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Should it come, resulting from the current crises, peaking now in the shooting down of a civilian airliner over eastern Ukrainia, to a Third World War, we cannot expect that after it, memorial places like the ones around Verdun which I visited recently will be built.

A visit to remember, says

Oliver Schuster



1914 - 1918 Death in France

Soldiers' cemetery at Consenvoye close to Verdun.

Buried at this site are 11,146 German soldiers, the German nurse Marie Klein († 27.11.1916), a Russian fallen and 62 soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Armed Forces.

Verdun 2014

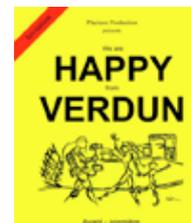
Visiting with Friends

With the beginning of the new year 2014 people all over the world quietly recall World War I

... this was how I started the previous issue of *qualitalk*. As of this writing, the anniversary of the assassination by a Serb terrorist of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz

Princip, the assassin, and called him a »freedom fighter against the foreign powers in Vienna«. As can be seen from this incident, the effort of reconciliation is met with resistance from Bosnian-Serb parts, still clinging to their idol Gavrilo Princip who even seems to serve to have justified Serb atrocities against Muslim Bosnians. A détente in the Balkans, with its different ethnicities, is therefore not in sight, probably not even in a hundred years.

**On the Western Front:
Laid Back in »Happy Verdun«**



Verdun's official web page presented itself very relaxed: Graphic reference to a video clip »Happy Verdun« figured prominently on top of the home page (see picture). That wasn't exactly the right introduction one would be looking for when interested in getting information about the soldiers' cemetery of Consenvoye, nor any visitor to any of the other soldiers' cemeteries surrounding Verdun. I had intended to pay respects to my grandfather who had fallen close to Verdun in 1917. The meaning of »Happy Verdun« was therefore lost to me, something of a put off; but best of it all, I couldn't even watch the video clip in Germany. A message popped up: »This video isn't available in Germany because it could contain music from SME (Sony Music Entertainment); agreement with GEMA over its use has not yet been reached.«

Getting curious, I asked friends in neighboring countries to check it out; they were able to access the video. Their reaction was puzzled, to say the least: The video showed young people dancing through Verdun and sur-

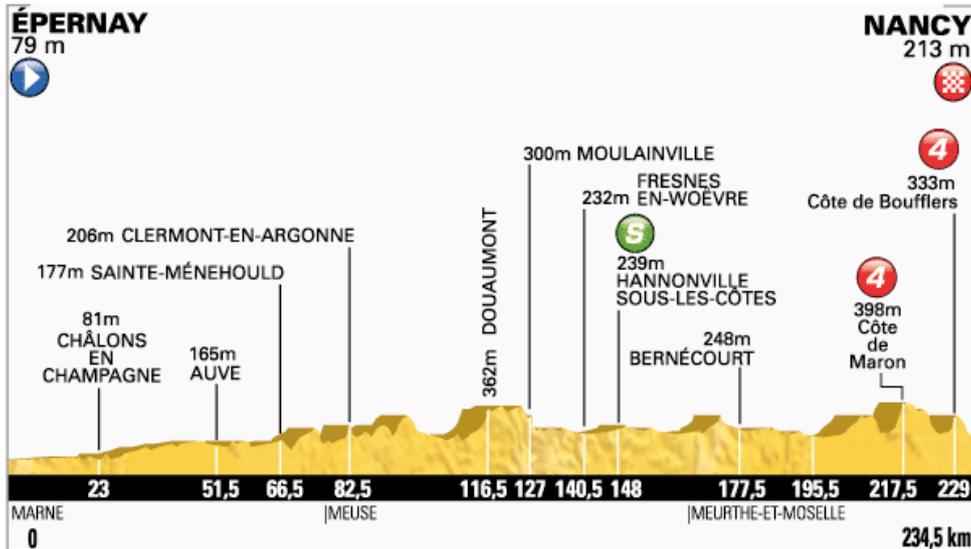


Verdun: *The prominent towers of Notre-Dame cathedral were still half in ruins after the end of World War I.*

A World Peace Museum has moved into the former bishop's residence – here the inner courtyard with dove of peace on blue fabric displayed.

Ferdinand, and his wife has already passed. The day was remembered in Sarajevo, the location of the assassination, with a befitting ceremony and an unbecoming act of Bosnian Serb representatives: a boycott of that ceremony.

It was to be a »concert of reconciliation«. On that day, 29 June 2014, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra played in the Hall of Sarajevo's National Library – rebuilt after its destruction by Serb forces – but at the same time, Milorad Dodik, president of the Serb portion of Bosnia called Republika Srpska, honored Gavrilo



101st Tour de France

Profile of 7th stage:
Epernay to Nancy.
Stage passes Douaumont at
km 116.5

S = sprint stretch
4 = climb



Notice to All Visitors

[of Battlefields of]
1914 - 1918

Archaeological excavations generally are prohibited without official approval of owner and local office of the Ministry of Culture (Article 1, 2 and 19 of the law of 27 September 1941).

Use of metal detectors without official approval of the local prefecture is prohibited (law 89-900, of 18 December 1989).

Every year, people are still fatally injured: due their infatuation with relicts of war, they dig at objects which very well may explode. Therefore: Keep on walkways; don't pick up anything.

Death Becomes Tour de France: Passing between Ossuary and cemeteries death is omnipresent. Whether the cyclists were aware of it is highly doubtful. Thinking of that one cannot help but wonder: commerce, or piety? Source: ASO

rounding walks – where still remnants of World War I, and remains of fallen soldiers are found from time to time – to the tunes of some pop music, with comments how *cool* all this is (*cool* still being very much an »in- word« in Europe). So, I wrote to the mayor that for visitors like myself who want to visit the World War I battlefields in Lorraine the video appeared to be inappropriate and distasteful. I was asking myself: Would, in a similar vein, HIROSHIMA publish on its website something like *Happy Atomic Bomb*,

Hiroshima? And I wrote to him: »Que c'est cool... Peut-être vous suggérez au maire de Hiroshima, pour son page Web, un vidéo *Happy bombe atomique, Hiroshima*.« Not surprisingly, an answer was not forthcoming.

Death Becomes Tour de France

If people in France hear *July in France*, they – and many others in Europe – think of the Tour de France. The very first one took place 111 years ago, in 1903. Start can be in almost any town, even in neighboring countries, only the final stage has to finish



In the Sign of the Peace Dove



Picasso's *La colombe*
Enblem of the East's Peace Tour – in a poster for the Tour.

on the Champs Elysées in Paris. This year, 2014, the race started in Leeds, U.K.; on its fourth stage, Epernay to Nancy, the route passed on its right the Ossuary of Douaumont, where the remains of over 130,000 unidentified French and German soldiers are put to rest. To the left of the route are soldiers' cemeteries *mort pour la France*. That meant that during the day the

through 1989, the socialist countries of Eastern Europe had organized a counterpart to the Tour de France, the *International Peace Tour*. It followed different routes between Warsaw and Prague; later, (East) Berlin was also included. This *Tour de France of the East* was also observed with interest in the West. Official symbol of this Peace Tour was Picasso's *La colombe* (The



72 Countries sent their citizens as soldiers to "La Grande Guerre" 1914 – 1918. On the occasion of France's National Holiday 2014, and on invitation of French President François Hollande, 250 youths demonstrated for peace at Place de la Concorde. Source: SZ

cyclists passed through the area – which probably took no more than one hour – , the route they and their support vehicles were coming through, access to ossuary and cemeteries as well was cordoned off for all traffic, for nearly 24 hours – very much to the chagrin of a group of young students from Maria-Ward School in Mayence who had come by bus on a day-trip just for the purpose to visit these sites of remembrance, foremost the ossuary.

I recall that from about 1948

Dove). Interestingly enough, stages of the Peace Tour never passed the Polish town of Oswiecim – better known by its German name AUSCHWITZ.

France's National Holiday

It surprises me to feel time and again the quiet power radiating from Picasso's *La colombe* created in 1949. It has endured over half of a century, across political and economic boundaries, as an icon of peace. No larger ceremony seems to be without a release of doves. So it was also

on France's National Holiday, 14 July 2014. That only a few foreign dignitaries had joined French President Hollande on the stand wasn't surprising: the majority had already come to participate in the ceremony of remembering the landing of Allied troops in Normandy 70 years ago, on 6 June. On the National Holiday, President Hollande had invited in their stead 250 young people, of the ages between 18 and 24 years, coming from those 76 nations who had participated in World War I. The choreographer of Théâtre National de Chaillot, José Montalvo, stage-managed the release of doves at Place de la Concorde. He said his inspiration came from Pablo Picasso's *La colombe* and Georges Braque's *Les oiseaux* (The Birds).

German Spoken

Walking or being guided through the memorial installations, a visitor from a foreign country is well taken care of: with audiophones, one can follow easily explanations in one's own language.

I could take advantage of two perfect translations into German: the first one during a trip through the underground labyrinths of Verdun's citadel, in a small trolley. Life in the bunkers is shown in re-constructed bakeries, ammunition depots, sick bays, with life-sized figures, equipment, projections. Underground temperatures were then, as they are now, about 7°C (44°F) all year round, the air is musty. While over the earphones a German speaker matter-of-factly explains life underground and under siege, in area 3D of the citadel, sound-tapes of thunderous explosions, cries of fear, commandos shouted are heard in the background. The second experience was at the Ossuary of Douau-

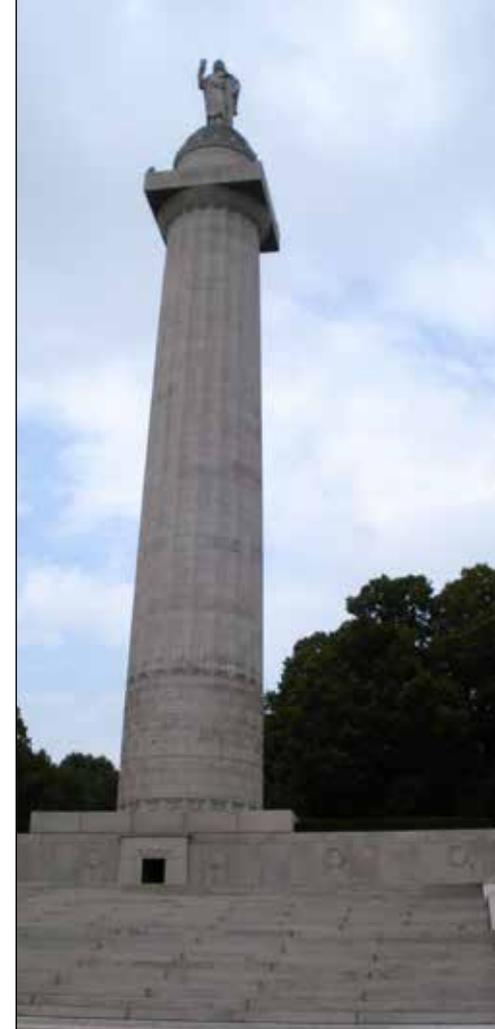
mont, where in the basement one can watch every half hour the documentary »*Verdun, des hommes de boue*« (Verdun: Men of Mud), about the realities of trench warfare in that sector.

I was deeply moved by both presentations but felt the explanations somewhat reserved, on both occasions. It is common knowledge that it was German troops who invaded first Belgium, then France. But no word about German atrocities, except mentioning poison gas – this, too, common knowledge. But transgressions against civilians, such as pillage and burning down villages, part of the conduct of war (at least on the German side) in those days, isn't mentioned at all. Taking hostages from among honoraries of a town was also common practice who were executed at the slightest sign of resistance; snipers received the same treatment, immediately. Though Germany had signed the Hague Convention of 1907 (for protection of civilians during a war), its military chiefs prevented its implementation.

War's Soil

People in this area of the former Western Front have lived now for one hundred years within an immense graveyard. Still today, remains of fallen soldiers are found from time to time. Small villages where hostages had been executed keep their memories in graveyards and small monuments or plaques. One has to add to this the large monuments and the vast cemeteries with tens of thousands of graves, all meticulously maintained; on the 14,246 white crosses and Mogen Davids all made of marble in the U.S. American soldiers' ceme-

*) Tuchman, Barbara: August 1914, 1979 © Scherz-Verlag Bern und München, pg. 320 (original: The Guns of August (1962). New York: The Macmillan Company)



Montfaucon: The American Monument of Liberation rises 60 m (200 ft) above the completely destroyed eponymous village, and its monastery (see picture below).

After climbing 235 stairs, one has an all-encompassing view over the terrain so heavily fought over a hundred years ago.





Consenvoye (see pg. 1) black crosses for German soldiers' graves on French soil were mandatory

The marker with Mogen David on the right side reads:

Here lies
ERNST MÜLLER
LIEUTENANT
 fallen 10 Nov 1916
 May his soul be tied in with
 the circle of the living



Verdun: old houses still showing bullet holes (near Notre Dame cathedral and bishop's residence; see pg. 2).

tery of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon in the Argonnes not one bird dropping could be seen.

The »industry of remembrance« flourishes. The aforementioned cemetery of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, with an area of 52 hectares the largest in Europe, employs over forty gardeners, under the auspices of the American Battle Monuments Commission. The German War Graves Commis-



Romagne-sous-Montfaucon: markers (crosses and Mogen Davids) made of white marble.

sion also has many local people under contract and additionally can count on the help of a goodly number of volunteers. For the greater part, arrangement and maintenance of these blood-soaked fields of heritage of two World Wars rests with the French military. Compared with the impeccably maintained sites of remembrance, all too often houses within the area show signs of decay and neglect. □

Impressum



Chris Schuth

Photo by Maurice de Chlourigon

qualitalk edited by
 Chris Schuth | Max-Planck-Straße 45
 55124 Mainz | Germany
 phone (+49) 06131 - 476466

www.chris-schuth.de
 mail (schnabel-a) chris-schuth.de

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