

**THE GIUDICARIE SOLDIERS ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT  
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR (1914-1920)**

by

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By studying history, we as students have understood the important role that memory plays.

We think that memory helps us acquire ethic and moral values for our life as citizens. We have learnt that, with reference to 20<sup>th</sup> century history, the First World War completely changed our society not only politically and economically, but also socially and culturally. We have also understood that our territory was directly involved in this event, and encouraged by our history teacher, we decided to look for information on people from our valleys who went away to fight.

During the time in question our territory was part of the border between the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and Italy, in fact the border crossed through the centre of our valleys: The Chiese Valley, The Busa di Tione, The Giudicarie Esteriori and The Rendena Valley in the south west of Trentino.

The Austrian Empire fearing that the people from this area would fight on the side of Italy sent all of them to the Eastern Front mainly in Bucovina and Galicia.

In order to acquire a more solid background our teacher advised us to read a book written by Quinto Antonelli “I dimenticati della grande Guerra” which loosely translated would be: “The forgotten soldiers of the First World War”. This book describes the personal experiences of some soldiers, through extracts of letters and diaries, revealing their personal emotions and feelings without taking into consideration the strategies of war and of the commanders. These common soldiers were obliged to fight, not always for a clear purpose, against their enemies, who were young men just like them.

Starting from this we set out to find out more information and do a history project on the soldiers from our valleys who were sent to the Russian Front between 1914 and 1920. All this was possible also thanks to the collaboration of the Judicaria Centre and the Trentino Museum of History.

To begin with we decided to take into consideration the main principles of historiography and to divide our project into 3 parts:

1. Observation and collection of the information
2. Analysis and comparison
3. Over-all interpretation

However, aware that the history is not only a science, we decided to elaborate our data and to put it in a form of a narration. The aim of our texts is to tell the story of different people during the First World War.

We started to gather the different source materials asking all members of our school community for possible documents, we consulted materials collected in the Museum of History of Trento, books published and our family archives.

Afterwards with the wide variety of documents and information gathered we categorized them in order to analyse them better and to place them into the appropriate sections.

Our narration, with the aim to explain the feelings and emotions of the soldiers is divided into 12 chapters:

1. Departure
2. Journey
3. Galician life
4. Military life
5. Battles
6. Death
7. Wounded
8. Prisoners in Russia
9. Life continues at home
10. Siberia
11. Return home

After having carefully analysed and interpreted the documents we put them into the different sections, and then we decided to mount an exhibition on 34 panels. To carry out this idea we involved, with an interdisciplinary view in mind, our art teacher. He helped us to creatively use our abstract knowledge and skills in the graphic field.

In addition to the exhibition we decided to produce a publication of the whole project as 34 panels could not contain all the documents and information found.

Altogether there were over one hundred documents and therefore we were able to understand that almost every family had to in some way face the difficult problems related with the war.

We were also able to see another aspect of history, not only the traditional one that we learn from books about illustrious characters, but also that of common men, who had to bear the tragedy of war.

Since the war changed the lives of countless soldiers, in many cases they felt the need to leave some form of written testimony to their descendants, hoping in this way to stop the same situation being repeated in the future.

They wrote about precarious conditions, for example one of them using a metaphor anticipates one of the main Italian poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ungaretti saying: “men fall like leaves”. By using simple, popular and hard-hitting language, they recount their days, their exhausting marches, their fears of dying, their wishes to return home and their nights out in the open. They write about the Russian environment almost with astonishment, because from their point of view it was an unfamiliar, strange world.

We found sources written by people belonging to different stations in life from peasants and craftsmen to teachers and clerks. They describe the Russians, their enemies as foreigners who changed their lives. In fact many soldiers died, but scores of them were hosted by Russian families and helped to return home.

The main thing that we learnt doing this work is that the soldiers, be they from Russia or the Giudicarie were first of all human beings.