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Collective Memory in Contemporary Poland and Pre-Independence (1918) Warfare: An Early 21st Century Foreign Traveler's Observations concerning Polish Battlefield Memorials

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Abstract

This essay examines war memorials in contemporary Poland. The article also analyzes Polish historical memory through the prism of three theories of collective memory discussed by Nachman Ben-Yehuda. To the eye of a foreign observer, Polish memorialization of pre-1918 battle sites appears strange. Significant battlefields from the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and World War I are largely ignored in favor of emphasis on medieval battlefields. The author argues that this pattern reflects both Polish ethnocentric nationalism and a desire to forget the many years during which German-speaking peoples controlled portions of present-day Poland. The author maintains that Poland's early Cold War-era policy of de-Germanization of cultural sites is no longer appropriate for contemporary Poland - a member of the European Union.

Keywords: Poland, Polish, collective, historical, memory, battlefield, war, memorial

1. Introduction

This essay explores one aspect of war and collective memory in contemporary Poland. Specifically, it examines war memorials on pre-1918 battlefields. To the eye of a foreign observer, Polish memorialization of pre-1918 battle sites appears strange. Significant battlefields from the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and World War I are largely ignored in favor of emphasis on medieval battlefields. The author argues that this pattern reflects both Polish ethnocentric nationalism and a desire to forget the many years during which German-speaking peoples controlled portions of present-day Poland. The author maintains that Poland's early Cold War-era policy of de-Germanization of historical sites is no longer appropriate for contemporary Poland - a member of the European Union.

2. Material Studied

This study examines memorialization (or lack of memorialization) at nine battlefields in contemporary Poland: Liegnitz I (1241), Tannenberg I (also known as Grunwald) (1410), Mollwitz (1741), Leuthen (1757), Liegnitz II (1760), Tannenberg II (1914), Limanowa-Lapanow (1914), Gorlice-Tarnow (1915), and Przemsyl (1914-1915). This study will focus entirely on the memorialization (or lack of memorialization) of military events which occurred (1) within the boundaries of modern day Poland and (2) before independence was reestablished (late 1918). Thus there will be no examination of post-1918 battlefields including those of the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920) and the Second World War (1939-1945).

Since the conclusions reached here are heavily reliant on the observations of a single non-specialist scholar, they can be considered neither exhaustive nor definitive. The hope is that other scholars will join the conversation to flesh out the parameters of contemporary Poland's military historical memory. The goal of this article then is to initiate a long overdue discussion on Poland's memorialization of the military past, not to conclude it.

An understanding of Polish historical memory is critical for an understanding of Poland. Throughout the entire nineteenth century there was no Poland on the map of Europe, only the memory of Poland. Poland has its roots as a nation in medieval Europe. In 1795, however, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe as the result of three devastating partitions (1772, 1793, & 1795). Poland was not reconstituted as an independent nation until late 1918. "Collective national memory," wrote historian Larry Wolff, "was…essential for the preservation of

Polishness over the course of the nineteenth century…" (Wolff, 2006).

Scholars recognize that an understanding of the role of memory and commemoration is "fundamental for all of modern European history. (Wolff, 2006) Indeed, aspects of Polish historical memory have been the subject of much scholarly analysis. In particular, prior scholars have noted the great significance of nationalism in the Polish historical memory. Despite decade of foreign occupation and control, the Poles are well known for rejecting efforts at foreign cultural dominance (Wagner, 2003). The view, held by some Poles, that Poland has long served as the center of Europe has previously been identified (Wagner, 2003). Historical memory places a premium on the close connection between Polish nationalism and the Roman Catholic Church (Wagner, 2003). Furthermore, Polish historical views have become politicized. Various Polish political parties in recent years have emphasized how they differ from one another in their view of the past as well as in their perspective of the Roman Catholic Church (Koczanowicz, 1997).

Poland's fluctuating historical reaction to the holocaust has also been the topic of academic inquiry. (Steinlauf, 1997) Likewise, that nation's post-Cold War memory of Soviet-dominated Polish governments (1945-1989) has been examined (Koczanowicz, 1997). Another study researched the role of Polish historical memory in creating the skepticism present in some elements of Polish society concerning integration with the European Union. (Wagner, 2003) That study also examined the effort to maintain a collective memory of a historical continuity between the aristocrat-dominated United Kingdom of Poland-Lithuania (1569-1795) and present day Poland (Wagner, 2003).

This study differs from prior studies of Polish historical memory for several reasons. First, it focuses on chronological periods and events sometimes ignored by prior scholars of memory. Second, it focuses exclusively on events from Europe's military past. Third, it will analyze Polish military historical memory through the prism of three theories of collective memory discussed by Nachman Ben-Yehuda. Fourth, it focuses on physical evidence (memorialization) rather than on surveys or literary evidence. Fifth, the impressions related are not those of a scholar who specializes in Poland and is fluent in the language. Rather these observations are those of a non-Polish general military historian with some grasp of the course European history who traveled through Poland early in the 21st century.

3. Area Description

Contemporary Poland is a nation half the size of the province of Alberta yet with a population slightly greater than all of Canada. To put it another way, Poland is roughly the same size as the state of New Mexico but with a population slightly greater than California – America's most populous state. Throughout its history, however, Poland's borders have constantly remained in a state of flux. The size and population of Poland has thus been subject to dramatic shifts. The bulk of Poland is an undulating plain making it suitable for large scale mobile warfare.

Much of Poland's dramatic history can be attributed to its geographic location. With its northern boundary on the Baltic Sea, it lies near the center of Europe. Wedged between the powerful nation-states of Russia, Germany, and (prior to 1918) Austria, for centuries Poland has been the scene of military conflict. Poland has been nick-named as "the Devils playground." For more than a century Poland was divided up between three powerful empires. This previously-mentioned partition left the Poles under the rule of Austrians, Prussians, and Russians. Following World War I, Poland gained its independence but was immediately compelled to fend off an invasion from Soviet Russia. The combination of foreign oppression and constant conflict may account, at least in part, for the fact that during the 19th and 20th centuries substantial numbers of Poles have elected to emigrate to places like Canada and the United States.

Although the battlefields examined in this study all pre-date World War II, an understanding of the consequences of that conflict is central to understanding the historical memory arguments being presented in this paper. The European phases of the Second World War commenced in 1939 when Poland was invaded by both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Following World War II, Poland's boundaries were artificially pushed west. Poland gained territory from Germany in the west but lost nearly twice as much territory to the Soviets in the east. Moreover, in the northeast Poland gained East Prussia from Germany. Most of the battlefields discussed in this paper lie within the regions pried loose from a defeated Germany by the Soviet Union and presented to Poland.

Beginning in 1945, Polish authorities in these "Recovered Territories" began a policy of "de-Germanization" (which they referred to in public documents as "re-Polonization"). As University of Pittsburgh history professor Gregor Thum has pointed out, the goal of this de-Germanization was to cleanse western Poland "of all traces of their German past" (Thum, 2011). All visible evidence of a German presence was order "removed from public places, streets and squares, public buildings, and even residential buildings" (Thum, 2011). German historic

monuments were eliminated. The new territories were cleansed “of all cultural traces of their German past” (Thum, 2011).

As an additional point, the reader needs to understand that Poland fell within the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War (1945-1991). In Poland, the Soviet influence was strong during the early Cold War but had slackened somewhat by the 1980s. The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) led to new problems. As historian Larry Wolff has noted, “living memory in post-Communist Eastern Europe in the 1990s has contributed to the resurfacing of the traumas of World War II” (Wolff, 2006).

4. Methods and Techniques

This essay is informed by the theoretical framework used by Nachman Ben-Yehuda in his study of one aspect of collective memory in newly independent Israel. (Ben-Yehuda, 1995) There are three competing theories about collective memory. Two theories are extremist in nature and one theory seeks a compromise between the two extremist theories. The first extremist theory - called "social constructionism" - denies that there is an objective past. This liberal view contends that the past is a burden. It is construed only in terms of the present. In other words, "facts" are secondary to the needs of the present. There is thus a clear discontinuity between the past and the present. "...Social construction requires deception and fabrication, because the past typically does not exactly fit the needs of the present and `corrections’ of that past will always be called for" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995; Schwartz, 1991).

More conservative thinkers oppose "social constructionism" by maintaining that an objective past did in fact exist. Moreover, "the past shapes our understanding of the present rather than the other way around" (Schwartz, 1991; Ben-Yehuda, 1995). This view - held by only a minority of scholars - asserts that commemoration of the past is not intended to shape it to meet the present but rather to recreate it as it actually occurred. Under this theory there is a clear continuity between the past and the present. (Schwartz, 1991; Ben-Yehuda, 1995)

Sociologist Barry Schwartz, however, has proposed a compromise view called "contextual constructivism" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995; Schwartz, 1991). He contended that in most cases:

> ...we find the past to be neither totally precarious nor immutable, but a stable image upon which new elements are intermittently superimposed. The past, then, is a familiar rather than a foreign country; its people different, but not strangers to the present.

Thus "the collective historical memory always demonstrates continuity but also reveals new elements as the `past' is made to better fit contemporary needs, concerns, and linguistic habits." (Ben-Yehuda, 1995) The most widely accepted view among modern academics, however, remains the first view - that there is no objective past (Schwartz, 1991; Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

Rather than relying on written and oral sources as was largely done by Ben-Yehuda, this essay will rely heavily upon the physical memorialization of battle in the landscape. Battlefield inspections thus constitute a critical element of the methodology used in this article. In this regard, the analysis made here will be informed by Jay Winter's examination of World War I memorialization in Western Europe (Winter, 1995). War memorials are important indicators of collective memory in Europe since they have traditionally been sites of collective and individual grief. They are central to European sculpture and architecture (Winter, 1995).

In Europe war memorials are typically ubiquitous and one only need look around to find them (Winter, 1995). This essay, however, will examine not only the placement of war memorials at some locations but also the absence of war memorials at other locations. This essay argues that the *non-existence* of war memorials in certain critical locations can be just as revealing about a nation's collective memory as the *existence* of war memorials in other locations. As Ben-Yehuda has observed, "collective memory and collective forgetting can be thought of as two ends of the same process - that of selecting historical facts and events" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

This study analyzes sites related to (1) the medieval period, (2) Frederick the Great, and (3) World War I. Poland's pattern of commemoration and lack of commemoration may seem bizarre to foreigners. Both what is remembered and what is forgotten often appears strange. Poland tends to ignore events which from a foreign standpoint seem far more important than those that are remembered. In other words, the military events that are most celebrated in Poland have seemingly little importance outside of Poland. This essay will suggest an explanation for this pattern.

5. Results

This essay argues that the Schwartz compromise theory of collective memory best explains the Polish situation. There is evidence in Poland, however, to support both of the extreme views. Poland's pattern of preservation and

interpretation (or lack of preservation) of military sites tends to reflect current political events more than it does the military importance of the sites. Poland tends to use history to justify (by implication) recent events. Chief among these events is the expulsion of the Germans from substantial portions of what is modern day Poland (especially Prussia and Silesia) in 1945. Specifically, the sites which are remembered tend to support a Polish occupation of traditionally Germanic territory. Those sites which are not memorialized would have the opposite effect - reminding the visitor of the lengthy Germanic habitation in the area.

Despite the foregoing, there is evidence of historical continuity. The events which the Poles have in fact commemorated demonstrate the continuity of the past. Additionally, the Poles have been unable to eliminate historical memory outside Poland leaving open the possibility that sites presently ignored will be memorialized in the future. The author maintains that Poland's early Cold War-era policy of de-Germanization is no longer appropriate for contemporary Poland - a member of the European Union.

6. Discussion

6.1 Poland's Interest in Military History

The strange gaps in the Polish pattern of memorialization are not due to a lack of interest in military history. Indeed, the capital city of Warsaw boasts an interesting and popular Polish Army Museum with an excellent outside display of Cold War weaponry.

The most visited site in the large urban area of Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) is a gigantic circular battle painting. (Dydynski, 2002) This "Raclawice Panorama" depicts the Polish victory over the Russian army in 1794. The battle of Raclawice took place after Russia had seized large tracts of Polish territory during the Second Partition of Poland (1793). This last gasp of Polish resistance was soon quashed by Russian forces with Prussian and Austrian support. (Black, 2002) The Third Partition of Poland followed in 1795. Despite the short-lived success of the 1794 insurrection, the Panorama is "overrun by tourists, including endless school excursions." (Dydynski, 2002)

Moreover, the Poles have no cultural aversion to battlefield monuments. For example, Poles built and continue to help maintain a huge World War II monument at Monte Cassino, Italy. Polish forces, fighting under Allied control, helped wrest the site of a massive medieval monastery from the Germans in 1944. Even during the Cold War, when Italy and Poland were aligned on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, Polish school children were bused to the site. The defeat of the Nazis remained an important shared historical memory among both nations belonging to the Warsaw Pact and nations belonging to NATO

6.2 The Emphasis on Commemorating Poland's Medieval Past

Polish pre-1918 war commemoration emphasizes the medieval past. The two medieval events which receive the most emphasis are the battles of Liegnitz I (1241) and Tannenberg I (also known as Grunwald) (1410). Significantly, both of these sites are deep into territory which until 1945 had been Germanic for centuries.

One of the best commemorated military events in Poland is a *defeat* - the battle of Liegnitz. In 1241 the Mongols had swept into this region and razed its major town: Wroclaw (Breslau) (Thum, 2011). At Liegnitz, several miles west of Wroclaw, in April 1241 the Mongols thoroughly demolished a Polish and Silesian army led by Duke Henryk Pobozny (Henry the Pious). Although the Mongols were highly successful in the battle on the outskirts of town, their siege of the Liegnitz castle itself failed. Liegnitz stood as the high water mark of the Mongol advance into Europe.

The invaders soon withdrew. This departure was due to the death of Genghis Khan and the need to return to the Orient for the election of a new leader. The withdrawal was probably not the result of the military situation. Nonetheless, the Mongols never managed a sustained occupation of Central Europe. This fact marks a significant difference between Russian history and the history of the rest of Europe. In the years immediately before 1241, the Mongols had overrun Russia. Russia then remained under the "Mongol yoke" for generations.

Liegnitz, the name by which the battle is known in the west, is a German name. In 1945 this area (Silesia) was forcibly given to the Poles by Soviet military forces. The Germans were expelled and the town itself now bears the Polish name "Legnica." Seven miles outside of town there is a tiny village called Legnickie Pole (Liegnitz Field). Although one guidebook describes this town as the site of the battle (Dydynski, 2002), the actual fighting is believed to have occurred at an unmarked rural site a mile or two away. The village of Legnickie Pole, along with its small museum and its large church from the 1730s, marks the site where Duke Henry's decapitated body was recovered after the battle.

Duke Henry (and thus the medieval battle of Liegnitz) is commemorated at other sites as well. His tomb is in the

Church of the Holy Cross at Wroclaw. The tombstone itself, however, is considered of such importance that it has been moved to the National Museum in the same city (Czerniewicz-Umer, Omilanowska, & Majewski, 2001). A facsimile of the tombstone may be found in the Museum of Legnickie Pole.

The only guide book available at the museum (Jelenska-Hombek, 1991) contains a two page English language summary which makes no mention of the participation of Teutonic Knights in the battle. These Germanic warriors, along with their Grand Master, did in fact participate in the clash against the Mongols (Chandler, 1987). Additionally, the church guide/museum attendant was quite explicit in asserting that Henry was Polish, not German. Such statements are entirely consistent with the official Polish historical interpretation “that the ceding of German territories [after World War II] represented the return of lands that were originally Polish” (Thum, 2011).

The message implied at this commemorative site was quite clear. First, the Poles, by their sacrifice, had saved Europe from the Mongol hoards. Second, Silesia was Polish, not German. The massive evictions of the Germans in 1945 were thus impliedly justified. Although Germans may have occupied the area for centuries, it was the Poles who were the original inhabitants and the ones who had saved Silesia from the fearsome Asiatic hoards. This conclusion is completely consistent with the findings of other scholars of Polish historical memory. Researchers have previously pointed out that Poles view their nation as “the bulwark of Christianity” (Mucha, 2000). Prior scholars have also noted a strain in Polish collective memory which asserts that “only the Polish nation should be the protective rampart of Christian Europe” (Wagner, 2003).

A second medieval event which receives substantial commemoration in contemporary Poland is the first battle of Tannenberg (July 15, 1410). This battle pitted the German Teutonic Knights against an allied force of Poles, Lithuanians, and Tartars. King Wladyslaw Jagiello, a Pole, commanded the allied forces. In a ten hour battle, said to be the largest medieval battle in Europe, the Germanic Knights were defeated and their Grand Master was killed (Dydynski, 2002).

In terms of commemorative grandeur, the memorial park at Tannenberg is probably Poland's greatest military monument. Two huge sculpted towers reach into the sky, multiple smaller monuments donated by different areas of Poland dot the landscape, and the amphitheater features a concrete battle map as a stage. The museum beneath the amphitheater frequently shows a film reconstruction of the engagement. Two of the most significant Polish cultural values (as identified by previous scholars) are freedom and independence (Mucha, 2000). The memorial park symbolizes these values.

Despite the architectural grandeur, the limited importance of the event to foreigners is candidly admitted by one leading English-language guidebook. "Frequently visited by Poles, Grunwald is essentially a memorial to this glorious moment in Poland's history. Foreigners may find it less interesting" (Dydynski, 2002).

The fact that the site of the battle lies several miles within what was for centuries German-speaking East Prussia makes the commemoration particularly important. Like Liegnitz, it stands as an implied justification for ejecting the Germans from East Prussia in 1945. Since the Poles had long ago defeated Germanic knights here, any continued German settlement in this region was merely a temporary occupancy. Accordingly, centuries of German presence could justifiably be eliminated in a matter of weeks.

The Polish physical memorialization of this site in the 1960s (Odoj, no date) constitutes a counter blast to two German efforts to demean it. According to the park brochure (Odoj, no date), in 1720 Prussian authorities had ordered the destruction of a chapel on the site. This chapel had been built to mark the spot where the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights had been killed. According to the brochure, however, the authorities were perturbed by the fact that pilgrims from Poland visited the site each year on the anniversary of the battle. The Poles have thus excavated the site (1959-1984), even though it was a German chapel, to prove the correct location of the memorial park and its continuity with the past.

There were other German efforts to marginalize the medieval battle. During the nineteenth century Tannenburg I “became one of the most important sites of memory of Polish national history” (Thum, 2011). In 1910 the Poles in the town of Cracow erected a monument to King Jagiello and Tannenberg/Grunwald. The Nazis, however, destroyed this memorial after seizing Poland in 1939. The structure was re-erected in 1976 and still stands in Cracow today (Tycner, no date).

Another German effort to overshadow the Polish victory here was made in the early 20th century. As will be discussed below, the Germans achieved a major victory over the Russians in this area during World War I. Even though little World War I fighting had taken place on the medieval battlefield itself, the victorious German general, Paul von Hindenburg, had nonetheless decided to call the battle "Tannenberg". (The German forward

headquarters had been located just a few miles away at Frögenau.) This name was chosen to vindicate the defeat of the Teutonic Knights in 1410 (Keegan, 2000).

It is now the Poles who control the commemoration of the Tannenberg battlefield site. Although this would be a logical site at which to obtain touristic information about the World War I battle, no such data was on display. Upon inquiring at the souvenir booth, however, the sales clerk pulled a single German-language book (Tycner, no date) from behind the counter. This small paperback was quite recent (circa early 21st century) but rather limited in scope.

The few maps in the book used the German-language name for the towns which were in effect at the time of the battle. In order to navigate the vast battlefield, one needs to know the current names of the towns. The region's towns have borne Polish names for half of a century and these are used in the available road maps. No information about the World War I battle was available at the Tannenberg/Grunwald museum and memorial in either Polish or English. No monuments on the site reminded the visitor of the Great War despite its proximity to the German forward headquarters of the battle.

6.3 The Lack of Commemoration of Frederick the Great

Poland contains several sites which were highly significant in the campaigns of Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712-1786). Frederick perfected the formal linear type of limited warfare which was practiced during the age of absolutism. (Griess, 1984) Since Napoleon and many historians have acclaimed Frederick as one of the greatest military captains of all time (Durant & Durant, 1967; Dupuy, 1969), one might expect some sort of touristic commemoration. There is, however, no such memorialization on three of Frederick's most significant battlefields. These sites are completely ignored in modern Poland.

The battle of Mollwitz (April 10, 1741), for example, provides a distillation of many of Frederick's tactical concepts (Griess, 1984). No sign of the battle, however, exists in the modern village of Malujowice (Mollwitz) nor in the adjacent fields where the battle was fought. The Prussians seriously defeated the Austrians near this village despite the fact that Frederick himself had fled the field (believing that Prussian defeat was imminent). It was the battle of Mollwitz which secured Silesia and the city of Wroclaw (Breslau) for the Prussians (from the Austrians). As Gregor Thum noted, however, "the Prussian conquest marked for Polish historians the beginning of one of the bleakest chapters in Wroclaw's history…" (Thum, 2011). "Until very recently Polish historians have tended to portray Prussia as the epitome of imperialism and an unrelenting source of anti-Polish policies, and Frederick the Great as an especially despicable figure" (Thum, 2011). Postwar Polish propaganda depicted Frederick "as the precursor of Adolf Hitler" (Thum, 2011). Moreover, modern Polish Silesians apparently do not wish to be reminded that until a few decades ago, Silesia was German.

Similarly the battle of Leuthen (December 5, 1757) is one which the western world has "never forgotten." (Griess, 1984) Napoleon considered it a "masterpiece" which entitled Frederick "to a place in the first rank among generals." (Durant & Durant, 1967) The battle is considered a classic because of the beauty of Frederick's tactical maneuvering and deception. (Griess, 1984) Frederick's memorable speech to his generals before the battle (Durant & Durant, 1967) is likewise considered a classic in inspirational speaking (which might be compared to Shakespeare's version of King Henry V's harangue at Agincourt). Frederick's outnumbered army shattered the Austrian army, captured Breslau, and confirmed Prussia's hold on Silesia. (Durant & Durant, 1967)

The Durants, a husband-wife team of historians prominent in the mid-20th century, considered Leuthen as the greatest battle of the Seven Years War (Durant & Durant, 1967) - a conflict that deserves to be known as the world's first true global war. Frederick's victories at Rossbach and Leuthen in late 1757 were arguably central to the British victory in North America during the concurrent French and Indian War (1754-1763). The French – allies of the defeated Austrians - could not concentrate their efforts on the defense of New France (Canada) as long as Prussia remained a viable threat in Europe. Indeed the very next year (1758), after years of French military success in North America, the momentum shifted in the New World. The great French fortress at Louisbourg (Canada) fell to a British siege. Commitments elsewhere prevented the French from reinforcing the bastion's garrison. The following year (1759) the French garrison at Quebec fell to the British. Again no reinforcements arrived from France. New France (Canada) was irrevocably lost to the French.

The village church in modern Lutynia (Leuthen), which was a center point of Frederick's battle, still exists. Yet in modern Poland, the battlefield lays unmarked. Few Poles seem to want a reminder that the nearby major urban center of Wroclaw was for centuries the important Germanic city of Breslau. Polish historical memory dictates that the "the evacuation of Germans from Wroclaw after the Second World War" was not "a rupture in the city's demographic history, but rather…a corrective to the artificial inflation of the German population that had occurred during the Prussian period" (Thum, 2011).

Nearly three years later Frederick fought yet another engagement which lies in modern Poland - just outside the city limits of present day Legnica (Liegnitz). During the battle of Liegnitz II on August 15, 1760 King Frederick exposed himself to great personal danger but managed to escape a trap. At that point in the war, Frederick was opposed by all of the major European continental powers. The Prussian army was in greater peril here than at any time since Mollwitz (Duffy, 1986).

Despite the fact that Frederick had been reeling from a years worth of ill fortune, he was still able to achieve an amazing victory over the Austrians. Frederick and his army thereby regained confidence in each other. Frederick won the praise of Lord Holdernesse, a British minister at the time, who declared Frederick's maneuvering in that campaign a "masterpiece of military skill" (Duffy, 1986).

The battlefield stood completely unmarked in the early 21st century – at least from the perspective of a foreign tourist. The message was clear - any monument here would detract from what the Poles view as the real story at Liegnitz. The visitor instead should concentrate on the medieval battle against the Mongols (which lies a few miles away) and Central Europe's escape from a subsequent Oriental ravaging.

To the rest of the world Frederick might be a brilliant military leader but to the Poles he is the initiator of the infamous first Partition of Poland in 1772. Moreover, Frederick is an inconvenient reminder of the long Germanic occupation of Silesia which predated the Polish partitions. The Seven Years War, which marked the rise of Prussia as a major power in Europe, is to the Poles a conflict which is best forgotten.

6.4 The Lack of World War I Commemoration

It is in regard to the First World War that Poland appears most strikingly different to what a western traveler might expect. In countries like France and England there is a monument to the dead of World War I in virtually every major town or village. (Winter, 1995; Keegan, 2000) Indeed, the towns and cities of most of the belligerents in the Great War have lists of the dead prominently carved in stone (Keegan, 2000). Twenty-first century British and Belgian subjects crowd the nightly playing of the Last Post at the Menin Gate at Ypres, Belgium. The gate's Memorial Arch lists the names of nearly 55,000 British Commonwealth missing from the Ypres salient.

Such Great War memorialization is not limited to Europe. The National War Memorial in Canada's capital of Ottawa serves as an example. There 23 bronze figures representing all branches of the Canadian forces in World War I occupy a prominent location across from the nation's picturesque parliament buildings. Even non-Europeans make long pilgrimages in commemoration of the Great War. Canadians trek to the Vimy Ridge Memorial (France). The number of Americans and Frenchmen visiting the American cemetery at Belleau Wood (France) for the annual American Memorial Day celebration still creates rural traffic jams in the 21st century. Australians and New Zealanders journey half way around the globe to the carefully tended monuments at Gallipoli (Turkey).

In Poland, on the other hand, few, if any, such monuments exist. This is ironic because the territory of modern-day Poland was the scene of some of the most significant military action of that war. For example, it was in Poland (west of Warsaw) where the world's first use of gas warfare was attempted. On January 3, 1915 Germans at Bolimov fired tear gas into Russian positions on the River Rawka. The cold temperature rendered this non-lethal gas ineffective. This event, however, was the direct forerunner of the world's first use of poison gas - by the Germans north of Ypres on April 22, 1915 (Keegan, 2000).

Visiting World War I's Eastern Front is no easy task. Whereas the visitor to the Western Front has available excellent English-language guide books (Coombs, 1986; Holt & Holt, 1993), no such guide books are available for the Russian Front. Attempting to follow the movement of the armies with World War I era maps is difficult because the roads have changed and, in many areas such as East Prussia, the names of the towns have been changed from German words to Polish words.

Whereas organized tours of the Western Front are readily available, such tours of the Eastern Front are virtually impossible to find. Despite the fact that centennial of the Great War is nearly upon us, the lack of historical battlefield preservation, the absence of qualified guides, the vast distances, the multiple languages required, and the numerous countries (some requiring visas) involved present almost insurmountable barriers to comprehensive touring of the Eastern Front. Unlike the massive literature that poured out of the Western Front, little in the way of war memoirs was written by the Russian and Austrian soldiers (Keegan, 2000). Thus the literary pilgrimages held for the writers and war poets of the Western Front do not occur on the Eastern Front.

One of the most striking differences in Poland is the lack of readily observable soldier's cemeteries, particularly in the Carpathian sector (southeastern Poland). As military historian John Keegan has noted, those familiar with

the Western Front have come to see graveyards as the "chief heritage" of the First World War (Keegan, 2000). The massive British Commonwealth cemetery at Tyne Cot (Passchendaele, Belgium) serves as example of a Great War burial site that remains frequently visited to this day. The Russian Front, however, was quite different. Military historian John Keegan noted that "few Russian...soldiers were ever decently interred and many German and Austrian soldiers killed on the shifting battlefields of the Eastern Front simply returned to earth" (Keegan, 2000).

The lack of commemoration of the massive August 1914 battle of Tannenberg is striking for two reasons. The first reason is that "Tannenberg II" was one of the most significant engagements of World War I. At this early stage in the war, the Germans had focused their major effort on rapidly defeating France. The German's Schlieffen Plan incorrectly assumed that the Russians could not mobilize fast enough to attack the sparse German holding forces on the Eastern Front. The Central Powers thus perceived the clash as having saved Germany from the Russian barbarians. The German victory left the Russians temporarily stunned and impotent (Keegan, 2000). Tannenberg II was the outstanding German victory of the Great War. Successful encirclement battles, such as that achieved by the Germans at Tannenberg, almost never occurred during World War I. (Keegan, 2000) The number of prisoners taken at Tannenberg (92,000 Russian prisoners) was virtually unique for the Great War (Keegan, 2000).

The second reason is that there once was a Great War monument at Tannenberg (Keegan, 2000). This massive structure, modeled after Stonehenge, was particularly important for the Germans because their ability to establish monuments on the Western Front had been severely restricted. France and Belgium, having been invaded by the Germans and having eventually proven victorious, were begrudging in granting even war cemeteries to the Germans. The Germans were thus frequently limited to mass graves in remote locations (Keegan, 2000). Much of the Eastern Front was likewise foreclosed to the Germans due to the Bolshevik Revolution. "Only in East Prussia, on the site of the Tannenberg epic, did they succeed in creating a mausoleum of triumphal monumentality for the fallen" (Keegan, 2000).

This commemorative structure, which once contained the grave of General von Hindenburg, was dynamited by the Soviets in 1945 (Keegan, 2000). So complete was the destruction that today the site of the monument is difficult to find even with written directions. (Tycner, no date) Having proven victorious over the Germans during the final phase of World War II (1944-1945), the Russians had no intention of allowing a reminder of their devastating defeat in 1914 to remain standing. Such a monument was undoubtedly seen as particularly inappropriate at a point in time when Prussia was being taken from the Germans and handed over to the Poles.

From the Soviet and Polish perspective, a prominent monument to the German defensive victory at Tannenberg would be sending the wrong message: this region had traditionally belonged to (and had been skillfully protected by) the Germans. Furthermore, nominally independent post-World War II Poland was in fact a subject state of the Soviet Union. A reminder of recent Russian military weakness could only be an invitation for a Polish revolt. Widespread Polish reaction against Soviet hegemony would come soon enough (June 1956) without visual reminders.

In Southern Poland - the Carpathian sector controlled by the Hapsburg dynasty until 1918 - there is also little to remind the visitor of World War I. The lack of commemoration cannot be explained away as a dislike for the Austrians. For the most part, the Poles in the Austro-Hungarian army of the Great War remained loyal to the Emperor. This is not something that could be said about the Austrian Serbs or the Czechs serving in that same army. The Poles, however, had received substantial privileges from the Habsburg monarchs (Keegan, 2000). Additionally, the Russians, whom the Austrians were fighting, were the traditional enemy of the Poles (Davies, 1972; Keegan, 2000).

The lack of a monument, cemetery, or even a roadside map is particularly striking when one considers the significance of the events that occurred just north of the Carpathians. The battle of Limanowa-Lapanow in December 1914 saved Austria-Hungary from disaster (Keegan, 2000). The Russians under General Brusilov were threatening not only to capture Cracow - the capital of Austrian Poland - but also to break through the Carpathians (which would have threatened the Hungarian capital of Budapest). Indeed, one of the Carpathian passes (Lupkow) had in fact been captured by the Russians on November 20, 1914 (Keegan, 2000).

Limanowa-Lapanow was the last battle of the war in which the Austrian-Hungarian army could claim a victory against the Russians based on its own initiative, its own commanders, and its own troops. The Habsburg force drove squarely into a weak spot created by a boundary line between two different Russian armies. The Austro-Hungarians promptly sent the Russians reeling back forty miles. Russian plans for both a drive south of Cracow (toward Germany) and an attack through the Carpathians (onto the Hungarian plain toward Budapest)

were thus thwarted (Keegan, 2000). Yet even if the modern visitor drives the entire thirty mile gap between Limanowa and Lapanow, he sees no obvious visible reminder of this vital battle.

A similar situation exists just to the east at Tarnow. After Limanowa-Lapanow it would be the German army, not the Habsburg army, which controlled all Central Power military operations in Poland (Keegan, 2000). Picking up in the narrow gap (between the Carpathians and the Vistula River) where the Limanowa-Lapanow victory had left off, the Germans launched an offensive on May 2, 1915 (Keegan, 2000). This Gorlice-Tarnow offensive drove the Russians not only out of recently occupied Austrian Poland but also out of Warsaw and the rest of Russian Poland (which they had occupied for a century). The German thrust even cost the Russians four of their traditional frontier fortresses (including the soon-to-be-famous treaty town of Brest-Litovsk). (Keegan, 2000) Despite the dramatic impact of this event, the modern visitor driving through the center of Tarnow along the road between Cracow and Przemsyl sees no reminders of this major event.

A drive even further east to the town of Przemsyl (not far from modern Poland's border with the Ukraine) likewise fails to yield any significant Great War memorialization. Przemsyl, scenically situated on the hills above the strategic San River, was once a mighty fortress city protected by outlying barrier forts. The purpose of the fortress of Przemsyl was to guard the "gaps in the Carpathian chain where the Rivers San and Dniester rise to flow into the Polish plain..." (Keegan, 2000).

During the first few weeks of World War I its garrison of 150,000 men was twice cut off and surrounded by the Russians (Keegan, 2000). Following the second siege (October 1914 - March 22, 1915), Przemsyl surrendered (Keegan, 2000). The Russians captured 2500 officers and 117,000 Austrian soldiers - quality troops which Austria could not easily replace (Keegan, 2000).

The popular Lonely Planet guide book for Poland reports that the local tourist office can provide information about how to reach the overgrown earthen fortification ramparts in the rural areas outlying the town. (Dydynski,, 2002) Otherwise, modern Przemsyl displays no apparent reminders of the two great sieges. Today's traveler would never guess that the still existing railway bridge had been demolished and collapsed into the River San. Nor is there any hint of the fact that captured Austrian officers once shared the cafes of the town with their Russian captors (Keegan, 2000).

Why has Poland chosen to forget some of history's most dramatic events? Perhaps Poland, not having been an independent belligerent at the time, sees the war as a conflict waged by other powers that merely happened to have been fought largely on Polish soil. Reminders of World War I, regardless of the significance of the battles in a greater historical sense, might also provoke an unwelcome recollection of internal conflict. Since modern day Poland was at the time divided (between Germany, Russia, and Austro-Hungary), Poles of the Great War could potentially have ended up fighting fellow Poles. Germany and Austro-Hungary were the primary Central Powers while Russia fought with France and Britain in the Triple Entente. Thus Austro-Hungarian memorials would stand in opposition to the memory of Poles fighting in Russian uniform.

Furthermore, two of the three belligerents which fought on Polish soil during the Great War showed little interest in commemoration once the conflict ended. Indeed World War I was largely repudiated by postwar Russian and Austrian societies as an imperialist war foisted upon them by the upper classes. Such a wide scale rejection never occurred in the Western democracies like France and England. Thus one finds museums featuring aspects of World War I in France, Belgium, England, Slovenia, and Italy but not in Poland. The communist governments which controlled the Soviet Union (and thus indirectly Poland 1944-1989) emphasized World War II to the virtual exclusion of World War I.

7. Conclusion

The existence of the commemoration sites for medieval battles (Liegnitz and Tannenberg I/Grunwald) lends some support for the continuity theory. There is an old church at Liegnitz and the remains of the Grand Master's chapel at Tannenberg. When there is a physical commemoration of an event on the site where it occurred, this fact tends to support the conservative theory. "...A geographically specific location and archaeological artifacts obviously tend to magnify and support the continuity perspective" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

Overall, however, one must conclude that Schwartz's compromise position best explains the Polish example. Even where there has been commemoration, there has also been some disconnect with the past. The church at Liegnitz Field was not built until half a millennium after the battle. The Tannenberg I site was not developed until the 1960s. Commemoration at both sites is heavily influenced by modern politics.

What about the significant military sites which are not commemorated in Poland? The "collective amnesia" demonstrated by the Polish example is by no means unique. Nachman Ben-Yehuda has convincingly argued that

Zionists in newly independent Israel have been by and large successful in maintaining that "the modern Jew should ignore the not-so-glorious past of living in the Diaspora..." (Ben-Yehuda, 1995). Just as Polish commemoration patterns seek to negate the great actions of World War I and Frederick the Great, newly independent Israeli sought to "negate and deny the very legitimacy of...the Jew who lived in the Diaspora" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

At first glance, the Polish examples of non-commemoration might be thought to support the dominant "social constructivism" theory. There seems to be a substantial disconnect between historical reality and modern collective memory. If, as historian Jay Winter has argued, remembrance is part of the landscape (Winter, 1995), then forgetting is part of the landscape as well. Poland's pattern of commemoration indicates a desire to forget many things. It desires to forget that many of the buildings, towns, and villages that it now occupies were Germanic for centuries. It also desires to forget World War I when Poles fought on opposing sides.

Former Sandhurst instructor David Chandler's "A Traveler's Guide to the Battlefields of Europe" provides a good standard for measuring which Polish sites are considered most significant to the worldwide military history community. That volume lists only three battlefields in Poland: Leuthen, Mollwitz, and Tannenberg II. Leuthen and Tannenberg II are rated as sites of the highest significance (four asterisk rating) (Chandler, 1998). Yet none of these three sites are commemorated or memorialized in modern Poland.

Despite the foregoing evidence, however, the dominant "social constructivism" theory cannot be considered proven by the Polish example. "Collective forgetting is...never complete, because as long as there are groups that remember, a memory can be adopted and revived by other groups as well" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995). The rest of Western Europe (for example: Chandler, Duffy, and Keegan) persists in writing about and asserting the importance of events which Poland ignores. This lends support to the conservative view that there is a continuity with the past.

Both Schwartz and Ben-Yehuda have suggested that the past can be recovered and recreated after periods of "collective amnesia" (Schwartz, 1991; Ben-Yehuda, 1995). This can occur when a group which has repressed the memory of certain events loses dominance. (Ben-Yehuda, 1995) As the work of Nachman Ben-Yehuda, Alessandro Portelli, and Henry Rousso have demonstrated, politics can effect the construction of collective memory (Ben-Yehuda, 1995: discussing Masada's role in Israeli politics) (Portelli, 1991: discussing a labor martyr in Italy) (Rousso, 1991: discussing French memory of Nazi occupied France).

Poland's non-commemoration of major historical sites represents an attempt to control the future. Poland does not want to return traditionally Germanic lands back to Germany. Poland seems to have borrowed a principle from the "Big Brother" society described by George Orwell in his famous novel 1984. "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949).

Twenty-first century advocates of the importance of Polish history have been outspoken in their claims that Polish history is too often ignored in American textbooks covering Western Civilization. Historian John J. Kulczycki, for example, has asserted that "Poland is part and parcel of Western Civilization, and its history obviously reflects the impact of Western Civilization in a way worth noting." (Kulczycki, 2005) Too often, however, historians of Poland ignore the extent to which that nation itself has elected to ignore significant Western Civilization events.

The de-Germanization policy that sought to cleanse Poland of all of its German cultural and historical heritage is no longer appropriate for modern Poland. That policy managed to thrive in Cold War Europe when Iron Curtain travel restrictions severely limited the number of foreign travels in Poland. Now, however, that policy is completely inconsistent with Poland's role as a member of NATO and the European Union. The continuation of the de-Germanization policy's refusal to recognize sites of major historical importance leaves Poland looking parochial and unsophisticated.

Several factors may cause a Poland of the future to readjust its collective memory. Poland is only now shaking off the many years of Soviet domination and seeking to better integrate itself with Western Europe. Very recently, Polish scholars have even began to view the previously despised Frederick the Great less harshly (Thum, 2011). Officials in Wroclaw (Breslau) are now demanding that Warsaw's Museum of the Polish Army return medieval shields that once belonged toWroclaw despite the fact that the shields contain German inscriptions (Thum, 2011).

Poland's reintegration with Europe may call for a greater recognition of events that are important to non-Poles. Additionally, Poland might be able to better exploit the tourist market if it recognized the potential value of its history. By simply focusing on the limited sites now commemorated, Poland may be losing an opportunity for

financial gain. As a newly independent nation matures, it is not unusual for "myth wrecking activity" to occur (Ben-Yehuda, 1995).

Therefore, the Schwartz compromise theory appears to work best for the commemorated and non-commemorated pre-1918 military sites in Poland. The political passions of the present heavily influence Poland's memorialization of past events. These political factors call for some events to be "forgotten." Poland, however, is not in a position to completely blot out the memory of these events. Continuity with an objective past thus exists both for the sites which Poland commemorates and those which it does not.

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