

How The Associated Press Supported the Nazi Media Campaign During the German Attack on Poland in September 1939

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Abstract

Contrary to what could be expected, relatively little attention has been given in historical research to the actions of foreign correspondents accredited in Berlin during the Third Reich. The focus has been on “the other side of journalism,” that is on the relations between the state and the people, as well as on Nazi Germany’s propaganda apparatus and its leading figures, such as Joseph Goebbels. This is particularly thought-provoking, as the foreign journalists working in Berlin made a major contribution to shaping the international perception of Nazi Germany and increasing global awareness of its nature and actions. What is more, it is largely forgotten these days that at the beginning of the Second World War, American reporters followed military units of all belligerents, since the United States was a neutral country up until December 1941. The article presents the top American journalists working in Berlin – Louis Lochner (AP), William Shirer (CBS) and Otto Tolischus (“New York Times”) – who for some time accompanied Wehrmacht units or had the opportunity of coming to Poland towards the end of 1939 or at the beginning of 1940, under German supervision. What did their work look like? What did they include in (and omit from) their reports? What impact did their texts have on the North American and international public? Finally, to what extent were their radio broadcasts and articles shaped by the trips arranged for them by the German Ministry of Propaganda? In the context of my 2017 archival discovery concerning the secret co-operation between the Associated Press and Nazi Germany in the years 1942–1945, part of the article will be devoted to American photographic journalism of 1939–1940.

The Associated Press (AP) – one of the largest news agencies in the world – and Louis Lochner, its chief correspondent in Berlin, were more than prepared for Germany’s invasion of Poland,¹ both long-term, after certain plans leaked out² during the annexation of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939, and also shortly before the assault, when Lochner was presented with the text of Hitler’s address to the Wehrmacht Command, given at Obersalzberg on 22 August 1939.³ Seeing that the leading American news agency was in the know, it is barely surprising that the first information photo presenting the German aggression against Poland to the American public (additionally coming with a pro-German message) was provided by the AP.

This first photograph was released on 2 September 1939 in “The New York Times,” among others (pic. 1). “Life,” America’s biggest illustrated magazine, reprinted it in its next issue with the caption “The first picture of the German army actually going into action against the Poles.” This sounded like a report from a football game which finally kicked off after a delay that had annoyed the fans – all the more so because those fans were not involved themselves and it was others who were risking their lives.⁴

The AP and its reporters and photographers definitely welcomed the invasion of Poland with relief, following a period of nervy anticipation as to when the “action against the Poles” would finally commence, and whether their own preparations with respect to exclusive photos and news bulletins would result in success. They ultimately did. Exclusivity of the AP’s materials had been guaranteed since the very first day of the war: their first press photo was reprinted only five days later in “Wiener Illustrierte” (pic. 2), where it was also one of the first depictions of the invasion of Poland, and was correctly captioned as made available courtesy of the AP. This clearly shows that the global circulation of photographs was controlled by the agency, and that the Third Reich and the lands which it had conquered were no exception.

1 For more details on the events see: Domeier, 2021, chapter 6.2.

2 On 19 March 1939, an AP report was published in the American press – specifically in “The Salt Lake Tribune” (p. 3) – in which Louis Lochner predicted that capturing Bohemia was just the beginning, and that the Germans would then claim Klaipeda in Lithuania and Gdańsk in Poland.

3 “The invasion of Poland and its thrashing will begin Saturday morning. I will order a few companies to launch attacks in Polish uniforms in Upper Silesia or the Protectorate. I could not care less if the world will believe this. The world only believes in success. [...] Hence: take on the enemy! We will be celebrating our next meeting in Warsaw!” Lochner passed Hitler’s speech to the British Embassy on 24 August 1939, after Alexander C. Kirk, the American *chargé d’affaires* in Berlin, had refused to take the message, fearing consequences. ADAP D 7, no. 193, FN 1, Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, pp. 171–172 (Lochner, 1942, pp. 13–14).

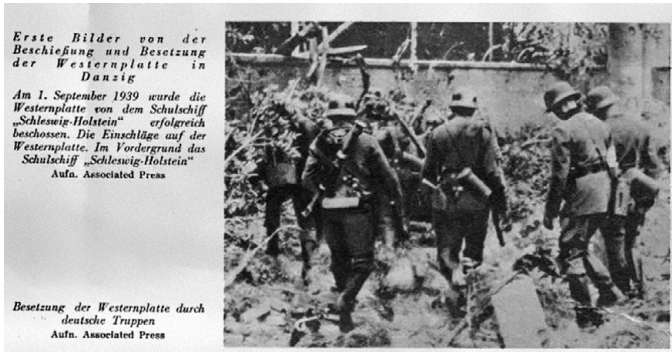
4 Foreign reporting has been discussed by Alexander M. Nordlund (2015).



The first pictures of the German Army actually going into action against the Poles. These are in the area of the Free City of Danzig, showing in on the Polish-held Westernplatte peninsula. The man in the foreground carries a escape-bag along across his back. At the left is an officer. The others are members of a German artillery observation unit about to scale a wall.

1. Probably the first press photo of the Second World War. It originated with the Associated Press, the Third Reich's most loyal media partner.

Source: "The New York Times", 2 September 1939, p. 3.



2. A photograph in a Nazi newspaper attributed to the Associated Press

Source: "Wiener Illustrierte", 7 September 1939, p. 5.

The comparison in pic. 3 shows how Nazi informational photographs from Poland in September 1939 promptly reached both American and British press outlets, and thus the public opinion of the Reich's military opponents. The Nazis wanted it that way in order to control the global coverage of the invasion of Poland. The bulk of the photographs produced by German propaganda⁵ was circulated by the AP's transatlantic network, a development considered a huge success of Goebbels and his Ministry. On 18 September 1939, "Time Magazine" (p. 26) praised Nazi propaganda – even if with a tinge of cynicism – while at the same time sharply criticizing the PR of the Allies, i.e. the UK and France.

⁵ On the network of propaganda units and the involvement of German AP photographers – for example Franz Roth – who were also members of the Waffen-ss, see Scharnberg, 2016. Regarding the operations conducted by propaganda units in Poland, see Król, 2018.



3. Photographs depicting the invasion of Poland in September 1939, published in different periodicals. The closeness of their publication dates testifies to the skillful exchange of press photos between Nazi Germany and the UK and USA in September 1939.

Source: “Völkischer Beobachter”, 5 September 1939, p. 3; “Wiener Illustrierte”, 7 September 1939, p. 3; “The Brooklyn Daily Eagle”, 18 September 1939, p. 8; “Picture Post”, 30 September 1939, p. 17.

“Time” viewed the Reich’s propaganda as successful, while specific mistakes were pointed out to the Allies (pic. 4):

in line with British belief that false hopes should not be raised, French troop movements on the Western Front were reported with so little detail they sounded downright dreamy. While Germany’s Propaganda Ministry exulted over the capture of each unpronounceable Polish town, and handed over photographs of Hitler at the front, Hitler comforting the wounded, Hitler sitting in an automobile, Hitler peering through a telescope, Lord Macmillan at first clamped down on all wire and radio photos (“Foreign News”, 1939).⁶

⁶ On the initially abysmal quality of media reports provided by the British government, see Smith, 1942, pp. 45–48. On the contemporary criticism of British press censorship aimed at American journalists in London, see McKenzie, 1940, pp. 310–312.

FOREIGN NEWS

committee chairman: of committees investigating lunacy and mental disorders, street officers, the coal dispute, the wage dispute in the wool industry, income-tax revision—flooding jobs that won him the confidence of British officials.

If Lord Macmillan's first task was to undo Britain's reputation for cleverness, he could not have started more brilliantly. Nobody could accuse Britain's propaganda of functioning smoothly last week. It was clumsy, amateurish, slow-starting, gave an impression like that of a sincere but badly staged show in which stagehands dropped things during big speeches, and the curtain came down at the wrong time. Britain's first air-raid scare produced

from London, of mothers weeping at the separation from their children, placed the responsibility for Europe's anguish where Britain wanted it placed: on Adolf Hitler, who in German photos was shown smiling at the sound of guns.

Main line of Britain's publicity as it appeared outside Great Britain during Lord Macmillan's first week was not to arouse hatred against Germany, but to show that normal European life was impossible unless Hitler was overthrown: the awe of Britain's military might, but to win confidence in Britain's aims.

Speed. While Britain drowsed in the propagandist shadows last week, whipped to full speed was Dr. Goebbels' powerful

shocking and sickening the population, making it apathetically submissive to totalitarian control, was worked hard. Last week Germans took United Pressman Fred Dechster on a tour of captured Polish villages, showed him the bodies of 21 villagers, claimed they had been mutilated and killed by retreating Poles.

Third great line of German propaganda: to prepare for a peace move after the conquest of Poland. This was done not only in Marshal Goring's German speech-of-the-week, but through the papers of Axis chums in Italy. If peace did not come, the gambit had another usefulness. Germany had no way to escape the guilt of firing the first shot of the war, but the Nazis hoped to create the impression that the British and French could stop it.

France. Hidden in secrecy was France's *Revue des Informations*. But the main French policy has long been known: "The brutal propaganda of the Axis powers has not always been favorable to their reputations. . . . We will not stoop to the showy advertising to which our rivals have resorted. . . . The propaganda of France must be of an informative character."

Also well-known is Director Jean Giraudoux, who seemed likely to make France's war news exciting if any Frenchman was going to. But French official war communiques, while a little newswier than the British, were as guarded as Devil's Island. It was as though the French were reluctant to make big claims lest they have to retract them later.

A diplomat, dramatist (*Amphytrion*, 18), novelist and profound student of national characteristics, Author Giraudoux came out of World War I a chevalier of the Legion of Honor. Typical Giraudoux observation of current interest to U. S. readers: "The Americans . . . always fight themselves. When they were English, they fought the English, as soon as they were Americans they fought each other. When their culture became sufficiently Germanic, they fought Germany. The first American who took a prisoner in 1917 was named Meyer. So was his prisoner."

Effect. War being what it is, War II's propaganda emphasizing isolated horrors seemed likely to underbust the mark. The generation of 1914 had little comprehension of war's atrociousness. It was consequently more receptive to "atrocity" tales than the generation of 1939, shocked by one war after another during the 20-year "peace," could possibly be. An atmosphere of sweet reason will probably have the greatest effect in the propaganda of World War II.

Names

To the colors of their embattled countries last week flooded millions of little names, dozens of big. Some of the latter: Sir Frederick Banting, University of Toronto's professor of medical research



CZESTOCHOWA'S SHRENE LAST WEEK
A "bombing" boomeranged.

two flatly conflicting stories passed through the censor to the U. S. before the War Office's own propaganda agency (under old-time Harkewerter Ian Hay) got out the third or "official version" (see p. 15). Foreign correspondents were driven into a frenzy by the slow and clumsy handling of news of the torpedoing of the *Athenia*; Britain's feat-of-the-week, the bombings of German naval bases, was announced as laconically as the results of target practice; in line with British belief that false hopes should not be raised, French troop movements on the Western Front were reported with so little detail they sounded downright dreary. While Germany's Propaganda Ministry (see col. 2) excelled over the capture of each unpronounceable Polish town, and handed over photographs of Hitler at the front, Hitler comforting the wounded, Hitler sitting in an automobile, Hitler peering through a telescope, Lord Macmillan at first clamped down on all wire and radio photos. Main channel of Britain's publicity appeared to be the radio, over which announcers with an air of detached candor and without heat discussed military operations; and the cinema. Moving newreels of evacuation of children

Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, which even in peacetime spends some \$100,000,000 a year, employs 25,000. Twenty-four hours after German troops entered Poland, neutral newsmen had photographs of German troops on the march. Tanks, big guns, bombers, ruined villages, prisoners, wounded, mutilated bodies, charred houses, refugee children, smashed bridges all added up to create an impression of overwhelming military strength, dramatized the speed of Germany's advance.

But not only striking photographs and detailed accounts of the capture of cities demonstrated Dr. Goebbels' swift work: ▶ Forty-eight hours after Poles announced that the "holy city" of Czestochowa had been bombed, high-speed operators had photographs of Polish women and children worshipping at the shrine in the presence of a German soldier. This piece of propaganda hit three ways: defensively, it gave the lie to Polish charges; appealed to neutral opinion; was an attempt to convince Poles that Germans were really their friends who respected their relics.

▶ Basic Nazi technique of systematically

4. A blunt analysis of the dominant Nazi propaganda in Poland, published in "Time Magazine" as early as mid-September 1939. Louis Lochner's trip to Czestochowa was also mentioned, but no wider context was provided.

Source: "Time", 18 September 1939, p. 26.

The Allies' peculiar indifference and lack of motivation were seen in the context of serious executive errors and London's inexplicable ban on phototelegraphic transmissions.⁷ Meanwhile, in Berlin, the AP transmitter was operating at full tilt. As a result, the Nazi propagandists could inundate the international public – most of whom were against Hitler – with photographs favorably depicting the Germans. How strong an impact this partial American phototelegraphic coverage had on media presentations, which painted a rosy picture of Germany's invasion of Poland, will be further discussed with reference to, first, the alleged destruction of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, and second – the posting of the Wehrmacht's

7 On the early days of the AP phototelegraphic system (1933–1934), see Gramling, 1940, pp. 383–397 (Chapter VIII. "The fight over pictures").

guard of honor at Józef Piłsudski's tomb after Kraków was seized by German troops.

On 3 September, the Polish Telegraph Agency reported that the monastery in Częstochowa “has been burned” by German troops.⁸ Referencing the purported event, Goebbels wrote the following in his journal:

The Poles are throwing a hissy fit about the [alleged] atrocities. This is a whole panoply of crime. First and foremost, the fairy tale about destroying the painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. It's been all over the news everywhere. I've ordered that the American journalist Lochner be flown to Częstochowa on a bomber, so he can report on what he will have seen with his own two eyes.⁹ I hope that will be enough to quash the lie (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 92–94).

In those decisive days of September 1939, everything happened too fast. Resources played no part whatsoever. The war was seen as a conflict involving not just the military, but also the media, and so it was to be decided in this context as well (Sommerfeldt, 1952, p. 71; Stephan, 1949, pp. 194–195). As early as 6 September, Goebbels observed in his diary that:

Lochner was in Częstochowa. He's briefing the international public now. That way, I'm killing the worst of English, and especially Polish, lies about [German] atrocities. [...] The Poles have launched a true factory of lies. But that will be of no use to them anymore, and will only hurt them (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 94–96).¹⁰

Indeed, during his visit to war-ridden Poland, which the Nazi hierarchy arranged specially for him, Lochner, the AP's chief correspondent,

⁸ The report was published in the “Derry Journal” on 25 September (p. 6).
⁹ Lochner was probably accompanied on his trip to Częstochowa by Georg Wilhelm Müller, Goebbels' personal secretary, who in April 1940 was appointed head of the Propaganda Department in Norway (Stephan, 1949, p. 195). Some time later, on 9 September 1939, he was joined by Goebbels' top propagandists, among them Hans Schwarz van Berk (Züchner, 2010, p. 99). In June 1941, Harry Flannery was sent to a field hospital in Athens on a mission similar to Lochner's, that is to interview boxing world champion Max Schmeling and thus refute the claims of the British, who had reported that he had been killed in Crete (Flannery, 1942, p. 222; Boelcke, 1966, pp. 756–757, 29/30 May 1941).

¹⁰ In late September 1939, on Goebbels' initiative and through the agency of the Foreign Press Association (*Verband der Ausländischen Presse*, VAP), an “information trip” was organized to Poland by land for 25 Berlin foreign correspondents. A visit to Częstochowa was on the itinerary (Fuchs, 2015, p. 137). On 23 September, Goebbels wrote, “I have just sent 25 foreign journalists to the Protectorate (of Poland). They will dispel the British lies” (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 117–119).

created an astonishing body of material that was used in hundreds of American papers and neutral outlets all over the world, as evidenced – for example – by the “Minneapolis Star” of 6 September 1939 (pic. 5). The very headline, “Storm center of war propaganda,” clearly suggests that it was obvious for all parties involved that the story was a battle in a propaganda war. The dramatic tenor was achieved by means of questions printed in capital letters: “Black Madonna bombed?”, “Black Madonna unharmed?” The text provided the background of Lochner’s arrival in the Polish war zone: “From Berlin, the Nazis flew Louis P. Lochner standing at the right in the picture above, to Czestochowa to see the shrine intact. Today this picture was radioed from Berlin.” The article explained that the untrue information about the destruction of the Czestochowa monastery and the Black Madonna was being disseminated by Warsaw to incite the hatred of Polish Catholics toward the Germans. “The Germans were indignant when Warsaw reported Monday ...that the shrine... was in ruins.” From the perspective of the American press, Lochner’s mission had led to a clear conclusion: “Thus the propaganda war sees a victory for the Reich” (Storm center of war propaganda, 1939).

The AP photo, which was sent immediately to the USA via the Berlin transmitter over AP Wirephoto and circulated globally, is unique in that it shows the correspondent himself. Louis Lochner thus confirmed that the Czestochowa monastery and the Black Madonna were intact. Without him, the photograph could have been seen as an element of German propaganda, that is as one that had been taken earlier or possibly doctored. In this case, however, the American correspondent’s personal stamp assured the Reich of victory. Flying Lochner to the Polish war theater on a bomber from Berlin to Czestochowa (accompanied by an SS escort, ordered by Goebbels himself) ultimately paid off, but such methods were classified as unprofessional even under contemporary journalistic ethical and professional standards, including the *AP-Guide for Foreign Correspondents* (Associated Press, 1930/1932). Interestingly, it had been published with the involvement of Lochner himself, especially as the AP considered itself the crown jewel of American journalism.¹¹

There is no denying that, if we look at the matter from a purely positivist standpoint, Lochner was merely reporting on facts: the monastery on Jasna Góra and the Black Madonna were intact. However, the report, given specific credence by the man himself, contributed to the brushing aside of the bigger picture, namely that war crimes were being perpetrated by the Nazis all around. During those days, which are also significant for later commemorations of the German invasion of Poland in the historical context, information pertaining to this aspect was omitted by

11 The most recent edition: *The Associated Press Guide to News Writing*, 2019.



5. In this press photo, taken by a German army photographer and instantly converted into an Associate Press Wirephoto, Louis Lochner (right) personally confirms that the Black Madonna of Częstochowa was intact. By his involvement he made the biggest contribution to the first Nazi propaganda success of the Second World War, i.e. “The First Big Lie of the Second World War,” as he himself labeled it in 1964.

Source: “Minneapolis Star” (daily), 6 September 1939, p. 34.

both Lochner and the AP. On 4 September, just one day before his arrival, Wehrmacht units massacred civilians in the center of Częstochowa (Böhler, 2009, pp. 145–149). Lochner had no information about the event, which only shows the tightness of the propaganda bubble within which he was placed. He did not even attempt to find a way to talk to the locals unassisted, and only spoke briefly to a priest about the Black Madonna icon – in the presence of a Propaganda Ministry supervisor. This story shows the huge difference between reporting on facts, and not reporting on concurrent events of still greater significance.

Interestingly, prior to Lochner’s and the AP’s reports the British press had not written about the alleged destruction of the painting at all. There were only communications about the damage done to Częstochowa, as it had come under fire and been captured by the German Army (News notes and queries, 1939). In reality, as we shall demonstrate later, this narrative had originated with Goebbels’ men in Paris. It was only after Lochner’s article came out that the issue was taken up by the British and international press, for example by the “Liverpool Daily Post” of 7 September. In his piece for the AP, Lochner wrote about “a big controversy” surrounding the destruction of the Black Madonna, while actually the controversy

was sparked by his visit to Częstochowa (On the German-Polish Front. Report on Conditions and Incidents, 1939).

The context of these events was kept away from the contemporary public, but the Black Madonna controversy as a transnational media event was the subject of an accurate analysis in “Time” as early as September 1939 (“A ‘bombing’ boomeranged”): it was deemed part of successful German war propaganda:

Twenty-four hours after German troops entered Poland, neutral newsmen had photographs of German troops on the march. Tanks, big guns, bombers, ruined villages, prisoners, wounded, mutilated bodies, charred houses, refugee children, smashed bridges, all added up to create an impression of overwhelming military strength, dramatized the speed of the German advance.

Just like the Blitzkrieg in Poland, the propaganda front was presented as a German triumph:

But not only striking photographs and detailed accounts of the capture of cities demonstrated Dr. Goebbels’ swift work: Forty-eight hours after Poles announced that the “holy city” of Czestochowa had been bombed, high-speed operators had photographs of Polish women and children worshipping at the shrine in the presence of a German soldier. This piece of propaganda hit three ways: defensively, it gave the lie to Polish charges; appealed to neutral opinion; was an attempt to convince Poles that Germans were really their friends who respected their relics. Basic Nazi technique of systematically shocking and sickening the population, making it apathetically submissive to totalitarian control, was worked hard (“Foreign News”, 1939).

In hindsight, there is little to add to this analysis of the media-propagandist situation, aside from the fact that the whole Częstochowa story was a fake news of German propaganda, which, thanks to the AP’s contribution, had an even stronger impact on the perception of the war than it would have had otherwise.

After Kraków was seized by German troops on 6 September 1939, the AP and its global phototelegraphic network was again the main conduit for Nazi propaganda. The German media had been instructed to provide coverage of the “ceremony” at Marshal Piłsudski’s tomb by all means available (text, photo, motion picture, radio). News of the celebrations attended by German generals was disseminated on the same day through an AP wire (pic. 6). A German propaganda photo was skillfully converted

Nazis Place Honor Guard At the Tomb of Piłsudski

By The Associated Press.

BERLIN, Sept. 6. — Generals commanding the German advance into Cracow today went to the tomb of the late Marshal Josef Piłsudski to pay tribute to a leader for whom Chancellor Hitler in the past has expressed his esteem.

An honor guard was established at the tomb on orders of Herr Hitler, according to a message by Col. Gen. Walther von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Germany Army, to the forces in Poland.

"With the capture of Cracow, the Germany Army also has taken under its protection the grave of the first Polish Marshal, Piłsudski," the message said. "His aim was peace with Germany. Disregard of his trust led to war. The Germany Army esteems and honors this great soldier."

6. An AP communication informing of the posting of a guard of honor at Marshal Józef Piłsudski's tomb in Kraków.

Source: "The New York Times", Thursday, 7 September 1939, p. 4.

into an "AP wirephoto" and sent by means of the Berlin transmitter to all corners of the globe.¹² Joseph Goebbels was extremely pleased with this "picture" propaganda.¹³

But the German propaganda strategy did not proceed entirely unchallenged. Even before the "Time" published its analysis in late September, some foreign correspondents, including Otto Tolischus from "The New York Times," expressed critical views of both the guard of honor at Piłsudski's tomb, and the Black Madonna case. While Tolischus did mention a "more conciliatory attitude" of the Nazis toward the Poles, he did it for tactical reasons (Tolischus, 1939). In an anonymous article published by "The New York Times" on 12 September 1939, it was opined that the cult of Piłsudski initiated by the German invaders was an expression of gross cynicism. The unknown author jibed that apparently the "guard of honor" was intended to mean that "the only good Pole is a dead Pole" (pic. 7). It was further stated in the same article that the annexation of Czechoslovakia had been first and foremost a military move designed to facilitate the invasion of Poland. However, the admiration for Piłsudski, at least as far as Hitler and Goebbels were concerned, was genuine, as evidenced by

12 "Inform about paying respects at Piłsudski's tomb [...], using all means available (text, photo, motion picture, radio) and see that it will be sent to Berlin as soon as possible" (OKW/WFS. [Oberkommando der Wehrmacht] telex of 6 September 1939, qtd. in Scharnberg, 2016, p. 25).

13 On 4 September 1939, Goebbels wrote: "Photo propaganda agreed upon with Kurzbein [Heiner Kurzbein, Director of the Photographic Office at the Ministry of Propaganda]. Things are playing out well on this end, too" (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 94–96). On 10 September, he wrote: "Photo materials and weekly movie chronicles checked in the evening. They are being expertly delivered by propaganda campaigns" (pp. 99–100).

German invaders in Cracow
His have placed a guard of honor
Czech at the tomb of Marshal Piłsudski.
Base The idea seems to be that
the only good Pole is a dead
Pole. Tears roll down the cheeks of the
German radio announcers as they bewail
the fact that Piłsudski is not alive today
to tell the people of Poland how good a
friend they have in Hitler. But if there
is anything to be deduced from the
Hitler record of the last few years it is
the certainty that if Piłsudski were
alive today he would now be leading the
armies of Poland against the German
invaders.

7. The cult of Piłsudski did not
escape criticism

Source: "The New York Times",
12 September 1939, p. 24.

numerous entries in the latter's journal.¹⁴ Whatever the case, it was aptly utilized to achieve propaganda goals.

But the sort of sharp criticism exemplified by the "The New York Times" article did not make the first pages. Meanwhile the photograph of the Wehrmacht guard of honor (pic. 8) and pictures of Hitler himself next to Piłsudski's bust (pic. 9) were printed in a prominent position, in line with the political agenda of the Nazi regime, which focused on presenting the military involvement of German troops as honorable. The propagandists continued paying respect to Piłsudski throughout September, while the relevant photographic materials circulated in the AP's Berlin bureau and were subsequently printed all over the American press. The first issue of the propagandistic "Ilustrowany Kurier Polski," which was firmly controlled by the German occupiers, came out on 13 October 1939 and also carried the Wehrmacht's guard of honor on its first page.¹⁵

At the same time, some American foreign correspondents, such as Frederick Oechsner from the United Press, reported extensively on Polish war crimes while "with the German Army in the Polish corridor," although no such obligation had been imposed on them, even if they were

14 15 May 1935: "In the afternoon, I'm exploring the life of a great soldier. The life of a hero. Plenty of suffering, plenty of feats. The most eminent son of Poland. His address in the Sejm in 1926. Heartwarming. Cromwell's second coming!" (Goebbels, 1998). 10 September 1938: "Poland cannot successfully replace Piłsudski with anyone. Lipski told me about the personal side and many endearing features of the great Marshal." In Goebbels' notes there are also more critical remarks about Piłsudski, and some tactical assessments, e.g. 16 June 1934: "Half Asian. In bad health. An old revolutionary. Even older than Hindenburg. But the clarity of a soldier[']s mind]. The army is good overall. Piłsudski has a grip on Poland. A great man and a fanatic Pole. Hates people and the big city. A tyrant, I presume. Has endless anecdotes up his sleeve in conversations. At his request, we were photographed together." 13 May 1935: "Poland has lost its best man, and we – the most important piece in the grand game."

15 On Hitler and the cult of Piłsudski, see Szarota, 2001, pp. 159–160.



Nazi Place Guard at Tomb of Polish Patriot

Associated Press Wirephotos

Picture above radioed from Berlin shows a Nazi soldier standing guard at the tomb of Marshal Piłsudski in Krakow, a Polish city captured last week by the Germans

8. An AP telegraph photo implying the “honorable” nature of the Wehrmacht’s military involvement in Poland.

Source: “The Washington Post”, 11 September 1939, p. 10.

The Fuehrer Pays His Tribute to Poland’s Hero



Associated Press (by radio)

Adolf Hitler is shown in this picture, sent from Berlin, standing in front of a bust of Marshal Joseph Piłsudski, the founder of modern Poland, in a government building at Kiełce

9. Hitler next to Piłsudski’s bust in the occupied part of Poland. This AP telegraph photo immediately reached the USA via the Berlin transmitter.

Source: “New York Herald Tribune”, 12 September 1939, p. 3.

journalists embedded with the Wehrmacht. This is evidenced by the critical coverage of Otto Tolischus from “The New York Times” or Wallace Deuel from the “Chicago Daily News.”¹⁶ In the relevant literature, the strong presence of Berlin correspondents embedded with the German Army still goes unnoticed. It was assumed that only a few foreign reporters attended the victory parade in Warsaw.¹⁷ However, the reality was more complex and at once bleak.

According to Goebbels and his Ministry, the propaganda campaign against Poland followed the “learning by doing method,” at the same time drawing upon the lessons learned from the annexation of Czechoslovakia

¹⁶ Tolischus and Deuel were also considered by their colleagues as being the most uncompromising journalists in Berlin (Smith, 1942, pp. 51–53).

¹⁷ “Allied and neutral correspondents had no real opportunity to report the fall of Poland. They had little choice but to flee before the Nazis, dispatching such accounts as the censorship and tottering communications would permit. Toward the end of the brief campaign, the Nazis allowed a few Berlin correspondents to follow at a safe distance to corroborate what the official communique and propaganda companies had already told” (Mathews, 1957, p. 181). In his interesting analysis, Joseph J. Mathews fails to mention that the USA only entered the war in December 1941, by which time American correspondents had been present on all military fronts. That way, he cannot but be surprised at concluding that all the German military triumphs until that point had been informational nightmares for the Allies.

in the spring of 1939. As September progressed, the sense of confidence gradually increased. Goebbels wrote the following under his diary entry for 11 September 1939: “We are hitting top form just now. Also as regards global propaganda” (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 100–101). The entry for 23 September read thus: “My statements made before representatives of the foreign press have had a positive effect. They have resonated profoundly.” He also mentioned the dispatch – referred to above – of 25 foreign journalists to occupied Poland (pp. 117–119). Three days later, on 26 September, he wrote: “Press conference. Foreign press is on our side. Neutral press even too much so. Lies about the Protectorate [occupied Poland] dispelled. Representatives of the foreign press denied it themselves. This has been yet another remarkable feat of our office” (pp. 123–124).

But effecting a complete blackout on the war crimes was a difficult task, even for Goebbels. On 4 October, before the “parade for the Führer” in Warsaw, which was attended by several Berlin foreign correspondents whom Hitler had personally greeted at Warsaw airport (Huss, 1943, p. 23; Pihl, 1944, pp. 12–13),¹⁸ the Propaganda Minister was concerned about the international public: “Yesterday: Warsaw looks terrible. We need to be very careful if we’re sending foreign journalists there. They are supposed to be present when the Führer is reviewing the [victory] parade, that is, on Thursday [5 October]. On Friday, the Führer plans to give an address [in the Reichstag]” (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 136–137). A month later, on 3 November, Goebbels still did not know how to “sell” the destroyed Warsaw to the world. “Question: should we allow the publication of photos depicting the destruction of Warsaw? Pros and cons [of making such a decision]. One advantage is a shock effect. The Führer wants to see these photos first” (pp. 179–180). Eventually, Hitler went for shocking the international public, even if he also considered this in the unclear context of willingness to make peace: “Let that be a warning to those statesmen in London and Paris who still think of continuing this war” (Grigg, 1943, pp. 119–126). These musings of Goebbels prove that for Hitler, the policy relating to photos was of significance, and that some of its sensitive aspects even required the decision of the Führer himself. It was also agreed that the cult of Piłsudski would be tapered off, because it had already served its purpose for the media in September 1939: “Following my suggestion, the Führer orders that the Piłsudski Museum [in Belweder palace] be closed. Otherwise, it could become the epicenter of Polish hopes” (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 179–180, 3 November 1939).

In September 1939, the AP significantly contributed to presenting the invasion of Poland in a way favorable to Nazi Germany. Pic. 10, which was sent by the AP, was one of many in which Germans were depicted in

¹⁸ The photograph of this scene reprinted in Dietrich, 1940, p. 173.



—Associated Press Wirephoto
NAZIS CART OFF POLISH PRISONERS—Berlin, Sept. 17—This radiophoto, released by German headquarters today, shows Polish war prisoners being transported in German army trucks.

10. A transport of Polish POWs (Associated Press Wirephoto)

Source: "The Tampa Tribune", 18 September 1939, p. 3.

a better light than Poles. It shows well-dressed German soldiers and Polish POWs, who, having been stripped of their dignity as combatants, are being transported like cattle.

In the period of German conquest, the American foreign correspondents in Berlin were treading on thin ice. This started with the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938 and continued after the incorporation of the Sudetenland under the Munich Agreement in late October that year, and after Czechoslovakia was fully occupied in March 1939. With the invasion of Poland in September 1939, these conquests reached their climax. But the outbreak of the Second World War should not obscure the fact that there was continuity in how the international media operated before 1933 and after 1945. After the Phony War, the American correspondents in Berlin were still embedded with the Wehrmacht – also during the blitzkriegs against Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. In other words, they were “embedded” with the Nazi propaganda machine. In 2017, it was discovered that even after the USA went to war in December 1941, the international transmission of news and photographs continued uninterrupted. Indeed, the process even intensified under a secret agreement between the AP and the Third Reich, while the Second World War forced the globalization of the news and photo market (Domeier, 2017).

The American press did not side with Germany and the Nazis, but the close co-operation between the AP and the Third Reich was to the advantage of Nazi propaganda. Additionally, being embedded with the Wehrmacht created a rare opportunity to mine the war zones and restricted areas for information which did not originate with the German propaganda centers. The only foreign war correspondents allowed to operate on the German front line and battlefields were journalists from Fascist Italy, but even they could not move uninhibitedly (Tolischus, 1939).

When Louis Lochner, the chief correspondent of AP's Berlin branch and one of the top journalists of the era, went on special missions with Joseph Goebbels' permission, as in the case of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa,¹⁹ this was at least one step too far. His narrative was indeed grounded in facts, but its dissemination relied on the resources of the American press and played a part in the fact that the crimes which the Germans perpetrated at that time were not investigated, nor even reported on. In addition, what the AP did directly facilitated Germany's propaganda success after the invasion of Poland (pic. 5). Arranging journalists' trips had also been the Nazi propagandists' response to news in the international press concerning massacres in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia: opportunities were offered to interview the living, who "corrected" the global public by making it possible to ignore any reference to executions. The principle of "revealing and simultaneously concealing facts" had already been observed during organized visits to the first concentration camps, at the Olympic Games, or in the course of giving foreign correspondents tours of the Siegfried Line, when they were actually shown Potemkin villages. The same scenario applied to journalists' visits to the Theresienstadt concentration camp during the war.

But Louis Lochner must have had pangs of conscience or been affected by criticism, because he contributed to the *Overseas Press Club of America* collection with an article entitled "The first big lie of the Second World War." It offered the only justification of his trip to Częstochowa. Lochner claims that he had seen through Goebbels' plans and intended to put a dent in them:

I was convinced that any mileage the Goebbels propaganda machine might get out of finding the Black Madonna unharmed would be offset by the much larger and more comprehensive story that the first foreign correspondent admitted to a region captured by the Nazis would be able to write (Lochner, 1964).

He admitted that on his way from Gliwice to Częstochowa he had witnessed war crimes, including major damage inflicted on the town of Graszyn, whose civilian population had allegedly opened fire on Wehrmacht soldiers. In 1964, he explained that he was mostly describing the

19 During a Christmas party organized by the Ministry of Propaganda for the foreign press corps in Berlin in December 1939. Additionally, Lochner made a faux pas when, in front of all those present, he accepted a gift for his reporting from Częstochowa. "In the ante-room a Santa Claus performed and gave us jolly presents. Mine was a halo and I was proclaimed the Saint of Czestochowa!" (Lochner, 1967, p. 329). In his memoirs published in March 1943 he made no mention whatsoever of the propaganda context of his trip to Częstochowa (Lochner, 1942, pp. 96–98).

observations he had made while passing through the war theater, and that he considered his trip to Częstochowa as insignificant. But his 1939 reports paint a different picture. In reality, as late as 1964, Lochner was simply too proud of the fact that the Częstochowa mission had made him the first foreign correspondent to have seen and reported on the Second World War on the spot:

The American press gave nationwide circulation to the first eyewitness description of the war to reach the United States out of Nazi Germany. I felt satisfied that the trip to the Polish front, even though used by Goebbels for home propaganda, was well worthwhile, especially in view of the Propaganda Ministry's failure to prevent me from gaining a glimpse of Nazi war methods (Lochner, 1964).

He presented it so skillfully that it seemed as if, thanks to his mission, Goebbels had only achieved a propaganda success in the German press, and that the American and international outlets had promoted Lochner's observations about the war: "The Goebbels-controlled German press had a field day publishing these photographs and printing Ministerialrat Mueller's²⁰ one-sided version of our expedition" (Lochner, 1964). Meanwhile, it was the exact opposite: as explained earlier, Goebbels had, first and foremost, won over the international press. The German newspapers had to print whatever he wanted, anyway. In 1964, Lochner also failed to mention that the shot taken as an AP radiophoto by a "German army photographer" (featuring Lochner as the prime witness to the intactness of the Black Madonna icon) was the only such picture sent out globally, thus allowing it to reach its full potential as a visual image. He even went as far as claiming that

I did not know then that Hitler had just given secret orders to 'send to death mercilessly and without compassion men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language', on the specious pretext that Germany needed more Lebensraum (space for living) (Lochner, 1964).

In reality, he was presented with the text of this speech – which included the quotation he invoked – shortly after Hitler's famous appearance before the Wehrmacht command on 22 August 1939 at Obersalzberg, that is less than two weeks before his mission, which he had undertaken at

²⁰ On Ministerial Advisor Georg Wilhelm Müller, who accompanied Lochner, see Goebbels, 1998, pp. 94–96, 6 September 1939.

Goebbels' request. It is not clear how Lochner could get entangled in such blatant contradiction: he also published the speech in 1943, in the book entitled *What About Germany?*, and in 1945–1946 he provided it to investigators as part of the Nurnberg Trials.

But what is particularly disquieting is that in the winter of 1939, only a few weeks after Lochner had done a favor to the Nazi propagandists, his informant, Dr. Alfred Mehlhemmer,²¹ explained to him the context of Goebbels' actions: the narrative about the alleged destruction of the Black Madonna was always a lie, and had been craftily circulated in Paris. A German *agent provocateur* had told Cardinal Jean Verdier, the Archbishop of Paris, about the annihilation of the monastery and the painting. The cardinal thought that such an ignoble deed was plausible, and condemned it from the pulpit:

The cardinal's public protest made world news.²² That was exactly what Hitler and Goebbels wanted. They figured that the testimony of an American correspondent flown to Czestochowa would enable them to brand the French and Poles effectively as liars, and at the same time to demonstrate that they, the Nazis, were not barbarians such as the world believed them to be" (Lochner, 1964).²³

The notorious and successful anti-Semitic propaganda concerning atrocities ostensibly committed during the First World War, which Hitler and Goebbels had been almost obsessively preoccupied with since the 1920s (Goldfarb Marquis, 1978, pp. 487–489),²⁴ should have been stemmed immediately the moment Poland was invaded precisely because the Germans perpetrated war crimes in Poland on a daily basis.

In 1964, Lochner persuaded himself and the world that "[w]hatever propaganda value the Black Madonna episode may have had inside Germany, it did not cause a ripple abroad. It's main purpose, to influence world opinion, failed completely" (Lochner, 1964). In reality, because of his desire to be the first foreign correspondent accredited to Germany to report events from the war theater – which allowed him to acquire

²¹ Incorrectly referred to in the text as Karl Mehlhemmer.

²² Lochner was skillfully shifting the blame for the emergence of the Czestochowa narrative to "The New York Times," stating: "I may here interpolate that 'The New York Times' of September 5, 1939, carried a photograph with the caption, 'Cardinal Verdier of Paris, who has protested the aerial attack of Czestochowa'" (Lochner, 1964, p. 24).

²³ Goebbels' "planted stories" were often exposed, for example a communication from early December 1939 about 14 German warplanes landing in the Netherlands, with their crews asking to be interned (McKenzie, 1940, p. 302).

²⁴ On Hitler's and Nazi propagandists' conclusions, see Goldfarb Marquis, 1978, pp. 493–496.

in-demand sensationalist materials²⁵ – he gifted the Nazis not just the first big lie, but the first propaganda success of the Second World War, propped visually by a photograph for which he posed, and validated globally by the prestige enjoyed by the Associated Press. The ingenuity of the entire narrative is only apparent in hindsight; back then, it served to attain Hitler and Goebbels' goal to a tee.

Even under contemporary standards of journalistic conduct, Louis Lochner's actions were vile, because thanks to confidential intelligence on which he had had exclusivity since 24 August 1939 he was fully aware of the aggressive nature of the war fought against Poland: after all, he handed over the text of Hitler's speech of 22 August 1939 to the British. Regardless, he accepted Goebbels' offer. Even after learning from Mehlhemmer a few weeks later how he had ignobly aided Nazi propaganda, he did nothing to go public about this strategy, as it would have constituted the biggest humiliation of his career, and even the AP, which was positively disposed to the regime, would not have been able to keep him in Berlin any longer. That as late as 1964 he still attempted to obfuscate the issue and believed that he could put himself in a good light is beyond moral judgment.

The case discussed also allows for concluding that in no way did Goebbels use his journals to become the affable revealer of secrets, nor did he scribble down "truths" that he was forced to keep to himself while performing his everyday duties as a propagandist. The long passages quoted earlier about the Częstochowa incident show the extent to which Goebbels' famous proclivity for lying was reflected in his notes, and the degree to which this tendency can be reconstructed.²⁶ The production of the journals was in large part the volition of a prominent historical figure, and took place so that he could narrate events to posterity in line with his outlook. This implies deception, distortion of reality, and lies.²⁷ In any

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- ²⁵ Lochner also claimed that, being one of the chief correspondents of the three American news agencies in Berlin, he "picked" the Częstochowa trip, which was only to his advantage: "I was itching to go." Pierre Huss from the International News Service, who sympathized with the Germans, was the only other serious contender, but he came in third. That Frederick Oechsner from the United Press ceded his first place to Lochner, since he ostensibly could not leave Berlin as chief of bureau, is another indication of Oechsner's greater reserve toward the Nazi hierarchy, and suggests that he had suspected the trap, at least in principle (Lochner, 1964, p. 19). Oechsner repeatedly took risks by not letting himself be used as a pawn of the Nazi propagandists (Boelcke, 1966, p. 360, 22 May 1940).
- ²⁶ Hans-Leo Martin, a liaison officer of the Wehrmacht's High Command who was responsible for contacts with Goebbels, referred to "notes in the form of an alibi, an attempt at protecting himself" in case the journals fell into the hands of a personal enemy. Goebbels had a deep-running fear of Hitler, perhaps in the wake of the Röhm case, so in his notes he was constantly praising the Führer while at the same time running down everyone else "in a most disrespectful way" (Martin, 1973, p. 65).
- ²⁷ This was obvious for many reasons, one of them being that as early as 1934, Goebbels published a meticulous edition of his journal notes, entitled *Vom Kaiserhof zur*

case, Goebbels saw no reason to reveal the true character of his first major propaganda success of the Second World War and to show it as a masterful play staged in the shadow of the complex of the German propaganda of atrocities dating back to the First World War.

During meetings held at the Ministry he was also posing before his inner circle. For example, when he cursed bureaucracy in the presence of Wehrmacht liaison officers in the context of a trip of eight foreign correspondents that had been arranged for propaganda reasons, he proudly invoked his enormous success from the early stages of the Polish campaign:

Immediately after the war broke out, he managed, despite fierce opposition from relevant military bodies, to force through the proposed trip of American journalist Lochner to Częstochowa, thus nipping in the bud the first great lie of the war. From that point onward, it was constantly repeated that he could dispatch foreign journalists in order to falsify the lies of the enemy, and do so in the face of strong opposition; after each success, he would obviously also get credit from the very institutions that had formerly opposed him. However, it must be generally understood that the American press in Germany is a potent weapon when it comes to quashing the lies of the enemy. (Boelcke, 1966, p. 459, 14 August 1940).

In Goebbels' dialectics, the final statement could just as well be rephrased as: "when it comes to spreading war lies to our advantage."

Thanks to the excessive focus on the Wehrmacht's ceremony at Marshal Piłsudski's tomb and the posting of a "guard of honor," the Nazis had sealed the AP's entrapment in their propaganda, all the more that the guard originated with an admirer of the Marshal – Goebbels.²⁸ But all this was neither a work of chance, nor an error. Rather, it was a logical and structural consequence of the unwavering co-operation between the AP and the Germans, which reached its climax under a secret agreement concluded after the USA went to war in December 1941, and which continued all the way until the Reich's fall in the spring of 1945.²⁹

From the technical point of view, the very maintenance of the AP transmitter in Berlin was massively aiding German propaganda, and, during the invasion of Poland, Goebbels fully capitalized on it. There was

Reichskanzlei. *Eine historische Darstellung in Tagebuchblättern (Vom 1. Januar 1932 bis zum 1. Mai 1933)*.

28 7 September 1939: "On my initiative, military respects are paid at Piłsudski's tomb. This will surely have positive outcomes for us" (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 96–97).

29 On the secret agreement between the AP and the Germans, in effect from 1942 to 1945, see Domeier, 2017, FN 35.

no AP transmitter in Warsaw, and no bureau that could report on this stage of the war from the Polish perspective. During the September campaign of 1939, which sparked military, political and media controversy, the instant AP wirephotos determined the hierarchy of photographs in the American and global press, furthering – as has been demonstrated – exclusively German interests. At the time, it was often argued that the American public had to be briefed first, but this argument was insufficient even then, since the Americans wanted to be apprised not just first, but also with the utmost accuracy. Focusing on reports partly reminiscent of a sports commentary,³⁰ according to which the Wehrmacht was fighting a successful war in the spirit of fair play, and even protecting Poland’s national monuments, such as the Częstochowa monastery and Piłsudski’s tomb, was merely pulling the wool over the eyes of the Americans, who would otherwise have had an opportunity to additionally obtain information about war crimes. By disseminating the “facts” provided by the Germans, the AP in particular created a ruse which allowed for concealing the truth about mass violence and war atrocities that did not cease after the fighting in Poland ended. And even if correspondent William Shirer looked back with pride on his work while accompanying Wehrmacht units in his *Berlin Diary* and postwar bestseller *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, in his private notes concerning the seizing and destruction of Warsaw he nevertheless wrote: “I myself saw little of it.” Likewise, he was only watching the capturing of Gdańsk from afar and could not send his report to the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) due to technical problems (Shirer, 1982).

In addition, playing into the Germans’ hands were the actions of the Polish press and propaganda, which according to the United Press’ Edward Beattie, who had stayed in Warsaw until the first Stuka bombings, were abysmal. If it had not been for Sonia Tomara from the “New York Herald Tribune,” who spoke fluent Russian, the foreign correspondents (who were few and far between anyway) would not have got any information as the press conferences were held in Polish only. “Nothing had been organized.” Valuable reports never left Warsaw due to technical problems, or were “massacred” by the rigorous Polish censorship (Beattie, 1943, pp. 128–133).

³⁰ Some American correspondents complained about the tendency to report on German invasions as if they were major sporting events, because this meant falling for Nazi propaganda: Howard K. Smith wrote the following about the invasion of the Soviet Union: “The Russians were already collapsing. It wasn’t war. It was a national sport and the reporters were right on the sidelines giving a play-by-play description” (Smith, 1942, p. 74). “Reporting about the invasions of Scandinavia, the Low Countries and France was sports reporting. One focused on technique and it was beautiful. But this frame of mind could not last” (Smith, 1996, p. 95).

In any case, the majority of international journalists had fled the country. The British foreign correspondents were evacuated to safety on the morning of 5 September. Together with the staff of the British Embassy and Ministers of the Polish Government, they were quickly escaping “to the hinterland,” as Sefton Delmer wrote in his memoirs. The actual destination was Romania,³¹ which they reached four days later (Delmer, 1962). Those who avoided being interned by the Germans in this way included Edward de Pury, Hugh Greene (“Daily Telegraph,” later the BBC),³² Willie Forrest (“News Chronicle”), and Patrick Maitland (“Times”). Green was soon joined by his assistant, Clare Hollingworth, who – having been a journalist for just a few days – had already had her first sensational story: on 29 September 1939, she broke the news about the concentration of German armored troops near Gliwice. On 1 September at 5 a.m., she informed Greene and the British Embassy in Warsaw of the Luftwaffe’s bombing of Katowice. Thus, she is actually credited with giving the first communication about the outbreak of the Second World War (Hollingworth, 1940). Delmer himself thought that he may have been too timorous as a foreign correspondent:

Warsaw had resisted the German Wehrmacht for another fourteen days. Day after day, the defenders of the city addressed the Western superpowers on the radio. Listening to these broadcasts, I was angry with myself. I had the feeling that I should have stayed, after all. I could have aired my reports on the radio and told the world about the battle fought by this valiant nation. The sense of shame arising from my premature departure from Warsaw – as I saw it back then – would stay with me for a very long time. It only let up one year later, when, together with Eddie Ward from the BBC and Bob Cooper from “Times,” I had held out in Paris until the morning of the day when the Germans entered the city later in the evening (Delmer, 1962, pp. 401–407).

Reports concerning war crimes committed in Poland during the German invasion and the initial phase of the occupation reached the American foreign correspondents in Berlin. In a letter to CBS director Edward Kleuber dated 16 February 1940, Shirer named the examples of Poland and Czechoslovakia to explain why the work of an American foreign correspondent in a Nazi-controlled territory is pointless:

31 Edward Beattie also wrote how the British motorcade leaving Warsaw and heading for Romania was led by Delmer “with his customary aplomb” (Beattie, 1943, p. 141).

32 On the escape of British correspondents from Warsaw, see also Tracey, 1984, pp. 72–75.

For instance, we cannot go to Poland to check up on the reports that we get from there on German sadism, murder, repression. We indeed have done a bad job on both Poland and Czechoslovakia. Organized German murder in both is one of the most disgusting chapters in this war so far (Shirer, 1940).

As early as under the entry in his *Berlin Diary* for 19 November 1939, he wrote, “An American friend back from Warsaw tonight tells me the Nazi policy is simply to exterminate the Polish Jews.” He also mentioned that thousands of Jews had by then been deported from Germany to Poland “to die” (Shirer, 1942, pp. 186–187).

The foreign press corps in Berlin knew about the planned extermination, even if acquiring and verifying the relevant information was far from a straightforward task.³³ For a long time, Shirer could only send to the USA “facts” provided by Nazi propaganda, and these were self-explanatory, as they concerned, for example, the introduction of forced labor for Poles and hard labor for all Polish Jews in January 1940 (Shirer, n.d.). In his *What About Germany?*, released in March 1943, Louis Lochner also described numerous atrocities perpetrated in Poland. The problem is that neither he nor the AP’s Berlin bureau reported on them (Lochner, 1942, pp. 97–98). The agency did favors to the Nazis even when the lives of American citizens and state interests were at stake, a case in point being the sinking of the “Athenia” steam liner by a German submarine on 3 September 1939. In the entry in his journal for 6 January 1940, Goebbels’ mood was that of gratitude: “We are revisiting the Athenia case. The British made attempts to absolve themselves. But the Associated Press has come to the rescue, and we are eagerly taking advantage of the opportunity” (Goebbels, 1998, pp. 260–261).

Otto Tolischus from “The New York Times” took a greater risk, even if this was not always for the sake of direct publications in the American press. While in Oslo, where he moved with the Wehrmacht in April 1940, he sent a confidential memo to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, editor of “The New York Times,” in which he shared his knowledge about mass murders perpetrated by the Germans in Poland: “The Poles, like the Jews, are marked for extermination – physical extermination for the Jews and for those Poles who cannot reconcile themselves to German rule.” Sulzberger decided that the note was important and passed it on via confidential channels to Henry Morgenthau, who then showed it to President Roosevelt (Henry

³³ “Unbiased reports, especially with German pre-censorship on radio reports, became almost impossible” (Shirer, 1942, p. 73, 7 May 1937). Even before 1939, pre-emptive radio censorship was imposed whenever the Nazi regime saw fit.

Morgenthau to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 20 April 1940, 1940³⁴). Despite the sensational news and numerous warning signs, another year and a half had to pass before the USA entered the Second World War.

In the spring of 1941, the British Government conceded that they were lagging behind Nazi Germany on the media and propaganda front, especially due to an insufficient number of photo reports. This went down very badly with the USA, which it was hoped could be persuaded to join the Allied cause and enter the war as soon as possible. The Chiefs of Staff “expressed profound dissatisfaction with the poor quality of this important weapon.” A secret analysis compiled by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, whose job was to assess the situation and present practical conclusion, noted:

American opinion and morale was severely shaken by the sheer volume of German-inspired news. News from London has been sketchy, insignificant and stale. German photographs of high technical quality have been received daily [in the USA] but not a single photograph was received from the Allied side until 18th April (Propaganda. Report..., 1941).

In September 1939, Germany was definitely in the military ascendancy. But it is striking that in its reports the Associated Press, the world’s largest news agency, presented only the (triumphant) German narrative. In this way the AP was violating its own principles, which Louis Lochner himself laid out in his manual for the agency’s foreign correspondents:

News items, scanned each day by every member, must therefore be unbiased, fair statements of pure facts. They are written and distributed solely on their merits as news. The Associated Press does not lend itself to propaganda. Every effort is made to present both sides of a controversial subject. Its chief instruction to its correspondents is that they be fair, impartial and that they examine and present every viewpoint when a difference of opinion exists (Associated Press, 1930/1932, pp. 1–2).³⁵

³⁴ The memo is only signed by a “Berlin correspondent”, but according to Laurel Leff, Tolischus was the only correspondent with “The New York Times” in Oslo at that time (Leff, 2005, pp. 75–76). Wallace Deuel also openly described the exterminatory policy against the Jews and Poles, pointing out that Heinrich Himmler and the SS were central to it: “More specifically, they underestimated Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler. For Hitler has now ordered and Himmler set out to do exactly this difficult and utterly evil thing: to destroy whole European nations.” As early as at the beginning of 1942, Deuel estimated the first 18 months of the German occupation had claimed the lives of 3 million Poles (Deuel, 1942, pp. 74–76).

³⁵ Cf. the version revised by Louis Lochner in 1932 (Lochner, 1932).

With AP reporting being heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda, a scenario that would have been possible had the information been acquired independently and critically evaluated never materialized. The war crimes perpetrated by the Germans at the very same time were left out of reports favorable to the regime. This is where it becomes evident that the AP, having received preferential treatment from the Nazi dictatorship, did not develop a “drive” towards investigative journalism that could have dragged the crimes of the Third Reich out into the light. Its cooperation with the regime was strengthened in the spring of 1939 at the latest. Further to a secret agreement in force from late 1941, and the consequent daily influx of photographic and information materials all the way until the fall of Nazi Germany, said cooperation eventually solidified to the point that it stifled any journalistic independence that would have allowed for detecting and describing the war crimes committed against the Czechs and the Poles, or the Holocaust of European Jews. As the Germans brutally cracked down on the Warsaw Uprising between August and October 1944, the confidential circulation of photographs between the AP and the Nazis was in full swing. Even though the agency did not have any photographers at the scene or close by, the “exclusives” kept coming in. American reporting journalism “depended heavily on the official output of the Nazi propaganda machine” (The Associated Press, n.d., p. 121). The AP was thus kept satiated with materials delivered by the Reich right until April 1945. This trend, which adversely affected global public opinion during the Second World War, was already discernible when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939.

(transl. from Polish by Maciej Grabski)

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