

# The “Alert”<sup>1</sup> for non-sites of memory: a 1965 scout action of discovering and describing Second World War sites in Poland

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## Abstract

During the First Scouting Alert (Poland 1965), scouts were tasked with finding and describing sites related to the events of Second World War. Those were mostly monuments, places of conflict, graves and body disposal pits. The scouts were tasked with finding such sites in their neighbourhood according to information collected from local communities. The campaign resulted in 26,000 reports in form of the registration sheets containing self-made maps, short descriptions of the found sites and answers to several questions on how to commemorate them. The Alert can be seen as a nationwide response to non-sites of memory.

The article analyses the reports of the scouts, as well as considering the action as a process. It presents the political background of the action and diagnoses its influence on the results of the reconnaissance conducted - types of places to be found and registered or overlooked by scouts. In particular cases, the Alert generated opportunities during which non-sites of memory could be restored to the public awareness. The paper summarizes the campaign and focuses on two cases: Krępiecki Forest and Adampol, described to present the influence of the Alert on the memory cultures. In the neighbourhood of Krępiecki Forest, the Alert was an impulse to transform a person who saw the mass murder into a key witness. The case of archaeological investigations conducted in Adampol shows the potential of the Alert archive materials to evoke the state of unrest and to become forensic evidence

## Key Words

Scouting Alert, body disposal pit, call to action, memory transfer, Nazi crimes, non-site of memory, oblivion, recon, scouts

“Non-sites of memory”<sup>2</sup> cannot be simply understood as “forgotten” – the notion pertains rather to places which, due to their contested or unsettling status require inter-

vention – a constant re-opening of processes of exploration, documentation and recollection. These processes have been ongoing ever since the end of the war in any

<sup>1</sup> In Polish Scouting terminology, an alert is a campaign or call to action which engages various troops in a particular endeavor. Given that there is no ideal English equivalent, the term has been retained here. See the section below for a further explanation of the term.

<sup>2</sup> The article was developed within a team research project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” (2016-2020), where the researchers understood non-sites of memory in the following way: “The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparations (and of any official designation of the scope of the territory in question). Non-sites of memory also have in common the past or continued presence of human remains (bodies of deceased persons) that have not been neutralized by funerary rites. These sites do not, meanwhile, share physical characteristics: they may be extensive or minute, urban or rural, though they are often characterized by some variety of physical disturbance to the organic order (human remains, plants, animals) and to the inorganic order (ruins, new construction). The victims who should be commemorated on such sites typically have a collective identity (usually ethnic) distinct from the society currently living in the area, whose self-conception is threatened by the occurrence of the non-site of memory. Such localities are transformed, manipulated, neglected, or contested in some other way (often devastated or littered), the resultant discouragement of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism.” (Sendyka 2016a: 700). This term is developed further in the article “Sites of violence and their communities: critical memory studies in the post-human era” by Roma Sendyka in this volume.

given part of Poland, yet there are also episodes when those interventions are of especially high intensity. As an example of such an intervention, one can cite the First Scouting Alert – an event organised in 1965 by the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego: ZHP) in cooperation with the Council for the Protection of Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom (Rada Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa: ROPWiM). During the action, Scout troops were tasked with finding and briefly describing places from their neighbourhoods related to the events of Second World War.

The organizations that prepared the campaign are worth characterizing. ZHP is a coeducational youth organization founded in 1918. It is part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the World Organization of the Scout Movement. The organization has its own specificity – ZHP was shortly described by its founder Andrzej Małkowski as “scouting plus independence” (Mirowski 1997). ROPWiM, on the other hand, was established on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1947 by the decision of the Polish legislative parliament as an institution responsible for the identification and documentation of national memorial sites regarded as “sites of struggle and martyrdom of the Polish nation”. By 1965 it had identified approximately 14,000 sites of memory. ROPWiM also had the task of engaging the public in the process of preparing monuments and taking care of the memorial sites (Bartelski 1977). The number of recognized sites increased significantly in the spring of 1965, as a direct result of the Scouting Alert.

## Scouting “Alert”. A case of social unrest

The French term “alerte” [in English: “alert” or “warning”] is translated as “alert” in Polish, but the Polish word can also mean “alarm”, referring to a situation when an “alarm is raised” – it is a warning signal calling for readiness or a period of such readiness, signifying a moment of anxiety or agitation. The term also means a state of readiness in reference to an alarming natural phenomenon or a call given by a central authority towards the members of a given society/group (“central alert”, similar to the English “call” as in “call to arms”; this is a key aspect of the meaning associated with the ZHP “alert”). An “Alert” may thus be described as a call, the addressees of which enter a state of agitation and undertake specific actions of a collective or individual character. The phenomenon of “social unrest” includes the launching of social activities (e.g., starting a movement), initiating a discussion on a given topic (discussing particular issues, matters, problems) and a concomitant state of heightened emotions (unrest includes being unbalanced, excitement, a state diametrically opposed to indifference). The first major

dictionary of the Polish language published at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Linde 1807) quotes the following saying, “Evil. When it goes silent, let it rest”. It may be regarded as a social indication of how to treat topics too hazardous for local identity. In this context, the state of “unrest” can be considered a moment when a taboo is breached. Therefore, an “alert” can evoke a period of social change during which non-sites of memory can be restored to the public awareness.

## Annual Scouting “Alerts”

The annual “Alerts” (from the Chief Scout - head of ZHP) were centrally prepared, nation-wide, 2-4 day long intensive scouting campaigns, as a part of which individual scout troops performed the tasks assigned to them by the headquarters of ZHP. The “Alerts” were intended to confirm the efficiency of the Association, to serve its advancement, to consolidate its social standing, and to achieve goals regarded by the leaders to be essential for the society: it organized meetings with combatants, promoted a healthy style of life among the youth, familiarized young people with self-defence techniques or with the fate of Polish children during Second World War and set up regional memorial rooms, mostly at schools, devoted to local history. The “Alert” staff were responsible for monitoring whether the tasks were carried out and for the organization of the campaign, with local staff assigned to each troop. Both the date of the “Alert” and the tasks related to it were kept secret and only announced at the launch (Fietkiewicz 1988).

## “The Victory Alert”

The first scouting call to action, “The Victory Alert” also known as “The Scouting Sprint Recon”, was carried out between April 24 and 26 in 1965. The recon included two tasks. Firstly, the scouting troops had to find sites related to the struggle of the Polish nation against the Nazis in 1939–1945, both commemorated and forgotten, gather information about them by interviewing local people and representatives of appropriate organizations dealing with the Nazi occupation, structure (marking by different means: cleaning the place, plucking the grass, putting stones on the body disposal pit<sup>3</sup> or fencing it) and commemorate the places and the occasion by paying respect (such as placing flowers or a guard of honour). The forgotten places were to be taken care of by the scouts also after the “Alert”. Secondly, the troops were to find buildings erected after 1945 in their surrounding – during the then 20-year existence of the Polish People’s Republic. This campaign, organized to honour the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary

3 In the research project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” we decided to use the term “body disposal pit” rather than “mass grave” as the places we researched were not transformed into graves in terms of funeral rite, marking, their status is unstable. On the designations used in the research by our interviewees see: “Sites of violence and their communities: critical memory studies in the post-human era” by Roma Sendyka in this volume.

of the socialist state, combined recognition of struggles for liberation with the formation of the Polish People's Republic and thereby made visible the development of the country as a result and continuation of the wartime heroism and martyrdom of the nation. The work done for the state's development was regarded in that context as a perpetuation of the wartime struggle for the country (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966; Syrokowski 1972). The first of the abovementioned tasks, as emphasized by the authors of reports on the "Alert", mainly the reports of ZHP, turned out to be much more interesting for the scouts than the other (Scouting Archive CI8; Syrokowski 1972).

The places sought by the scouting troops were located in their own neighbourhoods – in villages within an 8-kilometre radius and in cities nearby individual schools – and, thus, the troop members often knew the people they sourced information from, who were their family members or neighbours. The participants of the campaign were aware that their work had important social ramifications, the activities concerned their immediate surroundings and, in some sense, concerned them personally. Moreover, the recon was potentially attractive, having an appeal as a reconnaissance leading to discovery of a secret. The task performed during the "Victory Alert" was considered by the scout leaders to be successfully completed and unique in comparison to subsequent orders because it met the real needs of the ROPWiM which co-organized it: it would not have been possible to register so many mentioned in the "Alert" documents as "unknown" and "forgotten" sites spread across the country in a few days had there been not for the engagement of the youth organization. Scouting troops were present in almost every primary school (in some schools, more than one troop was active) as indicated by the report summarizing the actions of ZHP in the school year 1964–1965. The campaign involved more than 90 % of the troops. That is, 900 thousand members of ZHP (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966): it was on a massive scale, given that also parents, teachers, policemen and policewomen, soldiers and members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy were asked to help the scouts. The engagement of society in support of the "Alert" participants was deemed by the leaders of ZHP and ROPWiM one of the event's greatest successes. Between April 21 and May 1, Polish Radio reported on the "Alert" with a total of 36 programmes and messages broadcast on the national radio channels providing announcements, instructions, reports and summaries. There was also television and nationwide and local coverage in the lead-up to the event featuring messages from ZHP and reportages and reports on the "Alert" itself (Scouting Archive CI8,1). As a result of the significant social support of the event and of its broad exposure, it was reported that in many instances the locals who witnessed the events had been waiting for the arrival of the scouting troops and sometimes they even looked for the scouts themselves in order to tell them about the events they saw (Scouting Archive CI8,1). It

can be assumed that this reflected their strong desire to share knowledge.

The event resembled a drill: scout troops were to meet at the appointed time at their places scattered around Poland to open an envelope received from the scout leaders. The contents of the envelope - orders from the Chief Scout, instructions, and a form to be completed – had previously been kept secret. The command explained the tasks of the recon and how they were to be executed. The first stage of the first task consisted of identifying places related to Second World War located nearby, and in choosing a destination of a recon, a place connected to Second World War (sometimes more than one). Then scouts had to do reconnaissance of the site (during this activity some scouts took photos or made drawings), they were asked to evaluate the condition of the site (whether it was marked or commemorated, whether anyone was taking care of it) and gather all available information about the site and associated historical events. This information usually came from the members of local populace, including bystanders who had witnessed the events or even their participants or – in the case of previously known sites – from members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, ROPWiM and representatives of other institutions. The surveys conducted by scouts indicate that they were most impressed by the memories of partisans and direct witnesses of historical events. The troops had to honour the site for instance with a ceremonial roll-call and a minute of silence. They also had to consider what needed to be done at the site, if possible, by the group in question or with an assistance of some institution – each troop was asked to submit their declaration that it would take care of the neglected site. When the site had not been previously memorialized, the scouts were to suggest how to go about marking the uncommemorated place.

The majority of participants were members of junior troops, mainly pupils at primary school. From today's perspective, the participation of young people in the search for traces of war might be considered potentially traumatic due to the direct exposure to drastic reports given by people who witnessed the events, to the knowledge that mass killings took place in the direct neighbourhood of the scouts' living spaces and to the awareness that the ground they investigated still contained human bodies that were put into the ground without any burial ceremony. No such concern was expressed in the records of the time; they do not address potential remedies for the consequences of shocking children. The Centre for Psycho-Pedagogical Research at the headquarters of ZHP admittedly conducted a participatory observation investigation of the event – every tenth troop was accompanied by Association delegate who filled in the forms about the course of the activities. Furthermore, one scout from every monitored troop was asked to fill in an evaluation questionnaire after the completion of the Alert. Yet the questions in the surveys only concerned the integration of the scouting environment, social engagement in the help for young people, the promotional value and, in particu-

lar' the propaganda effect achieved. They did not address the emotional impact of the event on its participants.

## The results

It is reported that the First Scouting Alert resulted in the discovery and description of 6,000 previously unknown or forgotten sites. From the perspective of research on non-sites of memory, this "Alert" is a performative formula created by society in response to non-sites of memory. It is interesting as a phenomenon in itself, as well as with regard to the documents prepared during the action.

The notion of "unknown sites" requires some clarification here: it refers to sites not registered at the time by the ROPWiM. The scouts found those sites thanks to instructions given to them by members of local communities. The individuals or groups who passed on their knowledge to young people engaged in the campaign and who, in turn, registered all information during the "Alert," became actors of memory transfer.

The archives of the reconnaissance available today form a record of a specific, nationwide event which had been initiated in a top-down manner. Sometimes these archives represent valuable evidence for forensic research, demonstrating the necro-performative impact of non-sites of memory. The impact of a dead body, often absent or lost, on the actions of present society is described by Dorota Sajewska (2016) as a search warrant issued by the missing corpse and this is clearly discernible in the context of non-sites of memory. The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC), an organization working with the Chief Rabbi of Poland, established in 2002, that oversees Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust mass graves, as well as The Forgotten Foundation – formed in RCC structure organization searching for and commemorating abandoned Jewish graves and seeking to create an inventory of them – quite often come across "Alert" reports during their research. The representatives of The Forgotten Foundation are given access to "Alert" reports concerning those places when doing archival research on the location and events associated with a specific site at the Polish Institute of National Remembrance.

## The reports

The direct results of these actions – the registration sheets filled in by hand and accompanied by maps, map keys, short descriptions of the found sites and answers to several questions conveyed in the report forms – were sent to the headquarters of ZHP. 26,000 reports were sent/received, among them reports describing sites previously not registered. ZHP handed the reports over to ROPWiM, The National Academy of Sciences and to the Main Commis-

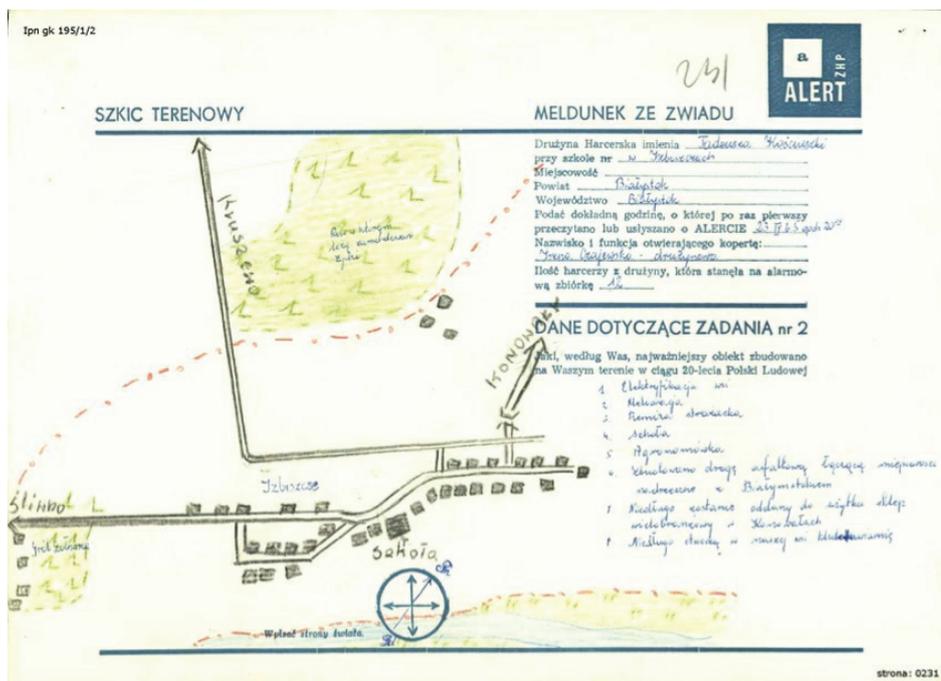
sion for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland – an organization established in 1945 to investigate Nazi crimes in Poland, collect and archive evidence, analyse materials and publish historical analyses. The Commission was established to provide evidence to the courts, the Supreme National Tribunal among others. Investigators from the Commission were tasked with verification of the veracity of scouts' reports. There seems to be no indication that this task was ever accomplished, although it could have progressed slowly as evidenced by the short, red pencil notes on some of the numerous scout reports: "m. up." [commemorated place] and "m. nup." [uncommemorated place]. Considering the numerous investigations of Nazi crimes commenced by the Chief Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland and its local branches, the state of unrest evoked during the scout "Alert" of 1965 could be considered as a call (more precisely one of the calls, including exacerbation of the political situation and propaganda activities) to initiate them.

The scouting event is included in the collection of sources in the *Registers of Sites and Facts of Crimes Committed by the Nazi in the Territory of Poland in 1939–1945*, published by the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (at present Chief Commission for Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation) in the 1980s. and '90s. The scouts' reports were included in investigation files composed by the Commission and surveys of town courts on the places and facts of Nazi crimes. However, there is a significant difference in scale between those collections of documents – especially the investigatory files compiled by the Commission are as a rule much more detailed than "Alert" reports as they were drafted by qualified investigators and created over an extended period of time. On the other hand, the specific value of the scouts' reports depends on its vernacular character, local knowledge (including local, folk names of the killing places) written down by the troops and, especially, maps. However, these materials have to be read taking into consideration not only the limited competences of the scout investigators, but also a possible tendency of their local informers to change reported events into a tabooed narration and pass over inconvenient facts.

## "Memory Sieves"

The memory sieves<sup>4</sup> are the mechanisms practiced by a given group that serve to distinguish what is considered worth remembering from what is not (Chwin 2016). Here they lead to being inattentive to the difference between sites of armed struggle and the murder of civilians, as well as a lack of ethnic distinctions between civilian victims. This causes some facts and events being omitted. The memory sieves launched during the "Alert" perpetuated the main propaganda lines of Władysław Gomułka's

4 The memory sieve is a metaphor coined by the Polish literary historian and writer Stefan Chwin. Memory sieves might have different origins, i.e. family, neighbourhood and generational, political, religious, gender (Chwin 2016).



**Map 1.** Map on the back of the Alert report from Izbiszczce (village in the east of Poland). Notes on the map: “Rów w którym leżą zamordowani Żydzi” [the ditch where the murdered Jews lie], “Grób żołnierza” [soldier’s grave], “Szkoła” [school], and villages names. Institute of National Remembrance, IPN GK 195/I/2, p. 241.

government (Żukowski 2014; Wołowiec 2014). Gomułka was the head of the ruling communist PZPR party [Polish United Workers’ Party] from 1956 until 1970. His government is known for the anti-Semitic campaign that took place in Poland in 1968. In 1965, the year of the “Alert”, the anti-Semitic attitudes of the rulers were not yet so perceptible, however, patriotic sentiments aimed at nationalism were increasingly present (Żukowski 2014; Wołowiec 2014). The matrix of subjective narrative emphasized the active and armed participation of the Polish nation in the struggle for independence. As Stefan Chwin (2016) writes, this matrix was built during the partitions of Poland, during the PRL period and after 1989. In the mid-1960s, it was strengthened by the state-building discourse of PRL a clear case of which was the second “Alert” task. The desired form of national solidarity, one built on the basis of “exalted bloodshed and common sacrifice on the front line and behind it” (Puerta and Żukowski 2014, 222), excludes the “passive” part of society to which Jewish victims were attributed. The cult of heroes overlaps with an anti-Semitic cliché that excludes the Jewish minority from history, the subject of which was exclusively the Polish nation.

The Victory Alert issued by the Chief Scout of ZHP, conveying the propaganda message associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People’s Republic of Poland, centred on the importance of identifying sites related to the national struggle with the former occupants. One would expect, therefore, that the reports focus predominantly on

battle sites and graves of soldiers and partisans and there is little or no reference to the disposal pits with remains of civilians, including places related to the Holocaust. Yet, it is the notion not only of “sites of struggle”, but also “martyrdom” that is used as an official term in the “Alert” reports. To substantiate this statement, I will refer to how the “Alert” tasks were formulated by scout leaders (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966). The objective was

to honour sites of the nation’s martyrdom, to find sites of liberation struggles and gather information about them, to find sites of struggles with the Nazis, to find the lost places or monuments not taken care of, to find places of forgotten deaths, during the trip = recon to find places where the graves are located, to find places of execution from the Second World War.

Moreover, the publication summarizing the outcome of the recon published by Scouts Publishing house, *Na szlakach walki* [On the trails of conflict] (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966) too, records not only places of struggle but also the execution sites, sites of tortures and of body disposal pits of murdered civilians. Its authors argue that the Spring Call to Action and the resulting publication were an exercise in the didactic and identity-forming work of reading the landscape<sup>5</sup> and the history inscribed in it, as in a book:

5 On modes of reading landscapes and cultural remembrances and on mapping as a research method see: Fyfe, J. (2020). *Unsettled Landscapes: The Narrative and Material Capacities of Landscape in the Post-War Croatian Hinterlands* (Doctoral thesis).

The earth is a book of experience. And the Polish land is a particularly rich book. The times of the Second World War are engraved in each of its locations: in every wood, on every field, on every street and in every house. Browsing through its tragic pages is the experience for youth.

## This is why we stand to attention for the Alert...

As the event progressed, it was impossible not to come across some of the thousands of body disposal pits of the victims of the Holocaust, especially since it was the bystanders of the wartime event who suggested the direction of the searches and led scout troops to the places which they remembered the most. Therefore, as indicated in the reports, both the sites of struggle and those of suffering were investigated by the scouts. In the process of "reading the [book of] Polish land" that took place in mid-1960s, many body disposal pits containing remains of people of different nationalities were discovered. In the documentation and publications issuing from the event, materials concerning the body disposal pits of victims not engaged in the civilian struggle or of members of national minorities were yet not always differentiated from information about units and groups engaged in the struggle for national liberation. Descriptions of the maps drafted by the scouts admittedly include information on the victims' ethnic identity, yet the body disposal pits pictured on the maps are not usually distinguished in a visual way from places of struggle. The Jewish and Polish disposal pits are usually marked on the maps in the same way, using a square, circle, X sign, a cross or combination of those marks, and they do not seem to depend on the ethnicity or religion of the victims. However, the emphasis on the heroic history of Poland as the way that led to building the Polish People's Republic might be the reason for some of the disproportion between the number of reports between both groups of potential findings. This might also have led members of the scout troops to experience feelings of confusion and disappointment when the pit turned out to be occupied by German and not Polish or Soviet soldiers (National Archives in Kielce, 21/1101/153).

The publication *Na szlakach walki* (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966) does not seem to differentiate war or uprising victims from murdered civilians. It places information on the victims of the September campaign (the invasion of Poland in 1939 which began the Second World War in Poland), on French Prisoners of War (POWs), on Polish and Soviet victims of the POW camps, prisoners from Szucha Alley (the infamous Gestapo headquarters and an investigative prison in Warsaw), or unknown soldiers, on an equal footing. The reports provide information on the bomb attack on Arbeitsamt (German Labour Office responsible for round-ups and deportations of Poles to the Third Reich) by the Polish Underground

Movement and sites of other partisan activities, on places of struggle from the period of the Warsaw Uprising and other clashes with the occupying forces. The publication also refers to murdered policemen and gives information on a group of people murdered during the Death March, children who froze to death during transport, and the Jewish victims of the Siedlce ghetto. It is only the last mentioned report which refers directly to Jewish victims. Although other information on the execution of civilians might have concerned Jewish people, the reader would assume they were ethnic Poles since there is no information about ethnicity or religion. Summarizing, among 74 "Alert" reports included in the album, only one addresses the murders of members of the Jewish community and explicitly established the victims as Jewish.

The political and dignity sieve of memory based on the matrix of the subjectivity and agency of the Polish nation and anti-Semitic tendencies was not the only factor leading to the sifting of sites registered by scouts and others not mentioned in their reports: connected with victims of different ethnicity that turned out not to suit well enough the patriotic narration of the time. Among other possible contexts, the educational sieve is worth mentioning. The questionnaire surveys carried out among scouts indicate a high repeatability of responses to the task concerning the history of Second World War: defining the Nazis and mentioning war heroes (people who "fought the Nazis"), including Mieczysław Moczar (the leader of the government section who in 1968 would lead to an outbreak of anti-Semitic sentiment). The scouts' answers seem very emotional but also, in the vast majority of cases, perfectly in line with state propaganda, also on the rhetorical level (National Archives in Kielce, 21/1101/153, 84-89).

## Remembrance

The "Alert" order of the Chief Scout obliged scout troops to arrange and take care of the investigated sites that were not cared for before the recon.

A year after the Victory Alert, in 1966, at the request of ZHP, the Council for the Protection established the medal of Guardian of National Remembrance Sites awarded to teams and groups who "grant permanent patronage over a memorial site". This patronage meant the obligation of regularly cleaning up the site, organising a guard of honour during national holidays and anniversaries and drawing up a chronicle of the site. From a general perspective, the action of patronage turned out to be very successful (IPN GK 195/VIII/21, 19-27). Some scout troops addressed relevant institutions with the application for taking patronage over the place even before the medal was established, already during the "Alert". Such requests were granted.

The appeal to take care of "the sites of national memory" was repeated by the Chief Scout on various occasions connected with the establishment of The Polish People's Republic. The cooperation with the scouting institutions



**Figure 1.** Photo attached to the report from the reconnaissance in Zamość (Zmość-Zamczysko). Caption on the back of the photo: “Scouts of troop no. 5 from Zamość build up the grave of an unknown Jew murdered by the Nazi invaders”. Institute of National Remembrance, IPN GK 195/VIII/21, pp. 39-40.

undertaken by ROPWiM was aimed at educating young people in a patriotic spirit, therefore it can be assumed that the “Alert” participants, following their leaders, particularly appreciated sites connected with the defence and liberation struggles. Therefore, such places could be especially predestined for scout patronage. Despite the institutional work and numerous symbolic activities, the scouting patronage did not always survive the test of time. Places associated with Jews, which did not directly fit into the patriotic paradigm, could be at a greater risk of being abandoned and often returned to a state of oblivion. This can be supposed on the basis of the contemporary field research of the RCC. According to interviews conducted by The Forgotten Foundation at particular sites where the “Alert” took place, local residents indicate 1968 as the date when the scouts stopped looking after memorial sites related to the extermination of Jews. If so, this fact would be easily connected with the aforementioned anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. However, Agnieszka Nieradko from RCC highlights that this date may appear in the narrative of witnesses on the basis of associations as the year 1968 is a very powerful and symbolic date in Polish imaginary, i.e. the information may not be true (interview with Nieradko, Warsaw 15.07.2018). Still, the sites recorded in 1965 and examined nowadays by the RCC have again fallen into oblivion in the decades following the “Alert”, remembered in the performative form of oblivion: bypassing, abandonment or silencing the voice when talked about. The “Alert” resulted in many record cards which can still be used today. “Alert” documentation is included in the archival resource of the Institute of National Remembrance, some of the State Archives (The Archive of New Files, the State Archives in Poznań, in Kraśnik and in Katowice) and the ZHP Museum Archive.

## The effective stirring of memory. A case of Krępiecki Forest

One of the “Alert” reports describing the killing site in Krępiecki Forest in the south-east of Poland, several kilometres from the Majdanek Concentration Camp, was accompanied by an 11-page-long account written down in 1953 by a direct witness of the killings of mostly Jewish victims. It was the testimony of Roman Podolski, a citizen of one of the villages neighbouring the forest. In the case of Podolski, as can be proved by a detailed analysis of archives collected in various locations, an impulse of “unrest” evoked by the scout “Alert” not only made him share his testimony, but also motivated him to conduct other activities connected with memory of the crime. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1942, while observing a mass killing, Podolski saw a Jew, named by him “The Brave One”, who escaped the execution and ran away. After the “Alert” Podolski decided to write a letter to Polish Radio, asking if they could find out whether the “Brave” Jew was still alive. In the letter, Podolski explains the history of Krępiecki Forest and his role as a witness. The letter was probably the first bottom-up act of communication by Podolski as a witness of the crime. Although there is no evidence that the Radio conducted any search for the potential survivor, it can be traced that it sent Podolski’s letters to the Regional Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin. This information led to the decision to initiate an investigation that lasted in the years 1966-1977. Podolski was one of the witnesses questioned in this investigation (IPN Lu 284.410 t. 1., k. 3.).

The story of Podolski makes it possible to investigate how the “Alert” evoked a specific atmosphere, meaning that memory could have an influence on the non-site of memory. It seems that the state of unrest evoked by the

"Alert" was an impulse which transformed Podolski from a person who saw the murder into a key witness who undertakes the responsibility to remember, record and transmit his testimony.<sup>6</sup>

## A case of Adampol

As noted earlier, the scouts' reports are included in the documentation obtained by institutions and researchers that ask in the Polish Institute of National Remembrance about archival materials pertaining to the sites of the Holocaust in Poland. The informative value of this "Alert" is primarily the fact that when it was carried out in 1965, many direct witnesses of the events were still alive. Secondly, the maps drawn by the scouts with a wind rose and reference points (the instructions for the creation of maps were simple: the scouts were advised to mark places related to Second World War, as well as locations of nearby bus stops or other sites related to mass communication), based on recollections of wartime inhabitants of the areas, still prove helpful in locating the sites. In the research conducted by the Forgotten Foundation and archaeological investigations leading to the discovery of disposal pits containing bodies, the reports made by scouts are used in combination with aerial photographs and non-invasive terrain tests.

In the town of Adampol in the east of Poland (<https://m.zapomniane.org/miejsc/adampol/>, accessed: 21.09.2019) the scouts found two "sites of struggle or martyrdom": a fenced in and ordered "place of murder of the Polish population" (as it was framed by the scout troop in the report) where the remains of seven partisans were said to have been found (the scout report does not mention who found the bodies or when it happened) and a neglected "place of murder of the Jewish population" where 300 Jewish people were believed to have been murdered. Both places were marked on an "Alert" map with rectangular figures and the difference in the victims' ethnic, national or religious identity can be established exclusively on the basis of a description accompanying the map provided in the report. The "Alert" sheet, containing information on both locations, speaks of a need to "extend care towards the place" and, indeed, the scouting troop declared the intention to take care of the location in the aftermath of the "Alert". Nevertheless, the sheet does not include any indication as to which of the two places was to be taken care of. Neither is a plural form used, the two marked places being located at a significant distance from each other. Since the Chief Guide's order called for the need to take care of forgotten places, one could assume that the scouts declared that they would look after the neglected site. And yet, contrary to these assumptions, it was at the site dedicated to the memory of the partisans that a boulder with a memory plaque was placed in 1966 (and is still there today) (IPN GK 175/78). The scout "Alert" could initiate this commemorative intervention. When the members of the RCC embarked on

an endeavour to find the location of the Jewish remains in 2013, they found neither a sign of commemoration nor any marking of body disposal pits. They were not able to locate the site as there were no witnesses who could point them in the direction of the site. On this basis one may assume that in a "place of murder of Jewish people" no commemoration was set up or, if it was, it was so insignificant or short-lived that it has been forgotten.

In 2015, the archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls, commissioned by the Pomeranc Group and the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland, conducted non-invasive archaeological research in Adampol. It was clear that in the town or in its surroundings, in the course of several mass executions, a large group of Jews were murdered who had previously been imprisoned in the labour camp. On the basis of available documents, in-field investigations and LIDAR survey data techniques the archaeologist marked ten places where the bodies of the victims may have been located. One of those places was located in the vicinity of the site marked during the scout "Alert". In this case, the "Alert" report was the only source indicating precisely its location and defining it as "the place of murder". It was checked by the archaeologists against the result of LIDAR examination and the aerial photo which allowed for a precise selection of the area to be studied. Today the site is a field. Reading the historical maps on Google Earth allowed Sturdy Colls to conclude that the chosen area, despite being part of a field, had been excluded from cultivation until at least 2011 – it had been left fallow. If the presence of remains at the site were confirmed, we could speak of a practice of "non-memory" described by Roma Sendyka (2016b) as "not revealing and yet maintaining relations to a certain event from the past". In this practice, which can be observed among others in Poland in the context of body disposal pits of the victims of non-Polish ethnicity, sites of memory are highlighted by not being transformed, thereby introducing an atmosphere of taboo around the semiotic memory transfer. The memory of the presence of dead bodies is not verbalized or marked by any monument or readable sign located in the area. In the case of "non-memory", it has a performative, silent way of transferring activities and omissions. However, field research conducted in Adampol with the use of ground radar yielded a negative result. The acquired image did not indicate the presence of human remains; shallow changes in the structure of the soil had arisen rather as a result of the removal of vegetation in this place (Sturdy Colls 2015). The final report prepared by the archaeologist does not exclude the possibility that murders might have taken place at the site located by the scouts and that some remains might have been buried there and exhumed a long time ago (perhaps during the occupation itself, in order to be burnt in the process of obliterating evidence of the crimes – authors note); no serious disturbances were discovered in the magnetic structure of the soil.

It seems significant that in their report the scouts do not call the area studied by Sturdy Colls a "cemetery", "body

6 See also Szczepan, Kobielska in this volume. Esp. the category of the crown witness.

disposal pit” or “grave”, but only a “place of murder”. Perhaps the bodies of the victims were never buried here.

## Conclusion

When discussed in relation to non-sites of memory, the term “alert” can be understood as a transgression and an act of questioning of the existing reality performed by the “Alert” participants as well as their possible followers who, as in the case of Podolski, after the action found themselves in the state of unrest and mobilization. As a result of this mobilization, the status of non-sites of memory, their conceptualizations, local, state or wider dimensions, may be affected, though it does not happen in most of the cases of oblivion. The “Alert” would be read as an action aiming to supplement the registry of memory, extending it onto a site or sites that have yet to be recognized. It is an act whose objective is ultimately to neutralize the disturbing awareness of the existence of non-sites of memory, which is done through gathering, announcing, registering, or forwarding knowledge about events related to those places. The analysis of “Alert” as processual act of vehicular, bottom-up communication in which a local community informs the centre about the disturbing scandal of oblivion and lack of commemoration associated with the neighbourhood of human disposal pits, allows one to indicate its potential consequences. “Alerts” can evoke the transformation of a non-site of memory into a memorial site or the easing of potential movement and unrest. “Alert” reports have been deposited in the archive in order to be investigated by the Main Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland. At present, rather unexpectedly for the report writers, they are and may be used as a call to action for future potential memory researchers. Thanks to the preserved documentation, the state of unrest, caused by the “Alert” in 1965 and probably suspended around 1968, and the direct entrustment resulting from it, may be triggered again. Reports produced by scouts have the potential to become forensic evidence and to awaken doubts, sometimes impossible to settle, about history and local memory and especially about their Holocaust parts.

transl. by Patrick Trompiz

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## Archival materials

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- National Archives in Kielce: 21/1101/153.
- The Institute of National Remembrance: IPN GK 195. Chosen materials, mostly in particular from the Lublin Voivodeship: IPN GK 195/VIII/1-22.