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A Cast of Thousands: *Stela* at  
Militärhistorisches Museum Der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden

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### Abstract

In 2014, New Zealand artist, Kingsley Baird, built a temporary memorial in the German Armed Forces' Military History Museum in Dresden. The memorial comprised two elements: a stainless steel 'cenotaph' and 18,000 biscuits in the shape of soldiers of different nationalities who fought in the First World War. On 12 July 2014, almost 100 years after that conflict's beginning, *Stela* was formally presented for public viewing and visitors to the museum were invited to take a biscuit from the memorial. For the previous 10 days, in the heart of the museum, the sculpture evolved as the artist stacked the Anzac recipe biscuits around the cenotaph form until it disappeared from view. During this 'performance', many 'players' — including the city of Dresden, a cemetery, characters from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the museum, staff and visitors — contributed to the artist's experience of *Stela*. This article introduces some of them.

Key words: *Stela*, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, memory, memorialization, World War I.

## The Cast

Figure 1. “Die Toten leben indem sie uns mahnen” (“The dead live on through the warning they give us”). Carved lettering on a stone bench, Heidefriedhof (forest cemetery), Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.]



## The Cemetery, the City, and Slaughterhouse-Five

Theresienstadt. Sachsenhausen. Ravensbrück. Dachau. Buchenwald. Bergen-Belsen. Dresden. Auschwitz. Coventry. Oradour. Rotterdam. Warsaw. Leningrad. Lidice. Each of these 14 names, in bronze lettering, is fixed to its own sandstone block pillar encircling a patera in Heidefriedhof (forest cemetery) on the northern outskirts of Dresden. The place names of the stone ring (built by the regime of former East Germany) list concentration camps and other sites of barbarity of the Nazi period, as well as bombed cities—including Dresden—in a Communist catalogue of war crimes.

Figure 2. Memorial roundel, Heidefriedhof, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Proceeding in a north-west direction from the roundel one comes to the path's destination — another memorial from the Soviet era — this time commemorating the inhabitants of Dresden who died during the Allied bombing raids of 13 and 14 February 1945.<sup>1</sup> The carved words, standing proud of the stone block surface, read:

*“Wieviele starben? Wer kennt die Zahl? An deinen Wunden sieht man die Qual; der Namenlosen die hier verbrannt; im Höellenfeuer aus Menschenhand”.*  
(*“How many died? Who knows the count? In your wounds one sees the ordeal; Of the nameless who in here were conflagrated; In the hellfire made by hands of man”.*)

In Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the Englishman said to Billy Pilgrim: “You needn't worry about bombs, by the way. Dresden is an open city. It is undefended, and contains no war industries or troop concentrations of any importance”.<sup>2</sup>

Who to believe, Vonnegut — who was on the ground — or The United States Army Airforces who had a bird's eye view.<sup>3</sup>

*“Every other big city in Germany had been bombed and burned ferociously. Dresden had not suffered so much as a cracked windowpane. Sirens went off every day, screamed like hell, and people went down into cellars and listened to radios there. The planes were always bound for someplace else – Leipzig, Chemnitz, Plauen, places like that”.*<sup>4</sup>

*“Billy, with his memories of the future, knew that the city would be smashed to smithereens and then burned — in about thirty more days. He knew, too, that most of the people watching him would soon be dead. So it goes”.*<sup>5</sup>

*“‘It had to be done’, Rumfoord told Billy, speaking of the destruction of Dresden. ‘I know’, said Billy.*

*‘That’s war’.*

*I know. I’m not complaining’.*

*‘It must have been hell on the ground’.*

*‘It was’, said Billy Pilgrim.*

*‘Pity the men who had to do it’.*

*‘I do’.*

*‘You must have had mixed feelings there on the ground’.*

*‘It was all right’, said Billy. ‘Everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does. I learned that on Tralfamadore’”.*<sup>6</sup>

Today Dresden looks like this.

Figure 3. Dresden Innere  
Altstadt (old town interior),  
2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Once known as the “Florence of the North”, after Allied bombing in February 1945, the *Allegorie der Gute* (Allegory of Goodness) atop the Rathaus looked out over a scene “...like the moon”, according to Billy Pilgrim.<sup>7</sup>

“There was a fire-storm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn”.<sup>8</sup> The Altstadt was rebuilt after the reunification of Germany, including the Frauenkirche. The Altstadt’s violent past is recorded in the stone patchwork of the Church of Our Lady. The dark stones reveal what remained of the church after the bombing in which between 25,000 and 40,000 people were killed—many burnt to death—in the resulting firestorm.<sup>9</sup> Gruesome photos show Dresden’s dead piled in preparation for cremation, a task undertaken by the SS (Schutzstaffel) because of their expertise in cremating the bodies of concentration camp victims. The sight of baked, soldier-shaped biscuits lying on a tray in the oven would never mean the same again. “‘It’s the sweetest thing there is’, said Lazzaro. ‘People fuck with me’, he said, ‘and Jesus Christ are they ever fucking sorry’”.<sup>10</sup>

Dresden’s violent history during the latter stages of the Second World War, the allusions to the destruction of the city’s inhabitants in Heidefriedhof, physical manifestations of the largely-razed Altstadt in its restored architecture, and Vonnegut’s semi-autobiographical, fatalistic narrative: these and other fragments of my Dresden experience provided the backdrop for the *Stela* artwork I made in Saxony’s capital in 2014.

Figure 4. Restored Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Museum

The stage for the building and performance of *Stela* was the German Armed Forces' Military History Museum (Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr) in Dresden. I was struck by the museum's imposing architecture the first time I visited. This impression is heightened when approaching the main entrance on a road that gently slopes up to the rather grand, neo-classical structure. It looked more like a palace, I thought, than an armory, the purpose for which it was built between 1873–1876, and remained until its transformation into a museum in 1897. From then it served different masters as an army museum for Saxony; the Wehrmacht, during the Nazi years; and later of East Germany before closing in 1989 when the German state was unified.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 5. Militärhistorisches  
Museum der Bundeswehr,  
Dresden, 2013. Photo: Kingsley  
Baird.



When the museum reopened in 2011, the Neo-Classical architecture had been diagonally divided by a Daniel Libeskind-designed steel, chevron-shaped wedge—outside and inside. The interior exhibition spaces were dramatically reformed, intended to “facilitate a reconsideration of the way we think about war”.<sup>12</sup> According to Studio Libeskind:

*“The new façade’s openness and transparency contrasts with the opacity and rigidity of the existing building. The latter represents the severity of the authoritarian past while the former reflects the openness of the democratic society in which it has been re-imagined”.*<sup>13</sup>

Figure 6. Inside the Daniel  
Libeskind-designed ‘wedge’,  
Militärhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2013.  
Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Standing inside the wedge one is afforded wide views of the surrounding city and countryside. From the 25-metre high viewing platform another of the architect's intentions is revealed. The wedge points towards the old heart of Dresden, the area of intense firebombing on 13-14 February 1945. Ironically, given the museum's use during the war as military barracks, it was spared the bombing, being located 3 kilometres across the river Elbe from the city's historic centre and, therefore, away from the Allies' main focus. Libeskind's wedge is an apt metaphor for the museum's approach to the complex story of war and, in particular, Germany's history in the 20th century. The museum does not shirk from the nation's difficult past, instead it poses awkward questions that some of Germany's former foes and allies could ask of themselves.

Figure 7. *Stela* exhibition poster, 2014. Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr. Photo: David Brandt.



## The Curator

*“Dear Kingsley Baird,*

*It was a pleasure to have you as our visitor.*

*As you correctly stated in your letter April 12th we are enthusiastic about exhibiting and realizing the stela project. Location and timing is perfect. It will coincide with our big 100th anniversary exhibition about World War I in August 2014.*

*Of course there will be some challenges and I am sure we will overcome them together.*

*The stela project is in perfect alignment with our museum’s philosophy. To give our visitors real food for thought.*

*Best regards”,<sup>14</sup>*

So wrote curator, Dr P., following my visit to the Military History Museum weeks earlier. His email revealed that there would be some opposition; not everyone associated with the museum was as enthusiastic about the project as he was. However, Dr P. would go in to battle on the project’s behalf. He believed in it.

The museum is run by the Bundeswehr, the German Armed Forces. Although he understated the amount of effort it would take to realize the project, Dr P. had his work cut out convincing the military hierarchy that the exhibition was a good idea. Who could blame them? Dr. P’s pun, ‘food for thought’, was both the point and the problem of the exhibition. While he did not elaborate on the challenges he would face, I assumed the project’s deliberate tension between the sacred and the profane, could prove difficult to negotiate. Once the word was out, an article appeared in a local Dresden newspaper questioning the appropriateness of exhibiting an artwork in a military museum — perhaps any museum — that included visitors eating biscuits in the form of soldiers. Fair enough, but I hoped the ‘Eucharistic’ ritual would be interpreted as revealing society’s responsibility in sacrificing others in war, as well as being an act of commemoration. Simultaneously a gesture of forgetting *and* remembering.

Back in the Antipodes, I was awakened after midnight by a telephone call from a Dresden journalist, no doubt oblivious to the time difference. Aware of the potential for controversy, I had to gather my thoughts quickly as I was grilled about the project by my interrogator. Dr P. had cautioned me to be on guard during such media encounters. Apparently, the skills of a diplomat and tactician would be required; loose talk might jeopardise the exhibition.

I think I had heard Dr P. was once in the Army. Compulsory military service or a career soldier, I don’t know. His ponytail is out-of-place in an army environment. Perhaps this mark was essential in drawing a line between military and civilian life. An outward sign of the distinction he must maintain between a critical position and being imbedded in the military apparatus.

Figure 8. Grave of Hans Bogner, Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, Polygon Wood, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### Hans, Peter and 'Bert'

I concluded my essay on the *Stela* artwork in the catalogue of the Museum's World War I centenary exhibition as follows:

*"Above all, Stela is a work about memory; while I am stacking the soldier-shaped biscuits around the form of the Cenotaph I am certain to think of Hans Bogner, Peter Kollwitz, 'Bert' Grant, and their comrades".<sup>15</sup>*

Hans is the only German buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Polygon Wood in Belgium.<sup>16</sup> Killed on 28 September 1918, if he'd survived another 7 weeks it would all have been over. So it goes.

I was drawn to his headstone whose form is subtly distinguished from those of the mostly New Zealand graves that surround it. While the height and width appears similar to its companions, the top was horizontal instead of radiused, the font sans serif and characteristic symbols of faith such as the Latin Cross or Star of David, are absent. Upon closer inspection, the inscribed language, regiment, and discreet cross pattée or Tatzenkreuz indicated that this headstone was that of a German soldier. How Hans Bogner of the 27th Bavarian Infantry Regiment

came to be buried in Polygon Wood Cemetery I don't know, but in common with his former adversaries, he is commemorated with an individual burial marker. What struck me about this grave—and perhaps the reason I had the impulse to photograph it—was the singular humanity and dignity accorded to a former foe; in life he was an enemy to those who now surround him, but in death, he appears as their comrade.<sup>17</sup>

Peter was also a German soldier but buried in a Military Cemetery of his own nation at Vladslo in Belgium. Unlike Hans, Peter's remains are interred with some of his comrades. Karl, Roberts Z and O, Charles (who had a French middle name, "Guillaume"), Johann, Wilhelm (the Emperor's name), Paul, Friedrich, and... Peter! "Peter Kollwitz Musketier + 23.10.1914". He was dead keen; a representative of the *Kriegsbegeisterung* or "war enthusiasm". His mother had encouraged him to go to war; his father not. And did she regret it? For the rest of her life and after life. My knees were sore after the first two days of biscuit stacking despite the pads. Käthe and Karl are destined to kneel for eternity before their son's plaque.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 9. Käthe Kollwitz. *Die trauernden Eltern* (The Grieving Parents), 1932. Granite. German Military Cemetery, Vladslo, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



A hundred years ago, my maternal grandfather, Albert (Bert) George Grant, had journeyed to Europe "from the uttermost ends of the earth" to make war. "From the uttermost ends of the earth", the inscription on the four New Zealand battlefield monuments on the Western Front, alludes to the physical distance that New Zealand soldiers travelled to take part in World War I, and their position on the margins of Empire and civilisation.

A full body portrait in his 'hospital blues', painted on one of the occasions Bert was wounded, a few service medals, his very succinct army history record, and a rusty bayonet are all that testify to his World War I service.<sup>19</sup> Left arm in a sling; a shoulder wound, I think? Returning to active service he swapped and became just

as proficient with the right. Generic; probably hundreds—maybe 1000s—by the same painter. There were certainly enough subjects. But it's Bert all right.

Figure 10. Albert George Grant  
in 'hospital blues', c. 1916.  
Painter: unknown.



I know those features, I spent hours sculpting them, bending over, or kneeling beside you to capture that perpetual smile as you sat motionless in your armchair, head turned from the spectacular Breaker Bay view towards the telly. Your mind somewhere else. “Unstuck in time”.<sup>20</sup> You didn’t talk about the war. Except for one incident, enough times for it to become my faded memory as well. Something about Mersa Matruh, I think.<sup>21</sup> You’d come across those Scots in the desert. If they’d just killed them it might have been different. But they cut off their balls. There was no way back from that. The first village would do. “‘Anybody ever asks you what the sweetest thing in life is’, said Lazzaro, ‘it’s revenge’”.<sup>22</sup> You were so kind, so gentle to a grandson. It just didn’t square with the story about holding the feral kittens under the water until they stopped struggling.

Figure 11. Kameraden Grab  
(Comrades' Grave), German  
Military Cemetery, Langemark,  
Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley  
Baird.



#### Stela: Biscuits and a Biscuit Tin

*Stela* was a long time in the making, going back to my first visit to the German military cemeteries of Vladslo and Langemark in Belgium in 2008. There I was struck by the contrast between the 'natural forest' aesthetic of mature oak trees and the open, 'English churchyard' design of the Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries. I thought the former were about hiding away the dead of the defeated aggressor. Respect for the fallen, of course, but not in our faces!

The concept and reality of Langemark's mass grave of German soldiers was very affecting. The remains of 25,000 combatants of the Great War buried together—beside and on top of each other.<sup>23</sup> Pragmatic, yes, but the name, Kameraden Grab—Comrades' Grave—suggested another motivation altogether.

*Stela* was inspired by the oak forest, the mass grave, and the surrounding monolithic funeral markers, each with surfaces covered in a texture of hundreds of names.

Figure 12. Commemorative stela, Kameraden Grab, German Military Cemetery, Langemark, Belgium, 2008. Photo: Kingsley Baird



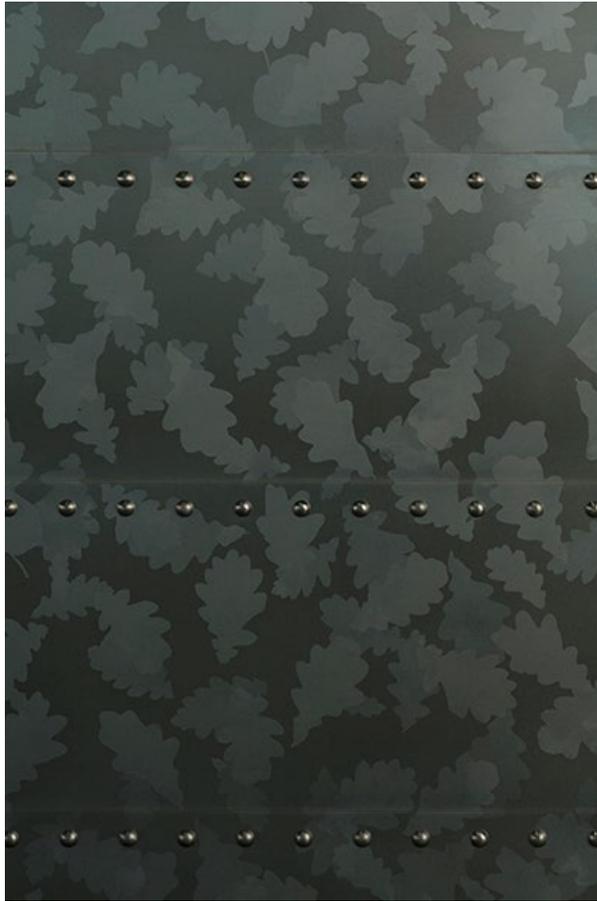
### The Cenotaph

Figure 13. Kingsley Baird. *Cenotaph*, Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014. Stainless steel, 1800mm x 1800 mm x 540 mm. Collection: Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr. Photo: David Brandt.



In early July 2014 a stainless steel form 1800 mm high x 1800 mm long x 540 mm wide appeared without explanation or label in a ground floor gallery of the museum, beside the “Militär und Technologie” (Military and Technology) section. The *Cenotaph*—meaning an “empty tomb”—is appropriately, though not intentionally, reminiscent of Lutyens’s quintessential memorial in Whitehall.<sup>24</sup> Its shape is that of 6 human-sized ‘caskets’ stacked on top of each other. At once a mass grave and a biscuit tin. Sacred and profane.

Figure 14. Kingsley Baird.  
*Cenotaph*, Militärhistorisches  
Museum der Bundeswehr,  
Dresden, 2014. Stainless steel.  
Detail (oak and kawakawa  
leaf pattern). Collection:  
Militärhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden.  
Photo: David Brandt.



The surface, as if in the shadow of Langemark's and Vladlso's foliage, is decorated with a pattern of etched oak leaves. Amongst these symbols of Germany and remembrance are the leaves of the native New Zealand plant, kawakawa, a Māori funerary, commemorative symbol.

On 12 July 2014, almost 100 years after the beginning of the First World War, *Stela* was formally presented for public viewing. For the previous 10 days visitors to the museum had the opportunity to watch the sculpture evolve as I stacked approximately 18,000 Anzac recipe biscuits formed from cookie cutters in the shapes of soldiers from the 1914-18 war around the *Cenotaph*, until it disappeared from view.

Figure 15. Stainless steel cookie cutters for *Stela* biscuits, Akademie Deutsches Bäckerhandwerk Sachsen, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



## The Biscuits

### Recipe for making 30 biscuits

#### *Ingredients*

*½ cup white sugar*

*1 ½ cups plain flour*

*1 cup rolled oats (finely ground in food processor)*

*¼ cup desiccated coconut (ground in food processor)*

*¼ cup wholemeal flour*

*125 grams butter*

*4 tablespoons golden syrup*

*1 teaspoon baking soda*

*1 egg<sup>25</sup>*

While their combined monetary value was not insignificant—1 and a half Euros each—their real value was symbolic. Or at least that was the perception the museum and the artist wanted to communicate to the visitors.

Eighteen thousand biscuits in columns—3 in line facing out—the soldiers' distinguishing headgear exposed—3 across them at 90 degrees, then 3 facing out again, and so on, until about 38 layers for each of the 6 sections had been stacked. The number of layers varied a little because none of the biscuits—although quite precise in their length and thickness—was exactly the same as the next. Sometimes, I would only use two soldiers in a row when there were two French 'Poilu' lying side by side.<sup>26</sup> Their buttoned-back coats made for a wider profile than the other nationalities. If I ran short of biscuits, rows of two rather than three

would be a saving. Once the stacking was completed, visitors to the museum would be invited to eat a biscuit until finally all were consumed and the *Cenotaph* was completely visible again.

Figure 16. Top view of *Stela* showing stacked biscuits and *Cenotaph* 'lid'. Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Attendant

Herr S. was bored. In the land of his birth perhaps he'd had a more stimulating occupation than museum attendant. But here, at least, his tall, thin frame was free to glide through the corridors of the majestic, 19th century Military History Museum. From time to time, during his 'rounds', Herr S. would alight for a talk. On one occasion, fixing his gaze on the sculpture, he observed:

"I heard you describe it [to the visitors] as a *denkmal*.<sup>27</sup> It is not a *denkmal*", he declared matter-of-factly. "A *denkmal* is like a building; it is a permanent place for memory to reside. This is not a *denkmal*". An affable discussion followed and I explained why it was a memorial even though it was made from temporary materials. Being ephemeral, it reflected the nature of memory and the eventual fate of the specific memory ascribed to remembrance forms. Herr S. said nothing; he would need to think about this notion of a memorial which was foreign to his own.

Herr S. and I shared repetitive actions. He walked (glided) around and around while, in public view, I stacked biscuits higher and higher against the four vertical sides of the steel *Cenotaph*. The bottom two horizontal sections, each 300mm high and containing approximately 3,000 soldier-shaped biscuits, had to be constructed while kneeling. As the stacks got taller I could stand upright. This enabled me to work faster, less concerned that the frequent conversations with visitors, museum staff, and the media would compromise my completion date.

Herr S. commented on my kneeling and noted my back would be sore—which indeed it was. He had played classical guitar, practising sometimes for over 6 hours

a day, he disclosed empathetically. Eventually, his tendons could no longer stand the strain and he had to stop. He pulled up his sleeve and revealed a permanently-swollen left forearm.

Although it was apparent he was eager to talk, perhaps a desire to recover his half-lost English was more of a motivation than my project. Fenced in a small enclosure protecting the vulnerable biscuit stacks from the visitors, I was available to both museum attendants and the public alike.

Herr S. had grown tired of the permanent displays: but there are also temporary exhibitions, I offered. That is how we got onto Stauffenberg, the German officer made famous in the outside world by the 2008 “Valkyrie” film, starring Tom Cruise. The museum, located on Stauffenbergallee, was presenting an exhibition about the colonel and his co-conspirators who failed in an attempt to kill Hitler and take over the government in 1944.<sup>28</sup>

Herr S.’s voice lowered. He spoke in German of which he knew I had very limited understanding with my frequent response to enquiring native speaking visitors of the overstated phrase, “Ich spreche ein wenig Deutsch”.<sup>29</sup> I knew from his muted tone that he was confiding something. He glanced around frequently and furtively. He needed to get it out but didn’t want to appear disloyal to the country that had adopted him, and, that he revealed—on another occasion—he loves because of the freedom it offers. In part German, part English he wondered why the high-ranking Wehrmacht and political assassins, some of whom had been plotting against Hitler before the war’s outbreak, had not been successful in this and earlier attempts.

“I hate war”, he had confided, “it is terrible. In my street, there was bombing and killing every day. My daughter, every time she hears a plane...”. He moved his hand around and around over his stomach. I nodded sympathetically.

On the tenth day, when the stacking was almost finished, Herr S. approached me. Obviously, he had been reflecting on our conversations which always returned to the nature of the sculpture I had been building. “You are right”, he said without further explanation, “this is a *denkmal*”. He nodded as though confirming his statement and without waiting—nor apparently wanting—a response, he glided on.

Figure 17. Kingsley Baird. *Stela*.  
Militärhistorisches Museum der  
Bundeswehr, Dresden, 2014.  
Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The Minister

They were very excited in the museum; especially the military. The Minister of Defence was coming to visit. I was requested to meet the Armed Forces' boss. Wikipedia informed me that she was born in Belgium, had 7 children, and was a member of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union.<sup>30</sup> I stood obediently at my post until the flurry of activity in the adjacent gallery indicated the minister had arrived. And then she appeared; petite, with a shock of brushed back blonde hair, flanked by men in military and civilian uniforms. Today, she was wearing trousers. "What should I wear"? I had asked the curator when I heard of the VIP's visit. "You can wear anything", he replied, "*you* are the artist".

She smiled broadly and exuding a charm that immediately put me at ease, commented, "I've read about you". "And I about you", I replied thoughtlessly, regretting it immediately and sensing her minders' disapproval at the artist's impertinence and concern their plans for a successful visit might be ruined. *Ein Künstler und ein Ausländer*.<sup>31</sup> Unknown terrain.

"May I come in"?, she gestured to the stanchion surrounding *Stela*. Once inside the perimeter she asked what the work was about and I responded with a version appropriate for a busy minister on a military schedule.

"May I try one"?, she asked a little coyly. I had not expected this; no one had. The press were there en masse. An unflattering snap. Few of us look good frozen while eating. An injudicious moment. But it was the symbolism of the Minister of Defence biting the head off an — albeit emblematic — soldier, that I thought a savvy politician would avoid. It was the kind of image that could come back to haunt one, especially if, as Wikipedia says, she is a contender to succeed the Chancellor.<sup>32</sup> And politicians have an instinct for such things.

The biscuits were past their best. Three nights ago during the throng of Museums Sommernacht when the exhibition opened they had visibly wilted in the heat and humidity.<sup>33</sup> I had stood with my back to *Stela* while interviewed by the German language TV culture programme, 3sat *Kulturzeit*.<sup>34</sup> The interviewer smiled and nodded encouragingly as I repeated my well-rehearsed lines under the spots' glare. But I wasn't worried about interviews: by now with the substantial media interest in the project, they had become routine. I stood with my back to *Stela* wondering if the swelling biscuits would tip so far forward they would collapse onto the floor.

I gestured to a stack in front of the Minister and she delicately picked one from the pile. "That's a New Zealander", I said about to launch into an explanation as to how the biscuits were differentiated by national uniforms. The New Zealanders, I would have told her — gesturing with my open hands above my head, wore then and still do, a hat called a lemon squeezer.

If she had been interested I might have elaborated. The Germans — it would have been diplomatic to start there — were wearing the Stahlhelm — introduced in 1916 to replace the comical Picklehaube. Even looking at the biscuit silhouette I am reminded uncomfortably of the Second World War Wehrmacht. Or the Australian, wearing his distinctive slouch hat with a turned-up brim. Or the French 'Poilu' in his Adrian helmet and the musical symmetry of his greatcoat. There was also the generic shape of the Brodie helmet — the universal soldier — that covered Britain and her Dominions as well as the United States. Each nationality was represented by 3 body shapes: 'complete', one armed, and one-legged.

But the Minister wasn't listening. She bit off the head of the New Zealander, declared him delicious and requested the recipe claimed by Australia and New Zealand, as the Antipodeans scrambled for a sense of identity they could call their own. Again, with consummate charm she requested my signature on one of the photographic giveaway cards depicting the biscuits and cookie cutter. I obliged, there was a blur of photos, she thanked me and was gone, her diminutive frame lost in a sea of followers. A 'good sport', I thought.

### The General's Daughter

I told the curator that the person who was to distribute the biscuits on the night of the opening, had to handle them with care for two reasons. Firstly, because they were individually delicate and the stacks they formed, at risk of collapsing. Secondly, it was important that members of the public who received a biscuit observed that the museum staff treated the symbolic soldiers with respect. For the project to work, the illusion that the biscuits were something other than the sum of their physical ingredients, had to succeed.

"The librarian, Frau R., has volunteered", the curator declared. Thinking that one of the museum attendants would do the job, I expressed surprise that the museum's librarian would take on the task. "She is a general's daughter",

he shrugged matter-of-factly; as if the link between her paternity and the task of distributing *Stela*'s biscuits was obvious.

Frau R. was nothing like I expected. The combination of librarian + general's daughter in my 'search engine' resulted in an entirely different preconception. Not the woman with dyed blonde hair, close-fitting, short, black dress with white polka dots and high heeled shoes. In a slow and rather exaggerated manner—to get the point across—I demonstrated, rather than described, the care with which I wanted the biscuits to be removed from the memorial. Frau R.'s English language knowledge was limited but she understood her role completely. At the opening, when the speeches were over, a long line of visitors assembled in front of the memorial. One by one they stepped forward to receive a biscuit. Frau R. carefully—but without unnecessary ceremony—selected a biscuit from a stack with her white-cotton-gloved hands and placed it in the specially-designed, waxed paper bag complete with sponsors' logos. Judging from the number of biscuits that remained by the end of the night she must have repeated this action some 3,000 times.

She had obviously been thinking about her role. Perhaps even rehearsing. It was as if Frau R. had done this before; at least she seemed born to it. It was a ritual, she understood as much. Now her costume made sense; she was a priest officiating at communion as I had intended.

At the end of the night when I thanked her she replied in English with obvious deep sincerity, "It was an honour". A general's daughter. Now I understood what the curator had meant.

## The Sailors

The military presence in the museum of the Bundeswehr is apparent without being overwhelming. Museum military staff would occasionally walk by undertaking their duties or armed services personnel would be part of guided tours.

Hauptmann N., one of the press officers, passed by *Stela* frequently. It seemed every day there was another press event. The local TV channel will be at the baking academy tomorrow. Oh, and various newspapers will be there as well. The next day there is an interview at Deutsche Radio. He drove me to various engagements and we talked about his plans for the weekend. His girlfriend had a young son and every weekend he drove to his hometown of Magdeburg to be with them. I had read about Magdeburg.<sup>35</sup> It had a pitiful history; twice destroyed. I wondered if the Hauptmann knew. Hauptmann. Most of these military ranks took me back to my childhood and the war comics I had read and re-read, the black and white war movies I watched on Sunday afternoons with my mother, starring the likes of John Mills, Alec Guinness, and Anthony Quayle.

The soldiers in the museum were very different from the jack-booted automatons portrayed in the comics; their voice bubbles shouting "Achtung",

“Himmel”, “Die Engländer dog”! and the like. Today, they are citizen soldiers with a responsibility to follow their own consciences, not their orders exclusively. Most of the armed services personnel seemed happy to eat a soldier biscuit if the opportunity offered itself.

Several days before the exhibition opening, while I was stacking the biscuits, I noticed a group of young men standing on the other side of the stanchion tape watching me. They were wearing casual civilian clothes and some were bearded, but there was an air about them that suggested they were in the armed services. Perhaps what is called a ‘military bearing’. “What are you doing”? asked one of them, a tall, broad young man with blond hair and beard. I explained the meaning of the artwork. They were silent and just stood there looking at the stainless steel *Cenotaph* and the rising layers of biscuits. I broke the awkward silence asking them if they were from Dresden. “No”, replied the laconic, blond one, “Kiel”.

Later I described my experience to Hauptmann N. “They must be trainee naval officers on an excursion”, he offered. “Kiel is a naval port in northern Germany, on the Baltic Sea coast”.

They continued to stare, in no way hostile but apparently deep in thought. Then, without a word, several nodding, they turned and walked away. This was the only time when I felt my explanation might have been a bit glib.

I had promised the curator that I would work on my German before returning to Dresden to undertake the project. Despite the best efforts of Elizabeth Smith and her “*Fast German*”, I was largely unsuccessful in this aspiration.<sup>36</sup> It seemed my ignorance had prevented a meaningful exchange with the young men from the navy. This lack on that and other occasions is the one failure of the project for me.

## The Old Lady

However, over the 10 days I spent stacking biscuits I had many encounters with museum visitors and staff. I was gratified by what seemed a genuine interest to learn about *Stela*. Ranging from young to old visitors, the reaction to the work by those who spoke to me directly or through translation, was overwhelmingly appreciative. Many were moved. When the memorial was complete and museum attendants took on the distribution of biscuits, I watched discreetly in the background as visitors continued to engage with the work.

The elderly couple on Day 8 were from an ‘old’ family, I suspect. Dressed very well, chic, but understated. I saw them out of the corner of my eye but decided not to approach. They stood facing *Stela* for a while talking in hushed tones. They seemed interested. Time to approach them and engage in conversation. “Guten Tag. Es ist ein Denkmal für die Soldaten, im ersten Weltkrieg und heute”.<sup>37</sup> It was embarrassing but it would have to do. Little is expected of native English speakers, after all. Lazy or pragmatic, it didn’t matter, the Germans would soon realize that even limited English was better than the bastardised German this fellow uttered.

They nodded politely. The man drifted away to another exhibit and his female companion to *Stela*'s interpretive signs, one in German and the other in English. I continued stacking, aware of her presence.

Minutes passed and she was still looking at one of the signs. Presumably, the German version. I kept stacking. Standing upright now I was making good progress. Soon I would need a ladder or scaffolding to complete the top sections. Still she stood there, motionless, staring down at the sign. Perhaps I should talk to her. I moved towards the stanchion cord that separated us but she had already left the sign and approached where I stood facing her. Up close I could see the tears. We looked into each other's eyes. As tears welled up in mine too she said softly in English, "Thank you for doing this". I had no reply. She turned and walked away to join her male companion who was inspecting the early submarine exhibit. If I had needed any affirmation of *Stela*'s existence, that encounter had provided it.

## The Endnotes

1. The bombing was carried out by the British Royal Air Force and United States Army Air Forces.
2. Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *Slaughterhouse-Five, Or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-dance with Death* (London: Random House, 1991. First published 1969), 120. For years after the bombing the strategic rationale of the Allied raid was questioned. While the Allies argued that Dresden was a legitimate military target, critics asserted it was of little military significance. Frederick Taylor's *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* (referenced below) provides a well-researched and balanced discussion of this issue, attesting to the city's military and industrial importance to Germany's war effort.
3. Vonnegut, an American serviceman, was a prisoner of war in Dresden and experienced the bombing and aftermath first-hand.
4. Vonnegut, 122.
5. *Ibid.*, 124.
6. *Ibid.*, 163. Tralfamadore is the home of the fictional alien race which kidnaps Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.
7. *Ibid.*, 147. The figure of the *Allegory of Goodness*, carved by Peter Pöppelmann, became famous from Richard Peter's 1945 photo depicting the figure of the Allegory looking down on the destroyed city.
8. *Ibid.*, 146.
9. Earlier reports that claimed the figure to be 10 times this number have now been discredited. Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 443-448.
10. Vonnegut, 114.
11. Gorch Pieken and Matthias Rogg (eds), *Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr: Exhibition Guide* (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012), 7-13.
12. <http://www.architecturetoday.co.uk/?p=20907>. Retrieved 26.8.15.

13. <http://libeskind.com/work/military-history-museum/>. Retrieved 26.8.15.
14. “Dr P”.: Personal correspondence to the author, 18.4.12.
15. Kingsley Baird, “Stela im Tod sind alle Kameraden” [Stela: all are comrades in death] in ed. Gerhard Bauer, Gorch Pieken, and Matthias Rogg, *14 Menschen Krieg* (Dresden: Militärlhistorisches Museum, 2014), 238. German text.
16. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/55100/POLYGON%20WOOD%20CEMETERY>. Retrieved 26.8.15. Sixty of those buried in the Polygon Wood cemetery served with the New Zealand forces.
17. This paragraph is taken from the author’s German text essay, “Stela im Tod sind alle Kameraden” in *14 Menschen Krieg*, 232.
18. Käthe Kollwitz’s over life-sized stone sculpture, *Die trauernden Eltern* (The Grieving Parents) (1932), located in Vladslo German Military Cemetery in Belgium, depicts the artist and her husband kneeling before the plaque bearing Peter Kollwitz’s name.
19. The blue hospital uniform worn by soldiers convalescing in English hospitals during World War I.
20. Vonnegut, 19.
21. Mersa Matruh is an Egyptian seaport. I remember the name from my grandfather’s reminiscences. It might have been connected to the massacre story described in the text which may or may not have happened.
22. Vonnegut, 115.
23. <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/cemetery-langemark.htm>. Retrieved 26.8.15.
24. Sir Edwin Lutyens’s war memorial Cenotaph in Whitehall, 1920.
25. An existing recipe ‘fine-tuned’ by my sister, Susan Jane Baird, so that the biscuits would hold their soldier shapes when baking.
26. ‘Poilu’, meaning ‘hairy one’, is a term used to describe a French World War I infantryman. Poilus often wore beards and moustaches.
27. German for monument or memorial.
28. The Stauffenberg exhibition curated by Linda von Keyserlingk, *Attentat auf Hitler. Stauffenberg und mehr* (Assassination attempt against Hitler. Stauffenberg and more) at the Military History Museum marked the 70th anniversary of Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg’s attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler.
29. “Ich spreche ein wenig Deutsch” (“I speak a little German”).
30. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen). Retrieved 26.8.15.
31. Ein Künstler *und* ein Ausländer (An artist and a foreigner).
32. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen). Retrieved 26.8.15.
33. Museums Sommernacht is a tradition in Dresden and some other German cities in which once a year during summer, museum collections are open to the public until late at night for a reduced entry fee. In 2014 Dresden’s Museums Sommernacht was on 12 July.
34. Screened on 3sat Kulturzeit, 14 July 2014.
35. Magdeburg was destroyed twice in its history: in 1631, during the Thirty Years’ War the city was burned and 20,000 inhabitants massacred, and during the

Second World War when Royal Air Force bombing destroyed much of the city and approximately 16,000 inhabitants were killed. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdeburg>. Retrieved 29.8.15.

<sup>36</sup>. Elizabeth Smith and her *Fast German* (textbook and cd) language course which I had taken to Germany intending to complete during my residency in the museum. Elizabeth Smith, *Fast German*, 2011 (London: Hodder Education [Hachette]).

<sup>37</sup>. “Good day. It is a monument for the soldiers, in the First World War and today”.

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Studio Libeskind; <http://libeskind.com/work/military-history-museum/>

The Great War 1914-1918; <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/cemetery-langemark.htm>

Ursula von der Leyen; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula\\_von\\_der\\_Leyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_von_der_Leyen)

## Biographical Note

Kingsley Baird is a visual artist and academic whose work represents a longstanding and continuous engagement with memory and remembrance, and loss and reconciliation through making artefacts and writing. Major examples of his work in this field are the New Zealand Memorial in Canberra (2001, with Studio of Pacific Architecture), the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (2004); the international Nagasaki Peace Park sculpture, *Te Korowai Rangimarie The Cloak of Peace* (2006); *Tomb* (2013) at France's Historial de la Grande Guerre; and *Stela* (2014) at Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Germany in 2014. Kingsley Baird is the board chair of WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network; was the co-convenor of "Contained Memory Conference 2010"; and is the General Editor of Memory Connection journal.

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