

# “Science enables us to return to the past”

**We are talking to Paul Bauman, a geophysicist from the Hartford University in Connecticut, about the satisfaction of working as a geophysicist, discovering the secrets of World War II and the emotionality of memory. Bauman has participated in many international projects and at the invitation of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum has searched for traces of the past in the so-called Anielewicz’s bunker at 18 Miła Street and the Bersohn and Bauman Hospital at 60 Sienna Street.**

The result of your geophysical research is a lot of potential finds – natural groundwater sources, unexploded bombs, ancient burials, tunnels, industrial waste. Which of these are the most interesting for you? The search process itself is tedious, it is the finding that counts...

*For an outside observer, our actions may seem extremely boring. But when we walk around with radars, we collect data and create the image of what is below us in our heads, like a painter who slowly fills the canvas with brushstrokes. Coming back to your question, two types of finds are particularly important to me. The first one is water. We search for it in the most difficult, poorest places to live on our planet, such as Uganda, and areas struck by civil wars which destroyed the infrastructure, in refugee camps such as Kukuma in north-west Kenya, or in camps for Rohingya Muslims who fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar. Finding water for hundreds of thousands of refugees is very rewarding. Likewise, when you find it in the desert for people who desperately need it. Especially when we manage to do so in places where the search by other organizations has failed. Projects related to the Second World War are equally satisfactory, and they are of great importance to us. Last week we were in Kaunas, Lithuania, looking for a collective burial place for 50,000 people in Fort IX of the Kaunas Fortress. We were also in Ponary in Lithuania, the largest extermination site in this country during World War II (in Ponary, located in the North-Eastern Borderlands of the Second Republic of Poland, Germans murdered 80 thousand people, including about 72 thousand Jews – editorial note). The invitation from the Warsaw Ghetto Museum is also very important to us, as it enables us to make another important project.*

Yesterday you and your team worked at 18 Miła Street, where the so-called Anielewicz's bunker was located. Have you found anything there?

*We are not sure yet, but we may have found a tunnel. As I know, there were as many as 300 people in the bunker, so it was very big. Probably half the people managed to escape. Over a hundred people, ghetto insurgents and civilians committed suicide and their bodies are still there. There had to be at least one tunnel which led to a canal system, and a maximum of six tunnels. We will know more in about three months' time when we analyze the data.*

In this way, modern science helps to discover the course of events connected with the Holocaust in Europe, in territories occupied by the Germans...

*Such use of science enables us to return to the past, 75 years after the end of the war, when there are few witnesses to those events. People expect eyewitness stories, drama, and we cannot provide them with that. Science allows us to remain objective. We worked in the area where the death camp in Sobibór was located. We wanted to find the place where the gas chambers were. 54 people escaped from the camp and lived to see the end of the war. Many of them prepared maps of the camp. These were also prepared by German and Ukrainian guards. They are all different. People have a different understanding of space and emotional factors also play a role – we all remember the reality in a different way. None of the former prisoners remembered where the gas chambers were, because none of those who were taken there survived.*

You mentioned help for refugees belonging to the Rohingya ethnic group, fleeing from genocide in Myanmar. Is the humanitarian aid that you are providing part of the Geophysicists Without Borders project?

*That's right. It is a non-governmental organization. Thanks to this organization we were able to come here to Poland. Regardless of where we go and the funds provided by our sponsor, we always need good cooperation with local partners. The Warsaw Ghetto Museum provided us with historical knowledge, documentation – maps and photocopies, access to the examined*

*places. To be honest, and I wouldn't say this if it wasn't true, we haven't yet experienced such a professional welcome as here in Warsaw.*

Interview by Anna Kilian