

United States and German Military Cemeteries in Italy - Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract

The US and German military cemeteries in Italy differ greatly from one another in style and message. Art-historical methods such as stylistic analysis and iconographic interpretation along with historical research are used to explore the ideological character of each nation's cemeteries. These, in turn, are used to illuminate aspects of the respective cultures at the time of their design and construction. The results reveal post World War II US society becoming more conformist and politically conservative and German society undergoing a redefinition of its values.

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Introduction

[1] A visit to any World War II German soldiers' cemetery, and to its US equivalent reveals differences so striking that they seem as night to day. At a German cemetery, the visitor is confronted with mass death and quiet acceptance. At a US cemetery, the visitor seems to sense calming beauty, gratitude for victory and security assured by a benign people's military. This study analyzes the two in order to reveal situational realities as well as assumptions that affected the thousands of decisions that were made, decisions that are evident in their forms as well as the messages each set of cemeteries bears. Cemeteries in Italy are explored because during WWII Italy was both ally and foe of the US and Germany. In addition, Italian examples include pre-war Third Reich (German) cemeteries, which serve as a baseline for a stylistic and ideological analysis of post-war examples.

[2] Neither German nor US cemeteries in Italy have been studied in a comprehensive manner through the perspectives of historians or art-historians.

There is little Italian research.¹ This is the first comparative study of German and US military cemeteries (in Italy). It sums up my PhD dissertation titled *German and United States Second World War Military Cemeteries In Italy – Cultural Perspectives*.² The work is primarily based on archival research and art-historical analysis of style and iconography. Historical materials such as letters, memos, protocols and records of sessions have been garnered from archives in Italy, Germany and the US.³

[3] These cemeteries showcase iconography, architecture, sculpture, painting, mosaics, emblems, landscape design, tombstones and grave fields, entrance gates and fountains, all of which are full of meaning. Each was thoroughly thought through by serious, highly competent people. Inspired by the approach of Jane Loeffler's important work *The Architecture of Diplomatic Building: America's Embassies*, I treat these soldiers' cemeteries as works of public art that make political statements.⁴ Aesthetics and political/cultural conditions are interconnected. Art historical analysis offers a tool to illuminate collective meanings, those intended as well as those unintended. Juxtaposing the two groups sharpens understanding of art's serving ideology, of aesthetics put to the service of politics, and of soldiers' death being used to project national self-views.

¹ Piero Poldoro, "I luoghi della battaglia", in: *@lumsa. Periodico della Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta* 4 (2014), no. 8, 19-21; the author discusses the German cemetery at Cassino/Caira; Patrizia Dogliani, "Il cimitero tedesco della Futa" in: *La montagna dopo la guerra. Continuità e rotture nell'Apennino bolognese tra Idice e Setta-Reno: 1945-2000*, Bologna 2009, 475-485; Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, "Paesaggio per la memoria. Il cimitero tedesco del Passo della Futa di Dieter Oesterlen", in: *Engramma* 95 (December 2011) http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=1944 (last accessed May 4, 2017).

² Disputatio on June 27, 2015, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany; forthcoming book with Peter Lang Publishing Group, Bern, autumn 2017.

³ The main archives that were consulted are: State Archive, Florence, Italy; State Archive, Rome, Italy; Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Rome, Italy; the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C. Erich Gugler Papers; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington D.C. Record Group 117; Columbia University Archives, G. Clarke Papers; Avery Library, Columbia University, New York City, NY; Erich Gugler Papers; New York Historical Society Library (NYHS), New York City, NY; James Kellum Smith Papers; University of Pittsburgh Archives, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Ralph Griswold Papers; VDK Archive, Kassel, Germany; Akademie der Künste, (AdK) Berlin, Bauarchiv, Arch. Oesterlen.; Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry AA, Berlin, Bestand B 92 on *Kriegsgräber im Ausland*.

⁴ Jane Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomatic Building: America's Embassies*, New York, 2011. A similar approach can be found in James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, New York 1988. Author reads the aesthetics of the layout of US sites as political statements.

US America, its ABMC (American Battle Monuments Commission), and their monuments

[4] The ABMC was (and remains) a Washington-based, independent albeit military-oriented organization established in 1923 and funded by Congress. It intended its foreign military cemeteries to be both burial grounds and monuments that celebrate the achievements of the US Armed Forces.⁵ The US examples' art, conceived and executed between 1947 and 1957, reveals an ascendant and energetic nation that is religious, organized and conformist, and moving reluctantly toward militarism and global power.

[5] This study restricts itself to those examples located in Italy for the following reasons. During WWII Italy saw many battles and had become politically contorted. Both Germany and the US had been allies as well as foes of its various regions and factions. Against the backdrop of Italy's powerful Communist movement, Anglo-Americans having broken their pact with their Soviet allies not to make a separate armistice was a delicate issue. On the German side, SS atrocities engendered a thorny post-war political environment. Thus, for both nations, political messaging was a sensitive matter. German examples vary greatly. Those executed during the Nazi period provide a baseline to which post-war examples may be compared. The two US cemeteries are similar in style and messaging

[6] These US cemeteries demanded sites that were larger than needed for mere burial. Cemeteries should be sited on actual battlefields, to which President Abraham Lincoln had referred in his famous Gettysburg Address as "hallowed grounds".⁶ One senses, in the ABMC's persistence in obtaining such desired lands, an underlying "Right of Conqueror" attitude. Landowners resisted expropriation of their lands with every means at their disposal and drawn-out legal struggles resulted, which had moral overtones.⁷ Widely disparate economic and geopolitical situations between the US and Italy came into play. Expropriation of the Anzio/Nettuno site was eventually affected only through the intervention of General George Marshall, then US Secretary of State and author of the plan that bore his name.⁸ The Italian government (reluctantly) obliged.

⁵ Ron Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad 1900-1965*, Princeton, NJ 1992. Author sees the display of military glory and of political hegemony as the main reasons for the ABMC's cemetery building abroad.

⁶ Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, Urbana 1991.

⁷ State Archive, Florence, Italy "Genio Civile" folders titled "Cimitero Americano" and Archives of the Italian Interior Ministry and State Archive, Rome, folders "Cimiteri Americani" trace these drawn-out struggles.

⁸ On official Department of State letterhead from Marshall to ABMC's General T. North informing him of having written to Italy as requested. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. RG 117, Entry 9, Box 72, Folder 687 (6-1-48 to 3-31-49), (June 25, 1948). For convenience, the two cemeteries are referred to herein by their location. Anzio/Nettuno's official name is "Sicily Rome American Cemetery and Memorial" and Impruneta's official name is "Florence American Cemetery".

[7] The ABMC's intention, copiously documented, was to display American artistic excellence.⁹ The correspondence of General Thomas North (Ret.), ABMC's General Secretary, reflects great pride and confidence in American designers, as though to prove that America had moved beyond being a provincial artistic colony of Europe. (Only American architects and artists were considered.) All art and design needed approval by the US's Washington-based Commission on Fine Arts (CFA), but not by any Italian authority. The ABMC, in effect, could build as it wished. The patrimony of US WWI monuments in France was the aesthetic point of departure. French landscape architects had designed the cemetery layouts within the reliable tenets of Beaux Arts aesthetics. Some of the US's leading architects designed the actual monuments in stylistic variety.¹⁰ After WWII the classicist legacy of French-American architect Paul Cret became the binding model for ABMC's foreign cemeteries.¹¹ Seen in this light, US WWII cemeteries reveal staunch conservatism in choice of style at a moment when international modernism purveyed by such architects as Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Saarinen was fast taking root in Corporate America.¹²

[8] All artists, architects and landscape architects involved in the Italian projects knew each other socially as well as professionally and formed a tight network, an "Old Boys' Network" that centered in the New York - Philadelphia - Washington corridor. All had been groomed as fellows or stipend holders at the prestigious American Academy in Rome, and were experts with Greek/Roman and Italian Renaissance stylistic conventions, as well as with Art-Deco, which had been fully embraced in the US as a derivative of Classicism.¹³ All shared a consensus, a mutual affirmation of supremacy of the classical style, especially for monumental public art. Nothing makes this clearer than the fact that the US Army's AGRS (American Graves Registration Service) had erected a completely adequate cemetery at the

⁹ All ABMC archives can be found at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. Record Group 117.

¹⁰ Elizabeth G. Grossman, "Architecture for a Public Client: The Monuments and Chapels of the American Battle Monument Commission", in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, May 1984, vol. 43, No. 2, 119-143.

¹¹ The supremacy of classicism, in heritage to Paul Cret, was vigorously defended by Gilmore D. Clarke, head of the influential CFA (United States Commission of Fine Arts) who had decision-making power as to the design of cemeteries. See "The Future of Our Profession" speech on February 6, 1951 before the American Institute of Architects and the American Society of Landscape Architects, Columbia University Archives, G. Clarke Papers. An exception to the supremacy of classicism is St. James, a neo-gothic structure in St. James, Brittany, France.

¹² W. Gropius, L. Mies van der Rohe, E. Saarinen, and F. L. Wright were on a list of possible architects, but quickly dismissed. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. RG 117, Entry 13, Box 143, Folder 231.24, (MG_5294).

¹³ See Denise Rae Costanzo, *The Lessons of Rome: Architects at the American Academy, 1947-1966*, Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, August 2009, for a detailed portrait of the supremacy of classicism at the Academy in Rome and its gradual shift toward modern classicism.

Anzio/Nettuno battlefield (dedicated in March 1947) that was dismantled as soon as the ABMC was granted authority. To the dismay of Italian landowners, ABMC's vision demanded four times more valuable land for reburial of the same number of cadavers.

[9] As ABMC's brochures on the Military Cemeteries at Anzio/Nettuno and Impruneta point out, each cemetery includes a broad entrance gate leading to a wide mall of lush green grass, at the end of which lies a memorial with a museum depicting, through maps and verbiage, the "path to victory".¹⁴ All have a highly axial design and include a non-denominational chapel and a wall engraved with the names of the missing. In addition, each includes a comfortable reception room for visitors that reminds one of an idealized 1940's era American front parlor, or "living room". Embedded in manicured lawns, fields of graves lie lateral to the mall, with individual bright marble crosses engraved with the name, rank and unit of the individual buried beneath (7,861 in Anzio/Nettuno, 4,401 in Impruneta). The cemeteries' classical layout and monument, intended to be "readable" by the common man, were to convey beauty, American values, and a secure uncontested authority.¹⁵ Classical style would proclaim "triumph" through the memorial's Greek Doric temple façade at Anzio/Nettuno and at Impruneta, through more modernist Cret-derived form with wall segments serving as pillars (Fig. 1 and 3).



1 US Military Cemetery at Anzio/Nettuno (Latium); official name: Rome-Sicily Military Cemetery; commissioned in 1947, construction begun in 1949, dedicated in 1956; Eric Gugler, architect, Ralph Griswold, landscape architect (photograph © Bob Utah, ABMC)

¹⁴ Illustrations and data on each cemetery can be found at: www.abmc.gov (last visit April 27, 2017) under cemeteries and memorials. Some sites have the museum and memorial at the entrance, before one enters the grave fields, e. g. Collville-sur-Mer above Omaha Beach.

¹⁵ On the relation between form and patriotic meaning see M. Stevenson (ABMC's supervising landscape architect), "Our Memorials Abroad", in: *National Sculpture Review*, Spring 1965, American Battle Memorial Issue, 5.

[10] Throughout the planning stages, commemoration of soldiers' death vied with celebration of victory as the primary design theme. Individual marble crosses seem regimented, as though standing for inspection at a muster. Nothing visual suggests pain, despair, privation, mutilation or the agony of dying. Anzio/Nettuno has a garden, which resembles a Renaissance garden complete with a Roman fountain. From it, the view onto the grave fields is shielded by planting. There, one is not in the presence of the dead, but in the presence of designed beauty with flowers and shrubs forming stars, emblems of the Armed Forces. The memorial's court displays a statue group titled "Comrades in Arms", where two young men, very alive, arms over each other's shoulders, stride optimistically forward. At the monument's wall, a large marble relief represents a GI (US soldier) being borne heavenward in the arms of an angel, as though a loving mother were gently taking her sleeping boy to his bed, wishing him "sweet dreams" (Fig. 2).



2 *Resurrection*, relief at front of museum, US Military Cemetery at Anzio/Nettuno (Latium), designed in 1949 by Paul Manship, carved in 1951 by Pietro Bibolotti (photograph © Domenico Tomei)

[11] A grateful nation thus bestows eternity in the heavens upon its fallen heroes. Both the sculpture and the relief (by Paul Manship) are in a most readable idealized naturalist style, with some art-deco touches around the angel and clouds. At the Impruneta cemetery, large inscriptions inside its museum lend nobility to dying for the nation. An ancient heroes' pedigree is conferred by a quotation from Pericles' famous funeral speech.

[12] The ABMC apparently set out to create "little Americas" by grafting a bit of Washington onto foreign soil. Nature was bent to serve the art of presentation. Rich Italian agricultural lands and thick planting frame bright marble and travertine. All is beautifully green and well maintained. Prior to beginning of construction, about 60%

of the US's cadavers had been repatriated (per families' wishes), and the cemeteries' designers realized that few American visitors of the day would be able to pilgrimage to Italy. Clearly, the mandate to build such cemeteries in foreign lands (fourteen in all) resulted from ideological and political motivation. Optimism and triumph so lavishly memorialized evidently bespeaks the US's unique historical nexus at the end of WWII, meant for all to see.¹⁶

[13] Although US foreign cemeteries share basic features, individual artists' and architects' styles, temperaments, and personalities are apparent.¹⁷ Architect Eric Gugler blended classicism (Doric temple façade of Anzio/Nettuno's memorial building) with romanticism (a reflecting pool with a Böcklin-type "Island of the Dead"). His patriotism found idiosyncratic expression through a zodiac on the chapel's ceiling showing positions of planets (Mars, Jupiter and Mercury) and stars at the exact moment the Allies landed at Anzio beach. This became his personal project, which he continued to oversee well after the cemetery had been dedicated. Impruneta's architect, J. K. Smith (of McKim, Mead & White) likewise realized his unique, more modernist vision. A central "Wall Of The Missing" (1,401 names) forms the monument's main façade and is flanked by two projecting open atria with large water basins, one atrium leading to the chapel, the other serving as the museum (Fig. 3).



¹⁶ On this emphasis on the triumphal, national message of US military cemeteries see Robin, *Enclaves of America*. He re-iterates his interpretation in: "A Foothold in Europe: The Aesthetics and Politics of American War Cemeteries in Western Europe", in: *Journal of American Studies* 29, no. 1 (April 1995), 55-72.

¹⁷ Literature on these formerly well-known architects is scant. This is true also for sculptors Paul Manship (Anzio/Nettuno), Sidney Waugh (Impruneta) and for artist Barry Faulkner, whose gold mosaic titled "Remembrance", an allegorical female figure, adorns Impruneta's memorial chapel. The latter wrote an autobiography *Sketches from an Artist's Life*, Dublin 1973, which reveals how famous all these architects and artists were at their time.

3 US Military Cemetery at Impruneta (Tuscany); official name: Florence American Cemetery and Memorial; commissioned in 1947, construction begun in 1949, dedicated in 1960; J. K. Smith, architect, Michael Rapuano, landscape architect (photograph © Don Savage, ABMC)

[14] Smith insisted on the inclusion of the tall pylon with sculpture atop (by Sidney Waugh) of an angel accompanied by the soaring "American Eagle". Pairing the two, Waugh embodies artistic tension between the eagle's keen and vaguely threatening guarding and the angel's calm soulful reassuring. The statuary, in American hybrid style that blends classicism with Art Deco, overlooks the grave fields where 4,401 casualties lie buried. Astonishingly, such different design impulses display a recognizable ideological vision of a US America at peace with itself, a nation with a mission and a destiny.

[15] The media took scant note of the ABMC's foreign cemetery projects and hence the public at large was unaware of them, a fact that the ABMC and the designers regretted with some bitterness. What little attention these projects did receive was not flattering. An early exhibition of models in Philadelphia (November 1948) that went on to be shown in New York and Boston prompted art critic Aline Loucheim to question whether it was really necessary to look to the classical past to find dignity and beauty.¹⁸ The ABMC defended the cemeteries on the basis that the common man could understand the art and the intended messaging of patriotism, authority and national strength.¹⁹ Fifteen years later, when the completed projects were publicized anew, New York based art critic John Candy found the art weak and outdated, and with the war in Vietnam escalating, lamented that it sought to sanitize war's cruelty.²⁰

Germany and its Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge

[16] Following WWI, Germany's VDK (*Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*) was founded in 1919 as a non-governmental organization and chartered to affect decent burial and commemoration of Germany's fallen soldiers (variously estimated at about two million on the western front alone). Immediately after WWII it resumed its work. Funding came primarily from membership fees, project-oriented support by the Foreign Ministry, and even from individual donations and collections by school children. Unlike the ABMC, the military played no noticeable role in the VDK. While the US was able to undertake its Italian cemetery projects shortly after the war's end, Germany was able to resume cemetery building only after its accord with the Italian Government of December 1955. (Italy however had permitted forensic research beginning in 1947.) Also, unlike the ABMC, the VDK needed to submit its designs to Italian authorities for approval. During Germany's alliance with fascist

¹⁸ Aline Loucheim, "Memorials to Our War Dead Abroad", in: *New York Times*, (January 15, 1950, sec. 2), 10.

¹⁹ See Stevenson, "Our Memorials Abroad", 5.

²⁰ See John Candy, "Our National Pride: The World's Worst Sculpture", in: *New York Times*, (July 25, 1965), 5 and 25.

Italy, the VDK had erected WWI cemeteries that still exist today. Characterized by imposing, theatrical architecture, these allow the tracking of aesthetic and ideological changes that Germany underwent following WWII.

[17] The VDK did not pursue acquisition of agriculturally valuable lands. It preferred hill terrain: "[...] we like to lead our dead toward the light, and bed them on heights for their last rest." (VDK's Secretary Christel Eulen to Italy's Excellency Umberto Ricagno.)²¹ A sole exception is its cemetery at Pomezia, the first built after WWII. Situated on flat land, it was gifted by Italy in 1947 in order to accommodate reburial of ca. 2,000 German cadavers exhumed by the US at its Anzio/Nettuno site.²²

[18] The Federal Republic of Germany's Basic Law begins by stating that the dignity of the individual is unassailable. The VDK followed suite, and its movement toward emphasis on the individual soldier and his family is more pertinent to this study than the oft-discussed continuity of Nazi thought and personalities. During the decade following WWII, within a climate of "suppression of the past", the VDK succeeded in formulating and reformulating stylistic and ideological "guidelines". It abandoned such notions as individual worth being subservient to that of the collective, and soldiers' death being sacrifice to the nation.²³ A new emphasis on an individual soldier's death being a tragedy emerged and took form. This reorientation was no simple process, but its end result was the notion those soldiers' deaths (in their millions), though tragic and mournful, had purpose if such deaths admonish future generations to pursue peace. The VDK adopted this theme in its motto "Mahnung zum Frieden" (admonishment to make peace).

Architect Robert Tischler's Remarkable Hegemony – Pre- and Post-World War II Projects

[19] The VDK's history and subsequent post-war development may be traced through the work of its Chief Architect, Robert Tischler, who had designed three German cemeteries in Italy during its fascist period precisely to express Nazi ideology.²⁴ Those at Pordoi and Quero followed the model of the "Totenburg", castle-like structures reminiscent of medieval fortifications sheltering the dead (Fig. 4).²⁵ At

²¹ May 29, 1958, VDK Archive, Kassel, A 100-884, File "Geländefrage". Ricagno was the head of the *Commissario Generale Cura e Onoranze alle Caduti in Guerra* of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, responsible for approval of VDK's designs.

²² According to the German/Italian 1955 accord, Italy would purchase the land for cemetery construction and make it available to Germany in perpetuity. However, the Futa Pass site could only be obtained by a large subsidy from the German Foreign Ministry augmenting the paltry amount offered by the Italian government.

²³ These guidelines from various years may be found in the VDK Archives in Kassel, and at the Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry in Berlin.

²⁴ No comprehensive study on Robert Tischler's work yet exists. For aspects of his work, see: Christian Fuhrmeister: *Robert Tischler, Chefarchitekt 1926-1959. Ein Desiderat*, in this special issue of the RIHA Journal.

Pordoi, completed after war's end, (mostly) Austrian casualties of WWI were buried in its crypt, with WWII cadavers later buried outside.



4 War cemetery ("Totenburg") at Passo Pordoi/Pordoijoch (Dolomite Alps). By 1939, crypt finished and first storey of wall; construction halted at begin of WWII in 1939; construction resumed on the basis of original plans in 1957; dedicated in 1959; Robert Tischler, architect (photograph © Nicholas Philpot)

[20] This remarkable architect's work is poorly researched and its creative quality overlooked or dismissed, likely because of its associations with Nazi ideology. Indeed, the Nazi "Totenburg" model persisted in Tischler's initial post-war designs, as did his use of nature's sacred ("heilig") attribute.²⁶ However, it has been noted that Tischler's pre-war "Totenburg" at Quero embodies officially banished modernist features, such as configuration of cubes and winding access paths.²⁷

²⁵ On the subject of the "Totenburg" see Gunnar Brands: "From World War I Cemeteries to the Nazi Fortresses of the Dead: Architecture, Heroic Landscape and the Quest for National Identity in Germany", in: *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design*, ed. Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, Dumbarton Oaks 2001, 215-256. On the "castle for the dead"-aspect of Quero also see: Gavin Stamp, "Quero" [2012], <http://c20society.org.uk/war-memorials/italy-quero-deutsche-soldatenfriedhofe/> (last accessed May 15, 2017), and Fritz Kirchmeier, "Eine Festung, die ein Friedhof ist", http://www.volksbund.de/fileadmin/redaktion/BereichMeldungen/Presse/2014/Prospekt_Quero.pdf (last accessed May 15, 2017).

²⁶ See Meinhold Lurz, "... ein Stück Heimat in Fremder Erde. Die Heldenhaine und Totenburgen des Volksbunds Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", in: *Archplus* 71 (1983) 66. Groves and trees, particularly oaks, were imbued with the significance of holiness and eternity in order to sanctify soldiers' death. Author sees continuity of this in Tischler's post WWII work as e. g. in Lommel, Belgium.

²⁷ Christian Fuhrmeister, "Klatschmohn und Ochsenblut, Zur Ikonographie der Kriegsgräberstätten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", in: Gert Gröning and Uwe Schneider (ed.), *Gartenkultur und Nationale Identität*, Worms 2001 (= *Grüne Reihe*, 22), 119-134.

[21] Tischler's aesthetics are remarkable for their creation of theatrical mystery. His mastery of proportion and use of impeccable stonework are recognizable "trademark features", as is his signature ritualized entry experience. The most ambitious of his pre-war projects in Italy is located at Pinzano (abandoned during the war and never completed). Plans and sketches exist, revealing a mighty crypt building to hold 20,000 remains. The site was to have had grandstands and parade grounds for fascist theatrical ceremonies, and involved a ruthlessly altered natural topography, not unusual for Nazi projects.

[22] By comparison with pre-war projects, Tischler's first post-war structure in Italy, at Pomezia (temporary burial begun 1947, VDK cemetery with 27,443 buried, dedicated in 1960) is at once quietly brilliant and yet restrained. It features a low entrance building with scaled-down memorial structure in form of an open baldachin with a sculpture by Fritz Schmoll genannt Eisenwerth, visible at the terminus of a path purposely made too narrow for a parade. The latter's work here is an exercise in modesty as well as a change of message, as his pre-war "Germany Awake" (at Annaberg in Silesia, destroyed after the war) had taken the form a huge male nude, an allegory of Germany arising from sopor. At Pomezia, such allusion to nationalist power is totally absent. Rather, the artist sculpted a group of pilgrims (attached to the baldachin's central pillar), their wide-open eyes expressing speechless grief. "Our peace lies in his will" is inscribed at the back of the pillar.²⁸ Tischler's (and his successor Gerd Offenberg's) evolving aesthetics parallel the VDK's ideological development. With successive projects, the mysticism that had surrounded Tischler's entrance sequences, such as found at Pordoi and Quero, and in more modest form at Pomezia, gave way to greater transparency of wide open entrance, as at Costermano (dedicated in 1967, 21,951 buried). Individual grave markers were adopted, even though several names needed to be engraved on each single marker due to the sheer numbers of dead. A statue of a nude young male on one knee (by Hans Wimmer) in the cemetery's chapel gazes downwards to the comrades' graves that are permanently entombed in the crypt below. In simplified elongated form derived from classicism, he expresses quiet mourning. The promise of resurrection, so prominent in the US cemeteries, is conspicuously absent. A tall steel cross, erected at each cemetery's highest point, is meant as the universal symbol of human suffering.

[23] Although soldiers' death was seen as tragedy, the human experience of "comradeship" among soldiers was seen in a positive light and worthy of honor. The VDK paid particular attention to the "comrades' grave", as is evident in their "guidelines".²⁹ This was a delicate matter as comradeship had played a central role in Nazi ideology.³⁰ The post-war VDK reinterpreted comradeship as affection for one's fellow soldier. Tischler's stone "symbolic crosses", large, rough-hewn and

²⁸ See Virginia Jewiss, "Piccarda's Peace in a German War Cemetery", in: *Modern Language Notes* 127, no.1, January 2012 (Italian Issue Supplement), 119-129. The author interprets this quote from Dante as Germany's desire to rejoin the civilized world.

²⁹ "Richtlinien-Gestaltung" (1958) VDK Archive, Kassel, A.10-122.

presented in groups of three or five, the central one taller, sparked controversy as such might represent a military unit, or a leader (*Führer*) with followers.³¹ Tischler defended their post-war use, successfully at first, (in La Cambe, Normandy and Costermano, Italy) for aesthetic reasons, arguing that massing of individual crosses would make too dreary a sight.³² It is of note here that the VDK had to cope with far higher density of burial than did the ABMC. Germany's Futa Pass cemetery is about the same size as the US's Anzio/Nettuno cemetery, but holds about five times more remains (30,653). A compromise was reached by including a few symbolic groups of crosses combined with name-bearing stone markers flush with the ground.

[24] The traditional Germanic concept of nature being a holy omnipotent presence, a dimension apart from the human sphere, also underwent reinterpretation.³³ Tischler's cemetery at Pordoi in the Dolomites (1939) renders the concept in NS garb. There, an inscription over the entrance reads: "Beyond time, beyond the mountains, may stone and star-filled heavens bring us closer to your eternity". Nature supersedes humanity's efforts to dignify. Nature's power would remove soldiers' death from the realm of human responsibility. In similar spirit, Tischler's initial design for a cemetery near the monastery of Monte Cassino envisioned the dead finding eternal rest in nature. He submitted a design for an imposing crypt in intimate textural and ideological dialogue with a near-by medieval castle ruin and its surrounding mountainous environment. This design became embroiled in conflicts between Italian State and Church officials at various levels. It prompted the VDK to revisit its commemorative cannon with special focus on the "Totenburg" model and on crypt versus earth burial. The VDK gathered opinions from individuals, ranging from veterans to politicians to Catholic prelates. A lively correspondence ensued.³⁴ Ideas about the appropriateness of such monumental design came into question. As it became clear that Tischler's design would never be acceptable to Italian cultural sensibilities, the VDK abandoned it and with it, the "Totenburg" tradition.³⁵

³⁰ See Hans Gstettner, *Deutsche Soldatenmale*, Berlin 1940, for NS ideology of soldiers' death as sacrifice for the nation and comradeship.

³¹ This interpretation originated with Franz Hallbaum, an ardent NS ideologue and author of numerous articles on soldiers' commemoration. See Michael Hütt (ed.), *Unglücklich das Land, das Helden nötig hat: Leiden und Sterben in den Kriegsdenkmälern des Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Marburg 1990.

³² Letter from Tischler to VDK, November 7, 1949, VDK Archives, Kassel, A 100-1031.

³³ On the high significance of nature in German cultural consciousness see Christof Mauch (ed.), *Nature in German History*, New York 2004, 3.

³⁴ For this correspondence see VDK Archive, Kassel, "Cassino-Friedhofsbau", A 100-857, Teilakte.

³⁵ Tischler designed VDK's two Post World War II "Totenburg" with crypts in North Africa; Tobruk, Lybia (1955) and El-Alamein, Egypt (1959) recalling Emperor Frederick's II Castel del Monte, Puglia (13th century). The desert, it was argued, did not allow for earth burial. The cemetery at Motta San Anastasia in Sicily, dedicated in 1965 with 4,561 buried in a crypt is an exception to VDK's post-war preference for non-crypt burial in Europe. See Kai Kappel,

[25] The cemetery that was finally realized (located at near-by Caira, dedicated in 1965, 20,027 buried) is situated on a mountain and offers views onto the surrounding landscapes, mostly cultivated and tamed by the human hand. It does not mystify nature's power, as had Tischler's abandoned design. Less imposing, it reveals a decisive turn away from murky, irrational, quasi-religious notions and toward clarity and openness. Its commemorative sculptural group portrays the individual family's pain in abstracted non-classical style that facilitates generalization to the nation's mourning. Titled "Mourning and Consolation" (by Suse Müller-Diefenbach), it presents a man and a woman and marks the visual and spiritual center of the entrance/memorial building (Fig. 5). While US sculpture retains the classical cannon, the group at Caira subliminally recalls bombing and burning by means of style moving toward abstraction and rough surface treatment. Such was often seen in Germany beginning in the late 1950's. Tischler died before completion of the cemetery. Architect Gerd Offenbergr finished the interior of its cubic entrance building in contemporary modernistic style, which appropriately hosts the sculptural group.



5 Suse Müller-Diefenbach, *Mourning and Consolation*, ca. 1960-1965, sculptural group in the entrance space, German War Cemetery at Cassino/Caira (Latium); overall plan by Robert Tischler, executed by Gerd Offenbergr who designed interior of entrance hall; construction begun in 1959, dedicated in 1965 (photograph © Horst Vay, VDK Bildarchiv)

[26] A large floor mosaic of a dove marks the entrance to the grave fields at both Costermano and Caira. Contrary to Tischler's wishes (and those of the VDK's architects who completed the cemetery after his death in 1959), the VDK steadfastly refused to allow a monument on the cemetery's hilltop prominence.³⁶ The cemetery's ideological message had moved away from death-as-sacrifice and

"Die Totenburgen von Tobruk und El Alamein - strategische Memorialarchitektur für die Bundesrepublik", *RIHA Journal* 0161, 27 June 2017, URL: <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2017/0150-0176-special-issue-war-graves/0161-kappel>.

nature's omnipotence, centering more explicitly on tragedy, mourning, and Germany's political pursuit of peace.

VDK's Endpoint in Italy – The Futa Pass Cemetery

[27] The cemetery at the Futa Pass (1961-1969) was to be the VDK's largest, costliest and final project in Italy. Although Robert Tischler had initially located and advocated for the Futa Pass site, he was not invited to design the cemetery. He passed away suddenly in 1959 and with him passed his Italian hegemony but not his patrimony, as the Futa Pass cemetery incorporated many of his hallmark features, such as heavy precise stonework, a managed entry experience and the inclusion of nature (here de-mystified) as an integral design element. Nevertheless this single cemetery represents a radical newness.³⁷ Architect Professor Dieter Oesterlen's design brilliantly resolved hitherto irresolvable issues such as nature's appropriate role and what constitutes a prominent yet appropriate monument. Tischler's Cassino/Caira and Oesterlen's Futa Pass cemeteries are both hill sites. Tischler designed gently sloping terraces with calming ellipsoid curves that are retained by substantial horizontal walls. Oesterlen designed a single non-horizontal retaining wall composed of irregular straight segments that seem to lurch as they spiral restlessly upward, finally ending in the form of a dominating, overarching eminence. This design, with its varying sizes and orientations of grave fields is clearly neither restful nor calming nor consoling (Fig. 6).

[28] The Futa Pass cemetery covers a mountaintop. Its most obvious and innovative feature is Oesterlen's clear and simple spiral wall (of about 2,000 meters) which begins at the site's singularly narrow entrance (Tischler's design patrimony) and proceeds in straight, irregular segments, enclosing and embracing while retaining vast grave fields. Toward its zenith the wall rises and becomes freestanding and develops a stylus-like form that seems to challenge the restless sky before dropping off abruptly. As Oesterlen explained, the wall's rising and sudden drop-off represent the soldier's life leading up to his sudden, violent death.³⁸

³⁶ "Sachverständigenbeiratssitzung", VDK Archive, Kassel, Altpläne, Teilakte, November 12, 1958.

³⁷ It is astonishing that this extraordinary work is not better known nor explored. Of note is a phenomenological monograph by Michel Duinker, *Der Totenberg. Un cimetière militaire allemand au Col de la Futa/Italie*, unpublished diploma thesis, École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, 1964.

³⁸ Akademie der Künste (AdK), Berlin, Archiv für Bauwesen. Passo del Futa Archiv. Oesterlen Büro-Ordner-Arch.Reg. No 300. From a detailed description by Oesterlen about his intentions, dated January 1, 1982. These archives hold the Dieter Oesterlen archive as well as those of landscape architects Walter Rossow and Helmut Bournot.



6 German War Cemetery at Futa-Pass/Passo della Futa (Apennines); construction from 1961-1967, dedicated in 1969; Dieter Oesterlen, architect, Walter Rossow and Helmut Bournot, landscape architects (photograph © Kai Kappel)

The wall's contortion creates an open court-of-honor (Fig. 7). In Oesterlen's architectural space, emptiness itself seems to find voice.



7 Helmut Lander, mosaic at court of honor, German War Cemetery at Futa-Pass/Passo della Futa (Apennines); construction from 1961-1967, dedicated in 1969; Dieter Oesterlen, architect, Walter Rossow and Helmut Bournot, landscape architects (photograph © Kai Kappel)

[29] With each step this visitor takes, the monument changes aspect. Its stylus-like form is visible from afar, and when viewed from certain directions, appears needle-like, as though piercing the sky. Neither sculpture nor inscriptions nor foliage interferes with architectural dynamics. In the Apennine's wild vastness, stony form dialogs with sky. Oesterlen made it clear from the beginning that he would avoid the pathos of the "Totenburg" tradition. He wrote: "My goals were [...] to offer no false pathos in the usual form. My vision was to depict the grim relentlessness of the fates they suffered, and to give war no glorification."³⁹ The grandiose mountains were meant to console rather than to give ideological meaning. In the court of honor his architectural rhetoric, however, is simply too powerful not to speak, and one might argue that he nevertheless found a new language of and message for pathos, in which nature plays an integral part. In his bold stylus rising skyward, one senses defiance and outcry. A huge abstract mosaic using protruding boulders (by Helmut Lander) sweeps over a stone floor and in diagonal and dramatic upward thrust, scales the wall at its highest point, quickening its message of dying. Rather than dwelling in the stasis of death, Oesterlen's architecture and Lander's mosaic dramatize dying.

[30] The cemetery's commemorative center lies in its crypt, beneath the court yet above grade, with views onto the Apennines. A large abstracted crown-of-thorns of black matte steel (by East-Berlin blacksmith/sculptor Fritz Kühn) writhing restless upon the floor bespeaks suffering. Behind a sealed wall lies the "comrades' grave" for those whose remains could not be separated. The VDK's 1958 guidelines stipulate that Christian symbolism should be used exclusively, with interpretation of the Christian message focusing on suffering. Markers flush with ground identify with name, military rank and life dates. Oesterlen avoided the issue of Tischler's symbolic crosses by designing crosses of the same stone as the wall, emerging from it almost inconspicuously at 100-meter intervals. Between these, stone seats just wide enough for a single individual jut from the wall. In the crypt, a single, short quote from Matthew 5:4 is offered, attached to the rear wall; "Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted", but here is no allusion to resurrection as a reward for dying for the nation.

[31] At the Futa Pass cemetery, gently sloping grave fields cover the mountain's topography, contrasting with the movement and heightening of the spiral wall as it lurches and changes direction. Mass death is visualized through grave fields that span the whole mountain, but monotony is avoided thanks to patterning of their varying sizes (the design of experienced landscape architects Walter Rossow and Helmut Bournot). At the periphery, natural trees and shrubs establish pauses and rhythms. Open toward the surrounding Apennines, the cemetery now is reverting to nature, as intended.⁴⁰ Thus, nature was seen as a force, a Germanic tradition, but

³⁹ Akademie der Künste (AdK), Berlin, Archiv für Bauwesen. Passo del Futa Archiv. Oesterlen Büro-Ordner-Arch.Reg. No 300.

⁴⁰ Akademie der Künste (AdK), Berlin, Archiv für Bauwesen. Passo del Futa Archiv. Oesterlen Büro-Ordner-Arch.Reg. No 300. Walter Rossow confirms Oesterlen's view on the role of

now bereft of semi-religious and ideological overtones. Nature offers relief from quest for meaning. While US cemeteries receive intensive maintenance, the Futa Pass cemetery hosts wild grasses and shrubs that have long since replaced the original plantings.

[32] With each step the visitor takes along the path that accompanies the spiraling wall the monument appears to change its form.⁴¹ This dynamic recalls expressionism and other traditions of the pre-Nazi period and stands in antinomy to Tischler's static designs. Restless angularity and lack of calming horizontals recall daring expressionist designs (mostly unexecuted), these having found renewed favor likely due to associations with Germany's democratic Weimar Republic era. Walter Gropius's Monument to the *März-Gefallenen* in Weimar (1922), destroyed by the Nazis, was likely a source of Oesterlen's inspiration.⁴² In the context of re-visiting pre-Nazi culture, the so-called *Darmstädter Gespräche* must be mentioned. This forum was founded in order to define new moral guidelines for a democratic Germany. Its first two sessions (1950 and 1951) might well have been the moment of genesis of the Futa Pass design.⁴³ Their thematic emphasis centered on art and architecture, and prominent personalities including expatriates took part. It is likely that Oesterlen and Helmut Lander (1924-2013) met at that venue. Their subsequent working relationship included several collaborative church projects prior to the Futa Pass. Through word and art, Lander expressed his wartime terror and his horror of Nazi-crimes.⁴⁴ He donated part of his fee for his Futa Pass mosaic to the VDK.⁴⁵

[33] The history of the Futa Pass cemetery's construction is evidence of Germany's renewed self-confidence, as well as its increasing industrial strength and financial

nature: "Bau und Landschaft sind im Laufe der Zeit verwachsen" (Building and landscape are grown into one with time).

⁴¹ Calandra di Roccolino, "Paessaggio per la memoria", http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=1944 (last accessed May 4, 2017) relates this feature to the expressionist heritage of Hans Poelzig.

⁴² Anne Schmedding, "Die Moderne als Tradition. Architektur in der Nachkriegszeit der BRD am Beispiel Dieter Oesterlens (1911-1994)" in: *Architecture in the Age of Empire. Die Architektur der neuen Weltordnung*, Tagungsband 11 Weimar 2011 Bauhaus-Kolloquium Bauhaus-Universität 2011, 516-517.

⁴³ For these seminal meetings see: *Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit* (= *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 1), Hans Gerhard Evers (Hg. im Auftrag des Magistrats der Stadt Darmstadt und des Komitees Darmstädter Gespräch), Darmstadt 1950, and *Mensch und Raum* (= *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 2), Otto Bartning (Hg. im Auftrag des Magistrats der Stadt Darmstadt und des Komitees Darmstädter Gespräch), Darmstadt 1952. Tagungsband 11 Weimar 2011 Bauhaus-Kolloquium Bauhaus-Universität 2011, 516-517.

⁴⁴ See Lander's own words on his sense of guilt and responsibility from 1994 at www.helmut-lander.de under the category "Werke" (last visit May 1st, 2017). Lander's attitude was confirmed by his daughter Petra Lander in personal conversation, in April 2013.

⁴⁵ Akademie der Künste (AdK), Berlin, Archiv für Bauwesen, Oesterlen Archiv. Arch.-Nummer 66, April 21, 1964.

power. Challenges associated with acquisition of its site reveal then-lingering resentments toward Germany in Italy. As is well archived, the VDK succeeded in solving these with diplomatic skill, as well as with substantial payment for the land. Said history also documents the VDK's determination to carry the project through to completion. Oesterlen's design, which had won them over at the outset, proved to be nearly intractable as construction proceeded. In addition to unexploded ammunition and landmines, natural hindrances in form of flooding and mudslides necessitated fundamental engineering to stabilize the site and to ground its spiral wall. Costs escalated to four times the initial estimate. For the ABMC fifteen years earlier, costs did not escalate as dramatically, but funding and political focus diminished in the face of the Korean War. Thus, albeit for different reasons, both the ABMC and the VDK showed remarkable persistence, each refusing to abandon a vision in which it believed.

[34] When comparing the two sets of cemeteries, the US examples' lavish use of valuable land is striking. The US cemeteries are park-like, well maintained and irrigated, with green lawns and shade offered by mature umbrella pines and oaks. German soldiers' cemeteries are not as lavishly maintained and not routinely irrigated during Italy's dry summers. Both use Christian themes to convey meaning, Germany's to emphasize suffering and the US's console with the prospect of resurrection. Both nations' cemeteries make powerful historical and political statements. Today, some US cemeteries, such as that which dominates Omaha beach in Normandy host visitors by the busload, but the two in Italy lie remote from centers of commerce and major highways. A visit to either is a moving and lonely experience. The VDK continues to organize regular tours, and its outreach programs involve international youth. A visit to any of the German cemeteries is a moving and painful experience.

Conclusion

[35] Following WWII, classicism's continuing hegemony in public art, at least in US officialdom's view, presents a vision of US society becoming more conformist and conservative. For Germany, classicism's appeal, as well as Robert Tischler's medievalism had been tainted by abuse during the Nazi era, compelling Germany to move toward new expressive forms and to revisit and reinterpret its pre-Nazi art. Tischler's remarkable post-war design evolution reveals a Germany haltingly searching. Its cemeteries reflect a society forced (and forcing itself) to undergo redefinition of its core values. They reveal a culture developing, while the US's reveal a culture at peace with its values, values that would remain unquestioned until the Vietnam War brought about a cultural schism. Dieter Oesterlen's Futa Pass design unambiguously proclaims tragedy and at the same time, is evidence of a Germany recovered. However, its seething restlessness also betrays a Germany finding no inner peace, a Germany where inconvenient and unresolved issues surrounding its Nazi past would engender its own youth rebellions of the late 1960's.

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