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European Military Sites As Ideological Landscapes

ABSTRACT

The American tradition of devoting substantial quantities of public resources to the acquisition and preservation of battle sites is generally foreign to European nations. Many battlefields in Europe are unmarked or have few monuments. Preservation efforts at most of the remaining sites have concentrated upon relatively small portions such as isolated structures or natural vistas. Cemeteries are at times integral elements of these landscapes. Selected battlefields in Ireland, Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Czech Republic provide varied examples of European landscape preservation and commemoration. It is argued that the often minimal preservation efforts in Europe reflect an ideological landscape of modern political and social concerns.

Introduction

A 53 year-old Serbian resident of Kosovo was quoted during summer 1999 as saying, "This is Serbian holy land. Our churches and our graves are like a stop sign to us. They don't let us leave here" (Erlanger 1999). His comments were made near the Field of the Blackbirds in Kosovo, the site where the Serbs lost a 14th-century battle against the Turks but, so legend holds, found cultural identity. The image of the Field of the Blackbirds was frequently invoked by the former dictator Slobodan Milosevic as a means of promoting national unity.

A military base in northern Germany was renamed in May 2000 for Anton Schmid, an Austrian soldier in the army of the Third Reich who saved hundreds of Jewish citizens in Lithuania from capture and murder and who was himself executed in April 1942 for doing so. The base had formerly honored Günther Rüdell, a *Wehrmacht* general during World War II. Rudolph Scharping, the German defense minister, justified the redesignation by stating, "We are not free to choose our history, but we can choose the examples we take from that history" (Cohen 2000).

This article presents an overview of the various perspectives that Europeans bring to the

commemoration of landscapes of conflict and military sites within their continent. The study is a subjective one, not conducted in a systematic fashion with regard to either time or place. For example, no review is offered for World War I battlefields in France or Belgium, which have been interpreted in traditional and macabre ways and where the futility and horror of war is a unifying theme. I have chosen to emphasize sites of which I have some direct knowledge—except for those in Scotland—and to place those sites within European historical contexts both national and regional in character. In this sense, therefore, the sites chosen are representative of various time periods for countries in western Europe. Site visits have taken place over a period of 25 years; earlier observations have been updated through reading and correspondence.

Furthermore, the analysis focuses not on the interpretation of excavated data from these battle sites but, rather, on a theoretical foundation for understanding site interpretations that are offered or suggested reasons for not interpreting or preserving sites in the first place. European battle sites have attracted particularistic and even anti-quarian excavation attention for decades or centuries. However, I contend that modern needs and concerns have often transformed these sites into the material reflections of nonphysical ideological landscapes, and it is this transformation that holds fundamental anthropological interest and importance.

What follows, then, is an overview of the manner in which battle sites and cemeteries are interpreted—or ignored—in various European countries. In so doing, I will consider two questions: (1) Since so few military sites are actually selected for preservation and interpretation, what are the factors that influence this selection; (2) to what extent does regional or national ideology influence preservation and interpretation?

The concept of ideology utilized herein is derived loosely from that reproduced and discussed by Mark Leone (1984:26). Ideology in the present usage does consist of ideas about people, nature, and causality. Beyond naturalizing and masking social inequality, however, ideology in the commemoration of past or present military sites serves to guard

against that which people fear or to protect that which they cherish in the present, as the above quotations from Kosovo and by the German foreign minister suggest. To the extent that ideology is successful in making current social relations or political beliefs seem resident in the past, these modern hopes and fears will be viewed as natural, inevitable, and justified.

Physical and Nonphysical Perspectives on Landscape

Military landscapes may be traditionally categorized within a variety of physically oriented perspectives. A relatively straightforward temporal framework may be summarized as follows:

- *Historical Landscape:* This perspective relates to vestiges of strategic and tactical events related to the military conflict under consideration. Components of the historical landscape, in the restricted usage employed herein, would include the following: archaeological artifact distributions generated during the military event; architectural features such as roads, bridges, buildings, or earthworks constructed prior to or during the conflict; vegetation patterns and topographic features (fields, woods, open meadows, streams, etc.) that closely approximate those at the time of the battle.
- *Memorial Landscape:* This perspective addresses the manner in which original participants and subsequent persons have commemorated and interpreted the events of historic significance. Monuments designed and erected by veterans are elements, as are later concepts of commemoration. The ruins of Battle Abbey near Hastings, erected by William following the 11th-century Norman victory, are obviously historic but would represent elements of the memorial landscape under this definition.
- *Modern Landscape:* The modern landscape serves to define those sites that exist at present with little or no protection from alteration and with minimal interpretative recognition. Whatever topographic, archi-

tectural, and archaeological elements such landscapes possess have survived by accident or perhaps through the efforts of an individual landowner or small local group. These locations have effectively been ignored for the purpose of preservation.

It is possible to place battlefield landscapes or specific elements of battlefields within a given landscape in one of these categories, and references to these perspectives will be made on occasion in this analysis. One will quickly discover, however, that most military sites in Europe, and I strongly suspect in the rest of the world, are modern landscapes with little or no interpretive focus.

The primary concern of this analysis is the identification of circumstances under which sites are ignored or, if preserved as memorial or historical landscapes, the reasons for such preservation. I submit that decisions whether or not to preserve and interpret military sites, and the form of preservation that does occur, may only be comprehended with reference to a nonphysical “ideological” landscape. This perspective considers the meaning of the event in cultural contexts past and present. The ideological landscape represents the philosophical foundation that provides the conscious or unconscious motivations for preserving or ignoring a particular physical site or commemorating an event. These perceptions direct, for example, whether preservation efforts focus upon recreating a stark and violent historic landscape or allow a less threatening park-like memorial setting to emerge.

The use and abuse of historical reality to promote a broader mythology or ideology are primary examples of the ideological landscape. It is particularly important to recognize that several conflicting ideological landscapes may coexist at particular moments in time, and that this non-physical landscape may be reinvented through time by changing ideological perceptions.

Ireland

The site of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne lies in the Republic of Ireland just north of Dublin. The less well-known Battle of Benburb on the Blackwater River, a 1643 victory for Irish forces over a Scottish army, occurred in the province of Ulster.

It seems apparent that the Irish have been faced with a geographical paradox. Since the site of the Irish victory at Benburb falls within modern Northern Ireland, it is not surprising that the Protestant majority would have little interest in commemorating such a site. Conversely, the Republic of Ireland has until recently virtually ignored the site of the Boyne, a crushing defeat for Catholic Jacobite forces that dashed hopes of an independent Irish state for more than a century.

It is in the north of Ireland where one may see clear consequences of the use of the military past to support the political present. The Protestant victory at the Boyne is celebrated each July; Protestants in the city of Londonderry have an additional parade each August to commemorate the successful defense of the fortified city shortly before the Boyne. The July parade represents a veneration of the event, since they are denied effective access to the site of the battle. However, the past has proven a fertile source of inspiration for both sides. Protestant graffiti celebrate links to William III, the victor at the Boyne, and to Great Britain. Graffiti in Catholic neighborhoods invoke the memory of the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Dublin as a means of legitimizing the IRA campaign in the 1970s.

It should be noted, however, that an expansion of efforts to preserve and interpret Irish battlefields is afoot. *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service in the Republic of Ireland, has begun to acquire portions of the field at the Boyne. The site will eventually become a national monument with interpretive signage (Eugene Keane of *Dúchas* in Nicholas Brannon 2000, pers. comm.). The Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland has recorded battle sites in the Sites and Monuments Record database with the intent of providing a degree of protection from development (Nicholas Brannon 2000, pers. comm.).

Scotland

The Scots and the English fought for more than half a millennium to define a border and eventually determine whether Scotland would remain an independent kingdom. The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) owns large portions of several battle sites, including two with very different consequences for Scotland.

Bannockburn was the site of the June 1314 victory of Robert the Bruce's army over

the invading English that affirmed Scottish independence, at least for a time. The memorial landscape today consists of open fields, car park, visitor center, and large 1960s equestrian statue of Robert the Bruce. Approximately 60,000 persons pass through the visitor center each year. One of my correspondents at NTS described the interpretation as being decidedly pro-Scottish.

Culloden, the site of an April 1746 battle, commemorates a very different event. As stated in the NTS publication, "No name in Scottish history evokes more emotion than that of Culloden..." (National Trust for Scotland 1998). Culloden culminated in a disastrous charge by the Highland clans that had no real hope of success. The consequent defeat of the clans led to the end of the Jacobite rebellion (the "Forty-Five") and the last Scottish military attempt at independence.

For more than a century, expressions of clan identity such as tartans and bagpipes were outlawed, Highland populations were displaced as land use patterns were altered, and much of Gaelic culture was suppressed or eradicated (Prebble 1961; Myra Lawson 1999, pers. comm.; National Trust for Scotland 1999). During the 19th century a roadway was laid out directly through the battlefield, disturbing a number of Scottish burial mounds from the battle.

Modern management of Culloden is more enlightened. The site is a memorial landscape, but attempts to restore the battlefield to "its state on that fateful day" (National Trust for Scotland 1999) reveal a conscious desire to recreate an historic setting. A car park and visitor center greet those who stop: approximately 125,000 persons come through the center alone between February and December. The site itself is marked by burials of both English and Highland Scottish soldiers. This is an important point as it introduces a theme that is encountered repeatedly on European battlefields: the juxtaposition of the military event with the logical consequence of that event—violent and untimely death.

Interpretation at Culloden is subdued and, in the opinion of the NTS, balanced. "Culloden is a very somber place and is virtually a shrine for the Gaels; the Trust is conscious of this ... for example, we have no battlefield re-enactments and the retail outlet sells primarily books" (Myra Lawson 1999, pers. comm.).

This approach reflects a complex blend of regional and national ideologies. Harmony

within Great Britain is probably considered a desirable goal at the national level, so preservation and interpretive efforts that offend no one would seem to contribute to that goal. However, it is important to remember that the NTS is a private organization that is clearly conscious of local or regional sensitivities. The spirit of independence has never died in Scotland, particularly in the Highlands, and the impending creation of a Scottish Parliament in the current process of devolution will only serve to augment that spirit. It is also interesting to note that the Scots embrace the “Forty-Five” as a “lost cause” in a manner reminiscent of the American South and the Confederacy. Celeste R. Ray (1998) provides a detailed examination of this last point.

England

The many medieval and Renaissance battle sites are generally marked solely by monuments in the field and notations on Ordnance Survey topographic maps. Sedgemoor in the west of England provides an example of such a modern landscape. This site of an unsuccessful late-17th-century attempt to mount a challenge against the English crown is greatly altered by the installation of drainage ditches on the moor (Smurthwaite 1984) and is of interest chiefly as the location of the last armed conflict on English soil.

Interpretation may be undertaken on a local and fairly informal level. The site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings lies within the grounds of a private school and surrounding farms, although some of the lands have evidently been preserved by a local trust or by English Heritage (Smurthwaite 1984; Myra Lawson 1999, pers. comm.). During the 1970s interpretation at Hastings was provided by a guidebook that could be purchased at local shops (Lemmon 1970). The author indicated that permission for visitors to stop at various spots around the battlefield had been granted by private landowners.

Some sites are owned, probably coincidentally, by the Ministry of Defense and a few others, such as the 15th-century Bosworth Field, are preserved by the local county authority (Myra Lawson 1999, pers. comm.). For the most part, however, English battle sites were offered minimal protection in the mid-1980s (Smurthwaite 1984).

Continental Europe

A fundamental difference between the Continent and the British Isles may be found in the extent to which local populations were active participants in the issues being decided by force of arms. Battles within Britain were insular affairs, usually focusing on issues of royal succession or the ultimate political relationship of neighboring countries with England. As such, local inhabitants were often active combatants. By contrast, the nature of the continental land mass ensured that armies followed certain campaign routes repeatedly over the centuries. As a result, battles were fought on lands occupied by populations who may not have been actively involved in combat, although civilians suffered just the same. As a consequence, a certain detachment from the event, particularly of older battles, may be anticipated.

Czech Republic and Belgium—Napoleonic Era

Napoleon remains a dominant historical figure from the early-19th century and not only in France. The site of Napoleon’s 1805 victory over Russian and Austrian armies at Austerlitz (or Slavkov to local residents) lies in southern Moravia. An excellent map of the field has been produced that outlines important elements of the battle. The field headquarters of Napoleon stood on a “hill” that was, in fact, a burial mound from the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. The hill with a 1930 monument is considered an “extra-territorial region of the French Republic” (Špatný and Grieblerová 1991). It may be relevant to note that the monument was erected during the period between the First and Second World Wars when Moravia was itself part of an earlier Czech Republic after the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and prior to the rise of the Soviet Eastern Block. France and the Soviet Union both supported the new republic.

The site of Waterloo south of Brussels was the scene of the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, but sources suggest that one would scarcely realize that he had in fact lost the battle from visiting the area (Myra Lawson 1999, pers. comm.). Remember, however, that Waterloo lies within the French-speaking southern part of Belgium.

France and World War II

Americans are quite naturally interested in European battlefields of the 20th century, due in no small measure to the substantial role played by American soldiers in those conflicts. The immense scale of these military campaigns precludes the acquisition of large tracts as public lands, even if such a tradition existed in Europe. Commemoration efforts have focused upon preservation of small loci, museums, isolated monumentation, occasional driving tours, and military cemeteries.

The names Normandy and D-Day evoke powerful images for older Americans; the reality of war is never far removed in this region of France. Several sites have been acquired by the Coastal Conservation Trust. The British and Canadian beaches fell in or near resort villages, so only small patches have been obtained. The American landing beaches are located in more rural areas, and larger tracts have been preserved. Point du Hoc is one such site. An attempt to return the point to its appearance in June 1944 has been undertaken. The Comité du Débarquement sign here is particularly daunting as it warns of the potential danger posed by as yet undetected mines in the surrounding fields. Since 1979, this site has been owned by the United States Government and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission, which also administers the U.S. military cemeteries, so an American philosophy of landscape presentation is not surprising (American Battle Monuments Commission 1984). Point du Hoc represents an historic landscape as defined herein.

Omaha Beach is clearly a memorial landscape that looks nothing like it did on D-Day. The overlook above the beach at Colleville-sur-Mer reveals a verdant landscape with a curved walkway that, in fact, wraps around the site of a large gun emplacement. However, the formidable nature of the terrain is evident. The earliest American cemeteries were established on the beach. The 1947 Michelin map (Michelin 1947a) indicates a number of cemeteries on and behind Omaha Beach; all of these were subsequently abandoned when the cemetery containing more than 9,000 graves was created on the bluff at Colleville. The 1947 map does not indicate the location of German cemeteries, but modern Michelin maps do, and one

containing more than 21,000 burials may be found at la Cambe.

Military cemeteries, large and small, are defining features of the Normandy landscape. The numbers of graves are staggering (Table 1). Since most burials, except those of the Americans, have remained in their original locations of interment, these cemeteries provide more eloquent testaments to the ferocity of the fighting than any museum exhibits or restored landscapes. Further, no mention has been made of the loss of civilian life or destruction of Norman villages.

TABLE 1
MILITARY BURIALS IN NORMANDY

Nationality	Burials	Cemeteries
American	13,796	2
British	19,736	16
Canadian	5,007	2
Polish	650	1
German	77,966	6

Comité du Débarquement (ca. 1984).

Belgium and Luxembourg—World War II

The *Voie de la Liberté* or Road to Liberty was established in 1946 and 1947, following the route of American troops from Cherbourg in Normandy across France through Luxembourg to Bastogne in Belgium (Michelin 1947b). Small concrete pylons were placed every kilometer along the route and many remain in place. The route leads to the area of the Ardennes campaign more familiarly known as the Battle of the Bulge. As in Normandy, the Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg has deep emotional meaning for Americans and Europeans. As in Normandy, the landscape is marked by museums, monuments, and military cemeteries. Unlike Normandy, however, virtually none of this land has been acquired for conservation.

Bastogne is one of the most well-known places associated with the Ardennes battle; a memorial on Mardasson Hill erected in 1946 honors the sacrifices of American soldiers who defended the town and the country. A nearby modern museum (the Bastogne Historical Center organized by M. Guy Franz Arend and the town of Bastogne) uses

a film and multilingual map program to present an interpretation that still pays homage to the American defenders.

An easing of some of the anger and passion on the part of citizens in Belgium and Luxembourg is to be expected with the passing of time. Such passions burned brightly indeed in September 1945 when a plaque referring to *les hordes nazies* was placed on a strategic bridge in Stavelot. The village of la Gleize was virtually destroyed in December 1944; its idyllic appearance today suggests none of the damage sustained by this and many other Ardennes villages. The Musée Décembre 44 is housed in a new brick building and a rebuilt stone one that served as a military hospital. A “souvenir” of the battle—a massive tank abandoned by German troops—dominates the square outside; inside, an extensive collection of photographs labeled in four languages (Dutch, English, French, and German) documents the agony of la Gleize and surrounding villages. Although the interpretation is balanced, background musical recordings of the Andrews Sisters and the Glenn Miller Orchestra are decidedly one-sided.

“Objectivity” in presentation is frequently mentioned in the Ardennes. The Musée National d’Histoire Militaire in the Luxembourg town of Diekirch advertises in its brochure a “balanced and objective historical presentation of the military operations in the Ardennes from the American, German, and civilian points of view.” Such an emphasis on objectivity is probably due to the passage of time and the proximity of the Ardennes to Germany. A portion of the Belgian population in this area speaks German; many *Luxembourgeois* are bilingual, having French and German. Tourism from Germany to the military monuments and museums of the Ardennes is commonplace.

Most military sites, however, have no monumentation. The small collection of farmhouses at Erria was the scene of a ferocious battle on the night of 27 December 1944, yet no markers are present or at least obvious. Fields that are placid today may in fact have been the scenes of horrific events. The setting of the Malmédy massacre is a farm pasture; the names of 86 American prisoners who were murdered here are inscribed on a memorial wall at the nearby crossroads.

As in Normandy, the military cemeteries are dominant features. The Luxembourg Cemetery at

Hamm contains 5,076 American burials, marked by Latin crosses and Stars of David (American Battle Monuments Commission 1998a). A few kilometers away may be found the German cemetery of Sandweiler, with nearly 11,000 interments, more than half of whom are unknown. The cemetery at Sandweiler was started by the United States Army Burial Service (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge n.d.a).

The differences in design and symbolism between the American and German styles of military commemoration are marked and complex. Consider the grave markers. American headstones reveal the name, state, military unit and rank, and date of death. The American headstones mark individual graves, but references to state and army unit establish a unity of association and purpose.

Gravestones in the German cemeteries mark the graves of several persons, each identified by name, rank, dates of birth and death, but with no mention of army unit. German graves are collective but emphasize the life span of the individual with no reference to membership in a particular army division. Further—and this is somewhat speculative—this emphasis upon the individual may consciously or unconsciously reinforce the view that ultimate responsibility for monstrous military and political acts lay with the Nazi Party and certain fanatical army units. Such apportionment of responsibility would hold that German soldiers were as much victims of fascism as were the Allied soldiers and European citizens who died. These attitudes reflect major philosophical perspectives in post-war Germany (Knischewski and Spittler 1997). Although the cemeteries were transferred to the ownership of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge n.d.a), they are maintained by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German Association for the Provision of War Graves), a group that solicits funds from private donors.

The cemeteries also reflect the degree to which passions have eased through time. As was the case in Normandy, German cemeteries in Luxembourg and Belgium are not shown on the 1947 Michelin commemorative map, which does mark the locations of the American ones at Hamm and north of Bastogne at Foy. However, modern Michelin maps indicate both the German cemetery at Sandweiler and another (Recogne-Bastogne)

near Foy. The former American cemetery at Foy, which lay across a narrow road from the German one, was subsequently abandoned as the burials were moved to Hamm or to the Ardennes Cemetery near Liège (American Battle Monuments Commission 1998b).

Conclusion

The World War I battlefields in Belgium and France have not been mentioned. Such places include Ypres, Mons, the Somme, and particularly Verdun, where the horror of war is vividly depicted in the “Trench of the Bayonets” or in the underground ossuary of human bones. Indeed, a pamphlet produced by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (n.d.b) describes Belgium as *das Land der toten Soldaten* (land of the dead soldiers). The numbers of war burials in Belgium from two world wars are much higher than those in Normandy, although certainly not for France as a whole (Table 2).

TABLE 2
MILITARY BURIALS IN BELGIUM

Nationality	Burials
American	13,500
Belgian	16,000
British Commonwealth	204,000
German	180,000

Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (n.d.b).

Urban settings as military sites have also not been considered, although many have been battle sites for centuries. Most importantly, I have devoted little attention to the suffering and privations of civilian populations, although their stories are recounted on monuments, in the remains of martyred villages such as Oradour-sur-Glane in France (Keegan 1982:156) and Lidice in the Czech Republic, and at the sites of labor and extermination camps spread across the continent.

What I have examined are the ways in which battle sites have been commemorated and some of the motivations and meanings that underlie those commemorations. The manner and means

of commemoration have changed through time, in concert with changing perceptions of past events and new concerns of the commemorators. As such, it may be argued that the study of military sites in Europe is less a window on the past than a reflection of the present, particularly on a succession of presents.

Two questions were posed at the outset of this paper: why are European sites preserved and what is the impact of ideology upon preservation and interpretation? The prevailing European philosophy towards the preservation of physical remains of the past is not one that embraces the acquisition of large land holdings to commemorate any event. However, battlefields and military events stir the greatest passion and interest *if* the issues being contested by force of arms *then* are perceived as having relevance *now*. The reverence paid to the site of Culloden provides the current desire to establish a separate identity within Great Britain with an apparent pedigree that is centuries old.

The commemoration of Austerlitz, a French defeat of the Austrians and Czarist Russians, when the Czechs were recently liberated from one and soon to be dominated by the other, may also reflect this relationship. The site was celebrated in 1930 by the Czech Republic at a time when alliances with France and the Soviet Union were formed.

The annual revival of memories of the Boyne and the siege of Londonderry by Northern Ireland Protestants are clear expressions of present fears and desires by means designed to exclude Catholic residents. The Serbian resident of Kosovo who was cited in the introduction of this paper was invoking a 700-year-old tradition to sanctify—by use of the term *holy land*—the current struggle to dominate non-Serbian residents.

Military site commemoration reflects a complex interplay of ideological influences, with regional concerns sometimes reinforcing broader national ones but at other times proving to be of greater importance. The Scottish Highland identity with the “Forty-Five” at Culloden within the political sphere of Great Britain indicates the importance of regional ideology.

Regional identity in substantial portions of Luxembourg and Belgium, including the area around Waterloo, has been heavily influenced by French culture. In transitional areas such

as the Ardennes, there exists a need to honor Allied liberators while presenting a “balanced” interpretation that recognizes the importance of the military events to modern Germans.

The historical landscape purports to show a visitor how it was; memorial landscape elements attempt to tell one how it should have been, or why it was important. The nonphysical ideological landscape provides the conscious or unconscious motivations for those who memorialize or who strive for historical “accuracy.” In the context of the present, what actually happened during a past event—assuming it is possible to acquire that knowledge—is less important than the utility of the event to promote a modern need or ward off a modern evil.

As these needs or evils shift through time, so too does the ideological landscape of modern perceptions. The “objective” interpretations of World War II events in Belgium and Luxembourg and the notation of German military cemeteries on maps in these countries and in France reflect less anger with and more acceptance of Germany as an ally in the modern political and cultural climate of Europe.

The redesignation of a military base in honor of a compassionate Austrian soldier, as discussed in the introduction, is a conscious attempt to provide modern German soldiers with a new example selectively chosen from their history. The displacement of General Rüdell, who had been considered a model soldier following the war, admirably illustrates the shifting ideological landscape. Objections to his displacement from older German soldiers, such as a former base commander (Cohen 2000), reveal that conflicting ideological landscapes compete in the effort to define and redefine the physical presentation of the military past.

European perceptions of war are shaped by the knowledge that armies are extensions of cultural groups and that war always has a devastating impact on soldier and civilian. Cemeteries are unquestionably the most powerful memorial features of battlefield landscapes. Yet such symbolically laden landscapes may be constructed to convey very different messages. Consider, for example, how different a reaction one may have in visiting a well-maintained cemetery, even a huge one, and then gazing upon the piles of human skulls and limb bones visible in the ossuary at Verdun.

It has been argued that the extent and nature of military site commemoration in Europe reflect ideological landscapes oriented to perpetuation of the present. The role of ideology is fundamental to understanding these commemorations as “that knowledge of the past that present society would emphasize in order to reproduce itself as it is now constituted” (Leone 1982:754). As the manner in which a society is “now constituted” changes, so too will the corpus of past events, opinions, and people change that is incorporated into or omitted from the interpretation. Military sites are obviously not the only ones subject to this sort of ideological manipulation, but they are often directly linked to the formulation of a national identity. Given that ideological landscapes may compete across space and change through time, one may conclude that selected military events have not and may never come to an end.

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