



## APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATION OF MILITARY HISTORY IN THE EXTERIORS OF MILITARY MUSEUMS – CASE STUDY OF THE MILITARY HISTORY MUSEUM IN SVIDNÍK

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Today, more than seventy years after the end of World War II (WW II), we are again experiencing a rise in the interest in military history and the events or places associated with it. On the one hand, there is a steady increase in the visit rate of places connected with military history, which has led to the formation of 'military tourism', on the other hand there is a dangerous deformation of history and growth of extremism, nationalism and racism. We see the necessity to preserve objective history also in the form of military museums or places connected with WW II, namely through the renewal of these places and increasing their attractiveness for the young generation. The aim of this article is to resume the basic design principles of contemporary military memorials and military museums and to develop a case study of The Park of Military Equipment at the Military Museum in Svidník based on these principles. The Svidník District is closely linked to the fighting during WW II, the Carpathian Operation of the Soviet Army (Red Army), and the 1st Czechoslovak Army in north-eastern Slovakia in the autumn of 1944. In the territory of the Carpathian Operation, several memorial sites were created. The whole territory is a national cultural monument registered as 'the Dukla Battleground' in the Central List of the Monument Fund since 1961. In the town of Svidník, the Memorial of the Soviet Army was built in the place where Soviet soldiers were buried in spring 1945. There are 9,000 Soviet soldiers buried in 4 mass graves. In 1965, the Military Historical Museum in Svidník was opened. The museum also includes an outdoor exposition – the Park of Military Equipment, built between 1971 and 1974. After the current state analysis of the military park, the principles of contemporary design of memorial places were applied in the design of the case study area.

**Keywords:** memorial, park, landscape, military museum

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Military museums and monuments in Slovakia

From the point of view of landscape design of memorial places connected with the history of the World War II (WW II) battles in Slovakia, we distinguish the following types of objects:

1. memorial sites of special historical importance (Banská Bystrica, Svidník) – complexes of various memorial elements, located in a small area;
2. historically significant landscape areas (Dukla and Kalište);
3. landscape areas affected by WW II;
4. memorials as modern landmarks of the country, placed on the top of a hill (Strečno, Slavín, Nicovo, Uhrovec – Jankov Vršok) or on an elevated location (Svidník, Dargov, Zvolen).

The smallest memorial elements are military cemeteries, small memorials, simple graves (real or symbolic) and memorial tables (Benčať and Vreštiak, 1971).

Today, there are two museums in Slovakia focusing on the issue of WW II. The Military Museum in Piešťany presents the Czechoslovak Army armament from the period between 1945 and 1992. The Department of the Military Museum in Svidník presents the military history of Slovakia in the period between 1914 and 1945. The other institution is the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, which presents and disseminates materials about the history of the Slovak society in the period between 1938 and 1945, with an emphasis on the documentation of the anti-fascist national liberation struggle and the Slovak National Uprising. It also documents contemporary manifestations of neo-fascism and racial intolerance. Both museums, in Banská Bystrica and Svidník, also include outdoor exhibits – parks of military equipment. The museums were founded in the late 1970s. Although interior exposures have already been renewed, external exposures have still not been changed since their establishment.



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## 1.2 Military monuments and museums in the world

From the point of view of landscape design of memorial sites in the world, we focused on studying examples of contemporary design of military museums and other memorial sites. The National Military Museum in Soesterberg (Utrecht, the Netherlands) was founded in 2015, on the site of the former Air Force Base during WW II and the Cold War (Bueno, 2015). The museum played an important role in the Dutch military history as the Dutch Aviation Base during WW II and the Cold War and reminds the visitors of the German occupation on May 5 in 1940 and the Allied bombing at the end of WW II. The project is an example of presentation of all physical elements (military, war and aviation relics and landmarks – pre-existing monuments, abandoned bunkers, bomb craters and the air base itself); most of them were left in situ and are placed in different landscape sceneries. This is a positive example of linking the past, present and future in accordance with the surrounding natural environment (Bueno, 2015). The Peaceful Park – Green Road in Utrecht, the Netherlands is a large military area with a defensive trench and bunker system from WW I and WW II. It has been transformed into a peaceful park that shares its history with the visitors (Bilir, 2016). The project presents the reconstruction of military area with an emphasis on preserving the history and nature of the site. The Memorial to Victims of Violence in Mexico City, Mexico established in 2013 is a public space project with a memorial based on strong symbolism of three main elements – steel, water, and light – which tell the story (Coman, 2013). The most positive principle of this landscape design is an opportunity for an interaction of people with the memorial, its story and with nature through the power of storytelling. The Saiki Peace Memorial Park in Japan is an example of a modern memorial park, which connects the function of a historical and a memorial place with the function of an open space for relax. Also the Poppy Plaza – Memorial of WW I and WW II, in Calgary, Canada is a high-quality public space that connects all elements – the memorial, people (users) and nature (trees and river). Here, trees are important design elements, as each of them is a symbolic tombstone of a fallen soldier.

## 2 Material and Methods

The object of the case study is the exposition of the Military Museum in Svidník. The area of the case study is situated in the municipality of Svidník, a small town populated by 11,289 inhabitants, situated in northeastern Slovakia in the Prešov Region, 230 m a. s. l.

## 2.1 The case study area during the World War II

The Svidník District is closely linked to the fighting during WW II, the Carpathian Operation of the Soviet Army (Red Army), and the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Army in north-eastern Slovakia in autumn 1944. The aim of this military operation was to help the Slovak insurgent army during the Slovak National Uprising. The participation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Army in the Carpathian Operation was the largest fighting operation of the Czechoslovak Foreign Army in WW II. The liberation of Slovakia from German occupiers began with the liberation of the Dukla Pass. The Carpathian Operation was one of the most difficult and cruel fighting in the mountains during WW II. The operation lasted three months and during the battles, 85,000 Soviet, 6,500 Czechoslovak and 52,000 German soldiers died or were injured.

## 2.2 The Dukla Historical Landscape Area

In the territory of the Carpathian Operation, several memorial sites were created. The whole territory is a national cultural monument registered as 'the Dukla Battleground' in the Central List of the Monument Fund since 1961. The National Cultural Monument 'Dukla Battleground' consists of two localities:

1. Dukla – Memorial of the Czechoslovak Army in the cadastral territory of Vyšný Komárnik,
2. Memorial of the Soviet Army in the cadastral territory of Svidník.

The most famous element of the Dukla memorial site is the imposing Memorial of the Czechoslovak Army at Dukla dedicated to the fallen soldiers on the border crossing between Slovakia and Poland. The memorial is connected with the cemetery, where 563 soldiers of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps were buried (Mindoš, 1979). In the area of the Dukla Pass on the Slovak-Polish border, a 49 m high viewing tower was built, from which the visitors can see a wide area of the Slovak and Polish territory, where the Carpathian Operation took place. The current tower was built in 1974 at the site of a wooden tower built in 1959 on the site of the original observation point of the General of the Czechoslovak Army – Ludvík Svoboda. At the Dukla Battlefield Area (from the village of Kapišová to the Slovak-Polish border crossing on Dukla), The Dukla Military Open Air Museum is open to the public since 1959. In 'The Valley of Death', which occupies the territory of seven municipalities, a tank technique depicts a tank battle. The reconstructed artillery firing positions and bunkers have also been made accessible. There is also the War Cemetery of German Soldiers in Hunkovce where 3,100 German soldiers are buried.

In the town Svidník, the Memorial of the Soviet Army was built in the place where Soviet soldiers were buried in spring 1945. There are 9,000 Soviet soldiers buried in 4 mass graves. The Monument was built in 1954, reaching a height of 37 m.

In 1965, the Military Historical Museum in Svidník was opened. The author of the building design is architect František Jesenko. The shape of the museum building symbolises a plate-shaped anti-tank mine. Untypical is the shape of the roof, which is divided into several smaller parts. The exhibition of the museum documents the military history of Slovakia during WW I in the Eastern Carpathians and during WW II with a focus on the Carpathian-Duklian operation, the Partisan Movement and the liberation of Slovakia between 1944 and 1945. The exposition of the Military History Museum was redesigned in 2011. The museum also includes an outdoor exposition – the Park of Military Equipment, built between 1971 and 1974. In the park, there are 14 items of military equipment, tanks, an armoured transporter, a transport aircraft and a cannon howitzer. The landscape design includes a lake in the shape of the republic with a fountain, surrounded by lindens (Mindoš, 1979).

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Analysis of the current state of the Park of Military Equipments

##### 3.1.1 Operation and compositional analysis

The Memorial of the Soviet Army is the dominant compositional element of the whole memorial area in Svidník. Other points of interest in the territory are the Military Historical Museum and the Park of Military Equipment. The main axis of the composition leads from the main road directly to the Memorial of the Soviet Army, finished by the memorial on the elevated place. The area is not accessible by a motor vehicle, there are only pedestrian paths and the car parks are reserved for the visitors. The most frequented footpath is not the one on the main compositional axis, but the walkway that leads from the town and museum through the Park of Military Equipment towards the memorial.

##### 3.1.2 Greenery

The greenery in the area consists of a lawn, small groups of trees and tree groves. In the park, there are 220 trees and shrubs in total, with coniferous trees accounting for up to 63%. The most common species is *Picea abies*

(L.) H. Karst with 45 individuals (20.5%), *Pseutotsuga menziesii* (Mirb.) Franco with 34 individuals (15.5%) and *Thuja occidentalis* L. with 31 individuals (14%). The species *Tilia cordata* Mill. with 18 individuals (8.2%) is the most frequently occurring deciduous tree species.

##### 3.1.3 The Pros and Cons of the area

The flat surface, the open space, a plenty of greenery and the high quality architecture of the museum building are the positive elements of the park. Negative elements of the park are the lack of park facilities, the unattractiveness and the unreadable composition of the park in the exterior spaces of the museum.

#### 3.2 Revitalisation design of the park

The revitalisation design of the park is based on the following basic contemporary design principles:

- creation of landscape sceneries for exhibits so that the history and the landscape are linked,
- use of symbolism in the design, in the form of compositional elements that tell the story (trees, materials, colours and light)
- creation of a linkage between the memorial site and the relaxation and educational function.

##### 3.2.1 The design concept 'Peace Park'

The concept of a park design as an exterior of the military museum lies in the idea of creating a peaceful park. The original function of the Park of Military Equipment is preserved in the new design, but already in line with the overall idea and architectural design of the 'Peace Park', a place full of historical facts and exhibits depicting cruel battles during WW II will serve for dissemination of knowledge and also as a recreational area. There are several zones designed for all age categories.

##### 3.2.2 Landscape design

The design of the park is based on the morphology of the round museum building. The artificially created terrain symbolises the original mountainous terrain where fighting with trenches and bunkers took place. The Terrain modulation makes the space more dynamic and allows for a more authentic placement of military equipment exhibits, as the design no longer counts with concentrating of exhibits on one place. Benches are also sensitively embedded in the modified terrain. The material to be used for the construction of the park consists of three types of materials – concrete, Cor-Ten steel and wood. The use of the park by visitors is prolonged by the lighting that creates a different atmosphere in the park. The educational function in

the park is represented by glass information boards showing exhibits in their fighting conditions and contexts.

### 3.2.3 Planting design

On the basis of the vegetation analysis, we propose a change in the species composition of trees by planting deciduous trees. We propose the planting of the species *Tilia cordata* Mill., which is also mentioned in the historical facts about the construction of the complex and the species *Pyrus calleryana* Decne. The modified terrain is covered by perennial plantings and lawns. An important feature is the colour aspect of flowers and the blossoming of woody plants. The white colour in the design of the park is a symbol of peace and capitulation, the symbol of the liberation of the town of Svidník in the winter, January 19, 1945, with which the liberation of the territory of Slovakia began. The white colour is represented by the white blossoms of *Pyrus calleryana* Decne. and the spring flower bulbs. The red colour of blooming perennials in the autumn symbolises the bloody fighting, which took place in Dukla during autumn 1944. Red, as the colour of blood, martyrdom, sacrifice and courage is devoted as a sign of thankfulness to all the soldiers and victims fallen during the fights in the Carpathian Operation. The flat roof of the Military History Museum building is designed as a green roof, supporting the ecological side of the complex.

## 4 Conclusions

Today, more than seventy years after the end of World War II, we are again experiencing a rise in the interest in military history and the events or places associated with it. On the one hand, we are currently looking at World War II without political demagogy and negative emotions; on the other hand, it also leads to forgetting the horrors brought by the war, its causes and consequences. Although there is a steady increase in the visit rate of places connected with military history leading to the formation of „military tourism“, a dangerous deformation of the history and growth of extremism, nationalism and racism exists. We see the necessity to preserve the objective history also in the form of military museums or places connected with the war, namely through the renewal of these places and increasing their attractiveness for the young generation. Military museums play the most important role in preserving and disseminating information on military history. While internal expositions of military museums in Slovakia have undergone renovation,

the external exposures in military parks are still in the original, by now desolate condition. Through an analysis of several contemporary landscape designs of memorial sites and military museums abroad, we have identified their following basic compositional principles: presentation of physical elements placed in landscape sceneries, linking the history and landscape and with the surrounding natural environment; using a strong symbolism of compositional elements in the design of memorial places; telling a story of memorial places, designing an opportunity for interaction of people with the memorial, its story and with nature; connecting function of the historical an memorial place and open space for relax. Several of these principles were applied in the design of the case study area – the Park of Military Equipment at the Military Museum in Svidník.

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