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## WAR CEMETRIES OF THE VENETO, ITALY

The first three tours looked at war memorials and cemeteries in France and Belgium: British, French, German, American, and one Italian. This tour examines some of the huge memorials, ossuaries and cemeteries erected in the 1930s by the Italians in their own territory along the frontier where war was waged against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1915-18, together with some British, French, German and Austrian cemeteries in that part of Europe. Because so much of the fighting took place in mountainous and difficult terrain (often in harsh winter conditions), many of these sites are comparatively inaccessible and difficult to reach so, inevitably, there are major monuments which cannot be included in this itinerary.

The memorials in north-east Italy are not as well known in Britain as are those in France and Belgium (indeed, though monumental in scale, they hardly figure in histories of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian architecture), just as the war in Italy tends to be regarded as a sideshow compared with the fighting in Flanders. But it was a very serious matter. Italy lost 651,000 dead, either killed in action, missing or from disease, one of the highest rates of casualty (100,000 out of 600,000 Italian prisoners died in captivity because their government, uniquely, prevented food parcels reaching them). The war against the Habsburg Empire was ferocious and costly, as the book by Mark Thompson, *The White War* (2008) makes very clear: “Some of the most savage fighting of the Great War happened on the front where Italy attacked the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Around a million men died in battle, of wounds and disease or as prisoners. Until the last campaign, the ration of blood shed to territory gained was even worse than on the Western Front”.

Casualties were so high partly because, along the 600-kilometer length of the Italian-Austrian frontier from Switzerland to the Adriatic, the (usually greatly outnumbered) Austrians (that is, Austrians and Hungarians, plus Poles, Czechs, Croats, Slovenes and other Slavs) occupied trenches on the high ground which surrounds the plains of the Veneto to the west, north and east, often in impregnable mountainous positions (on one day in December 1916 10,000 soldiers perished in avalanches). Against these, and against impregnable barbed-wire, the Italians ordered repeated bloody frontal assaults. Thompson notes that there were at least half a dozen cases in which the Austrian machine gunners were so appallingly effective against the advancing ranks of Italian infantrymen that they stopped firing: "Italians! Go back! We don't want to massacre you!"

Matters were compounded by the fact that Luigi Cadorna, the powerful Italian commander-in-chief, a rigid, remote martinet over whom the government had little control, not only had little concern for the lives of the mass of conscripted peasants, many from the South, Sicily and Sardinia, whom he commanded – the worst paid and worst treated in Europe - but seemed unable to learn from past mistakes or the experience of fighting on other fronts. His campaigns in 1916 alone resulted in 400,000 casualties, killed and wounded, while the 11<sup>th</sup> Battle of the Isonzo the following year alone produced 166,000 casualties. Desertions were widespread, and the "mystical sadism" of this monstrous commander, who made Douglas Haig look both imaginative and humane by comparison, revived the ancient Roman practice of "*decimation*", arbitrarily executing a proportion of his soldiers in a vain attempt to sustain morale. In August 1917, Pope Benedict XV intervened to try and end a war that "looks more like useless slaughter every day". Eventually the front and the Italian army collapsed, and Italy's effort in the final year of war had to be sustained by French and British involvement (a fact that does not accord with what became a national myth about Italy's victory in 1918).

The behaviour of the newly united Kingdom of Italy before, during and after the Great War was not edifying. "Alone among the major Allies," writes Thompson, "Italy claimed no defensive reasons for fighting. It was an open aggressor, intervening for territory and status". Italy wanted the Austrian Tyrol, which had been part of the Empire for centuries. It also wanted to expand eastwards, into Istria and the Balkans. In this desire to secure *Italia irridenta*, to advance to natural frontiers like the Alpine watershed, the noble nationalist ideals of the Risorgimento, of Mazzini and Garibaldi, were perverted, for unredeemed Italy contained a majority of non-Italians: German speakers and Slavs. The cry was for Trento and Trieste, even though Alto Adige, the northern part of the Tyrol around Bozen/Bolzano contained (and contains) a German majority, while Trieste, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's principal port may have had a dominant Italian population but it was surrounded by country inhabited by Slovenes. Despite being defeated in battle during the war between Prussia and Austria in 1866, Italy had been given most of the Veneto. But it wanted more: there was unfinished business with Austria.

In 1915 it seems clear that a majority of Italians did not want war, but many politicians, and others in positions of influence, did. The national culture was increasingly belligerent, what with the glorification of violence as well as technology in the rhetoric of the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio and of Filippo Marinetti and the Futurists. In 1911, the Italians invaded the Ottoman provinces which constituted Libya, hoping for an easy victory (in which they pioneered the use of aerial bombing). In 1915, Italy's entry into the European conflict was engineered by the prime minister, Antonio Salandra and his foreign minister, Sidney Sonnino, abetted by the vacillation of the king, Victor Emmanuel III. But not only was there no plausible excuse for attacking Austria, Italy was meant to be part of the Triple Alliance, that is, an ally of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But the ostensibly neutral country stood out for the highest bidder. Despite the fact that, in 1915, Vienna was now prepared to grant most of the territory Italy coveted, Italy was seduced by the Allies – Britain, France and Russia – under the secret Treaty of London, which promised not only Trento and Trieste but territory in Dalmatia and Albania as well as more colonies in Africa (Winston Churchill described Italy as “the harlot of Europe” while David Lloyd George called it “the most contemptible nation”).

Italy declared war on the Habsburg Empire in May 1915 (hedging its bets, it did not declare war on Imperial Germany until the following year). There were two principal front lines. Cadorna's main objective was to strike east, in Friuli, across the 1866 frontier towards the river Isonzo and the Julian Alps beyond to reach the Habsburg heartlands. But there was also the Trentino frontier to the west, with the Dolomites behind, and here Conrad von Hötzendorf stole a march on the Italians by mounting an offensive in May 1916 to relieve the pressure on the Isonzo front. This “punishment expedition” against treacherous Italy overran the Asiago plateau and left the Austrians with a strong defensive position inside Italy looking down on the plains of the Veneto. Cadorna made one big attempt to push the Austrians off the plateau in November 1916. In June 1917 he made another, with an assault on the rocky wilderness of Ortigara. This was Italy's equivalent of the first day of the Somme: after 19 days of battle the Italians sustained 23,000 casualties for no territorial gains at all (the Austrians lost 8,800).

On the eastern front, around the Isonzo (the river Soča for the Slovenes), Cadorna tried repeatedly to drive the Austrians back. The much smaller, multi-ethnic Habsburg army here was commanded by the Croatian general Borojević von Bojna, and everywhere occupied strong defensive positions on higher ground, whether in the mountains or on the wild and rugged Carso (Karst) limestone plateau further south. There were, in all, twelve Battles of the Isonzo, after eleven of which, at a huge cost in lives, the Italians eventually crossed the river, took Gorizia/Görz and pushed the Austrians back beyond Mount San Michele and Monte Santo.

Then, in October-November 1917, with the twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, better known as Caporetto, all this was lost. On the northern part of this front, near Karfreit or Caporetto, the Austro-Hungarians, reinforced by the Germans (including the young

lieutenant Erwin Rommel), counter-attacked and broke through the Italian lines. The result was a rout, a catastrophe; 294,000 soldiers surrendered. The Italians were driven back, in complete disarray, almost as far as Venice, with the front stabilising on the line of the river Piave after the Italians (with French help) managed successfully to defend Monte Grappa. At long last, Cadorna was dismissed, partly at the insistence of the British and French, and replaced by General Armando Diaz. (As for the unrepentant Cadorna, he was made a field-marshal by Mussolini in 1924 and ended up, in 1928, in a magnificent mausoleum at Pallanza on Lake Maggiore designed by Marcello Piacentini.)

Under the more humane and cautious Diaz, the Italian army was reformed and reinforced with French and British troops, held the line of the Piave. In June 1918 it resisted a renewed attack by increasingly exhausted Austro-Hungarian forces, which gained ground across the river on the Montello ridge. The Austrians then withdrew from the right bank of the Piave. This, the Battle of the Solstice, was, according to one Italian veteran, “the only proper *national battle* of which our country can truly be proud”. The Allies now urged Diaz to advance, but he was cautious. But, with Germany now in retreat on the Western Front and Austria-Hungary disintegrating, it was essential that Diaz pushed forward to stake Italy’s greedy territorial claims. Eventually, in October 1918, the Italians, reinforced by British and French troops, attacked across the Piave towards Vittorio Veneto. The result was a stunning victory against the starving, demoralised and by now ill-equipped Habsburg forces. An armistice was agreed on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

Caporetto was avenged, and the positive (mendacious) myth arose that the Italians had defeated the Austrians alone in this great victory. This boosted Italy’s belligerence and expansionism. At the Peace Conference at Versailles in 1919, Vittorio Orlando, Italy’s prime minister, exasperated the other Allies by its petulant behaviour, arrogantly demanding what was promised in the Treaty of London and more, despite the fact that this contradicted President Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the democratic principle of national sovereignty. Italy did its best to thwart the new Slav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats & Slovenes – Yugoslavia – and occupied not only the whole of the Austrian Tirol but the whole Istrian peninsular, eventually grabbing Fiume as well as Trieste. It failed, however, to be awarded the Dalmatian coast (other than Zara and a few islands) although it began to interfere in Albania.

The war – “the fourth war of independence” – was not good for Italy. As Mark Thompson writes, “it was disastrous for the nation. Apart from the cost in human life, the war discredited Italy’s liberal institutions, leading to their overthrow by the world’s first fascist state”. The March on Rome came in 1922 and “Benito Mussolini’s self-styled ‘trenchocracy’ would rule for twenty years, with a regime that claimed the Great War was the foundation of Italy’s greatness. For many veterans, Mussolini’s myth gave a positive meaning to terrible experience”. Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1935 and occupied Albania in 1940. But the alliance with Nazi Germany ended in disaster. The Fascist government fell in 1943 and after the Second World War Italy lost much that it had gained in 1918. Under the Treaty of Paris of 1947, Istria became part of Yugoslavia, although Italy

managed to retain Trieste as well as the German-speaking Alto Adige, or north Tirol, in “Venezia Tridentina”. Today, the eastern frontier runs close to the Isonzo, leaving many memorials and cemeteries of the Great War outside Italy – not least that at Caporetto, which is now Kobarid in Slovenia.

When the fighting was over, the Italian state had the problem of dealing with the huge number of war dead on its territory – not just Italy’s own casualties but many thousands of Austro-Hungarian remains. Many were unidentified. Most were in small war cemeteries created immediately after battles. The Commissariato Generale Onoranze Caduti in Guerra was founded in 1919 (under the Ministry of War) and its work in identifying the dead, establishing and maintaining cemeteries &c. was established by laws passed in 1919, 1931 and 1935. Its approach to laying out war cemeteries was at first similar to that of the French, and unlike that of the British. The cross was used as a headstone, and there was no attempt to create a secular character, minimising sectarian division. Italy was a Roman Catholic country, so religious symbolism was often evident, while even the later monumental mass graves created in the 1930s have chapels – and in several towns the war dead were buried in a crypt in a church, now called a Tempio-Sacrario.

Nor was there the equality of treatment so resolutely imposed by the Imperial War Graves Commission – except by virtue of the fact that so many of the dead, both identified and unidentified, ended up in mass graves. Celebrated individual commanders – the Duke of Aosta at Redipuglia, Giardino at Monte Grappa, Papa at Oslavia – were buried in conspicuous tombs integrated into the monuments, while the remains of generals and holders of the *Medaglie d’Oro al Valor Militare* were sometimes buried separately or honoured on special monuments or in chapels.

Italy after 1918 was politically unstable as well as economically exhausted, and the huge task of commemorating the dead was not really tackled until well after the rise to power of Mussolini in 1922. As in Britain and elsewhere, there was the question of how attitudes to the war and aspects of national culture were to be represented in the design of the official cemeteries and memorials, but in Italy the huge task of permanently burying and remembering the dead was to a degree hijacked by Fascist ideology. The myth of Italy’s military triumph was to be enshrined in stone and a cult of the dead would encourage patriotism and national unity and strengthen the nationalistic, expansionist programme in a state that was still fragile and divided. A rhetoric of martyrdom was encouraged that depicted the state as worthy of sacrifice.

In 1927 general Giovanni Faracovi was made “commissario straordinario” at the Commissariato Generale Onoranze Caduti in Guerra and charged with the task of developing a national plan for dealing with the war dead, at home and abroad. Instead of keeping the existing, often makeshift cemeteries, Faracovi proposed exhuming bodies and creating a much smaller number of large mass-graves or ossuaries close to the battlefields, connected to railways and major roads (the term ‘*sacrario*’ was preferred for such places rather than the painful ‘*ossario*’). This was the form of burial best able to

ensure “Individuality”, “Perpetuity” and “Monumentality” – the last as solemn witnesses to “the gratitude of Italy to her dead”. They were to be “historical documents of the Great War” as well as “a virile school for the living”, and so would serve as Fascist propaganda as well as providing a focus for grief for those who had lost son, husband or father.

It was intended that these monuments would become pilgrimage sites – continuing the Italian tradition of *sacri monti*. In the 1920s, the pilgrims were mainly veterans as well as members of the families of the dead, but by the 1930s the regime had others in mind: schoolchildren, community leaders and members of political organisations. But it is worth remembering that this idea built on the existing national tradition of building public monuments to the heroes of the Risorgimento and the Wars of Independence. And even before Mussolini took power, the huge Vittorio Emanuele Memorial in Rome, first designed in 1885, had been augmented and transformed into a national shrine by adding the *Altare della Patria* after 1906 and being made the grave of Italy’s Unknown Soldier in 1921.

After 1928, local attempts to build monuments to the war dead were obstructed by the state. The following year Faracovi, advised by the architect Alberto Calza Bini, prepared a list of suitable architects for the task ahead – several of whom had already been submitting ideal schemes for national memorials. These were Pietro Del Fabro, Fernando Biscaccianti, Giovanni Raimondi, Brenno Del Giudice, Orfeo Rossato, Chino Venturi, Felice Nori and Alessandro Limongelli. All had fought in the war and it was hoped they would accept reduced fees in homage to their fallen brothers in arms. At first it was decided not to choose the design for the monuments by open public competition as this would waste time, but after 1931 Faracovi was advised by a commission of consultants and limited competitions were held amongst invited architects.

In 1935, Faracovi was ousted by General Ugo Cei, who was given greater power as “*commissario generale straordinario per la sistemazione di tutti i cimiteri di Guerra nel Regno e all'esterno*”, reporting directly to Il Duce. Cei had his own ideas about architects, and he removed several of those chosen by Faracovi. As director of works at Monte Grappa since 1932, he had already replaced Limongelli by his own favourites, Giovanni Greppi and Giannino Castiglioni. Now they were put in charge at Redipuglia and Caporetto as well. Neither had served in the war but they were ardent Fascists (Castiglioni, the sculptor, had been recommended by the general’s nephew, Giorgio Pierotti Cei). A few years later, in 1938, General Augusto Grassi replaced Cei as commissario but by then almost all of the great *sacrari* were finished – both Redipuglia and Asiago were inaugurated that year.

Mostly designed and built in the 1930s, the major Italian *sacrari* or memorial mass-graves reflect the great change that came over Italian architecture between the world wars. The florid, elaborate and ornamental Classicism familiarly exemplified by Milan railway station (actually designed before 1914) was succeeded by a much simplified monumental Classicism, with an emphasis on pure geometry and volumes. After 1923 there was much

debate over which architectural approach was the best national style to represent the modernity of Fascist Italy. Modernism, or Rationalism, has received most attention, but there was also much emphasis on producing a modern Classical style. This was achieved through simplification, notably the trabeated Stripped-Classicism much favoured by the Fascist state for public buildings – post offices, railway stations, etc. – of which the best are those designed by Mussolini’s state architect, Marcello Piacentini. This architecture was usually much more subtle than, say, the official style of Nazi Germany. But a simplified, rationalised Classicism could also be arcuated, as with the ‘Novocento’ architecture of Milan, exemplified by the work of Giovanni Muzio.

In the war memorial field, the change can be seen in the contrast between the Sacrario Militare at Pasubio of 1920-26 (which we are not seeing), a rather ugly tower with rubble masonry and grotesquely exaggerated details in a style which ultimately derived from monuments in Imperial Germany, and, say, the Sacrario at Montello. This last is also Classical, but with simplified forms influenced by the monumental Neo-Classicism of c.1800 (as was contemporary architecture in Germany, Russia and, indeed, Britain). But there were certain aspects of Italian monumental Classicism of the 1930s which were unique, ranging from the characteristic proud sans-serif lettering to the remarkable idea of the “*archi-scultura*”, of vast stone landscaped monuments – not mere buildings – created by the partnership of the architect Giovanni Greppi and the sculptor Giannino Castiglione.

What, from a British perspective, seems strange is that such monuments, although vast and commemorating an appalling loss of life resulting from a traumatic episode in modern Italian history, are comparatively little known. They do not seem to figure in general histories of modern Italian architecture, although recently they have been the subject of specialised studies. Similarly, their designers are not much celebrated. Unlike those architects who practiced under Fascism but went on to embrace modernism after the Second World War, like Libera and Mazzoni, no modern monographs have been devoted to them, although they have not, unlike the brilliant but tainted Piacentini, been completely ignored. This cannot be because Italian historians are at all squeamish about the architecture of death, for there are many studies of the remarkable urban cemeteries typical of Italy. It is clearly because most of these great memorials and cemeteries were created under Fascism. It is certainly true that these monumental creations, which, in their programmatic theatricality and implicit vaunting of military values, expressed the ideology of the Fascist state. But they were also artistic creations of considerable quality and originality whose expression of a terrible purpose continues powerfully to resonate. They remain places of pilgrimage. These sites, and particularly the powerful and astonishing creations of Greppi and Castiglione – Redipuglia and Grappa – are some of the most remarkable structures of their time to be found anywhere. Almost three-quarters of a century after Mussolini’s fall, it surely ought now be possible to regard – and admire – them objectively.

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## ITINERARY

TREVISO became the seat of the Italian Supreme Command after Caporetto, and is our base for exploring the monumental results of industrialised warfare in this part of Italy. Treviso, with its DUOMO and many churches, like Venice built around canals, was a Mediaeval city which became part of the Venetian Empire in 1389. It was attacked from the air in both world wars. The Austro-Hungarian air force made some thirty bombing raids, but what was devastating was the Allied attack on Good Friday 1944 which destroyed much of the old city and one Gothic church and badly damaged many other ancient buildings, including the PALAZZO DEI TRECENTO. The church of SAN MANTONIO URBANO was destroyed and replaced by a remarkable modern church by *Angelo Tramontini*, 1960-70. Amongst post-war buildings there is also the CAPELLA OSSARIO at the church of S. MARIA AUSILIATRICE in which are laid the bodies of 946 victims of the First World War and 246 of the Second. A votive church here (along with the nearby railway station) was destroyed in 1944 and was reconstructed in 1950 by Prof. *Pietro Del Fabro*.

The WAR MEMORIAL in the Piazza della Vittoria, begun in 1926 and unveiled in 1936, has an impressive group of mourning figures by *Arturo Tagliano* (1867-1936).

### Day One

*By coach east on Autostrada A4 to Gorizia, then local roads to:*

SACRARIO DI OSLAVIA between the villages of Piuma and Oslavia. This tough, castle-like ossuary contains the remains of 57,200 Italian soldiers, 36,440 of them unknown, many of whom were casualties of the 12<sup>th</sup> Battle of the Isonzo, i.e. Caporetto. There are also the bones of 539 Austro-Hungarian troops. These remains were largely taken from war cemeteries on the Bainsizza Plateau to the east.

The monument, proposed in 1932 and completed in 1938, was designed by *Ghino Venturi* of Rome, who responded to the contemporary architectural mood by producing something “synthetic, rational, stripped of everything superfluous”. It consists of a fortress-like circular tower on a rugged plinth above a flight of steps, with three lower circular bastions flanking it on either side and behind and connected by underground passages. The names of the identified dead line the walls of the four internal circular chambers. In the central tower – originally open to the sky – is a tall black marble cross; below in the crypt is the tomb of General Achille Papa (killed on the Bainsizza on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1917) and of twelve other holders of the *Medaglia d’Oro al Valor Militare*. A bell in the detached campanile sounds at sunset. The condition of the memorial is now causing concern and repairs are urgently required but no funding is available.

*Ghino Venturi* (1884-1970), architect & urban planner, was trained at the Rome Academy of Fine Arts. He was influenced by Marcello Piacentini, with whom he worked on exhibition halls in Rome (1911) and the Savoy cinema in Florence (1920-22). In 1923 he was a co-founder of the Fascist Union of Architects and was from 1928-31 part of national directorate; during 1930s designed several hospitals in Livorno and Pisa. His design for Oslavia, with a rectangular projection rising against curved walls of rubble stone, is vaguely reminiscent of Fritz Schumacher’s crematorium at Dresden of 1912.

Opposite the ossuary, axial with the grand staircase, is a MEMORIAL to 55 volunteers from Venezia Giulia who died on the battlefields of Medio and Alto Isonzo.

*Local roads via Gradisca d’Isonzo to:*

IL SACRARIO DI REDIPUGLIA: This is Italy's national site of mourning for her war dead. It is the best known of the several huge *sacrari* created in the 1930s to contain the bodies of the country's huge number of casualties in the Great War, partly because it is the most accessible being near the coast on the way to Trieste rather than high in the mountains, but also because it is there are the most burials here. Redipuglia is the last resting place of the remains of 100,187 Italian servicemen (and one woman: a Red Cross nurse), of whom almost two thirds – 60,330 – are unknown: all victims of the twelve Battles of the Isonzo.

The Redipuglia sacrario, begun in 1935 and completed in 1938, is also the masterpiece created by the collaboration of the architect *Giovanni Greppi* and the sculptor *Giannino Castiglione*. As at Monte Grappa [see below], the overwhelming emotional effect is not created by buildings, but by the enhancement of the landscape with masonry features, with terraces, steps and paths. It has been described as “*archi-scultura*” and is a combined work of art, architecture and landscape design of remarkable originality, almost without parallel.

The mass-grave or ossuary is essentially a giant staircase, or a sequence of terraces, laid out on the western slope of a gently sloping hill – Mont Sei Busi – which was bitterly fought over. Beyond, to the east, lies the notorious Carso plateau, for whose control so many died. From the entrance, across which lies an anchor chain from the destroyer *Grado* (built as the *Triglav* for the Austria-Hungarian navy in 1915). From here, an axial route across a large, rising, stone-flagged area (with inscriptions on the ground in superb lettering) focuses on a large cube of porphyry raised above a few steps. This is the tomb of the DUCA D'AOSTA, who died in 1931 and wished to be buried with his soldiers. Born in 1869 in Genoa, the son of Amadeus, King of Spain, and the grandson of Vittorio Emanuele II of Italy, the Duke of Aosta had commanded the Third Army and had acquitted himself well after Caporetto by organising an orderly retreat. Just behind is a row of five smaller granite monoliths, which are the tombs of some of his generals. And behind these, framed by staircases at either side, rises the series of 22 terraces, gently tapering on plan so as to increase the impression of distance. These staircases are a crucial part of the composition; they introduce movement and make the monument dynamic, a setting for the solemn rituals intended by the Fascist state. The wall supporting each step is faced with bronze tablets bearing names and above, carved onto the topmost stones, the word PRESENTE over and over and over again, as if answered by those interred here to their commander: a military parade of ghosts, a roll-call of the dead. This treatment is repeated twenty-two times all the way to the top of the slope where, in the centre, three simple crosses rise into the sky. These stand over the CAPELLA VOTIVA, whose entrance is in a sunken area, hidden from distant view. And either side are huge bronze doors to the ossuaries within which are the TRENTAMILA MILITI IGNOTI.

Beyond, an axial path leads to the circular OSSERVATORIO, attained by a flight of steps and affording a view over the surrounding country over which so much blood was shed. Nearby are many individual and regimental memorials.

*Giovanni Greppi* (1884-1960) was born in Milan, trained at Academia di Belle Arti di Brera, graduating in 1907, and then worked in the office of Raimondo D'Aronco; he designed a company town for Dalmine and the (Milan) headquarters of Banca Popolare di Milano.

*Giannino Castiglioni* (1884-1971), sculptor, painter and medallist, was also born in Milan and trained at the Academia di Brera, graduating in 1906. Their partnership was also responsible for the Sacrario at Caporetto (now in Slovenia), a large arcuated tiered polygonal structure with an asymmetrical placed steeple above the chapel.

To the west of the Sacrario, across the road and railway, is the COLLE S. ELIA where the original war cemetery has been made into a PARCO DELLA RIMEMBRANZA. Here are more memorials and, at the summit, the ancient Roman COLONNA D'AQUILEIA reconstructed as a memorial. In *The White War*, Mark Thompson describes this cemetery at Redipuglia, as seen from its replacement: "Looking down from the terraces, you see a low green hill on the other side of the road to Trieste. At the end of the war, the regimental cemeteries on the Carso were emptied and the remains brought to that hill. The dead men's families fashioned little monuments from battlefield detritus: a broken propeller blade for a pilot, crossed pickaxe and shovel for a sapper, or simply a battered helmet, with a nameplate on a plinth of boulders and prigs of wire like ivy. Infinitely sad and truthful, this cemetery expressed the native genius that nationalists had boasted about before the war ('We are for the ephemeral... We hate methods, we are for disorder against discipline.') Mussolini decided the Fascist myth about the Great War needed something more grandiose and streamlined, less ramshackle – and less honest. Redipuglia became the showpiece of Fascist commemorative architectonics, one of the few places where a visitor still feels the urgency of Walter Benjamin's warning in 1940: '*Even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins'."

A little to the north, REDIPUGLIA RAILWAY STATION of 1936 is by *Roberto Narducci* (1887-1979).

There is also the CIMITERO MILITARE AUSTRO-HUNGARICO containing the remains of 14,550 Austro-Hungarian casualties.

#### *Local roads to:*

GORIZIA lies on the east bank of the Isonzo and next to the frontier with Slovenia (the 1947 frontier was adjusted in 1952 and 1978-9 to leave most of the town in Italy and Nova Gorica then developed in Slovenia; under the 2007 Schengen Agreement, border controls have been removed). As Görz, it was a winter resort, "the Austrian Nice, the city of roses or violets". *Baedeker* in 1900 noted it was "the capital of a province, and an archiepiscopal see, ... charmingly situated on the Isonzo. Pleasant walks and excursions: theatre; casino". In 1911 the guide noted "30,940 inhab. (mainly Italians)... the capital of the principality of Gorizia and Gradisca, which has belonged to Austria since 1500".

There is the DUOMO (originally 14<sup>th</sup> century), the former Jesuit church of SANT'IGNAZIO, and, above the town, the 12<sup>th</sup> century CASTELLO built by the counts of Gorizia. On a hill to the east there was also the Franciscan convent of CASTAGNAVIZZA where, surprisingly, Charles X, the last Bourbon king of France was buried in 1836, joined by his grandson, the Comte de Chambord, the Bourbon pretender, in 1883 (now the Kostanjevica monastery in Nova Gorica).

The Italian nationalist martyr, Guglielmo Oberdan (Wilhelm Oberdank) was arrested in Gorizia in 1882 on his way to attempt to assassinate the Emperor Franz-Josef in Trieste. The town was a major objective of Cadorna's eastwards offensives and he shelled it in November 1915, inaugurating total war on the Isonzo. It was taken in 1916, lost after Caporetto, and became part of Italy in 1918.

In 1925-9 a MONUMENTO AI CADUTI GORIZIANI, a circular Classical temple designed by *Enrico Del Debbio* of Rome, was raised in the PARCO DELLE RIMEMBRANZE; badly damaged in 1944, it has been left as a ruin. *Del Debbio* (1891-1973) is best known as the architect of the Foro Mussolini in Rome.

There is also the fine CENTRAL POST OFFICE of 1929-31, an asymmetrical rationalist building by *Angiolo Mazzoni*.

Also the CHIESA DEL SACRO CUORE in the Via Nizza, which was begun in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but after several vicissitudes, the project was taken over in 1928 by *Max Fabiani*; it was consecrated in 1938. It was proposed that this church be made into a *tempio ossario* for the war dead; there was also a proposal that the cemetery in Gorizia should be made into a *Cimitero degli Eroi*, but in the end both projects were superseded by the proposal to build the new *sacrario* nearby at Oslavia.

*Route 56 west, then local road to*

MEDEA: ARA PACIS. The *Ara Pacis* or Altar of Peace in Rome is a marble sculptured altar commissioned by the Roman Senate to honour the peace within the Empire established by the victories of the Emperor Augustus; it was largely excavated under the government of Mussolini, who commissioned a building for exhibiting it. The Ara Pacis in Medea is a remarkable monument built soon after the end of the Second World War (and the removal of Mussolini) as a symbol of the sacrifice of the nation and to represent the hope of a world of peace, liberty and justice. Sited on a hill in an area full of the legacies and reminders of conflict, built in six months and inaugurated in 1951, it was designed by the architect *Mario Baccocchi*. The altar itself, an elegant Classical form, of porphyry from Valcamonica, contains earth taken from eight hundred war cemeteries, concentration camps and the like in both Italy and beyond. The inscription on one face reads L'ODIO PRODUCE MORTE / L'AMORE GENERA VITA. The altar stands within a 13 metre high enclosure of Roman travertine. At the narrow ends this is penetrated by a vertical opening; to north and south there are tall, severe colonnades – open the whole height between the square piers on one side, open only at a lower level on the other. The style could be described as stripped Classical, but the design - with the end piers gently canted outwards and rounded corners - is much more subtle than the typical public monuments of the 1930s.

The project to build the Ara Pacis was supported by the Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Caduti e Dispersi in Guerra. It deserves to be much better known.

*Mario Baccocchi* (1902-74) was from Milan, where he designed some flats in the 1930s; after the war he designed church of St Angela Merici (1957-59), the tower block in Piazza Diaz and the streamlined Agip petrol station (1953).

*Route 56 west to*

UDINE: an ancient city and the principal town of Friuli, was the seat of the Italian Supreme Command until Caporetto. It was bombed in the Second World War. The grand, domed TEMPIO-SACRARIO DI S. NICOLÒ in the Piazza XXVI Luglio (the date of annexation by Italy in 1866) was completed in 1940. Designed by the local architect *Provino Valle* (1877-1955), it was begun in 1925 as a new parish church on the west side of the city. Two years later it was decided to alter the scheme to make it into a mausoleum containing the remains of 15,855 known and 5,658 unidentified casualties of the war, and the Rome architect *Alessandro Limongelli* was brought in to assist Valle. The names of the known casualties are listed on twenty travertine columns in the crypt. The bronze figure of Christ bear the black marble high altar was by *Mistruzzi*; the gilded bronze stations of the Cross were by *Gianni Castiglioni*. The four giant statues of soldiers on pedestals against the west front of the church were the work of *Silvio Olivo*. *Alessandro Limongelli* (1890-1932) was born in Cairo and died in Tripoli before this church was finished. He submitted designs for an ossuary at San Michele (1920), the war memorial at Genoa (1924) for the sacrario at Redipuglia and he began that at Monte

Grappa [see below]; in 1927 he designed a pavilion for a trade fair in Tripoli and went on to design other buildings in Italian-occupied Libya, including a triumphal arch in Tripoli.

*Local roads south to*

#### CARGNACCO: TEMPIO VOTIVO CADUTI E DISPERSI IN RUSSIA

This poignant memorial to the many Italians who died during the Second World War as allies of Nazi Germany after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, a church dedicated to la Madonna del Soccorso (Our Lady of Solice), was built between 1949 and 1955 and designed by *Giacomo Della Mea*. With its tiers of open brick arches it was strongly influenced by the architecture of Giovanni Muzio in Milan (although it may also seem reminiscent of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana at EUR for the abortive Esposizione Universale Roma planned for 1942). It was paid for both by the Italian state and by contributions from the public – including survivors of the Russian campaign. Nicholas Long writes:

“The issue of Italian involvement in the war with the Soviet Union is a difficult subject which remains highly sensitive and reliable data is difficult to obtain even following the fall of the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities were not prepared to provide information about the fate of tens of thousands of missing soldiers, a list of soldiers’ names were not provided (and then in Cyrillic) including date and place of death until 1989. There remains uncertainty about the fate of 30,430 soldiers who died either during fighting (estimated at 20,000) or as prisoners prior to registration in camps (estimated at 10,000). “The ARMIR (*Armata Italiana in Russia*) was about 235,000 strong and was committed to support of German forces engaged in and around Stalingrad between December 1942 and February 1943. The total recorded by Italy as missing was 84,830. Soviet archives record 54,000 as reaching prisoner of war camps alive and the deaths of 44,315 in captivity, most during the winter of 1943. There are further Soviet records indicating the deaths of 28,000 of the 49,000 Italian POWs between 1942-1954. It is estimated at least 54,000 POWs died in Russia, a mortality rate of almost 85%. On capture, Italian troops were forced to move mostly on foot in very cold temperatures to destination camps and became known as the ‘davai’ marches (‘Davai!’ translates from Russian as ‘Keep Moving’). Conditions in the camps were appalling with high loss of life.

“The inspiration for a memorial and ossuary for those lost in the Russian campaign came from Colonel Ezio Leonarduzzi while in Suzdal 160 concentration camp (he died later in captivity) who told the Chaplain to Italian forces in Russia, Don Carlo Caneva ‘The Russians do not ever return the bodies of our dead .... we must do something because their memory and their names must not be forgotten’ His idea was that the Russians should be obliged to return one body to represent all the fallen. The practice of the Russians was to pile all dead into unmarked mass graves. Caneva devoted the rest of his life (he died on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1992) to the creation of the Temple to the Fallen and Missing in Russia. It was not until 2 December 1990, following Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, that the remains of an unknown soldier were handed over.

“Monumental ceramics by *Ugo Galliusi* and *Enore Pezetta* depicting moments in battles, retreats and life in prison camps. Sculpture by *Giulio & Max Piccini* including the Madonna in white marble and the terracotta Stations of the Cross. Mosaics by *Fred Pittino* and stained glass by *Arrigo Pozz* and *Riccardi di Netro*.

One of the Pezetta ceramics is of the Battle of Nikolajewka (26<sup>th</sup> January 1943), part of the Battle of Stalingrad and involved Soviet forces encircling the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army. This forced a retreat westwards from 15 January in terrible conditions (up to -40°C) with 22 battles until a regrouping of survivors at the village of Nikolajewka of the surviving 40,000 Italians, Germans and Hungarians stopped the Russian advance and enabled the

remnants to reach Axis lines. 150,000 Italian soldiers went to Russia. 40,000 returned. Known dead amounted to 10,000 and the missing over 100,000, many dying in concentration camps.”

*Giacomo Della Mea* (1907-1968) was born in Chiusaforte and died in Udine. He had served as a lieutenant in Russia before qualifying as an architect in 1946. His work is largely in the Udine area.

*Autostrada A23 and A4 to return to Treviso.*

## Day Two

*A53 west to Castelfranco then local roads north via Riese Pio X to:*

SAN VITO D'ALTIVOLE and the BRION CEMETERY. This is the most important and celebrated work by *Carlo Scarpa*, a masterpiece in terms of abstract sculptural architecture carried out in reinforced concrete: a composition of water, garden and geometrical forms. It was commissioned in 1968 by the widow of Giuseppe Brion, co-founder of the Brion-Vega electronics firm, and was created over the following decade. The new cemetery, with tombs and graves for members of the Brion family, is an extension of the existing village cemetery. Scarpa himself wrote of his creation that “I consider this work, if you permit me, to be rather good and which will get better over time. I have tried to put some poetic imagination into it, though not in order to create poetic architecture but to make a certain kind of architecture that could emanate a sense of formal poetry....The place for the dead is a garden....I wanted to show some ways in which you could approach death in a social and civic way; and further what meaning there was in death, in the ephemerality of life—other than these shoe-boxes.”

There is nothing else quite like it, yet in its abstraction, and as a composition of landscape architecture with the resonances of a memorial, perhaps it is not wholly unrelated to the monumental *sacrari* created three decades earlier by Greppi and Castiglione. Sherban Cantacuzino, writing in 1974, thought that “In English eyes the memorial, in its wholehearted celebration of death, will seem strange and irrelevant. It is a series of built forms wrapped around two sides of the village cemetery which includes the main tomb (standing at 45 degrees and occupying the centre of the composition), a family vault, a chapel, a cloister and a platform for meditation over a pool of water. The enclosing wall is low enough to allow views of the village church and for the maize of the surrounding fields to show its flower when fully grown. Irrelevant or not, the memorial reveals Scarpa in his most luxuriant mood, masterly in his handling of forms and lovingly attentive to texture and detail... Scarpa's work merits careful study, for he more than any other Italian architect has brought back decoration into architecture”.

Professor *Carlo Scarpa* (1906-78) was born in Venice; trained at the Accademia di Belli Arti di Venezia, he never officially qualified as an architect. After working with Francesco Rinaldo, he practised on his own, specialising in the design of shops, on adapting existing historic buildings and, above all, in renovating museums (he extended Canova's studio at Possagno). He died in Tokyo but was buried discreetly at the edge of his extraordinary cemetery for the Brion family.

*Local roads west, then A47 and A31 north to Chiuppano, and local roads north up to*

MAGNABOSCHI BRITISH CEMETERY. This is one of five British cemeteries on the Asiago plateau designed by *Sir Robert Lorimer* (the others are at Barenthal, Boscon, Cavaletto and Granezza) The British relieved the Italians on this section of the front in March 1918 and most of the casualties were sustained in resisting the Austrian attack in

June: the Battle of Asiago. This cemetery contains 180 burials. The dead could all have been moved to one larger cemetery, but the policy adopted on the Western Front, of keeping small war cemeteries, was followed here, although it led to practical difficulties. These five British war cemeteries are different from the Western Front examples; they are surrounded by rough walling of local stone, with curved corners, and Lorimer designed his own rugged version of the Cross of Sacrifice in response to local conditions and the severe winter weather.

To quote Philip Longworth in *The Unending Vigil* (1967), "Such places were already beautiful and Lorimer was content to treat them simply. But there were problems even in such idyllic spots. The Asiago cemeteries were threatened by wandering mountain cattle, and strong rubble walls had to be built to keep them out. The local labourers demanded extra pay for working at such high altitudes, and the steep and tortuous roads prevented the transportation of the [Great War] Stone and the Cross [of Sacrifice]. Everywhere climate and soil structure forced departures from the horticultural standards of the Western Front... so carpeting plants were used instead. Advantage was taken of the tall Italian cypress, but visitors were to be reminded of the peculiarly English nature of these cemeteries by the dwarf roses which were nurtured in them. The craftsmen and materials were excellent, if expensive. Vicenza marble was giving the Italian cemeteries a greater claim to permanence than almost any others."

Robert Lorimer (1864-1929) was appointed Principal Architect for Italy, Macedonia and Egypt for the Imperial War Graves Commission in September 1918 and was responsible for twelve cemeteries in North Italy. The distinguished Scottish Arts & Crafts architect and designer, whose best-known work is the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle, was probably recommended to the IWGC by his friend Lutyens. He received a letter about his possible appointment from Sir Frederick Kenyon followed almost immediately by a telegram summoning him to a meeting in London where terms were agreed. His instructions included ensuring the designs were kept simple and inexpensive with Kenyon stating "The country needs dignity and refined taste, not ostentation, and then it will not grudge the cost". Lorimer left for Italy a week later and spent a fortnight inspecting sites, including the Asiago plateau; he recorded that he visited "a number of pathetic little cemeteries with their rows of wooden crosses. This was right up close to the front line and shell fire even going over our heads at one place. They made us wear tin hats."

Most of the Italian cemeteries were complete by 1921; Lorimer visited them for a third time in 1923 when King George V and Queen Mary opened the Italian cemeteries officially. Sir Fabian Ware, founder and vice-chairman of the IWGC, described them "as impressive and artistically perfect as anything in the world".

[Captain Edward Brittain, the much loved brother of Vera Brittain, author of *Testament of Youth*, was killed on the Asiago plateau in June 1918 and is buried in Granezza Cemetery. In 1970, Vera Brittain's ashes were scattered over her brother's grave by her daughter, Baroness (Shirley) Williams.]

Opposite the British cemetery at MAGNABOSCHI is the ITALIAN CEMETERY with AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN graves. Under an agreement of the late 1960s, the remains here were re-interred in the Sacrario at Asiago [see below], but it was decided to retain five of the eight Austro-Hungarian war cemeteries in the area as memorials, with the gravestones (tree trunks) left *in situ*.

*Continue north-east on local roads to*

ASIAGO:SACRARIO MILITARE or the SACRARIO DEL LEITEN. This monument is prominently situated on the Colle Leiten at the end of a long rising axial approach high on the Asiago Plateau, 1058 metres (3471 feet) above sea-level, where so much fighting took place right through the war. And although the triumphal arch form was used for war memorials in Italian cities such as Genoa and Bolzano, this is the only example of the use of this familiar and resonant Roman military architectural form for the monuments associated with the huge Italian mass graves. Proposed in 1932, inaugurated in 1938 and designed by Prof. *Orfeo Rossato* of Venice, this giant, free-standing arch, which rises above a symbolic Ara Votiva, does not follow conventional Roman precedent, for it stands four-square – a quadrifrons - with an arch of equal height on each side. The architectural elements are simplified and the plain piers flanking the arches are relieved by two arched niches. Rather than an inscription, the attic above the cornice carries stylised winged figures at the corners. The sculptors were *Monti* and *Zanetti*. This arch should be compared not so much with, say, the Arch of Titus in Rome as with Chalgrin's Arc de Triomphe in Paris and Lutyens' All-India Arch in New Delhi (the latter's masterpiece at Thiepval being somewhat more complicated in form). The arch rises above a massive square base, containing vaulted tunnels lined with names, between which are the remains of 33,086 Italian dead, 20,291 of them unidentified, taken from 35 nearby cemeteries. More recently, in the late 1960s, the crypt at the Asiago Sacrario has accommodated a mass grave containing the remains of 18,505 Austro-Hungarian soldiers, 12,355 of them unknown, taken from the war cemeteries at Gallio, Stoccardo, Cesuna, Canove, Marcesina and elsewhere. *Orfeo Rossato* (1885-1937) was born in Legnano and studied at the School of Architecture at Modena, wanting at first to be a painter; he designed several villas on the Venice Lido, where he lived, before designing the Asiago monument; later he went to Eritrea to design buildings in Asmara but contracted the disease there that resulted in his premature death.

*Local road south-east down to*

BASSANO DI GRAPPA, known as Bassano Veneto until 1928. One of its landmarks is the PONTE DEGLI ALPINI, a covered wooden bridge originally designed by Palladio in 1569 but repeatedly rebuilt, the last time after the Second World War when the town was damaged.

In the Piazza Cadorna is the TEMPIO-SACRARIO, which began as a new cathedral for the town designed in Venetian Gothic in 1906 by the Venetian architect *Vincenzo Rinaldo*. Work resumed on its construction after 1918 but now in conjunction with the Commissariato per le Onoranze ai Caduti in Guerra and under the direction of the architect *Pietro Del Fabro* of Treviso in order to create a military ossuary. The building, with a crypt containing the remains of 5,408 Italian soldiers, was inaugurated in 1934. In the Piazzale Giordino is a memorial to GENERAL GAETANO GIARDINO, put in command of the "Army of the Grappa" in April 1918 and who defended Monte Grappa in the Battle of the Solstice and lead the attack at Vittorio Veneto; the sculptor of the stocky figure of Giardino was *Borelli*.

*Local roads north and then a steep climb up the*

VIA CADORNA: the military road constructed in 1916, from Bassano through Osteria del Campo, to facilitate the defence of MONTE GRAPPA, the mountain to the west of the Piave, which Cadorna (or Diaz?) realised was crucial to the defence of the Veneto. The Monte Grappa itself was fortified, and penetrated by a network of tunnels, including the GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUELE III, some 1500 metres long, capable of



accommodating some 15,000 troops and defended by 72 artillery and 70 machine gun posts. Fierce fighting took place here and around after Caporetto, in a successful defence against the Austro-German advance.

**IL SACRARIO DI MONTE GRAPPA.** This is the largest and most extraordinary of the Italian memorial ossuaries, placed on the mountain top 1776 metres (5826 feet) above sea level. It is monumental and histrionic in conception, but it is also a most imaginative response to a dramatic site and a very original architectural creation: like that at Redipuglia, the work of the architect *Giovanni Greppi* and the sculptor *Giannino Castiglione*. At first, the military tunnels were going to be used for the ossuary, under the direction of the architect *Alessandro Limongelli*. Work began in 1925 but was abandoned because of water penetration into the tunnels. General Ugo Cei having become director of works, Limongelli was replaced and the present scheme was begun in 1933. It was inaugurated – in 1935 in the presence of Marshall Giardino, commander of the Army of the Grappa. The monument is in three parts, placed axially on rising ground. It begins with the SACRARIO itself, a sort of cone or small mountain consisting of six concentric terraces, diminishing in diameter as it rises. Between each is a curving wall of rubble stone, penetrated by two regular tiers of semi-circular openings. Behind these are the remains of 12,615 Italian servicemen, the majority of whom – 10,332 – are unidentified. Just below the summit, on the mezzanine of the axial staircase, is a rectangular portal over which characteristic sans-serif lettering announces GLORIA A VOI SOLDATI DEL GRAPPA. This is the tomb of Giardino, who died shortly after the opening of the monument and was interred here in 1936. Above this, at the top, is a small circular temple, which is the SANTUARIO DELLA MADONNA DEL GRAPPA containing a statue of the Virgin and Child consecrated by Pius X in 1901 which had been in a chapel on this site demolished by an Austrian shell during the fighting and rebuilt after the war. From here, a long axial paved road, 300 metres long, leads on upwards – LA VIA EROICA. This is lined with free-standing tablets, or plinths (arranged like those placed alongside the contemporary Piazzale dell'Impero at the Foro Mussolini in Rome) bearing the names of places which saw fighting in the battle for Grappa. At the end is a massive stone portal in the manner of an ancient Roman sarcophagus: the PORTALE DI ROMA E IL MUSEO STORICO. Given by the city of Rome, this was designed by *Limongelli* as the entrance to the fortified Vittorio Emanuele gallery as part of the original scheme to use the tunnels as the ossuary. Either side of it, staircases rise further to reach the OSSERVATORIO, the observation terrace behind, which affords a magnificent view of the Dolomites beyond.

But there is more. A little further to the north, with the entrance off axis, is another SACRARIO, again circular, designed in a similar style but with a severe Classical portico. This one contains the bones of the former enemy: the remains of 10,295 Austro-Hungarians, almost all of them unidentified.

*Return to Treviso*

## **Day Three**

*Route 53 east to*

**FAGARÈ DELLA BATTAGLIA: SACRARIO MILITARE.** A memorial celebrating the Heroes of the Piave and the victory at Vittorio Veneto was erected here at Fagarè in 1919. It had a central obelisk with flanking wings on which were set four marble reliefs by *Marcello Mascherini*. These symbolised: Italy's entry into the War (24<sup>th</sup> May 1915); The

barbaric enemy on the soil of the fatherland (24<sup>th</sup> October 1917); ‘Hence you do not pass’ (16<sup>th</sup> June 1918); and the Triumph of the Italian Armies (3<sup>rd</sup> November 1918). In 1933-35 an arcaded ossuary was built axially behind this memorial to contain the remains of 10,255 soldiers who died in the battles on the Piave in 1917-18. The names of the 5,204 of these who were identified line the walls of the vaulted halls which flank the central chapel (which has a mosaic above the altar by *Giovanni Spadea* of ‘Angels in Prayer’. The building itself was designed by *Pietro Del Fabro* (who was also responsible for the *sacrario militare* at Trento) and, with its slightly curved arcade and projecting wings, is in a more conventional Classical manner than the other large Italian monuments and thus, perhaps, more comparable with contemporary British and American memorial buildings.

Because of the unflattering depiction of the enemy on the original 1919 monument, the Germans ordered its destruction in 1943 but, hearing of this, the local population removed and hid Masherini’s reliefs. They were subsequently placed on the inner flanking walls of the projecting wings, while the demolished memorial has been replaced by a smaller structure, supporting a flagpole, commemorating the dead of the Second World War.

One casualty of the First World War buried here is an American, Lt Edward Michael McKey, on whom Ernest Hemingway is said to have based Frederick Henry, the principal character in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*, based on his experiences behind the Italian front in 1918. As Nicholas Long writes, “McKey was serving with the American Red Cross when he was killed a short distance away on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1918. In the novel of 1929, which is vaguely autobiographical and based on Caporetto and the subsequent retreat, Hemingway was happy to allow the impression that he had been there. In fact he had tried to join the U.S. Army in 1917 but was rejected. Instead he joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver. He sailed for Europe in May 1918, arrived in Italy – based at Schio during June and was badly injured on 8 July. He was dispatched to an American hospital in Milan where he met and fell in love with a nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, the Catherine Barkley character in the story.” A poem by Hemingway, carved on metal by Simon Benneton, is placed on a wall inside the Sacrario; it concludes: “Now in the night you come unsmiling/To lie with me/A dull cold rigid bayonet/On my hot-swollen throbbing soul”.

In the gardens surrounding the memorial are the remains of a HOUSE which stood near Fagarè railway station on which are preserved soldiers’ graffiti; these include [translated] “better to live one day as a lion than one hundred years as a sheep” and “To the Piave! All heroes or all done in!” - both of which became popular Fascist slogans.

*Local roads north-west along the Piave to Nervesa della Battaglia and*

MONTELO: SACRARIO MILITARE. Sited on a hill on the long forested Montello ridge, which saw fierce fighting during the Battle of the Solstice in June 1918, this ossuary contains the remains of 9,325 men, 3,226 of them unidentified, which were taken from 120 nearby cemeteries containing casualties from the bloody battles along the Piave from November 1917 to November 1918.

The design of this dominating structure is curious. A tall squat square tower, with tapering sides, each with a central concave recession, rises above a low Classical base. Continuous bands of masonry run across primitive cylindrical columns (reminiscent of the Buddhist railing motif on the dome of Viceroy’s House in New Delhi, or a grain silo?) and above the gaunt entrance at the top of a flight of stairs the cylindrical columns – ornamented with fasces - support a low pediment. It has something of the character of the tough, sculptural Neo-Classicism of Ledoux. Inside, there are internal galleries lined

with names and a dramatic central staircase rises to the Chapel and to the observation balconies opening off the tower. This central space was originally open to the sky. Designed in 1931 and completed in 1935, the monument was designed by *Felice Nori* of Rome, who had worked with Limongelli in Tripoli in 1929.

A few kilometres to the west, hidden on a forested hillside, is the MONUMENTO ALL'EROE FRANCESCO BARACCA, a small circular domed Doric temple commemorating Italy's highest-scoring fighter 'ace' – 34 victories – who was killed by ground fire at Montello in June 1918 while strafing Austrian ground forces.

[*Digression*: the air war was almost as important on the Italian front as on the Western Front. Although most of the aeroplanes flown by Italian pilots were French – Nieuports and SPADs – Italy was much taken with flying. The country has the doubtful distinction of having pioneered aerial bombing (in Libya in 1911) and from 1915 onwards heavy bombers produced by the Caproni company repeatedly attacked Austrian targets. The Futurists were, of course, obsessed by the aeroplane as by speed, and much was made of the flight across the Alps to drop leaflets over Vienna by a squadron led by the posturing D'Annunzio in August 1918. By then, British aircraft were operating on this front. Royal Flying Corps squadrons were sent to reinforce the Italians in December 1917 and the RFC/RAF remained in Italy until the end of the war. One British pilot in Italy was the artist Sydney Carline, who painted, e.g., *British Scouts leaving their Aerodrome on Patrol, over the Asiago Plateau, Italy, 1918* and *Sopwith Camel Patrol attacking an Austrian Aerodrome near Sacile* [at the Imperial War Museum].

After the war, Mussolini was anxious to be associated with flying and with air power, and many former pilots supported his Fascist movement. So perhaps it is more pleasant to dwell on the glamorous and chivalrous Austro-Hungarian naval pilot, Baron Godfrey von Banfield, who was born in Pola, the son of an Irish officer serving in the Imperial Austrian Navy, had 9 confirmed victories, and whose skill and heroism led him to be called, by both sides, "the Eagle of Trieste". Flying a Hansa-Brandenburg flying-boat, he defended the Austrian naval bases, attacked military targets, shot down Italian balloons as well as aircraft and fought an inconclusive combat with Francesco Baracca over the Isonzo. For his exploits, which greatly boosted Austro-Hungarian morale, he was made a baron and personally decorated by the Emperor Franz-Josef. When Banfield died, as an Italian citizen, in Trieste in 1986 at the age of 96, flags were flown at half-mast.]

Local roads to *Giàvera della Battaglia* and

GIAVERA BRITISH CEMETERY, designed by *Sir Robert Lorimer* and sited on the brow of a hill south of the Montello ridge next to the village church and cemetery, contains 415 burials of men who relieved the Italians on the Montello sector between December 1917 and March 1918. This British cemetery, unlike those high up on the Asiago plateau, conforms to the standard character established by the IWGC on the Western Front and contains both an example of *Sir Reginald Blomfield's* Cross of Sacrifice and the Great War Stone designed by *Sir Edwin Lutyens*. It also contains the GIAVERA MEMORIAL, a large Hopton Wood tablet on the western wall between rustic pavilions designed by *Lorimer* commemorating some 150 Missing

*Local roads west to Route 348, then north-west to*

PEDEROBBA: OSSUAIRE MILITAIRE FRANÇAIS. This ossuary holds the remains of over a thousand French soldiers who died in Italy; its front consists of a long stone

wall relieved by a regular pattern of rusticated blocks in the centre of which are two seated figures [a father and mother? or two women representing France and Italy?] carrying a dead French soldier on their laps. The bodies were reinterred from a number of cemeteries all over this region. The ossuary was built in 1936-37 and was inaugurated by Marshall Pétain on the same day that the Italian military cemetery at Bligny near Verdun was dedicated. France had sent 103,000 troops to assist the Italians hold the Piave line after Caporetto (Britain sent 113,000).

The architect was *Camille Montagné*. The sculptor of the monumental figures was *Louis Leygue* (1905-1992) who studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and won the Prix de Rome in 1931; after this commission he moved to Ottawa to create the relief on the new French embassy there, then returned to France where he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp; he survived and was later commissioned to execute the Memorial to the Deportees of Ain.

*Continue north on Route 348 to*

QUERO: DEUTSCHE SOLDATENFRIEDHÖFE. This castle-like ossuary on the Col Maor overlooking the valley of the river Piave contains the remains of 3,443 German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers, only 835 of whom are identified (The 229 Germans belonged to the Alpenkorps; the rest were Habsburg troops). The rugged stone building, of porphyry from the Passo Rolle, with its low tower was intended to be reminiscent of the ruined castle at Lagopesole in southern Italy, the residence of Frederick II, the Hohenstaufen emperor. Built in 1936-39, it was designed by *Robert Tischler* (1885?-1959), chief architect of the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, with Otto Mayr of Innsbruck as project architect. The carefully composed walls and a stone curving “trench” frame the mass grave; it also incorporates the artillery observation post which was on the site. Inside the Hall of Honour is an altar of black Swedish granite and metal books recording the names of known burials. Everywhere, the building is toughly but beautifully detailed in fine materials: it is almost a late Arts and Crafts creation. There is a mosaic frieze depicting 12 German soldiers, with the inscription “We stood together in the ranks and we stood together in life/Therefore the same cross and same honour were bestowed on our tomb/Now we can rest from the fiery battle and wait consoled for eternity”.

Gunnar Brands writes how “For the memorial in Quero, the Volksbund chose a spectacular location above the river Piave that symbolised the dramatic efforts of the German army... The dominating building site, which allowed the structure to be seen from afar, and the mediaeval design, which recalled Germany’s past, were complimentary elements in the Volksbund memorials.” The erection of this powerful building was made possible by a treaty of 1936 signed between Italy and Germany permitting the construction of cemeteries and memorials. And it must be admitted that it reflects the aesthetic preferences of the Nazi government of Germany (to which Tischler was sympathetic, although he managed to survive as architect to the Volksbund after 1945). The earlier German war cemeteries, such as that at Langemarck in Flanders, had a greater emphasis on landscape gardening to create an introverted and solemn, Germanic character in honouring the dead. By the early 1930s, however, there was a desire for more architectural memorials on prominent sites, and these developed the rugged, vernacular style used by Tischler at Langemarck into more nationalist Mediaeval-looking structures, rather like fortresses. Brands notes how such structures would be “a showcase of German civilisation on foreign territory” as well as manifesting the German spirit and how “The new type of burial places developed by the Volksbund in the late 1920s were the so-called *Totenburgen*, the fortresses of the dead”. This manner was also used for the

Ordenburgen, party leader training institutions built by the Nazis in Germany inspired by the Mediaeval fortresses built by the Teutonic military orders, and the idea of the Totenburgen was adopted for the vast memorial structures designed by Wilhelm Kreis which the Germans intended to impose on the conquered lands of Eastern Europe. The Quero memorial is a subtly assertive structure which commemorates slaughter in a terrible world war which resulted from rival nationalisms while also reflecting the ideology of a revived German nationalism under the Nazi regime which would lead to another even more terrible war. It is, nevertheless, a most impressive and powerful work of architecture which honours the dead with dignity.

*Back south, to Treviso and Venice Marco Polo airport.*

*Notes © Gavin Stamp*

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[www.c20society.org.uk/war-memorials/](http://www.c20society.org.uk/war-memorials/)