2006 Holocaust and Genocide Studies Internship In
Lidice
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Lidice

The village of Lidice lies roughly 11 kilometers from Prague, the once capital of Czechoslovakia and now the Czech Republic. The town itself can be dated back to the early 1300s and eventually became a suburb for working class people working in the mines and steel works of the nearby city of Kladno. However in June of 1942 this small Bohemian village gained international fame as a site of horrific Nazi brutality. On May 27, 1942 Jan Gubis and Jozef Gabrlik, two Czech parachutists trained in Great Britain, attacked and mortally wounded the Reich’s Protector Reinhard Heydrich, otherwise known as the Butcher of Prague for his merciless assault on the Czech resistance. Heydrich died on June 4, 1942 and received an extravagant Nazi funerual. Hitler seeking to retaliate against the Czechs for what he saw as a flagrant and dangerous act which if not dealt with properly might inflame more resistance retaliated. Based on some faulty intelligence the Nazi authority believed the parachutists to be two servicemen who fled to Great Britain from Lidice. Hitler ordered the complete destruction of Lidice. All of the town’s men were summarily executed, the towns women were sent to the Terezin concentration camp, the younger children were given to German families and the older children died in the gas chambers of Chelmno in Poland. The town, church, and cemetery were all destroyed. The Nazi authorities even the streams diverted the streams through town. The carnage did not stop with Lidice as the town of Lezaky was destroyed two weeks later.

The Nazis openly revealed in Lidice’s destruction in an attempt to intimidate any future resistance movements in the Czech Republic. However outside of Nazi occupied Europe Lidice became a battle cry for the allies and served as an early example of Nazi brutality. Towns were renamed Lidice in the United States and Brazil in an attempt to show solidarity with the Czechs. “Lidice shall live” was the mantra of Dr Barnett Stross, a British Minister of Parliament, who became a staunch supporter of rebuilding Lidice after the war and establishing it as a place of peace and reflection. After the war Lidice was indeed rebuilt near the location of the original town which had become a place of Czech national suffering and remembrance.

Pamatnik Lidice
“The Lidice Memorial and Museum”

The first of many memorials to the people of Lidice was initially constructed when the Soviet Army occupied Czechoslovakia in 1945. It was a large cross with a crown of barbed wire placed over the mass grave of the Lidice men. Memorials were added periodically over the next 50 years culminating in a memorial to the Lidice children and all the children victimized by the Second World War installed in 1989. It is the largest of its kind in the world. Along with the many memorial additions the museum has also experienced ideological changes over its now 62 year history. During the Soviet domination of Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989 a grand plaza was built overlooking the revered area where the town once stood. This plaza presents a visual record of the Lidice tragedy on a relief displaying the horrors of June 10 and culminating in the rebirth of Lidice under the promise offered by Soviet Communism. During this period Lidice was as an example of the suffering created by western imperialism. The surviving widows of Lidice became the virtuous women of the socialist revolution and every year on June 10 thousands of people convened in Lidice where high ranking members of the Czech Communist party made magnificent speeches. However when Soviet authority ended in 1989 the museum fell into disfavor primarily because of its close association with the Communist party.

In 2001 however the Lidice Memorial was taken under the wing of the Czech Republic Ministry of Culture and began to once again receive regular government funding. Since then the memorial and museum have been restored along with the incredible rose garden found adjacent to the memorial. Part of this restoration process was the creation of a multimedia exhibition which presents the horror of the June 10, 1942 massacre that took place in Lidice and also the creation of a special exhibition room to display traveling historical and contemporary exhibitions focusing on both the waging of war and peace and reconciliation.

My Internship in Lidice

With a funds provided by the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Scholarship in Holocaust and Genocide Studies I was able during the summer of 2006 to intern at the Lidice Memorial and Museum. While working for the Museum I resided in “new” Lidice, the town built adjacent to the memorial, were I met many interesting people and learned a great deal about Czech life and culture. Working at the museum provided me the unique opportunity to learn about the many facets of museum management and meet a number of foreign diplomats and scholars.

The “new” Lidice is a very small town by American standards having only about 500 residents and comprising an area of about 4 square blocks. Every day on my walk from the Lidice Gallery, small art gallery which houses the administrative offices of the Lidice memorial and dormitories for visiting students and scholars, to the Memorial along June 10, 1942 street, named for the date of the Lidice tragedy. The town has its own city hall, post office, police station and aok, an athletic club which manages the local football fields and serves food and beer to spectators. While employed at the museum I performed many different tasks ranging from the ceremonial reception of honored guests to the practical constructing and dismantling of exhibitions. On an everyday basis I assisted with the sale of tickets to the museum and dealt with English speaking visitors. On several occasions I acted as a tour guide for Lidice English speaking guests. During the remembrance ceremony which is held annually on June 10 it was also my responsibility to receive foreign dignitaries including the US Ambassador to the Czech Republic. I was also fortunate to participate in conferences including a meeting of a coalition on Czech-Azerbaijani relations. In my final weeks at the museum I was also enlisted to electronically record and organize artifacts for the Lidice Archive which will soon be available online to scholars and historians.