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WAR CEMETERIES FROM 1915 IN THE AREA OF THE FORMER OSTRÓW COUNTY – PLACES OF MEMORY AND MEMORY OF PLACES

CMENTARZE WOJENNE Z 1915 ROKU NA TERENIE DAWNEGO POWIATU OSTROWSKIEGO – MIEJSCA PAMIĘCI I PAMIĘĆ MIEJSC

The political transformation which has taken place in Poland in recent years has made it possible to discover many “terrae incognitae” in the aspects of especially the latest history, but paradoxically it has “hidden” many of these aspects again¹. It has also become a favourable circumstance for a very interesting debate on places of memory or memory of places. It is also said more and more often about the “memory” of the places themselves, or even “landscape memory”². This is especially true in the context of the events which have left a lasting trace in the history of the region and about which it has not been easy to remember, and which have sometimes been ousted from memory as they brought a lot of traumatic experiences to the inhabitants. The event which is gaining more and more of its place in the Polish public space is at present the First World War, also known as the Great War, and especially its least recognized strand until recently, that is the actions of the European powers on the eastern front of this bloody conflict. However, this recovery of the “place in memory” is not painless. The difficulty of the subject arises from various reasons. First of all, from the fact that the Great War, despite taking place in the territories belonging to Poland now, was a struggle in which Poland, as a state, did not take part, since it was not on the map at that time. Therefore, until the present day, in the minds of many people there still remains a belief that it was “not our war”. According to some historians, the “oblivion” of the First World War in Poland is largely connected with the founding myth of the Second Polish Republic, which was the victory in the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920. In addition, or perhaps above all, the terrible hecatomb of World War II ousted the miseries of 1914–1918 from the collective memory of the Poles. The far-reaching consequence of this last conflict was also the institutionalized

¹ W. Borodziej, M. Górny, *Nasza Wojna*, Vol. I: *Imperia 1912–1916*. Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2014, p. 8.

² A. Zalewska, J. Czarnecki, *Ślady i świadectwa Wielkiej Wojny nad Rawką i Bzurą*. Fundacja Przydrożne Lekcje Historii, Warszawa 2016, p. 4.

ensorship of historical materials in the post-war years and the conscious obliteration of the “memory of places”³.

The remains of the Great War are also present in north-eastern Mazovia. In July and August, the German Armeegruppe Galwitz after the Second Battle of Przasnysz broke through the front near Przasnysz and began to drive out the Russian troops from the Kingdom of Poland. At the end of July, the offensive got stuck for some time on the heavily-fortified Russian natural defensive line that the Narew river bed constituted. After crossing the river, which ended on 3 August 1915 with capturing Ostrołęka, the German army was carrying out the so-called pursuit battles in the areas of the Green and White Kurpie Forests, the lands by the Orz and Bug rivers. The Russian troops retreating to the next line of defence, did not give back these areas too easily. The German regiments, even so well-trained in combat as the elite Guards regiments, were losing a lot of their soldiers, often in the course of a single day, often just as a result of the predominant attack tactics of an extended line battle array with low distances between soldiers, characterized by low resistance to modern weapons (heavy machine guns or field artillery)⁴. Necropolises from the time of the Great War in the territory of the former Ostrów County are evidence of these bloody struggles. Some of them have been preserved in almost unchanged state until today, but most have been either obliterated or forgotten. The location of many of them has been uncertain until the present day and requires extensive archaeological research. Such research has been carried out so far only to a small extent, in 2016, in connection with the works planned by the General Directorate of National Roads and Motorways on the modernized national road No. 8.

The number of necropolises from the First World War in the area of the former Ostrów County is estimated to be about seventy – eighty⁵. The data on them comes from heavily scattered archival sources, as well as from field research carried out among others by the author in the years 2014–2017. There is currently only one comprehensive study on Mazovian cemeteries from the First World War, but it is still incomplete and fraught with errors⁶. According to the Act of 1933 with minor amendments, these cemeteries as war necropolises are under legal protection, in

³ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁴ R. Figiel, *Bitwa pod Wąsewem*. Wydawnictwo OTN im. A. Chętnika, Wąsewo 2016, p. 40.

⁵ It concerns the cemeteries located in the area of the existing during the Second Republic of Poland Ostrów County being part of Białystok Voivodeship; the main archival source on the number of these necropolises are their censuses of the 1920s, available at Politisches Archiv in Berlin; in Poland, i. a. Ośrodek Badań Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej (Research Centre for Central and Eastern Europe) deals with them.

⁶ P. Ajdacki, *Szlakiem Wielkiej Wojny na Mazowszu. Cmentarze wojenne z lat 1914–1920. Tannenberga Denkmal*. Wydawnictwo PTTK, Otwock 2014, this work includes basically the cemeteries which are well preserved and listed in the Register of Historical Monuments.

practice the Voivodeship Office simply does not know about many of them, neither are they listed in the National War Cemetery Base.

In the area of the former Ostrów County, the cemeteries from the First World War were established in the following locations, and in some of them there were even a few necropolises (the number of cemeteries in a particular town is given in brackets): Andrzejewo, Bagatele, Bojany, Brok, Brulino Lipskie, Brzezienko, Chmiele-Pogorzele, Chrzczanka (now Chrzczanka Włosciańska), Czyżew (3), Dalekie (Wąsewo commune – 2), Dmochy Mrozy, Dybki, Fidury, Gąsiorowo, Godlewo-Warsze, Godlewo Wielkie, Grądy (Wąsewo commune), Grądy Szlacheckie (2), Guty-Bujno, Jabłonowo-Klaczce, Jelenie, Jelonki, Kalinowo, Kiryłówka (now so-called Cerkiewka), Komorowo, Kramkowo Lipskie, Króle, Króle Duże, Krzeczkowo Mianowskie, Krzeczkowo-Wyborowo, Lubiejewo, Łęg Nurski, Marianowo, Murowanka (now Nieskórz), Nagoszewka, Nowa Osuchowa (2), Nowa Wieś (Długosiodło commune – 2), Nowy Borek, Olszaki, Ołdaki-Polonia, Ołtarze-Gołacze, Ostrykół, Pieńki Wielkie, Pieńki Żaki, Przędziecko-Dworaki, Przędziecko-Grzymki, Sielc, Słup, Smolewo, Stasin, Stok, Strękowo (2 or 3), Sumiężne, Szulborze Wielkie, Trynosy Osiedle, Uścianek – Dębiana, Wąsewo, Wysocze, Zalesie (Zalesie Stare) manor, Zaręby-Warchoły (2), Zaszków, Znamięcki⁷. Arguably, this list does not include all the cemeteries. Based on the statements made by residents and topographic maps from the 1920s and 1940s, it may be assumed that there are others which are not included in the available censuses. Perhaps some of them have been exhumed, which cannot be determined without invasive archaeological research. At present, the exhumed cemeteries in Sielc, Nagoszewka and Osuchowa (one of the two, located by the national road No. 8, just at the turnoff to Nowa Osuchowa) certainly no longer exist. Out of the remaining ones, relatively well preserved and cared for are the cemeteries in Bojany (by the road from Poręba to Brok), Dybki (by the national road No. 8), Komorowo (on the right side of the road from Ostrów Mazowiecka to Ostrołęka), Kramokowo Lipskie (by the road Nur – Kramkowo), Lubiejewo (on the left side of the road from Ostrów Mazowiecka to Łomża, the cemetery incorrectly labelled as a World War II cemetery), Sumiężne (labelled also as the cemetery in Głina) and Czyżew (3). Some of the remaining ones are listed in in the Register of Historical Monuments, which allows hoping that they will be at least preserved (Pieńki Żaki), although it happens that the area of the cemetery carries traces of its exploration by treasure hunters. Sometimes a cemetery was built by a roadside cross, or such a cross was placed in the area of the cemetery, thanks to which it was not devastated, even if the memory of the necropolis was obliterated. This is the case for the graves located in Guty-Bujno, Stok or Nowa Wieś. Unfortunately, virtually completely

⁷ The list based on available archival materials and field research carried out by the author. A lot of information was confirmed by the courtesy of Małgorzata Karczewska from Ośrodek Badań Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej (Research Centre for Central and Eastern Europe) whom the author sincerely thanks for her assistance.

destroyed were the burial places located on arable lands (Bagatele), in forests (Fidury, Kalinowo, Znamięczki) or belonging to parishes as a separate cemetery quarter at the parish cemetery (Jelonki, Andrzejewo). The location of several necropolises remains doubtful until the present day (Jelenie, Króle).

Basically, three stages in the creation of cemeteries in the area of Ostrów County may be distinguished. The first period are burials as early as on the same or the next day after the soldiers' death. Military actions in this area took place during the days from the second half of July (forcing the Narew river) to 18 August 1915 (ending the pursuit battles by the upper river course of the Narew and Nurzec rivers). According to the information from both the regimental chronicles, the memoirs of Armeegruppe Commander – Max von Gallwitz and parish chronicles of Goworowo Parish, that summer was exceptionally hot, so the soldiers themselves tried to bury their comrades quickly to avoid the outbreak of an epidemic⁸. The archaeological report on the Osuchowa cemetery exhumation in 2016, describes this stage as “primary burials with an intact anatomic system” in which we deal with a “one-time burial of a human body, integral”⁹. However, where the troops advanced forward without being held back by the fortified lines of the Russians, there was probably no time to find and bury everyone, so the bodies remained in the woods and fields. The corpses were buried only after a few days, when they were in a state of advanced decay, and this was already the activity not of a regular army, but usually of a civilian population. The above-mentioned report states as follows: “The bodies of the soldiers that had undergone partial decomposition were transported to the burial site. There is a high likelihood that during such transport some elements of the body were separated from others. Depending on the amount of time which elapsed from death to burial and also depending on environmental conditions such as temperature or air and soil humidity, the decomposition process may have been relatively quick”¹⁰. At this stage, the corpses were mostly deposited in already existing cemeteries. Lastly, the third phase of establishing cemeteries can be discussed, which in the case of Ostrów County is difficult to locate precisely in time because of the lack of sources, and which concerns planned new cemetery complexes, redeveloping or extending already existing war necropolises in later years, especially while the German administration functioned in those areas. Such action may be observed in the places where at cemeteries emerged not only simple earth graves, but concrete

⁸ R. Figiel, op. cit., p. 63.

⁹ W. Więckowski, *Szczątki żołnierzy armii pruskiej z cmentarza wojennego z okresu I wojny światowej w Osuchowej Nowej gm. Ostrów Mazowiecka*, [In:] *Opracowanie wyników archeologicznych badań wykopaliskowych przeprowadzonych na stanowisku nr 2 w Nowej Osuchowej, zlokalizowanym na trasie planowanej rozbudowy drogi krajowej nr 8 do parametrów drogi ekspresowej S 8, odc. węzeł „Poręba” – obwodnica Ostrowi Mazowieckiej (Ekshumacja cmentarza z czasów I wojny światowej)*. Ed. M. Milewski. GDDKiA, Warszawa 2016, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

or stone tombstones, of specific height and shape, with appropriate inscriptions in the font of an exact size and style.

The cemeteries of the former Ostrów County were established in the first and second stages¹¹, probably at least some of them were neatened later (phase III), but no permanent gravestones survived there until the present day¹². These were mostly small fields or forest cemeteries, sometimes located by the roads, where a dozen or so or several dozen soldiers were buried¹³. Simple, earthen, individual and collective graves were created, which in the course of time underwent natural or in some cases intentional obliteration. The wooden crosses, originally dug in them, decayed and the necropolises were in need of renovation as early as a few or a few dozen years after the burial. Sometimes they were separate, in many cases no longer existent today, quarters in parish cemeteries. Probably all or most of them were to be eventually exhumed. The agreement concluded between Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German People's Graves Protection Association) and the authorities of the Second Polish Republic in 1938 assumed joining together small burial sites at large collective cemeteries or burial mounds, designed in the amount of one per each county, but there is lack of source coverage for the fact of creating such places in the former Ostrów County. The draft project of cemetery works assumed the following: "Basically it is planned to create burial mounds for the collective honorary grave for German soldiers in Poland. The mound is meant to be a large circular hill whose shape will change, but also 12, 10 or 8 angular mounds whose form may change and whose diameter will be at least 30–40 m. Eventually, the German soldiers' remains will be put in linen bags, and later all of them will be buried in a large mass grave at the base of the hill. In the face of death all the comrades are the same, united with one another; the huge barrow will cover and protect them, and its greatness will be the symbol of it"¹⁴. It may be assumed that the plans of exhumation and joining together the burial sites were thwarted by the outbreak of World War II, although this does not mean that the redevelopment or neatening of the cemeteries were completely stopped. Ignacy Saramak from the village of Wołowa in Płock County, during the war staying with his parents in Ostrykół, recalls: "Almost directly by the gable of our barn there was an old cemetery of German soldiers from the First World War. Blurred by the rains and weedy graves, the remnants of rotten, broken crosses, and throughout the area thin, high pines [...] Jews worked on its renovation. They were always watched by a few

¹¹ M. Karczewska distinguishes two phases, identical with stages I and III in this publication. Cf M. Karczewska, *Cmentarze z czasów I wojny światowej w krajobrazie górnej Narwi*, [In:] *Narwiański Park Narodowy. Krajobraz, przyroda, człowiek*. Eds. P. Banaszuk, D. Wołkowycki. Białystok–Kurowo 2016, p. 300

¹² An exception is the cemetery in Dybki with at least two gravestones with inscriptions.

¹³ In the case of the exhumed cemetery in Nowa Osuchowa, according to W. Więckowski doing research on this place (op. cit.) the minimum number of burials is 25.

¹⁴ As cited in: R. Figiel, op. cit., p. 99.

armed Germans with dogs. On their chests and backs, the Jews had to wear the capital «J» letters («Jude»). They cut sod with spades from our meadow, which they then transported on wheelbarrows and used it to mulch the newly formed, individual and collective graves. Then they set birch crosses over them, gravelled the alleys, and finally set up a large birch cross in the centre and fenced everything with wooden perches. It lasted a few weeks. And we would grass cows on the meadow and we saw it all close up”¹⁵. The inhabitants of Ponikiew Mała village, in conversations with the author, also mentioned arranging or neatening cemeteries during the second occupation of those areas (the first one took place in 1915–1918), although in this case they talked about children working under the guidance of a teacher, which was probably supposed to serve as specific “pedagogy” of the occupant. These “German orders”, as the interlocutors put it, are probably one of the reasons for the reluctance to deal with the subject now, because the deceased, in the eyes of the people forced to work, equated with their persecutors.

As regards the identification of the soldiers buried in the cemeteries of Ostrów Land, it is extremely difficult for several reasons. The first cause is the already mentioned nature of the necropolises, which currently have no indications. There is lack of source data about those places – most of it was destroyed during World War II. Excavations and archaeological research enables collecting a little more data, although even then determining the identity is often incomplete¹⁶. It is possible to identify individual soldiers in terms of their resting in a particular cemetery, based on regimental chronicles and the so-called *verlustlisten*, or “loss lists”. In this case, we have several data that complements each other: the place of death recorded in the regimental chronicle, the statement from *verlustliste* informing whether the soldier was listed as fallen, wounded or missing and the cemetery existing in the area. Additional information can be found on the memorials of the fallen soldiers still existing here and there in the villages which they came from or where they lived. If we combine these elements, we get the probable place of rest of individual people. It is only probable because it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether those sources are not burdened with error. Moreover, many German units in the 1920s and 1930s did not list the fallen, and sometimes there was only a table providing the names of the officers and the number of soldiers who died. The situation when there were two or three cemeteries in a given location, or if a soldier is listed as missing, meaning he may have died but not have been buried in the first stage, may not have been buried

¹⁵ I. Saramak, *Wygności z ojcowizny*, [In:] *Moje wojenne dzieciństwo*, Vol. 14. Ed. M.L. Krogulski. Fundacja Moje Wojenne Dzieciństwo, Warszawa 2004, p. 48.

¹⁶ M. Milewski (Eds.), *Opracowanie wyników archeologicznych badań wykopaliskowych przeprowadzonych na stanowisku nr 2 w Nowej Osuchowej, zlokalizowanym na trasie planowanej rozbudowy drogi krajowej nr 8 do parametrów drogi ekspresowej S 8, odc. węzeł „Poręba” – obwodnica Ostrowi Mazowieckiej (Ekshumacja cmentarza z czasów I wojny światowej)*. GDDKiA, Warszawa 2017, p. 55.

or his remains have been buried anonymously, makes it impossible to determine the place of burial. On many Mazovian cemeteries where tombstones are preserved, many of them bear such inscriptions as “one German soldier”, “Russian soldier” or “unknown hero”.

An exemplary place of burial, where one can be tempted to perform partial identification, is a small forest cemetery in Ostrykol Dworski. This village, under the name of *Ostrykol*, is mentioned in two chronicles, namely the chronicle of the 61st Infantry Regiment (Infanterie-Regiment 61) and the 141st Infantry Regiment (Infanterie-Regiment 141) as a place of death of their soldiers. In the latter, the village is listed under a double-barrelled name *Ostry-kol*, in one case in the abbreviated form – *Ostry*. In the village there is only one cemetery from the First World War, mentioned in the archives and preserved until the present day, located on a private property near the Narew river bank. According to the chronicles, 30 soldiers fell at Ostrykol. The layout of the preserved graves allows estimating the minimum number of burials at thirty, but there were rather more, even around forty.

Table 1. Soldiers resting in Ostrykol Dworski war cemetery

Name	Military rank ¹⁷	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Ahlemeier Otto	Musk.	5.	IR 141	Bökendorf, Höxter	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Bergmann Richard	Ers. Res.	1.	IR 141	Remscheid	24.07.	1915-08-16/8187
Brinkhoff Heinrich	Res.	12.	IR 61	Gr.Holthausen, Hörde	25.07.	1916-05-1/12261
Bülter Josef	Musk.	7.	IR 61	Nordwalde, Münster	25.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Danielsen August	Ers. Res.	1.	IR 141	Mühlbrook, Bordesholm	24.07.	1915-08-16/8187
Deja Johann	Musk.	5.	IR 61	Luboczyn, Tuchel	26.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Godziewski Wladislaus	Musk.	6.	IR 141	Laszewo, Strasburg	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128

¹⁷Full forms of German army military ranks abbreviations mentioned in the tables: Lt. – Leutnant, Musk. – Musketer, Ers. Res. – Ersatz Reservist, Res. – Reservist, Ldstm. – Landsturman, Uffz. – Unteroffizier, Gefr. – Gefreiter, Gren. – Grenadier, Freiw. – Freiwilliger, Schtz. – Schütze.

Name	Military rank ¹⁷	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Hellweg Wilhelm	Musk.	5.	IR 141	Avenwedde, Wiedenbrück	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Hock Johann	Ldstm.	5.	IR 141	Offenbach a. M.	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Hoffeins Max	Utffz.	5.	IR 141	Blumsdorf, Strelno	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Jahn Max	Gefr.	6.	IR 141	Landsberg	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Jayme Peter	Gefr.	7.	IR 141	Rohrbach, Dieburg	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Jordan Friedrich	Gefr.	5.	IR 141	Maten, Dortmund	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Kaminski Franz	Ers. Res.	2.	IR 61	Hoffmannsdorf, Wirsitz	26.07.	1915-08-25/8350
Kegeler Otto	Musk.	7.	IR 61	Werben, Osterburg	25.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Kirstein Alfred	Utffz.	5.	IR 61	Ströbitz, Cottbus	26.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Kugel Hermann	Ers. Res.	6.	IR 141	Grünental, Lennep	24.07.	1915-08-25/8357
Lange Johann	Musk.	5.	IR 61	Bremen	26.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Mackowiak Anton	Utffz.	10.	IR 141	Sarbinowo, Gostyn	25.07.	1915-08-13/8146
Mittag Rudolf	Utffz.	6.	IR 61	Schwerin	24.07.	1915-08-25/8351
Riefe Wilhelm	Freiw.	7.	IR 141	Athenstadt, Peine	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Schluckebier Rudolf	Utffz.	7.	IR 141	Lippstadt	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Schröter Ernst	Musk.	6.	IR 141	Langwaltersdorf, Reichenbach	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Spata Wilhelm	Musk.	6.	IR 141	Scherbeney, Glatz	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128

Name	Military rank ¹⁷	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Stache Hans	Musk.	1.	IR 141	Berlin	24.07.	1915-08-16/8187
Storch Alfred	Musk.	1.	IR 141	Breslau	24.07.	1915-08-16/8187
Streich Rudolf	Schtz.	MGK ¹⁸	IR 141	Ledaha, Wladimir	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Thiede August	Musk.	6.	IR 141	Hamburg	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Wenigrodt Hermann	Musk.	7.	IR 141	Barmen	24.07.	1915-08-12/8128
Wunsch Hugo	Musk.	1.	IR 141	Grabowitz	25.07.	1915-10-15/9371

Source: Keiser, Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments v. d. Marwitz (8. Pomm.) No. 61 im Weltkriege 1914/1918, Wieseicke, Brandenburg 1924, p. 371–414; E. Schulemann, Das Kulmer Infanterie-Regiment No. 141 im Weltkriege, Berlin, 1926; Online: <http://des.genealogy.net/eingabe-verlustlisten/search/index> [6.07.2017], own study based on data.

A similar identification can be performed in the case of the cemeteries in Marianowo or Olszaki, which are located on the battle trail of Gdańsk 5th Grenadier Regiment (Grenadier-Regiment 5).

Table 2. Soldiers resting in the cemetery in Marianowo

Name	Military rank	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Burreh Hermann	Gren.	7.	GR 5	Oberröblingen, Sangerhausen	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Franke Otto	Utfz.	7.	GR 5	Aue, Zwickau	27.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Furchtmann Ernst	Ers. Res.	7.	GR 5	Polenzig, Weststernberg	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Gerlich Oskar	Gren.	7.	GR 5	Breslau	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Härtel Friedrich	Ers. Res.	7.	GR 5	Frankfurt a. O.	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263

¹⁸ MGK – Maschinengewehr-Kompanie – Machine Gun Company.

Name	Military rank	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Heldt Frierich Karl	Gren.	7.	GR 5	Berlin	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Klemz Walter	Freiw.	7.	GR 5	Kelpin, Arnswalde	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Laskowski Isidor	Gren.	7.	GR 5	Kurstein, Marienwerder	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Laskowski Joseph	Res.	7.	GR 5	Lubna, Konitz	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Thier Wilhelm	Ers. Res.	7.	GR 5	Serbitz, Delitzsch	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263

Source: A. Seydel, *Das Grenadier-Regiment König Friedrich I. (4. Ostpreußisches) No. 5 im Weltkriege*, Oldenburg 1926, p. 419–491; Online: <http://des.genealogy.net/eingabe-verlustlisten/search/index> [6.07.2017], own study based on data.

Table 3
Soldiers resting in the cemetery in Olszaki

Name	Military rank	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Bidder Karl	Lt. d. R.	7.	GR 5	Wossitz, Danzig	26.07.	915-08-20/8263
Brandt Paul	Ers. Res.	9.	GR 5	Magdeburg	27.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Hartig Otto	Schtz.	3. MGK	GR 5	Eichel, Wertheim	29.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Kowalski Wladislaus	Gren.	5.	GR 5	Tuchel	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Kuhsick Waldemar	Ers. Res.	12.	GR 5	Schöningen, Helmstedt	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Pietrzik Gustav	Gren.	12.	GR 5	Soffen, Lyck	28.07.	1915-11-24/10332
Rennhack Hermann	Schtz.	1. MGK	GR 5	Gr. Runow, Stolp	27.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Schott Max	Res.	5.	GR 5	Adamshof	31.07.	1915-09-11/8695

Name	Military rank	Company	Regiment	Place of birth	Date of death	Verlustliste of day/page
Stiller Otto	Res.	3.	GR 5	Heubude, Danzig	28.07.	1915-09-11/8695
Weinschenka Kuno	Res.	5.	GR 5	Borgfeld, Danzig	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Weiß Theodor	Ers. Res.	5.	GR 5	Gr. Steinau, Thorn	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263
Winkel Arthur	Res.	12.	GR 5	Römhild i. Thür.	26.07.	1915-08-20/8263

Source: A. Seydel, *Das Grenadier-Regiment König Friedrich I. (4. Ostpreußisches) No. 5 im Weltkriege*, Oldenburg 1926, pp. 419–491; Online: <http://des.genealogy.net/eingabe-verlustlisten/search/index> [6.07.2017], own study based on data.

The above tables confirm the legitimacy of using, in relation to World War I cemeteries, the terms emphasizing the affiliation of the fallen to military structures (e.g. German army military cemetery) and not nationality¹⁹, because apart from Germans also Poles are listed in them (Godziewski, Deja, Kamiński, Maćkowiak, two Laskowskis, Kowalski, probably also Pietrzyk) or a Dane (Danielsen) which is indicated not only by their names but also places of birth. (Godziewski – Łaszewo, Brodnica County; Deja – Lubocień, Tuchola County, Kamiński – Dworzakowo, Piła County; Maćkowiak – Sarbinowo, Gostyń County; Laskowski Isidor (Izydor) – Kursztyn, Tczew County; Laskowski Joseph (Józef) – Łubna, Chojnice County; Kowalski Władysław – Tuchola; Pietrzyk Gustav (Pietrzyk Gustaw?) – Krokocie, Elk County; Danielsen – Mühlbrook, Bordesholm²⁰). In addition, in one case, the author managed to reach the descendants of a fallen soldier (Deja), which allowed to finally verify his ethnicity. In one case (Rennhack Hermann) the name of the soldier and the date of death are also visible on the memorial of the fallen soldiers, preserved in the place he came from (Gr. Runow – now Runowo, Słupsk County)²¹. The identification mentioned above was performed for the purpose of the database of the soldiers fallen on the Eastern Front of the First World War, created by volunteers.

¹⁹ M. Karczewska, op. cit., p. 300.

²⁰ A location in the area of Schleswig-Holstein, which was the area disputed by Denmark and Germany, annexed after the Austro-Prussian War in 1866. Denmark was neutral and did not participate in World War I but the Danes from Schleswig-Holstein, as subjects of the emperor, had to serve in military service, e.g. in the 84th Infantry Regiment.

²¹ W. Machura, *Dawne miejsca pamięci o żołnierzach na terenie powiatu słupskiego*. Słupsk 2011, p. 130.

Currently, by law, war cemeteries are to be protected by voivodes as required by the Act of 1933, but the direct protection over them lies with local authorities, supported only recently by the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites and since 1 August 2016 by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The places of memory from World War I in Ostrów County are, however, in danger of destruction due to several factors. One of them is the aforementioned lack of information on them. Another one – poor legibility in the area, except for some of the most well-known and listed in the voivodeship or communal register of monuments. The danger of destruction concerns particularly those which are poorly visible, located on private property, which, according to the law, should be acquired by the State Treasury as a result of an agreement, expropriated or the existing cemetery should be, in consultation with the landowner, exhumed and the remains transferred to the designated for this purpose decent burial place. Sometimes it is possible to save and mark such places as, for example, in the case of one of the cemeteries in Dalekie (Wąsewo commune), which was, at the request of the author, cleaned of weeds and marked by the landowner. In this way the preserved fragment of the cemetery in Brzezienko was also saved. But most probably the greatest danger which the World War I graves face in this area, is the belief still existing in the minds of many people, including those who decide on their fate, of the ethnic nature of these objects, the conviction that they are “not our” cemeteries, just like the war they commemorate was “not ours”. A solid educational campaign may change this mentality, especially the dissemination of the history of the “small homeland” as a fragment of the world history, in this particular case the history of the Great War – the conflict which brought to us Poles independence, offset by so much personal misery and tragedy. We need to regard those whose ashes are buried in our land, as no longer our enemies, but as those who are equally the perpetrators and victims of that war, because they often took part in it against their will and values, not having much say in this matter. Without glorifying and judging the motives, it is necessary to restore them their humanity which the war took away from them, which was also taken away from them after death, by creating “the image of the enemy” in the minds of people. It seems reasonable to finalize the aforementioned idea of a central database, including not only the Eastern Front cemeteries located within the borders of present Poland, but also individual soldiers resting in them. Such a database could help not only the historians but also the descendants of victims and veterans of the Great War who, in the age of developing genealogical interests, are looking for information about their ancestors. The “battle field tourism” widespread in the 21st century may contribute to the preservation of the places of memory associated with the First World War, and the consequent treatment of those places as the elements of the region which may contribute to its promotion. This is an argument which especially appeals to the local authorities; an example of using its potential is the emerging and developing for some time “World War I Eastern Front Trail”. The author hopes that in the future it will also cover at least

some of the cemeteries of the former Ostrów County. They are undoubtedly the places that have retained the traces of the long bygone, painful events and in this sense are somehow “burdened with memory”, especially where human memory has failed for various reasons and today they remain the only “witnesses” of history. Anna Zalewska, in her publication on World War I traces by the Rawka and Bzura rivers, writes about social activists, the people who “felt uneasy” seeing the treatment of World War I cemeteries as “second-class” objects and who thanks to their own unselfish actions contributed to the “...arising a *place of memory*, which would not have arisen had it not been for a constructive human and material memory *point of contact*”²². “Feeling uneasy” may have a different form – it may result from the sense of guilt caused by the neglect of statutory duties, it may result from the sense of ethnic otherness, “non-familiarity” of those whose remains are buried in Ostrów Land, but in fact it may also result from something completely different – from the duty felt towards “the memory of place”. The duty to care for the nameless graves, for the remains which are actually human, for the graves of the soldiers who are, as Benjamin Franklin said, “the best sermon about peace”.

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²² A. Zalewska, J. Czarnecki, op. cit., p. 6. The italics in the quotation used by A. Zalewska.

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SUMMARY

The article concerns World War I cemeteries located in the former Ostrów County, within the borders of the Second Republic of Poland.

The author presents the current state of knowledge about these necropolises, discusses the stages of war cemeteries creation, attempts to identify the fallen who were buried in these cemeteries on the basis of German “loss lists” published after the war as well as the chronicles of particular military units involved in war operations in the eastern front of World War I. He also reflects on the advisability and ways of preserving the traces of the Great War for future generations.

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł dotyczy cmentarzy pierwszowojennych położonych na terenie dawnego powiatu ostrowskiego, w granicach z czasów II Rzeczypospolitej.

Autor referuje obecny stan wiedzy na temat wymienionych nekropolii, omawia etapy tworzenia cmentarzy wojennych, podejmuje próbę identyfikacji poległych, pochowanych na tych cmentarzach, na podstawie publikowanych po wojnie niemieckich list strat oraz kronik poszczególnych jednostek wojskowych, biorących udział w działaniach wojennych na terenie frontu wschodniego pierwszej wojny światowej. Podejmuje także refleksję nad celowością i sposobami zachowania śladów Wielkiej Wojny dla przyszłych pokoleń.

Key words: World War I, Eastern Front, war cemeteries

Słowa kluczowe: I wojna światowa, front wschodni, cmentarze wojenne