

Dead and missing Slovenes

in the Italian armed forces and as prisoners of war during the Second World War: questionnaires on sources, numbers, names

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ABSTRACT. In the following contribution, the author analyses the sources and databases of dead and missing Slovenes who lost their lives as members of the Italian armed forces or as Italian soldiers of Slovene nationality as prisoners-of-war during World War II and after it. Slovene and Italian databases, resulting from many years of research effort by individual researchers, were the primary sources for the author. She highlights the Slovene national collection *Casualties of World War II in Slovenia (entitled Fatalities among the Population on the Territory of the Republic of Slovenia during and immediately after World War II)*, created by researchers from the Institute of Contemporary History; and the Italian database *Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2^a guerra Mondiale*, created by researchers of the Archive of the General Commissariat for War Graves Care (*Commissariato Generale per le Onoranze ai Caduti*) of the Italian Ministry of Defence. Almost a hundred years have passed since Slovenes from the Littoral Region were first drafted into the Italian armed forces between the world wars. Since Slovenes in the Italian Army were among the first Slovene casualties of war in the interwar period (in 1935) and during World War II (in 1940), this contribution analyses the current state of the basic lists and sources relating to the fatalities, their numbers and names, as well as examining the possibilities of assisting the families of victims among Slovenes mobilised into the Italian armed forces with more detailed lists and by honouring their memory.

KEYWORDS: SLOVENES IN THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCES, PRISONERS OF WAR, WORLD WAR II, CASUALTIES, LISTS OF WAR DEAD

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Some highlights of the mobilization of Slovenes into the Italian armed forces in the period of Fascism

This year will mark the centenary of the debate in the Rome Parliament on the law on the military service of new Italian citizens acquired by the Kingdom of Italy under the Treaty of Rapallo, concluded on 12 November 1920 between the Kingdom of SHS and the Kingdom of Italy. It officially annexed them to its country on January 5, 1921. On August 6, 1921, the Trieste newspaper *Edinost* wrote the following about the debate: “*The Minister of War [Luigi Gasparotto] stated that this law had not been introduced in the new provinces for political reasons, because they could not impose civic duties on those people until they had political rights. Now that they have sent their representatives to parliament, the government intends to introduce the said law in the new provinces as well. The Minister of War concluded his reply by stating that he hoped that the new Italian citizens would respond to the call to arms just as gladly as the Friulian Slovenes in 1860. The manner of implementing the law on military service in the new provinces will be determined by agreement with MPs from these provinces*».¹ The method of introducing military service and its legalization is not the topic of the article, but only an introduction to the fact that a year later, in 1922, the Italian military potential increased by law - in the Slovene case - with boys and young men from Slovene Istria, Trieste and the Karst, from the Vipava Valley, from the Goriška region, from the Posočje region, from the Idrija and Cerkljansko regions, from the Brkini, and from the Ilirska Bistrica, Postojna and Pivka regions. They became part of Italy’s expansionist, warlike exploits between the two world wars and during World War II. Not of their own volition and not for their own nation; they died for a state ruled by the Fascists, which glorified victims, including Slovenes, as having sacrificed themselves for the homeland. In both cases, Slovenes in the Italian armed forces were the first victims of war among the Slovenes on the entire Slovene national territory. They were the first victims in 1935 of the Ethiopian War period² and in 1940, when the Second World War and with it the mobilization of Slovenes west of the Rapallo border, began even before the rest of the Slovene territory faced war.

1 «Italija, Vprašanje vojaške službe v novih pokrajinah», *Edinost*, 6. 8. 1921, 1, online.

2 On victims among mobilised Slovenes in the war in Abyssinia see Milica Kacin WOHINZ, «Ob ‚abesinski‘ vojni», *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 37, no. 2 (1997): pp. 123–39. Milica Kacin WOHINZ and Marta VERGINELLA, *Primorski upor fašizmu. 1920–1941*, Ljubljana: Društvo Slovenska matica, 2008.

Primorska Slovenes were mobilized for the first time between the two world wars for the war in Ethiopia, then Abyssinia - for the future Italian empire *Africa Orientale Italiana*. Men born between 1907 and 1912 were called up, the majority of those mobilized being born in 1911.³ The war began in October 1935 and ended in May 1936 with the Italian conquest of Addis Ababa. The Abyssinian War was followed by the Spanish Civil War, from July 1936 to April 1939, in which Italian units, including conscripts of Slovene nationality, took part on Franco's side. After the end of the war in Spain, the mobilized Slovenes, just before Easter in April 1939, took part in the Italian occupation of Albania. A good month later, on May 22, 1939, Italy concluded the steel pact with Germany but, out of reluctance, it postponed entry into the war and - waiting for a more favourable time - kept soldiers and recruits born in 1917 and 1918 in the army. Italy entered on 10 June 1940 with a declaration of war on France and the United Kingdom. Mass mobilization began, which in the years 1940-1943 included twenty-three year olds born between 1901 and 1923.⁴ Primorska Slovenes were mobilized for all Italian battlefields. In 1940, they took part in military attacks on France and Greece. Many of the mobilized were involved in military operations on the North African battlefield (1940-1943), on the Eastern Front (1941-1943), and a minority were even mobilized into units that carried out the attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and which operated on the territory of the Ljubljana Province until the capitulation of Italy. As prisoners of war of both Allied and Axis forces, they were dispersed to prisoner-of-war camps around the world: across Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Australia. They lost their lives in fighting, other violence of war and infectious, parasitic and other diseases, as well as conditions in prison camps.

Victims among Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces in Slovene sources

Between 1997 and 2012, the Institute of Contemporary History (hereinafter INZ) conducted a scientifically based study of Slovene deaths during the Second World War, those who lost their lives between April 1941 and January 1946 due

3 Virgilio ILARI, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia. Volume Terzo. »Nazione militare« e »Fronte del lavoro« (1919-1943)*, Roma: Centro militare di studi strategici, 1990, 186, online.

4 Virgilio ILARI, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia. Volume Quarto. Soldati e partigiani (1943-1945)*, Roma: Centro militare di studi strategici, 1991, 11, online.

to violence during the war and immediately after it from revolutionary violence and the consequences of war.⁵ With a searchable list of fatalities by name and/or surname and/or year of birth published on the *SISTORY* web portal⁶, for the first time the Slovene public was given the opportunity to search for the names of dead and missing Slovenes in the Italian armed forces and prisoners of war during the Second World War. For the first time, relatives were able to find their deceased or missing person in an online database using a Slovene name and surname. The database for Primorska actually includes victims from 10 June 1940 onwards,⁷ when Italy entered the war and when there were the first deaths among the Slovenes mobilized into the Italian armed forces. The register includes data on victims who had permanent residence on the territory of today's Republic of Slovenia during the war (including, for example, incomplete data on victims among residents of Italian nationality in Primorska), but not on Slovene victims outside their home territory.

Due to the long search and review of sources and accurate printing of data, and above all because it is the first Slovene database of victims that includes all victims of war and victims from the period immediately after it, it is undoubtedly an exceptional work of the Institute of Contemporary History. However, the online database, like the Italian one that will be presented below, does not allow searching by place of birth, place of death or place of burial or other categories, which could provide a more transparent picture of victims among Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces. At my request, the Institute of Contemporary History sent me for study purposes a list of victims among Slovenes mobilized in the Italian Armed Forces, for which I am grateful to Andrej Pančur and Marta Rendla.⁸ The submitted list will enable comparisons with other (Italian) lists of names, refinement and analytical treatment.

Tadeja Tominšek Čehulić, one of the co-authors of the victims' database and the author of a master's thesis published in 2006 entitled *The Structure of Victims in the Primorska Region during the Second World War*, pointed out that »given

5 Žrtve II. s. v., *Zgodovina Slovenije – SISTORY*, online.

6 Ibid.

7 Žrtve II. s. v., *historiat*, *Zgodovina Slovenije – SISTORY*, online.

8 The study is related to one of the chapters of the doctoral thesis that I am preparing at the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana under the mentorship of Dr. Mitja Ferenc.

that the post-war communist authorities were not inclined to all Slovenes, mobilized into foreign armed forces, this topic is still relatively unexplored« and that »the number of casualties among Slovenes in the Italian army remains only an approximation, and for about a quarter we still do not know what their actual fate was«. ⁹ In 2002, researchers estimated that around 700 Primorskans mobilized into the Italian army had died, not including the dead in special battalions in Sardinia and Corsica. ¹⁰ On 5 January 2006, the national database recorded 1,198 casualties among Slovenes in the Italian Royal Army, ¹¹ and 1,316 on 23 July 2020. All entries from the Slovene Register of Victims in the remainder of the article refer to the list of victims among Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces and prisoners of war of 23 July 2020. ¹²

The reluctance of the post-war authorities to recognise Slovenes mobilized into foreign armies is reflected, for example, in the monuments with missing names of victims among Slovenes mobilized into the Italian armed forces, in the rejected applications from Overseas Combatants for recognition of a special period ¹³ or in the initial round table entitled *Victims of the Second World War in Slovenia*, organized in 1989, fifty years after the beginning of the Second World War, by the Section for Contemporary History at the Historical Association of Slovenia. The purpose of the round table was to discuss victims from an expert point of view, but one of the aspects of the discussion was of a political nature: »This is especially about the question of what are war victims or who do we today consider among them. Today, this issue automatically takes on a political connotation. [...] I have in mind the initiative or request of the Slovene Democratic Union, addressed to the Socialist Union, to erect a monument to the victims of

9 Tadeja Tominšek RIHTAR, *Struktura žrtev na Primorskem med drugo svetovno vojno*, master thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2006, pp. 47.

10 Bojan GODEŠA et al., «Žrtve druge svetovne vojne v Sloveniji», *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 42, št. 1 (2002): pp. 121–30.

11 Tominšek RIHTAR, cit., pp. 4, 39.

12 Mobilizirani Slovenci v italijansko vojsko (Excel document) from the ICH internal database: Tadeja Tominšek Čehulič, Mojca Šorn, Marta Rendla, Dunja Dobaja: Smrtne žrtve med prebivalstvom na območju Republike Slovenije med drugo svetovno vojno in neposredno po njej [Zbirka]. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, [1997–] on 23. 7. 2020.

13 SI_PANG/1014, M 4, št. spisa M158/3/37, Rejected request of Izidor Črne of 1979: »Similarly, the proposer was mobilised into the regular Italian army in May 1942, when the NOG was already developed in Grgar and vicinity. He had the possibility of avoiding mobilisation« See Irena Uršič, (Ed.), *Prekomorci*, Ljubljana: Muzej novejše zgodovine Slovenije; Koper: Pokrajinski arhiv Koper, 2014.

war, *Fascism and Stalinism*. It seems that the victims of the war are controversial from a political point of view, as the discussion at the extended session of the Council Secretariat for the Preservation and Development of Revolutionary Traditions and Monument Protection at RK SZDL [The Republic Conference of The Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Slovenia] showed a few days ago. The question is who to count among them, or (whether to include) ideological, political and military opponents from the national liberation struggle.«¹⁴ The introductory finding was that Slovene historians paid little attention to the issue of war victims and that historians were more interested in who caused the victims.

In the years and decades before the round table (as well as after it), the key archival sources for studying victims of the Second World War were the material of the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and Their Accomplices (KUZOP), which was established during the war, and the Associations of the National Liberation Movement of Slovenia (ZZB NOV Slovenije). The only serious attempt to evaluate the cost of war, human and material, scientifically, was the short concluding chapter of the book *The National Liberation War in Slovenia 1941–1945*¹⁵ from 1976.¹⁶

However, out of 1,316 registered victims among Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces, INZ researchers recorded only 27 victims from the KUZOP material, and only 13 victims from the ZZB NOV censuses. Slovenes mobilized in the Italian armed forces are also omitted as a category of victims by the already mentioned book, which in the chapter *Losses of the Slovene Nation in the National Liberation War* states an estimate of the number of victims among Slovenes mobilized into the German army but does not even mention victims among Slovenes mobilized into the Italian army. It cites as an obstacle in determining this category of victims the fact that part of the national territory was not united with its native Slovenia.¹⁷

On the other hand however, in Slovenia, including the western part, which was part of the Kingdom of Italy, there are data on casualties among Slovenes

14 Zdenko ČEPIČ, «Vojne žrtve kot predmet zgodovinarjeve raziskave – uvodne besede», *Bo-rec*, 5–6 (1989): pp. 588.

15 Zdravko KLANJŠČEK et al., *Narodnoosvobodilna vojna na Slovenskem 1941–1945*, Ljubljana: Vojaški zgodovinski inštitut Jugoslovanske ljudske armade and Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja v Ljubljani, 1976, pp. 1018.

16 ČEPIČ, cit., pp. 590.

17 KLANJŠČEK et al., cit., pp. 1018.

mobilized into the Italian armed forces. The largest number of victims among them, 913, was recorded by INZ with the help of *Registers of deaths*, as well as *Registers of births* kept in individual administrative units. Approximately half fewer, 481 names of victims, were recorded in the war damage inventories, which are kept mainly in the Regional Archives of Koper, in the Regional Archives in Nova Gorica and in the Historical Archives of Ljubljana (in the Idrija unit). The reason why a certain proportion of the names of deceased and missing of those mobilized into the Italian armed forces were in the war damage inventories can be found in the *Rules on Reporting and Determining War Damage*, issued in June 1945 by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DFJ), which also saw the victims of war as part of the damage to war - damage to the life, health and body, freedom, sexual integrity and honour of Yugoslav citizens.¹⁸ Only a slightly smaller number of victims, 467, were recorded from the *Official Gazettes* of Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY). More than half fewer victims, 223 among Slovenes in the Italian armed forces, were recorded in the 1964 census of victims of the Second World War, unpublished and preserved only in Belgrade.¹⁹

In the already collected lists of victims and published in several books of the Friuli Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Udine entitled *Caduti, dispersi e vittime civili dei comuni della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale*, also available online,²⁰ INZ registered 51 Slovenian

18 ČEPIČ, cit., pp. 591.

19 The material was never made public, nor was it handed over to the Statistical Office of Slovenia, but preserved in Belgrade, from where it was handed over to ICH for research. See GODEŠA, cit., pp. 122.

20 *Caduti, dispersi e vittime civili dei comuni della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale. Vol. I, Provincia di Udine*. Tomo I, (A-Pa) / Tomo II, (Po-Z), Udine: Istituto Friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1987. *Caduti, dispersi e vittime civili dei comuni della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale. Vol. II, Provincia di Pordenone*, Udine: Istituto Friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1989. *Caduti, dispersi e vittime civili dei comuni della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale. Vol. III, Provincia di Gorizia*, Udine: Istituto Friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1990. *Caduti, dispersi e vittime civili dei comuni della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale. Vol. 4, Provincia di Trieste*, Udine: Istituto Friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1991–1992. All the cited works are available on: *Caduti, Dispersi e Vittime civili dei Comuni della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale – IFSML*, <https://www.ifsml.it/caduti-dispersi-e-vittime-civili-dei-comuni-della-regione-friuli-venez-giulia-nella-seconda-guerra-mondiale>.

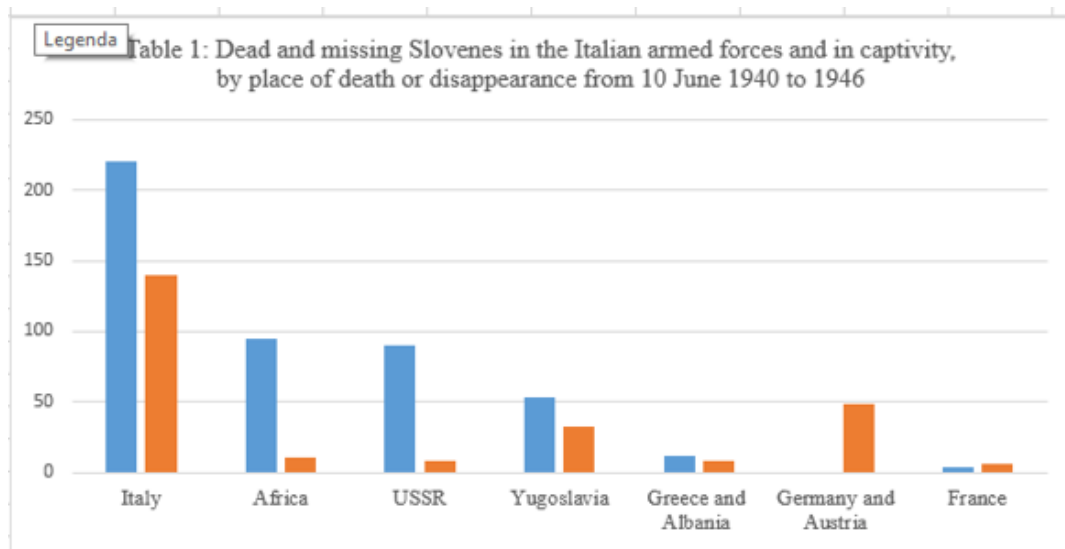
victims from the area of their native Slovenia. These lists refer to fallen, missing and civilian victims in the municipalities of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region during the Second World War. Following the lists published in 1987 for the province of Udine and in 1989 for the province of Pordenone, the third and fourth volumes with a record of victims from the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste were published in 1990 and 1991/1992. The registration of victims from the Province of Trieste geographically covered only Trieste and the five Slovene border municipalities, and not the Province of Trieste to the extent of the period of Fascism.

Among the sources of data in determining the victims of the Second World War, a smaller number of victims was also found on the basis of material from the Regional National Liberation Committee for the Slovene Littoral and Trieste and from the special *List of Fallen and Missing in the Italian War* of the Regional Archives in Nova Gorica. A small number of victims of mobilised Slovenes who died in Russian captivity was recorded with the help of data from the Russian State Military Archive, a smaller number of victims buried in the military cemetery in Barletta were obtained from the Italian General Commissariat for Honors to the Fallen, one victim was registered with the help of material from the Commission of Inquiry of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia (NA RS) for the investigation of post-war massacres, legally dubious trials and other such irregularities.

An insignificant source that INZ researchers also took into account, is data on victims, especially in the book material on Slovenes who were mobilized and then prisoners of war in Sardinia and Corsica, and partly also data in modern literature of local history and local chronicles.²¹

21 E.g.: Franc ČERNIGOJ, (Ed.), *Mati Gora: zbornik o Gori, Gorjankah in Gorjanih: ob 400-letnici naselitve Gore*, Predmeja: Društvo za ohranjanje in varovanje naravne in kulturne dediščine Gora, 2001. Franc ČERNIGOJ, *Znamenje na Gori, Ajdovščina: samozaložba*, 1999. France FILIPIČ, *Slovenci v Mauthausnu*, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1998. Jože KANALEC, *Drežnica z okoliškimi vasi: od prve pisne omembe do konca dvajsetega stoletja*, Ljubljana: samozaložba, 2003. Jožko KRAGELJ, *Pobitim v spomin*, Gorica: samozaložba, 2003. Živa KRAIGHER, *Ljudje in kraji na Pivškem med NOB: 1941–1945*, Ljubljana: Društvo piscev zgodovine NOB Slovenije; Postojna: Organizacijski odbor ZZB NOB, 2002. Nada LUZEJ et al., *Sveto – puntarska vas na Krasu*, Komen: Občina, 1997. Janko MAČEK, *Rovte v viharju vojne in revolucije*, Ljubljana: samozaložba, 2003. Jožko MARTELANC, *Šempeter skozi čas, Šempeter pri Gorici*, Nova Gorica: Branko, 1997. Branko MARUŠIČ, (Ed.), *Jako stara vas na Goriškem je Solkan: zbornik ob tisočletnici prve omembe kraja*, Solkan: Krajevna

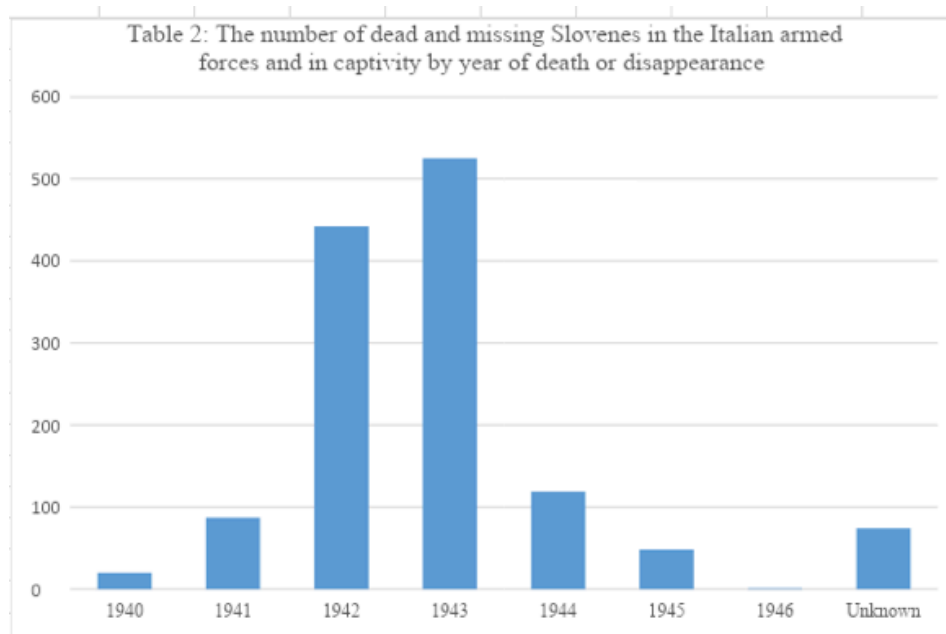
The register of victims enables analysis of data by very different categories. Table 1 gives a graphic presentation of fallen and missing Slovenes in the Italian army or in the Italian armed forces and in captivity, by place of death or disappearance from 10 June 1940 to 1946, before or after the capitulation of Italy. According to these data, most of them lost their lives on the territory of Italy (taking into account the borders of Italy under the London Memorandum of 1954), Africa and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Yugoslavia (taking into account the borders of Yugoslavia - SFRY after 1954 and territory west of the former Rapallo border). After the capitulation of Italy, most people died or went missing on the territories of Italy, Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia. A small number of victims was registered on the territories of Greece and Albania and France, and individual cases of victims were also recorded in the territories of the USA, India, the United Kingdom and the Mediterranean. Such a depiction cannot be an accurate sketch of the dead and missing, though, since for a large proportion of the victims, as many as 512 out of 1,316, the place of death or disappearance is unknown.



skupnost, 2001. Alojzij NOVAK, *Črniška kronika*, Gorica: Goriška Mohorjeva družba: Katoliško tiskovno društvo; Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 1992. Franc PAVŠIČ, *Ljudje ob Idrijci: ali Stopnik in okolica skozi čas in zgodovino*, S. l. : s. n., 199?. Jelka PETERKA, *Kambreško – Srednje*, Nova Gorica: Branko, 2000. Srečko VILHAR in Albert KLUN, *Narodnoosvobodilni boj Primorcev in Istranov na Sardiniji, Korziki in v južni Franciji*, Nova Gorica: Soča, 1969.

In Table 2, the number of dead and missing is categorized by year of death or disappearance.

In 1940, 20 Slovenes died or went missing, in 1941 there were 87, in 1942 already 442 and in 1943 another 525 of those mobilised. In 1944, 119 Slovenes died or went missing, and in 1945, 48. One died in 1946 in captivity in Africa. The year of death or disappearance of 74 Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces is unknown.



A more precise, comprehensive and more relevant analysis will only be possible by supplementing the data from Italian sources. Tadeja Tominšek Čehulić has already highlighted the need for research in Italian archives because of incomplete data.²²

In April 2009, the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia for the first time published a list of victims among Slovenes mobilized into the Italian Armed Forces, at the exhibition *Fascism and Slovenes*. It was prepared by Nataša Nemeč from Regional Museum Goriški muzej, on the basis of archival research. She designated it a *Draft Census of Soldiers of Slovene Descent (taking*

²² Tominšek RIHTAR, cit., pp. 47.

into account potential soldiers of Croatian and Friulian descent), who lost their lives as conscripts in the Italian army from June 10, 1940 to September 8, 1943.²³ An analysis of the list of victims is published in the exhibition catalogue *Fascism and Slovenes - Selected Images*.²⁴

The number of victims is extremely high: 8,454. It is based on files of deceased or missing members of the Italian armed forces and prisoners-of-war from the former provinces of Udine, Gorizia, Trieste and Rijeka. The list is methodologically problematic because sources are not cited and Italian and/or post-Italian names and surnames from ethnically mixed territory are used, which often makes it difficult to conclude about ethnicity. It is also more difficult to compare it with the INZ register due to its different categorization, especially by place of death or disappearance. On the other hand, the list is extremely important, since it facilitates verification of the names of victims with data from the Slovene and Italian registers. Last but not least, the first publication of the names and surnames of deceased, fallen and missing Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces also had, above all, piety value to the decades of forgotten victims.

Victims among Slovenes in the Italian Armed Forces in Italian sources

While a special census was conducted for the whole of Yugoslavia in 1964, explicitly devoted to the victims of World War II, due to too low numbers for the then political needs it was never published, the first statistical list of military and civilian casualties was published in Italy in 1957 in *Morti e dispersi per cause belliche negli anni 1940–45*.²⁵ The statistical list was created »out of duty to the state and in honour of the memory of all the victims«. ²⁶ The basic source was the files of the dead, which were censused from June 10, 1940 onwards. Numerous data on dead and missing members of the armed forces were the result of cooperation with the Ministry of Defense. The lists extend to the period ,before

23 SI-MNZS, Nataša NEMEC, *Seznami žrtev, slovenski mobiliziranci v italijansko vojsko*, Excel documents obtained 3., 18. and 30. 3. 2009.

24 Jože DEŽMAN, (Ed.), *Fašizem in Slovenci – izbrane podobe*, Ljubljana: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije, 2009, pp. 191–95.

25 *Morti e dispersi per cause belliche negli anni 1940–45*, Roma: Repubblica Italiana, Istituto Centrale di Statistica, 1957, online.

26 Ibid., Lanfranco MAROI, introduction, online.

the armistice’, pre-armistizio (from 10 June 1940 to 8 September 1943) and to the period *,after the armistice*’, post-armistizio (from 9 September 1943 to 31 December 1945).

Numerical data on dead and missing members of the armed forces are placed into various categories. In the first part, they are classified according to the time of death or disappearance by years and individual months then by places of death or disappearance. Their full geographical dimension is indicated by the places of death or disappearance of members of the armed forces as evidenced by classification into Italian national territory, Europe, Africa, Asia, America (USA, Canada and *,other*’ countries), Oceania, specifically to the *,sea*’ and specifically to unknown or unidentified locations. Statistics on place of death or disappearance in Europe are specifically broken down into France, Germany and Austria together, Greece and Albania together and Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries, the USSR and *,other*’ European countries. Places of death or disappearance in Africa are also classified separately: North Africa, especially Egypt, East Africa, especially Kenya, and *,other*’ African countries.

In the second part, the figures on casualties are classified according to the position of the member of the armed forces and into different categories: land forces, navy, military aviation, colonial units, military clergy and other armed units (finance, police, firefighters, prison guards and MVSN) . They are also categorized according to age, cause of death (due to violence in war and accidents and illness), occupation and according to the number of children.

In the third part, the figures on victims are broken down by region and province. The statistical tables, in which the numbers of deaths and missing persons are given by province, refer in the case of the designation *,territorio nazionale*’ to the territory of the Italian state with its borders under the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty.²⁷ Victims among Slovenes mobilised into the Italian armed forces, although not specifically mentioned, are mostly included in the *,ex-territorio nazionale*’ category, which also includes Slovene territory west of the former Rapallo border. The victims among the mobilized Slovenes from Trieste and partly from Slovene Istria are included in the category Free Territory of Trieste, while the Slovene victims from the provinces of Udine and Gorizia are included in the

27 Ibid., VIII, online.

category of the province of Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

The number of dead and missing members of the armed forces according to the place of birth in the ,former Italian territory‘ is 5,780, and in the then Friuli-Venezia Giulia region with Udine and Gorizia 10,551. Only three victims were recorded for the Free Territory of Trieste. The victimological picture of dead and missing members of the armed forces is somewhat different according to their place of residence; 637 victims were recorded for ,former Italian territory‘ , 2,167 for the Free Territory of Trieste and 10,982 for Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Italy also has an online national database on the victims of the Second World War (1940-1945), which was created under the auspices of the Commissariato Generale per le onoranze ai Caduti at the Ministry of Defense and is available online under the title *Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2a guerra Mondiale*.²⁸ By October 2019, all 318,740 preserved files of dead and missing members of the Italian Armed Forces during World War II had been digitized.²⁹ The database enables a search of data exclusively by the victim’s surname and, at the same time, by name and/or year of birth and/or place of birth. While the Slovene online database on victims is geographically limited to the territory of the Republic of Slovenia, the Italian online database on victims also includes dead and missing members of the Italian armed forces of Slovene nationality from the territory of the Republic of Slovenia. They are written with post-Italian names, post-Italian or Slovene surnames, as well as with post-Italian names of Slovene places of birth.

The Italian online register of victims, like the Slovene one, is being supplemented. The following is an example. In the catalogue and in the exhibition *Broken Threads of Life - Weaving of Memory*,³⁰ set up in 2017 in Gorenjska Museum in Kranj, the personal story of a missing Italian soldier of Slovene nationality, Albin (Zoro) Žvab from Krepelje na Krasu, was also published. He was drafted into the Italian army in January 1942 and taken to the Eastern Front in October. He wrote soothing letters to the family from behind the lines at Stalingrad at a time

28 Ministero della Difesa, *Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2^a guerra Mondiale, Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2^a guerra Mondiale*, online.

29 Clemente PISTILLI, «Caduti della Seconda guerra Mondiale, 300 mila fascicoli digitalizzati, Caduti della Seconda guerra Mondiale, 300 mila fascicoli digitalizzati», *La Repubblica*, 2. 10. 2019, online.

30 Jože DEŽMAN, (Ed.), *Pretrgane niti življenja – tkanje spomina*, Kranj: Gorenjski muzej, Trboje: Jagraf, 2017.

when the Soviet army was carrying out a violent counterattack and encircling German-Italian forces. His last letter arrived in the homeland on December 12, 1942. The family inquired about him long after the war and learned that he was in captivity in Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea. In 2014, his brother Emil Žvab sent letters between Albin and his family to the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in response to the project *Same Heart Bring Back*, and expressed his wish: “*If only we knew where he died and why he died.*”³¹ The family were provided with data from the Slovene and Italian online registers of victims. According to Italian data of 5 April 2017, *Giorgio Svab* had been missing since 31 January 1943 and, according to Slovene data from the same day, *Zoran Žvab* had been missing since 12 December 1942. The Slovene register also listed the area of the River Don as the place of disappearance. On 29 May 2019, the data on the death of the victim was corrected during a re-check in the Italian online register. *Albin (Zoro) Žvab* was newly identified. The date of his death was re-established as June 28, 1945, and Kazakhstan as the place or country of death. The surname *Svab* was corrected to *Zvab*.³²

In addition to the aforementioned national databases of victims, there are a number of online lists of victims from individual Italian provinces and by individual camps.³³ Some online lists are more accurate than others and contain more publicly available information. For example, the web portal *Dimenticati di stato: I Caduti sepolti nei cimiteri militari italiani in Germania, Austria e Polonia* lists „*Italians from Istria, Giulia, Fiume and Dalmatia*“,³⁴ who are buried in military cemeteries in Austria, Germany and Poland. The data are more extensive than the data from the Italian and Slovene online databases of victims, and it is also interesting that correctly written Slovene names have been added to the post-Italian names of Slovene places. Among the „*Italians*“ are also Slovenes. The website notes the thought: „*Lists are an absolute treasure, because behind every name there is a face and behind every face there is life.*“ Franc Likan is an example,

31 Irena URŠIČ, «Albin Žvab», v: Dežman, (Ed.), *Pretrgane niti*.

32 SI-MNZS, Osebna zapuščina Albina Žvaba. Evidentirano gradivo.

33 Example: *List of deaths in the British camp Zonderwater in South Africa, which was the world's largest military camp for captured Italian soldiers during World War II, Cimitero di Zonderwater*, online.

34 *Dimenticati di Stato, I Caduti sepolti nei cimiteri militari italiani in Germania, Austria e Polonia*, online.

born 1 August 1922 in Ajdovščina, a member of the Italian armed forces and prisoner, who died on 24 October 1943 in Ansfelden and is buried in the Italian military cemetery in Mauthausen, in the eighth row, tomb 929.³⁵ The Slovene online register of victims lists the date of death as 26 October 1943 and Germany as the country of burial, while Austria is listed in the Italian register as the place of death, while the country of burial is not listed.

Slovenes can also be found in the list of victims among Italian soldiers who lost their lives in the Aegean islands of the Dodecanese, published on the website *Per non dimenticare, elenco dei caduti italiani and Egeo*³⁶. Alojzij Pirc is an example, born on April 25, 1912 in Idrija, who died on November 3, 1942. He is listed as *Luigi Pirci*, a doctor with an officer's position, »*ten. med.*« (*tenente medico*). In addition to the indication of the place of birth of Idrija, it is attributed to „(Gorizia), (ora Jugoslavia)“. The Slovene online register lists the hospital in Athens as the place of his death, while Greece is listed in the national Italian register. The same list records *Ivan Sušanj* as *Giovanni Strino* from Dolenje pri Jelšanah, who belonged to the air units and died on 29 August 1943. He is listed in the Italian online register as *Giovanni Susani*. In this register or the mentioned list, the place of death of *Ivan Sušanj* is Greece or the Dodecanese, and in the Slovene register the place of death and burial is the island of Rhodes.

In the future, the data will require systematic and accurate verification between the Slovene and Italian online registers and other publicly available lists. Randomly selected cases show that the names of some victims are missing in either the Italian or Slovene register of victims. For example, *Vladislav Fatur* (born June 26, 1921 in Bač; died April 30, 1943 in Mareth, Tunisia) is not in the Italian register, nor is *Franco Fonda* (born September 30, 1919 in Lokev; died October 5, 1944 in Florence); *Anton Ferfolja* (born on 21 January 1917 in Tomaj; died on 27 December 1942 in Tunisia) is not in the Slovene register, or the data on the date and place of death or disappearance of the same person are different or exist in only one of the two registers. Checking the data in Italian sources requires some patience and ingenuity due to the same surnames written in several versions: for example *Novak* appears as *Novak/Novacco/Novaco*, *Tomšič* as *Tomsic/Tomsich* and similar.

35 Ibid.

36 *Dodecaneso, Per non dimenticare, Elenco dei Caduti italiani in Egeo*, online.

The updating of the register of victims is also linked to the detection and protection of the remains of Italian soldiers. The *Protection of Mortal Remains Act* of 1931 was amended in 1951 and defined obligations for the protection of cemeteries (obligation to census, temporary and subsequent final burial of corpses). A new law from 2010 defined the protection of war cemeteries (cemeteries, ossuaries and monuments) of Italian soldiers at home and abroad.³⁷ They are cared for by the General Commissariat for Honors to the Fallen, as well as by Italian soldiers of Slovene nationality. In Slovenia, the *War Cemeteries Act* was adopted in 2003, which in Article 6 defines war cemeteries abroad, including cemeteries of those forcibly mobilised into foreign armies. The Act provides for the protection of war cemeteries in accordance with interstate agreements or in agreement with countries with which the Republic of Slovenia has not yet concluded agreements.³⁸

CONCLUSION

Slovene and Italian sources, online registers and lists of the dead and missing also contain information on Slovenes who lost their lives as soldiers of the Italian Armed Forces or as Italian soldiers of Slovene nationality in captivity during and after the Second World War. Comparing and supplementing the basic databases, the Slovene database *Deaths among the population in the Republic of Slovenia during the Second World War and immediately after it*, the Italian database *Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2a guerra Mondiale* as well as other Italian lists and the list of Nataša Nemec, would bring us closer to a more accurate victimological, nominal and numerical picture of Slovenes who died in the Italian armed forces and in captivity. The creators of the Slovene register of victims reinstated Slovene names and surnames to dead and missing Slovenes in the Italian armed forces and prisoners of war, and extracted the dates and places of death for their relatives. They were also given moral and ethical significance, which from the question before the independence of Slovenia, whether „victims“ also included Slovenes in the occupying armies, has grown into an ethical listening to all war victims, which can be achieved by civilized society. Dead and missing mobilised

37 Mojca PRISTAVEC ĐOGIĆ, Marjana KRIŽAJ in Nina ZEILHOFER, *Množična grobišča*, Ljubljana: Republika Slovenija, Državni zbor, Raziskovalno-dokumentacijski sektor, 2014, online.

38 *Zakon o vojnih grobiščih (ZVG)*, online.

Slovenes in the Italian armed forces were multiple victims: they were mobilized without ethnic rights from an environment of ethnic suppression by the Fascist regime, they lost their lives for the military interests of a foreign country and, in the post-war environment of their own country, as members of the 'occupying' armies they were expunged from public memory. Online databases containing data on the victims of the Second World War, both Slovene and Italian, offer wide access to data on the victims and, at the same time, inform us of methodological difficulties on both sides. The Italian national register of victims also includes Slovenes, while the Slovene national register of victims, mainly due to difficulties in determining the nationality of victims from ethnically mixed laws, does not include victims among Slovenes beyond the borders of the Republic of Slovenia. The case studies of both national registries demonstrate the need to supplement missing or different data on victims. There are still Slovene victims who are not in the Slovene National Register of Victims and who are still only in Italian lists, with post-Italian names and surnames, eighty years after the beginning of the Second World War for Slovenes west of the former Rapallo border, and just as many years after the first Slovene deaths during the Second World War. After refining the lists of victims, quantitative and qualitative substantive analyses and comparisons of causes of death in the context of military conflicts, diseases and conditions in prison camps, geographical dimensions of places of death, specifics and aspects of mobilisation as one of the processes of ethnic suppression, will be more relevant. There are also the questions of a single list of victims among Slovenes in the Italian armed forces and prisoners-of-war in all wars, including the second half of the 1930s, a memorial and the possibility of establishing a publicly accessible topography of places and countries in which they fell, died or remained forever as missing and without a grave.

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SUMMARY

In 1922, after it had annexed the majority of the western Slovene territory in accordance with the Treaty of Rapallo, the Kingdom of Italy started drafting Slovenes into the Italian Armed Forces and mobilising them for wars as of 1935. Slovenes from the Littoral Region took part in the wars in Ethiopia and Spain, as well as participating in the occupation of Albania. As of the Italian entry into the war on 10 June 1940, they were deployed to all Italian battlefields in France, Greece, North Africa and the Eastern Front. A few of them were even members of the units that carried out the attack against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. As prisoners of wars, captured by the Allied and Axis forces, they would end up in POW camps all over the world: in Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Slovene lives were lost during fighting, wartime violence, as well as due to infectious, parasitic and other diseases and adverse POW camp conditions. In the wars during the 1930s and World War II, Slovenes in the Italian Army were among the first Slovene casualties of war in the entire territory inhabited by this nation. The online database titled *Fatalities among the Population in the Territory of the Republic of Slovenia During and Immediately after World War II*, which included 1,316 casualties among Slovenes in the Italian armed forces and in captivity on 23 July 2020, was created by the Institute of Contemporary History's researchers between 1997 and 2012. It finally restored the Slovene names and surnames of the fatalities and revealed the dates and places of their deaths to their families. The data indicates that Slovenes drafted into the Italian Army died on battlefields all over the world.

While the Slovene registry does not include fatalities beyond the borders of the Republic of Slovenia, the casualties among the Slovenes in the Italian armed forces are also listed in the Italian online registry of victims entitled *Banca Dati dei Caduti e Dispersi 2a guerra Mondiale*, created by researchers of the Archive of the General Commissariat for War Graves Care (*Commissariato Generale per le Onoranze ai Caduti*) of the Italian Ministry of Defence. In addition to the two national registries of casualties, other sources and lists also exist. Comparisons between the two national registers and other sources indicate that the Slovene registry must be supplemented with missing or different information about the casualties. After the lists of casualties are completed, quantitative and qualitative analyses and comparisons of their contents will also be more relevant.