

HORSES AGAINST TANKS: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND
THE GERMAN INVASION OF POLAND

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The entrance of the German Invasion of Poland and depiction thereof into modern historiographical conversations offers historians superior articulation of the creation of historical memory, mythos, and identity – especially in wider terms of European Imperialism. By utilizing the current trends in gendering of empire, the use of auto-biography and life writing to understand felt realities and obfuscated truths, and the attempts by empire to queer and utilize labeled deviations to control and gain power over their colonized subjects, one is presented a better understanding of how the German Invasion of Poland fits into the story of empire and indigeneity. That story continues past the Third Reich however, as German propaganda in its various forms was accepted as truth after the Second World War, providing justification for and rationalizing post war political power structures of Western nations. As the threat of a cold war with the USSR loomed, many in the American military felt it necessary to accept and support German myths about their military prowess (and non-culpability for the Holocaust) and the inferiority of Slavic military forces. By analyzing not the myths themselves, but how they were created and propagated, historians can add to this historical conversation a case study of just how two seemingly opposed power structures can mobilize similar myths as justification for their own desires and decisions, and in doing so, mythologize the identity and memory of the earnest beginning of the Holocaust.

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INTRODUCTION

DELETED VOICES: MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN IMPERIALISM

The act of inventing a lie presupposes an effort which is distasteful to the mental inertia common to the majority of men. It is much easier to accept with complacency an illusion, at first spontaneous, which gratifies the interest of the moment.

– Marc Bloch

When Marc Bloch wrote *The Historian's Craft*, he did so under German occupation while fighting as a member of the resistance. Published posthumously after his death at the hands of the Nazis, Bloch asserted a strong argument against the dominant German School of History; one which evaluated history from scientific rigour, dealing only with political facts and figures, and ignoring subjectivity, interpretation, and questions of emotion.¹ *The Historian's Craft* fought against this dominance – to open the question of just what history *is* and what historians actually *do* to a wider audience. In doing so, Bloch helped reinsert subjectivity into the historical debate, a subjectivity that had, of course, always existed. Indeed, his assertion that illusion (*myth*) could arise not from invention, but from honest belief, reflects well how human creativity and subjectivity can alter the very memories and identities of history.

Early in *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's graphic novel depiction of his father's (Vladek Spiegelman) experience of the Holocaust, the elder Spiegelman finds himself fighting against the Germans as a member of the Polish Army. Captured in combat, German soldiers accost Vladek and intend to execute him on the spot upon discovering his rifle was hot to the touch – evidence that he was “shooting at us.”² Indeed, the very concept and notion that the Polish nation, Jews in

¹ R. R. Davies. “Marc Bloch,” *History*, Vol 52 no 176, (1967), 280.

² Interestingly, Vladek Spiegelman saves his life by pleading to the Germans in German- showcasing a sudden alteration and adopted identity that the Germans accept and use to believe his claim to have “only fired in the air.” By changing his identity in the view of his captors, his resistance becomes resistance *against* his Polish officer's

particular, would resist the Wehrmacht's invasion was alien to German soldiers, as evidenced by their own writings, which claim Polish military resistance as “characteristic of primitive peoples...in the ‘so-called wild.’”³ The war in Poland was portrayed by German press, popular media, and by the soldiers and generals themselves as a colonial war, in which the German army liberated the German minority in Poland from the tyrannical and unjust rule by “Polish subhumans” and Jews, both of whom held inferior value compared to the lives and civilization of the Germanic peoples. The Third Reich crafted specific identities for Poland and its peoples, Poles and Jews before the war, stoking propaganda efforts to inflame the German civilians and military for a war of extermination; further twisted in popular consciousness as a romantic, idealized form of colonial (anti-)conquest.⁴ Though mostly dismissed by the West, parts of these myths rang true, confirmed by free broadcasters in both Berlin and Warsaw, who, in the best tradition of doublethink, simultaneously disrupted German propagandization of exterminative warfare yet accepted and propagated romanticist notions of warfare, most notable William Shirer's account of Polish cavalry charging upon tanks.

The entrance of the German Invasion of Poland and depiction thereof into modern historiographical conversations offers historians superior articulation of the creation of historical memory, mythos, and identity – especially in wider terms of European Imperialism. By utilizing the current trends in gendering of empire, the use of auto-biography and life writing to understand felt realities and obfuscated truths, and the attempts by empire to queer and utilize

orders – in reality he had shot and killed at least one German soldier. (Art Spiegelman, *Maus I*, (New York City, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 49).

³ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 224.

⁴ Alexander Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 216.

labeled deviations to control and gain power over their colonized subjects, one is presented a better understanding of how the German Invasion of Poland fits into the story of empire and indigeneity.⁵ That story continues past the Third Reich however, as German propaganda in its various forms was accepted as truth after the Second World War, providing justification for and rationalizing post war political power structures of Western nations. As the threat of a cold war with the USSR loomed, many in the American military felt it necessary to accept and support German myths about their military prowess (and non-culpability for the Holocaust) and the inferiority of Slavic military forces.⁶ By analyzing not the myths themselves, but how they were created and propagated, historians can add to this historical conversation a case study of just how two seemingly opposed power structures can mobilize similar myths as justification for their own desires and decisions, and in doing so, mythologize the identity and memory of the earnest beginning of the Holocaust.

Over the past decades, revolutions in social and cultural history have pushed the boundaries of what the historiography of imperialism, colonialism, and the Holocaust have added to the growing conversations of historical memory and identity. Studies of Imperialism have pushed revisionist trends in our understandings of some empires, such as the modern field of Austro-Hungarian historiography, which has not merely reignited the debate among historians over the *modus vivendi* of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but also provided a more comprehensive explanation for the breaking apart of community and social structures in the First World War that served as a catalyst to the rise of the Third Reich's imperialism in Eastern

⁵ In this context, 'queer' or 'queering' refers not just to non-heteronormative behavior, but to the manner in which societies and cultures differentiate between 'normative' and 'non-normative,' including by gender, sex, race, culture, or other systems.

⁶ Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies II, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, (New York City, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Europe. From studies such as Pieter Judson's *Guardians of the Nation*, John Deak's *Building the Imperial State* and Alexander Watson's *The Fortress: The Siege of Przemyśl and the Making of Europe's Bloodlands* we have seen a growing number of historians push the First World War as the maelstrom wherein modern concepts of ethno-nationalism whipped into competition with the imperial power structures of the day, and spun off some of the first 20th century mythologies about Poland and the Eastern Front.⁷ These studies have cemented themselves into broader studies of empire, which have pushed new concepts of gender and the power of empire over trade, using gender and trade as systems of conversation within empire, even if those conversations are repressive in nature (with that repression feeding into the resistance of imperial/colonial subjects within those conversations).⁸

As well, with the end of the Cold War, the historiography of the Holocaust finally achieved a grand synthesis resolving the Intentionalist versus Structuralist debate, as Ian Kershaw and Peter Longerich provided modern analysis which rejected mythic concepts of a highly efficient German bureaucratic apparatus and less-complex visions of an intentionalized “evil” in favour of a chaotic radicalization process of “Working Towards the Fuhrer.”⁹ This concept has even been found to have precedent in Wilhelmine imperial adventures in Africa,

⁷ Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006); John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015); Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Alexander Watson, *The Fortress: The Siege of Przemyśl and the Making of Europe's Bloodlands*, (New York City, New York: Basic Books, 2020)

⁸ Kate Imy, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019); T.J. Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

⁹ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York City, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Edward Arnold, 2000), Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012).

most notably a similar system of “Working Towards the Kaiser” during the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in South-West Africa (modern-day Namibia).¹⁰ This modern view is gaining its footing in military histories of the Polish campaign, and even more specified histories which depict the brutality and genocidal ambitions of the Third Reich in Poland during the campaign. However, as pointed out by Wildt in *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, there is a “significant gap in the scholarly literature” in synthesizing the German Invasion of Poland into the greater conceptualization of both Nazi views on race and broader Imperial historiography.¹¹ Though works like Wendy Lower’s *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* serve to explain the modes of German colonialism in the Ukraine and Knab’s *Wearing the Letter P* explore the deportation and slave labour of Poland women in Germany, the actual invasion of Poland has been left out of these stories – which seem to use the military campaign as a footnote rather than a definitive segment of German imperialism.¹²

To make that contribution, however, theoretical approaches that have been pioneered and developed during this foundation of historiography must be utilized to analyze and comprehend the depiction and memory of the German invasion. One important consideration is explained in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper’s *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* as the concept of the “Politics of Difference.” This concept proposes that the manner

¹⁰ David Olusoga and Caspar W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, (London, United Kingdom, Faber and Faber, 2010); Jeremy Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero: Kaiser Wilhelm II, His General, His Settlers, His Soldiers*, (Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press, 2011).

¹¹ Wildt, 440.

¹² Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Wearing the Letter P Polish Women as Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany, 1939-1945* (New York City, New York: Hippocrene Books, 2016); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

in which imperial nations gained control over subjugated peoples through the categorization and division of resistance to their power also led to *better* resistance against definition, as people used their granted identities as rallying points around which to build a conversation with the imperial state.¹³ One can see such resistance occurring as Poles during and after the invasion used the identities given to them by German colonizers to define their own communities and memory of the war, including the unemotional rationalization of collaborationist efforts against the “lesser” Jewish populace.¹⁴ However, in order to tie into broader explanations of Imperialism, one must move beyond mere Euro-centric definitions of indigeneity and empire. Though the Politics of Difference as a theoretical approach to empire holds much weight, history remains global, not centralized to any one geographical region, as proposed by C.A. Bayly’s *Birth of the Modern World*.¹⁵ While still supporting the concept of the Politics of Difference, Bayly provides the needed framework for research into the Western reaction to the Polish campaign, decentralizing the campaign from simple German/Polish interpretation and opening up to a broader world, especially in the United States, and even filmographic depictions of the Siege of Warsaw propagated by Julien Bryan in South America.

Those Politics of Difference, however, raise an especially illuminating approach – the concept put forward by T.J. Tallie’s *Queering Colonial Natal* of British imperial “queering” of socio-cultural institutions in their conquered territories. Where Tallie looks at the “queering” of native peoples in Africa as a way to exert colonial control and alter identity, a similar queering of

¹³ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010)

¹⁴ Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ C.A. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, (Malden, Massachusetts, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

the German invasion of Poland occurred, as German and Western stereotypes of Poland fed into promoting the backwardness, resistance, and “sub-humanity” of Poles and Jews.¹⁶ Jews were especially degraded, as representation of Jews in German society focused on clothes, physical appearance, and religious identity as specific examples of their sub-humanity; queering Jewish Orthodox culture as something “other” and “lesser” than German *Kultur*. Gender Theory can also be included in ‘queering’ analysis – examples provided by Elizabeth Harvey’s *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* operate as a part of the puzzle of gender in the conquest of Poland; however they ignore war’s innate ‘masculinity’ as portrayed by German propagandists.¹⁷ Such depictions of masculinity in the German invasion pair well with the breakdown of social mores, as women fight in the Polish resistance and German women go east as the bearers of *Kultur* in a civilizing mission. Their experiences combine to offer new avenues of understanding the German invasion itself, especially the roles of masculinity, feminism, and differing gendered voices both during the invasion and in its representation in popular media after.

In speaking of representation, its theoretical grounding encompasses a wide range of analytical approaches which includes not just forms (including violence) of representation, but also ways to understand self-representation and its seeming limitations which are, in fact, strong benefits to my project. Analysis of photograph, film, and other representative forms in news and propaganda media offer the chance to not just see such media as evidence of actions, but as self-censored and subjective distorted aspects of reality, which can, in their act of creation, serve as

¹⁶ Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal*.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*, (London, United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2003). The masculinity of uniforms, medals, and weaponry themselves can also be understood using theories and concepts of material culture, such as in Leora Auslander and Tahra Zahra’s *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018).

violence against those depicted. *On Photography* by Susan Sontag, “Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians” by R.C. Raack, and *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* by Michel-Rolph Trouillot all serve as prime theoretical examples of how to approach the violence media representation. Indeed, Susan Sontag points out that photography itself becomes a “fantasy-machine whose use is addictive” in a predatory fashion – a concept which explains neatly German and Western war photography of the campaign.¹⁸ However, even *if* these acts of violence attempt to serve as tools of repression, as pointed out in Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Vol 1*, repression *itself* can be seen as a full conversation through which power is created and utilized within the political economy of the imperial state.¹⁹ This broadening of violence is supported through works like Slavoj Žižek’s *Violence*, which offers a theoretical approach to the question of violence itself, defining violence as not merely physical, but non-violent as well, paralleling well with Michael Geyer’s “Some Hesitant Observations Concerning ‘Political Violence.’”²⁰ Indeed, this inner subjectivity of violent acts and representation fits well into subjective theories on valuation – the valuing of voiced accounts and memories falls into a subjective lens, as culture and power structures pick and choose, much like a planned economy, without allowing a true market of voices to develop. If it is the historian’s job to open up to these voices, one must work to accept their inner subjectivity – the German war reporter may be supporting a specific party line, however his inner

¹⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York City, New York: Picador, 1977); R.C. Raack, “Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians,” *Journal of Contemporary History* (1983); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*, (New York City, New York: Random House, 1978).

²⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *On Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, (New York City, New York: Picador, 2008); Michael Geyer, “Some Hesitant Observations Concerning ‘Political Violence’ *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* Vol 4 no 3, (Summer 2003).

belief in that line must be accepted to better understand his or her vision of events.

This concept, often portrayed in Holocaust studies as “Working Towards the Fuhrer,”²¹ falls neatly into the system of “felt reality” put forward by the historiography and theory of autobiography and life writing. By analyzing the falsehoods and deletions of voice and memory from life-writing, books like Jennifer Wallach’s *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* and Sidondie Smith and Julie Watson’s *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative*, these flaws turn into critical advantages, demonstrating how life-writers actually understood and saw history and their part in it.²² By applying such concepts of deletion of voice/memory to the historiography of the campaign itself, any analysis of media depiction of the invasion of Poland works within both the historiographical conversations of imperialism, and the theory of historical memory and representation. By analyzing diaries and life-writing about the campaign, such forms of memory can be contextualized within their own voice and tone, as various German memoirs published by military history publishing companies (most notably Stackpole) serve to present the Polish Campaign, and warfare in general, in romantic and heroic tones, obfuscating the exterminative and racial colonial war of the Germans in favour of rote tactical and individual action. Essentially, to study memory, one must expand beyond the classical concepts of archival research and expand into modern media as source and representation; the use of photography,

²¹ The “Working Towards the Fuhrer” principle, coined by Ian Kershaw, reconciles the debate among historians on Hitler’s role in decision making, and has become the modern synthesis for Holocaust studies. Essentially, Hitler’s aloofness and chaotic administrative practices, allowed power to remain in his hands, while putting decision making on *how* to carry out his ideas in his subordinates. This system permeated the German civilian and military structure, allowing great leeway and subjectivity to vague orders, yet always pressing for greater and greater violence and finality. (Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis*, New York City, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000, 313-4).

²² Sidondie Smith and Julie Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

film, radio broadcast, and life writing to better encapsulate the memory and identity of the campaign, and even utilize secondary sources as primary. Those historians who accept the crafted historical memory of the Polish Campaign at face value served to show the strength and resonance of certain myths and identities.

Theories of life-writing can also be used to better analyze war-time German accounting of the campaign, including the day-by-day paperwork for German units in Poland. The *Kriegstagebücher*, or War Diaries, of German divisions include minutes, orders, reports on combat actions, and even analysis of the Polish people and military. These war diaries are not merely document-laden tomes, but the life-writing of a military unit, offering the chance to find and analyze falsehoods, deletions, and representations of their time in Poland to better comprehend how these diaries influenced the memory of the campaign both during the war and after.²³ Expanding into media depictions, such as German war-time photography, newspaper reports, and propaganda movies produced during the war about the Polish Campaign demonstrated how German government planned the political economy and narrative of the campaign, creating and disseminating many of the early myths and identities of the invasion that would later be picked up on by Western media and broadcast with little to no real critique.²⁴ Even Western war-time media, post-war interviews and military acceptance of German explanations of the war showcase the manners with which conversations of Allied war-time choices and future conflict with the Soviet Union were repressed or strengthened via interpretations of the Polish Campaign. Indeed, the invasion by the Soviet Union, beginning on September 17, 1939, went (and continues to be) underreported in Western media, typically

²³ Wildt, 440.

²⁴ Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front*, (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2008).

assuming the Soviet invasion as a *coup de main* which could go unquestioned, and Polish resistance to this invasion from the East completely ignored in favour of the Western-Soviet wartime alliance.

These sources set up a field of conversations, between creators of media and political powers, between enemies east and west, and between Poles, Jews, and their occupiers. Through understanding Polish collaboration and support of the Holocaust, even early on during the Second World War, one can see how German views on identity translated to the creation of power and myth in Polish society, breaking apart established multi-ethnic communities as the Poles radicalized their anti-Semitic leanings to outward physical violence and genocide – taking their place in the Nazi hierarchy at the same time they were resisting it.²⁵ This creates a fascinating juxtaposition in my research – Poles both accepted and rejected segments of the German identity and mythos of the invasion of Poland, much as the Western Allies, utilizing it for their own sense of power and heroism as a manner of resistance and survival. The queering of Poland even allowed some Poles a way out – by accepting their hidden “Germanness” many Poles were able to adopt new, apex identities as Germans, as Vladek Spiegelman was able to for a fleeting time, to save their lives and even gain new power over their prior community structures. Overall, these methodologies offer a significant contribution to fill the gaps identified by Rossino and Wildt. The use of life-writing analysis, media representation as violence and conversation, and the “Politics of Difference’s” role in the creation of memory and mythos (or “felt reality”), clearly demonstrate that the creation of colonial, romanticized identities led to a mythic historical memory which rooted itself deeply into prior conceptualizations and visions of empire which still cling to the historiography of the Polish Campaign.

²⁵ Grabowski, 21, 69.

Rather than accept a simple chronological narrative of events, this dissertation takes a thematic approach with chapters arranged to exploit the synergy of their interdependent characteristics to better analyze each thematic area in turn. The first two chapters face Eastward to demonstrate the Nazi German approach to the campaign and are paired together as war-time interpretations of the Polish Campaign that existed in Germany *solely* on the foundation of the campaign's presentation itself. In "A Savage Colonial War," the representation and memory of the combat and campaign itself is analyzed, including soldier's accounts, war time diaries from leaders/units, and especially the Nazi media empire, as war reporters took photos, shot film, and even created a documentary about the campaign just days after its end. Their representation and journalism provided the world's first snapshots of the Second World War in Europe, with a booming voluminous voice carrying distortions of reality that overwhelmed, obfuscated, and silenced other voices. These representations justified the German Imperium abroad as a co-equal among other "imperialist" powers and encouraged the fantasies of empire already well entrenched into the mindset of the German soldiery. By critically analyzing these representations I bring forth an understanding of how not just concepts of race, but concepts of colonial conquest and warfare affected the performance and media representation of the German invasion. Such concepts had long maintained themselves in the psyche of German culture and visions of Eastern Front, traumatized by the defeat of the Teutonic Knights at the hands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, seeking revenge, a *Drang nach Osten* which would reassert German domination of their Eastern neighbors.²⁶

The following chapter 2, "War as the Grand Adventure," analyzes the exploitation of

²⁶ Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (New York City, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 180, 196.

these early snapshots from the war-time media as fodder for fictional movies, published novellas, and other non-fiction or fictional depictions serving to constantly remind the German people of their victories, especially as the war front started to turn sour during the mid-war years. Often pulled from the various interviews and photos taken of the campaign itself, they were expanded upon and grown into full length interpretations of the campaign, which emphasized the ease, colonial aspect, and an almost voyeuristic comparison of German living conditions to the Poles/Slavs and Jews of Eastern Europe. Such media continued to purport the charge of Polish cavalry, including filmographic, literary, and even artistic accounts of the campaign (Fig. A.1) which were meant to not only colonialize the war, but to even provide an uplifting view of defeat²⁷ to the conquered Poles. Indeed, the occupation of Poland also provided new methods of political differentiation and identity, as the Third Reich sought to categorize and subjugate the Polish nation based on phrenological and eugenic interpretations of racial science. The Germans encouraged an ongoing conversation with Poles, both based on resistance to offered identity, and acceptance of other concepts of power which encouraged collaboration and involvement in anti-Semitic violence.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn westwards, looking specifically to England and the United States of America, as broadcasters trying to feed a news hungry audience, leavened their own limited direct reporting from the battlespace with German announcements verbatim – without questioning. In “Romanticizing Resistance,” Western media sources such as William Shirer and Julien Bryan and their roles in the romanticization of the Polish Campaign are brought out by comparing to straight-forward accounts, such as those of the war tourist Claire Hollingworth, to

²⁷ “What made the conduct of the figure in question heroic was that he had displayed physical courage and metal fortitude in the face of defeat.” (Stephanie Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016, 20).

distinguish observation and true reportage of the campaign from personal biases and romance. Where Shirer operated from Berlin depicting the war as he was shown it, gradually finding himself accepting Nazi claims about the nature of the military action while still finding ways to wheedle out the worst aspects of the Third Reich, Julien Bryan stayed in Warsaw during the siege, providing the only significant photo and film documentation of the war from the Polish perspective. Claire Hollingworth, who broke the story of the Second World War before any other reporter, quickly leaves the scene staying just ahead of the Germans, her reporting flitting vignette to vignette whilst never staying long enough to truly inculcate and cover the evolving situations in detail. As such, the Polish campaign shown to Western audiences had already gone through multiple lenses of interpretation, from Julien Bryan's singular focus on the Siege of Warsaw and the sympathetic portrayal of Polish suffering to Shirer's ultimately flailing attempts to broadcast the truth of the Polish Campaign to the West, as his reporting submersed in German romanticized myths of Polish cavalry charges and backwardness.

These findings from Chapter 3 feed directly into Chapter 4, "The Political Economy of Truth and Myth," wherein these myths and identities are accepted in Western Media and used to depict a romantic mythology of the campaign and further reinforced already existing Western stereotyped racial attitudes towards Eastern Europe. Many of these military retellings of the campaign fixated on Nazis myths of Polish backwardness, incompetence, and general technological failings, essentially agreeing with the colonial precepts of the Nazis; Poland was Near-Asia not European, a remote expanse far removed from the vaunted cultural capitals of Europe.²⁸ These precepts played into the political economy of the West, which sought to

²⁸ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 38-9, 114, 251-3.

maintain an alliance of convenience with the Soviet Union that meant rejecting the Polish Government in Exile's attempts at recognition for their sacrifice and their voice – a voice deleted by the need to rationalize those in power and their choices to achieve victory in Europe. Although extremes of Nazi propaganda would not be tolerated, the portions which most mated up with British and American notions of Poland's identity and their own diplomatic needs became widely accepted, propagated, and adopted, affecting not only the depiction of the campaign, but even how far media was willing to portray Poland as an allied nation.²⁹

Finally, Chapter 5, "A 'Felt' Reality," launches a broad assessment of post-war historiography, memoir, and accounting of the Polish campaign from both German and British/American sources. Following war's end, with descent of the Iron Curtain across Eastern Europe, a growing need to buttress a Western Alliance against the Soviet Union meant rejecting Polish voices about the war in the east. Thus, the Western "felt" reality absorbed the German "false" reality, one in which stories of Polish cavalry officers breaking their swords on German tanks before committing suicide to avoid surrender was accepted and continues into the present day.³⁰ By using memoirs, especially those of German and Polish soldiers, one can witness this evolution, as German accounts are widely distributed and became widely popular, while Polish voices are suppressed to small prints for local ethnic communities. Writers who did know better were often simply ignored, as there was such little attention paid to the campaign that many authors of history simply relied upon "common knowledge" across the community and saw no reason to dig deeper than a surface level into what was (and sometimes still is) consistently seen as a mere opening act to the greater historical drama. Indeed, even in Poland such stories found

²⁹ Mieczysław B.B. Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland, 1939-1945*, (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 61, 86, 91.

³⁰ David Stone, *Hitler's Army, 1939-1945: The Men, Machines and Organization* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith, 2009).

a second act, as Communist Poland sought within a Marxist historiography to prove Poland was always on a path to Communism, glorifying Marxist heroism by identifying politically correct heroes whilst simultaneously denigrating the preceding Polish culture as anachronistic/monarchist/capitalist/exploitive, by appropriating Nazi propaganda to fit into their own beliefs on the war.³¹ Such depictions often landed on the same tropes accepted in the West, though not always for the same rationales. In effect, what had been Nazi war time propaganda found itself useful to both sides of the post-war European landscape, and thus lacked any motive to die out.

The study of memory and identity in war-time media demonstrates how this mythic identity was a successful attempt to dominate German, then global, memory of the Polish campaign, queering the Polish military, people, and nation to not only support in-place power structures, but to mythologize the campaign out of a sought nostalgia for the campaign itself. Such steps, however, only serve as an initial foray, one which must be expanded upon and seen from new and varied case studies crossing geographical and cultural barriers. Concluding with “A Mythic Identity,” the manners with which Germany and the West ‘queered’ Poland during the invasion and its aftermath are shown to continue to affect historiography and modern memory to this day. Within Poland, the rise of nationalism and memory for the war have led to clashes in media representation, as even movies that glorify the Polish army fail to glorify it appropriately or enough, while some Germans lash back at Polish attempts commemorate their resistance in 1939 as simply replacing one mythos for another.³² In other cases, aspects of

³¹ *Lotna*, Directed by Andrzej Wajda, Written by Andrzej Wajda and Wojciech Żukrowski, KADR, 1959; *Westerplatte broni się nadal*, Directed by Stanisław Różewicz, Written by Jan Szczepański, Zespół Filmowy “Rytm,” 1967.

³² “‘Tajemnica Westerplatte’ filmem antypolskim?” *Stopklatka.pl*, August 26, 2015, <https://stopklatka.pl/wydarzenia/wydarzenie.asp?wi=48267> (Accessed February 12, 2023); “Sieben Tage im September.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (September 1, 2019).

German colonial myths are embraced by Polish educational foundations and the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, even when the Polish government simultaneously attempts to push back at that mythos internationally.³³ Thus, studies into obscure propagandistic media and mythic memory are not merely attempts to set the historical record straight, or to disabuse long-dead Nazis of their staying power, but as a path to greater understanding and preparation for humanities ongoing need to romanticize, queer, and mythologize its own identities and memories.

The German Invasion of Poland was not merely one of military objectives, but one which grounded the conversation between the Third Reich, her subject people in conquered Poland, and to the wider world. The conversations occurring in imperial and identity/historical memory historiography justified the conquest of Poland as a fulfillment of colonial aspirations which dated back to the early days of European imperialism.³⁴ As early as the 1500s, German colonizers in the New World such as the merchant group Bartolomä Welsler were involved heavily in trade with Spanish South American colonias, before being given license to establish their own colony in the area of Venezuela. The failure of this venture, far from turning German off from colonialism, only drove further romance of the colonial mission as authors Viktor Hantzsch and Kurt Hassert sought to utilize that failure as, in fact, a glorious adventure, in which atrocities were mitigated by circumstance, and the ultimate failure “legitimized their claim to be

³³ “No, Polish Cavalry Never Attacked Nazi Tanks, Irate Poland Tells ‘Mad Money’ Host,” *Foreign Policy*, May 23, (2017); Rafael Medoff, *Karski’s Mission: To Stop the Holocaust*, Illustrated by Dean Motter, (Washington, DC: Wyman Institute, 2015). *Karski’s Mission* is now printed and distributed regularly in Poland for use in educating Polish youth about Karski and Polish resistance to the Nazi Invasion and the Holocaust.

³⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (New York City, New York: Routledge, 2008); Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*; Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

given another chance.”³⁵ Indeed, post-war analysis of German memory of the war found it focused on their loss and victimhood as a result of WW I and used that to excuse away defeat and, by mythologizing the state of the war, Germans could still cling to their own nostalgia, pointing to the pre-1939 massacres of German Poles as evidence of the necessity of war and to rationalize their racial views of Slavs.³⁶ Meanwhile, romantic notions of Polish cavalry charges and mechanized warfare gripped readers of the west, whilst providing the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) and Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH) an underpinning to plan Operation Barbarossa, foreseeing a final struggle against an anachronistic foe who would resist gloriously, irrationally, but ultimately futilely prior to being eclipsed. Matching preconceived notions of Poland supported by centuries of mythology and applied identity, the West was primed to accept the portions of German propaganda which matched their stereotypes of Eastern Europe.³⁷ Using these stereotypes to understand the writings and reportage of the Invasion brings a modern conceptualization of media representation and historical memory into our understanding of the Polish campaign, and imperialism itself, one which has found itself all the more important in a world where imperial, colonial ambitions in Eastern Europe have again raised their ugly head.

³⁵ Zantop, 29.

³⁶ Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2008); Frank Biess, Mark Roseman, and Hanna Schissler, *Conflict, Catastrophe, and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History* (New York City, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

³⁷ Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland, 1939-1945*.

CHAPTER 1

A SAVAGE COLONIAL WAR: THE PRODUCTION OF MEMORY BY GERMANY

DURING THE POLISH CAMPAIGN

Kriegsberichter or Kriegspropandandist?

The 4th Panzer Division's share in the invasion of Poland suffered a rough start at the village of Mokra, with nearly one quarter of its armour knocked out by a Polish cavalry brigade backed by a single armoured train. Resolute as proper German soldiers, the men of the 4th Panzer Division recovered and stormed through Polish lines, nonstop pinpricks, and rearguard actions by the Polish defenders.³⁸ By September 7, 4th Panzer stood in front of the enemy capitol, Warsaw, intending to make history. That evening the corps commander, Erich Hoepner, pronounced an all-out assault by his units on Warsaw for the next morning – a coup-de-grace that would crush Poland's resistance once and for all.³⁹ Not only would his men of 4th Panzer prove their mettle, but also the superiority of the German soldier and their illustrious new Panzers. Yet, days later, 4th Panzer remained stuck outside Warsaw fighting for its very survival against a massive Polish counter-attack.⁴⁰ Rather than a quick jog into Warsaw to wipe out a presumed sporadic, demoralized defense, the men and tanks of the 4th Panzer Division found themselves caught in a trap of their own making. From every street corner and building window, Polish machine gunners and riflemen poured fire into their accompanying infantry. Shielded behind barricades, Polish anti-tank guns spat shells into the German Panzers, blasting the small

³⁸ Steven Zaloga, *Poland 1939: The Birth of the Blitzkrieg*, (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2002), 43.

³⁹ Erich Hoepner, *4th Panzer Division Microfilmed Records*, Record Group T315 Roll 191, (National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 1964).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

tankettes to smithereens.⁴¹ The civilians of Warsaw joined the fray, lobbing hand grenades and Molotov cocktails, even filling an entire street with oil to set ablaze under the German tanks – roasting the crewmen alive. Warsaw would not fall easily.

This truth of the assault on Warsaw would not, however, be recorded by the divisional *Kriegstagebücher* (war diaries), nor witnessed by the PK-Reporters. These “war reporters” rode alongside the combat men of 4th Panzer Division with orders to record and describe the actions of the Wehrmacht for posterity, in authentic, frontline accounting meant to demonstrate the reality of the German invasion and their actions. They would not, however, record September 8th’s actions in a manner fitting with modern war photographers or journalists. Rather than diving themselves into the fray to record the near crushing defeat of a German Panzer division, the PK-Reporters restricted themselves to taking a few posed shots proffering only a glimpse of an attack on Warsaw, one that was orderly, by the book, and displaying as little real resistance as possible (see Fig. A.3). Instead of joining in the assault, the PK-Reporters were there to showcase a war that was fought clean and fairly, with German modernization and regimentation enforcing order over chaos. Divisional war diaries left out defeats and losses, focusing more on command directives and speeches by their leaders, extolling their perceived successes above all else, and often providing little more than supporting testimony to the war the PK-Reporters wished to portray. Primarily, the war was to be sanitized for the home front, and focus the rest, not on the chaotic experiences of combat, but propandization of German moral and military superiority.

The PK-Reporter program was instituted shortly before the outbreak of war as a

⁴¹ Richard Hargreaves, *Blitzkrieg Unleashed: The German Invasion of Poland, 1939*, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2008), 146-7.

corrective measure by the Wehrmacht.⁴² Recognizing Germany's failure during the First World War to understand the importance of psychological warfare as a weapon led to repeated post-war self-questioning as to how propaganda could be incorporated into a wider schema of psychological warfare. Indeed, propaganda had been, in the eyes of pre-WWI Germany, "nothing more than despised Western cant" that had no purpose in the *Kultur* of Wilhelminian Germany.⁴³ By recognizing these failures, the Germans sought to address them in a specifically German manner – rather than viewing the mass-appeal of western propaganda as an outgrowth of Western democracy, many saw it as "an instrument...that, if operated properly, could vent a certain opinion, conviction, or message out into the world."⁴⁴ It would take the Nazi Party, with its natural disruption of old, conservative outlooks on war and the use of psychology, to truly harness the power of propaganda for the military. This transformation would serve not only to use the military itself as a tool towards psychological victory but would allow the military to experiment with its own usage of propaganda as a weapon of war.

The PK-Reporters were formed, first and foremost, as a propagandistic wing of the Wehrmacht. Rather than operating as western news reporters would, these war propagandists were educated and trained to emphasize the ideals of the Nazi state, and to buttress Nazi ideologies through their war reporting. Goebbels' Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, or RVMP) acted as the catalyst for the transition, hand picking and training those who would soon lift their cameras and pens in support of the German war effort.⁴⁵ But, as a part of the Wehrmacht, such propaganda

⁴² Uziel, 26-7, 66.

⁴³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, (New York City, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2001), 215.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁵ Uziel, 96-97.

efforts could and would be controlled and tailored by the military itself to their own ends, whilst kept under the rein of the Nazi leadership. Thus, the military and the state were both able to push forward a nationalistic drive for war that did not exist prior to the invasion of Poland.⁴⁶ Indeed, the German citizenry was by and large against foreign adventures, and Hitler's popularity rode heavily on the public perception that Hitler sought to *avoid* war, not start it. The PK-Reporters therefore had the job of not just emphasizing Nazi Weltanschauung (world view), but to legitimize the aggressive actions of the Wehrmacht to the German public at large, "...present[ing] it to his people as a 'lovely dream' in which every soldier does his historic duty...."⁴⁷ This lovely dream, of course, was the subjugation and colonization of a foreign nation. Using photography, film, oral interviews, and written testimonials, the PK-Reporter fostered unique colonial identities that legitimized the German invasion and assault on the Polish nation and Jewry, especially relying on real and contrived Polish war crimes, the mythic ineptitude of the Polish (Slavic/Jewish) military, and the blatant criminality, laziness, and general sub-humanity of the Polish Jew.⁴⁸

Indeed, one of the key aspects for understanding the actions and rationale of empire is well summarized by T.J. Tallie's *Queering Colonial Natal*. The concept of "queering" presented by Tallie involves the making of a land's natives into non-normative identities, as the Nazis viewed Poland through a "skewed" lens of assumed "ideas, actions, or formations."⁴⁹ Violence, such as enforcing new clothes, new cultural standards, and new gender roles, could be resisted by "challeng[ing], subvert[ing], and rema[king]" imperial structures to fit into their own sense of

⁴⁶ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 202-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁸ Uziel, 257-9.

⁴⁹ T.J. Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 7.

self.⁵⁰ In similar ways, the German memory and myth of Polish campaign is a form of queering. Visions of how Polish men, Jews, and even use of cavalry, were all non-normative to an American or Western European viewpoint and were presented in ‘queer’ formats. Such queer formants already had long been established, as even prior to the First World War German administrators operating in Poland already saw the Polish as a “badly retarded culture” and Poland itself as “backward, not very modern, and disorganized” filled with a people who were imbued with a “natural laziness and contentment with their lot.”⁵¹ Indeed, it is this position of *defining* which is so critical to the PK-Reporter’s role. Through their reports and photographs, the PK-Reporters hoped to define Eastern Europe, and Poland especially, as a new German imperium – harkening back to Europe’s original colonial definitions of empire in Africa. Early Nazi attacks on Jews based themselves on separation, dehumanization, and the seeds of legal terror.⁵² Rather than enacting extra-legal punishment, the Germans maintained a legal codification of their crimes against Jewish Germans. Years of dehumanization of the other, the de-valuing of a group of human beings, served as a strong catalyst for future radicalization during the Second World War.

That radicalization, however, did not descend purely from a top-down ordering. While the PK-Reporter were trained along Nazi propagandistic lines, we know today that much of the Nazi Regime was not run as a simplistic, top-down formula of control. Instead, the regime acted as a conversation between the lower echelons and higher, with higher echelons (guided from the

⁵⁰ Tallie, 52.

⁵¹ Stephan Lehnstaedt, “Pride and Prejudice: The Central Powers’ Images of Poles and Jews, 1915-18,” *The Central Powers in Russia’s Great War and Revolution: Enemy Visions and Encounters 1914-22*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica Publishers, 2020), 26.

⁵² Marion Kaplan, “In Public: Jews are Turned into Pariahs, 1933-1938,” *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York City, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-49.

top by Hitler himself) issuing guidelines and general procedures, while those at the lower levels sought to meet those guidelines and exceed them in pursuit of their own self-interest and need to impress.⁵³ As Wendy Lower makes clear in her work, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, Hitler's musings of Ukraine (and Eastern Europe in general) as Germany's "India" must not be dismissed, as such visions informed and "...shaped the policies and behavior of Nazi leaders and their functionaries..."⁵⁴ This acceptance of the internal *Weltanschauung* of the Nazi state dominates much of modern Holocaust literature, but has yet to be fully applied to the actual creation of mythic memory and identity from below. Individual PK-Reporters, in the course of their duties, crafted stories and artistic accounts which matched their own subjective valuation of news and imagery – informing the top just as much as the top informed them.

Such identities and myths were not unique to Germans in Western European culture, as evidenced from the hundreds of years of anti-Eastern European stereotyping by Enlightened Europeans be they German, French, English, or American. Indeed, Western European belief in the Poles as Asiatic half-breeds that couldn't govern their own nation, one overflowing with unwashed, uneducated peasants and nefarious Jews was a long-established identity.⁵⁵ Voltaire, in his travelogues, wrote extensively of the Poles as little different than "ancient Sarmatians" ruled by a nobility which mastered Poland through warrior ethos and violence, rather than enlightened, 'modern' rule.⁵⁶ Such beliefs carried through the 20th century, as even nations nominally allied to Poland produced films that remained highly insulting to Slavic peoples, going

⁵³ Wildt, 18, 120.

⁵⁴ Lower, 3.

⁵⁵ Wolff, 91, 335.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

so far as to claim Poles as “uncomprehending at the sight of a tractor.”⁵⁷ What was unique to the Germans, was their coopting of such ethnic propaganda to abet the legitimization of the German invasion, especially in the framing and subject of PK-Reporter photography. The German and Nazi empire sought to define and invent Eastern Europe in memory, myth, and violence before, during, and after the Second World War as their own Orient – a way to romanticize conquest, legitimize violence, and comfort self, respectively. Through the deft use of both traditional and modern media formats, PK-Reporters succeeded in crafting specific, intentional colonial identities and myths aligned with Nazi policies for Poland, Jews, and the Slavic peoples; identities that generated traction among the civilian populace to rally to the cause and also to instill and confirm within soldiers a patriotic fervour to fight and die for the Vaterland.

Liberation from Lawlessness

Though not yet famous for his photographic and film work during the Siege of Warsaw in 1939, Julien Bryan was a prescient photographer forecasting the power of imagery media in the 1930s. Writing for *The Leica Manual* in 1938, Bryan gave a lengthy discussion of how “photography is...tool which I use for a very definite purpose, namely, to tell a story.”⁵⁸ Bryan goes on, after discussion of gear and field choices, to point out that all cameramen should “have some clear cut objective” rather than simply taking photos ad hoc.⁵⁹ While Bryan was, likely, little read by the average German camera man training to become a PK-Reporter, his points still ring true for the PK-Reporter role in the Invasion of Poland. The photographers were not there so much to document reality, but to use their camera lens to tell a story – in this case, the story

⁵⁷ Biskupski, 189.

⁵⁸ Julien Bryan, “Exploring with the Leica,” *The Leica Manual*, (New York City, New York: Morgan and Lester, 1938), 513.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 519.

the Wehrmacht and Nazi establishment wanted to tell the home front and the world. Especially key to this was the portrayal of the initial invasion not as an aggressive action against an equal people within the European family, but as a war of liberation to free oppressed persons from an incompetent and dangerous government.⁶⁰

As the invasion commenced, the PK-Reporter were assigned their storylines by the RVMP, either through Goebbels himself, various lower ministries, or the Wehrmacht. The first story, on September 3, included a special focus on mountain and armoured troops (meant to showcase technological developments within the Wehrmacht during the 1930s), the benevolence of the German invasion (especially the lack of damage to churches and monuments), and, of special note, the “activity of civilians as partisans.”⁶¹ Such activities had long been propagandized within the Third Reich, as Goebbels and his propaganda ministry spread tales of genocidal assaults against the German minority in Poland. Thus, even before the war began, Nazi propagandists had been hard at work creating an oppressed ethnic minority yearning for freedom.⁶² It was in this setting that the PK-Reporter portrayed Germany’s entrance into Poland in a jubilatory manner. The German minority in the Polish Corridor are shown coming out in throngs to welcome the German invasion, viewing it as final release from the lawlessness and corruption of the *Sanacja*.⁶³ It was a perfect opportunity for the PK-Reporters to craft their trade – documenting the invasion of Poland with a mind towards the liberation of the oppressed German Volk, while simultaneously disguising Germany’s real goal of the invasion – colonial conquest. Indeed, the PK-Reporter were, in these early campaigns of Nazi Germany, “the only

⁶⁰ Rossino, 24-5, 224.

⁶¹ Uziel, 257-8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 257.

⁶³ The *Sanacja*, or “Sanitation” was the pre-war Polish government. Essentially an oligarchical dictatorship, it had emerged under Józef Pilsudski after his overthrow of the democratic Polish government in 1924.

news gathering organizations allowed access to the zones of operations,” and so duly were the only source of information for the RMVP.⁶⁴ The fortunes (and misfortunes) of war would also present PK-Reporters with the opportunity to prove to the German people (and attempt to demonstrate to the world) the efficacy, humanity and benevolence of the German invasion.

The photography of the PK-Reporters, in practice, relied on carefully staging scenes, embellished with racial stereotypes playing to Western European prejudices; imagery meant to inspire home front support and sway world opinion. One such photograph shows Panzer IV tanks carefully making their way down a street packed with cheering onlookers (see Fig. A.4). Those in the forefront of the photograph are shown beaming with what appears to be a blissful sense of liberation as they urge on the invasion of their country. In his caption, the photographer writes that “Everywhere there are the best relations between troops and inhabitants. All German inhabitants, also the decent-minded Polish population, see in our soldiers the liberators from chaos and mismanagement...” Yet, this photograph and the related caption are simply following the story arc the PK-Reporter were ordered to create: a rosy propagandistic view of the invasion meant to foster support – support for what, in actuality, was a war of conquest and racial extermination.⁶⁵ Showing a German minority massing in the street to cheer on German tanks, the photographer is portraying an invasion that is peaceful and non-violent. German Panzers are not just smashing through Polish defenses, they are parading through town being showered with flowers by a good German citizenry enthusiastically giving the *Hitlergruß* in a show of loyal support for their Führer and his policies. Indeed, as the focus is clearly on the ethnic German

⁶⁴ Uziel, 257.

⁶⁵ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 439-440.

minority in the town – a sharp division being drawn between German and Pole in the Polish corridor.

It is through a thoughtful reading of the captions, and the close analysis of the vocabulary, that one can demonstrate how these photographs sought not to just portray a rosy picture of the war, but also work towards propagating and buttressing Nazi Weltanschauung. The PK-Reporter uses terms in the captions that distinctly separate the German from the Pole: “Einwohner” and “Bevölkerung” distinguishes the German minority as true inhabitants of the land and towns from Poles who are merely the “population” allowed to remain upon the conquered lands via the benevolence of the German army. Indeed, by further noting that the “decent” Polish populace come out to support the German invasion, the PK-Reporter contrive a credence to popular Polish support for the invasion, as well as draw a line between the “decent” Poles and Poles who continue to resist as ‘bandits.’ There is no reference to Jewish citizenry (who are presumably not counted as inhabitants or populace). The ‘decent’ Poles can remain as a population, according to Nazi policy, as an uneducated, docile slave caste – Jews are to be expelled.⁶⁶

The backgrounds of images can often speak more than the foregrounds – in Figure A.4, the emphasis in the foreground is on a preselected group of avid citizens, while in the background several townspeople look on with furtive expressions and lingering doubt regarding the German invasion. Where are the “decent” Poles in these two groups? Which group is more representative of the sentiments of the whole of the townsfolk? While the focus of the image is on the Panzertruppen entering on their armoured steeds to the scene, in reality there are only two tanks in the entire image with no accompanying German troops as required by tactical doctrine –

⁶⁶ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 428-9.

clearly indicating a staged event. The tank most clearly showcased (as well as the one behind it) is a Panzer IV – the largest, most powerful tank in the German arsenal, but also the least common, making up a miniscule percentage of total German tanks in the invasion.⁶⁷ One surmises that the choice of Panzer IV's for the image was intentional – rather than show the numerous small, underpowered, under-armoured and under-gunned Panzer Is and IIs that the Germans relied on for the invasion, the German propagandist inserts the Panzer IV as archetypal (however mythical) of the overwhelming German armoured might powering the invasion. Interestingly, this exact street corner appears in two more images, one, claiming to show the actual liberation of the town, with German motorcyclists riding in the reverse direction (compare Figs. A.4 and A.5), with a similar enthusiastic crowd surrounding them! The last of the three images on this corner is of Polish prisoners of war being escorted away from the front – marching in the same direction as the German tanks clattering forward to battle front (see Fig. A.2). In this third image, the crowd has dwindled, there is less cheering or saluting, the throng seems to melt away along with enthusiasm as they go home to face the reality of the war against Poland. Indeed, it would seem that this street corner was a set piece, given that all three photographs are taken from a high angle on the street, implying that the PK-Reporter had ample time to compose and execute an extended photo shoot from a triangular plaza (now the Pomnik Mikołaja Kopernika – Nicolaus Copernicus Monument) that provided ample room for positioning cameras and staging crowds, soldiers and panzers.

Unfortunately for the Poles (and fortunately for the PK-Reporters) the Polish military provided an ideal situation for German propagandists to prove the lawlessness and oppression of the German minority. During the Polish retreat through the town of Bydgoszcz/Bromberg,

⁶⁷ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 27.

Polish soldiers came under fire from fifth columnists hiding amongst the German minority. In reaction, the Polish soldiers engaged in a vicious street battle against these ‘francs-tireurs,’⁶⁸ who were soon joined by regular German troops.⁶⁹ After pushing the Germans out, these Polish soldiers ran amok, killing dozens more German civilians as group punishment for the attack, many execution-style, before evacuating the town. PK-Reporters quick to arrive on the scene, captured multiple photographs of slain civilians, laid out in rows by the PK-Reporters to emphasize their innocence, as well as the barbarity of the Polish military (see Fig. A.6). These photographs of executed German civilians were used to showcase the actuality of brutality by Polish rule over the German minority – rationalizing the intent of and necessity for the German invasion as one of liberation (Fig. A.7). Follow up shots foreshadow the coming punishment, as local Jews are rounded up and forced to bury the dead (Fig. A.8). Deaths for which many townsfolk, both Jew and gentile, would be executed in retaliation by the Wehrmacht.⁷⁰ After the incident, the number of dead in Bydgoszcz/Bromberg was repeatedly inflated by both PK-Reporter and the RVMP, until in a 1940 report, Goebbels had arrived at a final crescendo of

⁶⁸ The term ‘francs-tireurs’ refers to partisan groups that operated for France during the Franco-Prussian War, shooting at and harassing German columns from hidden positions, and being seen as criminals, rather than soldiers. German soldiers mythologized the francs-tireurs’ actual commonality and effectiveness, turning them into sociopaths who sought to torture and maim German soldiers. The myth of the francs-tireurs and their crimes against German soldiers created a massive complex of fear and anxiety. This vortex of “false rumours and tales” fleshed out the very points of the myth and excused immediate reaction; soldiers could claim pot-shots from far off soldiers and friendly fire incidents as proof of a wider francs-tireurs movement. Thus, German general staff and field officers both legitimized the actions of their soldiers, using rumours and over-stated incidents to legitimize the massacres committed by their troops against Belgian and French civilians in 1914. In the Second World War, ‘francs-tireurs’ would continue to be regularly reported by German soldiers, leading to mass reprisals against prisoners of war and civilian populations. (John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁶⁹ Aleksandra Rohde, *The German Fifth Column in Poland*, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Dale Street Books, 2014), 39-42.

⁷⁰ Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010), 144.

58,000 killed by the Polish army and Polish civilians during the invasion.⁷¹

Of course, the PK-Reporter would exploit all such opportunities to reinforce Nazi stereotypical race identities on Poles to rationalize the invasion. Not only were the Poles to blame for creating the atmosphere for invasion with a “politico-pathological” need to destroy the German people themselves, the Polish military was guilty of massacring German citizens during the Invasion in a series of forced marches not unlike those the Germans would later actually inflict on concentration camp victims in 1945.⁷² The mythic slaughter of the innocent German minority was “merely to satisfy the feeling of revenge against the Germans with their higher standard of culture. The Pole has never lost his inferiority complex in regard to the Germans.”⁷³ Thus, the slaughter could be blamed on a people who were unfit to rule themselves and were jealous of the supposed higher culture of the German people. The German invasion was not merely a landgrab, but a provoked reaction to the (real or imaginary) repression of the German minority in Poland. It was the picture-perfect proof of why liberation was necessary.

Therefore, these photographs represent an attempt to craft a mythic identity for the German Invasion of Poland. They seek to highlight a liberation of both the German minority and those ‘decent’ Poles, as well as provide proof of the corruption and savagery of the Polish government’s treatment of their German minority. Such myths ran deep and quick, as even common German soldiers taking part in the invasion were quick to absorb these myths. In his interviews with German prisoners of war during the Siege of Warsaw, Julien Bryan asked repeatedly why they sought to invade and conquer Poland, much less bombard and destroy a city

⁷¹ Hans Schadewaldt, *The Polish Atrocities Against the German Minority in Poland*, (Berlin, Germany: Volk und Reich Verlag Berlin, 1940).

⁷² Schadewaldt; Stephan G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler’s War of Extermination in the East*, (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 454-5.

⁷³ Schadewaldt, *The Polish Atrocities Against the German Minority in Poland*.

full of innocent civilians. Their response was straight forward, as each in turn argued to Bryan that the invasion, and bombardment of Warsaw, were necessities brought on by the Polish nation's mistreatment of ethnic Germans within its borders. One German soldier summed this sentiment, of liberation from the lawlessness, backwardness, and cruelty of the Pole with the simple phrase: "Wir müssen," "We must."⁷⁴

Crushing the Untermensch

If the Nazi invasion is, as the PK-Reporter assert, liberation, then it follows that the Polish military is the barbarian threatening Western civilization. It is a backward military of untermensch, of Slavs and Jews; corrupt, incompetent, and no match for the Wehrmacht. Such was how the PK-Reporter saw their role in documenting the military aspects of the invasion. They were, in essence, to portray the "racial inferiority of the enemy" while still allowing for the German soldier his chance to participate in a grand adventure.⁷⁵ To this end, many myths about the campaign and the Polish army's performance were crafted by the PK-Reporter to portray a highly victorious invasion that ran, for all intents and purposes, as smoothly and humanely as possible.⁷⁶ When combat scenes are shown they are sanitized with a minimum of German casualties while showcasing the technological might of the Wehrmacht, especially that of the *Panzertruppen*. While all tanks figure prominently, the star attraction is the largest and most formidable tanks in the German arsenal – the Mark III's and IV's. Given their ubiquity however,

⁷⁴ Julien Bryan, *Siege*, (New York City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1940), 42, "Wir Müssen."

⁷⁵ Uziel, 340.

⁷⁶ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 20th 1939, 23.45. After the invasion, Kriegsberichter film companies worked to create a full documentary of the campaign, and later films were produced providing fictional accounts, all of which reinforced myths of Polish incompetence. See *Feldzug Polen* and *Kampfgeschwader Lutzow*.

smaller Panzer 1 and 2 tanks find their way into imagery, especially those by PK-Reporter operating closest to the front (see Figs. A.9 and A.10).

The attack on Warsaw became a prime showcase for Panzers as they lead the way in both PK-Reporter propaganda and divisional war diaries – covering the vulnerable infantry, pushing the Wehrmacht successfully into the very heart of the Polish capitol (see Fig. A.3). In reality, this attack was a disaster as *Panzertruppen*, so glorified in PK-Reporter’s photo-documentation of combat in Warsaw, were slaughtered; 4th Panzer losing almost 100 tanks in the urban combat, and finding themselves nearly at the breaking point in their attack on Warsaw when Wehrmacht resources were suddenly strained to overcome the Polish counter-attack on the Burza.⁷⁷ Indeed, the war diaries of 4th Panzer Division portray a similar spell of quiet and focus on their victorious advance, covering, or outright ignoring, the massive toll their eight-day sprint to Warsaw had taken on the division. One of the most startling of these incidents comes with the first day of the war. On August 31, 1939, the day prior to the jump-off, initial divisional movement orders for September 1 note that, among the first day’s objectives, will be the three-part town of Mokra (Mokra I, II, and III). Thereafter follows a day long gap in memoranda before orders on the September 2 appear.⁷⁸ Yet, the 4th Panzer’s baptism of fire on that first day was anything but inconsequential. During one of the most lop-sided battles of the Polish Campaign, the 4th Panzer Division found itself facing an under strength Polish cavalry brigade supported by a single armoured train. To the officers and men of the 4th Panzer Division, this must have seemed at first blush a cakewalk for the powerful panzer division and its 341 tanks. It must also have shocked the *Panzertruppen* when, rather than breaking through weak enemy opposition, the 4th

⁷⁷ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 65-66.

⁷⁸ Hoepner, Roll 191.

Panzer Division received a bloody drubbing. In total, the Poles knocked out over 100 tanks and another 50 armoured cars with their cannon and anti-tank rifles (German tanks of 1939 were all thinly armoured, far cries from the virtually impenetrable beasts of the late war, and therefore highly vulnerable even to anti-tank rifles) – fifty of the tanks destroyed beyond recovery.⁷⁹ The 4th Panzer Division, rather than parading lackadaisically into Mokra, was thrown back to their starting positions with 30% casualties in tanks, and only able to occupy the now destroyed towns of Mokra on September 2 – after the Poles had pulled out in a planned withdrawal. Victory, if defined simplistically as holding the battlefield, was theirs in the end, but not arising from tactical success.

Thus, we can return to the omission of the Battle of Mokra from the divisional war diaries with new insight. Rather than omitting the day's events due to their inconsequentiality, the omission shows a more glaring and psychologically interesting standpoint. For Hoepner and his men, the Battle of Mokra was a debacle in which the division resorted to wave assaults by massed tanks against well positioned Polish defenses, often finding themselves riding into the middle of ambushes or being smashed to pieces by a redoubtable armoured train.⁸⁰ However, by the next day, the ground was cautiously taken when the Polish defenders were nowhere in sight, having left only destroyed towns, equipment, and dead horses in their wake. The next week proceeds as according to plan – 4th Panzer Division continues their sweeping advance through Poland, with opposition constantly brushed aside or otherwise defeated, before reaching the outskirts of Warsaw on the night of September 7. At this point, their tank force is reduced to 220 – 141 destroyed tanks since the start of the invasion – reflecting quite a different account on the

⁷⁹ Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2009) 25.

⁸⁰ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 43.

strength of Polish opposition. Despite this, orders to the division on September 7 urges an all-out attack on Warsaw.⁸¹ Once again, like the battle at Mokra on the first day of the invasion, there is again a gap in the memoranda. This four-day gap lasts until September 12, where we find the 4th Panzer Division is still sitting just outside Warsaw, having failed utterly, yet provided, as seen above, a worthy propaganda event for the PK-Reporters.

The 4th Panzer Division would continue to sit just outside Warsaw for the rest of its time in Poland, despite the illusions drawn by their war diaries and *Propaganda Kompanie* units and was nearly destroyed by the Polish counterattack on the Burza before being pulled out of line on September 18 due to massive losses in manpower and tanks. At this time, the Polish counterattack at the Burza River was swinging into full gear and nearing its objectives of cutting off the German spearheads at the Vistula. Hoepner makes two illuminating admissions here. In the first, he notes that “broken enemy detachments have made themselves very noticeable in the rear areas” of the division.⁸² This may seem to indicate that there are merely scattered enemy forces behind their lines, something that would seem like a likely scenario in the case of a rapid, blitzkrieg style advance. However, the last part of the statement makes clear these enemy detachments are making “themselves very noticeable.”⁸³ This is bureaucratic double-speak at its best. Rather than admit to the fact that Polish infantry and cavalry are ranging freely behind his lines attacking his rear, Hoepner must somehow find a way to explain away these attacks as merely “broken enemy detachments.”

⁸¹ Hoepner, Roll 191.

⁸² Ibid., Roll 133.

⁸³ Ibid.

In the next statement, he goes even further, speaking of a considerable number of enemy troops “flooding” through his lines.⁸⁴ Once again, his wording seems to indicate a mass exodus of disorganized, defeated Polish troops. However, if these Poles are merely disorganized rabble, why does he note that they are fighting a major defense to attempt to “prevent breakthrough...to the Vistula” by these men?⁸⁵ In his memoranda, these Poles are nothing more than the refuse and rabble of a defeated foe – yet this “vanquished” foe is now fighting hard battles to smash through Hoepner’s lines, weakened by the extremely heavy losses incurred in the past week. Hoepner ends with one more note, now stating that he “wishes to surround Warsaw, but was not issued orders to do so.”⁸⁶ In the middle of the Burza River battles, whilst fighting on both front and rear sides, essentially indicating that his division is surrounded, Hoepner is noting that, if he had only been given the orders, he would have surrounded Warsaw by now. Gone is the *chutzpah* of his September 7 orders. This final statement reveals the true delusion of success Hoepner has brought on himself. Buoyed by defeat and debacle turned into success by good fortune and propaganda, he now finds himself advocating a move which would be disastrous at best, if it were not simply, utterly ludicrous given the state of his division. Whilst he may know that they could never truly surround Warsaw by themselves, Hoepner is unwilling to admit it openly, and so leaves to posterity a sign of confidence and triumph. In reality they are no longer capable of carrying out combat operations as a division.

By September 9, 4th Panzer division had taken over 60% tank losses. To put this into perspective, according to one modern US Army Intelligence Officer: “Any formation at 30% of its’ assigned strength, particularly as a result of combat, is likely incapable of performing

⁸⁴ Hoepner, Roll 133.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

assigned missions as a tactical formation of its' original size. A commander should not expect full combat effectiveness from soldiers exposed to casualties on this scale.”⁸⁷ Hoepner would not have been capable of pushing across the Vistula with the casualty rate his division had suffered. Still, suffering the victor's delusion and with the need to cover up loss in his orders, he has given historians an account in which his division seems to have taken light casualties against little enemy opposition. The final document of interest in the 4th Panzer Division's records on the Polish Campaign comes from a memorandum addressed to all members of the division, after their return to Germany on September 19. In it, Hoepner announces that: “The Polish Army is annihilated. The operations against Poland have now closed. In not even 3 weeks the conflict on the Eastern Front has been decided.”⁸⁸ The war, begun on September 1, has been brought to a close by the 19th. Factually, we know this to be untrue. The second largest battle of the entire campaign, and largest tank battle, continued past the 21st on to September 27.⁸⁹ Warsaw did not capitulate until the 28th, and major combat operations did not cease until the final Polish surrender at Kock on October 6, over two weeks after Hoepner claims military operations to be at an end⁹⁰.

Yet another division conveniently evoking ‘spell of quiet’ is the 5th Panzer Division. Much like the 4th, the 5th Panzer Division ran headlong into a brilliant Polish defense at Pszczyna, losing almost 50 tanks on the first day, with another 50 lost during a slog-fest against

⁸⁷ Major (now Lieutenant Colonel) Andrew J. Camp, Intelligence Advisor, 3/205 Brigade, Afghan National Army Security Force Assistance Team, US Army: Interviewed May 13th, 2013.

⁸⁸ Hoepner, Roll 191, 149.

⁸⁹ Stanley S. Seidner, *Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz Rydz and the Defense of Poland*, (New York City, New York: St. John's University, 1975), 277.

⁹⁰ John Mosier, *The Blitzkrieg Myth*, (New York City, New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 74.

their erstwhile enemies, the Polish 16th Infantry Division.⁹¹ They then failed to take the crucial bridges over rivers in the area, all of which were blown by Polish engineers during their fighting retreat. Yet again, this entire battle is not referred to, and documents do not exist to explain divisional reaction to the losses suffered throughout the battle, which ended in a German victory, but only at the cost of one third of their tank force.⁹²

Kriegstagebücher descriptions of other Panzer divisions serving in Poland repeated the same delusion of success without loss. The 2nd Panzer Division, defeated in a brilliant holding action by General Maczek (who rose to fame in the West for his actions in the Normandy Campaign⁹³) at Jordanów over the period of a week, lost another 50-70 tanks.⁹⁴ As with Mokra, there are few documents to attest to this defeat from the German side, with only the divisional doctor willing to admit to a grave number of losses, the majority coming from the 3rd Panzer Regiment.⁹⁵ The doctor even notes that at one point, the hospital was forced to “circle the wagons” and issue the medical staff and clerks with firearms in order to repel Polish attacks.⁹⁶ Thus, the divisional doctor tells a more realistic story than the officers commanding the division – for him, the war is only about the human toll, and he reports the war as he sees it. However, he is merely a divisional doctor, and his records can go unnoticed by the popular historian interested more in relating the glories combat, and less in the casualties of war. As well, the usage of the

⁹¹ Marian Małecki, *Bitwa Graniczna Pod Pszczyną*, (Warsaw, Poland: Ponidzie, 2003).

⁹² Kriegstagebuch, *5th Panzer Division Microfilmed Records*, Record Group T315, Roll 256, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1964).

⁹³ Koskodan, 147.

⁹⁴ Ludwik Ferenstein, *Czarny Naramiennik: Wspomnienia Oficera Sztabu 10 Brygady Kawalerii Zmotoryzowanej*, (Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1985), 17-64.

⁹⁵ Divisionarzt, *2nd Panzer Division Microfilmed Records*, Record Group T315, Roll 111, (National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 1964).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

term “circle the wagons” speaks not to modern warfare, but to the practice of “circling the wagons” in the American Old West or the Boer “lager” in their Conquest of South Africa.⁹⁷ Such combat took place between a combatant of inferior numbers (and sometimes insufficient number of weapons) who had to hold out in a last-ditch defense, surrounded on all sides, unable to fight face to face with their “uncivilized” attackers. Such colonial tropes, permeating both the conscious and subconscious, allowed German soldiers to not only excuse their invasion, but to revel in it, a final achievement of their colonial fantasies. In this light, while the divisional doctor is admitting to major Polish resistance, he still acts to queer them, putting their attacks into the gaze of an imperial army trekking across the African savannah, as imagined by Germans for centuries.⁹⁸

Throughout PK-Reporter’s imagery, when environmental devastation or urban ruin is shown it is as the responsibility of the Polish military. The Germans are, as the bearers of western civilization, not to blame for the savagery of the Slav and Jew. This quickly finds its way into print press as the German political leadership blames the destruction of Warsaw on the Polish military, with PK-Reporter photographs as evidence to buttress these positions. In one stark photograph, a Polish horse (likely from a cavalry unit) emaciated, exhausted, and broken in spirit – emblematic of the Polish military – is shown abandoned in a destroyed field at the edge of a forest (see Fig. A.11). The caption reads, simply, “A mute witness of Polish destructive rage.” Again, the vocabulary is clear – by hammering home the destruction as that of “rage” rather than defense of their country, this PK-Reporter is driving home the point that the Polish

⁹⁷ To ‘circle’ the wagons meant to take a column of wagons, be they civilian or military, and literally circle them, creating a fortress from which to fight from. This tactic dated back for hundreds of years but was made famous on the plains of the American West and South Africa as the best defense against Indigenous populations.

⁹⁸ Zantop, 74.

soldiers' behavior is, in fact, to be compared to a child's temper-tantrum. Much like Goebbels' pronouncement on the massacres at Bromberg, the Polish military itself is merely acting out in a "destructive rage" against the German invasion/liberation, one born by Poland's own jealousy of the achievements and superiority of Germanic culture.⁹⁹ Indeed, one of the few photos that shows dead soldiers is that of Polish, not German soldiers – further driving home the propaganda point that Poland that is suffering from this self-rage, not Germans (Fig. A.12).

This childishly "destructive" Polish military is also portrayed as hopelessly backward – reliant on outdated planes the Luftwaffe destroyed on the ground before they could get airborne (in reality, the Polish air force evacuated to hidden airfields and carried out a heroic campaign of David versus Goliath).¹⁰⁰ The PK-Reporter, of course, avoid capturing any evidence of downed German planes in favour of photos of abandoned Polish biplane trainers on Polish airfields, rendered burning hulks during the early hours of the invasion, to drive home the myth of a backwards Polish Air Force, easily destroyed by the might of the Luftwaffe (Fig. A.13) In one of the more revealing images upon examination, is of a hanger filled with destroyed Polish planes that has been converted into a stable for German horses (Fig. A.14) Not only does this reinforce the point of the backwards Polish Air Force, it offers an even deeper insight into the mind of the PK-Reporter. Poland is no more and her airfields, once teeming with activity of an independent Polish nation, are now the stable grounds to feed and care for the conquering army's horses. It is not merely an exercise in myth-making, but a deliberate humiliation of the Polish nation.

⁹⁹ Schadewaldt; Fritz, 18-9.

¹⁰⁰ William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, (New York City, New York: Bonanza Books, 1984), 163; A Polish flight officer noted how "It seems quite naïve of the Germans to have believed that during the preceding days of high political tension...we would leave our units sitting at their peacetime bases." (Hargreaves, 121).

There are, however, occasional illuminated spots in the sea of quiet where the German officer corps is willing to not only admit defeat, but to even show admiration for their opponent. This fascinating document comes to us not from a glorious panzer division, but from a lowly infantry division: the 24th. In an intelligence report by a divisional intelligence officer, one finds an appraisal of the Polish Army. Rather than the denigration that would occur during and after the war, this officer instead praises the Polish soldier:

The [Polish] infantryman *is to be regarded as full-fledged warrior. His main strength seems to lie in close combat and night fighting.* He is a tenacious and brave fighter. Front Officers have made a good soldierly impression. ...The entire cavalry of their division made a particularly great impression. They are the elite of the Polish soldiery. ...In night combat and forest combat the Pole was superior to the German troops.¹⁰¹

Here, at last, is a straightforward portrayal. Not only does this infantry divisional war diary admit to defeat when it occurred, such as at Wola Cyrusowa on September 8, but this infantry division commissioned and received an accurate evaluation of the Polish soldiers it had faced during the campaign. Whilst eventually victorious, the 24th Infantry Division's officers were able to see past their victories and recognize what a hard-fought campaign it had been. They admit that the Poles were not only tough opponents, but in some ways were even superior to the German soldier, a thought that one would be hard pressed to find in a nation that was convinced that the Poles were a Slavic *untermensch*. Furthermore, the German author goes out of his way to praise the quality of the Polish cavalry, noting that "the cavalry only attacked on foot," dismissing the myth of a Polish cavalry force trained only to fight on horseback.¹⁰²

Despite a glaringly different approach here, such accounts were simply ignored or unknown to the PK-Reporter, who sought to portray the war as a grand adventure, and not a hard

¹⁰¹ Kriegstagebuch, *Kampfwert der polnischen Truppe, 24th Infantry Division Microfilmed Records*, Record Group T315, Roll 796, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1964) 3-4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 3.

fight against an erstwhile and capable enemy. Indeed, even within this account, we can see an air of colonial fantasy, as Polish “warrior” traits match those which PK-Reporter often call out as unseemingly, barbaric warfare, emerging in the night to ambush German columns, or closing to close combat as if the Poles were the Zulus at Isandlwana.¹⁰³ Myths created in 1939, be they of events or identities, reflected the colonial fantasies of empire and conquest and legitimized the invasion as an “anti-conquest” and liberative force. Susanne Zantop argues in *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* that, by defining themselves as the conqueror, German fantasies set up the colonial native both physically and culturally, crafting future stereotypes therein for any conquered group. In doing so, authors of these “Colonial Fantasies” created visions of self as naturally-ordained conquerors – nature having ceded the power of civilization to the Old World, the destruction of the New World was a foregone conclusion.¹⁰⁴ Such visions sexualized the New World as a feeble, effeminate entity – virgin soil fit to be opened by colonial entities. Those who resisted such fantasies were drowned out, their calls to reason cast aside by romanticized fantasies of conquest and subjugation which met “psychological needs...and the desire for gratification.” Thus, even the author of 24th Infantry Division’s account is merely meeting a subjective need to explain the high losses suffered by his division against the Poles, coming off respectful of their “warrior” traits, yet still holding the Poles at arm’s reach as a ‘queered’ military only capable of excelling the German army in ungentlemanly combat.

With the Poles barbarians, then the German occupiers are, perforce, the pinnacle of civilization and culture. The invading Wehrmacht, as often as possible, is shown as treating

¹⁰³ Stephanie Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016), 150, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Zantop, 208.

refugees with kindness and dignity. Yet, depictions of Polish children gleefully taking cigarettes from German soldiers, or curious Poles gathering around a German soldier explaining the new realities of their statehood, remain acts of violence, wrapped in the “emotions that attend the act [of harm] *or its threat* (emphasis added).¹⁰⁵ It matters not that the Germans are, seemingly, being kind to the residents of their newly conquered lands, the act of conquest is itself a violent act, and so everything done to perpetuate and excuse or rationalize that violence, including giving candy and cigarettes out, remains a part of that violence. The German soldier handing out treats could very quickly turn into a German soldier executing the parents of that child, as multiple PK-Reporters documented in their photographs of claimed “*Heckenschützen*” (partisans) being rounded up and quickly shot.¹⁰⁶ These mix with photographs comparing German and Polish living conditions and various Volksdeutsche to showcase the clear imperial lines being drawn by the Germans.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, one photograph (Fig. A.15) shows German Panzer soldiers at ease, celebrating with Sinti and Romani peoples! Others show German soldiers speaking calmly, with worried expressions, with Polish refugees fleeing into their lines (Fig. A.16). One surprising photograph shows Polish soldiers raising high Nazi flags and salutes, with the PK-Reporter noting these to be ethnic German-Poles forced into the Polish military (Fig. A.17). Such photographs were meant to show the “true” nature of the German invasion – as one that wouldn’t merely liberate the German minority, but which would impose order and civilization on a people long deemed unable to manage their own affairs.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Geyer, 696.

¹⁰⁶ Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1640, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 1000-1003.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 972-999.

¹⁰⁸ Harvey, 79.

Being that the collapse of Imperial Germany would still be fresh in the minds of many civilians, having been born or grown up under the old Imperial borders, it could be possible they saw the entry of the Germans as just a continued part of a cycle within those borders, collapsing the identities of people and allowing them to inhabit multiple nationalities at once.¹⁰⁹ The ability to speak in both German and Polish would be a definite bonus, and witnessing the treatment given to Volksdeutschen could only encourage such actions. The gleeful looks of Volksdeutschen seem to ignore that their own family, young men, husbands, sons, would have been caught up in the meatgrinder of combat due to mobilization into the Polish Army, betraying even true Volksdeutsch their joy at “liberation.” In another fascinating example, German officers are seen doffing their caps to a Polish civilian walking by (Fig. A.18). This action, a height of formality, is meant to reinforce just how polite and civilized the German military is to the newly colonized Polish subjects. And mere subjects they will remain, even as the PK-Reporter seek to show a benighted humanity of German occupation over their inferiors. New street signs are raised high above the original Polish signs, imposing Germanic and Nazi names to once independent Polish cities (Fig. A.19). Polish workers are ‘volunteered’ into worker groups, which will be shipped to Germany. Nominally meant to offer employment to the huge swath of unemployed Poles following the collapse of the Second Republic, this program was, in fact, forced labour.¹¹⁰ Still, the PK-Reporter sought to showcase these peoples are willing volunteers, while entertaining the viewer with their exotic Asiatic ‘otherness’, placing special attention to those dressed in native costume (Fig. A.20).¹¹¹ Thus, the German army’s

¹⁰⁹ Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Knab, 7-9.

¹¹¹ Wolff, 334, 352.

interactions with the Polish people, meant to be seen as conciliatory at best, always remain one of a conquered people submitting to the benevolence, grace, and dominance of the German empire.

Putting Jewry to Work

The German conception of colonization was supported heavily in both the German treatment of the Polish military, turning it into a weak, incompetent army which relied on outdated weaponry and melee tactics against the Blitzkrieg, and by the assault on the Polish citizenry itself. To do this meant not only defining and queering the inhabitants, but also the colonization of Poland itself. While prior attempts at such projects had failed (inner colonization thought stretched back to before World War 1 to attempts by Prussia and Imperial Germany to assimilate or drive out the Polish diaspora in West Prussia and Posen), such projects had often failed on legalistic concerns and the resistance by Poles themselves, matched with aristocratic Junkers who craved the cheap labour of Poles versus the more expensive German farmer.¹¹² Yet, there remained another critical element in the PK-Reporter's forte. The state of the Polish Jews served as a critical part of Nazi Propaganda, who saw them as proof positive of how dissolute and impossible the Polish economy was without German intervention. Previously, many German politicians and military planners had attempted to make use of the Jewish question in West Prussia and Posen regions of Imperial Germany to bend and break down national identity structures, seeing them as "natural allies"¹¹³ whose education could transform them into

¹¹² Robert L. Nelson and Justin Fantauzzo, "Soldiers as Settlers in East Central Europe during and in the Wake of the Great War," *The Central Powers in Russia's Great War and Revolution: Enemy Visions and Encounters 1914-22*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica Publishers, 2020), 284.

¹¹³ Indeed, the service of Jews in the Imperial German military is proof positive, seeing themselves first as Germans and only secondly as Jews, and eager to prove their patriotism through their service. This came despite the military's wariness of Jewish participation, culminating in the *Judenählung* or "Jew Census" in 1916, an attempt to confirm the lack of Jewish service. Instead, it demonstrated Jews were serving in mass numbers. (Noah William

productive members of the German nation.¹¹⁴ The new Nazi Reich sought to solve the matter along far more racial lines. While the war cured prior issues with freeing up land for German settlement, the war also offered the chance to demonstrate German superiority in economy, labour, and treatment of the Polish Jew, who would, to start, be put to labour, correcting the perceived wrongs of their existence. This labour acted as the new hallmark of the German civilizing mission, one which would be well documented by the PK-Reporter.

During and towards the end of the campaign, especially in the occupation of cities with large Jewish populations (Łódź, Lublin, Warsaw, etc.), the PK-Reporter turned to a full-fledged photographic assault on Polish Jewry. The largest sub-set of PK-Reporter photographs from the campaign within the Bundesarchiv are of Polish Jews in a variety of “Asiatic” fashions, to confirm racial identities that had been fed to the German public en masse by the Nazi Party. On October 1, 1939, just a couple of days after the fall of Warsaw, PK-Reporter units were ordered to obtain “any kind of footage of Jewish types in a greater extent than before: characteristic portraits, as well as Jews in work detachments. This material is intended for the strengthening of our interior and foreign political anti-Semitic enlightenment.”¹¹⁵ This order makes clear that the PK-Reporter were no longer focused on a campaign that was still almost a week from completing but were now to be the documentarians of Polish Jewry racial stereotypes for the Nazi establishment.

Some photographs catalogue and show Jews of various stereotypical features (as ordered), with strong emphasis on Orthodox Jews and those with physical traits (large noses,

Isenberg, *Between Redemption and Doom: The Strains of German-Jewish Modernism*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 59-60.).

¹¹⁴ Lehnstaedt, 28-29.

¹¹⁵ Uziel, 259.

beards, etc.) or stereotypical clothing (black coats, black hats) purposefully chosen to match the worst of Nazi propaganda about Jewish men (Fig. A.21). Others are simply line-ups of all the Jewish men from a particular village, pressganged into formation and photographed repeatedly from different angles to document their inferiority. These images are a means to degrade, to prove the nonhumanity of Jewry, and garner support for the genocide the Nazis plan for Jews in Poland. It is a taste of what is to come, and images such as the one captioned “Juden sind keine Menschen” encapsulate this treatment in both subject and form (Fig. A.22). The Jewish woman, in obvious fear, is set upon by members of the German military, their backs to the camera, one of whom holding her at gunpoint. She is a threat, despite being a civilian, despite being shoeless, empty handed, and in a state of distress. She is a threat because *all* Jews are a threat to the German war effort.¹¹⁶ Indeed, where one might see her humanity in the image itself, the inclusion of the PK-Reporter’s caption “Juden sind keine Menschen” is there to remind the German viewer that she is not, in fact, a human – that her looks can deceive, her emotions can bewilder, and to make no mistake in offering her humanity in return. Her husband is held back, beside the Germans, forced to watch as his wife is terrorized for no other act than being Jewish. It is hard to say what happened to this couple, however, given the odds of survival during the war for Polish Jews and the callousness with which the PK-Reporter photographer dismisses their very humanity; it is likely this image is the last of this Jewish couple alive.

Additional images revel in the tinge of criminal element; Jews are shown as layabouts and ruffians as the city collapses around them. Some are drifters, carrying their belongings, while others are lambasted as controlling all trade in the Polish cities (Figs. A.23 and A.24). Others are grifters and petty thieves, with one photograph noting the arrest of Jewish “coffee

¹¹⁶ Longerich, *Holocaust*, 180.

hamsters,” aka, men who have been hoarding and later reselling coffee to the Warsaw public (Fig. A.25). PK-Reporters go into the ghetto to document these sub-humans in their ‘natural habitat’ and display how Jews live to the rest of Germany (thus also proving the efficacy of Nazi racial ideology).

More photosets show Jews forced to labour for the German military and the German imposed civilian administration (Fig. A.26). Of note, it is the Wehrmacht (and the Heer) which take part in these actions, not the SS; debunking the common myth of the Wehrmacht not participating in such grisly and criminal acts. In Bromberg, Jews are forced to dig and repair roads, while others are forced to dig graves for the massacred German civilians (Fig. A.27). In Warsaw, elderly Orthodox Jews are forced by Wehrmacht soldiers to clean up the ruins created by the German aerial and artillery bombardment during the Siege of Warsaw. Many look terrified – forced to labor for hours – their clothes, beards, and hair covered in white dust from the limestone and concrete rubble (Fig. A.28). In one image, one of the older Orthodox men looks back towards his tormenters, almost pleadingly with his eyes to be allowed to return to his family (Fig. A.29). Such humiliations are celebrated by the PK-Reporters in their captions; “These Polish Kaftan-Jews, whose activity hitherto consisted only in inciting against folk-conscious Germanness in the most disgusting and devious manner, now have the opportunity...to make themselves truly useful for the first time in their lives” (Fig. A.30). Indeed, in line with the internal logic of the Nazi Weltanschauung, it is Jewry who is to blame for organizing the anti-German sentiment within Poland, and it is Jewry who shall be punished and put to “useful” work. A connection to their supposedly eastern origins is simultaneously drawn with the reference to kaftans, an Asiatic-style of long robe, a German derogatory title for

the coat worn by many Orthodox Jews in Poland.¹¹⁷

Such images stand in stark contrast to the resistance by these same civilians, of the multitude of ways civilians resisted the Nazi invasion just a few weeks prior as photographed by Julien Bryan, while trapped in Warsaw during the siege. Included in his photographs is one not dissimilar in scene and place to those taken by PK-Reporters just a few weeks later (Fig. A.31). In Julien's photo, Polish Jews, dressed in the same "Kaftan" style, are seen willingly digging entrenchments and anti-tank ditches for the defense of the city. They are watched over by a Polish guard, likely there to organize the digging (including rounding up passersby as workers) and to keep a watchful eye for enemy aircraft. Yet, in this image, the Jews can also be interpreted participating in the common defense, conscripted or no, but certainly not villains being humiliated and punished with hard labor. They are, far from being punished for the crime of being a Jew, resisting those who would see all of Europe's Jews dead, whether or not they are aware of the horrors that await them. Even if the resistance proves futile in the long run, as it did, the meaning behind Julien's photograph is clear. The contrast between PK-Reporters and Julien reinforces how a photographer uses the camera lens for a very definite purpose, namely, to tell a story. Where Bryan saw and captured a moment of heroism and resistance, a nearly identical act could be used by a PK-Reporter to reinforce anti-Semitic beliefs. The PK-Reporter photographs are meant to degrade the Jewish citizenry and provide a clear identity for the German occupation – as the victorious colonizers. The Germans can finally enact their policies governing the Jews, driving them to work and showing no humanity in their treatment. "Juden Sind Keine Menschen" is not a mere propagandistic line – it was a true belief harkened by the PK-Reporter through their photographic mission. The focus on their coerced labour is, in effect,

¹¹⁷ Wolff, 209, 240.

ethnic gloating over forcing Jews ‘to clean up the mess they caused’ through their “inciting against folk-conscious Germanness” (Fig. A.30).

Heroism and resistance by Jews to the Nazi invasion, however, did not stop at the digging of trenches in Warsaw. In one incident, documented by PK-Reporters, Rabbis and Jewish youth fought to the death to defend their Katowice’s synagogue against the German invaders. Surrounded, they refused to surrender and were burned to death by German troops. It is heroic self-sacrifice in the face of a certain death, and yet the PK-Reporter manage to spin it – with carefully chosen vocabulary – to conform to Nazi anti-Semitic beliefs. In the caption accompanying the photograph of the burnt-out synagogue, its remnants are the place “from which Jewish rabbis and outspoken, half-grown boys fired at the invading German soldiers. The synagogue was surrounded and fumigated....” (Fig. A.32). The use of the term fumigated describes something quite different from the reality of being burned. Common throughout all Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda was the treatment of Judaism as an infection, and the use of medical terminology as its antidote.¹¹⁸ These “half-grown boys” and rabbis are not heroic resisters, but bandits and a plague on German civilization, quickly cured with application of a prescribed antiseptic treatment. Fumigation with fire at Katowice, with Zyklon-B at Auschwitz.

Thus, the German colonial growth into Poland folded neatly into the Nazi campaign against Jewry across the world. Not only did the PK-Reporter support the view of Jews as *untermenschen*, the PK-Reporter showed how the new colonial structures within Poland would operate, even with the campaign still on-going. Jews who resisted would be eliminated in a manner befitting a disease on civilized society, while those who remained would be put to useful

¹¹⁸ Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s World View: A Blueprint for Power*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 58-9.

work for the German war effort. Such images could then be flashed throughout Germany, offering proof of not only German anti-Semitic propaganda, but of the efficacy and efficiency of Germany's victory over Judaism. It allowed for a triumphant Nazi invasion, with the identity of a colonial state simply occupying a backwards nation full of sub-human elements unfit to rule themselves, or otherwise suspect to civilization at large. It was a "fitting" beginning to the future horrors wrought upon Europe's Jewish population.

A German India?

On a dirt road in a forgotten village in rural Poland, a PK-Reporter stood snapping photographs of a Jewish man walking along a dirt road (Fig. A.33). He raises his cap high in greeting a German officer, a greeting as much out of fear of the Germans as it is fear of the camera man snapping his image. This photo, perhaps a moment of real life captured in time, or a posed spectacular, was described simply as "Polish man (Jew?) on dirt road in a village, greeting German soldier by taking off his cap." The confusion seems less a genuine lack of clarity (the man is clearly in stereotypical 'Jewish' dress) and more a questioning of the man himself – that Germanic twitch to identify the Jew hiding among the Polish populace. His raised cap belies his expression, as rather than looking to the German officer who has already passed by without even a glance, the man stares directly into the camera lens in a mixture of fear and trepidation. He seems to be raising his cap not so much for the officer, but for the man snapping the photo. This moment in time is the reality of occupation, of new colonial and submissive identities established by the PK-Reporters.

The PK-Reporters were not mere witnesses to combat, meant to document the conflict and the lives of man and machine caught up in the struggle of battle and warfare. They were, from conception, *Kriegspropandandists* – the bearers of propagandistic ethos meant to support a

wider German colonial policy in Eastern Europe. By crafting identities related to the liberation of German minorities and the submissiveness of the Polish population, the PK-Reporter sought to create a legitimizing identity for the conflict and Nazi Weltanschauung. Meanwhile, by displaying the supposed backwardness and barbarity of the Polish military compared to the benevolence of the Wehrmacht, the PK-Reporters looked towards designing the war in their own vision, one of a crushing victory over the Poles followed by the casual establishment of dominance over a people fit only for subjugation and colonization. With the documentation of general anti-Semitic actions against Polish Jewry, the PK-Reporter supported anti-Semitic propaganda within and without Germany, to show to the world the proof positive of Nazi rhetoric towards the “Eternal Jew.”¹¹⁹ The stereotypical outlooks on Eastern Europe, fermenting in Enlightened Western European thought generations, supported the Nazi ethos in Eastern Europe, and likely helped make their actions palatable to the German public, already steeped in years of Nazi rhetoric.¹²⁰

Speaking to his troops in 1942, Hitler noted that Eastern Europe from Poland to the Urals was to become, in his words, “Germany’s India.”¹²¹ In so describing their occupation, Poland was for the Germans a colonial frontier analogous to those of other Western imperialist nations such as Britain and France. If those nations, as bearers of civilization, could justify their history of atrocities against the ‘native’ inhabitants of their far-flung colonies, wasn’t Germany, as a

¹¹⁹ Uziel, 260. The anti-Semitic film, “The Eternal Jew,” was produced using documentary-esque footage filmed by PK-Reporters operating in occupied Poland’s Jewish ghettos in the fall of 1939.

¹²⁰ Such attitudes were common even before the rise of the Nazi Party. Many saw Poles as unfit to rule Germans and spoke as such. Heinz Guderian, one of the major Panzer leaders in the Third Reich, stated in the early 1920s that “The Poles are still half-savages. Poor, dirty, incapable, stupid, and vulgar, depraved, and treacherous.” (Hargreaves, 19).

¹²¹ Patrick Bernhard, “Colonial Crossovers: Nazi Germany and its Entanglements with Other Empires” *Journal of Global History*, Vol 12, no 2, (July 2017), 206-227.

‘true bearer’ of western civilization, afforded the same right in Eastern Europe? Yet, the policies brought to the lands occupied and colonized by the Germans did not resemble those of England or France. Modeling themselves more on Italian and Japanese colonial systems (and to a lesser extent, the experience in the American West), Hitler and the Nazis wanted not simply to rule as imperial administrators; as “a central power over a variety of peoples.”¹²² Nazi Germany, driven by a Hitler’s Weltanschauung, wished to exterminate much of the local populace, leaving those remaining as a slave caste operating on the submissive fringes of a new colonial frontier. Given the Social Darwinist aspects of Weltanschauung and Nazi Lebensraum ideology, that colonial frontier was required not just for the honour of Germany, but for the very survival of the Volk. Photos taken shortly after the German occupation attest to this survival, as German minorities are granted land and rights over their Polish neighbors, with one being given “30-50 Polish workers”¹²³ (Fig. A.34).

Despite the success of German propagandists within Germany, the vast majority of the world did not accept their propaganda of liberation and Jewish sub-humanity. However, the idea of a backward, inept Polish military survived, broadcast far and wide throughout Western media. Initiated either directly by journalists like Shirer, unintentionally by photographers like Bryan, or film and governmental backing in both Nazi Germany and abroad, these myths flooded the historiography of the Polish campaign and entered the public consciousness through the actions of Hollywood and other media.¹²⁴ Indeed, even after the war, PK-Reporters continued to operate in favour of their story-telling and narratives. Though often dropping and covering up their

¹²² Bernhard, 206-227.

¹²³ Of course, no mention is made of how one farmer will afford to pay the 30-50 Polish labourers, and it can be assumed they are effectively slaves.

¹²⁴ Biskupski, 49.

involvement in anti-Semitic activities, veterans of the PK-Reporter companies framed their service as to documenting the ‘grand adventure’ of war.¹²⁵ Their exclusivity to accompanying the Wehrmacht during the invasion gives their depictions of events on the ground – their imagery, their explanations, their captions, *their stories* – unwarranted and unquestioned credibility. Their work remains the only major surviving pictorial record of the invasion of Poland.¹²⁶ This exclusivity makes the PK-Reporter’s role unquestionably a crucial one in the Nazi crafting of colonial identities for conquered peoples as well as perpetuating the lingering Wehrmacht mythos of an incompetent Polish military. These are PK-Reporter story arcs – ones that dominate still the memory of the German Invasion of Poland.

¹²⁵ Uziel, 393, 397.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 426-7.

CHAPTER 2

WAR AS THE GRAND ADVENTURE: THE PRODUCTION OF MEMORY

BY GERMANY DURING THE OCCUPATION

An Empire Reclaimed

Decades before Nazi Germany assumed a colonial role in Poland, German soldiers were playing out their own colonial fantasies in Africa and arriving at conclusions startlingly presaging those of the Nazis. In 1905, at their sprawling Konzentrationslager in Swakopmund, the Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Südwestafrika established a ghoulish military/academic collaboration. Chancellor Von Bülow had previously rescinded the *Schutztruppe* commander Lothar von Trotha's "annihilation" order and in its place established Swakopmund to extract economic benefits from the forced labor of the inmates – under conditions which murdered thousands of Herero and Nama. Here imprisoned Herero and Nama women were forced to spend days boiling and scraping the flesh and sinew from the skulls of their loved ones, relatives, and strangers with shards of broken glass; the skulls then carefully packed and shipped to German institutes of racial "science" for study.¹²⁷ Some of those very same German "doctors," dedicated to the progressive reforms of eugenics, were well into old age during the rise of the Nazis when they avidly taught their "science" to the next generation of German "doctors" including one Josef Mengele.¹²⁸ Doctor Mengele would go on to conduct even greater horrors of human experimentation in Auschwitz. Though authors David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen are unable to provide a direct causal link in *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, their work provided a vision

¹²⁷ Olusoga and Erichsen, 6, 224-5, 245. These preserved heads and skulls only recently have been returned to Namibia for proper burial, along with an official German apology and reparations for the genocide.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 309-10.

for a future genocide, with similarities (and differences) in cause and course that inform our understanding of events in the Second World War in Eastern Europe – especially Poland. The Invasion of Poland in 1939, unlike the earlier annexations and actions by Germany, was a unique and radically escalatory step for Germany. Where previously Hitler’s actions had been to reassert German dominance over German lands (Rhineland, Austria, Sudetenland, Memel), or to set up puppet governments in Bohemia and Slovakia, the Nazi attack on Poland was to begin the culmination of colonial fantasies with a history stretching back centuries.¹²⁹

The work of the German PK-Reporters, as has been seen, was rooted firmly in genocidal, colonial fantasies and mythology which had long dominated German romantic thinking. In the 1700s, German romantic fantasies were setting up concepts of identity for German conqueror and native alike by defining themselves as conquering heroes, taming the wilds and savages of lesser civilizations – such visions sexualized the New World as a feeble, effeminate entity, virgin soil fit to be opened by colonial entities. Those who resisted such fantasies with calls to reason were drowned out by romanticized fantasies of conquest and subjugation which met “psychological needs...and the desire for gratification.”¹³⁰ Sold as story and parable, these fantasies *expected* actions in empire that would later be emulated by Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany.¹³¹ Conquest became a glorious and fair pursuit to colonist and native alike, while gendered identity structures informed readers of the effeminacy of native peoples. Indeed, one did not need merely to look to parables to see the dreaming of mythic conquest. Abundant in the 19th century were travelogues, giving readers not just a fantastical version of exploration, but sourced from the reality of English, American and German adventurers (such as Richard Burton,

¹²⁹ Pratt, 40-48; Zantop, 3.

¹³⁰ Zantop, 209.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 74, 208.

Henry Morton Stanley, and Johann Heinrich Barth) surveying the African continent, resplendent with lore and heroism. Using systems of anti-conquest which asserted the innocence of conquest over any violence attached to it, such stories and tales drowned out voices against colonization with their support for eugenicist conceptualizations of both nature and humanity.¹³² Looking eastward from Germany, travelogues and self-definition of the ‘other’ for Eastern Europe trace back at least as early as the Enlightenment era, as philosophers and travelers returned from the distant lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, filled with tales of backwards, ‘Asiatic’ peoples and the filth of Jewish ghetto life.¹³³ Indeed, Johann Georg Forster, a German intellectual and Professor at the Vilnius University no less, saw the poles as “alone hav[ing] taken ignorance and barbarism so far, as to almost extinguish the last trace of brain power in their serfs...” before going on to queer Poland as not a European civilization, but a hodgepodge only comparable to “millions of cattle in human form, who are here utterly excluded from all privileges of mankind...”¹³⁴ Yet, despite their age, these “enlightened” concepts found themselves grounded into German Romanticism culture (as laid out by Fritz Stern’s *The Politics of Cultural Despair*), including a climatological rationalization of the world, that humanity improved, both physically in stature and mentally in intellect, as one approached the temperate climes of north-central Europe.¹³⁵

These colonial fantasies and visions of anti-conquest were central to the work of the PK-Reporter and Propaganda Kompanie with their photography, film and writing recollecting those very travelogues and adventurous dreams of the early 1800s. Far from dispassionate

¹³² Pratt, 37, 65, 77.

¹³³ Wolff, 29, 32. 335.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 337-8.

¹³⁵ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, (Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1961), 298.

documentation of the war, PK-Reporters were assigned the responsibility within the Nazi propaganda apparatus to portray the war through the photography, film, and written word as one of victorious battle, strange new worlds, and the German soldier interacting as both liberator of Germans and conqueror of bestial heathens, no different from the Africans and Asians conquered by Britain and France at the height of Imperialism. In doing so, the Nazi state insisted that their actions be excused as simply another colonial war by another European imperial state; actions which the West could not attack without being hypocrites. Indeed, the Germans already had years of experience in waging genocidal warfare against savages – the war in South-West Africa having presaged much of the German mindset towards colonial wars.¹³⁶ Resplendent with mass slaughter of civilians, execution of prisoners, and the concentration of the enemy populace into slave labour and death camps, the Herero Rebellion had also seen attempts by German scientists to utilize the genocide to prove the European racial hierarchy. Combat itself was represented by the Germans as opposition to a savage foe, against whom atrocity was *expected* in order to break resistance, indeed, the very act of resistance showcased their sub-humanity, their rejection of the obvious superiority of living under German leadership.¹³⁷ Policy making, much as would be seen in the Nazi regime, came from ground up, meeting approval, even if disobeying the spirit of top-down orders, thanks to the greater desire to end the situation as finally as possible.¹³⁸

Colonization in the European continent had also entered the German mindset well before the Second World War. Beginning with inner colonization attempts prior to WW1 which sought

¹³⁶ Helmut Bley, *South West Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 67, 163, 205.

¹³⁷ Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 216, 225. Indeed, even had they accepted German rule, Byrd proposes that even the *act* of existence qualifies *as* resistance for many Imperial states, so long as the enemy is dehumanized enough. Their voices and desires simply become a past tense in the transit of empire.

¹³⁸ Bley, 249, 254.

to push out the unseemly Polish populace of Eastern Germany, the First World War offered many radical German planners the chance to attempt to implement their policies without regard to the rights of nominally German citizens.¹³⁹ Though failing thanks to poor execution, military/political infighting, and the loss of the war itself, such actions demonstrated an escalation of German imperialism in Europe – from acting within the role of the state’s borders, to expansion Eastwards – the famous *Drang nach Osten* which supposedly exemplified the destiny of Germany. A destiny ended by the First World War with Germany not only stripped of its African and Asian colonies, the colonies which marked it as a great global Imperial power, but also its Polish colonies – as well as territorial cessions to France, Denmark, Belgium, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia – which had marked it as a great European Empire. While attempts to reclaim Africa would be flirted with by Hitler, they were largely dismissed as something which could be bargained and dealt with after the war. In Europe, however, the Nazis would relaunch a colonial effort, free from even the most legalistic protections and constraints that the German Empire, at least nominally, trod in Europe. The conquest of Poland offered Nazi Germany a tabula rasa in their eyes – virgin, untouched land, which only needed a German *Pflug* and *Pflüger* (plough and ploughman) to pour forth from this *Füllhorn* (Cornucopia) the fruits of the earth in a never-ending stream. Those natives that remained – uncivilized, brutish, and stunted – would be exploited as labour, until their usefulness and bodies wore out, or simply be excised like a cancerous growth.¹⁴⁰

Duly inculcated with decades and centuries of cultural fantasies of Eastern Europe as a wilderness on the edge of the German civilization, the German soldier went forth seeing himself

¹³⁹ Nelson and Fantauzzo, 284.

¹⁴⁰ Rossino, 232-3.

less as a modern soldier, and more as a Victorian adventurer, leaving behind civilization to tramp through the wild, untamed wilderness and do battle with ‘savages’ on a savage level – not dissimilar to the actions of German soldiers and settlers in Africa.¹⁴¹ The atrocities, executions, burning of villages, and other criminal actions were not considered criminal, but merely a continuation of those colonial conquests, the Pole being nothing more than the Herero and Nama had been in 1908, the Jew something even lesser. While difficult to draw a direct line, the indirect actions of the German soldier as interviewed by the PK-Reporter – the suppression of Polish resistance as either inept and easily destroyed, or cowardly and deserving of retribution – showcased the campaign in the penny-novels and films pandered to the German public during the war, in a cultural “through-line” – a sequence of story points within a singular perspective – a perspective glorifying Germany as a bearer of European civilization and enlightenment not that dissimilar from the other Imperial states.¹⁴² Indeed, these similarities served dual purposes, both excusing Germans for their actions (which they saw as simply being a more total, more *final* version of those tried before), but also to appeal to other Imperial nations.¹⁴³ The ability of German mythos to transfer from exclusively Nazi domestic propaganda, *Dreigroschenheften* (penny-novels) and *Kriegsfilme* (war films), to global myth and memory, served as one more

¹⁴¹ Wildt, 224, 440.

¹⁴² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York City, New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 39; Judson, 448-9. Austro-Hungary was commonly seen in Germany as a Germanic Empire which held together the Slavs under their ‘benevolent’ rule. Hitler, however, detested the Empire, as it sought to maintain neutrality of nationhood.

¹⁴³ David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics*, (New York City, New York: Routledge, 2006), 336, 437.

instance of the “White Man’s Burden.”¹⁴⁴ Their perseverance is a testimony to the lasting mythos of European Imperialism.¹⁴⁵

Combat and Liberation

Just before the start of the German invasion, Erhard Milch, commander of the Luftwaffe’s efforts in the campaign, approved a pamphlet to be distributed to members of the 4th Motorized Luftwaffe Propaganda Kompanie (*Lw.Prop.-Kp (mot.) 4*), which would serve as the first Luftwaffe PK unit to operate in an active war zone. Showing how important propaganda had become to the Wehrmacht, Milch approved of the language stating:

The work of P. companies [propaganda companies] fulfills one of the most important tasks of modern warfare within the framework of propaganda warfare. It takes place on the express orders of the Fuhrer and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht. It is therefore to be supported as far as possible.¹⁴⁶

Entering Poland, the PK-Reporter was all armed with cameras, as has been seen, to enact Nazi violence and worldview upon the Polish people and nation, whilst extoling the virtues of Germany as not an aggressor, but a defender of the rights of Germans near and abroad. That effort, however, went beyond the camera, and into the realm of secondary literature, as the PK units were tasked not only with photo and film, but interviews and their own accounts and opinionated takes on the campaign. Thus, rather than merely record instances of the campaign,

¹⁴⁴ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1940), 321-3.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Heinemann, “‘The Hour of the Woman: Memories of German’s Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, no 2 (1996), 365-6; Robert G. Moeller, “Fighting to Win the Peace: 08/15 and West German Memories of the Second World War,” *Conflict, Catastrophe, and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History*, (New York City, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 320, 330; Mary Nolan, “The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Republic,” *Radical History Review* Vol 81 (2001), 122-4. Indeed, it would last right to the end of the 20th century, and into the 21st century, in Germany. The recent series *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (2013) could not help but showcase the Poles as the ‘true’ anti-Semites, with the main German cast having a Jewish friend, resisting the Nazi regime, and in general being the ‘true’ victims of the conflict.

¹⁴⁶ Lw. Prop. Kompanie (mot) 4., *OKL – Luftflottenkommando 4.*, Record Group T-242, Roll 173, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 84.

the PK's soldiers utilized their own memory, and the memory of German soldiers, to shape the campaign into the imperialistic fantasies desired by the Wehrmacht and Nazi Government – meant to demonstrate to the German people just how exciting, adventurous, and down-right *enjoyable* war could be.¹⁴⁷ Military myths played into these efforts as the PK recast the Polish people and armed forces as both absurdly incapable of proper resistance and simultaneously cunning and fighting from the shadows, thereby hardening the German attitude against these forms of resistance that they viewed as “banditry.”¹⁴⁸ Reports and photographs by Kriegsberichter routinely showcased the execution of the so called “Heckenschützen” or “Hedge-shooters,” a reference to the perception that such ‘bandits’ hid in ambush behind bushes and hedges, too afraid and inhuman to face German soldiers in a fair fight.¹⁴⁹ Such stories were not meant for immediate distribution, but to be picked through and published in specific target markets, where it was felt they could make the most impact. Thus, rather than simply document the campaign, PK-Reporters were directed to present specific, guided memories and tropes.¹⁵⁰ These would, later, be produced for sale to the German reading public.

One of the first documents produced by the PK-Reporter was not, in fact, an account of the Polish Campaign of 1939, but, rather, an account of the campaigns in Poland in the Great War!¹⁵¹ Intended as a history, this work, in fact, served as a set piece for the future tropes of the campaign, with much focus put on the Russian ‘Cossack’ cavalry charges with lances, and the

¹⁴⁷ Eric Borchert, *Entscheidende Stunden: Mit der Kamera am Feind*, (Berlin, Germany: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1941), 5.

¹⁴⁸ Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, R1642, 1000-1003.

¹⁴⁹ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1642, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 1223.

¹⁵⁰ Uziel, 257-9.

¹⁵¹ Geschichte, Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1661, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 282.

‘beauty’ of death, the self-sacrificing hero being the epitome of martial excellence fulfilling “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.”¹⁵² As an introductory to the new campaign, this brief history set the stage for how PK-Reporters would portray the new campaign in Poland, reflecting an Ostfront through which many had already served in the prior war, and through which many Volksdeutschen had also served. Such stories, already embedded in the mindset of the German soldier, made it all the easier to relate similar stories, as their memories juggled with preconceived notions to offer PK-Reporter interviewers what they themselves believed a war story was supposed to be. Typically, most of the stories are tales of quick, dangerous combat, with the lobbing of hand grenades or rattling of machine gun fire and over quickly with a shout of “Hurra!”¹⁵³ Polish soldiers had only two real choices given to them by the Germans. The first is to surrender without a fight, be rewarded for ‘compliance’ with food, then pats on the back, and magnanimously allowed to return to their home villages almost as a father might softly chastise a wayward son who saw the error of his ways and came to apologize.¹⁵⁴ Otherwise, they flee, the word “*flucht*” (rout) being used almost to the point of excessiveness, as most cases of the Poles actually fighting back lead to their almost immediate “*flucht*” from the battlefield the moment the German army leans in their direction.¹⁵⁵ The occasional death on the German side, is either heroic or simply passed over quickly, in a matter-of-fact manner that simply wants to move forward with the grand adventure.

Polish cavalry, the elite of the Polish military with the best training, firearms, and

¹⁵² Geschichte, Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918, 322-3.

¹⁵³ Examples include Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1642, 687, 1104, 1223; Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1643, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 197, 199.

¹⁵⁴ Anlage z. KTB- Sep 1939, *Korück 582, 1c/AO*, Record Group T-501, Roll 347, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 50.

¹⁵⁵ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1642, 557.

leadership, are presented as the exact inverse in the German accounts. Accounts which read much like Cossack stories from the KP Great War history, or even more blatantly, as crazed horse-backed hordes slaughtered by a British infantry square in the Sudanese desert. In the PK-Reporter telling of Polish cavalry charges, the German soldiers relate their astonishment and fear mixed with awe as the Poles attempt to push the attack home but are mown down in their ranks by machine guns, confirming their feelings of cultural dominance and superiority.¹⁵⁶ The Polish Airforce appears and disappears almost at random throughout the campaign, with one account claiming it was gone from the skies by the second day, and another account shortly after, mentioning a flight of bombers that hit their column weeks into the campaign.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the fact that an unescorted flight of Polish bombers could pass through supposedly German dominated airspace, drop their bombs amid a German column, then escape back across the horizon would alone demonstrate that the Polish Air Force was still contesting the air, but instead the comment is simply buried in a tidal wave of German superiority and bloviating, with one reporter going so far as to claim that Polish planes were, in fact, British and French air force units, offering a simple and clear explanation for how the air could still be contested.¹⁵⁸ The rest of the Polish military, whilst said to be fairly decently equipped, is seen more as a cargo cult, a military which, while having all the trappings and equipment of a modern army, lacks the “Kunst,” the art, of

¹⁵⁶ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1643, 217-8.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹⁵⁸ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando X Armeekorps*, Record Group T-314, Roll 441, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 68; Glen Knoblock, *With Great Sacrifice and Bravery...: The Career of Polish Ace Waclaw Lapkowski 1919-41*, (Bennington, Vermont: Merriam Press, 2012). One of the rare English-language memoirs by a Polish veteran of the air war over Poland itself, Lapkowski does battle over the skies of Warsaw and the rest of Poland for weeks. Indeed, the Polish Air Force itself, while small and in some ways outdated (but never obsolete, and with very modern bomber aircraft), acquitted itself well, contesting the skies and launching daring raids for the entire campaign.

knowing how to actually use it.¹⁵⁹ One PK-Reporter actually becomes upset at what he views as the press back home *overestimating* the effectiveness of the Polish army, claiming instead that the Polish army simply flees before the German “strength of will.”¹⁶⁰ This would be a through-line for much of their writing, supporting the general, and famous, Nazi theme of the “Triumph of the Will,” – the concept that *anything* was possible through willpower alone.¹⁶¹

PK-Reporters were not limited to the written word, however. Some would put their artistic talents to work, be it drawing depictions of battle, of towns, or in one case, a political cartoon meant to show the reality of what the Invasion of Poland War was about (Fig. A.35). Germany, represented as a nude Adonis clad only in Stahlhelm and holding a spear, does combat with a Polish, French, and British soldier, each holding individualized shields. Having thrust through the Pole’s shield who is now raising his hands in surrender, the spear is leveled at the Frenchman’s shield, soon be dispatched and then onto the Brit. Behind all of them, stands a stereotypical racialized depiction of a Jew. The caption, “Wer da kämpft für dir Semiten, ob Franzoschen oder Briten, der gedeute an dir Polen; dann sich ein’n blutigen Kopf dabei holen!” (Idiomatic, but essentially meaning, “Anyone who fights for the Semites, whether French or British, think of the Poles; you can get a bloody head!”) explains the message if one has not already understood the drawing. Germany, through attacking Poland, through waging war against Britain and France, is in fact targeting one specific enemy, only pushing through Poland as a necessary path to fight the Jewish race, which cowardly shields itself behind its protectors. Maps of the conflict also proliferate, mostly showing accurate troop positions, but bending them

¹⁵⁹ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1642, 670.

¹⁶⁰ Feldzug in Polen, 2. Gibergsdivision, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1643, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 289.

¹⁶¹ *Triumph of the Will*, Directed by Leni Riefenstahl, Written by Leni Riefenstahl, Walter Ruttmann, and Eberhard Taubert, Reichsparteitag-Film, 1935.

to fit Germany's needs, as the Polish forward positioning of their troops looks less like a defensive frontline (indeed, the Poles never wanted to fight at the border) and more like a massing for attack, a claim the Germans would use later against the Soviet Union to explain Operation Barbarossa.¹⁶² Thus, war, rather than a matter of choice, had been forced upon Germany through the "Eternal Jew" and his scheming with enemy nations to surround and destroy Germany.

Volksdeutschen, Polen, Juden

Such mythmaking, of course, did not cease with combat. Once the frontlines passed, the Germans were quick to mobilize the local populace and gather tales of the abuse of Volksdeutsche under Polish rule. PK-Reporter photography continued to stage photo-ops of cheering crowds of thankful Volksdeutsche, criminal massacres of German civilians, and demonization of Poles and Jews as the unrightful, oppressive subhumans who had temporarily held sway over the 'true' ruling class, that of Volksdeutsche. This extended to civilian reporting, which just as the combat reports, would be spread throughout Germany, in an attempt to demonstrate to the German people not only the righteousness of their cause, but as if a Roman Triumph, to show off the new lands and inhabitants to the German people, racializing and queering Poles and Jews in the process.¹⁶³ The occupation of Poland provided new methods of political differentiation and identity, as the Third Reich sought to categorize and subjugate the Polish nation based on phrenological and eugenic interpretations of racial science.¹⁶⁴ The Germans encouraged an ongoing conversation with Poles, both based on resistance to offered

¹⁶² Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, *Generalkommando X Armeekorps*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1644, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 881.

¹⁶³ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1642, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Longerich, 142-4.

identity, and acceptance of other concepts of power which encouraged collaboration and involvement in anti-Semitic violence. As well, the importation of German labour was part and parcel with the *Kriegsberichter's* propagandistic accounts of the 'Polish Economy,' as Poland was shown as backwards, poor, filthy, and mismanaged.¹⁶⁵ Even German women, typically suppressed to being housewives in the Nazi conception of womanhood, were utilized in Poland, not only giving German women an outlet to gain power and freedom from home, but also offering the empire an educational tool to 'teach' *Volksdeutschen* how to be 'properly' German.¹⁶⁶ In doing so, Poles were to be relegated to a slave caste and Jews into itinerant slave workers on the path to expulsion and extermination.¹⁶⁷

One surprising group of studies were interviews, more like interrogations, of various *Volksdeutschen* who had either been arrested or attempted to offer their services to the German 'liberators' only to find themselves under close scrutiny. Rather than simply trust their compatriots, the German military worried incessantly about their true loyalties, believing that they could have been coopted by decades of living under Polish rule, corrupted to the nefarious ends of the Poles and only offering their support to Germany out of survival instinct.¹⁶⁸ In other cases, *Volksdeutschen* turned on *Volksdeutschen*, informing on 'race traitors' in their midst who had too easily accepted Polish rule, learning the language, marrying Poles, and even serving in the Polish military, despite having been members of the Imperial Germany army in WW1, and having a long lineage of German roots.¹⁶⁹ Thus, even in the first days of the war, the *Wehrmacht*

¹⁶⁵ *Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1642, 112-540.*

¹⁶⁶ Harvey, 167-71.

¹⁶⁷ Knab, 8-9.

¹⁶⁸ Anlage z. KTB- Sep 1939, 1-191.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-9, 189.

was forced to deal with categorization and racial scrutiny, with such interviews already being labeled for the individual's *Rasse*, be it Volksdeutsch or Polisch, and their status in the Polish military, if any.¹⁷⁰ Much anger is placed on those who are viewed as having been stolen from the German race by Poland, placing the German people as the victims, a superior civilization that had not only been ruled by inferiors, but who had been actively taken from the Vaterland and Heimat – the war a correction of Versailles' mistakes.

This ability for Volksdeutschen to inhabit dual worlds was not a new part of empire in Eastern Europe. As has been shown by studies of Austro-Hungary and German Imperial borderlands, many groups sought to cohabitate with multiple nationalities, easily code switching between languages and cultures to adapt to living in mixed communities.¹⁷¹ This code switching, however, became more and more dangerous in the post-WWI environment, as national governments sought to define and order groups based on language and national culture, refusing to accept any gray areas or the possibility that nationality could, in fact, be chosen or transition over time.¹⁷² Indeed, as pointed out in Pieter Judson's *The Habsburg Empire*, Austro-Hungary had, in fact, encouraged this neutrality of identity, allowing the empire's citizenry to employ the tools of empire and resist nationalization.¹⁷³ This neutrality of identity, however, was an affront to the Nazis, whose concepts of racial and national hierarchy *required* non-neutrality in race, and enforced it through phrenological and *Rassenhygiene* methods meant to pull apart 'lost' German volk from Poles, Romani, and Jews. Indeed, Polish intellectuals were of a particular danger due to their "fantastic" racial qualities, having to be separated out rapidly to

¹⁷⁰ Anlage z. KTB- Sep 1939, 32-37.

¹⁷¹ Harvey, 36.

¹⁷² Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 227, 306.

¹⁷³ Judson, 381-2.

avoid any chance of resistance and leadership amongst what was otherwise seen as a docile, easy to control populace. As such, the PK-Reporter sought to categorize what they saw, denoting the differences between German villages which held all the beauty and orderliness of *Heimat*, and the primitive nature of rural Polish homes, with any urban Polish homes being simply the product of prior German engineering and economic leadership.¹⁷⁴ The Jews, meanwhile, are something other, something even more queered than any repressed Volksdeutsch or slovenly Pole. They are filthy, lazy, lurking in the shadows and in dingy alleys, running odd businesses and populating the cities, “10 Jews for every 1 Aryan,” allowing them control of many of the finest homes; a product, however, not of their business acumen or legitimate success, but of implied trickery.¹⁷⁵

Via these identities, the PK-Reporters sought to dehumanize and *explain* the inhumanity of those queered peoples the Germans were conquering. Rather than approach from a neutral viewpoint, they entered with a *Weltanschauung* that demanded strict racial hierarchy and subordination. Volksdeutsche were not immune to this, with many being looked at as childish Germans, capable of learning and being brought back into the fold of the *Vaterland*, but still lacking in development thanks to their years surrounded by Poles and Jews and living under the ‘Polish Economy’ for far too long. Others were seen as race traitors, those who had adapted to the two decades of Polish rule as a matter of course, had learned Polish, served in the Polish military, and adopted Polish customs. While not ‘lost’ they were certainly lower on the proverbial totem pole and had to be treated with deep suspicion.¹⁷⁶ The Poles, on the other hand, were more malleable. Apart from a few intellectuals, the Poles were overall seen as a colonized

¹⁷⁴ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1643, 282.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Roll 1642, 239.

¹⁷⁶ Harvey, 151

people not much different than how Imperial nations had viewed India or Africa – a poorly educated people who, bound by the constraints of their Slavic origins, could not be expected to be anything more than a labour force for the Germans, but also weak-willed enough to remain subservient despite their treatment.¹⁷⁷ The Jews, being the archenemy, were simply derided, a race that would soon disappear, one way or another, from German territory.

Propagandabücher und Kriegsfilme

On return to Germany, these reports, photos, and films found themselves printed across Germany, sometimes targeting specific markets (such as the exploits of former-Austrian mountain divisions being printed extensively in Viennese other Austrian newspapers), other times being marketed across the Reich as a chance for the average civilian to read up on the exploits of the Wehrmacht in a war many still retained much anxiety over. Fears of another slaughter a la the Great War could be allayed as the war was, as described, essentially a literal walk in the park, helped by the relatively low casualties the Germans had suffered (ignoring the rapid up-tick in losses in the final weeks of the war as Polish resistance morphed from holding and rear-guard actions into active defense and counter attack/breakout).¹⁷⁸ Combined with the later quick campaigns in Western Europe, such propaganda served to ill prepare the German public for what awaited them in 1941.¹⁷⁹ The easy crushing of the Polish military, once considered the finest of the Eastern European armies, now allowed both soldiers and civilians alike to believe the short leap to Warsaw could be replicated on the way to Moscow, while essentially ignoring the mass differences in distance, army size, economic size, and terrain. This,

¹⁷⁷ Harvey, 122-3.

¹⁷⁸ Koskodan, 41.

¹⁷⁹ David Stahel, *Operational Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East*, (New York City, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39, 45, 138.

combined with the portrayal of Eastern Europe peoples as no more capable of combat and resistance to the German war machine than the Africans were in the late 1800s against European imperialists armed with machine guns, reassured the German populace even more.

War-time propaganda books of German publishers, marketed both to children and adults, proliferated in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Easy to mass produce, often on unornamented cloth binding with a simple stamped title, these books became the mass-market medium in which Germans digested the tales of war, heroism, and victory in print form. Others saw more grand covers, with fine paper and hardback binding, marketed more as set pieces for a good German's bookshelf (Fig. A.36). More so than newspapers, they encapsulated story-telling, filling themselves with the various reports, interviews, and writings of the PK-Reporters, often copying their stories word for word, and including photos which may have been taken by the PK unit in question, or which might have been shot miles away.¹⁸⁰ What mattered was the narrative – one of German victory. Again and again, the focus is on the performance and technical capability of the Wehrmacht. A book on the Luftwaffe, for example, explores each branch in turn, even the reconnaissance aircraft; demonstrating the importance the Germans placed on the cooperation between various services and making even flying a scout aircraft an exciting story.¹⁸¹ One longer book, *Wir zogen Gegen Polen*, goes a step further, focusing down on the experience of a German artillery battery during the campaign, but including multiple claims of Polish cavalry charging across open fields towards the battery, which unlimbers and, in a scene out of the US Civil War, fires over open sights into the mass of horses and men, destroying an

¹⁸⁰ Josef Grabler, *Mit Bomben und MGs über Polen*, (Berlin, Germany: Verlag C. Bertelsmann Gütersloh, 1940), 20.

¹⁸¹ Ulrich Kerber, "Wir suchen den Feind!" *Unsere Flieger über Polen*, (Berlin, Germany: Deutscher Verlag, 1939), 9-60.

entire Polish cavalry brigade, all by themselves, in three days of charges!¹⁸² Such a claim is wild, considering the Polish cavalry brigade in question fought all the way to Warsaw and through to the end of the war. Yet, without any outside information, the book *feels* genuine, holding all the romance and excitement of an American western or British conquest in Africa. The Germans are the underdogs, despite their technology, due to the overwhelming mass of the enemy forces (Germans having actually outnumbered the Poles), and win through dash, will, and raw German martial prowess.¹⁸³

German filmmakers also cashed in on the action, hoping to utilize the heady early years of the war to earn box-office money whilst simultaneously fulfilling orders by the Propaganda Ministry and Goebbels to produce better quality films for the populace that would improve morale and make them more accepting of a wider expansion of the war. *Kampfgeschwader Lützow* holds a special place in that pantheon, as its footage would have wide ranging implications for the greater mythos of the Polish campaign.¹⁸⁴ Focused on a bomber crew during the 1939 invasion, the film whitewashes repeated criminal actions of the Luftwaffe while showcasing the bomber crew as rescuing defenseless Volksdeutschen refugees from Polish police officers eager to drive them eastwards to certain death. The Polish Airforce, when it does briefly appear, is represented by aged Czech biplanes, a type of plane obsoleted by Poland's adoption of all metal monoplanes in the early 1930s. Most importantly, however, was the cavalry charge. Filmed from a high angle, Polish cavalry is seen gathering, charging forward against a line of German motorcyclists, who are soon backed by Luftwaffe and Panzer support.

¹⁸² Hans Weidmann, *Wir zogen Gegen Polen*, (Munich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1940), 73-4.

¹⁸³ Wolf Glaßer, "An der Bzura," *Das Buch des Krieges 1939/40*, (Berlin, Germany: Verlag "Die Wehrmacht" KG, 1940), 60-3.

¹⁸⁴ *Kampfgeschwader Lützow*, Directed by Hans Bertram, Written by Hans Bertram and Wolf Neumeister, Tobis Filmkunst, 1941.

Rather than give up, the Poles charge forth through machine guns and bombs, screaming and calling unintelligibly as if Mongol hordes, clashing with the armoured cars and tanks which pour fire into their ranks – slaughtering them. It was a scene which would be replayed for decades, lasting into the era of the History Channel and its war documentaries.¹⁸⁵ Another film, *Feldzug in Polen*, attempts a more documentary approach, despite being directed and filmed well after the campaign.¹⁸⁶ Barely even showing the Polish military, the focus is instead on cheering crowds of liberated Volksdeutschen, and even respectful Catholic Germans visiting Polish cathedrals. When they are shown, the Poles are disorderly and filthy, mounted on horseback, bicycle, or foot, surrendering to German soldiers without resistance.

Such images and visions were, of course, produced for the purpose of influencing the German people, confirming for them their superiority in culture and arms, and preparing the populace to accept further conquest and war in the East – overpowering, with few casualties, a quick conquest and return to peace. The Holocaust provided a background, the racialization and suppression of Poles and Jews a foregone, obvious conclusion, one long desired but unable to be acted upon for decades if not centuries. Victory had never been in doubt, losses had been light, and the German Empire had been reborn as a continental power which could against exert its dominance in Europe. The conquered lands were paraded, in cinema and in books, to be digested, absorbed, and civilized by the German people, raising the Volksdeutschen to true Germanic status, and guaranteeing that the ‘natural balance’ had been restored. As well, the myth of the Wehrmacht as “immune” to the enemy was born in Poland and generalized to

¹⁸⁵ Robert M. Citino, “Polish Cavalry Charges Tanks!” HistoryNet. Accessed 3/20/2023, <https://www.historynet.com/polish-cavalry-charges-tanks/>.

¹⁸⁶ *Feldzug in Polen*, Directed by Fritz Hippler and Leni Riefenstahl, Written by Fritz Hippler, Deutsche Filmherstellungen und Verwertungs GmbH, Berling (DFG), 1940.

Eastern Europe, allowing the Wehrmacht to dismiss Eastern European civilization as weak, backwards, and technologically incapable of resisting the power of “will” and German/Aryan “superiority.”¹⁸⁷

Weltanschauung

Seated in a crowded theater, a film-going audience in Königsberg waited patiently for the news reel to begin. Proud of their work, the German propaganda machine was now not only disseminating its creations to the German people, but also to foreigners, for, in the theater, was seated Julien Bryan, newly arrived from Warsaw. Having spent three harrowing weeks in Poland, most of it in Warsaw documenting the German siege, Bryan was horrified to be shown a celebration of the bombing of Warsaw, “the burning and ruined villages of Poland, and the sad, frightened faces of the Polish refugees.”¹⁸⁸ He believed the reels had failed, that the other viewers, by their lack of applause, had not enjoyed seeing what their military, their boys in grey, had wrought on a neighboring land. Bryan believed the power of film could transcend boundaries, stereotypes, and discrimination, serving only to draw global humanity together tighter.¹⁸⁹ Farther to the west, an American radiobroadcaster was watching the same reel. Having spent most of the war thus far stationed in Berlin, apart from a short trip to the frontline with German handlers, William Shirer held a different perspective. He saw not a public that was ashamed, but one which was worried, concerned not for the Poles, but for what the retribution from France and Britain would be, hoping against hope that Hitler’s ‘Peace Offensive’ would

¹⁸⁷ Stahel, 59-60, 76.

¹⁸⁸ Julien Bryan, “The Last Days of Warsaw” *Reader’s Digest*, April 1940, 32.

¹⁸⁹ Sam Bryan, International Film Foundation, October 6, 2018, New York City, New York. <https://www.internationalfilmfoundation.org/>.

come to fruition and a massive European war could still be avoided.¹⁹⁰ The veterans of the campaign, however, were prouder. They talked “of their achievement in Poland, the destruction they wrought, just like a youth of 19 or 20 at home might talk of that touchdown he made last Saturday.”¹⁹¹ For them, the campaign *had* been an adventure, as so many young soldiers throughout history have seen their first experience of combat – the adrenaline rush, the high of surviving, of returning home unscathed, proud of having defeated, dominated, *subjugated* an enemy.

The German propaganda press, as shown, did not stop at only capturing instances and events for reporting, but sought to gather and disseminate memories of the campaign itself, from soldiers and officers, meant to demonstrate to the German public the excitement and adventurism of war. In doing so, they deleted Polish resistance where possible, turning the Poles from a capable, worthy enemy, into colonial tropes of wild men charging home with spears, or tricksters who could only win through deceit and improper warfare – be it ambushing German soldiers on the march, refusing to give proper battle, or tricking German aircraft into not attacking.¹⁹² Indeed, the very ability of Poles to occupy identities as both friend and foe became a fearful challenge for the Germans, who could never trust that a Pole wouldn’t heel to their faces then shoot them in the back. German Poles were not to be trusted either, as rumours proliferated of their recruitment by Polish Secret Service branches, or that their credentials as veterans of the Imperial Army were not simply a cover for their true allegiances.¹⁹³ This forced German soldiers to be wary of even welcoming arms, and PK-Reporters to have to be all the more

¹⁹⁰ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Oct 5, 1939, 24.47, 1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹² Die Schwesterwaffen, Die Luftwaffe, 1939-1942, *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1658, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 230.

¹⁹³ Anlage z. KTB- Sep 1939, 32-37.

thoughtful in their presentation of Volksdeutschen, who, while German, could be treated as slightly ‘lesser’ Germans, capable of being brought up to the same level of Germans proper, but still needing education and guidance – their natural superiority having been, assuredly, suppressed and tamped down by Polish rule.¹⁹⁴

In covering the campaign though, the PK-Reporter went beyond simply recording and tweaking veteran stories of combat and daring-do. They actively involved themselves in the colonial mission, doing their best to document their perspectives and thoughts on the native population, how they lived, looked, acted, and felt about the arrival of the Germans. Indeed, it is not without a hint of domination that one PK-Reporter records how “all good Poles went back inside” on the approach of the Wehrmacht, whilst the Volksdeutschen came out to greet and cheer on their liberators.¹⁹⁵ The subservience of Poles was a matter of fact, their existence was to be ignored and hidden away, as even recognizing it endangered the German Empire. Others wrote extensive descriptions of the Polish military as unfit due to its cosmopolitan nature, being made up of Ukrainians and Belarusians who were incapable of facing down the German juggernaut.¹⁹⁶ Polish town life was portrayed as filthy, unclean, approaching animalistic, unlike the German towns and farming communities which were routinely showcased as clean, orderly, the perfection of *Heimat*.¹⁹⁷ In doing so, the PK-Reporters offered to the German public a vision of empire, an empire not far away in Africa, but one just next door, full of virgin land and subservient natives who would make a fine work force with a few cracks of the whip and some

¹⁹⁴ Harvey, 151.

¹⁹⁵ Anlage z. KTB- Sep 1939, 71.

¹⁹⁶ Krieg 1939, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1641, 724-8, 789-90.

¹⁹⁷ Celia Applegate, “Heimat and the Varieties of Regional History,” *Central European History*, Vol 33, no 1, (2000), 109-115.

fine tuning of their education.¹⁹⁸ Soldiers themselves were encouraged to see the Poles as such, given the Nazi dreams of offering veterans land and Polish workers after the war ended; to transform themselves into soldiers-farmers and properly settle and tame the wilderness of Eastern Europe.

The films on the campaign largely continued these stories. Based around the exploits of individual units, or even rote copying of PK-Reporter colonial myths, they rallied the German people to the cause, attempting to unify the years of racial hatred and target it to the newly acquired territories. Inner colonization had always foundered on the rights of the people already there, and on the disinterest of the German population in general.¹⁹⁹ The coming of the Second World War neatly eliminated the rights of the native peoples in the Nazi mind, which meant the next step was popularizing and incentivizing Germans to move to Poland. Women's organizations and Volksdeutschen groups did their best to make the appeal attractive, offering classes, financial support, workers [read: slaves] from the Polish population, as well as free land and domiciles, typically stolen from former, non-German tenants.²⁰⁰ The films also propagated the myths of the Polish military, seeking to emphasize the technological and tactical superiority of the German army, not just the inferiority, but the 'Scythian' roots of the Polish military – an Asiatic horde that threw their lives away without care, mechanically charging to their deaths armed with swords and lances. Such films ignored the other side of the campaign's mythos, seeking to avoid any instance of the Germans losing, even if it were due to 'ungentlemanly' tactics, since to portray the Poles as 'cunning' would have been too much for a future slave caste.

These myths and tropes, however over the top, still made it into the international market.

¹⁹⁸ Krieg 1939/40, Der Feldzug in Polen, Roll 1641, 884.

¹⁹⁹ Robert L. Nelson and Justin Fantauzzo, 284-5.

²⁰⁰ Harvey, 66, 85.

Be it through foreigners witnessing the films, reading the popular books, or their later dissemination to the wider world after the end of the war, these myths, rather than appearing ludicrous, matched neatly with Western perspectives on Eastern Europe.²⁰¹ Poland had long been a backwater, a forgotten realm that had not even existed on the map in living memory. It was a nation full of dreamers and archaic beliefs, of dashing bravery mixed with a total lack of modernity or acceptance of their 'role' in the world order.²⁰² Indeed, after the war, Western military staffers ate up depictions of Slavs as contemptuous of death, "possess[ing] neither the judgement nor the ability to think independently."²⁰³ While certain racial views were tossed aside as simply the byproduct of the Nazis, the work of the PK-Reporters cemented itself in the West, as their production of books and films legitimized and served as records of a war that lacked a counterpart from the other side. Polish accounts were few and far between, with many Polish intellectuals slaughtered at Katyn, being killed in years of fighting, or simply not speaking English. Much as today, propaganda can function by pure overload – bombard the viewer with messages long enough and fast enough, and eventually parts will stick. As Hitler pointed out, quite succinctly, in *Mein Kampf*, "...in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility."²⁰⁴ By propagating mythos at a rapid pace, the German war reporters managed, purposefully so, to make *some* of it stick in the Western world.

While the Third Reich seems to have copied a multitude of imperialistic functions, originating from romanticized tales of conquest and empire, and the real experiences of Imperialism by a host of global powers, the bureaucratic functions of the Nazi state meshed with

²⁰¹ Wolff, 360-2.

²⁰² Biskupski, 100-1.

²⁰³ Smelser and Davies, 69.

²⁰⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Vol I Chap. X*. (Munich, Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger G.m.b.h., 1933).

the Nazi view of Eastern Europe to lead to the unique radicalization that would occur within the Third Reich before and during the Second World War.²⁰⁵ This radicalization, although occurring without true central direction, relied heavily on centralized theming, as orders from on high set the boundaries and standards by which those on the ground would be judged. The PK-Reporters were no exception, indeed, as has been shown, they were considered an essential part of the entire propaganda apparatus, a group which could bend popular will and create history through the deft use of mythic colonial identities and memories of the campaign. They were so successful in this task that, even after the war, cultural precepts of that empire have proven difficult to shake from the German people's historical memory.²⁰⁶ Even the Federal Minister for Expellees, Refugees, and War Victims claimed, in 1954, that the rape of German women by the Soviet army was a non-European behavior, but one traced to "traditions and ideas that are still in effect, according to which women...are the rightful bounty of the victory...the Asian mentality contributed substantially to these outbreaks."²⁰⁷ The idea of Eastern Europe as a land of Asiatic barbarism simply continued after the war, an entrenched Weltanschauung in the mindset of Germans and Americans alike. Propaganda and media functioned within a defined, yet chaotic, bureaucratic apparatus to create and propagandize mythic historical memories of the Invasion of Poland both in Germany and across the wider world. While physical violence proliferated throughout the campaign, non-physical violence also acted upon identity and self – through the cameraman's lens, the journalist's pen, and the broadcaster's microphone. Regrettably, it would not only be Germans who took part in this global transmission.

²⁰⁵ Longerich, 6; Wildt, 440.

²⁰⁶ Heinemann, 368; Moeller, 320, 330.

²⁰⁷ Heinemann, 370.

CHAPTER 3

ROMANTICIZING RESISTANCE: THE PRODUCTION OF MEMORY BY WESTERN MEDIA DURING THE POLISH CAMPAIGN

By Spear and Sword

The tough, unwavering resistance by Polish cavalry must have appeared antithetical to German soldiers who saw and remembered the campaign in imperialistic identities, steeped in decades of colonial romance voicing the failure of cavalry in Africa and Asia against the Imperial European militaries. In 1898, the British campaign in the Sudan culminated with the final battle against the Mahdist forces. Swarmed by tens of thousands of Mahdi cavalry, the ending was never truly in doubt, as British soldiers, resplendent in their red coats (for the last time) tore into the ranks of Mahdist forces at ranges unprecedented in much of human history.²⁰⁸ Artillery, machine guns, and volley fire took its toll at ranges well beyond human eyesight's ability to pick out a single person, instead, the lead was thrown into the mass of human and horse flesh, blunting the mass charge hundreds of meters from the British lines. The Battle of Omdurman saw the final destruction of Mahdist resistance in Sudan against British rule, however, it was one which many saw as a glorious finish, with much focus spent by reporters on the romantic conceptions of the noble Arab horseman plunging unwittingly to their deaths against British technological superiority.²⁰⁹ Indeed, throughout the era of Imperialism, the crushing of native groups had not been without its romantic notions of the noble savage, or praise for the technology of old, be it spear, sword, or bow, with the British focusing their tales on few defeats and the glorious resistance given by British soldiers, whilst tacitly ignoring the

²⁰⁸ John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, (New York City, New York: Arno Press, 1981), 86.

²⁰⁹ G.A. Henty, *With Kitchener in the Soudan*, (London, United Kingdom: Blackie and Son Ltd., 1903).

wholesale slaughter of the savages which typically ensued.²¹⁰ Even during the First World War, much focus was put on the dash and elan of units, on hand to hand and bayonet combat, despite its increasing obsolescence as anything more than a final option for the average soldiers wading through the mud and guts of no man's land.²¹¹ This romance for the older ways of war survived the mechanized slaughter of the trenches and continued into the start of the Second World War.

Though certainly not Nazi sympathizers, multiple American foreign correspondents strove to balance news with the German side of the conflict, striving to be neutral spectators of yet another European war. Technology let them telegraph news back to the United States at lightning speed, as new advancements in radio, film, and teletype had altered the traditional manners with which news spread, allowing even photographs to be sent across the Atlantic in just minutes, and aircraft, flying film fresh from the battlefield back in the States to be edited and shown in the local cinemas newsreels in a matter of a few days. Yet, despite their apprehension at serving from Berlin or following the German advance, many refused to believe that they themselves could be hooked into the propaganda machine of the Nazis. It took a callous disregard for their subconscious instinct – their gut feel for distinguishing truth from falsity – for some, such as William Shirer, to stray down romanticized notions of combat, and to out-right falsifying stories to fit into their personal memory and biased interpretation of events.²¹² Others, such as the roving reporter/war tourist/feminist groundbreaker/adrenaline junkie Clare Hollingworth, staying just ahead of the frontline, found themselves moving far more rapidly than they could truly report, enraptured by the need to follow story to story, and transfixed by what

²¹⁰ Barczewski, 150.

²¹¹ Michael Strobl, "Writings of History: Authenticity and Self-Censorship in William L. Shirer's *Berlin Diary*" *German Life and Letters*, Vol 66, no 3, (July 2013), 322-3.

²¹² Clare Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, (London, United Kingdom, Duckworth, 1940), 59.

they perceived as a massive, mechanized juggernaut launching itself across the Polish steppe.²¹³

On the Polish side were few American journalists, and fewer still from the nominally Allied nations. With the German advance nearing Warsaw within the first week, and bombs raining down on the city, most reporters had simply packed their bags and fled to Romania, Hungary, or Lithuania, eager to escape what they must have seen as a dangerous, sinking ship.²¹⁴ This distance meant a reliance on gossip, hearsay, and official press from governments who were, if not outright allied, at least sympathetic to the Nazi cause, with Czechoslovakia, the last democracy in Eastern Europe, snuffed out at the beginning of 1939 by the First Vienna Award. One journalist, however, traveled in the opposite direction. Julien Bryan, more of a photographer and pioneer of film documentaries than a news journalist, had sought to make his way into Warsaw to film and document the war firsthand.²¹⁵ By the time he arrived, however, he found himself already caught up in a maelstrom of bombing and shelling, as the Germans attempted to take the city by a lunging attack that smashed itself against Warsaw's defenses.²¹⁶ Rather than focus on the battle, Bryan found his gaze turned towards the plight of the civilians, focusing his lens on their trials, tribulations, and suffering. Working diligently, and with little regard for his own personal safety, Julien Bryan became, effectively, the *only* journalist from the United States or Western Europe to document and report back on the Polish side of the war.²¹⁷

²¹³ Clare Hollingworth, "Clare Hollingworth (Oral History)," Interview by Lyn E. Smith. 12 March 2001. # 21130. Imperial War Museum, Sound Collections, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80020181>. Accessed 27 February 2022.

²¹⁴ Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, 114.

²¹⁵ Lewis Jacobs and Julien Bryan, "War Is, Was, And Always Will Be, Hell" *The Documentary Tradition*, New York City, New York: W.W. Norton, (1971, 1979), 168.

²¹⁶ Dennis Showalter, *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare*, New York City, New York: Dutton Caliber, 2010, 189.

²¹⁷ Jacek Sawicki and Tomasz Stempowski, *The Colors of War: The Siege of Warsaw in Julien Bryan's Color Photographs*, (Warsaw, Poland: Instytut Pamieci Narodowej, 2010), 19.

However, as only one man, his reportage was hyper focused and, while not meaning to, painted a specific picture of the campaign, one of heroic civilian resistance and suffering in Warsaw, thereby lacking any wider context.

These three reporters, while a small part of the greater effort to report on the war, likely carried the most effect and sway for how the Polish Campaign was reported in American newspapers and radio during the Second World War. Where many other reporters of the day simply were jotting down the latest army communiques from Wilhelmstrasse, these three actually went to the front lines, and gave their own emotional appeals to the American public as to what they had seen with their own eyes, their own experiences, their own unique memories of the campaign. Shirer would seek to utilize these to rally the nation for war, as he sought to craft narratives which would fit into his desire to stop the Nazi war machine. Hollingworth, a woman in a field dominated by hyper-masculinity, sought to make a name for herself and prove herself worthy to stand with the men, pushing herself to flit from story to story, always seeking the freshest and most interesting events during her 3 weeks in Poland.²¹⁸ Bryan, in stark contrast, focused on one single story, the Siege of Warsaw, utilizing his skills as a cameraman, coupled with luck and a genuine despair for Warsaw's people to simply *document*, to show through his lens what he felt would be distorted and misreported otherwise.²¹⁹ In doing so, he gave visual evidence of Nazi war crimes and the heroism of the Poles to the American public – envisioning his manner of journalism as more truthful and factual, certainly more than Shirer with his willingness to bend and outright manufacture reality.²²⁰ These three journalists accounts fed various Nazi, colonial, and imperialistic tropes into the mindset of the United States and other

²¹⁸ Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*.

²¹⁹ Jacobs and Bryan, 174.

²²⁰ Strobl, 316, 319-20.

western nations – unwitting hosts to the mythos and identities the Nazi press hoped to forge and cement to justify the Polish Campaign as a crusade of civilization against Eastern hordes.

Krojanty

William Shirer defied the Hemingwayesque image of a war correspondent. Thirty-five years of age, balding, and wearing the trim, neat mustache affected by so many of his generation in the 1930s and 40s, he was the archetypical radio broadcaster of the time, with a face made for radio. And yet, in September of 1939, he found himself in the curious time and space to not only report on the very beginning of the greatest conflagration of the 20th century, but to do so from the heart of the beast. Berlin in 1939 was a hot-bed of extreme ideology, a city fully in lock-and-step with the Nazi Party and its *ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* gestalt. Shirer had been reporting from Berlin and Europe for years developing a solid reputation as one of the pioneering reporters of his time in both style and format.²²¹ Where once he had been nervous that his voice would prevent him from reporting over the airwaves, he was by 1939 a shrewd, calculating journalist, easily able to self-censor and placate the Nazi authorities and Propaganda Ministries, whilst simultaneously offering in-depth analysis of events throughout Europe – from the ascent of the Nazi Party to the extinguishment of Czechoslovakia. As the storm-clouds gathered, and reporters began to return to their respective homelands, Shirer refused to leave – if war came, he wanted to be there, at its epicenter.²²²

Shirer bore the crush of events leading to war admirably, but he was self-admittedly unprepared for the reality of front-line combat reporting. While there were a myriad of

²²¹ Ken Cuthbertson, *A Complex Fate: William L. Shirer and the American Century*, (Montreal and Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 162.

²²² Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 183.

challenges reporting live in Nazi Germany, reporting from the frontlines was a different beast, one which even he recognized.²²³ While he had been restricted from field reporting at the start of the war, both by German reluctance to allow the American reporter access to the combat zone and CBS reluctance to broadcast actual combat to the American audience, Shirer still continued to broadcast constantly, relaying the latest in news and public announcements to his listeners up to two or three times a day while carefully self-censoring his reporting – offering up only what the Nazi ministries allowed; in a neutral tone and manner that endeared himself to the German censors.²²⁴ His professionalism in the face of authoritarianism would finally pay off a little over two weeks into the war, with the offer of a guided tour of recently ‘liberated’ areas of Western Poland and Danzig – hosted by the German Propaganda Ministry. Recognizing that he would only see what the Germans wished him to see, Shirer still leapt at the chance and, on September 17, began the chauffeured drive into the Polish Corridor.²²⁵

The weather in Poland had been abnormally dry throughout August and September, much to the chagrin of Polish military planners. Where Polish military planners had expected wide rivers to slow the advance of the German forces, there were only shallow creeks; where dirt roads were expected to be muddy and near impassable to vehicles, the dry, hot weather had given the Germans firm passage for their swift moving Panzers and motorized infantry. The weather had a further odiferous effect – rotting bodies of soldiers and horses remained in the Polish Corridor for weeks, swelling till bursting under the hot late-summer sun. It was here where William Shirer got his first scent of the reality of war – in the forests near the small hamlet of

²²³ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 19, 1939, 1939 Broadcasts.

²²⁴ Cuthbertson, 208.

²²⁵ Steve Wick, *The Long Night: William L. Shirer and the Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, (New York City, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 152.

Krojanty. German *Propagandakorps* officers, led by one Dr. Boemher brought him to a cluster of hilly fields, to see the uncounted bodies of horses, and the mounds of hastily buried Polish cavalry men.²²⁶ Here, the Germans claimed, was where the vaunted charge of the Polish cavalry had taken place – an entire division had been massacred in a foolhardy, and ultimately futile attempt to stem the German onslaught.²²⁷ They had charged, lances and sabers drawn, into the cannon and machineguns of hundreds of *Panzers* and been slaughtered nearly to a man. Then it was on to Danzig, where Shirer would, for the first time in his life, witness an actual battle in progress – the last stand of the Polish defenders of the Corridor in the forests outside Gdynia. This tour provided the crowning moments of the campaign for Shirer, memorializing the hopelessness of the Polish military against the Wehrmacht that September – for both his reporting of the war, and historical writing thereafter.

None of it was true. Despite all he had witnessed, despite the seeming change from reporting merely what German propagandists' newspapers told him to report to what he himself had witnessed, these memories, these moments in time etched into his brain held little to no truth of the conflict. No Polish cavalry charge had taken place against German tanks in or around Krojanty – indeed, there was no such case to be had in the entire history of the campaign.²²⁸ The Polish defense of Gdynia did not show the hopelessness of the Polish cause; it showcased the fearlessness and might of Polish resistance to inflict casualties on the Wehrmacht and deny them the ability to impose defeat on their own terms. Shirer's reporting on other areas of the campaign shows similar disconnects between his reporting and the reality of the campaign – from the Polish Air Force's supposed destruction, to the collapse of the Polish military, the

²²⁶ Wick, 151.

²²⁷ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 212.

²²⁸ Biskupski, 49.

Soviet Invasion, and the Siege of Warsaw.²²⁹ Shirer's reporting did not even accurately cover the events of the campaign from start to finish – cutting out weeks before the true end of major Polish resistance – instigating a strange loss of events as Shirer's broadcasts on the latest combat came to an abrupt finish.

Many of these problems in William Shirer's reporting could be forgiven as he was, after all, reporting from the epicenter of Nazi Germany and the news he was fed came from German radio, newspapers, and the *Propagandakorps*. Still, months before the war breaks out Shirer's diary evidences his preconception of the Polish military as an anachronism. A preconception which, as the campaign ensues, he accepts, rationalizes and expands as the core propagandistic mythos of the campaign. Indeed, throughout his raw diary, Shirer is already at work applying romanticism to the slaughter – perhaps as post-traumatic coping methods – that would only cement the mythos when his *Berlin Diary* was published in the United States in 1941. Shirer was using his own diary's publication, to confirm and reinforce the myths he broadcast to the American public – confirming the German propaganda he relayed was truth. But such deference cannot be granted to Shirer's post-World War 2 writings.

After the war, Shirer found himself quickly in need of financial support, having lost his job at CBS after a falling out with his previous friend and supporter, Edward R. Murrow.²³⁰ He turned to historical writing, hoping to transfer his experiences and journalistic talents into those of an academic, writing his history of the Second World War from a seemingly objective viewpoint. In doing so, Shirer created some of the most seminal, and popular, histories of the mid to late 20th century. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, *The Collapse of the Third*

²²⁹ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 197-231.

²³⁰ Cuthbertson, 349.

Republic, and his more personal memoir, *20th Century Journey*, cemented Shirer 's public reputation both as a historian and as a public figure. His books became widely read within and without the historical community – informing both the public *en masse* and influencing up-and-coming historians – neither of which had reason to distrust his accounts. After all, Shirer was not merely recounting through research gathered from musty archives – *he had been there*, and he could buttress his history with his own personal connections throughout the German, French, and English-speaking world, having managed countless personal interviews and friendships with the generals, diplomats, and politicians of their respective nations.²³¹

William Shirer promulgated as fact the very same myths and propaganda of the Polish Campaign that he had played such a central role in creating – indeed, these had long been accepted as fact, as even luminaries such as Winston Churchill recounted them verbatim in their own histories of the Second World War.²³² While he was not the only creator or propagator, William Shirer formed a crucial role in the creation of myth due to his own memories of the campaign. In his mind, the myth and the reality were one and the same, and over time Shirer grew to accept this mythic reality as canonical to telling the story. In turn, his reporting and writing affected how the campaign was portrayed in wartime media and post-war historiography. Thus, Shirer unwittingly played a major role in cementing the myth in public consciousness.

William Shirer as War Reporter: Broadcasts and Reality

The beginning of the Second World War did not come as a surprise to William Shirer. Having long resided in Germany, reporting the continued escalation of tensions against Poland

²³¹ William L Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, (New York City, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), xxviii.

²³² Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 443.

and the Western Allies, Shirer knew the breakdown would come, just not exactly when. Rushing to broadcast the outbreak of hostilities, he was full of adrenaline and confusion, and short on factual content. Indeed, most of what he could report was the reaction of himself and other journalists to the news that Germany was launching what had been elegantly termed a ‘counter-offensive’ by the Nazi Government, in retaliation for a faked Polish attack on a German radio station near the border.²³³ Quickly gathering his comportsment, Shirer continued regular broadcasts throughout the length of the campaign, sometimes up to three a day, filled with the information he received from German press briefings and the German newspapers. Though Shirer began the war fully cognizant that he would be reporting the German point of view to the American public, no matter how propagandized and pro-Nazi it would be, he was willing to accept these sacrifices to do his due diligence as a journalist.²³⁴ While he did not relish the reality of his situation – a neutral, liberal journalist caught-up in the censorship and propaganda of a fascist state – he would self-censor his reporting to ingratiate himself to his handlers and maintain his access to information and events.²³⁵

September 1-9

The first days of the war proceeded swiftly for Shirer, who seamlessly segued from one broadcast to the next, each filled with the pronouncements of German victory and rout of Polish forces. As early as September 2, he was reporting military communiques which noted how

²³³ In fact, there was no attack by the Poles. During the Gleiwitz Incident, SS troops acting under Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Müller staged an attack on a German radio station on August 31, 1939, followed by a short, pro-Polish broadcast. The SS men murdered prisoners, including concentration camp prisoners, and dressed them as Polish servicemen to add authenticity. (*Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 4*, Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, December 20th 1945, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/12-20-45.asp>).

²³⁴ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 3, 1939, 22.45.

²³⁵ Cuthbertson, 208.

Polish forces were “cut off from the rest of Poland in the north part of the corridor...[with] mopping up operations” having already begun.²³⁶ As one of the first hard-dying myths of the war, Shirer would also report on the destruction of the Polish Air Force by the Luftwaffe in a single day, as “many Polish planes in hangars and on the airfields...[were] seen going up in flames.”²³⁷ Indeed, most of the initial war reports that Shirer would make over the coming days would frame all news as “official army communiqués,” always insulating his own opinions and statements of fact, clearly denoting them as news releases from the German military’s own propaganda.²³⁸ By September 4, Shirer’s broadcasts turn to even more German victories, as the German news releases settled into a repetitious patter of prose – the near constant report of German victory in terms such as “smashing” and Polish resistance typically being “routed” or otherwise dissolving in front of the might of the Wehrmacht.²³⁹ Only in a few cases do his broadcasts relate acts of Polish bravery, such as that on September 7, when Shirer mentions the fall of Westerplatte, a Polish position near Danzig which held for a week against nonstop German land, air, and sea attack.²⁴⁰ The first week of combat, for all intents and purposes, leaves his listeners with the feeling of a total rout of the Polish military – even if Shirer is not yet quite ready to throw his lot in with the Blitzkrieg narrative.

The actual first week of the war marks a very different tale, one which sees a Polish military capable of inflicting severe losses on a numerically superior foe, whilst simultaneously executing a complex withdrawal-under-fire to their prepared defenses along the Vistula River.

²³⁶ Shirer, *Shirer Broadcasts*, Sept 2, 1939, 1.45.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept 2, 1939, 19.45.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, Sept 4, 1939, 19.55.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Sept 7, 1939, 19.45.

Battles such as Mokra, Pszczyna, Jordanów, and Mława exemplified the capabilities of Polish defenders to resist the Wehrmacht's onslaught, breaking waves of German tanks against anti-tank cannon and rifle fire.²⁴¹ During the Battle of Mokra alone, a single Polish cavalry brigade²⁴² backed by an armoured train inflicted crippling losses on the 4th Panzer Division on the first day of the war, knocking out almost one third of its armoured force before retreating that night in line with Poland's withdrawal plans.²⁴³ The Polish Air Force, far from being blown apart on the ground in the opening hours, had scattered itself to hidden airfields days before the German invasion.²⁴⁴ Though this degraded the Polish Air Force the ability to concentrate their smaller forces, it kept the fighters and bombers in action throughout the campaign, where they would make non-stop raids and attacks on German supply lines, tanks, and bomber fleets. Indeed, the Polish fighters, despite being a generation older than the German planes, would shoot

²⁴¹ Steven Zaloga, *Poland 1939, The Birth of the Blitzkrieg*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43, 46; Marian Małecki, *Bitwa Graniczna Pod Pszczyną*, (Warsaw, Poland: Ponidzie, 2003); Jerzy Majka, *Brygada Motorowa Plk. Maczka 10. Brygada Kawalerii: 1937-1939*, (Rzeszów, Poland: Libra, 2007), 199.

²⁴² Far from being ill-equipped to deal with modern warfare, the Polish cavalry acted as mobile fire-brigades, heavily equipped with anti-tank weaponry. Of the ~1800 German tanks knocked out in combat during the campaign, roughly half fell to the Polish cavalry. "The defense against mechanized forces on a wide front will be even more difficult. Here the enemy should be destroyed from ambush, by the use of mined fields as well as by individual action or by the action of small detachments of not more than a platoon in strength, which, by properly utilizing the terrain should manage to get to single tanks and destroy them with their small arms [wz. 35 anti-tank rifles] or hand grenades." ("Training of Modern Cavalry for War" *Cavalry Journal*, Vol 48 no 4, Jul-Dec 1939, 298.) Dr. M. Kamil Dziewanowski, an Eastern European historian and veteran of the *Suwalska* Cavalry Brigade, also recounted his experiences during the campaign (including a wildly successful charge of the entire brigade): "Each day, our techniques of fighting the enemy hiding behind armor improved. It was a technique of pursuit, of ambush, and of ruses. A machine that looked formidable at a distance began to show, especially at night, its impotence against daredevils who had the nerve to approach the tanks and throw gasoline-filled bottles. Others crept up to wreck the caterpillar treads of these tanks with bunches of hand grenades. During the first week, our antitank guns destroyed 31 enemy armored vehicles. We smashed at least a dozen of them with bottles and grenades. We took over 200 prisoners. Thus, step by step, from a proud cavalry brigade we had turned into an outfit of tank hunters. By night we lost ourselves in woods and marched over trackless ground to harass the enemy's armored columns at rest stops or on the march." (M. Kamil Dziewanowski, *Last Great Charge of the Polish Cavalry*, Polish News, September 30th, 2014, <http://polishnews.com/last-great-charge-of-the-polish-cavalry>).

²⁴³ Koskodan, 25.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

down more German planes than they themselves lost.²⁴⁵ Yet, all this was against the narrative line the Germans wanted to communicate to the world – while the occasional heroic defense such as Westerplatte could be stomached to offer real glory to the German soldier, true defeat at the hands of those deemed *untermensch* could not exist in media and the public sphere.²⁴⁶ Such acts would have to be downplayed, covered up, or, as would soon happen, new myths would need to be created to fill the gap between reality and *Rassenkunde*.

On September 8, 1939, William Shirer broadcast that “this evening that German troops have entered Warsaw. Armoured and motorized troops, we are told, reached the Polish capital at 5:15 this afternoon, Central European time.”²⁴⁷ Shirer seems stunned as he attempts to do the math on the German pace, calculating their advance at roughly 25 miles a day, and still having to push an extra 15 miles to reach Warsaw – a pace which he concluded could be maintained only if it was against little to no resistance. Indeed, he even questions this, rhetorically asking “what has happened to the Polish army...” and noting that a large pocket seemed to have been forming [w]est of Warsaw proper.²⁴⁸ The next day, September 9, Shirer reiterates his apprehensive attitude towards the German claim, noting that there had been no more details that day apart from the usual news of Polish retreats along the entire front.²⁴⁹ Later that same day, more shocking news came in – the first report of Polish cavalry charging German tanks, with a simple headline of “CAVALRY ATTACKS TANKS—exclamation point” reported to his audience.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 52-53.

²⁴⁶ Matthew S. Palmer, “The Grand Delusion: The Creation and Perseverance of the September Campaign Mythos” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 30 no 1, 2017, 64-68.

²⁴⁷ Shirer, *Shirer Broadcasts*, Sept 8, 1939, 23.30.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept 8, 1939, 23.30. Shirer also accidentally types ‘east’ instead of ‘west.’

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Sept 9, 1939, 1.00.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Sept 9, 1939, 19.45.

The first, meek inkling of a myth that would soon dominate the cultural understanding of the September Campaign for generations to come, that partially begins with Shirer himself. In truth, these reports from the German propaganda machine that Shirer relayed to his audience were meant to save face in the wake of debacle. Yes, the 4th Panzer Division had, indeed, reached the outskirts of Warsaw on September 8, but had done so only in the wake of non-stop combat and ambush by Polish Uhlans and infantrymen who extracted a bitter toll in German lives and tanks.²⁵¹ In its abortive assault on the city, 4th Panzer lost another 80 tanks in a meatgrinder that saw whole columns of German Panzers destroyed by Polish defenders.²⁵² The assault was thrown back, and the German announcement of Warsaw's fall was pre-mature. When *Wilhelmstrasse* did finally come clean, Shirer was merely told "that it would not be taken by assault" or be bombarded, implying both a German attempt to change the story, as well as reframe themselves as fighting a clean war against the Polish people.²⁵³ Shirer, of course, had no way of knowing this course of events – he could merely articulate what the Germans told him.

September 10-18

After September 9, Shirer's broadcasts returned to the routine of rout and destruction continuing apace as the Germans piled victory laurels upon their caps. Even Shirer began to grow weary with this repetition, noting how "It is getting hard to distinguish the days, because everyone is like the other."²⁵⁴ It is during this time period that Shirer begins to not merely report these events as they are fed to him – but to accept them as the reality. Whether due to the

²⁵¹ By this point, 4th Panzer Division had only 220 operational tanks left of the 341 it had begun the campaign with. (Palmer, 65).

²⁵² Showalter, 189.

²⁵³ Shirer, *Shirer Broadcasts*, Sept 9, 1939, 23.30

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept 10, 1939, 14.00.

constant repetition and force of credibility of the “*große Lüge*”²⁵⁵ or perhaps simply due to the dearth of any evidence to the contrary from foreign media outlets, Shirer’s broadcasts begin to tilt towards accepting the German myths of the campaign as realities. In his broadcast on September 10, Shirer notes that “...there’s no doubt that the German air-force has wrought terrible havoc over most of Poland.”²⁵⁶ The Polish Air Force, embroiled in a tactical battle against the Luftwaffe and *Heer* was unable to raid into Germany, and yet not seeing Polish planes over Berlin seems supporting evidence to Shirer that the Polish planes were, indeed, destroyed on the ground, and that the Luftwaffe holds mastery of the air.²⁵⁷ Though unwilling to believe the idea that “THE POLES BOMBARD WARSAW” as was printed in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Shirer still accepts the general flow of events as the Germans report.²⁵⁸

Throughout his reporting, Shirer was under full censorship by the German intelligence services. Wary of a neutral foreigner reporting on events, many of Shirer’s battle-related broadcast scripts bear the signatures of German censors, such as Kapitän-Leutnant Petzold and Herr A. von Schimpf.²⁵⁹ Noteworthy is Shirer’s thorough self-censorship and adherence to what he saw as journalistic integrity which required him to broadcast the story the Germans wanted the world to hear. That the German censors almost always simply signed off on his broadcast scripts, reveals their comfort with the content Shirer wished to announce to the American public and their confidence in his self-censorship. It was perhaps this journalistic reliability that would lead to Shirer being picked as one of a handful of foreign correspondents to visit the front on, of

²⁵⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Vol I Chap. X*, Munich, Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger G.m.b.h., 1933.

²⁵⁶ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 10, 1939, 22.30.

²⁵⁷ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 199.

²⁵⁸ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 11, 1939, 23.30.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Sept 5, 1939, 9.50, Sept 15, 1939, 1.00, Sept 20, 1939, 23.45.

course, a guided tour by the Germans. Shirer leapt at the chance, and on September 18, 1939, he found himself packed into a car with his German handler and chauffeur, and motoring east into the Polish Corridor. He would not return to his broadcast studio until September 20, after having born witness to events which cemented for him, irrevocably, the reality of the German military's victories.²⁶⁰

September 20-October 18

“After three days at the front—during which we finally saw an actual battle—I can see why the Polish losses have been so terrific,” wrote Shirer, reading his type-written document aloud late that night on the 20th. “The Poles had no defense against the devastating attacks of the German bombers and of German tanks. ...Against tanks the Poles used cavalry, and the result was terrible--for the cavalry.”²⁶¹ Shirer was correct on one point – the Poles certainly did deploy cavalry against tanks, cavalry equipped with wz35 anti-tank rifles and 37mm Bofors anti-tank cannon; and the result was, more often than not, terrible – for the German *Panzertruppen*. Shirer's visit to the front had included a stopover at the fateful site of the Charge of Krojanty, where he had born witness to heaps of rotting Uhlan corpses and slaughtered horses. The next day, he witnessed a battle in progress – the last days of the Battle of *Kępa Oksywska*, as around 15,000 Polish soldiers held the line desperately against more than 38,000 Germans. The Polish defenders would resolutely fight to the last round, before those who could broke out to join the last stand on the Polish coastline at the Hel Peninsula, while the rest surrendered. As Shirer recounted to his listeners in his September 24 broadcast, “It was one-sided warfare.”²⁶² And yet,

²⁶⁰ Wick, 152.

²⁶¹ Shirer, *Shirer Broadcasts*, Sept 20th 1939, 23.45.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, Sept 24, 1939, 1.14.

the Poles *had* resisted. Rather than surrender on German terms, the defenders of Gdynia had resisted for nine days against non-stop German attacks, inflicting serious losses in men and *matériel*.²⁶³

Polish valour and resistance in the face of Blitzkrieg proved inconsequential, however. By the time of his return, Shirer had been changed. Be it through seeing carnage and scenes which aligned with the German reporting of war, or the trauma that seeing such sights for the first time surely inflicted on his psyche, Shirer's broadcasts soon fully accepted the myths the German military's *Propagandakorps* created. What remained in the final three weeks of the campaign was some of the most bitter fighting of the war, as Polish resistance stiffened drastically and German casualties doubled, even in the face of the Soviet invasion from the east.²⁶⁴ Polish troops, unwilling to surrender, withdrew towards their Romanian Bridgehead redoubt and fought their way to neutral territory, be it Hungary, or Romania. Poland's soldiers would live to fight another day across the European theater, and major combat operations would still not conclude until October 6 when General Kleeburg surrendered the last major Polish units at Kock.²⁶⁵ As to this continued combat, Shirer's broadcasts are silent. Rather, he repeated the German claims that declared the war concluded on September 15, then September 20, reiterated on September 21 along with all ground operations, and finally September 22 would mark his last mention of any combat apart from the on-going siege of Warsaw.²⁶⁶ By October, while Polish forces were still fighting and dying in both successful and unsuccessful breakouts, Shirer was reporting on victory celebrations in Berlin, and German newsreels showing the actual

²⁶³ Edmund Kosiarz, *Obrona Kępy Oksywskiej*, (Warsaw, Poland: Książka i Wiedza, 1973).

²⁶⁴ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 85.

²⁶⁵ Hargreaves, 264.

²⁶⁶ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 15, 1939, 1.00, Sept 20, 1939, 23.45, Sept 21, 1939, 1.00, Sept 22, 1939, 1.00.

bombardment of Warsaw, demonstrating, in Shirer's eyes, the surreality of the war, as destruction reigned where he once saw "Polish troops...full of confidence."²⁶⁷ Where Shirer, on September 9, had vehemently asserted that Poland, and the Polish Campaign, was "Obviously...turning out to be no walk-over," by October 18 he declared the campaign to have been a "walkover."²⁶⁸

The Tourist

While William Shirer may have not looked the part of a roving war correspondent, Clare Hollingworth held the most dreadful characteristic for any up-and-coming journalist in the 1930s – she was a woman. Having been routinely taken across England to explore war monuments and battlefields by her father, Clare grew up with a love of military history that seemed strange and off-putting to 1920s and 30s society, such areas being largely still the domain of men.²⁶⁹ Clare bore this with pride, bobbing her hair and embracing the flapper fashions of the late 20s to early 30s and rising as a strong feminist who advocated for her own educational growth by attending university and flirting from man to man, including a brief soiree with no less than James Joyce!²⁷⁰ Hollingworth was a woman who was not to be trifled with and sought to push herself constantly into bigger and better things, seeking to break out from the male-dominated world and chart her own, free path as a professional, not merely a housewife as society and her parents expected from her.

Her role in the Polish Campaign, though small, offers a solid insight into not only the

²⁶⁷ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Oct 5, 1939, 24.47.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., Sept 9, 1939, 19.45, Oct 18, 1939, 14.00.

²⁶⁹ Patrick Garrett, *Of Fortunes and War: Clare Hollingworth, First of the Female War Correspondents*, (London, United Kingdom: Thistle Publishing, 2015), 6-7, 9.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.

average journey for most war correspondents during the campaign, but one whom was already well dug into events on the ground. Having arrived in Eastern Europe to support refugee efforts following the First Vienna Award and subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, Hollingworth plunged into efforts to bring as many refugees as possible via Poland and thence on to the United Kingdom. Working around the clock, she quickly took a dominating role over the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC), it essentially becoming a chance to force through the approval of as many refugees as possible, ignoring complaints by the British consulate, German authorities, and the BCRC's own headquarters in London.²⁷¹ Giving papers and travel documents out to anyone who came, she managed to rescue almost 3,000 refugee families before she was removed from her post at the British consulate's insistence, with Consul John Anthony Thwaites describing her work as "entirely irregular and, in fact, subversive to the system of control which the Government decided should be exercised over the admission of these refugees to this country."²⁷² Though she would later be appointed as the "Honourary Commissioner for Relief Work Among Polish Refugees" by the Save the Children Fund, she was soon removed from that position as well, for similar tendencies, or as the third secretary at the Foreign Office put it, making herself "a menace" and "excessive[ly] self-advertis[ing]," likely referring to her constant pushing and demanding attention for refugees.²⁷³ Regardless, the loss of her post with the BCRC at the end of July 1939 pushed Hollingworth into a job she'd keep for the rest of her life.

Taking a job with *The Daily Telegraph* as a correspondent in Poland, Clare showed all the drive and passion for her work that she had shown working for the BCRC. Finding herself

²⁷¹ Garrett, 43, 46, 48.

²⁷² Ibid., 40.

²⁷³ Ibid., 102.

essentially free to travel around Poland and Germany with British press credentials, borrowed cars, and cash for stories, Hollingworth fell in love with the adventure seeking life, later describing her field kit as her “TNT” or “Typewriter ‘n Toothbrush” kit.²⁷⁴ She soon obtained a passport and headed for the German borders as tensions continued to rise between Poland and Germany, eager to try and gain the scoop on potential war footing in Germany. Disappointed by the cool heads, she found most Germans simply believed that Hitler would “...get Germany her rights without war this time, just as he did before.”²⁷⁵ Driving back to Poland, she still could feel the buzz in the air, as German soldiers seemed to appear everywhere, motorcyclists bursting out of small paths in front of her, everything seeming to be in a rush of energy and preparation.²⁷⁶ Then, a small gust of wind blew up a stretch of hessian cloth, and “scores, if not hundreds, of tanks” appeared, parked in a valley stretching into the distance. This was not merely a feint or idle threat: a concentration of armour, with all the sundry logistics and personal attendant to it, could only mean one thing. Consul Thwaites would have none of it, calling her a “fuddy little girl” and accusing of her lying about even having been to Germany, and only being swayed when Hollingworth produced German wares and receipts from her escapade into Silesia.²⁷⁷ “1,000 tanks massed on Polish border. Ten Divisions reported ready for swift stroke” stated the headline.²⁷⁸ While many, to the present day, claim this headline was the ‘first report of the outbreak of the Second World War,’ what Clare had actually broken was the first sign that Hitler was *not* bluffing this time, German public opinion be damned.

²⁷⁴ Hollingworth, Interview by Lyn E. Smith.

²⁷⁵ Garrett, 65.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 66-7.

²⁷⁸ “1000 tanks massed on Polish border” Clare Hollingworth, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1939.

The course of the war would be a flurry of travel and work, as Clare sought to push herself to the extreme, traveling extensively, coming under attack by German fighters and dive bombers repeatedly on roads chocked by civilian refugees, whom the Germans openly sprayed machine gun fire into in order to sow panic and prevent the Polish military from having free use of the roadways.²⁷⁹ Trying to break through to Warsaw, she ran into forward units of the German army, and was forced to turn back, nearly an hour's drive from the city itself. Instead, she was caught up with the movement of the fronts, fleeing from city to city with other journalists, and writing mostly of German terror bombings. After escaping across the Romanian border, she made another foray attempt as the Soviet Union entered the war, but again escaped, claiming that Soviet tanks were racing just behind her.²⁸⁰ The day before, she noted the optimism of Polish Foreign Ministry officials on the border, and yet, saw "an atrocious irony, for the date was September 16, and in twenty-four hours Poland would no longer exist." Poland would, of course, continue to exist, and fight on until October, but that wasn't nearly as poetic an end.²⁸¹ For the rest of the Second World War, Clare would report tirelessly across the frontlines of the war, ingratiating herself to some, irritating others, with Field Marshall Montgomery himself throwing her out of his headquarters on the basis that women held no place at the front. Rather than back down, she befriended an officer of a recce battalion and participated in their operations, coming close multiple times to capture. Indeed, Clare showed purpose, drive, and ambition, yet would remark until her dying day that she had always found great fun in war, belying an interest that bordered on adrenaline seeking.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Garrett, 85.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 95.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 94.

²⁸² Hollingworth, Interview by Lyn E. Smith.

Hollingsworth broke the dam on female war correspondents, opening the Second World War to a flood of female journalists, and shifting a paradigm in journalism that continues to the present day as more and more women are seen on the frontlines of reporting. In this, despite her self-interest and promotion, she served a critical role in both the reportage of the first days of the Polish Campaign, and in how wars are reported overall, continuing to work well into her old age, finally passing in 2017 at the age of 105.²⁸³ Though only spending a short while actually witnessing and reporting the war, Hollingsworth was able to break the initial news of the German buildup for war, and provided at least some accounts of both German atrocities and perceived Polish blunders to the outside world. Yet, thanks to her obscurity, the chauvinistic attitudes of her managers/military counterparts, and indeed the lack of attribution for communiques in the *Daily Telegraph*, her name was lost, being listed merely as “Our Own Correspondent.”²⁸⁴ It would take another journalist, one not working for any specific press outlet, and serendipitously dropped into the first great humanitarian crisis of the war, to truly broadcast the Polish side of the conflict, and the cold reality of modern warfare.

The Girl

The potatoes needed to be dug. Warsaw, the city, was under German siege for six days, with bridges and crossings east cut off by non-stop German bombardment and all other avenues blocked by the Wehrmacht. The city isolated and forced to fend for itself. Many of the peasants and poor in the city struggled to live as normal a life as possible under the constant threat of

²⁸³ Ray Moseley, “Remembering Clare Hollingsworth,” *Yale University Press*, <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2017/01/17/remembering-clare-hollingsworth/> (Accessed 24 February 2022).

²⁸⁴ In fact, the *Daily Telegraph*'s “Own Correspondent” was not even Clare Hollingsworth, but Hugh Carlton Greene, who took the story from her and sent it to the editors. She would later be paid for the story that broke the news about German invasion preparations, but credit remained elsewhere. (Hollingsworth, Interview by Lyn E. Smith).

German bombardment.²⁸⁵ Laundry had to be hung out amid the fear of shrapnel, and food had to be acquired by those men, women, and children who were not fighting the battles raging at the frontlines in the western suburbs. The Kostewicz family was one of those who found themselves engulfed by the war – their own home destroyed by Luftwaffe bombs early in the campaign; they had been shepherded with many other peasant families into overcrowded homes and forced by the siege to subsist on what they could wrest from the soil. Potatoes needed to be dug – despite bombardment, despite risk of death – so that Warsaw could go on living.

By September 14, 1939, the week-old siege was intensifying. The Polish Air Force, valiant though it was, was simply unable to prevent the constant storm of steel flying overhead.²⁸⁶ Bombs and artillery plummeted into the city in a haphazard fashion belying Berlin's claims of strict adherence to all the rules of warfare. On September 14 the Kostewicz's were to harvest potatoes in a local field beside other peasant families – labor to be paid in kind by the plot owner, Neuman. That day, Kazimiera Kostewicz's parents and elder sister, Anna, left for the field, leaving their youngest child Kazimiera to mind their belongings. German warplanes thundered overhead seeming to ignore the small group of peasants tending to the field, leading Kazimiera's father to reassure Anna that "You see it's already gone. There's no danger anymore."²⁸⁷ Yet, as he spoke those words, a wave of dive bombers burst out of the cloud cover, sending the peasants, including the Kostewiczs, scrambling to escape. Many were too late, bombs slamming into the field and nearby homes where some had taken shelter. The dive

²⁸⁵ Julien Bryan, *Warsaw: 1939 Siege, 1959 Warsaw Revised*, (Warsaw, Poland: Polonia Publishing House, 1960), "Life Goes On"

²⁸⁶ Knoblock, 28-9.

²⁸⁷ Brian, *Warsaw*, 162.

bombers then turned, machine gunning those fleeing before disappearing once more into the clouds.²⁸⁸

In but a few moments, seven had been killed in the field by bombs and bullets. Kazimiera's father and mother lay severely injured in one of the bombed-out homes with others killed outright. Upon hearing the news of her family's injuries, Kazimiera raced to the scene. A girl of just 12, she ran into the field only to see the fallen body of her older sister, Anna. Kazimiera had never seen death – indeed, she had no words or ability to comprehend this finality. She bent over her sister, pleading with Anna to wake, to move, to respond to her pleas. She brushed her hair, trying desperately to wipe away the blood and grime left by the Luftwaffe's attack. She, like so many in the potato field, was lost and inconsolable. Quietly, just in front of a nearby pear tree, a motion camera hummed as a man in a light grey suit, doing his best to retain composure at the horrific scene, steadily filmed.²⁸⁹

Julien Hequembourg Bryan, aged 40, had seen death and destruction before. During his time as an ambulance driver in the First World War, he had come to face to face with the horrors of war in all its incarnations – burned out villages, mutilated men living and dead, the charred bodies of civilians. He published his personal journals shortly after the war, filled with photographs he had taken; a hobby that had grown out of his own childhood love of the photographs and stories told at church by visiting missionaries. His father, an elder of the Presbyterian Church, supported his interests, and Bryan had, by 1918, found photography to be the perfect medium, in his eyes, with which to tell the story of humanity. Graduating in 1921 from Princeton, he chose not to continue his studies to become a preacher but instead embarked

²⁸⁸ Julien Bryan, "Camera Man at the Front." *Popular Mechanics* Vol 73 (1940), 555.

²⁸⁹ Bryan, *Warsaw*, 163.

on world travels. Operating as an independent photographer and film-maker for various American news outlets, Bryan provided still imagery and film for a host of newspapers, magazines, and what he especially liked, mini-documentaries. In his far-ranging excursions, he witnessed the hosts of humanity in the 1920s and 30s, offering the first glimpses of regular life in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and the only imagery of the Nazi's Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937 (art showing qualities such as "decadence," "weakness of character," "mental disease," and "racial impurity").

With war-clouds gathering on the horizon in the fall of 1939, Bryan saw the opportunity to dart into Eastern Europe – a chance to collect, in his words, "...a few behind-the-lines photographs..."²⁹⁰ It would be a quick in & out, and he had little reason to believe he would be in any danger. In late October, Bryan booked himself on a train to Romania (avoiding passage through Germany as he feared a rather cold reception given his previous work²⁹¹), then crossed the border into Poland. It was the last chance for Bryan to make his choice; remain safely on the sidelines in Romania, or boldly continue to Warsaw and become the documentarian of the siege, of the resistance, of the survival of a civilian population in the face of criminal attack from Nazi Germany. Julien Bryan chose to go forward and would, for weeks, be the only operating journalist, the only photographer, the only film-maker in Warsaw.²⁹² It was through his lens, and his lens alone, that the world would see the awful truth – rather than the lies broadcast by the Nazi Propaganda ministerium – and witness for the world the suffering of Warsaw.²⁹³ His personal war-time experience, his philosophical approach to the art of photography and film-

²⁹⁰ Bryan, *Warsaw*, 15.

²⁹¹ Bryan, *Siege*, 17.

²⁹² Jacobs and Bryan, 168.

²⁹³ Sawicki and Stempowski, 22.

making, and his sense of story developed over the 20's and 30's combine to colour his reporting as he decides to focus specifically – narrowly – on the suffering of the *civilian* population.

While the Polish military is not be ignored per se, Bryan's narrow focus on this narrative he wished to tell – to *preserve* memory of the civilian's *feats of endurance* – also added credence to German propaganda's own mythos of the overwhelming might of the Blitzkrieg brushing aside an incompetent Polish military.²⁹⁴

The global memory of the campaign, from the Polish side, is almost totally reliant on Bryan's work after Bryan returned – to much acclaim – and produced the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Siege* in 1941. Postwar he would spend the rest of his life touring the United States, Latin America, and even returning to Poland, as he dedicated his life to the art of the documentary. Indeed, Julien Bryan's work as a photographer and documentarian of the Siege of Warsaw cannot be overstated. Without any other neutral or foreign correspondents remaining in the city, Bryan was uniquely placed to capture the suffering and resistance by the civilian population, and to spread awareness of German war crimes and cruelty to the world at large. However, his documentation, constrained in both time and place, offered only a glimpse from the Polish side of the reality of Polish military and civilian resistance throughout the nation to the German invasion. He was, after all, only one man.

The Ambulance Driver

Julien Bryan, born on May 23, 1899, grew up in the small, rural town of Titusville, nestled neatly between the sprawling farms of north-west Pennsylvania and the foothills of the Alleghany Mountains.²⁹⁵ The son of a Presbyterian preacher, Bryan found himself immersed at

²⁹⁴ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 9, 1939, 1939 Broadcasts, 19.45.

²⁹⁵ Julien Bryan, "Exploring with a Movie Camera," *Scholastic* Vol 34, (1939), 23-E.

a young age in the accounts of visiting missionaries returning from far-flung adventures – adventures which promised a far more exciting engagement with humanity than that available to middle-of-nowhere America. At the age of 10, he was gifted a camera, and began a life-long obsession with photography – indeed, he viewed photography as the “best tool for [his] purpose,” the telling of how people live.²⁹⁶ His childhood musings on the use of film to bring stories and narratives about distant locales to the rest of the world would mature with his experiences in The Great War and guide him during his sojourn in Warsaw.

Graduating from high school at 17, Bryan was unwilling to accept simply sitting around until he went to college at 18 while war raged in Europe for its third straight year. Too young to enlist in the Army, Bryan was transfixed by the opportunity offered “in a poster saying, ‘Volunteers Wanted for the American Ambulance Field Service in France.’”²⁹⁷ Here, just in reach, was a chance to travel to Europe and take part in the great game while simultaneously fulfilling his own desire to expand his horizons into the world. “[His] father was enthusiastic” and Bryan quickly signed up, trading his cramped room in the Erie Y.M.C.A for a slot on a French liner, bound for the killing fields.²⁹⁸ Bryan would be an Ambulance driver, and would quickly come to know the realities of warfare and human suffering. “I have finally seen what I came over for...war, real war, stripped of glory. ...you realize how absolutely weak and helpless you are when a load of dead are brought in, some with arms and legs gone, others with heads and trunks mixed together...”²⁹⁹ Bryan the adolescent, not yet a legal adult, was witnessing the

²⁹⁶ Bryan, “Exploring with the Leica,” *The Leica Manual*, 513.

²⁹⁷ Julien Bryan, *Ambulance 464: Encore Des Blesses*, (New York City, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1918), 1.

²⁹⁸ Bryan, *Ambulance 464*, 1.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

horrors of mechanized warfare, and his reaction was, rather than to shut down completely, to bury himself into photography.

Bryan, of course, had brought his treasured photographic equipment with him, and set to recording the devastation, suffering, and human resilience he witnessed. His photographs inserted throughout the recounting of *Ambulance 464* (his post-war published journal) show a perhaps morbid fascination with the destruction of civilian structures and the realities of combat. Bryan also describes his utter admiration for the French soldier, viewing his own actions as middling in comparison to the stalwart resilience of the poilu. In his speaking of horrific, mutilated bodies he was forced to load and drive back to the field hospitals for collection and identification on March 26, 1917, Bryan writes “People at home think that we are making tremendous sacrifices to come over here and do this work. But they are nothing compared to those which the simple, uneducated poilu makes.”³⁰⁰ Here, Bryan was already showing humility regarding his war-time actions – downplaying his role as that of a simple observer, using his photographs of French soldiery to further cement the central message of *Ambulance 464*: that of the true resistance spirit of France.

Bryan’s photographic record of the First World War does not merely begin and end with the poilu. He also described, and photographed extensively, the destruction wrought on the towns and villages in which he was billeted.³⁰¹ It would, however, take a specific incident to truly bring forth his realization of the civilian cost of war. While relaxing with some of his comrades in an abandoned farmhouse, Bryan recalled that “...a knock came at the door. ...as the door slowly opened, we saw an old French couple standing on the threshold. The woman wept

³⁰⁰ Bryan, *Ambulance 464*, 57.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, List of Illustrations.

when she saw the shell hole through the ceiling, the broken furniture which we were burning...and the heap of old family treasures lying in one corner.”³⁰² Bryan and his comrades, ashamed at their squatting in and personal destruction of this couple’s home and belongings, found themselves rendered speechless. The couple slowly left, and Bryan heard, as the door closed, the husband muttering “it is not very nice but after the war we will—” before his voice faded away.³⁰³ “It had never occurred to us before...that people like these had actually lived in [these homes] or would ever return. Before, Dombasle was only a mass of ruined buildings. Now we see in it the destruction of hundreds of happy homes....”³⁰⁴ In this singular incident, Bryan had personally awoken to not just the suffering by the soldiers at the front, but to the tragedy playing out in the lives of the civilian populace, powerless as they were to prevent it.

Further incidents solidified themes that Bryan would reach for when recounting his future narratives of the Siege of Warsaw. On June 5, 1917, Bryan recounted a German fighter pilot who “...played his machine gun up and down the village street. This was a new trick to us, but the old lady who lives next door says they have been doing it all Spring.”³⁰⁵ Later, on June 10 1917, Bryan conversed with various German prisoners of war, noting how “they had the peculiar idea that Russia had unexpectedly attacked them in 1914, and they had been forced to resist.”³⁰⁶ Such themes, of German pilots willingly spraying bullets into obviously civilian populations, and prisoners of war incomprehensible at their own nation’s role in the outbreak of war, would resurface during Bryan’s coverage of the Siege of Warsaw. Photographic themes also develop:

³⁰² Bryan, *Ambulance 464*, 95.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

on July 6, 1917, Bryan speaks about becoming fascinated with a destroyed church, “the belfry...had been torn away. The four bells were lying where they fell...and the statues of two angels, kneeling in prayer, stood behind them.”³⁰⁷ Bryan, camera in hand as usual, quickly snapped several photos.

After returning home, Bryan completed his theological studies at Princeton in 1921, intending, initially, to follow in his father’s footsteps.³⁰⁸ Throughout all his future writing, Bryan would continue to hold a firm belief in God, however a career in the priesthood was not to be. He chose not to be ordained as a minister after completing his post-Princeton studies at Union Theological Seminary, instead following his life’s passion to become an independent photographer, traveling through both frequented and remote locales ranging from “the Caucasus, Siberia, Manchukuo, Japan, China, Russia, Poland, Finland, Turkey, Germany, [and] Mexico.”³⁰⁹ Along the way, Bryan matures and codifies his technical and philosophical approach to photography, first sprouted from his experiences with the Ambulance Service. Writing for *Scholastic*, Bryan demonstrated his views on film making, using as an example his time among the Tungus people near Lake Baikal, Siberia. He saw it as his role not to create fanciful scenes or randomized depictions of events, but instead to “map out and film, in a methodical, analytical way, a logical series of scenes that tell the true story of the life of the people there.”³¹⁰ While Bryan was aware that no scene could truly be genuine given the preparation (and he goes into great detail on his manners of diplomacy and respect for guest-welcoming traditions among “wild tribes”), he still believed in the ability to craft narratives and

³⁰⁷ Bryan, *Ambulance 464*, 167.

³⁰⁸ Sawicki and Stempowski, 17.

³⁰⁹ Bryan, “Exploring with the Leica,” 23-E.

³¹⁰ Bryan, “Exploring with a Movie Camera,” 24-E.

scenes which would best depict accurate portrayals of his subject.³¹¹

The most formative, comprehensive explanation of Bryan's philosophical approaches to photography and memory would come from his offering to *The Leica Manual* in 1938.

"Exploring with the Leica" encapsulates, succinctly, Bryan's modes of operation and basis for photography. "If I have any specific theory about my work, it is something like this: that photography is to me a tool which I use for a very definite purpose, namely, to tell a story."³¹²

As such, Bryan advises his readers to take photographs of everything, pointing out that, of the some "30,000 Leica negatives" he has exposed, few will ever see a general audience.³¹³ "I have taken this great quantity of pictures in order to sift out the small percentage which will enable me to tell my story of human beings...and to tell it well."³¹⁴ He further points out that all

cameramen should "have some clear cut objective" as to their photography, and to travel extremely light, eschewing bulky gear for simple devices and as much film as can be packed.³¹⁵

He critiques heavily those photographers who are "too fussy about keeping their clothes clean and [are] quite content to take almost all their pictures from a prim standing positions."³¹⁶

Rather, Bryan believes that the photographer should always vary their position and angle, namely to add interest and emotion to the photographs themselves – thus adding to story.³¹⁷

Bryan finishes his chapter with "a Few Brief Sentences," forming a list of the primary points and take-aways he wishes to leave the reader with. Many of these points deal with the

³¹¹ Bryan, "Exploring with a Movie Camera," 23-E.

³¹² Bryan, "Exploring with the Leica," 513.

³¹³ Ibid., 514.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 519.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 524.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

same issues and critiques seen above, such as a minimum of special gear, and the importance of objective for one's photo-story.³¹⁸ Of special importance is Point 9, in which Bryan argues "Above all, no shots unrelated to the story should be taken; rather, after the people have been put at their ease, a whole series of shots should be made following the narratives implicit...."³¹⁹ Perhaps, more than any other part of the list, this point exemplifies Bryan's future work in the Siege of Warsaw – the determination to not only present an accurate, realistic account of daily life, struggle, and resistance during the Siege, but also his loyalty to and focus on objective. Bryan, as will be seen, would rarely stray from his narrow focus on civilians during the Siege, and this objective, while understandable, would constrain the context for his memory and recounting to the isolated events he witnessed. He could not witness the wider truth of the siege of Warsaw, and thus, could not portray the *whole* story of the Siege of Warsaw. He was, after all, only one man.

Bryan as Photographer: Civilian Resistance and Suffering

Julien Bryan crossed the border from Romania to Poland by train on September 4, 1939, a day after attempting to telephone the American embassy in Bucharest to inform them of his plans. Unable to get through due to it being the weekend, a telephone operator offered to leave a message for the embassy staff. Bryan's wife would receive the message almost two weeks later simply informing her that "Your husband when last heard from was in Bucharest, Rumania, on his way to Warsaw."³²⁰ Almost immediately on crossing the border, Bryan found himself in the middle of hostilities, as German bombers sought to blast train tracks to smithereens in their

³¹⁸ Bryan, "Exploring with the Leica," 528.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Bryan, *Siege*, 17.

assigned mission to disrupt Polish logistics. “We were less than eight miles from the Rumanian frontier...half a mile in front of us seven or eight bombs exploded...”³²¹ Thus Bryan and the entourage of Polish military rushing back from Romania found themselves facing bombers daily; though quickly discovering the inherent inaccuracies of the bombs, they ceased worrying too badly. The train began to travel mostly at night, and stops became more frequent, but by September 7, Bryan and the remaining passengers rolled into the eastern section of Warsaw, just barely beating the arrival of the German army in the western suburbs. Bryan quickly set himself to work.

Initially, Bryan attempted to organize and coordinate his activities with other members of the press corps, as well as the American consulate. Arriving at the Hotel Europejski, Bryan was shocked to find rooms “ominously plentiful” and a clerk who seemed uncaring about payment (indeed, Bryan would note that he never did pay his hotel bill).³²² Later that same night, Bryan would spend his first air raid huddling in the cellar with the few other guests, the first of many he would experience during the coming weeks. Yet, as Bryan put it, he “still didn’t realize what it was all about” until his attempt to reach the American Embassy the following morning.³²³ Rather than finding a staffed embassy buzzing with journalists and foreign attaches, Bryan stumbled into an vacant building; Ambassador Biddle, as well as almost all remaining staff, had fled with the Polish government on September 5.³²⁴ It only then began to dawn on Bryan that there *was* no one else left in Warsaw to report to the outside world. No journalists, no photographers, no film makers. The majority of embassy staff from all nations had left, and the

³²¹ Bryan, *Siege*, 18.

³²² *Ibid.*, 14.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

only remaining neutrals were those simply unable or unwilling yet to flee Warsaw. Bryan had landed himself in the story of his life – and his objectives was clear – to be the sole witness for Warsaw to the world.

Through the siege, working with those still-operating Kodak production and development studios he could find and with a small escort of attachés assigned to him by Warsaw’s major and Civil Commissar at the Command of Warsaw’s Defense, Stefan Starzyński, Bryan began to travel the city with relatively free reign. Apart from occasional incidents with over-zealous Polish police officers (Bryan spoke no Polish, and only some German) who confused him for a spy, Bryan enjoyed tremendous press freedom within the city – indeed, he was the *only* press in the city.³²⁵ As such, Bryan’s objectives, story-telling, and narrative eye for the lens would direct the worldwide remembrance of the Siege of Warsaw, as it was *Bryan* through whom public memory would have to be formed. Influenced as he was by his time in the First World War and his experiences with so many photographic and filming expeditions to see the commonality of humanity, Bryan would cast his gaze, not on the military desperately defending the city from the Nazi invaders, but upon a civilian populace struggling to survive a never-ending German bombardment, and to resist, with all their might, occupation by the invader.

This is not to say, however, that Bryan totally ignored the military aspects. The Polish military appears in many of his published photographs, but as the Polish military could not spare large numbers from the frontlines, that scattering of soldiers who appear in the photographs are dispirited; going through the motions of supervising civilians working on entrenchments and tank traps, or simply guarding, or otherwise milling around the city.³²⁶ At no time, as far as can

³²⁵ Sawicki and Stempowski, 19.

³²⁶ Bryan, *Siege*, “Milkman,” “A Woman Visits Her Husband,” “Refugees Before the Opera House.”

be determined, did Bryan attempt to visit the frontlines of Warsaw or otherwise photograph or film the dire combat in the city suburbs. This is indeed made all the more surprising due to the German assault of Sept 8, which was brutally thrown back by the Polish defenders with severe tank losses for the Germans.³²⁷ Yet, nowhere in Bryan's collection is there a single photograph of the many destroyed tanks, or of Polish soldiers engaged on the frontlines. Bryan, either due to lack of access, or his restriction of focus, remained fixated on his objective – to tell the story of *civilian* feats of endurance, turning a blind eye to the Polish military feats of arms. Thus, the military only appears as peripheral stage dressing to Bryan's storyline. Those images that incidentally include lethargic Polish soldiers, portray their conscripting civilians at random to dig trenches, while standing around passively supervising.³²⁸ In reality these few soldiers are there to keep look out for German air attacks on the civilian workers. Seen from Bryan's narrow focus, these images showcase only the civilian resistance. One of the more famous of these photographs shows elderly, orthodox Jews taking part – perhaps some of the first documented instances of Jewish martial resistance in Poland.³²⁹ Sadly, Bryan's narrow focus and obvious inability to be everywhere with his camera, would be exploited in Nazi propaganda to reinforce their war-time mythos that Warsaw held on only due to its people, while the Polish military simply melted away.³³⁰

In his focus on civilian resistance, Bryan's photographs divide mostly along three distinct themes: the attempted normalcy of civilian daily life, the general destruction of Warsaw's buildings and cultural icons, and the suffering endured by the civilian populace. These themes

³²⁷ Showalter, 189.

³²⁸ Bryan, "Last Days of Warsaw." *Life*, October 23, 1939, 76.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*.

³³⁰ Department of Military Art and Engineering, *The Campaign in Poland, 1939*, (New York City, New York: United States Military Academy, 1945,) 15-6; Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 9, 1939, 23.30, Sept 22, 1939, 1.00.

would be netted together by Bryan in his later publications and documentary to re-tell the saga of Warsaw's people, and to showcase the manners of resistance. The most tranquil, of course, were the attempts by civilians to maintain dignity and a sense of normalcy. From photos of women doing laundry quietly in the middle of air raids, to children reading Mickey Mouse magazines published during the siege, Bryan showcased how the civilian populace struggled to eke out a living amongst the rubble and death.³³¹ "A mother was sitting on the ground peeling potatoes. A girl of seventeen had found a mirror and was primping beside the ruins of her home. Fourteen dead horses were lying in the middle of the street. Twenty feet from the horses lay ten people. They had taken shelter in their cellar. All ten had been killed." Soldiers on the front often returned home to check on their families, rotating in and out of the frontlines to take care of their households or, as the case may be, to pick through the rubble left by a German bomb or shell.³³² This normalcy in the midst of horror emphasized the resilience of the populace – to come together as one, to defy the German invader not through aggressive, military resistance, but through sheer spirit and willpower. In doing so, Bryan leaves a memory of Warsaw as the brave city – the city that refused to surrender when all else seemed lost.

The second theme, of destruction within Warsaw, also figured heavily within Bryan's photography. Unable to escape life under constant bombardment, Bryan filmed and photographed throughout the city, covering craters, destroyed buildings, and even churches which fell under the Luftwaffe's bombs. In doing this, he creates two separate narratives – one tragic and one hopeful. With his coverage of the bombings of residential buildings, hospitals, and other civilian structures, Bryan showcased the capacity of modern warfare to destroy entire

³³¹ Bryan, *Life*, 73-4.

³³² Bryan, *Siege*, 42.

city blocks. He uses specific identifiable buildings, such as showing the American Embassy becoming pockmarked and tattered with the embassy staff forced to construct a bomb shelter just to evade the constant threat of a stray German bomb.³³³ Meanwhile, residential structures were hit massively, with great loss of life and property. In one iconic image, a boy is seen leaving his family home carrying a canary in a small cage – the only keepsake he was able to salvage from the pile of smashed stone and timber that covered ~10 bodies.³³⁴ In yet another, Bryan speaks of the Germans experimenting with fused bombs, meant to smash through multiple floors before exploding, causing widespread devastation as whole buildings collapsed to the ground.³³⁵

Bryan's photographs of church destruction, however, tell a different story. Perhaps due to his own religious background, Bryan spent time focusing on instances of churches which were bombed by the Germans, sometimes killing parishioners during mass. While he is willing to still show the bodies and the dead of these attacks, Bryan also turns his lens to the priests and worshippers. He photographs not just the destroyed interiors, but that worshippers still return to mass and prayer amid the wreckage, that the priests worked to recover what they could – evacuating to perform services in safer locations, but never giving up on their religious duties. In this sense, Bryan was not merely recording a story of destruction – he was seeking to provide hope surviving destruction through religion and faith.

The final theme encapsulates the most powerful of Bryan's pictures – not those of bombed out buildings or women doing their laundry – but the images of the dead, the suffering, and those who had lost everything to circumstance beyond their control or comprehension. In one scene, he found an elderly woman, seated outside the broken rubble of her bombed out

³³³ Sawicki and Stempowski, 139-40.

³³⁴ Bryan, *Siege*, 34, "Boy with Canary."

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, "Where People Lived," "These Were Homes."

house. All she had recovered from the ashes were two silver spoons and a pair of scissors – an entire life reduced to a few objects in an instant.³³⁶ A maternity ward at the “Transfiguration of the Lord” hospital found itself under bombardment, with mothers and their babies being killed by German bombs and artillery, while the others raced to escape to the basements.³³⁷ There they were treated as best as the doctors and nurses could, all the while praying for an end to the air raids. In still another scene, taken at the site of the massacre of potato diggers, Bryan finds a young boy, aged 6-10, sitting by the body of his mother, silent and uncomprehending/unwilling to leave his mother’s side.³³⁸ The photos are brutal – they leave little to the imagination, and Bryan was unwilling to censor his subjects. He was, true to his philosophies, loyal to the *reality* of the carnage, no matter the cost.³³⁹ Desensitized to such brutality as he was after his time in the First World War, Bryan was able to compartmentalize his emotions and continue photographing, continue rolling film, all the while doing his best to speak to and support the Polish inhabitants. Indeed, on September 16, just 5 days before he would evacuate from Warsaw, Bryan issued a radio statement, calling on Roosevelt and the American people to demand Germany cease the bombardment. He chastised the Luftwaffe, noting how bombs were dropped indiscriminately, and was blunt in recounting the horrors he had witnessed. Sadly, the broadcast never made it outside of Poland, and all that remains is a single recording, which itself was not found until decades after the war.³⁴⁰

Bryan also found the opportune chance to speak with the perpetrators of the horrors he

³³⁶ Bryan, *Siege*, “Saved.”

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, “Maternity Ward in the Cellar,” “Shell Interrupts a Patient’s Meal.”

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, “The Potato Diggers: A Boy and His Dead Mother.”

³³⁹ Bryan, “Exploring with the Leica,” 528.

³⁴⁰ Bryan, Sam, “Interview with Sam Bryan,” Interview by Matthew S. Palmer, October 8, 2018.

witnessed. Dozens of German planes were shot down over Warsaw during the aerial bombardment, be it by Polish anti-aircraft defenses or daring Polish aviators. Though unable to stop the onslaught, this military resistance was key to maintaining morale, yet only played a small role in Bryan's imagery. Only once did he himself capture a downed German bomber on film. After his return to the United States, he repeatedly stated that he had never seen any Polish planes during the siege.³⁴¹ An observation that is belied by his interviewing captured German pilots and air gunners shot down over Warsaw during the siege. He reported these conversations as closely mirroring those he had with German POWs in the Great War. Rather than being apologetic for the carnage they were visibly raining upon a civilian populace, the German aviators were defensive, unwilling to admit wrongdoing. "I repeatedly asked them why they, as German soldiers, were inflicting such terrible tortures upon the Polish people. They answered as one, "Wir müssen (We must)."³⁴² Some even seemed unaware that the war was going to begin at all, while others simply wanted to return home. Regardless, the point was clear – far from seeing the horrors their bombardment had wrought, the German prisoners of war believed that they were in the right to do what they had done – they were merely defending the Fatherland from Poland.

Bryan's photography and filming of the siege of Warsaw preserves the memory for posterity of a terrible event in human history. The Siege of Warsaw marked one of the first wide-scale attacks on a civilian populace in the Second World War and was directly a part of a Nazi terror operation meant to strike the Polish (and Jewish-Polish) population to the core.³⁴³ However, Bryan's work was isolated in both time and space. Not only was Bryan unable to offer

³⁴¹ Bryan, *Siege*, 53.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 42, "Wir Müssen."

³⁴³ Rossino, xiii.

a full depth of the civilian *and* military resistance within Warsaw, he was, of course, unable to travel to frontlines *outside* of Warsaw. Bryan's account of the Siege of Warsaw would, effectively, be the *only* account from the Polish side of the war. The rest of the war would be described from the German side by reporters chaperoned by German minders, most notably, by William Shirer. Operating from Berlin and with only a quick jaunt to the front in the middle of September, Shirer reported, with even increasing belief, the German propaganda tied to the campaign.³⁴⁴ Thanks to Shirer, many of the myths about the campaign cemented themselves into popular memory – Blitzkrieg modernity overwhelming a backwards and anachronistic foe as he crafted romantic stories of Polish cavalry charges on tanks that emphasized his greater narrative story.³⁴⁵

Bryan did not intend to support *this* myth making by men like Shirer, however, indirectly, his narrow focus on civilian resistance and suffering, with a lethargic Polish military peripherally involved, meshed neatly with German propaganda and Shirer's own belief that Warsaw had only continued to resist (and was the only real point OF resistance in Poland) due to the civilian populace. These propagandists and journalists (as well as future historians) dismissed the Polish military as actually performing its job, preferring instead a kind of 'mass rising' that could explain away the German inability to conquer the city; these Polish equivalent of "*Franc-tireurs*" providing the justification for terror raids on the populace.³⁴⁶ Still, to get his witness out to the world, Julien Bryan would, of course, need to escape Warsaw (there was little point in remaining and finding his end at a German's rifle due to what he had seen and recorded). Only then could

³⁴⁴ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 15, 1939, 1.00, Sept 20, 1939, 23.45, Sept 21, 1939, 1.00, Sept 22, 1939, 1.00.

³⁴⁵ William L. Shirer, Rise and Fall of the Third Reich Original Manuscript, Box #97, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW, Chapter 18, insert 1005-a.

³⁴⁶ Rossino, 191-2.

he showcase to the American, and world, public what he had seen.³⁴⁷ It was through this humanitarian and documentarian duty that Bryan would rise to true fame. Unfortunately, the story he would tell would be used by others to buttress the Blitzkrieg myths constructed by Shirer and German propagandists into memory. Bryan's narrow focus on the story of civilian suffering and resistance could be coopted neatly.

Shortly after his radio broadcast into the unknowing aether, Bryan typed a letter to his wife. Knowing that she had little idea of where he was, or if he was even alive, Bryan hoped to leave his wife (and his infant son) something with which he could apologize for his actions and give her hope for the future. "I think constantly of you and Sambo and what I want him to grow up to be. Mostly I want him to be brave- not simply under fire as we are now, brave enuf[sic] to stand for all things that are fine and decent and kind."³⁴⁸ Here, Bryan is finally releasing his detachment, revealing what has occurred around him did indeed have an emotional impact. In this letter he steps out of the role of the objective, distant recorder of memory, and into the humanity of an individual. He hopes his son, only months of age, can hold the bravery Bryan believes he himself lacks. He briefly explains the situation, how he found himself in Warsaw, and how all attempts to evacuate have failed:

Whatever happens please forgive me..[sic] And remember that noone [sic] ever loved you as I have and do, noone [sic] ever admired and believed in you and adored you so.... And someday you will love a man again. Goodnight now- tomorrow should be our great day. Love love love from your foolish, wandering adoring husband."³⁴⁹

Bryan placed the letter, along with a copy of his radio broadcast transcript, in the safe of the American embassy, hoping that, upon his death, his wife would at least know his enduring love

³⁴⁷ Jacobs and Bryan, 174.

³⁴⁸ Julien Bryan, *Apology Letter*, Provided by Mr. Sam Bryan, New York City, New York, 2018.

³⁴⁹ Bryan, *Apology Letter*.

for her, and accept his apology for why he did not return.³⁵⁰

On September 17, the crucial day dawned for Bryan to escape Warsaw. One of his attachés, a military pilot, had offered to attempt a daring night-time escape, piloting low over the countryside to a neutral border. The military staff approved, all deeming the risks were outweighed by the importance of sharing Bryan's work with the outside world. "So [the captain] set out that night to get our plane. He never returned. Next day we learned that the Nazis had moved up during the night.... I was discouraged – more than that, I began to feel responsible for this man's death...."³⁵¹ It would be four more days before Bryan would find his chance to escape, though in a manner that would risk everything. The Wehrmacht, tired of Warsaw's continued resistance in the face of mounting pressure, offered a ceasefire for the evacuation of all neutral citizens from the city. This would allow them to move-up their preparations for the final all-out assault, and eliminated the worry that neutral nations, like the United States, would protest the unnecessary deaths of their citizens. On September 21, 1939, Julien Bryan along with many others crossed the lines into the hands of the Wehrmacht.

Having retrieved his apology letter, Bryan continued to scribble notes in the margins, detailing his fears and points of travel during the evacuation, likely in the hopes of leaving a written record should the untoward happen. In his notes, he stated that he "had no idea yet what the Germans will do..." a caution advisable given what he had seen the Germans were willing to inflict upon the Polish people.³⁵² Bryan left with not just his letter and his life – he had packed film canisters in every possible hiding space on his person and in his luggage, enlisting help from fellow travelers, and had even wrapped his torso with a reel of film in a bid to smuggle as much

³⁵⁰ Sam Bryan, "Interview with Sam Bryan."

³⁵¹ Jacobs and Bryan, 174.

³⁵² Bryan, *Apology Letter*.

out he could. Bryan did so, despite the full knowledge that the Germans “had no love for me. I had spoken freely over the Warsaw radio of the brutalities.... I had lectured all over America warning about the rise of Nazi Germany.”³⁵³ Bryan, miraculously, brought more than 5,000 feet of film and hundreds of Leica and Kodachrome negatives safely across the Lithuanian border.³⁵⁴ Bryan would then safely return to America by boat in October of 1939, and quickly begin his “real” work, the preparation for dissemination of the memories of Polish civilian heroism he had preserved on film.

Journalists as Mythmakers

In a review of the then-upcoming *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939* by Roger Moorhouse, historian Adam Zamoyski points out how, despite German claims to the contrary, the average person did not believe Hitler’s claims to self-defense, however “did believe his carefully crafted propaganda to the effect that the Poles were so dumb they used cavalry armed with lances against tanks.”³⁵⁵ Indeed, such myths, exemplified by the “cavalry against tanks” meme permeate the understanding and popular consciousness of the campaign, but the question remains (one that Moorhouse and Zamoyski alike do not address) – how *did* such myths become so widely accepted and propagated through both popular consciousness and academia alike? The German Invasion of Poland saw almost 5 weeks of furious combat between Poland and both German and Soviet forces. Although defeat was inevitable, the Polish military and civilians alike resisted heroically and punched far above their weight against the crushing advances of

³⁵³ Jacobs and Bryan, 174.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Adam Zamoyski, “Poland was no Walkover for the Reich” *The Spectator*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/11/poland-was-no-walkover-for-the-reich/> (Date Accessed: November 30th, 2019).

both the Wehrmacht and Red Army.³⁵⁶ Yet these events have only recently resurfaced in academic discussion, while the myths and out-right propaganda of the campaign, largely crafted and honed by Nazi propagandists themselves, remain *the* critical memory of the first traumatic event leading to the wider Holocaust.

While much of 1939 Europe found itself in flames, the United States stood aside as the only great power not caught up in the conflict in its first two years. It is only *after* the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's declaration of war that specific governmental offices were formed to organize and censure reporting on the war.³⁵⁷ As a direct consequence, most historical research is disinterested in questions and concerns involving how American newspapers and other media outlets responded to and crafted narratives covering the European and Asian conflagrations prior to December 7, 1941.³⁵⁸ Indeed, although *editorially* supporting the Allied cause, American *straight news* reporting from 1939 to 1941 would be, for all intents and purposes, neutral. This neutrality is exemplified best by the preeminent American war correspondents of the campaign – William Shirer, Clare Hollingworth, and Julien Bryan – reporting from opposing sides of the conflict in 1939. With so few reporters on the ground outside the capitols of Germany, Poland, and the USSR, reporting the war was overly dependent on the propaganda of the invaders, especially given the limited range afield of these few reporters.³⁵⁹ This is reflected, in turn, by American newspaper depictions of the war wherein Nazi propaganda and myths would find themselves repeated essentially verbatim as factual.

³⁵⁶ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 43, 46.

³⁵⁷ Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 32.

³⁵⁸ Samuel Hynes, Anne Matthews, Nancy Caldwell Sorel, and Roger J. Spiller, *Reporting World War II: Part One: American Journalism 1938-1944*, (New York City, New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995), 19-28.

³⁵⁹ Cuthbertson, 208.

This overreliance on German propaganda sources, both governmental and military mouthpieces and German *PK-Reporter* (militarized war reporters) photography meant that the German Invasion of Poland would largely be seen through the eyes, and sometimes lenses, of the Nazi Party. Thus, rather than being able to report an accurate depiction of the war, the American public was awash in rumour, speculation, and propaganda based on Nazi racial depictions of the campaign and the Polish nation.³⁶⁰ Indeed, even photography was heavily martialled for these depictions and played key roles in the formation of racialized identities and memory; the same photographs that would be used in American newspapers. This in turn greatly coloured the memory of the campaign, as the initial news cycle of September and early October 1939 influenced depiction in media and governmental propaganda during and after the war. Working from the safety of their offices in the United States, journalists in many major, national newspapers ignored the realities of the Polish campaign and thereby vanished them from world consciousness. Instead, American journalism's willingness to accept, amplify and broadcast a mythic understanding of events and identities only served to buttress the formation of false identity and memory.

Near the Soviet border on September 11, 1939, Jerzy Szapiro, a long-time correspondent for the New York Times based out of Warsaw, wrote out his first communique from the beleaguered nation since the war had begun.³⁶¹ A delay had been enforced by the total abandonment of Warsaw by the diplomatic corps and foreign correspondents represents, in many ways, a reason for why reporting from Poland collapsed during the September campaign. Indeed, Szapiro himself issued two separate wireless articles to the New York Times, on

³⁶⁰ Schivelbusch, 226.

³⁶¹ Jerzy Szapiro, "Defense is on Madrid Model," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1939.

September 1 and 2, before he fled to the Romanian border.³⁶² Unlike Julien Bryan, a majority of the press corps opted to flee as bombs rained down on Warsaw. Szapiro himself was in Romania within the week and would find his way to Paris and London by October of 1939 to carry on his work with the *New York Times* and other newspapers, operating as their correspondent within the Polish Government in Exile. Interestingly, Szapiro's interview with an anonymous official in the Polish military on October 2 showed an already forming push-back against the myths of the campaign. "Anti-tank artillery, skillfully handled by intelligent Polish soldiers, destroyed many motorized units. Polish cavalry was not once stopped by tank columns in its daring charges, and whenever it came to close fights, the Polish infantry invariably defeated the Nazis."³⁶³ However, this would prove too little, too late. The American nation had already moved on to accounts of Senate embargos and Italian mediation efforts of what was, still, just a limited conflict in far-flung Eastern Europe.³⁶⁴

Szapiro's article was buried on page six.

³⁶² Szapiro, "Hostilities Begun," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1939; "Warsaw Raided Four Times in Day," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1939.

³⁶³ Szapiro, "Pole Lays Defeat to Dearth of Arms," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1939.

³⁶⁴ *The New York Times*, "Senate Opens Battle over Embargo; Strain on Rome-Berlin Axis; Peace Moves are Delayed," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1939.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TRUTH AND MYTH: PRODUCTION OF MEMORY BY WESTERN MEDIA DURING THE WAR

It's Just Politics

When the Second World War began, the world was still a newspaper reading world, long before televisions in every home revolutionized the news cycle. As such, newspapers, alongside and in competition with radio, were the primary means of transmitting world events, only starting to be buttressed by film media, and so served as the focal point for the transmission of memory and myth, as crafted by the 'experts' in journalism. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot rejects the concept of the victor alone writing history, in favour of those in *power* writing history, victor or not. If history is produced by power, then who chooses what to remember and memorialize becomes a crucial question to understanding how we remember the past.³⁶⁵ To this, add enforced silences which create gaps at source manufacture, archives, narrative history due to power imbalance in their creation. Rolph-Trouillot calls for the deconstruction of these silences. The past simply is *not* fixed, it lives on in the world it created, and the power that created it can and must be analyzed.³⁶⁶ As later explored by Susan Sontag, mediums like photography give the wielder of the camera power over historical memory and its production. It is, in essence, a means of control.³⁶⁷ Film also plays a crucial role, as R.C. Raack's "Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians" points out the opportunity for film and cinema to understand and report the

³⁶⁵ Trouillot, 26.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 147-51.

³⁶⁷ Sontag, 9, 14.

least reported aspects of the past – if the cameraman chooses.³⁶⁸ Film records memory due to the multiplicity of the depictions, forming alternative moulds of time and space. Film remains a powerhouse of myth, as those alternative moulds can also be obfuscated in the same ways photography does. Newspapers fulfill another crucial role, as during the 1940s they were the primary means of information delivery to people at large. Where cinema and photography could create the subjective illusion of ‘being there,’ print journalism portrayed itself as an objective, straight-forward window into world events. When the journalists themselves began to author their own memoirs, that trust translated to those memoirs, as the journalists could be depended upon as unbiased witnesses to the events they reported on.

The function of historical memory and myth has offered empires and agents of political economy the ability to craft power relations by inventing reality, memory (and thus identity) for the people en masse, or through silencing (or simply ignoring) marginalized voices. These myths and memories provide a useful framework; giving structure to chaos, creating romanticized cultural traditions, producing systems of control – all in service of maintaining collective behavior and shared values.³⁶⁹ Indeed, such actions to support the needed political economy can, themselves, be actions of political *violence*, as the distortion of reality, spreading of mythos against all considerations, and actions undertaken specifically to narrate a message which silences those who are most affected *by* that message, demonstrate the power held by those entrusted – by those in political power – with crafting the narrative. While Slavoj Žižek’s attempt to find violence in effectively every action ever under taken by man seems flawed, his points about the conception of violence as not merely a physical action, but one which can be

³⁶⁸ Raack, 412.

³⁶⁹ Trouillot, 24-27; Jeremy King, *Budweisers Into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 146, 158-9.

mental and metaphysical, is showcased in the Nazi narrative of the Polish campaign, which sought to delegitimize not merely the Polish nation, but Polish resistance, the Polish people (especially Jews) as a whole.³⁷⁰ Despite at least tacit rejection of the more extreme parts of this narrative, other portions would be expanded and exploited by American newspapers, memoirists, and cinema alike, as it fit into specific, necessary myths meant to easily explain a distant, colonial war to the American public, to then attempt to politicize and rally Americans to support the allied cause, and finally to buttress support for the ally of convenience, the Soviet Union, which necessitated throwing another ally under the entertainment media bus.

Reporting the Invasion

Tailoring one's focus to a small sample of major national, and state-wide newspapers, can gain one an appreciation for how newspaper reporting of the time sourced its material. With few on-the-ground reporters throughout Europe, the newspapers of the United States found themselves heavily reliant on Associated Press reporters, often using their affiliated reporters to provide most of the coverage, stories and even headlines. A few influential reporters, such as the esteemed William Shirer, recognized how much sway they held over the reporting cycle even if remaining unattributed in a published article. By exploring American newspapers, such as the New York Times and Dallas Morning News, the effect William Shirer's reportage (or simply his sources) had in bolstering the credence of various German accounts of the campaign, is evident. Indeed, the vast majority of American newspapers seem to have largely utilized the same pieces, as AP reporters simply sent their reports and broadcasts back to editors who in turn passed them along to the news agencies, meaning that few newspapers held any actual variance in their

³⁷⁰ Žižek, 58, 217.

reportage or narratives of the Polish campaign. Indeed, both the New York Times and Dallas Morning News commonly report, and even accept, accounts written by German propagandists, which was spread equally so by other newspaper outlets. In the Dallas Morning News, the Gleiwitz Incident is reported as factual, with no questioning of the particulars – an account that even Shirer held private doubts over.³⁷¹ These newspapers also follow similar reportage patterns to Shirer's; initial shock and concern over propaganda segueing to constant reports of German advances coupled with incredulity at any effectiveness of Polish resistance that eventually wear thin any questioning of the German narrative. Interestingly, the *Dallas Morning News* did not even report the start of the actual war on September 1, having the advantage of being a time zone later in “going to press” than the *New York Times*, perhaps reflecting their own dependence on information flow first coming through New York from Berlin and Europe in general.³⁷² Both papers, all the while, confirmed their reporting by repeating “independent” sources such as official governmental announcements from Berlin and Moscow, with almost no counter reporting available from the Polish side (apart from the occasional official press release, often from exiled government officials operating out of Hungary and Romania!³⁷³). Thus, although these representative newspapers did initially question the German side as propaganda (again, much like Shirer), by the end of September, 1939 they simply adopted the German narrative and

³⁷¹ Associated Press, “Clashes Rage Along Border, Berlin Says.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1939. During the Gleiwitz Incident, SS troops acting under Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Müller staged an attack on a German radio station on August 31, 1939, followed by a short, pro-Polish broadcast. The SS men murdered prisoners, including concentration camp prisoners, and dressed them as Polish servicemen to add authenticity. (*Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 4*, December 20, 1945).

³⁷² Associated Press, “Clashes Rage Along Border, Berlin Says.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1939; *The New York Times*, “Germany Army Attacks Poland; Cities Bombed, Port Blockaded; Danzig is Accepted into Reich.” *The New York Times*, September 1, 1939.

³⁷³ Associated Press, “3,000 Poles, Carrying Wounded, Walk Through Bitter Cold to Safety.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 21, 1939.

myths of the campaign.³⁷⁴

Critical to understanding the importance of how news becomes history, is how conjecture introduced in reporting from the beginning of the campaign quickly becomes cemented as factual over the course of the war. This is especially evident in Shirer's early reporting from his visit to the frontlines in the middle of September. This guided tour is intended by the Germans to reinforce the validity of the propaganda they had been feeding him since the start of the campaign two weeks earlier and to confirm, in his mind, the accuracy of his earlier reporting. Leaping at the chance, Shirer found himself packed into a car with his German handler and chauffeur on September 18, 1939, and motored east into the Polish Corridor. As iterated previously, after returning from this trip, Shirer reported to America that, "After three days at the front...I can see why the Polish losses have been so terrific," reading his type-written document aloud late that night on the 20th. "Against tanks the Poles used cavalry, and the result was terrible--for the cavalry."³⁷⁵ This myth, relying on mixture of reports from the German side and later Shirer's broadcasts, had *already* been widely disseminated in American newspapers. The Dallas Morning News reported as early as September 14 that "Polish cavalry...was sent against the Germans in several places...affording the spectacle of men and horses crashing into guns and scientific fighting machines" or, in other words, tanks.³⁷⁶ Interestingly, this report comes from an Associated Press Staff Writer, Elmer W. Peterson, operating "Somewhere in Southeastern Poland" presumably behind German lines. He also notes the Polish Air Force as being

³⁷⁴ Associated Press, "Truth or Propaganda?" *The Dallas Morning News*, September 3, 1939; Associated Press Feature Service, "Here's How Poland was Conquered---and What Germany and Russia Gain." *The Dallas Morning News*, September 24, 1939.

³⁷⁵ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 20, 1939, 23.45.

³⁷⁶ Elmer W. Peterson, "Lightning War's Aerial Terrors Prove Main Cause of Polish Woes." *The Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1939.

“overpowered in the air” and essentially destroyed – continuing yet another myth of the campaign.³⁷⁷ Just a day later, on September 17, Otto Tolichus reported in an article in the New York Times how German panzer divisions “...triumphed over Polish horse, and German armored cars over a famous cavalry[sic] that at first tried to attack tanks with lances.”³⁷⁸ Both of these articles predate Shirer’s trip to the frontlines and his subsequent broadcasts which reinforced the cavalry charge myth, especially with the addition of himself as an eyewitness to the alleged (by his German handlers) aftermath of a battle he had not witnessed.

With a dearth of independent sources, both the New York Times and the Dallas Morning News are forced to rely on German and Western European accounts of both the Polish Campaign and the war itself. Mention of Polish soldiers becomes stereotypical and banal, with various platitudes to Polish bravery – negated by using German photographs of surrendering Polish soldiers.³⁷⁹ Early op-ed expectations of Polish resistance, and even Polish superiority in some parts of their military, are quickly displaced by accounts of a German mechanized beast that overruns the weak, outdated Polish military.³⁸⁰ Much is made of air power in particular, perhaps relating American concerns of vulnerability to air attack.³⁸¹ Equally, there is a turn of attention to the western front that gives the abortive French offensive against Germany an undue amount of coverage with both newspapers reporting French propaganda nearly verbatim, thereby transforming a small reconnaissance and retreat into a grand offensive with hundreds of tanks

³⁷⁷ Peterson, “Lightning War’s Aerial Terrors Prove Main Cause of Polish Woes.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1939.

³⁷⁸ Otto Tolichus, “Blitzkrieg Strategy No New German Idea.” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1939.

³⁷⁹ Associated Press, “Accused of Sniping, Poles Arrested by German Soldiers.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 8, 1939.

³⁸⁰ Fredrick Palmer, “Modern Weapons Receive Real Test.” *The New York Times*, September 10, 1939.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

and planes pounding German positions.³⁸² Conversely back on the eastern front, the Soviet Invasion of Poland receives almost no coverage – it is reported, but downplayed as merely an occupation and not the land invasion it truly was. By September 17, the war is essentially over for both newspapers, as Warsaw remains, up until its capitulation on September 28, 1939, as the only part of the Polish Campaign to still demand front-page coverage. The papers repeatedly declare the war over after September 19, with *Dallas Morning News* even running an article entitled “How Poland was Conquered” on September 24 despite there being another 13 days until the final Polish capitulation at Kock and major combat operations not ending until October 6.³⁸³ Interestingly, this coverage follows along William Shirer’s timeline of announcements parroting German claims that declared the war concluded on September 15, then September 20, reiterated on September 21 along with all ground operations, and finally September 22 which would mark his last mention of any combat apart from the on-going siege of Warsaw.³⁸⁴ While the most bitter fighting of the war was reaching a crescendo with German casualties doubling as Polish resistance stiffened (even in the face of the Soviet invasion from the east), American newspapers had already offered the Germans a *fait accompli*, fading the entire campaign to the backdrop of the ‘real’ war between England, France, and Germany.³⁸⁵

Reports such as these, from respected newspaper correspondents, flowed into the American news cycle and independently confirmed through the telling and retelling of German

³⁸² *The Dallas Morning News*, “French Seize Pillboxes on Siegfried Line.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 7, 1939.

³⁸³ Associated Press Feature Review, “How Poland was Conquered.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 24, 1939.

³⁸⁴ William L. Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 15, 1939, 1.00, Sept 20, 1939, 23.45, Sept 21, 1939, 1.00, Sept 22, 1939, 1.00, 1939 Broadcasts, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW.

³⁸⁵ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 85.

propagandistic accounts. Shirer even found his way into these accounts as a newsmaker, his frontline expedition not going unnoticed in the press. The *Dallas Morning Sun* reported his trip to witness the end of combat around Gdynia on the 20th – the same day his broadcast went out from Berlin reporting his journey. This supposed “independence” of press narratives, behind which lay German and Western Allied prognostications, justified their wider propagation which, in turn, froze propagandistic, and in many ways, racial narratives into the public memory of the campaign. After all, once the trusted, vaunted newspapers have reported and re-reported these events as factual, who is anyone else to judge?

There was, however, one area where American newspapers differed in how they received and distributed information – domestic foreign language newspapers. These newspapers, especially those on the West coast and Hawaii with significant Asian minorities, typically focused on domestic events in Japan and the war in China. Already embroiled in its attempted conquest in Asia, border clashes with the Soviet Union, and growing alliance with Germany, Japan found itself needing to react to the sudden outbreak of war on the European continent. Indeed, Japanese-American newspapers interest in the Polish invasion focused on trepidation that events in Europe could disturb the Pacific and draw Japan into a war with the western powers prematurely.³⁸⁶ A tiny minority in California, they had long suffered discrimination starting with the California Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 and feared being stigmatized as enemy aliens should Japan and America come to blows. Similarly, those in Hawaii, being a plurality (37% of the Hawaiian population according to the 1940 US Census), feared being assaulted as a 5th column. It was paramount to these loyal Americans to support peace in the Pacific.

³⁸⁶ For this section, I have relied on the Hoover Institute’s Hoji Shinbun Digital Collection, currently the world’s largest online archive of open-access, full image Japanese American newspapers. In addition to their Japanese language sections, they often include English language sections, the front page in particular highlighting international news.

For their readership, they incorporated news from Asia as well as Western news sources. The preeminent source for news from Asia was the Domei News Agency (Dōmei Tsūshinsha) created in 1936. “While the government was a major participant in establishing and subsidizing Domei, the primary and principal motivators for a Japanese News Agency were journalist and businessmen who, years before the rise of militarism in Japan, were concerned about the way Japan was portrayed in the Western Dominated International News Networks ... Domei was considered a semi-official news organ and was perhaps the single most powerful news organization in Asia during the China and Pacific Wars.”³⁸⁷ Domei supplied news in both Japanese and English, the lingua-franca of the international community. Domei included reporting from their correspondents in Berlin, London, and Moscow, in addition to the usual reliance on German press releases. Indeed, the war in Europe increased the importance of Berlin as a news center for “although the fighting in China would always be the mainstay of foreign news from 1937 to 1941, Germany’s early victories no doubt made good copy after Japan’s military bogged down in China.”³⁸⁸

The *Jitsugyō no Hawaii* / 實業之布哇 weekly featuring articles on political, economic, and social issues in Hawaii, first reported on the Polish war in their September 8, 1939 issue with a lead article titled “European War Good for Hawaii,” concluding: “Thus it is that while millions of men are engaged in a desperate struggle to the death on the soil of Europe, and more millions of civilians are terror stricken at the prospect of death, maiming, and separation of their loved ones—combatants and noncombatants alike—we in Hawaii can for the present rejoice grimly

³⁸⁷ Roger W. Purdy, *The Ears and Voice of the Nation: The Domei News Agency and Japan’s News Network, 1936-1945*, (Santa Barbara, California: University of California, Santa Barbara, 1987), v.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 340-1.

over the fact that their mounting troubles point to a lessening of our own.”³⁸⁹ A second article, “Hope for Better Cooperation” claimed that “One of the probable beneficial results of the European conflict appears to be the likelihood of an early American policy of cooperation with Japan” and “Such an agreement would be profoundly welcome to the Japanese residents of Hawaii, who wish for nothing better than complete amity and cooperation between the two nations.”³⁹⁰ Beyond editorializing for the restoration of peace and amity and business, there is no Polish war news.

In California, the *Nichibei Shinbun* / 日米新聞 (Japanese American News), one of the two major San Francisco–based daily Japanese language newspapers, has reportage very similar to the *Nippu Jiji* / 日布時事 (one of the two major Japanese newspapers in Hawaii), with the Polish War being first reported in the September 2, 1939 issue relying on the United Press (UP) for Western reporting on Polish war news, supplemented by Domei for news from Japan. Domei extensively covered the progress in the Russian/Japanese border war in Manchuria and its eventual settlement. Also emphasized is the Japanese “round-the world” good-will flight’s arrival in Seattle.³⁹¹ The paper continues with Domei stories emphasizing the maintenance of cordial, peaceful relations with America and the hope for restoration of peace worldwide as in an article in the September 17, 1939 issue in wake of the settlement of the Russia/Japan border war in Manchuria titled “Rhine to Japan ‘Peace Bloc’ is Seen by Nazis” reporting the “Outline of a ‘great European peace bloc extending from the Rhine to Japan was described today in the

³⁸⁹ Jitsugyō no Hawai, “European War Helps Hawaii” *Jitsugyō no Hawai*, September 8, 1939.

³⁹⁰ Jitsugyō no Hawai, “Hope for Better Cooperation” *Jitsugyō no Hawai*, September 8, 1939.

³⁹¹ Nichibei Shinbun, “Japanese ‘round the world’ good-will flight’s arrival in Seattle,” Nichibei Shinbun, September 2, 1939.

Hamburger Fremdenblatt by its Berlin correspondent.”³⁹² Yet, like with the Western newspapers, the story then falls away, even as some of the largest battles of the Polish Campaign raged on. The Japanese American newspapers continued to report every scrap of news promoting continuing amity and cooperation between Japan and America from Domei. In contrast the Japanese government promulgated, through Domei, what was needed to guarantee *peace* in Eurasia (pending a swift German victory paired with England and France backing down), unifying the great totalitarian empires into a defiant bloc aligned against the European and American democracies.

As reports from the Polish side were quickly relegated to the background and even disappeared from the headlines altogether, journalists themselves took on the mantle of reinvigorating discussion of the campaign, linking it into larger anti-Nazi narratives meant to rally the American public to the allied cause. Yet, utilizing Nazi colonial identities to turn Poland from an ardent ally to a backwards, pitiful wreck that needed American help *because* of its weakness minimized the robust defense and valour of the Polish military’s resistance. In the end, the Polish campaign faded from headlines across all newspapers, as invasion became occupation and reports dwindled from Germany. Poland, isolated and crushed from both sides, had been extinguished. Her erstwhile resistance was dismissed as inconsequential and forgotten as the war moved on to the ‘big leagues’ of the western powers, France and England. By moving on from the campaign and ignoring the swelling number of victims of Nazi extermination in Poland, this sends a clear message about identity – Poland is, like much of Eastern Europe, far away, and racially stereotyped as backwards and barely ‘European’ at this time.³⁹³ Such

³⁹² Nichibei Shinbun, “Rhine to Japan ‘Peace Bloc’ Is Seen by Nazis,” Nichibei Shinbun, September 17, 1939.

³⁹³ Uziel, 257-9.

identities had been long established in Western intellectual society since the days of the Enlightenment and were accepted throughout the United States.³⁹⁴

Effectively, the American public quickly forgot about the war in Poland, content after the excitement of the first couple weeks to accept the campaign as over (apart from the Siege of Warsaw) and to move on to other more current events. Soon the focus of American new reporting was on government reactions at home and the build up by England and France to fight the expected German attack to the West. Soviet actions on the eastern frontier of Europe as it absorbed Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the eastern third of Poland were rarely discussed to any meaningful understanding, especially with a total lack of independent coverage from those regions. It would take the return of the very journalists who had written and produced the above narratives and myths to turn the public eye back onto the Polish Campaign, as those journalists now sought to leverage their experiences into political action.

A Radioman's Diary

William Shirer's broadcasts, however, were not the only record he left behind of his time in Berlin during the culminating period of the 1930s. Starting with his arrival in Germany in 1934, Shirer began a diary of sorts, a collection of his personal thoughts, emotions, and record of, as he put it, his "increasing fascination and horror" at Europe's slide towards chaos, authoritarianism, and eventually the Second World War.³⁹⁵ For clarity, this will be referred to as his "raw diary" to distinguish it from his published version, *Berlin Diary*, which incorporates significant modification, omission, and embellishment. While his raw diary entries would not be regular, and would shift in tone, topic, and style over the course of 1934 to December 1940

³⁹⁴ Bryan, *Siege*, 11; Wolff, 91, 335.

³⁹⁵ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, ix.

(when he escaped through Switzerland and returned to the United States) they offer, possibly, the most human approach to his own thoughts on the Polish Campaign, however sparing they may appear. At a time of rapid upheaval throughout both Europe and his own life, Shirer in a few months quickly reworked the raw diary into *Berlin Diary* (June 20, 1941) as his written testament to what he witnessed during those climactic days.³⁹⁶ While at first read the Berlin Diary is thorough and well executed, there is, perhaps, too much polish, too perfect of a story arc in his writing. In the forward, Shirer freely confesses that “Where there are lapses, I have drawn freely upon my dispatches and radio scripts. In a few cases I have...reconstitute[d] from memory the happenings of the day....”³⁹⁷ Shirer does not merely recount his own thoughts and feelings from his raw diary – his *Berlin Diary* was, in essence, an exercise in story creation; of mastering narrative, plots and sub-plots, characters, and story devices that would propel his journal into the literary spotlight when it was published in 1941. One finds the narrative on the conduct the Polish Campaign biased by Shirer’s, pre-conceived notions regarding the backwardness of the Polish military – notions developed during his pre-war years in Berlin and Poland.

One of the first such examples traces back to a short fact-finding mission to Warsaw, which took place in April of 1939. On April 2, Shirer was taken by some Polish friends to view an airshow, a show of force meant to emphasize the capabilities of the Polish Air Force to defend the nation until England and France could arrive in support. Shirer, however, was not impressed:

April 2 1939: Attended a pitiful airshow this Sunday afternoon, my Polish friends apologizing for the cumbersome slow bombers and the double-decker fighters – all obsolete. They showed a half-dozen modern fighters that looked fast enough, but that was all. How can Poland fight Germany with such an air force?³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Cuthbertson, 278.

³⁹⁷ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, x.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

Four days later, in dining with some Polish officers and members of the Foreign Office, he confided that "...they will not bring themselves to realize that they cannot afford the luxury of being enemies of both Russia and Germany...."³⁹⁹ Shirer, already, is forming his bias against the capabilities of the Polish military. The Polish Air Force, while not the most modern, was far from obsolete – indeed, her bombers, far from being cumbersome or slow, were some of the most modern in the world, and there were no biplanes (or as Shirer calls them, double-deckers) in service in the military at all!⁴⁰⁰ Yet here, in *Berlin Diary*, Shirer presents an antiquated air force that will, later on, be unable to compete with the Luftwaffe and will be supposedly destroyed either on the ground or shortly after takeoff. Meanwhile, the Polish officers are shown as foolhardy – unwilling to look facts in the face about their hopeless inferiority. Shirer continues this trope further in his diary. On August 9, Shirer recounted in his diary a discussion with some of his friends, in which he noted their cool attitude towards the Polish capability to resist – one saying that the “Poles would collapse” and still another describing “[Polish] backwardness [as] impressive. Only 2 millions read any kind of newspaper....”⁴⁰¹ Indeed, tropes such as these survive to the present day (the ubiquitous Polish joke) and would be well repeated throughout popular media during the Second World War. The Poles were unstable, over-emotional, and reckless at best, per Shirer’s account.⁴⁰² *Berlin Diary* – received with such wide readership and acclaim – serves to almost seed the public’s mind with this stereotype, one

³⁹⁹ William L. Shirer, 1939 Diary, April 6, 1939, Loose Diaries, William L. Shirer Papers George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

⁴⁰⁰ Jerzy B. Cynk, *Polish Aircraft, 1893–1939*, London, United Kingdom: Putnam & Company Ltd., 1971.

⁴⁰¹ Shirer, 1939 Diary, August 9, 1939.

⁴⁰² Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 164, 176; Shirer, *The Nightmare Years, 1930-1940*, Boston, Massachusetts: Little Brown and Company, 1984, 457.

that would continue to regale popular culture and media during and after the Second World War.⁴⁰³

These preconceived biases rendered Shirer extremely susceptible, during his carefully guided experience of the campaign, to accepting his guides' explanation of events, which would serve only to buttress the story arcs he portrays throughout his *Berlin Diary*. The supposedly lightning-fast German advance through a crumbling Polish military matched not only the pre-existing biases which had grown on Shirer over his pre-war exposure to the Polish people, but also served to illustrate the ominous threat Shirer wished to frame – that Nazi Germany posed a great danger to the American public. Many of his diary entries are critical of the German conduct of the war, repeatedly pointing out the German bombing of Polish villages and towns (seemingly with impunity), and threats made against the city of Warsaw.⁴⁰⁴ On September 7, the same day he reports the fall of Westerplatte and the destruction of Polish divisions in the Corridor, Shirer notes “I feel sick of the whole business already. No stomach for the daily reports of smashing G[erman] victories over the Poles.”⁴⁰⁵ Later, on September 9, Shirer marks his anger at the German people, who refuse to see the “righteousness of a country defending itself against a gigantic military force which has attacked it.”⁴⁰⁶ Instead, fighting through his own revulsion at the success of the Nazis in order to articulate the story arc, Shirer attacks the West for inaction, noting that “We have an idea Brit[ain] and France, will not shed much blood.... In the meantime of course P[oland] will be overrun.”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland*, 97.

⁴⁰⁴ Shirer, 1939 Diary, Sept 11, 1939, Sept 14, 1939.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., Sept 7, 1939.; Shirer Broadcast, Sept 7, 1939, 19.45.

⁴⁰⁶ Shirer, 1939 Diary, Sept 9, 1939.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., Sept 7 1939.

Things change when Shirer visits the front. Much as he reveals in his broadcasts, Shirer's diary reinforces that the trip to the front changes Shirer emotionally, as he views both the destruction of the Polish military and the rising tide of Nazism firsthand. On the 18th, he remarks on his visit to the site of the supposed Polish cavalry charge, noting "In the woods in the Corridor the sickening sweet smell of dead horses and the sweeter smell of dead men. Here, the Germans say, a whole division^[!408] of Polish cavalry charged against hundreds of German tanks and was annihilated."⁴⁰⁹ Later, in watching the battle of Kępa Oksywska on the outskirts of Gdynia, he writes: "It was tragic and grotesque and I felt like a worm. We stood there and watched the lives being snuffed out as though we were spectators at a football match."⁴¹⁰ Yet, we find here a curious case – while the *Berlin Diary* entry for the 19th is well recorded and documented in his raw diary pages, the *Berlin Diary* entry for the 18th, the viewing of this "division" of slaughtered Polish cavalry, is nowhere to be found in the raw diary. Indeed, as Dr. Michael Strobl discovered in his own study of *Berlin Diary*, many entries contained within the published book simply do not exist as originals.⁴¹¹ While some may have been lost to time, Shirer was, indeed, quite clear that he was reconstructing some parts of *Berlin Diary* from memory – and here we seem to find one of those cases. It is, indeed, quite possible Shirer invented a diary entry to showcase the futility and hopelessness of foolhardy Poles charging an

⁴⁰⁸ Interestingly, there were no Polish cavalry divisions at all. The Polish cavalry were grouped into 10 separate brigades assigned to the various Armies as mobile reserves. They did not operate as divisions, and the only cavalry in the Corridor was the *Pomorska* Brigade.

⁴⁰⁹ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, Sept 18, 1939.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Sept 19, 1939.

⁴¹¹ "The alterations include deletions (of his own misjudgments or of compromising details), additions (of later knowledge and anecdotal details), shifts of content (by concentrating on a main issue while deleting minor ones, adopting a new perspective, and changing topics), formal restructuring (by re-dating and re-evaluating entries, adding comments with the caption 'Later') and composing literary narratives (creating expectations and dramatic arcs, and integrating subplots). (Michael Strobl, "Writings of History: Authenticity and Self-Censorship in William L. Shirer's *Berlin Diary*" *German Life and Letters*, Vol 66, no 3, (July 2013), 309.)

entire division of horse cavalry into the teeth of German tanks and being slaughtered.

In the end, Shirer's diary and subsequent publication had always been a political treatise meant to sway public opinion. Shirer edited conversations and interviews – during a conversation with Polish radio operators in Gdynia on August 13th, Shirer writes that the operators noted: “We’re ready. Everyone of us has been assigned his job. We’ll do it.”⁴¹² When this story went to publication in 1941 in *Berlin Diary*, these words had been altered to “We’re ready. We will fight. We were born under German rule in this neighborhood and we’d rather be dead than go through it again.”⁴¹³ In this simple act, Shirer had “dramatize[d] the dry and sober reply of the Poles into a heroic determination to resist the German onslaught. ...He does not publish what he had actually recorded, but a different version, designed to make a political impact....”⁴¹⁴ Other cases exist towards the end of the campaign. On October 2, Shirer wrote in his raw diary of the Polish defense of the Narew front, noting that “the Poles held stubbornly for several days” and that “the Polish positions...even the Polish artillery held up the Germans well....”⁴¹⁵ This section was pruned when the diary went to print and disappeared completely.⁴¹⁶ It is quite likely it was erased simply because it did not match the narrative that Shirer wished to portray within *Berlin Diary* – that Poland had been overrun without much trouble by an ascendant, masterful Wehrmacht that now threatened to dominate the globe.

Myths, such as the Polish cavalry charge, the destruction of a weak, obsolete air force, and Polish stereotypes of foolhardy bravery and incompetence gave Shirer a free-hand to call

⁴¹² Shirer, 1939 Diary, Aug 13, 1939.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Strobl, 319.

⁴¹⁵ Shirer, 1939 Diary, Oct 2, 1939.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

upon support in the United States to fight encroaching Nazi dominance of Europe; a way to morph “events he has experienced into allegories.”⁴¹⁷ The Polish cavalry charge was not merely suicide, it was an example of the Poles reluctance to give in to authoritarianism, elevating Poland into the status of a necessary sacrifice which would serve to illuminate the rest of the world to the dangers of Hitler and the Nazis. At the same point, it reinforces the stereotype of their “impressive backwardness” and how foolish the Poles were to believe that they could stand up to a modern, mechanized onslaught through bravery and faith in traditions. Meanwhile, German war crimes and the Luftwaffe’s bombardment of civilians in Warsaw and elsewhere represented the threat that all Germany represented to the free world. To illustrate this *Übermensch* stereotype, Shirer writes of his difficulty convincing a German maid that Poles were, in fact, human beings just like Germans and the French.⁴¹⁸ Of course, in publication Shirer spruced up the story – she remains unconvinced and wall eyed at the proposition.⁴¹⁹ In the end, Shirer’s diary, both in its raw and its published form, did not, as diaries are supposed to, harken to the inner turmoil and humanity of the author. Instead, the raw diary represented fodder for the story arcs Shirer would unfold in *Berlin Diary* and other published works. Such disregard for accuracy would soon transfer over to the post-war era, as William Shirer sought to make his mark on historiography – indeed, in his eyes, the story arcs were backed by the facts on the ground and had already been tested on the general public successfully. Now he merely needed to craft history around them.

⁴¹⁷ Strobl, 322.

⁴¹⁸ Shirer, Shirer Diary, Sept 14, 1939.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

A Three Week Tour

After a whirlwind of travel through the Balkans, Clare Hollingworth saw fit to publish a book, much like Shirer would a year later, documenting her experiences of the war thus far. Having already been witness to the preamble and very outset of the war, Hollingworth sought to cement herself as a member of the press, and to finally earn full accreditation with the British government to be allowed to operate as a war correspondent – the first woman to seek and achieve this status. In *Three Weeks War in Poland*, published in 1940, Clare wrote what was essentially two shorter books in one, the first dealing with her own brief experiences of the war, which mostly involved traveling from city to city, unable to stay in one place for any time, and unable to get to where she *really* wanted to go, Warsaw.⁴²⁰ The second part, beginning with the chapter “War and Defeat,” dealt with her opinions and experiences of the course of the war itself, and how and why she believed Poland had lost.⁴²¹ Both operated as different parts of the larger, mythic narrative, and both held a plethora of colonial dogmas, stereotypes, and downright falsehoods, which her book, however innocuous her intentions, dutifully spread.

Almost immediately in this chapter (“War and Defeat”), Hollingworth is stating, quite matter of factly, stereotypical differences between a European civilization (such as her England) and Poland as she comments on the construction of the central railway station in Warsaw, noting that all summer it “had been in ruins – the Slav idea of rebuilding....”⁴²² Such observations continue in the book, as she notes everything from the over-ambitious claims of Poles that they will surely win the war, especially as they were assured of support by their French and British allies, to the chaos surrounding mobilization and the civilian populace. At one point, she relates

⁴²⁰ Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, 60.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 10.

the ‘boastful’ comments of the Poles that their industry would “never fall intact into German hands.”⁴²³ She follows up as being surprised at Polish workers simply leaving their work without attempting to effect the sabotage, chalking it up to a mixture of workers being unwilling to destroy their jobs (more likely them fleeing as refugees/being mobilized) or the actions of nebulous fifth columnists.⁴²⁴ This rides in stark contrast to her own “Stay Calm and Carry On” upper class British ethos, as she continues to be able to keep her head in her work and mission, while contrasting the well-dressed and well-appointed Polish officers, against a backdrop of far more ‘civilized’ British civilians, who, in the middle of war, remained “true to the theory that foreigners are not quite people” choosing instead to lounge “in their dressing-gowns.”⁴²⁵ Hollingworth describes herself as almost an outside witness, not actually existing *within* the events she is experiencing. In one incident, she relates traveling along a road filled with civilian refugees when it is suddenly beset by German fighters, who rake the refugees in machine gun fire. Six are killed before the fighters turn away, yet the entire scene is reported simply as a simple matter of fact, with no description of what *she* experienced in the attack. This scene, however, “was repeated again before I reached Lublin. Many of the refugees I saw must have been killed later on....”⁴²⁶

As her war tour progresses, Hollingworth wavers between viewing the Poles as unable to react effectively or, perhaps, were prepared for a long war, seeing optimism and hope in the Polish cause. While she dismisses the idea that the Polish Air Force was wiped out on the first day, she goes on to claim, having seen many major Polish airfields without flying planes or

⁴²³ Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, 23.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

petrol, that the Poles simply did not have enough petrol. This, again, mythologizes the events, as without actual knowledge of the situation (the Poles having predeployed essential military planes, fuel supplies and ammunition to secret, hidden airfields), she simply arrives at a solution that matches her conceited notions of Polish incompetence.⁴²⁷ The Polish Army, which in reality had to delay and cancel mobilization at the urging of the British and French governments – pressing *their* pre-war battle plans upon the Poles – is dismissed by Hollingworth as being a “second-rate boxer, being beaten to the punch. Everything happened before they expected it; one saw this in the little things.”⁴²⁸ Yet, by September 16, hope had been miraculously restored, as the Battle of the Burza began and pushed the Germans back, encircling some divisions and offering the Poles a chance to regain the initiative, with Hollingworth “really believe[ing] that at this moment the most pessimistic of the Poles believed that the tide of the war had turned....”⁴²⁹ A line later, she declares that “in twenty four hours Poland would no longer exist,” referencing the entry of the Soviets into Eastern Poland. Even here, she is unwilling to simply accept the Polish fear of the Soviet Union, claiming that the Poles should simply have agreed to “Russian help from the start” regardless of the danger of Soviet occupation.⁴³⁰

Following her end to the campaign (which, of course, had weeks more to run, but that didn’t stop Hollingworth, Bryan, or the Nazis from having declared victory by the 17th), Hollingworth summarizes the course of the war to the best of her ability, correctly noting that all journalists in Poland “save myself, were outside Poland after the sixth of seventh day.”⁴³¹ Her

⁴²⁷ Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, 121.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

account, instead, is padded with what she can gather from others, hearsay, and of course, the more well recorded German announcements covering the campaign. Resplendent with the usual mythic trappings, Hollingworth not only accepts the cavalry charge myth (“Again and again throughout the war, detachments of cavalry also seem to have been flung against motorized units, tanks, armoured cars, and machine guns. In these obscure, lost Charges of the Light Brigade, the flower of the heroic cavalry was butchered.”⁴³²), but outrightly proclaims that Poland “had a nineteenth century army to oppose to the German war-machine.”⁴³³ Such lurid lines strike home the romance, paralleling Shirer, in the view of Poland as a gallant yet ultimately doomed nation, unable to adapt to modernity thanks to their inferior culture, retarded by Slavic economics and social stagnation.⁴³⁴ She does accurately state that the Germans did not intend to fix the war ravaged economy of Poland, instead focusing their organization and expertise on withdrawing all things of value that remain, whilst enslaving the Poles and brutalizing the Jews.⁴³⁵ Even here, though, her feelings seep through, as in attempting to categorize the German oppression of Polish Jews, she calls out the “...most unattractive class of Jew” as being “the least abused: the small minority of rich and flamboyant plutocrats...”⁴³⁶ In doing so, she, however wittingly or unwittingly, merely repeats and spreads anti-Semitic tropes, playing right into the hands of the German oppressors themselves. In the end, Hollingworth’s odyssey through the fall of Poland reads as a memoir meant to showcase her aptitude as a reporter, her struggles to be taken seriously, and *her* vision of why Poland fell. Highly

⁴³² Hollingworth, *Three Weeks War in Poland*, 114.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 135, 139.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

subjective, written from a blatant bias, *Three Weeks War in Poland* remains a testimony to how the West really viewed their ‘ally’ in Eastern Europe.

Julien Bryan and *Siege*

Bryan’s return to America had been an adventure in of itself, but on coming home, he found an America that was already losing interest in the German Invasion of Poland. Initially, Bryan attempted to disseminate his work using the same media channels that he had used in the 1920s and 30s – he lectured, showing his film and sharing his stories with anyone who would listen. Multiple news agencies brought him in for guest articles and short photo-studies, each clamouring to be among the first to produce actual scenes of warfare. The New York Times, on October 8, 1939, was the first to publish the images, though focused down to two simple photos of destruction from the maternity ward and a bombed-out building. Other articles accounted his lectures, or simply clung to small tidbits, such as a New York Times article on Nov 24, 1939, where Bryan noted that the gasmasks he and many others were issued proved utterly useless, while helmets could well have saved many lives from “fragments of German shrapnel or Polish anti-aircraft shells dropping on their heads.”⁴³⁷ However, it would be the photo essays in large print, photo-intensive magazines and journals, that would first widely expose the American public to the uncensored carnage that Bryan had memorialized.

On October 23, 1939, Julien Bryan published in *Life Magazine* a “Documentary Record of the Last Days of Once Proud Warsaw.”⁴³⁸ It was not the cover article – that was given over to war-themed women’s fashion. Regardless, it was the first exposure of Bryan’s photographs in

⁴³⁷ Julien Bryan, “No Need for Gas Masks” *New York Times*, Nov 24, 1939, 9.

⁴³⁸ Bryan, “Last Days of Warsaw,” *Life*, 73.

their fully uncensored state.⁴³⁹ For five pages they stretch out – the photos Bryan would become most known for – covering the struggle for normalcy, devastation of the city, and the overwhelming suffering of Warsaw’s populace. Only once does a Polish soldier appear, an erstwhile but lethargic guard looking on as “Old Jews in Orthodox Russian chalats are recruited to dig barricades.”⁴⁴⁰ The rest all focus narrowly on the civilians, be they boys engrossed by *Gazetka Miki* amid rubble, the bombed out maternity wards, and the slaughter of the potato diggers.⁴⁴¹ Just a few months later, a similar photo-essay would be published in *Look Magazine* (December 5, 1939) Extended to eight pages, it included what *Look* billed as the “...first war photographs ever to be taken in colour...”⁴⁴² Although the cover went to “Zorina: Hollywood’s New Zoiew Girl” providing escapism in an increasingly dangerous world, Bryan’s article “What Hitler’s Lightning War Will Do To England.”⁴⁴³ topped the list on the cover.

Bryan recycled many of the photographs from his *Life* magazine article, but included several that were brand-new to American eyes, including two pages simply dedicated to Kazimiera Kostewicz the distraught sister of the fallen potato digger Anna.⁴⁴⁴ A few colour photos rounded out the essay, featuring yet more suffering civilians and religious iconography, juxtaposing Bryan’s focus between the destruction of the city and the hope for rebirth.⁴⁴⁵ The Polish military, as before, is little seen, with its only appearance occurring in the same repeated

⁴³⁹ Bryan, “Last Days of Warsaw,” *Life*, 76.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73, 76.

⁴⁴² Julien Bryan, “What Hitler’s Lightning War Will Do To England” *Look*, December 5, 1939, 16-7.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, Cover.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-5.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-7.

image of the Orthodox Jews digging trenches.⁴⁴⁶ It would seem, however, that the American public had had its fill – no major headlines occurred after December of 1939, and Warsaw and Poland were soon forgotten as the Russo-Finnish Winter War commenced, providing a new conflict (and one which would *seem* more heroic in military resistance) for America’s vicarious entertainment. Meanwhile, deep in his studio, Bryan was working tirelessly to assemble what would become his masterpiece.

Writing, narrating, and editing the thousands of feet of film he had smuggled out under the Nazi’s noses, in 1940 Julien Bryan premiered *Siege* to the American public. A mini-documentary of only 9 minutes, 47 seconds long, nevertheless Bryan had crafted a unique first-hand account of the suffering of the civilian populace, and their stubborn resistance to Nazi occupation.⁴⁴⁷ As before, the Polish military rarely played a role, a scattering of soldiers in passive roles such as minding civilians digging trenches, sparse formations marching towards the front (or perhaps straggling away from it?) and a few self-important officers interrogating German POWs. That said, Bryan does express esteem for the Polish anti-aircraft gunners, noting that they had shot down dozens of German planes during his time there. Regardless, Bryan retells the narrative he chose to narrowly focus on – the people. He even shifts around the chronology – rather than telling a simple start-to-finish story, Bryan shifts focus and theme at will, in order to maximize emotional impact upon the audience. His images are, sadly, self-censored, as American cinema would not allow the full extent of gore and death to be aired, yet Bryan still managed to strike at the very heart strings of humanity. He finishes with long, still looks at Polish civilians, showing their fear, their anguish, their lack of comprehension. His

⁴⁴⁶ Bryan, “What Hitler’s Lightning War Will Do To England,” 12.

⁴⁴⁷ *Siege*, Directed by Julien Bryan, 1940.

elevation of the potato diggers is, in his narrative, “the most tragic scene [he] had ever witnessed” and showed not only the sorrow of death, but also how, around those bodies, women and children continued to labour on, digging potatoes from the hard soil. It finishes, simultaneously with a call for aid and prayer, with the outstretched hands of Kazimiera Kostewicz and the clasped hands of civilians praying for rescue.⁴⁴⁸

Siege released to critical acclaim, was nominated for the Academy Award, and only lost due to it not being officially screened in theaters. It represented the culmination of Bryan’s work, and would soon travel throughout the Americas as Bryan later discovered, while working in Argentina in 1941, when he happened by a cinema playing *Siege*, and was surprised to find that it had been translated into Spanish!⁴⁴⁹ This widespread acclaim led the Roosevelt administration to appoint him to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs’ documentarian, being placed in charge of a series of documentaries covering Latin American culture and nations, as part of an educational blitz meant to tie the Americans together in the harrowing times of the Second World War.⁴⁵⁰ Bryan published a companion book to the documentary, also titled *Siege*, which included uncensored still imagery and a recounting of the events of the siege, though making sure to change names and hide information, under fear that the Germans would retaliate against those who had aided him.⁴⁵¹ After the war, Bryan would not forget the experience that made him famous – he would return to Warsaw in 1946, 58, and 74 to witness the rebuilding of the city he had seen obliterated.⁴⁵² There, he would work to find those

⁴⁴⁸ *Siege*, Directed by Julien Bryan, 1940.

⁴⁴⁹ Sam Bryan, “Interview with Sam Bryan.”

⁴⁵⁰ Jane M. Loy, “The Present as Past: Assessing the Value of Julien Bryan’s Films as Historical Evidence.” *Latin American Research Review* Vol 12, no 3, (1977), 103.

⁴⁵¹ Bryan, *Siege*, Acknowledgement.

⁴⁵² Bryan, *Warsaw*, 159.

survivors who peopled his photographs and give them voice to recount their side of those tragic events.

Regardless of the importance of Bryan's work in preserving the story of the Siege, one must still cast a critical eye upon his works as employed in the various myths and propaganda that would surround the Polish Campaign. His media blitz, coming at a time when most American's had only learned of the campaign from William Shirer's broadcasting, fell neatly into an already primed American audience.⁴⁵³ Bryan's choice to focus on civilian rather than military resistance, reinforced acceptance of Shirer's myths of a German army that simply rolled over the Polish military, and that the Polish Air Force, however valiant, was wiped from the sky in the opening day or two of the campaign. We find these all coalesced with his imagery and used by others to buttress the false memories of the campaign.⁴⁵⁴

Bryan was, for all intents and purposes, the creator and keeper of memory and testimony for the Polish side of the German invasion. In *Siege* (book), Bryan praised highly the Polish military's defense of Warsaw, noting their resilience while "Outnumbered five to one and outmachined twenty to one, with all Poland except Warsaw already in the hands of the enemy, each day they went forth to battle."⁴⁵⁵ Ultimately, his words would never be as widespread or as powerful as his imagery, a fact which Bryan was ready and willing to admit even before the war.⁴⁵⁶ Without a more comprehensive photo-documentation of war from the Polish side to back up his book, Bryan's more widely consumed film left the American public with a very narrow, and perhaps regretted, firm memory of the Siege of Warsaw as a civilian feat of endurance,

⁴⁵³ Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, Sept 18.

⁴⁵⁴ Bryan, *Siege*, 34.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵⁶ Bryan, "Exploring with the Leica," 513.

rather than a military feat of arms. In turn, these false memories, be they from Bryan, Shirer, or elsewhere, affected how war-time, propagandistic films would be scripted, as the Hollywood War Cinema simply fell in line with these myths, unable or, more likely, unwilling to question these precepts.⁴⁵⁷

Myth Becomes Entertainment

By focusing solely on the Siege of Warsaw with only sparse depiction of other fronts, a picture was formed in public consciousness that the rest of Poland and her army had fallen to pieces, with only Warsaw holding.⁴⁵⁸ This aligns with both the reporting of William Shirer *and* the reporting and mythos propagated by the German army. The Wehrmacht wished to portray Warsaw as a heroic but doomed last stand by a civilian population abandoned by their military conjoined with a façade of adherence to civilized warfare to obscure their bombardment of civilians.⁴⁵⁹ War crimes were largely considered rumour, as it was difficult at this time for Americans to believe what the Nazis wished to achieve in Poland. This pale of doubt was cast by the successful interwar campaign by Germany to question reportage of German atrocities in Belgium in 1914, leading many to question any accounts of German atrocities in 1939.⁴⁶⁰ The German war of extermination simply dumbfounded her enemies in its initial phases, and even the Poles couldn't quite understand how different this war was being fought compared to previous combat.⁴⁶¹ Thus, reported war crimes were considered sensationalized or blame shifted onto

⁴⁵⁷ Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland*, 97.

⁴⁵⁸ Associated Press Feature Review, "Invisible War Being Waged in North Sea May Decide Future of Europe." *The Dallas Morning News*, October 1, 1939.

⁴⁵⁹ Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 9, 1939, 23.30.

⁴⁶⁰ Horne and Kramer, 402.

⁴⁶¹ Bryan, *Siege*, 53.

Poland itself (“Poles bombard Warsaw!”) rather than decrying the Germans as war criminals.⁴⁶² Indeed, for the whole of the campaign, just one reporter was able to document German war crimes from the Polish side of the war – Julien Bryan. During the Siege of Warsaw, thanks to a series of flukes, Bryan would for weeks, be the only independent, western source reporting from the Polish side – indeed the only journalist, the only photographer, the only film-maker in Warsaw.⁴⁶³ It was through his lens, and his lens alone, that the world would see the awful truth – rather than the lies broadcast by the Nazi Propaganda ministerium – and witness for the world the suffering of Warsaw.⁴⁶⁴

After his return to the United States, Bryan’s photographs, despite their headline immediacy, were buried into the back pages of various magazines, and never found their way into major newspapers.⁴⁶⁵ His photography provides the only access to the Polish side of events, but was not available for publication until his escape from Warsaw and return to the United States in the fall of 1939 – after Poland had faded to the backdrop. The New York Times and the Dallas Morning News were both reliant on German photographs to accompany their reporting, which simply depicted what the German propagandists wanted Americans and the world to see: triumphant, brave German soldiers, weary, defeated Polish prisoners, and a mechanized onslaught of Panzers and the Luftwaffe.⁴⁶⁶ With only these photographs providing Americans memory of the campaign, German propaganda quickly became the accepted narrative, as seen in

⁴⁶² Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 11, 1939, 23.30.

⁴⁶³ Jacobs and Bryan, “War Is, Was, And Always Will Be, Hell,” *The Documentary Tradition*, (New York City, New York: W.W. Norton, 1971, 1979), 168.

⁴⁶⁴ Sawicki and Stempowski, 22.

⁴⁶⁵ Bryan, “No Need for Gas Masks” 9; Bryan, “What Hitler’s Lightning War Will Do To England.” 16-7.

⁴⁶⁶ Associated Press Wire Photo, “Nazi Troops Advance Along Warsaw Street” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 15, 1939; Times Wide World Radiophotos, “Machine-gun Warfare On the Outskirts of the Polish Capital” *The New York Times*, September 14, 1939.

the change in reporting by late September 1939. Gone were attempts to claim strong Polish resistance and German defeats at the gates of Warsaw; instead the focus was on German victory, the crushing of Poland, and the valiant if doomed stand at Warsaw.⁴⁶⁷ Both newspapers simply accepted the German narratives and images because it was *all* they had to offer an eager public. Poland was faded to the backdrop just as soon as the papers could declare the campaign over, transferring attention to stalwart England and courageous France – while Germany proceeded to not only carve Poland up with the Soviet Union, but to ignite the flames of the Holocaust (Fig. A.32).⁴⁶⁸

By the end of September 1939 such reporting filled the American consciousness. American cinema, always looking for a good storyline, capitalized on these myths and propaganda narratives. Wittingly or not, American movie makers would further confirm the German depiction of Poland as an anachronistic, medieval backwater. One wartime Hollywood film would even impugn the Polish people as “uncomprehending at the sight of a tractor.” while another would see a Polish officer caricature “expatiat[e]...on the superiority of the horse over mechanized weapons.”⁴⁶⁹ Such stereotypes, while ludicrous, would appear throughout war-time cinema, and become driving plot lines in the propaganda and political narratives that permeated the medium. The portrayal also extended to people themselves, not merely as backward, but as unable to be trusted to lead themselves, aligning with common colonial tropes. The Polish Home Army, one of the most successful and largest resistance movements of the war, is depicted in one film as being run by the British, with no evidence of any Polish government even existing. As

⁴⁶⁷ Associated Press, “Warsaw, Ruined by Siege, Gives Up.” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 28, 1939.

⁴⁶⁸ Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 58-9; Rossino, 224.

⁴⁶⁹ Mieczysław B. Biskupski, “Hollywood and Poland, 1939-1945: The American Cinema and the Poles During World War II.” *The Polish Review* Vol. 47, no. 2 (2002), 189.

M. Biskupski's *Hollywood's War with Poland* puts it, such films essentially state that "[Poles] belong to a theatrical nation that, though quite charming, is not really appropriate for the modern world."⁴⁷⁰ Such depictions pair well with those of Shirer or Hollingworth, whom had queered Poles in the same breath with which they sought to bear witness to Poland's downfall and write the tale of the German campaign. Poland, in the end, was simply too far away to be anything more than an alluring, near-Oriental nation of sentimental, vane relics of a bygone era.

One movie in particular, "Mission to Moscow" (1943), sought to portray the lead up to the Second World War in Poland, but in doing so, eliminated the Soviet Invasion in a stroke, instead, focusing on Poland as a blindly anti-Russian reactionary nation which was consumed by the Germans due to their lack of pragmatism.⁴⁷¹ With a production team largely in support of the Soviet entry into the war (the screenwriter Howard Koch later accused of being a "fellow traveler" of the CPUSA), "Mission to Moscow" was supported by the State Department, eager to develop pro-Soviet feelings in the United States,⁴⁷² to simply serve the war needs of the United States. Its release just after the German announcement of the discovery of the Katyn Massacre, though unplanned, paired well with Soviet propaganda's attempt to pin the Massacre on the Germans, as it openly sided with the Soviet telegraphing of Poles as uniformly anti-Soviet. The twisting of myth and German propaganda into a factual record based on reporting and journalism affected broadly how the campaign is depicted during the war, yet it was Hollywood which pushed the myth into the realm of *necessary* political realities. Thus, print journalism, photography, and cinema acted in concert to spread and legitimize a mythic, colonial identity for

⁴⁷⁰ Biskupski, *Hollywood's War with Poland*, 86.

⁴⁷¹ *Mission to Moscow*, Directed by Michael Curtiz, Written by Howard Koch, Warner Bros., 1943.

⁴⁷² Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, "A Great Historic Mistake: The Making of 'Mission to Moscow,'" *Politics and Film*, Vol 16, no. 4 (2004), 358-377.

Poland during the war, one originally created and driven by Nazi propagandists. The political and cultural *need* for the myth had outweighed any interest in what Polish voices had to say.

The Photographer and the Siege

Julien Bryan let his camera drop, the shot of his lifetime made, and yet the scene played on. Kazimiera sobbed over the body of her sister uncontrollably, praying to all who would listen to bring her sister back. He approached, raised Kazimiera from her knees and held her close, mustering all his gentleness to explain that Anna was, indeed, dead. “She did not understand what he said, but she knew that his words were from his heart and that he wanted to comfort her....” Kazimiera would later recall.⁴⁷³ Bryan also remembered the touching moment, never forgetting how he, and the Polish officers he was with, had all broken down into tears. It was, for Bryan, a lapse from his usual detachment as an objective documentarian. The death of Anna Kostewicz had, for however brief a period, ripped him from his objectiveness and exposed his true feelings – Julien Bryan’s inner humanity. Anna was buried in a mass grave, and later secretly moved by the Polish Resistance, along with the other dead women, to keep the Germans from eradicating evidence of their war crimes.⁴⁷⁴ Kazimiera and her family would recover, and even survive the war, with Kazimiera marrying in 1954 to Adolf Mika. It was only a few years later that, on Bryan’s return to Warsaw in 1958, they would be reunited. Bryan instantly recognized her, despite not even knowing her name, and Kazimiera would remember him simply as the man “wearing a light grey suit” who had explained death to her.⁴⁷⁵

In 1945 after the Second World War and his service in the CI-AA, Bryan founded the

⁴⁷³ Bryan, *Warsaw*, 163.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

International Film Foundation, dedicated “to produce and distribute documentary films that would promote better world understanding.”⁴⁷⁶ He would go on making and producing films, rarely home and rarely being able to see his wife and son.⁴⁷⁷ His goal in life was, simply put, to educate and share the power of humanity and the peoples of the world with others, to bring together the great community of man that they could understand each other and learn from each other.⁴⁷⁸ In this small way, Bryan sought to do his part in the world’s avoiding another great conflagration, like those he had witnessed twice in his life. He traveled extensively, including multiple returns to Warsaw to report on the rebuilding of the nation and to meet with the various subjects of his works, including Kazimiera Mika (nee Kostewicz). Bryan “came to believe that the true ‘documentary’ was the ‘raw stuff of history in the making – beginning where the newsreel flashes off and the travelogue falters, to grope ahead toward recording noteworthy realities.”⁴⁷⁹

Bryan lectured as well, passing through schools and campuses on circuits that took him across the United States and Europe. Sadly, Bryan eschewed notes and transcripts, preferring to lecture purely from experience and memory although some of these lectures in the 1960’s were recorded on cassettes. Unfortunately these recordings have gone un-transcribed over the subsequent 50 years, and have likely deteriorated to the point of making it impossible to attempt – this testimony of Bryan’s memory has been lost to history.⁴⁸⁰ Julien Bryan died on October 20, 1974, at the age of 75, and just a few short months after returning from his final trip to

⁴⁷⁶ Sam Bryan, International Film Foundation.

⁴⁷⁷ Sam Bryan, “Interview with Sam Bryan.”

⁴⁷⁸ Loy, 106.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Sam Bryan, “Interview with Sam Bryan”; Julien Bryan, Julien Bryan Papers, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

Warsaw, where he was decorated with the Odznaka Honorowa “Zasłużony dla Kultury Polskiej (Decoration of Honor Meritorious for Polish Culture). His son, Sam Bryan, would carry on his father’s work, having joined him for the 1974 trip, taking over the IFF in Julien Bryan’s stead, a role he still performs today although the IFF’s mission has changed mainly to the preservation and research of 16mm film and documentary evidence. In 2006, as a final award to Bryan and his work, the Library of Congress added *Siege* to the National Film Registry, noting in their announcement that “Bryan’s footage is a unique, horrifying record of the dreadful brutality of war.”⁴⁸¹

Julien Bryan’s work during the Siege of Warsaw is truly monumental as both an undertaking and an example of the crafting of memory. Through his own objective eye and photographic philosophies born out of experiences with the horrors of the First World War, Bryan found himself uniquely situated to document the terror and destruction wrought by the Wehrmacht on Warsaw from earth and sky. His evidence rejected German claims to a civilized war and belied their outlandish attempts to twist the narrative as such as claiming the Poles were the ones bombarding themselves.⁴⁸² Bryan’s focus on civilian stubbornness in the face of overwhelming force remains one of the key memorializations of the human will to resist. And yet, due to his own human limitations, Bryan preserved in the historical record a memory that was incomplete. While his recording of civilian suffering is highly laudable, it did not tell the entire story of military resistance and state of affairs across the rest of Poland. While this can be excused due to the circumstances and would not be a problem if there were other American journalists or even Poles reporting and documenting the campaign across Poland, there simply

⁴⁸¹ Sheryl Cannady, “Librarian of Congress Adds Home Movie, Silent Films and Hollywood Classics to Film Preservation List,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/prn-06-234/>, November 2, 2018.

⁴⁸² Shirer, Shirer Broadcasts, Sept 11, 1939, 23.30.

was no one *but* Bryan. Without intending to, Bryan's work reinforced various myths about the campaign due to his narrow choice of focus, and the manner he chose for broadcasting his opus to the American public. Kazimiera's experience, and the rest of Bryan's potato diggers, however real and tragic their suffering was, could not encompass the entire story of Poland's war from the Polish side. Bryan may have been fully aware (and fully excusable) of how his work might be exploited by others and indeed that was the case. His carefully crafted and preserved memories were coopted by the Blitzkrieg myth's progenitors in support of their propagandistic and outright false version of events.

Bryan, however, would not be the only one whose attempts at memorializing and even telling the story of the Polish Campaign would both help and hinder understanding of the campaign itself – William Shirer's diary, full of mistakes and fibs, served to expand American support for the war effort through telling the story Shirer wished to be told, parts of which he surely believed himself. Hollingworth, meanwhile, simply wanted to continue her career in journalism, utilizing her book to spread awareness of the Polish campaign and try to explain just 'what' happened during it, so she could then move on to other stories.⁴⁸³ Where Hollingworth would simply disappear into other wars and adventures, Shirer would continue to push his eyewitness account of the start of the Second World War into a series of books with which he hoped to prove his worth as not just a radioman or journalist cum memoirist, but as a historian himself. His series of books on the war would craft not just the stories and narratives he was telling into an even greater production but would catapult him to near-celebrity status amongst

⁴⁸³ Within just a few months of the Polish Campaign's end, Hollingworth had attempted another refugee program and had traveled throughout the Balkans, until she finally made it to Egypt and obtained actual press credentials with the British Army. (Clare Hollingworth, *There's a German Just Behind Me*, (London, United Kingdom: The Right Book Club, 1943)).

popular readership, even as American historians themselves largely found his work distasteful.⁴⁸⁴

By studying the newspaper reporting, war-time auto-biographical accounts, and Hollywood cinema of the Polish campaign, one can achieve a better understanding of how heavily reliant American journalism, prior to 1941, was on Nazi and Western European propaganda. American field journalists were few, and those few were exploited by newspapers in their own reporting and the recycling of other newspapers' articles that originated from the same few sources. This scarcity of independent on-the-scene reporting was amplified by newspapers in a closed loop of myth and propaganda feeding on itself, further confirmed by preconceived biases towards Poland and modern warfare itself. News reporting remains, to this day, one of the most powerful creators of public memory, and American reporting during the Polish campaign greatly contributed to the forming of lingering mythic memories and identities. This was only buttressed further, as Hollywood and the US Government, desperate to maintain the alliance with the Soviet Union, supported propagandistic movies that largely fell in line behind those myths brought home by the news; myths conforming to preconceived notions of the backwardness and 'colonial' appearance of the Polish as a nation and people – queering the Poles – in order to rehabilitate the image of the Soviet Union and solidify popular feeling in support of our erstwhile ally against Germany and Japan. Thus, recognizing and studying the production and consumption of war-time media, within the framework of its political economy, is *crucial* to understanding how *news* becomes *history*, and how *myth* becomes *truth*.

⁴⁸⁴ Shirer, *The Collapse of Third Republic*, (New York City, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 993.

CHAPTER 5

A “FELT” REALITY: THE POST-WAR NOSTALGIA FOR

THE MYTH OF THE CAMPAIGN

Nothing exists; all is a dream.

- Mark Twain

Subjective Memory

Competition between the Western allies and the Soviets for hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe began almost immediately following the German surrender, in a series of sphere of influence squabbles leading into the Cold War. Although supposedly censured for his impolitic statement, General Patton summed up the ethos of the times quite succinctly (and apocryphally), supposedly stating, “We may have been fighting the wrong enemy [Germany] all along. But while we’re here [on the Soviet Empires border], we should go after the bastards now, ‘cause we’re gonna have to fight ‘em eventually [sic].”⁴⁸⁵ Though Patton may have put it blunt and crudely, Western leaders (in more statesman-like prose) proceeded to rehabilitate and integrate West Germany firmly into the new Western alliance – NATO. This action included the forming of a new German military, the Bundeswehr, which included many veterans of the Second World War taking up leadership roles as Germans who were considered experienced and capable of reforming a capable military.⁴⁸⁶ Part and parcel to this process was the ‘Myth of the Clean Wehrmacht’ which acted to ignore, reject, and erase discussion of the Wehrmacht’s crimes or the political beliefs of those veterans. Among other areas, this necessitated rejecting Polish voices about the war in the east and instead accepting German memory. Thus, a “felt” reality crafted by

⁴⁸⁵ Phillip Coleman, *Cannon Fodder: Growing Up For Vietnam*, (Self-Published: Phillip Coleman, 1987), 207.

⁴⁸⁶ Smelser and Davies, 76-79, 135.

the Germans in 1939 was accepted, one in which stories of Polish cavalry officers breaking their swords on German tanks before committing suicide to avoid surrender could be believed and propagated into the present day.⁴⁸⁷

This was not, however, simply a conscious act of lying and refusing to believe otherwise. As has been explored by historians and philosophers for decades, history and memory work in an interlocking system, by which memories inform our historical understanding of the world, and vice versa.⁴⁸⁸ Rather than viewing history and historical knowledge as a static, monolithic structure, it is far more useful to view history as something which is subjective to the individual, whom is largely a product of their own memories.⁴⁸⁹ The fickleness of memories, however, entails different narratives and interpretation by each individual, leading to history itself being subjective. Where history purportedly seeks to reveal all memory, it resurfaces emotions as it reinvents the forgotten or misremembered, truths of the lived past. Memory fills in the gaps with feeling. This filling of gaps is, in fact, referenced by Nora's *Le Lieux de Memorie*. After defining the differences and diametric opposition of history and memory, Nora still concludes that historians *must* preserve these felt memories of the past, as a historian acts not merely to record history, but to prevent "history from becoming *merely* history."⁴⁹⁰ Thus, memory *dictates* emotion while history writes.

This interlacing can well explain how veterans, journalists, and historians who witnessed or grew up on the memes of the Polish campaign continued and continue to believe them. They

⁴⁸⁷ Stone, 28.

⁴⁸⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 563, 600-601.

⁴⁸⁹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Press, 1966), 133.

⁴⁹⁰ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Le Lieux de Memorie," *Representations*, Vol. 26, (1989), 18.

are, in fact, utilizing their memories to construct the necessary narratives for their understanding of the world. Be they German generals attempting to sooth their own guilt, or buttress their reputation, or journalists eager to make their mark on history, such individuals occasionally made both deliberate and non-deliberate alterations to what had occurred in their quest to explain history and present their inner felt realities. History, being an agreed upon methodology for unemotionally bringing order out of our chaos of memory, relies on the felt realities of our past and present to come to grips with events. Attempts to make history unemotional flounder – subject to the impossibility of maintaining objectivity in its production.⁴⁹¹ This does not, of course, imply that one should not seek to improve and reinterpret history, but only deepens our understanding of how and why history consistently morphs through its study. By utilizing memoirs, especially those of German soldiers, attempts at history by historical actors, and true historiography and media that sought to expose historical events to a wider, popular audience, one can come to terms with how the romanticized, accepted portions of the Polish Campaign’s mythos worked into the fabric of memory. Despite the limitations of autobiography in terms of objective truth, that limitation only serves as a catalyst for further interpretation, through analyzing *why* that limitation surfaces. They inform how a human being saw the world and their actions within it, and the places where they remember, forget, or alter.

Quick-Dry Cement

Following the end of World War Two, a plethora of books, pamphlets, and memoirs were published by various combatants, generals, and political leaders. Just months after the war’s end, the US Army’s historical department began planning the teaching of the war to its future officer

⁴⁹¹ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 23, 33.

corps. Part of this historical pursuit was the creation of small guides and books to various campaigns in the war, to be issued to students at West Point and other military academies, in order to educate up-and-coming officers on the war. In one of these reports on the Polish Campaign, one can see even the exponential growth of the mythos and delusions that both the Germans and Allies had propagated. Whereas the OSS had arrived at the already inflated number of 3500 German tanks in Poland (almost double their actual numbers) this educational document almost doubled it again to “Germany had about 6,000 tanks.”⁴⁹² The estimate was now triple the actual count of German tanks in the campaign. The guide to the history of Poland, for the best and brightest of the Army Officer Corps, was now at the forefront of promulgating the delusion.

The West Point historical report also repeated the superiority of German tactics over Polish. “Germany’s balanced, well trained, and ably led forces found no match in those of her smaller rival...the outbreak of war found Poland in possession of an army patterned closely after those of the First World War.”⁴⁹³ The first part, as we have seen, is nonsense. The Polish Army performed admirably and was capable of inflicting severe defeats on the Germans. It was only sheer weight of German materiel and the Poles own operational plans for strategic withdrawal that kept the Poles on a retreat to the Vistula. The second part of the report’s assertion misses the important tactical revolutions within Poland since the Polish-Soviet War. “The Polish Army of 1939 was heavily influenced by the Polish Soviet War...[it] had taught Polish tactical and strategic thinkers that war in Poland would not be a static trench conflict...but a fluid and dynamic campaign that would need heavy use of airpower and mobile infantry and artillery

⁴⁹² Department of Military Art and Engineering, 3.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 2.

forces.”⁴⁹⁴ The Polish army had indeed fulfilled these requirements to their own industrial capabilities, with a rapid reaction force in the guise of their cavalry brigades, all of which were equipped as anti-tank soldiers. They would be the fire-brigade to plug the gaps, and it was a tactic that worked perfectly well during September 1939.⁴⁹⁵ Notwithstanding this, the idea that cavalry could take on Panzer divisions went against the common wisdom of mechanized warfare at the time and could be brushed aside in favour of the Blitzkrieg. Cavalry, as far as the West was concerned, had died in the First World War.

Lastly the West Point report also promotes an interesting interpretation on 4th Panzer Division’s activity around Warsaw on the 8th of September. Possibly going off of the documents available on 4th Panzer, the report notes: “Neither column, however, was sufficiently concentrated to undertake the occupation of the city, although resistance at first appeared to be slight and unorganized.”⁴⁹⁶ Thus the initial German foray into Warsaw, a complete slaughter for the tank crews, was turned into a simple division organizational issue. The language sets the tone, with Warsaw not being “occupied” (indicating that it was abandoned and open to the taking) because the German spearheads did not have the numbers pulled together to simply occupy a city of the expanse of Warsaw. The 80 tanks the Polish defenders destroyed as Hoepner attempted to smash into Warsaw are not acknowledged – as we have seen, the 4th Panzer Division itself does not record this destruction in their own war diaries. The report ends the campaign with the Soviet invasion of the east, noting casually that the Soviet invasion was inconsequential, as “Polish resistance had been completely broken and all avenues of retreat had

⁴⁹⁴ Paul Latawski, “Armoured Warfare in NW Europe – The Polish Experience.” (Lecture, BCMH Summer Conference, London, UK, 2009).

⁴⁹⁵ Latawski, 27.

⁴⁹⁶ Department of Military Art and Engineering, 15-16.

been blocked.”⁴⁹⁷ The delusions had run deep, and the next generation of military officers, many of whom would become historians in their own right, would carry the delusions forward.

German generals supported and aided these historical studies regularly, utilizing them as a chance to prove the efficacy of German operational thinking, overriding calls to strategic caution in favour of the demonstrated swiftness and decisiveness of a victorious offense. Indeed, “One could not create a better atmosphere for a reconceptualization of a major part of World War Two.”⁴⁹⁸ Led by Franz Halder, the Operational History (German) Section created by the American army worked to assimilate the German agenda into the studies of the Eastern Front requested by American army leadership. In doing so the German Section not only shifted the retelling of the war on the Eastern Front to one of an honourable Wehrmacht trading blows with a savage Communist enemy, but also mainstreams racial and Nazi based ideologies into American military training; German generals writing (in pamphlets meant for a general American military audience) of ‘Slavs’ as “bestial,” “semi-Asiatic,” holding emotions of “animal ferocity.”⁴⁹⁹ These exotic descriptions captivated a military audience eager to learn more about their new Slavic foe, while also striking a nerve amongst those drawn to imperialistic, colonial visions which mythologized the concept of mechanization versus ‘barbarian’ hordes.⁵⁰⁰ While arguments were adopted to buttress the Cold War need to demonize the Soviets and to rehabilitate Germany as a new-found ally, they also ignored the true beginning of the Eastern Front – the Invasion of Poland, despite often utilizing the same rhetoric used by Germans previously.

⁴⁹⁷ Department of Military Art and Engineering, 21.

⁴⁹⁸ Smelser and Davies, 56.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 123.

Indeed, many early historical studies absorbed memoirs by leading German generalship to discuss more deeply the German experience of the Invasion of Poland, even though that experience had been sanitized through the lens of their post-war desire to cleanse themselves of wrongdoing and buttress their own egos.⁵⁰¹ No less than Guderian himself, the famed architect of the Blitzkrieg, lent his support to the romanticized and clean Wehrmacht notions of the Invasion of Poland in his memoir *Panzer Leader*. Writing of the initial days of the campaign, Guderian repeatedly brings up his birthplace and former family estates in Poland, his first time visiting them since his birth being the invasion. In doing so, he almost excuses the conquest, waxing over the beauty of his grandfather's estate, as the son of a colonizer might wax about their father's plantation in Rhodesia – ignoring the native worker and their aspirations.⁵⁰² Of combat, there is the usual cluster of anecdotes, of brave Panzer officers, soldiers nervous on their first day of combat, and awe at the power of modern air forces and tank divisions. Of the Poles, Guderian is more flippant – although brave, they fight largely defensively, from concealment, and are not afraid to use ambush and snipers to fight the Wehrmacht invaders.⁵⁰³ In the one actual attack by the Poles, Guderian reiterates the usual fable:

The Polish Pomorska Cavalry Brigade, in ignorance of the nature of our tanks, had charged them with swords and lances and had suffered tremendous losses.⁵⁰⁴

A fairy tale, yet one easily and earnestly believed by an audience eager for such myths.

Erich von Manstein's memoir, *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General* deals with more tepid affairs. As a staff officer, his was not to enter combat

⁵⁰¹ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 1982). As one might suspect from the title, von Manstein was not the humblest of generals.

⁵⁰² Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2002), 70, 84.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 70, 76, 81.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

like Guderian, but to orchestrate the planning and logistics of the Polish Campaign.⁵⁰⁵ As such, von Manstein lacks the combat accounts, but does offer a glimpse into pre-war German thinking about Poland. Of the army's views on Poland, von Manstein is rather clear in his denial of any planning or desire to wage war in Poland, noting *only* that:

Poland was bound to be a source of great bitterness to us after she had...annex[ed] German territories to which neither historical justice nor the right of self-determination gave her any claim. Every time we looked at the map we were reminded of our precarious situation. That irrational demarcation of the frontier! That mutilation of our Fatherland! That corridor whose severance of East Prussia from the Reich gave us every reason to fear for that lovely province...a nightmare that disturbed us all the more whenever we thought of the aspirations for German territory still harboured with such ill-concealed longing...of the Polish people.⁵⁰⁶

Manstein, of course, quickly followed up to note that despite all of this, “the army never dreamt of fighting an aggressive war against Poland” and “we had no wish to fight an aggressive war” though also refusing to believe that “even...the most unprejudiced view of the Polish mentality” would prevent a peaceful settlement to these “senseless frontiers.”⁵⁰⁷ A lover of peace indeed. Memoirs such as Guderian's and Manstein's, however distasteful to the modern day, played a major role in the shaping of memory of the Second World War. Though written by the enemy, they were an enemy who seemed docile and compliant – eager to aid the United States in the Cold War and willing to say exactly what the Western military and historical establishment wanted to hear. The Myth of the Good Wehrmacht permeated much of the Second World War's historiography for decades, largely due to the work of Franz Halder and other German officers and men who simply sought to expunge themselves of sin, while still holding on to their racist

⁵⁰⁵ Manstein, 22.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 24-5.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 24-5.

viewpoints of Slavs, including the Poles they faced in 1939.⁵⁰⁸

Among the forefront of the early historians of the conflict was Winston Churchill, former war-time Prime Minister of England and a well-known historian in his own right from before the war. His series, *The Second World War*, chronicled the war from his changing viewpoints as First Lord of the Admiralty to Prime Minister, from start to finish. It was one of the most complete retellings of the Second World War in print when it debuted in 1948 – however, this did not mean it was the most accurate. Churchill’s chapter on the Polish Campaign continued the practice during the war of repeating the Allied and German myths surrounding the effectiveness of the Panzer Division in the Polish countryside.⁵⁰⁹ Churchill claimed that the Germans had surrounded the Polish Army almost within the first week of the war, whilst continuing the fanciful myth of Polish cavalry charging tanks. “Their horse cavalry...charged valiantly against the swarming tanks and armoured cars, but could not harm them with their swords and lances.”⁵¹⁰ Not only is Churchill so comfortable with the delusions of the 1939 campaign that he is willing to fully accept that the Poles would be so idiotic as to charge armoured vehicles with lance-armed cavalry, but he goes further to speak of “swarming tanks”; the picture perfect snapshot of the Western view of the German blitzkrieg. Relying mostly on British intelligence reports and perhaps captured German documents to base his history on (Polish documents by 1948 were under lock and key with the Communist government), Churchill chose to accept the German version of events as canonical. The tanks had swarmed

⁵⁰⁸ Wolfram Witte, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 73.

⁵⁰⁹ Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 442-445.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 443.

victoriously through weak defenses and suicidal cavalry, and the war was essentially over, for Churchill, in the first week.

There was, however, little excuse for such myths to exist. In 1942, *The Defense of Poland* was published, marking the *first* full scale book highlighting the campaign in the Western World. Of interest, was that the book's author, rather than base his research solely off of German and British reports, used as his primary sources his personal interviews as well as records and written testimony by Polish participants in the campaign.⁵¹¹ The book offers a distinctly different view of the campaign, and attacks the commonly held delusions of German superiority during the campaign. One of the first notions the book dispels is that of the backwardness of Polish tactical doctrine of the time. The book is quite candid in pointing out "Army instructions had always laid stress on maneuverability and mobile warfare."⁵¹² This is a shot across the bow of Western analysts who were quick to jump on the bandwagon of blaming Poland for fighting with an army based on First World War dogma. The book goes further, noting: "The alleged wide encirclement [of Polish forces west of Warsaw] was hardly a fact."⁵¹³ Here, the author points out that the German forces "encircling" the Polish divisions were spotty at best; German divisions, which had overstretched from their lines, were easily pushed aside by the Poles as they moved back to the Vistula defensive lines.

The Defense of Poland also does not skimp when it comes to the German tank losses. "...up to 5 September some [German] armoured divisions lost as much as 28 per cent...up to 16 September we arrive at the total of 1400 tanks" [knocked out]."⁵¹⁴ These numbers are supported

⁵¹¹ M. Norwid-Neugebauer, *The Defense of Poland*, (London, United Kingdom: M. I. Kolin, 1942), 228.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

by the German records. Most German tank divisions had indeed taken grievous casualties in the first days of the war, and total German tank losses amounted to 850.⁵¹⁵ When considering that the 850 only includes those tanks which were un-repairable, the Polish kill claim of 1400 appears to be accurate. This imparts a very different view of the success of the German Panzerkorps in Poland. Rather than effecting easy victories, they were slaughtered, with nearly 75% of the tanks committed to Poland being knocked out at some point in combat, and nearly 50% permanently destroyed. The author goes further, to note that, given these losses, and the state of the German fuel supply (over one half their initial reserve had been depleted), “[Poland] could have gone on fighting for a long time if it had not been treacherously stabbed in the back from the east.”⁵¹⁶ Thus, the Russian attack, rather than being inconsequential as poised in the West Point document, is in fact crucial to the Polish defeat. Unable to hold the Vistula line with the sudden attack from behind, having to scrap long held plans for a further fall-back position (the Romanian Bridgehead), and with no help in the offing from her erstwhile “allies,” Poland was doomed to fall.

Unlike the war time allied delusions, *The Defense of Poland* offers a contrasting point of view that at least attempts to bring in the Polish side of events. Despite this, it was shunted to the sidelines and forgotten; the delusions and mythos outweighing any argument or factual evidence the author developed. The reason may have to do with the author himself – General Dywizji Mieczyslaw Norwid-Neugebauer – a Pole. Originally posted as Chief of the Polish Military Mission to England in 1939, he had watched from the sidelines in London as Poland fell,

⁵¹⁵ Fritz Hahn, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen des deutschen Heeres 1933–1945, Polen 1939* (Koblenz, Germany: Monch, 1986).

⁵¹⁶ Norwid-Neugebauer, 200.

desperately pleading for the British to do something, to no avail.⁵¹⁷ His book was a response to the propaganda and verbose rhetoric which emanated from England, that Poland could not have been saved, that her army had been crushed, and that the German Panzers had cut through Polish cavalry like butter. Norwid-Neugebauer was ignored however, as he was a Pole. Already unwilling to bother with the Polish account of the campaign, the Western Allies were not about to be lectured to about tactics and history by an upstart Polish general, who had already caused them so much trouble during the campaign. Norwid-Neugebauer felt this deeply – one of the last lines in the book, referencing the collapse of the BEF and French Army in 1940, was simply: “The lesson of the Polish campaign had not been learnt.”⁵¹⁸ Nor was it after. The felt realities of the Polish campaign were much more fashionable, much more *real* than what a Polish voice could offer.

Shirer Plays Historian

Throughout his career with CBS, William Shirer’s employment had been tied to the support and friendship he engendered with Edward R. Murrow, the famed radio broadcaster who had organized the world-wide reporting of the Second World War for CBS. Shirer was a founding member of ‘Murrow’s Boys,’ a group of journalists and broadcasters scattered across the European continent reporting in live broadcasts. Indeed, even after his return home in 1940, Shirer soon found himself reporting again for CBS throughout the wartime and post-war years, culminating with coverage of the Nuremberg trials. But a falling out with Murrow in 1947 quickly turned catastrophic, as Shirer lost his job, and eventually his ability to find any gainful

⁵¹⁷ Nicholas Bethell, *The War Hitler Won: The Fall of Poland, 1939* (United States: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 115.

⁵¹⁸ Norwid-Neugebauer, 225.

employment as he was caught up in the Red Scare, being named by *Red Channels* as a Communist sympathizer.⁵¹⁹ Soon, Shirer was selling “stories to magazines and [being] paid for speaking engagements, but there was far too little money to keep [his] family going. He hoped to find a way back into radio or the new medium of television, but nothing materialized.”⁵²⁰ Soon, Shirer would be forced, by financial obligations, to attempt what he posited as a modest venture – a history of the Third Reich, and Adolf Hitler, just a decade and a half after the end of the Second World War.

The publication of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in 1960 became, for Shirer, a dizzying success far exceeding his initial expectations for the work. From an initial run of just 12,500 copies, it exploded into the mainstream, winning the National Book Award and selling millions of copies (indeed, it remains in print to this day).⁵²¹ Shirer’s attempt to breach the line between journalist and historian seemed successful – he had mined his connections in Europe to gain interviews and access to archives and documents in Germany, France, and Britain, and combined this with captured documents and notes presented during the Nuremberg trial to present, for Shirer, the most comprehensive history of the Third Reich that had been written to date.⁵²² However, not was all as it would have seemed to graduate students just learning the craft of history or the many armchair readers of history. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* implanted into public consciousness a history of the Third Reich that reused similar narrative arcs and characterizations found in Shirer’s earlier *Berlin Diary* and continues the casual

⁵¹⁹ Cuthbertson, 371.

⁵²⁰ Wick, 230.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

dissemination of the September Campaign's myths that Shirer had begun inculcating in his 1939 broadcasts.

Reading the research notes for *Rise and Fall*, one gets a real taste of the deficiencies in Shirer's research for this, his magnum opus. Being a journalist first and foremost, Shirer neglects to pursue multiple angles and alternative viewpoints of the September Campaign, relying on German sources to carry the bulk of the story of the Invasion of Poland. In his outline and research notes, he writes "Here, briefly on Pol[ish] Campaign...see [Halder's⁵²³] diary."⁵²⁴ This he supplements with his personal diary entries, and this combination forms the entire basis for his chapter on the Fall of Poland. Indeed, there is little else – no attempt is made to contact a member of the Polish government or military during 1939, or to read any one of the many publications proffered by Poles living in exile in England, France, and America by the 1950s. Shirer could easily have contacted any one of hundreds of generals, officers, and political officials who had witnessed first-hand the German invasion. Yet, Shirer did not – there was, by this point, no need – given the accepted historiographical consensus established by the many contemporaneous eminent historians on the Second World War.

By 1960, the general thesis of a quick, lightning run through Poland that was over in a couple weeks, if not a couple days, had by and large inundated the academic field. Propagated by luminaries including Winston Churchill himself in his landmark series, *The Second World War*, the idea of Polish cavalry charging forth in a Don Quixote-like attack into swarms of German tanks had long been established as factual, regardless of any reality, or the protests from

⁵²³ *Generaloberst* Franz Halder was Chief of Staff of the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (Army High Command) from 1938-1942.

⁵²⁴ William L. Shirer, "Rise and Fall of the Third Reich Research Notes," Box #114, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW.

the Polish military communities.⁵²⁵ Thanks to war-time propaganda and media, this version of events had become so heavily romanticized it simply could *not* be false, it matched too well into the story arcs that men like Shirer crafted to explain allied failures and Nazi successes of the early years of the Second World War. The Polish Campaign *had* to remain a quick walkover, an exploratory tale of hubris and bravery approaching ludicrousness that neatly capped a half a decade of compromise with Hitler. This was an arc long established by Shirer himself with his *Berlin Diary*, and one he would use to even greater effect with *Rise and Fall*, as he would offer the reader the romanticization Shirer had long hinted.

Shirer's initial draft manuscript for "Chapter 18, The Fall of Poland" is heavily edited, which reveals Shirer's progression from initial reticence to full embracing of the meme. Indeed, at some point during the editing and revising, an entire half paragraph is crossed out – whether by Shirer or his editor, one cannot say.⁵²⁶ However, its content is revealing, it was a first trial run at the romanticization of the Polish cavalry charge. Calling the Poles "brave, valiant, and fool-hardy," this deleted half-paragraph recycles much of the narrative Shirer had called upon throughout his broadcasts and *Berlin Diary*, including the "racing forward" of German panzers, the "pounding...with the Stuka dive bomber" and the incredible speed of a vast army on motorized wheels."⁵²⁷ ⁵²⁸ Following this deleted half-paragraph, Shirer expounds on of the utter annihilation of the Polish Air Force within "48 hours" and the quick arrival of 4th Panzer to the

⁵²⁵ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 443.

⁵²⁶ Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* Original Manuscript.

⁵²⁷ Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* Original Manuscript, Chapter 18, 1005.

⁵²⁸ The German army was, in fact barely motorized at all (only ~10% of the entire military) – yet another myth to come out of the September Campaign and the Second World War as a whole. (R. L. DiNardo, *Mechanized Juggernaut or Military Anachronism? Horses and the German Army of World War II*. (New York City, New York: Greenwood, 1991).)

gates of Warsaw.⁵²⁹ Only in a few spots is any hint of Polish resistance noted, specifically the “Warsaw triangle” and a pocket “near Posen,” while the rest of the Polish military collapsed in an inevitable haste. “In one week the Polish Army had been vanquished. Most of its 35 divisions – all that there had been time to mobilize – had either been shattered or caught in vast pincers...tightening the noose around the dazed and disorganized Polish...”⁵³⁰ Yet, even this revision would pale in comparison to the final hyper-romantic account Shirer goes forward with:

Horses against tanks! The cavalryman’s long lance against the tank’s long cannon! Brave and valiant and fool-hardy though they were, the Poles were simply overwhelmed by the German onslaught. This was their---and the world’s---first experience of the Blitzkrieg: the sudden surprise attack; the fighter planes and bombers roaring overhead, reconnoitering, attacking, spreading flame and terror; the Stukas screaming as they dove; the tanks, whole divisions of them, breaking through and thrusting forward thirty or forty miles in a day; self-propelled, rapid firing heavy guns rolling forty miles an hour down even the rutty Polish roads, the incredible speed of even the infantry, of the whole vast army of a million and a half men on motorized wheels, directed and coordinating through a maze of electronic communications consisting of intricate radio, telephone and telegraphic networks. This was a monstrous, mechanized juggernaut such as the earth had never seen.⁵³¹

Here, at last, was the hyper-romantic war that Shirer had so hinted at, the overwhelming of Poland that so matched and supported the narrative arc that Shirer had developed in his work. It was a combination of myths and falsehoods that still, at this time, many other eminent historians of his time accepted and repeated in their writings. There was no reason for Shirer to question these myths, and so he did not pry any deeper than he needed to support the story he wished to tell. Yet by failing to dig deeper, to pry into the writings of the Polish witnesses to these events, Shirer unwittingly supported the continued propagation and cementation of these

⁵²⁹ Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* Original Manuscript, Chapter 18, 1005.

⁵³⁰ Shirer, insert 1006; Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 625.

⁵³¹ Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* Original Manuscript, Chapter 18, insert 1005-a.

myths into popular consciousness and historiography. The popularity of his book alone helped ensure the myth's survival in historiography and the public mindset for decades to come.

Following on his success, Shirer continued to write, publishing just nine years later another comprehensive history, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, a companion piece to *Rise and Fall* which was meant to analyze and come to grips with the reasons the French Third Republic had crumbled, against all expectations, in the face of the Nazi invasion. Yet here, Shirer remains true to his diligent (or lack thereof) research techniques. In the brief section covering the start of the war, Shirer touches on the September Campaign, lifting much of the text from *Rise and Fall*. Curiously, where in *Rise and Fall* the Poles held out for a week, this time Poland is “vanquished in eight days.”⁵³² His research notes are even more threadbare, but hold a curious note, that would appear in *Collapse*, stating “Failure to study lessons Polish campaign.”⁵³³ This would be somewhat expanded in the actual published text, “German blitzkrieg tactics...had quickly overwhelmed the Polish troops. This was new. It marked a revolution in warfare. But the lessons were not learned.”⁵³⁴ Shirer, however, failed to heed his own advice – like the French, he too failed to learn from the campaign in Poland due to his reliance, and acceptance, of German propaganda and the mythos that he himself helped established as dogma within the history of the campaign. It paired too perfectly to the reality he felt, the reality he wished others to feel.

William Shirer's final 'historical' work (essentially a memoir) was the *20th Century Journey*, which would eventually span three volumes published in 1976, 1984, and 1990. It was,

⁵³² William L Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, 519.

⁵³³ William L Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic Research Notes*, Box #42, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW.

⁵³⁴ Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, 533. Indeed, this mirrored the opinion of Neugebauer in *The Defense of Poland*, “The lesson of the Polish campaign had not been learnt.”- Neugebauer, 225.

in many respects, a retrospective version of *Berlin Diary*, looking back on all the history he had witnessed throughout his long career. The second volume, *The Nightmare Years*, was published in 1984 and dealt specifically with the period between 1930 and 1940, encapsulating neatly the rise of the Nazis to their peak of power on the European continent, and ending with Shirer's escape to neutral Switzerland and eventually home to the United States at the end of 1940.⁵³⁵ Much as with *Rise and Fall*, the book instantly became a best seller, the story arcs and narratives that Shirer had spent over 40 years cultivating and burnishing remained just as riveting as when they had first been published. The September Campaign, of course, remained a focal point of the narrative, the singular moment where the world was finally plunged into warfare for years to come, marking the ascendancy of Nazi Germany in Europe.⁵³⁶

In this memoir, Shirer's pre-war preconceived biases against the Poles previously seen within the published diary pages pour out. Indeed, Shirer himself freely admits to them. In his research notes, he specifically references the air show and talks with Polish officers he wrote about in *Berlin Diary*, stating "A week in Poland convinced me that the Poles were in no shape to withstand a German onslaught."⁵³⁷ This is expanded upon greatly, to nearly an entire page, as he questions "But did its High Command intend to commit horses against tanks? The Polish troops I saw seemed confident – over confident, I thought."⁵³⁸ Shirer is foreshadowing, of course, providing the reader the basis for what he will describe when he reaches the campaign itself. Even his editor was clear on the approach Shirer was to take with this last stab at the writing of history and memoir, reminding Shirer of Francis Grierson's *The Valley of Shadows*:

⁵³⁵ William L Shirer, *The Nightmare Years*, xiv-xv.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁵³⁷ William L Shirer, *The Nightmare Years Research Notes*, Box #171, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW.

⁵³⁸ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years*, 386.

The Coming of the Civil War, and that “We feel in Grierson that a great moment of history has lived itself through him. YOU should do this with your German section.”⁵³⁹ Other notations implore Shirer to have his characters organized properly, the historical actors who will, like actors on stage, unfold the narratives that Shirer constructs around the history they each play a role in.⁵⁴⁰

His research, as well, falls back on tried-and-true methods. In his outline notes, the Polish Campaign is, soberly, woefully under played. Where *Rise and Fall* at least offered some attempt, some basic ability to research even a biased point of view, *The Nightmare Years* makes no such offering. The line is simple: “Polish campaign. (See bdcasts).”⁵⁴¹ Shirer has looped back to the very genesis of the myth – Shirer is circularly reporting himself:

At one point, while racing east across the Corridor, an armored division of Guderian’s had been attacked by the famous[!]⁵⁴² Polish Pomorska Brigade of horse cavalry. A few days later I saw what mincemeat he had made of it. The bodies of a thousand horses or so were still rotting along the roadside and across the adjoining fields. The remains of hundreds of dismounted men had been hastily buried near by.⁵⁴³

He then lifts, yet again, from *Rise and Fall*, repeating the line of “Horses against tanks!” and commenting on how the Polish foolhardiness “pitted the old horse cavalry against the new cavalry of steel.”⁵⁴⁴ Yet again, the reader is met with a romantic story, a charge of hundreds, if not thousands of brave yet tragically foolish Polish cavalymen, a relic from a by-gone era charging by lance and sword into mechanized modernity to be snuffed out like so many candles.

⁵³⁹ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years* Research Notes, Editor’s Note.

⁵⁴⁰ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years* Research Notes, German Journal.

⁵⁴¹ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years* Outline, Box #170, William L. Shirer Papers, George T. Henry College Archives, Stewart Memorial Library, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IW, German Journal.

⁵⁴² Being that the *Pomorska* Cavalry Brigade had only been in existence since 1937, this seems a case of further alliteration on Shirer’s part.

⁵⁴³ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years*, 457

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

It remains the focal point of the campaign – while the usual myths of Polish collapse and annihilation in a few days, maybe a week, continue to exist, Shirer again drives home the point with a mythic charge on German tanks.

William Shirer’s attempt to achieve acceptance within the historical discipline was met with mixed reactions by established historians. While in the United States he would be looked down upon by many in academia unwilling to, as Shirer put it, accept “former journalists breaking into their sacred field,” he met incredibly welcoming reactions in Europe, as French and British historians alike reveled in the attention given to their nations in his writings.⁵⁴⁵ His histories had all the solid academic hallmarks of well researched and well analyzed archivally sourced materials. Meanwhile, his lack of Polish sources was certainly not a noteworthy hinderance, given the general acceptance at the time of the various myths related to the campaign and the biases exhibited in the academic field, both in American and in Europe, towards the Polish exiles.⁵⁴⁶ Yet, what made Shirer’s work even more important would be their effect on mass public consciousness regarding the Second World War. His wide readership spread into every facet of American life, even leading to a made-for-TV series covering *The Nightmare Years*.⁵⁴⁷ In 1941, Shirer had first stepped into the limelight of American culture with the publication of *Berlin Diary*. With his post-war writings, Shirer had secured for himself his place on stage with the luminaries of American history.

From Canon to Meme

This version of events was accepted as canonical throughout the Western world. It was a

⁵⁴⁵ Shirer, *The Collapse of Third Republic*, 993.

⁵⁴⁶ Biskupski, *Hollywood’s War with Poland*; Norwid-Neugebauer, *The Defense of Poland*.

⁵⁴⁷ *The Nightmare Years*, “Parts 1-4.” Directed by Anthony Page, Written by Ian Curteis, Turner Network Television, September 17, 1989. Curiously, it premiered on the 40th anniversary of the Soviet Invasion of Poland.

romantic mythos, a cherished delusion that not only gave into the romance of the mechanized juggernaut, but also supported British and French rationalization of their defeats. It confirmed western stereotypes and was fully supported by the German accounts. In yet another publication, an author writes of only “200 German tanks [destroyed], about 10 percent of the total number deployed.” a figure far below German and Polish estimates.⁵⁴⁸ Even Norman Davies, the esteemed English historian of Poland, was seduced by the mythos. In his first book, *White Eagle Red Star*, on the Polish-Soviet War, he writes, “...on September 9th when on the Prussian frontier the Polish uhlans charged into Guderian’s tanks in exactly the same heroic manner that they had charged into the Konarmiya.... This time the result was catastrophic.”⁵⁴⁹ Davies, brought up with a traditional English public-school education, had been thoroughly educated in the mythos. Eventually, as new information leaked out of German archives, especially related to their losses in 1939, and accounts of the Polish cavalry began to filter into the media, the tone of the meme repeated by Davies begins to change. The supporters of this meme were beginning to find themselves on the defensive, but still unwilling to surrender it totally.

To follow how this cherished delusion morphed with the increasing availability of new information, one can track the telling of the Polish Cavalry Charge myth by historians. Nine years after Davies’ own acceptance and recounting of the myth, he next published *God’s Playground*, the seminal English language history of Poland. Here, his tone sees a revealing change. Gone is the foolish Polish cavalry charge on tanks. It is replaced with a seemingly more convincing argument:

Every popular history of the campaign paints the picture of the ‘brave but foolish’ Polish uhlans charging the German Panzers on horseback. It even happens to contain a grain of truth. In one or two places, isolated squadrons of Polish cavalry found themselves

⁵⁴⁸ Robin Havers, *World War II: Europe 1939-1943*, (New York: Rosen Group, 2003), 42.

⁵⁴⁹ Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20*, (New York: St. Martin’s, 1972), 270.

surprised by tanks and, despite their orders to the contrary, did try to fight their way out in the traditional fashion.⁵⁵⁰

The storyline has shifted. No longer are the Poles charging bravely into the German tanks, they are now simply panicked soldiers trying to fight their way through to escape. As time further passes and the Cold War ends, bringing to light thousands upon thousands of Polish military records, the storyline shifts yet again. In his 2006 book, *No Simple Victory*, Davies offers again a slightly further evolved tale of events. Rather than isolated incidents, Davies speaks only of a single incident, on the 9th of September, when a Polish cavalry regiment attempts to charge through encircling German tanks, only to be “cut to pieces by tank fire.”⁵⁵¹ No citation is given for the incident, and Davies goes so far as to say that the Poles enjoyed the myth, “because it confirmed their age-old reputation for reckless bravery,”⁵⁵² apparently ignoring that the world generally finds the idea of cavalry charging tanks to be less brave and more idiotic. Davies is in essence providing confirmation of the ‘dumb Pollack’ stereotype.

The myth, however, alters yet one more time. In her 2012 book on Poland in the Second World War, Halik Kochanski, a Polish-British historian, updates the ‘Charge at Krojanty’, the classic example of the ‘Polish Charge on Tanks.’ While she is willing to note that no charge on tanks was planned, she still presents the charge as suicidal, with the Polish cavalry being slaughtered shortly after forcing a group of German infantry to flee.⁵⁵³ Still it is a twisting of the reality, as the Polish cavalry actually cut the German infantry to ribbons and were only surprised

⁵⁵⁰ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland: Volume II: 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 325.

⁵⁵¹ Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939-1945*, (New York: Viking, 2006), 77-78.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 78

⁵⁵³ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 63.

by German armoured cars whilst reorganizing, collecting POWs, and preparing to leave.⁵⁵⁴ This exercise in untwining a single thread of the myth offers unique insight on the ‘cherished delusions’ of the Polish campaign. From the weak Polish opposition to the easy victories of the invincible Panzer spearheads, the supporters of those delusions are often forced to defend them by offering concessions but still trying to keep intact the heart of the meme – that the German Blitzkrieg in Poland was an easy victory – when the campaign was, in fact, a bloody nose for the Germans, in which victory came more from superiority in numbers, as well as a Soviet invasion.⁵⁵⁵ Although German victory was never in question thanks to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the rapidity of that victory led to the campaign being seen as a quintessential case of Blitzkrieg, and the future campaign in France as simply an extension of that victory.

As such, military historians demonstrated an inability to mesh *Weltanschauung* and Germanic ideology into an understanding of the German invasion of Poland. In operational studies such as *Poland Betrayed: The Nazi-Soviet Invasions of 1939*, David G. Williamson offers little in addition to this methodology. While willing to crack open various myths of Polish backwardness, Williamson still ignores much of the Wehrmacht’s role in implementing Nazi racial policy in Poland.⁵⁵⁶ Even the brief section on prisoners of war during the campaign does little to rectify this issue, as Williamson states Polish prisoners of war “had an easier time” when compared to those who fell into Russian hands, and his only example of a Polish prisoner involves one who was “initially treated very well.”⁵⁵⁷ In the spirit of what Smelser and Davies term in their *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*

⁵⁵⁴ Koskodan, 23-24.

⁵⁵⁵ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*.

⁵⁵⁶ David G. Williamson, *Poland Betrayed: The Nazi Soviet Invasions of 1939*, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2011), 166-7.

⁵⁵⁷ Williamson, 158.

as “romancers,” studies like Williamson’s and others seek to only understand the operational and tactical nuances of the campaign, rather than form a cohesive interpretation of the invasion with the rest of Nazi policy.⁵⁵⁸ Studies of Polish and German tanks do little to address the reality of Wehrmacht culpability in the Holocaust in Poland, and only obfuscate the reasons for the invasion in the first place. Even when authors mention the war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht, they do so with seeming hesitation, repeatedly noting that such crimes were not endorsed by the Wehrmacht’s high command and going to lengths in comparing German racial based crimes in Poland to the crimes committed by Polish soldiers against prisoners of war and German civilians.⁵⁵⁹ Such interpretations simply do not stand up to close scrutiny, and act to further romanticize the Wehrmacht as a clean organization that sought to maintain a clean war in the face of unruly soldiers, while holding the SS at arm’s length.

In recent decades, a new crop of authors steadily rolled back these memes. Often outsiders, Polish historians, or new revisionist historians, they have chipped away heavily to expose the reality of the 1939 campaign. In *Hitler Strikes Poland*, Alexander B. Rossino offers a comprehensive rebuttal to the plethora of operational and tactical histories of the campaign. Relying heavily on archival record groups and extensive secondary sourcing, Rossino categorically shows how the Wehrmacht willfully and enthusiastically took part in a racial war of extermination in Poland. He ties this willfulness into the overarching social and cultural ideologies of the day, showing how “frequent calls in Germany for a renewed ‘Push to the East’ against the Poles perpetuated the notion that ethnic conflict on Germany’s eastern frontier was a

⁵⁵⁸ David R. Higgins, *Panzer II vs T-34: Poland 1939*, (New York City, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2015); Jamie Prenatt, *Polish Armor of the Blitzkrieg*, (New York City, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2015).

⁵⁵⁹ Richard Hargreaves, *Blitzkrieg Unleashed: The German Invasion of Poland, 1939*, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2008), 238-9.

constant fact of life.”⁵⁶⁰ Such calls permeated German society and helped draw both the generalship and average soldier into a voluntary role in the subjugation and extermination of a Poland filled with a “base and animalistic...undeserving of equal treatment of respect” people.⁵⁶¹ Such propaganda and cultural mythos only served to allow the rampant abuse and racial extermination that took place during the German invasion – an invasion marked by full Wehrmacht support and aide for the expulsion and extermination of Poland’s Jewry and the Polish people themselves.⁵⁶²

Another early revisionist perspective of the Polish Campaign is *No Greater Ally*, by Kenneth Koskodan. Rather than focusing on the strategic affairs and equipment specificities that Mosier thrives on, Koskodan offered a unique look at the Polish view of the 1939 campaign. He offers up tales of heroic Polish stands such as Mokra, Narew, and Mława, and gives the impression that, far from disorganized and “flooding” to the rear as Hoepner would have it, the Poles were simply fighting a desperate battle for their nation, and only giving ground after making the Germans pay for it with fields of destroyed tanks and downed planes.⁵⁶³ Koskodan, like Mosier, comes to the conclusion that the Polish defeat was not any tactical or combat superiority of the Panzer Division; it was the same ineptitude of the western allies and the attack by the USSR to the east.⁵⁶⁴ In the end, these recent post-war histories highlight the battle between new revisionists and an old guard willing to concede small points in hopes of saving the heartland of their cherished delusion – specifically the myth of the invincible Panzerkorps in

⁵⁶⁰ Rossino, 224.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 225.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 232-3.

⁵⁶³ Koskodan, 41.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

Poland – the old guard historians fighting a strategic withdrawal much like the Poles in 1939. Having gone unquestioned for 40 years after the war, the de-classification of the Polish archives gave new historians the chance to reopen a historical event that was felt to be closed.⁵⁶⁵ The revision proves that the Panzer division in 1939, far from invincible, was in fact incredibly fragile and that it was only through constant self-delusion that they were able to leave to posterity the myth of their effectiveness. In turn, the failure of Panzer division officers to confess defeat when it happened obscured the viewpoint and prevented historians from clearly seeing a Poland as a complex and difficult campaign, giving cover to western militaries to explain away their defeats in 1940 and 41.

While academic journals and scholarly books may be the primary medium in which historians communicate to one another, to reach the general public remains a trickier task. While reading history remains a popular pastime, much of the focus for the general audience is in what one historian has termed ‘Dad History’, in other words, “a genre of history, almost entirely in book form, written for your average dad, but particularly designed for American men older than 50.”⁵⁶⁶ Instead, media entertainment acts as a reliable way to imbue, consciously and

⁵⁶⁵ Recent publications that have rejected the standard meme of the Polish Campaign include, but are not limited to, Roger Moorhouse, *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939*, (London, United Kingdom: The Bodley Head, 2019) and *Poland 1939: The Outbreak of World War II*, (New York City, New York: Basic Books, 2020); Andrew Rawson, *Poland’s Struggle: Before, During, and After the Second World War*, (Barnsley, United Kingdom: Pen & Sword Military, 2019); Evan McGilvray, *Poland and the Second World War, 1938-1945*, (Barnsley, United Kingdom: Pen & Sword Military, 2019); and Robert Forczyk, *Case White: The Invasion of Poland 1939*, (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019). All follow the similar *idée fixe* of analyzing a lesser understood campaign, debunking many of the memes of the Polish campaign, and interlacing German atrocities in Poland into the campaign itself, including the many mass executions of Polish Prisoners of War and civilians by the Wehrmacht during the campaign.

⁵⁶⁶ Michael J. Douma, “‘What is Dad History’? Giving a Label to a Popular Genre of History Writing,” <https://michaeldouma.com/2020/07/05/what-is-dad-history-giving-a-label-to-a-popular-genre-of-history-writing/> (Accessed 5 July, 2020). He goes on to note that “Dad History is a genre of history that sells millions of books a year. And yet, there is, as far as I can tell, no academic history class, no dissertation, not even a published peer-reviewed article devoted to understanding Dad History as a phenomenon.” An interesting field for further research on cultural interaction with history, and how it affects modern discourse on revisionism!

subconsciously, the viewing public with “history,” especially when it is used subtly to enforce preconceived ‘felt’ realities. Famously, the movie “Gods and Generals” promulgated the Lost Cause, without explicitly stating such, through its portrayal of General Jackson’s relationship with his servant and, by cinematic omission of slaves in the Confederate camps, falsely suggested a *dearth* of slaves in the Confederate Army.⁵⁶⁷

In the years since 1939, entertainment media rarely covered or even touched upon the Polish Campaign. One could justify ignoring the “short” campaign in favour of the ‘bigger’ war on the Eastern Front, so most war gaming and movies focus on Operation Barbarossa, the North Africa Campaign, and Normandy/Battle of the Bulge.⁵⁶⁸ Movies were largely nationality based, with the only films documenting the Polish campaign releasing in Communist Poland, heavily propagandized, and inlaid with pro-Communist messaging. One of the most famous, *Lotna*, even included a stirring Polish Cavalry charge with lances, sabers, and bugles blaring, which is promptly annihilated by German tanks, driving their treads over the dead horses in a climactic crushing of Polish resistance by German modernity.⁵⁶⁹ Another, *Westerplatte*, covering the eponymous battle, erased the actions of the hero of the battle, Captain Franciszek Dąbrowski due to his szlachta origins, in favour of the Major Henryk Sucharski, who was, while nominally in command, unconscious and delirious through most of the battle. Sucharski, however, was of

⁵⁶⁷ “...the film depicts slaves as generally happy, vaguely desiring freedom at some future date, but faithful and supportive of their beloved masters and the cause of the Confederacy. Slaveholders in the film treat their slaves like family or better, and the slaves reciprocate by doing their best to protect their masters’ property from the invading Yankees. The many thousand times more numerous slaves who eagerly sought freedom and aided Union soldiers are invisible in *Gods and Generals*. Echoing pro-Confederate claims since the war itself, the movie represents the South as being uniquely and sincerely Christian, while the North has at most a vague spirituality. Once again, *Gods and Generals* presents a skewed depiction of history through judicious omission.” Steven E. Woodworth, “Gods and Generals” *The Journal of American History*, Vol 90, no 3, (2003).

⁵⁶⁸ Smelser and Davies, 190-200.

⁵⁶⁹ *Lotna*, Directed by Andrzej Wajda.

peasant extract, and therefore more befitting a hero role than Dąbrowski.⁵⁷⁰

It is only recently that the Polish Campaign only received a new wave of movies, as anniversaries and greater film production in Poland proper led to a reexamination of the Polish Campaign and Second World War in Polish cinema. In 2007, *Katyn* was released to much acclaim, as it dealt with the open sore of the Katyn Massacre in Poland, its focus largely drawing on the act of remembering, as survivors of the victim's families grapple with learning of their fates and holding on to their names and memory through both German and Soviet occupation, right through to the end of the Cold War.⁵⁷¹ The massacre is not revealed until the final sequence of the film, leaving the viewer with a strong survivors guilt, despite knowing the inevitability of their deaths. *The Battle of Westerplatte*, meanwhile, received a refreshing take, as *Tajemnica Westerplatte* (The Secret of Westerplatte, or 1939 Battle of Westerplatte internationally) addressed the erasure of Dąbrowski, showcasing him as a hero who led the defense bravely, while not ignoring Sucharski's role in the battle's beginning and closure.⁵⁷² Indeed, the movie caused controversy in Poland, as it depicted a few Polish soldiers as deserting and being executed, with some nationalist Polish historians dismissing the movie as "offensive to the dignity and honour of Polish soldiers."⁵⁷³ Thus, even now, Poles themselves fight with their felt realities of the war, wishing to only see Polish soldiers as brave, self-sacrificing heroes, rather than as flawed human beings.

Consequently, the wide acceptance of various clean Wehrmacht myths encouraged

⁵⁷⁰ *Westerplatte broni się nadal*, Directed by Stanisław Różewicz

⁵⁷¹ *Katyn*, Directed by Andrzej Wajda, Written by Andrzej Wajda and Przemysław Nowakowski, Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2009.

⁵⁷² *Tajemnica Westerplatte*, Directed by Paweł Chochlew, Written by Paweł Chochlew, eOne and Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, 2013.

⁵⁷³ "'Tajemnica Westerplatte' filmem antypolskim?" *Stopklatka.pl*, August 26, 2015, <https://stopklatka.pl/wydarzenia/wydarzenie.asp?wi=48267> (Accessed February 12, 2023).

collections of amateur military historians to fetishize the Wehrmacht, exploring all hobbyist aspects possible from technical data to losses to hero worship of specific soldiers.⁵⁷⁴ They ate up popular accounts from generals and privates alike, war-gamed as Rommel in Africa or Manstein in Russia in attempts to ‘win the war’ without the overbearing orders from Hitler.⁵⁷⁵ In doing so, they refused to examine the greater historical context of the German invasion, much less the reality of the Wehrmacht’s war crimes, writing the Holocaust and the Wehrmacht’s responsibility out of their felt realities. It would only be with the rise of modern historiographical treatment of the Polish campaign and the rejection of the Myth of the Good Wehrmacht that war gaming and computer gaming would shift – drastically so – either to accepting these revisions and including them in the gaming narratives, or to outright rejecting any historical accuracy and seeking to commercialize the conflict without *any* attempt show the realities of the war for fear of offense, political backfire, and to widen their demographics.⁵⁷⁶ This duly has led to a separation in the gaming world, between niche, indie, well researched, historically accurate gaming, and mass-market AAA games which no longer even pay lip service to history.⁵⁷⁷ Accordingly, one of the primary manners in which current generations interact with history has improved for some, but largely dumbed down history for the majority.

⁵⁷⁴ Smelser and Davies, 201-10.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 191, 196.

⁵⁷⁶ Yussef Cole, “Call of Duty: Vanguard Continues the Trend of Mythmaking and Tokenization,” *Polygon*, <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/22776800/call-of-duty-vanguard-review-single-player-ps5-xbox-series-x-pc> (Accessed 13 November, 2023).

⁵⁷⁷ Matthew S. Palmer, Historical Advisor, *Forgotten Hope 2* (2009-2023) Modification of Battlefield 2 (2005): DICE, Stockholm, Sweden; Matthew S. Palmer, Historical Advisor, *Verdun* (2015) *Tannenberg* (2017), *Izonso*, (2022): M2H & Blackmill Games, London, United Kingdom.

Shattered *Szabla*, Broken *Kopia*

In 2009, David Stone, a former British staff officer cum amateur military historian, published the book *Hitler's Army, 1939-1945: The Men, Machines and Organization*. In it, he related a short history of the Polish campaign, including an anecdotal story of an anonymous Panzer soldier:

[He] recalled seeing one officer charge up to one of the vehicles in his squadron, rise up in his stirrups and give a vicious downward stroke with his sabre. This shattered in his hand and the Pole looked dumbfounded. Immediately he pulled out his pistol and fired several rounds at the Panzer, finally shooting himself, determined to die rather than surrender.⁵⁷⁸

To Stone, the story is true, the myth is irresistible, it *feels* real. The Polish cavalry officer's purported conduct has all the elements of great story telling from the ancient Greeks to the modern age, from medieval romances to Hollywood blockbusters; the romance of reckless bravado from a simpler era refusing to submit to the rote regimentation and machinery of modernity. Nevertheless, it is *myth*. Stone finishes his one-page description of the invasion by enumerating that the Germans lost only "217 tanks," repeating yet another component of the enduring myth of German armoured success, one which dismisses Polish resistance as effectively moot.⁵⁷⁹

Following the end of World War II, a storm of writing was produced by those who had participated in it, each hoping to offer up their interpretation of just what had happened to humanity during those terrifying years. German generals sought to exculpate themselves from the crimes of the Nazi regime, PK-Reporters hoped to portray themselves as mere adventurers documenting war in the manner of journalists like Clare Hollingworth.⁵⁸⁰ Luminaries such as

⁵⁷⁸ Stone, 28.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁸⁰ Uziel, 393, 397.

Churchill and Shirer hoped, through their connection to the great statements and decisions of the war, that their interpretations and realities would be accepted as canonical, as each tried to turn the 1930s and 40s into a single, grand opera, complete with its cast of characters, directors, producers, and musical numbers.⁵⁸¹ Films were rare, but focused on those narratives, as the new Polish Communist government sought to utilize the crushing of the Polish army to legitimize the new Communist government, twisting events to suit their own needs.

As young Churchill succinctly observed: “The statesman has to deal with events. The historian, who has merely to record them, may amuse his leisure by constructing policies, to explain instances of successful opportunism.”⁵⁸² Postwar historians were willing to accept the German Panzerkorps claims of easy victory because it fits centuries-old popular narratives, and their own ‘felt’ reality of what had occurred in September of 1939. At heart, historians are storytellers, and the mythos of the Polish Campaign made for too damn good a story, a meme that could be spun and retold time and again. This clinging to racial, colonial narratives deleted the voices of others, ignoring their already tenuous grasp to speech and resisting any attempt to move past the German view of the war in Poland. These memes slowly turned from mythos to a heavily cited source, a bulwark behind which German generals and journalists cum historians retreated to defend their work. Revising these notions does not destroy history – it acts to improve and alter our relation to it, setting aside romantic concepts and replacing them with deeper understanding of German imperialistic and colonial visions of Poland and the Second World War, as well as giving voice to those who had been denied it. In a time when the fear of ‘revisionism’ is growing in American political discourse, it is important to remember and understand not just where myths originate from, but how they travel with us for so long.

⁵⁸¹ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years* Research Notes, German Journal.

⁵⁸² Winston Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2010) 82.

CONCLUSION

A MYTHIC IDENTITY: QUEERING THE POLISH CAMPAIGN

History never repeats itself, but...it does rhyme.

- Mark Twain (Apocryphally)

Propaganda, Romance, Truth

In August 2021, Dr. Jan Grabowski, a famous, or infamous, historian of the Holocaust in Poland, won an appellate court ruling that overturned his conviction of defamation for his research and book, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*.⁵⁸³ It was a ruling which claimed to cement academic freedom in Poland, yet, it was devoid of any great celebration. Grabowski's work had been vilified within Poland, both by fellow historians and the ruling PiS Party, which viewed his attempt to explain and showcase the role common Poles had in the Holocaust as a libelistic attack on both Polish heroism and the Polish government. Indeed, such claims are not unknown in a Poland which, in recent years, has radicalized more and more in its embrace of the Second World War.⁵⁸⁴ While initially simply pushing back against the old Nazi narratives, this revision found itself moving from simple memorialization and commemoration of Polish units, battles, successes, and resistance, towards deifying the Polish state as one sacrificed on the alter of the Western Allies, betrayed, humiliated, its soldiers used to further the ends of England and the Soviet Union, before being left at the hands of Stalin and the Communists for decades.⁵⁸⁵ For academic freedom to survive,

⁵⁸³ Alan Charlish and Anna Wlodarczak-Semczuk, "Polish court orders historians to apologise over Holocaust book," *Reuters*, (February 9, 2021) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-holocaust-idUSKBN2A91M7> (Accessed 7/25/23).

⁵⁸⁴ Masha Gessen, "The Historians Under Attack for Exploring Poland's Role in the Holocaust," *The New Yorker*, (March 26, 2021).

⁵⁸⁵ Jan Grabowski, "The Holocaust and Poland's 'History Policy.'" *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* Vol 10, no 3, 2016, 481-486.

however, one must attempt to tread carefully these commemorations, lest one lose sight and fall into the same pitfalls of the past, substituting *Polish* mythos for *German* mythos. Polish resistance against the German was certainly valourous, yet it does not override understanding the issues of anti-Semitism and Empire which existed throughout the 2nd Polish Republic, from the queering and othering of Belorussia, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian minorities within the *Kresy* (the borderland region of Poland's East along the Soviet border), to the role anti-Semitism played in driving Polish support, tacit or complicit, for the Nazi genocide of Polish Jewry. The Poland of the inter-war period was an Imperial nation, just as it had been before the partitions, and attempting to solidify a Polish nation around memory of the Second World War can also serve to silence the voices of minority groups that fought for, or against, that very Polish nation.

Imperialistic structures, whether in Africa or Europe, were and are violent in nature, seeking to usurp local power structures, extract resources, and subjugate native inhabitants (if not outright assimilate/exterminate) in a deluded quest to 'civilize' and 'rationalize' what was foreign and queer to them. That violence, such as enforcing new clothes, new cultural standards, and new gender roles, could be resisted by "challeng[ing], subvert[ing], and rema[king]" those imperial structures to fit into their own sense of self, resulting in a never-ending battle between the colonizer and the colonized.⁵⁸⁶ In other cases, the queering was not placed on the natives, who were simply to be eliminated as pests, but the environment itself, seen as ripe for civilizing agriculture – untouched, virgin soil that only needed the honest soldier-settler and his family to work the plow and defend their homestead as both an economic boon *and* bulwark of the mother country.⁵⁸⁷ In this sense, the German memory and myth of Polish campaign is a form of

⁵⁸⁶ Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal*, 52.

⁵⁸⁷ Olúfẹ̀mí Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 28, 32, 38.

queering. Visions of ‘shabby’ Polish domiciles compared to ‘clean’ *Volksdeutsche* houses, Jews lurking in the shadows of murky alleys, in their filthy oriental Kaftan robes. The Pole’s anachronistic military use of cavalry (and ‘uncivilized, brutal’ edged weaponry) at a time when militaries were rapidly replacing horses with tanks. All this was non-normative to both the German and Western European viewpoint. Such mythic visions were duly presented in ‘queer’ formats as proof positive of the backwardness of Eastern Europe.

The racialized and imperial visions and memories of Germany centered around mythic traditions and communities, modernized under the Kaiserreich, and amenable to deeper radicalization. As Michael Geyer points out in “Some Hesitant Observations Concerning ‘Political Violence,’” territoriality, such as that seen in the propaganda of the Third Reich, can itself be analyzed as violence.⁵⁸⁸ The export of German co-op farms to Poland worked by Polish slaves, denotes a heightened violence and radicalization in fulfillment of Germany’s imperial vision. That violence, however, extends beyond the physical. Geyer argues that questions of violence have now moved to questions of power, leading to violence being more widely defined as both physical and non-physical acts of power, including the very making of myth as the narration of violence.⁵⁸⁹ By translating the violence of the Third Reich in Poland through memory and mythic tradition, that violence can be shown to be something beyond the physical or even the tangible, but reach into media, art, memory, and the ‘felt’ realities we construct on a daily basis to fit our own subjective world views. Research into film, photography, and other media accounts of the Polish Campaign do not merely elucidate how our memory was constructed – they give a pathway to understanding the violence of these actions when used to

⁵⁸⁸ Geyer, 701.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 707-8.

subordinate others and glorify the conquest of their spaces, even when those actions are undertaken with the best of intentions.⁵⁹⁰

Examining the photography and written accounts of the Polish Campaign through the eyes and lenses of German propagandists does more than simply show how the Nazis perverted their gaze to racialize and dehumanize their enemy – it demonstrates the crucial need to read between the lines between viewer and victim, to deal with how context and lack thereof can alter the comprehension of something so seemingly *true* as a photograph. Far from a mechanical, unthinking, evil beast, the Nazi regime was made up of human beings, who rationalized their descent into a horrible world view, internalized “logic” to its execution, individually acting as they saw fit to best relate that world view for a general audience at home.⁵⁹¹ The PK-Reporters and propagandists harnessed the power of photography, journalism, film, and even religious iconography for their own vision of politics based in German romanticist language and viewed the “well-being of the entire world as dependent on German victory.”⁵⁹² While the “Working Towards the Fuhrer” principle has often been applied to the more violent and genocidal portions of the Holocaust, the principle expanded to subsume everything from propaganda to military culture to material culture. This recognition offers historians new avenues towards understanding the Holocaust and genocide in general. Furthermore, the myths spun by the Nazis did not merely evaporate with the regime – they have a staying power rooted in the same racial,

⁵⁹⁰ Tallie, 187.

⁵⁹¹ Longerich, 304; Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011), 68.

⁵⁹² Klaus Vondung, “National Socialism as Political Religion and Apocalyptic World View,” *Politics, Order and History: Essays on the Work of Eric Voegelin*, (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), 95.

imperialistic dogmas that much of the ‘civilized’ world shared at the time and that continue to today.⁵⁹³

Far from an outlier, the Nazi regime, though certainly radicalizing method and ambition, rooted itself firmly in the traditions of other imperial powers, including flourishing democracies such as the United States.⁵⁹⁴ Thus, while the more radical policies could be dismissed, other, more ‘acceptable’ views matched and confirmed the felt realities of journalists and historians during and after the war. Even after social and cultural progression, certain aspects continued to ring true, as their racial undertones receded and the focus became on their *romance*, a bygone era’s last breath filled with heroic tales of modern warfare, a romance clamoured for by a public eager to hear about victorious Panzers rolling through the European continent.⁵⁹⁵ Studying the rise and fall of mythos, however, does more than simply encourage historians to debate the causes and methods of violence in the Nazi regime, or more broadly, in Imperialism and Totalitarianism in general.

The technological growth of the last 3 decades has greatly expanded how myth and memory interact with historical understanding, in manners which go largely unresearched and underdeveloped in the historical community. Where TV and magazines were previously the realm of pop-history, video games and internet memes have largely taken over, thanks to accessibility and interactivity.⁵⁹⁶ Shifting the discussion to new methodologies and paths of

⁵⁹³ Said, *Orientalism*, 334, 340.

⁵⁹⁴ Arnd Bauerkämper, “Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922-1939,” *East Central Europe* Vol 37 (2010), 223; Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 454.

⁵⁹⁵ Smelser and Davies, 248.

⁵⁹⁶ Anushka Kulkarni, “Internet Meme and Political Discourse: A Study on the Impact of Internet Meme as a Tool in Communicating Political Satire,” *Journal of Content, Community & Communication Amity School of Communication*, Vol. 6, Year 3, (June 2017).

research, to the development of the internet meme as a form of not just humour but messaging, view, and memory or the role video gaming is playing in historical awareness/education is not merely a side note, but a crucial step in cultural history.⁵⁹⁷ Where once games were dismissed as frivolous pursuits for children, they have centered themselves as cultural touchstones; appropriate for all genders and ages, and become a cornerstone of the Zeitgeist. To expand our understanding of memory, identity, and myth, means pushing cultural history forward into new horizons of culture, from how information travels on the internet, to the role memes now play in political debate, to how games on the Second World War have both helped and hurt education about the Holocaust. These are the manners in which current and future generations are interacting with history, and they cannot be dismissed.

The Journalist and the Charge

Pułkownik (Colonel) Kazimierz Mastalerz and his 18. Pułk Ułanów Pomorskich (18th Pomeranian Uhlan Regiment) had been in continuous combat since the early morning hours of September 1, 1939. Since the sudden onslaught by the Germans began, the cavalymen of the Pomorska Cavalry Brigade were growing exhausted with the day's unrelenting fighting, forced by the Polish Government's strategic decision to defend the indefensible out of fear that an uncontested occupation of the Polish Corridor would encourage French and British reticence to honor their common defense pact with Poland (Czechoslovakia and Lithuania's experiences less than a year before helped inform this decision.)⁵⁹⁸ Now, rather than being able to easily

⁵⁹⁷ Indeed, if as Raack pointed out, movies and film were the primary manner of digesting history for the public, and necessitated deeper understanding by historians, would not, given the popularity of video gaming as a modern art form, video games be a crucial area to expand that understanding? The proliferation of historical video games also brings back Myth of the Good Wehrmacht motifs, as the Holocaust and war crimes are rarely, if ever, represented in those historical games, especially ones where you may play *as* Nazi Germany.

⁵⁹⁸ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 20.

withdraw with the rest of the Polish Army to the fortified and defensible positions along the Vistula River in Central Poland, the Pomorska Brigade's duty was to harass and slow down the German advance – to buy time with their lives for the Polish infantry's escape from the expected German double-envelopment.⁵⁹⁹

Towards the end of the day, Col. Mastalerz himself led from the front, well acquainted with the necessities of command thanks to his experience in the First World War and the Polish Soviet War. A cavalryman for his entire length of service, he understood well the role of cavalry in modern warfare, and how few the opportunities for a traditional charge – as many would picture cavalry in combat – would present themselves. Indeed, lances had been removed as a standard weapon by 1938 – though some soldiers still chose to carry them, as some of Mastalerz's did at the start of the war.⁶⁰⁰ However, near the small hamlet of Krojanty, he was presented just that fortuitous opportunity – a singular best-case scenario that was one of the few situations where a cavalry charge was not only allowable, but demanded. Having led a battalion from his regiment of approximately 250 men and horses to an area near the *Tuchola* Forest while on a rearguard patrol that evening, Mastalerz likely would not have been able to believe his own eyes. Stretched out in a clearing just a couple hundred yards away was an entire German infantry battalion, seemingly unaware of the exposed nature of their position, without guards or machine guns posted to cover themselves. Col. Mastalerz immediately organized a charge – this was a situation that commanded rapid action above all else. For the first but not for the last time, Polish cavalry would charge into combat during the Second World War by lance and saber – and

⁵⁹⁹ Williamson, 82.

⁶⁰⁰ Steven Zaloga, *The Polish Army 1939-45*, London, UK: Osprey Publishing, 1982, 9.

would do so successfully.⁶⁰¹ Taken by surprise, and far removed from the Napoleonic era of infantry trained to calmly form square to repel cavalry, the green German infantrymen scattered, panicked by the sudden onslaught of cold steel. The charge was over almost as it began – those Germans not killed in the charge surrendered or fled into the woods nearby. It was, for all intents and purposes, a complete rout.⁶⁰²

Col. Mastalerz and his staff officers took the success in stride, congregating to confer and plan their next move (organizing their own scattered troops, escorting their haul of prisoners, and preparing their next rearguard action) when the Poles were, themselves, surprised. The German infantry had paused for a reason – to await armoured car support before moving forward. The armoured cars were already close by and, having likely heard the commotion, charged forward in their own counter-ambush, raking the Polish horsemen with machine gun fire. Polish cavalrymen scattered and raced to escape back over the hill from whence they had charged. Col. Mastalerz was gunned down racing to rescue Eugeniusz Świeściak, a fellow officer. The Charge of Krojanty was at an end – Col. Mastalerz and many of his staff officers lay dead and dying among their mutilated horses.⁶⁰³ The 18th Pomeranian Uhlans, though, would carry on the fight without their commander, only surrendering along with many other cavalry and infantry men in Warsaw on September 28 having fought German panzer divisions tooth and nail from Krojanty's fields to Warsaw's brick and mortar, inflicting a frightful toll. All told, at Krojanty the 18th Uhlans had lost 20 men and horses – the same 20 men and horses William Shirer was shown by

⁶⁰¹ There were approximately two dozen Polish cavalry charges during the Second World War, most of which occurred during the September Campaign, with all but two succeeding. The last, at the Battle of Schoenfeld, occurred on March 1, 1945, and was highly successful, routing German defenders where previous infantry assaults had failed. (Krzysztof Komorowski, *Boje Polskie 1939–1945*, (Warsaw, Poland: Bellona, 2009)).

⁶⁰² Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 42.

⁶⁰³ Militarily speaking, the attack was a Polish strategic victory that paralyzed the German advance for the rest of the day. (Williamson, 83.).

his German *Propagandakorps* guides 17 days later.⁶⁰⁴

The Charge at Krojanty represents only one of the various myths to come out of the war reporting, propaganda, and romantic shaping of the September Campaign. However, more than any other, this meme of Polish cavalymen – ignorant, ill-informed, or simply too brave and arrogant to care about reality, charging home with lances lowered and *Szabla* (the Polish saber) raised against the tanks, machine guns, and cannons of modernity – resonated widely with the worldwide audience. There is something not only romantic about it, the last *Hurrah!* of a by-gone era and its replacement by a brutal, cold, mechanized modernity, but something fitting, that the first day of the Second World War would also be the last day of the horseman.⁶⁰⁵ William Shirer was not immune to this romanticism, rather, he relished it and made it his own, expanding the numbers of dead men and horses in his memory to comparatively astronomical levels. Much as Günter Grass would immortalize the myth of the charge in his poetry, and filmmakers like Andrzej Wajda would create entire films based around the fabled action, William Shirer worked this myth, like many others from the campaign, into nearly all his writings on the Second World War.⁶⁰⁶

When William Shirer began broadcasting from Berlin, he was fully aware of both the

⁶⁰⁴ Zaloga, *Poland 1939*, 42.

⁶⁰⁵ It, of course, was not. Cavalry would serve in specialized roles throughout the Second World War in many of the militaries of the day. Even the Germans would expand their own use of horse cavalry rapidly throughout the war. (David R., Dorondo, *Riders of the Apocalypse: German Cavalry and Modern Warfare, 1870-1945*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2012)).

⁶⁰⁶ “O insane cavalry...with what aplomb they will kiss the hand of death, as though death were a lady; but first they gather, with sunset behind them – for color and romance are their reserves – and ahead of them the German tanks, stallions from the studs of Krupps von Bohlen und Halbach, no nobler steeds in all the world. But Pan Kichot, the eccentric knight in love with death, lowers his lance with the red-and-white pennant and calls on his men to kiss the lady’s hand. The storks clatter white and red on rooftops, and the sunset spits out pits like cherries, as he cries to his cavalry: ‘Ye noble Poles on horseback, these are no steel tanks, they are mere windmills or sheep, I summon you to kiss the lady’s hand.’” (Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel*, (Berlin, Germany: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1959)); *Lotna*, Directed by Andrzej Wajda, Written by Andrzej Wajda and Wojciech Żukrowski, KADR, 1959.

reality of the news he was given, and of his own rationalization for reporting it in a neutral tone and manner. He saw himself as giving an authoritative voice to Nazi Germany's view of the war, a view that Shirer disagreed with (vehemently so), however as a 'proper newsman Shirer saw it as his duty to the American public to report it regardless.⁶⁰⁷ In doing so, Shirer was able to ingratiate himself to his German overseers early in the war, a fact which not only gave him lee-way in the content and censorship of his writings, but also the chance to visit the frontlines, albeit on a guided tour. Yet, despite this awareness, this tour cemented, in his mind, the validity of the myths that Shirer had been reporting in the run-up to, and initial weeks of the war.

Through a mixture of trauma at the reality of modern warfare and his own fog of memory in the chaos of that first month of the war, Shirer essentially confirmed, to himself, what he had been reporting about the campaign all along – that the Polish Army had crumbled, unwilling to look facts in the face and unable to fight back against what seemed to be the massively more capable and technologically apt Wehrmacht.⁶⁰⁸ His diary reinforced this notion – on publication, not only did it become a best-seller, it encouraged the myths of the campaign as reality, as the diary did nothing to confirm, correct, or reject the Nazi account of the campaign. Indeed, Shirer even modified and edited his diary to improve the story in his eyes – he was, after all, a journalist first.⁶⁰⁹ Many of these myths would go on to be disseminated across the Western World in both print and film, as the public consumed and accepted them at face value, craving both the romanticism of a cavalry charge on tanks, and the story-telling narrative of a German Blitzkrieg across a backward Poland.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ Shirer, *Shirer Broadcasts*, Sept 3, 1939, 22.45.

⁶⁰⁸ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years*, 457.

⁶⁰⁹ Strobl, 319.

⁶¹⁰ Biskupski, 159.

While Shirer and others had repeated these myths in war time, they had the chance, after the war's finish, to readdress these myths. Churchill and Shirer held many connections abroad, German officers had seen the battles themselves, historians had access to documentation and authorship of Polish officers themselves, there was an open door to not only re-examine his account and memory of the campaign, but to offering a more nuanced, accurate, myth-free history of the German Invasion of Poland. Yet, they largely did not avail themselves of those opportunities. Rather than conduct new research into the campaign, such as the contacting of the many Polish diplomats and officers in exile in England, America, and France, Shirer simply researched and wrote from his own, provenly inaccurate and myth-laden, broadcasts and diaries.⁶¹¹ Essentially, he was circular-reporting his past-self, while his past-self had been working entirely with German propaganda. Rather than fact check, early military historians absorbed the lessons taught by former-Nazi generals because they complimented how those historians wished to view and interpret the world. This was not a method that would correct mythos – instead, it would reinforce and buttress the myth as reality, a reality that went unquestioned by all but a few voices in the Western World for so long that it became accepted historical dogma. There was, indeed, no *reason* for a man like William Shirer to question these ‘truths,’ as they had already been accepted by nearly the entire world.⁶¹² Instead, Shirer was free to romanticize these ‘truths’ into the story narratives he wished to publish in the guise of actual history, matching these narratives with the pre-conceived notions and biases that Shirer had formed even before the war began. Furthermore, these histories were consumed and accepted by

⁶¹¹ Shirer, *The Nightmare Years Outline*, German Journal.

⁶¹² As late as the 2000s, serious academic texts still speak of a Polish cavalry charge on tanks as factual. (Stone, 28; Tod Strickland, “Cavalry Charging Panzers: An Evaluation of Leadership Doctrine in the Canadian Army,” *The Canadian Army Journal* Vol 8, no. 1, (Spring 2005), 39.)

public and future historians alike, as both clamored to see what the vaunted reporter had compiled. After all, *he had been there*. Thus, Shirer, Bryan, Gudarian, anonymous PK-Reporters, and amateur war gamers did not just help create or disseminate the mythos of the campaign – they ensured its survival – and did so, by and large, unwittingly.

The staying power of these Shireresque myths can be made clear by simply visiting any average public or private university across the United States. More often than not in their place of honour alongside serious historical works in the department libraries, one can find William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, or perhaps a volume or two from his *20th Century Journey*. They reside on those shelves as a testament to their staying power – indeed, many of the faculty who deal with 20th century German or French history will have read them at one point or another. If the un-experienced or simply unknowledgeable were to pull one off the shelf, perhaps out of interest in reading about the start of the Second World War, they would find not accurate, nuanced history, but myth piled on myth, and would almost assuredly accept those myths as reality. After all – why would such volumes be kept in a departmental library, or the history section of a university library, if they could not be trusted? The lasting power of William Shirer's work, of the work of any of the multitude of propagandists, journalists, witnesses, is held in the trustworthiness of the author – *they* were there, *they* bore witness. And yet, memory, especially traumatic, emotional, 'felt' memory, can be a fickle creature, one apt to turn molehills into mountains – or 20 dead horses into a field carpeted with thousands of slaughtered men and beasts.

APPENDIX

PHOTOS

Figure A.1: *The Battle of Kutno* by Jerzy Kossak, oil on canvas, 1940.



Source: Kosciuszko Foundation. On loan from the Republic of Poland's Consulate-General in New York City, Washington DC. https://old.thekf.org/kf/chapters/washington-dc/gallery/art_gallery/?count=3&slidestart=8.

Figure A.2: Polish POW in Graudenz 4/9/39



Source: AKG-Images, ID: B3EH0T, <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-polish-pow-in-graudenz-photo-1939-19375016.html>, (Accessed May 7, 2019).

Note: Figures A.3 to A.30 and A.32 to A.35 were sourced from Bundesarchiv, <https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/>, accessed May 7, 2019. English translations of German captions provided by the dissertation author.

Figure A.3: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0022-25



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0022-25
Foto: Lanzinger, Otto | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation |
|--|---|
| <p>Erste deutsche Vorhutten erreichen die polnische Hauptstadt; Infanterie mit Panzer Unterstützung geht in einem Vorort von Warschau vor.</p> | <p><i>The first German advance troops reach the Polish capital; Infantry with Panzer support deploys forward in a suburb of Warsaw.</i></p> |

Figure A.4: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E10600



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E10600
Foto: o. Ang. | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|---|
| <p>Ein Bilddokument, das die begeisterte Begrüssung der deutschen Truppen in der Stadt Graudenz schildert. 7/9/39</p> | <p><i>An image document depicting the enthusiastic welcome of German troops in the city of Graudenz. 7/9/39</i></p> |

Figure A.5: Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1994-103-03A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1994-103-03A
Foto: o. Ang. | 7. September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| Ein Bilddokument, das die begeisterte Begrüssung der deutschen Truppen in der Stadt Graudenz schildert. 7/9/39 | <i>An image document depicting the enthusiastic welcome of German troops in the city of Graudenz. 7/9/39</i> |

Figure A.6: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E10593



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E10593
Foto: o. Ang. | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| Zu den bestialischen Geiselmorden in Bromberg. 18 am Bromberger Kanal gefundene Leichen nebeneinander, darunter 2 Kinder. Bis auf einen einzigen waren allen die Hände auf dem Rücken zusammen gebunden. | The bestial hostage-murders in Bromberg. 18 corpses found next to each other on the Bromberg Canal, including 2 children. All but one of them had their hands tied behind their backs. |

Figure A.7: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E10612



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E10612
Foto: o. Ang. | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| <p>Über Bromberg steht der Schatten des Todes. In den Straßen, Parks, Anlagen in Gräben und Hauseingängen, zwischen Hecken und Büschen liegen die Opfer polnischer Grausamkeit, die Leichen vieler hunderter von Volksdeutschen, mit deren Ermordung die Polen ihre Drohung nur zu schrecklich wahr gemacht haben, vor dem Einzug der Deutschen noch Rache zu nehmen. Widerliche bestialische für Menschen kaum denkbare Grausamkeiten sind, bevor die Opfer unter den Bajonetten und Gewehrläufen ihr Leben für Deutschlands Ehre und des Reiches Größe hingaben, an diesen Toten verübt worden. Weinend suchen die Angehörigen ihre Vermißten. Die schmerzgebeugten Frauen selbst hatten für ihre hingeschlachteten Männer und Söhne die Massengräber zu schaufeln begonnen, bis ihnen die einmarschierenden deutschen Soldaten diesen letzten Dienst für die unschuldigen Opfer des Polenhasse abnahmen. Die Geiselmorde von Bromberg, eine Folge der leichtfertigen englischen Blankovollmacht, wird allzeit ein Schandfleck in der Geschichte der polnischen Nation sein.</p> | <p>Above Bromberg stands the shadow of death. In the streets, parks, ditches and house entrances, between hedges and bushes, the victims of Polish cruelty lie, the corpses of hundreds of ethnic Germans, whose murder has made the Poles their threat too terribly true, even before the arrival of the Germans revenge to take. Disgusting beastly atrocities, barbarous to human beings, were committed on the dead before the victims, under the bayonets and rifle barrels, gave their lives for Germany's honor and the empire's greatness. Crying, the relatives search for their missing persons. The pain-stricken women themselves had begun shoveling the mass graves for their slaughtered husbands and sons until the invading German soldiers took away this last service for the innocent victims of hatred for Poland. The hostage murders of Bromberg, a consequence of the frivolous English blanket authority, will always be a stain on the history of the Polish nation.</p> |

Figure A.8: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-R99296



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R99296
Foto: Argusfot | Oktober 1939 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| Juden im Internierungslager in Bromberg. | Jews in the internment camp in Bromberg. |

Figure A.9: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0022-21



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0022-21
Foto: Lanzinger, Otto | 8. September 1939

Figure A.10: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0022-26



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0022-26
Foto: Lanzinger, Otto | 8. September 1939

Figure A.11: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-380-0094-16



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-380-0094-16
Foto: Heydrich | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| Ein stummer Zeuge polnischer Zerstörungswut. | A mute witness of Polish destructive rage. |

Figure A.12: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0018-06A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0018-06A
Foto: Kiem | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Kriegsgefallene polnische Soldaten in einem Straßengraben. | Fallen Polish soldiers in a ditch. |

Figure A.13: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E1 1027



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E11027
Foto: o. Ang. | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| Zahlreiche feindliche Flugzeuge wurden nicht im Luftkampf abgeschossen, sondern durch unsere Luftwaffe durch Bombenwürfe vernichtet, bevor sie überhaupt dazu kamen aufzusteigen. | Numerous enemy aircraft were not shot down in aerial combat, but destroyed by bombing by our Air Force before they even managed to ascend. |

Figure A.14: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E1 1309



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E11309
Foto: Stempka | Oktober 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| <p>Die Flugzeughalle als Pferdestall Die Flugzeughallen der Warschauer Flugplätze wurden von unseren Truppen, da ja die polnische Luftwaffe dank der Tätigkeit unserer Flieger nicht mehr benötigt, in Pferdeställe umgewandelt.</p> | <p>The aircraft hangar as a horse stable. The aircraft hangars of the Warsaw airfields were converted into horse stables by our troops, since the Polish Air Force no longer need them thanks to the activity of our pilots.</p> |

Figure A.15: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0037-30A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0037-30A
Foto: Lanzinger, Otto | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| <p>Musizierende Sinti und Roma mit deutschen Soldaten (Infanterie und Panzertruppe), im Hintergrund Wohnwagen.</p> | <p>Musical Sinti and Roma with German soldiers (infantry and armored troop), in the background caravans.</p> |

Figure A.16: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-012-0016-32



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-012-0016-32
Foto: Klemm | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| Zivilbevölkerung und Soldaten im Gespräch (Befragung?). | Civilian population and soldiers in conversation (questions?). |

Figure A.17: Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1979-050-10A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1979-050-10A
Foto: o. Ang. | 3. September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|---|
| Polnische Überläufer, zum Teil Volksdeutsche, die von Polen zum Militärdienst gezwungen waren, begrüßen die deutschen Soldaten. | Polish defectors, in part ethnic Germans, who were forced to serve in Poland, welcomed the German soldiers. |

Figure A.18: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-320-0934-2717



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-320-0934-27
Foto: o.Ang. | September 1939

Figure A.19: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E11782



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E11782
Foto: o.Ang. | 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| Aus der befreiten Provinz Posen. In allen Ortschaften werden die polnischen Strassenbezeichnungen durch deutsche ersetzt. U.B.z. ein Strassenschild mit der Aufschrift "Adolf Hitler-Platz" in Jarotschin. Darunter die alte polnische Bezeichnung. | From the liberated province of Posen. In all localities, the Polish street names are replaced by German. For instance, a street sign with the inscription "Adolf Hitler Square" in Jarotschin. Below is the old Polish name. |

Figure A.20: Bundesarchiv Bild 121-0339



Bundesarchiv, Bild 121-0339
Foto: o. Ang. | 1939/1940 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|---|
| Polnische Landarbeiter auf dem Wege nach Deutschland (Freiwillige). | Polish agricultural workers on their way to Germany (volunteers). |

Figure A.21: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-317-0057-37A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-317-0057-37A
Foto: Amphlett, Eduard | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|---|
| Porträt polnischer Zivilisten (Juden?), Gruppe von Männern mit Bart. | Portrait of Polish civilians (Jews?), group of men with beards. |

Figure A.22: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-R67029A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R67029A
Foto: o.Ang. | 1939/1941 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Juden sind keine Menschen. | Jews are not humans. |

Figure A.23: Bundesarchiv Bild 121-0323



Bundesarchiv, Bild 121-0323
Foto: o.Ang. | 1939/1940 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Juden in Lodsch. | Jews in Łódź. |

Figure A.24: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-2007-0831-500



Bundesarchiv, Bild 121-0328
Foto: o. Ang. | 1939/1940 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|---|
| Polnische jüdische Gepäckträger am Bhf. (Bahnhof) in Kielce. | Polish-Jewish porters at the station (railway station) in Kielce. |

Figure A.25: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-2007-0831-500



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2007-0831-500
Foto: o. Ang. | 1939 September - Oktober

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|---|
| Ost-Oberschlesien kehrt heim. Jüdische Kaffeehamsterer werden abgeführt. | East Upper Silesia returns home. Jewish coffee hamsters are led away. |

Figure A.26: Bundesarchiv Bild 121-0335



Bundesarchiv, Bild 121-0335
Foto: o. Ang. | 1939/1940 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Juden auf dem Weg zur Arbeit. | Jews on their way to work. |

Figure A.27: Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1979-050-10A



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1979-050-10A
Foto: o. Ang. | Oktober 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|---|
| Unter der Nazi Herrschaft wurden die Juden zwangsweise zu schwerer körperlicher Arbeit herangezogen. Faschistisches Internierungslager für Juden in Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) Oktober 1939. | Under the Nazi regime, the Jews were forced to do heavy physical labor. Fascist internment camp for Jews in Bydgoszcz October 1939. |

Figure A.28: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-001-0251-36



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-001-0251-36
Foto: Schulze | 1939 September - Oktober

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| <p>Nach der Eroberung Polens durch die faschistische deutsche Wehrmacht werden Juden zu Aufräumungsarbeiten in Warschau durch die deutschen Behörden eingesetzt.</p> | <p>After the conquest of Poland by the fascist German Wehrmacht, Jews are used for cleanup work in Warsaw by the German authorities.</p> |

Figure A.29: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-001-0251-34



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-001-0251-34
Foto: Schulze | 1939 September - Oktober

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|--|
| <p>Nach der Eroberung Polens durch die faschistische deutsche Wehrmacht werden Juden zu Aufräumungsarbeiten in Warschau durch die deutschen Behörden eingesetzt.</p> | <p>After the conquest of Poland by the fascist German Wehrmacht, Jews are used for cleanup work in Warsaw by the German authorities.</p> |

Figure A.30: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E10855



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E10855
Foto: Schwahn, Ernst | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| <p>Diese polnischen Kaftan-Juden, deren Tätigkeit bisher nur darin bestand, gegen das volksbewußte Deutschtum in der widerwärtigsten und hinterhältigsten Weise zu hetzen, erhalten nun an der Ostfront Gelegenheit, sich zum ersten Mal in ihrem Leben wirklich nützlich zu machen. Hier sieht man sie, bereits zum Abmarsch für den Arbeitseinsatz.</p> | <p>These Polish Kaftan Jews, whose activity hitherto consisted only in inciting against folk-conscious Germanness in the most disgusting and devious manner, now have the opportunity on the Eastern Front to make themselves truly useful for the first time in their lives. Here you can see them already marching off for work.</p> |

Figure A.31: Julien Bryan photograph: “Under the supervision of Polish soldiers, elderly religious Jews in Orthodox Russian chalats dig anti-tank trenches to impede the German invasion.”



Source: Julien Bryan, “What Hitler’s Lightning War Will Do To England” *Look*, December 5, 1939, 12.

Figure A.32: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-S56759



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S56759
Foto: o. Ang. | 1938 Henst

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| <p>Dies ist die jüdische Synagoge - oder ihre Überreste - in Katowice, von der aus jüdische Rabbiner und ausgesprochen halbwegs erwachsene Jungen auf die einmarschierenden deutschen Soldaten geschossen haben. Die Synogogen wurden umgeben und begast, weil die Gefangenen nicht aufgeben wollten.</p> | <p>This is the Jewish Synagogue - or its remnants - in Katowice, from which Jewish rabbis and outspoken, half-grown boys fired at the invading German soldiers. The synagogue was surrounded and fumigated, because the trapped did not want to surrender.</p> |

Figure A.33: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-320-0934-29



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-320-0934-29
Foto: o. Ang. | September 1939

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|--|---|
| <p>Polnischer Mann (Jude?) auf unbefestigter Straße in einer Ortschaft, deutsche Soldaten durch Abnehmen seiner Mütze grüßend.</p> | <p>Polish man (Jew?) on dirt road in a village, greeting German soldiers by taking off his cap.</p> |

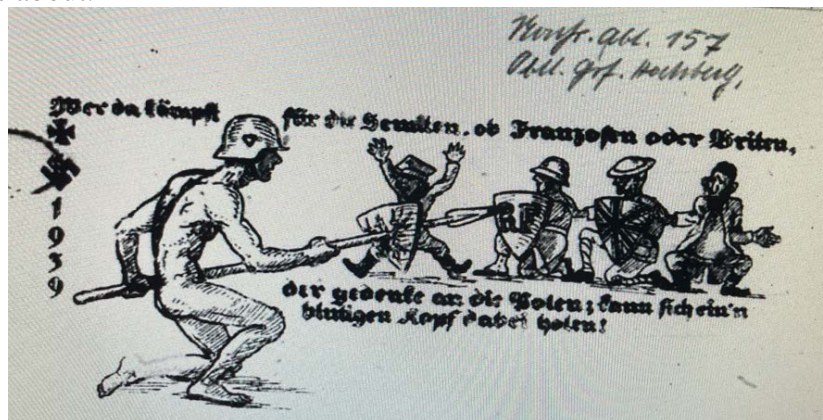
Figure A.34: Bundesarchiv, R 49 Bild-1405



Bundesarchiv, R 49 Bild-1405
Foto: Senckpiehl, Joachim | 1939/1940 ca.

| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|--|
| <p>Wohnhaus u. Stallungen werden instandgesetzt. Das ist oft dringend notwendig, “die polnische Wirtschaft” ist auch hier nicht spurlos vorübergegangen. Über 200 Studenten der technischen Hoch- u. Fachschulen leiten hier den Einsatz. Jedem von ihnen unterstehen 30 bis 50 polnische Arbeiter u. in kurzer Zeit sind die dringenden Arbeiten auf dem Hof des Rückwanderers fertiggestellt.</p> | <p>Residential house and stables are being repaired. This is often urgently necessary, “the Polish economy” has not left its mark here. Over 200 students of technical high and low Specialized schools lead the assignment here. Each of them oversees 30 to 50 Polish workers. In a short time, the most urgent works on the farm of the returnee are completed.</p> |

Figure A.35: PK-Reporter political cartoon meant to show the reality of what the Invasion of Poland War was about.



| Original Caption | English Translation by Author |
|---|---|
| <p>Wer da kämpft für die Semiten, ob Franzosen oder Briten, der gedenke an die Polen; kann sich ein' n blutigen Kopf dabei holen!</p> | <p>Anyone who fights for the Semites, whether French or British, think of the Poles; you can get a bloody head!</p> |

Source: Krieg 1939, Feldzug in Polen. *Generalkommando XVIII Armeekorps, 1c Wehrpropaganda Archiv*, Record Group T-314, Roll 1644, (National Archives at College Park, Maryland, 1966), 157.

Figure A.36: Advertisement for *Wir zogen Gegen Polen: Kriegserinnerungswerk des VII. Armeekorps* [We fought against Poland: War memorial work of the VII Army Corps].

Zentralverlag der NSDAP.  Stz. Eber Nachf. München

Ein einzigartiges Dokument Deutschen Soldatentums!

Wir zogen gegen Polen

Erinnerungswerk des VII. Armeekorps



Text zusammengestellt und bearbeitet aus Beiträgen der Gruppe von: Dr. Wiedmann, Alfons von Gzibulka, Dr. Hans-Arthur Thies, Justus Schröder und Offizieren des Generalkommandos. Die Zeichnungen im Text sind von Albert Reich, die Bilder Truppenaufnahmen. Das Werk umfasst 172 Textseiten und rund 100 Bilderseiten auf Kunstdruckpapier. Eine beigelegte Landkarte erläutert den Vormarsch der Divisionen. Der Kommandierende General des VII. Armeekorps, General der Infanterie von Schobert, schrieb das Vorwort, in dem es unter anderem heißt:

So war's in Polen

Der Führer befahl, und wir waren am Feind . . . Wir jagten ihn, wo wir ihn fanden. Wir schlugen ihn, wo er sich stellte . . . Wie ein Sturmgewitter brausete dieser Krieg über das polnische Land. Als „Krieg der 18 Tage“ wies er in die Geschichte ein.

In diesen 18 Tagen liegt eingeschlossen eine Reihe glänzender Waffentaten . . . Unser hartnäckigster Gegner, das war der polnische Dreck und Staub, das waren die polnischen Straßen . . . Aber an keinem Tag konnte das frische Draufgängertum im polnischen Staub ersticken. „Vorwärts“ blieb die Parole,

Ran an den Feind!

Leinen RM 4.80

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951 Hörtenblatt f. d. Deutschen Buchhandel. 106. Jahrgang. Nr. 281 Sonnabend, den 2. Dezember 1939 6765

Source: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, “Börsenblatt f. d. Deutschen Buchhandel.” Vol. 106, Nr. 281 (Münich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1939).

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