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Trophies of War: U.S. Troops and the Mutilation of Japanese War Dead, 1941-1945

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A cartoon published in the *Chicago Tribune* three days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor depicted a muscular and grim-faced U.S. sailor carrying powder charges to a naval gun aimed at the distant Japanese home islands. From one of the charges dangled a tag reading "War without Mercy on a Treacherous Foe."¹ Indeed, the war which the United States waged against Japan from December 1941 until August 1945 was characterized by a degree of savagery unmatched by the war being fought simultaneously against the European Axis. The explanation for this goes far beyond the fact that the United States had been the victim of a Japanese "surprise attack," whereas Germany and Italy initiated war by means of formal and "gentlemanly" declarations. To a much greater degree than Germans (and certainly Italians), Japanese became dehumanized in the minds of American combatants and civilians, a process facilitated by the greater cultural and physical differences between white Americans and Japanese than between the former and their European foes. It was, moreover, an outgrowth of a long history of white antipa-

1. Reproduced in John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986), 181. This splendid book is indispensable for an understanding of the temper of the war between the United States.

thies towards “colored races”—American Indians, blacks, and Asians—which had frequently found expression in acts of murderous violence.² The often savage conduct of Japanese troops, already demonstrated in the “China incident” which had begun in 1937, was carried into the Pacific war with the United States and, combined with a suicidal tenacity which most Americans found unnatural, contributed to the widely held view of the Japanese as less than human.

This view was reflected in and stimulated by imagery, both pictorial and verbal, propagated by the U.S. mass media. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the press applied to the Japanese such terminology as “mad dogs” and “yellow vermin.” An article in the U.S. Army weekly *Yank* referred to Japanese working on the airfield on Guadalcanal as “termites.” The official U.S. Navy film on the capture of Tarawa characterized the Japanese defenders as “living, snarling rats.” Pictorially, Japanese were commonly represented as apes or monkeys, but also as insects, reptiles, and bats. A particularly repugnant caricature appeared on the cover of *Collier's* magazine commemorating the first anniversary of the air raid on Pearl Harbor. A hideous, slant-eyed creature with huge fangs and large, pointed ears, wearing a “samurai sword,” is shown descending on Oahu on bat wings, preparing to loose a bomb on the ships anchored in the harbor beneath.³

The mixture of underlying racism exacerbated by war-time propaganda in combination with hatred generated by Japanese aggression and real and imagined atrocities was a potent brew. The Japanese were loathed more intensely than any enemies of the United States before or since. One U.S. veteran of the Pacific war has written that:

the Japanese made a perfect enemy. They had so many characteristics that an American Marine could hate. Physically, they were small, a strange color and, by some standards, unattractive.... Marines did not consider that they were killing men. They were wiping out dirty animals.⁴

2. *Ibid.*, 147 ff.

3. Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps U.S.A.: Japanese-Americans and World War II* (New York, 1971), 32-33; *Yank: The Army Weekly*, Oct. 28, 1942, p. 2; “Counterattack” in the television series *War Stories*, narrated by Eric Sevareid; Mark Bryant, *World War II in Cartoons* (New York, 1989), 74.

4. Andrew A. Rooney, *The Fortunes of War* (Boston, 1962), 37.

Japanese was like killing a rattlesnake,"⁹ then it might not seem inappropriate to detach something comparable to the reptile's skin or rattles for the pleasure of the victorious combatant and the entertainment of his friends and relatives back home. The percentage of U.S. troops who engaged in the collection of Japanese body parts cannot be ascertained, but it is clear that the practice was not uncommon. U.S. Marines on their way to Guadalcanal relished the prospect of making necklaces of Japanese gold teeth and "pickling" Japanese ears as keepsakes.¹⁰ An American officer told Charles Lindbergh in 1944 that he had seen Japanese bodies with ears and noses cut off.

Our boys cut them off to show their friends in fun, or to dry and take back to the States when they go. We found one Marine with a Japanese head. He was trying to get the ants to clean the flesh off the skull, but the odor got so bad we had to take it away from him.

"It is the same story everywhere I go," Lindbergh concluded.¹¹ A Marine Corps veteran of the fierce fighting on Peleliu recorded in his memoirs the horrific scene of another Marine extracting gold teeth from the jaw of a wounded but still struggling Japanese, a task which he had attempted to facilitate by slashing his victim's cheeks from ear to ear and kneeling on his chin.¹²

Atrocities of this nature were widely reported. Early in 1943, *Yank* published a cartoon depicting the parents of an American soldier receiving a pair of "Jap" ears mailed to them by their loving "Junior," then fighting in the Pacific.¹³ Newspapers regaled "the folks back home" with a story of a U.S. soldier collecting Japanese teeth and of another service-

9. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York, 1985), 410.

10. Richard Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York, 1942), 15-16. The collection of Japanese skulls by U.S. servicemen seems to have begun on Guadalcanal. See Paul Fussell, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays* (New York, 1988), 48.

11. Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York, 1970), 919

12. Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* (Novato, Calif., 1981), 120.

13. *Yank*, Jan. 13, 1943, p. 24.

man who purportedly possessed photographs illustrating the steps in “cooking and scraping” the heads of Japanese dead for souvenir skulls.¹⁴ Such photographs may have been included in a large number of sets of lurid prints which had been sold by Seabees on Guadalcanal to merchant seamen and which, to the navy’s consternation, found wide circulation on the West Coast, particularly among patients in the naval hospitals at San Diego and Oakland.¹⁵

General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, was sufficiently disturbed by these accounts to radio General Douglas MacArthur in October 1943 about his “concern over current reports of atrocities committed by American soldiers.”¹⁶ This was followed in January 1944 by a directive from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to all theater commanders calling upon them to adopt measures to prevent the preparation of skulls and “similar items” as war trophies, and to prevent members of the armed forces and others from removing from the theater skulls and other objects which might be represented as Japanese body parts.¹⁷ Marshall’s and the Joint Chiefs’ effort to terminate the practice of collecting grisly mementos from Japanese war dead proved, however, to be ineffective, and the result of that failure was to be a bizarre international incident within the broader context of war.

Life magazine, the weekly (in those days) aggregation of dramatic photographs and pithy captions, was a major source of information on the war for the civilian population of the United States. In the May 22, 1944, issue, there appeared one of the more grotesque photographs to have been published

14. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun*, 411. On his return to Hawaii after several months as an adviser in the Pacific, Lindbergh was asked by a customs official if he had any human bones in his luggage. “Many men” tried to take them home, he was told. One returning GI was found with two “green skulls.” Lindbergh, *Wartime Journals*, 923.

15. U.S. Naval Intelligence Service, Eleventh Naval District, Investigation Report, “Japanese Skulls, Sale of to Merchant Seamen by Seabees at Guadalcanal,” Jan. 4, 1944, General Records of the Department of the Navy, Record Group 80, National Archives and Record Service (hereafter cited as NARS, Navy).

16. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun*, 411.

17. See dispatch no. 191225 attached to memorandum for Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, Aug. 5, 1944, Chief of Naval Operations, Record Group 38, National Archives and Record Service (hereafter cited as NARS, CNO).

in the magazine during the war years. In full-page format, as “The Picture of the Week,” a young woman, identified as a twenty-year-old “war worker” of Phoenix, Arizona, was shown sitting at a desk, pen in hand, gazing dreamily at a skull, on the cranium of which was evident a number of written statements. The photograph’s caption read “Arizona war worker writes her Navy boyfriend a thank-you note for the Jap skull he sent her.” The accompanying commentary merits full quotation:

When he said goodbye two years ago to _____, 20, a war worker of Phoenix, Arizona, a big, handsome Navy lieutenant promised her a Jap. Last week, _____ received a human skull, autographed by her lieutenant and 13 friends and inscribed: ‘This is a good Jap—a dead one picked up on the New Guinea beach.’ _____, surprised at the gift, named it Tojo. The armed forces disapprove strongly of this sort of thing.¹⁸

A number of readers of *Life* disapproved as well. Letters to the editor were overwhelmingly condemnatory. “Revolting and horrible,” commented one reader. “The head of the Navy lieutenant mentioned is without a doubt as empty as the skull pictured on the desk,” declared another. Still others feared the likely impact of the photograph should it reach Japan. “I have never seen a picture that could be used more patently by the enemy for anti-Allied propaganda,” wrote one. Most thoughtful was a reader who observed:

Let us reverse the situation and imagine that one of the most prominent magazines in Tokyo published the picture of a young Japanese girl in such a pose, gazing at the skull of one of our sons who died for his country—the storm of protest at such savagery would sweep America and it would most certainly be held up to us as an example of the hopeless depravity of Japanese youth.¹⁹

Although the skull in the offensive photograph had been sent to the United States by a naval officer, it was the army which first made substantive response. In a memorandum dated June 13, 1944, and addressed to a War Department

18. *Life*, May 22, 1944, pp. 34-35.

19. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1944, p. 6.

Assistant Chief of Staff, the army's judge advocate general, Major General Myron C. Cramer, asserted that "such atrocious and brutal policies" were not only "repugnant to the sensibilities of all civilized peoples," but were violations of the laws of war as well. He recommended that a directive be addressed to each commander of an overseas theater of operations, task force, or port of embarkation, pointing out that the maltreatment of enemy war dead was a blatant violation of the 1929 Geneva Convention on the sick and wounded, which provided that:

After every engagement, the belligerent who remains in possession of the field shall take measures to search for wounded and the dead and to protect them from robbery and ill-treatment.²⁰

In addition to flouting treaty law, practices such as those publicized in *Life* contravened the customary, unwritten rules of land warfare and carried with them liability to trial and the possibility of the death penalty. Commanders, therefore, were to undertake all steps necessary "to prevent such illegal and brutal acts," and to prohibit the movement of parts of enemy dead for the nefarious purposes under discussion.²¹ A week later, the navy's judge advocate general expressed himself in similar terms while adding the caveat that the atrocious conduct of which some U.S. servicemen were guilty could lead to retaliation by the Japanese which would be justified under international law. In a memorandum for Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, the jurist recommended that the navy prepare a directive similar to that already produced by the army.²²

But the naval leadership moved slowly and reluctantly. King's chief of staff argued that the Joint Chiefs' directive of the previous January had been sufficient, and that an additional order on the subject would be redundant. Moreover, since the most highly publicized incident of the desecration

20. Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, June 13, 1944: Maltreatment of Enemy Dead, June 1944, NARS, CNO.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Memorandum for Admiral King, "Maltreatment of Enemy Dead," June 21, 1944, NARS, CNO.

of enemy dead had occurred in General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area, he argued, it was up to MacArthur to enforce the January order. King was persuaded, at least temporarily, of the wisdom of inaction.²³

The War Department had little more enthusiasm for action than the navy, although the army showed greater sensitivity to the possibly awkward and even dangerous results of publicity given to events such as those featured in *Life*. In a memorandum to the army's Bureau of Public Relations, Colonel W. A. Schulgin, Acting Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, requested the bureau's director to inform U.S. publishers that the desecration of Japanese dead was recognized as a "grave violation of law and decency," and that commanders in the field had been ordered to prevent these occurrences. But in an obvious effort to promote discretion, the director was ordered to inform U.S. publishers that publication of such stories would be likely to encourage the enemy to take reprisals against American dead and prisoners of war.²⁴

Calls for caution came too late, however. Early in August, the Foreign Broadcasting Service of the Federal Communications Commission provided abundant evidence that information concerning treatment of Japanese dead had reached Japan and had ignited a firestorm of indignation. The information had been transmitted to Japan by Zurich-based correspondents of Domei, the semiofficial Japanese news agency.²⁵ Their initial report did not include a description of *Life*'s "war worker" and her autographed skull, but did alert the Japanese mass media to an incident at least as awkward. On June 13, 1944, there had appeared in the *New York Mirror* a column by the noted commentator Drew Pearson describing the presentation to President Franklin D. Roosevelt by Pennsylvania's Congressman Francis Walter of a letter-opener

23. Chief of Staff to Admiral King, June 23, 1944; memorandum for Judge Advocate General, June 24, 1944, both in NARS, CNO. King may later have changed his mind. There is an undated directive on the maltreatment of enemy dead along with a distribution list in his files.

24. Memorandum for the Director, Bureau of Public Relations, July 28, 1944, NARS, CNO.

25. On Domei, see Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford, Eng., 1981), 94.

purportedly fashioned from an arm bone of a Japanese soldier. The congressman was reported to have been apologetic for presenting the President with “so small a part of the Japanese anatomy.”²⁶ Another report of unknown provenance reaching Domei claimed that children in the United States had been discovered playing with the skulls of Japanese soldiers which had been sent home by U.S. servicemen.²⁷

Domei’s English-language broadcasts of August 4 reacted to these reports with outrage. Sadao Iguichi, spokesman for the Board of Information, declared:

No one who calls himself a human being, much less a civilized human being, can read such reports without feeling the most profound indignation. If such playing with human bones were the doing of African headhunters, it would be superfluous to make any comment, but concerning as it does people who claim to be paragons of human decency, honor and righteousness, the matter cannot be left without our utmost serious consideration. If necessary, a representation will be made through the good offices of the Spanish Government, our protecting power.²⁸

It is not surprising that *Yomiuri-Hōchi*, the most nationalistic and anti-Western of the major Japanese newspapers, should have interpreted the defilement of Japanese corpses by U.S. forces as indicative of the racism of American society.²⁹ In an editorial on August 4, the paper asserted that these examples of American brutality were deeply rooted in the American character, and were being fueled by a “superiority complex” in regard to East Asians. These bestialities were simply the most recent manifestations of a racist savagery which had victimized many others, including American Indians, Filipinos, African-Americans, and Chinese, and which had been

26. Hull to Forrestal, Aug. 19, 1944; Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Federal Communications Commission, Far Eastern Section, International Comment, Aug. 4, 1944, page R 1, both in NARS, CNO. Charles Lindbergh reported that fighter control personnel at the U.S. airbase at Noemfoor sometimes conducted patrols to collect Japanese femurs from which paper knives and penholders were made. Lindbergh, *Wartime Journals*, 906.

27. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence service, Far Eastern Section, Aug. 4, p. R 1, NARS, CNO.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Shillony, *Politics and Culture*, 99.

responsible, according to *Yomiuri-Hōchi*, for the murder of Japanese troops on Guadalcanal where, allegedly, wounded soldiers had been deliberately crushed by tanks and tractors.³⁰

Desecration of Japanese dead, moreover, was an affront to the spirit of Bushido. A Japanese-language radio broadcast of August 4 noted:

it is natural that we and the enemy kill each other mercilessly. . . . However, in our nation, which has the spirit of Bushido as the fundamental of morals, there is no difference between us and the enemy, and the dead are innocent. By this conviction, since ancient times, it has been our custom to treat enemy dead with special courtesy. This fact is certainly not contrary to the Christian faith.³¹

President Roosevelt was not spared a dose of invective. Alluding to Congressman Walter's gift of the letter-opener to the President, the Japanese commentator asked rhetorically:

just how did Roosevelt, who received this, feel and just what did he do with it? The president tears a page of the book on [sic] the culture and freedom of humanity, of which he is in the habit of speaking; . . . we want to hear the answers to these questions from the mouth of Roosevelt himself.³²

More ominous in their implications were Domei's English-language broadcasts intercepted later on August 4. Referring to reports that the U.S. armed forces were being urged to employ poison gas against Japanese combatants and civilians, a Domei military correspondent remarked sarcastically that such a proposal should occasion no surprise, coming as it did from a nation "where the diabolical act of presenting President Roosevelt with a letter-opener made from the bones of a Japanese soldier . . . was tolerated without scruples. Americans may be classified into the category of insane people."

30. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Far Eastern Section, Aug. 4, 1944, p. R 1, NARS, CNO.

31. *Ibid.*, p. R 2. There was a substantial element of hypocrisy in this righteous indignation. Some Japanese troops were guilty of atrocious mutilations of American dead (and perhaps prisoners, too), although this was not for the purpose of securing trophies, nor does it seem to have been as widespread as the American practice. The lower frequency may have been due to fewer opportunities. See Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 148.

32. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Far Eastern Section, p. R 2.

They should be made to understand, the commentator continued, that retaliation might be in order “if the U.S. continues indulging in beastly acts.”³³

The air waves were relatively calm during the following week, although agitated on August 8 by Domei’s English-language announcement that the Japanese Foreign Ministry had requested that Spain undertake an investigation of American defilement of Japanese remains.³⁴ By August 10, however, the storm had reformed and had broken with redoubled fury. *Life’s* photograph of the American girl and Japanese skull had been radioed from Berlin to Tokyo and was featured prominently in all of the major Japanese newspapers along with vitriolic commentary. “Japanese Blood Boils with Indignation,” read the Osaka-based *Mainichi Shimbun’s* caption to the photograph.³⁵ “This is American Savagery Unveiled,” declared *Yomiuri-Hōchi*.³⁶ *Asahi Shimbun*, Japan’s largest circulation daily, exploded with “Destroy This American Barbarism,” and editorialized:

This is truly the picture in question that has starkly revealed true American barbarism of eating meat and sucking the marrow of bones. We, as Japanese, find it difficult to bear looking at it. A prayer spontaneously wells from our hearts—a prayer of blessing for the spirit of that Japanese war dead. The next instant we feel indignation pressing fiercely within our breast. Even on the face of the American girl can be discerned the beastly nature of the Americans. Let us all vow the destruction of American savagery from the face of the earth.³⁷

The fact that the American penchant for collecting grisly souvenirs had created an international incident involving not only belligerents but at least one neutral power supported the revival of the earlier proposal for a joint War Department-Navy Department demarche. But additional forces now intervened. On August 19, 1944, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, perhaps prompted by Spanish inquiries, addressed similar letters to both Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary

33. *Ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1944, p. R 1.

34. *Ibid.*, Aug. 8, 1944, p. R 1.

35. *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1944, p. R 1.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

of the Navy James Forrestal. After noting the obligation of the United States under international law to respect enemy war dead, Hull stressed the particular importance which the Japanese attached to the matter. Members of the State Department who were familiar with Japanese culture confirmed what the fulminations of the Japanese mass media had so recently indicated—that failure to treat the remains of those fallen in battle in a dignified manner was an outrage to Japanese sensibilities and that, in Japanese eyes, the collection of body parts as trophies constituted “gross barbarism.”³⁸ Moreover, Hull revealed, the Japanese government had earlier approached the United States in an effort to regulate the disposition of the remains of at least some of the fatalities of war. In November 1942, Japan had offered to cremate the remains of deceased American prisoners of war in Japanese custody and return the ashes via prisoner exchange ships, unless U.S. authorities preferred local burial. The United States had expressed a preference for *in situ* burial and post-hostilities recovery, although it was willing to cremate the bodies of Japanese prisoners who died in the United States. The Japanese government was assured, moreover, that the United States was keeping careful records of the disposition of deceased Japanese prisoners in anticipation of an exchange of remains following the end of the war.³⁹

Hull intimated that the United States, in tolerating the desecration of Japanese dead by some of its combatants, was not only in violation of the letter of international law, but also the spirit of a recent bilateral commitment. The Secretary of State concluded with an admonition and warning:

I am sure you agree with me that the traditional respect which men of all faiths have from time immemorial rendered the dead should during the period of hostilities be observed as scrupulously as possible. . . . If we fail in our commitment, we also face the grave danger that living American prisoners of war and civilian internees in Japanese custody may be sacrificed. For these reasons, I feel constrained to bring to your attention the gravity of the situation for such action as you may deem appropriate.⁴⁰

38. Hull to Forrestal, Aug. 19, 1944, NARS, Navy.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

Anticlimax followed Japanese editorial outrage and Hull's prim disapprobation. It can be no coincidence that President Roosevelt took belated offense from Congressman Walter's gift and ordered it returned "with the explanation that he did not wish to have such an object in his possession and with the suggestion that it be given burial."⁴¹ The attention of the armed forces, and particularly the navy, was largely limited to the "big, handsome Navy lieutenant" whose romantic solicitude had been responsible for the skull featured in *Life*. The navy's effort of the previous June to assign responsibility for investigation and discipline to the army, due to the lieutenant's service in MacArthur's command area, misfired. MacArthur reported, with probable satisfaction, that the culprit was no longer under his jurisdiction, as the ship on which he served had been transferred from the Southwest Pacific Area's Seventh Fleet to the Pacific Fleet of Admiral Chester Nimitz.⁴² In a directive from King to Nimitz dated September 1, 1944, the Chief of Naval Operations instructed the Pacific Fleet's commander to undertake an investigation of the lieutenant and his acquisition of the Japanese skull, the most notorious although not the most heinous product of American trophy hunting. That King's interest in the matter was no more than tepid was indicated by his explanation that the motivating factor behind his directive had been the State Department's agitation, and, by implication, not his own.⁴³ That Forrestal's attitude was little different was suggested by a communication from the Secretary of the Navy to Hull on October 9 in which the navy's disinclination to take action beyond that already in progress in regard to the "alleged" desecration of Japanese dead was made clear.⁴⁴

Reaction by some domestic religious organizations, on the other hand, was vigorous. Japanese authorities had noted with satisfaction the condemnation by the Catholic archdiocese of

41. "Roosevelt Rejects Gift Made of Japanese Bone," *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1944, p. 30. This article raises the possibility that Vatican disapprobation may have had something to do with Roosevelt's action.

42. Chief of Staff to Admiral King, Aug. 31, 1944, NARS, CNO.

43. Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, Sept. 1, 1944, NARS, CNO.

44. Forrestal to Hull, Oct. 9, 1944, NARS, CNO.

Missouri of the collecting of Japanese body parts as souvenirs.⁴⁵ In October, the president of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America appealed to GIs to abstain from these practices on both moral and practical grounds. Not only were they contrary to Christian ethics and “the canon of human decency,” but would likely stiffen enemy resistance and engender hatred among the Japanese people which would make difficult the establishment of friendly relations with the United States after the war.⁴⁶

The navy’s conclusions were more equivocal. On November 27, 1944, Admiral King reported to Secretary Forrestal the results of Nimitz’s investigation. The lieutenant whose actions had been the focus of the investigation had demonstrated poor judgment and the lack of “an appropriate sense of decency,” which had presented Japan with an opportunity to make propaganda, “even though it has not been established that the skull was that of a Japanese national.” So dubious an offense obviously did not warrant severe punishment. King recommended that the young officer be sent a letter of reprimand.⁴⁷ These half-hearted measures were not likely to halt practices as popular as they were gruesome, and evidence suggests that the collection of trophies from among Japanese remains continued.⁴⁸

In the context of a war characterized by the slaughter of tens of millions, the mutilation of those already dead may seem a trivial matter, and was regarded as relatively unimportant by the military and naval leaders whose responsibility it was to guide U.S. forces to victory. But these acts vividly symbolized the racist attitudes which informed the U.S. war against Japan. To be sure, objections to the desecration of Japanese dead were raised by armed forces jurists, the State Department, religious leaders, and private citizens, but to many Americans the Japanese adversary was no more than

45. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, Far Eastern Section, Aug. 11, 1944, p. R 1, NARS, CNO.

46. “Tucker Deplores Desecration of Foe,” *New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1944, p. 6.

47. Memorandum to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 27, 1944, NARS, Navy.

48. Fussell, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb*, 51-52.

an animal, and abuse of his remains carried with it no moral stigma. The widespread inability to empathize with the purportedly subhuman foe was dramatically reflected in the contrast between American treatment of Japanese dead and the extreme solicitude shown by the United States for its own war dead which were interred in elaborate cemeteries or brought back to the United States after the war at considerable expense. It is significant, too, that no comparable pattern of abuse of enemy dead emerged from combat between U.S. forces and troops of the European Axis.

But a dehumanized enemy is one to whom it is easy to do terrible things while he is still living. The area bombings of Japanese cities in the latter stages of the war, culminating in the two atomic bombs dropped in August 1945, were based on considerations which, in the context of total war, were rational. Yet the widespread image of the Japanese as subhuman constituted an emotional context which provided another justification for decisions which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands. Two days after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, president Truman remarked: "The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them. When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true."⁴⁹ Thus, there is a kinship between the charred bones of Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki and the polished bones of souvenirs gathered on Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and Iwo Jima.

49. Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York, 1985), 171.