

From glory to doubt and back again? The changing mainstream of military museums in Western Europe

by Ralf Raths, German Tank Museum, June 2012

Introduction

Military museums in Western Europe are changing significantly, sometimes even radically in Western Europe. What are the causes, circumstances, characteristics and consequences of these changes? To find answers to these question, this article will describe generally the transformation (or lack of) of military museums in Western Europe. These museums include as examples the leading military museums of France, Great Britain and Germany (Musée de l'Armée in Paris, Imperial War Museum in London and Manchester and Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Dresden) as well as important Tank Museums in these countries (Musée de Blindes in Saumur, Tank Museum in Bovington and Deutsches Panzermuseum Munster in Munster). This distinction between broadly oriented military museums and specialized museums for military technology is reasonable, since both museum types handle the process of change slightly differently.

Causes

The historical roots of military museums are triumph, glory and pride. Military museums developed out of collections of war trophies that had been gathered by dynasties or nation states. These collections' function was to create and/or to reassure collective dynastical or national identities: The exhibiting of former glorious triumphs ought to evoke pride in the beholder and the desire to belong to and serve the respective group. The oldest collections addressed nearly exclusively the members of noble houses, since warfare was seen as a responsibility of the nobility. But this changed in the late 19th and early 20th century: Industrialized mass warfare was based on much broader participation of the common people and now their collective identity as well as their morale had to be addressed also – especially during long wars. Therefore collections of recently conquered guns, rifles, vehicles and flags were gathered and presented to the public during wars.¹ These collections often continued to exist after the respective wars were finished and their function basically remained the same: They served as witnesses for glorious narratives and therefore became focal points for the formation of tradition among the veterans.²

With growing temporal distance to the wars that created them, these collections of military

¹ Lange, Britta: Einen Krieg ausstellen, Berlin 2003. S.1-15.

² Zwach, Eva: Deutsche und englische Militärmuseen im 20. Jahrhundert, Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse des gesellschaftlichen Umgangs mit Krieg, Münster 1999. S.31-55.

technology were more and more considered as “military museums” by the public. As a consequence, two characteristics were firmly attributed to military museums by the public: Firstly, military museums were considered as inherently positive and therefore uncritical in their views on the military and therefore seen as active boosters of military and national tradition building. Secondly, military technology, trophies, tactics and the decisions of great men on battlefields were considered to be the natural topics of a military museum.³

This view was indeed pretty accurate for the first two thirds of the 20th century. Military museums were comfortable spaces for everyone who agreed with their set of values and perspectives. Veterans, active soldiers, armchair-generals and fans of military technology had a reassuring home in these institutions. But this harmonic constellation came under attack from three sides in the last third of the 20th century.

First of all, military history itself changed. Whereas the military historians up to the 1960s mostly shared the described views and values of the military museums of that time, they now changed drastically in the next decades. Military history sought and found the connection to academic historiography and evolved in huge leaps: New methods, ideas and tools were adopted from many neighbouring fields like social history, cultural history, gender history, oral history and the history of mentalities. These additions turned military history in a often very critical, eventually even post-modern sub-field of academic history. The change was so drastic that the practitioners even created new names like “New Military History” or “Modern Military History” to distance themselves from earlier, classical military history. The concept of a critical, multi-faceted military history was incompatible with the old halls of military fame.⁴

The second impact came from other museums. The concept of museum education emerged in the 1970s and evolved rapidly.⁵ According to this approach it is the museums’ responsibility to deliberately design their exhibitions such that visitors are encouraged to question, think about and discuss the objects they are seeing. Museums thereby turned into public educational providers that stimulate critical and independent thinking while deliberately giving up the power to present a seemingly “correct” history. Museum education flourished in the next decades and a new level of professionalisation was reached in the world of museums – and during that process, the concept of museums education became an obligatory corner stone for professional museums. This development was the exact opposite of the approach of the military museums and challenged them in their core.⁶

3 Beil, Christiane: Der ausgestellte Krieg, Präsentationen des Ersten Weltkriegs 1914-1939, Tübingen 2004. S.178-207, 315.

4 Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin: Militärgeschichte in der Erweiterung; Konjunkturen, Interpretationen, Konzepte, in: Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin (Hrsg.): Was ist Militärgeschichte?, Paderborn u.a. 2000. S.9-48.

5 For a short historical overview, see: Klausewitz, Wolfgang: Prinzipielle Aspekte der Museumspädagogik, in: Museumskunde 59 (2/3), 1994. S.128-138. For a longer and more recent overview see the special volumes 83 (April 2009) and 84 (August 2009) of the journal Standbein Spielbein, Museumspädagogik aktuell.

6 The International Council of Museums offers a multitude of free online resources regarding the latest standards for

The visitors themselves were the third group that demanded fresh ideas from the military museums. Simple, heroic narratives weren't able to provide sufficient answers for the questions that came from the many different parts of the evolving post-modern, post-heroic societies of the late 20th and early 21st century. The proxy wars of the Cold War, the trauma of the Vietnam War, the political problems of the Iraq wars, the continuous bloodshed on the Balkans, the nightmarish genocide in Rwanda, the endlessness of the Afghanistan war – all led many people to questioning war itself and the old, related narratives. Glorious weapon collections weren't what these people wanted to see in military museums.⁷

Moreover, the visitorship of the museums became more and more civilian. For a long time, the millions of veterans of the World Wars formed a large part of the visitorship. Due to conscription, the remaining visitorship consisted to a large degree of men who at least had been in the military world temporary. So the soldiers and ex-soldiers, who mostly ran the military museums, basically made museums for peers – people of more or less similar views and mindsets. But this source of visitors dried up. While Great Britain abandoned the National Service already in 1969, France and Germany continued it until 2001 and 2011 respectively. But already then, more and more men were not drafted at all toward the end of the Cold War. This, and the fact that the numbers of the veterans of the World Wars dwindled, meant that less and less visitors entered the museums with military knowledge and values. An increasing lack of understanding between the two sides began to exist, since the museums had assumed such knowledge while creating their exhibitions.⁸

So military museums received more and more criticism towards the late 20th century. But one has to bear in mind that there were also still huge numbers of enthusiastic supporters. There still was a high demand for a binding, glorious military history narrated through generals, kings, battles and weapons. Military technology was and still is a particularly heatedly defended topic, since the enthusiasts of this field often argue that their objects can be uncoupled from all other fields of modern military history. Fans of generals and kings, wars and battles have to accept at least a faint connection between their topic and political history. From there it's only a small step to also accept for example cultural or social history. Military technology enthusiasts on the other hand often argue that technology is completely unconnected to such fields and thus demand that no modern approach shall disturb their fascination.

Decisions

So military museums had good reasons for and against fundamental changes in their exhibitions: On the one hand professionals from the universities and other museums as well as a part of the visitors demanded modernization, on the other hand another (and usually larger) part of the visitors

museums: <http://icom.museum/what-we-do/professional-standards/standards-guidelines.html>

7 The best example being the heated debate around the „Wehrmachtsausstellung“ in Germany in the late 1990s. See for a summary: Hartmann, Christian (Hrsg.): *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht; Bilanz einer Debatte*; Hamburg 2004.

8 Thiemeyer, Fortsetzung, S.103-106.

refused such modernization. In this situation, the military museums reacted differently – more or less decisive, more or less fast, depending on political, social, economic and academic aspects.

The Imperial War Museum in Great Britain chose a mixed approach. The main house in London (opened in 1920) modernizes its exhibitions, but in a rather slow and gentle way: New areas are designed in a way that they show new historical perspectives and use the tools of modern museums education – but never too radically. An example for this approach is the Holocaust Exhibition. Old areas on the other hand are left untouched for the most part, including for example the exhibitions about the First World War and the Cold War. This way the site in London shows the principal ability and willingness to modernize and at the same time makes sure not to irritate the traditional visitors too much. The offshoot in Manchester, the Imperial War Museum North, on the other hand is a playground for avantgarde museums education. This includes for example audio/laser shows of contemporary witness reports, for the duration of which the whole museum hall is darkened. Here modern military history and the most progressive forms of museum education (including a rather unusual, very symbolic architecture) are blended homogeneously into a museum that often disturbs the traditional visitors of military museums, but is able to delight visitors who usually reject the classical military museums. As a result, though being part of the same organisation, both museums differ drastically: The IWM London is situated in a classical, historical building and rather full with objects. These (in the main exhibition) are presented in a chronological order that follows wars and political events like a string of pearls and tell a rather binding story of the British military as an organisation. The IWM Manchester is situated in a modern, deliberately sterile building, designed by Daniel Libeskind, that is considered as an symbolic object itself.

The museum presents rather few objects and tries to use the empty space to create an atmosphere for reflection and learning. The objects therefore are grouped thematically and shall challenge the visitor to think and reflect on many different themes, including for example the experience of humans in war or the role of the civil society during war.⁹

A similar dichotomy can be seen in France. The central Musée de l'Armée in Paris (opened in 1905) is an example of an military museums that still upholds rather traditional approaches regarding historical perspectives (for example a drastic concentration on “great persons”) and museum education (mainly a concentration on weapons, uniforms and decorations, presented in a traditional fashion in showcases). Though a modernization (the ATHENA program) took place in the 2000s, the museum still is very conservative in both aspects and resembles the IWM London in many ways. The counter-part in France would be the Historial de la Grand Guerre in Peronne (opened in 1992). This museum presents only the First World War, but serves as an good example for the evolution of military museums nonetheless. The Historial focusses on the history of

⁹ For a far more detailed account on the IWMs, see: Thiemeyer, Thomas: Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln; Die beiden Weltkriege im Museum, Paderborn u.a. 2010.

mentalities and cultural history in an explicitly international perspective and chose similar ways like Manchester on the field of museum education. Not large collections of weapons and uniforms dominate the exhibition, but few and selected objects from the soldiers' everyday life are the core of the exhibition, situated again in rather empty halls. The museums wants to stimulate the visitors hearts and minds, creating empathy, but making them question the seen things at the same time. The focus on an international perspective is used for that, since differing, sometimes contradictory statements from contemporaries of all nations are deliberately presented equivalently, thus forcing the visitors to think and judge for themselves.¹⁰

Germany on the other hand has to offer the example of a museum's radical reform – even a re-creation, basically. The Militärgeschichtliches Museum der Bundeswehr in Dresden opened its doors in 2011, after 13 years of planning and (radical) rebuilding. The Museum evolved from an arsenal of the 19th century into the Saxonian Army Museum, then into the Army Museum of the Wehrmacht and then into the Army Museum of East Germany. Thus it resembled the institutions in Paris and London: Large collections of weapons, uniforms and flags, stored in an historical building. But after the Reunification of Germany, this museum took a different path. The Bundeswehr decided to abandon all old approaches and turn the museum in the most progressive military museum in Western Europe. This step was possible, because the Bundeswehr as the post-Wehrmacht army always had a very difficult relationship with ideas like glorious tradition¹¹, which chained (at least in part) the other museums. So the Bundeswehr decided to see this constellation as a chance: Since a traditional military museum was out of the question and a modern progressive approach had to be taken anyway, the Bundeswehr decided to take point and be radically modern. Therefore an academic advisory council of high-ranking scientists was established and large funds were provided – the costs for the whole process would finally add up to over 62 million Euros.. The concept was heatedly discussed for years and finally came down to this basic idea: Dresden wants to show a multi-faceted, cultural and social history of violence that constantly challenges the visitors to think, reflect and come to own conclusions. The museum fulfils this idea. Interestingly enough though, the museum to some degree shows the dichotomy of conservative and progressive design also – within itself. A gigantic metal wedge has been added to the classical museum building, seemingly cutting it in half and thereby representing violence and disturbance. The exhibition within basically consists of two parts: A more traditional exhibition based on a chronological order is located in the wings of the classical building, presenting the objects in classical showcases. The wedge on the other hand houses a far more progressive exhibition, in which the objects are grouped according to topics from the cultural and social areas of modern military history. These topics include for example “Animals and military” or “Protection and

¹⁰ For a far more detailed account in Paris and Peronne, see again Thiemeyer, Fortsetzung.

¹¹ Due to the historical heritage of the Wehrmacht, official tradition was a complicated and sensible topic in the Bundeswehr. Biehl, Heiko; Leonhard, Nina: Militär und Tradition, in: Leonhard, Nina; Werkner, Ines-Jaqueline: Militärsoziologie; Eine Einführung, Wiesbaden 2005. S.216-241.

destruction". Additionally these objects are presented in unusual, sometimes surprising and often highly aestheticised ways. Although both parts are officially one big exhibition, it is clear that the sharp differences basically establish the aforementioned dichotomy to some degree.¹²

Tools

So what exactly does modernity and/or modernization usually mean for military museums that decide to follow that path?

The most important fact is that these museums accept the described socio-demographic change in their visitorship and begin to define laymen as the target audience. As a result of that, two fundamental parameters change: Firstly the museums accept that the "new visitorship" does not have a common interest in and/or a common perspective on the museum anymore; the visitors are on the contrary increasingly differentiated in their backgrounds, interests and opinions. Secondly, modern military museums can not and do not expect the visitors to have knowledge of military practices, terms and culture any more; they simply assume that the visitors know nothing at all. The change of these two basic assumptions affects everything of these museums' work.

Instead of one binding narrative, the museums now try to offer several different perspectives on military history. These include all the perspectives that academic military history has developed over the last decades: social history, cultural history, gender history, oral history and the history of mentalities. The sheer multitude of perspectives forces the visitors think for themselves and to question the old narratives – but even the new ones as well, because the new perspectives are often presented in a way that deliberately leaves questions open and/or seems contradictory to insights the visitors gathered from other perspectives. This is especially true when museums stress the international perspective. This competition of narratives is supposed to activate the visitors' minds during their visit – while they classically "learn" all the while nevertheless.

To enable the "new visitors" to learn in the exhibitions, the museums have to radically simplify the texts. For decades they could expect their visitors to have a profound knowledge of military terms and practices and therefore could base the texts in their exhibitions thereupon. This is no longer given and therefore the museums have to rethink their way of educating – they now have to explain a lot more in easier words in the same amount of words or less, which often is a harsh process of learning for the employees.

To achieve the aim of being a place to learn, the exhibitions themselves change too. The most obvious change is in the most cases that less objects than before are shown in the same halls. The halls therefore are simply emptier than before.. For decades military museums were more simple collections of materiel – the more, the better. This was not an exclusive problem of military museums: contemporary, modern museums of all kinds have their roots in collections that aimed

¹² Pieken, Gorch; Rogg, Matthias (Hrsg.): Das Militärhistorische Museum der Bundeswehr; Ausstellungsführer, Dresden 2011. Especially Rogg, Matthias: Die Architektur (S.15-20) and Pieken, Gorch: Konzeption und Aufbau der Dauerausstellung (S.21-38).

predominantly at quantity. Museum education changed that, because its supporters argued then (and still now) convincingly that the visitors' attention span is very limited. Large collections have to be boiled down to a reasonable amount of exhibits. Museums therefore have the duty to use their expertise to identify objects of special historical significance and present these objects with critical, multi-faceted context. More recently the architecture and the design of the rooms (material, colours, light) themselves were declared as equally important to create an atmosphere in which the visitors can open their minds and “experience” the historical narratives the museums offer. As a result, modern museums more often than not look very stylish – much like art galleries of their respective time, regardless whether they present art or not. Reducing the number of objects in an exhibition is always a hurtful step for a museum, since museum professionals always like to show their collections. But in the case of military museums it was especially hard: Since their founding, the “big guns” have dominated the collection: huge pieces of materiel like field guns, planes, tanks and so on. For many visitors of military museums, such materiel therefore was the actual essence of military museums. When the museums started to assess the historical significance of objects as related to the new perspectives, only few of them remained in the exhibitions. The museums were practically “gutted” in the view of more traditional visitors, since tons and tons of objects vanished with each vehicle or gun.¹³ This is, for example, especially true for the museum in Dresden, which relocated dozens of military vehicles from the exhibitions to the depots. Of course, new objects found their ways into the new collections – toys, art, personal belongings and such, but these weren't regarded as “proper” military history by many.

The museums for military technology obviously have to deal differently with this situation. Since their *raison d'être* lies in the presentation of exactly these kind of objects, they have to find other ways to reach a multitude of historical perspectives and challenging content without removing the core of the exhibition. This usually means adding new content like text signs, multimedia guides, sensory stations and so on, but this again also includes the danger to overfill the museum.

Connected with the new appreciation of single objects was a trend to aestheticise and (sometimes lavishly) stage them. Objects became the core of sceneries that were meant to evoke emotional experiences in the visitors rather than function only as focus points for pure rational learning. This was supported by the trend to arrange the objects in new and sometimes surprising orders in the museum. Whereas earlier exhibitions almost always chose classification or chronology as their systems of order, the new museums try to think outside the box and present their topics in more or less unusual ways. This, again, is an especially hard task for museums for military technology.

¹³ This reduction was necessary from the museum educational point of view. See for a more detailed account: Thiemeyer, Thomas: Waffen und Weltkriege im Museum. Wie sich die museale Darstellung der beiden Weltkriege und der Umgang mit Militaria gewandelt haben, in: Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte, 69(1), 2010. S. 1-16. Modern military history does not deny the importance of military technology, quite the contrary. See for example Kaufmann, Stefan: Technisiertes Militär; Methodische Überlegungen zu einem symbiotischen Verhältnis, in: Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin (Hrsg.): Was ist Militärgeschichte?, Paderborn u.a. 2000. S.195-209. See also Barton C. Hacker: Military Institutions, Weapons, and Social Change: Toward a New History of Military Technology, in: Technology and Culture 35 (1994), S. 768–834.

Their objects present problems on two levels: First of all, it is simply very labour-intensive and expensive to move and securely place these objects; especially if the third dimension is involved, which happens a lot when “unusual presentations” are planned. On a more abstract level, until today no presentation form was novel enough to solve a specific problem: The technical aura of huge military equipment. This aura is powerful and tends to dominate the minds of the visitors. The tanks/planes/submarines dominate all senses of the visitors and thereby, being primarily technical objects, fix the minds of the visitors in a technical perspective. An unusual presentation theoretically could break up this fixation, but such a presentation has yet to be found. This technical aura is another reason why the visitors of museums for military technology are so resistant to the idea that there could be a need to change. The aura is so dominant that a potential insight in the need for additional perspectives often is crushed beneath it.

All aforementioned changes were made possible because museums were less and less playgrounds of amateurs. For a long time, enthusiasm seemed to be sufficient qualification to run a museum, be it military or civilian. In military museums this problem was even worse, since a military career was often regarded as a real and fitting qualification for working in a military museum. Therefore the need for change was denied more rigorously – the seemingly qualified employees said so, after all. The general process of professionalisation changed that. Not only were the museum staffs everywhere increasingly dominated by museum professionals, which sooner or later affected the military museums as well.¹⁴ The more important step was that many military museums got academic advisory boards. These boards were firmly rooted in the academic world of history and museology and on this basis set the course for the future developments. Though the internal discussions were of course very intense sometimes, the main lines for the development of the museums were now based in the academic world and its insights.

Reactions

This set of more or less radically executed changes then again obviously provoked reactions among the visitors. Naturally these reactions were distinctly different according to the opinions described earlier: Visitors of a more traditional mindset regularly saw and see these changes as an onslaught not only on their hobby, but on the political beliefs and values that in their opinion a military museum is supposed to transport. Due to the fact that political views are involved in the argument, they see the modernisation of military museums often not as a step based on the insights of academic military history or museology, but based on ideology. The critical perspectives, the reduction of objects and the unusual presentation in their view didn't serve to lead the visitors to new insight and more knowledge – they served to targetedly disparage the military and its values, thereby influencing the discourses of the respective society in the direction of a somewhat

¹⁴ For the ongoing discussion regarding standards for museum employees, see John, Hartmut: Mindeststandards für qualifiziertes Museumspersonal, in: *Museumskunde* 70(1), 2005. S.40-46.

“pacifist” and/or “leftist” zeitgeist. Especially the museums for military technology were regarded as keepers of the grail during such discussions. Since they always had concentrated on the “correct” military history (meaning weapons and vehicles), they seemed to be potential bastions against the condemnable developments in the military museums scene. Therefore the pressure on the tanks museums from the traditionalist side is relatively higher than on the museums which had a broader spectrum of topics to begin with. This makes it harder for those houses to modernize themselves. Visitors, historians and museum professionals who were sceptical regarding the old museums and demanded modernization, naturally appreciated the changes by and large. This faction is more concerned with the “how” and “how far” of the change process and gets therefore increasingly involved in the discussions and processes of change.

This in turn raises the question how the military museums react to these new impulses from outside. A radical modernization is always a critical point in a museums existence: The aim is to win visitor groups and this may work out, but an amount of steady visitors almost certainly will be lost. To minimize this loss it's essential to communicate the reasons for and concepts of the planned and/or implemented changes as well as possible. Even if no modernization is going on, the question if and how a museum stays in discussion with its visitors is very interesting per se in the internet era. Classical media like flyers, brochures and books are well known for their very limited effectiveness. Classical websites are a more suitable tool, since they can be kept up to date and are available to a huge proportion of Western European societies. But they also are a one-way-medium and therefore more a platform for information than for open discussion with the visitors unless they include forums or an open feedback function. A short comparative look at the usage of the internet for such one-way-communication reveals a surprising result: All museums have websites, but the effort put in these sites obviously differs: There are well designed, modern and informative websites for all museums in Germany and Great Britain and relatively outdated websites for the French museums. Of all websites, only the German Tank Museum offers an platform for open feedback and discussion, but it's heavily moderated.

Facebook on the other hand allows two-way-communication between the museums and the visitors. The use of this social network shows a distribution that differs from the first: Of the seven museums, only four are active on Facebook – but these four include two of the tank museums (Bovington with ca. 9.500 fans and Munster with ca. 4.000 fans) as well as London (ca. 11.500 fans) and Manchester (ca. 2.000 fans), while the other museums do not use Facebook.¹⁵ This is not surprising in the case of Saumur and Paris, especially if one bears in mind their websites, but it is somewhat surprising in the case of Dresden and Peronne. As progressive museums that aim at a broad visitorship, the use of the biggest (and costless) social network could have been expected.¹⁶

¹⁵ Result of an online survey in early June 2012.

¹⁶ This amount is rather surprising. A recent survey of German museums analysed that only 90 museums in a sample of 341 were using social media actively. Schmid, Ulrike: Museen und Orchester im Social Web. Da geht noch was!,

While the reasons in the case of Peronne are not known to the author, for Dresden an educated guess can be made. The museum in Dresden is directly run by the German military. The Bundeswehr is an army in radical transformation. After decades of conscription it now turns into a volunteer force and for the first time really has to deal with recruiting – while still not having sorted out fully which image the Bundeswehr wants to present to the public. This insecurity regarding the handling of public relations presumably leads to a stance that right now less communication is preferable to bad communication.

About half of the military museums of the sample use two-way-communication. None of the Facebook pages is closed, which would mean to deny the users to post. They give their visitors a voice. So although one theoretically could argue that Facebook is just a platform to advertise their own institution, it is plausible to assume that the museums listen to that voice to some degree. With the importance of visitors research on the rise also in the whole museums scene, it is safe to assume that military museums listen and talk to their visitors more than earlier.

Future

A short view into the future is most interesting for the German area. While the views on war and civil-military relations are surely constantly changing in France and Great Britain too, Germany is a much more dynamic arena regarding this question right now – and military museums play an important role in this process, influencing the public opinion and the military and being influenced by both as well.

The reason for the greater dynamic lies, of course, in Germany's history. After the total defeat of 1945, military history was practically non-existent in the West German universities until the 1990s. The field was left to romanticisers, war buffs and armchair-generals, but generated rather small interest beyond that circle. Military museums were rare and, while they had a loyal group of core visitors, were eyed suspiciously by the broader public for a long time. Actually all things military were seen critical in the West German society of the Cold War; even the Bundeswehr itself untiringly tried to define and present itself as an utterly normal employer with no unique characteristics whatsoever.¹⁷ East Germany never had such problems with military and military history, but then again everything was confined in the tight limitations of the official socialist interpretation of history.¹⁸

The end of the Cold War changed all four parameters. The socialist interpretation of military history ended without leaving a trace. The remaining German military history started to catch up rapidly, both in the academic world and in the popular media. Military museums therefore had rising visitor numbers. Meanwhile the Bundeswehr had to face out-of-area missions and began to search for a new identity, under constant, often critical observation of the society.

in: *Museumskunde* 76(2), 2011. S.69-73.

17 Von Bredow, Wilfried: *Militär und Demokratie in Deutschland; Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2008. S.107-124.

18 Rogg, Matthias: *Armee des Volkes? Militär und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, Berlin 2008. S.41-68.

Thus a discourse started in Germany, regarding general opinions and ideas regarding the military and military history. Now the lack of an unbroken tradition of glorification proved as very productive, because this discourse was very relatively unbiased and dynamic. The duration, severity and fruitlessness of the Afghanistan mission fuelled the discourse considerably over the last few years. In this situation, the military museums are actors that influence society's opinion on war and all things military – while the military in turn influences the museums since the Bundeswehr is heavily involved in both museums of the sample.¹⁹ So what does the new Bundeswehr bring on the table? The experiences of the out-of-area did not bolster a roaring heroism – quite the contrary. The harshness of the missions, especially Afghanistan, made the Bundeswehr self-aware as a fighting force, but without romanticisations. The rather sober tradition of the Cold War Bundeswehr supported this and led to a matter-of-factly approach regarding war as well as tradition and military history.²⁰ This matched the public opinion pretty good: The German society grew more and more sceptical regarding the missions, especially Afghanistan. With a rising body-count and (at least in the broader perception) no obvious successes, precious little room was left for drum-and-trumpet militarism. Therefore right now, there is a curious constellation: Military and war are more in the focus of the public than ever before and are taken more serious than ever before, but this does not lead to an emotionally based admiration, but to a rather sober respect for the troops. This in turn is something that the museums can utilize in their exhibitions, because the visitors can be encouraged to use this critical, but not malevolent perspective on armies of the past – which are normally shrouded in clouds of admiration. Then again, this of course works the other way around too. People who had no interest in the traditional, glorifying military history may be much more favourable to the Bundeswehr once they saw in the museums how self-critical the Bundeswehr can be – self-critical, mind, not self-hating. This in turn affects the society's opinion towards war and military per se, which then again radiates in the Bundeswehr and the museums and so on. So there are new views on war and military evolving in Germany right now. They are differentiated and object of heated discussions. Although there is no “back to glory”, as slightly provocatively suggested in the title, there generally seems to be something like a third way evolving: a critical and questioning view, that doesn't fall for blind admiration, but doesn't support blind disparagement either. The new multi-faceted exhibitions that are finished (Dresden) or planned (Munster) provide the fitting environment to support such critical and open discourses. They want stimulate the visitors to ask, think, learn and discuss and thereby secure the role of the museums as vital social actors in the discourse on military and war past, present and future.

¹⁹ The museum in Dresden is run by the Bundeswehr itself and in Munster, the army possesses and maintains the vehicles. So while all the actual running of the museum is the responsibility of the Town of Munster, a consensus between civil and military side in every important question is essential. This turns the Bundeswehr into an essential pillar for the Tank Museum.

²⁰ Chiari, Bernd: Was heißt und zu welchem Ende treibt man historische Bildung? Auslandseinsätze als Herausforderung für die Bildungsarbeit der Bundeswehr, in: Echternkamp, Jörg; Schmidt, Wolfgang und Vogel, Thomas (Hrsg.): Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte, Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung. S.323-334.

Bibliography

- ♣ Beil, Christiane: Der ausgestellte Krieg, Präsentationen des Ersten Weltkriegs 1914-1939, Tübingen 2004.
- ♣ Biehl, Heiko; Leonhard, Nina: Militär und Tradition, in: Leonhard, Nina; Werkner, Ines-Jaqueline: Militärsoziologie; Eine Einführung, Wiesbaden 2005. S.216-241.
- ♣ Chiari, Bernd: Was heißt und zu welchem Ende treibt man historische Bildung? Auslandseinsätze als Herausforderung für die Bildungsarbeit der Bundeswehr, in: Echternkamp, Jörg; Schmidt, Wolfgang und Vogel, Thomas (Hrsg.): Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte, Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung. S.323-334.
- ♣ Echternkamp, Jörg; Schmidt, Wolfgang und Vogel, Thomas (Hrsg.): Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte, Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung.
- ♣ Hartmann, Christian (Hrsg.): Verbrechen der Wehrmacht; Bilanz einer Debatte; Hamburg 2004.
- ♣ John, Hartmut: Mindeststandards für qualifiziertes Museumspersonal, in: Museumskunde 70(1), 2005. S.40-46.
- ♣ Kaufmann, Stefan: Technisiertes Militär; Methodische Überlegungen zu einem symbiotischen Verhältnis, in: Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin (Hrsg.): Was ist Militärgeschichte?, Paderborn u.a. 2000.
- ♣ Klausewitz, Wolfgang: Prinzipielle Aspekte der Museumspädagogik, in: Museumskunde 59 (2/3), 1994.
- ♣ Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin: Militärgeschichte in der Erweiterung; Konjunkturen, Interpretationen, Konzepte, in: Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin (Hrsg.): Was ist Militärgeschichte?, Paderborn u.a. 2000.
- ♣ Kühne, Thomas; Ziemann, Benjamin (Hrsg.): Was ist Militärgeschichte?, Paderborn u.a. 2000.
- ♣ Lange, Britta: Einen Krieg ausstellen, Berlin 2003.
- ♣ Leonhard, Nina; Werkner, Ines-Jaqueline: Militärsoziologie; Eine Einführung, Wiesbaden 2005.
- ♣ Pieken, Gorch; Rogg, Matthias (Hrsg.): Das Militärgeschichtliche Museum der Bundeswehr; Ausstellungsführer, Dresden 2011.
- ♣ Rogg, Matthias: Armee des Volkes? Militär und Gesellschaft in der DDR, Berlin 2008.
- ♣ Schmid, Ulrike: Museen und Orchester im Social Web. Da geht noch was!, in: Museumskunde 76(2), 2011. S.69-73.
- ♣ Thiemeyer, Thomas: Waffen und Weltkriege im Museum. Wie sich die museale Darstellung der beiden Weltkriege und der Umgang mit Militaria gewandelt haben, in: Zeitschrift für

Militärgeschichte, 69(1), 2010. S. 1-16.

- ♣ Thiemeyer, Thomas: Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln; Die beiden Weltkriege im Museum, Paderborn u.a. 2010.
- ♣ Von Bredow, Wilfried: Militär und Demokratie in Deutschland; Eine Einführung, Wiesbaden 2008.
- ♣ Zwach, Eva: Deutsche und englische Militärmuseen im 20. Jahrhundert, Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse des gesellschaftlichen Umgangs mit Krieg, Münster 1999.