

Citation: [Editor. \(Apr. 18, 1917\)](#). German Ghouls - Corpses Converted to Soap and Explosives, Dividends from Death [The Wellington House War Propaganda Bureau, formed Aug. 1914, anti-German propaganda]. *Sheffield/Yorkshire Evening Telegraph and Star*, British Newspaper Archive.

[Editors. \(Oct. 27, 2014\)](#). 11 unusual tales of terror from historical newspapers. The British Newspaper Archive. <https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2014/10/27/11-unusual-tales-of-terror-from-historical-newspapers/> [1]

[1] "The British Newspaper Archive is full of grisly stories about the unusual and the unexplained. We've selected some of the oddest tales, including a description of a monster with the head of a sea lion and a rumour that Germany was turning dead soldiers into explosives during the First World War.



Item: 4) 1917: FWW explosives made of dead soldiers

The Sheffield Evening Telegraph was one of many newspapers to report a shocking rumour during the First World War. In April 1917, it stated that the Germans were 'distilling glycerine from the bodies of their dead' to make soap and explosives.

It is thought that the report was actually anti-German propaganda, and in 1925, the British Government announced that there had never been any foundation for the story." (Emphasis added).



<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000276/19170418/029/0002>

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"We have known for long that the Germans stripped their dead behind the firing line, fastened them into bundles of three or four bodies with iron wire, and then dispatched these grisly bundles to the rear. Until recently the trains laden with the dead were sent to Seraing, near Liège, and a point north of Brussels, where were refuse consumers. Much surprise was caused by the fact that of late this traffic has proceeded in the direction of Gerolstein, and it was noted that on each waggon was written 'D.A.V.G.'"

"German science is responsible for the ghoulish idea of the formation of the German Offal Utilisation Company, Limited ('D.A.V.G.' or 'Deutsche Abfall-Verwertungs Gesellschaft'), a dividend-earning company with a capital of £250,000, the chief factory of which has been constructed 1,000 yards from the railway connecting St. Vith, near the Belgian frontier, with Gerolstein, in the lonely little-frequented Eifel district, south-west of Coblenz. This factory deals specially with the dead from the West front. If the results are as good as the company hopes, another will be established to deal with corpses on the East front.

"The factory is invisible from the railway. It is placed deep in the forest country, with a specially thick growth of trees about it. Live wires surround it. A special double track leads to it. The works are about 700ft. long and 110ft. broad, and the railway runs completely round them. In the north-west corner of the works the discharge of the trains takes place.

"The trains arrive full of bare bodies, which are unloaded by the workers who live at the works. The men wear oilskin overalls and masks with mica eyepieces. They are equipped with long hooked poles, and push the bundles of bodies to an endless chain, which picks them with big hooks, attached at intervals of 2ft.

"The bodies are transported on this endless chain into a long narrow compartment, where they pass through a bath which disinfects them. They then go through a drying chamber, and finally are automatically carried into a digester or great cauldron, in which they are dropped by an apparatus which detaches them from the chain. In the digester they remain from six to eight hours, and are treated by steam, which breaks them up while they are slowly stirred by machinery.

"From this treatment result several products. The fats are broken up into stearine, a form of tallow, and oils, which require to be redistilled before they can be used. The process of distillation is carried out by boiling the oil with carbonate of soda, and some part of the by-products resulting from this is used by German soapmakers. The oil distillery and refinery lie in the south-eastern corner of the works. The refined oil is sent out in small casks like those used for petroleum, and is of a yellowish brown colour.

"The fumes are exhausted from the buildings by electric fans, and are sucked through a great pipe to the north-Eastern corner, where they are condensed and the refuse resulting is discharged into a sewer. There is no high chimney, as the boiler furnaces are supplied with air by electric fans.

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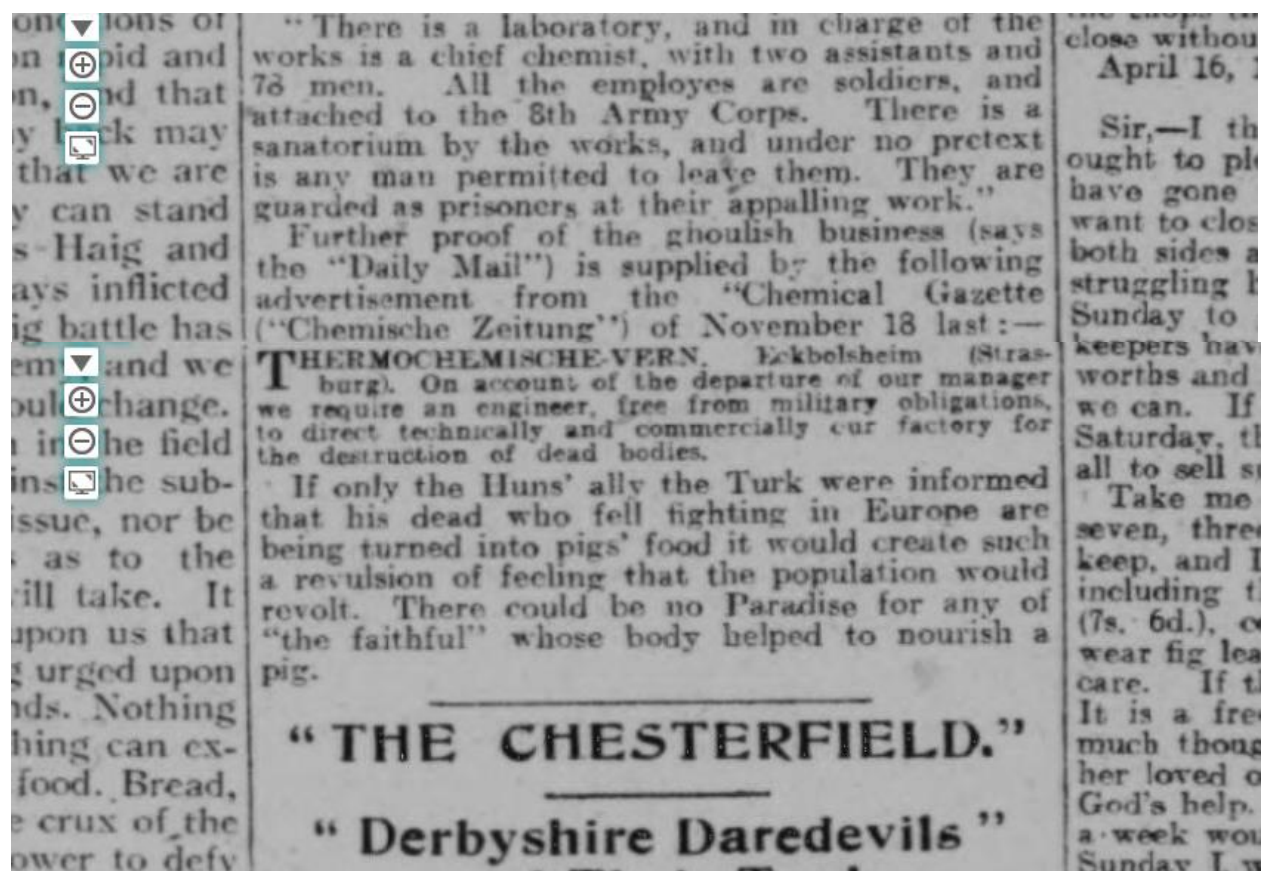
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TRANSCRIPTION:

YORKSHIRE TELEGRAPH AND STAR, WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 18, 1917.

GERMAN GHOULS

Corpses Converted to Soap and Explosives.

DIVIDENDS FROM DEATH.

The long suspected belief that the Germans are distilling glycerine [sic] from the bodies of their dead, and so obtaining some portion of their explosives, is confirmed by a statement in "La Belgique," of Leyden, in Holland, a translation appearing in the "The Times."

The story, omitting some of the most repulsive details, is as follows:-

"We have known for long that the Germans stripped their dead behind the firing line, fastened them into bundles of three or four bodies with iron wire, and then dispatched these grisly bundles to the rear. Until recently the trains laden with the dead were sent to Seraing, near Liège, and a point north of Brussels, where were refuse consumers. Much surprise was caused by the fact that of late this traffic has proceeded in the direction of Gerclatein, and it was notes that on each wagon was written "D.A.V.G."

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"From this treatment result several products. The fats are broken up into stearine, a form of tallow, and oils, which require to be redistilled before they can be used. The process of distillation is carried out by boiling the oil with carbonate of soda, and some part of the by-products resulting from this is used by German soapmakers [sic]. The oil distillery and refinery lie in the south-eastern corner of the works. The refined oil is sent out in small casks like those used for petroleum, and is of a yellowish brown colour.

"The fumes are exhausted from the buildings by electric fans, and are sucked through a great pipe to the north-Eastern corner, where they are condensed and the refuse resulting is discharged into a sewer. There is no high chimney, as the boiler furnaces are supplied with air by electric fans.

"There is a laboratory, and in charge of the works is a chief chemist, with two assistants and 78 men. All the employees are soldiers, and attached to the 8th Army Corps. There is a sanatorium by the works, and under no pretext is any man permitted to leave them. They are guarded as prisoners at their appalling work."

Further proof of the ghoulish business (says the "Daily Mail" is supplied by the following advertisement from the "Chemical Gazette ("Chemische Zeitung") of November 18 last [1916]: - THERMOCHEMISCHE-VERN. Eckbelsheim (Strasburg). On account of the departure of our manager we require an engineer, free from military obligations, to direct technically and commercially our factor for the destruction of dead bodies.

If only the Huns' ally the Turk were informed that his dead who fell fighting in Europe are being turned into pigs' food it would create such revulsion of feeling that the population would revolt. There could be no Paradise for any of "the faithful" whose body helped to nourish a pig.

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