

# ON THE WIRE

1914 THE NEWSLETTER OF Fall '95 THE GREAT WAR ASSN. 1918

## Austrian Issue

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# On the Wire

Volume 6, #2 Summer/Fall 1995

*On the Wire*, the official newsletter of the Great War Association, is published three times a year in the Spring, Summer, and Fall. All contributions are welcomed, but we reserve the right to edit for length, spelling and content.

\*\*The views expressed herein are the opinions of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff of OTW or the officers and members of the GWA.

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# Words from the Editors' Desk

by Marsh Wise & Sue Fisher  
Co-Editors OTW

**G**reetings Friends! Welcome to our stunning "Austrian issue" (We'll bet Les Peters is, at this very moment, excitedly hopping up and down and dancing with glee!). We have an excellent article; *Three Days on the Isonzo*, which is the moving account Dr. Julius Polzer, a veteran of the Austro-Hungarian Army. Although long, this article is so outstanding we had to bring it to you in its entirety.

Unfortunately, due to factors beyond our control our "go-to-press" date on this issue was held up for important info on the Newville site! But, fear not, we do plan on having our next issue out on time.

A few notes about OtW. Normally, OtW wouldn't be this long, but we ended up having to combine the Summer and Fall issues into one edition and this is the result. We hope you enjoy it! From now on, we plan to try and keep OtW to about 24-28 pages.

Another goal, in fact our basic premise is to make OtW both interesting and informative by having a variety of useful, educational articles. Hopefully, once we get the ball rolling, our readers will start contributing good material.

Some other ideas for OtW are:

- A different theme for every issue, thus trying to keep our coverage from being heavily weighted towards one side or the other. So, the next OtW will be our French issue, followed by the German issue, with probably the British issue following and so-on and so-on. Eventually, we will cover all the countries involved in the Great War. By the way, with the American or British issues, we're going to leave it up to 'them what knows it best!', the Americans and Brits themselves, to write the articles. So, when you guys send in enough good stuff, we'll print them. *We thought it was a good idea too!*
- There is a need to revamp the ad rates to more realistically reflect the cost of printing OtW. Hopefully, we can find a business manager for OtW to help out with this. As it stands now, one of our biggest problems (besides getting good articles) is printing costs. We are in dire need of somewhere to print OtW economically! If you are a printer (or know of someone) who would be willing to print OtW

Editorial

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# President's Address to the Membership

by Ernst Deksheimer  
GWA President

**M**y friends, it has been a very long and hard fight to get the Newville, PA site to be a reality, **but we have been victorious!** On 13 September I signed the lease with the landowner. I can not express how much work so many people have put into this effort with any semblance of the magnitude. Quite honestly, I would never want to go through this again, ever! The bottom line is that, as of this date we, the **Great War Association**, have a permanent site which no one can take away, guaranteed to us for 29 years!!

The Newville site which now has been named the **Caesar Krauss Great War Memorial Site** is a 156 acre piece of land isolated by many acres of trees and hills and is a perfect site for our growing hobby. It is located very conveniently to the majority of our membership 15 miles right off I-76 in south-central Pennsylvania. The property is owned by Mr. Mark Anderson who is using this land for a memorial to his grandfather Corporal Caesar Krauss of the 79th Division, 313th Regt. Company M, AEF. We will be utilizing approximately 80 acres of this land for our battlefield (compare this to the approx. 20 acres at Shimpstown). Our lease with Mr. Anderson allows us to shape the battlefield to our needs and to have scheduled National Events, as well as, Regional Events and field/work weekends.

As of right now, the land for our trench system, as well as, the incoming road and parking area have already been cleared and the trenches started. The trenches to be dug have been carefully planned and will be totally historical in layout and design. The two **GWA** trench masters, Jeff Holder (Allies) and Rick Keller (Central Powers) are in charge and will be the ones to ensure every trench, gun emplacement and bunker is correct. We literally will have a site which will rival the fields of France! I am positive that every member who would like to assist in the preparation for this first event by filling a sandbag, putting up wire or revetting walls would be more than welcome. We would welcome individuals or whole units who can come to work as it will be an unbelievable effort to get things from a forest and field to the moonscape of France 1917 before 3 November. PLEASE contact either of the two trench masters for coordination of all efforts!

I certainly would be remiss if I did not personally thank Ernie Cowan and Rick Keller who handled the massive effort with the local township, Pennsylvania governmental officials and the two landowners, past and present. While I was working with the lawyers and landowner, Ernie and Rick did all the work which made possible the landowner and I coming together to sign the lease. Without their selfless efforts we simply would not have this site for November. Quite honestly, I need to give an even greater thank you to Mark Anderson, a man who has put up more money than you would want to know to purchase this property and pay for the many subsequent fees for lawyers, surveyors and the like. Mark, we say a heartfelt thank you and a hope you will come often to our events!!

Friends, this will not be an event to miss! So much will be going on at this event which literally demands you to come. A

great new trench system will be started and will need everyone to help, elections for new officers will take place and a major vote on changes to our Constitution...all at this event. I believe we will even have artillery bombardments. I would like to go over each of these last items.

**First off**, on the new site, here are the main points of the lease:

- ☑ a 29 year lease which guarantees we can not lose the site.
- ☑ all trenches, bunkers, etc... will be historically correct and will be done according to a carefully laid out plan.
- ☑ We alone have the right (which is unlimited) to shape the battlefield for our own needs. And here let me say that, having seen the battlefield, the scenarios are endless. Frankly, you can not even imagine the sheer size of the proposed trench system both in length and scope.
- ☑ We will be taking out substantial liability insurance to cover both the landowner and ourselves. With the potential liability involved, it will be mandatory that **NO ONE** may go onto the site without signing a liability waiver.

**Secondly**, the coming election of new officers is a crucial one. The next administration will need the most capable people we have to offer in order to steer through the many issues which will confront us. A great deal of listening to the many viewpoints and finding consensus is necessary. I urge you to carefully read the biographies and goals for each of the nominees as laid out in this **OTW** in order to make the best choice for the next two years. The same goes for the changes proposed to the Constitution of the **GWA**. We need to continually change as we grow, but want to do so responsibly. Please vote but carefully read each proposed change.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to the entire membership of the **GWA** for the privilege of being your president for the last two years. While there have been times when I would have sooner been in a Siberian winter, it has been a challenge and one in which I hopefully have been able to contribute something to the growth of our organization. While I believe this administration has gotten a lot accomplished, we just started the work that needs doing. The job of president (also the vice president, reps, treasurer and combat commanders) is a tough one. The many different egos, personalities and issues requires considerable compromise and removing of one's own desires. Frankly, our administration has struggled with this. One of the frustrations I have had as president is seeing many of our committees reduce in size to a single member. It is vital to have vibrant committees with diverse viewpoints and active members. I share these things with you to encourage you to not be merely participants at events. I know that many of our membership truly care about both the hobby and our organization. May I urge you to get involved. Join a commit-

President's Address

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## Schedule of Events - GWA Fall 95 Reenactment

### Friday - November 3, 1995

Noon - Midnight	Open Registration
Noon - 630PM	Work on Trenches and/or Battle Lines
5PM	GWA Executive Committee Meeting (Reg. area)
530 - 730PM	Dinner (mess tent) / Combat Catering
630PM	Safety Meeting (combat site)
645PM - TBD	Night Tactical (combat site)

### Saturday - November 4, 1995

7 - 9AM	Open Registration
7 - 830AM	Breakfast (mess tent) / Combat Catering
730AM	GWA Meeting - Unit Commanders (Reg. area)
9AM	Safety Meeting (Registration area)
930AM - TBD	All Day Reenactment (combat site)
1200 - 2PM	Lunch (mess tent) / Combat Catering
6 - 8PM	Dinner (mess tent) / Combat Catering

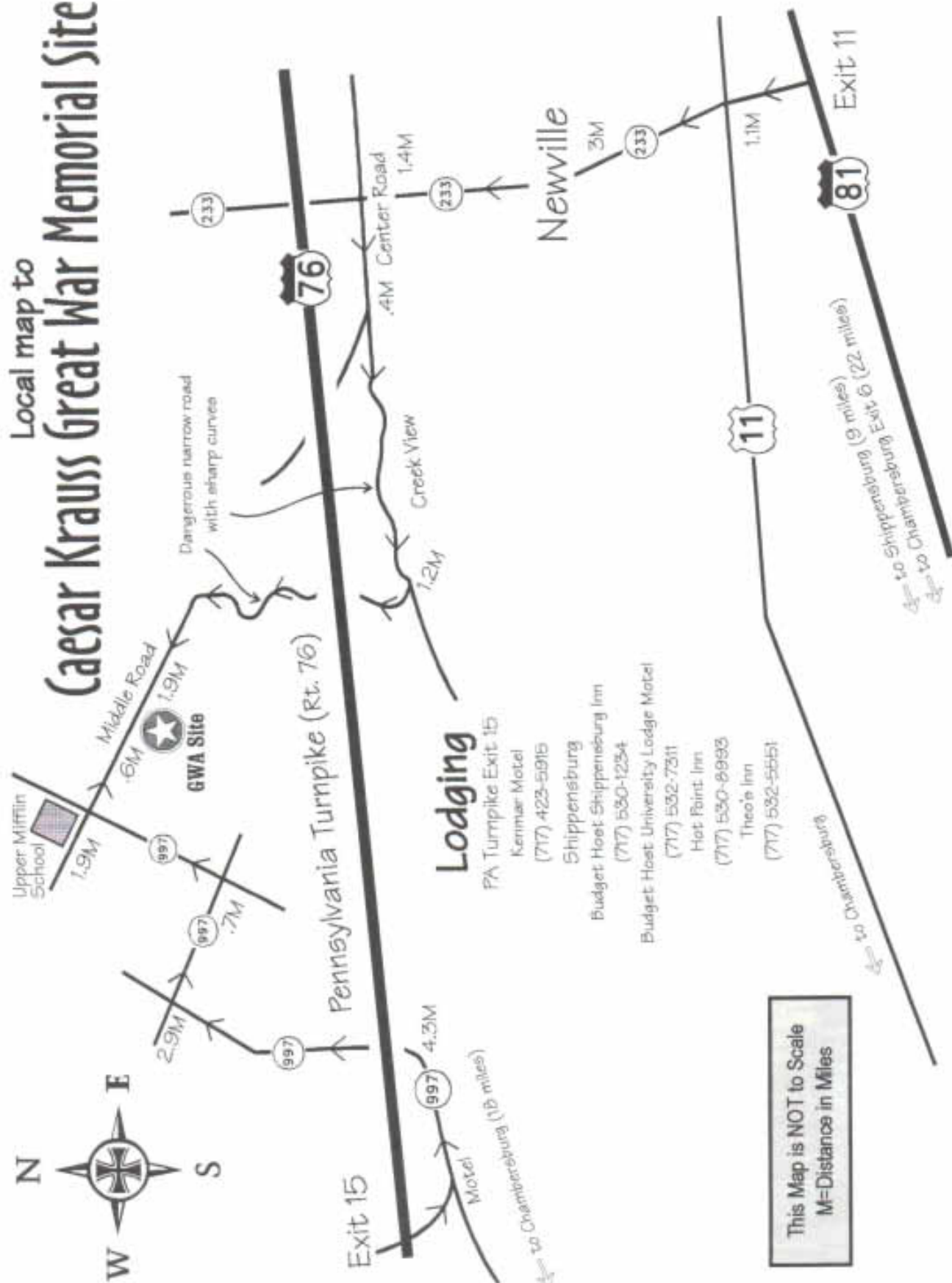
### Sunday - November 5, 1995

7 - 8AM	* Morning Assault (combat site)
7 - 830AM	Breakfast (mess tent) / Combat Catering
8 - 10AM	Clean-up registration, camping & combat areas
12AM	New Administration takes office!!!

\* There will be a one hour combat scenario Sunday morning for all GWA "die hards." Hot coffee will be available at the combat site!

Note - Individuals are welcome to come Thursday to help revet/sandbag the trenches and put up wire in No Mans land.

# Local map to Caesar Krauss Great War Memorial Site





# Words from the GWA Vice President

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by Tim Goodwin  
GWA Vice President

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1. The GWA fall event will be held at our new site, near Newville, Pennsylvania on November 3, 4 & 5. Directions on how to get to the property are included in this issue of On-The-Wire. Signs will also be posted along the road.
2. Property Update—Acquisition of the Newville site is proceeding. We now have a signed (long term) lease agreement between Mark Anderson and the GWA for use of this site. The completion of the numerous engineering drawings, EPA/soil testing, legal searches, etc., took much longer than originally anticipated. Although we have received formal township approval to develop this property into a WWI battlefield, we are still awaiting written EPA approval. The latter should be a mere formality, for Mark has already been given the verbal go-ahead. Closing should take place in October. Both Mark Anderson and Mr. Craig (current land owner) have agreed to allow the GWA to hold our fall event at Newville, regardless of the status of ownership. Preparation of the site for the fall event has already commenced (i.e. clearing away vegetation, grading a road back to the combat area, scraping the parking lot, etc.). Construction of the trenches is scheduled to commence the week of September 18th.
3. Registration will take place in a tent near the parking area. The table will be manned from Noon to Midnight Friday and 0700 to 0900 Saturday. The Allies will be handling registration for this event (we need volunteers). The Newville event fee is \$15.00. To minimize any confusion for our first event at the Newville site, please register immediately upon entering the premises. You can pick up a site map at that time, showing the layout of the property and the location of the various areas/facilities.
4. A single parking lot is being constructed near the highway, which will accommodate approximately 150 vehicles. This area will be scraped, graded and given an added shale topping for firmness. Individuals can load/unload their gear at any of the areas, but must then return their car to the parking lot. Both the flea market and modern camping areas are near this lot.
5. This will be a 1½ day event. We have scheduled a combat scenario for Friday evening, which will commence at 1845 hrs and will continue as long as there is interest. A safety briefing will be held at 1830 hrs at the battle site, for those individuals who intend to participate in Friday's night action. You must attend this briefing, if you want to play. Unit members are encouraged to help fill sand bags and string wire during the day Friday. Both the sand bags and wire will be provided by the GWA.
6. The GWA Site Committee is responsible for coordinating the actual development of the trench system. Committee members have spent many hours designing the trenches. Unlike Shimpstown, all strong points, outposts, bunkers, reveting, etc., must be historically correct and pre-approved by the two trench masters. Please coordinate all construction in your assigned sector with the appropriate trench master, so as not to waste your time.
7. The GWA Safety Meeting will be held at 0900 Saturday morning near the registration area. All grenadiers will bring their grenades with them for inspection. Sample grenades will be selected and retained by the Safety Officer for analysis. The G7 will try to keep this meeting as brief as possible, so we can get right into the tactical scenarios. This meeting is mandatory for all participants—please be on time! (Trench Passes will be checked)
8. Elections will be held at the fall event for the seven GWA leadership positions. GWA members will fill out ballots as they register. These ballots will be counted immediately following the Saturday Safety Meeting and the results announced later in the day. Three individuals will conduct the actual count. These will be the GWA Secretary and two others (one Central Powers and one Allied) chosen by lot. The new administration will assume office at the close of this event.
9. Last Spring, petitions were circulated proposing 40 changes to the GWA Constitution. The purpose of these changes were to clarify several gray areas within the GWA Constitution and to add provisions recommended by the Association's attorney. All 40 changes have received the required 50 signatures needed to be placed on the ballot and will be voted upon by the membership during registration. A copy of these changes has been forwarded to your unit commander (along with a current GWA constitution).
10. There will be no time constraints upon Flea Market hours during this event. Sutlers will set-up their tables in an area near the parking lot. Please keep in mind that the GWA will not be providing tables, chairs or shelter of any kind. Additionally, starting with this event, only GWA dues paying members can sell items at the Flea Market. This provision is necessary due to liability concerns and will be strictly enforced.
11. "Combat Catering" will again be providing meals. The cost is \$30.00 for the entire weekend. This includes five meals (Friday dinner / Saturday breakfast, lunch & dinner / Sunday breakfast). Anyone interested in using this service should contact Lou Ritter at (410) 479-0911 / 204 Third St., Denton, MD 21629. (Remember to bring your own mess kit and eating utensils)
12. IR23 will be sponsoring an authentic field mess behind the German lines. This mess is open to other units. Unit commanders should contact Ken Boice at (412) 445-3547 for details. Arrangements for food must be made prior to the event.
13. Although a water buffalo will be on-site for this event, I suggest individuals should plan on bringing an extra gallon of water to meet any supplemental needs.

GWA VP

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# Message from the Allied Representative

To: Members of Allied Units

From: Allied Representative, Pete Tuttle

Greetings! I hope the summer season has treated you all well. This will be just a short missive covering several topics in preparation for November's event.

1. First, I received a letter from Mark Meader this month (June 95) that notified me that he is stepping down from command of the 151<sup>e</sup> Régiment d' Infanterie du France. He will be participating as a soldier from the ranks. Mark has been the commander of the French for quite a while and I take this opportunity formally and publicly to thank him for his efforts in support of our hobby. Take care Mark—we'll see you in the trenches!
2. Second, the trenches: Having recently talked with Rick Keller and the rest of the G-7 on a conference call, I am of the opinion that events are progressing towards being able to occupy the Carlisle, PA site and fight in November. Hopefully, by the time this issue of *On The Wire* is published, more concrete information will be forthcoming. In the meantime, unit commanders please consider contacting our trench master, Jeff Holder, and offering him any assistance. If we are able to work on site this summer and fall we will have to coordinate work parties and weekends to ensure that we put in a maximum effort to be ready for November. I'd also like to publicly thank Jeff Holder and his team for putting together the Allied trench plan/program.

As I have suggested and reiterated previously, we need to place maximum efforts into getting the play area (fire trench, communications trenches, listening posts and no mans land) ready for war. This needs to be our top priority. There will be plenty of area for unit dugouts and ample time to construct them, but we need to make sure that we put the majority of the efforts towards the areas that benefit all of us, not just little portions of us.

If you have any trench construction materials (lumber and etc.) on hand that you would want to donate to the cause, please let me or Jeff Holder know. We (the GWA) are going to probably spend beaucoup bucks on backhoes and the like and it may be a positive move to try to see if we can mitigate any cost impacts for initial trench construction. This is just a thought—not an official position.

3. Third, France: Some of you may have noticed that I was absent from the April event. When my father passed away in late March my wife and I went to France to escape reality for two weeks. Several other members of the "Khaki Club," from the greater Detroit area, arrived and we spent a

solid week in the Meuse Argonne sector. It was a good journey. We walked where the doughboys walked, drank where they drank and saw their graves at Romage and Belleau Wood. We also saw a bit of Verdun, Montfaucon, the "Lost Battalion's" ravine, and lots of other things.

This was the first opportunity for me to see what I've reading about for years. I highly recommend a pilgrimage for anyone that cares to spend the dough to go. Don't bother looking for relics—*Keller has them all!!!* Just kidding, but I couldn't resist it. The well known areas are pretty picked over and the findings are slim.

4. Fourth, Impressions: Please continue to work on your impressions over the summer. Not everybody currently has a crackerjack impression, but whatever is there can be improved. My trip to France, and seeing the graves at Romage and Belleau Wood, brought home the point that we all should try to improve our impressions as much as possible (within reason and financial constraints, of course) so we can properly honor those who served in the Great War.
5. Membership: I have had more than a few calls from interested people concerning the GWA and the allies. We may have some of them attend for the first time in November. Take these folks under your wing and treat them right. Get them started off on the right foot so we don't end up having "quality" problems later. Once the trench site is a "go" we can build our units and membership up beyond what it was a few years ago, while we were at Shimpltown.
6. New Units: I know there is at least one allied group working on forming a new unit. Get your unit packet in ASAP so the G-7 can review it and issue a decision prior to the November event.
7. Last, an apology: This last twelve months has been pretty challenging for me personally, with the death of both my parents and major career changes, so I have been able to devote very little discretionary time towards GWA activities. This has been disappointing to me, because I think each elected officer must maintain a passion and drive for the hobby that will both inspire the membership and carry the GWA through any tough times. Hopefully, between now and November, I will be able to participate a little more fully.

See you in the trenches.

Peter G. Tuttle  
Allied Representative



## From the Central Powers Representative

by Steve Fisher  
Central Powers Representative

Kameraden,

As you all know by now, the Newville site lease has been signed. Now, the real work by the membership must begin. I visited the site last month and it was so heavily overgrown that an event there would have been impossible.

During the week of Sept. 11, Ernie Cowan made a great effort at clearing the access road and preparing the site for the event. The backhoe should have started work on Sept. 19. Ernie needs help!!! Please volunteer to help with the clearing and preparation of the site for the Fall event. This event will be our first on our new, permanent site; let's all pitch in to make it a successful event. Be sure to bring shovels, picks, etc. to the event—there will be plenty of work for everyone.

Access to the site is restricted. Rick Keller must be notified if you intend to do any work there. Only current, dues-paying members will be permitted on site, since only valid members will be protected by our insurance. Any structures built on site must be pre-approved by the site committee. Let's make this site better than Shimpstown!

I look forward to seeing everyone in November.

*Ihr Kamerad,*

*Steve Fisher*

### GWA VP

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14. For those members who do not wish to camp in the field (since we do not yet have in-ground bunkers), the following is a list of nearby motels:

Motel	Phone #	Location	Distance
Shippensburg Inn	717-530-1234	Shippensburg	18 miles
University Lodge Motel	717-532-7311	Shippensburg	18 miles
Hot Point Inn	717-530-8993	Shippensburg	18 miles
Theo's Inn	717-532-5551	Shippensburg	18 miles
Kenmar Motel	717-423-5915	Exit 15/PA Turnpike	11 miles

15. A GWA Unit Commanders/Elected Officers meeting will be held Saturday morning at 0730 near the registration area. At which, the current status and future usage of the Newville site will be discussed. All units should be represented at this meeting. If you have any gripes, questions or suggestions — now is a good time to talk to your unit commander.
16. As part of our lease agreement with the land owner, the GWA will thoroughly cleanup the site following each event. Individual units will be assigned specific sectors to police Sunday morning. Expended brass will remain on the field, but all paper and plastic items need to be picked up. Trash bags will be distributed and areas assigned during the unit commanders meeting. A dumpster will be on-site for trash disposal.
17. Specific areas have been designated for parking, camping and flea market set-up. Signs will be posted identifying these areas. Period camping near the battle site is permitted.

18. No live ammunition is to be brought onto the Newville site for any reason. Let me say this again — No live ammunition will be brought onto the site!
19. No Drugs!!! Anyone caught with illegal drugs will be immediately expelled from both the site and membership in the GWA. This type of nonsense will not be tolerated. Our hobby is dangerous enough without some idiot getting high, then wanting to carry a gun.
20. If anyone has any extra tables, chairs or canopies that we can use for registration, please contact Tim Goodwin at (614) 427-3544.
21. Until further notice, all visits to the Newville site must be **pre-arranged** with either the GWA President or Rick Keller. Please keep in mind that this property has not yet changed hands. All visitation must be strictly regulated.
22. There have been numerous rumors concerning proposed legislation by the State of Pennsylvania supposedly banning the transportation and/or ownership of automatic weapons. Several of our members have closely followed these proceedings and the proposed statutes do not apply to WWI era machine guns. (All current state laws remain in effect.) For additional information, you can contact Rick Keller at 717-264-6834.
23. Safety : At the April event, several members received "minor" injuries, most of which could have been prevented had everyone remained alert and strictly adhered to the GWA's safety guidelines. The worst incident (from a safety prospective) was an individual being hit in the forehead



## Book Review:

# The Salvation Army in the Great War

Harpers Pictorial Library of the World War:  
Harper & Brothers Publishers New York and London, 1920  
excerpts from pages 379-389

Contributed by Al Fuerst  
116th Inf. Regt./Hdqtrs Co. A.E.F.

If you ever have the privilege of speaking at length with an Allied veteran of the Great War, the subject of the Salvation Army usually comes up. Tommy Atkins and Doughboys alike had a universal love for the Flapjacks and Doughnuts that made the Salvation Army famous in France. ...That and the fact that everything the Salvation Army provided to the soldier was free!

One of the best compilations of Salvation Army stories is the Armies of Mercy volume of the Harpers Pictorial Library of the World War. A few of these stories are as follows:

At the foot of Montfaucon, on the morning of Sept. 28th, 1918 there was a small shack surrounded by shell holes and craters and inhabited by four Salvation Army workers. They had occupied it after the 313th Infantry had moved their line to the base of the hill. As they set up shop to produce those world famous doughnuts, shells were still falling nearby. Col. Sweezey, Commander of the 313th urged the girls to go back. "Ladies," he said, "This is no place for you now. The men would far rather do without than to see you killed. I want to ask you to desert this place, because at any moment the Germans may open up a barrage. It is too dangerous for you here."

"We will not leave," They said!

with a rifle butt during the night action. ***This is Stupid!!!*** The only physical contact allowed is with rubber knives or any other weapon made from soft, pliable material. This is especially true at night when you can't see your opponent very clearly. Newville is an unfamiliar event site for the GWA. Be forewarned, there is a lot of poison ivy, thorn bushes, ticks, broken glass and some snakes on the property. We will begin this upcoming event with a night action. Be Careful, Watch the other guy and let common sense dictate your actions. Enough Said.

24. If you have any questions concerning the fall event, unit commanders can contact either:

Tim Goodwin (GWA Vice President) 614-427-3544

Pete Tuttle (Allied Representative) 703-522-1586

Steve Fisher (Central Powers Representative) 317-328-7851

25. Attached is a "tentative" Schedule of Events for this weekend.

26. This event should be a lot of fun!

*Tim Goodwin*

At 0600 the next morning the men of the 313th lined up for coffee, rolls and doughnuts. Half an hour later they went up Montfaucon took it, and went on. Ration parties did not catch up with them for four days. Their only food being the extra rolls and doughnuts pressed on them by the Salvation Army girls and squirreled away in pockets and packs. Did the troops appreciate those Doughnuts? You can bet your life they did.

Sergeant Major Charles Walker of the Princess Pat Regiment, 10th Infantry, Canadian Forces relates that the during the April, 1915 battles around Ypres the men members of the Salvation Army station in YPRES filled in as stretcher bearers and that the for four hours when he came out of the trenches after that battle, two of the lassies at the Plug Street canteen remained on duty, feeding 1000 troops. "My but the coffee, doughnuts and pies they handed us were good."

"BUDDIES", is the name given to Salvationists by the famous Devil Dogs of the fifth Regiment, U.S. Marines. The title Buddies is considered a big tribute by the front line soldier. It implies shared trust and shared hardship and a common bond of friendship that the war could not overcome. "When we landed in France," said a Sergeant of the 5th Marines, "We found the Salvation Army active and on the job. On our arrival at the trenches the Salvation Lassies were already there and served us doughnuts and hot coffee. On our return to the States, the first ones to greet us with free telegrams to send the folks back home were the Salvation Army Lassies."

Private First Class William J. Proctor, when asked about the Salvation Army, said "As long as any boy who went with Pershing has a nickel in his clothes, he'll give it up to the Salvation Army! We were broke most of the time overseas, and the Salvation Army gave us things, and didn't even ask us to thank them. They didn't bother us about religion, either—just kept on the job helping us and making us comfortable. AND we won't forget it!" So, when next in the Trenches, and you smell Hot Coffee brewing and the hint of Fresh Doughnuts in the morning air, think about all that the Salvation Army did for the common soldier in France.

## Presidents Address

Continued from page 3

tee. Support each of the G-7. If you sit on the sidelines while others do the work, you simply do not have the right to complain. In the coming years this organization and the site will become internationally known. We can and should be more than a re-enactment society; I believe we have almost a moral obligation to carry the torch to see the memory of WWI and its lessons learned stay alive. I can see future museums, educational classes, dealings with the Federal government for monuments, other parks and memorials developed and a growing interest in the history of WWI fostered to many different countries around the world. I believe, even in the short run, we will see this site grow to accommodate thousands of participants. Friends, we are seeing the rebirth of the GWA. Be a part of it and lend your viewpoint and effort. I look forward to seeing you in the trenches!

**Thank you!**

*E. Deksheimer*

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# Some Modest Proposals...

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by Glen Dresback  
member, IR23 & GWA

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**A**s we embark upon customizing a new site to our needs, there are some things I would like to set out for discussion. I am just a member, but would like to point some things out that we could all work on or discuss, and perhaps change. We have seen WWI shrink drastically from the highs of attendance at the last Shimpstown events to the lows of the current era, and we must take some steps to reinvigorate the hobby. There has been a lot of talk about the new site solving everything, i.e. "the new site will solve the attendance problem, or the flare problem, or this \_\_\_\_\_ problem." The lack of a site, however, is only one of the problems assailing WWI, and we must insure that we do not become a mediocre hobby on a great site, or limit ourselves so much that everyone loses interest.

Looking at more than the attendance, one of the non-casualties of the last few years has been the authenticity standards. Some units have improved, and in fact the German line has improved significantly in many areas. I really can't write about the Allies, except to say that I love seeing the slowly increasing numbers of French, Russians, and British. But problems do still exist. Rubber soled boots have appeared, creeping in from the Farb hinterlands. Some WWII stuff has appeared. But generally, most units have improved, not collapsed. While there are still some horrible uniforms on the field, most units have begun to look far better than they had in the past, if many are indeed smaller in size.

If we're here to reenact, or do living history, we must guard against any collapse in authenticity. If we do not, we are not doing anything more than running around a field with a gun. You might as well bring out your M-1A or your SKS rather than your Enfield, Mauser, or Lebel, since after all, it would surely work better! (And they *definitely* would have used it had they had it!). We either need to do this right or go do "reenacting" where you take off your hat to show you're hit, paintball, or just MTV-style "adventure sports." Rubber soled boots should all go away now. Period. Haircuts should be right. Take a careful look at your impression. Is it right? Why or why not? Dump the stuff that is wrong. We owe it to each other and to the memory of the men and women who fought that war. Above all, always try harder.

Some suggestions that I think would make reenacting on the new site better:

1) Everyone needs to realize that our battles are NOT tacticals. Yes, I know both sides have fallen prey to this. But we should stop this mind-set before it overwhelms the living history side of the hobby. We need to decide if the two trench lines that we are building are the two points of two salients, so that we can go around to the sides, or if they are a part of the front "in a box" so that we can't. They would be constructed differently, and if we go with just a portion of the front, we should stop trying to go around the sides of the enemy trench line. There is no "around" after all—the race to the sea solved that in 1914. The trenches

extend from the English Channel to the Swiss border. There is no "flank" to turn. Everyone dies. There are no heroes. Forget sneaking around behind the position, there is no way to do that. Forget "winning." These battles went on for months. There should be no clear winners anyway, just the dead. If you're here just to burn powder, you should go find some other hobby anyway. We should all take more hits, and help support services get established for both sides.

2) Now that we have a site again, let's make the events more realistic! When I came into WWI, all that I heard about was that it was a "24 hour" event. Well, that hasn't been true for some time, and isn't likely to be true soon. But really, most of the attacks started in the morning, when the sun is dim and the attackers have some chance of getting to the enemy trench without all getting hit. Most of the days really were spent on fatigues, sleeping, or just BS'ing with your comrades. Why? You couldn't do much above ground during the day, because of the danger of being hit. As close as the Ft. Pickett lines are, most of any attacks would be mowed down in minutes. Extensive artillery fire would have helped out a lot.

Why not do more after dark again? It was the best time at the old events: nothing farby around you as the flares, and the machine guns, flashed. Some of the best and the heaviest action was at night, and the most correct. It is cooler, and wearing your uniform in action is much more comfortable at 60° degrees than at 100°. Sleep more during the day. It is a thought.

3) Let's take the some of the opportunities afforded by the new site and the decline in members and put them to good use! One thing we should do is break out of what had, to an extent, occurred at Shimpstown—that we wound up doing the same months, of the same years, over and over again. Due to the makeup of the reenacting force on the field, (mostly American, British and German) We rarely did anything other than 1918. The "early war" portion of the event was limited to one day of the Spring event, and was mostly just a change of helmets.

Instead of bifurcating one event, why not have a new event just for the early war? In this way, we could keep all camps happy: those who want to do nothing but 8 months of 1918, and those who want to do the rest of the war! The "early war" date and location (where it's "at" in France or Belgium) could fluctuate. Really, what would be the easiest to do would be the mid-war, say 1916. This is about all that we ever did anyway, but if we really want to learn about how the uniforms & tactics changed during the war, we could go for an actual early date, say 1915. The armies of the Great War changed quite a bit from 1914-18, in tactics, weapons, attitudes, and uniforms. It could be a lot of fun, especially if we change more than just uniform parts, but also the way that we act. From flags and swords, to Stahlhelms and submachine guns—all were present during the war. We should try to do more, to learn more. The mass charges

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Proposals

Continued on page 15



# Fall 95 GWA Election Candidate's Statements

## For GWA President:

- Marvin Chadab
- Steve Fisher

## For GWA Vice-President:

- Rick Blair
- Keith Saari

## For Central Powers Representative:

- Ernst Deksheimer
- Rob Zienta

## For Central Powers Combat Commander:

- Michael Gonzales
- Tim Goodwin

## For GWA President:

### Marvin Chadab

I am the product of a mixed marriage. My father was from the small Lithuanian town of Utena, my mother from the small city of Baranov, which is near Krakow. Only a momentous event (the Second World War qualifies) would bring these totally different cultures together. It was very interesting being the product of a sophisticated educated mother and a simple rural father who lacked a formal education, but had a great deal of good sense. I suppose it was a combination of luck, smarts and the hand of God which allowed my parents to survive the Ghettos, the slave labor camps and the death camps that they were incarcerated in. At the end of the war they found themselves in Bavaria where the SS had abandoned them. Again, they showed their innate intelligence in deciding that Eastern Europe was no place for a survivor to find a life. Subsequent massacres of returning Jews in Poland bore out their decision. My parents met in a displaced persons camp in Feldafing which ironically was a Hitler Jugend resort. The lack of living space prompted the U.S. occupation authorities to requisition civilian villas and they comfortably settled into villa number one. I was born in January 1947. The raging debate was whether to immigrate to Palestine or to the United States. America won out after my aunt tried unsuccessfully to reach Palestine aboard the Exodus. We arrived in Marine Terminal Brooklyn N.Y. aboard the USS General Moore and promptly settled. My upbringing in a one bedroom apartment on the fourth floor of a teeming tenement was in retrospect one of the great incentives in obtaining an education. There is nothing like poverty to focus ones vision of the future and to distinguish between what is important in life and what is superficial.

My education was steady and unspectacular. P.S. 179, Erasmus Hall High School and Brooklyn College. The difference in the later two schools was that the bus turned right instead of left.

True Education actually started in 1968 at the Howard University College of Medicine. I spent two years there living in the Washington, D.C. area where I was to eventually settle. I completed my medical school education at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx N.Y. where I was awarded my medical degree in 1972. My medical Internship was at the Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx where I should have received a Silver Star or at the very minimum a Purple Heart. I entered the United States Public Health Service for my dermatology training which included a year fellowship at Columbia University. After the completion of my training I moved

to the Washington area and opened a private dermatology practice. Eighteen years later I am still here.

I discovered WWI reenactment five years ago when I took my kids to the local Washington day parade and saw doughboys in the living flesh and moving at normal speeds. I knew at that moment that my love for history had finally found an outlet. I had a mere six weeks to get my kit together and with the help of my unit and Rick Keller I was able to look correct. My first event at Shimpstown was cold wet and physically uncomfortable; in short, I loved it. I have not yet missed an event including the superb aviation event at Shimpstown and the "Siberian" battle at Beaver Falls. I have seen our hobby at its best and when it has lost its way. I believe that with the new site in Pennsylvania we are about to embark into a renaissance for our hobby. My vision for the Great War Association is one of recapturing the glory of Shimpstown and even surpassing it. I am not embarrassed to admit that I thought the events and the site at Shimpstown were superb. Newville can and will exceed Mr. Lee's farm. Fairness, respect for all and the absolute need to demand safety in the hobby will ensure that goal. There are many talented intelligent and motivated members in the GWA and by pooling our resources we can easily meet our goals. The job of the president of our organization is to recognize these talents and channel them for the common good. Being fair-minded accessible and receptive to innovation is my platform and my promise.

### Steve Fisher

Kameraden, as most of you know, I am running for President of the GWA. I have not taken this action lightly; having been the Central Powers Representative, I am well aware of the problems and frustrations of such a position. However, my experience also allows me to see what areas of the GWA need attention and those that work well as is.

I am 34 years old and hold a B.S. in Marketing and a M.A. in History. I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Military History at Temple University. I began reenacting in 1982. I have also been a volunteer living history interpreter at Fort Necessity (French & Indian War) and at Antietam and Appomattox Courthouse. I was a founding member of IR111, which I now command.

My past experience in the GWA includes going to Fort Pickett to investigate it as a potential site. As the Central Powers Representative, I have put together our new trench guide, gone to the Newville site when its use was first proposed. I endorsed our investigating Mr. Anderson's offer and was the first GWA officer to speak to Mr. Anderson about what he had in mind for us and his WWI foundation.

This election is especially important because we are going into a new site—which will require the cooperation of all of our members



to ensure that an organized plan is put in place to develop our trenches as quickly as possible while getting us the most for our money. Our organization will begin to grow again as old members return and new reenactors join us.

Of primary importance is to get back to basics—that is, reenacting. Administrative chores involving the elected officers and unit commanders should generally be done prior to the event. Event dates should be set as early as possible and should follow a regular pattern so everyone can plan ahead. The bureaucracy within the GWA should be kept to a minimum. The safety meeting should be kept to 15 minutes. Other administrative items can be dealt with later or prior to the event. Our focus should be on what we came to the event for—living history.

My second goal is that we move forward with the development of the new site. This should be done with the least amount of conflict. We should focus on cooperation and getting everyone involved in the process. My aim is to promote cooperation within the GWA and ensure that everyone is represented. The elected officials are there to work for the organization, not for their own private agenda. I believe my experience and leadership can benefit the Association. If you support me, then I ask that you also give your support to: Rick Blair of IR92 for Vice President, Rob Zienta of IR23 as Central Powers Representative, and Mike Gonzales of IR23 as Combat Commander. Together we can lead the GWA into a new future. Thank you.

### For GWA Vice-President:

## Rick Blair

I have been a member of the GWA and IR92, the Brunswick Regiment, since 1992. I currently hold the rank of Gefreiter and serve as the editor of *Der Schützengrab*, my unit's newsletter.

I support Steve Fisher of IR111 as a candidate for GWA president. Steve and I are fiercely committed to the advancement of this hobby and share a vision for its future.

I have been reenacting various periods of military history for nearly 20 years. I regularly attend *Military Through the Ages* at Jamestown, VA, with various award-winning units. I serve as the WWI liason for the *Marching Through Time* living history event held annually at Marietta Mansion, Bowie, MD.

I am a graduate of Penn State and Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA, having earned a B.S. degree in Criminal Justice. I am currently employed as an administrator with the Washington County Sheriff's Office in Hagerstown, MD.

As a resident of Western Maryland, I live in close proximity to the Newville site. I would be able to visit the site often and work closely with its developers.

If elected, I will work to ensure the Newville site is developed quickly and authentically. I advocate limited bureaucracy and bureaucratic authority. I advocate sound planning for the growth of our hobby. I will promote safety. As your Vice President, I would work to ensure a highly organized and efficient G-7 that is responsive to the wishes of the membership. My campaign promise to you is this—I will work with you and for you to make WWI an enjoyable and worthwhile hobby.

*My best to all of you. Hope to see you in the Fall!*

## Keith Saari

My name is Keith Saari and I am running for Vice President of the Great War Association. I have been reenacting since 1980, from French and Indian War to World War II. I joined the GWA seven years ago and since then, I have helped out with the registration, set-up and clean-up at both the Shimpstown and Ft. Pickett sites.

I work at Fort Ward Museum in Alexandria, Virginia as a Museum Technician. In this capacity, I have assisted in the organization of many historic reenactments and events, from Revolutionary reenactments and Civil War Garrisons to Museum Openings. I am a volunteer at Fort Washington as a historic interpreter and am certified as a black powder demonstrator.

When elected to the Vice Presidency I will work hard to promote and advance the Great War Association. I see Newville as the premier reenactment site of WWI, like Shimpstown where authenticity and friendship were one. I ask that you please vote for me in November to help make a brighter future for our hobby.

### For Central Powers Representative:

## Ernst Deksheimer

(Craig Nordquist)

You know me as Ernst Deksheimer. I am running in the fall elections for the position of Central Powers Representative. Why, after being President of the GWA for the last two years would I want to be your Central Powers Representative? I have always had a love of our hobby; from Civil War clubs as a boy, to a Military History degree from college, to 23 years in battle reenactments. I have spent my last 14 years in WWI as a German and with only one unit—IR63. My love affair with WWI and the GWA goes deep. I have been a private, squad leader, platoon leader, unit commander and now currently am President of the GWA. During my 14 years I have missed only one event. I put a very high priority on my involvement with the GWA.

As President of our organization, I have worked hard to include all views and reach consensus of action. These last two years have been **very** trying for the GWA. We have responded with continuing events, starter trenches at Ft. Pickett, a better *On the Wire* and now, at last, a site of our own. Now, having served my time as president of our organization, I feel I can best help the GWA by representing Central Powers needs. What with the new trenches about to be dug, along with bunkers, gun emplacements and the like, the Central Powers units will have their hands full. We also must be concerned with working toward better uniform and accoutrement standards, encouraging regiments that are weak and seeing **YOUR** viewpoints accurately represented to the G-7 (our leadership team). While I will be concerned for our forces to make sure they are taken care of, I will also look to be part of the leadership team to see the GWA flourish and become the back seat to no other event or organization. I can and want to do this for our forces. I ask for your vote in November.



## Rob Zienta

Approximately seven years ago I joined IR63, where I received my training as a Soldat. During that time, I served as temporary Gefreiter and unit treasurer. Currently, I am the unit field commander of IR23. My family is from Silesia and that is why I have chosen to be a member of Silesian units.

I have been a teacher and school administrator for the past 18 years. My primary responsibilities have been to build community and business coalitions. I have a great deal of experience working with groups and have received numerous national, state, and city commendations for my work. Therefore, I feel very confident that I can work with the Central Powers commanders.

As Central Powers Representative, I will make every effort to strengthen communication and cooperation among Central Powers units. I will serve as liaison between the units and the G-7 to ensure that your issues and concerns are addressed. For that purpose, I propose that we would form a unit commanders' council. This advisory council would ensure that all units (large and small) had a voice in the decision-making process. My desire would be to limit meeting time so that it would not take away from combat. Therefore, most of our work would be done via mail, phone, etc.

I believe that communication is extremely important, because as unit commanders, you and your members need to be aware of decisions that will affect you before they are made! To this purpose, I intend to pursue every effort to get information concerning pending decisions to you prior to action being taken so that your views will be represented. Be assured that my intention is to represent Central Powers units as a group; that is why I feel that establishing an advisory council is a priority.

There is a great deal of work to be done and it is going to take all of us working together. Regardless of background, we all share the common interest of improving the hobby and providing the best experience possible for all involved. Please join me in this endeavor by supporting my candidacy in November.



## For Central Powers Combat Commander:

### Michael E. Gonzales.

**MSM, ACM, AAM, GCM, NDSM, RVnC**

I am a retired Army officer, with active duty as both an enlisted man and a regular officer. My years of service have taken me from the combat zones of Vietnam to the gunnery ranges of Germany, where I was stationed for nearly ten years. I am a graduate of several NCO Professional Development courses, the Armor Officers' Basic course, the Infantry Officers' Advanced course, the Army War College, and I am Airborne-qualified. Today, I am Curator of the 45th Infantry Division Museum, the nation's largest National Guard/State military history museum.

I began reenacting in 1979 with the WWII HRS. Since then, I have done Civil War and Indian War reenacting in addition to Great War. Upon my watch as your combat commander, I have improved communications between this Headquarters and those of subordinate units. My organization of the Central Powers into an Abteilung has vastly enhanced command and control, simplified interior administrative lines of communication, and provided better cohesion between member units.

I bring to the field the impression of a Prussian Infantry Officer, correct in every detail. I possess particular knowledge of the period, the Great War, its uniforms and tactics. My vision of the future is optimistic and energetic! I foresee a period of great expansion for the hobby with our occupation of the new trench site.

It is my intent, upon reelection, to aid with the expansion of the Abteilung through increased membership within units, and new unit formation. I will continue to add to the realism of the events through the accurate reproduction of maps and other paperwork, always striving to enhance your ability to present the best possible impression you can. Right now, I'm in contact with several manufacturers of period footwear, hoping to bring you correct, affordable march boots. And as always, I will provide you with an impeccable impression, leadership by example, and tactical proficiency. Thank you for your support in the past, and I hope, in November.

### Timothy E. Goodwin

#### Personal Background

- ✦ Graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1978 with a B.S.
- ✦ Graduated from the Naval Staff War College in 1991
- ✦ Have 9 years active / 8 years reserve military experience
- ✦ Former Navy pilot
- ✦ Currently self-employed and owner of my own sales agency
- ✦ 41 years old / Married / No Kids

#### Reenacting Qualifications

- ✦ Participated in CW / Rev War / WWI reenacting for the past 20 years
- ✦ Joined the GWA in 1981 / Old Timer
- ✦ Gefreiter IR63 (Squad Leader) 1987-1990



- ✦ Unteroffizier IR63 (Platoon Leader) 1990-1994
- ✦ GWA Treasurer 1991-1993
- ✦ GWA Vice-President 1993-1995

Having an avid interest in military history, I am very excited in what the Great War Association is all about. The historical recreation that we strive to portray is completely different (and in my opinion more enjoyable) than any other period I have been involved with. I have accepted the nomination for the position of German Combat Commander, for with my extensive military background and knowledge of "period" infantry tactics, I believe I can make a good contribution to our hobby. I feel I have done a very credible job in the past as the **GWA Vice President, Treasurer, and Site Committee member**. My duties have included the actual coordination/running of the last three events. I have the time, financial resources, and historical knowledge to fully handle this elected position.

If elected, my goals would be **threefold**:

- ✦ **First**, to make each event as realistic, enjoyable, and safe as possible (this would include the introduction of ground bursts to simulate artillery).
- ✦ **Second**, to push the development of historically accurate trenches at our new site.
- ✦ **Third**, to improve the tactical coordination between the various German units and the German Command structure. Should I be elected, I pledge to work hard for the German cause. If you have any questions, **please feel free to call me**. My home phone number is (614) 427-3544.

*Thanks for your consideration!*

## Proposals

Continued from page 11

and bright flags of 1915 were just as much a part of the war as the Stormtroop tactics and tanks of 1918, and just as important!

4) Last but not least, why not move the Spring event to the end of March rather than the end of April? The weather is better, (cooler, but usually not heavy snow) and for all of our school teacher and student members, maybe we'd hit someone's spring break. This last event was a scorcher. Every Spring event that I can remember has been a scorcher. If we want to reenact in 90 degree weather, let's just do Gallipoli and get it over with. We should also not pay so much attention to what other branches of the hobby are doing, and mind our own when setting the event dates, as we have events too seldom to really worry about this. Those who really want to come, will. Moving the Fall event would probably be a mistake, since it was originally moved to November because of heat, but why not move the Spring?

None of this is intended to provoke anger, but instead to provoke thought. I earnestly hope that I have offended none, but that good things and improvements come of this. Let's get to work!✠

## Editorial

Continued from page 2

for cost, you could save the GWA a goodly amount of money!

- We see a broad horizon for OtW and WWI reenacting. OtW can be a tool to not only educate people about WWI, but also interesting them in WWI reenacting. Hopefully, we can open up subscriptions to OtW to *anyone* who is interested in the Great War, thereby increasing our base for more info on the Great War.

Once again, this issue is heavily weighted in favor of the Central Powers, which is why it became the "Austrian Issue." It would give us such great *joy* to print your Allied (or even Turkish) articles, but first we need to find them in our Feldpost box. If you have any photos and cartoons pertaining to WWI or WWI reenacting, we could use them too!

The deadline for the next issue is *1 January 1996*, so get those cards, letters, photos and computer disks in to our offices **Pronto!**

For those of you who have computers, **PLEASE** submit your articles on disk! Use something like Microsoft Word, WordPerfect (Preferred!), PageMaker, or if possible give it to as a Rich Text Format (.rtf) as a last resort, simple ascii text format (.txt) is good. In fact, we can take stuff off of just about any word processing program, even Macintosh stuff (ick!). A note on this: Give it a SIMPLE and decipherable filename and please, send a hard-copy along with your masterpiece of the Journalistic Art (just in case we DO have a problem getting it off your disk)! Or... if you're really high-tech and up-to-date, send it to us through the Internet. Our e-mail address is:

Sanni1@aol.com

Mail your articles, art, photos (please include a self-addressed, stamped mailer for return of the photo [Hey, at least we're honest about this!]) and/or disks to:

Sue Fisher  
6658 Longwoods Circle  
Indianapolis IN 46254

*Well, that's our bit for this time. We look forward to hearing from you and hope to see you at Newville.*

*Sue & Marsh*

# A Guide to Better Reenacting

## The First Person Impression

By Gefreiter Gerhard Dreisbach,  
IR23 „von Winterfeldt“

**F**irst Person? What's that? How can I do it? These are just a few of the many questions that new recruits might ask in this hobby. Aside from the bewildering mass of new equipment, foreign commands, and endless searching through surplus junk, the "neues Helden," "Paddy" or "Fleisch" coming into the hobby is also faced with oldtimer windbags extolling the virtues of "first person." "First person" out of the trench? The car? The event? Into the food? Multiple personalities? Unfortunately, this arcane art is often assumed to arise instinctively in the re-enactor, and few questions are asked or answered about it.

Basically, first person is the direct portrayal of a participant in the Great War. It is the mental or non-physical aspect of all of our impressions. Anyone can get into a uniform and run around a muddy field with a helmet and rifle, but having a good first person impression is more difficult to do. It is strongly related to character acting, or "living the part," and is truly "living history."

It isn't for everyone, but if even a few practice it well, the whole event can benefit dramatically, and everyone will have a better time. World War One is probably more suited to first person portrayal than any of the other eras of reenacting. The trench, and the subterranean life of the soldiers in it, demands a very high level of living history to make it work, and if we don't try, then why are we here at all? To really achieve the feeling of having seen a small part of the Great War is what we are all here to do, and there is more to this than just the uniform and equipment. The ability to put himself and others in the "period" by using first person is one of the greatest skills that a re-enactor can possess, and the following basic steps can help everyone, including the newest recruit, give it a try.

1) **Choose a Name:** The first thing that you should do is choose your name. There are two different ways of doing this, either by using your own name, or creating a new one. Due to the different nationalities involved in the war, it is often impossible to use your own name, due to the inappropriateness of your name for the nationality you're portraying. Many people simply modify their own name, usually by adding to it.

Selecting a new name can be a lot of fun. You should first look at the types of people in the area that your unit was from. Most of the armies of the great war recruited units from particular areas of their nations, and certain names may be especially appropriate for the area that your unit is from. The second half of choosing a new name is to broadcast it to the other members of your unit, so that it is used. This may take some insistence on your part, but as long as you haven't chosen something impossible to say or remember, it will eventually stick. Just remember to answer to it when called!

2) **Your age:** This is one of the areas that many impressions founder on. When were you born? The best way to find this is to look at the year that you are portraying, (or the beginning of the war if you are planning to stamp your birthdate on a tag) and subtract your age. You can use your own birthday, and a good idea to help your impression is to check the traditional holidays of the nationality that you're portraying, to see if it falls near a period holiday of some sort. This can give you a good item for your impression, i.e. born the same day as the Kaiser, the week after a battle in 1870, the Diamond Jubilee, Ladysmith, during Fasching, etc.

3) **HOME!** This is important to soldiers of every war, and perhaps even more on the minds of soldiers in the muddy trenches of 1914-18. Where was it for your character? Again, look at where your unit is from. The towns and cities of the home district make great fodder for this. Choose one, and if possible, read all you can about it, even studying modern tour guides for pictures. What is the terrain like? The weather? The main industry? If you have some major reason why you don't quite fit or would be unusual, (like English-language tattoos in Germany or Russia) you will need a cover story as to how you got there. If you choose a hometown outside your unit's district, again, you'll need a cover story. Business? Wife's family is from the unit's area? Shanghaied? Unit reputation? Family/Friends already in the unit? Whatever the reason, you'll need it, but will enjoy making it.

4) **Family:** Married? Bachelor? Rake? Who is waiting for you at home? How many brothers and sisters do you have? The size of families had decreased tremendously in Europe, especially Western Europe, since before 1850. It had become a major issue in France in 1890-1910, as the Generals worried about the "baby gap" between France and Germany. Some in the French military were even interested in stopping contraception, so that more future French soldiers could be born.

Again, study where your unit is from. Southern Germans (Roman Catholics especially) had large families. Urban French generally didn't. How are your parents? Grandparents? Is your spouse living? Is it your first spouse? Are all of your children alive? Many of the late Victorians/Edwardians married fairly late, usually in their 20's. This is especially true if you were educated. Uneducated and Rural types might still get married younger, at age 18 or 20. It would be highly unlikely for anyone to get married at 16 or younger, except in Russia, Serbia, or points in-between. It was common for many Germans to put off marriage until after the obligatory two years service with the colors. Divorce was generally extremely difficult, and very uncommon. The education of your family is also something that you should decide, such as has your spouse attended any school?

5) **Your Occupation:** Chances are, that this war thing is not what you do for a living, unless you were 18-20 at the start of the war. If you were, then what did your father do? The rank that you are will have a great effect on the occupa-



tion that you can pick. Officers of all armies were generally either professionals or men of means in civilian life. The enlisted ranks held a huge variety of people, and people from every walk of life were brought together in any unit. Again look at where your unit is from. If farming was common in your area, pick that, or if factories were common, pick worker.

Above all, pick something that you know something about, or study up on the occupation at the local library, so that you can discuss it. If you have a group of friends that all live together, perhaps you should pick something that would have brought you together as a group in civilian life, and invent a story about your enlisting together! Just make sure that your story of your career can hold water. No-one, then or now, can make a farm profitable on 1/2 acre, (legally) and there were precious few—read *no*—airmail pilots.

6) **Your Education:** This would probably be tied to your job that you held in civilian life. Almost all of the people in the various nations of Central and Western Europe could read and write, and most had attended secondary education, like a modern high school. Many were exceptionally well educated by the standards of the American Civil War era. Almost any impression that you choose from the Western or Central European nations should be able to read and write. In the east, the story is different. Russians and other Eastern troops would be the opposite, often being illiterate. Germany had a very good nationwide schooling system, as did Austria-Hungary, England and France.

7) **Your Personality:** So, is the person that you are portraying an easygoing old trench hog, or a snapping martinet? What kind of person is he? You don't have to be the same kind of person that you are in civilian life! Actually, the sort of person that you are might be partially determined by the rank that you are and the job that you have. A drill-corporal would very likely be a strutting martinet, while a supply officer might be a sneering thief. Remember though, that there would be far more good or normal people than the legendary "Col. Blimp" types, and that the SuperHero types were few and far between.

8) **What has happened so far in the War?:** This is not absolutely necessary, but helpful. Find out the nominal dates that the event is set in, and look up the events of the day. What is the news of the war? What has happened to you or your family directly? Has your family lost anyone so far? Have your fortunes prospered or declined? What battle is going on? We are supposed to be historians, and a big part of living history is research. Look it up. Take some notes. It probably won't take very long, if you can keep from just reading all that you see.

Is there some area of the war that you are particularly interested in your real life? Transfer it over! If you like airplanes, look up what the latest models are that each side has out. If you like trucks or motorcycles, look up what the latest developments in them were, or how they were being used. If you like artillery or guns, study the newest things or most interesting new idea of the day. Maybe the Navy and the commerce raiders have your attention, or the war in the colonies. Look it up, and you can talk about it. If enough of us look these things up, it can lead to great discussions and a better experience for us all.

9) **POLITICS:** Yes, the favorite topic of lots of people now, was the favorite of a lot of people then. What do you want out of the war? What kind of politics did you believe in before the war and how have you changed? Remember that politics then

in Europe were far different than politics in the United States now. Communism was a bold new idea, and one that swept through the armies and nations of Europe in 1917-18. There should be communist activists, monarchists, and even democracy activists in the armies of all nations. Defeatists, war hawks and people just wanting to survive would all be there as well. Do you believe in the goal of a greater Empire? What goal, for you, would make all the deaths worthwhile? Why did the war start in the first place?

Most of the soldiers in any army should believe in the system that they are fighting for, or the nation as an abstract idea. But there would also be many who would not believe, such as Communists, leftover Bonapartists, and other groups, especially by 1918.

10) **Language:** We portray soldiers of many different nationalities and languages, and knowing how to speak the language of the nationality that you are portraying is a real plus. Learn it! Chances are, you'll have a fun time doing it, and will learn a lot more about the people that you are portraying. You'll also meet a lot of very fun people, and be able to read all that WWI printed matter that we all collect.

If you know something of the language, even a little bit, you can truly help the other side have a better event as well. This is true from the easiest impression on the field, the Americans, to the hardest to do right, the French or Russians. If the language of your nationality is English, study the dialect. Learn the period slang and the way that people talked then. Remember that "Black Adder" is a TV series, *not* reality, and try to study what the soldiers would have really said.

If you don't have the time or the inclination to study the language, then just try to speak with an accent, and softly. A German loudly speaking English isn't really right, and if you've spent all the money and all the time to get out in the field, why not do it right? We've all been guilty of doing this at times, and will do it again, whether in the heat of action or just exasperation. And of course, no-one can do this the whole event. Just using a few words of your language at the right time can make all the difference. Above all, if you do speak a foreign language, don't be elitist about it. Try to bring others into the conversations that you are having. You might be amazed at how quickly they start to pick up the language! Remember, we're all out here to have fun *together*, not to show off that Doctorate in French or Russian!

11) **Your Unit:** Just look it up and find out some basic facts about it. If you know what it's done so far, or did in the past, you can talk comfortably about it. You might also talk about some of the things that you've done in it, such as how you got up to the line this time, what that last fun trip to Etaples was like, or when the last time that you saw any cavalry in action was. You might also discuss something that has actually happened to your current unit, like an attack several years ago, a lorry going kaput on the way to the event, (the front) or someone doing something especially noteworthy, heinous, or atrocious. When talking about an old battle, remember that just because the history books say one side or the other won it, it didn't have to look that way from your point of view! You would also likely see only a small part of the battle anyway.

You should also know the names of your (reenactment) commanding officer and your ranking NCO. What do you think of them? What company do you belong to, and when did you join it? Why? Are you a volunteer or a conscript? How long are

See "First Person," continued on page 28



# Three Days on the Isonzo

by Dr. Julius Pölzer  
Translation and Annotations by T.W. Grogan

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*The following account of the late Dr. Julius Pölzer came by chance into the hands of my friend, Sepp Leicht, who served in the Austrian Kaiserschützen Regiment Nr. 2 during the First World War, and has been translated and published here with his kind permission. It should be noted that this account originally was written in January 1916 and is, therefore, full of the emotions of the time. Hopefully, no one will take offense at its frankness.*

The conduct of the war on the Dniester<sup>1</sup> had already become entirely "gemütlich." My God—trench warfare with 1000 paces<sup>2</sup> separating frontlines in a region where one doesn't find a single grain of sand even after having dug three meters deep. We constructed earth fortifications in the impenetrable humus which were formal marvels, and laid out wire entanglements again and again and still always further in order to get rid of the large quantity of barbed wire, which they always sent to us from the Divisionskommando. Artillery, we had in substantial quantity behind us—no wonder therefore if we already felt ourselves entirely safe and secure in our earth shelters. We worked diligently on the further extension of our positions. Thus resulted accommodations which were decidedly more habitable than the railway station barracks in Graz.

Quite suddenly we<sup>3</sup> and the rest of the 6th Infanterie Division<sup>4</sup> became detached and were sent after a couple days rest on a frantic journey to the South.<sup>5</sup> Below us the war, which we had nearly forgotten about while opposing the Russians, was again brought into remembrance. I want to try to express three days which I experienced "below" and to convey the hideousness as greatly as possible.

Our position, which we had taken over around midnight<sup>6</sup> under torrential weather, began at the intersection of our Front with the Isonzo River, easily 500 paces from the lower end of the mouth of the Wippach<sup>7</sup> and rested its right flank on the stretch of railway line between the Isonzo and the foot of the Kurst Plateau.<sup>8</sup> From there it extended itself in a very angular and irregular line across the edge of the plateau. At the foot of the railway embankment were inserted two long and tall water passages in the form of well-built tunnels,<sup>9</sup> which formed secure protection for a Kompanie. Our position began there and stretched out across the mountain. This battle position wasn't worse than any of the other many defensive lines which stretched themselves one behind the other deep towards the Krain<sup>10</sup>. I myself thought that our "Herrn Offiziere" hadn't reckoned with the Italian artillery, when they created this layout! It was decidedly not all too suitable. How should boards and roofing felt withstand week long bombardments? The most advanced line may have been the best. But it has unfortunately been abandoned to the Welschen<sup>11</sup> by the "brave and heroic" Honvedtruppen<sup>12</sup>. How so, if each piece of ground that the enemy took from us down there, had "unsurpassable" Honved as defenders?

Hungarians were also in our sector of the Front before our arrival. Certainly they have had to endure much during the five week long "Ari" (Artillery) preparation of the Italians, but

they let the trenches go dreadfully to the dogs. During the night each and every bombarded trench should have again been duly deepened and improved, every breach in the rampart should have been filled in with sandbags, and every tattered obstacle should have been erected again without fail. The Honved apparently did none of this. Generally, I can never remember anywhere, where the Honved left behind a decent position to us. Everything was dirty, filthy, and in a state of ruin. I speak the purest truth—all of my Kameraden of the 9th Feldjägerbataillon can bear witness, that the Hungarians even permitted the Welschen to remove the wire obstacles from in front of each battle line on the brightest of days, as I have just said, only in order to not receive any artillery fire, because if one of them shot at an Italian, then they would thereby run away and thus allow their "Ari" to again aim at the Hungarians, until no more of them was stirring. The Hungarians also hadn't hastened themselves with the removal of corpses.<sup>13</sup> No one can imagine how our new position appeared. The communication trenches to the forward battleline were still maintained to a depth of perhaps one meter; if one sneakily ducked within them, then one was still halfway covered against infantry fire. Naturally these communication trenches were interrupted by numerous shell holes, as well as by the laying therein and about of the badly wounded and the corpses of those which had broken down on the way to the dressing station and died. Although the ground was rocky there lay within the trenches an extremely thick and greasy brown-red layer of mud which had washed together from the folds in the rocks during the down pours of rain. The slough stood in the shell holes often as deep as a man and was hideously intermixed with pieces of corpses, such as shreds of hand skin, intestines, skulls, ribs, and other similar pieces of half-decayed men. Floating about within these pools were bloated corpses, whose flesh was already falling from their skulls in decaying shreds. If then, especially at night, someone who had been badly wounded would want to haul himself to the Aid Station with his last bit of strength, he might fall into such a pool, which would act as a death trap and suffocate him in misery. I, who was at that time healthy and full of strength, fell into such dreadful mud troughs several times, and had to summon forth exertions of all my strength in order to free myself from these thick, gurgling and bubbling mires. The stench is unimaginable. The human sense of smell doesn't hold out and refuses to function—Thank God—after spending a couple of hours in such air, so that this infernal vapor can be completely breathed. Such a plaguing smell must, of course, paralyze the smelling nerves.

## Brook Warfare

Now, these communication trenches had yet another evil side. For as we occupied our position a thunderstorm gave forth with pounding abundance; I thought the down pours in rain-rich Steirerland<sup>14</sup> were nothing more than a mild May shower in comparison. This happens where moisture-saturated sea air collides with icy mountain wind and instantly condenses itself. The bleak rocks absorb nothing, the run off forms innumerable little streams which all become caught by the communication trenches running contrary to their direction. Moreover, the communication trenches had quite a steep slope at many points, whereby a truly fast flowing, chest deep brook



was formed. My Kompanie was inserted at just such a time. It was half-dark, thus incidentally between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. We had to use the trench because the Welschen still had plenty of shooting light with the small distance between front lines of 30-100 paces.

A hundred times the tempest threw us to the ground with its slimy and putrid spray. It bounded upwards at our chests and hurled wooden debris and shreds of corpses at our heads, it seeped into our throats and flowed amongst our legs, where it rolled stones, weapon debris, wire, and shreds of corrugated iron under our stumbling feet. Such were the curses which we thrust aside on this occasion, material that even the earth couldn't support. At last this communication trench came to an end, and we were in the line. Oh God, Oh God, Oh God! Wasn't the Dniester indeed a Paradise! That this should have been a position! Not a trace of chest protection if one disregarded the heaps of corpses which lay in some spots in layers four to five deep. The total cover was composed of a depression that formed the "Schützengraben" (trench) out of the numerous consecutive shell holes that rose up the mountain one next to the other. There were often genuine ponds if one came upon a crater from a 28 cm shell. Until bursting, the bloated corpses would float on top of the multi-colored opalescent mire. Next to and underneath them were wood debris, shrapnel cases, twisted rifles, broken bayonets, lime chloride, shredded sand bags, smashed armored shields, back packs, regimental pieces, roofing felt, coarse blankets, shreds of wire, corrugated iron debris, roots, splinters, shattered by the exploding shells like icicles, and only the Devil knows yet what all else. So it appeared as we got there. There faintly came the order "down!"

#### Glossary of GERMAN TERMS

Arbeiterkompanie .....	Labor Company
Batterien .....	Batteries
Divisionskommando .....	Division
Falotten .....	a worthless good-for-nothing
Feldjägerbataillon ....	Independent battalion of light infantry
gemütlich .....	pleasant, cozy
Hauptmann .....	Captain
Jäger .....	Private (rifleman)
Kamerad .....	Comrade
Kanaille .....	a malicious type, a rogue
Kompanie .....	Company
(at full strength a Kompanie would have numbered approx. 250 men)	
Oberjäger .....	Sergeant-major
Oberleutnant .....	First Lieutenant
Oberstleutnant .....	Lt. Colonel
(normally the commander of a Feldjägerbataillon)	
Offizier .....	Officer
Patrouilleführer .....	Lance Corporal
Pfriem .....	cut of chewing tobacco
Pioniere .....	Pioneers, engineers
Sanitätlern .....	medics, stretcher bearers
Schützengraben .....	Trenches
Schwarm .....	Section
(at full strength a Schwarm would have numbered approx. 14 men)	
Schweinhund .....	swine, scoundrel
Sturm .....	Storm, assault
Unterjäger .....	Corporal
(normally in command of a Schwarm in a Feldjägerbataillon)	
Unteroffiziere .....	Non-commissioned officers
Zeltblatt .....	a portion of a tent
Zug .....	Platoon
(at full strength a Zug would have numbered approx. 80 men)	
Zugführer .....	Sergeant (Platoon Leader)

Consequently, it was into the mud on the edge of a hell hole. The morass gurglingly closed over my rear end. In this manner we lay there. It became always ever darker, with the rain becoming thinner and more constant. Here and there a shot in the vicinity, a chirp of a small Italian bullet, a clattering or, a round of rapid fire above on the summit, a flare, the rumble of a Revolver Kanone<sup>30</sup> a juicy curse soon here, soon there, again a few seconds of quiet, then an Italian search light nosed about over here from Gradiska—so passed the hours. The cursing grew and became heavier.

Near to me one said: "You, Unterjäger, I can't stand this any longer!"<sup>31</sup>

"Me too!" said another from further above.

"Stop the chatter," I said to him, "You must, and I must also."

The one near to me: "You, if this lasts any longer, then I might shoot myself"

"Shit man!"—Again it is quiet. Then a Czech, a detailed 36er,<sup>32</sup> again cries down with: "Pane!" Unterjäger, I can't stand this!"<sup>33</sup>

"Quiet Czech," I said again.

But I myself was already to the point of howling. I drew out my watch and waited until the Welsche searchlight was so obliging, as to illuminate it for me. This didn't take long; it was 10:30. Damn it! I thought to myself, only three hours elapsed and we must hold for 24. That has to be what takes place. The rain also became heavier.

"You," said the one next to me "think the Italians have it so wet as we do?"

"I think not."

"Well for heavens sake, do you know what I think would happen if we blocked the brook up there?"

"Yes!" I roared full of joy. For just a piece further above us was a favorable point for this, since a section of the rampart still remained intact there. If we were to remove the sandbags and block the trench with them, then the brook would shoot down over onto the Italians.

After much exertion I succeeded in extracting my frost-numb bottom from the rubber-like morass and stood myself up. There was no danger with this because it was too dark and gloomy for the Italians to see me and the others. Consequently I waded up there, with my Kamerad behind me. One after the other we put the sandbags down there, and thereby shifted this "Communication Trench Brook." The water had already carried the wildest of the filth to the valley, thereby also making the work easier for us. Soon the water had broken through the rampart and the ditch had been shifted. To weigh down our dam we even threw on a couple of corpses. Immediately we heard the "Polentahengste"<sup>34</sup> cursing, shouting, and making confused noises. The brook shot again wildly downwards and tore with it every possible filth that was in its way. The others had also stood up a little in the meantime, and we now celebrated like children, no, like "Karl May'sche" Sioux Indians<sup>35</sup> after a victory.

We had restored our position, at least a little, since we were already now busy with our work. However, it appeared to have been a hopeless beginning. One didn't know where or what to tackle first. We certainly didn't do anything in order to create a defensive bulwark for the coming day, which we all counted along with certain death, but on the contrary we only did it in order to be able to have ourselves a little rest. No one can relate what it means to be stuck an entire night in his filth. Consequently we threw anything that was loose in front of us as additional cover, such as stones, corpses, dirt, wood, etc. We worked and toiled, despite these things tumbling back numerous times, until we had piled a suitable and relatively high defensive wall before us.



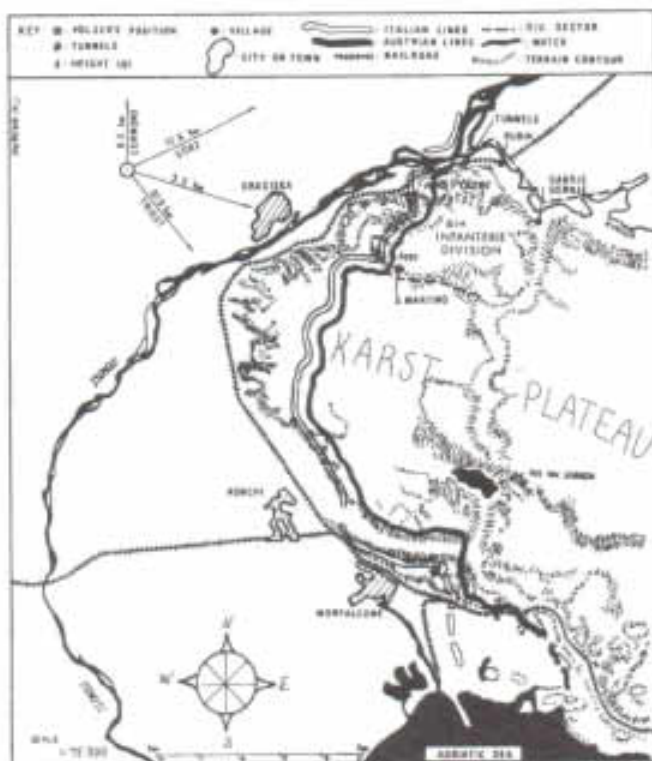
Towards morning the Arbeiterkompanie (Labor Company) brought sandbags up to us. Indeed the mood had already noticeably improved itself while above in the sky a couple of stars stole through some tears in the clouds. As dawn broke I ordered the rifles to be cleaned of dirt, so that there wouldn't be any delays with their loading and firing. Daybreak quickly dwindled. The sky became bluer than I had ever seen it before. The sun came and with it the Welschen shells and flyers. I could now better review the terrain between the two fronts. The Welsche front lay approximately 60 yards away running parallel beneath ours. Curiously, we lifted our heads, which had become crusted over with mud and peered downwards. The scoundrels seemed to have been waiting for this. *Rratsch!* Whipped a volley against us. The bald head of a worthy old Jäger sank silently back along with a Czech. A bright red jet of blood sprang from the mouth of the Patrouilleführer, Grünauer.

"Unterjäger, help me!" he gurgled to me with a look that turned me hot and cold. Then he fell back into the deep shell hole behind him, within which there already floated a couple of dead Honved. He splashed completely under into the morass. I wanted up so as to pull him out, but the mud and slime was so sticky, that I could only bring out my limbs, after some minutes of the greatest exertion, for they had become numb and without feeling due to the cold and unnatural position. Bloody bubbles twirled slowly upwards in the brown-green mire. Suddenly, his body jerked once more to the surface. I saw only the round shape of his head which was covered with morass, the two wide open eyes that seemed to spring forth, and his mouth from which there came red and mud-brown spurts. He cried to me one more sound that seemed to unite all tones which could be squeezed forth from human agony—I believe he wanted to scream "I'm dying!" Then the high splashing filth again devoured him. To rescue him was not to be. Pity on the gallant warrior, I thought to myself. As I looked up to my left, someone was roaring "Medic! Medic!" like a mad man. It was Gspandl, the most lazy and worthless in my Zug. I truly disliked him, and moreover, because he was bad-mouthed and dreadfully infested with lice. But now it utterly got to me since his cry was so remarkably piercing. I crawled over to him and cut off his equipment. He had a throat wound. He assembled yet enough strength to be able to haul himself down to a small branch of the railway. Of course, now if there had only been visible one such scoundrel of the Welschen. I burned with rage over these bandits.<sup>10</sup> They had very nice cover and shot forth from tiny slits masked with grass. And how well they shot! No wonder of course, as in Italy each and every young scamp raced around all winter with a carbine, shooting birds that come from the maledetta terra tedesca.

### The Italians Attack

Soon the artillery shells came, too. Shameful Devils! I become bad tempered yet to this day when I think about this.

How they howlingly crashed into the heaps of corpses that formed our cover—premm—and the shreds flew! Immediately as it started, I received a piece of intestines from a half-decayed Honved's corpse in my face. All the languages in the world can't describe the atrociousness of what came now. Within a moment, the rampart that we had created in the night was swirling high into the air. The muck from the shell holes behind was splashing house high. There was an unbroken crackling, crashing, and howling, as well as the insane shouting and gurgling of the wounded and dying. I pressed myself to the earth and thought of nothing other than that each new breath I took had been a death reprieve which had been granted to me. All at once everything was still. Was the bombardment



or my life ended? I looked up. It could hardly be possible that one out of all still lived. And yet, little by little, everyone who was not wounded raised their heads. I rallied just about half of them. But, otherwise, it appeared dreadful. A few steaming ribs and a piece of scalp lay right next to me. They must have been from Marchler—who had had such beautiful black hair. He was a fanatical Social-Democrat, but also a good and true soldier. Nearly all the other wounded rolled moaning and wailing in the muck. There wasn't the slightest possibility for dressing their wounds. Indeed not one time could one see where the wounds were, other than when there was a limb missing, since we were so heavily covered over with the filth. Some few could, of course, pull themselves together and haul themselves down to the Sanitätslern (medical orderlies). Certainly they often collapsed. Our uniforms were entirely yellow from the "Eskrasit" smoke. The sandbags had been atomized, and the heavy thick, steel plates together with the corrugated steel arches, which we had carried up with great pains and panting lungs during the night, lay all around us shredded into little pieces as if an angry child had torn up a piece of silk paper. While I still stared about entirely silly and not really knowing what my conscious had to be given to understand, I heard shouted from below "AVANTI!" It went through me like a shock. I peered down below and saw them creeping forward, as quick as lightning, in large numbers from their trenches. I had earlier been near to insanity, but the moment that I saw and heard that the authors of everything which had brought me this far were in my vicinity, my hate and anger broke loose with such animal ferocity that I was with one stroke so cold and calculated and thus so prudent, that I am astonished by it yet to this day. I realized here for the first time the power of anger. All senses become quiet when its voice roars, and even the hottest instinct for life is hardly an audible whisper next to it. I jerked up and shouted:

"Shoot—tangent sight 300—the storming enemy before us!"

This regular command tore everyone out of their absent-mindedness. Good Heavens, we are once more indeed soldiers!



And 9th Jäger at that!—our shots “pietsched” out towards the Welschen

“Take deeper aim,” I shouted. “Aim at the Devils.”

Even though they already fell more thickly, I never aimed so cold-bloodedly at a piece of wild game as now upon the “Katzelmacher,”<sup>30</sup> and never have I so surely held off an enemy. How cowardly the pigs were! Each sought to cover himself behind the other; thus they came hence in crowds and clumps instead of in decent “Sturm” columns. They shouted to one another “Avanti! Corraggio!” as they shoved themselves mutually forward. To us this was Justice, for we hit them so much the better. Unfortunately, they soon turned back. They threw away rifles and anything else that was loose, and ran back to their cover like thrashed dogs with their tails retracted. Their wounded cried: “madre, o mia madre!” And the healthy ones, which had come away with their hides unhurt, cursed and swore most pitifully from their trenches. Now it went easier with me for I had peppered off a few magazines without too many shots missing.

### Blooming Violets

But not for long. In a flash—crack came the shells again. This time it was the Revolver-Kanone which again barked at our flank from over there in Gradiška. However, they always shot some meters too far and didn’t cause much damage. It only rained some rocks and earth on us here. This was as yet being endured, when all at once a piece of turf flew before me onto my ready-to-fire rifle. I was intending to hurl it away when I noticed three purple spots on it. They were violets! Actually—genuinely—**blooming** violets! But, at this moment I was not a human being, but rather only a living creature whose nerves were of course too strong to collapse, but were unable to grasp the frightfulness of the moment. I thought to myself that the use of foolish talk about courage, tenacity, bravery, and contempt of death, in such a situation as we now found ourselves, is nothing but an annoying imbecility. Absurd! As if humans were gentlemanly beings in such situations. Here it is drill and military obedience which have become instinct, and anger which brings forth the best and top strength that support, maintain, and motivate a man. I am not superstitious, but to me it was at that time as if providence had thrown them down before me, and thereby promised that nothing would happen to me.

I became entirely more cheerful and laughed about the shells cracking in here. I saw again all at once the blue sky and the golden sun and started—I’m not lying—to hum a favorite melody. I stuck the three violets into my cap rosette and imagined therewith to possess a sort of camouflaged cap against the thousand fold threat of death.

My human requirements also arose into my senses upon this occasion. Namely, as nature certainly demands, I had developed a colossal appetite. I grabbed the breadbag of one of my fallen Kameraden and found it agreeably filled with three excellent tins of meat, a piece of cheese, and a half loaf of bread. With this I was again satisfied, but most unfortunately not for long. The southern November sun is already dully hot for us cool Northerners, but I had also already proceeded to go into this position thirsty; my ration of black coffee having already been consumed. In addition, there had now come the enormous thirst-producing tinned foods and the sharp cheese which I had eaten.

Imagine now for yourselves the scorching thirst that I had to endure. It was maddening.<sup>31</sup> The need for water which we experienced in this Isonzo Hell was a great deal more irritating than on the endless marches in Galacia during the mid-

summer heat; also certainly no trifle. My heart is still saddened today, when I think about how my brave, worthy, and mortally wounded Kameraden cried incessantly “Water! Water!” with their hoarse and inhumanly ringing sounds. And how they—because there was none to be had, drank from the murk in the shell holes, which was intermixed with blood and dissolving corpses, until they died.

The day went on under continuous bombardment. I no longer knew how many men I still had, or whether even one of the 7th Jäger, which were attached to my Zug, was alive. My four Kameraden to my left were still healthy. I ordered that the word be passed to report back who, if anyone, was still alive to our left. My God, even that was also denied. Our position was constantly enveloped in the clouds of the artillery shells; our ears had already spent themselves in the hellish noise caused by the exploding of the big Italian shells. The exploding of a shell came to me as if from a small paper cannon and the crackling of rifles was no longer audible. To me this was a justice of sorts, for at least I couldn’t hear the surely spine tingling wailing of those two Jäger above me who had had their guts torn out by a shell fragment. I only saw the veins in their throats, which were swollen to the point of bursting, the blood gurgling from their mouths, the whites of their eyes, and their hands which were bloodied from rooting about on the stony ground with genuine agony.

So it now continued for hours. I thought of nothing and acted unconsciously. When the Welschen would try and start an attack, I would scream the order to shoot and shoot good! There were few who escaped whom I had taken my sights on. We always threw them back again. And how easily! Our numbers were always dwindling, but despite this, they always ran back again. Towards afternoon they suspended their artillery fire. With a sense of terror, I harbored the ammunition which I now perceived was threatening to run out. Quickly, I sent two men down to the Tunnel after a full crate of cartridges and at the same time, I also gave them the situation report to pass on to the Oberleutnant. I permitted the removal of ammunition from the dead and wounded; thus we were again able to assemble a very small supply. Twelve of my men were still healthy. The others lay dead or dying in their filthy troughs, or they had already drowned and sunk to the bottom of the pools in the shell holes.

I now wanted to personally inquire for myself as to what was wrong to our left. So, I slid on my belly up towards their position like a plantworm. Again and again I came upon the dead and dying.

“Water!” “Help me!” “Bind me!” “I’m hit, my end has come!” “Mother!” “Greet my family back home!” — “Must I die!” Thus and similarly they had called to me. Naturally there were also other dreadful scourges down there which I haven’t written down — I couldn’t linger anywhere and wasn’t able to help anyone. My God that was difficult. Dear, dear, Kameraden were down there, splendid men body and soul.

### More Fearsome than Death

At last, I again hit onto a fresh Zug of the 7th Jäger Battalion. Heaven help us! Between here and my position there was a stretch of about 200 paces in which there wasn’t a single battleworthy man. To be sure, the “Katzelmacher” could stroll through there in a parade march, without us being able to do them much harm. A hot flash passed through all my limbs. The Welschen could storm us at any moment—then the position which had been entrusted to me would be in the care of the Devil himself. Certainly I couldn’t defend it against the innumerable Italians with only a handful of men. I ran down



to my men, not once taking the time to watch the ground and protect myself. I at all times stared only down at the Italians to see whether or not they were already coming, and thereby kicked a dying Kamerad right in the face. I couldn't do anything about it. It had done me more pain than him; namely in my heart. Having arrived back down to my position, I saw that the ammunition also still wasn't there. I yelled to my second in command that he should immediately go back to speed up the ammunition carriers and tell the Oberleutnant that he should, no he must, under all circumstances, send me a Zug as reinforcement, otherwise the position would be lost. It seemed to be too late, for down by the Welschen the pagan uproar had started—as they were already coming forward, crouching and darting quick as cats. I thought not of danger, death, of being wounded, or of being taken prisoner. I thought only about the disgrace of it being related to the Bataillon, that it had been I, under whose command the position had been lost. Just not that, God willing, just not that! The fear of this was more vexing than the fear of death. I roared like a madman to my men "Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!" The Welschen scoundrels seemed to know the unoccupied portion of our front precisely, as their attack was aimed exactly thereon. A lump of mud fell into the breech of my rifle which I had just opened and became stuck therein. I didn't take the time to thoroughly clean it out but hit the breech shut with all of my might and shot. Again one of them threw his arms high and then collapsed. I wanted to recock but the breech wouldn't open. I pulled like a madman. To the left of us the enemy was almost in our trenches—but the breech didn't come out.

### "Nienta granata!"

"The ammunition is exhausted," cried the men next to me. Some had loaded dirty cartridges so they were now having the same problem as myself. On our left, the men of the 7th Jäger couldn't support our flank due to a natural traverse. I grabbed a rock and pushed on the breech bolt with all my weight—it thereby sprang open. I tore out the magazine and wanted to clean the casing containing the feeding mechanism—but of course with what? There wasn't a thread on me that hadn't been covered over with a thick crust of mud. Then—I don't know how—a thought came to me. I took off my cap and tore out the lining which still hadn't become muddy and used it to wipe the dirt out of the cartridge casing. But in the meantime, the enemy was already in the trenches to our left. They scurried in like ants by the dozen. "Let's go. If we sit any longer we'll be taken prisoner!" the man at my side cried to me. "Mount Bayonets!" I roared to him as my answer, with lungs nearly bursting with rage. This was an unnecessary order, if one took it literally, for we had anyhow already fixed our "Pokers" earlier. It served merely as the call for hand to hand fighting. Just then the two men with the crate of ammunition whisked behind me. I flew off to it like a hawk and tore the lid off. And Hurray! They had also brought hand grenades! I laughed with joy as I threw the cartons of cartridges to my men. Despite this, I wouldn't have had anymore time, had the Welschen not been as cowardly as dogs. But each of them wanted to protect himself against us behind some sandbags and consequently no one wanted to be the first to come at us. They strove to create a covering against our flanking fire with reels of wire, instead of coming straight at us along the trench with bare iron. If we had been in their position, we would have cleaned out the 30 or so men that we still had in the trench, without hesitation. Naturally, we didn't allow this gang any time to carry out their intention, but on the contrary, we blew off a very strong fire at them with our new ammunition. This soon

got to their nerves; for we had hardly concentrated our good and well aimed rapid fire upon them than they started something of a pagan hullabaloo over there. One couldn't really make out what they screamed as each strove to push the other forward and thereby utilize him as cover. We peppered our shots into the crowd with bestial delight. A Czech behind me struck a hand grenade and threw it at the Italians. Naturally, it fell much too short despite the fact that this Czech was a good "hurler," the "Ceskey" could all throw well. I was already wanting to curse back to the "Böhm,"<sup>91</sup> on account of this flittering away of the munitions, when I saw with joy and astonishment that the "Katzelmacher" were hurriedly running away. "Nienta granata!" they cried in high Caruso-tones as they ran back towards their original position, having thrown everything which was loose from their bodies. We cheered and bawled like silly Berliners. The "Böhm" said: "joje kaketooro" as he stuck a "Pfriem" of tobacco to his seal like snout. In any case, he certainly attributed the enemy's flight to the effect of his grenade. If he survives the war he will no doubt relate this to his countrymen in Caslau or Leitomicl with proud satisfaction. I don't begrudge him the glory. He was furthermore one of the best from among our 36er.

The attack had been beaten off, though of course I had a foreboding, that it might not be the last, which would be made on our position today. So I went with the proper assumption that the Welschen would now at any moment bring together a violent artillery fire upon the point on which we laid, inasmuch as it was from there that we had expelled them through our flanking fire. For this reason I shifted my men and myself, sliding on our bellies, to the left, into the same portion of the trench from which they had just taken flight. From there on I distributed my men appropriately for the defending of the area. We found therein, a considerable number of enemy dead and wounded, which were comforting themselves by moaning and crying "grazie!" while they wallowed in the mire. We weren't able, nor did we dare, rescue them from the shots with which we had just "redeemed" them, for we would have given away our position, which the Italians presumed to be unoccupied. The "Böhm" took a stone into his hand and used it to hammer about on the head of the one who cried out the most until he was silent. The Jäger Pichler, who was in civilian life a shoemaker and convict, took his extra sharp bayonet down from his rifle and stabbed to death the remaining wounded. I didn't desire to look on. This guy was the most brutal beast that I knew. He had already distinguished himself in the early battles in Galacia through his cruelty and technical skill with the hanging of traitors. As a soldier he was otherwise very brave and extremely obedient. As a Kamerad he was immensely generous, cheerful, and true. To his grim joy he discovered all kinds of treasures on the dead Welschen, whom he thoroughly searched. He examined each object which he found and rejoiced over it like a child under a Christmas tree. He didn't perceive one whiff of the hideousness of the moment.

My hypothesis proved itself correct. There cracked a salvo, one after the other, into the position that we had occupied earlier. They seemed to want to thoroughly smoke us out and to bombard us steadily into nothingness. We didn't budge an inch, except to prepare the ammunition and hand-grenades. I was becoming anxious again. The reinforcements, which must be coming at any moment, couldn't advance forward since the "Katzelmacher" were keeping the approach path to our position under artillery fire. Soon down below an entire wave of men surged forward from the enemy trenches and rolled themselves against us. We shot like fools. But what was the use, even if we did also cause many Italians to tumble head over



heels. "Hand grenades" I cried, as they came onto the appropriate distance. They hesitated slightly at this point and even scattered and ducked but then they again jumped up and forward. Ever closer this "wave" rolled toward us. Our kills almost could no longer overtake them. When all at once I heard a comforting and lively crackling to my right. A Zug of reinforcements had arrived from the 1st Kompanie. The robust Zugführer immediately grasped the situation and allowed his group of men to quickly dash into the enemy's flank. There arose a murderous whirlwind to my left, where there was already hand to hand fighting, but the Welschen now felt horror over the flanking fire, and were undecided as to whether they should storm our trenches completely or flee backwards. In any case they would rather have done the latter, but their reserves sprang forth at once out of their trenches. I noticed a sabre (still permitted by the Italians) sparkling in the evening sun, down with the reserves. I brought it forth exactly on my sight and shot down this officer. He must have been a superior officer, since five, six, then seven of his men sprang instantly to him, or in any case they jumped to save themselves from our lead. So it now went exactly as it had so often with the Russians: hardly was the "Capitano" gone than the noble Romans fully lost their dash and turned themselves around to a hurried retreat. We crackled into the crowd around the fallen officer, which then also promptly and howlingly broke itself up. This then was the general signal for the retreat. Where one of them turned around, he was immediately joined by a large number of other. There now came something very comical up to the left where they had already penetrated and suppressed the two men that I had posted there. These Italians, who saw the flight of their comrades next to and behind them, now didn't know what they should do. We hurled some hand grenades over there and they then sprang out of the trenches like scalded cats. They wanted to run after their comrades, but we shot down the first of them. As the furthest of them collapsed, the others played dead, almost as if on a common "Down" command. That seemed absolutely suspicious to us, so the Jäger Washl broke cover taking a hand grenade in each fist, and moved towards these "dead" men. Coming onto about 20 paces of them, he hit the two hand grenade detonators together and threw them over to the Welschen. Whereupon they rose up

and ran screaming horribly down towards their trenches. Of course, we shot them all down as they ran back down towards their own lines. All except one that is, who hadn't the presence of mind to disappear before the fuses of the grenades burnt down and exploded. He stood fearfully motionless and only cried: "Not hand grenades!" Whereupon both exploded and killed him.

### A Brief Respite

The Welschen had had enough for this day. Their artillery was also silent. Nevertheless I remained at my post for several more hours and then went back down to the Oberleutenant, in order to report the day's events to him. He gave me a glass of very fine Schnapps, which comforted my throat in an entirely suitable way. Then he sent me to the Bataillon Kommandanten with a report. I ran into the acting Oberjäger along the way. I was to be most pleased by what came from his mouth, as he ordered me to assemble the men of the 4th Kompanie, for we were to now again come into the reserve for the night. Imagine for yourselves the effect this angelic tidings had upon me. I was physically and mentally drained, exhausted and debilitated, crazed by thirst and hunger, and generally suffered from all that only a human being could possibly endure. But I again became entirely well with the order from the Oberjäger.

Having again reached our position, I summoned down all the men of the 4th Kompanie. The front line duty was then taken over by the Zug of the 1st Kompanie, that had come as reinforcements. I assembled the men below. I was barely able to bring together one Zug from the entire 4th Kompanie. I had furthermore experienced, at this place, the deaths of many, many dear Kameraden along with the entire Unteroffiziere of the Kompanie, with the exception of the acting Oberjäger and myself.

We all allowed ourselves to be taken into one of the previously described tunnels and fell immediately into a drained and exhausted half slumber. All at once I heard my name. I was already wanting to instinctively shout "here"—however, it suddenly occurred to me that my tired bones and I would perhaps again have to carry out an order. I therefore pulled my damp Zeltblatt over my head and positioned myself as if I

were asleep in the hope that no one would find me through the enormous confusion in this nearly dark tunnel. Unfortunately, a real blockhead next to me shouted: "Here he is!" I indignantly snarled and cursed and asked just for what in the devil they would already again be wanting of me and my ill treated joints. The Oberjäger announced to me that the Hauptmann had ordered that I should go and fetch our Pioniere from Gabrje Gornje. It was nine o'clock in the evening. I slandered heaven, earth, and hell for this order which I had just received. Naturally it didn't help. Ouch, pain! My joints! It seemed to me like they had been rusted for a long time. I handed my rucksack to the dumb devil next to me, waging and damning all the while. At last the Oberjäger recommended that I shut up and I then took up my rifle and ammunition pouches and set myself in motion with a sigh. It was again pouring horribly outside. Gabrje Gornje lay about



"Wasn't the Dnjester indeed a Paradise!" Austro-Hungarian soldiers relaxing on the Russian Front, 1915. (T.W. Grogan photo).



two hours into the Wippach Valley. The road within this valley could become constrained by the Welschen through shell fire any time day or night. It was over this path that our poor, poor medical personnel now had to make their way with all the wounded men. The entire length of the road was full of groups of tired figures dragging themselves forward. The night was really raven black.

From across the Isonzo two Italian search lights caused a very subdued reflection of light to come back down to earth. One was now able to see the groups of wounded as they dragged themselves along this shell ravaged road. There were many who were sighing and moaning as well as many who were as pleased as punch since they were only lightly wounded and had now overcome this "witches' abbot." I couldn't take the time to linger with the various acquaintances that I met from my Bataillon, but on the contrary, I marched straight on like a good soldier, despite the fact that it made my head spin. Behind the village of Rubia, this otherwise good road became very narrow as it squeezed itself through a thicket of all types of bushes. This village was bombarded day and night by the Welschen shells. But despite this, all types of military requirements, such as boards, water, sand bags, splints and other such things needed at the front, were brought up during the night from the main supply station to this village, from where they could then be hauled into the front lines by the men themselves.

### A Magyar gets his Due

A Hungarian supply column consisting of about a dozen wagons was just starting to make its way back to the main supply station, having just brought up boards and some other things required for the construction of a defensive shelter. I overtook the entire column behind Rubia at the point in the road which I just mentioned as being hemmed in by a thicket. The horse drawn carts took up the entire width of the road so that I had a hard time pressing past this column in the dimness, as it slowly wormed its way through. I now moved forward with difficulty, pushing aside the wet plants which were continually peppering me in the face, all at once I saw white bandages become illuminated. They belonged to wounded soldiers who had been overtaken by the supply column. For better or worse, they were now pushing themselves into the thicket in order to avoid being trampled down by the horses. I called to them. They identified themselves as men of the 7th, 8th and 9th Jäger Bataillons, while they cursed in their Steirisch, Karnterisch, and Krainerisch tongues about the steeds. I wasn't surprised by this, as the rudeness of the Magyars was sufficiently well known. I wondered why the wounded didn't sit themselves up onto the empty wagons, instead of trying to press past the column with such difficulty. I asked one of the Jägers why they hadn't done this. With abusive language, he then related to me that the driver wouldn't allow them up onto the wagon, and that he threatened them with his whip. With that I felt anger swirling within me. I called up to the driver, who was guiding the cart next to me. "Nemdudom," he snarled back. I shouted to him once more. As his answer, he cut loose on his horses. I did a quick jump forward and descended onto the bridle and the reins. The horses stood up on their hind legs and then stood motionless. The column faltered to a stop. "Sit yourselves up there," I cried to the Jäger, several of whom didn't allow me to say it a second time for they had immediately gone about getting up onto the wagon. At that the noble Magyar shouted, "nemsabat!"<sup>102</sup> and grabbed for his whip. I didn't concern myself about that and continued to urge the Jäger onto the

wagon. With this the Hungarian snatched out his whip and fell upon the wounded with it. I felt the blood surge and rise in my throat. It came forth as a strangling lump with my rage. I have never been hot tempered, but here I fully lost my self-control. With a furious cry of rage, I let go of the reins and flew at the driver of the cart. I tore him down from the wagon, wrung the whip from out of his fist, and then flung, no, smashed him onto the rocky edge of the road. I then proceeded to let the lashes whip down on this "Kanaille" with all my available strength, so quickly, one after the other, that I had already put it to him three to four times before he could even think about standing back up. However, the lash soon became caught in a tree branch above me, and thus the Hungarian sought to use the resulting pause to jump up at me. But I gave him such a juicy kick, that he again flew back to the ground. I pulled with all my might on the entangled whip until finally the lashes tore apart. I then proceeded to let loose onto the "Falotten" on the ground with the resulting whip handle. He rolled himself together there like a hedge hog and howled like a dog when it hears music. The more I hit on him, the more frenzied I became. I soon broke the whip's handle. I slammed on his head with the stub end of the whip and then flew at the "Schweinhund" with bare fists—that is to say that my fists did less here whereas my feet did more. I had thrown my rifle aside when I had restrained the horses. This was his good fortune. Otherwise, I would have smashed his head in with the stock. I stepped on him, stomped on him, and knocked around on him, in the places where I had just hit him. At the start he defended himself as he dreadfully screamed and cursed; but soon he became stiller and stiller and gave up all opposition. I don't know how long I had cut loose on him in this manner. At last he became completely still and unconscious and I became tired and breathless from the anger and the exertion. "Now he is finished." "He deserved it," said the wounded Jäger who had just witnessed this as they called down to me their appreciation and approval. I wasn't at all embarrassed by them nor by what I had done. On the contrary, a feeling of boundless satisfaction came over me.



Dated 23 September 1915, this photograph shows a fully uniformed and equipped Austrian infantryman. Of interest is its original caption: "Franz Schürer of k.u.k. Landwehr Infantry Regiment 24 writes home to his mother in Rochester, New York, for cookies and chocolate, complains about lack of cash." (Photo courtesy of Richard J. Lundstrom).



I wondered greatly why the other drivers hadn't hastened to the aid of their Kamerad. Since they didn't see a rifle or a backpack on me, and since I had pulled a "Billroth-Battist" of an Oberjäger over my usual coat, they seemed to have mistaken me for an Offizier. This is very easily understood when one considers the confusion, the dimness, and my threatening roar of rage with which I let my blows whiz down. Further back there were two drivers sitting on one wagon. I leapt back, fetched one of them down from the wagon, and gave him charge of the vacant team of the so badly mauled supply hand. I then loaded the wounded onto the empty wagons and went on my way. Let no one who reads this call me a brute! It would have been a pitiful chap who would have handled it differently had he been in my position. Yet to this day I still feel sincere satisfaction over this behavior of mine. Thrashing on the wounded with a whip! Is there anything over which one could become more wild? A man who had it better in war than in peace, who slept when we kept watch, who was dry when we were swimming for days in the damp morass, who was safe behind the firing line while death threatened us a thousand times over, who drank and ate himself full while we were with thirst and hunger, and who attacked the wounded with a whip! I have paid him back with his own stuff. The dog wasn't dead, but I discovered later on the next day that because of bone breaks and contusions he would have to be sent to a hospital.

I arrived in Gabrje Gornje around midnight and fetched the men. Nothing special came to pass on the way back with the men.

### Back to Hell

Having again arrived back at the Tunnel, I dutifully handed the men over to the *Battillonsadjutanten*, and then disappeared to again take my place in the Tunnel, which someone else had occupied during my absence. But I was ruthless enough to fling him down from that portion of the wooden framework that was mine, and again occupy my place. Naturally, I quickly fell into a bear's slumber, from which I wouldn't be awakened again until the next afternoon—that is, the afternoon of the same day namely when it was commanded:

"Fourth Kompanie keep battle alert!"

I slung my rifle and gathered my little horde outside, or as one may want to say, behind the Tunnel. However, there wouldn't be anything in the way of a battle engagement on this day, for they didn't require anything more of us.

It wasn't too long before night time came that we took up the duties of the Reserve Kompanien. That is, the carrying of food and drink to the men in the firing line, the filling of sandbags, the repairing and adjusting of the bulwarks, the burying of the dead, and other such similar things. These tasks were extremely laborious. Around midnight we received our rations as usual.

The morning came and we had to again steal ourselves into the firing line. "Good God, receive my young life with favor" we each thought to ourselves. I even spoke it out loud. "Up the stairs! Up! Up!" cried the Oberleutnant, yet he was barely audible amidst the hellish noise of the enemy's rapid firing artillery, which was so loud that his otherwise very good voice of command was outdone by all the crackling. A half-Zug from one of the other Kompanien, the 2nd I believe, led by an Unterjäger, ran up to the wooden step which led up over a rocky precipice and into the threatened position. Up! Up!" he cried—more to himself, I believe, than to his men. He ran, followed by a Schwarm of his Jäger, blindly up towards the position through the obstacle of the exploding shrapnel which the Welschen had placed in the way. *Hiu, Hiu, Hiu—prem,*

*prem*, came the shots as they howled up there and whistled smack into the crowd of men who were just preparing to exit from the upper portion of the steps. There came a simultaneous crying out and five torn and tattered bodies fell back down the steps, tearing with them several others who were about to make their way up, and finally plunged with a huge splash into the pool of Morass which stretched itself out in front of the foot of the steps. Sanitäter ran to them there—but it was in vain. The Oberleutnant again cried "Up! Up! Up!" and thus once again the balance of the half-Zug sprang forth and up the stairs. Hardly every other one made it to the position.

"Unterjäger Pölzer, up the stairs with the 1st and 2nd Schwarm!" the Oberleutnant commanded. I shouted to my men that they should pass over the steps into the position one at a time, as otherwise, it would have gone the same for us as it had before with the other. I then flew up the stairs, as three shrapnel shells again cracked into the top of the steps, just in front of me. I scurried through the foul cloud of powder smoke and was again in the front line. Naturally, I immediately threw myself down to the ground. Behind me I could hear my men hastening up to me. I shouted to them to lie down to my left. Nearly every other one was hit on the way up.

I now became entirely unaware of anything. This seemed to me to be like a Gramophone record on which life itself had been loudly scratched. I felt no trace of anxiousness nor fear of death, no thought of God nor the eternity, nor anything else that would otherwise lead my memory to bring thoughts of death before my eyes. I acted instinctively, in that I pulled out my spade and began to dig ceaselessly and laboriously, with my head pressed down to the ground. How difficult it went! The earth was thoroughly interwoven with clothing, human shreds, rifle debris, and pieces of iron. These things were all over the place and continually hampered the penetration of my spade. Moreover, there is no way to relate how difficult this work was for me, as my right wrist isn't very strong and is quickly exhausted because of a bone break that didn't heal properly. It wasn't long before I came upon yet even another obstacle. I had struck onto a corpse with this strenuous digging. Not that I shuddered with its presence, since such feelings weren't suitable for the moment. I was merely annoyed by this obstacle, which as again restricting my spade. I had no other choice than to unearth and take out the corpse. After some time of much exertion, I had, I hoped, scraped away enough earth so as to be able to extract the dead man. I carefully knelt myself up, that is, I supported myself with my right knee on one edge of this excavation and my left knee on the other, so that the corpse came to lay between my feet. Then I grabbed at him. My heavens, this guy was heavy! I pulled and tore, and tore and pulled so much that the shattered ribs of the dead man were crackling and grinding. Of course I wasn't able to bring him out, so I decided to stand up in order to be able to employ more strength. Thus I exposed myself to the Welschen down below, but with that I succeeded. I rolled the cadaver out in front of me in such a way to improve the little bit of cover that I already had.

### Further into the Depths

But as I then looked back into the pit—Heaven help!—there lay inside yet another corpse. I was only able to see it then, after I had removed the first that had laid over it. Even as I was still considering whether I should pull it out too, there puffed over there from the flank—sississississi—. As quick as lightning I threw myself into the hole on top of the other corpse. It was already fully seized by decay and as I lay with



my weight completely on it, there gushed out onto my body a most putrid excrement through a bullet hole in the dead man. There was nothing I could do. I had to remain lying in this hole because the enemy machine gun didn't cease firing at our flank. Damn, the shots were barely zipping over my back, and every moment there howled a man who had been hit. Naturally, there wasn't any helping the poor devils, since anyone who raised himself up was instantly peppered by bullets. One man went to turn himself onto his other side, but even though his twist was lightning quick, he still caught three bullets in his shoulder. This continuous fire lasted surely an hour, although the time that I spent on this swollen, draining, and gurgling cadaver whose black skin was already beginning to loosen itself from skull, seemed to last a thousand eternities. There simply aren't words and sentences which are sufficient for the portrayal of such hideousness.

I learned from an ammunition carrier that our Artillery shot the Welsche machine gun section to pieces with a few well placed shells. I then crawled cautiously out from my pit and drew a deep breath since I had hardly dared to breathe for as long as I had had to lay therein. It appeared to me as if I were climbing out of my own grave. I forced myself to also lift the second corpse from out of the hole. However, the hand that I grabbed it by tore off because it was already rotted through. So now I had to again take hold of the slippery and slimy torso and roll it out. There then came a third cadaver into view. I had had enough. I didn't take it out, but on the contrary, I threw a thin layer of dirt over it and then laid myself on this. It seemed to me that I must have laid down on a shell hole that had been filled up with corpses and so employed as a mass grave, as was generally the custom down there. As already previously mentioned, it wasn't possible to recover the corpses during the time of the Isonzo Battles, which went on non-stop seven days a week. One had to cover them lightly with dirt right on the spot and in this case a welcomed shell hole was utilized for this purpose.

### Imminent Doom

Our area had become noteworthy quiet. What does this stillness mean? Had the Welschen been convinced of the futility of their painstaking exertions or had they some new devilry in mind, having used the pause in the struggle for the collection of their strength? I was right, as I had assumed the latter. Soon it came: wrr-wrr-wrr—I had already come to know this noise very thoroughly. When we were out on the Dniester, we were sincerely gratified to take careful note of this noise whenever our heaviest Morser would shoot over our heads to cause a hot hell for the Russians. It sounded sort of like the rollers of a slowly driven tram, only amplified many times over. The following explosion sounded like a salvo from a thousand guns. 800 meters away from the point of impact of such a giant bomb, there still resulted soldiers badly wounded from being struck by stones. They shot over here with their Naval Guns from Cormons. Our Batterien couldn't engage them because of the continuous fog and mist. Their shots howled far above and landed into where the 11/e (ersatz) Kompanie and the 8th Jäger impacted a little bit further behind the first, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, etc., with each continuing on in this way. That is to say that there was always a steady interval from one sudden impact to the other and thus each explosion came ever onward and closer to my location. They were genuinely thorough and cleaned out the trenches with complete precision. My gaze was firmly fixed upon the points of impact. I had counted approximately nine shells when the tenth exploded yonder, where the midpoint between

me and the first point of impact would want to be. Consequently, I thought to myself, ten more and I'm a dead man. Moreover, I had already prepared my own grave. I looked all around myself at the corpses of many, many familiar and unfamiliar Kameraden and thought of how I would also soon be among them as a rotting mass of flesh, over which my Kameraden, who would still continue to live, would cursingly trip during the night. My best comrade in arms wouldn't recognize me any more since my face was already covered over with the morass. He might possible trample on my face, slip on my skin as it became slippery from decay and loosened from my skull, and then curse insultingly about the damn corpse obstructing him in his crazy mad rush of hurrying from one place to another, as I had done on so many others. There was no possible rescue. The abandonment of the position didn't come to mind. To make myself scarce, no, not even at the price of my life.

I counted the bombs and estimated after each how much the distance between the previous impact and myself had been reduced. Premm—six more yet—Premm—five more yet—Premm—still four more—. As they came ever closer so the crash of their explosion became more unbearable to my ears. Their detonation was nearly equal to a blow to the head with a club. Whewee—Premm—I was nearly stupefied and was only roused by the blotches of earth which pattered down on me. The stones whistled over my head as they were forcibly vaulted high into the air. That one was the third to last by my calculations. One more and then it's my turn. There wouldn't be much trace of me left, I told myself. I heard the second to last coming. I am of the opinion that it was the last which was of any importance to me; a howling whistle that made my heart stand still, a crunching blow to my ribs and spine, and at the same time, a single flash of thought that was ultimately expressed all at once and cried forth: Death! I'm dying! Father! Adieu! Home! Future! Finished! Night! Nothing!

### Resurrection

"Hell, but is this one heavy."

"He has always crammed himself full"

These were the two voices I heard as I awoke. I felt as if I existed merely out of pieces and fragments which someone had thrown together onto a stretcher. It took awhile before I could force my badly confused brain to perceive that I was still alive and laying on a stretcher being lugged by two "Sanitätler." I ventured hardly a breath and kept myself from saying anything or from otherwise stirring, and again soon sank into a stupor that lasted the entire night.

I am merely able to remember a room with fine shavings of wood spread out on the floor whose furniture and accommodations had been built from a few boards and crates. There was always a steady stream of new and freshly wounded soldiers flowing in.

The freshly arriving wounded related how our last reserves of all, namely the Pioniere and the Telegraphisten, had also already been inserted into the line. The Kompanie of "Sanitätsmannschaften" had also been so drained and exhausted that some of them dropped to the ground. I was then loaded onto a wagon and lead to Volce-Traga, where we were loaded into a train, and proceeded to the Hospital.

Thus were my three unforgettable days during the Fourth Battle of the Isonzo<sup>28</sup>. ✠

*Postscript:* Dr. Polzer survived the war to become a successful singer and appeared many times at the Bavarian State Opera.



## Footnotes

- The Dniester River flows from the Carpathian Mountains to the Black Sea. It represented the front line between Austria-Hungary and Russia during the autumn of 1915.
- The 6th k.u.k. (Imperial and Royal) Infantry Division began its journey away from the Russian Front on 23 October 1915. It arrived in the vicinity of Pivavina and Reifenberg between 28 October and 1 November, and then proceeded to march up to its new position on the "Southwestern Front." (See: *Geschichte des k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillons Nr. 8, 1808-1918*, by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jakob Baza, Klagenfurt, 1974, page 408, as well as: *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. III, Vienna, 1930, Beilage 10).
- The probable order of battle for the 6th k.u.k. Infantry Division during November 1915 was as follows:
  - 11. k.u.k. Infanterie Brigade:  
k.u.k. Infanterie Regiment Nr. 7  
k.u.k. Bosnisch-herzegowinisch Inf. Regt. Nr. 2
  - 12. k.u.k. Infanterie Brigade:  
k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon Nr. 7  
k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon Nr. 8  
k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon Nr. 9
  - Division Kavallerie:  
5th and 6th Schwadron from k.u.k. Dragonerregiment Nr. 5
  - 6. Feldartillerie Brigade:  
k.u.k. Feldkanonenregiment Nr. 9  
1. Div. k.u.k. Feldhaubitzenregiment Nr. 3
  - The 6th Infantry Division was recruited from the district of the III. Korps which was headquartered in Graz.
- south: "Southwestern Front" as it was designated by the Austro-Hungarians, or the "Italian Front" as it is more popularly known.
- "Below": "The Hell on the Isonzo." This is what this area was widely called by the Austro-Hungarian soldiers. (See for example: *Die Hölle am Isonzo*, by Georg Geßler, Berlin, 1940.)
- This date is not known for certain, but it was probably the night of 2-3 November 1915. A minor front-line position was lost to the Italians on the 3rd of November due to a bad transfer of responsibility from the k.u. Landwehr (Hooved) Infanterie Regiment Nr. 3 and the k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon Nr. 8. This, in turn, led to something of a controversy between the Austrians and the Hungarians in regard to who was at fault and why it had happened. (See: *Geschichte des k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillons Nr. 8, 1808-1918*, by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jakob Baza, Klagenfurt, 1974, pp. 408-415.)
- Wippach: Wippach River.
- "...the Carso (i.e. Karst Plateau) formed 'enormous natural fortresses,' the Carso being 'a howling wilderness of stones as sharp as knives.'" (See: *The Battle of Caporetto*, by Cyril Falls, New York, 1966, page 8). "The grim and forbidding limestone plateau of the Carso, 'a howling wilderness of stones,' made entrenchments difficult, and the splintering stone multiplied the effects of fire. During the autumn and winter the plateau was swept by rain and snow, while during the summer months heat and the lack of water inflicted additional hardships on the armies." (See: *The Army of Francis Joseph*, by Prof. Günther E. Rothenburg, Purdue Press, W. Lafayette, Indiana, 1976, pp. 187-188).
- Krain: the Austrian province of Carinthia.
- "Moreover with the equipment then available, the building of good trenches was almost impossible in the rocky ground, and during the yearlong fighting along the Isonzo (in 1915), the Austro-Hungarian Army had failed to devise an efficient way of constructing trenches. The troops paid heavily for this. The 'trenches,' even in the most favorable conditions were constructed in three layers. The bottom layer was hacked out of rock, the next consisted of broken-up rocks and this was, in the third layer, finally topped with sandbags. The preliminary fire from the Italian guns regularly levelled the sandbags and rocks and thus filled up the lower third of the cover available to the Austrians." (See: *Purnell's History of the First World War*, London, 1970, "Austria on the Defensive," by Dr. Friedrich Wiesner, page 1230).
- Welachen: Italians or French. It is used here in reference to the soldiers of Italy.
- Hooved: a Hungarian word which means literally "Homeland Defender." It is used here to describe the soldiers of the k.u. (Royal Hungarian) Landwehr. In 1917 Kaiser Karl of Austria officially changed the title of these units to k.u. Hooved.
- The Hungarians referred to here were men of the 20th k.u. Landwehr (Hooved) Infantry Division. The men of this division had just endured the Third Battle of the Isonzo which lasted from 18 October 1915 until 5 November 1915. This battle cost the Italians 67,000 casualties and the Austro-Hungarians 42,000. (See: *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. III, Vienna, 1930, page 42, as well as *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, by Anton Wagner, Vienna, 1968, page 102).
- Steierland: or Steiermark, is the Austrian province of Styria.
- "It was sheer hell for the Austro-Hungarian soldiers on the Karst Plateau. The limestone made the construction of lines and trenches doubly difficult, splintering stone increased the effect of the Italian's fire, heat and a lack of water resulted in agonizing living conditions and the fact that there was no vegetation for protection or camouflage restricted movement and aggravated problems of supply. The heavy autumn and winter rainfall made it similarly difficult for the Italian troops situated in the low-lying plains. The ground was transformed into a swampland, in which every trench and dugout was filled with water." (See: *Purnell's History of the First World War*, London, 1970, "Austria on the Defensive," by Dr. Friedrich Wiesner, page 1236).
- Because of its conduct during the engagement near Sieniawa on 26 May 1915, the k.u.k. Infanterie Regiment Nr. 36 (in 1914: 95 percent Czech, 5 percent other) was disbanded and its number dropped from the list of army regiments. This was done by a decree from Kaiser Franz Joseph a few days after the battle as the result of a request put forth by the regiment's commander. It never was to be reinstated and the majority of its men were consigned into more reliable units of the III. Korps. This disgrace only befell one other k.u.k. infantry regiment throughout the Austrian Army's long history. This was the k.u.k. Infanterie Regiment Nr. 28 from Prague, and it came about as a result of its conduct near Zboron on 3 April 1915. However, this regiment eventually was allowed to reform about one year later, partially due to the fine conduct of its XI March Battalion on the Isonzo during the autumn of 1915. But after it was reformed many Sudetenland Germans also were included in its ranks to help ensure its reliability. (See: *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. III, Vienna, 1930, various pages).
- Pane: a Czech word with a meaning somewhere between "you" and "mistake."
- Polentaheggen: Polenta—the national dish of Italy. It is something of a corn meal mush, and its use dates back to ancient Rome where it was consumed by Caesar's legions. Hengste—stallions, jackasses or the male of other similar animals, such as the zebra.
- The Austro-Hungarians felt especially justified to use such terms as "scoundrels" and "bandits" in regard to the Italians due to the ill feeling caused by Italy's Triple Alliance upon the outbreak of hostilities, her subsequent efforts to "blackmail" Austria-Hungary into surrendering substantial amounts of territory in return for neutrality and finally for her "stab in the back" when she joined the Allies by declaring war on Austria-Hungary on 23 May 1915.
- Katzenmacher: Kettlemakers—a name used by the Austrians for the Italians. It was descended ostensibly from the Middle Ages when it had been a designation used almost exclusively with reference to the Italians, since they made and exported kettles to Austria. (See: *Das Infanterieregiment Nr. 47 im Weltkrieg*, Vol. I, by Ludwig Freiherr von Vugelsang, Graz, 1932, page 361).
- "Bohm": a Bohemian.
- zemasbat: Magyar word for "act into there."
- The Fourth Battle of the Isonzo lasted from 10 November until 14 December 1915. Casualties during this battle were 49,000 men for the Italian Army as compared to 25,000 men for the Austro-Hungarian Army. (See: *Geschichte des steirischen k.u.k. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 27 für den Zeitraum des Weltkrieges, 1914-1918*, by Oberst Hermann Fröhlich, Graz, 1937, page XIII, as well as *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, by Anton Wagner, Vienna, 1968, page 103). Any confusion over the dates of the Third and Fourth Battles of the Isonzo is best explained by the following passage: "Having filled the gaping holes in his ranks and further increased his artillery, Cadorna (the Italian commanding general) tried again on October 18. In the Third Battle he again directed his main offensive on Gorizia (Goriz), but this time he had resources sufficient for flanking attacks—on the right over the Carso (Karst Plateau), on the left against Pavia on the left bank of the Isonzo 12 miles south of Caporetto. Again, after the attack had petered out on November 4, he renewed it in the so-called Fourth Battle, beginning on November 10, and lasting to December 2. Once more he accorded the honor of two names to what was really one battle. It was a dubious honor indeed for all but the Italian infantry, which in many cases showed splendid courage in hopeless tasks, but it is to be feared that the double title was gassed." (See: *The Battle of Caporetto*, by Cyril Falls, New York, 1966, page 9).
- Further mention of the tunnels can be found in: *Geschichte des k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillons Nr. 8, 1808-1918*, by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jakob Baza, Klagenfurt, 1974, page 412, as well as *Geschichte des steirischen k.u.k. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 27 für den Zeitraum des Weltkrieges, 1914-1918*, by Oberst Hermann Fröhlich, Graz, 1937, pp. 473-474. The tunnels' location on the map was based primarily on: *Geschichte des steirischen k.u.k. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 27 für den Zeitraum des Weltkrieges, 1914-1918*, by Oberst Hermann Fröhlich, Graz, 1937, Skizze 66. While the rest of the map was put together from several sources: (See: *First World War Atlas*, by Martin Gilbert, New York, 1970, various pages, as well as *Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen Jahrgang 1930*, Heft 7/8, "Zum Aufsatz 'Taktische Erfahrungen aus dem Weltkrieg' von Mjn. Nemeth," as well as *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. III, Vienna, 1930, Skizze 13—"Die ital. Durchbrüche und Umfassungversuche auf dem Karst vom 12. bis 15. Nov. 1915," as well as *Ein Buch der Erläuterung an Grosse Zeiten—Hessen 1914—1918-1918*, Linz, 1919, Karte 2).
- This was the official cap badge for the k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillone (in this case Nr. 8). The badge of this size was worn only by the officers of the unit on the front of their caps and underneath the Imperial cypher.
- This was the semi-official cap badge of the 9th k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon. It could be worn by all members of the unit and generally was fastened to the side of the cap.
- This was the semi-official badge of the 7th k.u.k. Feldjägerbataillon. It could be worn by all members of the unit and would have been fastened either to the side of the cap or to a breast pocket.
- "...adventure stories..." by James Fenimore Cooper and his German imitator, Karl May. The latter had never been to America but his tales of noble Indians and hardy cowboys were accepted as gospel by generations of German and Austrian boys." (See: *Adolf Hitler*, by John Toland, Garden City, N.Y., 1976, page 14).
- Face: the official length of one pace (Schritt) in the Austro-Hungarian Army was 75 cm. (1 cm. equals .394 inches). (See: *Österreichisch-ungarischer Kriegs-Taschen-Kalender 1915-1916*, page 49).
- Revniver Kanine: Austrian soldier's jargon for the M1886 "47 mm. Mitrailleuse" (system Hotchkiss) artillery pieces. The name derived from the fact these guns had five rotating barrels. (See: *Kampf um die Drei Zinnen*, by Peter Kubler and Hugo Reider, Bonn, 1981, page 184).



# A Retrospect

by Unteroffizier Erich (Rob) Zienta  
3/1R23

The day after the tragedy in Oklahoma City, Jef, Mike, and I began our trip to the spring event. I was teaching in a school five miles away when I heard and felt the blast; Jef's wife would have been in that building two hours later, and Mike knew it was a bomb blast but couldn't tell where it came from. We appreciate the support and condolences received from everyone at the event and during our travels to and from.

Perhaps it is because of this recent tragedy in our city, the focus of the national media on state militias and para-military groups, and comments overheard at this last event that started me thinking about our hobby. There were complaints that nothing happened at this last event, that there wasn't enough fighting, etc.

There has long been a debate between those who are involved in "living history" and those who are perceived as "powder burners." I can understand the latter group's enthusiasm; adrenaline pumps and it's easy to get carried away.

In view of the Oklahoma City bombing, it is imperative that we draw a clear distinction between who and what we are, and those para-military, militia, or whatever groups that advocate violence. These fringe groups carry weapons—so do we. They practice military assault and defense tactics—so do we. They are anti-gun control—so are we. They wear military or military-style uniforms—so—do—we!

Ours, by nature, is a hobby that depicts violence. To an observer at one of our events, all of us could appear as lunatic fringe militia units. Even beyond that, there are those who will consider us as part of the violent militaristic fringe just because we believe in the Second Amendment and own firearms. By focusing only on firing weapons and not on the aspects of living history, we are providing them with evidence that supports their view. Therefore, it is in our best interest to ensure that there is a clear and definite distinction between why we do what we do and they (various other groups) do what they do.

To engage in living history requires knowledge. It is impor-

tant to understand that, as narrated in many first-person accounts, there were long periods of boredom marked by short periods of fighting. Therefore, there are things that can be done other than combat, that will provide a rich living history experience.

After I got home from this last event and I began to read and listen to media coverage, particularly interviews with militia members, the negative way in which these and similar groups were being portrayed and the call for more control. I couldn't help but imagine what would be thought of us? How would we and our hobby be portrayed?

As a result, I asked myself some serious questions about our direction. Are we practicing living history when some German units become so frustrated by the lack of action that they attack their own lines in the guise of "Belgian resistance fighters?" Does this mean that there's no living history if there's no shooting? Do we not have enough restraint and sincerity in our hobby that we can forego combat and still have a good time?

The battle commanders on both sides made wise decisions not to have extensive combat, for the health and welfare of the participants. They don't control the weather and had to play the hand they were dealt. In cases like this, thinking about alternatives as to what we could be doing as Soldiers would be in order. Units could use their time productively by working together to improve their position, having mail call, and generally doing much of what you have found in a trench position.

No doubt there will continue to be stronger initiatives to ban guns, limit the Second Amendment, and expand the powers of enforcement agencies. You can be assured that Gun Control, Inc. will be at it again. At some point, like it or not, we may be faced with having to respond to those wishing to eliminate our organization.

My comrades—Jef, Mike, and Glen—have taught me the valuable lesson that you don't have to be pulling the trigger to have a great event. I hope this is something that all of our fellow reenactors will learn, or at least think about. If we don't, then I fear that our hobby will be looked upon as nothing more than one of those extremist para-military groups, and we will be reduced to playing in Billy's backyard and yelling, "Bang!" ❖

## First Person, continued from page 17

you signed up for? Where were you inducted into the unit? You should be able to come up with a short history of the company from the soldiers point of view, and the others in your unit should help with this. You should also be able to explain the different distinguishing points on your uniform, from bayonet knots to patches, to people from other units. What is the history behind all that stuff?

12) **Your Religion:** Last, but certainly not least, religion played and still does play an important part in many people's lives. You can stay with your own, or you can do an impression of someone else's. Keep in mind though, that if you are taking on someone else's, to make sure it is period (no Moonies existed then) and that you do it right. Your use of it may be limited to a religious medal or book, or may even involve daily ritual, like Indian or Jewish troops' religious dietary scruples. Whatever you decide to do, remember to do it right and have fun!

This list is not all-encompassing, and can't be. But it may start you on the right direction, and hopefully, even help a little. Doing first person can bring our impressions to life, and lend a whole new dimension to our hobby. It is not easy, and in the beginning, you'll have a tendency to slip back into the current time. There will even be those who will purposely try to make you slip out of character. When you have mastered it though, you'll have a much better time with your comrades, and even with the enemy.

I wish to encourage every one to give first person a try. World War One is, again, perfect for it. We have few spectators, and none visible inside the trench lines. If we ever do, running candle-light tours through the trench, in which everyone is in first person except the guide, would be a wonderful way to show what we do. But since we are all in the trenches together at any event, we can all give each other a better time by practicing first person in the trenches and bunkers of the front. If you give it a try, stick with it, and ask others that have done it for pointers and tips. The end result is Living History, which is what we're all here to do! ❖



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