

Sensing the material remains of the forgotten Great War in Poland. Sensibly or Sensationally - the dilemma in front of presenting results of the Airborne Laser Scanning visualisations

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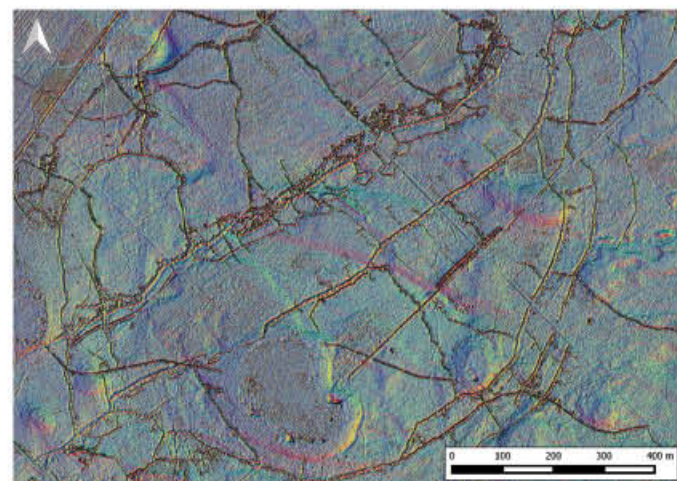
Introduction

The research project "Archaeological revival of memory of the Great War. Material remains of the life and death in trenches of the Eastern Front and the condition of the ever changing battlescape in the region of the Rawka and Bzura [1914-2014]" (implemented by The Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, financed by The National Science Centre Poland and supervised by Anna Zalewska) aims to restore the social memory of the World War I through archaeological studies of the material remains of the front established between December 1914 and July 1915.

Currently the memory of the Eastern Front of World War I is being marginalised in Poland. This refers to the research, education and mass media. The social awareness of the bloody conflict that emerged a century ago was gradually replaced, over the time, by the following wars.



The archaeological excavations on No Man's Land, close to Joachimów Mogiły, were significant number of human remains was found (2014).



No Man's Land of Eastern Front in Bolimów Municipality. LiDAR Visualization SVF+PCA+DTM (colour coded)



Poles on the fronts of World War I

We estimate that about 80.000 soldiers died during the Battle on Rawka and Bzura. Among them were many Poles. Also the local inhabitants were aggrieved. In total of about 3,5 million Poles fought in World War One, more than 400,000 Poles were killed and 800,000 were injured fighting for three empires. How many of them lost their lives near Bolimów remains unknown. We find worthy to be revived memory of all those who suffered and lost life and normality during 1914 and 1915 also in Eastern Front.

The Battle of Rawka 1914-1915

The Battle of Rawka fought in 1914 and 1915 was among the bloodiest engagements of the World War I on the Eastern Front. The tragic uniqueness of this encounter is partially due to the fact that it was the place where the Germans resorted chemical weapon as they found themselves unable to breach Russian defences in other way. For the first time on 31 January 1915 close to Rawka River, the Germans deployed on a massive scale chemical agents (irritant and tear gases).

The attempt was seen as unsuccessful by the perpetrators. Soon, lethal chlorine was released in the form of a poisonous cloud from thousands of cylinders: on 31 May, on 12 June and on 6/7 July 1915. Each use of the poisonous gases in the area of Bolimów was the climax of that drama, which caused harm to the thousands of soldiers from both sides, as well as to the local civilians and natural environment.

The landscapes of conflict

The Great War left its bitter marks in the valleys of Rawka and Bzura Rivers along with various material traces of the past events. Application of the Airborne Laser Scanning allowed to reveal many kilometres of trenches, numerous dugouts, shell and mine craters, graves of unnamed soldiers etc. All those objects are scattered throughout the countryside along the former frontlines.

The field verifications and test excavations exposed great number of finds, also never buried human remains. Results of the first stage also called the question about contemporary valorisation of the former battlefield and its social and scientific status and significance. Shall it be just another forgotten battlefield or the socially active warning (!) – the material deponent of atrocity of war, including chemical warfare?

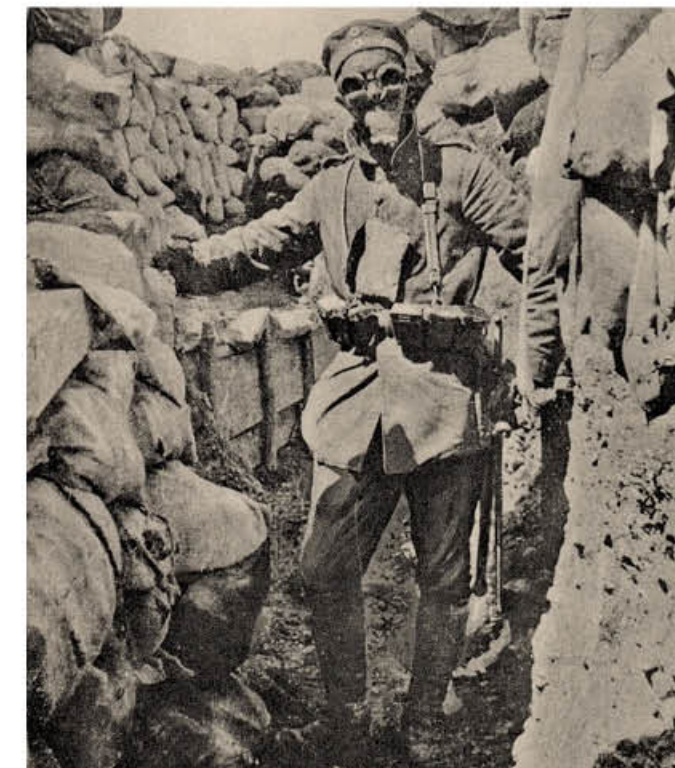
Presenting the research results to the wider public. Sensibly or sensationally?

Archaeological studies of the material remains of everyday life, fights and survival in the frontlines from 1914 and 1915 can shed a light on the stories of individual people. The outcomes of our survey can be valuable and persuasive to the general public. However, in the shadow of the research remains specific threat.

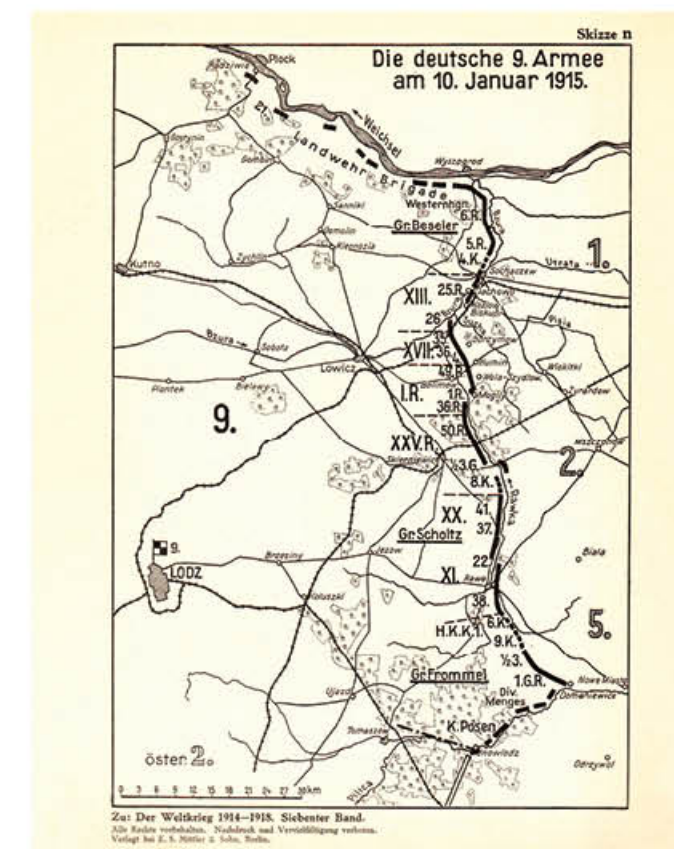
That former battlefield attracts not only tourists interested in unique cultural and natural landscape of Rawka region, but unfortunately also destructive 'militaria collectors' driven by the desire of finding personal belongings of the fallen soldiers. Thus, the results of the research must be presented in the most reasonable and sensible way, to preserve the uniqueness of material witnesses of WWI in the Eastern Front.



German soldiers marching through the village in the Polish Kingdom (1915). From private collection of Anna Zalewska and Jacek Czarnecki.



German map with the course of the frontline in January 1915.



German soldier in gas mask in the trench (model 1915). From private collection of Anna Zalewska and Jacek Czarnecki.