



## Introduction: World War I

It's been almost a century since the First World War started, but its memory still resides in most people's conscience like very few other past events.

The 1914-1918's war was extraordinarily ferocious. It produced and spread all over the world the horrors and anxieties of the 20th century, involving millions of soldiers as well as citizens, leaving a terrible trail of death behind, using new and more devastating weapons, destroying the territory and creating enormous artistic emergencies. Besides the injustices, the frustrations, the seeds for new wars that the first conflict left as inheritance to Europe, it also gave birth to a grief-centered, bellicose, barbaric and full of hate culture.



The Italian front of this huge conflict is usually remembered abroad thanks to the battle, and the resulting defeat, of Caporetto. History books narrate about the military strategies, statistics list the slain, the disabled and the widows.



To Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto though, as well as to Austria and Slovenia, the memory is even more intense and upsetting. The war walked over these territories, it shred people and feelings and drained all natural resources.

These are the territories where most of those terrifying battles took place. These are the territories where so many young people, coming both from the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, found death. Here,

from May 1915 to October 1918, for twenty-nine endless months, the two armies fought harshly. The Julian and Carnic Alps, but above all the Karst, witnessed to twelve bloodthirsty battles. The plain, on the other hand, became, at first, an enormous rear guard for the Italian army, and then, an invasion-field for Austrian troops.

In the meantime, on the high plateau of Asiago and on Mount Grappa, the Austrian assaults smashed Italian alpine troopers.

After the defeat of Caporetto and the following withdrawal of Italian troops, the frontline moved on the Piave where three massive conflicts took place: the "Arrest battle", that stopped the Austrian; the "Solstice battle" the ultimate great onslaught that struck the enemy, and the following "Final battle" in Vittorio Veneto that led to victory and to the armistice.

Local people's lives were deeply and irrevocably changed



by war. Many evidences still testify war's passage over this region, as well as the courage and the spirit of sacrifice shown by those who were called to arms: abandoned fortifications and shelters, trenches and paths, posts, milestones, monuments and museums represent just as many memories, through which is possible to recall and recollect emotions, hopes and fears of those who were involved in the war.

## The route: the province of Treviso

### Crespano del Grappa

Coordinates: 45.82902, 11.840874

The "Royal Palace" of Crespano del Grappa (a historic building of the eighteenth century, which owes its name to a probable stay of Umberto di Savoia Aosta, the grandson of Umberto I, who fought in the regiment "Cavalry Treviso" on Monte Grappa, where he died of Spanish flu in 1918), houses the Great War museum.

The exhibition is divided into four thematic areas that show the hard life of the soldiers who fought on the Piave front: the ration, the field hospital, the spare time and the trench.



### Crocetta del Montello

Coordinates: 45.832943, 12.038607

The 900's and Great War museum in Crocetta del Montello, located in Villa Pontello, narrates the life of soldiers and the local population during war years.

Through a three-dimension staging and vintage audio evidences, such as speeches performed by Cadorna, Diaz and the sizzle of machine guns, is possible to confer a voice and a face not only to the soldiers who fought and died on the front, but also to those who suffered the war without wearing an uniform.



In the other rooms there are reconstructions of: an early 900's house with annexed shed; an old tavern, where visitors can read old newspapers to remember those men who suffered and died during WWI as well as the ill fate of their relatives; there is also a classroom with original furniture and books.

The sufferings that war brought are displayed in the room that hosts the reconstruction of an infirmary, which were often set up in churches. Doctors and Red Cross nurses attended, with makeshift means,

soldiers and citizens struck by weapons and diseases caused by the hard life in trenches, hunger and cold.

The collection is enriched by many weapons, uniforms and other military relics, as well as tools and utensils used by common people, who endured the austro-germanic invasion.

## Fagarè

Coordinates: 45.70032,12.434312

“The Solstice battle”, fought in June 1918 between the royal and imperial troops, was the ultimate massive onslaught launched by Austrians, who had been weakened by Italian soldiers, during the Great War.

In 1918, the Austrians prepared an attack on the Italian front that had to be launched in the early summer in order to take the conflict to a turning point and defeat the Italians.

During the advance, the Austrians have employed 6.000 cannons and shot 200.000 teargas and asphyxiating grenades, but obtained poor results, thanks to the English gas masks used by Italians.

On the other side of the front, peasants took buckets of water to the Italian artillerymen in order to cool down cannons' mouths, which were constantly shooting against the enemy and its gangways upon the river.

The bombing of gangways was crucial, since it cut out all Austrian supplies, and made it very hard for imperial troops to resist on the Piave.

The maximum advance point of Austrian troops, that were persuaded to arrive in Treviso, was Fagarè, where Italian assault infantrymen drove back the Austrians on Piave's shore. Italian assault infantrymen were famous in those times because they never captivated anyone, they attacked with a dagger between their teeth and terrorized the enemy.



The bridge's head of Fagarè was the last land, on the Piave's right, to be won back by the Italians but hundreds of soldiers died in the night trying to ford the in flood river.

The Austrian attempted onslaught turned into a bitter defeat: considering deaths, wounded and prisoners, the Austro-Hungarian lost almost 150.000 men.

The Italians, on the other hand, lost almost 90.000 soldiers, but their sacrifice meant the end of the Austrian empire: from the “Solstice Battle” on, it took only four months for the Italian final victory in Vittorio Veneto.

During the Great War, after the defeat of Caporetto, Fagarè was on the Piave's front and was so deeply involved in the war that, to the original village name, was added the phrase “della Battaglia”.



Fagarè's shrine is one of the main Great War's memorials and was built on the maximum advance point of the Austrians. As a matter of fact, the shrine is not far from the right shore of Piave, a strategic outpost in the Solstice's Battle, where the river narrows and creates a wide cove.

A milestone had already been built there in 1919, and it consisted of four marbled low reliefs inspired by the conflict: the Italian entrance in the war (24th

May 1915); The enemy's savagery on the homeland (24th October 1917); Thou shall not pass (15th June 1918); Italian troops' triumph (3rd November 1918). The sculptures were reset on the façade after the Second World war, during which they were hidden by peasants in order to preserve them from the Nazis' savagery.

During the Fascist regime, the original monument was enclosed into a big, nine-aisled exedra, designed by architect Del Fabbro, which was inaugurated in 1933 by the King of Italy and Achille Starace.

In the lateral aisles, 10.541 fallen soldiers of the third army rest. 5.350 of them are unknown.

On a headstone, in the central chapel, 27 purple heart awarded soldiers, deceased on the Piave, are listed. The shrine also hosts the remains of Red Cross lieutenant Edward McKey, a close friend of

Ernest Hemingway, who died in the battles along the Piave and to whom the writer dedicated the poem "Ucciso" whose lines are engraved on the gravestone.

One of the most famous lines used during the conflict surmounts the aisles: The Piave whispered: the enemy shall not pass.

On the outside, along the edge, two wall pieces, belonging to a house near the old railway station, are exposed. Someone wrote on it, during the Solstice Battle, two famous sayings "Better one day as a lion than one hundred days as a sheep" and "All heroes! Either we get the Piave, or we get killed".

The same sayings were often used during the fascist regime to incite to conflict and relate its swagger to recent victories. The shrine also hosts a small museums whose relics were given as a gift from veterans: uniforms, weapons, munitions documents and other war findings.

## Fontigo

Coordinates: 45.861228, 12.119397

Fontigo is part of the municipality of Sernaglia della Battaglia, on the left bank of the Piave.

In the days following the defeat of Caporetto, Fontigo was on the forefront: the village was occupied by the Austro-Hungarian troops and the entire population was forced to flee.



During the last year of war, the small town had been bombarded by Italian artillery that destroyed almost all the houses, with heavy losses among civilians.

On the night of October 26, 1918, with a heavy Italian bombardment on the Austrian troops, the final battle begun: from Fontigo, probably the first freed village on the Piave front, our troops pointed towards Vittorio Veneto.

In memory of those epic battles and in memory of an ambush that German soldiers tended to Italian ones, in Fontigo, in 1925, was built, a monument to the fallen

with a painting of the Addolorata represented among the disasters of war.

The Museum of Fontigo devotes a large section to the reconstruction of the war on the Piave front during the last phases of WWI. A room displays a great number of artifacts that were found along the pebbly river banks or donated by local people. Among them there are two Italian machine guns, numerous authentic uniforms of various corps of the Austro-Hungarian empire, weapons, projectiles and remains of military equipment arranged in such a way as to be able to understand the technological evolution; there are also many everyday items found in the trenches of the area. An Italian trench and an Austro-Hungarian post are faithfully reconstructed and help visitors understand the harsh living conditions of the soldiers of both armies engaged on the Piave front.

## Giavera del Montello

Coordinates: Giavera del Montello 45.804288, 12.165046, Tezze 45.813374, 12.348015

In Giavera del Montello and in Tezze (a small village near Vazzola) there are two graveyards hosting the remains of British warriors and of soldiers from the Commonwealth who died in the Final Battle, when regiments from across the Channel helped Italians on the south east of Montello. Just like in every other British cemetery, all headstones are alike.

On the white stones personal details are engraved, the age of decease and the military division.



The choice of building identical headstone was well reasoned and was made in order to remember all

the fallen in the same way without making any distinction of grade, race or religious belief. On certain graves, relatives have dictated some quotes and placed crests with religious symbols.

417 Commonwealth soldiers are buried in Giaviera while 356 British soldiers rest in Tezze, among them there are 15 RAF aviators fallen in battles previous to the spring of 1918.

## Maserada sul Piave

Coordinates: 45.748413, 12.320383

The little islands of Papadopoli, right in front of Maserada sul Piave, have witnessed to the very first allies' breakthrough of the austro-hungarian front, in the night of 24th October 1918.

Maserada's museum hosts an entire section dedicated to the events preceding the great war. It focuses especially on the British troops' activities on the Piave. Many allied squads operated in the area, and the British expedition unit was crucial in the final battle of Vittorio Veneto.



## Nervesa della Battaglia

Coordinates: 45.827394, 12.197374



The village of Nervesa (the phrase "Della Battaglia" was added after WWI), has been right in the middle of the conflicts that happened on the Piave's shores during the German onslaught and the Italian resistance. The first cannon shots fell upon the empty houses in November 1917. The Solstice's Battle (fought from the 15th to the 26th June 1918) represented the enemy advance's climax, but previously, until the Italian attack in the October of 1918, the village was constantly hit by opposite artillery and was ultimately

burned to the ground.

The big military shrine, which collects the remains of 9.235 Italian soldiers (6.099 of which were identified) who had been previously buried in about 120 scattered war cemeteries along the Piave, was finished in 1935 and officially inaugurated on the 19th June 1938 as a celebration for the twentieth anniversary of the Solstice's Battle.

The shrine's a 25 meters tall tower that stands upon a reinforced concrete base; at the sides of the grand central staircase were collocated some pieces of artillery.

In the lower part of the building, niches, containing the bodies of more than 6,099 fallen, are aligned. There are also some great collective tombs in which were conserved the remains of 3,226 unidentified bodies. From the balconies, that refine the top floor, you can see the course of the Piave, which, in 1918, was transformed into a giant battlefield.

The great building culminates with a glass and steel dome. The interior of the mausoleum houses a tiny chapel and a small but significant museum that, through relics and news related to the Solstice's Battle, furnish proof of war's stages and narrates the



daily life of soldiers. During the excavation of the foundation, as a matter of fact, more than 250 unexploded shells and a walkway full of boots, cartridges, gas masks and other objects belonging to the Italian army were discovered



In Nervesa many other monuments, that recall the sacrifice of the fighters, arise. A small circular temple, enclosed by a curtain of cypress trees, is located in the place where the major Francesco Baracca, the Great War's Italian hero, was struck with his airplane during the Solstice's Battle on the 19th June 1918. The emblem of his plane is still the symbol of one of the most famous Italian car manufacturers in the world. (45.820762 -12.186235).

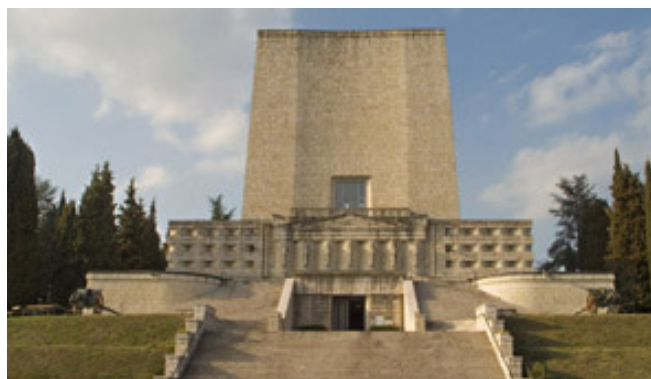
A monument, consisting of an original boat bridge, with the hull completely riddled by grenades, that

was used by both Italian and Austro-Hungarian sappers in the Piave during the Solstice's Battle, commemorates the bravery and sacrifice of Italian sappers. (45.823177 - 12.220248).

In the village of Santa Croce, about 5 km from Nervesa, there's a monument to the "Boys of '99", the young teens called to arms at the end of 1917, in memory of whom the bell of the nearby bell tower strikes the hours with the melody of the "Leggenda del Piave". (45.845292 - 12.168645)

On the scenic hill overlooking Nervesa, lie the ruins of the Saint Eustace abbey, founded by Benedictine monks in the eleventh century. Over the centuries the monastery became an important abbey, a pilgrimage destination and a place of faith for the people of the surrounding area.

After many acts of plunder and property's spoliation during the Napoleonic period, the final secularization and suppression of the monastery took place in 1865 by a decree of Pope Pius IX. The furious fightings of the Solstice's Battle in June 1918, reduced the abbey to a crumbling heap of ruins, but it kept intact its charm and history. (45.823992 - 12.194056)



The whole area is also dotted with cemeteries that house the remains of the fallen on the Piave.

## **Pederobba**

Coordinates: 45.874645, 11.964328



The only French shrine dating back to WWI is located in Pederdobba, not far from the Piave and Mount Tobas's slopes.

A huge wall symbolizes the enemy's advance, that was stopped by the sacrifice of those transalpine soldiers who first came in Italy in April 1918 and died during the Solstice's battle and the final battle.

The monument is completed by a grandiose group of statues representing Mother Italy and Mother France united by pain while holding their dead sons.

The shrine was inaugurated in 1937 contemporarily to that of Bligny, a war memorial near Verdun (France), that collects more than 4.000 Italian soldiers who died on the western front.

## Vittorio Veneto

Coordinates: 45.976667,12.293056

On October 24, 1918 the Italians started the attack that went on until the 31st of the same month and led to the Italian victory in Vittorio Veneto. After crossing the Piave, the VIII Army freed the



city (that back then was called only "Vittorio", the phrase "Veneto" was added in 1923) and proceeded towards Trento, sending the cavalry to chase the enemy.

At the end of that battle, General Armando Diaz wrote some famous words about the Austrian army: "The remains of what was once one of the most powerful armies in the world, now retreat in hopeless disorder in the valleys that it had descended upon with proud security". These words show the great sense of pride in accomplishing a historic challenge.

On November 4, the armistice that ended the First World War, was signed.

The Museum of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, located inside the sixteenth-century Loggia di Ceneda and opened on November 2, 1938 during the twentieth anniversary of the city's liberation, is one of the Italian landmarks of the Great War's memory. The exhibition unfolds over three floors and in adjacent rooms.

On the ground floor you can see the testimonies of the harsh life in the trenches, the weapons used such as pistols, rifles, truncheons, helmets, and symbolic objects of technological development that took place during the war, such as field telephones.

The first floor collects the peculiar elements of this museum such as written documents, maps, newspapers, typed messages and posters of different parties drawn up in the languages of the people involved in the conflict. On the top floor you can see a gallery of photographic portraits that portray war's protagonists, and a collection of graphics and official documents. The remains of a German plane, a gun and a machine gun Skoda Fiat-Rivelli are kept in the Hall of Victory.



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*Texts by Enza Chiara Lai (bibliographical references on [www.ciaoin.com](http://www.ciaoin.com))*