

The Bodies of Belsen

Were all those skeletal victims we see in WWII photos “gassed to death”—or is there more to the story?

By Peter Winter

The Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, located in northern Germany, generated the haunting imagery which is now most often associated with “the Holocaust.” The photographs and films of piles of emaciated bodies, often being bulldozed into mass graves by British liberators, are now the most commonly used imagery associated with World War II concentration camps.

In reality, Bergen-Belsen was not the site of “gas chambers” or any sort of systematic mass execution. The widespread impression that the dead at Belsen were victims of “gassing” is a misconception that overshadows the true causes of the camp’s shocking appearance in 1945: the devastating disease of typhus.

These images of piles of skeletal corpses have been used to fuel an assumption of “gas chambers,” but the reality is that these awful scenes were the product of disease, overcrowding, and the collapse of Germany’s logistics and food supply network due to the Allied mass bombing campaign.

TYPHUS: THE DISEASE OF DEPRIVED CONDITIONS

Epidemic-level typhus is caused by bacteria known as *Rickettsia prowazekii*. In Bergen-Belsen’s case, the typhus epidemic was spread by body lice, aggravated by overcrowded and



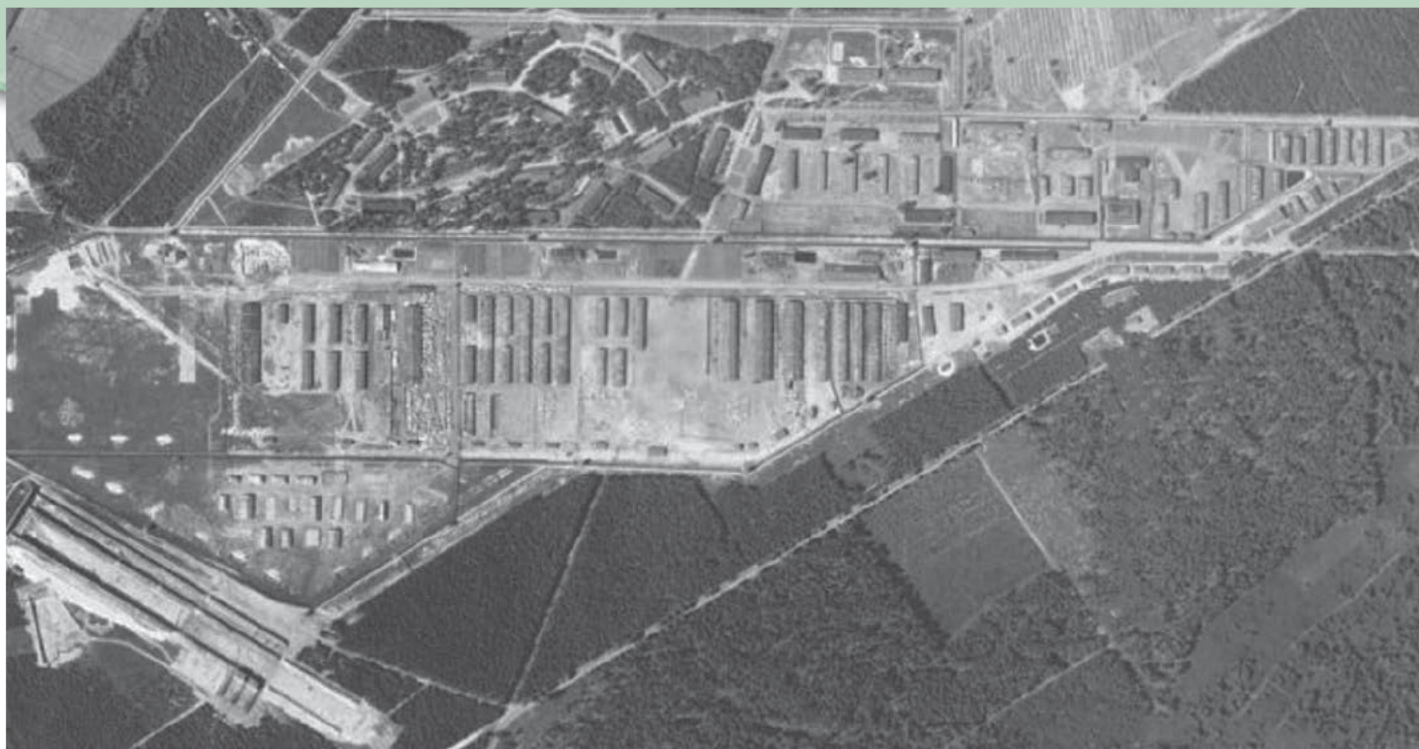
Not everyone in Bergen-Belsen looked like the camp horror images shown to enrage the public. These smiling women, collecting their bread ration from one of the five camp cookhouses after the British occupation, had not contracted typhus and are in perfect health and well-fed, contrary to post-war propaganda which claimed that the Nazis had deliberately starved inmates to death or to a skeletal state.

unsanitary conditions.

Rickettsia prowazekii has distinct microbiological characteristics: it is “gram-negative,” that is, it has a thin inner and outer cell wall that contains

specific proteins that nature has designed to trigger strong immune responses in hosts, such as fever, inflammation, or septic shock.¹

The bacteria are transmitted



A British aerial photograph of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1944 showing its neat and orderly layout. This was before the typhus epidemic of 1945, and there are no piles of corpses or other horror images, which are now claimed to be evidence of “Nazi genocide.”

through the bite of infected body lice, which thrive in conditions of poor hygiene, overcrowding, and inadequate clothing or bedding sanitation. Lice become infected by feeding on the blood of an infected person and then spread the bacteria to others through their feces, which enter the human body via scratching of bite sites or through mucous membranes.

Typhus has affected human populations for at least 800 years, with the first clearly documented cases dating back to the 15th century. Outbreaks almost always occur during wars, famines, and social crises, exacerbated by impoverished, overcrowded, and unsanitary conditions, such as conflict zones and Third World regions in Africa, Central America, South America, and Asia.

Its persistence is tied to the human body louse, making it a disease caused almost entirely by socioeconomic backwardness.

It used to be equally prevalent in Europe and North America before modern sanitation. During World War

II, typhus emerged once again as a killer disease in the German concentration camp network.

SYMPTOMS OF TYPHUS

Symptoms of epidemic typhus typically appear 7–14 days after infection and range from mild to severe, often progressing rapidly if untreated. They include a high fever (often exceeding 104°F or 40°C) and chills, severe, persistent headaches due to systemic infection and inflammation, and generalized muscle and joint pain.²

External symptoms include a characteristic rash that appears 4–7 days after symptom onset, starting on the trunk (chest, back, or abdomen) and spreading to the limbs but typically sparing the face, palms, and soles. The rash begins as red spots and often progresses to small hemorrhages under the skin.

Delirium, confusion, and stupor are frequent due to the bacteria's impact on blood vessels and the central nervous system. In severe cases, patients may experience seizures or

coma. Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain are also common.

Without treatment, epidemic typhus has a mortality rate of 10%–60%, particularly in malnourished or immunocompromised individuals. Death is most often caused by damage to blood vessels, which leads to organ failure or pneumonia or other bacterial infections, while prolonged infection can cause lasting cognitive or neurological impairments.

THIN BODIES THE RESULT OF TYPHUS

Epidemic typhus causes significant weight loss and a gaunt, emaciated appearance—often described as “thinning”—due to its systemic effects and the conditions in environments like Bergen-Belsen, where it was prevalent.

This physical appearance is the result of typhus's high, sustained fever, which significantly increases the body's metabolic rate. This heightened energy demand accelerates the breakdown of fat and muscle tissue, especially in individuals already malnourished,

leading to rapid weight loss.

Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain reduce appetite and impair nutrient absorption. Infected individuals often consumed even less food than the rations provided in camps, exacerbating starvation.

Furthermore, the *Rickettsia prowazekii* bacteria cause widespread inflammation, particularly in blood vessels, which can lead to tissue damage and cachexia—a wasting syndrome characterized by loss of fat and muscle mass. This contributes to a cadaverous appearance.³

Finally, the fever, sweating, and vomiting associated with typhus cause significant fluid loss, leading to dehydration. This can make the body appear even more emaciated, as sunken cheeks, hollow eyes, and taut skin become quite pronounced.

The photographs and films that date from the time of Bergen-Belsen's liberation in April 1945 show survivors and deceased prisoners as skeletal or emaciated.

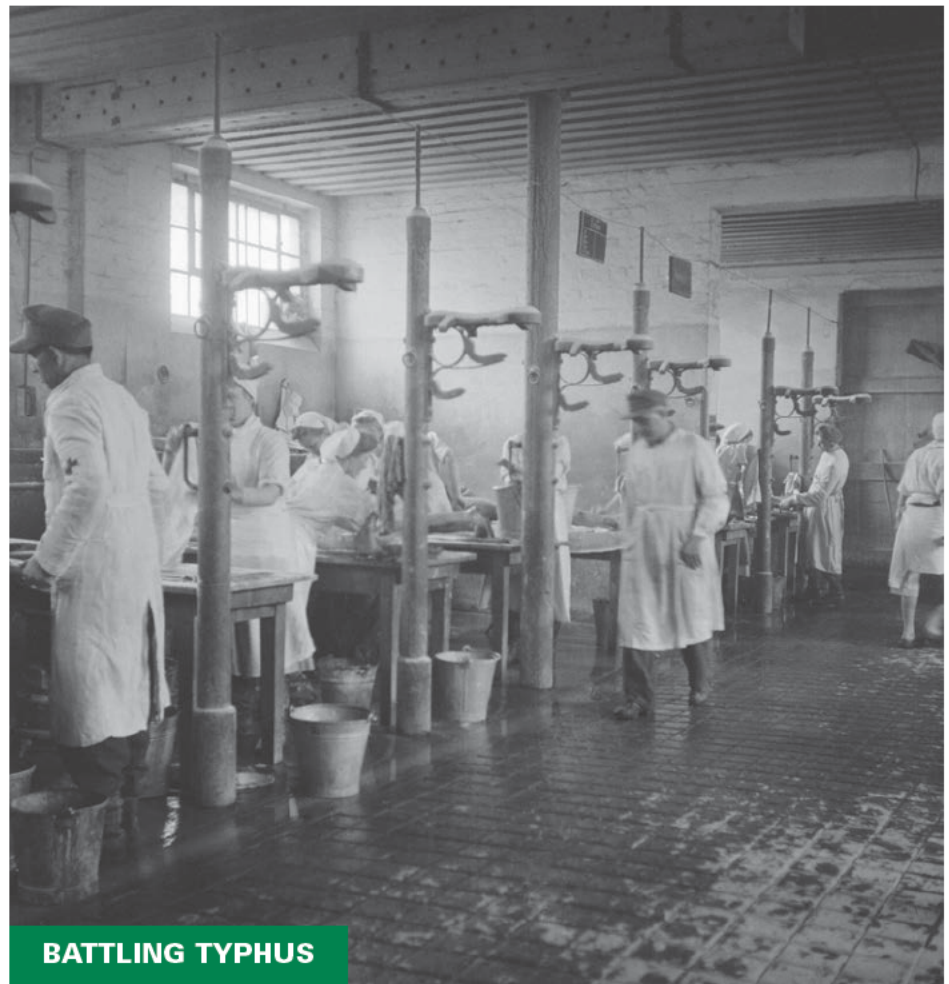
This was caused directly by typhus, as can be seen in the photographs of other prisoners who had not been infected by the disease, who all appear in the photographs to be of normal body weight and decent health.

LICE CONTROL IN THE WORK CAMPS

Body lice were a significant concern in the German concentration camps due to their role in spreading epidemic typhus. As a result, several strategies were employed in an attempt to control the pests, which included:

- **Disinfection Chambers:** Many camps had delousing stations where prisoners' clothing, bedding, and personal items were treated with heat, steam, or chemical agents to kill lice and their eggs. Steam sterilization was common, as it effectively destroyed lice at high temperatures.

- **Gas Chambers for Delousing:** In some camps, such as Auschwitz, Zyklon B (a hydrogen cyanide-based pesticide) was used to fumigate clothing and barracks for lice control. This was done in specially designed



BATTLING TYPHUS

Under British supervision, German doctors were drafted to help delouse prisoners and then treat them for the disease. The spraying systems visible in this photograph are specifically designed to try and kill the typhus-carrying body lice.

chambers to avoid harming personnel or prisoners.

- **Shaving and Hair Removal:** Upon arrival, prisoners' heads and bodies were often shaved to reduce lice habitats. This was a standard procedure in camps like Auschwitz and Dachau to limit infestations.

- **Most camps provided bathing facilities,** where it was mandatory for prisoners to shower with disinfectant solutions (e.g., carbolic acid or cresol-based soaps) to kill lice residing on the body.

- **Insecticides,** such as sulfur-based powders or early synthetic pesticides, were applied to prisoners' bodies or clothing. Barracks were regularly fumigated with chemicals to reduce lice populations.

- **In camps with better organization** (e.g., early in the war), prisoners suspected of having typhus or heavy lice infestations were isolated in designated barracks to limit disease spread.

THE TYPHUS EPIDEMIC AT BERGEN-BELSEN

Bergen-Belsen was established in 1940 as a prisoner of war (POW) camp (Stalag XI-C) and transitioned into a concentration camp in 1943 under SS administration. Initially, it served as an exchange camp for Jewish prisoners whom the Nazis intended to trade for German nationals or resources.⁴

When Bergen-Belsen operated as a prisoner of war camp and, later, as a holding camp for Jews intended for exchange, delousing procedures, such

as steam treatment of clothing and bathing, were widespread and kept lice infestations under control. As the camp population began to soar, however, it became increasingly difficult to ensure.

Then, the arrival of tens of thousands of prisoners from evacuated eastern camps (such as Auschwitz) in late 1944–early 1945 caused extreme overcrowding, with the population reaching over 60,000 by March 1945. These numbers overwhelmed any existing lice-control measures.

Finally, early in 1945, a transport of prisoners from the east introduced typhus into the camp, and the disease then spread rapidly, with the death toll spiking from that month onward.

DEATH TOLL FROM TYPHUS

It is widely claimed that approximately 50,000 prisoners died at Bergen-Belsen. This figure, however, includes the approximately 13,994 who died after the British and Canadian army took control of the camp.

Almost all of these deaths occurred during the typhus epidemic which raged from January 1945. In December 1944, the surviving records from the camp show that 350 deaths were recorded at the camp. This jumped to 1,000 in January 1945, 7,000 in February 1945, 18,168 in March 1945, and 18,365 in April 1945, all as a result of typhus.⁵

This is a total of around 44,533 deaths in the first four months of 1945. It should be borne in mind that the April 1945 figure includes the deaths for the whole month, and that the camp was turned over to advancing British and Canadian troops on April 15. Hence it is estimated that around 37,000 died in 1945 while the camp was still under German control.

The camp crematorium, which had only one oven, was not able to cope with such a high death rate. It was this logistical backlog that caused the corpses to become stacked up. With no way of dealing with this situation, the problem spun out of control and created the shocking scenes that awaited the incoming Allied troops.

ALLIED BOMBING CAMPAIGN CRIPPLES GERMAN LOGISTICS

The situation was further aggravated by the Allied bombing campaign against German rail and logistics networks, a development which significantly impaired the ability to maintain effective administration and supply chains, including those for concentration camps like Bergen-Belsen.

The camp relied on rail networks to deliver food, medical supplies, and other essentials. Allied bombings targeted rail centers, marshalling yards, and bridges across Germany, particularly from 1943 onward, causing significant delays and shortages.

As a result, shortages had slashed rations at Bergen-Belsen by early 1945, a development which exacerbated starvation and weakened prisoners' immunity to diseases like typhus.

In addition, the inability to deliver soap, clean clothing, or disinfectants due to disrupted rail transport prevented effective lice control, fueling the typhus epidemic. Damaged rail networks meant prisoners arrived in poor condition, often already infected with typhus or carrying lice, seeding the epidemic.

The administrative collapse is evident in the SS's failure to screen or delouse new arrivals, as noted in British liberation reports.

The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (1945) notes that attacks on transportation infrastructure caused a 40% drop in rail marshalling capacity by late 1944. From April 1944, transportation systems became a primary objective, with the USAAF dropping 600 tons of bombs monthly on German rail yards from September 1944 to April 1945. The Deutsche Reichsbahn lost significant rolling stock, with repair crews overwhelmed by damaged tracks and bridges. Bergen-Belsen was particularly affected by the massive raids on nearby cities like Hamburg and Hanover.⁶

Finally, a two-thirds decline in Germany's oil supply from late 1944 to April 1945—caused by a strategic Allied bombing effort aimed directly at Germany's fuel production process, codenamed "The Oil Campaign"—crippled not only the army, air force, and ground forces, but also the railway network.⁷

This bombing campaign was decisive, not only in the direction of war



Shortly after the British occupation of Bergen-Belsen, the new camp wardens implemented measures to bring the typhus epidemic under control. One of the steps included enforcing a 5 mph speed limit on all vehicles to stop road dust from spreading live typhus bacteria into the air.



A SEA OF CORPSES

Bergen-Belsen camp doctor Fritz Klein, shown standing among the typhus-infected corpses, was drafted to oversee a mass grave burial by British troops.

(for example, by February 1945, aviation fuel production was 0.5% of early 1944 levels), but also in destroying the supply system to a camp like Bergen-Belsen, which was totally dependent on the rail network for all supplies.

BRITISH AND CANADIAN FORCES ENTER THE CAMP

The peaceful handover of Bergen-Belsen to British and Canadian troops in April 1945 was a direct result of the typhus epidemic within the camp.

As the British 11th Armored Division advanced northeast across Germany toward the River Elbe, Bergen-Belsen lay in their path.

In early April, German authorities, aware of the camp's dire state, proposed a localized truce to prevent the spread of typhus beyond the camp's confines. This proposal was motivated by the fear that fighting in the area could exacerbate the epidemic, endangering both military and civilian populations.⁸

On April 11, 1945, Reichsführer-

SS Heinrich Himmler authorized the surrender of Bergen-Belsen without a fight, a decision communicated through German military channels.

The following day, April 12, Wehrmacht representatives approached British forces at a bridge in Winsen, approximately 30 miles from Bergen-Belsen. The German emissaries were escorted to VIII Corps headquarters to negotiate terms of surrender.

The negotiations focused on creating a safe handover to mitigate the typhus risk. The Germans informed



The 80 SS men and women who voluntarily stayed behind at the camp to fulfill their duties were forced to help start burying the mountains of dead by the British authorities.

the British of the camp's catastrophic state. On April 13, 1945, a formal agreement was signed between British and German representatives. The agreement designated a 19-square-mile neutral zone around Bergen-Belsen to prevent military engagement and contain the typhus epidemic.

Permission was also granted for most of the SS personnel to leave the camp, reducing the risk of resistance. Only a small number of SS men and women, including camp commandant Josef Kramer, voluntarily remained to maintain order inside the camp.

In addition, it was agreed that Hungarian and regular Wehrmacht troops would remain to guard the camp's perimeter—to prevent a breakout of the prisoners carrying typhus into the surrounding areas, with the understanding that they would be returned to the German front lines shortly after the handover.

This agreement ensured that British and Canadian troops could enter the camp without facing armed resistance, a critical factor given the Allies' limited

resources for managing a large-scale health crisis.

Thus, on April 15, 1945, British and Canadian troops entered Bergen-Belsen without resistance. Upon entry, the troops encountered the horrific conditions of the camp which were to become infamous. Approximately 60,000 prisoners, many emaciated and ill, were packed into overcrowded barracks, and 13,000 unburied corpses were strewn across the grounds.

BRITISH ATTEMPT TO BRING THE EPIDEMIC UNDER CONTROL

Upon taking control, British forces faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The SS guards who remained were forced to assist with burying the 13,000 bodies, but that process was too slow, and the British forces were forced to employ bulldozers to bury the dead.

These scenes, captured on film, are the basis of the images that have come to symbolize "the Holocaust," and which are still shown to school children around the world as an emo-

tionally and psychologically overwhelming introduction to the topic.

The official British reports from the scene noted typhus as the dominant disease, and they almost immediately started dealing with thousands of unburied bodies and survivors in advanced stages of infection.

Their immediate reaction was to deploy a chemical compound far more effective than anything the Germans had: Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT).

DDT is a synthetic insecticide developed for its ability to kill insects like lice and mosquitoes. Nazi Germany did not have DDT due to its development in neutral Switzerland by J.R. Geigy, its exclusive sharing with the Allies, and Germany's scientific, industrial, and geopolitical isolation. Instead, Germany relied on far less effective pesticides like Zyklon B to control lice in the camps.

British medical teams immediately used DDT powder to delouse prisoners, clothing, and barracks, which quickly reduced lice populations.

Prisoners were bathed, provided clean clothing, and moved to sanitized facilities (including a nearby former German military hospital). Typhus patients were isolated and treated, halting further spread.⁹

These measures brought the epidemic under control within four weeks, even though, as mentioned earlier, 13,000–14,000 prisoners still died post-liberation due to advanced disease.

Even so, the lice infestation was so bad that, on May 21, 1945, the British used flamethrowers mounted in Bren gun carriers to physically burn down the entire camp. This is why there are no structures at all on the present-day camp memorial site.

BELSEN IMAGES WIDELY USED

The films and images of emaciated bodies and their gruesome burial using bulldozers at Bergen-Belsen, captured by the British Army's No. 5 Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU), are used extensively in Holocaust educational materials.

In the United Kingdom, the Holocaust Educational Trust and University College London (UCL) Centre for Holocaust Education's "Belsen 75 Programme" (commemorating the 75th anniversary of liberation in 2020) provides Bergen-Belsen images to secondary schools (ages 11–18), emphasizing "carefully selected" images for "younger audiences."¹⁰

In the United States, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and other Holocaust museums around the country incorporate Bergen-Belsen photographs in lesson plans for middle and high schools (grades 6–12).¹¹

The Bergen-Belsen Memorial's educational resources, used in German and international schools, include digitized AFPU footage and photos in exhibitions and online modules, tailored for students aged 14 and older.¹²

In the UK, United States, Germany,

PETER WINTER is the penname of a scholar at a prestigious academic institution who, in outrage at the continued lies perpetrated about WWII by the establishment, authored the work *The Six Million: Fact or Fiction* (125 pages, #604, \$25) is available from TBR.



The solitary crematorium oven at Bergen-Belsen was never intended to cope with mass deaths, as happened during the typhus epidemic of January to April 1945. This was the reason why thousands of corpses piled up in the camp and formed the basis of the horror images which have now come to symbolize the "Holocaust."

and other countries with Holocaust education mandates, these materials are used for students aged 11–18. Examples include GCSE history curricula (UK) and state-mandated Holocaust education in states such as California and Florida.¹³

The use of these materials has profound educational, emotional, and societal effects. The graphic nature of the images, described as "horrifying" by the website of *LIFE* magazine, evokes shock and empathy.¹⁴ The disturbing content, particularly bulldozer burials, is often utterly overwhelming and many youngsters, unprepared for the shocking sights, are left near tears.

NAZIS NOT TO BLAME

Despite the widespread use of these images to promote the official Holocaust narrative, none of the actors involved in spreading these images ever points out that these scenes are not the "fault" of the Nazis, but rather of circumstances created by the Allies themselves, and, in particular, the wholesale destruction of German

supply and logistics networks, which effectively destroyed the state's ability to keep the camps in good order.

In addition, these photos are offered as "proof" to unsuspecting viewers that the Germans genocided mass numbers of Jews in homicidal gas chambers, even though none of the dead prisoners at Bergen-Belsen displayed any signs of homicidal gassing.

Bergen-Belsen existed in excellent working order for nearly four-and-a-half years before the catastrophe of early 1945. Predictably, the Holocaust propagandists will never show images of the camp before the typhus epidemic.

Instead, all the images and films used to "prove" the Holocaust all date from the time of the Ally-created German collapse.

What must be the most disturbingly duplicitous development of all, the "mass graves" and "bulldozer" sequences—the most shocking ones shown in "Holocaust education" programs—all date from the time of the Allied occupation of the camp. ❖

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Top, a British army propaganda unit cameraman films SS men being forced to unload and bury typhus victims at Bergen-Belsen. These films today form the mainstay of most shock "Holocaust" propaganda, despite these scenes having nothing to do with "gas chambers" or deliberate exterminations of any sort.

Perhaps the most infamous photo (and film) from the Bergen-Belsen camp is shown below. A British bulldozer piles bodies into a mass grave to speed up the burial process. In this way, the British authorities brought the typhus epidemic under control, but this measure is now used to claim "proof" of the "Holocaust."

