

PECULIARITIES AND TRENDS IN THE FORMATION AND PLACEMENT OF MEMORIAL COMPLEXES IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the world experience of placing and arranging military memorials, the study of the development of forms of commemoration of the fallen defenders of Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war in the period from 2014 to 2024 and the determination of the military memorials' possible types, options for their placement in the settlements' structure, their functional composition, forms of burials (traditional and/or urn), symbols that will be used. The article first examines the forms of spontaneous commemoration that arose in Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war and were then partially institutionalized by decisions of local governments and central government bodies. The practice of dealing with existing Soviet military memorials is considered from the point of view of fulfilling the requirements of the laws of Ukraine aimed at decommunization and countering Russian imperial propaganda. The main possible options for placing memorial complexes in Ukraine, their functional composition and figurative and symbolic solutions are determined. It has been proven that such memorial complexes should become not only a place of remembrance symbols, but also museum and educational centres where one can learn about the country's history through the stories of the lives and deaths of individual people.

Keywords: War memorial; Memorial complex; Burial; Commemoration; Russian-Ukrainian war; Cossack cross

Introduction

Nowadays, a memorial is mainly understood as something tangible (e.g., a monument, structure or building) or intangible (e.g., a certain ceremony) that is created and/or held in memory of an individual deceased person or in memory of an event that caused mass death of people [1].

The concept of a war memorial is somewhat broader and can be focused on commemorating a specific event (usually a victory in a battle) or (and this trend has prevailed since the 20th century) an object or architectural or sculptural structure or architectural and landscape ensemble in memory of those who died or were injured as a result of military actions (this can apply to both combatants and non-combatants). The most common type of this second type of war memorial is a tombstone or a mass burial site in a certain architecturally designed way.

While the construction of significant memorials commemorating an event can be postponed until the post-war period and largely depends on the results of the war, commemorating the fallen defenders is a pressing task for any country, including during a military conflict.

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For Ukraine, which has been in a state of de facto war with Russia since 2014 and, since 2022, in a state of high-intensity war, the most urgent issue now is, first, a worthy commemoration of those who died in hostilities and this article mainly focuses on this type of war memorial. At the same time, some considerations are given regarding the locations of future war memorials of the first type, i.e., those focused on preserving the memory of certain events rather than individual people.

The aim of the article is to identify, based on the analysis of existing experience of commemoration and local traditions, possible features of the formation and placement of military memorials in Ukraine in the post-war period and partly already now.

The purpose determined the tasks of the study:

- to investigate the existing experience of building and using war memorials in the USA and Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries;
- to analyze the existing practices of commemorating those killed in the military conflict, which have been formed in Ukraine since 2014;
- to investigate how existing war memorials are changing under the influence of the Laws of Ukraine “On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the prohibition of the propaganda of their symbols” [2] and “On the condemnation and prohibition of the propaganda of Russian imperial policy in Ukraine and the decolonization of toponymy” [3];
- to determine possible approaches to the placement of war memorials in the structure of settlements in the post-war period.

The defined goals and objectives necessitated the study of the following sources:

- works that analyze the experience of commemoration and the construction and operation of war memorials [4-11];
- research into the influence of political and ideological factors on the policy of commemoration, memory of certain historical events and its perpetuation in war memorials [12-17];
- works devoted to the influence of war on the preservation of cultural heritage monuments (including memorials) [18,19];
- legislative acts and regulatory documents of Ukraine concerning issues of cultural heritage, the influence of colonialism and totalitarian ideologies on the commemoration and memory of those who fell in wars, as well as the organization of burials [2, 3, 20, 21].

Materials and Methods

The goal and objectives of the study determined the use of general scientific research methods. The comparative analysis method was used to compare different options for arranging war memorials, the analytical method to identify problems that arise during their arrangement and operation, the forecasting method to assess possible options for the development of commemoration practices, the graph-analytical method for comparison and the photofixation method to create an evidence base for conclusions and proposals.

Results and discussion

War memorials have a very long history. According to A. Porter *et al.* [22], the White Monument in Tal Banat (northern Syria) can be considered one of the oldest known war memorials, where regular burials of soldiers of the state army took place starting from the 3rd millennium BC.

However, as B. Niven notes [12], war memorials before the First World War in Europe (and, perhaps, before the Civil War of the 1860s in the USA [6]) were created mainly to commemorate the victory of a particular ruler in a particular battle or war. Only after the First World War did war memorials appear in Europe, focused primarily on perpetuating the memory

of individual people – victims of war and not only military but also civilian. A typical example is one of the largest memorials in France, the memorial located on the hill of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, in Northern France, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the First World War [9].

In the period between the two world wars, the basic planning techniques for creating such memorials and their main components were developed: a cemetery, where soldiers are buried under identical tombstones, stretching in even rows across green, neatly trimmed green fields; the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (usually a cenotaph dedicated to honoring the memory of fallen soldiers who could not be buried properly); steles with the names of the dead, where the names of not only those whose remains are buried in this cemetery can be indicated; and a monument designed to perpetuate memory. Even the Eternal Flame, which has become a kind of marker of Soviet memorials, was borrowed from France.

Undoubtedly, war memorials were not free from political and ideological influences, just as they are not free from them now [12-14]. Each memorial, in addition to the function of remembrance, also performs a more or less indirect function of propaganda. In the territory of modern Ukraine, the first war memorials in the interwar period appeared on the territory controlled by Poland and the most significant of them was not dedicated to the events of the First World War at all. The Polish War Memorial in Lviv—or, according to the Polish interpretation, the “Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv” (Polish: *Cmentarz Obrońców Lwowa*)—is a burial place for Poles who died in the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918–1919 and in the war with the Bolsheviks in 1920 and is ideologically aimed at affirming the Polish character of Lviv. In the then Soviet Union, the events of World War I were not considered worthy of memorialization; it was called an imperialist war and viewed as a senseless bloodshed initiated by imperialist powers to redistribute the world.

However, the events of World War II (the Soviet Union commemorated only the part from June 1941 to May 1945, calling it the “Great Patriotic War”) were widely memorialized in Ukraine, which after 1945 became a full part of the USSR. The structure of the memorials and planning techniques repeated European developments of the interwar period.

Among the memorials of the Soviet era in Ukraine, one can distinguish both memorials dedicated mainly to the celebration of significant events (mostly battles victorious for the Red Army, for example, the Memorial of Eternal Glory in the Pechersk district of Kyiv, 1957 and the Memorial Complex to the Liberators in Mykolaiv, 1967) and memorials combined with burials and focused mainly on remembering the fallen (often these are places of significant defeats or places of destruction of the population of individual villages, such as the Memorial Complex to the Soldiers of the South-Western Front 15km from Lohvytsia, Poltava region, 1976 and the Memorial “Malyn Tragedy” in the Rivne region).

There are memorials combined with open-air museum exhibitions of military equipment of the corresponding time (Memorial of the Heroic Defense of Odesa of the 411th Coastal Battery, 1975, National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II. Memorial Complex, 1974-1981). In addition to monuments dedicated to events and tombstones, at this time monuments dedicated to the glorification of personalities, usually military leaders, were also erected.

Thus, at the beginning of the 2014 war, Ukraine had experience in building and using memorials focused mainly or largely on remembrance.

It is obvious that the beginning of the military conflict in 2014 and Russia’s use of a strange mix of communism, Orthodoxy and great-power chauvinism as a state ideology, as well as the de facto creation of a state quasi-religion—the cult of the Great Victory of 1945 [23]—pushed Ukraine to search for its own way of commemorating and remembering the victims of World War II.

On March 24, 2015, by Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 169 [24], alongside the Victory Day over Nazism, which continued to be celebrated according to the Soviet tradition on May 9, an annual celebration of May 8 as the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation was

introduced (a date that coincided with the celebration of the Day of Victory over Nazism in Europe, Canada and the United States). These two days continued to be celebrated side by side until 2023, when Ukraine finally switched to the European tradition of commemorating the Second World War. On May 29, 2023, the Verkhovna Rada made the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in the Second World War 1939–1945 on May 8 a public holiday, canceling the Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War on May 9 [25].

In 2015, Ukraine, following the Baltic countries—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—equated communist ideology with Nazi ideology. The Ukrainian Parliament adopted the law “On Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols” [2]. Following this law, amendments were made to the law “On Protection of Cultural Heritage” that allowed certain monuments to be stripped of their monument status or to change certain of their elements.

It should be noted that the implementation of this law in the period before the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 was rather sluggish. It primarily concerned the dismantling of monuments to Vladimir Lenin and other communist figures, while monuments to Soviet military leaders, even those who participated in the war with the UNR in 1918–1920, the suppression of peasant uprisings, mostly remained in place, despite the protests of activists.

However, after February 24, 2022, Soviet military monuments began to be treated more decisively. Their fate varies in different cities and regions of the country.

If in Lviv on the Field of Mars—part of the Lychakiv Military Cemetery, where a Soviet war memorial was erected in 1974—the complete dismantling of the monuments was accompanied by the exhumation and reburial elsewhere of the remains of Soviet soldiers and officers [26], then in Kyiv on the monument “Motherland,” located on the territory of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II – the tallest sculpture in Europe, erected in 1981 – the image of the coat of arms of the Soviet Union on the shield was only replaced with a Ukrainian trident [27].

In Poltava—the regional center of Central Ukraine—on the memorial of Soldier’s Glory, they only changed the date of the beginning of the war from 1941 to 1939 and extinguished the Eternal Flame, mounted in a five-pointed star (Fig. 1). Overall, the elimination of symbols prohibited by law (which will obviously be completed later if funds are available) will not significantly change the overall appearance of the memorial.



Fig. 1. The Soldier's Glory Memorial Complex in Poltava: on the left – the main element of the complex – a monument to the soldier-liberator; on the right from above – the former place of the Eternal Flame in the form of a five-pointed star (a communist symbol prohibited by law); on the right from below – a granite block with the changed year of the beginning of the war (1941 replaced by 1939 – the year of the World War II beginning).

Memorials in public spaces commemorating those killed in the military conflict began to appear in Ukraine on public initiative as early as 2014–2015 (Fig. 2). After the war in Donbas transitioned to a low-intensity stage in the second half of 2015, honorary burial sectors in existing cemeteries were used to bury the dead (Fig. 3). With the increase in the number of fallen defenders of Ukraine in 2014–2022, other forms of commemorating their memory in the public space began to appear, in particular, using modern technologies.



Fig. 2. A memorial sign in honor of the fallen defenders of Ukraine, installed in 2014 at the public initiative on Nezadezhnosti Square opposite the Poltava Regional State Administration building.



Fig. 3. Continuation of the alley of honorary burials of the Poltava city cemetery, designated since 2014 for the burials of participants in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Thus, in 2018, in Poltava, in the Kotliarevskyi Park, next to the Soldier's Glory Memorial, a stand was opened where photos of fallen soldiers and brief information about their lives and the circumstances of their deaths were displayed on a video screen, one after the other. With the beginning of the large-scale invasion, stories dedicated not to individual people but to significant events of the war are mainly shown there (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The video stand in Kotliarevskyi Park is decorated with red poppies, a symbol of memory for those who died in the war.

In 2022, the war entered a high-intensity stage, which led to a significant increase in the number of dead. Therefore, both the means of commemoration in public spaces and the approaches to organizing memorial complexes have changed. The installation of national flags by the number of dead (often with the names of fallen defenders and the dates of their death indicated on them), which can be seen both on Independence Square in Kyiv and in the central parts of most cities in Ukraine (Fig. 5), was the result of a spontaneous public initiative aimed at commemoration. It is obvious that this is a form of commemoration that can be defined as short-term, but it will remain relevant until the end of the war.



Fig. 5. National flags with the names of the dead on Sobornyi Maidan in Poltava, near the Assumption Cathedral, where the funeral procession and religious ceremonies occur.

The installation of portraits of fallen defenders in public places is not only a consequence of public initiative but also decisions of local governments. Thus, in Poltava in 2024, stands were installed on one of the central streets of the city – Sobornosti Street—where portraits of the fallen and brief information about them were placed on each of the two sides (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Stands with portraits of fallen defenders of Ukraine on Sobornosti Street in Poltava.

Flowers are laid in front of the portraits and lamps are lit as a sign of remembrance, especially on the anniversary of the death. This form of commemoration can be assessed as medium-term. It will probably operate not only during the war but also after its end, at least until the construction of monumental memorial complexes. This form of commemoration practically makes it impossible for any other activities to take place on this section of Sobornosti Street, designed as a boulevard known in the city as Kashtanova Aleia (Chestnut Alley), turning it into a kind of cemetery alley. However, during the war, this form of commemoration of the dead can be assessed as a reasonable compromise between the everyday needs of people and the need to perpetuate the memory of the fallen defenders of Ukraine.

The increase in the war's intensity and the increase in the number of dead soldiers exacerbated the problem of their organized burial. An attempt to solve it was to expand the sectors of military burials in existing cemeteries, arrange memorial steles with the names of the dead (not necessarily only those buried in this cemetery), as well as memorial signs. In 2024, local governments began to massively approve the rules for arranging military burial sectors (for example, in Chernihiv – on February 27 [28] and in Poltava – on November 28 [29]). All tombstones in a certain territorial community are the same, according to the established model.

The most common gravestone forms in Ukraine today are a rectangular slab (as in Poltava) and the so-called Cossack cross (as in Chernihiv). The rectangular slab can be supplemented with special holders for the flagpole, which can be installed above the grave. This can be either the blue-yellow State Flag of Ukraine or the flag of the military unit in which the deceased serviceman served.

However, the problem of organizing military memorials is being solved not only at the local but also at the national level. Already on October 4, 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, by its Resolution No. 1115, allowed the Ministry of Veterans Affairs to establish a state institution, the “National Military Memorial Cemetery,” within its sphere of management.

At the end of 2023, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs presented a draft design of the complex (chief architect Serhiy Derbin), which was planned to be located near Kyiv near the village of Gatne. The design took into account the experience, in particular, of the Arlington National Cemetery in the USA. Thus, a military cemetery, a ceremonial area, a house of mourning, a crematorium, a museum and exhibition complex and other necessary infrastructure will be located on a land plot of more than 260 hectares; construction is planned to be carried out in several stages. The next day, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to allocate this site for a cemetery and construction work began in 2024. This project has been and continues to be criticized for its location, lack of competition, lack of a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and use of a Cossack cross as the main form of the tombstone. However, it should be said that it is impossible to implement such a project in a short time in any other way.

Let us dwell separately on two forms of gravestone monuments approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On Approval of Samples and Descriptions of Gravestone Structures and Memorial Plaques Installed on the Territory of the National War Memorial Cemetery” [31] (Fig. 7).

The Cossack cross is proposed as the main option for a tombstone and a rectangular, rounded-off vertical slab is proposed for people of non-Christian faiths and atheists who find it unacceptable to be buried under a cross. Critics of this idea point out that all monuments should be the same and, accordingly, the Christian majority should adapt to the non-Christian minority.

However, as an analysis of world experience (and not just Arlington Cemetery and several European war memorials) shows, the shapes of tombstones for servicemen of different faiths may well be different and this is not perceived as a manifestation of discrimination and does not harm compositional unity.

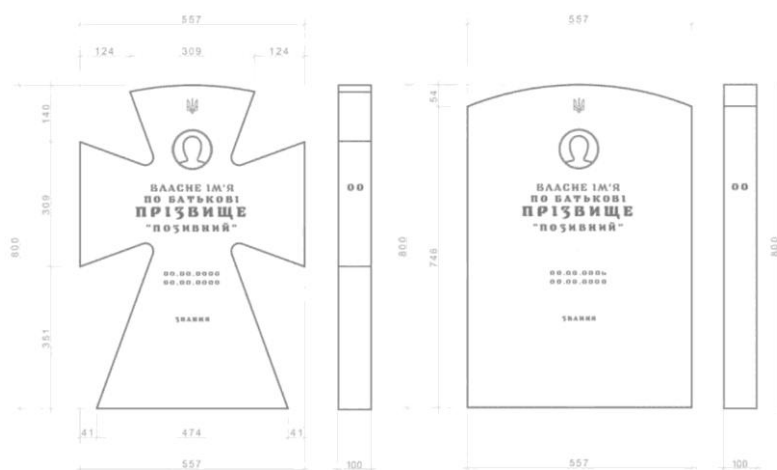


Fig. 7. Left – a sample of a burial structure – a gravestone in the form of a cross. Front and right side. Right – a sample of a burial structure – a gravestone in the form of a slab with a rounding in the upper part. Front and right side [31]

An example is the war memorial to Allied soldiers who died in the Battle of Singapore and in Japanese captivity during the occupation of the island, where the shape of the tombstones differs for buried Christians and servicemen of other faiths (Fig. 8).

The Cossack cross is the basis of the emblem of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, approved by the Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the Symbols Used in the Armed Forces of

Ukraine” dated June 20, 2006, No. 551/2006, the description of which is contained in Appendices No. 1 and No. 2 to this Decree [33] (Fig. 9). There are still no known cases when servicemen declared that such an emblem contradicted their religious or ideological beliefs. The trident is also often used in practice – the sign of the princely state of Volodymyr the Great, approved as the State Emblem of Ukraine by the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine “On the State Emblem of Ukraine” dated February 19, 1992, No. 2137-XII, a schematic representation of which (Fig. 9) is given in the Appendix to this resolution [34].



Fig. 8. The Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore – the final resting place for Allied soldiers who perished during the Battle of Singapore and the subsequent Japanese occupation of the island [32]

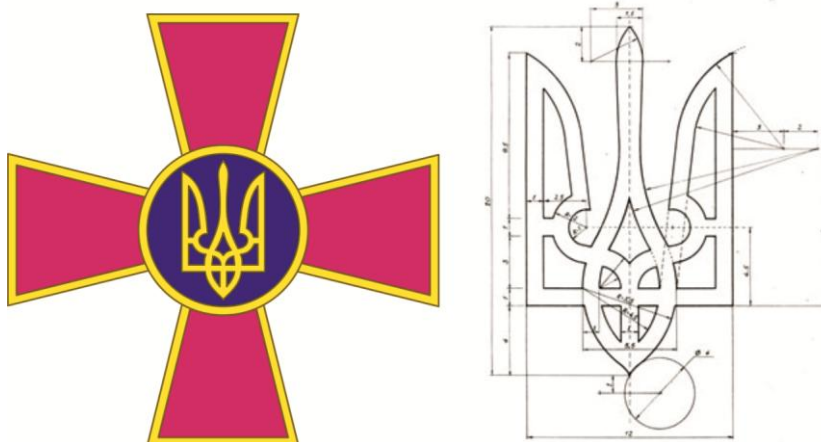


Fig. 9. On the right – the emblem of the Armed Forces of Ukraine [33]; on the left – a schematic image of a trident [34]

The Cossack cross with a trident on it has become widespread in recent years as an element of a war memorial (Fig. 10). Of course, the two forms of tombstones proposed in the National Military Cemetery project are not the only possible ones. However, they have a compositional connection with each other (Fig. 10) and they repeat the most common forms of tombstones that became widespread on war memorials in Ukraine in the period 2014–2016.

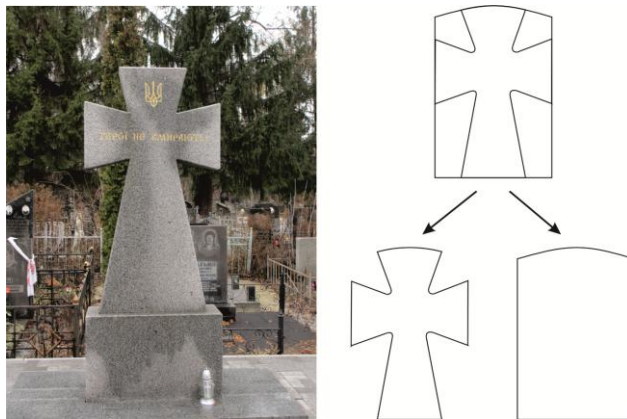


Fig. 10. On the left – a Cossack cross on the alley of honorary burials at the Poltava City Cemetery, installed in 2018 (photo by A. Dmytrenko, 2025); on the right – a compositional connection between tombstones in the shape of a Cossack cross and slabs with a rounded top, intended for placement at the National Military Cemetery of Ukraine

Modern war memorials also use symbolic images of an arch, a memorial bell, a simplified image of a trident (first introduced during the Ukrainian People's Republic as an embroidered chevron and reintroduced in the Armed Forces of Ukraine starting in 2018), images of a sword, grapes and viburnum leaves and other symbols.

As for the arrangement of a crematorium within the National Military Cemetery, this decision should only be welcomed. All large, significant and most significant cities of Ukraine experienced a significant shortage of burial grounds even before the large-scale Russian invasion. It should also be recalled that, according to the current regulatory documents of Ukraine [35], fairly strict requirements are imposed on the location of cemeteries, which leads to the location of large new cemeteries in the suburban areas of cities. Such a location makes it difficult for relatives and friends of the deceased to visit graves. At the same time, the placement of columbaria is allowed within the city limits at a distance of not less than 100m from residential and public buildings and can be implemented within memorial parks, memorial complexes etc. If the deceased did not object to cremation during his lifetime and his relatives and friends do not object, this method of dealing with the deceased is more appropriate both from the point of view of using the territory and from the point of view of organizing visits to burial sites.

In our opinion, the organization of burials in places whose capacity is deliberately limited or not allowed at all by existing standards is unacceptable neither from the point of view of compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards nor from the point of view of compliance with the principle of equality of all the deceased. From this point of view, the burial of individual fallen servicemen, for example, in Kyiv at Askold's Grave, is a manifestation of

legal nihilism and arbitrary determination of the most worthy (in contrast to traditional war memorials with their emphasized equality of all the fallen and equal opportunities for burial).

Conclusions

The analysis of world experience in the arrangement and use of war memorials and the study of war memorials created in Ukraine before 2014, in the period 2014–2022 and from 2022 to the present time allowed us to identify peculiarities and trends in the formation and placement of memorial complexes in the post-war period in Ukraine.

In cities, the placement of war memorials is possible in park areas as part of a memorial sign, steles with the names of the dead and possibly a museum. It is also possible to place columbaria, provided that regulatory distances to residential and public buildings are observed. According to the authors, the case of Lviv, when a new memorial is placed on the site of a former Soviet memorial, will remain one of the few exceptions.

The existing forms of commemoration that spontaneously developed during the Russian-Ukrainian war will persist not only until its end and for some time after its end, until the creation of monumental memorials, but will probably also exist in parallel with them. The issue of dismantling and/or moving such improvised memorials will have to be approached with extreme caution and resorted to only in cases of extreme necessity.

According to the regulatory documents of Ukraine, it is advisable to place memorials with burials in the suburban area. Most of them will be located within existing cemeteries, within sectors of honorary burials. In addition to the burials themselves, it is advisable to include a memorial sign, steles with the names of the deceased (not only those buried in this cemetery), fields of urn burials or columbaria in the composition of such memorials.

Specialized military cemeteries, such as the National Military Cemetery near the village of Hatne near Kyiv, should be created in suburban areas only of the most significant cities, such as Dnipro or Odesa. Such military memorials should additionally include the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a crematorium, a museum and a hotel complex for short-term stays of relatives of the deceased who have come to visit their graves. Traditional burials in such cemeteries should be combined with urn burial fields and columbaria.

The issue of placing religious buildings in such cemeteries is somewhat debatable. On the one hand, Orthodox Christians make up the vast majority of both the entire population and its Christian part and the placement of memorial chapels or churches not only in cemeteries but also at the sites of battles – both won and lost (for example, on the battlefield near Berestechko) – is an ancient Ukrainian tradition. On the other hand, servicemen of other Christian denominations and faiths (sometimes quite exotic – for example, Buddhists or Krishnaites) have the same rights to conduct funeral religious rites. Several possible solutions can be proposed here – from the creation of a universal sacred building without pronounced signs of a particular religion to the creation of several sacred buildings of different religions.

If we talk about the symbols that will be used on such memorials, we can confidently say that the most common of them will be the Ukrainian trident and the official emblem of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as the Cossack cross (which was laid down as the basis of Ukrainian military symbols).

The shape of the tombstones will probably have two most common options – the Cossack cross and a rectangle (possibly with a rounded upper part). It seems more likely to use

either just a slab or two options – the Cossack cross and a slab, depending on the religious and ideological beliefs of the deceased.

In general, Ukrainian war memorials, following the example of American and European ones, should become not only a place of common memory of the dead and the events of the war and symbols of the indomitable spirit of the Ukrainian people but also museum and educational centers, where you can get acquainted with the history of the country through the stories of the lives and deaths of individual people.

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