

# Weltblutpumpe

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**July 22, 2022**  
**Flensburg, Germany**

*Humanity is mad. It must be mad to do what it is doing. What a massacre! What scenes of horror and carnage! I cannot find words to translate my impressions. Hell cannot be so terrible. Men are mad!*

— from a French Lieutenant's Diary, 23 May 1916, Verdun, France

*Hell*, the French lieutenant was referring to in the quote above was the Battle of Verdun, during WWI. The battle cost the lives of 555,000 French Allied, and 434,000 German soldiers between February and December of 1916. It was the bloodiest battle of the First World War and ranks as one of the most savage in history.

By a strange twist of geo-political fate, my Great Uncle Andreas Bekker fought on the German side of that battle.

Andreas Bekker was the fourth of six sons and two daughters born to Neils and Karen Bekker in Fole, Denmark, in 1877. At the time of Andreas' birth, Fole was in the politically disputed geographic region of Schleswig-Holstein. Both Denmark and Germany coveted the territory.

Neils and Karen Bekker were loyal Danes. They feared that their sons would be conscripted by the German army as their home region was absorbed by Germany. The Bekkers encouraged their three eldest sons to emigrate to America to avoid conscription. For reasons unknown, Andreas and the younger boys stayed in Fole and became Germans (in name only, the Bekker family remained unwaveringly loyal to Denmark).

At the outbreak of World War I, Andreas was conscripted into the German army. He was given a rifle and a uniform with brass buttons, and shipped to barracks in Wesel, Germany. Denmark, his true country, was neutral during the war. Andreas was forced into battle against an enemy he felt no animosity toward.



There is no way to describe the horror of hand-to-hand, trench warfare. Even soldiers who experienced it, like the lieutenant quoted above, could not find words to adequately convey their impressions of battle. We don't know what Andreas' personal combat experience was like, all we know is he made it through alive.

The reason for such carnage is also difficult to understand. Why would opposing armies expend hundreds of thousands of soldier's lives? What purpose could there be to justify establishing *Hell* on earth?

I read several articles about Verdun. The best answers I could come up with to these questions were the words of a German General, and an image created by a war medal artist.

General Falkenhayn stated that Germany's objective at Verdun was to demoralize, to *'bleed the enemy white'*.

Walter Eberbach, an artist commissioned by the German army to capture the battle, produced this macabre medal, of a skeleton pumping blood from the earth amid a bleak landscape.

Falkenhayn's words and Eberbach's image are as close as I can come to understanding the horror Andreas Bekker felt at war.

The medal is entitled '*Verdun: the world blood pump*'.



**Verdun: die Weltblutpumpe**

