

Pierluigi Sanzovo

LINKED_IN

A digital network which links the stories of 30,000 young Europeans

Today I am presenting a project of the Emotional Museum of the Great War whose name is Linked_In, as the popular social network used to keep in contact people by finding the link between them through their professional experiences.

Before starting I will present shortly the experience of the Emotional Museum of the Great War. Situated in Giavera Del Montello, near Venice, in Italy, the 'Emotional Museum' is designed to attract people to recognize the importance of The Great War and its legacy. The museum will be atypical by not housing objects but will be a container of events and cultural activities that emote a contemporary audience looking at an historical event. So our starting projects are a Musical about the 1914 Christmas Truce, the constitution of a youth chorale, the "Pipes of Peace", and we are working to realize a great field of poppies to remember the fallen that you could come to visit starting from next spring.

But the most important work involves research about the stories of the thousands of men who died in our part of Italy during the First World War. The focus of our project is to enhance on-line digital resources detailing the military and private lives of soldiers from many different countries who died during The Great War in the same place and the different kind of relationship between them. These new resources will facilitate new research and teaching opportunities about these men and their gallant sacrifice.

The project is focused on the area of the mid-lands of the river Piave, in the Treviso province of the Veneto region of Northern Italy. Here, between November 1917 and November 1918 on the banks of the river and in the surrounding hills, soldiers from Italy, France and Great Britain fought gallantly against soldiers from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bosnia, Croatia, Poland and Romania.

Cemeteries and memorials dot the landscape, as a tangible reminder of this International presence and to the memory of those soldiers who died.

In a short distance between them we can find:

- The German and Austro Hungarian Memorial of Quero with 844 known and 3461 unknown soldiers.

- The French Memorial of Pederobba with 863 known soldiers.
- The Giavera British Cemetery with the graves of 416 soldiers and the memorial of 150 missing in action.
- The Italian Memorial of Nervesa della Battaglia with 7.000 known and 2325 unknown soldier.
- The Tezze British Cemetery with the graves of 337 soldiers.
- The Italian Memorial of Fagarè della Battaglia with 5.191 known and 5350 unknown soldiers.

Using on-line national resources such as the Commonwealth World Graves Commission database for English servicemen, the *Onorcaduti* database for Italian servicemen, the *Memoire des Hommes* for the French servicemen or the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge database our project aims to catalogue more than 30,000 soldiers who are buried in the area. In addition, the more common search engines such as Google provide extensive information on the soldiers' private lives (many of whom were for example accomplished sportsmen prior to their military service, as Marino Chiovatti, football player of the Vicenza Football Club). Other online resources, such as regimental diaries, personal diaries, memoirs, blogs and themed forums provide an additional source of reference materials.

The culmination of our cataloguing will result in a unique record card for soldiers of all nationalities; here for example the cards of a French soldier, of a German one, of an Englishman, in this case there are also additional information and a photograph, and an Italian soldier. All the cards will be collected in a digital database which will allow the reader access to extensive information about the tragic stories of those young Europeans who fought and died in the region.

In addition to visiting the many graves and memorials to the soldiers, visitors will be able to gain access via the database to specific information such as the soldiers' parents, their nationalities, home cities and towns and details of the branches of the armed forces in which they served. But the most interesting thing is that we could find many unknown links between the stories of soldiers from different nations.

For example we could know that Engelbert Peter and Gustav Haller, German soldiers, and Bon Felix, Benoit Adrien and Berchat Gabriel, French soldiers, died together, brothers in blood, in the same day, the 30th December 1917, in the small area of the top of the Mount Tomba.

We can look for the stories of the aviators of many different nationalities buried in the area, starting from the memorial of the ace of the aces of Italian aviation, Francesco Baracca.

But we could also visit the graves of all the sportsman, as Robert Dale, rugby player of the London Rosslyn Park team, or Giuseppe Ferrino, winner of the Italian football championship

in 1913 with the Casale Football Club, or Reginald Pridmore, winner of the Gold medal at the Olympic games of London in 1908 with England field Hockey team.

Processing of the data is already up and running in two projects involving students in Italian schools. The first project intend to catalogue all the British soldiers buried in the Giavera British Cemetery and involves the students of the Pio X International School, a school of Treviso. The students, after some lessons to learn the ways to find and use on-line sources, and after visiting the cemetery to start an emotive relationship with each soldier, are working with the Emotional Museum in the researches about the 416 buried in the Cemetery.

The second project aims to find and let be remembered the names of soldiers reported as missing in action by the Italian military archives during the “Battle of the Solstice”, from 15 to 23 June 1918, in the area of the Montello Hill. The name of each missing soldier will be write down on a ceramic tile that will be placed in a small Memorial near the “Valle dei Morti”, the valley of the dead, in the Montello Hill. This project involves students and schools from all regions of Italy, each of whom will focus on soldiers who were born in their city. Actually are working the students of a school from Sardinia, that will look for the soldiers of their home town, Cagliari, into the “Albo d’oro dei Caduti della Prima Guerra Mondiale”, an issue of 1930 now available on line, and in other on line sources. After this research they will create a ceramic tile for each one of them, using as symbol a leaf of a tree typical of their region, as the olm for Sardinia.

To conclude my talk, I would like to clear to all of us the deepest meaning of our researches. Over the technical aspect, over the historical questions, I would like to remember the words of a father of European Culture, Marco Tullio Cicerone, that more than two thousand years ago wrote:

“Vita enim mortuorum in memoria est posita vivorum”, the life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living.