



XXXII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MILITARY HISTORY

POTSDAM, GERMANY 20th-25th AUGUST 2006

Dr John Peaty, International Secretary BCMH

The 32nd Congress was hosted by Germany and held in the city of Potsdam (18 miles south west of Berlin) from 20th to 25th August 2006.

The topic was: Nation State, Nationalism and the Military. There were seven sub-topics:

1. Early Forms of Nationalism before 1789
2. Revolutions, Liberation Movements and Nation Building 1789-1918
3. Colonialism, Imperialism and Non-European States
4. Nationalism, Class Struggle and Totalitarianism in the Age of the World Wars
5. The Cold War and the Rise of New Nations
6. Nationalism and New Wars
7. Transcending the Nation: Hired Soldiers, Alliances and Supra-National Forces.

The Congress was organised by the German Commission which is based at the MGFA (Military History Research Institute) in Potsdam.

The Congress began with a reception at the defence ministry in Berlin on the evening of Sunday 20th. Monday 21st began with the formal opening by the minister of defence in the morning and ended with a reception in the evening. The reception was hosted by the Prime Minister of Brandenburg. It took place aboard a pleasure cruiser as we cruised the Templiner See and River Havel, seeing the sights of Potsdam and passing under the Glienicke Bridge of Cold War infamy.

On the evening of Tuesday 22nd we enjoyed a Luftwaffe band concert followed by a reception at the hotel. On Wednesday 23rd the day trip included visits to the Citadel in Spandau, the Cecilienhof palace (of Big Three fame) and the Sans Souci palace (which was surprisingly small and astonishingly well preserved) in Potsdam and ended with dinner accompanied by music at the German Air Force Museum at Gatow, the former RAF airfield of Berlin Blockade fame. On the afternoon of Thursday 24th there was a guided tour of the Reichstag including the debating chamber and the spectacular dome followed by a reception, after which participants had the evening in Berlin to themselves. Many English speaking delegates attended the American party held in the Potsdammer Platz. The Congress ended with a banquet held opposite Sans Souci palace on the evening of Friday 25th. The banquet was preceded by a drill display in full costume by the Lange Kerls ("Big Lads", a re-enactment group devoted to the Prussian Grenadiers) and we were guided back to our transport by torch bearers of the Bundeswehr.

Everywhere we went we were escorted by motorcycle outriders of the Feld Polizei and accompanied by a Bundeswehr ambulance.



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The Congress was attended by 178 delegates with 76 partners. The largest delegations were the American, German and French. The BCMH delegation comprised the President Emeritus and Mrs Bond, the Secretary General and the International Secretary.

As always, the papers varied considerably in terms of presentation, research, relevance and interest. Prof Bond's paper on the 1940 debacle, Prof Kawamura's on the Japanese military before 1941, Dr Heinemann's on the integration of GDR forces after reunification, General Mangan's on Irish peacekeepers and Mr Galster's on the Danish defence debate stood out.

The latest volume of the German Official History of the Second World War, covering the Eastern Front in 1943/4, was unveiled, as was a collection of the latest writings on the Schlieffen Plan.

The business meeting on the Friday was very business like. Only one country was admitted (Tunisia) and none was expelled. The Madrid ACTA was unveiled, as was a new edition of the International Review of Military History, on military recruitment. The South Africans gave a seductive presentation about the 2007 Congress.

The programme of tours and visits for partners included Potsdam, Berlin, the Old National Gallery and Lehnin Abbey.

The Congress venue was the Kongresshotel on the Templiner See, which was converted from the old airship factory where the Graf Zeppelin was built, and next door to the former GDR athletic training school.

The post-Congress tour (26th-29th August) visited Naumburg with its famous cathedral, Freyburg with its famous wine cellars, Königstein with its famous fortress, Dresden with its famous church and opera house and included a cruise on the Elbe.

Our German hosts are to be congratulated for such a well organised Congress. The contribution of Dr Heinemann, the Secretary General of the German Commission, deserves particular mention.