

Tamara Scheer  
Nikolaus Rottenberger

## Where have all the young men gone?

The 460 Austro-Hungarian Soldiers from First World War  
buried in the Crypt of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome



Where have all the young men gone?



Produziert nach den Richtlinien des  
Österreichischen Umweltzeichens



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**The 460 Austro-Hungarian Soldiers from First World War  
buried in the Crypt of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome**

As this book is the result of an ongoing international research project, we have decided not to publish the list of soldiers' names here. You can easily access an up-to-date version and further information about the project by using the following QR code and/or contacting Dr. Tamara Scheer:

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## Dr. Michael Max

Rector of the Pontifical Institute  
Santa Maria dell'Anima, Rome



Credit: Erzdiözese Wien

*PAX*—in large letters the Latin word for *peace* is written on the stylized sarcophagus in the memorial chapel of the church Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome. The First World War had cost the lives of millions of soldiers. For 460 of them, who were initially buried in the Roman cemetery at Campo Verano, a memorial chapel was erected in the church of the Anima in 1937. Under the chapel they were to find their final resting place, their peace. Dr. Johan Ickx, in his essay (published in 2010 in *Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Rom*), tracing the construction history, describes the chapel as “an extraordinary work of art [...] whose solemn monumentality is and remains in a special way attuned to its reverent purpose.”

But *PAX* is dedicated not only to the dead. It is also an enduring reminder, indeed an imposition, to us the living that it is also and especially up to us to work for peace. The memory of these young 460 men who were robbed of their lives far too early can never be a justification of war, but rather a permanent reminder to do everything possible to prevent it from happening again, and to do everything, really everything, to ensure that in conflicts other solutions are sought than violent confrontation. The words of Pope Pius XII remain timeless:

*“Nothing is lost with peace, everything can be lost with war!”*

As an important contribution to the message of peace of the memorial chapel of Santa Maria dell'Anima, this book and research project is to be seen. PD Dr. Ta-

mara Scheer and her team aim at reconstructing the lifestory, albeit far too short, of the soldiers buried in the crypt. Starting from the names recorded in the directory, it was possible in many cases to reconstruct the birth place, the family and a piece of the respective life path in painstaking detail work and international networking. Work that preserves the concrete human being in his uniqueness and set outs something of his hopes and longings into life which is always work on human dignity and thus on peace.

As Rector of the Anima, I would therefore like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have collaborated and generously supported this project! May the Patroness of Souls—of the living and the dead—as whom Mary has been revered in the Anima for centuries, also show us again and again the paths to peace.

## Klaudia Tanner

Federal Minister of Defence  
Republic of Austria



Credit: HBF/Peter Lechner

War has returned to Europe.

24 February 2022 has proven to be a turning point for European history and for European and Austrian security policy. Russia's attack on Ukraine has shocked and affected all of us. Peace can no longer be taken for granted on our continent.

Over a hundred years ago, our ancestors recklessly jeopardised peace, and the consequences of the First World War devastated Europe. The fate of many soldiers remained unknown for a long time. Even today, research on the War and its consequences still produces new findings.

This is the case with 460 Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who fought on the Italian front and who found their final resting place in the crypt of Santa Maria dell'Anima.

In an exceptional project, the soldiers' descendants were traced and contacted, and the fate and stories of the soldiers discovered. Many families finally learned about what had happened to their ancestors over a hundred years ago.

The soldiers came from all over the Habsburg Monarchy and one even from my own home district in Lower Austria: the U-boat crewman Friedrich Auer was identified as one of the men buried in the crypt and his fate was finally revealed. You will find more biographies of Anima soldiers in this book.

There are, however, still too many soldiers left, where we lack military records or information regarding their identity. This is the reason why the Anima project needs to be continued.





## Dr. Thomas Reichl

Curator of the Austrian Black Cross  
War Graves Commission



Credit: HGM

The high number of fallen in the initial months of the First World War quickly made all states involved realise that their registration, identification and burial by various associations, authorities and private individuals had led to major confusion. At the end of 1915 a ministerial war graves department was set up, which led for the first time to a monarchy-wide registration of all fallen soldiers, regardless of whether they were own, allied or enemy soldiers for Austria-Hungary. Following the war's end, the care of the graves was initially continued by the now dissolving Austro-Hungarian War Ministry. Later, the State Treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye (Articles 171 and 172) obliged the Republic of Austria to take over the care of war graves, which from then on was carried out by state agencies. From 1919 onwards, all war graves on Austrian soil were granted a permanent right of rest, regardless of the soldiers' origin. Parallel to state institutions, a private association was founded in Austria in 1919 which still dedicates its work to the care of war graves on a voluntary basis.

In contrast to state institutions, the Austrian Black Cross also took and still takes care of the graves of Austro-Hungarian soldiers who died in captivity. A component of the association's activities in the interwar period was the organisation of pilgrimages, which usually took place twice a year. Most of these journeys led to the former Italian front. In addition to visiting gravesites, they had the aim of checking their condition. In the course of the Black Cross' data research on fallen soldiers in Italy, a steady cooperation developed with

the Italian War Graves Commission. In Italy, the dead initially remained at their resting places; only the smaller military cemeteries were closed and the mortal remains transferred to larger facilities. In the spring of 1930, Italy announced the plan to consolidate the 1,840 military cemeteries scattered across Trentino and Veneto into a few large facilities—mainly ossuaries. Especially the burial in ossuaries, which took place without the consent of the Austrian authorities, met with fierce criticism from the latter, as it contradicted burial traditions. In June 1931, an Italian law passed, and from 1934 onwards, 163,297 dead from 718 cemeteries were transferred to 37 military cemeteries and ossuaries.

In March 1937, the Austrian Black Cross organised an Easter pilgrimage. In Rome, the pilgrims paid their respects to the Italian ossuary from the First World War at the central cemetery, Campo Verano. There was only a makeshift compartment containing 461 small pewter boxes stacked and covered with a flag, containing the remains of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who had died in and close to the Italian capital. During this visit, the rector of the Anima and former Austro-Hungarian army field curate, Alois Hudal, informed the visitors of his plans to transfer these remains to a crypt, soon to be set up in the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima, and to set up a memorial chapel above it. He promised to take over all costs. The Rector of the Vienna University of Technology, Karl Holey, finally took responsibility for building a chapel above the crypt. To the costs also the Austrian Black Cross contributed.

# Introduction

by Tamara Scheer and Nikolaus Rottenberger

## Where have all the young men gone?



Credit: univie.ac.at, HBF

This question is part of the lyrics of probably one of the most famous anti-war songs: “*Where have all the flowers gone*”. It best reflects the place this book is about, and where 460 soldiers found their final resting place. They had all fought in the First World War, most of them on the Italian front (some on the Balkan front who were then transported via Albania on boat to Italy), had been captured and ended up in prisoner of war camps mainly around Rome. Most of these soldiers died in Rome in a military hospital in Trastevere, some in Ostia, many of them from the Spanish flu between 1918 and 1920. Most of them therefore died in the immediate post-war period. The country they had fought for, Austria-Hungary, had already dissolved by then. For this reason, the exchange of information about their fates was now the responsibility of the many successor states. What had previously been an internal affair became a cross-border exchange in post-war Europe. This resulted in that many families were never informed about their relatives’ destinies. Therefore, most of the soldiers buried in the Anima eventually had to be considered missing and declared dead in the 1920s.

About 100 years later, in 2019, this project started when one of the editors, Tamara Scheer, found a letter from the Czech ambassador Jozef Špánik in the archive of Santa Maria dell’Anima in Rome. In the course of the centenary of the First World War, he addressed the rector of the Anima, Franz Xaver Brandmayr, with a copy of an Austrian Black Cross list. It bore the names of 460 soldiers

with the note “*Anima, Rome*”. Even at first glance it was clear that most of these names marked unidentified were completely misspelled, regardless of their origin within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Since one of Tamara Scheer’s research interests is the linguistic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian army, she began to track down some of them in the already digitised casualty lists compiled by the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry during the conflict. By trying different forms of the surnames, it was possible to verify some of the soldiers within a few hours. Not knowing all the Habsburg languages, she asked some priests in the Anima for help, and again more soldiers were identified. These quick results made the editors realise that with an international research team it would be possible to identify even more. Although the international academic team is still working on a voluntary basis, we were in need for some budget. We are very grateful that the Scientific Committee of the Austrian Ministry of Defence granted us project funding in 2021. This year, this guide is now the first printed result of our project, although fortunately newspapers and magazines as well as embassies and dioceses in almost all countries concerned have already reported on our research progress.

The Austrian Black Cross listed 269 soldiers out of a total of 460 for whom no records and any information on their identity could be determined (*keine Aufzeichnungen feststellbar*). Despite many research successes in the years since the beginning of the project, we are still far from having identified all the soldiers buried in the crypt of Santa Maria dell’Anima. Even more, in many cases the information given by the Black Cross turned out to be wrong, and some soldiers mentioned there returned home alive. Therefore we had to do research on all names on the list, and decided to distinguish between identified, unclear (when some information is missing or we are unsure about the correct spelling of a name), and unidentified. In sum, we were to the date (15 June 2023) able to tag 162 with clearly identified, and from among 269 without any information given by the Black Cross list only eleven remained totally unknown. As far as we know at the moment, there is no officer among Anima soldiers. All had been

Credit: Austrian Black Cross

ANIMA - ROM

40	Zarnowetz Peter	1/2. 1919	1/2. 1919	1/2. 1919	1/2. 1919	1/2. 1919	1/2. 1919
1	Adam Gustav	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
2	Alte Viktor	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
3	Altenburger Michael	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
4	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
5	Altenburger Peter	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
6	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
7	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
8	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
9	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
10	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
11	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
12	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
13	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
14	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
15	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
16	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
17	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
18	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
19	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
20	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
21	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
22	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
23	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
24	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
25	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919
26	Altenburger Josef	12. 1. 1919	Keine	Buchhändler	Keine	1. 1. 1919	1. 1. 1919

Fig. 1: The Black Cross list of names consists of two parts. While the first part contains 270 names, most of which were reported as identified, in the second part (191 names) hardly any soldier is marked identified.

rank and file, with only a few NCOs. Most of them had been infantrymen. The youngest was 17, and the oldest 46.

Soon it became clear that not only soldiers from post 1918 Austria nor of German nationality were buried in the Anima crypt, but from all over the Habsburg Monarchy and from all nationalities. However, they are not reflecting nationalities' percentage in the Monarchy equally, not even the troops' deployed at the Italian front. Some regions are overrepresented while others are much less than we would have expected for the Italian front. Soldiers from the Austrian province of Galicia make up the highest number among Anima soldiers. This means native Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) speakers. The second group is from the kingdom of Hungary, in particular from today's Eastern Hungary, and Romania. About equal number are soldiers from today Austria and Czech Republic. Totally underrepresented are soldiers with South Slavic mother tongue, despite the fact that they made up a large proportion at the Italian front. There is only a handful of soldiers in the Anima from today's Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Unfortunately a large proportion of the soldiers from today's Ukraine and Poland are still underrepresented in our research. Military records are for the bulk kept in the State Archive of Lviv, and since the war started, our research has come to a halt. Because the soldiers in the Anima crypt almost entirely reflect the ethnic, linguistic and religious composition of the armed forces of the Habsburg Monarchy, we have decided to publish this book in English in order to make it accessible to the widest possible audience. However, since linguistic diversity was such an important feature of the Habsburg armed forces, we have decided to include their languages as well in chapter 3.

In addition to soldiers' ethnic diversity, there is a religious. The largest proportion—as far as we know at the moment—had been Roman Catholics. But there are also many Greek-Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and Muslims. Maybe there is also Jews among them, but as we have not found military records indicating this, we can only guess from first and surnames. Religiously mixed war cemeteries in Central Europe are not unusual (although usually Jewish soldiers

were buried in nearby Jewish cemeteries). There is many prominent examples such as the cemetery in Graz-Lebring (Austria), or the Černovír cemetery in Olomouc (Czech Republic). What is however exceptional is that the resting place is not a (community) cemetery, but a crypt under a Roman Catholic church. What also differs from the Anima is that at many places the names of the soldiers are indicated somehow, if its on gravestones, memorials, or in books at the entrance of these cemeteries. This has not been the case with the Anima Crypt so far, but our project is not yet finished, and this book is only our first result.

Our—for historical science—quick results would have been impossible ten years ago. Our progress and success has two important reasons: the ongoing digitization of archival material all over former Habsburg lands and in Italy, which met a climax during the Corona pandemic, and the support of countless people who found our name list online, send us information and shared it on social media. Among these supporters, I first and foremost would like to thank Carlo Nardone (Cassino). It was his timeconsuming research that laid the ground for our most important progress so far. He went through the city of Rome's and Ostia's digitalized death certificates of the years concerned, and sent us those cards of whom he suspected could be soldiers from Austria-Hungary. Interestingly, these death certificates usually showed surnames more correctly than the Austrian Black Cross list. And as often also age, birth place and parents' first names were mentioned it made further research much more efficient and profitable. The Italian authorities in Rome therefore did a proper bureaucratic work in times of war and its aftermath. I also have to thank Jan Pecháček who is part of the team and a professional genealogist who found ways to find archival sources and contacted possible descendants of Anima soldiers of which the other team members have no access and experience. For their archival support we are also very grateful to Tomáš Kykal and Erika Mrhalová from the Military History Institute and Archive in Prague. There is countless of other supporters whom I unfortunately can not thank by name here. This project's success already strongly relied of many who offered support. They either did additional research



in data bases and archives, did interviews for newspapers and radio, shared our project information on social media, or provided us with helpful local contacts.

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# Chapter 1: The Burial Place: Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome

*by Tamara Scheer*

For most people, even those familiar with the history of what is now the Pontifical Institute of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome, it is surprising that the church, often referred to as the German national church, holds the remains of 460 soldiers from the First World War, from all Austro-Hungarian nationalities. After all, this is no historical coincidence, but reflects the multi-faceted history of an institution that for many centuries was a centre for pilgrims from all over the Holy Roman Empire, regardless of their mother tongue. In the nineteenth century, its protector became the Austrian Emperor and Hungarian King Francis Joseph I. It is therefore not surprising that soldiers who fought for Austria-Hungary in the First World War found their final resting place in the Anima church.

## The History of Santa Maria dell'Anima

The core of the Anima, as it is usually called for short, goes back to the donation of a couple in the late fourteenth century. They came from Dordrecht, which is now part of the Netherlands. At that time, it was part of the Holy Roman Empire, which stretched over large parts of Central Europe. Johann and Katharina Peters endeavoured to create a place where poor pilgrims could find accommodation by also hosting Roman Catholic clergy for spiritual care in an own church. From then on, with a few exceptions, all those who came from the empire benefited from this growing institution. It became the so-called national place of the Empire in Rome. When the Holy Roman Empire has ceased to exist

in 1806, Habsburgs remained patrons, but now as Austrian emperors. Even then, most former citizens of the Holy Roman Empire were allowed to take part, and it was extended to the other territories ruled by the Habsburgs, which then included also Hungary, Galicia and Dalmatia. However, throughout history there have been disputes about who should benefit, e.g. pilgrims and priests from the Netherlands and Switzerland, or only native German speakers from the former Holy Roman Empire.

In the 19th century, when the number of travellers from all over Europe increased due to the growing railway connections, the Anima became known as a place where all people from the above-mentioned areas could find and receive spiritual assistance. The care was offered in many languages by these priests who lived since the late 1850s in a newly established priests' college next to the church. However, complaints were regularly made and even addressed to Francis Joseph that nationalities other than German should be excluded. The patron's message was clear: He repeatedly demanded that all his citizens should have access—pilgrims as well as priests—regardless of their nationality, and even its administrative body, the *Verwaltungsrat*, comprised members of other nationality than German. However, the historiography of the 19th century, which is still frequently used by historians for the history of the Anima, speaks exclusively of a German national church, German priests and pilgrims there, and emphasizes its exclusive historical Germanic character.

When Habsburg rule ended in 1918, it was not entirely clear to which country the Anima would belong to in the future. Eventually it was decided that a priest from an Austrian diocese (now of course majorly reduced in size) would continue to head the Anima as rector, but the German Bishops' Council would also have decisive rights. However, through priests in the college, the Anima continued to reflect its multinational imperial past. What later became known as the interwar period, which ended with World War II, was dominated by only one rector. Alois Hudal was a priest from the Styrian diocese of Graz-Seckau and a descendant of mixed parents—German and Slovene. During World War I,

he was himself drafted and served as a field chaplain in the Austro-Hungarian army. Although Hudal had a mixed nationality, he chose a particular one for himself very early on. Over the years Hudal became more and more attached to the concept of a superior German culture, and as a result became well known and found sympathy among the supporters of the growing nationalist socialist movement. Eventually, it was Hudal who initiated and pushed through the reburial of the 460 Austro-Hungarian soldiers, but he originally planned to establish a memorial for German warriors of the First World War.

## The Soldiers' Reburial in the Anima Crypt

During the First World War and after the armistice, the prisoners of war who died in numerous countries were usually buried in newly built cemeteries near the camps or in special sections of municipal cemeteries. Since there were many graves of soldiers from Austria-Hungary in Rome and the surrounding area, there was already an idea of erecting a war memorial in the 1920s. The largest burial place of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war was at Campo Verano, Rome's main Catholic cemetery, but they were only buried provisionally. Rector Hudal finally took up an already ongoing discussion to create a dignified place for these soldiers. The former archivist of the Anima Johan Icks points out in his article about Hudal's approach: *"Although one should not exclude religious-political intentions"*. In fact, Hudal himself had already abandoned the annual commemorations in the Anima church in 1928. It was only in the late 1930s that he became the driving force for a reburial.

To put his plan into effect, Hudal first needed permission from the Holy See's authorities to bury human remains in or, better, under a church. Second, he needed the permission of the Italian authorities for a transfer. Hudal also sought assistance from the embassies concerned. According to historiography, it appears that he never tried to contact other than the Austrian and German

envoys. In May 1937 Hudal informed the latter of his plans. He formulated his plans as “*in grateful memory of the 450 soldiers of the old Austrian army who died in the hospitals of Rome and its environs.*” That same month Hudal corresponded with the German War Grave Commission (*Volksbund Deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge*). Their directorate was sceptical of his plan to bury 15 German soldiers side by side with Austrians. The reply from German Empire ended with the remark that enough had already been done for the German soldiers, so there was no need at all. While negotiations with the German authorities proved problematic, Hudal had immediate success with the Italian authorities: the inspector of the Verano cemetery and the Italian War Ministry approved his plans.

In June 1937 Hudal informed the German ambassador Diego von Bergen of the approval of the Holy See and the Italian authorities. By this time Hudal had already circulated a list of names of the soldiers he wanted to transfer from Campo Verano to the Anima. He took them from the in short called *Elenco*—a book published by the Italian War Ministry in 1925, which listed the names of many thousands of soldiers from Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria and Germany who had died on Italian soil. Hudal negotiated with the Italian authorities which soldiers from this list he wanted to rebury in the Anima crypt. The Anima archive still has a copy on which some soldiers are underlined—seemingly this was the copy Hudal worked with. According to historiography, Hudal initially wanted to transfer only the 120 Austrian soldiers who were registered as Catholic. It is still unclear if he had only the ones from the Republic of Austria in mind, or these from former Habsburg Austria which would have also comprised non German nationalities. However, Hudal had to drop his idea soon. The Italian authorities declared impossible to verify them as well as to select particular nationalities. Therefore, they finally ordered all the Austro-Hungarian soldiers to be transferred to the Anima, 456 in total. The transfer was led by the First Regiment of the *Granadiere di Sardegna*. An Italian daily reported that “*la cerimonia, pur essendo strettamente privata, si*

*è svolta con ordine e austerità militare.*” The exhumation, transfer and reburial thus took place without public attention. The human remains were interred in the crypt in metal boxes. Finally, a memorial plaque with a Latin inscription still visible today was placed on a newly built wall. It is not known why the number of 556 soldiers is mentioned here—it can only be a typo error.

After his attempt failed to transfer only the mortal remains of Austrian Catholics, Hudal’s efforts focused on ensuring that the symbolic character of the chapel was in keeping with his approach. The chapel was then built above the burial chamber and on the right side of the apse. When he sought financial support, Hudal described his efforts differently to Austrian and German diplomats. The Austrian envoy read of “*a final resting place for the fallen of the Austrian army,*” while the German was addressed as “*glorious allied armies*” of the past. To the German ambassador at the Quirinal, Hudal stressed that the chapel should be an expression of Austrian and German “*Nibelungentreue*” invoking an ideological concept of unconditional adherence even in the face of a possible catastrophic outcome. Hudal—as an Austrian citizen from an Austrian diocese—undertook his efforts in times of German nationalist-ruled Germany on the one hand and an opposing Austrian government on the other, but in his particular case it was a rhetoric he used throughout his life. The invitation to the dedication, which took place on October 31, 1937, read in Italian “*450 soldati del fu esercito austriaco,*” thus highlighting the soldiers of the Austrian army, while the invitation in German referred to the “*fallen heroes of our Reichsdeutsche community on the battlefields of France and Russia.*” Finally, the insignia in the chapel turned out to be relatively neutral, commemorating the deceased members of the Austrian army, but also the members of the German community in Rome who died for the fatherland in the First World War.

According to art historian Georg Steinmetzer, the ceremony was characterized by a low number of attending German officials. The Holy See is also said to have been reluctant to send officials to the event. Not even the cardinal protector of the Anima, Eugenio Pacelli, attended. Steinmetzer suspects that



Credit: Tamara Scheer (February 2022)

Fig. 2 and 3: In the crypt of the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima there is a memorial plaque on a wall, behind which are the mortal remains of the soldiers in numbered metal boxes.





Credit: Tamara Scheer (February 2022)



the Holy See may have recognized the event as a political statement by Hudal. However, the event was met with pompous interest from Italian authorities. The Italian War and Interior Ministries sent four generals, the Foreign Ministry sent two envoys, and the *Governatorato di Roma* attended with a delegation led by Prince Colonna. The *Carabinieri* with their commanding general were also present.

The dedication attracted some interest from the press. However, since Hudal had only informed and invited Austrian diplomats when it came to the soldiers in the crypt, it is not surprising that there was no press coverage at all in the countries where most of the soldiers' families lived. Today we know that a lot of information that was published in the press was not correct at all, because they relied on the Black Cross lists' information. On 4th November 1937, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* mentioned two soldiers from Salzburg who are buried in the crypt: Georg Ehsel and Georg Malli. They were right about Ehsel (Essl), but Malli came actually from Styria. The *Grazer Volksblatt* referred to four Styrians in the crypt a day earlier. In fact, we now know that there were about ten. One of them came from the crown land of Habsburg Austrian Styria, which after 1918 became part of Yugoslavia and is still called *Štajerska*.

The same issue of the *Grazer Volksblatt* reported that in the crypt of the Anima church, which consisted of a 3-meter-high, largely unused room, a part was prepared specifically for this purpose, and a spiral staircase newly built, which leads up to the war memorial chapel. The inauguration took place in October 1937, only a few months later—in March 1938—there were no more Austrian diplomats with whom Hudal could have corresponded, and no Austrian press that could have reported on the place. With the annexation to Reich Germany, Austria ceased to exist. During the Second World War, in 1943, another soldier was buried in the crypt. It was Peter Weinen, who fell in battle in Frascati. Since the family was friends with Hudal, he allowed a burial in the crypt.

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## Chapter 2: Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War in Italy

by Balázs Juhász, Vlad Popovici and Petra Svoljšak

*“I giorno passano silenziosi, calmi, senza divertirsi. Sono giornate belle, chiare, piene di sole e non troppo fredde ed io sono in carcere.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the opening quote, the Tyrolean field curate Isidoro Alverá recalls the days in captivity. They passed uneventfully, the seasons alternated, but his imprisonment endured.

The Austro-Hungarian experience is usually associated with captivity on the Eastern Front, where the scale of captivity and the number of prisoners exceeded all precedents. But with the outbreak of the war against Italy, another front of captivity opened up, where the main “flow” of captivity was determined by the last battle of Vittorio Veneto and after the Armistice of 4 November 1918. In total, about 477,000 soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army were taken prisoner on the Italian front during the First World War (1915–1918). After the war’s end, in May 1919, it was reported that the total number of prisoners according to post-war citizenship not yet repatriated was: Italians 960, Austrians 97,819, Hungarians 81,872, Czechoslovaks 41,588, Romanians 23,638, Yugoslavs 41,358, Poles 12,958 and Ukrainians 38,942. By May 1919, however, many of the soldiers now buried in the Anima crypt had already died, some of them just days before their repatriation.

The soldiers buried in the crypt of Santa Maria dell’Anima were interned in many different camps throughout Italy since they were captured: Avezzano, Asi-

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1 Paolo Giacomel, *Un Ladino-Tirolese di lingua italiana. Don Isidoro Alverá. 1915–1916 diario di guerra e prigionia 1939 le opzioni, Ghedina-cortina 1999*, p. 142.



Credit: Tamara Scheer (January 2022)

**Fig. 4: The Scalinata dei Prigionieri:** In 2018, the municipality of Velletri in the Alban Hills honoured the workers who had built the stairs through their town park. They had been Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. Velletri had been one of the places where many of the Anima soldiers were imprisoned and had to work.

nara, Cassino-Caira, or in the large POW camps in the south (Padula in Campania, Vittoria in Sicily) or in smaller camps in central Italy (Narni, Orvieto). However, before the prisoners reached the final destination camps, they usually passed through a series of smaller, often semi-equipped stations housed in farms, churches, or hospitals. They also often had to undergo a hygienic examination before their deportation to the camps, with a separation between the officers and the troops and hygienic treatments (haircut, depilation, bath); their uniforms were disinfected and the POWs were placed in special barracks (a quarantine) where they were observed by doctors to prevent any possibility of spreading infectious diseases. After 15 days of “quarantine,” the prisoners were sent back

to the camps. Beginning in 1916, large barrack-style/blockhouse camps were established to house tens of thousands of soldiers. In the camps, officers were often separated and had better living conditions. Since the Anima soldiers were common soldiers, they were kept in worse conditions than their officers, receiving less food and having to work. Like all other belligerent countries, Italy was overwhelmed with the many soldiers it had to house and feed.

In many cases, the soldiers changed internment camps. This also happened to the Anima soldiers. This can be seen on their list of names and Chapter 3 contains stories about these transfers. The prisoners were also regularly transported to other places where they were supposed to work. While the prisoners in the camps were mostly of mixed nationality and religion, the labor companies were ethnically quite homogeneous. An increasing number of prisoners became members of such labor companies in small towns. Near Rome were the following places to which laborers were frequently sent: Amelia, Cannetaccio, Casetta Mattei, Cecchina, Cerveteri, Fara Sabina, Granica (Castelnuovo di Farfa), Capannelle, Monte San Paolo, Monterotondo, Montespaccato, Ostia, Palo Laziale, Palombara Sabina, Pietralata, Poggio Mirteto, Portonaccio, Pratolungo, Prima Porta, Salisano, Sonnino, Stazione di Roma, Tuscolana and Velletri. Most prisoners were engaged in agriculture, and they were also engaged in the bonification of Agro pontino. Since the prisoners' work was cheap, they were very popular with the local landowners. The rule that prisoners could be employed only when there was a shortage of local labor did nothing to calm the population. This led to protests by the Italian workers, and even the prisoners began to strike when they had a need. For example, in Sonnino (Lazio), a town in which also Anima soldiers had to work, there was a strike. On February 1, 1918, 21 Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war working in the Sonnino settlement refused to work on the grounds that the bread rations were insufficient. They did not proceed violently, but simply refused to go to work. The commander of the squad gave in to their demands. Five days later, everyone returned to work. Not all strikes were successful or without consequences. Many striking

POWs received multi-year prison sentences based on court-martial decisions. However, these were almost always ignored by Italian authorities because the POWs would not have been useful when in prison.

There was another type of prisoner camps. Later in the war, soldiers from Austria-Hungary were in many cases separated by nationality for political reasons. This became common especially after 1917, when the actual system of forming ethnic legions to fight alongside the Italian army was put into practice. Soldiers of Czech, Yugoslav, Polish, Romanian and Slovak nationality became the target of propaganda campaigns aimed at winning them over to the Italian side and getting them to enlist in volunteer units to fight alongside the Italian army against the Central Powers. They were then housed and treated differently from prisoners i.p. of German and Hungarian nationality as well as those who refused to change sides. Propaganda activities were mainly carried out by officers who were also from Austria-Hungary and had the same nationality. Such activity was not always successful and also led to conflicts among the prisoners in the normal camps. In Padula, conflicts arose between Czech and Slovak prisoners of war who were loyal to the Habsburg Monarchy and those who wanted to join the Legion. These cases show that loyalty to the monarchy did not depend on nationality, but was the result of a personal decision. Some simply joined because they hoped for better living conditions. Some of the prisoners, mostly Romanians, Czechs, Slovaks and Poles, joined volunteer units that were trained in these special camps to be later employed to fight alongside the Italian army, but only the members of the Czechoslovak Legion contributed in large numbers to the war. The Romanian Legion numbered on paper three regiments, but only one saw action, in late 1918. Finally, these newly created forces played an important role in the post-war conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe: the Romanian regiments were integrated into the Romanian Army and participated in the campaign against Hungary in 1919, while the Polish regiments were part of the core of the newly formed Polish Army against Ukraine.



Credit: Tamara Scheer (October 2021).

**Fig. 5: Inner courtyard of the Cloister San Cosimato in the Roman district of Trastevere. This was the site of the Regina Margherita military hospital, where many thousands of sick Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war were cared for. Many of those who succumbed to their illness are buried in the Anima today.**

Since the number of Austro-Hungarian deserters on the Italian front was quite small, the Italian authorities often did not trust these so-called oppressed nationalities, and the legions were created mainly for propaganda reasons. Finally, living conditions were similar to the camps of the others. If we consider that in the crisis situation, due to the shortage of supplies, which also affected the prisoners of war at the end of 1918, only the members of the workers' companies were better fed, it becomes clear who had the greatest value in the eyes of the Italian authorities. Neither the Austrians, nor the Hungarians, nor the members of the national legions. Only those who helped to make the

Italian war industry work. However, more and more of the prisoners were no longer willing or capable to fight. They were scattered throughout Italy in camps such as those mentioned above and were forced to work either on public works (railroads, roads, canals) or as day laborers for private individuals. At the beginning of 1917, about 80,000 prisoners worked in the fields, mines, factories, and road construction; the next year the number rose to 130,000, and after Vittorio Veneto the labor situation changed drastically, labor was abundant and was used for reconstruction work in occupied areas, in the fields, and in drainage work in the marshes. Injuries, accidents, malnutrition, and various diseases, including Spanish flu, dwindled their numbers, and the dead were usually buried in the places where they died. In Casale di Altamura, for example, a typhus epidemic decimated the prisoners of war, including many members of the Romanian Legion. However, when they died, all nationalities often ended up in the same burial ground. As we now know, there is also a legionnaire among the soldiers in the Anima crypt. In Chapter 4 there is a short biography of Sušice-born Karel Měříčka, who aimed at joining the Czechoslovak Legion. He died in July 1918, before being sent again to the front against Austria-Hungary.

Most Anima soldiers died at the end of the war in November-December 1918 and during 1919, unable to return home because of the slow pace of repatriation and their poor health. The cases of illness were not the result of Italian negligence. The local health care system was already overburdened, and because of wartime experiences, the prisoners received the same treatment as the Italians themselves. Not for humanitarian reasons, but for fear of retaliation against the Italian POWs interned by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. By the end of 1918, the increase in mortality was also due to the already poor health of the soldiers in general. Treatment of sick prisoners in most cases took place in military institutions or in militarized civilian institutions. This was due to international treaties regulating the law of war (such as the Hague Convention of 1907): the prisoner of war had to be treated as a soldier, he had to abide by the regulations of the country whose authorities held him, and the state



that held him was also responsible for his treatment. Therefore, as soldiers, if they had health problems, they were first taken to the infirmary of their camp and, if necessary, to the nearest military hospital. In the case of most of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war buried in the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima, the hospital in charge became the Regina Margherita Hospital in the Trastevere district of Rome. This is not to be confused with the field hospital in Villa Margherita, the palace of the Queen Mother, a building now used by the United States Embassy in Rome.

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## Chapter 3: War and Captivity through the Eyes of Austro-Hungarian Soldiers

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the autobiographical records of soldiers who wrote about their military and war experience, which ended in prisoner-of-war camps in Italy. In selecting the texts, we have tried to include all languages, at least proportionately, and to bring stories from the camps where most of the Anima soldiers were interned. We have left the soldiers' voices in the original language, but added a brief note in English about the content and some additional information about the author and the context. We intend that readers do not understand everything, because this was the daily life experience of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers who fought in the First World War.

Journalist (and also wartime NCO in the Austro-Hungarian Army) Egon Erwin Kisch in his wartime novel "Schreib das auf Kisch" recalled when his Bohemian unit reached the suburbs of Belgrade in December 1914:

*"It rained and became darker and darker, comrades lost one another, I ended up in a column of Magyar Honvéds, whose language I did not speak, and felt even more lonely, than ever before."*

## Comrades of many Languages and Nationalities

by Jiří Hutečka

*“5. září [1917]. Vidíš zde Němce, ten se hádá skrz nějaké vítězství. Pak je Čech, ten někde sedí na kufru, baví se s druhým krajanem a kritizuje celou tu krásnou směsici. Maďar ten sedí na pytlí své zásobárny a požívá špek opaprikovaný, až člověku vstávají vlasy na hlavě. Při tom mlaská, až člověku jezdí husí kůže po zádech. A tyto všechny pěkné pocity ještě zapíjí samožitnou. V tom se objeví na obzoru náš armádní obchodník, totiž, Bosňák, ten chodí zase od jednoho ke druhému a kupuje, nebo vyměňuje, co se dá – za kruha [...] Dále v rohu sedí starý Polák při modlitbě, při níž dělá stále obrovské kříže, ale zatím kouká, co kde ukrást. Dále pak sedí tři Italové z Terstu a hrají karty, při čemž nadělají rámusu, jako padesát Čechů dohromady. Pak sedí jeden z Dalmácie, který je na polovičku vysvléknut a hledá vši, ale musí jich mít hodně, neboť ti vojáci, co seděli kolem něho, jsou již pryč [...] U kamen pak stojí Slovinec, který stále musí něco vařit, třeba i jen čistou vodu [...] Pak sedí skupinka Slováků od Prešova a ti se stále ženou za nějakým milostným dobrodružstvím [...] Dále jsou zde dva Rumuni, kteří sedí a mezi sebou se baví, přičemž jeden kouří čibuk a druhý žvýká tabák. Pak jsou zde dva Rusíni, kteří sedí jako Turci a stále něco vyřezávají nožem ze dřeva [...] Dále jsou zde dva Tyroláci, kteří svou samospasitelnou řečí zpívají a jódlují [...]”<sup>2</sup>*

There are not many summaries that better reflect the multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural character of the Habsburg military than this diary

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2 Alois Dolejší, *Válečné zápisky z první světové války vojína Dolejše z Nového Strašecí*, Brno, 2014, p. 103.

entry by a nineteen-year-old Czech-speaking soldier of the k. u. k. Infantry Regiment 28. It was a unit that was disbanded in 1915 because of the alleged mass desertion of its Czech soldiers on the Eastern Front. Dolejší was drafted in 1916 into the ranks of the only remaining battalion of this regiment. These soldiers were considered highly suspect and transferred to the Italian front. Here, to the surprise of the army authorities, they performed valiantly, their feats eventually leading to the regiment's reconstitution. Dolejší's views are a near-perfect collection of contemporary stereotypes and a prime example of the notions of cultural superiority that many Czech speakers clung to when thinking about themselves, their countrymen, or the cultural patchwork of the monarchy in general. Thus he describes "a Czech [...] who criticises the whole beautiful mixture and discusses it with his compatriots", while the Germans "argue about victories", the Hungarians are primitive gluttons, the Italians simply loud, the Poles overtly religious, the Slovaks womanisers, the Dalmatians incredibly dirty and the Tyroleans simply incomprehensible to anyone.

## Comrades of many Tongues and Nationalities

by Rok Stergar

"15. 9. [1915]: Ob ½ 10h do 3h popoldan ležimo s stotnikom Czerwenko, kadetom Fornasinom, medicincem Avianom, pozneje oblt. dr. Hammerschmidtom in lt. Vrečarjem pri kuhinji na soncu. Potem gremo v barako, in ko odideta slednja dva, pričnemo igrati maušelj. Igral sem prvokrat na nemške karte. Ob ¾ 6h popoldan udari težka granata prav v bližino; 30 korakov od kuhinje. To je šlo kamenje na vse strani! Koj nato zopet druga. Res zabava. Ta dan dobimo tudi povelje, da odidemo drugi dan iz Stellung, nazaj pa pride zopet 150 MB, ki je nemški (Štajerci in Korošci). [...] 22. 3. [1916]: Vreme se zopet zjasni. Ob 10 h pride poročnik Pogorelec

iz Ljubljane s štirimi drugimi cugskomdti prejemavat štelunge. Ko vse razkažem, prideta stotnik Musil in major od b.h.4 Krippel. Ko se mu predstavim, se odzove tudi on: 'Oberleut. Krippel'. Pa se le spomni, da je pred kratkim že major postal, čeprav je že 54 let star. Interesantno je, kako je naročal poročniku Pogorelcu, da mora natančno paziti, da bo na odgovorna mesta komandiral M in K Mannschaft, za drugo službo pa S Mannschaft! To so mohamedani, katoliki in Srbi. Je videti pravi original in nervoznež. [...] 21. 5. [1916]: Lep dan. Nedelja, skoro gotovo zadnja še v miru preživljena. Zvečer sedimo kakor ponavadi do 11 h v vinogradu, kjer je brigada, in pijemo sodček pive. Interesanten je pogovor, ki se razvije med stotnikom Straschek-om (deutsch erzogen) in nadporočnikom Stiasny-jem (dunajski čifut), nadporočnik Christian (Nemec) kot indiferenten, san. kadet Avian (Lah) sekundira Straschku in jaz kot peti pa špilam Sv. Janeza Nepomuka, ker se držim principa 'trau, schau, wem'. O razmerju Avstrije do Nemčije trdi Strašek, da je Avstrija 'nur ein Bummerl Deutschlands'. Dalje pravi: 'A, dann muss aber in einem halben Jahre zum Kriege mit Deutschland kommen. Da bin ich auch dabei, noch viel lieber als gegen die Katzemacher.'<sup>3</sup>

Franc Jernej Zupančič (born 1884) graduated from Ljubljana gymnasium and then studied at the Higher Technical School in Graz, from which he graduated in 1905. He then worked as a surveyor in various places in Carinthia and Carniola. During his studies he served as a one-year volunteer in the Austrian Territorial Defence, the *Landwehr*, and received a reserve officer's commission. At the outbreak of the First World War, he was mobilized and joined the Carniolan 27th *Landwehr* Regiment. He served on the Eastern Front and on the Italian battlefields as a reserve lieutenant and first lieutenant. In his diary, he

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3 Franc Zupančič, *Dnevnik: 1914–1918*. Edited by Jasmina Pogačnik. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1998, p. 41, 103 and 116–117)

closely observed the linguistic, religious, and national diversity of the officer corps and the soldiers and commented on their attitudes toward each other. Three entries from 1915 and 1916 show the diversity of Austro-Hungarian units on the Italian front, various prejudices of Zupančič and other officers, but also the almost traditional mixing of German with his mother tongue, Slovene.

## The Diversity of the Habsburg Armies

by Tamara Scheer

*“Bei den Unterabteilungen, Kompanien, Batterien, Eskadronen – wo man einander kannte, wusste natürlich jeder, wer Deutscher, Magyare, Tscheche usw. war, aber darüber gab es keine schriftlichen Aufzeichnungen. Aufgrund der Namen konnte die Nationalität nicht festgestellt werden, denn viele, die slawische, magyarische oder andere fremdsprachige Namen trugen, fühlten sich als deutsche Österreicher, andererseits gab es bei Slawen, Magyaren etc. Träger deutscher Namen, die überzeugte Tschechen, Magyaren, Polen usw. waren.”<sup>4</sup>*

The Austro-Hungarian army reflected the multiethnic and multilingual diversity of the Habsburg Monarchy. Under the language regime, every soldier had the right—at least officially—to use his language when serving in the army and to communicate with superiors who were obliged to speak that language. While this right had many shortcomings even before the outbreak of the First World War, language diversity in wartime led to higher casualties, failed or hampered operations, and left many soldiers feeling alone when there was

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4 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Nachlasssammlung, B/726.1, Robert Nowak, Die Klammer des Reichs. Das Verhältnis der elf Nationalitäten Österreich-Ungarns 1915, unveröff. Manuskript, o. D. (nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg), S. 9–10.

no one with whom they could communicate. The quote is from an officer who also points out the fact, important to this project, that it is often impossible to infer nationality and native language from surnames. Also the linguistic origin of the names of the Anima soldiers does not always indicate with which nationality they affiliated with.

## After Desertion

by Vlad Popovici

*“Soldaților mei li s-a servit câte o cafea neagră în gamela lor și câte o franzelă de câte 1 kg, albă ca zăpada și foarte bună. Pe la orele 3 dimineața au sosit două autocamioane mari, în care au fost încărcăți soldații mei, păziți de câțiva soldați italieni. [...] După un drum de vreo două ore în zig-zaguri mari, am ajuns într-o pădure minunată de brazi. Aici zăpada era mai mare, probabil eram pe vreun munte, cred că eram la poalele muntelui Bertiaga de 1.556 m. [...] Am fost dus la localitatea Rosa, la sud de Bossano. Tot atunci au fost aduși tot aici, cu două camioane, oamenii mei. Aici, la 2 km de gara Rosa, înainte de război a fost o fermă frumoasă, azi este un lagăr de prizonieri austro-ungari, cu o mulțime de corturi, cu un teren mare pentru sporturi și plimbări, în mijlocul unei câmpii, împrejmuit cu un gard de sârmă ghimpată. [...] În dimineața zilei de 2 ianuarie la orele 6 am plecat spre gară, însoțit de doi soldați italieni, iar în urma noastră venea o coloană cu oamenii mei, în frunte caporalul Dolha, cu care încerc să schimb câteva cuvinte, dar am fost oprit de soldații italieni, spunându-mi că nu e permis să vorbim cu nimeni. [...] În San Felice am întâlnit pe soldații mei, care se simțeau fericiți că au scăpat de suferințele războiului, și-mi rugau de sănătate.”<sup>5</sup>*

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5 Petre Ugliș Delapececa, Jurnal de război din anii 1914-1919, Alba Iulia, 2015, p. 122-128.

In many cases, the first experiences in a POW camp were brutal: cold, famine and sometimes epidemics took a heavy toll on the soldiers. There were however lucky cases in which the experience was not that brutal. Above, selected mentions from an officer's diary about the living conditions of his men in different triage stations in northern Italy, in late December 1917, immediately after crossing over to the Italian side. Petre Ugliş (1885–1978) was a primary school teacher from Pecica (Arad County, part of the kingdom of Hungary) who initially escaped conscription but was then sent to the front on a false denunciation for spying against the Hungarian state. His war diary shows a path of nationalist radicalization that ends with his desertion from the Austro-Hungarian side to the Italian (along with 80 of his men) and entry into the Romanian Legion. After the war he returned to his native village, where he worked as a teacher and writer until the end of his life.

## From the Balkan Front to Asinara

by Jiří Hutečka

*“Vylodování mužstva po několikadenní jízdě z Valony dělo se za dojmavých scén, jež byly výsledkem útrap albánské pouti v celé její hrůze a následcích. Málokterý pozůstalý byl s to, aby se udržel na slabých nohou [...] Většina byla úplně nahá nebo přikryta cárem, pod němž se šklebila mrtvolná tvář lidského přízraku se skelným výrazem očí, jež viděly a prožily hrůzy Dantova pekla. Byly to živé mrtvoly [...] Těžko, velmi těžko je líčiti a vyvolati ve vzpomínce pravý obraz této hrůzy a lidského zneuctění. Vidíte bědné postavy s rozdrásaným vojenským stejnokrojem nebo v cárech stěží přikrývajících zničená těla. Někteří jsou polonazí, jiní zavinutí do pytloviny nebo roztháných pokrývek. Většinou jsou bosí, někteří v sandálech nebo opáncích, nohy bolavé a zamotané do hadrů. [...] Italské úřady nemohly ostrov včas a dostatečně zásobit, a*



*tím lze si vysvětlit počáteční hlad a jeho konejšení ve spoustě odpadků a pokrmech, jež vymykají se představě lidskosti i důstojnosti člověka [...] Později z Porto Torres byly poslány větší zásoby potravin, příkrývek, slámy, oděvů, kuchyňského nářadí, plechovek na jídlo, stanových pláten, opatřených z příkazu a péči římského sborového velitelství.“<sup>6</sup>*

Some of the men buried in the Anima Crypt were from among the survivors of the so-called death march on the Balkan front in the early winter of 1915, when they had to accompany the Serbian army over the mountains to the Albanian coast after its defeat by the Central Powers. Many thousands of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war died on this route due to cold, exhaustion, hunger or even cannibalism. Those who made it to the Albanian port of Vlorë were transported to Italy and then sent to the island of Asinara, which served as a quarantine camp for POWs to keep the diseases rampant among the survivors—especially cholera and dysentery—at bay. After recovering, some POWs were transferred to the Italian mainland for work. The sick often ended up in hospitals in and around Rome, and many died there. A Czech-speaking officer—and it should be remembered that officers were usually treated somewhat better—vividly describes the scenes on arrival to the island in his memoirs.

## A Train Ride to Cassino

*by Tamara Scheer*

*“Über Mestre, Padua, Ferrara, Bologna ging die Fahrt nach Florenz, nach Rom. [...] In Rom ließ man uns sonderbarerweise nicht hinaus [aus dem Zug] der Hunger plagte uns gar schrecklich. Auf dem Nebengeleise steht*

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Laška, *Asinara*, Praha, 1928, p. 33–39.

*ein Lastzug, einige Beherzte springen hinaus, schieben die Wagentür zurück, werfen zwei Kisten in unsere Behausung und schon fahren wir wieder weiter. So rasch, wie möglich werden die Kisten geöffnet, in der ersten Seife, nichts zu essen also, in der zweiten Feigen, feinste italienische Feigen! Genau werden sie gezählt und auf die 54 Köpfe mittels höher Arithmetik verteilt. Noch fahren wir 150 km und werden endlich in Cassino in stockfinster Nacht bei heftigstem Regen auswaggoniert und ins Lager geführt. Triefend stehen wir von den Baracken, bis der italienische Rechenkünstler die 2.000 Mann auf 24 Baracken aufgeteilt hat. [...] Das Leben im Lager war eintönig. Ein Tag wie der andere: wann werden wir in die Heimat kommen? Hast du Nachricht von zu Hause? Was gibt's heute zu essen? Mit diesem Wortschatze reichte ein Prigi für seine ganze Gefangenschaft aus.”<sup>7</sup>*

After being captured at the front, most soldiers had a long way to go before they finally ended up in a camp. Italian officials were also often completely overwhelmed with the large number of prisoners, so that there were often shortages in the supply of food and clothing. When not sent to work, most prisoners found daily life in the camps extremely monotonous. The author of this report referred to himself as *Prigi*, derived from the Italian word for prisoner (*prigionero*). His name was Ferdinand Seebauer, who stemmed from Langenlois in Lower Austria and was captured on the Piave Front in October 1918. From there he was taken to the camp at Cassino, where many of the Anima soldiers were imprisoned. His account was published in one of the many post-war books that included the stories of prisoners of war to raise money for the wounded soldiers and their families.

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<sup>7</sup> Bundesvereinigung der ehemaligen österreichischen Kriegsgefangenen (Hg.), *In Feindeshand. Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, 2. Band, Wien, 1931, S. 26–27.

## Starvation and Diseases

by Kamil Ruszała

*“Зараз же по спійманню тяжко було полоненому задержати нараз про собі найконечнішу річ, не говорити вже про таке, як гроші, годинник і т.п. Зголодованих і вичерпаних до краю жовніврів порозміщувано опісля по всіх закутинах Італії. Найбільша часть була поміщена в звичайних полевих шатрах, в яких і прийшлося перебувати слоти і зими під одиноким накривалом серед найстудеїнйших вітрів. Так поміщених полонених уживано до робіт копалняних, полевих, до будови доріг і т.п. Можна було бачити сили наших жовніврів, як серед страшеної спеки лупали безупинно в поті чола тверде каміння (острів Азінара, Сардинія, Сицилія і т.д.) під строгим наглядом докучливої сторожі. Малярія валила з ніг сотки нашого люду, а вкінці прийшли і пошести тифу (Cassino), іспанської гарячки та инших недуг, які у високім степені підірвали здоровля наших людей; поважне число з поміж них не видержали мук і улягли хоробі на місці, де й лежать поховані не то сотками, а тисячами (острів Азінара). Часте погіршення харчу (живлення гнилими оселедцями на Азінарі, в Cassino) і недостаточна лікарська опіка збогатили значно і так вже зависоке число недужих та померших. Серед таких прикрих обставин справляв нашим воякам гіркі муки і брак всяких вістей з вітчизни та постійна безнадійність поліпшення долі цілковитого браку якогобудь чинника, що був готов вислухати жалі полонених і улєкшити їх терпіння.”<sup>8</sup>*

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8 N.N., Полонені Українці в Італії, in: Воля 3/2 (1919), p. 71–72.

Reports from POW camps in Italy provide numerous details about living conditions and daily life, forced labor, the widespread diseases, and the extremely difficult supply situation. The Ukrainians (called Ruthenians in the Habsburg Empire) from Galicia and the Bukovina made efforts during the Italian captivity to establish a camp exclusively for their people, but it was difficult to reach an agreement with the Italian authorities. Despite these difficulties, they took matters into their own hands and organized within camps of mixed nationality their own choirs and educational events and preserved their culture and traditions. Such reports were published in the newspaper *Vołya*, which was published in Vienna after the First World War. Dedicated to Ukrainian soldiers in captivity, including those recruited from Galicia and Bukovina, the purpose was to provide information about the fate of dispersed Ukrainians and to reach both Ukrainian territory and to stimulate debates in Ukraine after the collapse of empires following World War I. It also gave a voice to the prisoners themselves and enabled them to convey information about their fate to their compatriots in Ukraine.

## Forced Labor

by Filip Hameršak

*“Zbog zakupnikove dobrote nikad seljaci nisu željeli ići od njega jer bi ih se on uvijek spomenuo i uskakao im u potrebi. U tom dvorištu mi zarobljenici bili smo kao kod svoje kuće. Žene seljaka bi nas zakrpale i prale. Nismo ih odbijali jer njihova susretljivost bijaše ljubazna, a bilo im je žao vidjeti zarobljenika kako sam u potoku pere svoju odjeću. Čim bi[smo] primili kakvo pismo iz kuće, svi bi došli pitati što nam pišu. Nekom zarobljeniku pisali su da mu je brat poginuo na Goričkom frontu pa kad su to doznali svi su plakali zajedno s njim. [...] Takvu dobrotu i*

*ljubaznost koju sam kod seljaka u pokrajini Lombardiji osjetio, nisam vidio nigdje drugdje. Posao nije bio tako loš, a čak nas je i sam zakupnik opominjao više puta da se odmorimo jer njemu nije drago da se radnik na polju satire od truda. Orale su se livade i pripremao teren za sijanje riže i često bi nam poslao vina i hrane, a u nedjelju dao i pet-šest lira napojnice. Da skratim, nismo se mogli ni na koga potužiti i bili bismo zadovoljni da tu ostanemo cijeli rat.”<sup>9</sup>*

Ivan Kovačić, an ethnic Croat, was born in 1897 in the Dalmatian city of Split to a numerous working-class family. He was unenthusiastically drafted into the 37th Landwehr Regiment and served from November 1915 to August 1916, mainly near the embattled town of Gorizia/Gorica, which today is located on the border between Italy and Slovenia. Increasingly irritated and angered by the attitude of officers and non-commissioned officers, as well as the high losses (certainly not all of his fellow Dalmatians felt the same way), he finally allowed himself to be taken prisoner by an Italian unit on August 6, 1916. He thus considered himself a deserter, even if it is questionable whether he was able to escape imprisonment at all. He was transferred to the Italian hinterland and spent three years in various prisoner-of-war camps, including those where Anima Crypt soldiers had been: Padula, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Codogno near Piacenza, Legnago and Castel d’Azzano near Verona. In addition to cleaning the former battlefields (mountains near Edolo, Piave and Monticano rivers), he did work also with tenant farmers (Spino d’Adda near Milano), of which a certain Grimani, depicted in this fragment, treated him with particular kindness.

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<sup>9</sup> Ivan Kovačić: *Zarobljeništvo i bijeg* (eds. Snježana Buczkowska, and Nada Draganja), Split, 2018, p. 65.

## The Camps in Avezzano and Sulmona

by Jiří Hutečka

*“[In early December 1918 in the Sulmona POW camp] Když se k nám v té době dostavil legionářský poručík Dr. Týra z Říma a přinesl formuláře přihlášky, aby je rozdál mezi nás, měl se chudák co bránit, abychom mu s přihláškami neutrhali i ruce [Late December 1918, Avezzano POW camp] Každý voják byl skutečně vzorně oblečen a dostal i takové maličkosti, jako byly niti, knoflíky, nůžky, hřebínek a podobně [January 1919, under training in the Avezzano POW camp] Byly to ideální chvíle, kdy výčitka neb pokárání před šikem bylo trestem největším a kdy jen u nenapravitelných používalo se trestu ‚za dráty‘. Tohoto trestu báli se i ti, kteří měli za sebou celou řadu trestů z Rakouska a zdáli se být skutečně nepolepšitelnými. Představa, že by musil svléknout stejnokroj domobrance a obléknout znovu ty zavšivené a nenáviděné rakouské hadry, byla nejhroznější představou i pro ty nejotrlejší. [...] Tábor byl prostorný, rozlehlý a skládal se z několika velkých oddělení. V jednom byli zajatci maďarští, němečtí i českoslovenští (kteří nevstoupili k legiím), v jednom byly legie rumunské, v jednom naše prapory... Když jsme přišli do našeho tábora, byl už jeden prapor úplně oblečen do nových italských stejnokrojů a druhý se právě oblékal... Hůře to bylo s těmi neoblečenými. Obtěžování nepříjemnými zvířátky, která vojákům v poli byla vždycky nejměrnějším druhem, hladoví, vyhublí chodili po dvoře, čihajíce, kde by se dalo co ulovit. Dnes člověk ani tomu nevěří, že ti hoši mohli tolik zkusit. Vrhali se jako psi na každou odhozenou kůrku pomerančovou a žebrali o zbytky cigaret tak dojemně, že jich bylo člověku až líto. V té příčině trpěli zajatci nejvíce. Kuřivo vydáváno jim nebylo a za nepatrný zajatecký žold mnoho toho nekoupili, protože italští vojáci provozovali s kuřivem strašlivou lichvu... Duševní stav těchto hochů nebyl o mnoho lepší tělesného. Hlad a dlouhé hodiny*

*nečinnosti podporovaly vznik nejhorší vlastnosti, v první řadě egoismu, který by snad byl zardousil i vlastního bratra pro kousek lepšího sousta.”<sup>10</sup>*

His memoirs of a Czech-speaking officer describe the camp that served as the last home for many of those buried in the crypt. The Avezzano camp housed ordinary prisoners of war, and conditions here were much worse than in the Sulmona officers' camp, from which he came on the night of December 27, 1918. By this time, the Avezzano camp and the material conditions there were already politically divided, with preferential treatment given to men who had enlisted in the nascent national armies. The author himself, at the time of his arrival, was already a member of the Czechoslovak *Domobrana*, which was essentially a continuation of the Czechoslovak Legion, formed only after the end of the war from the men still in captivity. This memoirs sum up well the background of signing up for membership in the exile armies. Of course, national ideology played an important role and even bored officers in the POW camp would do anything to join the army and return to the newly formed republic. But for the other ranks in places like the POW camp in Avezzano, signing up and doing the right thing meant staying on the right side of the “wire” and possibly surviving, because the material conditions for the remaining ordinary Austro-Hungarian POWs were generally miserable.

## The Enemy Within

*by Kamil Ruszała*

*“Mamy tutaj duze scysje z Serbami i Czechami. Serbowie z Austrii są wielkimi wrogami Austrii, podobnie Czesi. Serbowie wyrzucają austriackie monety i biją własne serbskie, a Czesi ustanowili własne dowództwo i*

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10 Jaroslav Výborný, *Z rakouských zákopů do československé uniformy*, Brno, 1927, p. 21–29.

*noszą własne odznaki na czapkach. Jedyne Niemcy, Węgrzy i Polacy są przeciwko, dlatego boją się dalej wypuszczać i poruszają się tylko w okolicy swoich baraków. 3 maja (polskie narodowe święto) doszło do takiej bijatyki, że Włosi musieli strzelać. Strzelali na postrach w powietrze, tak, że wkrótce zrobiło się spokojnie. Było trzech rannych od uderzenia kamieniem.”<sup>11</sup>*

Nationalist conflicts were a frequent occurrence in the POW camps, often fueled by pre-war animosities and disputes. The present letter was written by Wojciech Pullit, who was imprisoned in the Vittoria POW camp in the province of Syracuse in Sicily and addressed Franciszek Przewłocki in Zabawa near Radłów in western Galicia on May 19, 1917. Unfortunately, we have no further information about the recipient or the sender of the letter, which was confiscated and registered by the Austrian censors: The letter may have been seized because the sender describes nationalist conflicts within the camp, suggesting that both Serbs and Czechs in captivity were against Austria-Hungary. Such content might have been considered sensitive or potentially inflammatory by Austrian authorities, leading to the letter’s confiscation.

## Food, Money and the Limits of Comradeship

by Balázs Juhász

*“VIII. 17. Kedd. Elég jól aludtam. Álmomban paradicsomos burgonyát ettem sült hússal. Legalább álmomban. Annál keserűbb az ébredés. 3 db cigaretta az összes vagyonom. Pénzem sincs most addig, még hazulról nem kapok. Nincs cigarettám és csak legalább ez lenne. Ma délben*

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11 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv/Armeeeoberkommando, Gemeinsames Zentralnachweisbüro D, Kt. 3752, Res. 4706, S. 56–64.



*eladtam a húsomat, úgy értem az ebéd részemet egy önkéntesnek 3 db cigarettáért. Ő ajánlotta. Hogy kiuzsoráz[z]ák az embert! Valamikor ennek 20 fill[ér]. volt az ára. Hiszen csak én kapjak hazulról meg a többiek is pénzt, akkor ismét felmegy az ára. Majd én is fogok uzsorázni. Hiába itt kíméletlennek kell lenni, nem embernek, Schilveknak [Helyesen Shylock, velencei zsidó uzorás Shakespeare Velencei kalmár című művében.], mert a legnagyobb ellenség a honfitárs, a bajtárs. Testben jobban érzem magam, de arczban ijesztő rosszul nézek ki. Otthon talán ti nem is tudjátok, mi az fogolynak lenni. Nehéz sors ez, egész nap egy bizonyos kis területen van csak mozgási szabadság. Minden nap egy és ugyanazt enni, mert pénz nincs.”<sup>12</sup>*

Food played an important role in the camp life of János Gunesch, a common soldier of the 1st Honvéd Infantry Regiment from Budapest, captured by the Italian army in the Second Battle of Isonzo. He preferred to exchange food for tobacco, and to the point of being charged with usury, he did everything he could to get a favorable rate. He wrote about these transactions in the above example. In fact, prisoner-of-war soldiers and officers were supplied differently with daily life goods. The latter received pay for the entire duration of the war, which they used to feed themselves: they used the canteen or cooked. The common soldiers, on the other hand, initially received no allowance and had to eat what the Italians gave them. This was monotonous and not adapted to individual needs. Special rations or extra coffee were covered by small jobs in the camp or by money sent from home. But the issue of supplies often tested the cohesion of camaraderie. János Gunesch, a common soldier, was in a camp in Brescia, like some of the soldiers buried in the Anima crypt, for example Georg Malli from Austrian Styria.

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<sup>12</sup> Source: János Gunesch, *Naplóm a harctérről és a hadifogságomból 1915–16–17*, Budapest–San Martino del Carso, 2022, p. 84.

## As Prisoner of War in Rome

by Vlad Popovici

*“Pe tot parcursul, pe aceste străzi înguste, ca aproape toate străzile Romei vechi, femei, copiii, ba și unii bărbați strigau după mine văzându-mă în uniforma austriacă: “Austriaco cattivo! Prova Madona!” și câte și mai câte înjurături, pe care eu nu avusesem ocazia să le aud și nici din cărțile de limba italiană nu le-am învățat. Însoțitorii mei se certau cu lumea aceasta necăjită, care vedeau în mine pe ucigașul soțului, fiului, fratelui, ori al părintelui celui care-mi adresa acele înjurături și blesteme și-mi ziceam în sufletul meu: “Iartă-le lor Doamne, că nu știi ce faci!” Sunt cu conștiința împăcată că, aproape doi ani cât am stat pe frontul italian, n-am tras niciun foc de armă și nu am făcut niciun rău fraților mei italieni.”<sup>13</sup>*

While interactions between soldiers of enemy armies on the frontline were frequent and followed the more or less official rules of the war, interactions between POWs and the civilian population—who often had lost relatives, or had suffered material losses due to the war—took place differently. Here, we have the experience of an Austrian-Hungarian POW on being greeted with discontent and insults on the streets of Rome in early 1918. Petre Ugliș was an officer of Romanian nationality who defected to the Italian side with 80 of his men. In this fragment, he recalls his journey through the streets of Rome, as a prisoner under escort, wearing the uniform of the Austro-Hungarian army, and the hostile attitude of the people who saw in him the enemy and evildoer against their family and friends.

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13 Petre Ugliș Delapecica, Jurnal de război din anii 1914–1919, Alba Iulia, 2015, p. 130.

## Censorship and Soldiers' Letters

by Kamil Ruszała

*“Nasz los trochę się pogorszył, jednak jeszcze można wytrzymać. Po wykryciu w naszym obozie prób ucieczki wprowadzono zaostżenia. Liczą nas dwa razy dziennie, o godzinie 10 i o 15, zrewidowano nasze szafy i skrzynie, szukali cywilnych ubrań, jednak nie znaleźli tego wiele. Również odnośnie pieniędzy musieliśmy oświadczyć, że nie mamy więcej niż 15 lirów, kto miał więcej, musiał oddać. Rozumie się samo przez się, że nie przeszukiwali naszych kieszeni, tylko wierzyli nam na słowo.”<sup>14</sup>*

The prisoners of war in the camps in Italy tried to keep up correspondence with their relatives – in this case from the Austrian province of Galicia (today Poland and Ukraine). In their letters and postcards they often described the atmosphere in the camps, the plight of the POWs, their physical and mental condition, but also the harassment of the prisoners. They also wrote about escape attempts from the camps and their consequences. These letters were subject to censorship and often did not reach their addressees. One example is the letter above of a prisoner of war named Szewieczek, who was in a POW camp in Piazza Armerina, province of Caltanissetta in Sicily, dated December 2, 1916.

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14 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv/Armeeeoberkommando, Gemeinsames Zentralnachweisbüro E, Kt. 3776, Res. 8056.

## The Cholera

by Jiří Hutečka

*“6. ledna [1916]. Svátek Tří králů. Den jest krásný, takže jsem se vyhříval na slunci. Jsem nějak sláb a mám již třetí den takzvanou cholery, na kterou umírá mnoho a mnoho našich ubohých hochů. Mnoho žízním, však udržuji se od pití. Pitná voda zde není, jen ta, co dovezou na lodi z pevniny. Většina nemocných, trápena žízní, doplází se k moři a pije velikou dychtivostí mořskou vodu. Na to rychle pak následuje smrt. Ačkoliv vojáci italští stojí na stráž, aby žádný k moři nemohl, přec dohlídati se lidu nemůžou. Utečou za noci.”<sup>15</sup>*

This diary entry by a captured infantryman of the k. u. k. Infantry Regiment 88, Josef Klejna, shows that even successful evacuation to a POW camp did not mean the end of the ordeal for these men. The author describes in detail how individual soldiers experienced the first days after their arrival on the quarantine island of Asinara, when there was a shortage of food, no drinking water supply, and a raging cholera epidemic costed the lives of hundreds. It took a while before the Italian authorities could fully supply the camp.

## Report of a Military Physician

by Balázs Juhász

*“Érintkezésbe lépve az őrizetre rendelt olasz zászlóaljparancsnokával, semmi megnyugtató sem tudott mondani arra nézve, hogy megadják nekünk a lehetőséget annak, hogy a kolera ellen a sikerre való kilátással felvehessük a küzdelmet. Gyógyszerekről, fertőtlenítő szerekről szó sem*

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15 Josef Klejna, Voják – zajatec – legionář, ed. Michaela Mrázová, Praha, 2014, p. 93.

*volt. Fegyelem semmi. Az emberek ölték egymást az ivóvízért, amit a víztelen szigetre kis mennyiségben szállítottak hajón. Azon melegiben hozzáláttunk a védekezés megszervezéséhez. Az altiszteket összehívtuk és feltárva előttük a helyzetet kioktattuk őket a veszedelem elleni védekezésre és főként a fegyelem helyreállítását kötöttük lelkükre. Aztán sorakoztattuk a katonákat és őket is csoportonként kioktattuk a védekezésre vonatkozólag. Megszerveztük a tábor, kijelöltük az egyes csapattestek helyeit. Kijelöltük a kórház és a gyengélkedők és a gyanúsak helyeit. Sajnos ezek alatt a helyek alatt csupán vonalakkal kijelölt területeket kell érteni, mert például kórház csak a holdban volt.”<sup>16</sup>*

International treaties granted special status to medical personnel among prisoners of war. They were not formally prisoners of war, but as soldiers they were subject to the regulations of the guarding state. Together with the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war captured by the Serbian army at the Balkan front and then handed over to the Italian, a number of doctors were also taken over by the Italian authorities. They were thus involved in ending the epidemics in Asinara and, as professionals, painted an unflattering picture of the measures taken. This is also the case of the author of this text, János Gabányi, who worked as a military doctor in Asinara. There, doctors outlined the measures to fight the epidemic, but the Italian authorities did not support them sufficiently to separate the sick from the healthy. There was simply no infrastructure available. The doctors then threatened to call in an international mission if the Italian authorities did not get the situation under control. The only thing they achieved was that the Italian authorities became angry with them as Gabányi concluded.

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16 Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, I. világháború, Unsorted material, 4361, Retired Colonel Lajos Gabányi's record of his Italian captivity.

## Infected with Typhus in the Cassino Camp

by Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová

*“V posledních rokoch válki prišla taká doba, kěj už ňebolo chlapov, bral'i aj žebrákvov. Takích, čo po dva roki robil'i ňejakú službičku u pluku. A šetko zebra'l'i, jakíchkoľvek mizerákvov a viviez'l'i náz na boj na Pijavu. Tam zahinúlo šetko, dze -čo, lebo to je voda kilometrová a bol'i tam ohromné bitki. Bil'i Tal'ijaňi, bil'i naši. No a zas len som tam ból raňeni do pravej nohi. Ból som v ňemocnici šesc tížňi pri Nijapolu. Ottál' som ból poslaní do l'ágru, dze sa skladali vojská ze zajatích muží, z Austrijákvov. Proci Ňemcovi viedel armádi Beneš a Ščefáňik. Ňebola to veľiká radozdz válečným chlapom, ale precci sa skladalo. Chto ňechcel ísc, mal sa veru zle. Bol'i sme tam tak tri mesáce. Každí čas k nám prichojel Beneš a prosel Čechoslovákvov, abi sa len dával'i a pomvoh'l'i zmvosc, lebo kěj premvože von nás, buje s nama zle. [...] Nás tam bolo ostalo dvacisíce, takích šel'ijakích, aj žebračích najvac. [...] Ale potom za krátki čas válka prestala, no a mi sme sa cofl'i nazad do Itál'ije. Tam sme rajzoval'i krížom-krážom na práci. V Itál'iji f Kasíňe som potom za ňejakí čas ležal dva mesáce tak, čo som ňikeho aňi ňevizel. Mal som tifús. Ležal nás tam celí l'áger, pet lebo šes\_cisíc. Vol'ačo aj mrelo. Ja som dva mesáce aňi ňestával s poscele a ešče potom, kej som začal chojic, ból som tam druhé dva. Tak som prišiel domvov takí len biedni. A hučalo mi h\_mojjej hlave aj dva roki doma po tem tifúse. Prišiel som do domu do Maríkovej dvacátého šiestého sektembra v dzevatnástém roku.”<sup>17</sup>*

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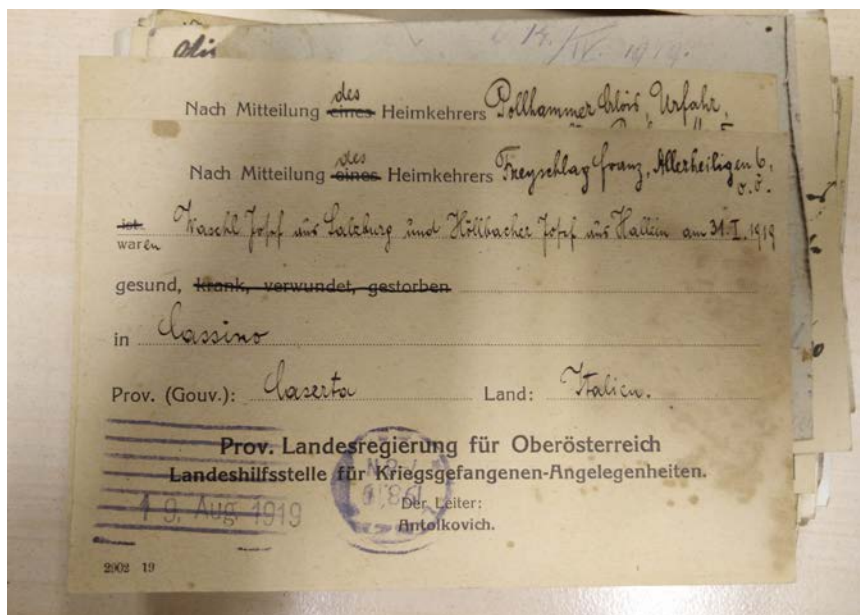
17 Oral history interview of J. Polník, published in: Rozpamätávanie. Prvá svetová vojna jazykom prastarých otcov a materí. Bratislava: VEDA – vydavateľstvo SAV, 2015, p. 84–86.

Many ordinary soldiers from the rural regions of present-day Slovakia (until the end of World War I the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary) experienced the fighting on the Carpathian front in Galicia and later in Italy. J. Polník, a Slovak, was initially wounded by Russian troops and almost lost his arm. Nevertheless, he was sent to the Italian front in 1917—as he stated in his oral testimony in 1965: *“They took everyone, all the unfortunates, and brought us to the battle on the Piave River.”* He recalls his stay in a hospital near Naples after being wounded in the leg, and later in the POW camp where he refused to join the Czechoslovak Legion. As many soldiers buried in the crypt of the Anima, his stay in Italy lasted longer than the war. Sick with typhoid fever, he spent more than four months in a hospital in Cassino: *“We were a camp, five or six thousand of us”*. He did not return home until September 1919. The transcription of his narrative, recorded in 1965, also reproduces the dialect of the then 80-year-old veteran.

## Camp Life and Nation Building

by Kamil Ruszała

*“Українців трактували і трактують Італійці досі на рівні з Мадярами та Німцями та держать їх під строгим наглядом серед всяких можливих, злишних вже обмежень свободи ще і тепер, так начеб-то війна нині ще тривала в повнім розгарію Не осягнули дозволу на основання окремого табору, почали українці організуватись кожний поменший табір для себе, старалися всіма силами наші часописі, обговорювали спільно події на Україні, гуртувалися в хори і держали просвітні відчити. Але часописі приходили з рідка (американські), вісти були неvistарчаючі, а старання основати осібний орґан для полонених в українській бесіді були безуспішні. Навіть часописі з Франції, Швайцарії*



Credit: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv/Nachlasssammlung, B/479, Kt. 1/2, Friedrich, Heimkehrer-Informationskarten an Landeshilfsstellen für Kriegsgefangenen-angelegenheiten

**Fig. 6: The exchange of information between the home country and the prisoners after the end of the First World War often took place on a provincial level—as this example shows—the prisoners who had already returned were interviewed and asked for the names and additional information of those they had met in the camps.**

*і самої Італії, що посвячені українській справі і писані в дусі прихильнім до держав Антанту, були і є до нині для полонених заборонені. Полонені інших славянських народностей були вже давно в сполучі з їх національними правительствами і могли основати свої центральні Комітети в Римі а нашим на численні просьби о утворення в Римі українського Комітету навіть не давали відповіді. Що більше: висилали і висилають агітаторів, які обіцяючи нашим жовнірам скорий поворот домів і инші догодження, стараються перетягнути їх на свою сторону, та на щастя*



*щавдяки непохитній витривалості наших вояків ці заходи знаходять всюди належну відправу.”<sup>18</sup>*

The reports from the POW camps in Italy contain numerous details about the living conditions and daily life of the prisoners, the forced labor, the diseases prevalent in the camps and the very difficult supply situation. The Ukrainians in Italian captivity made efforts to establish a camp exclusively for soldiers of their nation, but no agreement was reached. Faced with these difficulties, they took matters into their own hands and organized for themselves choirs, educational meetings, and traditional festivities. Since many of the Anima soldiers were of Ukrainian nationality (to be precise Ruthenian, as the Habsburg administration used to refer to them), it is likely that they had similar experiences before their deaths.

## Burials in the Camps

*by Balázs Juhász*

*“IX. 14. Kedd. Ma reggel 7 órakor volt a halottunk temetése. Szép két koszorút kapott. Egyikre mi adtuk össze, már akinek volt pénze. Delíriumban halt el szegény, biztosan ijedtségtől kapta a rajvonalba. A temetésre kivonultunk mi is, egy szakasz olasz katona is. Szép beszéltetés volt. Egy franciskánus barát szentelte be. Mi a várkapuig kísértük el, tovább nekünk menni nem szabad. A gránáttól megmenekült, de a gyilkos csírát elhozta magával, ami megölte.”<sup>19</sup>*

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18 N.N., Полонені Українці в Італії, in: Воля 3/2 (1919), p. 71–72.

19 János Gunesch, Naplóm a harctérről és a hadifogságomból 1915–16–17, Budapest–San Martino del Carso, 2022, p. 96.

Even after capture, death loomed. The POWs faced new infections in addition to those acquired at the front, so the question of death continued to preoccupy soldiers in the relative safety of the camps. However, honoring the dead was another link to the enemy guard, for the POW was also a soldier, and so final honors were paid in the form of military honors. The wreaths at the grave were often donated by the comrades, who were particularly saddened if only a part of them could attend the funeral, since the cemetery was usually outside the camp. In this case, outside Brescia. The author of the diary, János Gunesch, was a common soldier of the Honvéd Infantry Regiment 1 (Budapest), who was captured by the Italian army in the Second Battle of Isonzo. After the war he returned home and made a successful career as a bronze master.

## Last Message from Captivity

by Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová

*“Karta Pisana dna 14/2 1918. Srdečne a uprimne pozdraveni vam Posilam rodičove Mili[,] javaz kažem welice pekne pozdravuvat[,] vas tatíčko aj vas Mamičko aj dyetom [deťom,] aj sestrički setki dochromadi. Winšujem vam od Mileho pana Bocha dobreho zdrava a sčasča[,] hojneho požehnana[,] Nech vam Boch Milostivi pomacha šetkim dochromadi[,] Šak čosa tika meho zdrava[,] dakujem Panu Bochu[,] dosavad som zdravi ktereho aj vam vinšujem a ze rdca prajem. Tak ine vam nemam čo pisat[,] už zme na druchem mjeste. A [s] hoplar jankom zme spolu[,] Tak rozkážem ešče raz velice pekne pozdravuvat šetkich dochromadi[,] tak zbohom.”<sup>20</sup>*

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20 Military Correspondence Card written by Juraj Srnánek, February 14th, 1918. Private collection of Juraj Šedivý, family correspondence.



Credit: Private property, used with kind permission of Professor Juraj Sedivy.

Fig. 7: Gratuitous POW correspondence addressed to Geork Srnanek in Nitra, sent by Juraj Srnanek from Asinara.

The places of death and graves of many soldiers who were drafted for the First World War are still unknown. Only some sparse sources can serve as family mementos. Most families in present-day Slovakia lost beloved ones during the First World War in trenches, military camps or hospitals far from their homes. The Srnanek family from the small village of Lubina (then Lobonya) near the town of Trenčín lost two sons and several other relatives. Martin was wounded twice—in 1915 at the age of 22, the second time in 1917. Before he died, he wrote home to his parents as well as to his brother and cousin, who were also infantrymen in the Austro-Hungarian army. The last traces of his brother Juraj are two military correspondence cards from the POW quarantine camp in Asinara, which he wrote to his parents in February 1918. His last cards do not contain much information due to the censorship to which military mail was subjected (as shown by the postmarks of both the Italian and Austrian

ensorship authorities). From the incorrect spelling and the dialect used, it can be seen that writing was exceptional for Juraj. Although he wrote *“Thank God I am still healthy,”* nothing further is known about his fate. On the monument erected in his native village in 1938, the surname Srnánek is mentioned seven times among the names of soldiers killed in the First World War, to commemorate seven men of this family who fell between the ages of 21 and 34.

## Chapter 4: Selected Biographies of Anima Soldiers

The last chapter is devoted to the soldiers in the Anima crypt. These are short biographies of those about whom we have already acquired sufficient information, more than just accounts of their military experiences from their army personnel files. Unfortunately, the (military) records are not equally accessible and preserved in all the countries we deal with, which is why not all nationalities are presented here in equal numbers. However, this guide is only the first result of a large ongoing research project. Our plan is to publish a virtual book in which as many soldiers as possible will finally have their own page and thus their story presented.

### Friedrich Auer The Submariner from Lower Austrian Neustift/Scheibbs

*by Tamara Scheer*

The—at least according to current research—only sailor in the crypt of the Anima is Friedrich or Fritz Auer. In the list of the Austrian Black Cross his hometown is given as *Scheiben*, but we were able to correct this quickly. Auer came from Scheibbs in Lower Austria, more precisely from a small village nearby, Neustift. Auer was born on March 5, 1893. He was the son of the blacksmith Johann Auer. His mother's name was Franziska. Due to compulsory military service, Auer was called for his medical examination or *Musterung* in March 1914, found fit for service and was assigned to the k. u. k. Sailor Corps. His military record lists him as a Roman Catholic primary school graduate by

K. u. k. Matrosenkorps.

### Hauptgrundbuchsblatt.

Assentiert durch das Heeres- oder Kriegsmarine-Ergänzungsbüro-Kommando (Truppo oder Anstalt)	Evidenzunabhängiges Ergänzungsbüro-Kommando	Erscheint im Assentprotokolle		Assentjahrgang	1914	Blatt-Nr.	5382	Kompagnie	15	
		Abgangsheft-Nr.		405		Abgangsblatt-Nr.		80		
Vor- und Zuname		970		Auer		Friedrich				
Geburts-	Heimatszugehörigkeit nach	Ort	Kreuzstift			Geburtsjahr	1899			
		Stand				ledig				
		Bezirk	Schwäbisch			Religion	röm. Katholisch			
		Komitat				Genossene Schulbildung	Volksschule			
		Land	Niederösterreich			Kunst, Gewerbe, sonstiger Lebensberuf	Kommis			
Assentiert am	28. März 1914 nach der Reihe der Verzeichnung in der Stellungliste auf 4 Linien, 5 Reserve- und 3 Dienstjahre zum k. u. k. Matrosenkorps.									
Eingereiht am	28. Juli 1914 Im Delegationswege laut Standesakt-Nr. 0277 St. B. Nr. 18									

Credit: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Kriegsarchiv, Marine, Grundbuchblätter, Friedrich Auer

Fig. 8: Friedrich Auer's military record

profession *Kommis*, meaning an office clerk. Normally, *Musterung* in March would have meant the start of two years of military service in the early fall 1914. But everything was to turn out differently.

On 29 August 1914 Friedrich Auer began his active military service right at the beginning of the war, i.e. prematurely, since he should have started his compulsory military service in autumn. His military record shows that he was promoted several times in the course of his first two years. On May 12, 1916, it was reported by the submarine station in Pula that he was captured, in the Strait of Otranto. His military records, at least what is preserved of it in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna, does not mention a particular submarine, only from the war casualty lists it is clear that he had served as a telegrapher on the submarine 6. The U-6 got into a net blockage in the Strait of Otranto, from which it was not possible to free itself. When three British destroyers

approached, Commander Hugo von Falkhausen ordered the boat sunk. The entire crew, unharmed, was taken prisoner by the Italians.

Unfortunately, we do not know to which camp Auer was sent. The trace is lost then. What we know is that he was only 25 years old at the end of 1918 when he died in Rome in the military hospital Regina Margherita, like many others of the Anima soldiers. Today he is remembered on the monument to the victims of the First World War, located in front of the parish church in the town's square in Scheibbs. Since he is named among the fallen, in his case, his fate must have been known, unlike others in the crypt, who had to be subsequently declared dead.

## Iuon Buta and Samson Mămăligă The two fellow villagers in the Anima Crypt

by Vlad Popovici

Râmeț, in Romanian Alba County consists of twelve villages and hamlets spread over the slopes of the Western Carpathians, and is best known for its 13th century Orthodox monastery. On the eve of the First World War, about 2,200 people lived here; today there are fewer than 600. Two of the soldiers buried in the crypt of the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima were from this community, were comrades in the Austro-Hungarian Infantry Regiment 50, and most likely knew each other before they went to war.

Samson Mămăligă was born in 1879 in one of the villages of the commune. At the beginning of the war he was a master carpenter in Râmeț, where he lived with Istina Mogoșan (born September 28, 1886), with whom he had two daughters: Lina (born June 12, 1907) and Maria (born November 4, 1912). In the Register of War Widows and Orphans from the early 1920s, Samson is listed as "*missing in action*" in Italy in 1917. This means that the family was never informed about his fate, and Istina and her "*illegitimate*" daughters are listed as having

no assets at all (they did not even own a house). The girls did not attend school, but their upbringing was considered “good” and they initially received a pension of 100 Lei each. After they reached the age of majority, Lina’s pension was discontinued and Maria’s was reduced to 75 Lei. From the mid-1920s, information about Istina Mogoșan and her daughters disappears from the documents, and the name Mămăligă also disappears from the community.

Iuon (Ion) Buta was much younger than Samson. He was born on January 16, 1896, the third child of Simion Buta (born 1858) and Veronica Ștefănuț (born around 1870). His father was a farmer and his grandfather, Dumitru, a raftsman. There was a large age difference between Iuon’s parents, but that was common in rural Transylvania. A first sister, Maria, was born in December 1889 and died only a few days later. Another sister, Efmia, was born in November 1891. Simion Buta died in 1898, when Iuon was only two years old, and the widow remarried soon after the expiration of the one-year mourning period, to Vasile Ignat, a small landowner closer to her age. However, a few months later, in January 1900, Veronica Ștefănuț gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, Maria, raising questions about her new marriage.

It is known that Iuon’s mother, Veronica, and her children lived in Pleașa, a hamlet of the commune, in the pre-war years. In 1914 Iuon went to war, young and unmarried, was taken prisoner and died in Italy. His sister Efmia had married Ioan Muntean, also from Râmeț, in 1911 and had four children. The youngest daughter, Parastia / Paraschiva, born on January 1, 1919, married in 1938 Teodor Boteiu, a young man from Râmeț, with whom she also had four children: Victor, Elena, Olimpia and Aurelia (b. 1943). Aurelia Boteiu, Iuon Buta’s niece, lives today in Râmeț with her descendants, but the memory of her uncle, who died at the front, was not kept alive in the family. We now know his story, because the genealogical information was gathered with the help of the Mayor’s Office of Râmeț and confirmed by Niculaie Tecșa, the son of Aurelia Boteiu.



## Leopold Fuchs A Bishop's Intervention at the Anima Rector

*by Tamara Scheer*

The archive of Santa Maria dell'Anima contains a small collection of letters sent from Austria after the war, in which the senders asked the rector for help in finding missing soldiers and the places where they are buried. These letters were not always written by family members, but also by mayors or priests from their hometowns. Most of these letters in the Anima archive date from the early 1920s, thus, long before the Anima soldiers' remains were transferred to the crypt. Among these letters is one about Leopold Fuchs. On March 24, 1920, the bishop of Linz in Upper Austria, Johannes Maria Gföllner, to whose diocese Fuchs belonged, sent a letter to the rector of Santa Maria dell'Anima, Maximilian Brenner, because he already knew some of the details of his fate, but asked for help in obtaining an official death certificate, which the family needed in order to declare him dead (see fig. 9, p. 66f). It was known that Fuchs had been ill with the Spanish flu at the end of 1918 and had died of pneumonia in the Military Hospital Regina Margherita in Rome, but there was no official confirmation. Unfortunately, no further correspondence about Fuchs can be found in the archives of the Anima. Interestingly, there was also not the request for a repatriation of the remains, as was the case in other requests for help to the rector in those years after the war. The fact that 17 years later Leopold Fuchs would find his final resting place only a few meters away from the rector's desk was not foreseeable at that time.

Leopold Fuchs was born on November 15, 1897 in Ohnesdorf, Upper Austria, which belongs to the municipality of Sarleinsbach, where today on the monument in front of the church his name is mentioned among the fallen, although strictly speaking he had not fallen, but died as a prisoner of war. The son of a farmer served as an infantryman in the k. k. Schützenregiment 2 from Linz. Since Fuchs

was only 17 years old at the outbreak of the war, he was only drafted later in the course of the war. This is probably the reason why only an excerpt from the death register from 1925 can be found as his military record in the Austrian State Archives, but not, as with his older comrades, a military service record and all places of deployment. In any case, the Italian sources show that at one time he was also in the prisoner-of-war camp in Velletri close to Rome, the place where many of the Anima soldiers were, and the place where a while ago there has been a memorial plaque set up commemorating the Austro-Hungarian soldiers who built the stairs through the city park in labor service.

## Grabán Béla A Carpenter's son from Baia Mare

by Vlad Popovici

Belás' mother, Matild Raboczki, was one of the mothers who had to deal with the complicated legal situation created by the death in captivity of her son. Béla, mentioned in Austro-Hungarian military sources in German version as Adalbert, was born on April 25, 1897 in Baia Mare and seems to have been the only child to reach adulthood. The 21-year-old Matild had married Grabán János, a 25-year-old carpenter (*kincstárács*), on February 21, 1892. Both came from Baia Mare and between 1892 and 1897, four children were born: Amália, Kelemen, János and Béla. It is a bit strange that in different documents the first name of the father is sometimes given as János, sometimes as Pál, but since the name of the wife and the home address are the same (936 Libamező Street), it is most likely it is always him, who either used two first names or changed his name for whatever reasons.

Béla attended a forestry school. Immediately after his graduation he was enlisted and sent to the front on October 15, 1915. According to the archival

84. Platte  
(O. Anst.)  
14. V. 20

78

Linz, 24. März 1920

Geprehrtem Herrn Grafen Javalat!

Am 8. Dezember 1918 soll mir  
Titel „Regina Margherita“ in  
Rom im gewissen Größ Gold,  
Infanterie des kaiserlichen I. I.  
Pflanzregiments Herz Nr. 2,  
an Lungen-Entzündung gestorben  
sein. Er war geboren am 15. II.  
1897 zu Gumbdorf, Herr  
Lehrer in Oberösterreich; diese  
seiner Krankheit dürfte in der  
ersten Militär-Merit hat  
15. II. gegeben sein 15. I. Er  
starb im November 1918 an der

Credit: Archive of the Pontifical Institute Santa Maria dell'Anima, Rome, J/40, Bremser files.

Fig. 9: Letter by Bishop of Linz, Johannes Maria Gföllner, from 1920.

Spanischer Grippe in Zürich am  
3. Dezember in das obgenannte  
Spital gebracht, wo er am 8. Dez.  
starb.

Herrn Professor Dr. J. J. Suter  
möge mich in der Lage sein,  
eine offizielle, dokumentarische  
Nachricht über Obgenanntem  
zu verschaffen? Die Angelegenheit  
bedürfte für Zürich.

Im voraus für alle Anstrengungen  
vielmals dankend in herzlichster  
Grüßung

Ihr ergebener  
+ Johannes Maria  
Löffel von Luz

data at the Maramureş County Archives, fund of the District Court in Baia Mare, he “*went in March or April 1916 into Italian captivity, from which he has not returned to this day [1925].*” During the war also Béla’s father died, so after the war Matild Raboczki remained the only member of the family. In 1925 she began the formalities for the official recognition of her son’s death. It is difficult to say whether she hoped for his return for so long, or whether she was forced to resolve the situation for legal reasons (inheritance, property acquisition, etc.), but it is certain that during the last two years of the war, when Béla was still alive, she heard nothing from him or heard about him, because captivity was the last information she received about her son.

Since Béla’s name does not appear in the casualty records of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, we would never have been able to identify him without his mother’s correspondence with the court in Baia Mare. Today, however, we know that on October 17, 1918, Béla (Adalbert) Grabán died in the Regina Margherita hospital in Rome, because there is a death certificate issued by the hospital. But his mother apparently never found out what really happened to her son.

## **Karel Měříčka** **A Member of the Czechoslovak Legion** **from Sušice**

*by Jiří Hutečka and Jan Pecháček*

Sometimes, historical research is highly dependent on coincidence to find revealing fascinating stories. This happened in the case of Karel Měříčka, who turned out to be—as far as we know at the moment—the only member of the Czechoslovak Legion buried in the Anima crypt. The Czechoslovak Legion was an exile army formed by several Czech and Slovak politicians who saw

the war as a unique opportunity to demand the independence of a Czech-Slovak nation state. The Legion, which later in the war entered the conflict on the side of the Entente in support of its own diplomatic cause, was formed largely from the ranks of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. Their aim was to undermine the Habsburg monarchy, and the fact that one of the legionaries found his final resting place in the Anima crypt among his former comrades of the Austro-Hungarian forces, thus, is not without a certain historical irony. But how did it happen, and how did we find out?

Based on the available documents, we first assumed that Karel Měříčka was born on May 14, 1892 or 1893 in Sušice, a small town in western Bohemia, served as a private in the k. u. k. Infantry Regiment 102, was taken prisoner on September 14, 1916, probably on the Isonzo Front, and died in the military hospital in Sulmona on July 1918. Further research confirmed his identity in local birth records, revealing some minor errors in our early records, such as a different birth date of May 24, 1894 (a fairly common pattern running through the records of deceased soldiers). Karel's parents were identified as Jan Měříčka, a teacher, and Josefa Měříčka née Pražská.

Further data and final confirmation that this is the correct person can best be traced in military records, which, however, as with many records of common soldiers, do not exist any longer. Then chance intervened. As part of a class project, a group of students from the University of Hradec Králové were given the task of trying to identify at least some of the Anima soldiers named in the Austrian Black Cross list. They approached it with an open mind, and since for many Czechs, apparently even history students, World War I is synonymous with the legendary deeds of the Legion, they automatically ran the names through an online database of the Legionnaires on the Military Archives website. And the result was Karel Měříčka having been a member of the Legion. Their wrong assumption about the nature of the "Czech war experience" inadvertently allowed additional research, as the records of the Legionnaires are mostly

preserved in the archives. Thus, we were able to piece together the tragic but fascinating story of Karel Měříčka's short life.

First of all, we were able to confirm that in the Anima crypt it is indeed Karel Měříčka, born in Sušice on May 24, 1894, a private in the Austro-Hungarian Army's Infantry Regiment 102, who was captured on September 14, 1916. Further information emerges from the short, two-page index card, which is all that remains of the man's story: his last known address was in the town of Horažďovice, a few kilometers northwest of his birthplace. A salesman by trade, with eight years of schooling, he was drafted into military service by the outbreak of war and immediately enlisted in 1914. First on the Eastern front, he was wounded in the hand, and after recovering, he was sent to the Italian front where he was taken prisoner on the Isonzo River, and interned in Padula. Speaking Czech, he apparently identified with the Czech national cause to such an extent that he enlisted in the Legion on April 10, 1917, long before it had fully formed in Italy. His application was finally granted approval a year later, after the Italian government signed an agreement with the Czechoslovak National Council, enabling the formal existence of the Legion under the auspices of the Italian Army. By this time, however, Měříčka's health had failed him. Almost immediately, on April 28, 1918, he was admitted to a military hospital in Perugia. This may have helped him, because on June 4, 1918, he was finally accepted into the ranks of Czechoslovak Infantry Regiment 31 as a private. However, a new illness brought him to the hospital again on July 9, 1918, this time in Rome, and three days later he died there of tuberculosis. He was buried three days later in the military section of Rome's Campo Verano cemetery, to rest later in the crypt as a forgotten Czechoslovak legionnaire. However, the Czechoslovak government did not forget him and posthumously granted him official legionary status in 1924.

## Josef Obert Lost Son of a Grieving Mother

*by Jiří Hutečka and Jan Pecháček*

When researchers try to find out details about a soldiers' life, military archives are usually particularly helpful in getting facts, but less helpful in gaining insight into the soldiers' private lives. In the case of Josef Obert, this is different. We were able to confirm his identity using local birth records. He was born into a peasant family in western Bohemia. His file in the Military Historical Archives in Prague is incomplete; among other things, the most important document is missing: his personnel sheet with all biographical information and an overview of his military activities. Nevertheless, the file contains a fascinating correspondence which, in conjunction with other sources such as the birth certificate, the census and other local documents, has enabled us to reconstruct the sad story of a family torn apart by war.

On January 16, 1920, Margaretha Obert from Chodovská Huť (Kuttenplaner Schmelzthal), a village near Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad), wrote a letter to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense inquiring about the fate of her son Josef, whom she knew “was last seen in captivity in Italy, then on September 21, 1919 [...] left for Bohemia [...] but has not arrived to this day.” She assumed that he might have been hospitalized and prayed “with all my heart that inquiries be made or [that] any information on the subject be given” to her. It apparently took her several letters, which included information about her most recent correspondence with her son and about some disturbing rumors about his health, before the ministry finally responded in April 1920. Officials asked her where she got the information that her son had died on the return train on December 26, 1918. At the same time, an investigation was initiated and requests for information were sent to the Czechoslovak military attaché in Rome and to the Czechoslovak Red Cross.





Credit: Jan Edl

**Fig. 10: Memorial in Chodovská Huť (Czech Republic) which remembers two fallen brothers.**

In December 1920, officials finally received a response that confirmed Margaretha Obert's worst fears. Born on October 12, 1896, infantryman Josef Obert, a tailor by trade, who had lived with his parents until he joined *Landwehr* Infantry Regiment 6 in December 1915, was taken prisoner on the Italian front during the last weeks of the war and interned in a prisoner of war camp in Cassino, from where he had sent his last letter to his mother on December 12, 1918. He did not make it on the return transport, dying of pneumonia at 12:15 a.m. on December 26 after being hospitalized with flu-like symptoms that quickly developed into severe pneumonia—a common complication of the so-called Spanish flu. The place of death was given as the town of *Dichiarazione di Decesso*. In reality, Josef spent his last moments in the Regina Margherita Reserve Hospital in Trastevere, Rome, together with many others of the Anima-soldiers. *Dichiarazione di Decesso* means death certificate in Italian, but the language skills of the Czechoslovak Red Cross officials apparently left much to be desired. Their glaring error was then immortalized in Josef Obert's military records and communicated as such to his grieving mother.

When the inhabitants of Chodovská Huť (Kuttenplanner Schmelzthal) erected a monument “to the fallen heroes” in 1925, Josef Obert was listed next to his brother Johann, who was killed in action on the Eastern Front at the end of 1917. The community of about 780 souls mourned the loss of the two and 38 other sons, brothers and fathers who did not return home.

## Michael Schroffenegger The decorated Tyrolean

by Tamara Scheer

The case of Michael Schroffenegger is different from the others. He is one of the few whose name was spelled correctly in the Austrian Black Cross list. Yet he was marked as unidentified. But using the usual sources to search for him—casualty lists, local newspapers, church records—it was quick and easy to trace him. Once we knew he was from Tiers in Tyrol, thanks to the support of Fabian Tirler we got a picture of his home place's local memorial where he is mentioned having died in 1918 in Italy. Schroffenegger is also mentioned in the Tyrolean Book of Honour, where he is noted in his memorial sheet: *“missing in Italy since the retreat in November 1918”*. Today a lot can be found out about him, but apparently there was no contact with his homeland at the end of the war or until his death.

But to start with Michael Schroffenegger's origin. He was born on 15 September 1883 in Tiers. His parents were Johann, a tenant farmer, and Maria. When he reached the age of military service in 1904, at the age of 21, he was mustered and found fit. His occupation was listed as day labourer. At the beginning of



Michael Schroffenegger  
Unterjäger des k. k. Landesjäger-Regiments Nr. 11.  
Besitzer der silbernen Tapferkeitsmedaille zweiter Klasse.

**Fig. 11: Michael Schroffenegger  
in his uniform.**

Credit: Tiroler Soldaten-Zeitung, 4. August 1915, Beilage.

the war, he was already over 30 years old and his profession was then listed as carpenter.

Unlike the other soldiers in the Anima crypt, a great deal can be found about Michael Schroffenegger in Austrian newspapers, and not only in Tyrol. Even the Vienna-based *Neuigkeits-Weltblatt* took up his story and titled the article, which was taken over from the Tyrolean *Soldaten-Zeitung*, “*Die Heldentat eines Landeschützen*”. He received an award for bravery. This is the reason why we have a photo of him. As an *Unterjäger* in the k. k. Landeschützenregiment 2, meaning a rifle man in the local territorial defence, he was with his patrol near Belluno at a mountain hut on 30 May 1915. The date shows that it was shortly after the outbreak of war with Italy. Schroffenegger had the task to secure his comrades’ retreat, after many of them had already been wounded or killed in a battle. He held out so bravely that not a single more was harmed. For this he received the Silver Medal for Bravery (Silberne Tapferkeitsmedaille).

Since there is seemingly no record of his military service (Grundbuchblatt) preserved in the archives (in his case the Tiroler Landesarchiv), we do not know what happened after he became an Italian prisoner of war in November 1918. The Italian sources do little to fill these gaps. He was a prisoner of war in Ostia and, according to his death certificate, he died in the Regina Margherita military hospital in Trastevere at the end of January 1919, was first buried in Campo Verano in Rome and then transferred to the Anima in 1937.

## Nicolae Rossa (Roşa) Whose son Petru was born two months after his father's death

by Konrad Harris Gergely-Kiszella and Vlad Popovici

Nicolae Rossa (Roşa) was born on 26 November 1879 in Poşaga de Jos/Alsópodszága, a small Transylvanian village in Turda-Arieş/Torda-Aranyos County, which belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary before 1918. In the 19th century, Transylvanian Romanian was often written not phonetically (Roşa) but “etimologically” (Rossa), i.e. as close as possible to the Latin version, in order to emphasise the Latinity and Roman ancestry of the Romanians. Rossa is the “Latinised” version of Roşa. But no one used this “Latinised” version in everyday speech, everyone used the popular version, which became standard Romanian after the 1940s, Roşa.



Credit: Private possession, courtesy of the Roşa family

**Fig. 12: Ioan Roşa (left) and Petru Roşa in the late 1970s**

Nicolae's parents, Ioan Rossa Pitia (son of Petru) and Paraschia (daughter of Teodor Roşa and Maria), were born in 1852 and 1862 respectively into Romanian families of Greek Orthodox faith. They married on 30 April 1876 and their first child, Nicolae, was born three years later. Nicolae had three other brothers: Gligor, born on 10 January 1882, died only a month later, and Ilie, born on 20 July 1883, died in December 1884. Nicolae's third brother, also named Gligor, was

born on 22 October 1887 and reached adulthood. Probably around 1907–1908, Nicolae Rossa married Ana Popa[c], who was born in 1886. However, their marriage was not recorded in the church register. Their first child, Sofie, was born on 11 February 1908; she married in her home village but died at a young age in the 1930s. They had no children. Her former husband was later killed on the Eastern Front in the Second World War.

During the First World War, Nicolae Rossa fought on the Italian front, where he was captured. He is one of the cases where we found that the information in the Austrian Black Cross list was wrong. According to the list, he was born in Pasaga, Croatia, and died in captivity in Ostia on 1 March 1919. However, with the help of his death certificate from Rome, which has almost the same date of death as the Black Cross list and the same name, we found out that he was not from Croatia-Slavonia. His family apparently never found out about his true fate, believing he had been killed in action.

Two months after Nicola's death, his wife Ana gave birth to a second child, Petru, on 1 May 1919, who was registered as Nicolae's son both in the church register and with the state authorities. The picture shows Petru Roşa (son of Nicolae) and Ioan Roşa (grandson of Nicolae) in Poşaga de Jos. Petru wears the traditional Romanian folk costume that his father probably also wore. Petru Rossa (Roşa) married a distant relative, Palaghie Roşa, on 26 February 1940, with whom he had a son, Ioan, but divorced in 1950. During the invasion of the Soviet Union, he fought in the Romanian army on the Eastern Front and was taken prisoner. Unlike his father, Petru Roşa survived captivity, returned home, lived to the age of 76 and died in Turda (Cluj County, Romania) on 20 May 1995. His son, Ioan Roşa, still lives there with his family. They have many family stories and pictures from the village relating to Nicolae's son Petru's generation, but absolutely nothing about Nicolae except that he was killed at the front.

## Alois Scheuwimmer The 22 years old Smith from Upper Austria

by Tamara Scheer



Credit: Private possession, courtesy of Alois Scheuwimmer

**Fig. 13: Alois Scheuwimmer in the military hospital.**

When we started this project, we had planned to compile the short biographies also on the basis of family stories. Or better we had hoped to find a lot of descendants. Right at the beginning, when I read that Alois Scheuwimmer came from near the Upper Austrian town of Freistadt, I managed to find a contact through Goli Anni who is a resident there, which immediately brought me to Alois Scheuwimmer. Fortunately, he is very active in the research of his ancestors and made all his knowledge and the photos available to us. About the choice of his first name he told me:

*"My father was also called Alois Scheuwimmer (he was a teacher and school inspector, he had broken the line of blacksmiths), my grandfather named him after the fallen brother. Subsequently, I also got the name Alois, so I owe this name to the fallen great uncle."*

At the beginning of our project, however, Alois Scheuwimmer in the list of the Austrian Black Cross was an Alois *Schouriner*, for whom there was no further information, not even a date of death. However, a death certificate was soon found of an Alois *Scheurimer*, who died in Rome at the age of 22 on August 26, 1919, came from Freistadt and whose parents were listed as Johann and Anna. Alois Scheuwimmer's father was a blacksmith. He also learned this craft. Due to his young age, born in 1897, he was not called up for military service until 1915. The casualty list from his war service shows that he was assigned as a professional to a so-called Sappeurbattalion, a technical branch. However, he was not used in the farriery or wagon smithy but as a "quarry smith", specialized in continuously sharpening the tools in the quarry (drills, chisels, etc.). The sappers were important on the Italian front in mountain fighting (undermining and blasting various mountain peaks, e.g. Monte Cimone). In December 1916 he was wounded.

In April 1918 Alois Scheuwimmer was again in a field hospital, this time in Tyrolean Merano. He had fallen ill with infectious diarrhea. A so-called Celloidin card has survived in the family's possession, showing on one side Alois Scheuwimmer in the military hospital. The card was addressed to Johann Scheuwimmer, his father. It is possible that this card was written by his brother Anton, who was a dragoon on the Italian front. Anton had already written a card to his father about the poor state of health of his younger brother Alois, in which it says something like:

*"Lois is not in better health. Winter he must stay in the hospital, he was close to dying, the doctors had no hope."*

Unfortunately, military records do not give any further information about his capture and internment in Italian camps.

## František Vyhlídal A Peasant Son from Moravia

by Jiří Hutečka and Jan Pecháček

The case of František Vyhlídal is a relatively common case of an entry in the Austrian Black Cross list with the note “no information available”, here next to the name “*Vighidal Franz*”. He is also an example of a soldier whose fate remained uncertain after the war, and his community was left in the dark about what had happened to him. We now know he was born on March 29, 1888, in the village of Vrbátky near Prostějov (Prossnitz) in central Moravia. While his military records have not survived, we can combine Italian and Czechoslovak death certificates with local birth records and 1910 census records to gain insight into his short life.

František was born into the Czech-speaking Catholic family of Ignác Vyhlídal, a cottager, and Josefa Vyhlídalová, a Catholic farmer’s daughter from Hněvotín, a village near Vrbátky. František had a younger sister, Marie, who was born when he was nine years old, and the family shared their small cottage in the village square with his elderly grandfather and livestock typical of this rich agricultural region, including three cows, two pigs, and a goat. In 1909, he was drafted into the army to an unspecified unit to start his two year obligatory military service. In 1914, he joined either the k. u. k. Infantry Regiment 13 at Opava (Troppau) in Austrian Silesia (according to his death certificate, the last unit in which he served) or the Austrian *Landwehr* Infantry Regiment 13 in Olomouc (Olmütz) this would make more sense based on his age and place of origin).

Since his military records have been lost, all we know is that he was captured in Italy sometime during the war and died in the Regina Margherita Reserve Hospital in Rome on February 17, 1919. It can be surmised that he fell victim to the Spanish flu, but the records are vague in this regard. From the point of view of his relatives and the entire community of Vrbátky, he simply did not return



and was officially declared dead on February 7, 1921. In the village chronicle he is listed as *“missing in action in Italy in 1918”*, a depressingly uncertain statement that was set in stone in the early 1930s when the residents erected a monument *“to the victims of the war”* on the village green and could only write *“1918”* next to František’s name. It was not until a century later, in 2021, that his passing was given an exact date in local memory, on the wall of a memorial hall recently erected in the cemetery of a sister village of Dubany. The only date that could be given, however, was that František was declared dead a century ago, which is why he could only be listed as *“missing, 7 February 1921”*. In the memory of his community the fate of František Vyhliďal remains as vague as ever until today.

# Addendum: The Presumable Libyans

by Balázs Juhász

There are some names mentioned in the list of the Black Cross and therefore buried in the crypt of Santa Maria dell' Anima, which are still marked by us “*completely unidentified*”. Their names, according to the Black Cross list, are Ahd el Kerim, Amar lu Amar, and Mohamed Imed. Interestingly, according to the Black Cross list, the dates of death of all three are almost identical: early April 1918.

With the outbreak of World War I, the Italian authorities tightened their control over residents of foreign citizenship. The process was gradual and had several antecedents, since the traditional resettlement sites such as Favignana, Gaeta, Ponza, Ustica and the Tremiti Islands had already been occupied by colonial residents during the Ottoman-Italian War of 1911–1912, and the new “population” was not allowed to return until 1919. From 1911, the Italian authorities deported the colonial inhabitants to Italian territory mainly for administrative reasons. Their legal status was not clarified and they were often simply referred to as “rebels”, while some of them were old men, women and even children. In 1915 they were referred to as “prisoners”.

Their rather isolated situation changed when they were used by the Italian authorities due to the labor shortage during the war. One of the triggers for this decision was the Ansaldo company in Genoa, which requested Eritrean labor in May 1917, but because of the difficulties caused by the long distance, the colonial administration allowed the employment of Libyans. Since then, more than 4,000 Libyans were transported to Italy exclusively for labor purposes and were employed in a wide variety of fields, which automatically meant competition for the prisoners of war who were now being used in large numbers. In Sicily, for example, the industrial complexes used prisoners of war primarily in the sulfur mines. In August 1917, the Committee for the Mobilization of Industry in

the Province supported the sulfur mines, which wanted to use prisoners of war to fill the shortage of free labor.

However, correspondence reveals that Libyan laborers were initially considered, but could not be used because they could only be requested in labor detachments of at least 400 people. Ironically, in Piedmont, it was Ansaldo himself, the originator of the idea, who refused to replace the POWs with Libyans when the silicate factory was built in Stazzano: The available POWs and the Libyans that might be procured were not skilled workers, so the replacement would not have affected the work in Stazzano. So it was probably just a power play by Ansaldo. The Libyans were probably not mixed with POWs in guarding and employment, although some were Muslims (e.g., Bosnians), so when collecting the dead for the ossuary at Santa Maria dell'Anima, a Muslim POW could easily be mixed with a Muslim forced laborer.

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