Otto von Bismarck -- Man Of Countless Memorials

Throughout Germany in many small towns and large cities you'll find hundreds of monuments and memorials to one man, Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck, or simply Otto von Bismarck. But, what contribution did he make to German society that would facilitate the erection of them all?

It wasn't that he was JUST the Minister President of the Kingdom of Prussia, the Federal Chancellor of the North German Confederation, First Chancellor of the German Empire, or a member of the Prussian House of Lords. No, that doesn't quite cover it.

Bismarck wasn't always the political dynamo as he's often portrayed. I'm not downplaying his accomplishments in Germany's history. I'm only saying he was once a young boy who GREW to become a powerhouse.

He was born to a well-to-do family in the town of Schönhausen (Elbe), in what was then the Province of Saxony in Prussia, to Karl and Wilhelmine von Bismarck on April 1, 1815. Both parents were politically connected, his father a Prussian officer; his mother was the daughter of high government official.

His family's affluence and connections did afford him quite an education. He attended the University of Göttingen and the University of Berlin, originally studying law. He kind of screwed that up a bit, after chasing after a girl (two, actually). That was quite scandalous back in the mid-19th century.

He eventually married Johanna von Puttkamer in July 1847. Their marriage was happy and produced three children (Marie, Herbert, and Wilhelm).

Bismarck was also father to Germany's unification (we know about Germany's reunification, but you would have once had to been united to be "reunified," right?); although, he originally opposed the unification of Germany's states, kingdoms, and duchies in the late 1840's.

Both Otto and his wife were quite devout Lutherans; and it was this religious fervor that had had von Bismarck enact quite a bit of anti-Catholic legislation throughout his political career.

Despite having a bigoted view of Catholics (it was really the Catholic Church, because he felt they were a bit too politically powerful in Prussia — even throwing priests and bishops in jail), he was an excellent statesman and diplomat. His speaking (and writing) four languages (German, Russian, English, and French) helped with his foreign policy; that was quite liberal when it came to Britain and Italy.

Not so liberal when it came to some other countries, I might add. In the 1860's, Bismarck had his hand in the Austro-Prussian War. Prussia added some territory to its already vast kingdom, fueling

Bismarck to set his sights on France.

Less than a decade later, the Franco-Prussian War broke out; totally orchestrated by Bismarck himself. It was a dirty, underhanded political move that caused this conflict that started when one of the Hohenzollerns (who ruled Prussia) was given the chance to become king in Spain.

It was the start of the conflict that kicked off what became the German Empire (for all purposes was known as the Second Reich). By the end of Otto's political career, the German Empire has added Schleswig and Holstein (at that time they were two separate duchies), Frankfurt, Hanover, Hesse-Kassel, and Nassau into its territory.

He also had a hand in the creation of the modern welfare state. Von Bismarck was a staunch anti-Socialist, so be creating a Health Insurance Act (1883) and an Old Age & Disability Insurance Program (1889) he tried to shut down the Socialists and the flood of emigration to the United States.

Otto remained in office until 1890 (he was seventy-five years old), only retiring after many conflicts with Wilhelm II, including the prediction of [World War I](#) (though he didn't call it that back then).

He spent his remaining years at his estate in Varzin (that's in today's Poland), and after losing his wife he went back to his estate in Friedrichsruh (today part of Aumühle; given to him for his loyal service many years before) to write his memoirs.

After his death on July 30, 1898 many nationalists made him a "local hero." They banded together to create hundreds of monuments in his honor, which you'll find in places like [Bad Kissingen](#), [Dresden](#), [Berlin](#), [Bielefeld](#), [Hamburg](#), [Langerwehe](#), [Heilbronn](#), and [Goslar](#) to name just a few in Germany. You'll even find them in Russia, France, Poland, and the former German East Africa (which is now Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanganyika).

So revered was Otto (Fürst — a title of Prince) von Bismarck that Germany named two ships of the German Imperial Navy after him. And the capital of the state of North Dakota in the United States bears his name.

I think it would be a fair assumption to say that Otto von Bismarck did just as much to change the political situation in Germany as Martin Luther and his [Protestant Reformation](#). Wouldn't you agree?