

The Holocaust Historiography Project

Remarkable Nonsense about the Holocaust

Slippery Soap

Book revisits horrifying question about the Holocaust

- Atlanta man says Nazis made soap of Jews

By Jim Galloway
Staff Writer
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Before sunrise on a cold March morning in 1970, a rabbi and an architect slipped over the fence to Greenwood Cemetery in Atlanta to scout out a burial site for four bars of soap.

A hasty funeral service was conducted later that afternoon -- Jewish law required quick interment for the green-gray cakes, which had surfaced days before. About 35 people, most of them survivors of European concentration camps, gathered around a small hole dug at the base of the local Holocaust memorial.

None had any doubt that the soap bars were made from human beings.

The architect, Ben Hirsch, devoted a chapter to the incident in a memoir published this spring and urged scholars to take a closer look at the topic.

[...]

Most of "Different Drummer" is devoted to Hirsch's experience as a U.S. soldier in post-war Germany. But in the 10 pages of Chapter 23, he expresses his disappointment in the verdict of historians on Nazi soap-making. **He cites the example of his uncle, a chemist who was forced to work in Auschwitz making soap.** [...]

Hirsch says his uncle, who died in the 1950s, **confessed to Hirsch's brother that he had saved his own life by using human corpses** -- something that historians say never happened.

Hirsch also tells the story of the four bars of soap in Atlanta. They were found by a Jewish soldier who was part of a U.S. force that liberated a concentration camp near Stettin, Germany, near Frankfurt. The soldier saw the soap cakes, which had been stamped "RIF."

Historians say the initials stand for *Reich Industrie Fett*, or Reich Industrial Fat. But at the time, the "I" was widely interpreted as a "J", and the initials for *Reines Juden Fett* -- or Pure Jewish Fat.

[...]

Alternate headline: "Bizarre burial prods Holocaust angst."

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