

## Memorials Essay

Every country has its own unique way to memorialize a war, especially something as devastating as WWII. The way is influenced by culture, location, allies, enemies, and the outcome of the war. The best way to understand these differences is to pick a symbolic memorial from several countries and examine them closely. The USA has several memorials located outside of its borders. An example of a traditional US war memorial would be the US Memorial Cemetery located in Normandy, near Omaha beach. Of course, this is not how all of the US memorials are, but it does represent the style of the US. For Great Britain, there is the HMS Belfast, an old WWII cruiser transformed into a floating museum, dedicated to remembering WWII. For France, we have many memorials that are very similar to choose from. To keep this simple, we will use the simple stone memorial from Omaha beach. This sculpture is near the Wings of Hope. For Belgium we have Le Memorial du Mardasson, or the Belgium American Memorial on Mardasson Hill. For Luxembourg we have the German Cemetery, built by the German people but inside of Luxembourg. Lastly for Germany we have The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. This is a relatively new memorial that remembers the events of the holocaust. Each of these memorials tells a long story of what each country believe in and how they live their lives.

Starting with the American Memorial Cemetery, it is a large area, with more land than is actually being used to bury the dead. It is also in a very regular pattern. The graves of soldiers who have made great accomplishments are set apart from their peers by gold lettering. There are paintings on walls showing the Allies advance through Europe. There are also several statues situated throughout the cemetery, along with a chapel in the center. The grounds are very well kept, there is hardly any dead leaves, flower or grass anywhere in the cemetery. All the grave markers are also free from dirt and damage. Taking into account these facts, and my personal experiences in America, I come to the following conclusions. Americans typically like grand things and large things. Even memorials have to be large and bold. There is no subtlety in the design of the cemetery, it was made to tell people here I am, look at me. Also the fact that everything is so well kept and clean, means Americans show a lot of respect for the dead. There is no desecration that I could see anywhere in the cemetery. Also the walls showing the Allies advance shows that Americans like to see victory.

The British memorial, the HMS Belfast, is an old WWII cruiser. It did see active service and at the end of the war, it became a museum. Most of it was left in original condition. There were also several exhibits inside the ship showing British naval accomplishments and other stuff related to the British Navy. From the memorial and personal experience, I came to the following conclusions about the British. They have a tremendous amount of pride. All the memorials that I have seen in the UK

have put the British accomplishments ahead of the American accomplishments. Also the British want to remember the war in its original detail. They want historical artifacts to show that the war happened. Also there is a bit of tension between the British and the US, you do not see many US memorials in the UK, and when you do, the memorials tend to be small. Another thing, the British seem to have respect for the war, and understand the true cost of the war.

The French memorial is very simple. It is a stone with the inscription, "THE ALLIED FORCES LANDING ON THIS SHORE WHICH THEY CALL OMAHA BEACH LIBERATE EUROPE JUNE 6TH 1944". The same message is also repeated in French. The memorial is simple, it is basically a column of stone with the inscription and some carved figures in the side. Being in both big and little cities in France, I noticed a difference even within France. The smaller cities tended to have more WWII memorials than the bigger cities. The abstract way the French remember the war suggests that they really don't want to remember the details of the war, but rather just the sacrifice that was paid because of the war. Also most of the memorials are dedicated to the Allies, instead of to a nation by itself. The Omaha beach memorial is a key example of this. The Americans landed on the beach but the French remember it as an Allied landing. This suggests that the French prefer not to place a face to WWII, but just to remember it by vague references. While in France I also got a sense that even though they won WWII, they didn't qualify it as a victory. All other memorials in France, like the Arc de Triomphe, were large and very intricate. It almost seems that the French put up the memorials to WWII because they were obligated.

In Belgium, every town we visited had something dedicated to the American troops, not the Allies, but to Americans. The memorial that I choose to analyze from there is the Belgium American Memorial on the Mardasson Hill. This is a large memorial that is dedicated entirely to the American forces. It is the shape of a 5 point star with lots of writing on it. Some of this shows the units which participated in the defense of Bastogne during the German counter attack of the Battle of the Bulge. Other parts of this memorial told the story of the fight. This memorial, and the other one that I have seen show that the Belgium people are very grateful towards the American troops and want to remember them for a long time. It also shows that Belgium, despite its heavy losses, still wants to remember the war in actual terms, instead of an abstraction. I wasn't in Belgium too long, so I wasn't able to get an impression of the people there.

There really wasn't a "true" Luxembourg memorial that we saw, the closest one without outside influences is the German Memorial Cemetery. Although this was primarily built by the Germans, the people of Luxembourg still own the land unlike the American Cemetery where the land was permanently given to the Americans. The cemetery is located in basically the middle of nowhere, as if

the people of Luxembourg did not want anyone to find it. This in compared to the American cemetery which is located on a main road and practically begs people to come on in. The cemetery is also in a unkempt situation. The grass appears to be impure and not mowed frequently. There is also far less visitors to this cemetery. This indicates that Luxembourg will remember everyone who died, but they do assign values to people. If they didn't both the Germans and the Americans would have been buried in the same place as both of them basically died in the same place. Another thing is a great respect for the dead. If there was no respect, then they would not have given the land to build the cemeteries.

The last memorial that we visited was the Memorial for Murdered Jew in Europe in Germany. This memorial was very abstract. It was made of a grid of rectangular blocks varying in height. It is hard to describe the memorial, you would need to go there and see it to get a better sense of how it actually is. This memorial tells us that like France, Germany doesn't want to remember the war. The memorial cannot be directly linked to anything related to the war or the Holocaust without prior knowledge. You cannot simply look at the memorial and say, "oh, that's a memorial to the Jews that were murdered in Europe." Another thing this indicates about Germany is that when they do want to remember something, it is going to be big and grand. This memorial was larger than any other single memorial that I have visited. Also the Topography of Terror exhibit was suppose to be on a grand scale, but it had yet to be fully built.

In comparing the way countries memorialize events, I think that all of the countries memorialize positive events in the same way. All the countries have massive memorials dedicated to their highest points in their history. However, as you move to a mixed event like WWII, the differences between the countries appear. The US and Great Britain have similar ways of memorializing war related events. Both of them will glorify only their positive achievements in the war. A good example of this can be found in Paul Fullell's *The Boy's Crusade*. In the book, there is a chapter describing a failed Allies operation called Operation Cobra. In the operation, Allied bombers accidentally dropped their payload on other Allied troops causing a large number of casualties. The chapter ends with, "Tourist prowling around the COBRA area should not waste time looking for a memorial to the boys killed by the bombing error. There is none." This clearly shows that the US and the UK prefer to memorialize positive events instead of tragedies. Their difference is that Great Britain is more hesitant to memorialize the US actions in the war. I do not believe that the US has that problem. In sharp contrast to the US and the UK, there is France. In France, people do not really want to remember the war, but they feel obligated to put up some kind of memorial. The French still memorialize their victories like the US and UK though, but as for the WWII, the French style of remembrance is significantly different from the US and UK. Then we have Luxembourg and Belgium. Both of them are small countries that

have suffered greatly in the war, but yet they provide numerous memorials to the US troops who help them in their time of need. In fact they memorialize the US troops more than their own. I saw more US memorials than Belgium and Luxembourg memorials. Lastly there is Germany. The Germans have nothing glorifying their past. Anything that mentions the Nazi party is cast in a dark light, as for other events, the memorials are mainly put there by some other organization, such as the USSR or NATO. Only recently has the German people been able to erect memorials free of outside influences. Their memorial style suggest that the war is a painful memory, and that most memorials will likely be an abstract memorial.

A lot of these differences can be explained by the cultural differences between the nations. The American mindset is to reward winners. We never like someone who lost, but we will still accept them and aid them. The British have a great sense of national pride, but in most cases are like the American. However once you move into France, things become a lot different. First off the French have what Americans would consider a lower sense of decency. Nudity and public displays of emotions are much more commonplace. Also in France, there is an air of anti Americanism. I don't know when this started, but its presence suggest that the French memorials will more likely remember the Allies as a whole than as separate nations. I wasn't in Luxembourg or Belgium long, but for the time I was there, I got a sense that they are far more tolerant of Americans than the French, and more "decent." As for Germany, the people there seem nice, but their "decency" standards are even lower than the French. Also for the Germans, much of their culture and ideology has been forced on them ever since the war was over. Also due to the difference in treatment from the USSR and the NATO countries, Germany is far more liking to the US, than France. The idea of accepting the lesser of two evils during the cold war had lead to the current state of affairs in Germany. There are far more people here speaking American English than there are people speaking Russian.

To sum everything up, here are the key features of memorials in the various countries:

- America: Large memorials emphasizing the accomplishments of America and her Allies
- Great Britain: Historical and highly detailed memorials emphasizing British accomplishments
- France: Small scale abstract memorials emphasizing the work of the Allies as a whole
- Belgium: Medium to large memorials emphasizing the American sacrifice
- Luxembourg: There is no clear conclusion on the general memorial style for Luxembourg
- Germany: Large scale abstract memorials that are not directly related to combat.

All these different styles have come from the various cultural differences between the countries and of course the outcome of the war. Had the Germans won the war, all the countries would likely have the same memorials, all glorifying the Nazi party and Hitler. This just shows that memorials are a

reflection of a country's culture and history. There is a lot you can learn from just spending some time to look at how a country remembers its heroes.

## Moral Issues of WWII

The analysis of the moral issues found in the second world war is a long and complex process. There is an overwhelming amount of information to analyze. It would be impossible to write on every single moral issue of WWII in one paper. One has to focus his or her writing on several key issues. I have chosen to write about the moral issues associated with:

1. The London Blitz.
2. The Normandy (D-Day) Invasions on 06/06/1944
3. The Deportation of the Non-German European Jews and the Holocaust
4. The Malmedy Massacre and the Malmedy Christmas bombing of 44
5. The Buchenwald Concentration Camps and the Citizens of Weimar
6. The Violations of the 1929 Geneva Convention during WWII

The moral issues from these events are some of the key issues that need to be dealt with when studying WWII. In the London Blitz, we have the issues of escalation and the targeting of civilians for the purpose of terror. In D-Day, we had the bombing of civilian infrastructure as a method of deception. This also leads to the issue of who's life is worth more, a civilian or a soldier. From the Holocaust, we have some of the hardest to answer questions. We may never know why the Germans did what they did. The event itself is still very hard to comprehend by many. In the Malmedy Massacre, captured American troops were mercilessly gunned down by the SS for no reason. There was also the accidental bombing of Malmedy in a botched operation where the command thought that the Germans were in Malmedy when in fact, the Allies were occupying it. The issue found from Buchenwald are very similar to the one raised by the deportation and the Holocaust. We also encounter an issue of how civilians are expected to act when they encounter a horror of that level. Lastly we have the issues brought up by violations of the Geneva convention. Should there be retaliations that are also in violation? Or, should you let such acts go unpunished until the end of the war.

The London Blitz originally started as something that was free from moral dilemma. It was a straightforward military operation to reduce the British Royal Air Force to an ineffective capacity. There was no targeting of civilian targets, everything hit was a military installation or an airfield or in some way directly supporting the military. When you are at war, there is nothing immoral about killing your enemy or destroying his resources, it is part of war. However, in the course of the normal bombing operations, according to *The Battle for Britain*, a German plane accidentally dropped its payload on a civilian sector of London, killing innocent civilians. This led to a retaliatory bombing by the RAF on Berlin. There was no effort by the RAF to aim at military targets, they just hit anything in the city that they could. This in turn leads to the Germans expanding their bombing zones to all of

London and the surrounding suburbs. The key issue here is, was it okay for the RAF to retaliate on Germany? And was it okay for Germany to continually bomb the civilian population of London? Personally, I believe that the RAF should have never went to bomb Berlin. If the footage from the film is historically accurate, there should have been no doubt in the minds of the Allied commanders that the bombing was accidental. There is no need for a massive raid on Berlin. I feel that the British may have used that one incident as an excuse to bomb the people in Berlin. The bombing of London and Berlin also raises the question of when, if ever, civilians should be the direct target of a military operation, and also when do you stop going an eye for an eye and take the high road.

The next issue was the D-Day invasion. Looking at it from the military point of view, this was a necessary evil. We had no choice but to sacrifice the lives of many of our young men to liberate France from the grasp of the Germans. However, the events leading up to the assault on June 6, 1944, raise some serious questions. First there was the bombing of sites near Calis in an effort to confuse the Germans and to make them think that the main invasion was going to be from Dover to Calis. The unfortunate part of this operation was that some of the targets were located in civilian areas, like railroad stations and such. Even the top commanders had trouble with the bombing raids on the fake invasion area. From Eisenhower's *Crusade in Europe*, "Our scheme for employing the air force in preparation for the great assault encountered very earnest and sincere opposition, especially on the political level." This statement by Eisenhower shows that the commanders of the Allied force were trying to deal with the moral issues of bombing "friendly" civilian targets. This also raises another issue, who's life is worth more, the civilian or the soldier? The D-Day invasion could have gone ahead without the deception bombing at Calis, but without it, there may have been a lot more casualties for the troops landing on the beaches. Was it worth the lives of the civilians so the troops could have a slightly easier time landing on the beaches?

Whenever you have troops fighting, you inevitably end up with some prisoners of war. Such a situation occurred in Malmedy, a small group of American soldiers were captured by the SS. Without warning, the SS decided to gun down all of the soldiers. Some of them managed to escape, but the majority of them died. This brings out the issue of where to draw the line between combat and murder. A question one has to ask himself is, when does a soldier stop being a combatant and becomes a person? It is easy to justify killing a combatant, it's either you or him, but when the person has surrendered, he is no longer a combatant. He is now just a normal person. The murder of the American troops at Malmedy also shows the darker side of the Nazi beliefs and their lack of respect for life. American troops suffered a second tragedy at Malmedy, during Christmas of 44, Allied bombers struck the town of Malmedy under the assumption that the Germans were occupying it. They were wrong.

Many American troops died in the accident, but yet there is no memorial to them. This raises the issue of how to remember those who have perished by friendly fire instead of enemy attack. There are no memorials dedicated to this tragic event. Everything we have is dedicated to the soldiers who were killed by enemy fire. Is a death by friendly fire worth less than a death by enemy fire?

The next two events are closely tied. The Holocaust was the single most horrific event in human history. There are an uncountable amount of moral issues that are raised by the Holocaust and the deportation of the Jews. The second event the the concentration camps. Regarding the deportation issue, the Germans were not alone in some of the moral issues raised. Both the Germans and the American had a system of camps for certain people. The issue raised from the formation of the camps is the displacement of the people who are put into the camps. We have to wonder what gives a government the right to take a arbitrary selection of people, strip them of all their belongings and wealth. Also how do you choose what kind of person is put into a camp. Do you do it because the person might be threat to you? Do you do it because the majority of you country doesn't like the person's race? For the Germans, it was simply everyone who wasn't a pure German. For the American's it was people who were suspected of having some kind of relation to the enemy. Even though the American policy was more lenient, there was still the issue of American citizens being put into the camps because of their ancestry. This was almost as bad as the Germans saying all Jews must go to the concentration camps. Although the American interment camps and the German concentration camps served very different purposes, it is impossible to deny that both of them deal with the issue of displacement and bring up the moral issue of when it is okay to say that to a group of people that we do not value you life as much as we much as we value ours. Aside from the displacement issue, there is the issue of the wholesale murder of the Jews and other "undesirable" races within German occupied Europe. There is absolutely no moral justification for such an act. Even if the Jews were not humans, the systematic elimination of any species cannot be morally justified. There is absolutely no reason to delete the existence of any from of life completely from this existence, regardless of it's worth. This wholesale murder also leads into the next issue, what should the civilians of the country do.

In the city of Weimar, the citizens claimed to be unaware of the camp at Buchenwald, just a few miles away. Personally I think that the citizens were aware of the existence of a camp at Buchenwald, but may not have been aware of the torture and death coming from the camp. This raises the question of how far should someone go to hamper what one considers immoral. Should they participate in active resistance, with the risk of death and possibly joining the camp? Or, should one passive resist, such as refusing to use the labor force from the camp or refusing to buy and use products from the camp. If one knew of the atrocities that occurred at the camps, there should be no way that they would tolerate it.

The conditions that the inmates were subject to were far worse than anything a domestic animal would have had to endure. However, we cannot be quick to judge the people of Weimar, there is a strong possibility that the majority of the town has never visited Buchenwald and returned. If one doesn't know a crime has been committed, what duty does one have to try to answer for that crime?

Lastly there is the issue of violations of the Geneva convention. The convention was an agreement by several countries since the end of WWI to try to establish rules on warfare and treatment of prisoners from war. However in WWII we encountered a situation where only some of the powers had signed the convention. This presents a dilemma in how to follow the convention when the enemy doesn't have to. Of course, the signors tried to keep within the limits set by the convention when fighting against someone who hasn't signed it, but this tended to disintegrate when they found out the brutal treatment the non-signors gave to the POW's. This then raises a new issue, should you repay the action of the non-signors or should you take the high moral ground and let it be? Both choices had serious consequences, there was no ideal solution to the decision of whether to go eye for eye or to follow the letter of the law.

Just a small disclaimer before the conclusion of this essay. Some of the material in the conclusion is an over generalization of a nation as a whole. It is not meant to insult anyone or any nationality. It is simply based on what I have observed while visiting several countries for a short period of time.

In conclusion, we have dealt with issues concerning the civilians, soldiers and even countries. Each has its own unique aspect to it but they all share a common theme. There is no single right answer to any of the issues or questions that have been raised in this essay. Each person potentially will answer each question differently based on his or her morals. It is because of this difference in humanity that we have the groups that we belong to. This is the key lesson that I have learned in my time abroad. Every country, every province, every city, even every family has it's own unique set of moral beliefs. This was reflected by how the WWII was remembered by each country and how each country fought the war. It is hard to view the events of WWII from an unbiased standpoint. However being in all the different countries, and seeing their respective differences, has allowed me to understand why certain countries did what they did. America and Great Britain are more concerned with national power and prestige, this leads them to believe in the concept of acceptable losses. Consequently, this results in the decision to kill/injure civilians in the D-Day invasion and also for the retaliatory bombing in Berlin. This would also explain the mistaken bombing in Malmedy, the issue of winning lies in front of any other cost in the minds of the American and the British. This would seem morally correct in the eyes of the general British or American citizen or it would never have taken place. In sharp contrast to the UK

and US, Germany seems to lack the same respect for the dead, and perhaps, even for life itself as the Americans and the British have. I can to this conclusion when we visited Buchenwald and encountered jubilant school kids. It seemed that they showed no respect for the fact that hundreds of thousand of people had died on the ground possibly from the hands of their ancestors. These people were not that young either, they appeared to be in at least the US equivalent of high school. This was further reinforced when I saw the people playing between the stones in the Jewish Memorial near Brandenburger Gate. Having this inherent belief, can easily lead to the sub humanizing of a group of people to a point where it becomes easy for one to justify the wholesale slaughter of the group. This made it easy for them to evict the Jews from everyday life and do as they please with them. This type of behavior was tolerated and probably encouraged by the SS, who were the elite of the German troops and consequently responsible for most of the murders that took place during the war. As for the items relating the Geneva Convention, it is a crossing of two moral systems. Occasionally, one of the parties may not value the life of it's prisoner and the lives of the other country as much as it should and this leads to the violations. For some people it was okay to disregard the convention and do as they please with the POW's, while for others, it was a basic respect for human life that prevented them from committing the same atrocities.