

University of Alberta

**Flashpoints of Austrian Memory:
A Critical Analysis of the Controversial
Veterans Meetings on the Ulrichsberg**

by

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Abstract

This study reveals intriguing facets of Austrian memory politics by examining the controversial *Ulrichsberg* Veterans meetings, held annually in southern Austria since 1958. With up to 10,000 participants at their height, the meetings attracted considerable media coverage that evolved in conjunction with changing socio-political attitudes towards the traumatic recent past. The main questions this thesis aims to answer are: to what extent can the *Ulrichsberg* meetings be referred to as a pilgrimage of right-wing extremists from across Europe; how have symbolism and hidden meanings contributed to this understanding; and what was the role of the *Ulrichsberg* in the evolution of post-war Austrian cultural memory and memory politics? This study shows that the evidence clearly demonstrates a significant link between the majority of *Ulrichsberg* supporters to far-right political thought, although the media's obsession with the topic suggest some of these claims to be exaggerated. My micro-historical approach of providing answers to larger issues through the detailed study of a single phenomenon gives insight into the complex controversies of ongoing debates in Austrian memory politics.

Acknowledgements

To my beautiful and loving wife Jessica A. Holmes

Table of Contents:

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Introductory Poem

Introduction

1. The History of the Ulrichsberg Meetings	1
1.1. The Beginnings of the Ulrichsberg (c. 300 B.C.- 1918 AD)	
1.2. First Uses as a Memorial Site (1932-1938)	
1.3. The Ulrichsberg in the Ostmark (1938-1945)	
1.4. The Golden Age of the Ulrichsberg Meetings (1958-1995)	
1.5. The Ulrichsberg Meetings Decline Amid Increasing Criticism (1995- 2012)	
2. The Organizations behind the Ulrichsberg	19
2.1 Analyzing the Plaques: Coded Language, Euphemisms and Symbols	
2.2 Foreign Waffen-SS Volunteers	
3. Pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain	42
3.1 The Ulrichsberg's Relationship to Christian Tradition	
3.2 Summit Crosses and High-Elevation Memorials	
4. The Ulrichsberg under Austrian Laws Against Fascism	53
4.1 Denazification, Prohibition Law and the Law against Symbols	
4.2 Austrian Armed Forces and Uniforms on the Ulrichsberg	
5. The Ulrichsberg and the FPÖ	63
5.1 Origins of the FPÖ	
5.2 Jörg Haider at the Ulrichsberg Meetings	
Conclusions	71
Sources and Literature	76
Photographs (Figures 1- 14)	91

*"Den gefallenen Kameraden
Wir grüßen Euch alle,
Ihr deutschen Soldaten.
Man hat Euch verleumdet
und hat Euch verraten.
Man hat Euch verhöhnt
und hat Euch verlacht
und Euch zum Gespött
Eurer Enkel gemacht.
Man hat sogar
Eure Gräber plantiert
und den Pflug darüber geführt,
dieweil Ihr nichts tatet
als Eure Pflicht.
Ihr steht vor der Welt
mit reinem* Gesicht
mitsamt den anderen Kampfgenossen,
die alle ihr Blut für Europa vergossen.
Denn Eure Sache war gerecht
vom ersten bis zum letzten Gefecht.
Wären wir siegreich heimgekehrt,
Ihr würdet mit Heldendenkmälern geehrt."*

To the fallen Comrades
We greet you All
You German Soldiers
You have been slandered
You have been betrayed
You have been mocked
You have been laughed at
And made the object of Ridicule
Of your Grandchildren
Even your graves
Have been ploughed under
and paved over
While you had done
nothing but your Duty
You stand before the World
with a face free of guilt*
with all the other brothers-in-arms
that gave their blood for Europe.
Because your cause was just
From the first battle to the last
Had we returned home victorious
You would have been honoured
with Heroes' Monuments

*the German word 'rein' has multiple meanings including innocent, pure, free of guilt, clean, and to have a clear conscience

This poem was published in a periodical of the Waffen-SS Veterans' Organization "Society of Comrades IV" (*Kameradschaft IV*):

(*Die Kameradschaft*, no.6, 2004, Pg. 8) taken from the Archives of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW):

<http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/rechtsextreme-organisationen/kameradschaft-iv-k-iv-die-kameradschaft/zitate>, Accessed March 10th, 2013.

INTRODUCTION

Monuments and memorials are some of the most visible physical manifestations of a nation state's effort to define itself through its history. They can also represent outward expressions of private memory that may contradict national narratives. Austria in particular has a unique and complex relationship to its recent history that takes numerous, often controversial forms. Austrian historian Oliver Rathkolb famously referred to his country's post-war identity as "the paradoxical republic"¹, best explained by examining the evolution of the victim theory. The victim theory, a concept that cannot be attributed to any single scholar, refers to a concerted effort by the immediate post-war Austrian government to position itself internationally as a nation that had been unjustly invaded by the Nazis and forced to participate in an unwanted war of aggression. This political stance had its origins in an official statement made at an Allied conference in 1943 that became known as the Moscow Declaration and proclaimed Austria as "the first free country to fall victim to Hitler's aggression".² Widely regarded by scholars as a deliberate propaganda move designed to spur resistance within Austria, the immediate post-war provisional government adopted this declaration as a founding tenet of a future restored independent Austria via the 1955 State Treaty. According to Richard Lebow, the governments of many post-war European nations saw "the need to build or sustain a national

¹ Oliver Rathkolb, *Die Paradoxe Republik* (Paul Zsolnay Verlag: Vienna, 2005).

² Heidemarie Uhl, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis" in Lebow, Kansteiner, Fogu eds., *The Politics of Memory in Post-War Europe* (Duke University Press, 2006): 41.

identity”, as key to stability and reconstruction.³ Building a new identity for Austrians meant rejecting its role in Nazi atrocities, distancing itself from Germany and focusing on the cultural grandeur of the old Habsburg empire and the country’s natural beauty. Yet most ordinary Austrians rejected the victim theory, as Heidemarie Uhl has shown, and started to build many local memorials that contradicted the national narrative of victimhood.⁴ The resulting paradoxical, complex and confusing nature of Austrian memory politics is thus the overarching subject of this thesis.

This work examines a single memorial site in southern Austria and attempts to answer the moral and political queries that have surrounded its existence since World War I. I use a micro-historical approach to explain larger issues in Austrian memory politics by examining a geographically specific phenomenon in the style of other seminal publications such as Bertrand Perz’s analysis of the Mauthausen former concentration camp memorial site.⁵ The *Ulrichsberg* site, situated atop a prominent hill overlooking the Carinthian countryside approximately twenty kilometres north of the city of Klagenfurt, consists of dozens of plaques inside the ruins of a medieval church and an imposing metallic cross. Since 1958, veterans have gathered here once a year in October to commemorate their fallen comrades amidst a ritualized ceremony that incorporates both religious and secular elements. With close to 10,000 attendees

³ Richard Ned Lebow. “The Memory of Politics” in Lebow, Kansteiner, Fogu eds., *The Politics of Memory in Post-War Europe* (Duke University Press, 2006): 28.

⁴ Heidemarie Uhl, “Of Heroes and Victims: World War II and Austrian Memory”, *Austrian History Yearbook* vol. 42, (April 2011): 185-200.

⁵ Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2006).

at the height of these celebrations during the 1980s, the Ulrichsberg gatherings included the participation of representatives from both governmental and non-governmental organizations and attracted considerable media attention throughout its existence.

Interpretations of what constitute the Ulrichsberg meetings range from a peaceful display of cultural tradition decrying the universal horrors of war, to a pilgrimage of right-wing extremists and neo-fascists honouring the fighters of a war they wish they had won. The public perception of the Ulrichsberg gatherings has evolved in a parallel trajectory with Austrian memory politics in its gradual transition from denial and victim thesis, as theorized by Heidemarie Uhl⁶, to official admissions of guilt and political polarization. According to Walter Fanta's careful media analysis, the Ulrichsberg meetings were initially perceived mainly as necessary expressions of respect for the dead of the war, divorced from politics and ideology.⁷ The characterization of the meetings as hotbeds of right-wing activity came decades later as part of a national trend towards facing the guilt of Austria's participation in Nazi atrocities. The Ulrichsberg's deep roots in Christian symbolism, military tradition, and regional patriotism also made it attractive to a wider political spectrum not necessarily limited to the far-right. Yet the presence of plaques honouring specific units of international SS-Volunteers and the concurrent absence of any acknowledgement of the victims of the

⁶ Heidemarie Uhl, *Zivilisationsbruch und Gedächtniskultur: Das 20. Jahrhundert in der Erinnerung des beginnenden 21. Jahrhunderts* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003).

⁷ Valentin Sima and Walter Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land: Das europäische Kameradentreffen auf dem Kärntner Ulrichsberg von den Anfängen bis heute* (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 2003).

National Socialist regime directly explains the site's allure to neo-fascist groups and right wing extremists. The presence of organizations from other European nations that annually attend the Ulrichsberg gatherings give this analysis an international dimension by placing the Ulrichsberg within a larger network of post-war neo-fascist groups.

Navigating the extremes of the debate surrounding the Ulrichsberg also points to larger polarizing issues in post-war Austrian identity and memory politics. An intriguing aspect of what Jay Winter famously termed the "generation of memory"⁸ across Europe is how each country has uniquely dealt with participation/implication in Nazi atrocities. While Germany has allowed very open debates on the subject, provided restitution payments to victims and plainly admitted its guilt in the form of many official statements and prominent memorials, other countries have been less forthcoming. Although Austria tried to catch up to the progress made in Germany via such actions as the building of the Vienna Holocaust memorial in 2000, the continued acceptance of the Ulrichsberg meetings suggests otherwise.⁹

I suggest that, in terms of Austrian memory politics, the *Ulrichsberg* meetings constituted the polar opposite of what other sites like the *Mauthausen* memorial complex and the Vienna Holocaust Memorial demonstrate. The *Ulrichsberg* memorials were dedicated to the memory of people who fought for

⁸ Jay Winter (2001) "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Canadian Military History*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2001): 57.

⁹ Richard Ned Lebow. "The Memory of Politics" in Lebow, Kansteiner, Fogu eds. *The Politics of Memory in Post-War Europe* (Duke University Press, 2006): 2.
See also Heidemarie Uhl "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II in Austrian Memory," *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. 42, (April 2011): 185-200.

National Socialism, while *Mauthausen* was dedicated to the victims of Nazi terror.

This thesis seeks to investigate the background of the meetings primarily through a detailed examination of the individual plaques that constitute the memorial site and the organizations that correspond to each plaque. The wide variety of sources used in this work includes press coverage from both Austrian and international media, websites and publications of organizations associated with the Ulrichsberg and secondary literature on Austrian and European memory politics. In order to better understand the Ulrichsberg in its particular socio-political setting, this work also traces the evolution of Austrian anti-fascist laws through analysis of their content and reception and considers the influence of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria's (FPÖ) unique political inheritance.

The following questions will remain at the forefront of my analysis: To what extent can the Ulrichsberg meetings be referred to as a pilgrimage of right-wing extremists from across Europe and how has this affected the evolution of Austrian memory politics? The deliberate strategy of the organizations in question to hide their ideological underpinnings by keeping their activities within the guidelines of Austrian law complicates this issue considerably, since these tactics also served as defense mechanisms. As referenced by Austrian historians Walter Fanta and Valentin Sima's title to their book about the Ulrichsberg meetings, "Stands right in the Middle"¹⁰, one of the most problematic aspects of the Ulrichsberg is just how central a place it occupied in the Austrian post-war public

¹⁰ Sima and Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land: Das europäische Kameradentreffen auf dem Kärntner Ulrichsberg von den Anfängen bis heute*, 2003.

consensus. The meetings were never in any way secretive and were until recently considered perfectly legitimate without need of questioning. Although Fanta and Sima's work gives a detailed description of the controversy surrounding the meetings, it leaves the compelling question of their effect on Austrian memory politics curiously unanswered. Other scholars like Anton Pelinka, Oliver Rathkolb and Heidemarie Uhl have tied the Ulrichsberg into their discussions in various publications, albeit without providing a detailed analysis of the debates.¹¹

The Ulrichsberg's appropriation as a post-war memory site was considered all the more acceptable because of its roots as an ancient place of worship and the symbolic references to past struggles embedded in its history. How were the Ulrichsberg meetings able to take place annually despite their premise of positively remembering soldiers essentially rejecting the founding proclamation of the Second Republic (ie the victim theory) ? I will argue that the use of coded language and veiled references within plaques and ceremonies enabled the Ulrichsberg meetings to flourish in the societal mainstream despite undeniable links to right-wing extremist organizations.

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each with a unique focus. Chapter One offers a chronological overview of the Ulrichsberg as a geographical entity and traces the course of the site's use as a memorial meeting place in the twentieth-century. Chapter Two gives a detailed examination of the individual plaques and monuments that constitute the Ulrichsberg site and delves into the

¹¹ See for example Anton Pelinka. *Austria: Out of the Shadow of the Past*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), Heidemarie Uhl, "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II and Austrian Memory", *Austrian History Yearbook* vol. 42, (April 2011): 185-200, Oliver Rathkolb, *Die Paradoxe Republik* (Paul Zsolnay Verlag: Vienna, 2005).

background of the organizations responsible for organizing the meetings and installing the memorials. Chapter Three describes the Ulrichsberg's relationship to Christian symbolism and historical prejudices, along with the intertwining of religious faith and military tradition in Austrian cultural memory. Chapter Four explains how the gatherings operated in relation to Austrian post-war anti-fascist laws in addition to illuminating the evolution of the participation of the Austrian Armed forces (*Bundesheer*) in the memorial gatherings. Finally, Chapter Five examines the Austrian Freedom Party's political heritage and its relationship to the Ulrichsberg meetings amidst a careful analysis of domestic and international media portrayals.

Existing literature on Austrian memory politics and the Ulrichsberg meetings conclusively categorizes the gatherings as right-wing extremism in nature, yet the organizers steadfastly deny any such associations.¹² This thesis seeks to provide a balanced and critical analysis of these issues via a presentation of historical circumstances situated amidst recognized scholarship in order to better understand the complex landscape of Austrian memory.

¹²“Kärnten: ein Missverständnis,” *Die Zeit*, February 24th, 2000.

CHAPTER 1 – THE HISTORY OF THE ULRICHSBERG MEETINGS

1.1- ULRICHSBERG PRE-HISTORY (100BC- 1918AD)

A prominent hill stands overlooking a wide valley flanked by mountains to the north and south in a picturesque part of the eastern Alps. At the 1015m elevation summit a visitor will find the ruins of a late medieval church amidst a spacious clearing, an imposing 20m high cross on a pedestal and numerous commemorative inscriptions. Peering inside the church, the visitor will gaze at the walls covered in plaques and see the granite remains of the altar covered in fresh wreaths and candles. The magnificent view of the valley below and the sombre tone of the ruins give rise to contemplation and a search for answers to explain the meaning of this emotionally charged place.

The story of the *Ulrichsberg* goes back to the Celtic period of settlement in Central Europe between 500-100 BC. The evidence is sparse, but excavations in the late 1930's indicate that the Celtic tribes living around the base of the hill recognized the prominence of its geographic location by erecting a shrine to one of their most powerful deities, the goddess *Noreia*, at the summit.¹³ This marked the start of an influential spiritual importance that the hill imparted onto the surrounding region for over two thousand years.

¹³Friedhelm Thiedig and Gudrun Frohnert. "Der Ulrichsberg-eine Reliefumkehr: Geologischer Aufbau und erdgeschichtliche Entwicklung des 'mons carantanus' am Stadtrand von Klagenfurt." *Carinthia II*, vol. 198, no. 118 (2008): 47-82.

By 50AD the Romans had established the sizeable settlement of *Virunum* only a few kilometres away as the capital of the new Roman province of *Noricum*, named after the goddess *Noreia*. As was customary, Roman settlers converted the shrine to *Noreia* into a small temple dedicated to the Egypto-Roman god *Isis*. *Isis* symbolized protection and was revered as a maternal goddess that provided people with a sense of security.¹⁴

During the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries, Roman settlers established a small hamlet at the top of the hill and built a small church, marking the first Christian presence on the *Ulrichsberg*.¹⁵ With the subsequent collapse of the Roman Empire however, marauding Slavic tribes destroyed both the church and the settlement two hundred years later towards the end of the 6th century during this time of great instability. The first written evidence of the *Ulrichsberg*'s existence occurred during the 10th century as *Mons Carantus*, named by a monastical land survey conducted during the Carolingian period. The site remained uninhabited for more than 800 years until a late Gothic style church was built around 1485 dedicated to Saint Ulrich of Augsburg.

St. Ulrich was famous for having participated in a major battle against invading Magyars and thus became an enduring symbol for the defense of Central European Christendom.¹⁶ Although he had lived 500 years prior to the construction of the church, its dedication to this figure was a clear continuation of

¹⁴ R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Greco-Roman World*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1971): 34.

¹⁵ Harl Ortolf, "Wie heilig ist der Ulrichsberg in Kärnten?," *Archeologia Austriaca*, vol. 10 (1989): 56.

¹⁶ Catholic Encyclopedia Online, "Saint Ulrich": "It was due to Saint Ulrich's ability and courage that Augsburg was able to hold out against the Magyar besiegers until the Emperor Otto arrived. On 10 August, 955, a battle was fought in the Lechfeld, and the invaders were finally defeated." <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15123a.html>, Accessed March 14th, 2013.

the use of the site as a place to pay homage to a spiritual protector. St. Ulrich is even today celebrated in the annual Augsburg Ulrich's Week (*Augsburger Ulrichswoche*) as a defender of the city.¹⁷ According to legend he rode onto the battlefield of *Lechfeld* (955AD) with only a bible in hand, fearless against the numerically superior heathens threatening his beloved city. The bloody battle was a resounding victory against the Magyars, ending a prolonged period of raids by Magyars and Slavic tribes on Central Europe and ensuring the survival of what would soon become the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁸

Although St. Ulrich may have hailed from Augsburg, Carinthians chose him for their newly built church because he represented a spiritual connection, a spiritual hero, to the defense of the Christian Occident. At a time of increasing power of the Islamic Ottoman Empire (note the fall of Constantinople in 1453), dedicating a church to a legendary defender of Christendom was a logical choice. Although the 15th century clergymen who chose St. Ulrich did not think in nationalistic terms, by the 20th century it was easy to think of St. Ulrich as somewhat of a Germanic hero amidst the contemporary climate of radical ethnic and linguistic nationalism. Already by 1512 the Holy Roman Empire had begun to use the addendum "of German nation" (*Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation*) in its full title.¹⁹ Just like Isis and Noreia, St. Ulrich was originally revered as a protector of the land and its people.

¹⁷ "Heute beginnt die Ulrichswoche" *Augsburger Stadtzeitung*, June 29th, 2012
<http://www.stadtzeitung.de/nachrichten/augsburg/Heute-beginnt-die-Ulrichswoche;art478,3114>,
 Accessed March 15th, 2013.

¹⁸ Charles Bowlus, *The Battle of Lechfeld and its Aftermath AD 955* (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006).

¹⁹ Joachim Ehlers, *Die Entstehung des Deutschen Reiches*, (München, Oldenbourg Verlag 2012): 97.

For centuries the peoples of Central Europe stood in fear of invaders from the East; Huns, Magyars, Mongols and Ottoman Turks. The numerous Christian Crusades to Palestine during the centuries preceding the construction of the gothic church on the *Ulrichsberg* had established a long-standing tradition of ecclesiastically supported antagonism to eastern “heathen” ethnicities, a concept that was later adapted by 19th century German nationalists and given legitimacy by the secular realm of Enlightenment Era reason. This divisive line of thought reached its zenith when strengthened by social-Darwinist theories of racial superiority that the Nazis deeply relied on for their beliefs. For the SS-veterans who chose the *Ulrichsberg* as the place to celebrate the memory of their fallen comrades, Saint Ulrich clearly symbolized the triumph of Christianity in a hostile world, a comforting thought to those wishing to commemorate the loss of a monumental battle against an entity seen in the eyes of National Socialism as the most godless of enemies: Bolshevism. The Nazi propaganda machine drew extensively on old Germanic traditions that saw the East as a quintessential enemy and Hitler’s dreams of *Lebensraum* expansion envisioned the decimation of the existing inhabitants of the east. Especially when Soviet armies neared the borders of the Third Reich, the rhetoric of the “pillaging hordes from the East”, spread by the Nazis to maximize resistance, struck a chord in the minds of Germans and Austrians who had been reared on legends like that of St. Ulrich and the prominent placing of historical events in history books like the Battle of *Lechfeld* or the traumatic 1683 Turkish siege of Vienna. According to this reasoning, it was invaders from the East who had destroyed the first Christian settlement on the

Ulrichsberg in the process of overrunning the Roman Empire, that great flowering basis of Western civilization, and in 1945 the Red Army was threatening to do the same to the Third Reich. Today a large plaque hangs on the outer wall of the ruins chronicling the history of the site and blaming the destruction of the first Christian church settlement on “the Slavs”.²⁰ The Slavs in this case are simply an amorphous mass of “others” rather than a specific tribe, thereby reinforcing their foreign, allegedly adversarial nature.

In the centuries following the victory over the Ottoman Turks the church was neglected and fell into disrepair for unknown reasons, leading to the last mass being held in 1685 or 1786, according to two different conflicting sources.²¹ In 1897 a fire caused by lightning destroyed what was left of the deteriorated gothic church, leaving only the heavy stone walls intact. Although historians disagree over many of the details of the *Ulrichsberg's* long early history, the first organizers of the *Ulrichsberg* meetings undeniably had its history as a spiritual site in mind when they selected this particular hill as a central point of positive memorial celebrations dedicated to the protectors of the *Heimat*.

1.2 - ULRICHSBERG FIRST BECOMES A MEMORIAL SITE (1920s-1938)

²⁰ Plaque on outside of Ulrichsberg church ruins reads: “Destruction by Slavs in the 6th Century” (*Zerstörung durch Slawen 6. Jh.*). See Figure 1.

²¹ Plaque on outside of the ruins mentions 1685 as the last mass, soon after the Siege of Vienna, while archaeologist Rudolf Egger in, “*Der Heilige Berg Kärntens*” (Klagenfurt: Verlag Geschichtsverein Kärntens, 1976), gives a date of 1786, shortly after the end of Maria Theresa’s reign.

It was not until after the end of the Habsburg monarchy that the *Ulrichsberg* was first conceived of as a memorial site. The massive carnage of WWI spurred a frenzy of rural memorial consecration all over Europe as people sought a way to pay tribute to so many lives lost in vain. In Carinthia, people also wished to commemorate another, more locally significant event. The spread of nationalism in Austria-Hungary in the previous decades had forced areas of mixed ethnicities into professing loyalty to a single unilingual nation state, prompting many conflicts in former areas of the empire. The post-Habsburg future of Southern Carinthia, as one of the language frontiers Judson described as being unwillingly split into nationalistic categories by late nineteenth century activists, was determined by the so-called Carinthian Defence (*Kärntner Abwehrkampf*).²² After the death of Kaiser Franz-Joseph and the abdication of his successor, the kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs declared independence and promptly occupied linguistically mixed areas of Carinthia and southern Styria in December of 1918. In Carinthia, active local military resistance to the occupation, stoked by German-speaking nationalists, brought the attention of the victorious Allies who attempted to stop the violence by instituting a plebiscite in the territories in question as part of Woodrow Wilson's famous pledge of self-determination made at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.²³ With a 59% majority the plebiscite of 1920 allowed southern Carinthia to remain part of Austria. Interestingly, a majority of Slovene speakers had in fact voted for Austria, defying nationalist assumptions of inherent ethnically based loyalties. This could be attributed to

²² Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 29.

²³ Stefan Karner, *Kärnten und die nationale Frage* (Klagenfurt: Heyn Verlag, 2005): 22.

what Judson calls the existence of “national hermaphrodites” overlooked by the polarizing rhetoric of nationalism, although other scholars suggest that unrealistic Austrian promises of guaranteeing the minority rights of Slovenians within the new Austria contributed more to the outcome of the October 10th plebiscite.²⁴

In Carinthia today, the 10th of October is a provincial holiday that commemorates the event alongside several physical monuments that focus mostly on the sacrifice and bravery of the armed nationalist resistance. The *Ulrichsberg* was selected as a memorial site by members of the Association of Carinthian Patriots (*Kärntner Landsmannschaft*) in the early 1930s as a historically symbolic site to commemorate both the loss of lives in WW I and the casualties of the Carinthian Defence. By this time the *Ulrichsberg* stood on land that was owned by the aristocratic Goëss family for several generations after the local clergy had presumably lost interest due to the dilapidation of the building. The Goëss family agreed to provide the grounds for an annual commemoration to be held on the 10th of October in honour of the anniversary of the plebiscite.

The increasing authoritarianism during this period of the Christian conservative “clerico-fascist” regime, led by the rural-minded dictator Engelbert Dollfuss, placed considerable political emphasis on strengthening Austrian expressions of patriotism.²⁵ After disbanding parliament in March 1933, the brutal suppression of a Social Democratic uprising in 1934 known as the Austrian Civil War showed the stark antagonisms dividing Austrian political society and

²⁴ Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*, 228.

²⁵ Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 223.

justified further moves toward a totalitarian state. Despite exhibiting many similarities with National Socialism, the Dollfuss regime branded itself as patriotically Austrian and thereby fundamentally opposed to Nazi ideals of a greater Germany. Although the Association of Carinthian Patriots exhibited the same emphasis on militarism that both Dollfuss and the banned NSDAP celebrated, the organization focused on local commemoration efforts.

In 1933 the Association of Carinthian Patriots mounted a few plaques inside the church and built a crude cross representing the grave of an unknown soldier in the center of the ruins. Basic maintenance measures aimed at arresting the deterioration of the ruins were also undertaken, although no roof was reconstructed.²⁶ The first official memorial celebrations occurred in October 1934 under the direction of the Carinthian Patriots, and were mainly dedicated to the memory of the fallen Carinthian Defence Fighters (*Kärntner Abwehrkämpfer*), but also secondarily to the fallen soldiers of the old empire. Local veterans were invited to attend, songs were sung, prayers were read, and memorial wreaths were laid in the center of the church ruins. Usually the proceedings would include a speech from a representative of the Carinthian Patriots emphasizing the selfless sacrifice of those fighters who had lost their lives in securing Carinthia for Austria.²⁷

Evidence of the small size of these early *Ulrichsberg* gatherings proves that the Carinthian Patriots did not enjoy the same widespread support that was retroactively attributed to them by *Ulrichsberg* supporters in the Cold War era.

²⁶ Plaque on outside of Ulrichsberg church “Renovations 1933-1934” (*Renovierungsmaßnahmen 1933-1934*). See Figure 1.

²⁷ Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 15.

These modest celebrations of no more than a few dozen attendees emphasized basic military values such as duty and loyalty and provided an avenue for Carinthians to rejoice in the fact that their province remained part of Austria despite a sizable Slovenian minority.²⁸ Although the 1920 plebiscite was instrumental in determining the outcome of the crisis, the armed struggle was presented as the only significant factor in keeping Carinthia free and united: a clear indication that politics and diplomacy were secondary, even unwelcome concerns at this memorial site.

Although the appropriation of a formerly Christian site by nationalists could be seen as a secularization of a religious site, it was more of a union between celebrations of military sacrifice and faith, two ideas deeply culturally intertwined in European history. The site's namesake, St. Ulrich was both a religious figure and warrior, thus encapsulating a duality exhibited not only in prominent historical events like the European Crusades, but also the military chaplains who would later give speeches at the post-war iterations of the *Ulrichsberg* meetings.

The mythologizing of the Carinthian Defence (*Kärntner Abwehrkampf*)²⁹ as consisting of a black-and-white armed struggle between two nations in which German-speaking Carinthia was saved from treacherous Slovenian aggressors dominates Carinthian cultural memory. The celebrations on the *Ulrichsberg*

²⁸ Karner, *Kärnten und die nationale Frage*, 33.

²⁹ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude, deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*. (Klagenfurt: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2011): 58-75.

exemplified this trope through their emphasis on loyalty to a “free and united Carinthia”, which necessitated the exclusion of the Slovenian minority.³⁰ This harkened back to a deep-seated antagonism towards eastern peoples and Slavs, in much of Austria’s history, and would soon be stoked by the fires of National Socialism. Highlighted by events like the Turkish siege of 1683, the Habsburg Empire acted as both a bulwark and a bridge between east and west. The advances of the Ottoman Empire had been stopped at the “Gates of Europe” at Vienna thanks to the valiant efforts of the Germanic nations. Carinthia, which even today is the southern edge of a large cohesive territory in which German is spoken, was thus mythologized as a borderland with undeniably strong nationalist sentiments that were echoed on the *Ulrichsberg*.

1.3 – THE ULRICHSBERG IN THE *OSTMARK* (1938-1945)

In March 1938 Hitler’s troops marched into Austria under a hail of flowers and cheers all over the country. Austrian Nazi party members enthusiastically and violently eradicated what little opposition remained even before Hitler arrived. Of all the regions in what was renamed the *Ostmark* under the Third Reich, Carinthia was the first to report a full hand-over of power to the new authorities.³¹ The Nazi party had enjoyed strong support in Carinthia leading

³⁰ Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 15.

³¹ August Walzl, *Als erster Gau...Entwicklungen und Strukturen des Nationalsozialismus in Kärnten*, (Klagenfurt: Universitätsverlag Carinthia, 1992)

up to Austria's annexation and acted swiftly to occupy government buildings in advance of the arrival of German troops in Klagenfurt.

Shortly after taking power the Nazis banned the *Kärntner Landsmannschaft* due to its association with the deposed clerico-fascist regime's specifically Austrian form of cultural patriotism that clashed with Nazi ideals of greater German ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*).³² Its members were obliged to join National Socialist organizations and memorial celebrations were moved to the center of Klagenfurt where they could be more closely supervised. The Nazis used the continuation of a memorial tradition of remembering fallen German soldiers since the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon to promote their own brand of violent German nationalism. The Weimar Era Peoples' Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*) was replaced with an official Day of Honouring Heroes (*Heldengedenktag*) to firmly celebrate the accomplishments of the *Wehrmacht*. Nazi Heroes' Honourings celebrating ancient Germanic heritage, militarism, and sacrifice to the fatherland were held in Klagenfurt but not on the Ulrichsberg itself because of its association with the banned Carinthian patriots.

Although the anti-Slovenian narrative of the Carinthian Defence (*Kärntner Abwehrkampf*) seemed to fit neatly into National Socialist policies, the Nazis refused to tolerate a regionally independent organization that did not explicitly align itself with a Greater German community. As was the case with other cultural organizations such as the Catholic Youth, the complete reorganizing of society along National Socialist lines (known as *Gleichschaltung*) often led to the

³² Website of *Kärntner Landsmannschaft*: <http://www.k-landsmannschaft.at/>, Accessed May 25th, 2013.

replacement or dissolution of previous cultural organizations. The Nazi regime in Carinthia concentrated on persecuting the Slovenian minority by resettling thousands further south and seizing their property.³³

1.4 – THE ULRICHSBERG’S GOLDEN AGE (1958-1995)

There exists no documented use of the *Ulrichsberg* memorial site as a public meeting place under the Allied occupation from 1945-1955. Allied disdain for anything associated with militarism resulted in many memorials being destroyed in Germany and caused the *Ulrichsberg* site to remain inactive during this period.³⁴ Strict denazification efforts and the naming of the *SS* (and the *Waffen-SS*) as criminal organizations by the *Nürnberg* trials necessitated a withdrawal from the public sphere for those staunch National Socialist believers who had not lost their faith in the system after the collapse of the Third Reich. Only after the Austrian state treaty was ratified in 1955 could they emerge from obscurity and start officially reorganizing. The newly minted Austrian state’s pledge for neutrality and the withdrawal of the last Allied troops resulted in an open political climate not possible to the same extent in Germany. In May 1957 new laws declared denazification complete, removing the last obstacles to the re-

³³ August Walzl, *Als erster Gau...Entwicklungen und Strukturen des Nationalsozialismus in Kärnten*, (Klagenfurt: Universitätsverlag Carinthia, 1992): 44.

³⁴ James Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after WWII*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993): 55.

integration of all former NSDAP members back into mainstream society.³⁵ The time was ripe for the creation of the successor party of Nazi sentiments, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) (see chapter 5) in 1956. Two years later, the first postwar *Ulrichsberg* meetings were reorganized and the *Ulrichsberg* officially became a permanent memorial site (*Gedenkstätte*), sanctioned by the blessing of a military chaplain.

The focus of the new meetings switched from “defense fighters” (*Abwehrkämpfer*) to “returnees” (*Heimkehrer*) under leadership of the newly formed *Ulrichsberg* Society (*Ulrichsberggemeinschaft*)³⁶. The *Ulrichsberg* Society (UBG) was founded with the intention of providing a meeting place for veterans and upholding and promoting “soldierly traditions, camaraderie and love of the homeland (*Heimatliebe*)”³⁷. Drawing on a wide spectrum of Carinthian cultural and community organizations, the UBG counted many former NSDAP members that had been granted amnesty and had established themselves in all of the major political parties. According to its founding statements, the UBG aimed to provide a non-politicized commemorative site representative of a shared need to “honour the dead and missing of both wars”.³⁸ The *Ulrichsberg* Society included the Carinthian Patriots Association among its permanent members.

The new celebrations emphasized a continuity of sacrifice to the homeland through WWI, the Carinthian Defence and WW II despite the drastically different

³⁵ Siegfried Beer, “Hunting the Discriminators: Denazification in Austria, 1945-1957” in *Racial Discrimination and Ethnicity in European History*, ed. Gudmundur Halfdanarson (Pisa 2004): 183.

³⁶ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude, deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 79.

³⁷ Norbert Rencher, *Ulrichsberg Dokumentation*, (Klagenfurt: Satz-und-Druck Team, 1999): 29.

³⁸ Statute of *Ulrichsberg* Society 1954 in Sima and Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 160.

political circumstances each conflict represented. The erection of the “cross of returnees” (*Heimkehrerkreuz*) in 1959, the 20m high cross on the clearing adjacent to the church³⁹, which could be seen as far away as the outskirts of the provincial capital of Klagenfurt, was also a huge step in entrenching the *Ulrichsberg*'s importance while laying the ideological and physical foundation around which each subsequent celebration would be held. Various right-wing organizations (profiled in Chapter 2) were invited by the *Ulrichsberg* Society (UBG) to attend and help support the *Ulrichsberg* meetings under the euphemism of honouring the returnees (*Heimkehrer*). The UBG aimed to include both veterans of the *Waffen-SS* and those who had simply served in the “innocent” *Wehrmacht*⁴⁰, however, in order to appear legitimate to the federal government, they disallowed the *SS Death-Head Brigades (Totenkopf-Verbände)*, infamous for staffing the concentration camps, from openly being honoured at the meetings. As a result of this concession, the official speech consecrating the summit cross was made by the federal defense minister at the time: Ferdinand Graf of the centre-right Austrian Peoples' Party (ÖVP).⁴¹ Detachments from the newly reconstituted Austrian military (*Bundesheer*) provided logistical support and stood at attention during the memorial ceremonies. From its inception, the post-war *Ulrichsberg* gatherings were fully sanctioned by the governing coalition of the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the ÖVP.

³⁹Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 80.

⁴⁰Martin Cüppers, “Die Waffen-SS war der Wegbereiter der Shoa”, *Der Standard*, (September 17th, 2012).

⁴¹“Feiger Fortschritt: Veteranen der Waffen-SS feiern am Ulrichsberg 50-jähriges Jubiläum,” *Profil*, (August 22nd, 2009).

The inviting tone of the UBG's motto "The Ulrichsberg is calling you!" (*Der Ulrichsberg ruft!*), attracted underground veterans organizations of SS volunteers from countries like Croatia, Latvia, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark and Spain who made the pilgrimage to southern Austria to add their own honorary plaques, lay wreaths, make contacts with like-minded individuals and pay annual homage to their fallen comrades in a safe environment. Over 2000 participants attended the first meeting in 1958, increasing to over 9000 by the early 1980's before dropping sharply thereafter.⁴² Locals were happy about the influx of tourists and fully supported the gatherings, in part by voting to give the UBG annual provincial funding. The new *Ulrichsberg* gatherings also attracted organizations that supported the rights of German expellees (*Volksdeutsche* or "*Vertriebene*") who found a very receptive audience to their calls for future border changes. As Walter Fanta shows in his detailed media analysis, national and local media generally characterized the meetings as "gatherings in honour of a peaceful Europe", reflecting an overall unwillingness to politicize the recent traumatic past.⁴³

1.5 - THE ULRICHSBERG DECLINES AMID CRITICISM (1995-2012)

By the time Austria entered the EU in 1995 the *Ulrichsberg* meetings had started to come under increased criticism. The general trend of "coming-to-terms-with-the-past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) in Germany and Austria through

⁴² Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 106.

⁴³ Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 107-109.

events like the Waldheim affair, the *Historikerstreit* and seminal cultural watersheds like the airing of the 1979 Holocaust series, prompted a re-examination of commemorative activities.⁴⁴ Speeches made by German president Richard Weizsäcker in 1985 asking to Germans to “look truth in the eye” with respect to their past and Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky’s indirect allusion to admission of Austrians’ role in aiding Nazi atrocities in 1991 were both indicators of a shift in public consciousness that had begun to reconsider its approach to physical expressions of the past.⁴⁵⁴⁶

The FPÖ defended the meetings as harmless expressions of remembrance that promoted peace and argued vehemently against accusations that the meetings promoted historical revisionism and that they served as a nexus of neo-Nazi connections. To respond to the increasing criticism the UBG came up with the term “*Nie wieder Krieg*” (Never again War!) to make the meetings seem more legitimate in the eyes of the public and sponsored the erection of the *Europastein* (Stone of Europe) in 1994 in order to symbolize the brotherhood of the European peoples in a peaceful, democratic continent, free of communism.⁴⁷ Insiders knew, however, that the *Europastein* was meant primarily as coded homage to the cooperation between international SS volunteer veterans organizations, rather than any real support for greater European integration. In fact, the FPÖ had been a

⁴⁴ Bill Niven and Chloe Paver eds, *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) See also: Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*, (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2001).

⁴⁵ “Weizsäcker Rede 1985: ‘8. Mai war ein Tag der Befreiung’,“ *Der Spiegel*, (May 8th, 2005).

⁴⁶ Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka eds. “The Vranitzky Era in Austria,” *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, vol. 7, 1999.

⁴⁷ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 105.

critic of integration since the early 1990s and urged its voters to reject the EU accession treaty of 1995.

The rise of populist right-wing FPÖ leader Jörg Haider also contributed significantly to the media attention given to Ulrichsberg speeches. At the 1995 Ulrichsberg gathering he staunchly defended the honour of Waffen-SS veterans and their right to hold memorial celebrations.⁴⁸ Media coverage became increasingly polarized during this period, ranging from hostile criticism to defensive denials. Headlines from the late 1980s such as “5000 Carinthians Renew Commitment to Peace” and “Friendship Reaching Across Borders on the Ulrichsberg” defended the meetings by emphasizing their supposed abhorrence of war and intra-European cooperation.⁴⁹ By the mid 2000s headlines like “Nazi Symbols on the Ulrichsberg”⁵⁰ and “Right-wing Extremists visit annual Site” were to be found both in Austrian and international press.⁵¹ Further analysis in subsequent chapters of this thesis shows to what extent these headlines can be considered accurate portrayals. Contrary to the UBG’s original intent the Ulrichsberg meetings became increasingly politicized and attracted controversy drawn along clear left-vs.-right ideological battle lines. During the night of August 17th, 1997 leftist radicals attacked the Ulrichsberg site, destroying many of the plaques and vandalizing the walls with anti-fascist slogans. With the help of generous donations from the many organizations supporting the Ulrichsberg

⁴⁸ Anton Pelinka and Ruth Wodak, eds. *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria*. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002): 211

⁴⁹ Fanta and Sima, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 106

⁵⁰ “Nazi-Symbole auf dem Ulrichsberg,” *Kleine Zeitung*, August 27th, 2007.

⁵¹ Fanta and Sima, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 106.

gatherings, the site was quickly refurbished and a plaque installed by the UBG to commemorate the “undignified and shameful destruction” of the memorials.⁵²

By the beginning of the 21st century dozens of anti-fascist protesters were accompanying the attendees of the annual *Ulrichsberg* meetings on their way to the ceremonies. Increased media scrutiny of the UBG and its far-right connections culminated in 2009 when the then-president of the UBG, Wolf Dieter Ressenig, was accused of buying and selling Nazi memorabilia online. As a result of this scandal, defense minister Norbert Darabos withdrew all support of the Austrian Bundesheer and banned the use of its uniforms at the meetings. However, the support the Carinthian government gives to the UBG (over 10,000 euros annually) has not been withdrawn despite frequent calls to do so.⁵³ The clear political distancing exhibited by the federal coalition since 2009 was not shared by the FPÖ, which staunchly criticized these moves, calling them a breach of freedom of opinion (*Meinungsfreiheit*). To the casual observer, the *Ulrichsberg* meetings can easily be viewed as harmless, yet a closer examination of the organizations behind the gathering reveals many uncomfortable details.

⁵² Plaque affixed 1998: “*Diese Gedenkstätte wurde am 17. August 1997 schandbar und pietätlos zerstört*”. See Figure 2.

⁵³“Ulrichsberg: Staatsanwalt Ermittelt,” *Kurier*, September 17th, 2012.

CHAPTER 2 – THE ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND THE ULRICHSBERG MEETINGS

2.1 – Analyzing the Language and Symbolism of the Ulrichsberg Plaques

The interior of the Ulrichsberg church ruins is plastered with commemorative plaques, added gradually over several decades, each representing the support of a particular organization. Many of these organizations are affiliated with former military formations, while others consider themselves neutral cultural organizations that champion the upholding of patriotic traditions. The majority is based in Carinthia, representing regional cultural organizations that include the local volunteers firefighters. The most controversial organizations, however, originate in Germany and other European countries. These plaques are very carefully worded so as to appear in line with Austrian anti-fascist laws, although particularly for those from other European countries, a careful analysis of the organizations behind the inscriptions reveals their true intent. In many cases, the issue lies in omission of important facts rather than a distortion of established facts. Alternatively, the symbols next to the inscriptions can sometimes provide the informed viewer with more clues about the plaque's meaning than the text itself. This careful analysis of the organizations behind the most significant plaques and their political activities and ideological affiliations demonstrates the extent to which the Ulrichsberg meetings can be connected to lingering National Socialist sympathies.

Although the UBG organizes and heads the meetings, its plaque simply commemorates all veterans of Austria from both wars and the Carinthian defence. The UBG is composed of a wide cross-section of Carinthian society and acts as the administrator of the site, thereby deciding which plaques can be mounted. The UBG's conception of memory mirrored those of countless other local memorials scattered across Austria, created according to the same principles.⁵⁴ For those still holding on to the glory days of the German military machine and its early string of victories, the official victim thesis of the immediate post-war Austrian government, as Heidemarie Uhl argues,⁵⁵ was not acceptable. The emphasis on continuity of service to the "*Heimat*" or the "*Fatherland*" enabled many Austrians to simply add the dates 1938-1945 to inter-war era monuments without any mention of the murderous regime of which the federal government proclaimed it had been a victim. The need for commemorating so many fallen sons, brothers, husbands and fathers was undeniably strong despite the heinous crimes committed under the flag of the swastika. The UBG, among others, promised a safe way to public memory that avoided the sensitive issues involved with political affiliations.

One of the innocuously named organizations supporting the Ulrichsberg gatherings was the "Union of Returnees" (*Verband der Heimkehrer* or VdH), founded in 1950 and active in both Austria and Germany as an over-arching organization that promoted the rights of *Wehrmacht* veterans and helped with

⁵⁴Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 78.

⁵⁵ Heidemarie Uhl, "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II in Austrian Memory," *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. 42, (April 2011): 185.

caring for war-graves alongside the Austrian Black Cross organization (*Österreichisches Schwarze Kreuz*). The VdH actively campaigned to reintegrate former low-level NSDAP members into Austrian society and continually voiced opposition to denazification laws in the early 1950s.⁵⁶ The VdH was also the main force behind the erection of the imposing “cross of returnees” (*Heimkehrerkreuz*) on the Ulrichsberg in 1959.⁵⁷ The plaque affixed at the base of the cross is from a German chapter of the organization and encapsulates the many complexities of the Ulrichsberg site, as well as one of its core messages. The text reads “Recognition of the Returnees: Observe Fatherland: This is what we have brought back, our loyalty, our love, our courage, blessed by the sacrifice/victimhood of tens of thousands. It shall mean much to you, today and for all eternity” (*Vermächtnis der Heimgekehrten: Siehe Vaterland, Das haben wir zurückgebracht, unsere Treue, unsere Liebe, unsere Tapferkeit, geweiht durch das Opfer von Zehntausenden. Es wird dir viel bedeuten müssen, heute und für alle Zukunft...Gestiftet vom Landesverein Rheinlandpfalz- Verband der Heimkehrer*). The fatherland referred to here is not Austria but the concept of a greater German ethnic community, which all *Wehrmacht* soldiers would have fought for. The subtle demand that future generations should continue to recognize the sacrifice of tens of thousands helps explain the appeal of the Ulrichsberg gatherings to younger non-veterans.

⁵⁶ Birgit Schwelling, *Heimkehr – Erinnerung – Integration: Der Verband der Heimkehrer, die ehemaligen Kriegsgefangenen und die westdeutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, (München: Schöningh Verlag, 2010): 33.

⁵⁷ Sima, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*,” 21-22.

With over half a million members in the 1950's, the VdH had many regional chapters including one in each of the Austrian provinces. In its plaques and speeches held at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings the VdH continually emphasizes duty, loyalty, and courage while frequently employing the use of the German word *Opfer* (meaning both “victim” and “sacrifice” depending on the context in which it is used) to describe both the fallen and the returnees. The group was very active politically and, as James Diehl explains in his book on German veterans' organizations, the VdH also actively campaigned for the amnesty of so-called “late returnees” (*Spätheimkehrer*), German POWs that remained in mostly Russian camps after 1948, arguing that the harsh treatment they had endured had rendered them immune to extremism.⁵⁸ Although their plaque in the interior of the church warns against “hate between peoples” (*Völkerhass*) and encourages “bridge-building and reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*), the plaque itself is situated right beside another one commemorating the contribution of foreign SS-Volunteers. These juxtapositions of proclaiming desires for peace while fondly remembering and celebrating efforts at spreading National Socialist ideology are indicative of the kind of hypocrisy that critics of the *Ulrichsberg* point to.

Another vital aspect of the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings is its deep roots in regional history, particularly the commemoration of the Carinthian Defense Struggle (*Kärntner Abwehrkampf*). The Carinthian Associations of Tradition (*Kärntner Traditionsverbände*) are Carinthian cultural organizations that are founded on the tradition of the Carinthian Defence Fighters (*Kärntner*

⁵⁸ James Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after WWII*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993): 175.

Abwehrkämpfer), while exhibiting their own virulent brand of ethnic German nationalism. Seeing Carinthia as the southern borderland of German-speaking lands, the *Kärntner Traditionsverbände* view the events leading up to the plebiscite in 1920 as defining characteristics of their identity. The continuation of the post WWI paradigm of the greedy Slovenian threatening the cultural unity of Carinthia also allowed Tito's communist partisans to be viewed as an enemy even though they were significant contributors to "liberation" from Nazism. One of the most important elements of the *Kärntner Traditionsverbände* was the League of Carinthian Defenders (*Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund* or KAB), founded in 1955⁵⁹, which formed the founding core of the UBG, seeing its defensive myth as an ideal starting point from which to construct a memorial complex that would be a hidden homage to the greatness of the German nation. These Carinthian clubs essentially championed a borderland mentality in need of a psychological protection that was further strengthened by the prevailing Cold War political climate of staunch anti-communism. After all, Carinthia was situated on the most porous part of the Iron Curtain. The KAB retroactively accused Tito's partisans of having planned an ethnic cleansing of Germans in parts of southern Carinthia as had been the case in Istria, Poland and the former Sudetenland.⁶⁰ Although the partisans did commit some isolated cases of civilian murder, they specifically targeted those who had committed war crimes in Slovenia and punished their families accordingly. By the summer of 1945 the occupying British armies

⁵⁹ See the homepage of the Carinthian Defenders: www.kab.or.at, Accessed March 12th, 2013.

⁶⁰ "Verbrechen der Partisanen", http://www.kab.or.at/?id=ui_partisanen, Accessed March 12th, 2013.

forcibly prevented further revenge executions by the partisans from being realized.

Although many Austrians who actively resisted the Nazi regime in Carinthia worked together with Slovenian partisan units, the *Kärntner Traditionsverbände* portray both groups as enemies of freedom and the *Heimat*. No mention is made of the many atrocities committed by Carinthians under the flag of the swastika in Slovenia during the brutal occupation of 1941-1944. The website of the KAB chronicles the many supposedly unfair privileges awarded to the Slovenian minority still living in Carinthia today while championing the memory of those German-speaking Carinthians “murdered by Tito-partisans”. A memorial in central Klagenfurt prominently placed on the cathedral square was set up in 1990 dedicated to their memory. As this chapter will continue to demonstrate, the central currents of ethnic German nationalism and glorification of militarism are commonalities seen across the board in the organizations supporting the *Ulrichsberg*.

Plaques for Ethnic German Societies (*Volksdeutsche Landsmannschaften*) were erected in 1987 with the help of various organizations representing the rights of ethnic Germans forcibly deported from eastern Europe in accordance with post-war border settlements agreed by the Allies.⁶¹ Known collectively as “homeland exiles” (*Heimatvertriebene*) this diverse group includes Sudetenlanders, Lower Styrians, and *Siebenbürger* Germans and is represented on the *Ulrichsberg* plaque with the symbols of the respective exiles’ organization (*Vertriebenenverbände*). These organizations refused to accept the new borders of post-war Germany and

⁶¹ Rencher, *Ulrichsberg Dokumentation*, 34.

Austria and continue to seek increased sympathy with the plight of the deportation, while conveniently failing to mention the disastrous effects of ruthless Nazi racial “resettlement” policies that had preceded their own traumatic experiences. The *Ulrichsberg* offered a safe place where their revisionist views could be aired and where their grievances found a welcome audience. Attempting to downplay the brutality of the wartime experience of civilians under Nazi occupation in Eastern Europe is a recurring theme in speeches held at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, particularly those that praise the “innocent” Wehrmacht.⁶²

A similar example of revisionism is the Society of Comrades Four (*Kameradschaft IV* or *K-IV*), which was founded in 1954 as one of numerous Austrian post-war right-wing organizations that attracted and collected many former National Socialists and their sympathizers. Although officially claiming to be simply “*Heimat*” oriented and representing “returnees” (*Heimkehrer*), this organization cultivated and gathered lingering Nazi sentiments in post-war Austria via their political lobbying. The *Kameradschaft IV* was composed mostly of *Waffen-SS* veterans; the “IV” referring to the claim that the *Waffen-SS* constituted a fourth part of the German military machine, after the *Wehrmacht*, *Luftwaffe*, and *Kriegsmarine*. Recognizing the *Waffen-SS* as equals of the other three parts meant that it would be accorded the myth of honour and innocence long upheld in the postwar era for these parts. Under threat of a ban in the early 1990s, the organization disbanded itself on the national level by 1995 in order to avoid increasing public scrutiny, although many provincial chapters are still active

⁶² Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 87.

and have contributed to ceremonial wreath-laying at the *Ulrichsberg* in recent years.⁶³ The organization funds and promotes maintenance of memorial graves, holds “meetings of returnees” (*Heimkehrertreffen*), the most famous one being an annual closed door meeting that happens the night before the *Ulrichsberg* meetings in the Carinthian village of *Krumpendorf*. The *Krumpendorf* meeting has been attended by high-profile figures active in the Neo-Nazi community such as Gudrun Burwitz, the daughter of Heinrich Himmler, and received increased scrutiny when Jörg Haider’s presence in the 1990s became a public scandal exploited by his political opponents.

The influence of the K-IV’s ideology is evident in one particular speech that the acting UBG president Rudolf Gallob made at the 2005 *Ulrichsberg* meeting where he wanted to make a clear distinction between the field combat *Waffen-SS* and the SS “Death Head” (*Totenkopf*) divisions responsible for manning extermination camps.⁶⁴ “The *Waffen-SS* were soldiers and are thus welcome on the *Ulrichsberg*”(Die *Waffen-SS* waren soldaten und sie sind am *Ulrichsberg* gerne willkommen) Similarly, the slogan seen on their plaque at the *Ulrichsberg*: “*Des Soldaten Ehre ist seine Treue*” (A Soldier’s honour is his loyalty) is a deliberate rewording of the official *Waffen-SS* motto/slogan; “*Unsere Ehre heisst treue*” (Our honour is called loyalty), a phrase considered illegal under the Austrian anti-fascist laws enacted in 1947.⁶⁵ Recently the K-IV split

⁶³“Rechtsextreme Organisationen: Kameradschaft IV,” *Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes*, <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/rechtsextreme-organisationen/kameradschaft-iv-k-iv-die-kameradschaft>, Accessed April 13th, 2013.

⁶⁴ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 232.

⁶⁵ Plaque of Kameradschaft-IV. See Figure 3.

apart from the larger, more liberal League of Comrades (*Kameradschaftsbund*), which now sees itself as a “strictly anti-fascist organization”⁶⁶.

Appearing regularly at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, the Austrian League of Comrades (*Kameradschaftsbund* or ÖKB) is a traditional right-wing club formed in 1953 “to cultivate camaraderie and promote the memory of the dead”⁶⁷, according to its current website. With over 200,000 members the ÖKB is one of largest such organizations in Austria and is closely tied to the Austrian military. Besides publicly supporting the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings as peaceful meetings meant to promote “the brotherhood of all peoples and to warn against the destruction of war and terror”⁶⁸, the ÖKB also helps organize the controversial annual Viennese WKR-ball, an event that has drawn hundreds of anti-fascist protesters. Leftist critics accuse the event of serving as a prime networking opportunity for right-wing extremists (*Rechtsextremisten*) each year. In fact, the protests often become so heated that Viennese police are forced to physically protect ball guests from the verbal assaults of angry protesters.⁶⁹ Such criticism of the ÖKB is not unfounded: although it claims to be apolitical, the ÖKB clearly sided with the FPÖ in vigorously protesting the recent decision by the federal government to install a public memorial to *Wehrmacht* deserters in central

⁶⁶ “Eklat beim Kameradschaftsbund,” *Kleine Zeitung*, April 23rd, 2011.

⁶⁷ Official Website of League of Comrades: <http://www.okb.at/>, Accessed March 12th, 2013.

⁶⁸ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 87.

⁶⁹ The WKR ball was run by the Wiener Korporationsring, a collective of Burschenschaftler and right-wing fraternities. It also attracted other European right-wing politicians like Marine Le Pen. The ball has been renamed after +8000 protesters in 2012 forced a name change, despite these actions, 3000 continued to protest the new “*Akademiker Ball*” in Jan 2013. See “Massenprotest gegen den Akademikerball,” *Der Standard*, February 2nd, 2013.

Vienna.⁷⁰ Praised by the Vienna Jewish Cultural Council (*Jüdische Kultusgemeinde Wien*) and the Austrian left, the concept of a deserter memorial (*Deserteurer-Denkmal*) encountered fierce opposition from the right.

Many of the organizations on the *Ulrichsberg* share the ÖKB's emphasis on camaraderie. Comradeship (*Kameradschaft*) is a powerful "buzz word" of the *Ulrichsberg* scene along with "returnees" (*Heimkehrer*). Indeed, the entrance to the church is adorned with a copy of a sculpture by Hitler's favourite artist Arno Breker entitled "Comrades" (*Kameraden*).⁷¹ This relief sculpture shows two men of supposedly perfect Aryan physical attributes characteristic of Nazi realist art, in a display of loyalty and compassion.⁷² The copy was a personal gift from Arno Breker and its original was designed for Hitler's unrealized monumental architectural plans for Berlin in 1940. According to Peter Adams, Breker's depiction of male nudes "represented the ideal of the Aryan race, embodying the virtues of the regime: comradeship, discipline, obedience, steeliness, and courage. It was not just an ideal of beauty, it was an ideal of being".⁷³ The costs for its installation were paid for by the HIAG (see below) and the UBG. Historian Walter Fanta also sees the presence of the relief as a clear indication that the basis of *Ulrichsberg* commemoration is to be found in the ideology of the Third Reich.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ "Kein Denkmal für Deserteure," *Website of Österreichischer Kameradschaftsbund*: http://www.okb.at/index.php?page=startseite&land_id=0&artikel=240, Accessed May 1st, 2013. See also "Wiener Deserteursdenkmal Wiener Deserteursdenkmal: Im Sommer sollen Künstler feststehen," *Der Standard*, November 29th, 2012.

⁷¹ Arnold Breker's Relief Sculpture "Kameraden". See Figure 4.

⁷² "Relief Kameraden," Website of *Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens*: <http://www.u-berg.at/texte/foto20.htm>, Accessed February 16th, 2013.

⁷³ Peter Adams, *The Art of the Third Reich*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1995): 178.

⁷⁴ Sima and Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*, 25.

In a similar spirit of comradeship, the Fraternity Clubs (*Burschenschaften*) of Austria and Germany have been a stable aspect of the conservative political scene in both countries with a definite affinity for, if not direct link with, more radical right organizations like the *Kameradschaft IV*. The Austrian *Burschenschaften* are also heavily involved in the annual Viennese WKR-ball, representing the most youthful component of these celebrations. *Burschenschaftler*, as their members are referred to, regularly attend the *Ulrichsberg* meetings with large and colourful banners.⁷⁵ Representing some of the most youthful elements present on the mountain, they see themselves as continuing traditions of militarism, ethnic German nationalism (often replaced by or conflated with Austrian patriotism) and comradeship.

Although the aforementioned right-wing organizations are a part of the *Ulrichsberg* scene, they do not form the most controversial aspects of the site, in the form of associations directly affiliated with elements of the former National Socialist state. One such association with a particularly striking link is the “Protection League for former Labour Service Members” (*Schutzverband ehemaliger Arbeitsdienstangehörige*) which has a plaque in the center of the *Ulrichsberg* church to commemorate the fallen members of the compulsory labour service of the Nazi regime known as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD). Towards the end of the war the RAD was increasingly used for manning anti-aircraft defences and even direct combat on the eastern front. It is one of the few organizations commemorated at the *Ulrichsberg* with little or no officially documented war crimes. The men who served in the RAD were mostly forcibly conscripted unlike

⁷⁵“51. Ulrichsberg-Gedenkfeier in Kärnten,” *Burschenschaftliche Blätter*, September 1st, 2011.

those of the *Waffen-SS*, which had many volunteers. However, the RAD is an organization banned under the 1947 anti-fascist laws thereby technically rendering their commemorative plaque illegal. The plaque bears the words “*Arbeit Adelt*” (Work Ennobles), a slogan eerily reminiscent of the infamous concentration camp slogan “*Arbeit macht Frei*”.

Yet another German group with a direct link to the Nazi past is the euphemistically named “Aid Society on Behalf” (*Hilfsorganisation auf Gegenseitigkeit [der ehemaligen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS]* or HIAG). This organization was founded in West Germany in 1951 to promote the rights and privileges denied to *Waffen-SS* veterans as a result of the aftermath of the Nuremberg trials stamping of the *Waffen-SS* as a criminal organization.⁷⁶ Feeling themselves as victims of the justice imposed by the allied victors, the organization actively promoted a revisionist view of the *Waffen-SS* as a noble fighting force acting only in German interests in conjunction with the myth of the innocent Wehrmacht. With over 20,000 members at its height the organization succeeded in extending pension benefits to include *Waffen-SS* veterans alongside Wehrmacht veterans. Although this number represents only 8% of all *Waffen-SS* veterans living in West Germany in the late 1950s, the intense lobbying it practiced convinced politicians on both left and right to accept their demands.⁷⁷

According to Karsten Wilke’s study, the HIAG also actively campaigned to free

⁷⁶ Karsten Wilke “Organisierte Veteranen der *Waffen-SS* zwischen Systemopposition und Integration - Die ‘Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen *Waffen-SS*’ (HIAG) in der frühen Bundesrepublik” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 53, no. 2, (2005): 149-160.

⁷⁷ “Zeitgeschichte: Brauner Bluff,” *Der Spiegel*, October 17th, 2011.

imprisoned Waffen-SS men, arguing that they represented members of an “anti-Bolshevik group”, a convincing argument amidst the escalating Cold War.⁷⁸ Since 1956 the HIAG has also published a monthly magazine, “The Volunteer” (*Der Freiwillige*), which highlights the combat achievements of the Waffen-SS and glorifies their military ethos and discipline. Numerous articles on international volunteer segments of the Waffen-SS feature in this magazine indicating that readership extends beyond the borders of modern Germany and Austria.⁷⁹ Periodic links to the magazine also appear on the Facebook page of the UBG. Their members have attended the *Ulrichsberg* meetings since 1976, often arriving by bus from Germany.⁸⁰ By the 1990’s the organization came under increasing criticism in the wake of the general shift towards a more critical understanding of the past in Austrian and German society, forcing it to disband in 1992. However, regional HIAG representatives continued to make regular appearances at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, even after the national organization was disbanded. One image of the 2003 *Ulrichsberg* gatherings shows an aging HIAG member proudly waving the flag of a Saxon chapter of the organization while seated on the benches set up for the spectators to watch the ceremonies.⁸¹

Numerous images from the *Ulrichsberg* meetings also reveal veterans wearing their military decorations, some of which signify their membership in a particular organization. The plaque for the “Community of Bearers of the

⁷⁸ Wilke, “Die ‘Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit’ - Veteranen der Waffen-SS in der Bundesrepublik”, 159.

⁷⁹ See website of the publisher of *Der Freiwillige*: http://www.nordland-verlag.com/contents/en-uk/d17_01.html, Accessed April 12th, 2013.

⁸⁰ HIAG Monthly Publication: “*Der Freiwillige*” (Print Edition), (1/2003): 29.

⁸¹ Rencher, *Ulrichsberg Dokumentation*, 23. See Figure 5.

Knight's Cross" (*Ordensgemeinschaft der Ritterkreuzträger* or ORD), founded in 1955, commemorates recipients of the prestigious Knight's Cross award, the display of which was prohibited under Allied occupation. The bearers of the Knight's Cross were hailed as the best military heroes under Hitler and the ORD worked vigorously to promote myths of the "clean" Wehrmacht as being essentially divorced from National Socialist crimes. Their website, *www.das-ritterkreuz.de*, features a special section dedicated to the 1944 Stauffenberg assassination attempt on Hitler, long upheld as an image of the supposed innocence of the Wehrmacht. One of the most famous holders of this honour was the deceased Luftwaffe ace, Walter Nowotny, whose grave in Vienna is also a gathering place for annual commemorative celebrations attracting the regular fixtures of the radical right scene.⁸²

Another veteran's organization with a significant connection to the *Ulrichsberg* meetings is the Society of Mountain Infantry (*Gebirgsjäger Verein*) which was formed in the early 1950s to commemorate the unique contributions of the Austrian and Bavarian mountain troops to the Nazi war effort. Blasius Scheucher, the first president of the UBG after its founding in 1957 (and father of Harald Scheucher, mayor of Klagenfurt 1997 to 2006) was a member of the *Gebirgsjäger* and saw to it that sufficient plaques were added to the church to glorify the accomplishments of Hitler's special alpine troops.⁸³ The glorification of "Alpine" operations conducted by these troops as part of the *Wehrmacht* in

⁸² "Geschichtsnachhilfe für die FPÖ", *Der Standard*, May 4th, 2011.

⁸³ Ulfried Burz, *Kärnten: von der deutschen Grenzmark zum österreichischen Bundesland*, (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1998): 35.

Greece, Yugoslavia and the Caucasus is problematic because of the many incidents of civilian massacres (known in Nazi military jargon as “anti-partisan actions”) in these theaters of the war. For example, the 1st *Gebirgsjäger* Division was responsible for the execution of 5,000 Italian soldiers on Cephalonia. The Society of Mountain Infantry is still active today in promoting the camaraderie amongst specialized mountain soldiers and continues to maintain connections to the modern Austrian army’s mountain divisions.

Among other plaques dedicated to specific parts of the German military is the plaque for the Paratroopers (*Fallschirmjäger*) commemorating another unit involved in atrocities in Greece. This plaque shows the symbol of the Luftwaffe’s paratroopers, which in its original depicts an eagle holding a swastika in its claws. For the plaque, however, the swastika was removed so as not to conflict with the 1947 *Verbotsgesetz* (officially banning the NSDAP and all its symbols) and the 1960 *Abzeichengesetz*. This deliberate removal of incriminating symbols is also found on the plaque for an undefined “Doctor’s Academy Berlin-Graz”.

The plaque for the “Members of the Academy of Physicians Berlin-Graz” (*Angehörigen der ärztlichen Akademie Berlin-Graz*) is actually dedicated to a training facility for SS-doctors, several of which served at Mauthausen concentration camp in upper Austria. The plaque also contains the medical symbol of the facility, albeit with the SS runes removed.⁸⁴ The wording commemorates physicians of both wars who “lost their lives in brutal fashion in

⁸⁴ Helmut Gekle, “Schatten der Vergangenheit. Die Rolle der Medizinischen Fakultät während des NS-Regimes” *Unizeit Karl-Franzens Universität*, Vol. 4 (2000): 2.

service to the homeland”⁸⁵, a deliberate attempt to gloss over the heinous crimes associated with medicine in the Third Reich, particularly the T-4 Euthanasia program, of which Austria harboured a major facility in Hartheim, Upper Austria.⁸⁶ The “Academy of Physicians” mentioned in the plaque was actually the “SS Physicians Academy” (*SS-Ärztliche Akademie*), established in 1937 in Berlin and transferred to Graz in 1940.⁸⁷ The facility educated, among others, a notorious SS doctor responsible for forced sterilizations and abortions, and whose name is controversially immortalized in a street in the Carinthian capital; “*Dr. Franz Palla Gasse*”.⁸⁸ Indeed, post-war Carinthia was infamous for harbouring former Nazi physicians that had been prematurely released from prison. One example of this was Sigbert Ramsauer, a notorious camp physician that worked at both Dachau and Mauthausen, was sentenced to life in prison by a British tribunal for the execution of prisoners via the direct bodily injection of petrol, yet served only seven years of his sentence before effortlessly resuming his medical career at a hospital in Klagenfurt by 1954.⁸⁹ The tacit acceptance of such crimes via a cultural consensus that rejected foreign attempts at administering justice was a defining aspect of Austrian, and particularly Carinthian, society after the war.

2.2- Foreign Volunteers of the Waffen-SS on the *Ulrichsberg*

⁸⁵ Plaque of “Members of the Physicians Academy Berlin-Graz” (*Angehörigen der ärztlichen Akademie Berlin-Graz*). See Figure 6.

⁸⁶ Ernst Klee, *Deutsche Medizin im Dritten Reich. Karrieren vor und nach 1945*, (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2001): 56.

⁸⁷ Alois Kernbauer, *Die SS-Ärztliche Akademie*, (Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 2013)

⁸⁸“Strassennamen unter Beschuss,” *Kleine Zeitung*, April 25th, 2012.

⁸⁹ Lisa Retzl and Pirker Perker, „*Ich war mit Freuden dabei.*“ *Der KZ-Arzt Sigbert Ramsauer – Eine österreichische Geschichte*. (Wien: Milena-Verlag, 2010): 23.

Perhaps the most controversial organizations involved in the *Ulrichsberg* meetings are those from other European countries. The plaques erected by these organizations honour the direct contribution to the Nazi war effort of foreign SS volunteers, while never explicitly stating this intent. Primarily consisting of former SS veterans and their sympathizers, these organizations specifically commemorate the sacrifice of their fallen comrades in a war that suited their own interests, thus making the best case for the argument that the *Ulrichsberg* necessarily glorifies National Socialism. The Third Reich found many allies in the countries they occupied (particularly in eastern Europe) and thousands volunteered to participate in the monumental struggle against the Soviet Union. For the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, the presence of numerous foreigners that made the annual journey to Carinthia helped legitimize the gathering in its first decades amidst a widespread Cold War political climate of anti-communism.

One staunch anti-Soviet organization was the Latvian Legion (term for the Latvian volunteers forming the 15th and 19th Waffen-SS divisions), with an installed plaque in the interior of the *Ulrichsberg* church displaying its characteristic diagonal-white-stripe-on-a-red-background symbol and bearing the vague wording; “in memory of the 60000 Latvian soldiers who fell on the eastern front and who perished in extermination camps” (*In Erinnerung an die 60000 Lettischen Soldaten die an der Ostfront gefallen und in Vernichtungslagern umgekommen sind*).⁹⁰ Although this clever wording conjures up images of Nazi extermination camps via the use of the word *Vernichtungslager*, it is clear that

⁹⁰ Plaque of the Latvian Legion. See Figure 7.

this plaque commemorates those who lost their lives fighting for the Third Reich against the Soviet Union. The camps the inscription refers to were actually the Gulag system in Siberia with its infamously slim survival chances, especially for those identified as *Waffen-SS* members. Stalin dealt ruthlessly with enemy collaborators and Latvians who had fought for the Nazis would certainly have been imprisoned or killed. Latvian volunteer SS units were notorious for helping the infamous *Einsatzgruppen* and roaming the countryside to look for the few Jews left alive long after the mass shootings had ended. After the end of the Cold war, veterans of the Latvian Legion were able to openly hold a public annual commemoration in the centre of the Latvian capital Riga, restyling their wartime contributions as heroic resistance against Soviet oppressors.⁹¹ The Latvian Legion is now considered a symbol of Latvia's struggle for independence and its genesis as a *Waffen-SS* unit remains a contested issue.

The plaques of the foreign SS volunteers located on the *Ulrichsberg* are all carefully worded so as to make no mention of the cause they were so nobly supporting with all their thousands of sacrificed lives. The plaque of the Flemish SS-Volunteer veterans bears the words (both in German and in Flemish) "In memory of the 5000 fallen Flemish volunteers...dedicated to their former *Garnisonsstadt* Klagenfurt by the grateful *Heimkehrer* in Flanders". The nearly identically worded plaque dedicated to Danish SS-Volunteer veterans hangs a few metres to the left. Both mention Klagenfurt as the city where they performed their military service although it is left up to the viewer to decide for whom this service

⁹¹ Mark A. Jubulis., review of "The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents", by Mirdza Kate Baltais. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2000): 96-97.

was rendered. Incidentally Klagenfurt hosted both an SS barracks and an SS officer training school built by inmates of the nearby Loibl-Pass Concentration camp, a sub-camp of Mauthausen. One of the most infamous of members of the Danish SS volunteers, Søren Kam, was a regular guest at both the closed door *Krumpendorf* and the open-air *Ulrichsberg* meetings.⁹² Kam has long been on the Simon Wiesenthal Center's "List of most wanted Nazi War Criminals" and also attended an SS training facility in the Carinthian capital of Klagenfurt. Another plaque from Norway and a further one from the Netherlands similarly thank their "former garrison city".

Another case of curiously vague rewording is exhibited by the plaque of the Spanish fascist volunteers known as the "*División Azul*", which was incorporated into the Wehrmacht in 1941 and fought on the eastern front.⁹³ It commemorates "5000 Spanish volunteers who fell on the eastern front and perished in Soviet extermination camps".⁹⁴ This plaque openly uses the term *Sowjetische Vernichtungslager* to describe the horrific conditions in POW camps for German prisoners, although it fails to mention that the term extermination camp was invented by the Nazi regime for camps built specifically as death factories to murder Jews; ie Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek, Belzec, and Chelmno. Nor is there any mention of the millions of Soviet POWs that were deliberately starved to death in German camps during the summer and fall of 1941. The Spanish fascist volunteers also took part in the notoriously brutal siege

⁹² Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 94-95.

⁹³ David Wingate Pike. "Franco and the Axis Stigma." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Jul., 1982): 369-407.

⁹⁴ See Plaque of Spanish Fascists "Division Azul" in Ulrichsberg church. See Figure 8.

of Leningrad.⁹⁵ Undoubtedly for many visitors to the *Ulrichsberg* the term *Vernichtungslager* conjures up many well-known images of gas chambers, trains and selection ramps that are then subtly transposed onto the Soviet side, thereby completely misrepresenting historical records.

The infamous Croatian fascist group, the *Ustaša*, also maintains a special connection to the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings. During the occupation of Yugoslavia the *Ustaša* collaborated with the Germans in running concentration camps (for example *Jasenovac* Concentration Camp) and fighting Tito's partisans. The plaque installed by the *Ustaša* in the early 1990s bears the white-and-red-checked symbol of Croatia and the words "To the Croatian Countrymen that fell in loyal fulfillment of their duties. May 15th, 1945 Bleiburg" ("*Den Kroatischen Landsleuten die in treuer Pflichterfüllung gefallen sind*" 15. Mai, 1945 *Bleiburg*).⁹⁶ The loyal fulfillment of duties referred to in this plaque is the collaboration with the Nazi regime from 1941-1945. "Doing one's duty" is itself a very common trope invoked by many low-ranking NSDAP members (particularly at the Nuremberg Trials!) to explain away their criminal actions during the war. The word "Bleiburg", a village in southern Carinthia, refers to the so-called "*Bleiburg* Repatriation", an incident that occurred on May 14th, 1945 when a fleeing *Ustaša* army that surrendered to the British in Carinthia was extradited to partisan-controlled Yugoslavia.⁹⁷ This resulted in a bloody revenge massacre committed by the partisans seeking the death of the *Ustaša* Nazi collaborators,

⁹⁵ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht: Hitler's Ausländische Helfer beim Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus 1941-1945*, (Berlin: CH Links Verlag, 2007): 119.

⁹⁶ Croatian Plaque Inscription in Ulrichsberg church. See Figure 9.

⁹⁷ Christopher Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy. The Controversy Over the Repatriations from Austria in 1945*, (London: Duckworth Publishers, 1997): 46.

who had often helped point out villages eradicated in draconian “anti-partisan operations” (a common Nazi euphemism for civilian massacres) all over Yugoslavia. Many *Ustaša* members attended *Ulrichsberg* meetings during the Cold War and, similar to the Latvian Legion’s experience after the collapse of the Soviet Union, enjoyed greater recognition after Croatia’s independence and Tito’s death.⁹⁸ They continue to attend the meetings today and also hold a smaller annual gathering in the village of Bleiburg itself. Carinthia also harboured accused war criminal and prominent Croatian collaborator Milivoj Ašner (aka Georg Aschner) who fled Croatia after the war and remained on the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s list until his recent death in 2011.⁹⁹

The Bleiburg repatriations mirrored the experience of another foreign volunteer military unit that is immortalized on the Ulrichsberg. The plaque for the 15th Cossack Cavalry Regiment commemorates the surrender of this unit in Carinthia to the British although it only contains symbols and the abbreviation of the division, along with the name of the commander who was executed as a traitor in Moscow in 1947.¹⁰⁰ The British in turn proceeded to hand them over to the Red Army, who punished them severely for their role in atrocities committed against civilians in Yugoslavia during “anti-partisan operations”.¹⁰¹ The unit was formed from mostly Ukrainian Cossack volunteers who gladly participated in the war

⁹⁸ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 179.

⁹⁹ “Asner in Klagenfurt verstorben,” *Der Standard*, June 20th, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht: Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim „Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus“ 1941–1945*, 238.

¹⁰¹ For further reading see: Julius Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul: the Story of Forced Repatriation from 1944 to the Present*. (Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair Company, 1973) and Stefan Karner, “Zur Auslieferung der Kosaken an die Sowjets 1945 in Judenburg”, in: Johann Andritsch, *Judenburg 1945 in Augenzeugenberichten*. (Judenburg: Judenburger Museumsschriften XII. 1994): 243–259.

against the Soviet Union.¹⁰² This regiment is of considerable interest mainly because the former owner of the *Ulrichsberg* grounds, Duke Leopold Goëss (died 2005), was one of the officers who served in this division. Shortly before his death he gave a last speech at the *Ulrichsberg* meeting in 2005 that is now immortalized in a huge plaque hanging on the outside wall at the entrance of the church. In it he proclaims the holiness of the mountain, its centuries' worth of history, and denies that any hero worship takes place on his property: "This is not a Heroes' Monument. Very few of us wanted to be heroes, above all we wanted to go home"¹⁰³ ("Es ist keine *Heldengedenkstätte*, und hier sei vermerkt dass kaum einer von uns ein Held werden wollte. Wir wollten alle vor allem nach Hause"). In another part of this speech that is not recalled in the plaque, Goëss seeks to correct "misunderstandings that have crept up around the Ulrichsberg" (*Einige Missverständnisse den Ulrichsberg betreffend eingeschlichen*) by stressing that the "joyful return" (*glückliche Heimkehr*) of soldiers is the only purpose of the meetings.¹⁰⁴ The plaque also mentions his assertion that "the pain caused by an SS-Man's or a Wehrmacht soldier's death is always the same". (*Das Leid, welches der gefallene SS-Mann oder der gefallene Wehrmachtsangehörige mit seinem Tod verursacht, ist immer das Gleiche.*) This sentence is a subtle allusion to the efforts of the Kameradschaft-IV and the HIAG to put the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht in the same category, although it would not be perceived as such

¹⁰² Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht. Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim „Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus“ 1941–1945*, 207-212.

¹⁰³ Plaque on exterior of Ulrichsberg church detailing speech of Leopold Goëss. See Figure 10.

¹⁰⁴ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 55. See also website of Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens: <http://www.u-berg.at/archiv2005/goess.htm>, Accessed March 12th, 2013.

by less-well informed members of the Ulrichsberg audience. The plaque plays an important role in helping legitimize the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings in the eyes of visitors to the site by portraying them as being dedicated to peace and the sacrifice of “simple returnees”.¹⁰⁵ Although the Ulrichsberg meetings can easily be seen as a justified memorialization of painful losses, the background of the majority of organizations suggest otherwise, as I have shown in this chapter. Incidentally, there are no plaques that commemorate the countless victims of the National Socialist regime, nor are there any that speak to the role of Allied armies in liberating Europe from Hitler.

¹⁰⁵ See speech of Waffen-SS Veteran Herbert Belschan von Mildenburg at 2012 Ulrichsberg meetings: “I speak as simply a returnee...” (*Ich spreche als simpler Heimkehrer...*) in “Mitglied der Waffen-SS hielt doch Ansprache bei Ulrichsbergtreffen,” *Der Standard*, September 16th, 2012.

CHAPTER 3 – PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

3.1 – “Keep the Occident in Christian Hands” (*Abendland in Christenhand*) : The *Ulrichsberg*’s relationship to Christian Tradition

The highly emotional subject of public memorials is often tied to religious institutions, especially when a society is rooted in one dominant spiritual tradition. Although the *Ulrichsberg* is now primarily known for its use as a secular site, its religious elements still form a significant part of the experience of attending one of the meetings. The blessings provided by the priest are instrumental in positioning the event in the center of cultural acceptability. Similarly, the symbolic aspects of the Christian spiritual heritage manifested in the church ruins themselves are merely a convenient backdrop for what many see as a pilgrimage of right-wing extremists and *Waffen* SS-Veterans who have effectively made this site into a shrine to the memory of the supposedly positive features of National Socialism. In Austria, the Catholic Church, as in many other European countries, forms a solid cultural base on which Austrian identity is built. Around the birth of the Second Republic almost 90% of Austrians were registered Catholics¹⁰⁶ and thus it is no surprise that war memorials were often set up on church property, on cemeteries adjacent to churches or even inside the churches themselves. For example, the famous *Votivkirche* in Vienna houses many memorial plaques including one dedicated specifically to the Austrians who died in Stalingrad while

¹⁰⁶ Federal Statistics Austria, *Bevölkerung nach dem Religionsbekenntnis der Bundesländer 1951 bis 2001*, (Wien: Statistik Austria, 2002).

serving in the *Wehrmacht*. Not surprisingly the maintenance of Christian values is one of the main issues that the FPÖ claims is under attack by “Islamization” (*Islamisierung*).¹⁰⁷ As part of a campaign to appeal to young voters in 2010, current FPÖ leader H.C. Strache recorded a political song that included the lyrics “people’s representatives instead of traitors, [keep] the Occident in Christian hands” (*Volksvertreter statt Verräter, Abendland in Christenhand*).¹⁰⁸ Although the first phrase was a simple jab at the ruling ÖVP/SPÖ coalition not keeping its election promises, the second phrase, despite referring specifically to the increasing presence of Islamic immigrants in Vienna, also draws on clear traditions of xenophobia that unites the FPÖ with its National Socialist origins. Similarly, veterans visiting the *Ulrichsberg* often perceived the role of the *Waffen-SS* as the courageous defenders of Christian Europe against the godless Bolshevik hordes of the East. The Occident (*Abendland*) is by definition Christian and therefore the history of the *Ulrichsberg* site, along with the haunting power of the ruined church, evokes cultural memories of a land under siege.

The undeniable fact that Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union was purely a war of aggression and intended annihilation (*Vernichtungskrieg*) is steadfastly denied by the kind of revisionism practiced at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, as shown in the poem at the beginning of this paper.¹⁰⁹ Just like St. Ulrich of Augsburg’s legendary defense against the heathen Magyars, SS-veterans and their

¹⁰⁷“Strache will Kanzler der Herzen werden”, *Der Standard*, May 1st, 2012.

¹⁰⁸“Europäischer Rechtsruck: Auftritt der Anti-Euro Krieger”, *Der Spiegel*, April 18th, 2011.

¹⁰⁹“Rechtsextreme Organisationen: Zitate der Kameradschaft IV”, *Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstands*, <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/rechtsextreme-organisationen/kameradschaft-iv-k-iv-die-kameradschaft/zitate>, Accessed April 19th, 2013.

sympathizers tend to view the war as a necessary evil that was above all a pre-emptive defensive war waged against the threat of barbaric eastern Bolshevism, against the Slavs, and ultimately against “pagans”. Both Hitler and the FPÖ used this entrenched cultural antagonism towards the east to their advantage. To illustrate just how familiar the average Austrian is with a negative image of the east is exemplified by the common legend ascribed to the colours on the Austrian flag. According to this myth, which has several different versions, the flag stems from the white surcoat of a 12th century prominent Austrian noble that had returned from a Crusade in the Holy Land. He was supposedly drenched in blood after fighting a particularly brutal battle against the infidels threatening Jerusalem and when he removed his broad belt he realized that underneath was the only remaining white.¹¹⁰ Legend has it that his troops were so inspired by the sight of the vibrant colours that he decided to permanently adopt the image as a symbol of his Austrian homeland. Whether there is any truth in this story is irrelevant as its significance lies in the lasting cultural imprint the myth has on the Austrian view of the world (*Weltanschauung*).¹¹¹ Since the legend that every Austrian child learns about the making of the national flag consists of a fundamental conflict between east and west, it is not surprising how effective the FPÖ’s anti-Islamist campaigns are in attracting voters. Nor is it a coincidence that the *Ulrichsberg*’s religious foundations are steeped in the same defensive tradition. By choosing the *Ulrichsberg* as a site for holding annual meetings, the UBG and its supporters provided a spiritually rooted place of pilgrimage for right-wing extremists

¹¹⁰ Peter Diem, *Rot-Weiß-Rot durch die Jahrhunderte: die Geschichte der Österreichischen Nationalfarben*, (Wien: Ouldenburg Verlag, 1976): 15.

¹¹¹ Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003): 35.

wishing to honour [what they saw as] modern-day defenders of Western Christendom.

The *Ulrichsberg* gatherings always included a short mass conducted by a local Catholic priest, and sometimes also included Protestant preachers. The speeches made by the priests were generally apolitical and emphasized peace among all God's peoples, the general horrors of war, and the importance of keeping alive the Christian faith.¹¹² For example, at the 2008 meetings the priest opened with the words "to carry the peace in our hearts out into the world, that is our duty not only as Comrades, as Soldiers, but also as Christians". (*Im Herzen den Frieden in die Welt zu tragen, das ist unsere Aufgabe als Kamerad, als Soldat aber auch als Christ*) The sermons also draw on a strong sense of duty to upholding tradition (*Traditionspflicht*), an aspect that the UBG and its affiliated organizations champion. In the same 2008 sermon the local priest (name unknown) emphasized that "Carinthia, Austria, and Europe should safeguard its history, its values, and its traditions alongside the fundamental base of our Occident, the Christian faith" (*Kärnten, Österreich und Europa sollen sich die Geschichte bewahren, sollen sich die Werte bewahren, die Traditionen und letztlich auch das Fundament unseres Abendlandes, den christlichen Glauben*).¹¹³ By combining the idea of a secular duty of upholding tradition (*Traditionspflicht*) and loyalty to the nationalist homeland with a distinctly Christian heritage, the

¹¹² Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 60.

¹¹³ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 61.

UBG and its affiliates are able to legitimate their commemorative activities as an unassuming part of the cultural landscape.

The masses given at each *Ulrichsberg* meeting also position the meetings within the larger Austrian cultural practice of local “Heroes’ Honourings” (*Heldenehrungen*) that are held annually in most towns and villages.¹¹⁴ Despite their questionable titles, these ceremonies are held on the Catholic holiday All Saints Day without controversy (about a month after the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, depending on the year) and involve the gathering of veterans and their families to commemorate the fallen. The sermon of the local priest is central to these ceremonies, which are held in cemeteries or around cenotaphs. Unlike the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, however, these ceremonies do not involve delegations from international neo-fascist organizations, nor do they contain physical homages to Nazi volunteers from other nations. Nevertheless, the defenders of the *Ulrichsberg* are able to portray their event as just another “Heroes’ honouring” (*Heldenehrung*) since both are legitimated by the blessings of priests and the support of local communities. Although these localized ceremonies are arguably controversial themselves due to their portrayal of the fallen as defenders of the Austrian homeland, examining them in detail is beyond the scope of this study.

¹¹⁴ Heidemarie Uhl, “Perspektivenwechsel auf die Vergangenheit: Waldheim und die Folgen,” *Zeitschrift des Zeitgeschichtlichen Museums der KZ-Gedenkstätte Ebensee*, vol. 82, (July 2007): 12-21.

3.2 – The Cross on the Mountain: Christianity and High-Elevation War Memorials

For many Europeans, cultural and Christian traditions are synonymous with one another and, for Austrians in particular, a third identifier of tradition in the form of mountains needs to be examined. Indeed, as Peter Utgaard notes, Austria sought to assert a new post-war identity free of National Socialist associations by focusing on “mountains and music”.¹¹⁵ The beauty of mountains was emphasized in everything from the new national anthem to a booming tourist industry that expressed love of the homeland (*Heimatliebe*) in these terms. Putting memorials on mountains was thus a reassertion of pre-National Socialist traditions that tended to erase the uncomfortable details and disappointments of the war.¹¹⁶ Thus the mountain further serves to legitimate the Ulrichsberg as a sacred space steeped in a sense of *Heimat*. The Ulrichsberg is not the only higher elevation place of commemoration in the Alpine republic; numerous mountain memorials can be found throughout the Austrian provinces. Often placed near or as a part of the ubiquitous summit crosses (*Gipfelkreuze*) found on most Alpine peaks, these memorials ranging from simple plaques to purposely-built chapels commemorate fallen soldiers of both world wars either in general or of specific units in some instances.¹¹⁷ Summit crosses are not unique to Austria, however, and can be found

¹¹⁵Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*, 43.

¹¹⁷ See for example the Geschriebenstein site in Burgenland or the Auernig in Carinthia (Heidemarie Uhl, “Denkmäler als Medien Gesellschaftlicher Erinnerung: Die Denkmallandschaft der Zweiten Republik und die Transformation des Österreichischen Gedächtnisses” in *Nationen*

in other Alpine regions where they are also sometimes paired with memorials. As on the *Ulrichsberg* and most other Austrian war memorials, the dead from both World Wars are usually lumped together in one commemorative action in order to express continuity of remembrance without any references to victims of the Nazi regime.

Furthermore, the summit cross (*Gipfelkreuz*) is a powerful symbol of Christianity that marks the highest point of elevation in a particular region. It is thus unsurprising that war memorials were often placed at these sites where visitors would feel the elation of having victoriously ascended a mountain and Christian believers would feel nearer to God through a perceived closeness to heaven as the place of the afterlife where the souls of the fallen were believed to reside. The cross of the returnees (*Heimkehrerkreuz*) on the *Ulrichsberg* outside the church actually serves the same function as a traditional summit cross (*Gipfelkreuz*), although it has additionally become a symbol for the site itself. The cross is featured on promotional materials for the event and the UBG Facebook page even advertises T-shirts and decals featuring the cross with an outline of the church ruins behind it.¹¹⁸ As any visitor to Alpine regions notices, summit crosses are an integral part of the tourist experience and feature prominently on brochures and postcards. By constructing the 20-m high *Heimkehrerkreuz*, essentially an exaggerated version of a summit cross, on the *Ulrichsberg*, the UBG effectively

und ihre Selbstbilder: Postdiktatorische Gesellschaften in Europa. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008): 33.

¹¹⁸ Facebook page of Ulrichsberggemeinschaft, *Ulrichsberggemeinschaft*, <https://www.facebook.com/Ulrichsbergtreffen?ref=ts&fref=ts>, Accessed March 15th, 2013.

placed the mountain in the middle of this cultural milieu so that the *Ulrichsberg* could double as a harmless tourist attraction that beautified the landscape. Since the size of Alpine summit crosses are usually proportionate to the topographic prominence of the mountain it decorates, the *Heimkehrerkreuz* represents an overly large cross, given the relative altitude of the Ulrichsberg, which rises only 500m above the Carinthian capital, Klagenfurt. Although the proliferation of summit crosses was mostly a product of 19th century mountaineering enthusiasts, the symbolic importance of Christian symbols visible far and wide cannot be underestimated.¹¹⁹ The *Heimkehrerkreuz* thus functions also as a visible reminder of past struggles against forces hostile to the Christian Occident. The legendary narrative of the *Ulrichsberg*'s sanctified namesake and his association with fighting the threats from the east can also be found in other high-elevation Austrian war memorials.

For example, one mountainous site on the border between the provinces of Styria and Lower Austria on the *Hochwechsel*, an alpine ridge that experienced heavy fighting in the last weeks of the war between fanatic *Volksturm* defenders and advancing Soviet forces, offers a compelling point of comparison to the Ulrichsberg in terms of its treatment of East/West conflicts. The *Hochwechsel* site consists of a large chapel adorned with stylized, brightly coloured murals depicting war and suffering. Alongside the names of the 47 Austrians killed during this battle, phrases such as "Occident and Orient clashed here in bitterly violent battles" (*Abend und Morgenland begegneten sich hier in erbitterten*

¹¹⁹ Claudia Mathis, *Dem Himmel nah... Von Gipfelkreuzen und Gipfelsprüchen*, (Innsbruck: Berenkamp Verlag, 2007): 10.

Kämpfen) underneath the murals invoke the history of the site as a borderland against threats of the east. Another phrase states; “Many Turkish onslaughts threatened to make the Christian Occident extinct. Salvation only came through unity in faith” (*In vielen Türkenanstürmen war das Christliche Abendland dem Untergang nahe. Rettung kam durch Einheit im Glauben*).¹²⁰ As Gingrich notes, the FPÖ also often capitalized on references such as these to further its own anti-immigration agenda.¹²¹ Other phrases emblazoned on the chapel walls mention a massacre of women and children by Turks in 1532 in a nearby village and the widespread destruction wrought by Napoleon’s troops. Only one phrase vaguely hints at the more recent calamities underneath a stylized painting of a burning tank and soldiers bearing a wounded comrade on a stretcher; „More wars followed. Also in recent times, millions of people were killed by technologically advanced weapons and irreplaceable values destroyed.“ (*Dem Krieg folgten Kriege. Auch unsere Zeit hat mit technischen Waffen Millionen Menschen getötet und unersetzliche Werte zerstört.*)¹²² No mention is made of the hundreds of Hungarian Jews forced on death marches only 50 kilometres away through eastern Styria toward Mauthausen in April 1945, or the over 200 Jews massacred in the nearby town of Rechnitz in March of the same year.¹²³ Thus, any explicit

¹²⁰ Mural on inside of Hochwechsel Memorial Chapel. See Figure 11.

¹²¹ Pelinka and Wodak eds., *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002): 41.

¹²² Mural inside Hochwechsel Memorial Chapel. See Figure 12

¹²³ “Historians dispute Journalist’s Claims: Mass Murder as Party Entertainment?”, *Der Spiegel* [International Edition], October 22nd, 2007.

reference to the Second World War is avoided, let alone the naming of Hitler or National Socialism making it similar to the Ulrichsberg in this regard.

The chapel and the plaques on the *Hochwechsel* were funded by the Austrian Society of Comrades (*Österreichischer Kameradschaftsbund*), the Austrian Black Cross (*Österreichisches Schwarze Kreuz*), and local municipal and provincial governments.¹²⁴ According to an explanatory plaque inside this chapel, a mass is held here every August by a military chaplain in honour of “the victims of both wars”, similar to the *Heldenehrungen* conducted at rural cemeteries across Austria. This conflation of both wars into one simple strategy of remembrance is strongly reminiscent of that found in most local memorials, many of them in churches or on church property. This strategy is also developed further in the content of the *Ulrichsberg* plaques that provide a clear continuity between WWI, the Carinthian Defence (*Kärntner Abwehrkampf*), and WWII.

The culturally sacred refuge of the mountain is also expressed in the example of the *Mittenwald* meetings of the famous mountain divisions (*Gebirgsjäger*) in Bavaria. Scenes similar to the *Ulrichsberg* meetings unfold here every year around a memorial featuring a large cross, built on a natural amphitheater in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps near the town of *Mittenwald*. Songs are sung, wreaths are laid, speeches are made and a priest delivers a sermon. However, these meetings are not considered as controversial as the *Ulrichsberg* meetings because there are no homages to foreign SS volunteers, undoubtedly the strongest evidence of a glorification of National Socialism. Despite this lack of incriminating activity, the *Mittenwald* meetings drew vigorous

¹²⁴ Explanatory paper framed in glass on inside of *Hochwechsel* Chapel. See Figure 13.

protests from radical antifascists over the past decade, criticizing the alleged hero worship of the *Gebirgsjäger*, whose efforts only prolonged Hitler's reign of destruction.¹²⁵ The magnificent views from the *Hochwechsel* chapel also echo the beauty of those from the *Ulrichsberg*; both places are religious and scenic sites first and commemorative second. Yet the *Ulrichsberg*, with its controversial tradition of attracting foreign delegations representing *Waffen-SS* volunteers, rises far above in both domestic and international significance.

¹²⁵“Friedliche Gedenkfeier am Hohen Brendten”, *Münchner Merkur*, May 29th, 2011.

CHAPTER 4 – THE ULRICHSBERG UNDER AUSTRIAN LAWS AGAINST FASCISM

4.1 - Austrian Denazification, the Prohibition Law and the Law of Symbols

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the newly formed Second Republic passed and implemented denazification laws almost identical to those carried out in occupied Germany. As in Germany, however, the advent of the Cold War brought a premature end to the most far-reaching of denazification efforts. In Austria in particular, the conclusion of the state treaty in 1955 brought a very abrupt end to the push to imprison all significant NSDAP members. While Germany's incorporation into NATO in the same year had also accelerated the granting of amnesty to former Nazis, the continued presence of Allied forces kept a watchful eye on political developments. Not surprisingly, the absence of direct Allied supervision in Austria following the ratification of the state treaty had significant ramifications for the ways in which Austria dealt with the memory of its recent past.

After celebrating the last departing allied troops and proclaiming Austria's "eternal neutrality", the newly minted Alpine republic focused on stability. Despite Article 9 of the treaty expressly stating that: "Austria will continue its efforts to remove all traces of Nazism from political, economic and cultural life"¹²⁶, many convicted Nazis were quietly released or had their sentences commuted.

¹²⁶ Article 9 of Austrian State Treaty, 1955. Taken from the website of the Austrian Government: <http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000265>, Accessed March 30th, 2013.

According to Simon Hirt, the state treaty “marked a turning point, after which the war and Nazi dictatorship largely ceased to be present in public and political discussions”¹²⁷. For example, just two months after the treaty’s final ratification, the mechanism of local trials (*Volksgerichte*) responsible for bringing many low-level Nazis to justice was dissolved in December of 1955. Widespread opposition to denazification measures was shared across most political parties as soon as they were implemented, (except for the Austrian Communist Party, the KPÖ), and the conclusion of the state treaty allowed the process to be almost entirely dismantled.

Initially, the majority of denazification efforts aimed at the disenfranchisement and political quarantine of former NSDAP members. Since individually trying hundreds of thousands was deemed impossible given the lack of cooperation from the Austrian population, banning them from prominent civil service positions was considered more practical. The simple questionnaire (*Fragebogen*) method also enabled many party members to classify themselves as harmless *Mitläufer*¹²⁸ by indicating that they joined National Socialist organizations against their will. Alongside asking the subject to identify their wartime professions and involvement in any Nazi organizations, the questionnaires also included a clause that allowed the subject to “state any facts indicating an anti-Nazi attitude or activity”. A sarcastic rhyme popular in both

¹²⁷ Simon Hirt, *Vom Vergeltungs- zum Verbotsgesetz: Das Verbotsgesetz im Politischen Diskurs der Nachkriegszeit 1945-1957*, (Magister-Thesis 2008, Universität Wien): 3.

¹²⁸ The German word *Mitläufer* is usually translated as “fellow-traveler” or “hanger-on” although by definition it means an opportunist who gives in to peer pressure without being ideologically convinced. See also: Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläufer Fabrik : Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*, (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1982).

Germany and Austria at this time reflects how this clause was commonly confronted: “*Und als er sich dann wiederfand, war auch er beim Widerstand*”¹²⁹ (And as he found himself again, he had [suddenly] also been with the resistance). As in Germany, the entire questionnaire process produced hundreds of thousands classified as *Mitläufer* and only a few thousand were earmarked for trials.¹³⁰ Several legislative acts over 12 years following the end of the war progressively reduced the numbers of those facing criminal persecution to a negligible amount.

This liberal interpretation and loose application of denazification laws had significant ramifications for Austrian postwar memory and commemoration practices: it became acceptable not only to stop dealing with the problems of the Nazi legacy, but for certain segments of society to quietly honour the supposedly positive aspects of the former regime, inadvertently granting permission to SS veterans seeking to positively frame and celebrate their participation in WWII. It was from this socio-political climate that the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings were born. Indeed, the cessation of overt discussion of Nazi atrocities along with the dissolution of the local trial system coincided with the start of the first official post-war *Ulrichsberg* meetings held in 1958.

Political lobbying of organizations involved in the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings also helped the implementation of several Austrian amnesty laws that progressively reduced the effects of denazification. Each one of this series of amnesty laws was targeted at a different questionnaire category. The largest of these came only three years after capitulation and was known as the “amnesty of

¹²⁹ “Nationalsozialismus: Kleiner Beamte in der Ahnengalerie des Widerstands,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 9th, 2004.

¹³⁰ Niethammer, *Die Mitläufer Fabrik : Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*, 3.

the lesser- burdened” (*Minderbelastetenamnestie*) of 1948 and exonerated more than 80% of Austria’s 700,000 registered NSDAP members. A so-called “Amnesty for late-returning POWs” (*Spätheimkehreramnestie*) was enacted in 1951¹³¹ that effectively exempted those who had spent more than four post-war years in captivity from prosecution from anything but the most serious allegations of war crimes. According to scholar Günter Bischof, the Austrian *Kameradschaftsbund*, whose presence is observed annually at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, was among the loudest voices lobbying to recognize returning POWs as victims who had simply “done their duty” and were thus free of any guilt.¹³² Finally in 1957, amid the increasing intensification of the Cold War and in light of similar moves in Germany, the “amnesty of the burdened” (*Belastetenamnestie*) cleared the remaining few from punishment, save those that had escaped abroad using false names or those who were already serving life sentences. The majority of Austrians agreed that this final measure was completely justified, given their new sovereignty, and rejoiced that this effectively rendered the entire deeply unpopular denazification process legally complete.¹³³ Factors blamed for the lack of success in prosecuting the majority of the accused include a general unwillingness on the part of the Austrian population to cooperate with imposed denazification measures and the political pressures of the rapidly escalating Cold War.

¹³¹ Hirt, *Vom Vergeltungs- zum Verbotsgesetz: Das Verbotsgesetz im Politischen Diskurs der Nachkriegszeit 1945-1957*, Magister Diplomarbeit, (Universität Wien, 2008): 91.

¹³² Günter Bischof, “Victims? Perpetrators? Punching Bags of Historical Memory? The Austrians and Their World War II Legacies”, *German Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 2004): 17-32.

¹³³ Beer, *Hunting the Discriminators: Denazification in Austria 1945-1957*, 183.

Indeed, the desire of the United States for a favourable settlement on the Austrian question that would provide a militarily neutral buffer between western democracies and the Soviet Union's eastern puppet states, yet remain ideologically orientated towards the west contributed considerably to the quick reintegration of former Nazis into Austrian society. The first post-war Ulrichsberg meetings were organized during a period of intense fear of communist aggression that threatened to spill over from Hungary and overrun the fragile and recently declared neutral Second Republic. The US thus viewed economically strong Germany and Austria as the best way to practice "containment", therefore requiring the quick reintegration of indispensable skilled officials that had been imprisoned under short-lived denazification efforts.

After 1957, effectively the only legal remnant of the entire denazification process was the "Prohibition Law" (*Verbotsgesetz*) of 1947, which described in detail what constituted the crime of "the re-engaging with Nazi beliefs" (*Wiederbetätigung*).¹³⁴ It was these laws that any commemorative activities had to abide by in order to gain widespread acceptance and operate legally. The fact that Austria also acknowledged that it would be punished by sanctions were it to fail to uphold its commitments made in the state treaty, necessitated that far-right political elements had to be disassociated with Nazism as much as possible. Thus SS-Veterans simply became "returnees" (*Heimkehrer*) or Comrades (*Kameraden*), and the *Ulrichsberg* meetings were dubbed a "festival of peace" (*Friedensfest*).¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Hirt, *Vom Vergeltungs- zum Verbotsgesetz: Das Verbotsgesetz im Politischen Diskurs der Nachkriegszeit 1945-1957*, 8.

¹³⁵ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 102.

The list of prohibited organizations banned under the Prohibition Law (*Verbotsgesetz*) included the Nazi labour service, the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. As mentioned previously, the only place in Austria where this organization was publicly commemorated was the *Ulrichsberg* via a small plaque in the interior of the church, which is still today technically illegal under the Prohibition Law.

In 1960 the *Verbotsgesetz* was amended with the passing of the Symbols Law (*Abzeichengesetz*), extending it to include the prohibition of any symbols, emblems and uniforms resembling those of the organizations banned under the 1947 prohibition law.¹³⁶ Substantial monetary fines or prison sentences for up to one month were deemed sufficient for publicly displaying uniforms or parts of uniforms of organizations strictly prohibited by the prohibition law. Before this law was passed it was legally possible to appear at *Ulrichsberg* meetings wearing an SS uniform with the runes removed, after the law even wearing the style of uniform was taboo. The law did not, however, extend to the new Austrian military force (*Bundesheer*), which participated fully in the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings. Since these visible aspects of the Nazi heritage were most likely to come under the scrutiny of international observers, the Austrian government targeted them even after the conclusion of the state treaty. This meant that from its inception the *Ulrichsberg* meetings had to appear to be divorced from the National Socialist past without offending its core right-wing constituents, hence the careful removal of incriminating symbols on certain plaques as described in previous chapters.

¹³⁶ Oliver Rathkolb and Sebastian Meissl eds., *Verdrängte Schuld, verfehlte Sühne. Entnazifizierung in Österreich, 1945-1955*, (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1989): 10.

4.2 - The Austrian Armed Forces and Military Tradition at the Ulrichsberg

Immediately after the state treaty came into effect on July 27th, 1955 began the resurrection of a new Austrian military force, the *Bundesheer*. Despite its new status as the defender of a purely neutral nation on the model of Switzerland, the *Bundesheer* retained many pre-war military traditions. As was the case in Germany the same year, these new armed forces drew on former *Wehrmacht* officers to fill the need for leadership personnel despite officially renouncing the heritage of the Third Reich. As a result of the amnesty law implemented in 1957, all former NSDAP members could openly serve in the Austrian army, including those that had participated in questionable anti-partisan campaigns in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. From 1958 to 2009, the *Bundesheer* fully participated in the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, standing at attention during speeches, providing vehicles to shuttle aging veterans up the mountain, offering their support to police to keep protesters at bay, and appearing in uniform to lay wreaths.¹³⁷ They also provided a military band to play songs such as the famous “I had a comrade” (*Ich hatt einen Kameraden*).¹³⁸ The *Bundesheer* also installed a self-financed plaque inside the *Ulrichsberg* church that commemorated soldiers that died on UN missions since 1955, helping to further the impression that the site constituted a monument devoted to peace. The *Bundesheer*’s main function at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings was to integrate the event firmly into the cultural mainstream and to help

¹³⁷ Photograph of Bundesheer soldier standing at attention inside Ulrichsberg church. See Figure 14.

¹³⁸ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 144.

express continuity from the inter-war commemorative activities surrounding the “Carinthian Defense” (Kärntner Abwehrkampf), and to uphold the memory of the fallen soldiers that had fought for the *Wehrmacht*. The *Bundesheer* thus acted as a major legitimator of the *Ulrichsberg* meetings for over 50 years.

In addition, the presence of the *Bundesheer* represented the essence of the *Ulrichsberg* site as a military commemoration site. Enthusiasm for military traditions is a unifying quality that still binds the various organizations involved in the *Ulrichsberg* meetings together and is used frequently as a defense mechanism against accusations of activities that could fall under the crime of *Wiederbetätigung*. The UBG’s Facebook page reveals an obsession with military statistics, glorified posters of fighting German soldiers and the recurring theme of *Kameradschaft*. Any questioning commenters are attacked as “fouling their own nests” (*Nestbeschmutzer*) or accused of being “lefty goody-two shoes” (*Linke Gutmenschen*).¹³⁹ The legality of statements made on this site have recently been called into question by journalists, although the UBG claims that it is only a fan-page and therefore does not represent the organization’s interests or ideology.¹⁴⁰ The UBG’s support of the *Bundesheer* is self-evident, not least because of their enthusiastic endorsement of the results of the January 2013 referendum in which 60% of Austrians voted to keep conscription.¹⁴¹ The *Bundesheer*’s long-standing support of the *Ulrichsberg* meetings matched the widespread political support that

¹³⁹ Facebook page of Ulrichsberggemeinschaft, *Ulrichsberggemeinschaft*, <https://www.facebook.com/Ulrichsbergtreffen?ref=ts&fref=ts>, Accessed May 15th, 2013.

¹⁴⁰“Anzeige gegen Ulrichsberg Fanseite”, *Der Standard*, June 5th, 2013.

¹⁴¹ “Alle Ergebnisse der Bundesländer zur Volksbefragung”, *Der Standard*, January 20th, 2013.

accompanied the annual event and planted it firmly in the middle of cultural consciousness.

By the mid 2000s, however, the increasing criticism of the Ulrichsberg in part due to Jörg Haider's controversial appearances caused the government and the media to question the role of the *Bundesheer* at the gatherings. The anti-fascist vandalism of the Ulrichsberg site in 1997 and the increasingly critical tone of the Green Party and the SPÖ towards the ideological underpinnings of the meetings eventually forced the *Bundesheer* to withdraw its support. In 2009 the SPÖ defense minister Norbert Darabos forbade the *Bundesheer* from appearing in uniform at the *Ulrichsberg*. This signalled the first time that an official government statement questioned the character of the meetings, although it fell short of calling it a meeting of right-wing extremists.¹⁴² According to official statements, the motivation for the ban was the discovery that the then-president of the UBG had been discovered to have been dealing with Nazi memorabilia online. Darabos claimed that this incident was “the straw that broke the camel's back” (*brachten dass Fass zum überlaufen*) to confirm that the government could no longer endorse the meetings and simultaneously implying that there had been many previous incidents implicating the gatherings in right-wing extremist activities.¹⁴³

Although many *Bundesheer* officers still attend the meetings, they are no longer allowed to appear in uniform, signifying a profound change in the government's attitude towards the *Ulrichsberg* meetings. The departure of an

¹⁴² “Darabos sagt Teilnahme des Bundesheeres ab”, *Der Standard*, August 24th, 2009.

¹⁴³ “Darabos sagt Teilnahme des Bundesheeres ab”, *Der Standard*, August 24th, 2009.

official presence by the *Bundesheer* also removed the logistical (and musical) support the *Bundesheer* imparted onto the annual events, greatly denigrating the positive image of the meetings in the eyes of the public.

CHAPTER 5 – ULRICHSBERG AND THE FPÖ

5.1 - Origins of the FPÖ

One thing is certain: the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings would never have been able to maintain their openly public profile without the political lobbying and support of the FPÖ, the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreich*). Although throughout the over 50 years of the meetings' existence several politicians from other parties graced the podium to make speeches and provide their support, none were ever as enthusiastic as members of the self-proclaimed Socialist Homeland Party (*Soziale Heimat Partei*). It is no coincidence that this secondary title sounds eerily similar to another famous party catering to both workers and nationalists.

In fact, the FPÖ, whose birth in 1956 followed the conclusion of the state treaty a year earlier, was described by Austrian historian Anton Pelinka “as a party founded by former Nazis for former Nazis”. Indeed, its first chairman, Anton Reinthaller, was a former SS general and had joined the Nazi party several years before the *Anschluss*.¹⁴⁴ The precursor of the FPÖ was an unofficial organization called the Federation of Independents (*Verband der Unabhängigen*), literally a banding together of political elements that were unwanted or banned under Allied occupation. Many former Nazis who found other parties too liberal flocked to the VdU, representing a “third direction” (*Dritte Lager*) after the two big parties SPÖ and ÖVP.

¹⁴⁴ Pelinka, *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria*, 215.

After the departure of Allied forces in 1955, the VdU was able to emerge from the shadows and fully participate in the new arena of federal politics. According to Pelinka, the FPÖ of Austria is still today unique among European right-wing populist parties because it “emerged directly from an unbroken National Socialist tradition”¹⁴⁵. Despite what its title suggests, the FPÖ actually started out as a party that kept alive the desire to identify with the greater German *Volk*, even opposing the official “victim theory” as a key Austrian identifier championed by the so-called “grand coalition” government (of SPÖ and ÖVP) for many decades after the war. In its first party platform announcement in 1957 the FPÖ proclaimed one of its tasks was to “keep the feeling of belonging to the German people, with its associated rights and duties, an integral part of German Austrians” (“*in den deutschen Österreichern das Bewusstsein wach zu erhalten, ein Teil des deutschen Volkes mit allen sich aus dieser Zugehörigkeit ergebenden Rechten und Pflichten zu sein*“)¹⁴⁶. Pelinka describes the FPÖ as the direct inheritor of this German-nationalist tradition that predates the NSDAP, yet survives intact today in the FPÖ’s intensely xenophobic political platform. Central to this concept is the understanding of the German nation as an exclusive linguistic and racial entity rather than a political abstraction defined by national boundaries and citizenship. Although the FPÖ has since deviated from this position to focus more specifically on Austrian patriotism in order to gain votes from Eurosceptics, it never officially ruled out the possibility of a renewed *Anschluss* to Germany. Its preoccupation with a tradition of Germanic ideals and

¹⁴⁵ Pelinka, *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria*, 223.

¹⁴⁶ Susanne Fröhlich-Steffen, “Die Identitätspolitik der FPÖ: Vom Deutschnationalismus zum Österreich Patriotismus”, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, no. 3 (2004): 285.

thereby the othering of non-Germanic peoples is thus yet another indication of its deep roots in the kind of traditions most prominently celebrated at the *Ulrichsberg*.

5.2 - The FPÖ and Jörg Haider at the *Ulrichsberg* Meetings

In the early days of the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, regular appearances by high-ranking party members of all political parties that held seats in the national legislature established the legitimacy of the gatherings. Although all major political parties were represented at the *Ulrichsberg* meetings through most of its history, the FPÖ was always the most vocal in defending a positive image of the gatherings, particularly after it started to come under attack during the 1990s.¹⁴⁷ In a press release in 1996 the FPÖ defended the meetings as a “bridge to the generation of our fathers” (*Brücke zur Generation der Väter*), dismissing accusations that derisively labeled the *Ulrichsberg* as “Nazi-mountain” (*Nazi-Berg*) as “ridiculous exaggerations”.¹⁴⁸ The FPÖ also strongly opposed measures to compensate victims of Nazi social policies and called into question the continued relevance of Austria’s anti-fascist laws. As recently as 2010 the presidential candidate put forward by the FPÖ was accused of wanting to abolish the 1947 Prohibition Law (*Verbotsgesetz*) because of her public statement describing the law as an anachronistic and unnecessary breach of freedom of

¹⁴⁷ Sima and Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*,106.

¹⁴⁸ Sima and Fanta, *Stehst mitten drin im Land*,106.

expression.¹⁴⁹ Scrapping this law would have meant that many of the organizations present at the gatherings could more openly display their ideological orientations. In the post Waldheim-debate era numerous spokesmen of the FPÖ were caught in “slip-ups” that revealed their true view of the Nazi past. For example, in 2005 one FPÖ party member, Johann Gudenus, was forced to resign after being accused of *Wiederbetätigung*, promoting Holocaust denial and historical revisionism by claiming that the existence of gas chambers in the Third Reich was “a matter up for debate”¹⁵⁰.

Jörg Haider, one of the most internationally well known Austrian politicians was also famously accused of praising Hitler’s “orderly employment policies” in order to contrast with the SPÖ’s mismanagement.¹⁵¹ This praise of orderly employment policies is embodied on the *Ulrichsberg* through the plaque commemorating the contribution of the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, the militaristic Nazi compulsory labour service. Haider’s defense of the virtues of certain aspects of National Socialism also shone through in the speech he gave at the 1995 *Ulrichsberg* gathering. Haider triggered international outrage by paying verbal tribute to the *Waffen-SS*, describing it as “a group of honest citizens who knew how to stay true to their convictions”.¹⁵² At the same meeting he also expressly stated that since the *Waffen-SS* had been a part of the *Wehrmacht*, its veterans

¹⁴⁹ “FPÖ-Kandidatin Rosenkranz gegen NS-Verbotsgesetz”, *Kronen Zeitung*, March 3rd, 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Ruth Wodak and Rudolf de Cillia, “Commemorating the past: the discursive construction of official narratives about the ‘Rebirth of the Second Austrian Republic’” *Discourse and Communication*, vol. 1, no. 3, (August, 2007): 337-364.

¹⁵¹ Peter Zuser, “Strategische Ambivalenz: Der Umgang Jörg Haiders mit dem NS-Thema” IHS-Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, *Political Science Series*, No. 49, (1997): 15.

¹⁵² “Nazi Waffen-SS Veterans Honoured in Austria”, *Agence France Presse*, September 21st, 2008.

should be treated with the same respect and honour bestowed upon the latter, thereby mirroring the views of the *Kameradschaft-IV*.¹⁵³

Because of such controversial statements and a demonstrated link to National Socialism in his family, Jörg Haider garnered the greatest amount of international media attention of any Austrian political figure of the last few decades. The son of two staunch Austrian NSDAP party members, Haider participated in the youth wing of the party, the RFJ (*Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend*), as an eager young man. The RFJ, which is identically aligned with the political ideals of the FPÖ, caused a stir in 2006 when it was accused of paraphrasing the famous SS slogan “Our Honour means loyalty” (*Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*) by posting “Our Honour is our Loyalty to the Homeland” (*Unsere Ehre ist die Treue zur Heimat*) on its official homepage.¹⁵⁴ As explained earlier, this slogan was also appropriated conspicuously by the *Kameradschaft IV* and is in its original form still prohibited under the 1947 *Verbotsgesetz*. The RFJ also maintains a continual presence at the *Ulrichsberg* gatherings, often forming a large portion of the younger guests present.¹⁵⁵

Jörg Haider realized his greatest successes in Carinthia, itself long seen as a stronghold of right wing politics in Austria. Several of his speeches made at the *Ulrichsberg*, mere miles from the Carinthian capital, were seen as highly controversial and were often critically addressed by his political opponents. For

¹⁵³ Zuser, “Strategische Ambivalenz: Der Umgang Jörg Haiders mit dem NS-Thema” IHS-Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, *Political Science Series*, No. 49, (1997): 15.

¹⁵⁴ “Aufregung in Kärnten: RFJ wirbt im Internet mit ‘Unsere Ehre ist die Treue zur Heimat’”, *Austria NEWS Magazin*, August 12th, 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 38.

example, at the October 2000 *Ulrichsberg* meetings, he protested the critical treatment the media bestowed on the meetings by stating that "It is unacceptable that the past of our fathers and grandparents is reduced to that of criminals,"¹⁵⁶, echoing later statements from his successor H.C. Strache who went as far as to state that the FPÖ were "the Jews of today" (*die Juden von heute*)¹⁵⁷ because of what he deemed as undeserved political discrimination by the media and the Green Party.

Haider was an outspoken opponent of moves toward the centre by elements of the party during the 1970s and 1980s that wanted to expand the voter base by liberalizing the party's ideological platform. Although even more radical elements had split off in 1967 to form an Austrian version of Germany's extreme NDP (*Nationaldemokratische Partei*), this short-lived party was found to be conflicting with the Prohibition Law (*Verbotsgesetz*) and was dissolved in 1988. Haider became party leader in 1986 and immediately set out to reinvent the FPÖ by using his own brand of right-wing populism to appeal to blue-collar workers while simultaneously catering to the party's traditional nationalist voter base in order to present an attractive alternative to the long ruling "grand coalition" of SPÖ and ÖVP. By the mid 1990's the FPÖ was surpassing 20 % of the vote in national elections and even formed part of the governing coalition in January 2000.¹⁵⁸ Following diplomatic sanctions by the EU and internal party squabbling, the FPÖ's share of the vote declined back down to 10%, although they still had significant local support in some areas. For example, municipal elections in

¹⁵⁶ "Haider defends Nazi Army", *British Broadcasting Corporation News*, October 2nd, 2000.

¹⁵⁷ "Strache auf WKR-Ball: Wir sind die neuen Juden", *Der Standard*, January 29th, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 302.

Vienna in 2010 gave current FPÖ leader H.C. Strache's xenophobic, anti-EU platform a solid 25%.¹⁵⁹

Haider also served for several terms as governor of Carinthia, where he enjoyed widespread popularity in a province that was historically extremely conservative. In fact, leftists often derogatorily referred to the province "Brown Carinthia" (Braune Kärnten) during the 1990s.¹⁶⁰ Due to a constant fight against the recognition efforts of the Slovenian minority and an entrenched borderland mentality of ethnic protectionism going back to 1920, many Carinthians were continually drawn to the racial hierarchical aspects inherent in Nazi ideology. Haider's documented connections to the far-right along with his xenophobic anti-immigrant policies contributed considerably to Carinthia's reputation. In 1989 Haider first became the governor of Carinthia while simultaneously acting as the head of the federal FPÖ. During his early career as governor he frequently attended the *Ulrichsberg* meetings, though only as an official speaker on three occasions (1990,1995,2000).¹⁶¹ At the 1990 meetings, Haider emphasized that: "all soldiers, regardless of which part of the military, have earned to be honoured here", thereby implicitly including the *Waffen-SS*.¹⁶² Later in his career, Haider avoided speaking publicly at the meetings for fear of political consequences, after his infamous praise of "Hitler's orderly employment policies" during a debate in the provincial legislature had forced him to resign as governor of Carinthia in

¹⁵⁹ Beller, *A Concise History of Austria*, 306.

¹⁶⁰ Alfred Elste and Siegfried Pucher, *Kärntens Braune Elite*, (Klagenfurt: Verlag Hermagoras 1997): 51.

¹⁶¹ Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 37.

¹⁶² Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 87.

1991. Despite this setback, he was re-elected for a second term from 1999 until his death in 2008.

Haider had always been a staunch believer in the German-nationalist (*Deutschnationale*) tradition described earlier, famously describing the Austrian Second Republic in a 1988 interview as an “ideological miscarriage”¹⁶³. Although after Haider’s death the new leader of the party Heinz-Christian Strache put forward the “Austria first!” slogan, this should be understood more in terms of a policy of putting ethnic Germans first. Although their political platform may have appeared to be patriotically Austrian, the FPÖ seldom included German nationals in their targeted policies against the “foreigner” (*Aussländer*) category aimed mainly at linguistically distinct ethnic groups like Slovenians, Turks or Romanians, whom the FPÖ routinely blamed for a myriad of social problems. A racist conception of an overarching German nation is an unspoken guiding principle of the FPÖ and its xenophobic policies echo the dominant views represented in many organizations that attend the *Ulrichsberg* meetings. Haider’s statements at the gatherings invariably reflected what the audience wanted to hear.

The tradition of *Deutschnationalismus* is celebrated at the *Ulrichsberg* partly through the remembrance of the possibility of a continent coming very close to having been entirely ruled by ethnic Germans. Despite the presence of many non-German fascist sympathizers (Croatian *Ustaša*, Latvian SS-volunteers), the intertwining of the ideals of racial fascism and German nationalism cannot be ignored. The war is viewed by many *Ulrichsberg* supporters and attendees as a

¹⁶³Fröhlich-Steffen, “Die Identitätspolitik der FPÖ: Vom Deutschnationalismus zum Österreich-Patriotismus”, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, no. 3 (2004): 290.

defensive struggle against Communism; a common trope that unites neo-fascists from many European nations.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, the *Ulrichsberg's* Europe-Stone (*Europastein*), erected after the end of the Cold War in honour of a peaceful Europe free of the Communist threat is thus utilized as a symbol of what could have been an even better *pax Germania*, although it is represented as a tribute to the spirit of integration championed by the EU. The FPÖ's policies along with the traditions celebrated at the *Ulrichsberg* are clear indications of underlying racist beliefs continuously operating in Austrian society long after the state treaty was signed.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has shown that although the *Ulrichsberg* meetings can in some ways be seen as legitimate expressions of personal losses, the evidence shows that the gatherings constitute a clear link to upholding a positive image of certain aspects of National Socialism and an omission of its crimes. The arguments in favour of portraying the *Ulrichsberg* meetings as a pilgrimage of right-wing extremists gain the most credibility through the presence of the foreign SS-volunteer plaques, whose members come to the *Ulrichsberg* to mingle with other veterans that fought on the same side together. The inter-European feeling of military brotherhood and cooperation that the UBG maintains is the basis of such foreign visits, is called into question by the lack of any delegations from

¹⁶⁴Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens, *Friede, Freude Deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, 168.

countries that were considered enemies of the Third Reich during the Second World War.

Indeed, the most unifying feature of all of the organizations represented at the Ulrichsberg is their staunch anti-communism. The clearly defined ideological confrontation of the Cold War enabled the Ulrichsberg meetings to flourish and provided justification to allow former Nazis to reintegrate into post-occupation Austrian society. The latent anti-slovenianism and clear anti-communist tone of the Ulrichsberg corresponded to the profoundly orientalist view of the war in its later stages as a clash of civilizations between east and west. Free Europe was viewed as being a Europe without Bolshevism, a continent that would have done equally well under National Socialism or western democracy, as long as communism remained marginalized. The conspicuous absence of any references to the numerous victims of National Socialist policies positions the Ulrichsberg as the polar opposite of the Mauthausen memorial museum on the spectrum of Austrian memory politics. Both receive state funding, yet the former makes no mention of the victims of National Socialism while the latter focuses exclusively on these same victims.¹⁶⁵

The *Ulrichsberg* was long the shining tip of the iceberg of post-war neo-fascism while the truth of the organizations it represented lay hidden. The UBG's mottos of "War Never Again" (*Nie Wieder Krieg*) and "Peace for Europe" (*Frieden für Europa*) served as a protective shine intended to numerically increase the audience and legitimize the meetings in the eyes of the media, the increasingly "self-critical-of-the-past" federal government, and the Austrian people. Whenever

¹⁶⁵ Perz, "Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart", 6.

a scandal erupted about a remark praising some aspect of National Socialist ideology, the UBG and its supporters could point to their mottos and their carefully worded plaques to assure everyone that they had nothing to do with neo-Nazis, and that the dead they commemorated were by no means criminals. As Wolfram Wette showed in his book detailing the evolution of the concept of the Wehrmacht as a separable part of the Nazi military machine free of involvement in atrocities, this myth convinced the public in both Germany and Austria to demand an honourable commemoration of Wehrmacht casualties.¹⁶⁶ The UBG wanted to commemorate fallen soldiers that had fought for the Third Reich and utilized the complicated paths of euphemisms and defense mechanisms that bewilder scholars attempting to navigate the landscape of Austrian memory since 1945. Post-war Austrian governments catered to the demands of the powerful right and the votes of thousands of *Mitläufer* by openly supporting the *Ulrichsberg* meetings and many local Heroes' Monuments (*Heldendenkmäler*). The anti-communism of the western Allies helped allow a tacit acceptance of a resurgence of right-wing thought and paved the way for the success of the FPÖ in subsequent decades. Even now, after Austria has made it quite far in terms of coming to terms with its past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) evidenced by the ongoing renovations of the Mauthausen former concentration camp site, plans for a public memorial dedicated to *Wehrmacht* deserters and the recent banning of right-wing fraternities from holding their annual May 8th commemorative displays

¹⁶⁶ Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt, S. Fischer Verlag, 2002): 6.

in Vienna, the FPÖ and its corresponding ideology supporting the spirit of the anti-communist Ulrichsberg meetings remain on the political scene.¹⁶⁷

Banning the Ulrichsberg gatherings permanently, as has been demanded by the Austrian Green Party, is not an answer to the problem as it would simply drive the meetings behind closed doors, create resentment and enable the positive arguments that support the meetings to be martyred. Right-wing extremists would continue to congregate underground without the added legitimation of the *Ulrichsberg* milieu. The diminishing importance of the Ulrichsberg gatherings, reduced attendance, and a high degree of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austrian society today means that a healthy democratic Austria should be able to withstand the irksome, albeit insignificant antics of radical fringes. The argument that H.C. Strache makes about the FPÖ being the “Jews of today”, uncomfortable as it may be, resonates here because it means that the Prohibition Law is essentially undemocratic and any extension of its principles verges on the sort of totalitarian control of society exhibited under the Third Reich. The *Ulrichsberg* needs more government presence not less; it needs a memorial to the victims of the Nazi regime to be fully integrated into the ceremonies and the site itself. In order to fully provide a balanced memory experience the *Ulrichsberg* should perhaps include the presence of some of those young “memory servants” (*Gedenkdiener*)¹⁶⁸ who work as part of the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service.

¹⁶⁷ In a speech at the famous Heroes’ Square (*Heldenplatz*) in Vienna, Chancellor Werner Faymann labelled May 8th, 1945 as a “day of liberation, not defeat” and denounced those Austrians who had been “enthusiastic perpetrators” in taking part in Nazi atrocities. See “Faymann: 8. Mai ist Tag der Befreiung, nicht der Niederlage”, *Kronen Zeitung*, May 8th, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Founded in 1992, this organization provides an alternative state service for male Austrian conscripts by helping worldwide with Holocaust commemoration. See the official website: <http://www.gedenkdienst.at/>, Accessed April 25th, 2013. See also Martin Horvath and Anton

Austrian memory does not happen only at *Mauthausen*, it happens also at the *Ulrichsberg*. We can only hope that increased awareness of the complex history behind the politics of memory will ultimately diminish the possibility of the return of a National Socialist ideology that enjoys mainstream support.

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Figure 1 – The Legend of the Ulrichsberg

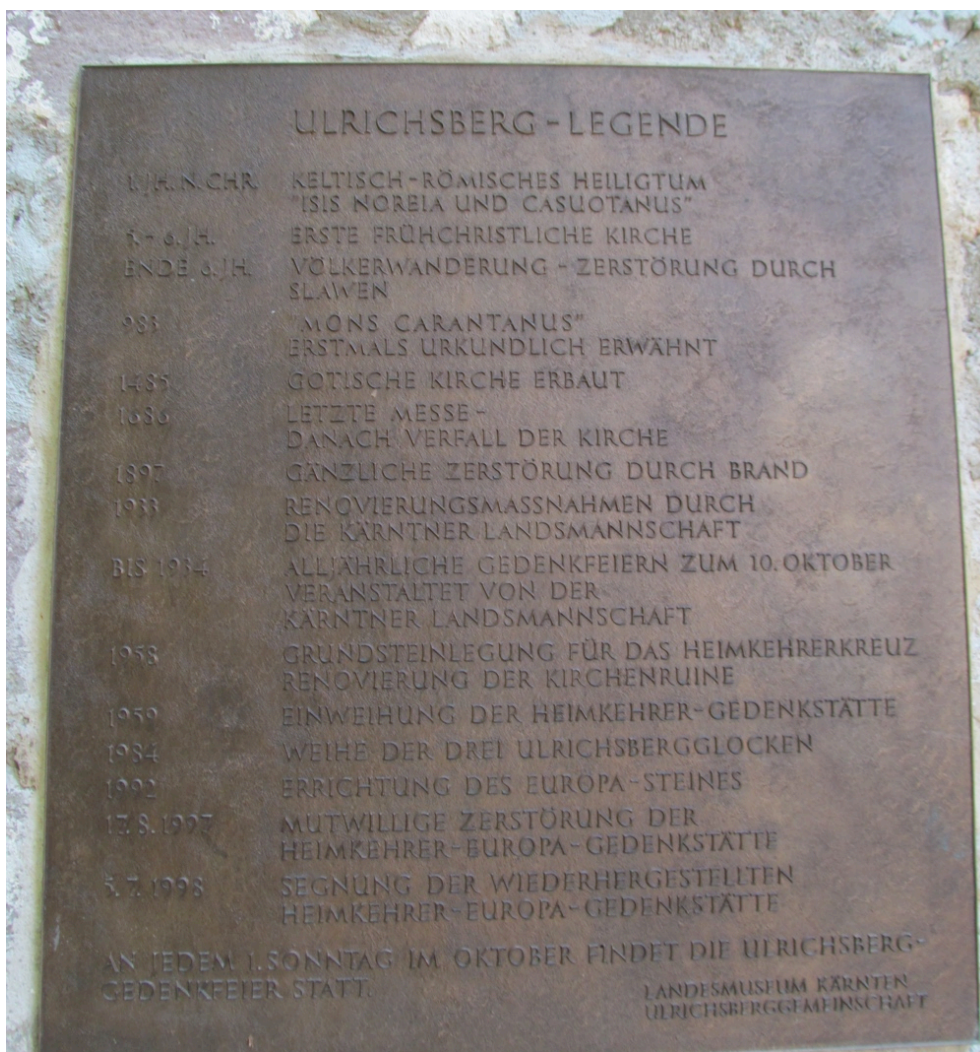


Figure 2 – Memorial plaque for the 1997 vandalism of the Ulrichsberg



Figure 3 – A Soldier's Honor is his Loyalty: Plaque of the *Kameradschaft IV*



Figure 4 – Arnold Breker’s Relief Sculpture “*Kameraden*”



Figure 5 –HIAG member of East-Saxony chapter attending Ulrichsberg celebrations 2003



Figure 6 – Plaque for the SS Physicians Academy Berlin-Graz



Figure 7 – Latvian Legion Plaque



Figure 8 - Spanish SS-Volunteers “Division Azul”



Figure 9 – Croatian Volunteers/ Bleiburg Massacre Memorial



Figure 10 – Plaque of speech of former Ulrichsberg owner Duke Leopold Goëss

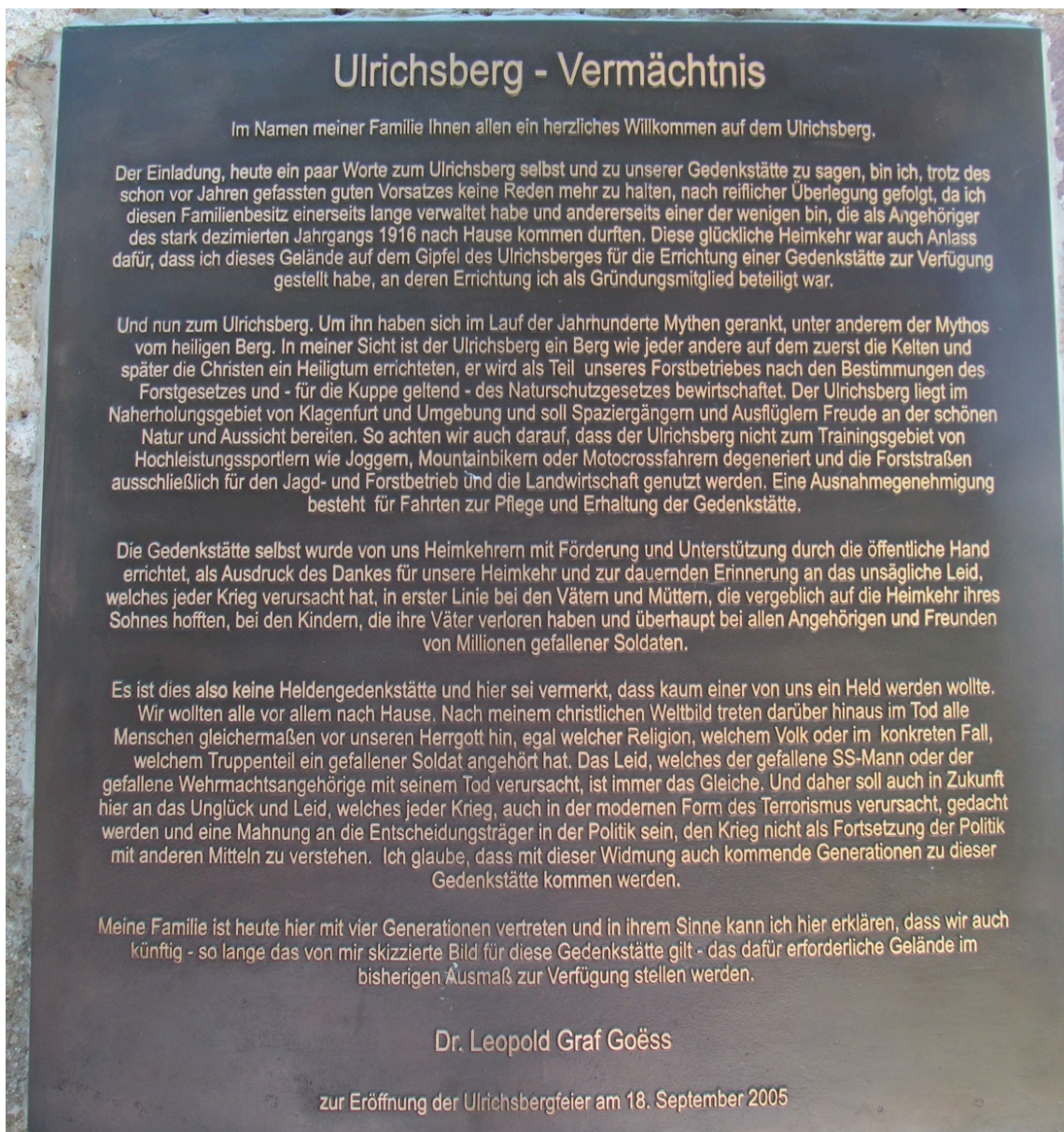


Figure 11 – Hochwechsel Chapel Mural

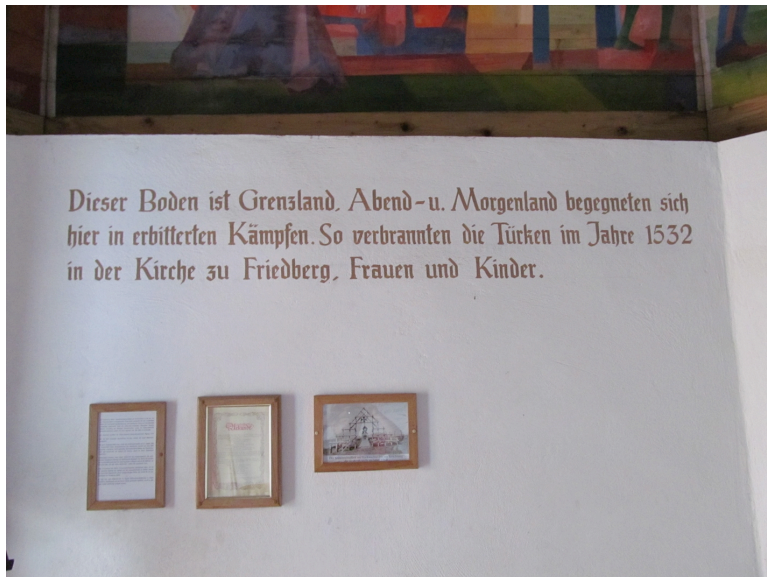


Figure 12- Hochwechsel Chapel Mural



Figure 13 – Hochwechsel Chapel Explanatory Paper

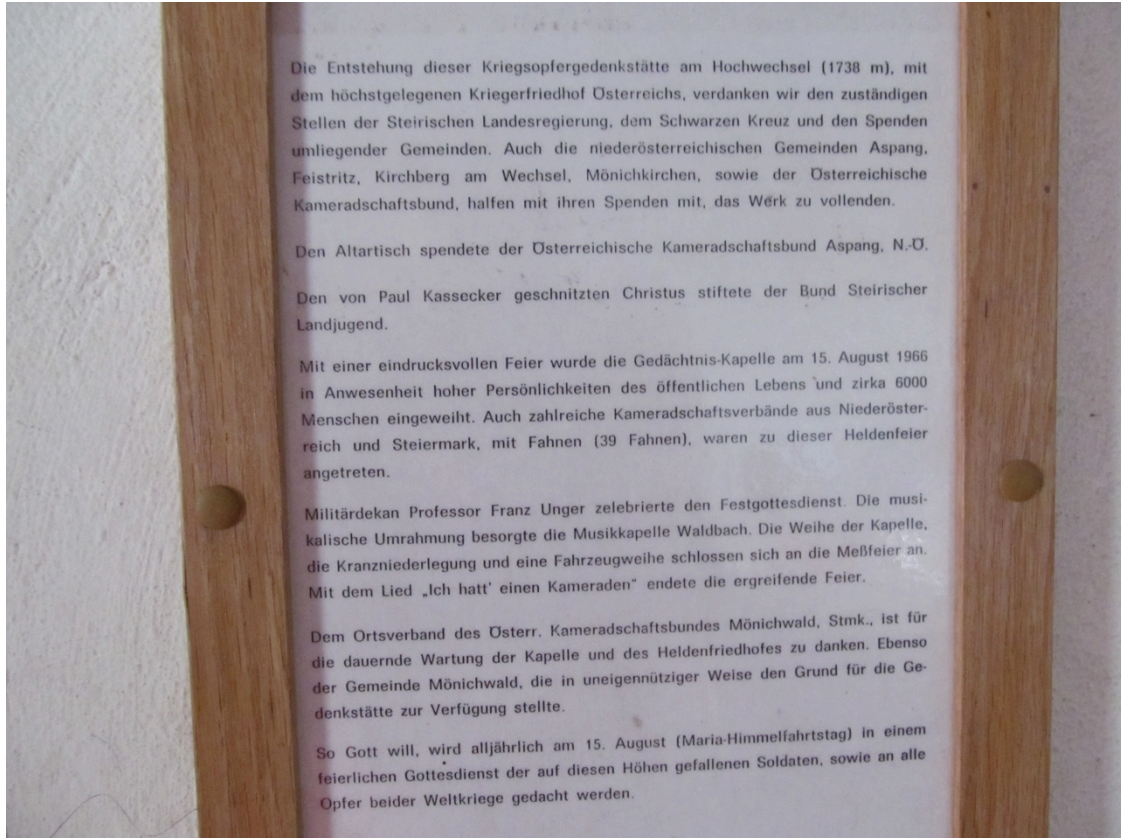


Figure 14 - Austrian Bundesheer at Ulrichsberg

