

THE WORLD WAR MONUMENT IN GRETTSTADT

Remembering family members who died in World War II

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World War monuments with the names of killed and missing soldiers written on them can be found in almost every village in Franconia. The soldiers whose names are written on these monuments lived in these villages and often their descendants still live there. But how does reading the names of their ancestors on these monuments affect people? In this essay, I analyzed this question by interviewing two people who are descendants of missing soldiers whose names are written on the World War monument in Grettstadt, my home village.

The monument was built in 1931 by the „Krieger- und Kampfgenossenverein“. It consists of a soldier with a lowered flag, which symbolizes the lost war, on a pedestal which has the names of the soldiers from Grettstadt who were killed in World War I written on it and two Bavarian lions.

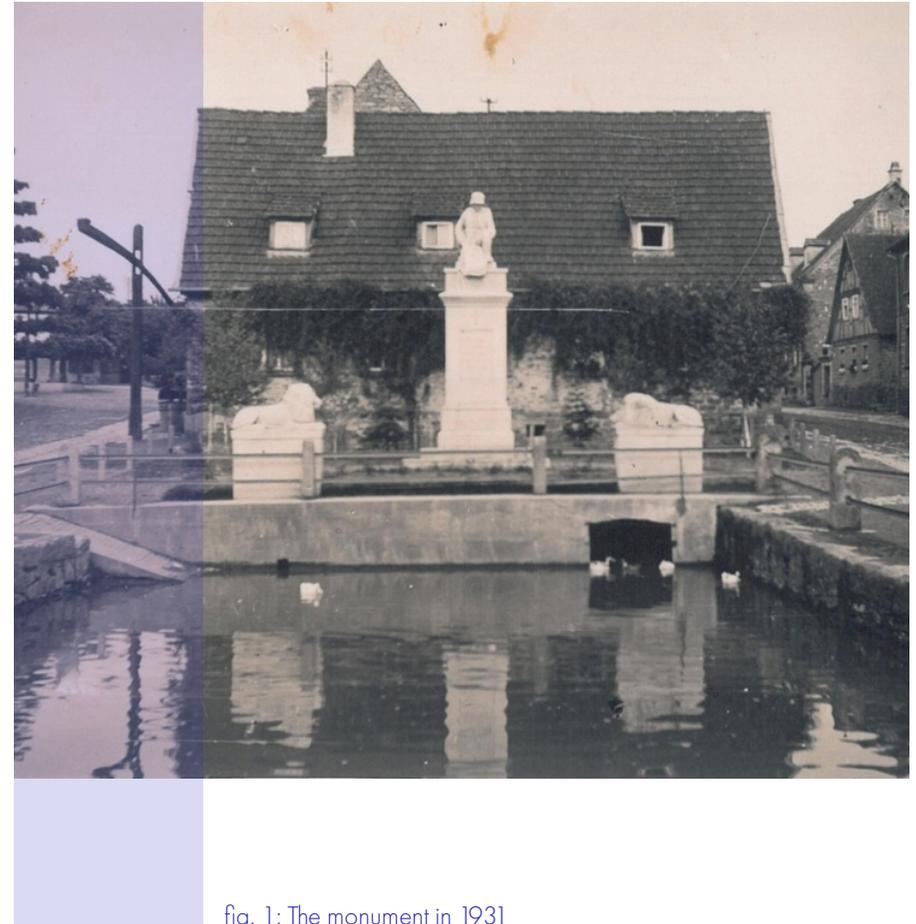


fig. 1: The monument in 1931

Memorial plaques (designed by the community Grettstadt) for World War II soldiers were built in 1959. They list Grettstadt's killed and missing soldiers from World War II. There is a date behind every name: The date of death of the killed soldiers and the date of disappearance of the missing soldiers. The erection of the memorial plaques was the first big festivity in Grettstadt after World War II.



fig. 2: The monument in 1959



fig. 3: The monument in 2011

The monument, who is owned by the community Grettstadt, was renovated in 2007 and 2011.



fig. 4: The monument in 2011

I interviewed two people from different generations for this project:

1. Roswitha Gerhardt (born Volz) is the daughter of Wilhelm Volz (missing soldier on the monument) and was born in 1939.
2. Katrin Stolper is the great-granddaughter of Erich Stolper (missing soldier on the monument) and was born in 1997.



fig. 5 and 6: The memorial plaques



I asked my interview partners these questions:

1. What do you know about your killed or missing ancestor?
2. Did you ever recognize the monument before and what do you think about it?
3. Did the monument ever make you think about your ancestor and if so, what did you think?
4. Did the monument make you think more and/or differently about World War II and if so, what did you think?
5. Is this because your ancestors name is on it or would are World War monument without names have the same effect on you?

My first interview partner was **Roswitha Gerhardt** (born Volz). She is the daughter of Wilhelm Volz, who is one of the missing soldiers of World War II listed on the monument and she was born in 1939. She lives in Würzburg now, but always visits the monument when she comes to Grettstadt. Also, she saw the bombardment of Würzburg as a little child. These are her answers to my questions:

” I like the monument.
It looks good.

It is a good thing that the monument is in the middle of the village. That way, people pass it a lot and see it.

” It is a good thing that the soldiers’ names are on it because they did their duty and deserve to be remembered.”

Information about **Wilhelm Volz**:

Wilhelm Heinrich Josef Volz was born 1911 in Mosbach, Baden-Württemberg. He was a carpenter and a soldier since 1933. He went to war school (a school where men were trained to be army officers) in Posen (today in Poland) since October 1944. Posen was attacked by the Russian Army three days before he would have graduated war school and the whole war school fought against the Russian army. His fate is unknown, he probably died on January 31st, 1945.

He was married to Anna Gerber (born in 1914 in Grettstadt, worked in Würzburg), they met in Würzburg when he was garrisoned there. They had two children: Rowitha (born 1939) and Friedbert (born 1944). His name is listed on the soldier graveyard in Posen. His widow had another son in 1951, Peter Volz, but she was not married to his father. She moved back to Grettstadt in 1967 and arranged listing her dead husband’s name on the World War monument in Grettstadt.

My second interview partner was **Katrin Stolper**. She is the great-granddaughter of Erich Stolper, one of the missing soldiers of World War II listed on the monument and she was born in 1997. She lives in Grettstadt and her apartment is very close to the monument. These are her answers to my questions:

My great-grandfather was married and had children. His original profession was train driver.

I recognized the monument before, and I like it.

The monument made me think about my great-grandfather. I also asked my grandfather, his son, about him, but he could not tell me very much because he was very young when his father went to war.

The monument made me think about World War II, but not more or differently.

A World War monument without names would have the same effect on me. Both types of monuments move me and make me think about how horrible the war was.

Although I asked them the same questions, I got very different answers from my two interview partners. Not only did Roswitha Gerhardt know her father personally, but she also experienced and still remembers World War II. Katrin Stolper, on the other hand, did not know her great-grandfather and did not experience World War II. Although the monument affects both, the effect on each of them is very different. They both like the monument, but for different reasons. Roswitha Gerhardt likes it because she thinks that the soldiers who died in World War II deserve to be remembered. For her, the fact that the soldier's names are on the monument is important. Katrin Stolper also likes the monument, but she said that a World War monument without names would have the same effect on her. She did not know her great-grandfather, so the monument reminds her more of World War I and II in general than of him. For her, it is more important that the monument reminds the people of the present of World War I and II and how horrible the war was than of the soldiers who died.

Interviewing two people from different generations showed me that the function of the monument changed overtime. It was probably built to commemorate the soldiers who died in World War I and II and people who can remember World War II still see it that way. But when people from younger generations see it, they do not think of the soldiers that are listed on the monument, the monument makes them think about World War I and II in general.



fig. 7: The monument in 2011

But what about people who do not have a memorial for their family members who died in war? Iman Barakzoy, one of the Flagler students who participated in Monuments and Memory, told me that her family immigrated to the USA 40 years ago from Afghanistan because of the war. She also told me that because of the continuing war, there are no monuments for her loved ones who died in the war and that maybe it would be comforting for her if such monuments existed. This showed me what a privilege it is to live in peace and how monuments for ancestors who were killed in wars can be comforting to their descendants – like the one in my home village.

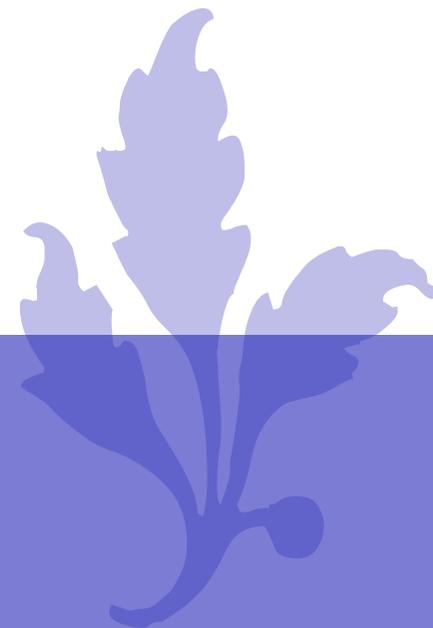


IMAGE CREDITS

fig. 1: Gemeindearchiv Grettstadt

fig. 2: Gemeindearchiv Grettstadt

fig. 3: Ruth Volz

fig. 4: Amelie Steinruck

fig. 5: Ruth Volz

fig. 6: Ruth Volz

fig. 7: Amelie Steinruck

SOURCES

The following essay was written with the help of the following people, institutions and resources:

Barakzoy, Iman (conversations during the *Monuments & Memory* working sessions)

Gemeindearchiv Grettstadt (Leitung Wolfgang Dorda),
Gemeinde Grettstadt: Hauptstadtstraße 1, 97508 Grettstadt.
URL archives: <http://www.grettstadt.eu/home.html>.

Gerhardt, Roswitha

Stolper, Katrin

Volz, Ruth