecution. Interest in him was evident predominantly in American newspapers and was limited to the weeks prior to the liberation of Dachau and the immediate aftermath.

The American press also paid particular attention to Martin Niemöller, a German Lutheran pastor, who is best known for his provocative “First They Came...” statement, written in 1937:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.79

As a national conservative, Niemöller initially supported the Nazis, however, he gradually abandoned his views and emerged as an outspoken critic of Hitler. He was imprisoned in 1937 for opposing the Nazification of Protestant churches and his forthright rejection of anti-Semitism. After spending eight months in a Berlin jail he was taken to one of Hitler’s Special Courts “established to pass judgment on persons accused of antigovernment attitudes and activities”.80 Niemöller was sentenced to seven months in jail. But having already served eight months he was released. Immediately upon release, Niemöller was arrested again and sent to Sachsenhausen. In 1941, he was transferred to Dachau where he was placed in the special section of the camp with

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80 Biographical details on Niemöller from “Appendix B: The Special Prisoners” in Smith, Dachau, p. 268.
other “privileged” prisoners. His time in Dachau was relatively comfortable in comparison with most inmates. In 1944, Niemöller was even permitted to preach in the camp and was afforded a range of privileges including better food, visits from his wife and access to books and magazines. In late April 1945, as American forces advanced towards Dachau, Niemöller was among a group of prominent inmates to be marched out of Dachau to South Tyrol where the SS abandoned them. In early May 1945 the United States army freed him.

In May 1945 reports mentioned that Niemöller had been imprisoned in Dachau. An account devoted to Niemöller’s special treatment because of his status as a “privileged” prisoner appeared in the *New York Times*. The report claimed he was “Germany’s only hope for the future”. Interest in him was related to his standing in the Protestant Church. Niemöller’s story was presented as a triumph of faith and courage in the face of persecution. In fact, Niemöller himself claimed after liberation “people now know that all false idealisms are worthless [and] there is no possibility for finding a new ideal base other than in the church”. No other Dachau victim received such extensive attention in the American press. A *New York Times* report dedicated to contrasting Hermann Goering and Niemöller wrote: “Germany, once a Christian nation, believed in Adolf Hitler [whereas] Martin Niemoeller believed in God”. The report added: “Because the steadfast pastor refused to turn from God and obey Hitler he spent eight years in Nazi concentration camps”. The danger in giving so much attention to Niemöller, though, was that the public received an impression of life

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81 ibid.
83 For example, MacCormac, “Military Hospital”, p. 4.
85 ibid.
inside Dachau that was not representative of the experience of the majority of inmates.

Niemöller’s popularity was not confined to the American press. In May 1945, three letters to the editor in the *Daily Telegraph* presented different views on Niemöller. They both criticised him and praised his actions, and controversy surrounded his proposed visit to Britain in the summer of 1945. The *Manchester Guardian* reported: “Church authorities in this country are hopeful that it may be possible for Pastor Niemöller to visit England during the summer”. The press detailed his thoughts on topics such as individuals forced to become Nazi Party members and German responsibility for Nazi crimes.

Interest in Niemöller was evident prior to liberation. The British produced a feature film based on him in 1940 called *Pastor Hall*. The film dramatised “the conflict between Christianity and Nazism”. Other issues that are explored in the film include the brutality of Nazism and the struggle against Germany. These themes were evident in press coverage of Niemöller once he was liberated.

Because of his leadership role in the church, Niemöller became an important representative of concentration camp victims as Christian traditions were seen as a central part of overcoming Nazism. He embodied the Nazis’ persecution of Christianity. Niemöller also was regarded as an attractive figure because of his anti-communism. A

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Washington Post editorial referred to him as a “celebrated” prisoner at Dachau and claimed:

Niemoeller whether he desires it or not, becomes the advocate of his people in their hour of disillusion and despair, a witness to the world that, if German human nature is capable of the most bestial evil, it is also capable of great moral heroism. 92

The American press in particular recognised his symbolic value. In many ways Niemöller represented the importance of freedom of religion, an ideal that Americans value.

**Conclusion**

Victims’ individual stories were absorbed into the story of mass atrocity. It was not necessary to identify individual victims since their suffering was viewed as one atrocity among many. It may not have been the case that correspondents found their story unimportant but rather they struggled to understand individual circumstances due to the scale of mass atrocity. During the trials, victims were given an unprecedented chance to share their experience and correspondents provided more detailed information about a select group of survivors and their time inside concentration camps. Victims’ experiences were hitherto the central theme of reports.

Predictably, newspapers focused on eminent political and religious figures or the one British prisoner listed on the Belsen Trial indictment. Correspondents looked to tell the stories of Allied victims since they were important in making a direct link between the British and American public and the camps. Niemöller and Schuschnigg were emblematic religious and political figures whose fate was of particular interest. Their open opposition to Nazism was presumably an important part of the attention they received and their stories embodied two

92 “Niemoeller”, p. 4B.
democratic ideals, political and religious freedom. Furthermore, it was easier for correspondents to write about individuals already known to readers. These individuals, however, were the “privileged” few. The risk in focusing on such individuals so heavily was that their experience might have wrongly come to be seen as indicative of all victims inside concentration camps or, at the very least, diminish/dilute the true nature of the typical experience.
It is a story of people so brutalised that they turned to cannibalism; of 39,000 men, women and children housed in a concentration camp in conditions that are indescribable: of naked women trying to wash themselves in one cup of water. It tells of the dead lying in rotting piles and in gutters and drains.


It is difficult to know what is the more horrible, the piles of naked bodies of men, women and children awaiting cremation or the emaciated forms of the half-dead racked with disease, filth, hunger and hopeless misery.


Images used to complement the above newspaper reports typify the language found in coverage of camp victims in the wake of liberation. This chapter examines how correspondents described victims and in written reports and scrutinises the depiction of victims and survivors in photographs. It considers how this terminology shaped and reflected the wider portrayal of victims in the media. Initial responses to camp inmates suggest the difficulties observers faced in explaining inmates’ circumstances. As Chapter 6 established, victims were absorbed into the story of mass atrocity, yet, when they appeared in reports terminology was graphic, and the focus was on victims’ bodies, behaviour and their dehumanised state.
**Zoological language**

In their efforts to communicate victims’ conditions, correspondents used metaphors to conjure up specific images. Zoological language suffused reports. Zoological language can be defined as “the comparing or attributing of non-human animal characteristics to people or to their behaviour”.\(^1\) Correspondents aimed to describe scenes in a way that the Allied public could understand and imagine the horror for themselves. Consequently, reports often solely concentrated on the degradation inside camps and victims were compared with animals with no redeeming features.

Descriptions of victims were graphic and sometimes sensational. The *New York Times* described prisoners’ eyes as “animal lights in skin covered skulls of famine”.\(^2\) Henry Standish documented how “human beings had been reduced to the status of animals”.\(^3\) Correspondents struggled to find metaphors powerful enough to capture what they were seeing.\(^4\) They searched for particular types of imagery as survivors were likened to “whipped dogs, miserable wrecks, and creatures”.\(^5\) Likening victims to animals and camp scenes to “the ultimate in human degradation and hell” reinforced the brutal reality of life inside camps.

In using such discourse correspondents were arguing that the Nazis were the ones who acted like animals and the victims were treated like animals. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* referred to camp victims as hanging like “sides of beef”.\(^6\) Another report described victims as having “lived like cattle and died like beasts”.\(^7\) Victims were not acting like animals but wretched human beings and their appearance reflected

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1. Celinscak, At War’s End, p. 75.
Dehumanised Victims

the treatment they had received in camps. Mark Celinscak observes that British soldiers’ first response to Belsen was to employ zoological language, and this adversely influenced perceptions of victims:

Referring to an inmate as an “animal” is to view them as reprehensible. As a metaphor, an animal is something “irrational, immoral, or uncivilized”. In this context, survivors were viewed as something repellent, uncivilized and disagreeable.

It was the camp’s conditions that were repellent and disagreeable. Harsh terminology in correspondents’ accounts did not mean they were not sympathetic to victims’ circumstances.

For the most part, there was an inability to relate to victims on the part of correspondents in the first reports coming from the camps. They were repulsed by the sight and smell of camps and victims’ state. Marguerite Higgins recounted in her memoir some years after liberation how inmates at Dachau disgusted her. She was surprised at their lack of dignity noting: “I remember being repelled by some of the prisoners who even kissed the dusty ground before me. It was an abjectness that gave me the willies”. Other correspondents, no doubt, encountered similar feelings upon observing victims and interacting with survivors. Even battle-hardened soldiers became physically ill after entering camps and were shocked by the state of inmates. Presumably, the intention was not to dehumanise victims.

Zoological language helped correspondents construct comparisons that might be familiar to readers. They drew on language that would normally be used to describe animals, possibly as a coping mechanism

8 Reilly, Belsen, p. 31.
9 Celinscak, At War’s End, p. 77.
used to sustain both a physical and psychological distance between them and victims. Joanne Reilly suggests that this enabled correspondents to deal with what they were witnessing:

In the same way that perpetrators, in order that they could kill on a massive scale, attempted to alienate their victims from themselves by stripping them of their civilizing qualities, the only way the liberators could deal with the survivors was to view them as other to themselves; only by creating this distance were they able to cope with the tasks at hand.\textsuperscript{12}

Higgins described the sense of detachment that her job required and admits that she felt “no strong emotional reaction to the terrible things I heard or saw [since] my condemnation and disgust were of the mind”.\textsuperscript{13} Higgins insists that her task was to obtain the facts of the case against the Nazis while meeting her deadlines. The role of a war correspondent, then, is to “compartmentalize his [sic] emotions and isolate them from professional reactions”.\textsuperscript{14} Arguably, correspondents and photographers needed to suppress emotions in order to keep composed and remain objective.

Those who visited Nazi camps commented that stepping into the compounds was like entering another world and some even described this as hell.\textsuperscript{15} The phrase “Hell Camp of Belsen” appeared in a photographic caption in the \textit{Sunday Express}.\textsuperscript{16} Derek Sington documented his initial entrance to Belsen in this way:

We swung through the almost deserted front compound of the camp... and we reached a high wooden gate with criss-cross wiring. It reminded me of the entrance to a zoo... I had tried

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Reilly, \textit{Belsen}, p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Higgins, \textit{News Is a Singular Thing}, p. 76.
\item \textsuperscript{14} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{15} “17,000 Died in Camp in March”, \textit{Sunday Times}, 22 April 1945, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{16} “The Murder Gang of Belsen Spread This Horror in the Name of the Germans”, \textit{Sunday Express}, 22 April 1945, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
to visualize the interior of a concentration camp, but I had not imagined it like this.\textsuperscript{17}

Camp atrocities were unbelievable and this helped to create a sense of awe. By emphasising that camps were another world that transcended normal behaviour, correspondents again reinforced the division and difference between themselves and victims.

Facing the reality that prisoners were “normal” human beings who had been forced into such a terrible state made camp scenes that much harder to comprehend. Correspondents possibly wanted to believe that they could not and would not ever experience what inmates had endured. Medical staff sent to Belsen to help with relief efforts encountered similar difficulties. At first they were unable to relate to survivors and it was only after medical staff spent time with survivors and once their patients started to display “normal” human qualities that this changed.\textsuperscript{18}

During the Belsen Trial, zoological language resurfaced in newspaper reports. Sington’s testimony provided important information about the camp’s liberation and he described in detail the scenes he encountered. Sington referred to inmates as “frightened animals”, an image correspondents repeated in their reports. In the \textit{New York Times} Sington’s observations appeared under the sub-heading “Inmates Like Animals”.\textsuperscript{19} Dr Fritz Leo likewise compared inmates’ behaviour to animals in his testimony. The \textit{New York Times} saw this as an important part of the trial and reported that Leo told the court “human beings fought like animals for food”.\textsuperscript{20} Again, animal imagery indicated the state to which camp prisoners had been reduced. Animal references were less common in press coverage of the trials overall, which

\textsuperscript{17} Sington cited in Celinscak, At War’s End, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{18} See Reilly, \textit{Belsen}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{19} “Eyewitness Tells of Belsen Horror”, p. 5.

suggests that such imagery was part of witnesses’ first response to camps. After the initial shock wore off the press relied less on graphic metaphorical language.

Descriptions of concentration camps drawing on the animal world portrayed camps as another world, somehow different and separate from normality and this had the effect of stripping victims of human qualities. Emphasising the ways in which victims resembled animals also implicitly referenced the animalistic perpetrators. Dan Stone argues the portrayal of camps as otherworldly suggested the evil of the perpetrators, but likewise surmises that the resultant dehumanisation may not have been intentional. 21 In highlighting how victims were forced to live like animals, correspondents were attempting to make a statement about perpetrators’ monstrosity. As Section Three shows, camp personnel were depicted as beasts in coverage of liberation and military trials, their crimes considered depraved.

**Victims’ Bodies and Behaviour**

Liberation reports concentrated on detailing victims’ physical condition and especially their emaciated bodies. One report on the Red Cross’ relief efforts at Belsen described the state of victims in the typhus section of the hospital:

> I saw one tragic figure lying with a shaven head and the blankets pushed aside exposing the most dreadful skeleton of a body, covered with sores and with the bones standing out from the skin, no flesh on them whatever. She was so emaciated that you could not believe she was alive, and she looked like an old, old woman. I asked her age and was told she was 37. 22

The report also referred to survivors as “scarecrow figures” and noted how another woman “looked almost human”. The Red Cross report,


22 “Red Cross in Belsen”, *The Times*, 16 May 1945, p. 3.
Despite being beset with empathy for victims, fixated on survivors’ terrible state. Other reports emphasised survivors’ uncleanliness along with what correspondents observed to be a lack of dignity. There was a fascination with the degradation of the human body.

Newspaper reports referred to victims as “corpses” and “bodies” and used terms such as the “walking dead” for survivors. Victims were also described as the “living dead”, “lifeless dead” or “nameless dead”. A report from a rabbi at Belsen labelled survivors “living skeletons” and the “walking dead”. Victims became indistinguishable from one another and all sense of individuality was lost. Ultimately, correspondents were responding to the position in which the Nazis had placed prisoners. An individual’s name was irrelevant once they entered a Nazi camp. Instead they entered the system of badges.

The fragile state of survivors reinforced their corpse-like appearance. A photograph of an emaciated man, his face in agony, appeared in the Washington Post under the title “The Living Corpse of Belsen” and according to the Chicago Daily Tribune survivors were in many cases just as “gruesome as the corpses”. Distinctions between the living and dead were blurred leading R W Thompson to declare: “Life and death had ceased to have meaning, because it is a fact that the living were dead”. Such comparisons suggested survivors were in such a bad state that they looked like the dead and were “no longer people”. Although appearing insensitive, these reports pointed to the resilience of survival.

Descriptions of scenes of mass death were common. A report in the New York Times stated that at Dachau “thousands of bodies were

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27 Thompson, “SS Women”, p. 5.
Dehumanised Victims

stacked in piles like cordwood” and the *Daily Telegraph* referred to a heap of bodies as a “bundle of waxen decaying limbs and foully soiled clothing”.28 Focusing on death and degradation so heavily, however, meant that victims took a passive role and were presented as objects of Nazi brutality.29

Corpses and bodies featured so frequently because, in the first instance, correspondents encountered mass atrocity and their attention was focused on the general plight of victims (see Chapter 6). It was important that correspondents convey the scale of the event they witnessed and writing about the number of dead bodies gave an accurate account of the situation in camps. Little more could have been expected at the time.

William Frye’s report on Belsen is an excellent example of the way victims were described in liberation reports.30 Frye spent considerable time detailing survivors and the dead, seemingly fascinated with how they looked and behaved. He described victims as “aimless swarms of living dead”. Frye, furthermore, emphasised the inhumanity of survivors, commenting on their broken spirits and calling them “still-breathing cadavers”. This hints at a fascination with the macabre. In attempting to explain what he witnessed, Frye reinforced the portrayal of victims as abnormal, describing how naked corpses were “hauled in trucks [and] dumped in a pit”. Whilst this brought home to the readers how impersonal the camp was, victims were seen as a mass of bodies instead of individuals who each endured their own suffering. Frye claimed inmates had no concern for their nakedness writing: “No sex, no shame, no modesty, no self-respect among these people”.31 Frye maintained, however, that the human spirit could survive this evil, ensuring the report had a sense of hope.

31 ibid.
Graphic descriptions of victims highlighted their dirtiness and general apathetic disposition. Correspondents stressed to readers that they were not grasping the full horror as they were unable to smell the stench of the camps. Experienced war correspondent Harold Denny wrote how photographs were less horrible than the reality since “they could not portray the stench and filth and death which clings to one’s nostrils for days after one has visited a concentration camp”. Correspondents tried to convey how terrible the smell of rotting corpses was and how “filth and pollution pervaded the camp”. But, in doing so, they reinforced the perception that inmates were dirty and diseased. For example, Henry J Taylor’s opening sentence regarding Belsen stated: “Two thirds of the walking dead here are women—tortured, starved, diseased and, for the most part insane”. The focus remained on how emaciated, sick and dirty inmates were, instead of concentrating on their ability to endure and survive in the most dreadful conditions. Another report declared women in Belsen had been “sub-humans” only a month ago but now were sunbathing and using lipstick. The report graphically observed how the Nazis turned female inmates into “cannibalistic sluts”. The aim of such reports presumably was to emphasise the success of Allied relief efforts, but in the process the press presented victims only in their dehumanised state. The focus was on what they had become.

Correspondents were unsure of how to respond to the lack of privacy in camps. Their accounts pointed out that women did not bother to cover their naked bodies. The Chicago Daily Tribune’s reference to “a mound of naked women’s bodies” in the middle of Belsen was the second time

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in the report that naked bodies were mentioned.\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Times} informed readers that many of the dead were “unclothed”.\textsuperscript{38} Correspondents were possibly shocked and fascinated by victims’ naked bodies. They may have found the scenes disturbing but also engrossing. Accounts that mentioned naked survivors and how close they were to piles of dead bodies, whilst largely accurate, served to further distance the public from relating to and recognising survivors as people.\textsuperscript{39}

Some correspondents endeavoured to draw attention to the fact that survivors did not give up in the face of extreme violence and mistreatment and acknowledged the ongoing issues survivors faced. Mea Allan, the first female correspondent accredited to the British Army, took a particular interest in Belsen survivors. Allan claimed a month after Belsen was liberated that most internees still were “not fully human beings”.\textsuperscript{40} But Allan added: “Their sense of decency and cleanliness was growing”. She suggested it took time for victims to regain their humanity after liberation. In another report on Belsen survivors still living in the camp, she observed that they were now physically fit but there remained some mental issues. The phrase “bringing them back to normality” hinted at the extreme mental trauma prisoners experienced in the camp.\textsuperscript{41} Emphasising the abnormal camp environment reflected Allan’s compassion for victims and her appreciation of what they had endured physically and psychologically.

Other reports also emphasised how humanity could overcome degradation. In a sensational manner Maurice Fagence exclaimed that “it was almost as if the dead of Belsen had risen from their pits in recrimination”.\textsuperscript{42} When commenting on how victims reclaimed their

\textsuperscript{37} “2D Army Frees 29,000”, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{38} “The Captives of Belsen”, \textit{The Times}, 19 April 1945, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{39} Bunting, Britain and the Holocaust, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{40} Mea Allan, “The Luckier People of Belsen Come Back to Life”, \textit{Daily Herald}, 15 May 1945, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{41} Mea Allan, “Belsen Victims Shun the Beast’s Trial”, \textit{Daily Herald}, 18 September 1945, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{42} Fagence, “British Rush”, p. 1.
humanity from the grave, Fagence was acknowledging the ability of inmates to endure. A Jewish chaplain wrote of his experience in Belsen and noted that prisoners “have become dehumanised”. He remarked:

They have forgotten the meaning of elementary hygiene. Excreta and faeces are everywhere. They lie in their own filth and do not notice the squalor. Death had ceased to have any meaning to them.43

In the midst of the horror, the chaplain wrote of prisoners’ “spirit and determination to live” and detailed how Jewish inmates were singing in Hebrew in camp huts.

The most morbid details about victims again received press coverage during military trials. In trying to prove defendants’ guilt, the most shocking details such as cannibalism, medical experiments and piles of dead bodies were described by witnesses. Kathleen McLaughlin detailed the evidence given by a colonel from the United States Army Medical Corps at the Dachau Trial about conditions in the camp.44 The report recounted at length testimony about “corpses intermingling with the living [and] corpses stacked in boxcars”. Similarly, a Times report featured testimony about victims and their “unbelievable lack of flesh”.45

Victims were once again presented as passive objects in trial reportage with the focus on mass death. Dachau inmates were known as “emaciated corpses” and “naked corpses” in The Times.46 Another report emphasised inmates’ unstable mental state describing them as “frightened, tormented, half-crazed refugees and prisoners”.47 Sigrid Schultz attempted to describe scenes from a movie shown during the Belsen proceedings: “Both men and women flung the corpses into a

45 “Callous Guards of Belsen”, p. 3.
46 “Dachau Camp Trial”, p. 3.
47 “Case Opened against Belsen Guards”, The Times, 18 September 1945, p. 4.
huge pit as if engaged in a kind of rhythmic sport”⁴⁸ Schultz captures the macabre and the senselessness of the situation and invites the viewer to imagine the scene.

Correspondents’ accounts referred to victims’ bodies with the aim of understanding how they had been reduced to the abject. Some reports emphasised victims’ ability to overcome extreme adversity and presented victims as human beings. But in emphasising victims’ degraded state correspondents presented a basic picture of victims’ suffering that contributed to their de-individualisation and dehumanisation.

**Victims in Photographic Images**

Photographers had to consider how the dead should be framed and take into consideration the lighting, exposure, and composition of photographs. They had to find the balance between documenting the horror without exaggerating or magnifying it. Many were aware that the photographs they took might be used as evidence in future war crimes trials.⁴⁹ It was the way in which photographs were presented that sometimes sensationalised the content.

A common response among photographers was to want to look away from scenes at concentration camps. Ian Grant accompanied the 11th Armoured Division into Belsen. He recalls how he peered through the wire at Belsen and rammed a telescopic viewfinder on his camera so he could see the figures inside:

> What now came into focus made the hair on the back of my neck do the most frightening things. If they were human, these groups of skeletons held together with rags. As if to prove they were alive, two of them pushed up into a standing position and began a slow shuffle in our direction. I pulled

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⁴⁹ Celinscak, *At War’s End*, pp. 174-175.
focus as they moved, and the gruesome sight of their emaciated faces made me pull away from the wire.\textsuperscript{50}

His first reaction was of shock but he also immediately wanted to look away from the gruesome sights. Photographers tried to keep a distance from the scenes but the nature of camp atrocities made this incredibly difficult. Photographers were repulsed not by survivors, but by the squalor and filth of camps. Allied soldiers experienced similar responses, reacting with disgust at victims’ state. Clara Greenbaum, an inmate at Belsen, recalls how she watched British soldiers circle the camp and stare at inmates:

But then I saw one of the soldiers double over and throw up. Soon another was doing the same, and then another. And then I understood. They were looking at us in disgust, we repelled them. We made them feel like vomiting!\textsuperscript{51}

Greenbaum recalls how she felt both shame and despair in the face of the soldiers’ responses.

There were key moral and ethical dilemmas that photographers faced in capturing Nazi camps. They had to depict the anguish and horror they witnessed but at the same time remain sensitive to victims and try not to exploit their suffering.\textsuperscript{52} War photographers were intruding on inmates’ privacy and capturing them in a vulnerable state. No doubt, photographers felt immense pressure to adequately represent camps and more specifically victims’ experiences. There was a fine line between ensuring that the public would view the photographs and be horrified but not be so repulsed that they would turn away. Pioneering

\textsuperscript{50} Grant, \textit{Cameraman at War}, p. 157. Grant, an AFPU photographer who accompanied the 11th Armoured Division, recounts his experience at Belsen.


\textsuperscript{52} For an assessment of the issues war photographers were confronted with see Celinscak, \textit{At War’s End}. 
photojournalist George Rodger found himself inspired by the scenes at Belsen. He later recalled how he captured victims:

Subconsciously arranging groups and bodies on the ground into artistic compositions in the viewfinder... treating this pitiful human flotsam as if it were some gigantic still life.53

Criticisms levelled at documentary photographs of liberated camps are based on the way photographs supposedly erased the humanity and integrity of survivors and the dead.54 Photographers recognised they could never express an individual’s experience through photographs but endeavoured to document the inhumanity of camps. They often wrote down accounts of their conversations with their subjects and named them whenever possible but this information generally failed to appear in newspapers after passing the scrutiny of editors and censorship.55 Photographers may have interacted with survivors, heard their experiences and learned their names, but such information was lost in the actual presentation in newspapers. Conceivably, such details were not included in published reports due to shortages in newsprint. Accounts accompanying photographs provided very basic details. This was a long-term project and impossible considering those capturing liberation often visited camps for short periods of time.

There was a clear sense of physical and emotional distance between photographers and victims. The press favoured images depicting mass graves or piles of bodies awaiting burial (see Figure 2.1).56 Mass death was often viewed from a distance with piles of dead bodies rarely captured in close frame. This may have occurred because photographers were hesitant to get close to victims and there were possibly restrictions

53 Naggar, George Rodger, p. 139.
54 Haggith, “Filming the Liberation”, p. 34. If one looks at the forty rolls shot by AFPU at Belsen, Haggith contends, the cameramen had a strong grasp of what happened there and showed sensitivity to survivors.
55 ibid.
on what could be published with close-ups considered pornographic. Distance shots reinforced the perception of camps as a separate world where unimaginable horror occurred. Inmates were shown to be different, somehow separate from viewers. Photographers appear to have lost sight of the individual as they concentrated on the dead.

Figure 7.1: A mass grave at Belsen. Photograph appeared in: “MPs to Visit Hell Camps”, Daily Worker, 20 April 1945, p. 1.  

A photograph of Fritz Klein standing in a mass grave epitomised this trend (see Figure 8.2). Photographs showing victims in pits or graves were common (Figure 7.1), too, since they illustrated the scale of camp horror. Naked bodies lacked individuality or differentiation and often the viewer could not discern which body part belonged to which victim. Rodger noted he “subconsciously arranged groups and bodies on the ground into artistic compositions in the viewfinder”. Piles of unidentifiable corpses may have inspired how photographers constructed their photographs.

57 “Buchenwald Memory Will Haunt Us for Many Years”, Daily Worker, 28 April 1945, p. 3.  
58 “MPs to Visit Hell Camps”, Daily Worker, 20 April 1945, p. 1.  
59 George Rodger cited in Celinscak, At War’s End, p. 176.
Photographers arguably viewed the dead from a distance in an attempt to maintain both a physical and emotional distance from victims’ suffering. This technique was in direct contrast to photographs of perpetrators that were close-up style shots, designed to highlight their guilt. \(^{60}\) Restrictions on photographers’ movement within camps may also have impeded their work. A photograph from the *Daily Express* illustrates how victims were presented with a sense of detachment. \(^{61}\) The photograph, a wide shot of dead bodies strewn across an open area of the camp, depicts victims with skeletal body parts protruding (Figure 7.2). It is hard to determine where one body starts and another ends, and according to the caption the subjects are male and were “lying face down, spandeagled”. Animal references were used to describe victims’ positioning and inmates generally remained anonymous.

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\(^{60}\) ibid. p. 182.

Photographers appeared fascinated by women’s experience of Nazi camps. They documented female survivors partaking in “normal” activities but also captured their vulnerability, fragile bodies and vacant eyes. Photographs of survivors typically showed them in their camp uniform, depicted inmates’ poor physical condition and the degradation around them. Contrasting everyday, mundane, normal activities with surrounding atrocity was a technique used to convey the utter senselessness of life inside concentration camps. Women survivors of Belsen were shown in their striped camp uniform cooking food after

Figure 7.3: Female survivors cook in a makeshift kitchen at Belsen. Photograph appeared in: “Men Who Died—and Women Who Lived—in the Camp of the Belsen Murderers”, Daily Express, 21 April 1945, p. 3.


63 See Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, p. 66.
liberation in a “rough field kitchen” in the *Daily Express* (Figure 7.3).\(^{64}\)

The news story was given a sense of optimism with the caption highlighting that the women were cooking food brought to them by the British “liberators”. Survivors, seemingly oblivious to the photographer’s presence, are shown washing themselves with water from a drain in a photograph published in the *New York Times* (Figure 7.4).\(^{65}\)


In other photographs, however, female survivors appear in a frontal gaze. A photograph published in April 1945 in the *Daily Worker* depicts a group of female camp inmates sitting in a crowded camp hospital. The women gaze at the photographer with expressions of distress and its caption states: “This scene of overcrowded squalor is the ‘hospital’ of Belsen horror camp; and the ragged and despairing women are the

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\(^{64}\)“Men Who Died”, p. 3.

\(^{65}\)Graham, “300 Burned”, p. 12.
hospital’s pathetic inmates”.66 A similar photograph appeared in the New York Times after Belsen’s liberation.67 Female inmates are shown crowded inside a hut and stare vacantly at the camera (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: Liberated inmates inside a hut at Belsen. Photograph appeared in: Frederick Graham, “300 Burned Alive by Retreating SS”, New York Times, 22 April 1945, p. 12.

Photographs of female inmates underscored the humiliation they endured. It is argued that the emphasis on gender in atrocity photographs was related to female victims’ fragility and how this reinforced the atrociousness of camps.68 Women’s lack of femininity was a source of interest in reportage more broadly. As Chapter 9

66 “This Shack Is Belsen Camp’s ‘Hospital’”, Daily Worker, 21 April 1945, p. 4.
68 Zelizer, “Gender and Atrocity”, p. 255.
addresses, a fascination with female perpetrators and their participation in Nazi crimes also was evident in coverage of camps.

The Nazis debased and dehumanised inmates and photographers documented the outcome. Photographs focused on women’s helplessness and the appalling state in which they were forced to live, not to dehumanise them but to document life inside camps. Photographs showing women partaking in activities such as cooking and washing themselves after liberation despite the horror around them importantly helped restore some of their humanity. Jessica Reinisch concludes that those who documented concentration camps helped to create a specific representation of survivors—the image of the archetypal survivors as “emaciated, sick skeletons, still wearing striped concentration camp uniforms, full of gratitude for the liberators and relief that their ordeal was over”.69 Indeed, photographs published after liberation were used to show the devastating horror of camps, the mass of victims and the joy of liberation. But, they often hinted at inmates’ ability to endure as well.

Conclusion
Feelings of disgust, repulsion, shock and disbelief all are reflected in correspondents’ descriptions of inmates. Victims were described in terms of the animal world. The terminology, intended to indict the Nazis, emphasises perpetrators’ brutality and expresses the horror of camp life, however, often stripped victims of all identity and individuality. In concentrating on victims’ uncleanliness, apathetic disposition, and nakedness, correspondents were attempting to show how inmates were reduced to a less-than-human state. Photographic images also highlighted the degradation inside Nazi camps. Victims were framed with a sense of distance and the focus was on corpses, bodies and mass suffering. This was an accurate portrayal of conditions but meant victims were viewed almost exclusively in their dehumanised

state. Some reports, however, successfully showed that even though they had been degraded, the “living and walking dead” had survived and that their humanity had not been lost entirely.
Concentration camp victims were de-individualised in newspaper coverage and correspondents were unable to identify them outside of an amorphous mass. In dealing with perpetrators, the opposite occurred. Key camp personnel were singled out as emblematic of the larger group. Paradoxically, newspapers’ focus on specific camp perpetrators occurred at the expense of concentrating on the plight of individual victims. A collective focus on perpetrators was evident in the immediate aftermath of liberation. The initial impression of perpetrators as an amorphous group is unsurprising considering correspondents had little time to identify individuals. Some emerging interest in particular perpetrators was evident. This was a natural progression partially due to the Allied investigations into camp crimes.

The preoccupation with individual perpetrators during coverage of military trials derived from the trials’ need to convict defendants of criminal acts. The trials were based on the premise of individual guilt and there was an interest in conspiracy among individuals. The focus on specific perpetrators especially intensified during the Belsen Trial as individual defendants dominated reports of trial proceedings. Belsen Commandant Josef Kramer, prominent female guard Irma Grese, and camp doctor Fritz Klein were features of reporting. During the Dachau proceedings the only defendant to be singled out in the press was camp doctor Klaus Schilling.

There is an important difference in the presentation of perpetrators from Belsen and Dachau. With the exception of Schilling, the collective treatment of perpetrators largely continued with Dachau. Dachau camp guards never became a focus in the same way as those from Belsen. Thus, all but one of the individual perpetrators who feature in this
section are from Belsen. The difference in coverage reflects the uneven nature of press reporting of the two camp trials. Correspondents largely ignored Dachau commandant Martin Weiss, revealing the skewed nature of reporting. Apparently, individuals from Dachau, with the exception of Schilling, did not fascinate correspondents to the same degree as their Belsen counterparts. That the collective treatment of Dachau perpetrators continued whilst several individuals from Belsen became press sensations also can be explained by the circumstances in each camp at the time of liberation, and the number and gender of guards who were captured and then later put on trial. A number of guards remained at Belsen when the camp was handed over to British forces, and 49 males and 26 females were arrested in the days after liberation. At Dachau, most high-ranking guards had fled by the time American forces arrived. A large number of female camp guards were found at Belsen and sixteen females were subsequently put on trial. Female personnel were active at Dachau, and yet no females were later put on trial.

Focusing on how correspondents wrote about perpetrators, this section examines the ways in which perpetrators were a key theme in press reportage, at the time of liberation and again during the Belsen and Dachau trials. Chapter 8 analyses how and why Klein and Schilling captivated observers and how their crimes were portrayed. Chapter 9 considers how the press drew on existing ideas of German monstrousness. It also traces the evolution of Kramer’s treatment in the press and compares this to Weiss. Chapter 10 focuses on how correspondents drew on established stereotypes about female criminality in their accounts of female camp personnel from Belsen. In particular, the chapter examines how Grese was depicted in reports and why she became the central female camp perpetrator during the Belsen Trial.

CHAPTER 8

Nazi Concentration Camp Doctors and Medical Atrocities:
Fritz Klein and Klaus Schilling

Extremely grave admissions were obtained by Colonel Backhouse in cross-examination to-day, especially from Fritz Klein, an S.S. doctor at Auschwitz and Belsen, who spoke with strangely insensitive candour of his part in selecting victims for the gas chambers and of the fearful conditions in which survivors dragged out their existence. With varying intonations we are hearing the voice of the Nazi executioner, for whom wholesale slaughter was a matter of orders... Klein, aged 59, describing himself as a Rumanian subject of German nationality, is the oldest and most cultured of the prisoners, but entering the box in his defaced uniform and jack boots, he lacked Kramer’s stolid composure and frequently his high-pitched voice faltered under the prosecution’s persuasive questioning.


When examined at Nurnberg before being transferred to Dachau for trial, Schilling talked at times like a medical man, sometimes likes a martyr and often as a Nazi. One Schilling argument—“I was ordered to conduct my experiments by Dr. Leonard Conti (Reich chief of public welfare) and had no choice but to obey”.... But Schilling also spoke of his care for the patients he had selected.

“Scientist Doctor on Trial at Dachau Says Fatal Tests Led to Malaria Cure”, Stars and Stripes, 7 December 1945, p. 3.
Medical crimes committed in Nazi concentration camps gained widespread press attention in 1945. The fact that Nazi doctors had participated in medical experiments and been involved in the neglect and poor treatment of camp inmates horrified correspondents. This chapter considers how Nazi doctors’ crimes were understood and why medical atrocities were seen to be among the worst camp atrocities. The way in which Nazi doctors were presented in newspapers in 1945 contributed to broader perceptions about Nazi physicians, the German medical profession and its complicity in Nazi crimes. Fritz Klein and Klaus Schilling featured in a number of reports and photographs when they were put on trial. This chapter considers why Klein and Schilling stood out during the Belsen and Dachau trials with a focus on how they were described in reports and what their crimes were said to represent.

**Nazi Medical Crimes**

Many German doctors willingly participated in Nazi war crimes and crimes against humanity. Paradoxically, in 1931 German medical authorities drafted path-breaking guidelines for research on humans that banned any coercion of test subjects but only a few years later they were involved in the Nazis’ forced sterilisation program.¹ Many doctors also participated in planning and enacting the “Euthanasia” Program, the systematic killing of those deemed “life unworthy of life” (*Lebensunwertes Leben*) including the institutionalised mentally ill and the physically impaired.² Moreover, during the Second World War German doctors conducted pseudoscientific medical experiments on unwilling camp inmates. Not all doctors in Germany were involved in Nazi medical atrocities, of course, but many physicians were directly involved in crimes committed at concentration camps. Doctors who were stationed at concentration camps to administer medical services also were complicit in the system of neglect and mistreatment. As SS


leader, Himmler presided over camp experiments although there was no centrally coordinated program. Whilst Himmler gave overall approval many initiatives came from the doctors themselves.3 Nazi camps opened up unlimited opportunities for ambitious researchers. Research subjects were available in large numbers and the restraints of medical ethics did not apply.4 Once camp experiments commenced ethical boundaries were further extended.

Doctors became Nazified more thoroughly and much sooner than any other profession.5 There was a high level of voluntary association with the National Socialists Physicians’ League, the Nazi Party itself and the SS. One third of all physicians were members of the League and by 1939 nearly 45 percent of all physicians were members of the Nazi Party. Doctors also were greatly overrepresented among the ranks of the SS.6

What did the Allies know about medical atrocities prior to liberation? According to Paul Julian Weindling “during the war, the Allies had reliable intelligence on abusive experiments, sterilisation, euthanasia and the genocidal gas chambers”.7 Even so, liberating forces were unprepared for their encounters with victims of medical experiments and were “surprised to find specially sealed off compounds for human experiments”.8 Members of the press who visited Nazi camps were shocked to discover evidence of doctors’ participation in camp atrocities.

3 Wachsmann, KL, p. 429.
8 ibid.
Correspondents gradually realised with the help of prisoner testimonies that the experiments represented a distinctive form of atrocity that merited publicity. Following liberation the Allies turned their attention to documenting medical crimes under Nazism and specifically medical experiments conducted in concentration camps. Liberated prisoners were instrumental in bringing Nazi medical crimes to the Allies’ attention and helped to push for the prosecution of perpetrators for criminal experiments. In May 1945, for instance, liberated prisoners from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Italy and Hungary organised an “International Investigation-Office for Medical SS-Crimes in the German Concentration Camps, Dachau”. The Allies collected evidence and details on the experiments. Documents discovered by the US Army in June 1945, including Himmler’s personal correspondence, further showed “the enormous extent to which Himmler’s SS, the German army and other agencies had carried out criminal experiments on humans in collaboration with hundreds of German medical scientists”.

The Western Allies lacked any policy for dealing with perpetrators of medical atrocities in 1945. Nonetheless, they set out to document the criminality of medicine under National Socialism and this culminated in the Nuremberg Medical Trial in 1946, also known as “US vs. Karl Brandt et al.”, or the Doctors Trial. Interest in medical atrocities, however, can be traced back to the Belsen and Dachau trials and specifically the press scrutiny directed towards Klein and Schilling. Evidence given at the Dachau Trial in particular, and the subsequent press reporting of doctors’ crimes fundamentally shaped early understanding of the complicity of the medical profession in Nazi

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9 ibid. p. 60.
10 ibid.
12 Weindling, Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials, p. 33.
atrocities. As one scholar points out the prosecution of Schilling was the “first of the post-war trials to confront the issue of medical experiments as murder” and the Dachau Trial was a forerunner for the Nuremberg Medical Trial. The Dachau Trial gave unprecedented publicity to these crimes and encouraged further investigation.

Only one doctor was put on trial at Belsen. The camp was not used as a site for medical experimentation in the same way as Dachau, although Klein was charged on both counts of the indictment. The first count included “participating in a ‘common design’ to commit war crimes (killings, beating, tortures, starvation, abuses and indignities) on thousands of foreign civilian nationals” and the second count read exactly the same except that it applied to “military members of belligerent nations”. Camp doctors such as Klein were not undertaking their traditional roles as protectors of life; rather, they were implicated in the suffering and murder of inmates. Klein did not carry out experiments on inmates, but as part of the Nazi medical corps (Sanitätswesen) operating within Nazi camps he was responsible for the medical care of prisoners.

Numerous medical experiments were carried out at Dachau including experiments in immunisation, malaria, freezing, seawater and high altitude. Physicians were sent to Dachau specifically for the purpose of conducting such experiments. These experiments were considered among some of the worst atrocities committed at Dachau because of their cruel and inhumane nature. Inmates were unwilling participants and suffered severe pain. Hundreds of prisoners died, were left disfigured or with permanent disability.

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14 ibid.


The nature of the charges at the Dachau Trial meant that the proceedings focused heavily on the experiments conducted on inmates. Five doctors were charged for their involvement in experiments. Over the course of proceedings the actions and guilt of camp doctors came into question. One report on the beginning of the trial did not mention commandant Martin Weiss but instead listed several doctors who were facing charges:

Chief defendants, in addition to Schilling, are Dr. Fritz Hintermeyer and Dr. Wilhelm Witteler, who are accused of conducting high altitude tests and cold water endurance tests on internees, many of whom died or lost their reason as a result.17

The headline “Dachau Camp Trial: Disease Experiments by Doctors” indicates how the trial focused on medical experimentation at the camp as opposed to other atrocities.18

Reports reflect the significant role doctors played in proceedings. The New York Times printed three reports in December that predominantly focused on medical atrocities committed at the camp.19 And, when newspapers covered the Dachau sentences, they specifically mentioned that five doctors had been found guilty.20 Schilling was named but Karl Puhl, Wilhelm Witteler, Fritz Hintermeier and Hans Eisele were not. The Washington Post stated also that those convicted in the Dachau Trial included five camp doctors and went on to describe Schilling’s crimes and mentioned that two others, Hintermeier and Paul Walter, were “charged with pressure experiments on prisoners for the benefit of

17 “U.S. Will Try 42 for Atrocities at Dachau Camp”, Chicago Daily Tribune, 3 November 1945, p. 3.
18 “Dachau Camp Trial”, The Times, 16 November 1945, p. 3.
20 “Dachau Trial Verdict”, The Times, 13 December 1945, p. 3.
the German air force”.

The Dachau Trial stressed the moral corruption of doctors and the Nazi regime and this was replicated in reportage.

**Doctors as Killers**

It is difficult to comprehend how highly educated and intelligent individuals were complicit in and indifferent to Nazi atrocities. German doctors’ participation in medical experiments and mass murder is one of the most disturbing aspects of the Nazi period. Camp doctors captured the imagination of the press because of the moral and ethical questions their behaviour posed. In April 1945, *Sunday Express* editor John Gordon addressed the complicity of the German medical profession in atrocities. Gordon was quick to indict the profession in its entirety asserting:

> The German medical profession was represented in every one of these torture camps, and carried out on human beings, in superbly equipped laboratories, medical and vivisection experiments which horrify a good many people in this country.

Their behaviour was also shocking as German doctors were world-leaders in scientific research.

In 1945, the Allied press portrayed Nazi doctors as though they possessed demonological qualities and as perverted and crazed individuals. Nikolaus Wachsmann likewise concludes that after the war, Nazi physicians essentially were depicted as solitary and mad scientists like Dr. Frankenstein, labouring secretly on macabre schemes. But as Wachsmann points out: “The truth is less lurid and more disturbing

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[because] most research was inspired by what passed for mainstream scientific thinking, and many perpetrators were respected members of the medical community”.25 Correspondents demonised Nazi doctors in the same way as other camp personnel. Nazi doctors were portrayed as irrational and depraved instead of well-adjusted, progressive and qualified doctors. As Gitta Sereny observed so well, “intelligence, of course, is not necessarily equated to morality”.26

There is widespread popular and scholarly interest in how doctors were made into killers under Nazism. Even before the end of the war there was interest in the psychology of Nazism in Britain and the United States with the prevalent attitude that Nazis were deviants.27 Scholars have since examined physicians’ complicity in the Nazi regime and their motivations for participating in medical atrocities.28

**Fritz Klein**
The senior doctor of Belsen, Fritz Klein, was identified as a Nazi perpetrator following liberation and was subsequently tried for his crimes. Klein was charged with attending and participating in selections for the gas chamber at Auschwitz-Birkenau, for the ill treatment of prisoners at Belsen and selecting “prostitutes for the camp brothels”.29 Prosecutors alleged Klein failed to try to improve conditions in Belsen or help inmates. Apparently, “the only time when he ever did anything to improve conditions in Belsen was when he knew the British were coming” and further evidence at the trial showed Klein “was content to neglect the camp completely”.30

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Fritz Klein (1888-1945), one of the most publicised defendants at the Belsen Trial, was born at Zeiden near Kronstadt in Rumania and considered himself a Rumanian subject of German nationality. Klein, then, was *Volksdeutsche*, or an ethnic German living beyond the borders of the Reich. After qualifying as a doctor in Budapest he served in the Romanian Army until the summer of 1943 before a treaty with Germany provided that all members of the German minority should continue service in the German Army. Klein claimed he joined the SS because “It was impossible to join the proper German Wehrmacht as one had to have German nationality for that”\(^{31}\). Assigned to Auschwitz in December 1943, Klein first served in the women’s compounds, the so-called Gypsy camp, the Theresienstadt family camp in Birkenau and finally in the *Auschwitz Stammlager*.\(^{32}\) In December 1944, he was sent to Neuengamme and in January 1945 he was transferred to Belsen where he assisted in handing over the camp to British forces. Klein was arrested and interrogated at Gifhorn military hospital on 14 June 1945.\(^{33}\)

Klein featured in several photographs after Belsen was liberated.\(^{34}\) A photograph published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in May 1945 showed Klein and a British soldier standing behind him. He was known as “Dr Klein” in the caption. The mass grave in the background and the women in the foreground of the original photograph were cropped out (Figure 8.1). Klein first appeared in a photograph published in the *Daily Worker* in April but he was not identified (Figure 8.2).\(^{35}\) In what had become an iconic photograph of the liberation of Belsen, Klein stands in a mass pit of dead bodies. He appeared in newspapers but the press was yet to establish his role at the camp and the exact nature of his crimes.

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\(^{31}\) Klein quoted in Friedlander, “Physicians as Killers”, p. 61.

\(^{32}\) For biographical details on Klein see ibid.

\(^{33}\) Weindling, *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials*, p. 86.


\(^{35}\) “Buchenwald Memory Will Haunt Us for Many Years”, *Daily Worker*, 28 April 1945, p. 3.
Figure 8.2: Fritz Klein stands in a mass grave at Belsen. Photograph appeared in: “Buchenwald Memory Will Haunt Us for Many Years”, Daily Worker, 28 April 1945, p. 3.

It was at the Belsen Trial that correspondents detailed Klein’s complicity in atrocities and reinforced his guilt. A Chicago Daily Tribune report on the Belsen sentences exemplifies his prominence:

The major defendants convicted with the 29 year old Kramer, were Irma Grese, 22, the blonde “queen” of the Belsen gang,
and Dr. Fritz Klein, grey haired physician who, witnesses said, picked victims for the Oswiecim gas chamber.\textsuperscript{36}

Reports emphasised Klein’s positioning as “defendant No. 2”.\textsuperscript{37} He was not given as much attention as Kramer or Grese, but he was repeatedly named alongside them.\textsuperscript{38} Klein was singled out in photographs during the trial, too. A photograph from \textit{The Times} showed him holding his cloth number in the dock.\textsuperscript{39}

Klein arguably appeared so often in reports of the Belsen proceedings as he had spent time at Auschwitz and was implicated in one of the most sensational crimes: gassings at Birkenau. Evidence given by witnesses at the trial relating to activities at Birkenau proliferated in reports due to the shocking nature of evidence.\textsuperscript{40} In a report titled “Auschwitz Gas Chamber Procedure” a witness identified Klein and other defendants “as persons concerned in running one or both camps”.\textsuperscript{41} He featured in another report when a witness identified him as having been “particularly vile to prisoners at Oswiecim”.\textsuperscript{42} The press reported on Klein under the assumption he was already guilty. There was no doubt about his complicity in atrocities with one report concluding he was “the Nazi doctor responsible for the death of thousands of people”.\textsuperscript{43}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} “Belsen Court Convicts 30 of Atrocities”, \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 17 November 1945, p. 2. This report incorrectly quoted Kramer’s age. Kramer was in fact 39 years old.
\item \textsuperscript{37} “13,000 People Died in Six Weeks at Belsen”, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 18 September 1945, p. 5; Anthony Mann, “Belsen Horror Trial Opens”, \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 18 September 1945, pp. 1, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{38} See, for example, “Belsen Inmates Saved by British, Woman Testifies”, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 26 September 1945, p. 5; “Extermination Thwarted”, \textit{New York Times}, 26 September 1945, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{39} “The Belsen Trial”, \textit{The Times}, 18 September 1945, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{40} “Belsen Shootings Seen by Britons”, \textit{New York Times}, 19 September 1945, p. 11; “Gas Chamber at Auschwitz”, \textit{The Times}, 22 September 1945, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{41} “Belsen Guards Identified by Polish Woman Doctor”, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 22 September 1945, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{42} “Belsen Inmates Saved by British”, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{43} “Belsen Trial Court on Visit to Scene”, \textit{Jewish Advocate}, 27 September 1945, p. 1.
\end{itemize}
Klein intrigued correspondents. When the Belsen defendants were taken back to the camp during the trial proceedings, Vincent Evans from the *Daily Express* observed Klein’s behaviour:

Klein the camp doctor, throughout the tour had to suffer the indignity not only of being handcuffed to Kramer, but also of having to hold up his trousers with his free hand, as he like the other prisoners had been deprived of braces and belt.  

Evans, the first correspondent to enter Belsen after liberation, went on to detail Klein’s response to a witness identifying him in court. Evans described how Klein “winced, dropped his eyes and was obviously upset at being confronted so calmly by a woman from his own camp”. Several reports also mentioned specific crimes of which Klein had been accused, including “picking victims for the Oswiecim gas chambers”. Mentioning that Klein had taken part in the selections confirmed his guilt. That Klein was involved in the gassings was in many instances the first thing readers learned about him. The emphasis on his time at Auschwitz presumably caused confusion over the true functionality of Belsen. The *Daily Herald* referred to Klein as “the gas chamber specialist” and this title further reinforced his portrayal as cold and calculating.

Correspondents appeared surprised by the forthcoming nature of Klein’s admissions and the detailed evidence he gave. One report commented that he “sounded like a witness for the prosecution as he told how aged, weak, sick, pregnant women, and children up to 15 were selected for execution”. Press interest in Klein was re-ignited when he

45 ibid.
made shocking admissions during the trial. A report titled “I Chose Victims for the Gas Chamber: Belsen Camp Doctor’s Admissions” suggests the level of scrutiny Klein’s crimes received.\(^50\) Klein accepted the accusations against him and admitted he was responsible for “killing thousands in these camps”.\(^51\)

Klein was portrayed in the media as indifferent to victims’ suffering. He was grouped with perpetrators designated as “Belsen beasts” and labelled a “typical German”, which was significant because Klein was actually a Romanian Volksdeutsche.\(^52\) Like other perpetrators, his demeanour was used to highlight his cruelty. Klein figured prominently in a Times report on the trial proceedings in which a witness described him as “callous and indifferent” and the report further detailed his behaviour in court.\(^53\) Reports noted he appeared “expressionless” during witness testimony and watched proceedings with a “glassy stare”.\(^54\) Klein perplexed observers even though his behaviour was consistent with assumptions about Nazi perpetrators as barbarous and unemotional. One report detailed how he “spoke with strangely insensitive candour of his part in selecting victims for the gas chamber”.\(^55\) He used the common Nazi defence that he was obeying orders and newspapers presented Klein as a typical Nazi who, despite claiming he disapproved of the gas chambers, did nothing to protest.

The Manchester Guardian provided a range of details about Klein describing how his “high-pitched voice faltered under the prosecution’s persuasive questioning” and observing that he was the “oldest and most

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\(^{50}\) “I Chose Victims for Gas Chamber”, Manchester Guardian, 6 October 1945, p. 7.


\(^{52}\) For example, “Belsen Beasts Are Typical Germans”, Manchester Guardian, 31 October 1945, p. 8.

\(^{53}\) “At Liberation of Belsen”, The Times, 19 September 1945, p. 3.


cultured” of the defendants.\textsuperscript{56} He also was referred to as an “educated” man. Although Klein was evidently intelligent, Anthony Mann was quick to suggest that he was actually quite insipid. Mann wrote that “in contrast to Kramer’s quick brain [Klein was] a dull, almost senile witness”.\textsuperscript{57} Correspondents pointed out that Klein was educated and cultured as this seemed to be inconsistent with his actions. Doctors are thought to be moral and intelligent individuals and that so many Nazi doctors participated in cruel and inhumane medical experiments reinforced the corruption of the Nazi regime. The term “doctor” was even placed in quotation marks in a report implying Klein was not performing the normal duties of a doctor. He may have been qualified but he did not adhere to ethical or moral codes and his role at Belsen and Auschwitz obviously was not that of a typical doctor.\textsuperscript{58}

When the Belsen executions were carried out in December 1945, Klein once again was identified as among those hanged, whilst other defendants remained nameless.\textsuperscript{59} A photograph of Klein leaving the courtroom upon hearing his sentence also was published in a number of newspapers with accompanying captions noting he was “snivelling” and “tearful”.\textsuperscript{60}

Klein was considered among the three major defendants at the trial. His prominence in news coverage is partly due to the fact that he was the most well-known doctor from Belsen and along with Kramer he assisted in handing over the camp to the British. Klein was an easily recognisable perpetrator in the first days after liberation. He also was one of the defendants charged with crimes at both Belsen and Auschwitz. Moreover, Klein featured in one of the most iconic photographs taken at

\textsuperscript{56} ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Norman Clark, “Camp Doctor ‘I Knew It Was Murder’”, \textit{News Chronicle}, 11 October 1945, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{58} “Irma Admits Belsen Guilt”, \textit{Daily Herald}, 6 October 1945, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{60} “Belsen Trial: Final Scene”, \textit{Daily Herald}, 20 November 1945, p. 4; “Their Sentence Was Death”, \textit{News Chronicle}, 20 November 1945, p. 4.
Belsen that showed him standing in a mass grave (Figure 8.2). This photograph was published widely and contributed to the press attention he received. Klein’s rationalisation of his actions also made him fascinating. His motivations and reasoning perplexed observers, as he believed he had adhered to his medical obligations declaring:

Of course I am a doctor and I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is a gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind.\(^{61}\)

But Jews were not his only victims. This declaration was sensational and drew more attention to him. His mind-set suggested the moral and ethical decay of not only Nazi doctors but also the German population more broadly under Nazism and indicated the racial theories that informed National Socialist policy.

**Klaus Schilling**

Although no individual doctors were singled out for blame in press reports after Dachau was liberated, the medical experiments were reported to be among some of the worst atrocities and a number of camp doctors were detained. Schilling was one of those arrested and later put on trial at the former camp grounds. He was charged with war crimes for conducting medical experiments on prisoners. Schilling was not the only doctor to participate in medical atrocities at the camp but he received intense press scrutiny.

Schilling (1871-1946) was born in Munich and received his medical degree in 1895. A renowned German tropical medicine specialist, Schilling studied in the United States and received grants from the Rockefeller Foundation for his work in helping to eradicate tropical disease in Africa.\(^{62}\) As a noted bacteriologist, he was connected to the

\(^{61}\) Klein quoted in Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, p. 16.

prestigious Robert Koch Institute in Berlin prior to his involvement in experiments at Dachau.63

Schilling’s malaria experiments were one of the largest concentration camp medical trials. Already in his seventies, Schilling had spent his career searching for a vaccine. Himmler was keen to find a drug to protect troops from malaria in the occupied east and requested Schilling come out of retirement and work on antidotes.64 Schilling’s experiments began in February 1942 and continued until the camp fell apart in spring 1945. Experiments involved the subject being bitten by mosquitoes carrying the virus or through direct injection and these were frequently performed on Roman Catholic priests.65 Many of those infected died from tuberculosis, dysentery and typhus.66 Schilling infected between 1,000 and 2,000 inmates with an unknown number of fatalities.67

Before the Dachau Trial commenced, *Stars and Stripes* identified Schilling as a key perpetrator and in many ways foreshadowed subsequent newspaper coverage of him and his crimes.68 Numerous newspapers identified him in reports at the beginning of the Dachau Trial.69 During proceedings, quality British newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* also referred specifically to Schilling.70 The *Washington Post* claimed that he “headed” the defendants and the *Los Angeles Times* referred to his status as “the No. 1 defendant”

63 See ibid.
64 ibid. p. 88.
65 ibid.
68 “40 Defendants to Face Dachau Court Today”, *Stars and Stripes*, 15 November 1945, p. 3; “Doctor Torture at Dachau Told; 42 Are Indicted”, *Stars and Stripes*, 12 November 1945, p. 8.
70 “Dachau Hearing Begins To-day”, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 November 1945, p. 6; “Dachau Trial Starts; Camp Horrors Pictured”, *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 1945, p. 6; “Dachau Camp Trial”, p. 3.
implying that he was the central figure of the trial and attention should be directed towards him.\textsuperscript{71} This is despite the fact that during the trial Schilling wore an identification cloth with the number fifteen on it.

Interest in Schilling continued as the trial progressed. Following the witness testimony of Franz Blaha, newspapers reported on the evidence relating to Schilling’s experiments.\textsuperscript{72} When witness Eugene Selbold accused “three of the defendants” of shooting inmates without cause, their names did not appear but when evidence was given about Schilling he was identified by name.\textsuperscript{73}

His experiments received the most publicity of any medical atrocities carried out at Dachau. The \textit{New York Times} listed specific acts of brutality carried out at the camp including “Dr. Klaus Schilling’s malaria experiments that killed hundreds otherwise doomed to starve”.\textsuperscript{74} Other perpetrators were relatively unknown and they were overshadowed by Schilling’s notoriety. The \textit{Washington Post} singled out both Weiss and Schilling in its report on 15 November 1945 noting they “listened expressionless” to witness testimony.\textsuperscript{75} These two were once again the only defendants identified in reports after sentences were handed down.\textsuperscript{76} Other doctors were occasionally mentioned but they did not interest correspondents to the same degree.\textsuperscript{77} A substantial report concentrated on Schilling, giving his background and detailing the experiments he conducted at Dachau.\textsuperscript{78} A photograph of him was published alongside the report (Figure 8.3). The report noted: “He

\textsuperscript{72} “Nazis Executed 8000 Russians, Czech Says”, \textit{The Washington Post}, 17 November 1945, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{73} “Record of 100,000 Deaths Presented at Dachau Trial”, \textit{The Washington Post}, 21 November 1945, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{74} “Belsen and Dachau”, \textit{New York Times}, 15 December 1945, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{75} “Dachau Horror Told”, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{76} “Dachau Death Sentences”, \textit{Jewish Chronicle}, 21 December 1945, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{77} For example, “Dachau Camp Trial”, p. 3; “U.S. Will Try 42”, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{78} “Scientist Doctor on Trial at Dachau Says Fatal Tests Led to Malaria Cure”, \textit{Stars and Stripes}, 7 December 1945, p. 3.
represents, the prosecution points out, the Nazi approach to science as surely as Goering and company represent the Nazi philosophy toward government and law”. 79 It appears his actions were seen as typical of those of all doctors put on trial.

Figure 8.3: Klaus Schilling. Image appeared in: “Scientist Doctor Trial at Dachau Says Fatal Tests Led to Malaria Cure”, Stars and Stripes, 7 December 1945, p. 3.

The fascination with Schilling was possibly connected to the nature of the experiments he carried out. Medical experts disagreed as to the benefit of his research. Stars and Stripes informed readers that the Surgeon General’s Office found the results “worthwhile” and claimed it had “advanced the cure of malaria”. 80 Schilling gave evidence during proceedings and maintained he had “discovered a vaccine immunizing against malaria”. 81 His assertions were controversial.

79 ibid.
80 ibid.
81 “Dachau Claims Malaria Aid”, Stars and Stripes, 8 December 1945, p. 3.
Correspondents closely watched to see what sentence Schilling would receive. The *Manchester Guardian* confirmed that Schilling had been condemned to death along with four other doctors and a similar report featured in *The Times*. A *New York Times* report on the Dachau sentences grouped the defendants together noting “the accused took their sentences stoically, although several bowed their heads when the verdict was read”. The report went on to describe how Schilling “blinked his eyes and bowed his bearded head when he heard the death verdict announced”. References also were made to his behaviour in court. Schilling was described as “expressionless” in the *Washington Post* during witness testimony and this seems to have confirmed perceptions of him as callous as it highlighted his disregard for victims’ suffering. *Stars and Stripes*, however, commented that he tearfully pleaded in court and the *Los Angeles Times* stated that, following the sentences where Schilling received death by hanging, he “broke down and cried”.

Intrigue intensified when Schilling pleaded to the court that “for the benefit of humanity” he be permitted to live so he could complete his research on a cure for malaria. Schilling’s concern for his own life and the fact that he was upset that his work may go to waste showed observers that he was staunchly devoted to his research, but also reinforced the lack of compassion he had for victims. It confirmed to the public how misguided Nazi doctors had become under National Socialism. Schilling claimed during the trial that he was working for the greater good of mankind, ultimately saving millions of lives in the

84 “36 Dachau Killers to Die by Hanging”, *New York Times*, 14 December 1945, p. 11.
85 “Dachau Horror Told”, p. 6.
future. In his cross-examination Schilling noted his acceptance to carry out experiments at Dachau:

Plac[ing] the concerns a doctor would have before performing experiments with human beings on one side of the scale and on the importance of those experiments on the other.

Schilling not only used this as a defence strategy but also apparently believed that his work was worthwhile and necessary. Schilling was an excellent example of how individuals under Nazism, even those who were not members of the Nazi Party or SS, had become normalised to Nazi brutality.

Press attention also was directed towards Schilling since he disputed the facts of the case against him. Schilling argued he inoculated only 500 persons and stated none of them had died. He insisted his subjects were willing and cooperative and claimed any deaths were from other causes like general camp conditions, not his experiments. Schilling even called character witnesses “who testified that his colleagues regarded him as a serious scientist and that his reputation for truth was untouchable.”

Another key detail distinguished Schilling from other Nazi doctors. He was not a member of the Nazi Party. Part of his defence tactic at the Dachau Trial was to separate himself from the other defendants by pointing out he was not a member of the SS, Nazi Party or any other Nazi organisation. Kathleen McLaughlin, in the New York Times, even stated that all but one of the Dachau defendants were SS men:

The single civilian arraigned was Dr. Klaus Schilling, who planned and supervised the inhuman medical experiments on

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87 Spitz, Doctors from Hell, p. 105.
88 Bazyler and Tuerkheimer, Forgotten Trials, p. 89.
89 Wachsmann, KL, p. 611.
90 Bazyler and Tuerkheimer, Forgotten Trials, p. 89.
91 ibid.
the Dachau prisoners in a futile attempt to find an antidote for malaria. He will be one of the major figures in the forthcoming trial.\footnote{McLaughlin, “42 Men”, p. 29.}

McLaughlin foresaw the significant role Schilling was to play in the proceedings and her report exemplifies how this focus was replicated in the press. Since he was not an SS member he was commonly cited as being the only German civilian or non-Nazi member on trial.\footnote{ibid.; “U.S. Will Try 42”, p. 3.} A \textit{Los Angeles Times} report named Schilling for this reason and grouped the other defendants together collectively.\footnote{“Allies Accuse 42 of Dachau Staff”, p. 6.}

Schilling was a focal point of press reporting since the trial concentrated heavily on the medical experiments conducted at Dachau. His achievements in the field of tropical medicine meant he was singled out among the defendants. Schilling was 74 years old when he stood trial and this further set him apart. Several reports mentioned that he was “aged” and “grey-bearded”.\footnote{“Dachau Doctor Pleads for Life to Finish Work”, p. 8; “Scientist Doctor on Trial at Dachau Says Fatal Tests Led to Malaria Cure”, p. 3.} The nature of his research and the fact that he pleaded to be allowed to continue his work also grabbed correspondents’ attention. Schilling typified how few doctors involved in human experiments and genocide had little sense of guilt and was a prime example of the archetypal German scientist “who pursues his legitimate scientific ends without thought of the ways he is pursuing them”.\footnote{Weindling, \textit{Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials}, pp. 42-43.}

\section*{Conclusion}
The unprecedented nature of atrocities committed by Nazi physicians ensured press interest. Nazi medical abuses and inhumane practices provided scandalous material for correspondents. Observers were aghast at the perversions of science under Nazism. The enduring fascination with Nazi doctors and their transformation from healers into
killers can be traced back to 1945 and the first reporting of medical atrocities in concentration camps. It can be seen most clearly in the attention given to Nazi doctors during the Belsen and Dachau trials. From the outset, correspondents struggled to understand their involvement in camp crimes and ultimately portrayed these individuals as ideologically crazed and unrepentant doctors.
CHAPTER 9
German Monstrousness, Martin Weiss and the “Beast of Belsen” Josef Kramer

The next morning I drove round with the camp commandant in a jeep. He was a typical German brute—a cruel, sadistic, heavy-featured Nazi. He was quite unashamed.

Belsen report: “Cannibalism in Prison Camp”,
_The Manchester Guardian_, 19 April 1945, p. 5.

How can the utter absence of moral and human values which is being described to us be explained? How do human beings sink to the level where they batter the life out of starved and naked fellow creatures as part of the ordinary day’s routine?

Belsen Trial report: Anthony Mann,
“Inhuman Torture and Murder Everyday Routine”,
_Daily Telegraph_, 29 September 1945, p. 2.

Stories about Nazi perpetrators and their monstrous crimes dominated coverage of liberation and the subsequent Allied military trials. This chapter considers how those alleged to be responsible for camp crimes were collectively described in the press. Enduring ideas about perpetrators’ character and motivations in many ways can be linked back to the monstrous narrative that dominated reportage of concentration camps in 1945. Correspondents quickly identified Josef Kramer as a key perpetrator referring to him as the “Beast of Belsen”. This chapter scrutinises the evolution of Kramer’s presentation in the press from liberation to the Belsen Trial, particularly his physical appearance and demeanour. By contrast, Dachau Commandant Martin Weiss was captured after liberation but did not receive the same level of attention.
Why did the press single out Kramer and personalise his crimes while overlooking Weiss?

**German Monstrousness**

In the spring of 1945 correspondents grouped personnel together and pointed to their criminal involvement in Nazi crimes. One newspaper referred to them as “guards, all of them Himmler’s SS men”.¹ The *Sunday Express* report, titled “The Murder Gang of Belsen Spread this Horror in the Name of the Germans”, exemplifies how the term “gang” was utilised to collectivise camp personnel and emphasise their deviance.² “Gang” suggested camp personnel were an organised group who worked together to engage in criminal acts. The term highlighted camp personnel’s alleged guilt and the deliberate nature of their crimes. Perpetrator cruelty was further reinforced with reference to the Belsen defendants as “specialists in human misery”.³

Correspondents were fascinated by guards’ behaviour. They even asked soldiers about their perception of the personnel. A *Times* report, for example, stated: “The guards, both men and women, are remarkably sturdy and seem unperturbed by all that is going on”.⁴ Other studies of the media’s coverage of liberation similarly conclude that correspondents who visited camps were quick to point out irreverent behaviour of any kind and any lack of remorse.⁵ Correspondents detailed how camp personnel were indifferent to their victims’ suffering and unremorseful, indicating to them that perpetrators were everything they had believed about the Nazis. In reference to inmates’ starved condition

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¹ “Murder Camps”, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1945, p. 4.
a *Daily Telegraph* report stated: “Himmler’s SS men betray something more than an utterly callous indifference to their suffering”.  

British and American newspapers also likened camp perpetrators to “beasts” and “monsters” as correspondents tried to capture their violence. Perpetrators’ sadism and cruelty was emphasised with constant references to the brutality of their crimes. Only days after liberation, a caption accompanying a photograph of a mass grave at Belsen described guards as “Nazi beasts who ruled the concentration camp”.  

A *Daily Worker* report from April 1945 also stated that fascism had “turned tens of thousands of Germans into monsters, wild beasts who bear no resemblance to human beings” and went on to describe crimes at Belsen as an “abandonment of every moral precept [and] a collapse into the slime of bestiality”.  

Although the report, by newspaper editor and communist activist William Rust, was quite sensational, it underlines the way in which perpetrators’ monstrousness was emphasised. Similar language was used later in 1945 with the *Jewish Advocate* stating: “The slaughter of 4 million Jews and other prisoners was the work of a comparatively small group of male and female monsters” and the *New York Times* referring to defendants from the Dachau Trial collectively as “Dachau monsters, like those of Belsen”.

The alliteration of “Belsen Beasts” made good headlines. Whilst “beast” was employed in a collective sense, it was most commonly used in reference to Kramer who became known as “The Beast”, indicating the special treatment he received in the press. These sorts of appellations were used more widely for other camp personnel, too, as

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6 “Murder Camps”, p. 4.

7 “MPs to Visit Hell Camps”, *Daily Worker*, 20 April 1945, p. 1.

8 William Rust, “The Death Camps”, *Daily Worker*, 21 April 1945, p. 2. Rust, a communist activist, was editor of the newspaper from 1939 until his death in 1949.

seen by the case of Ilse Koch from Buchenwald who was known as “the Bitch of Buchenwald”.  

The term “monster” generally refers to the “loathsome, terrifying or dangerous” and perpetrators whose crimes inspired horror and disgust were depicted as monsters.  

The concept of monstrousness seemed fitting, too, for there were no existing legal categories into which concentration camp crimes could be placed. They were considered inexplicable and the criminal charges seemed inadequate for the crimes. In discussing ideas of monstrousness, Penny Crofts writes that the image of the monster emerges “when categories and systems of order are exhausted”. Camp atrocities were unprecedented and the actions of former camp personnel were beyond the law’s understanding. 

The term “beasts” demonised camp perpetrators. A beast commonly denotes a brutal, uncivilised, or filthy animal that is savage in nature. They are considered dangerous and violent. Correspondents appear to have used “monster” and “beast” interchangeably although not all beasts are monsters. Monsters who are likened to beasts assume animal-like characteristics. Using the term “beast” stripped perpetrators of their humanity.

Describing camp personnel in this way portrayed them as evil and fundamentally different from “normal” people. Social psychologist James Waller is critical of the simplistic way correspondents’ characterised perpetrators and aptly points out they built on the existing tradition of Allied propaganda that “portrayed the Nazis as uniquely

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10 Koch was the wife of Karl-Otto Koch, who was commandant of Buchenwald from 1937-1941 and Majdanek from 1941-1943. She was accused of taking the tattooed skin of inmates as souvenirs and was tried by an American military court in 1947.


13 ibid. p. 91.

diabolical, sinister, viciously sadistic, and demonically deranged”.  

This was the case in many of the first reports, and although Hitler and the Nazis were the main targets, all Germans were stereotyped as evil. Early Allied representations of perpetrators, then, were based on the general belief that Nazis were all the same, but drastically different from “us”.

Nazi camp guards continue to appear as unhinged sadists in the popular imagination. 

This image likely draws on the monstrous paradigm of camp guards that was established following liberation. But it also can be linked to prisoner memoirs, which similarly used nicknames such as “beast” to describe concentration camp personnel.

Germans had not suddenly become the “other” at the moment of liberation. Ideas of German monstrousness existed since the First World War. As Chapters 3 and 4 established, the Western Allies had for years thought of themselves as morally different from Germans. In Chapter 1 it was shown that the idea of Germans as barbaric had persisted in propaganda since the First World War. Pre-existing notions, then, influenced reporting. Correspondents wrote within the conventions of the time, deliberately employing terms such as “monsters” and “beasts” to capture the nature of their crimes and emphasise perpetrators’ brutality.

An inability to relate to perpetrators and understand their motivations, their emotions, and priorities led to a form of “othering”. Similar trends have been observed in British soldiers’ responses to Belsen. The same could be said of members of the press. Instead of acknowledging that each and every perpetrator had different feelings, beliefs, and may have been involved in running concentration camps for varying reasons, they were collectively made into the “other”. This also reinforced group

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16 Wachsmann, KL, p. 17.
17 ibid.
cohesion highlighting the pervasiveness of the “us versus them” narrative. Distinctions between good and evil, liberators and perpetrators, were reaffirmed. The dichotomy of good and bad, moral and immoral is comforting but it does not help us to understand why ordinary people commit mass murder.\textsuperscript{19} You do not have to be inherently evil to commit evil acts. The contemporary issues correspondents grappled with in explaining perpetrators’ motivations have been echoed in more recent historiography.\textsuperscript{20} Depicting Nazi camp perpetrators as “monsters” and “beasts” precluded a deeper examination of the motivations and choices perpetrators made. Omer Bartov warns that this kind of thinking prevents understanding of how camp crimes occurred and provides a monocausal explanation for perpetrators actions.\textsuperscript{21}

More recently, controversy surrounding the release of the 2004 German film \textit{Downfall} suggests how those who commit evil acts are frequently labelled as monsters.\textsuperscript{22} The film, depicting the final ten days of Hitler’s rule of Nazi Germany, received criticism because it humanised Hitler, which made some viewers uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{23} Criticism of the film and specifically its portrayal of Hitler highlights how difficult it can be to accept that Nazi perpetrators were not monsters and underlines the ongoing influence of the “first draft” of concentration camp history. The film dramatically portrays Hitler as seemingly insane, however,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Oliver Hirschbiegel, “Downfall”, Constantin Film, (2004).
\end{itemize}
there also is potential evocation of sympathy for him.  

Gitta Sereny convincingly exposes the myth that evil people are somehow fundamentally different. In her 1974 book *Into That Darkness* she concluded that former commandant of Treblinka extermination camp Franz Stangl was an ordinary man who committed evil acts. Sereny argues we are not born monsters but rather all humans have a choice between right and wrong, good and evil. Although, she is quite equivocal about what Stangl’s motives were and felt he was not open with her.

As the focus shifted from the collective to individual perpetrators, the press increasingly portrayed camp personnel as representative of the evils of the Nazi regime by singling out specific acts of cruelty. Correspondents also pointed towards psychological explanations. The “Mad Nazi” thesis was widespread at the time, especially exemplified by the IMT Nuremberg Trial in 1945-1946. Mental health professionals assigned to Nuremberg questioned how many psychological issues they would find, not if they would find them at all. The thesis was appealing since it assumed the presence of some sort of mental disorder, which could account for perpetrator behaviour. In other words, there was something fundamentally wrong with camp personnel. This theory appealed to correspondents since it meant such crimes could be prevented by not letting such people into power. Although later research disproved the mad-Nazi thesis, in 1945 it played an important role in responses to Nazi crimes.


25 Sereny, *Into That Darkness*.

26 ibid. p. 367.

27 For details on the mad-Nazi thesis see Waller, *Becoming Evil*, pp. 61-63.
**Perpetrators in Photographic Images**

Perpetrators were presented in photographic images in a manner that strengthened their portrayal as “monsters”. Photographers who visited camps used various techniques in capturing the personnel making conscious decisions to photograph them in specific positions and favouring certain styles. Perpetrators were shown under Allied guard and handcuffed or shackled. This possibly reassured readers that Nazi criminals were going to be punished. Recent research similarly indicates perpetrators dominated images of the camp and this was part of a deliberate effort to highlight their alleged guilt. Photographs in many cases depicted perpetrators at harsh angles and in stiff upright postures. Furthermore, their faces were often shaded, they had narrowed eyes and pursed lips and they never looked directly at the camera. They appear dark and sinister. Such photographs reflected perpetrators so-called monstrousness and were in line with accompanying descriptions of them as cold and evil characters.

Portraits of perpetrators appeared in newspapers and invoked comparison with criminal mug shots. Photographing perpetrators in this style was deliberate. It suggested their criminality was a foregone conclusion. Carol Zemel considers photographs taken at concentration camps by Margaret Bourke-White and Lee Miller and their cultural force as icons of Nazi atrocity. Zemel comments on the unsettling nature of portrait-style photographs contending: “For in tempting us to scrutinise the face of evil or sadistic character, the portraits capture and objectify perpetrators and supply occasion for multiple hatreds—theirs and ours”. Close-up photographs certainly called on viewers to study

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28 For example, “Photo Standalone”, p. 36.

29 See Mark Celinscak, At War’s End: Allied Forces at Bergen-Belsen, (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, York University, 2012). Celinscak examines the liberation and relief of Belsen and the involvement of both British and Canadian forces, through personal narratives of military personnel as they responded to conditions in the camp.


perpetrators’ faces and reflect on their mind-set and character. This format was a simple way to capture facial appearance. The Allied public was invited to analyse the subjects and identify physical traits that may justify their brutality. This style of photograph appeared in press coverage of the Belsen Trial and again reinforced perpetrators’ status as criminals. Indeed, mug shots of Nazi perpetrators appear in museums all over the world including, for instance, the IWM Holocaust exhibition in London. Interest in perpetrators’ faces may have been partly due to the assumption that criminality was linked to facial features in arguments about physiognomy. It has been suggested that this interest found an outlet in trial mug shots that were published in the press because it allowed observers to discern “truth” in the reactions of the accused. 32

One of the most common photographs published during the trials was of defendants in the dock holding cloth numbers. 33 The numbers were used for identification purposes during proceedings but also were a form of humiliation. Defendants were referred to by their number instead of their name. Sington describes the numbers defendants wore for identification purposes as a type of degradation that “made one think of prize cattle”. He further writes: “It is curious how the incidentally degrading device helped a feeling that there was something less than human about these prisoners”. 34 Daniel Patrick Brown, likewise, has pointed out that the numbers made proceedings appear like a “cattle-show”. 35 This type of photograph was popular perhaps because it showed perpetrators in a vulnerable position in which they were humiliated and demeaned. Photographs in a number of newspapers depicted several defendants, or

33 For example, Mann, “Belsen Horror”, pp. 1, 6.
shots of the entire group holding their numbers.36 Defendants appear with expressionless faces, their gaze diverted from the camera. Headlines even played on the presence of the cloth numbers. The headline “The Chances Are Good That Their Numbers Are Up” in a *Stars and Stripes* report about the trial included a photograph of male defendants in the Belsen dock and a photograph of female defendants in a similar position (Figures 9.1 and 9.2).37

![Figure 9.1: Defendants at the Belsen Trial, including Josef Kramer (no. 1) and Fritz Klein (no. 2). Photograph appeared in: “The Chances Are Good That Their Numbers Are Up”, *Stars and Stripes*, 23 September 1945, p. 1. Source: “Luneburg, Germany, the Commencing of the Trial of the Criminals of Bergen Belsen”, Yad Vashem Photo Archive, 1584/195, <http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/12152.html>.](image)


Martin Weiss and Josef Kramer

Obersturmbannführer Martin Weiss, commandant of Dachau, was captured by American forces and put on trial in 1945 but he received very little attention in the media. On the other hand, his Belsen counterpart Kramer became so notorious that not only British reports but also American newspapers regularly mentioned him.38 Even though the Dachau Trial was officially titled “United States vs. Martin Gottfried Weiss et al.” and, like Kramer, Weiss was the lead defendant, he did not receive the same level of scrutiny. Weiss was a key figure but was largely ignored in the press. Why did Kramer become the most notorious perpetrator so quickly?

Kramer (1906-1945) was born in Munich to a middle-class family. Largely unemployed throughout the 1920s, Kramer joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and volunteered for the SS the following year. Kramer was assigned to Dachau in 1934 and worked as a clerk. His devotion to orders earned him promotions at Sachsenhausen and Mauthausen. It was at Mauthausen that Kramer first dealt with prisoners directly and was

38 For example, “German Prison Sadist Stoned by Prisoners”, Los Angeles Times, 22 April 1945, p. 6.
involved in atrocities. 39 In 1940, Kramer assisted Rudolf Hoess in choosing and developing a site for the Auschwitz camp. Once again his strict discipline received praise and he became commandant of Natzweiler in April 1941. 40 In 1943, Kramer participated in the gassings of some 80 Jewish men and women at Natzweiler who were selected to be part of a group to become anatomical specimens in a proposed Jewish skeleton collection. The collection was to be housed at the Anatomy Institute at the Reich University of Strasbourg under the direction of August Hirt. 41

Kramer was promoted to Hauptsturmführer in 1942 and, in May 1944, he was put in charge of the gas chambers at Birkenau. 42 In December 1944, he was transferred to Belsen where he ruled harshly and was responsible for the regime that included beatings and torture, and setting dogs on prisoners. Whilst many guards fled as British forces neared the camp, Kramer stayed on and was present when British forces arrived. He was incarcerated in Hamelin prison. Kramer was charged on both counts of the indictment at the Belsen Trial. Count One related to the “violation of the law and usages of war” and responsibility for the “ill-treatment” and “deaths” of several Allied nationals at Belsen and the “physical suffering of other persons interned there”. 43 Count Two read identically to the first but applied to crimes at Auschwitz. The most serious accusation was that he carried out selections for the gas chamber at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Other crimes included “mass murder, shooting 22 prisoners, beating a Russian girl who attempted to escape and ordering prisoners to ‘make


sport’ with other prisoners”. The British had little doubt that he was “implicated absolutely in the events at Belsen” and the prosecution attempted to show that he was culpable of neglect at Belsen and therefore responsible for the terrible conditions.

Weiss (1905-1946) was born in Weiden and studied mechanical engineering. An early devotee of the Nazi movement Weiss joined the Nazi Party in 1926 and became a founding member of the Weiden SA and later the Weiden SS. He was a graduate of Theodore Eicke’s school of camp terror. Weiss worked at Dachau intermittently between 1933 and 1945. From 1933 to 1938 he was in charge of technical issues at the camp including electrical power and heating and he worked as adjutant (second in command) of the camp between 1938 and 1940. From 1940 to 1942 he was commandant of Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg but was transferred back to Dachau acting as commandant from September 1942 to November 1943. Weiss was then sent to Majdanek where he was commandant until May 1944. He returned to Dachau only days before its liberation. Before American forces arrived at Dachau, Weiss and more than 1,000 SS guards fled the camp. On 29 April 1945, Henry C Senger, then a nineteen year-old corporal from Brooklyn, captured the former commandant. Senger’s unit had been sent to Munich to help military police round up remnants of the retreating German army. Two escaped Dachau inmates in striped camp uniform approached Senger and informed him that the two men across the street in civilian clothing were the commandant and adjutant of Dachau. Weiss was subsequently detained and later tried by an American military court because he was

44 “Kramer and Grese among the Belsen Guilty”, p. 6.
47 Wachsmann, KL, p. 195.
48 Bazyler and Tuerkheimer, Forgotten Trials, pp. 85-86.
the highest-ranking SS officer at the camp and acting commandant for two days before liberation. Charged “in pursuance of a common design” he was held responsible for medical experiments at the camp since he was commandant during the period they were carried out.

When Weiss was put on trial at Dachau he received nowhere near the same level of media attention as Kramer. An October 1945 *New York Times* report entitled “Dachau officials Will Face Trial” outlined the upcoming trial and named three doctors who were to face charges, but Weiss was not mentioned. During proceedings Weiss was sometimes named in reports and again after sentencing he was identified in a number of newspapers and one report was even titled “Boss of Dachau Doomed to Hang with 35 Others”. The *Washington Post* described him as “black-bearded” but no further information about his appearance, crimes or demeanour was included. Whereas correspondents dissected Kramer’s response to sentencing, Weiss was grouped with other defendants. A *Manchester Guardian* report, for instance, mentioned that Weiss and others “laughed as they left the court”. The *Jewish Advocate* even neglected to refer to Weiss in its report on sentencing.

Kramer arguably was singled out rather than Weiss for two reasons. First, Kramer was directly linked to Belsen whereas Weiss’ command of Dachau was vague. Weiss was an obvious choice for blame for camp atrocities because of his position as commandant but he did not preside over the final brutal phase of the camp’s existence. Kramer was held personally responsible for the awful state of Belsen. Second, Kramer was directly linked to monstrous acts at both Auschwitz and Belsen whereas Weiss was not seen as a monster even though he had been at

52 “Dachau Horror Told”, p. 6.
multiple camps including Majdanek. Rather than giving the two commandants equal coverage the press fixated on “the monster” and his heinous crimes.

Kramer was captured as soon as the camp was liberated and his behaviour surprised correspondents and soldiers alike. When British forces arrived he seemed relaxed and willing to assist in their takeover of the camp. In fact, he was the only commandant not to flee a concentration camp. Kramer was accessible to both correspondents and photographers in the days following liberation. It appears the press made the most of the opportunity to document and scrutinise the behaviour of a camp commandant. But interest in Kramer was not simply because he was commandant. Kramer was prioritised as he had spent time at Auschwitz-Birkenau and had been involved in gassings. Moreover, there was interest in his role as commandant of Belsen during the months before liberation when the camp descended into an abyss of horror. Kramer was considered emblematic of the evils of National Socialism, in so far as he was obedient to authority and undertook his role in mass murder with unwavering dedication and fervour. Kramer served the SS with a deep sense of duty, both ideological and emotional, and became part of the escalating system of brutality.

Importantly, Weiss had only returned to Dachau a few days before liberation. Former commandant Eduard Weiter (1889-1945) had been in charge of Dachau since 1943, but he left for Tyrol on 26 April 1945 with a transport of prisoners who were evacuated. Weiter showed little interest in the camp during his time as commandant, letting his subordinates deal with the day-to-day administration. Ideologically apathetic, Weiter did not join the Nazi Party until 1937. He spent most

56 Segev, Soldiers of Evil, p. 51.
57 Dillon, Dachau and the SS, p. 250.
of his time in his office, had minimal contact with prisoners and made only small changes at Dachau.\footnote{See Segev, \textit{Soldiers of Evil}, pp. 131-132.}

A seeming lack of attachment to Dachau may account for why Weiss was overlooked by the press. Moreover, Weiss was considered a relatively benevolent commandant in contrast to Kramer.\footnote{Marcuse, \textit{Legacies of Dachau}, p. 51.} His earlier and lengthier time presiding over Dachau was less brutal and he was known as the “good commandant” due to a number of changes he implemented. This image of Weiss as the “good commandant” was central to his defense during the Dachau Trial. Beatings were less severe, food was accepted from outside sources and a number of harsh punishments including hanging by the wrists and standing punishments were abandoned.\footnote{Bazyler and Tuerkheimer, \textit{Forgotten Trials}, p. 86.} But, Weiss still authorised numerous executions and beatings and medical experiments also took place during his time as commandant. Indeed, “the general culture of brutality at Dachau continued during Weiss’s fourteen-month tenure” and some of this brutality was “directly linked to him”.\footnote{ibid.} Although he authorised medical experiments, Weiss claimed under interrogation during the Dachau Trial: “I was absolutely powerless in the face of the experiments of Dr Rascher and Professor Dr Schilling”.\footnote{W Moody, \textit{Hell’s Folly}, (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2006), p. 85.}

The press treated Weiss less harshly as he had supposedly improved conditions in Dachau and he did not appear to be particularly sadistic or outwardly cruel. Kramer’s crimes were arguably more sensational and he offered a much more dramatic angle to the story of liberation. Naturally the press concentrated on the most extreme example of evil. Kramer also was an imposing figure. His physical features attracted the attention of observers. It was much easier to paint a bestial picture of Kramer as he physically conformed to stereotypes about monstrousness.
Kramer’s dominance also relates to the amount of press attention each trial received. Belsen dominated due to the terrible conditions in the camp and since it provided many of the most vivid images of Nazi atrocity such as mass graves filled with thousands of bodies. Newspapers detailed the opening of the Dachau Trial on the inside pages and these stories were brief, giving little opportunity to focus on Weiss and his crimes. In contrast, Kramer was the focal point of the Belsen proceedings. Newspaper reports were dedicated to the evidence against him and his testimony. The public closely followed Kramer’s story and he became a notorious figure of the trial.

Josef Kramer in Liberation Reportage

Only days after liberation Kramer began to appear in newspapers. Reports first mentioning Kramer were published on 19 April but without referring to him by name. The next day, several newspapers including the left-wing *News Chronicle* printed a photograph of him with a caption identifying him as “Hauptsturmführer Josef Kramer”.\(^{64}\) The accompanying headline was titled, “This is the Killer of Belsen Camp” and the caption underneath stated: “This is the face all Britain, all the civilised world has waited to see”. William Frye devoted an entire paragraph to Kramer in a report on Belsen. It was not until his account was published that any substantial details about the commandant appeared. Frye wrote:

> Josef Kramer, SS commander of Belsen now under arrest, previously commanded Auschwitz where children were reported taken from their mothers and burned alive, where a gas chamber killed thousands, where Kramer kept his own orchestra to entertain him with Strauss waltzes while abominations were practiced under his command outside his window.\(^{65}\)

\(^{64}\)“This Is the Killer of Belsen Camp”, *News Chronicle*, 20 April 1945, p. 1.

Similarly, a *New York Times* report from April described Kramer as one of the most “notorious German criminals” underlining his status as a key perpetrator.66

Correspondents were certainly fascinated by him. One report dedicated to Kramer’s response to the Allies pointed out how calm his manner was when conducting British soldiers around the camp:

This is a picture of Josef Kramer... when first questioned no idea of caution had entered his thick skull. He did not appear to realise that what had gone on in Belsen might seem reprehensible to anyone. It certainly did not appear so to him, judging by the calm way he conducted British officers around the camp, regarding without any appearance of emotion scenes which left experienced soldiers sick and shaken for days.67

By comparing his demeanour with that of British soldiers, the report reinforced his callousness and detachment. Kramer demonstrated a lack of empathy or remorse possibly because he did not feel any moral responsibility for his crimes. Kramer had moral shortcomings that clearly enabled him to not only carry out such horrible acts, but also then remain in the camp and welcome the British soldiers.68

The emerging monstrous image of Kramer was evident in a number of other accounts in April and May 1945. British officers described Kramer as “brutish”, “sadistic” and “subhuman” and this was replicated in newspaper reportage.69 Placing emphasis on Kramer’s abhorrent behaviour was an integral part of this representation. Newspapers sensationalised his crimes. A report claimed “he enjoyed the shuddering

68 The apparently bureaucratic mentality, or the “banality of evil”, that Hannah Arendt observed in Adolf Eichmann also applies to Kramer in that he carried out his role as commandant in what appeared to be a desensitised manner. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).
69 “German Prison Sadist Stoned by Prisoners”, p. 6.
filthiness, with a lascivious lust for degradation and death, that Belsen became”.

In another example the Daily Herald stated he “butchered” his victims. This fixation on Kramer continued in the weeks following liberation. Reports paid particular attention to the crimes he committed and his fate. A report titled “Belsen Boss a Meek Man Now” described his daily routine under British guard.

Kramer was first referred to as a “beast” on 25 April 1945 in a Daily Telegraph report titled “‘Belsen Beast’ To Be Tried”. Kramer was dubbed the “Beast of Belsen” in the populist Daily Express several days later. Only British newspapers used the term “beast” to refer specifically to him in the weeks following liberation. As noted previously, the term “beast” was not exclusively used in reference to Kramer but Nazi perpetrators more generally. Kramer was consistently and continually depicted as animal-like more than any other camp perpetrator. The Daily Telegraph stated: “He was isolated and caged like a wild animal”. Comparison between Nazi perpetrators and animals has continued up to the current day. Yet, eminent Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer observes that terms like “bestiality” constitute “an insult to the animal kingdom...because animals do not do things like that; the behaviour of the perpetrators was all too human, not inhuman”. Labelling Kramer a “beast” strengthened the perception that he was abnormal and reinforced the distinction between man and animal.

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72 “Belsen Boss Is a Meek Man Now”, Daily Express, 26 April 1945, p. 3.
During the Belsen proceedings Kramer was referred to unrelentingly as the “Beast of Belsen”. The American newspaper press also started to use this nickname with the first stories appearing on 18 September. Apparently the American press picked up on the use of “Beast of Belsen” from British newspapers and only then started to refer to Kramer in this way. “Beetle-browed Beast of Belsen” appeared in the Los Angeles Times and the Jewish Advocate described him as “The Butcher of Belsen”. One report in particular highlights just how embedded “Beast of Belsen” became in popular culture. A crossword appeared in the New York Times in December 1945 with one of the clues simply “Beast of Belsen” and the corresponding solution was “Kramer”. His name was viewed with such disgust and negativity that when German General Johann Cramer recounted his experience of the war for the Manchester Guardian he specifically requested that they not spell his name like “Kramer of Belsen”.

The image of Kramer as a “beast” was strengthened in reports that described in detail his physical appearance. His brutish looks and masculine features were linked to his immorality. News Chronicle’s Colin Wills wrote the following description in April 1945:

I saw him huddled in the corner, a huge, barrel-like torso, in a green, camouflaged smock, surmounted by a square head with cropped black hair. He is a strong full-bodied man with

81 “A German General Looks Back”, Manchester Guardian, 26 October 1945, p. 5.
red cheeks, small compressed lips and small bright brown eyes, under bushy black brows. A light tenor voice emerged startlingly from that huge chest.\textsuperscript{83}

Correspondents reinforced this image by focusing on his imposing figure, stout neck and thick, dark eyebrows. He was ugly and had a frightening appearance. The linking of Kramer’s physical features and criminality in the press was even more apparent later in 1945.

A number of photographs of Kramer published in April and May 1945 supported his portrayal as a “beast”. A photograph from the \textit{Daily Telegraph} showed Kramer sitting down with shackles around his ankles.\textsuperscript{84} Whilst Kramer appeared by himself, the accompanying caption stated that he was under close guard. A photograph from the \textit{Daily Express} also showed Kramer in shackles, this time though, the photo was full length and a British guard could be seen escorting him on what was described as a “perp walk” (Figure 9.3).\textsuperscript{85} The photograph that appeared in the \textit{Daily Express} was cropped so that only Kramer and the British soldier to his left appeared. A custom of American law enforcement, the purpose of “perp walks” is to parade the arrested subject and allow the media to take photographs.\textsuperscript{86} It is possible British forces adopted this procedure with Kramer. The photo caption “The Shackled Monster” highlights the way accompanying text reinforced his humiliation.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{83} Wills, “Belsen’s Chief”, p. 1.\hfill
\textsuperscript{84} “The Commandant”, \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 20 April 1945, p. 1.\hfill
\textsuperscript{85} “The Shackled Monster of Belsen”, \textit{Daily Express}, 21 April 1945, p. 1.\hfill
Josef Kramer in Trial Reportage

Kramer’s notoriety in the press intensified once he was put on trial. His prominence is reflected in the number of reports that stated it was “his” trial or the trial of Kramer and “his associates”.

The New York Times referred to Kramer as “director” and used the phrases “his regime” and “his gang” in the same report. Other perpetrators were described as “his accomplices” or “his subordinate”. Prosecutor Backhouse even singed out Kramer in his opening address stating: “I propose to show

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88 “Belsen Director Faces Trial Today”, p. 5.

that Kramer was primarily responsible for everything”. Evidence presented at the trial aimed to demonstrate Kramer was to blame for Belsen’s terrible state with reports describing how witnesses said “conditions at Belsen were relatively decent before Kramer took over”. It is understandable that the prosecution focused on charging Kramer with responsibility for Belsen instead of deflecting guilt to Hitler or Himmler or other dead Nazi leaders. There was no point blaming Hitler or Himmler for everything or otherwise the likes of Kramer could have escaped the harshest judgment.

During the Belsen Trial correspondents cemented his position as the No. 1 defendant and “beast”. The New York Times, a well-respected and measured newspaper, even sensationally labelled him the “master of horror compounds”. Correspondents recognised that it was essential to provide readers with specific examples of his involvement in atrocities. It was reported in the Los Angeles Times that one witness had described how Kramer “kicked a Russian lying helpless in the snow at Belsen until he died” and similar details were published in the Chicago Daily Tribune. Witness testimony about Kramer’s crimes were an essential part of the trial proceedings and important in the context of proving his guilt, but these accusations also confirmed his brutality to readers. Correspondents continued to employ animal metaphors in their descriptions of him. The Daily Herald reported Kramer had returned to Belsen and described this as though he was going “back into captivity”. According to correspondent Maurice Fagence, Kramer was “ox-like”.

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90 “250,000 Murders Laid to Nazis”, p. 5.
94 “Commandant of Belsen Is Alive”, p. 6.
Correspondents were keen to inform the public of this crucial evidence against Kramer and also were eager to report on any change in his demeanour. Anthony Mann covered the trial for the *Daily Telegraph* and quoted a British officer’s eyewitness testimony. The officer asserted that: “Kramer’s general attitude when we got into his office was confident... [and] at no time did he show any expression of emotion concerning the camp”. Kramer’s face was a focal point. A *Stars and Stripes* report from September singled out Kramer’s response to evidence regarding gassings at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The report observed that he “stopped smiling” upon hearing the testimony.

A similar interest in Kramer’s demeanour was evident in the presentation of photographs. This can be seen in a *Daily Express* report that was accompanied by a photograph of him in the dock, titled “The Beast Grins In Court”. The headline emphasised Kramer’s apparent arrogance and malevolence. Kramer is hardly grinning in the accompanying photograph (Figure 9.4) but it seems there was very little change in his demeanour. Norman Clark made a similar observation noting Kramer’s reaction to a film screened during the trial:

> In the long dock Kramer, No. 1, looked around the court, turning on it, like all the other prisoners, the same blank, arrogant, stony stare we have seen for days now.

Newspapers continually mentioned Kramer’s aloofness. He encapsulated the arrogant Nazi stereotype that dominated wartime Allied propaganda.

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Correspondents covered Kramer’s testimony extensively. They seized the opportunity to hear directly from him and to observe how he responded to intense scrutiny. The press waited for Kramer to take the stand with much anticipation and understood it was a climactic part of the trial. “Kramer in the Box” appeared as a headline in *The Times.*¹⁰⁰ This part of the trial was possibly given so much attention as it was seen as epitomising the process of justice in that Kramer was made to answer for his crimes. The attention also can be put down to the shocking nature of the admissions Kramer made when testifying, especially those relating to mass gassings at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Of particular interest was the fact that Kramer had initially tried to deny the accusations and when he did make admissions he used a common Nazi tactic and argued that he was following orders. Kramer’s cross-examination drew significant attention. Mann dramatised it by calling it a “ding-dong battle of cut and thrust

¹⁰⁰“Kramer in the Box”, *The Times*, 9 October 1945, p. 3.
between Kramer and lead prosecutor Backhouse”.

Fagence likewise described how “three hours of hard volleying of question and answer had begun”. The *Los Angeles Times* stated that he “lost his stony composure [and] blurted out an admission that he had personally turned on the gas jets in the execution chambers” and even described his cross-examination as “whiplike”. Observers were fascinated by Kramer’s reaction to questioning and were eager to see who would come out triumphant. Coverage of him was sustained throughout the entire trial, even as reportage of proceedings diminished.

Kramer’s physical features were detailed in liberation reports but correspondents took this a step further during the Belsen Trial and implied there was a link between his appearance and his involvement in camp atrocities. He was referred to as “hard-faced” in *Stars and Stripes* and a *Washington Post* report described Kramer as “brute-faced”. These terms were sometimes accompanied by comments relating to his sadistic crimes, thus drawing a direct association between his physical appearance and tendencies to sadism and brutality. A cartoon from the *Daily Herald* highlights the way in which Kramer’s physical appearance was linked to his portrayal as a “beast” (Figure 9.5). He was caricatured in such a way that his harsh features were exaggerated and he appeared imposing and dark. All photographs and illustrations were printed in black and white at the time and this exaggerated the impression of evil. A somewhat different description appeared in a *Manchester Guardian* report, however, with Kramer observed to be

physically the “most nearly normal” of the Belsen defendants standing in the dock. ¹⁰⁸


**Figure 9.5**: Cartoon of Josef Kramer of Belsen. Cartoon appeared in: “Belsen Victims Shun the Beast’s Trial”, *Daily Herald*, 18 September 1945, p. 2.

Correspondents used language that reflected widespread assumptions about criminality at the time. Theories linking physical appearance and criminality were popular, including Cesare Lombroso’s idea that criminals were characterised by certain physical features. In *The Criminal Man*, first published in 1876, Lombroso outlined what he believed to be the physical attributes of criminals. ¹⁰⁹ Lombroso’s theories were yet to be systematically disproven.

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¹⁰⁸ “13,000 People Died in Six Weeks at Belsen”, p. 5.

A cartoon published in the *Daily Express* in September 1945 gives further insight into how Kramer was represented (Figure 9.6). He was shown entering the courtroom but appeared dark and sinister. This is in direct comparison with the British soldier accompanying him who looked approachable and friendly. Kramer towers over the British soldier and his muscular build and thick, dark eyebrows are emphasised.

It was during the trial proceedings that the link between Kramer’s physical appearance and monstrousness was cemented. This is a fascinating contrast to the case of Adolf Eichmann, who was considered by some observers, including Hannah Arendt, to be a stereotypical bureaucrat. Eichmann did not look like a “monster”. He was grey, small and insignificant and it was hard to reconcile his crimes with his manner and appearance. Not all observers agreed with Arendt’s views and recent research based on interviews after Eichmann’s arrest and secretly taped conversations during his imprisonment have painted a far more sinister picture of overt anti-Semitism. Kramer supposedly looked evil and so it was easy for the public to see him as a “beast”. By the end of the trial newspapers concluded he was a “practiced brute and sadist” and his nickname had been indelibly established.

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113 “Verdict on Belsen”, p. 20.
Conclusion

Concentration camp personnel discovered after liberation were framed as monsters in press coverage. Ideas of monstrousness offered a straightforward way to present camp crimes and helped correspondents to distance themselves from perpetrators’ crimes. Kramer became the most recognisable male perpetrator in the concentration camp atrocity narrative. But it was during the Belsen Trial that observers labelled him the “Beast of Belsen”. Conveniently for correspondents, his demeanour and physical traits apparently indicated his monstrousness. Photographs of Kramer further reinforced this portrayal. He was everything the Allied public expected to see in a Nazi. He was an intimidating figure, he looked evil and he did not show remorse for his actions. Weiss, on the other hand, was not a focus of reporting in either the British or
American press. Weiss was not seen to be particularly sadistic or cruel and his crimes were overshadowed by the sensational nature of Kramer’s time at Auschwitz-Birkenau and the frightening conditions at Belsen in the first months of 1945. By focusing on Kramer’s fate, the press were able to present a simple narrative of good triumphing over evil. This evil Nazi “beast” was made to account for his crimes and Allied justice was successfully carried out.
A group of women who had been held in Belsen described German torture—the flogging of women’s breasts, the lashing of the soles of feet, forced prostitution, the use of human beings for vivisection experiments—that they declared were “enjoyed” by German women guards as well as German men.


Standing out among the women was Irma Grese, the “Blonde Beastess”, with the cold eyes and the slow, reluctant voice.

_**Belsen Trial report: “Belsen Accused Silent as They Hear Horrors”, Daily Herald, 18 September 1945, p. 1.**_

Early press descriptions of women guards from Belsen contributed to the sensationalised narrative of female Nazi perpetrators that continues to dominate western representations of these perpetrators. Correspondents were surprised to encounter female personnel at Nazi camps and their initial reports reflected attempts to establish the women’s involvement in atrocities. Portrayals of female perpetrators were influenced by widespread gender assumptions and stereotypes. This chapter probes the press fascination with female perpetrators at the time of liberation and during military trials. In particular, it examines how female camp guards’ crimes were described in the press. Female camp guard Irma Grese’s culpability was discussed at length during the Belsen proceedings. By examining correspondents’ descriptions of Grese, this chapter also scrutinises why she became the central female figure in the
Female Camp Personnel

Women worked in a number of capacities at concentration camps and participated in the torture and killing of innocent people. It is estimated that around 3,500 or 10 percent of all camp guards were female. Claus-Christian Szejnmann argues these females were not passive tools but key perpetrators and they used the camps to pursue personal initiatives. These women willingly participated in torture and murder and they thought of the camps as normal places of work.

Women were drawn to work at Nazi camps for a number of reasons including the offer of stable and well-paying work, accommodation, and the desire for adventure as well as for ideological reasons. Many of the younger guards had grown up in the midst of Nazism and were members of the League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel). Only 5 percent of female guards were formal members of the Nazi Party, in contrast to a majority of male guards. Nevertheless, female guards went through ideological training at Ravensbrück and as Lauren Willmott points out:

Just like their male counterparts female guards were trained to become hardened and to punish prisoners severely when necessary. Many became accustomed to beating and kicking

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2 ibid.

3 Female perpetrators have only more recently become an area of scholarly interest.

prisoners—sometimes to the point of death—with their jackboots, sticks, truncheons and, in the case of Irma Grese, with a whip made of cellophane.\(^5\)

Whilst not all became equally accustomed to brutality, female guards directly contributed to inmates’ deaths by ill treatment and violence.

Some 45 women had worked at Belsen and over half this number was arrested after liberation.\(^6\) British soldiers, however, were not immediately aware of their presence or functionality in the camp.\(^7\) Press interest in these women was sustained throughout 1945 as sixteen women were subsequently tried by the British military court at Lüneburg. Nineteen women served at Dachau but many fled the camp prior to liberation.\(^8\) None of the Dachau defendants were female, either, ensuring that female perpetrators from Belsen were the focus of correspondents’ reports once trials commenced. Women also worked at other Nazi concentration camps including Mauthausen, Gross Rosen and notably Ravensbrück. Acting as a training ground for female guards, Ravensbrück, with the exception of the camp administration, was primarily staffed by females.

Newspapers demonstrated their interest in female perpetrators from late April. *News Chronicle* readers followed the unfolding of the Belsen story through the accounts of Colin Wills. On 18 April, Wills produced a report that highlighted the press’ fascination with female perpetrators. “The Kind of Women Who Staffed Concentration Camps” appeared on the front page alongside his report on the conditions within the newly

\(^{5}\) ibid.


\(^{7}\) Playfair and Sington, *The Offenders*, p. 154.

liberated camp. Wills wrote that some women’s faces showed “marks of cruelty” and others “merely the callousness of animal stupidity”. He also noted how “their hour had come”.

Female camp personnel did not always warrant stand-alone reports like that of Wills, but they were mentioned in reports on Belsen. William Frye outlined the involvement of women in the camp horrors, describing in detail some of the atrocities committed by female guards. This “new” angle to the concentration camp story was repeatedly mentioned in newspapers over the coming weeks. Joanne Reilly suggests that, while correspondents recognised the need to inform the readership of the camp and its horror, stories such as that by Wills indicate there also was a “tendency towards sensationalism and the need to provide a certain amount of titillation from the camp material”. The media is prone to sensational portrayals of violent women and lurid stories about female violence likely engrossed readers.

The Jewish press drew attention to the female guards’ apparent brutality, with the Jewish Chronicle stating that the women in Belsen displayed the most “fiendish cruelty”. Such language was employed in reports on perpetrators more generally but was particularly marked in reports on female camp personnel. In some cases female perpetrators featured in headlines; for instance, a Sunday Times report by R W Thompson was titled “SS Women Tied Dead To Living”. Although Thompson reported more on conditions at Belsen, female perpetrators were considered such an important topic and possibly the most astonishing aspect to the story

10 ibid.
12 Reilly, Belsen, p. 58.
that they featured in the headline. Female crimes offered a spectacular “angle” to the concentration camp narrative.

That women had perpetrated violent and cruel crimes confirmed also the extent of National Socialist brutality. Scholars tend to conclude that the intense interest in female camp guards emerged because their brutality indicated the baseness of the Nazi regime and the depth of Nazi depravity. It was shocking that women in Germany not only accepted and tolerated violence but also participated in it themselves.

Photographs of female personnel soon appeared in British and American newspapers. A photograph from the Daily Express depicted a much larger group of women, describing them as “Well-Nourished Women Of Belsen”, in contrast to the starving inmates. They were described as “professional torturers” and “she-thugs” highlighting their criminality. Research on photographic techniques employed in capturing perpetrators suggests these women were almost always shown at one side of the frame, looking sideways, harsh angles, in rigid and upright postures. They looked cruel and angry. These patterns can be seen in a range of photographs published in newspapers. In April, a photograph of a group of female guards from Belsen appeared in the Daily Express in which the women did not look directly at the camera (Figure 10.1). Such photographs worked to strengthen the portrayal of perpetrators as cruel and unemotional.

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16 See Reilly, Belsen, p. 44; Celinscak, At War’s End, pp. 86-87.
17 “They Wielded Whips for Himmler—at Belsen”, Daily Express, 23 April 1945, p. 4.
18 Ibid.
19 See Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, p. 264.
20 “They Wielded Whips”, p. 4.
Female perpetrators appeared in photographs that resembled criminal mug shots and as Chapter 8 revealed, photographers deliberately used this technique in order to reinforce perpetrator guilt. George Rodger shot a series of photographs of female SS guards at Belsen using his Rolleiflex in a square format to resemble police mug shots. Rodger strategically chose this type of camera and made a conscious decision to take photographs in a way that induced connotations of criminality.

This fascination with female perpetrators and their crimes continued during the Belsen Trial. It is argued by some scholars that the sensationalised narrative of female Nazi perpetrators can be traced back to the way in which female guards were prosecuted and demonised as

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Female Criminality and the Quintessential Female Perpetrator Irma Grese

Female Criminality

There is a wider cultural fascination with the figure of the female Nazi perpetrator in western countries in both popular and scholarly arenas. Female concentration camp personnel offered real-world examples of the female offender. Correspondents appear to have relied on existing criminological ideas about female criminality. They extensively drew on the monstrous woman narrative and Lombroso’s theories in their depiction of female criminals. In his book *The Female Offender* (1895), Lombroso argued criminality can be identified by physical characteristics and moreover female crime is linked to their sexuality. Reports drew a link between women’s violence and their physical appearance. A *Daily Herald* report from September 1945 included comments from British Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) women. Tasked with guarding female perpetrators from Belsen, one woman declared the female camp guards “didn’t look as sturdy now as they did in the photographs taken of them at Belsen [but] they still look menacing and some are very stubborn”. Readers were left with an understanding of these women as having tendencies for brutality and sadism. This is not dissimilar to the way in which Kramer’s physical appearance was used to reinforce his portrayal.

22 Rowland, “Reading the Female Perpetrator”, p. 147.


24 See Rowland, “Reading the Female Perpetrator”, p. 154.

25 ibid. p. 146.


Due to perceived gender roles certain behaviour and personality traits were associated with women and females were generally stereotyped as more empathetic, passive and nurturing than males. Female guards, then, were seen as having betrayed their sex by being so cruel and newspapers suggested they were crueller than many of the SS men. This was not because the crimes they committed were inherently worse but was due to inmates claiming that the female guards actually “enjoyed” carrying out torture including flogging and whipping.29 There was a genuine sense of surprise that women were capable of this behaviour.30

Female camp personnel were seen also to deviate from normal female roles within society. The Nazis emphasised a “3Ks” motto for women: Kinder (Children); Küche (Kitchen); and Kirche (Church). Instead of adhering to this ideal, female camp personnel held positions of power in the male-dominated sphere of concentration camps.

Reports compared the women’s behaviour to that of the male guards. A photograph of a group of female guards appeared in the Sunday Express with the caption: “Their bestiality and brutality was equal to that of the men” (Figure 10.2).31 Antony Rowland surmises that there was a tendency to emphasise female perpetrators’ masculinity as the media was trying to come up with “an explanation for their transgression of feminine stereotypes”.32 Correspondents appeared unable to imagine that women’s acts of cruelty were linked to their femininity and therefore their crimes were presented as expressions of masculinity.33 Violent male perpetrators were portrayed as extreme examples of masculinity.

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32 Rowland, “Reading the Female Perpetrator”, p. 151.
33 Heschel points out that there has been little exploration of whether women’s acts of cruelty were linked to expressions of their femininity. See Heschel, “Does Atrocity Have a Gender?”, p. 314.
unleashed. Female Nazi perpetrators, on the other hand, were seen to be unnatural, masculine, freaks.34 This is perhaps why pictorial images of female defendants sought to repress their femininity. Women guards appeared in rigid columns and forcibly arranged straight lines.35 Their feminine features were downplayed and instead the cruel and violent aspects of their character were accentuated.


Sensationalised reports perpetuated the notion that their behaviour was wicked. Female perpetrators were treated with both fear and loathing in one report and their cruelty was emphasised with reference to their


“cruel twisted minds”. Such descriptions allowed correspondents and the public at large, to take comfort in knowing female Nazi perpetrators were fundamentally different from “normal” women. Ivor Montague’s language helped to marginalise female perpetrators. He described them as “the females of the species”, implying that these women were altogether different from normal women and indeed that Nazis generally were a separate species. This is similar to the way correspondents distanced themselves from men with the language of bestiality.

**Irma Grese**

The press generated a very simplistic image of female perpetrators. In April and May 1945, female camp personnel were grouped together and no individual stood out. This changed during the Belsen Trial, however, when one female perpetrator came to dominate newspaper reportage. Born into an agricultural family in Feldberger Seenlandschaft, Irma Grese (1923-1945) left school at fifteen and worked on a farm for six months before working in a hospital. After trying unsuccessfully to find an apprenticeship as a nurse she volunteered for service in a concentration camp at the age of nineteen. Grese worked as an overseer (*Aufseherin*) in Ravensbrück from mid 1942 until March 1943 when she was transferred to Auschwitz. During her time at Auschwitz she was promoted to Report Leader (*Rapportführerin*). Grese was in charge of approximately 30,000 women prisoners at Auschwitz. Known to wear heavy boots and carry a whip and a pistol, she was renowned for her sadism and cruelty.

In January 1945, Grese briefly returned to Ravensbrück. Along with a large number of prisoners she was sent to Belsen in March 1945. British forces captured her when they liberated the camp on 15 April 1945. Despite the fact that she had been at the camp only since March,

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38 ibid.
she became the most infamous female perpetrator as newspapers focused on her crimes and framed her as the worst female guard. Figuratively separated from other female perpetrators Grese was seen as special, prompting Anthony Mann to call her the “most notorious female guard”.39 She faced both counts of the indictment at the Belsen Trial and was charged with murder, torture and mistreatment of prisoners. Grese was accused of whipping inmates, “helping to select gas chamber victims, mass murder, and beating prisoners”.40 Camp survivors testified to her involvement in beatings, savaging of prisoners by her trained dogs and her involvement in gas chamber selections.41

Grese was far from the only woman captured at Belsen who had committed atrocious acts. At the Belsen Trial she was one of sixteen women to be found guilty. “Her actions were certainly not isolated and she was not a singularly out-standing aberration of German society”.42 Arguably, her age, relative beauty, and unrepentant attitude ensured Grese’s portrayal as the worst female guard. Along with Ilse Koch from Buchenwald, she was regarded as the most notorious female guard because of her cruel character and extreme sadism. An American military court tried Koch in 1947 and the trial received worldwide press attention. Like Koch, Grese’s crimes were reduced to the most sensational and spectacular, with the press especially interested in her sadistic tendencies including beating prisoners to death, the use of her whip and allegations she enjoyed torturing inmates. Grese personified the evil female camp guard. She had been “particularly vile” to prisoners according to a witness at the Belsen Trial.43

40 “Kramer and Grese among the Belsen Guilty”, p. 6.
42 Clarke, “The Beautiful Beast”, p. 6. Clarke explores why Grese was singled out as the key conspirator in the story of Nazi atrocities. His research looks at the way she is remembered and critically assesses some of the first representations of her in the press.
Grese was not mentioned in any newspaper reports immediately following liberation. At this early stage, the press knew very little about her. It is possible British forces had not identified her after entering the camp. During the Belsen Trial, Grese dominated reportage of the proceedings and overshadowed all other female defendants. Prosecutor Backhouse called Grese the worst woman in the whole camp and argued that there was no act of cruelty with which she was not associated. It seems that in the period between liberation and the trial, war crime investigations not only identified Grese, but obtained evidence of her specific crimes at Belsen and Auschwitz.

Grese was also the lead female defendant at the trial and this ensured she was prioritised in newspaper reportage. Newspaper reports reflected her prominent position amongst the defendants. Even though Grese was not the highest-ranking female from Belsen on trial, the fact that she was the lead female defendant influenced perceptions about her role at the camp. The New York Times referred to her as the “chief woman guard” and the Los Angeles Times described her as Kramer’s “blonde queen”. Likewise in a caption she was deemed the “woman henchman of Kramer” and “gang queen”. Grese, unlike other defendants, did not deny the harsh reality of daily life inside camps. She appeared fully indoctrinated into the brutal camp culture.

Trial proceedings concentrated on Grese and reports reflected this focus. Correspondents were aware of the public interest in her. Mann wrote in his account of the opening of the trial that: “apart from Kramer, the prisoner attracting the most attention is blonde, good-looking 21-year-old Irma Grese”. Mann only covered the latter parts

44 See Brown, Beautiful Beast, p. 78.
46 “SS Woman”, Los Angeles Times, 19 September 1945, p. 3.
of the trial, including the verdicts, sentencing and executions, yet he readily observed how much attention had been directed towards her over and above any other female defendant. The *Daily Telegraph*’s Edmund Townshend also commented on Grese’s notoriety reporting that she has been “tried many times by unofficial courts”. 49 After the sentences were handed down and again when the executions were carried out, Grese’s fate was of special interest. Observers paid particular attention to the fact that she was to be hanged for her crimes at twenty-two years of age. 50

**Figure 10.3**: Irma Grese following liberation. Photograph appeared in: Maurice Fagence, “Irma: ‘I Meant My Whip to Hurt’”, *Daily Herald* 17 October 1945, p. 3.


Photographs of Grese also were published in newspapers. She was shown in her jackboots and high-waisted belt in the *Daily Herald* (Figure 10.3).\(^{51}\) When photographs were published of a group of female defendants in the dock, Grese was at the centre and usually the only individual identified in the caption. Photographs of female defendants in the dock commonly showed Grese wearing a cloth number. As noted in Chapter 8, the numbers the defendants were forced to wear demeaned the subjects. The *Daily Herald* printed a photograph of several female defendants and Grese was at the centre of the frame (Figure 10.4).\(^{52}\) But, in addition, another photograph accompanied the report of the trial that showed Grese being helped from a British Army truck as she arrived for the day’s proceedings.

Several portrait style photographs were published of Grese.\(^{53}\) A *Daily Express* report from November 1945 dedicated solely to Grese and her background was accompanied by a photographic image.\(^{54}\) It was a mug-shot style but the photograph was in fact a cropped version of a larger photograph that showed Grese in the dock with several other female defendants. By zooming in, her harsh and angry look was emphasised. Photographs such as these reinforced the impression that she was particularly unpleasant. Mug shot photographs of Grese appeared in several newspapers and further highlighted her guilt.\(^{55}\)

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52 “Belsen Accused Silent as They Hear Horrors”, *Daily Herald*, 18 September 1945, p. 1.
54 Paul Holt, “How Did Irma Greese Get Like This?”, *Daily Express*, 16 November 1945, p. 2.
55 “SS Woman”, p. 3.
The “Beastess” of Belsen

It was not only the intense press focus on Grese but also the way in which she was described in reports that contributed to her demonisation. *Stars and Stripes* went as far as to say that she was a “witch”. Grese also was termed a “specimen of Nazi youth” in the *New York Times* implying she was an example of the Nazi perpetrator that was bred to be cruel and brutal under National Socialism. Grese was referred to variously as “Nazi Belle” and “Queen of Belsen”. She was known most commonly, however, as the “Beastess of Belsen”, an appellation embedded with implicit references to dangerous femininity. “Beastess of Belsen” made good headlines and juxtaposed her beauty and brutality.

Only ten days after the Belsen Trial commenced, Vincent Evans referred to her as the “Blonde Beastess”. Correspondents were fascinated by Grese’s transformation from a supposedly “normal” German girl into the

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57 “Verdict on Belsen”, p. 20.
sadistic and cruel “Beastess of Belsen”. Her immaturity was contrasted to her brutal crimes and observers were left perplexed. Reports drew attention to evidence given at the trial about her background and family. Correspondents referred to her childhood and the relationship she had with her father in particular, as if they were searching for some explanation for her behaviour. Grese’s sister Helene, for instance, was questioned about Irma’s relationship with her father. The prosecution, and correspondents, were trying to determine if something in her past could explain her apparent deviance.

By the conclusion of her trial, Grese had become widely known as the “Beastess of Belsen” and she had been deemed a “girl sadist”. The press assisted in her construction as a female “beast” by emphasising her so-called abnormalities and presenting her as pathological. Her crimes were scandalised in public discussion and reports on the trial. This is indicative of a wider trend whereby there was a tendency in trials conducted by the Allies of female camp guards to formally demonise the women. During the 1947 trial of Ravensbrück Aufseherin Dorothea Binz, for example, the prosecution described her as a “beast” and a “sadistic slut”. It appears Grese was one of several female Nazi perpetrators to be treated this way.

The press were inclined to mention when an individual was unmoved by the horror of the camp and Grese displayed a contemptuous and arrogant attitude in court. She apparently remained unaffected by the evidence given during the trial and this reinforced the perception that she was indifferent to victims’ suffering. Mea Allan described her as having “cold eyes [and] a slow reluctant voice” as though not becoming


61 See Brown, Beautiful Beast, pp. 77-78.
upset by the evidence proved their portrayal of her as a “beastess”. Grese’s behaviour also featured in a *Jewish Chronicle* report, which referred to her “cool cynical confessions”, commenting that Grese showed no signs of remorse. This worked to strengthen the public’s image of her as cold-hearted. Other scholars have similarly attributed Grese’s notoriety to the way she conducted herself.

The nature of the trial itself contributed to the intense scrutiny Grese received. The Belsen Trial gained international attention and as Sington writes it was in many ways a theatrical occasion. He remembers that one onlooker at the trial commented:

> Irma Grese’s demeanour resembled that of a booted ring mistress in a circus; someone else suggested her facial expression was like that of a tyrannical young queen in the age of absolutism.

Sington believed Grese failed to truly grasp the seriousness of her situation and treated the trial like a play in which she was the star. He argued that the context of the trial led to an over-dramatisation of her personality and “far from indicating a demoniacal character her demeanour during the trial seems rather to have pointed to immaturity if not childishness”. Grese was always well presented and during the first weeks of proceedings appeared to be rather unfazed by the fact that she was on trial. Daniel Patrick Brown comments also on the way that Grese maintained a contemptuous antagonistic look on her face at the beginning of the Belsen Trial, as part of a carefully orchestrated plan. Interestingly, he contrasts this to other female defendants at the trial.

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64 Brown, *Beautiful Beast*, p. 74.
65 Playfair and Sington, *The Offenders*, p. 159.
66 ibid. p. 160.
noting that Grese stood out since “the majority of the other accused were more concerned with saving their necks”. 67

Correspondents paid particular attention to Grese when she wept in court. 68 Reports detailed how she became visibly upset after answering questions about her father and after hearing the testimony of her sister. Hearing about Grese’s family and witnessing her emotional response humanised her. This display of vulnerability contradicted the dominant perception of Grese as a cold figure. Grese’s reaction to her sentencing also featured in newspapers as she again became upset. Vincent Evans dedicated a section just to Grese and how she took the news of her impending death. 69 Observers appeared engrossed by her response since this seemed to contradict perceptions of her as a “beastess”.

Grese’s comparative good looks and youth meant also that she was singled out among female perpetrators. The reaction to her was one of bewilderment. Sington points out that Grese’s attractiveness was one of the main reasons she received so much press attention:

For weeks, in scores of screaming headlines Irma Grese had been tended and canalised by the popular press of Britain and the United States, given its outlet and shown in quarry, which was not less “juicy” and satisfying for being young, handsome, and a girl. 70

Grese received intense media scrutiny presumably since she represented a fascinating dichotomy. Her age, appearance and sex appeared to be at odds with her violent and brutal crimes. The press drew attention to this discrepancy and generated an image of Grese that was sensational in

69 Vincent Evans, “Kramer, Irma Grese and Nine Others to Die by Hanging”, Sunday Express, 18 November 1945, pp. 1, 8.
Female Criminality and the Quintessential Female Perpetrator Irma Grese

nature where her beauty was emphasised but contrasted to her sadism and perversion. For Klaus Fischer the source of press fascination was a “dynamic at work that simultaneously attracts and repels people when the phenomenon of ‘beautiful beast’ or its more subdued counterpart, the femme fatale, arises”. This is why “Beastess of Belsen” seemed so apt. Fischer determines that the “combination of female beauty and brutal aggression held out a morbid fascination”. The contradiction between her beauty and atrocious crimes shocked and intrigued. It differentiated Grese from the other female perpetrators who were not as young or considered to be as attractive. Whereas the press suggested Kramer had the stereotypical “look” of a monster, Grese’s looks were at odds with ideas about monstrousness. Kramer stood out as he conformed to theories about physical appearance and evil and Grese was exceptional as she contradicted ideas about female violence.

As mentioned, violent female perpetrators often are thought to be unnaturally masculine. Grese, though, did not “look evil”. Since she appeared to defy widely held assumptions about female criminality, correspondents portrayed her crimes as somehow different from, and worse than, crimes committed by other females. Of course, Grese’s beauty had no relevance to her guilt or innocence. Although Grese was considered attractive, her striking features were used to underline her image as the “beastess”. Her strong features and confidence meant she was portrayed as imperious. The Daily Express reported that she was being called “jut jaw” because of her propensity to stick her chin out and pout during the trial. At first correspondents may have been more interested in her beauty but her cruelty was always emphasised.

71 See Foreword in Brown, Beautiful Beast, p. xxv.
72 ibid.
Newspapers seized on the circulation value of Grese with her blue eyes and blonde ringlets. Her physical features were central to her portrayal. Other female defendants were cast aside as Grese’s crimes and her clothing, hairdo and other physical traits dominated reports. *Stars and Stripes* referred to her “blonde and hefty” appearance and commented on her new hairstyle. The preoccupation with her appearance was noticeable especially during the first few weeks of the trial. The only time Grese was said to have looked terrible was when the *Chicago Daily Tribune* quoted a British major who visited the defendants in jail following sentencing. Maj. GI Draper of the war crimes section stated that Grese “looked awful [and] her usual neat appearance in dress and the way she swept back her blonde hair had gone”.

Captions accompanying photographs of Grese indicate just how central her beauty was to her portrayal in the press. Descriptions attached to photographs of women “targeted their physical appearance—their husky build, blonde hair, harsh features”. This can be seen in a *News Chronicle* report with the description below Grese’s picture stating she had “carefully waved hair”. It was quite common for correspondents to describe the physical appearance of females in reports even if they were not perpetrators. A *Daily Worker* report detailed the appearance of a female witness from the Belsen Trial. A *Manchester Guardian* report likewise described the physical appearance of a woman who

75 See Playfair and Sington, *The Offenders*, p. 178.
80 Zelizer, “Gender and Atrocity”, p. 265.
testified. 83 Nevertheless, in almost every report Grese’s physical appearance was commented on whether it was her “ringlets” or her “silky stockings”. 84 Even when the other female guards were featured, Grese was incorporated into the story. This was the case in a report on defendant Elisabeth Volkenrath that detailed some of her crimes. Ian Bevan (1919-2006), the youngest correspondent present at the Belsen Trial, mentioned that Volkenrath was Grese’s former hairdresser and was responsible for the “faultless coiffure” which Grese wore in court. 85 The press was interested in every detail about her life, behaviour and appearance.

Grese was a young and beautiful woman who committed heinous crimes and she became a journalistic sensation. Judge Advocate Stirling even made comment on Grese and her good looks in his summing up at the trial stating: “Irma Grese’s very youth, because of the physical attractiveness that went with it had made her a center-piece of the trial”. 86 As more information about her life and crimes was revealed during the proceedings, and as correspondents were given daily opportunities to report on her appearance, the press became increasingly interested.

Grese’s age was frequently printed in newspapers. 87 Only twenty-two years old when she was put on trial, Grese was the youngest woman to be executed under British jurisdiction in the twentieth century. 88 A Daily Herald report by Maurice Fagence highlights how intrigued

83 “Belsen Guards Identified by Polish Woman Doctor”, p. 6.
86 Playfair and Sington, The Offenders, p. 138.
correspondents were by the young Grese, stating: “She had been tempestuous. She had been calm. She had been everything but 21, which is her age”. 89 Her youth set her apart with many of the other female Belsen defendants far older. Captions underneath photographs of Grese also alluded to her young age. 90

That Grese’s physical appearance featured so often in reports suggests that this was one of the most interesting details about her but also hints at the sexualisation of female perpetrators. Wendy Lower argues that the stark exposure of the so-called worst female camp guards, such as Grese, may have stifled a more nuanced discussion of women’s participation and culpability. She suggests the “trials generated sensationalistic stories of female sadism, further fuelled by a post-war trend in Nazi-style pornography”. 91 Grese occupied a unique position in press reportage. Unable to reconcile her age and appearance with her crimes the press turned Grese into the “beastess”. She represented extreme deviance and dangerous femininity. 92 These traits were implicitly embedded in the title “Beastess of Belsen”.

Conclusion

Individuals of both sexes committed horrible crimes against camp inmates, but the press viewed female perpetrators with even more disgust than the male SS guards. Their involvement in camp atrocities fascinated observers as they transgressed deeply embedded expectations about feminine gender roles. Correspondents drew on existing images of female criminality and gender stereotypes in their descriptions of female perpetrators. By drawing on particular aspects of female perpetrators’ behaviour, such as the cruel nature of the crimes and lack of femininity, a sensationalistic representation of the Nazi woman

89 Fagence, “Irma”, p. 3.
90 “German Wonder at 14 Belsen Acquittals”, p. 1.
91 Lower, Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Killing Fields, p. 10.
92 See Clarke, “The Beautiful Beast”, p. 46.
dominated the camp narrative. Women were ultimately characterised as sadistic torturers who enjoyed the suffering of inmates.

Intriguing and complex, the fascination with Grese was intense over and above any other female perpetrators. There was no equivalent to Grese at Dachau and her attractiveness, age and what was seen as her extreme deviance meant she stood out among the female personnel at Belsen. Correspondents looked to determine if she was under the control of others or misguided by her naivety but these narratives did not seem to fit. So, to explain her behaviour, she was portrayed as a deviant and labelled the “Beastess of Belsen”.
In analysing correspondents’ reports and photographs printed in American and British newspapers in 1945, this thesis makes an original contribution to historical understanding of how concentration camps were first presented to the general public. Taking into consideration how important correspondents are in the development of the “first rough draft” of history, it has investigated how conventions of reporting and national and cultural frameworks shaped coverage, therefore adding to knowledge of contemporary perceptions of Nazi concentration camps. The thesis touched also on the overlaps between journalism and history and made observations about correspondents’ role as “witnesses to history” and their capacity to contribute to the historical record.

In examining the two historically critical events of liberation and military trials and focusing on two major Nazi camps, Belsen and Dachau, this thesis grapples with the links between early reporting and ongoing misunderstandings about the concentration camp system. It finds that the themes that permeated early reporting of camps have to a large degree endured and have suffused writing about, and understanding of, the Holocaust and concentration camps in British and American memory and historical writing. Ignorance, myths and misunderstandings about concentration camps are not confined to the popular arena but exist also among the academic community. Concentration camps, for instance, are often thought of as sites of genocide. Scholars such as Tony Kushner and Joanne Reilly have drawn attention to a number of contemporary examples that confuse concentration and extermination camps. The use of photographic images in memorialisation and commemoration also


indicates how photographs of liberated concentration camps have come to represent the Holocaust in the west. As Peter Novick has pointed out, a central theme of celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in the United States was “Americans’ belated confrontation with the Holocaust” at liberated camps such as Dachau.

A number of themes and approaches were identified in press accounts of concentration camps. Section One presented the contexts that shaped coverage of concentration camps in 1945. It uncovered the tropes correspondents employed in their accounts. From the outset, liberation was viewed through an Allied lens. This can be seen in the way soldiers were prioritised over victims in the press. Soldiers represented the noble Allied cause and were a symbol of British and American national identity. Camp atrocities also were used to justify and vindicate the Allied war effort and demonise the Nazis. This ensured the story of liberation was linked to the Allies’ role as “liberators” and the moral validity of the Second World War. This “liberator” narrative remains popular today and can be seen clearly at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Andy Pearce has observed a similar framework at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) with the Holocaust exhibition displays on “liberation” and “discovery” principally narrated through the British experience of Belsen.

Journalistic coverage of liberation was documentary in nature and accounts were presented through an eyewitness frame. Newspapers, however, often presented a generalised story of Nazi atrocity tending to

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focus on what camps indicated about Nazism more generally as opposed to the distinctive histories of each camp and the unique and varied experiences of inmates. There was little connection between text and photographs and readers were left to draw their own conclusions about the relevance of what they read and viewed in British and American newspapers. This was confounded by the fact that concentration camps liberated by the Western Allies frequently were reported as being the worst of Nazi camps. There was little differentiation between concentration and extermination camps and this was not clarified or corrected during coverage of military trials.

Sections Two and Three examined how the context of reporting of concentration camps in 1945 and the discourse that developed in the press shaped reports of victims and perpetrators. Specific stereotypes of these two groups were established and these continue to influence popular and academic perceptions about camp inmates and Nazi perpetrators.

Representations of victims in early reporting were addressed in Section Two. Immediately after liberation, camp inmates were portrayed as criminals and as political prisoners who happened to be from a range of different European nations. The universalisation of Nazi victims re-emerges in contemporary settings. In 1945, camps were understood in political not racial terms and there was little differentiation between victims. This was most striking in relation to Jewish victims. Victims generally were not the focus and their experience was largely absent from the coverage of liberation. Correspondents did not grasp the changing nature of the prisoner profile and their reports left readers with a fragmentary understanding of who inmates were and why they had been victimised. Textual analysis of newspaper reports indicates

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7 At the IWM, the desire to show the critical educational and moral lessons of the Holocaust means the category of victim is presented as neutral as possible. See Hannah K Holtschneider, “Are Holocaust Victims Jewish? Looking at Photographs in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition”, Normative Judaism? Jews, Judaism and Jewish Identity 1(2008), p. 104.
that the language used to refer to victims precluded any form of individuality amongst victims. The magnitude and sight of mass corpses and the parlous condition of victims overwhelmed any attempt to comprehend individual circumstances. The only exceptions were Allied victims and “privileged” prisoners who acted as a key link between the British and American public and liberated camps. The experience of “privileged” prisoners and Allied victims was not representative of the majority of victims. Their prominence indicates how national concerns shaped press coverage of concentration camps.

The language correspondents used to describe victims following liberation, whilst arguably historically accurate, shaped perceptions of survivors and victim discourse for years afterwards, and sometimes in a problematic fashion. The stereotype that formed was one of victims as a dehumanised amorphous mass with an emphasis on their dirty, diseased and starved bodies. In attempting to show how prisoners had been reduced to the abject, and to communicate the degradation of camps and indict those responsible for Nazi atrocities, correspondents and photographers presented a specific image of victims. Unprepared, and in the face of the horrors they encountered and the hardships they endured, correspondents and photographers tried to show compassion and understanding for camp victims. There were attempts to highlight how individuals had survived in the face of extreme hardship, but ultimately victims were presented as dehumanised victims of atrocity.

The de-individualisation of victims and correspondents’ overwhelming inability to identify inmates outside of an anonymous mass stands in direct contrast to how the press dealt with perpetrators. Section Three probed how the physical and psychological characteristics of the men and women who inflicted suffering on camp inmates were the subject of newspaper reportage both at the time of liberation and again during military trials. Whereas the problematic concept of “collective guilt” dominated reporting of liberation, the premise of national responsibility was replaced by individual accountability later in 1945 as attention
quickly turned to questions about how those directly involved in camp crimes would be punished for their guilt.

In examining four key individuals, Section Three explored how perpetrators dominated the concentration camp narrative and how those responsible for Nazi atrocities were suitably demonised in the press. Correspondents tried to identify common personality and physical traits of perpetrators and suggest psychological profiles to explain the behaviour of former camp guards. It has been suggested that efforts to demonise the accused and draw out peculiar physical traits would quickly became a trope of media reporting on war crimes trials following the IMT Nuremberg Trial.8 This thesis found, however, this trope was evident earlier, with key Belsen and Dachau perpetrators presented as “monsters” and “beasts” in the press.

In 1945, an inability to process the horror of camps led correspondents to grasp for images in their descriptions of perpetrators. Images of “beasts” loomed so large so quickly because correspondents drew on existing ideas of German monstrousness and propaganda from the First World War. Correspondents worked within conventions of the time and deliberately used existing tropes to communicate perpetrators’ crimes and their conduct. In using terms such as “monsters” and “beasts”, correspondents portrayed perpetrators as utterly outside mankind and society, and created a reassuring sense of distance between themselves and the perpetrators. In fact, correspondents used animal imagery in their descriptions of victims and perpetrators. This practice was common for both groups as it worked to highlight what camp conditions had done to human beings (victims) and suggested that camp personnel (perpetrators) were abnormal.

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During the military trials press coverage was again focused on perpetrators as opposed to victims. This was a reflection of the trials proceedings themselves but also indicative of the interest in individual perpetrators. The public gaze was directed towards those who were seen to be the most detestable and embodying the negative characteristics of the Nazi criminal. Josef Kramer, Irma Grese, Fritz Klein and Klaus Schilling dominated reportage in 1945 because they represented the brutality of concentration camps and the Nazi regime more broadly. In October 1945, a Jewish observer at the Belsen Trial exclaimed: “The trial was not just a trial of the Belsen beast, however; it was a trial of the whole bestial Nazi system. Josef Kramer, Dr, Fritz Klein, Irma Grese and the others were typical Germans”.\(^9\) Perpetrators collectively dominated reportage but specific individuals were characterised as the embodiment of evil.

Klein and Schilling were singled out as they symbolised the image of Nazi doctors as crazed and irrational. The continued fascination with Nazi doctors, both popularly and scholarly, can be traced back to how Nazi concentration camp doctors captured and put on trial in 1945 were the focus for press attention.

The image of Kramer as the “Beast of Belsen” emerged almost immediately after liberation but undeniably took hold during the Belsen Trial as correspondents confirmed his status as a typical Nazi whose physical appearance reinforced his monstrousness. The image of Nazis as “beasts” still is widely employed and recognised today. Nazi camp guards continue to be thought of as unique, sadistic, evil monsters. In a section of the IWM exhibition titled “Who were the Killers?” mug shot photographs appear similar to those that proliferated in reportage in 1945. Perpetrators are (re)-“demonised” and “set apart” confirming

their portrayal as monsters.\textsuperscript{10} Kramer’s treatment in the press suggests how the monstrous paradigm of camp guards first emerged.

The press also presented a distorted image of female Nazi perpetrators in 1945 and this iconic image remains prolific today. Grese was transformed into a sensationalised icon in the British and American press in the same way as other female Nazi guards would be in later Allied trials including Ilse Koch during the 1947 Buchenwald Trial.\textsuperscript{11} In 1945, the press dismissed female perpetrators who were middle-aged and heavily built and instead the young, attractive “Beastess of Belsen” intrigued correspondents. She was exceptional due to her age and perceived beauty. Her narrative became highly individualised as reports drew attention to the lurid details of her crimes and juxtaposed her beauty to her bestiality.

Correspondents and photographers who reported on concentration camps in 1945 were unable to grasp the complexities of what had occurred because of their proximity to the events and because of the gravity of Nazi crimes. The chaos of liberation and the nature of trial proceedings also played a role. As this thesis showed, early reporting contributed to confusion about the Nazi camp system, specifically the functionality and the history of Belsen and Dachau. The academic community has a responsibility to continue to ensure these misunderstandings are unpacked, analysed and further clarified. Ongoing research on the camp system continues to elucidate the complex history of Belsen and Dachau. Importantly, historical knowledge and understanding of the liberation process continues to grow. Yet, further investigation is required into the factors that shaped reporting of other concentration camps encountered by the Western Allies in 1945. The recent seventieth anniversary of the


liberation of Nazi concentration camps may re-ignite interest in how memories of the camps were forged in the public sphere. Media coverage of other military trials, however, also demands closer attention. How were the trials of personnel from Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Flossenbürg and other camps presented and did similar themes and stereotypes proliferate in reports? Looking more broadly, it would be worthwhile to examine press coverage of more recent trials of Nazi perpetrators to see if similar representations emerge. In order to better understand how the Nazi camp system is thought about, discussed, remembered, and represented, the links between early reporting and contemporary perceptions of camps must be explored further.

The first “rough draft of history” covering liberation and military trials had a lasting effect on perceptions of camps’ functionality, prisoner profile and concentration camps’ role in the Nazi state. Through the portrayal of key themes the press established stereotypes of victims and perpetrators, informed future categories of representation and shaped collective memory.
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