



Author's Note

I realize that there will be readers who are infuriated by the last chapter of this novel. It is considered un-American to suggest that any evil could be associated with America. Nevertheless, it is true: America, too, maintained death camps where disarmed German soldiers and even some women and children were systematically destroyed through starvation, exposure and bad treatment. This information was covered up for forty years, but now has come to light, and I think sensible Americans will prefer to explore it and try to find out how to prevent it from ever happening again.

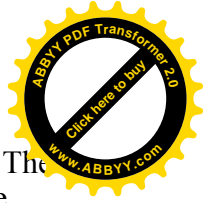
The source of my information is *Other Losses* by James Bacque, published in hardcover by Stoddart in Canada. You should be able to order it through your bookstore, unless the proprietors, like so many others, prefer to pretend that the book doesn't exist. The truth should be known, ugly as it may be.

According to this book, approximately three quarters of a million Germans were killed in American captivity, and one quarter million in French captivity. Only the British acted with decency in this respect. Apparently it was the determination of General Eisenhower and General de Gaulle that Germany should be rendered forever impotent, and the killing of German captives was part of the process. The Red Cross tried to protest, and the Quakers, and the British and Canadian governments, but they were barred from the camps, and mail privileges were denied, so that the prisoners themselves could not describe their situation.

What of the Geneva Convention? It was claimed that these were not prisoners of war, but Disarmed Enemy Forces--DEF--who had no such protection. In fact it was a gross and deliberate violation of human rights, similar to what the Nazis and Russians did. It has been easy to ask, pointedly, how the German people could not have known what their government was doing to the Jews and Gypsies. Now the question is reversed: how could *we* not have known what our government was doing to Germans who had laid down their arms?

Well, one reason is the same as it was for the Germans: we don't know because we don't *want* to know. Even those in a position to ascertain the truth may furiously deny it. I cite as evidence a commentary by Stephen E. Ambrose in *The New York Times Book Review* dated February 24, 1991 titled "Ike and the Disappearing Atrocities." It is what is known in the trade as a "killer review" of *Other Losses*. It describes the author's thesis, then goes on to say that "when scholars do the necessary research, they will find Mr. Baque's work to be worse than worthless." The review is, in essence, a comprehensive denial of Baque's thesis, in part and in whole. Since the reviewer is the director of the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans, so should know something about Eisenhower's role in the war, this is a damning indictment.

However, my assistant Alan Riggs and I had read the book. I asked Alan to do a point by point analysis of the review versus the book and ascertain, as far as possible, the truth. He spent two days on the comparison and wrote up an 1800 word report. The essence was that, on the whole, the book was correct. The reviewer had two valid points: (1) That we can not at this stage know what was in the mind of Eisenhower, so can not attribute a base motive to him. (2) The author's calculation of the number of German dead was in error. As to the first: lack of information about the secret motives of a man now dead works two ways. Eisenhower managed to hide immediate news of his adulterous love affair with his driver, Kay Summersby, but later documentation pretty well establishes it. There are significant hints that he did know and approve the death-camp policy. So Ike may indeed be innocent--but there is doubt. As to the second: the error in calculation, when corrected, still suggests more deaths than the official records admit. So it was our judgment that the death camps did exist as described.



Then came the reader response, in the Letters column of *The Book Review* for April 14, 1991. The letters covered the gamut from congratulating the reviewer to authenticating the atrocities. Two were from actual prison guards at the camps, one was from a prisoner who had been at Camp Rheinburg and escaped for the same reason Ernst did--British intervention--and one was from an Air Force officer who had witnessed the condition of the prisoners. Another letter writer expressed a caution about Ike's supposedly benign character: he described how Eisenhower had ordered the forced transfer of hundreds of thousands of anti-Communist Russians, Ukrainians and other Eastern Europeans to Stalin's Soviet Union, where death and slave labor awaited them. Another letter mentioned an article on the death camps that had previously been published in a Canadian magazine, which had elicited letters from former prisoners thanking heaven that at last the truth was being told. Significantly, there was no rebuttal from the reviewer. It was obvious that he was in error. So the case seems secure: it did happen.

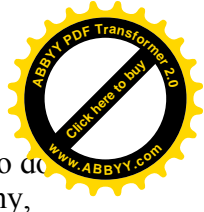
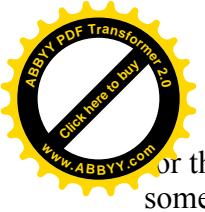
Now some background on my writing of this novel. I am known as a writer of light fantasy, but I have been moving into other areas and have been addressing increasingly serious social concerns. Thus I have written *Firefly*, related to sexual abuse, and *Tatham Mound*, about the situation of the American Indians displaced by the white man's colonization of their continent. *Volk* is similar in the sense that it contains provocative material, but different in other respects. It is technically a historical novel, and I expect to be doing a lot more historical fiction, but no more World War II fiction. I am headed deeper into the human past.

I started work on *Volk* in 1980, but publishers refused to take my non-fantasy efforts seriously and I was unable to place it. So I set it aside with only two chapters completed, and pursued other aspects of my career. Ten years later I took it up again, trusting that my increased leverage as a best-selling writer could enable me to get it into print this time. Originally it was a straight World War II novel, but in the intervening time the story of the "Other Losses" broke, and I realized that Ernst would not have ended up in an ordinary detention center, but in a death camp. Yet as the main character of my novel he had to survive, so he had to be in one of the camps that were transferred to the British.

There were other changes, because this novel, like most of mine, looked different when I was in the actual text than it did from afar, in preliminary summary. I had thought that Lane would learn that Ernst had been brutalizing Quality, and swear to kill Ernst. But I discovered in the course of research that Nazi SS men did not approve of abusing women, and could be disciplined for that sort of thing. So Ernst's terrible necessity to brutalize Quality, to prevent his superiors from realizing the real nature of their relationship, was reduced to one episode. Since Lane encountered Quality before catching up to Ernst, no desperate scene could occur with the two men. I had thought that Lane would be shot down over Germany, and be a prisoner, but with Quality already a prisoner, and Ernst destined to become one, I realized that this would be too similar. I had also intended to have a sequence in the defunct Maginot line, and had finally found a book on the subject--and then my story did not provide me the opportunity. Some other novel, perhaps.

Krista had a smaller part, and was going to fade out after Ernst fell in love with Quality. But the characters of novels do not necessarily resign themselves to their fates, and Krista refused to fade. So it went, but overall, the novel is similar to the one I worked out in 1980. Except that it is, oddly, less violent. I did not see reason to put in the usual dogfaces-in-trenches battle scenes when my story did not require it; I'm sure that others have done enough of that. So this novel shows other aspects of the war, and seeks other insights than mere victory and loss in battle. I had planned to make more of the German Spanish strategy, as their position would have been significantly strengthened had they taken Gibraltar and cut the allies off from the Mediterranean theater. But that is not the way history went, and this is a novel of history, not fantasy.

What of the major characters, after the end of the novel? I believe that after doing what they can



or the remaining prisoners of Camp Rheinberg, Ernst and Quality return to Wiesbaden. They seek to do something for the prisoners in other American and French camps, but are not allowed to approach any, and indeed, it is suggested that if they wish to remain free, they need to stay well clear. They return to America with their son, and again seek to change the American policy, but are rebuffed by the layered bureaucracy and secrecy. So it is that they, like other well-meaning folk, are unable to alleviate this horror. Meanwhile Lane and Krista also travel to America, where Krista is quite pleased with the relative affluence. Both couples visit Europe regularly, and their children are bilingual. Today they have disappeared into the fabric of society in much the way my own bi-national family has.

As it happened, I had a tiny bit of personal involvement in some of the events of that day. I was born in England, and lived for a while in Spain. My parents were in charge of the Quaker relief effort in north east Spain during the Spanish civil war. Quality Smith is fictional, but the work the Quakers did was real. That was shut down in 1940 when my father was arrested, apparently by mistake, and required to leave the country. We came to America on the same voyage that brought the Duke of Windsor to the Western Hemisphere, after the German plot to kidnap him had died stillborn. But for that exile of my father, I might have grown up in Spain. There is more on this in my autobiography, *Bio of an Ogre*. I was raised as a Quaker, but elected to go my own way. Thus my choice of a Quaker lady as a main character is not coincidental; I retain considerable respect for the Quaker way. I should clarify that the Quaker "plain talk" was originally an attempt to identify with the common folk, but as time passed and the language of the common folk changed, it became a distinguishing mark. Today few Quakers use it, but in the 1940's more did. Quality's practice of using it only with those to whom she was close is my adaptation; perhaps this is the policy of some Quakers, but not of most. As a general rule, Quakers do not seek to set themselves apart; their beliefs in integrity, pacifism and the "inner light" of the individual's communion with God are firm and to my mind commendable, but there is no "holier than thee" attitude. They have silent meetings instead of church services, and have no clergy; each person finds his own way. It is my impression that where good works are being done without demand for renown or material reward, you are likely to find Quakers. Quality was very much a creature of her religion in that respect, and if she is the type of person you would like to know, look among the Friends.

Several people helped me on aspects of this novel. One was Frances Wagner, a correspondent who introduced me to Nietzsche and reminded me of the power of Richard Wagner's music. She also described the tour of Paris which Quality took. Another was Arne Bister, a German student who happened to write to me when I was working on this novel: In ways he seems very like Ernst Best, for he had spent a year in America, been on a wrestling team, gotten to know an American girl, and then returned to serve in the German army. Arne had help in his spot research for this novel from his friend Michael Frömmel. There was irony here, because they included detailed material on the routes and trains leading into the Wiesbaden area, establishing that one of the most beautiful trains of that time, the *Rheingold*, used Route 600 down the west side of the river, going on to perhaps the most beautiful train station in Germany at Frankfurt. The thing is palatial! But the route 610 on the east side that went directly to Wiesbaden was a lesser thing, used more for freight, and that was the one the Best family took. So we did not get treated to the first class ride on the train with the purple roof, and did not see the phenomenal Frankfurt station. Sigh. "It is not my fault that their estate is in Wiesbaden," Arne grumped. And a special credit to Alfred Jacob, my father, head of the Friends Service Council relief effort in north east Spain. He was anonymous in the novel, but may be known here. Helpful comment was also offered by Stan Carnarius, a family friend.

One additional reason I completed the novel at this time: I had the research assistant, Alan Riggs. He was to work for me a year, and I realized that this was the time to do my research novel. Because I have found that I have been spoiled by the ease and speed of fantasy, and am no longer satisfied to take the necessary time for research. There are those who spend three years in research before starting to write a novel, but in the past three years (1988-90) I have completed thirteen novels and reworked one.



three were collaborative, and one was a movie novelization, which speeded things up; nevertheless, it is evident that I move at a good clip, and I'm just not about to take years on any one piece. So with Alan's help I was able to write *Volk* at almost the speed of a non-research novel. Alan mentions that he had help in the library, locating references, from Dan Monkern, Drew Wojciechowski and Peg Rombach.

You may wonder why I keep departing from the fantasy genre where I have had such success. The answer is that I started in science fiction and fantasy because that was what I liked and knew best. But I never wanted to be limited to it. I want to be free to write in any genre where I may have something to say. But since I have an easier time with fantasy, and make more money there, I don't step out of it unless I have special reason. Thus my non-genre efforts tend to have significant and perhaps controversial elements, as is the case in this novel. What is the point in breaking out of the barrier of one genre, only to be confined in another? I want to be known, ultimately, not merely as a fantasy writer, but as a writer with something to say, whatever the genre.

At any rate, I hope that it has been worthwhile for you, the reader. I hope also that those of you who object to the final chapter will do your homework before sending me angry or ignorant letters. It is not me you have to refute, but history.

Meanwhile, readers who want a source for all of my news and available titles can call 1-800 HI PIERS. This may go out of business sometime in 1997, however.

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