



Kingdom of the Netherlands

*Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, John M. Stienen*

# Serbian soldiers of World War I who died in the Netherlands

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*Драга Лена, ако не добијеш скоро моја писма, знај да нисам више жив. Јер волијем и умрети сада него доцније слеп ићи по свету. Ђорав човек не ради у руднику. Ако се избавим одавде јавићу ти. Само ми је жао што још нисам добио слику дечију и твоју, да бих могао видети и Руџицу.*

Dear Lepa, if you don't get my letters soon, you have to know that I am not alive anymore. Because I'd rather die than wander around like a blind person. A blind man doesn't work in the mine. If I escape from here, I will inform you. My only regret is that I still haven't got the children's and your photo, so that I could also see Ružica.

Excerpt from a letter from Đorđe Vukosavljević (born in Kragujevac, Serbia) who was a non-commissioned officer in the Serbian army. The letter was written on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1918 in Soltau (Germany). Đorđe died on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1919 in Nieuw-Milligen (the Netherlands).



# Foreword

Dear reader,

After the publications about Jenny Merkus, Jacob Colyer and the diary of Arius van Tienhoven, this brochure completes a series on Dutch-Serbian relations over the past century. A team of voluntary researchers has documented the identities of 91 Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands during or as a consequence of the First World War. Supported by various letters, photos, diaries, but also by getting in close contact with the family members of the victims, this brochure captures the whole story.

Not only does this brochure tell us the personal stories of the lives of the Serbian soldiers who died during the 'Great War', it also presents insights into its outbreak and the following shifts in frontlines, and offers a humanitarian law perspective. In addition, this research maps the present-day monuments for Serbian soldiers in several municipalities in the Netherlands.

The authors John M. Stienen, Tatjana Vendrig and Fabian Vendrig have successfully managed to combine the facts of the war with personal stories of the Serbian soldiers who expressed their experiences through their diaries. As the Netherlands and Serbia continue to strengthen our good relations and move forward to a shared future, we do so on the basis of a shared history. In this context, the contribution of this remembrance brochure in honor of the fallen soldiers is highly valuable. The Embassy wishes to foster awareness of this history in Serbia with the publication of this booklet.

I hope you will enjoy this unique research of shared Dutch-Serbian history as much as I have.

Henk van den Dool  
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands  
to the Republic of Serbia





# Introduction

In a corner of the Dutch Reformed Cemetery in Garderen, on the edge of the forested area of the Veluwe region in the Netherlands, stands a monument to the memory of Serbs who died of the Spanish flu in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I. The monument contains 29 names of soldiers who died in Garderen, 21 soldiers who died in Nijmegen and 14 who died in Enschede, but whose coffins, as the authors discovered in 2012, are no longer there. The authors are two Dutchmen and a Serb, and they were determined to find out what happened to those Serbian soldiers who had died in the Netherlands, which was a neutral country during the First World War. They wanted to know how they arrived in the Netherlands, where their remains are now and, if possible, to find the families of those 64 Serbian First World War soldiers.

After researching the Dutch municipal archives, they discovered that there were not only 64 Serbian soldiers who had died in three municipalities in the Netherlands, but rather 91 who had died in nine different towns. With help of the Serbian community in Rotterdam and Utrecht, the Serbian embassies in The Hague and Prague, and various other persons and sources in the Netherlands and Serbia, they found more answers to their questions. When they contacted the first descendants of some of those 91 soldiers, more questions arose, but more information also became available.

This brochure is the result of the research of the authors, who started to form the full picture of this specific chapter in the history of Dutch-Serbian relations, a century ago. The different phases are described: the legal aspects and the outbreak of the war, the atrocities in the prisoner-of-war camps, the repatriation of Serbian soldiers via the Netherlands, their death and exhumation. The brochure ends with a description of the current state of the monument in Garderen and the mausoleum where most of the Serbs who died in the Netherlands found their resting place, while it also includes some stories of the families that were uncovered by the authors.

However, it mostly tells the story of the 91 Serbian soldiers from World War I who died in the Netherlands and never made it home.

## Prisoners of war

The peace movement that started after Solferino and led to the First Geneva Convention, which led to the founding of the Red Cross, was also firmly rooted in The Hague towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Conventions of The Hague of 1899 and 1907, a legal framework was established to deal with disarmament, the laws of war and war crimes. This included rules aimed at regulating the conduct of neutral countries in the case of war on land. Little did the Netherlands know that the rules it had helped to create would become applicable within a decade of being promulgated. When Belgium was attacked by Germany in 1914, neutral Netherlands was surrounded by warring nations. As a result of the fall of Antwerp, almost a million Belgians sought refuge in the Netherlands, among them 30,000 soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

The official policy was to repatriate the civilians as soon as possible, but the military had to be disarmed and interned until the end of the hostilities, in line with the Hague Convention No. V of 1907.

At the beginning of 1917, the government took measures to reduce smuggling at the border with Germany. It was decided that the country could only be reached via official checkpoints or border railway stations. On this occasion, the various ministries confirmed the arrangement they had made regarding different groups of foreigners who would not be sent back for reasons of human rights: escaped prisoners of war, civilians who had escaped from internment camps, deserters, or any other person whose extradition would result in physical danger.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike active service soldiers, who needed to be disarmed and interned when reaching the border, escaped prisoners of war were free to move and leave the country in the direction they desired – they would usually leave via the port of Rotterdam with the help of the consul of their country. This meant that Dutch involvement was rather limited – delousing, feeding and organising transport to Rotterdam.<sup>3</sup>

## Atrocities and prisoner-of-war camps

The First World War started with the Austro-Hungarian Empire's declaration of war against the Kingdom of Serbia on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914. This declaration of war came as a result of

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1 Minister of the Interior Cort van der Linden's response to the interpellation of MP dr. E.J. Beumer (ARP, for Kampen district), *Handelingen Tweede Kamer* (Proceedings of the Lower House of Parliament) 1917-1918, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1918, p. 2278

2 Undated note verbale in *Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Volksgezondheid en Armwezen*, nummer toegang 2.04.54, inventarisnummer 137.

3 Brugmans, p. 70

several events, which reached their climax with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the Archduke of Austria, in Sarajevo on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914.

The Austro-Hungarian forces began shelling Belgrade, the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia, on the night of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1914. Millions of men were dragged into the war, while rough estimates suggest that some 18 million people died (11 million soldiers and seven million civilians). It is estimated that the Kingdom of Serbia alone lost more than 1.1 million inhabitants during the war (both army and civilian losses), which represented over 26% of its then total population and 58% of its adult male population.<sup>4</sup>

At the battle of Cer (mid-August 1914), the Serbian army initially halted the Austrian invasion, launched two weeks after the first shelling. Towards the end of 1914, following the battles of Drina and Kolubara, the loss of life had already become considerable, though no changes to borders had taken place.

After 10 months of relative silence, a full scale attack was launched in the first week of October 1915 by the Austro-Hungarians and Germans from the north, followed by a Bulgarian invasion from the east and southeast a week later, which caused the Serbian position to become untenable. The Bulgarian offensive cut the Serbs off from their allies on the Salonica<sup>5</sup> Front and prompted the Serbian Army's retreat via Albania and Montenegro to the island of Corfu. As a result of this offensive and the subsequent occupation of Serbia by the Central Powers, tens of thousands of Serbian soldiers were taken as prisoners of war.<sup>6</sup>

All of the Serbian soldiers who arrived in the Netherlands were held in Austro-Hungarian and German prisoner-of-war camps.

It is known where some of the 91 soldiers were held as PoWs thanks to the digitalised archives of the International Red Cross.<sup>7</sup> For example, it is stated on the International Red Cross card of Miloš Gavrović that he was born in Miločaj in 1893 and that he was made a prisoner of war on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1915 in Kruševac. His card also notes that he was in the camp *Braunau in Böhmen*<sup>8</sup> le 24.11.1915.

We know from the documents (letters and photos) we received from the families and traced back that some of the soldiers (e.g. Miloš Jeremić and Đorđe Vukosavljević) spent time in camps in Soltau and Emden in the province of Hannover.

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4 According to the article "Sudnji rat" by Čedomir Antić in Serbian newspaper Politika, 13 September 2008, link: <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/55742/Судњи-рат>

5 Salonica=Thessaloniki, Greece.

6 Doegen, p. 56-57 mentions 27,912 Serbian PoWs, who were held captive in Germany at any time between the outbreak of the war and 10<sup>th</sup> January 1919. Oltmer, p. 69 gives 28,746. Scheidl, p. 97 gives 154,700 Serbian PoWs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Cholakov, p. 13 mentions 28,254-31,679 Serbian PoWs and 37,647 civilians held in Bulgarian custody. The actual numbers may have been even higher.

7 1914-1918 Prisoners of the First World War ICRC Historical Archives, link: <http://grandeguerre.icrc.org/>

8 Braunau in Böhmen=Broumov, Czech Republic (Braunau was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of World War I).

In Henri Habert's brochure "Between the barbed wire"<sup>9</sup>, in which he interviewed 38 Serbian PoWs who were repatriated via the Netherlands in 1919, there are testimonies describing the circumstances in the Austro-Hungarian and German prisoner-of-war camps. This brochure also describes the routes traversed by those Serbian PoWs until they reached the Netherlands. The soldiers presented in this brochure did not die in the Netherlands.



Picture 1: prisoner index card for Miloš Gavrović

After analysing those routes<sup>10</sup>, it was discovered that most Serbian prisoners of war were captured in Central Serbia or Kosovo. Afterwards, they were transported to Kovin, Semlin<sup>11</sup>, Mitrovitza<sup>12</sup> or the fortress of Smederevo. After five to 10 days they were transported, mostly via Temesvar<sup>13</sup> (from Kovin/Semederevo), to Braunau or Heinrichsgrün<sup>14</sup>.

It can be concluded from Habert's brochure that Heinrichsgrün, together with Braunau, was one of the two major Austrian camps via which the Serbian soldiers arrived in Germany. After a couple of months spent in Heinrichsgrün or Braunau, they were finally transported to camps in North-West Germany. Those were mostly camps in the German province of Hannover (or in German the '*Kriegsgefangenenlager des X. Armeekorps in Hannover*'). Other Serbian soldiers who arrived in the Netherlands were held prisoner in the camps of the VII. Korps Münster.

The treatment within those PoW camps was far from decent. The brochure describes not only the atrocities committed in the camps, but also while they were held in Serbia awaiting further transport to Germany. The Serbian PoWs lacked food in the camps and were maltreated. The slightest breach of the camp rules was severely punished with beatings and tortures.

A striking example of the treatment of Serbian prisoners of war is the story of Gvozden Andrić, which Habert described as one of the 38 stories in his brochure.

<sup>9</sup> Habert.

<sup>10</sup> See more on: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=16oAoZG3ltogkZRyvlPIENqzXxkA&usp=sharing>

<sup>11</sup> Semlin=Zemun, Serbia (Zemun was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of World War I).

<sup>12</sup> Mitrovitza (Croatia)=Sremski Mitrovica, Serbia (Mitrovitza was part of Croatia, which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire, until the end of World War I).

<sup>13</sup> Temesvar=Timișoara, Romania (Temesvar was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of World War I).

<sup>14</sup> Heinrichsgrün=Jindřichovice, Czech Republic (Heinrichsgrün was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of World War I).

“Gvozden Andrić, soldier, age 28, 10th Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, born in Duskoratz, department of Užice. Made prisoner of war in Kopiliah 55 in October 1915 by the Bulgarian Army.”

“I managed to flee into the mountains, but the Austrians discovered me and took me with them. They brought me to Heinrichsgrün. In the camp there were 25 to 30,000 men, amongst them 5-600 of our officers. Afterwards they took me to Soltau; then, 15 days later, to Langenmoor, and from there to the camp near Bühnerbach where, I worked for 2 ½ months



Picture 2: The cover of Henri Habert's brochure "Between the barbed wire" for the French edition.

on the property of Krupp in the village of Klausheide. In all the camps, the food was really bad and not sufficient and we were starving. A lot of our men died due to hunger and cold, because we did not have clothes or shoes. We were housed in wooden barracks. Our guards beat us for the smallest things or treated us like animals. The stabs of the bayonets were uncountable. The Hungarians and Germans treated us the worst. Finally we got food supplies from our Red Cross; without that help we would have starved to death.”<sup>15</sup>

Another soldier, Milenko Pantelić from Vreoci (a village near Belgrade), a 28-year-old sergeant serving in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion from the Danube Division was also

interviewed. He was made a prisoner of war on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1915 by the German Army. Habert recorded the following story in his brochure regarding Milenko: “We, 2,000 people, were brought to Kuršumljia. From there we travelled through Kruševac, Mladenovac, Markovac, Požarevac, Dubravica to Kovin. All the time we suffered from hunger. In Kuršumljia we got bread, and then only in Mladenovac some baked corn. A lot of our men

15 Habert, p. 30-31.

collapsed, because they were too tired, but without mercy the guards beat them and forced them to continue marching. Some of us tried to escape, two succeeded, the others were killed instantly. The farmers who brought bread to their people were beaten. After Kovin, a four-week stay in Satmar (Hungary)<sup>16</sup> followed. After that was Branau, where I stayed for two weeks. We had it very bad in that camp. In January 1916 I was transferred to Meyenburg, Germany, three months I stayed there and it was like...as in Braunau. From this camp, I came to the village of Bulage, where I stayed 6 ½ months with a farmer, then it was again... Meyenburg. At the end I was sent to Nordeney, by the sea, where we had to work on the concrete reinforcement of the coast. The people with whom we worked were mostly poor and they forced us to work continuously. We were fed as if we had been pigs, in the morning we got some cooked corn and a small piece of bread; in the afternoon cooked potatoes with a bit of sauce. In the evening we got the same as in the morning. We received 250 grams of bread per day. It was black and it was full of straw and sand.”<sup>17</sup>

Habert’s brochure not only describes atrocities in the prisoner-of-war camps, but also atrocities committed in Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian armies. Habert was not the only person writing about those atrocities. Arius van Tienhoven, a doctor serving in the Red Cross Missions in Serbia, also wrote about them: he published his diary in a Dutch newspaper, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*<sup>18</sup>, and the diary was later published.<sup>19</sup>

Another story in Habert’s work about those crimes committed in Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian Army is described in the story of Jerotije Župac, a 38-year-old sergeant from Novo Selo, near Vrnjačka Banja, serving in the 12th Infantry Regiment, 1st Company, 4th Battalion, from the Šumadija Division. He was made a PoW by the Austrian Army in November 1915 and taken to Semlin: “The guards beat our soldiers and killed some of them”. Župac saw that the enemies plundered everything in the Serbian villages. He saw also that in Trstenik they plundered all the shops and warehouses. Women, children and old people were forced to work for them. He stayed for four days in Mladenovac. Those were terrible days, but he survived. He did not receive any bread or any other food and he slept outside the town in an open field. Many civilians died.<sup>20</sup>

## Escape

Germany held soldiers from the entire Entente captive: Russians, French, Brits, Romanians, Italians, Belgians, Serbs, Portuguese and soldiers of the various colonial armies.

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16 Satmar=Satu Mare, Romania (Satu Mare was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of World War I).

17 Habert, p. 27-28.

18 It was published there as “het dagboek van een oorlogs-chirurg (Dr. A. van Tienhoven in Servië)” in the feuilleton “Onder de Menschen” on 23, 24, 25, 27, 30 March and 3, 10, 12, 13, and 14 April 1915.

19 Van Tienhoven.

20 Habert, p. 35.

The number totalled more than 2.5 million throughout the course of the war.<sup>21</sup> The Hague Convention No. IV allowed the state in whose power the prisoners were to utilise their labour. In Germany, many Serbian PoWs worked outside the camps. This was true for the peat bog soldiers in Emsland, which borders the Dutch provinces of Groningen and Drenthe in the north of the country, but also for the mines of Grube Adolf in Herzogenrath-Merkstein near Kerkrade in the south. Or, as we saw, the Krupp (steel magnates) estate Klausheide, two and a half hour's walk from the Dutch border near Denekamp.<sup>22</sup>

Because of the proximity to the Dutch border, a significant number of soldiers employed in this way managed to reach the neutral Netherlands. Others would escape from the camps and walk to the Netherlands at night-time.

Not much is known about these escaped prisoners of war. Even their numbers were not officially kept. The Chief Constable of Rotterdam, Sirks, reported to various ministries in The Hague in 1918 about Russians, English, French and Belgians and that "formerly also a Serb or Montenegrin [could be] seen among them". At that moment, three Brits, 170 French, 226 Belgian and 819 Russian prisoners of war resided in Rotterdam, along with a considerable number of civilian 'Russians' who escaped from German internment camps.<sup>23</sup>

The first two escaped Serbs mentioned in the Dutch press arrived in Coevorden early on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1916. They had escaped from their place of employment, a cardboard factory in Emlichheim, eight kilometres from the border.<sup>24</sup> Dutch newspapers between 1916 and 1918 mentioned at least 165 Serbian PoWs who escaped and crossed the Dutch borders (Table 1).<sup>25</sup>

	Groningen	Drenthe	Overijssel	Gelderland	Limburg	Unknown	Total
1916	12	16	0	2	18	0	48
1917	48	28	0	1	0	16	93
1918	14	8	2	0	0	0	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>165</b>

Table 1: Serbian escaped PoWs arriving in the Netherlands (1916-1918), estimated minimums per province

The vast majority (126) of these escaped PoWs came from the area under the control of the German Army Corps X in the province of Hannover (bordering the Dutch provinces of

21 Herbert, p. 85, Doegen, op. cit., Oltmer, op. cit.

22 Habert, pp. 16, 29, 31, 33.

23 Sirks to Snijders 11th June 1918, in NL-HaNA, BiZa / Volksgezondheid en Armwezen, 2.04.54, inv.nr. 136.

24 Laatste berichten. *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche courant*. 28th June 1916, p. 3.

25 Results of searches in online newspaper archives ([www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl), [leiden.courant.nu](http://leiden.courant.nu), [krantenbankzeeland.nl](http://krantenbankzeeland.nl)) for terms such as 'Serviër', 'Serviërs', 'ontvluchte Serviër', 'ontvluchte Serviërs', 'Servisch krijgsgevangene', 'Servische krijgsgevangene', 'Servische krijgsgevangenen' between the end of 1915 and 11th November 1918. Doegen, p. 28 mentions 637 Serbian soldiers in all of Germany who escaped from captivity without being recaptured.

Groningen, Drenthe and the northern part of Overijssel), which had high numbers of PoWs working digging peat, or on the farms, hence outdoors. Only four to five seemed to have crossed the border under the control of the Army Corps VII in Münster (which bordered the southern part of Overijssel, Gelderland, and the northern part of Limburg). The number who escaped from the area of the Army Corps VIII in Koblenz (bordering Limburg) is unclear. All 18 Serbs who arrived in Limburg in the summer of 1916 were reported in Maastricht, which doesn't directly border Germany.

Not all the Serbs who tried to escape to the Netherlands were lucky. Herein below you will find some examples of Serbian escaped PoWs who didn't manage to join their army on the Salonica front.

### *Beerta*

On 9<sup>th</sup> July 1917, an 'unknown man, presumably of Serbian nationality' died at Nieuw-Statenzijl (municipality of Beerta) on the shores of Westerwoldse Aa, which forms the border between Germany and the Netherlands in the northeast of the country. It is unclear if he drowned or was shot by German border guards.<sup>26</sup> He was buried on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1917 in the cemetery in Nieuw-Beerta.

On 21<sup>st</sup> August 1918 the mayor of Beerta placed a small commemorative monument on the grave with the following text: "*Toen deze krijgsgevangenen Serviër uit Duitschland vlood / Vond hij aan d'oever van het land der vrijheid zijnen dood*" (when this Serbian prisoner of war fled from Germany, he met his death on the shores of the land of freedom).<sup>27</sup> The monument no longer exists, but the unmarked grave of the unknown Serbian PoW is still there in the far corner of the cemetery – it may be the only Serbian WWI grave still in the Netherlands.

### *Enschede*

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1918, Milan Biljović (37) died in Enschede of a kidney disease.

### *Bourtange*

At the beginning of September 1918, an escaped Serbian prisoner of war, who had spent 21 days on the run, was caught up in skirmishes between the border police and smugglers on the border. He became frightened and headed back in the direction of Germany, where he was arrested.<sup>28</sup>

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26 According to an article in the first column of *Nieuwsblad van Friesland : Hepkema's courant* of 10th July 1917, p. 2, he was shot at and dropped dead on Dutch soil, while others, e.g. Kort Nieuws. *Nieuwe Veendammer courant*. 12th July 1917, p. 3, claim that his body was taken out of the water while his watch was still ticking.

27 *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 22nd August 1918, p. 3.

28 Korte vreugd. *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche courant*. 11th September 1918, p.3.



## Rotterdam

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1918, Dragutin Stojanović arrived at the Sint Franciscus Gasthuis (Hospital of St. Francis) in Rotterdam, where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis universalis.<sup>29</sup> He was treated by internist Henri van Dijk, who himself had seen the destructive nature of the war in Serbia, when he served in a field hospital in Monastir in 1916. After Van Dijk's return from the front line, a series of newspaper articles and a book were published in Rotterdam by author and journalist M.J. Brusse about his experiences in the bombed city.<sup>30</sup>

After 179 days in hospital, Dragutin Stojanović died on 7th September 1918 and was buried on 10th September at Rotterdam (Crooswijk) General Cemetery.

## Nieuw-Buinen

31-year-old Tatomir Nedeljković died on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1918 at the home of Gerhardus Adolphus Lukken, a local glass worker, in Nieuw Buinen in the municipality of Borger. Nieuw Buinen was known for its glass industry for many years. Given its proximity to the German border, it is very likely that Serbian and other escaped PoWs were working in that industry to earn a living after reaching neutral ground.

27-year-old Milan Đelekar, who was indeed working at the A.J. Bakker glass factory, died of carbon monoxide poisoning on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1918 at the home of Poppe Wouter Dirker, who lived at Noorderdiep P 60 in Nieuw Buinen. A book on Bresno Polje, with a list of WWI victims from that village, mentions Milan R. Đelekar, who was drafted in 1914 and “died in the Netherlands”. His brother, Maksim, was a prisoner of war who escaped from captivity and fled to the Netherlands.<sup>31</sup> The Red Cross gave the items that Milan had kept on him to Maksim.<sup>32</sup> While the Red Cross registered Milan as a repatriating released prisoner of war, it is more likely that he was an escaped prisoner of war.

## The letters of Đorđe Vukosavljević

Đorđe (Đoka) Vukosavljević was one of the 91 Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands and, thanks to the kind permission of Đorđe's great-granddaughter, we were able to see the letters he wrote to his wife from the prisoner-of-war camps where he was detained.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Admission Register in: *Stadsarchief Rotterdam (SAR). Toegangsnummer 687 ('Sint Franciscus Gasthuis') inv. nr. 190: Opnameregister 29.08.1916-20.07.1921.*

30 Brusse.

31 Stojić, p. 155, 430.

32 Leclercq, p. 145.

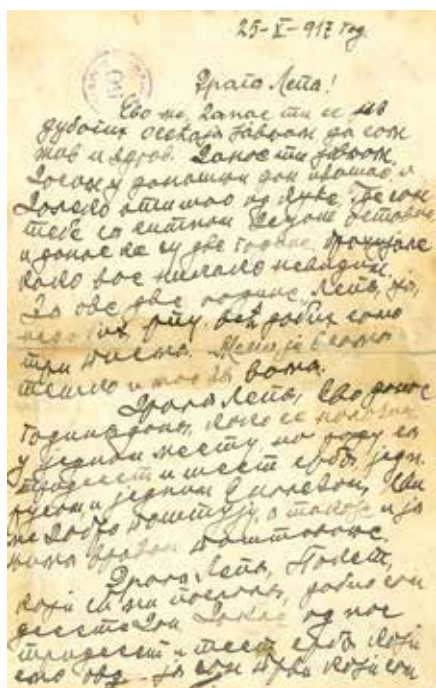
33 Personal archive of Zorica Jelača (Đorđe's great-granddaughter) with the letters of Đorđe Vukosavljević, written between 1917-1918 and a telegram from Dragi Rajičić dated 9th August 1919.

Đoka was born in Kragujevac, in Šumadija, Central Serbia. He was a non-commissioned officer of the 3rd Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.<sup>34</sup>

It is still unknown where, when and how Đorđe was captured, and how he was transferred to Germany and arrived in the Netherlands, where he died. In his letter of 25<sup>th</sup> October 1917, he wrote that it was then precisely two years since he had last seen his wife and children, which leads to the conclusion that he left his home on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915. His letters came mostly from a prisoner-of-war camp in Soltau, near Hannover, Niedersachsen in Germany. There is one postcard which was received from Hameln. Đorđe also managed to send pictures of himself that were taken during his time in captivity in Germany.

It can be confirmed that he was in Hameln and Soltau, thanks the letters he wrote to his wife, Lepa, and the censor marks on those letters. When World War I ended, Đorđe was sent to the Netherlands for repatriation to Serbia.

Đorđe's letters provide personal insight into the life as a Serbian prisoner of war in those German camps. In the first letter, dated 25<sup>th</sup> October 1917, he wrote to his wife:



Picture 3: first letter, dated 25<sup>th</sup> October 1917

“Dear Lepa,  
Here I am, writing to you that I am safe and sound. This date is exactly the date when I went far away from home, when I left you and the children and today two years have passed and I have not seen you. For these two years, Lepa I haven't got the piles of letters but only three letters. It is very hard for me and I suffer very much. Dear Lepa, one year has passed since I started working with 36 Serbs, a Russian and an Englishman. All of them respect me, and I respect them as well. Dear Lepa, the parcel you sent me, I received on the 10th day. Namely, out of 36 Serbs, I am the first one who has received a parcel. I was surprised when I read the address on the parcel and what is most important it was touching. The bread you sent every Serb took it, crossed themselves and kissed it, and then we all started to cry happy tears. On this happy and touching day, I shared and ate the bread brotherly with my people. Dear Lepa, I was glad when I received the parcel, but I was pondering for a long time and I think you deprived yourself of food in order to send me this, and if you had been hungry two or three days because of this parcel you shouldn't have sent me it.

34 Exhumation reports, Archives of Serbia (AS): The Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 4th October 1937 No. 84024/XII.

*I would like it more if I had received letters in which you would have written something about you and your children, and also I would be very happy if I had received the promised photo, for which I am anxiously waiting.*

*Dear Lepa, I would kindly ask you to write me more often, to send me photos of you and the children and if you can send me those books I asked for, and one pair of warm peasant's socks.*

*I hope you and the children are healthy.*

*I am sending you my regards. Kiss my Duška, Milica and a little yet unseen Ružica. Send my regards to Natalija and all the others who are asking about me.*

*Until we see each other again.*

*Yours, Đoka*<sup>35</sup>

In his second letter, dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917, he wrote that he was healthy, but was requesting more letters from his wife. He also he made a request to his wife in the name of a comrade who was with him:

*“Draga Lepa, there is one man from Kragujevac here with me, Boža Radović. His wife died, he has two children and they are in an orphanage. He hasn't got any letters and he hasn't got any news about them. A month ago, he sent 10 marks to them in order to have some photos taken and to send him one, but to this day he has received neither a reply nor the photo. Please, Lepa, would you be so kind as to visit those children and see how they are and if they have received the money. Anyway, in case you can't go, try to get some information through that girl, who is a housekeeper in the orphanage; she is close to you. If possible, Lepa, do this immediately and inform me. The children's names are Angelina and Simka. Their father is sending regards to them.”*



Picture 4: Picture taken on 15<sup>th</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1917 in a prisoner-of-war camp, possibly Soltau.

In the third letter, dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918, he wrote that he had received the parcels from his wife. She sent one in October and one in December 1917, but he received them only on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1918. A bit further on in his letter, he wrote:

*“No, I don't have anything here, everything I have is there. Thus, as I have already said, do not send me anything, because I don't want you and the children to suffer without the food, and I, let God help me. I have enough bread for now; I have enough money for tobacco; I have two pairs of state underwear and three pairs which are personally mine.*

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<sup>35</sup> Đorđe ends his letters always with Đoka, which is his nickname, which was not uncommon in Serbia back then and now.

*Therefore, I don't miss anything. I just miss you and my children. I only miss all of you."*

The last letter which Đorđe's great-granddaughter has in her possession is dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1918. In it Đorđe writes that he has been separated from the Serbs, with whom he spent 2½ years.

He writes further:

*"I am isolated and sent away among Frenchmen, Englishmen, Belgians and Russians, so I neither know what they are telling me nor do they know what I am telling them. The separation from my people was heart-breaking. Today, my life is miserable and dangerous for my eyesight. Anyway, I can't see out of my left eye, and there is a danger that I will lose the vision in the other eye, because of the labour. Dear Lepa, if you don't get my letters soon, you have to know that I am not alive anymore. I'd rather die than wander around as a blind person. A blind man doesn't work in the mine.<sup>36</sup> If I escape from here, I will inform you. Just, I feel sorry that I still haven't got the photo of you and the children, in order to see Ružica as well. Dear Lepa, hereby I am sending you 25 marks. Buy the children what they want, let them know it is from their father."*

Dragi Rajičić sent a telegram from Gornji Milanovac, dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1919, to Đorđe's wife, informing her about his death.

*"Dear Madam,*

*I consider as my humankind duty to inform you that your husband, Mr Đoko, died in Millingen<sup>37</sup> from flu and that I was there by chance with my brother, who also died. I had known Đoka since 1917 and he asked me then on his deathbed to inform you about his death.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Dragi Rajičić, tradesman*

*Please, I would like to apologise for not informing you sooner about his death, but please be convinced that only three days ago I arrived home after four years."*

## Repatriation

Upon the arrival of the last wave of 40,000 civilian refugees in the Netherlands, mainly from the northwest of France, in October 1918, a governmental commission was instituted to take care of their repatriation. The commission was led by J.B. Kan, State Secretary at the Ministry of Interior. The other members were D.W. baron van Heeckeren for Foreign Affairs

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36 He is referring to the potash salt mines in the Aller-Leine Valley, to which PoWs from Soltau and Celle were sent to work, see Otte, p. 188, who also describes the injuries inflicted by the salt mining.

37 Millingen=Nieuw-Milligen, a village near Apeldoorn, the Netherlands.

and one person each from the navy and the army. The commission first met on 29<sup>th</sup> October, when representatives of the French and Belgian delegations were present.<sup>38</sup>

Most problems were solved within a week: the refugees would be repatriated by sea, via the shortest route, i.e. Vlissingen-Dunkirk, but initially Rotterdam-Dieppe, because of mines and other inconveniences at sea. The French chartered boats from the Batavier Line, which launched a daily service from Rotterdam on 12<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>39</sup> These transports lasted until 10<sup>th</sup> January 1919.<sup>40</sup>

After the armistice came into force on 11<sup>th</sup> November, the Dutch decided that all foreign soldiers who were exchanged or interned in the Netherlands, due to the Geneva and The Hague conventions, should be repatriated at the earliest convenience. Hence 1,700 Brits and four Americans left the country on 15<sup>th</sup> November, while 30,000 Belgians were repatriated before the end of the year.<sup>41</sup> One of the reasons why the government promoted this fast repatriation was the expected arrival of hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war from the Entente armies, who – under article X of the Armistice – were to be immediately released from German camps. They would also be repatriated via the Netherlands. These soldiers had no special status under the Conventions. The commission, led by Jan Kan, would once more take the lead.<sup>42</sup>

The Council of Ministers discussed this as early as 11<sup>th</sup> November and was well aware of the risks involved in the operation, knowing that the Spanish flu had broken out in the areas along the eastern border.<sup>43</sup>

The situation in Germany was chaotic; a humanitarian disaster was about to break out. The nourishment of the PoWs in German camps had already been problematic during the war, but now, with the ghost of revolution having been released, the food situation became even more desperate. And, contrary to the arrangements made between the parties involved aimed at regulating the numbers of military personnel arriving in the Netherlands, smaller and larger groups of soldiers, and sometimes even whole companies, would arrive at the border on their own initiative.<sup>44</sup>

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38 Vluchtelingen. *Algemeen Handelsblad*. 31st October 1918, p. 2.

39 Reports by the board of directors to the supervisory committee for the second half of 1918 and the first half of 1919 in: SAR 1256 (Wm. H. Müller & Co.) inv. nr. 765. Cf. *De terugkeer der vluchtelingen naar hun land*. *Rotterdamsch nieuwsblad*. 7th November 1918, p. 9.

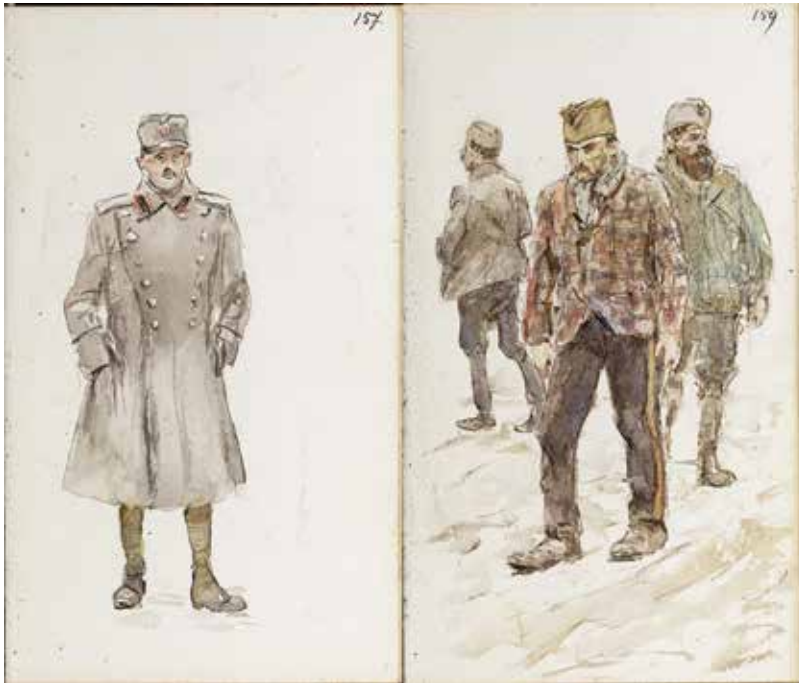
40 Leclercq, p. 137.

41 Leclercq, p. 92.

42 De repatriëring der vrijgelaten krijgsgevangenen. *De Telegraaf*. 17th November 1918, p. 6.

43 *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1918-1919*, p 824 (18th December 1918) and *Terugkeer van krijgsgevangenen*. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 11th November 1918, p. 10.

44 *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1918-1919*, p 824-825 (18th December 1918).



Picture 5: 'Serbian officer' (left) and 'Serbian soldiers who arrived in our country from German prisoner camps' from the sketchbook of Jan Hoyneck van Papendrecht.

The repatriation of the Serbs, as well as the Portuguese and Romanians, was organised by the French.<sup>45</sup> In an article written in the summer of 1919, the French member of the commission for repatriation, General Paul Boucabeille, summarised the three challenges of his mission: food, transportation and medical care. As far as food was concerned, he could rely on the food rations of the American Relief Fund and the food that the French could buy from the Dutch. Where it seems that the French and Brits succeeded, the Serbs were not always happy with the amount of food that the Serbian authorities could provide.<sup>46</sup>

The logistical side of the matter seemed even more complex. There was almost no rolling stock, and if there was then there was a shortage of coal, which had started several years prior.<sup>47</sup> As one of the largest camps, Friedrichsfeld (south of Wesel), was situated along the Rhine, an agreement was reached by the Repatriation Commission that the French, Serbs, Romanians and Portuguese would be evacuated by small ships via the Rhine.

45 Krijgsgevangenen via Rotterdam. *Algemeen Handelsblad*. 23rd December 1918, p. 9.

46 'Milligen' in: NL-HaNA, BiZa / Armwezen, 1918-1947, 2.04.55, inv.nr. 569. The Serbs, unlike the Belgians, French and Britons had not received extra bread rations in the German camps from their government either and received considerably less parcels during the war than others, see Otte, p. 80, 85.

47 On 16 December the Minister of War replied to written questions that "a significant part of the rolling stock [is] needed on a day-to-day basis for the transit of thousands of foreign prisoners of war", *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer* 1918-1919 nummer 122.

The soldiers would board the open ships in Wesel, which would sail down the Rhine, Waal and Merwede in convoys for about three days. Provided the weather permitted, the boats would sail all the way to the port area of IJsselhaven in Rotterdam, from which the soldiers would continue their journey to France aboard one of the Batavier boats chartered by France. At a later stage, transfer points were added to the route in Nijmegen and Dordrecht, after which combined transport by boat and rail also became possible.<sup>48</sup> Nijmegen, together with Enschede, was one of the railway junctions on the border with Germany, via which many soldiers also arrived.

During the course of November it became clear that the numbers of former prisoners of war arriving per day, sometimes thousands, surpassed the number of departures. Greater capacity was needed. The French chartered more boats and started operating the Vlissingen-Dunkirk route. From 27<sup>th</sup> November, they started daily operations of the packet boats *Le Nord* and *Le France*.<sup>49</sup> The French also started using extra boats from Rotterdam: the packet boat *Lutetia* and two “Holland Steamship Co.” boats, the *Lingestroom* and *Texelstroom*.

In spite of the enlarged departure capacity, arrivals were still unpredictable and exceeded the transit capacity – mainly because of the lack of rolling stock. Temporary shelter needed to be organised, primarily in the border areas near Enschede, Hengelo and Oldenzaal, where makeshift camps were made in textile factories, and later at the places where the interned foreign soldiers had been billeted during the war. To distinguish them from the wartime camps, these camps were called new camps. The soldiers were kept by nationality: British and French in Vlasakkers near Amersfoort, Russians in Gaasterland and Oldebroek, French and Serbs in Nieuw-Milligen near Apeldoorn, Belgians in Zeist, Italians and Portuguese in Harderwijk.<sup>50</sup>

That Christmas, the Repatriation Commission published the first statistics: the daily arrival was between 315 and 996, the daily departure between 1,253 and 12,302. The need for shelter per day was between 17,151 and 30,462. Over the preceding six weeks, 8,387 Belgians, 38,059 Brits, 81,355 French, 6,473 Italians, 3,983 Portuguese, 6,336 Russians, 823 Serbs, 15 Japanese, 119 Americans, and 10 Romanians had arrived. Of these 145,560 soldiers, 118,673 had left the country: 75,255, including 130 Serbs, had left via Rotterdam by boat; 34,874 French had left via Vlissingen by boat; and 8,544, primarily Belgians, had departed via Roosendaal by rail.<sup>51</sup>

That week, journalists from *Algemeen Handelsblad* conducted checks on the different missions in Rotterdam that were organising the repatriation. They were most impressed by

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48 Boucabeille, p.6.

49 Transit of French prisoners of war in: *NL-HaNA, BiZa / Armwezen, 1918-1947, 2.04.55, inv.nr. 549*.

50 Klinkert, p. 2449. Cf. *Krijgsgevangenen. Algemeen Handelsblad*. 26 November 1918, p. 10; *Italianen en Portugeezen. Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*. 28 December 1918, p. 17.

51 *Krijgsgevangenen. Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 30th December, p.1.

the British mission, which used the Hudig and Veder warehouses in the Lekhaven port area. Compared to this luxury, the French mission in the Waalhaven was considered much poorer. Even if they had stopped the transshipment of prisoners under the open sky, they, unlike their British allies, had no baths available and the soldiers received new uniforms only upon arrival.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, concentrations of Serbs appeared at all camps: the Enschede/Usselo area, Nijmegen, Nieuw-Milligen. When their numbers were at the highest, at the peak between arrival and departure, disaster struck.

The Serbs, exhausted by seven years of war (since the first Balkan War of 1912), had been through captivity, malnourishment and forced labour, and this eventually took its toll on them.

The French athlete and rugby player, Géo André, who competed in the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games, saw the Serbs arrive in Soltau a few years earlier. He described it as follows: "During my stay at Soltau, I witnessed one of the saddest sights I have ever seen: the arrival of the Serbs. I will never forget that gruesome parade. Emaciated, tottering, haggard, they lingered. The few kilometres' walk from the station used up their last strength; all they wanted was to get a suitable place and drop down." He continued: "Moved by the desperate look in their eyes, we gave them some bread, any kind of food. The sentries rushed over to them to prevent them from accepting, and threatened them with bayonets. But the Serbs, less passive than the Russians, stood up, with sparkling eyes, and their pride rebuffed their jailers."<sup>53</sup>

When the Serbs arrived in the Netherlands in the autumn and winter of 1918/1919, they were physically weaker than their allies. They were, thus, also more prone to disease.

## Rotterdam

Rotterdam was, together with Vlissingen, one of the two ports used for repatriation. The Sint Franciscus Gasthuis in Rotterdam, for example, treated seven Serbian, four French and two Italian soldiers between 6<sup>th</sup> December 1918 and 6<sup>th</sup> January 1919 alone. Eight of them were treated for pulmonary diseases, including four for Spanish flu.

On 11<sup>th</sup> December 1918, a 37-year-old soldier 2<sup>nd</sup> class of the 145 RI Vital Botte from Calonne-Ricouart died of heart failure, while on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 29-year-old Giambattista Rosso from Valli dei Signori near Vicenza died of tuberculosis.

One week earlier, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1919, Miloš Simonović and Svetozar Dimitrijević were admitted and diagnosed with Spanish flu. After 10 days of treatment, Miloš Simonović died

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52 Krijgsgevangenen via Rotterdam. op cit.

53 André, pp. 120-121.



of Spanish flu with pneumonia and nephritis. Dimitrijević recovered and left the hospital on 18<sup>th</sup> January, after 18 days of treatment.<sup>54</sup> Miloš was buried on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1919 with military honours in Rotterdam (Crooswijk) General Cemetery. The ceremony was led by the Russian archpriest Alexis Rosanoff from The Hague.<sup>55</sup>

## Nijmegen

In accordance with the agreement reached between the Allied Powers and the Dutch Commission for Repatriation, soldiers who were released from the prisoner-of-war camp in Friedrichsfeld, which had held French, Russian, British, Serbian, Italian, Portuguese and Belgian soldiers, were mostly repatriated via boat along the river Rhine. On the morning of Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 1919, the Rhine steamer “Bluecher” arrived in Nijmegen with 1,026 Serbs and 10 Frenchmen. Apart from a few dozen soldiers who were too sick to disembark, most soldiers bivouacked at the Infantry barracks situated in Groesbeekseweg, southeast of the centre. The majority of the arriving Serbs had been taken prisoner in Montenegro in late 1915 and had spent the last three years in camps in East Frisia and the province of Hannover, before they arrived in Friedrichsfeld. That same evening saw a second boat with Serbs arrive. There was optimism among these men when they reached the neutral Netherlands. It wouldn't be long before they could take a ship home.<sup>56</sup>

Those too sick to disembark were transported to Dordrecht, where they arrived on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January. On the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> January, some 50 Serbian soldiers in Nijmegen were found to be ill and a field hospital was opened in the adjacent building. These soldiers should not have been transported with their healthy compatriots, but rather should have stayed in Friedrichsfeld to recover before being transported.<sup>57</sup> The next day, Tuesday, most of the Serbs travelled on to Nieuw-Milligen, some 60 km north, to a transition camp.<sup>58</sup>

Serbian soldier Dejan Ilić died early on Friday morning, 17<sup>th</sup> January. The next day, five of his fellow-countrymen died in the field hospital. It was soon realised that an outbreak of Spanish flu had reached epidemic proportions.

By the beginning of the next week, after three more Serbs had died on 19<sup>th</sup> January and another five on 20<sup>th</sup> January, national newspapers sent reporters to the town to report on the events.

One of the Serbs, who was buried on 21<sup>st</sup> January along with 10 others, was 40-year-old Dejan Milojević, who had been fighting for almost a decade. He had participated as a

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54 Admission Register op. cit.

55 Servische krijgsgevangenen. *Rotterdamsch nieuwsblad*. 16th January 1919, p.1.

56 Krijgsgevangenen. *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant*. 13<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p.2.

57 Spaansche griep onder de Servische Krijgsgevangenen. *De Telegraaf*. 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1919, p.3.

58 'Milligen' op. cit.

volunteer fighting the Ottomans in Africa along with the Italians during the Italian-Turkish War, after which he served his motherland in both Balkan Wars and during the Great War. He had been taken prisoner two years earlier.<sup>59</sup>

In response to the large number of deaths, the Serbian Envoy went to Nijmegen on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. He was present for the funeral at the Rustoord protestant cemetery, which was led by the Russian archpriest from The Hague. The Dutch authorities were represented by garrison commander Major Donker, the French allies by Major Wilbien. The dead were buried with military honours.<sup>60</sup>

In one week's time, between 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> January, 21 Serbs died in Nijmegen. A week later, Spanish flu took the life of a 22<sup>nd</sup> victim, when 38-year-old nurse soldier Sietze Hassing, who had contracted the disease when treating the Serbs, died. The Dutchman was a father of five. A help committee was set up by public initiative to collect money for his widow.<sup>61</sup>

## Dordrecht

A total of 66 sick soldiers were sent from Nijmegen and arrived in Dordrecht on 15<sup>th</sup> January. They were treated at a makeshift field hospital set up on the premises of the Kromhout regional school.<sup>62</sup>

The first Serbian soldier who died was 29-year-old Svetozar Božanić from Varvarin. He died on 17<sup>th</sup> January, while another six Serbs died in the same week. Before 7<sup>th</sup> February, another eight Serbs died in Dordrecht. They were buried with military honours in the Roman Catholic part of the general cemetery.<sup>63</sup>

Most Serbs in Dordrecht were awaiting subsequent transport to Rotterdam, where a special auxiliary hospital for Serbs and Portuguese was to be set up by the Red Cross.<sup>64</sup>

## Rotterdam auxiliary hospital

At the beginning of January, the Rotterdam Red Cross found a multi-purpose building belonging to the Society of St. Aloysius in Rotterdam, which they used as a site for the auxiliary hospital. The hospital, with 80 beds, was run by retired medical officer first class Jan Smits, MD, who had spent the war leading the military medical inspection committee and had been chief physician for the interned German prisoners of war in Rotterdam.<sup>65</sup>

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59 Spaansche griep onder de Servische Krijgsgevangenen. op.cit.

60 De sterfte onder de in Nederland gekomen Serviërs. *De Telegraaf*. 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1919, p.3.

61 Op het veld van eer! *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 6<sup>th</sup> February 1919, p. 5.

62 De Servische krijgsgevangenen in Dordrecht. *De Dordrechtsche Courant*. 15<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p.6.

63 Laatste Berichten. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 24<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p. 2.

64 *Servische krijgsgevangenen* op. cit.

65 Het Roode Kruis te Rotterdam. *Algemeen Handelsblad*. 8<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p. 2; cf. Mandere, p.67.

50-year-old Mrs Cateau Wilkens-Havelaar, who had been a board member of the ladies' society of the Rotterdam Red Cross for several years, was charged with the daily management. She was the wife of Henri Wilkens, of the Schiedam distillery Van Dulken, Weiland & Co., who was also the Serbian consul in Rotterdam.



Picture 6: Serbian soldiers and staff at the Rotterdam auxiliary hospital, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1919

On 5<sup>th</sup> February, the Serbian Envoy, Dr Milan Đ. Milojević, visited the hospital. That day pictures were taken by Rotterdam-based photographer H.A. van Oudgaarden. Captain Dragoljub N. Đurković, who was taking care of the sick Serbs in Nieuw-Milligen, came to Rotterdam for the occasion. That day, 38 Serbs and 1 Portuguese soldier were treated, and the next day 31 healthy Serbs left aboard the *Batavier IV*.<sup>66</sup>

### *Nieuw-Milligen*

14<sup>th</sup> January 1919 saw the arrival of 1,788 Serbian soldiers in Nieuw-Milligen from Nijmegen.<sup>67</sup> On that day, 1,561 Serbs and 651 French were in the camp and another 1,208 French soldiers had departed. On 16<sup>th</sup> January, four sick soldiers were evacuated by hospital train and one was brought to the military hospital in Amersfoort. On 17<sup>th</sup> January, 414 Serbs left for Rotterdam, while 89 new Serbs arrived at the camp. Early on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> January, 39-year-old Srećko Bogosavljević from Miokus, soldier of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and soldier of the Niš military reserve, Milosav Milosavljević from Kovanica, both died of the Spanish flu. That same afternoon, another Serb was brought to the military hospital in Amersfoort, while two more Frenchmen, a 24-year-old soldier of the

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66 Servische Militairen. *De Maasbode*. 6<sup>th</sup> February 1919, p. 3.

67 'Milligen' op. cit.

416 RI Jean Marie Mortier from Givors and 38-year-old soldier 60e RI Pierre Paul Bérard from Riocaud, died. One of the two soldiers brought to Amersfoort, Živko Damjanović from Šabac, who had turned 39 on the day of his arrival in Nieuw-Milligen, died of bronchopneumonia on 19<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>68</sup> He was buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery of Our Lady in Amersfoort.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, early in the morning, the non-commissioned officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Đorđe Vukosavljević from Kragujevac, died.

During the month of January, another four Frenchmen and 25 Serbs died in the camp in Nieuw-Milligen. The Serbs were buried in a common grave in the reformed cemetery in Garderen.

## Twente

Enschede, or rather the whole region of Twente, in the east of the Netherlands on the German border, was another node in the network via which prisoners were repatriated. Several railway lines from Germany come together near Enschede. The prisoners were deloused in factory buildings in the region and awaited further transport to Rotterdam or any of the transition camps. In Enschede and Usselo there was an outbreak of Spanish flu in the second week of January 1919, which started among the British and caused the deaths of eight Brits, one New Zealander and 16 Serbs. Another three Serbs died in the adjacent Hengelo. Given the location near the border, and the fact that the outbreak started earlier, there is little reason to assume a direct connection with the Serbs from Friedrichsfeld who arrived in Nijmegen. At the beginning of February, the Serbian authorities sent Lieutenant P. Najdanović to investigate the sick in Twente, with nine sick individuals remaining in Enschede and four in Hengelo.<sup>69</sup>

## Vlissingen

Vlissingen was the second port of departure for the French mission. It was used twice to transport Serbs. Here, 17 French and five Serbs were hospitalised, of which four – all French – died.<sup>70</sup>

## *The Amsterdam committee for the benefit of Serbian prisoners of war*

In early February, nurse Ludovica Koning visited the sick Serbian prisoners left behind in the various towns all across the country. She herself had volunteered three times for

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68 'Milligen' op. cit.; Death declarations Amersfoort 1919 in: *Archief Eemland*, 0014, inv.nr. 16; Death declarations Apeldoorn 1919, in: *CODA Apeldoorn. Overlijdensverklaringen (1900-1949)*.

69 Binnenland. *Rotterdamsch nieuwsblad*. 29<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p.2 and *Krijgsgevangenen. Algemeen Handelsblad*. 4<sup>th</sup> February 1919, p. 2.

70 Leclercq, p. 145.

medical missions in Serbia during wartime between 1913 and 1916 – on one occasion, during the mission to Monastir, led by Doctor Van Dijk in 1916, she was awarded the Serbian Silver Medal for Bravery. Moved by the fate of the sick Serbs being repatriated, she founded a committee for the benefit of Serbian prisoners of war.

She wrote about her findings on 23<sup>rd</sup> February in *De Telegraaf*:

“During the Balkan Wars, when we treated these brave soldiers, with their exceptional endurance, we could never have imagined seeing some of them in their current state: exhausted, sick, apathetical.

First I visited the colonial hospital in Nijmegen. There were only seven sick left. Others, and they were many, had died in these barracks in Nijmegen and elsewhere in our country. The Serbs were transported from Germany to the Netherlands in open boats, where most contracted a cold, the flu or pneumonia. Some of these were brought to the barracks in Nijmegen, where medical orderlies were present wearing Red Cross brassards, some of whom didn't even know how to take a temperature, let alone how to treat the severely ill. Now the Serbs were in the colonial hospital, and older nurses could treat them. Nurses in the Wilhelmina hospital treated three patients, one of whom was in a serious condition – they wished they could use a spell to make them recover.

In addition, there were nine patients in Enschede, two in the hospital and seven quarantined. Some were well; some were seriously ill, but the head nurse and soldiers had compassion.

In Dordrecht some of the sick were in a school and some on a yacht, the Maasymph. On that boat the Serbs were treated excellently.

In Milligen, near Stroe, 20 patients lay in a camp, where there was never a hospital. Their position left much to be desired, but the seriously sick could not be transported. The care and nursing by the sisters was good.

Some 25 sick Serbs in Rotterdam were admitted to an emergency hospital, well equipped by the wife of consul Wilkens, where nurses treated them. The Serbs were regularly visited by Mr Milojević, the Serbian Envoy, and by officers, Colonel Popović and Vukićević.<sup>71</sup>

On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, an arts evening was organised for the benefit of the Serbs in our country, which raised f1000.<sup>72</sup> This enabled the committee to provide the Serbs with some refreshments.”<sup>73</sup>

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71 *Diplomatie. De Maasbode*. 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918, p.2 identifies them as Colonel M.A. Popovitch, recently appointed military attaché, and Legation Secretary, Reserve-Lieutenant Nemanya Voukitchevitch.

72 Amount in Dutch guilders, the former Dutch currency replaced by the Euro in 2002. The amount equates to a value today of €6,000.

73 *Bij de zieke Serviërs. De Telegraaf*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1919, p. 6.



Picture 7: meeting of the committee for the benefit of Serbian prisoners of war, Amsterdam, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1919

From February, the transit of prisoners of war via the Netherlands was gradually phased out. The total number of Serbian prisoners of war who arrived in the Netherlands between November and February was 4,316. As we saw, some of these died, primarily of the Spanish flu. Of the remaining Serbs, 1,902 were repatriated via Vlissingen, the others via Rotterdam.<sup>74</sup>

In 1947, 30 years after his arrival in the Netherlands, Dr Milan Đ. Milojević, who first served as the chargé d'affaires of the Kingdom of Serbia and, from December 1918 until 1920, the Envoy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, wrote in his memoirs about what he did for his compatriots: *“Unfortunately, at the end of the war, many escaped prisoners of war were not lucky enough to go to the Salonica Front. Then the “Spanish” flu broke out and killed them. They were scattered in various places in the Netherlands. During that period, even a military attaché himself was very ill so I had to visit many of the ill. Many of them died and were buried without anybody from the embassy. It was very sad to see young people dying in agony and excruciating pain. One of them, while suffering a lot, took my hand yelling “don’t let me go, sir.” Unfortunately, they could not be helped anymore.*

*The embassy subsequently acquired the data on the number of and places where our soldiers had died. With a Russian priest, I visited all the Serbian soldiers’ graves over which the priest performed a church funeral*

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<sup>74</sup> Statistics taken from: Krijgsgevangenen. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 30<sup>th</sup> December 1918. p. 1 (arrivals and departures between Nov-Dec); Repatriëring van krijgsgevangenen. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919, p. 3 (arrivals and departures Nov-Jan), Transit of French prisoners of war op. cit. (departures from Vlissingen).

ceremony. Thus, the neutral Netherlands had the opportunity to experience more closely the characteristics and virtues of the Serbian soldier and his deeply-developed homeland duty awareness, as well as his unconditional readiness.”<sup>75</sup>



Picture 8: Serbian soldiers and staff at the Rotterdam auxiliary hospital, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1919

A monument was placed in the Dutch Reformed Cemetery in Garderen in April 1919 by the legation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The text, written in French, said “*les soldats serbes décédés au camp de Millingen [sic] 1919*” with 29 names in French, and on the back, in Serbian and Dutch, the text read “Died for Serbia / the grateful Serbian fatherland” (“Умрли за Србију” / “Gestorven voor Serbie”, “Благодарна Отаџбина Србија” / “Het Dankbaar Serbische Vaderland”). By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, weathering had taken its toll and the letters had almost faded.<sup>76</sup>

A memorial service was organised by the legation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1919 in the Russian chapel on the Bazarstraat in The Hague to commemorate the Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands after they were released from German captivity. The service was attended by the Serbian Envoy, the staff of the legation, the Serbian consul-general, Mr Merens, and some Dutch and Russian friends of the Serbian people.<sup>77</sup>

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75 Milojević, p. 180.

76 Veldhuizen, p. 171.

77 Een Servische mis. *Haagsche courant*. 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1919, p.5.



Picture 9: monument in Garderen, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1920, a similar monument to the one in Garderen was erected in Rusthof Cemetery in Nijmegen.<sup>78</sup>

In Enschede, which was a main point of entry, like Nijmegen, a monument was erected early in 1921 to commemorate the transit of 32,690 French, 26,960 British, 6,930 Belgian, 6,650 Italian, 1,660 Serbian, 50 Russian, and 15 Japanese soldiers, who passed through the town between 20<sup>th</sup> November 1918 and 20<sup>th</sup> January 1919.<sup>79</sup>

### Statistics

In 1921 and 1924, the Inquiry Office of the Red Cross published two reports of their wartime activities. The office had been established in the wake of the Great War to collect the information ('list of names of the sick and wounded') required under Article 4 of the Second Geneva Convention of 1906, as well as being the 'inquiry office for prisoners

of war', required under article 14 of the Annex to The Hague Convention No. IV. During the course of the war, the number of tasks had been extended to include tasks not required by The Hague and Geneva conventions. The last such tasks, added in the autumn of 1918, were to collect bequests on behalf of the French Legation of the deceased French refugees and the registration of sick, wounded and deceased repatriating prisoners of war, as well as the care of the bequests of the deceased on behalf of the legations of their countries of origin.<sup>80</sup>

The archives of the office, which would have been extremely valuable for this research, were moved to Bezuidenhout 33 in 1942. This was one of 10 public buildings that went up in flames when the Royal Air Force accidentally bombed the Bezuidenhout area of The Hague on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1945.

78 Een monument voor te Nijmegen gestorven Serviërs. *De Telegraaf*. 5<sup>th</sup> August 1920, p. 2.

79 Het gedenkteeken op het Hoedemakersplein. *Twentsch dagblad Tubantia en Enschedesche courant*. 8<sup>th</sup> February 1921, p. 5.

80 Leclercq, p. 7-10, 28.



City or hospital	Casualties during repatriation of POWs			Other casualties		Total # records
	sick	deceased	# records	deceased	# records	
Amersfoort military hospital	2	1	1			1
Beerta				1	1	1
Borger	1	1	1		1	2
Dordrecht				2		
Dordrecht Kromhout Emergency hospital or Ecole Belge	67	14	15			15
Enschede	21	20	16	1	1	17
Enschede RC Hospital Bisschopstraat 17	1					
Enschede State quarantine camp	6					
Eijgelshoven				1		
The Hague				1		
Hengelo RC Emergency hospital	6	3	3			3
Hengelo St. Anthony Madhouse	2					
Milligen	30	30	29			29
Nijmegen	1	1				
Nijmegen Hospital Colonial reserve	29	22	21			21
Nijmegen Wilhelmina Hospital	3					
Rotterdam Hospital St. Francis			1		1	2
Vlissingen St. Joseph hospital	5					
	<b>174</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>91</b>

Table 2: numbers of sick and deceased Serbs: Red Cross vs. the numbers of death records found

The information collected by the Inquiry Office regarding the released Serbian prisoners was shared with the Serbian legation.<sup>81</sup> This information was not found in the archives of Yugoslavia.<sup>82</sup> As a result of this loss, it was not possible to verify the data against originals.

Given the large number of people missing after World War I about whom enquiries were received, the Red Cross asked the Ministry of the Interior in 1921 to report all deceased foreigners between 1914 and 1919. The names collected during the war and the names reported by the municipalities were compared. If the victims were military and died during the repatriation, i.e. between 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 and 25<sup>th</sup> March 1919, they were added to one list. If they were not military, or had died before or after the mentioned period, the Inquiry Office included them on another list. Hence, the 1924 report of the Inquiry Office gives different tables, one for prisoners of war and one that includes numbers of casualties “not including those interned and prisoners of war”.<sup>83</sup>

81 Leclercq, p. 32.

82 No such lists exist in the files of the Serbian legation in The Hague (Fond 425). The archives of the Serbian legation London (Fond 341) were not accessible.

83 Leclercq, see p. 144-145 for the sick and deceased during repatriation and 152-157 for the others.

Because the Civil Code of the Netherlands, which is largely based on the Napoleonic Code, required all deaths to be registered within three days in the Civil Registry of the municipality where they had occurred, it is possible to verify these death records against the statistics given by the Inquiry Office. Between 2012 and 2016 all, by now digitised, death records for the cities mentioned were consulted and compared (Table 2).

It is possible that the difficulty the Dutch had in spelling Serbian names may explain part of the differences. The exhumation sheets, for example, which were prepared by the Yugoslav Ministry of Justice in 1937 (see below), contained at least four duplicate names for Enschede. It is true that one death occurred on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1918 and 16 (not 20) during the repatriation of November 1918 - February 1919. The same could have happened in Dordrecht and Nijmegen – where no such proof exists.<sup>84</sup>

For Nieuw-Milligen, as many as 30 exhumation sheets were prepared, though only 29 deaths had occurred. Here the difference can be explained by death certificate No. 105 of 1919 for Dragan Dimitrijević. He had been pronounced dead and registered as such, but it was only after the burial in Garderen that it was discovered that it was not him, but rather his compatriot Vasilije Simonović, who had died on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1919. While a new death certificate was issued for Simonović, the old one was never cancelled.<sup>85</sup>

One victim in Borger was missing. The old mining village of Eygelshoven had a sizeable Slovenian mining community. Here a Slovenian casualty may have been registered as Serbian. The alleged victim in The Hague could not be identified in the 1914-1919 death records.

The numbers of sick reported are only accurate for Amersfoort, Dordrecht, Enschede, Hengelo, Nijmegen and Vlissingen. The numbers in Nieuw-Milligen, which the Inquiry Office does not claim to be correct, must have been at least 20 higher, i.e. more than 50, given the fact that by the time nurse Koning arrived in February, 29 had died, two had been transported to Amersfoort and 20 remained sick. The total number of Serbian soldiers who were sick and being treated in Dutch hospitals in the second half of January 1919, thus, exceeded 200.

## Exhumation and reburial

In 1931, the Dutch Interior and Agriculture Ministry wrote a letter to the Municipal authorities in Barneveld, as well as other cities, announcing the intention of the Yugoslav Government to consolidate the graves of the Serbian WWI victims buried in the Netherlands

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84 The Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia prepared 93 exhumation reports (4<sup>th</sup> October 1937 No. 84024/XII, held by the Archives of Serbia (AS) together with the *List of combatants who died in the Netherlands, whose remains were exhumed and transferred to lay to rest in the mausoleum in Heinrichsgrün-Jindřichovice Czechoslovakia*. [in Serbian]). Five of the reports were never signed: the ones for D. Paponić in Lonneker, D. Stojanović, Milorad Radanović and S. Rajčić in Enschede and Dragutin Dimitrijević in Garderen.

85 'Milligen' op. cit.

in a graveyard in Tilly [sic] near Paris. The ministry asked the municipalities to cooperate with the Yugoslav authorities.<sup>86</sup>

It was only in April 1937 that the Yugoslav authorities gave orders to start preparations for the transfer of the earthly remains to the Serbian military field of honour in Thiais, south of Paris. That summer, exhumation lists were prepared at the Ministry of Justice in Belgrade listing the soldiers who had died in the Netherlands as a result of World War I activity. The graves were situated in eight municipalities: Amersfoort, Barneveld, Borger, Dordrecht, Enschede, Hengelo, Nijmegen and Rotterdam.

The Yugoslav consul-general in the Netherlands, poet and painter Josip 'Sibe' Miličić, who was born in Croatia but raised in Serbia, had prepared everything with his fellow diplomats in Brussels and Paris. This included obtaining discounts from the various state railways, due to the humanitarian nature of the transport, when the Ministry in Belgrade informed the diplomats in November 1937 that Paris would not be the destination.<sup>87</sup> They had received information that the military cemetery did not have enough space to accommodate almost 90 coffins from the Netherlands.<sup>88</sup> A new destination was found that autumn: the mausoleum in Jindřichovice, Bohemia, which had been the location of Austria's Heinrichsgrün prisoner-of-war camp during the war. As a matter of fact, as determined previously, some of the soldiers who died in the Netherlands passed through that camp between 1915 and 1918. After Paris, this was the closest place with Serbian graves in Europe. As the transportation would now take place by road and via Germany, Nijmegen, on the Dutch-German border, was chosen instead of Rotterdam as the point of coordination during the exhumations.

An inventory of Serbian soldiers who lost their lives was compiled immediately after the war. In Czech and Moravian territory alone, the nuclei of the Czechoslovak Republic that emerged out of WWI, there were some 9,500 graves of Serbs who had died of malnutrition and maltreatment in Austrian concentration camps.<sup>89</sup>

From 1924, concrete plans were made to concentrate the remains of the Serbian victims in a mausoleum elsewhere in Bohemia. To this end, in the spring of 1926, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes purchased two plots of land (covering a total surface area of 2,490m<sup>2</sup>) from Karl Lößl, Heinrichsgrün No. 14, to construct a mausoleum where

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86 Ministry of Interior and Agriculture to Mayor of Barneveld, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1931 in: Municipal Archives Barneveld, Archive of the Municipal Authorities, correspondence, rubric 35 (begraafplaatsen): 1931.

87 Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), Belgrade, Fond 392 Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Belgium-Brussels, folder nr. 3, unit 11.

88 AJ, Fond 388, folder nr. 19, unit 51.

89 The Explanatory memorandum on the draft budget for 1940/41 (in: AJ, Fond 63, folder nr. 1 'Other materials') mentions 9,574 *war graves* in the Czech and Moravian lands. Scheidl, p. 97 gives the much too low estimate of 15,000 deceased Serbs in the whole of Austria-Hungary, i.e. including Austria proper, Hungary and the areas lost by Hungary under Trianon.

the victims would be reburied.<sup>90</sup> The land covered the location of a water reservoir that had been constructed during the war by forced labour - mainly from Serbia and Russia. Between 1926 and 1932, the bodies of 7,100 Serbian and 189 Russian soldiers were exhumed from cemeteries at the former Heinrichsgrün camp in Jindřichovice, Cheb (Eger) and Planá u Mariánských Lázní (Plan), and others, placed in wooden ossuaries, and transported to the mausoleum.

The Serbian Military Cemetery (mausoleum) at Jindřichovice was consecrated on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1932 under the patronage of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, President of Czechoslovakia, and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia.<sup>91</sup> By 1937, a total of 7,570 ossuaries had been reburied in the mausoleum, totalling 7,381 Serbs and 189 Russians.



Picture 10: The mausoleum in Jindřichovice, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2014

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1938, consul-general Miličić announced to the Barneveld municipal authorities that the Yugoslav government had issued a decree to exhume all remains of Yugoslav soldiers buried in the Netherlands. The remains would be relocated in a mausoleum in Czechoslovakia. To this end, two inspectors, Branko Popović and Dobrosav Popović, were appointed to lead the exhumations in the Netherlands, and were soon to be sent there.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Military cemeteries in Italy, Greece, Germany, France in: AJ, Fond 63, folder no. 231.

<sup>91</sup> Beranová, p. 64.

<sup>92</sup> Dr. J.S. Miličić to Barneveld Municipal Authorities, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1938 in: Municipal Archives Barneveld, Archive of the Municipal Authorities, correspondence, rubric 35 (*begraafplaatsen*): 1938.

Further to its 1931 letter, the Ministry of Interior also informed the mayor of Barneveld later that month of the formal decision of the Yugoslav Government to exhume the remains of Yugoslav soldiers, who had been buried in eight towns in the Netherlands, and relocate them to a mausoleum in Czechoslovakia. The secretary-general of the ministry asked the mayor for full cooperation with the two inspectors who had been appointed.<sup>93</sup>

The exhumations began in the second week of May. The two inspectors, both named Popović (unrelated), had a balanced division of work. Branko went from Rotterdam and Dordrecht via Amersfoort to Garderen, while Dobrosav started in Nijmegen and travelled via Twente (Enschede, Hengelo) to Nieuw-Buinen in Drenthe, on the border with Groningen. They were assisted by undertakers employed by the diaconate of the Dutch Reformed parish in Nijmegen. On Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May, the last of the remains of 88 soldiers that were to be brought to the mausoleum were dug up at the cemetery *Nieuw-Buinen* 32. All remains were placed in metal ossuaries and brought to Nijmegen for further transport.



Picture 11: metal ossuaries in the crypt of the mausoleum, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2014

In the minutes of the meeting of the diaconate of the Dutch Reformed parish in Nijmegen dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 1938, under the section any other business, Mr de Rooy mentions “...the exhumation of the Serbian soldiers buried on Rustoord and the involvement of the diaconate. It was a very sad job, and most at Rustoord had difficulties.

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93 Ministry of Interior to Mayor of Barneveld, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1938 in: Municipal Archives Barneveld, Archive of the Municipal Authorities, correspondence, rubric 35 (*begraafplaatsen*): 1938.

The net results amount to f 175,-<sup>94</sup> and the restitution of four second class graves.”<sup>95</sup>

After a short and solemn ceremony in Rustoord cemetery on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> May, the coffins were placed on three hearses. The funeral procession moved slowly towards the Beek-Wyler border crossing. At the border, the coffins were transferred to the German authorities. The national press reported on how the Third Reich spared no expense in this military tribute and display of power. A German company of 150 troops from Wesel was posted in a double row on the border. When the coffins crossed the border, a three-volley salute was fired. The military band played death marches. After a short speech, the captain from Wesel attached a wreath on behalf of the German Government to the metal coffins, of the erstwhile enemy. The ossuaries were placed onto two German military vehicles for the journey to the mausoleum 15 km across the German-Czechoslovak border.<sup>96</sup> This brought the total number of victims resting in Jindřichovice by 1940 to 7,659.<sup>97</sup>

On the day of the arrival of the transport, Czechoslovakia was partially mobilised because of the increased tension with Hitler's Germany regarding the Sudetenland, where the mausoleum is located. The region was annexed four months later. The harbinger of the new war caught up with the remains of the Serbian soldiers who had died in the Netherlands.

## Restoration and remembrance

The mausoleum at Jindřichovice was restored between September 1995 and October 1996, with the copper roof replaced and a new memorial plaque placed on the back, mentioning the original numbers of soldiers laid to rest there.<sup>98</sup> The 88 metal coffins from the Netherlands are still present in the mausoleum, now in the Czech Republic, where the Russian and Serbian Eastern Orthodox community of Karlovy Vary organises commemorations in June and November.

The Enschede monument to the prisoners of war in transit, which was erected on the Hoedemakersplein, has been relocated and is now in a park on the corner of Cort van der Lindenlaan and Goolkatenweg in the same town. The monument in Nijmegen has probably not survived.

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94 This amount in Dutch guilders is the equivalent of €1626 today.

95 Regional Archives Nijmegen, Archive Access Number 280 (*Nederlands Hervormde Gemeente Nijmegen Stad en Land 1591 - 1994*), Inventory Number 168 (minutes, fol. 53, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1938).

96 Overbrenging stoffelijke overschotten Servische soldaten. *Algemeen Handelsblad*. 18<sup>th</sup> May 1938, p.2, Stoffelijke resten van hier overleden Serviërs naar hun vaderland terug. *De Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*. 18<sup>th</sup> May 1938, p. 4.

97 Explanatory memorandum on the draft budget for 1940/41 op. cit.

98 Ambasadă SRJ, pp. 41-46.

At the reformed ‘Craatshof’ cemetery in Garderen, the Serbian community of the Netherlands commemorates the Serbs who died in the Netherlands every first Saturday of October. In October 2006, the original monument, which was erected in 1919 by the Legation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and which had barely survived the ravages of time, was renovated. Sexton Piet van Bentum and retired police inspector Gijs van Ginkel, who co-founded the Committee for the Serbian Monument Garderen Cemetery, received a Serb decoration for their involvement. One year later, the monument was extended when a so-called *krajputaš* was erected. In Serbia, from time immemorial, roadside monuments in the shape of persons have been erected in memory of those who fell on distant battlefields or while travelling, far from the land of their birth. This tradition was continued in Garderen when a *krajputaš* – according to the design of father Vojislav (Bilbija) from Rotterdam – was placed in the cemetery. The names of the victims from Nijmegen and Enschede were later added, while 29 crosses were placed to mark the locations of the former graves of the Serbs buried there between 1919 and 1938.



Picture 12: monument in Garderen, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012

As a result of their research, the authors of this brochure created a permanent digital online memorial in 2013 for the Serbian soldiers who died in Netherlands between 1917 and 1919.

## Search for families

Once the authors started this research, they began to find out a great deal about the birthplaces of half of those 91 unfortunate Serbian soldiers.

The first family to be found was the family of Miloš Gavrović in Miločaj, a village near Kraljevo in Central Serbia. One of the authors, Tatjana Vendrig, is from Miločaj and through her father, Andrija Raković, the family of Miloš was easily found and they showed us the monument to Miloš, which is still in the graveyard in Miločaj. Miloš's family told the authors of this brochure that they did not know exactly where Miloš had died: on the monument it states only that he “died in captivity, 1918”. His relatives thought he had died in Germany;

now they know that he died in Usselo on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1919. His remains were transported in 1938 in a metal ossuary with number 36 to Jindřichovice, where he found his final resting place.



Picture 13 : Miloš Jeremić : Inscription on the picture: "E. Schultze-Emden".

The family of Đorđe Vukosavljević, mentioned earlier in this brochure, was already in touch with Slaviša Jovanović, a member of the Serbian community in Utrecht, Netherlands. The authors contacted the great-granddaughter of Đorđe, Zorica Jelača, who shared Đorđe's letters, thus providing the authors with personal insight into life as a prisoner-of-war. She was not aware that the remains of her great-grandfather are in Jindřichovice.

In the autumn of 2014, the authors received a message from Miloš Tanasijević, a great-great-grandson of Miloš Jeremić from Resnik, a village south of Belgrade. They did not know that he had died in Nijmegen on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919<sup>99</sup> and that his remains are in Jindřichovice<sup>100</sup> until they found this information on the website [www.secanje.nl](http://www.secanje.nl). Miloš and his mother Zorica were willing to share the pictures they had of their relative and show us the monument to him, which is in the graveyard in Resnik. It is

interesting that "E Schultze-Emden" is printed on one picture. Emden is a harbour town in North-Western Germany close to the Dutch border (province of Groningen). He is also wearing a traditional Serbian hat<sup>101</sup> and clearly has a white label on his chest. Prisoners working outside the camps were allowed to wear either their uniform at all times, or dark civilian clothing with special markings (such as red stripes, or the word "Kriegsgefangener" (PoW) written on the back). The white label on Miloš's chest represents that special mark.<sup>102</sup>

In their search for families, the authors have contacted several municipalities in Serbia, with the assistance of the Serbian Embassy in The Hague. This process took a lot of time and yielded differing results. In 2015, the Municipality of Smederevska Palanka was contacted with an enquiry as to whether they knew anything about the fates of the three soldiers

99 Civil registration of the municipality of Nijmegen, January 1919, death certificate No. 74.

100 Exhumation reports op. cit.

101 In the Serbian language this is called a "šajkača".

102 Otte, p. 96.



who hailed from their municipality. We received the contact details of Žarko Talijan, a local historian and author of a book about the fate of the soldiers from the village of Azanja.<sup>103</sup> Đura Stojadinović and Milovan Milojević were both from Azanja: Đura died on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1919 in Nieuw-Milligen (Apeldoorn)<sup>104</sup>; a day later, Milovan Milojević also died in Nieuw-Milligen.<sup>105</sup>

When the authors visited Žarko Talijan in Azanja, Milovan's family member showed us the monument to Milovan in the graveyard in Azanja. This was actually the first monument the



Picture 14 The monument to Milovan in Azanja, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

authors had seen that recorded the soldier's place of death. The monument's epitaph reads: "Milovan, son of Stepan Milojević, soldier, lived for 30 years, died 6.1.1919. in Miligen in the Netherlands. This monument was erected by his bereaved father, brothers, son and wife".<sup>106</sup>

The family member told the authors that they had been informed that he died on the train; they did not know more. In Žarko's book, Milovan was mentioned as one of the soldiers from Azanja<sup>107</sup> who fell during the Balkan Wars and World War I. Azanja lost about 800 soldiers, which is almost 10% of its population, and this had a huge impact on the village. Žarko has traced around 400 soldiers.

Unfortunately, Žarko Talijan and Damir Živković (a history teacher in Azanja), have not found any information about Đura Stojadinović from Azanja. They have also failed to find out anything about the third soldier from Smederevska Palanka, Dragutin Stojanović, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1918 in Rotterdam. Both soldiers from Azanja were exhumed and transported to Jindřichovice.<sup>108</sup> Dragutin was earlier exhumed in Rotterdam and his remains were brought to a collective grave in the same graveyard, before the Yugoslav authorities came looking for them in 1938.

103 Talijan

104 Civil registration of the municipality of Apeldoorn, January 1919, death certificate No. 67.

105 Civil registration of the municipality of Apeldoorn, January 1919, death certificate No. 71.

106 Translated from Serbian.

107 Talijan, p. 349.

108 Exhumation reports on. cit.

The families of four other soldiers were also found, which makes a total of eight soldiers that the authors succeeded in tracing after more than 96 years. At least their families now know that their ancestors died in the Netherlands and that they are not forgotten: a monument in Garderen commemorates them, while it is known that the remains of 88 of them are in the mausoleum in Jindřichovice.

The authors are determined in their efforts to trace more families and to inform the Serbian and Dutch public about this specific chapter of history in relations between the Netherlands and Serbia. Regular updates can be found on their website [www.secanje.nl](http://www.secanje.nl) and their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/secanje.nl/>.

In the annex of this brochure an overview can be found of all 91 Serbian soldiers from World War I who died in the Netherlands.



*Picture 15 Milovan Milojević, date unknown.*

## About the authors

**John M. Stienen, M.Sc.** (1972) is Senior Policy Advisor at the Netherlands Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, with a broad interest in historical subjects – especially if they connect the Netherlands to Central and Eastern Europe. An industrial engineer (Eindhoven University of Technology, 2002) by vocation, he has been conducting research on prisoners of war in the twentieth century, including lesser known topics such as internees and prisoners of war in the Netherlands during World War I, or Dutch prisoners of war who escaped from Stalag 371 in Stanislau (present day Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine) during World War II.

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**Tatjana Vendrig (née Raković), M.A.** (1980) was born in Kraljevo (Serbia). She graduated from the Faculty of Philology, Department of English Language and Literature. She earned her Master's degree in Public Relations. She works as an English teacher. Upon meeting Fabian and John in 2012, she was introduced to the then unknown part of the history of relations between the Netherlands and Serbia. Thus, a completely new research world has been opened up for her.

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**Fabian Vendrig, BBA.** (1978) was born in IJsselstein (the Netherlands) and studied policy sciences in 's Hertogenbosch and Ghendt (Belgium). He has lived in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. When he first visited the Balkan region, he developed an interest in the region and its people, culture and history. In 2014, he decided to live together with Tatjana in Belgrade, with whom he established contact during the research: they were married in 2015. He currently works for a Belgian IT company.

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## Pictures

1: ICRC Historical Archives, <http://grandeguerre.icrc.org/>

3, 4: Private collection of Zorica Jelača (Đorđe's great-granddaughter).

5: Nationaal Militair Museum, No. 00106078/157 and 00106078/159

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## Annex: the list of the names of 91 Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands 1917-1919<sup>109</sup>

	Surname	Name	Date of birth	From	Place of †	Date of †	Coffin
1	Aleksić	Petar	1895	[Donji/Gornji] Dušnik	Dordrecht	23/01/1919	54
2	Antonijević	Živan		Mladenovac	Apeldoorn	25/01/1919	#
3	<b>Avramović</b>	<b>Mihajlo</b>	<b>10/04/1879</b>	<b>Carevac</b>	<b>Usselo</b>	<b>20/01/1919</b>	<b>24</b>
4	Biljović	Milan		Dobrava	Enschede	11/08/1918	29
5	Bogosavljević	Srećko		Miokus	Apeldoorn	18/01/1919	#
6	Bošković	Vladimir		Mala Vranjska	Apeldoorn	21/01/1919	#
7	Božanić	Svetozar	1889	Varvarin	Dordrecht	17/01/1919	56
8	Brčerević	Nikola		Rtkovo	Apeldoorn	20/01/1919	#
9	Brkić	Milan	1887	Burovac	Dordrecht	20/01/1919	60
10	Damnjanović	Milenko			Apeldoorn	22/01/1919	#
11	Damnjanović	Živko	14/05/1880	Šabac	Amersfoort	19/01/1919	22
12	<b>Đelekar</b>	<b>Milan</b>	<b>07/08/1891</b>	<b>Bresno Polje</b>	<b>Nieuw-Buinen</b>	<b>17/11/1918</b>	<b>44</b>
13	Dobrosavljević	Stanoje		Družetić	Hengelo	23/01/1919	43
14	Dodolisko	Velimir	1893		Nijmegen	18/01/1919	2
15	Donević	Miloš			Nijmegen	20/01/1919	21
16	Đorđević	Stojan	20/09/1884	Veliki Izvor	Usselo	21/01/1919	25
17	Gajić	Mihailo			Nijmegen	24/01/1919	1
18	<b>Gavrović</b>	<b>Miloš</b>	<b>23/01/1890</b>	<b>Miločaj</b>	<b>Usselo</b>	<b>23/01/1919</b>	<b>36</b>
19	Ilić	Dejan			Nijmegen	17/01/1919	12
20	Ivanović	Velisav			Nijmegen	18/01/1919	17
21	<b>Jeremić</b>	<b>Miloš</b>		<b>Resnik (Beograd)</b>	<b>Nijmegen</b>	<b>18/01/1919</b>	<b>4</b>
22	Jezdimir	N.			Nijmegen	20/01/1919	8
23	Jovanović	Tihomir		Gornji-Milanovac	Enschede	17/01/1919	30
24	Jovanović	Vladimir		Gornje Jarušice	Dordrecht	18/01/1919	52
25	Jovičić	Radosav		[Mali/Velikij] Borak	Dordrecht	26/01/1919	57
26	Kapović	Serafim			Nijmegen	18/01/1919	7

109 Soldiers marked **in bold** have been positively identified and traced back to Serbia by the authors; those marked with † are the soldiers whose earthly remains are not in the mausoleum, the remains of the soldiers with the symbol #, who died in Nieuw-Milligen and were once buried in a collective grave in Garderen, could not be identified in 1938 and their remains are now in one of the ossuaries numbered 45, 61-65, or 67-89. Names appear as they are in the *List of combatants who died in the Netherlands, whose remains were exhumed and transferred to lay to rest in the mausoleum in Heinrichsgrün-Jindřichovice Czechoslovakia – 1937 No. 84024/XII*, compiled by the Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and held by the Archives of Serbia.

27	Karadžić	Milojko		[Donji/Gornji] Dubac	Dordrecht	07/02/1919	51
28	Krušeljević	Todor		Bitolj (now Bitola, MK)	Dordrecht	27/01/1919	59
29	Lazarević	Arsen			Nijmegen	22/01/1919	5
30	Lazarević	Laza			Nijmegen	22/01/1919	10
31	<b>Lazarević</b>	<b>Stanko</b>		<b>Brdarica</b>	<b>Apeldoorn</b>	<b>30/01/1919</b>	<b>#</b>
32	Lazić	Bogdan		Braničevo	Apeldoorn	21/01/1919	#
33	<b>Marinković</b>	<b>Stanislav</b>		<b>Tavnik</b>	<b>Apeldoorn</b>	<b>20/01/1919</b>	<b>#</b>
34	Marjanović	Marjan		Kriva Reka (G.Milanovac)	Apeldoorn	21/01/1919	#
35	Marković	Kosta			Nijmegen	22/01/1919	15
36	Marković	Milenko	15/02/1876	Mali Izvor	Usselo	24/01/1919	34
37	Marković	Milisav			Nijmegen	18/01/1919	9
38	Marković	Stojan		Stupčevići	Dordrecht	02/02/1919	46
39	Martinović	Petar		Vrešnica [Bresnica ?]	Apeldoorn	25/01/1919	#
40	Matić	Viden		Smederevo	Apeldoorn	19/01/1919	#
41	Matijević	Milomir		Gornja Dobrinja	Apeldoorn	22/01/1919	#
42	Mijatović	Dragomir		Vučak	Apeldoorn	23/01/1919	#
43	Miladinović	Milivoje		Sibnica (Žabari)	Apeldoorn	25/01/1919	#
44	Miladinović	Živojin		Boževac	Dordrecht	22/01/1919	48
45	Milanović	Dragutin			Nijmegen	21/01/1919	18
46	Milojević	Dejan			Nijmegen	19/01/1919	14
47	<b>Milojević</b>	<b>Milovan</b>	<b>1889</b>	<b>Azanja</b>	<b>Apeldoorn</b>	<b>21/01/1919</b>	<b>#</b>
48	Miloković	Vukosav			Nijmegen	20/01/1919	11
49	Milosavljević	Milosav		Kovanica	Apeldoorn	18/01/1919	#
50	Milosavljević	Stojan		Živica	Hengelo	22/01/1919	42
51	Milošević	Arandel		Svrljiška Topla	Apeldoorn	24/01/1919	#
52	Milutinović	Dragutin		Brović	Dordrecht	05/02/1919	55
53	Mitrović	Đorđe	April 1874		Enschede	20/01/1919	28
54	Mitrović	Tihomir		Bačine	Apeldoorn	21/01/1919	#
55	Mitrović	Vladimir			Apeldoorn	23/01/1919	#
56	N.N.				Nieuw-Statenzijl	09/07/1917	‡
57	Nedeljković	Tatomir		Bresno Polje	Nieuw-Buinen	01/08/1918	‡
58	Nikodijević	Najdan	25/07/1894	Loznica (Čačak)	Usselo	17/01/1919	27
59	Nikolajević	Nikola	17/02/1880	Dušanovac	Usselo	18/01/1919	32
60	Nikolić	Dragoš	15/11/1880	Ćuprija	Usselo	23/01/1919	37
61	Nikolić	Milosav		Veliko Laole	Apeldoorn	24/01/1919	#
62	Nikolić	Petar			Nijmegen	21/01/1919	13



63	Nikolić	Radovan	29/05/1880	Todorin Do	Usselo	23/01/1919	<b>31</b>
64	Obradović	Miloš	12/10/1895	Sibnica (Žabari)	Usselo	21/01/1919	<b>33</b>
65	Paunović	Jovan	1887	Bratinac	Dordrecht	20/01/1919	<b>50</b>
66	Paunović	Stevan	25/02/1886	Požarevac	Hengelo	25/01/1919	<b>41</b>
67	Perić	Đorđe			Apeldoorn	25/01/1919	<b>#</b>
68	Popović	Desimir			Enschede	23/01/1919	<b>39</b>
69	Radivojević	Uroš	1882	Rečica (Požarevac)	Dordrecht	28/01/1919	<b>58</b>
70	Radovanović	Božidar	25/12/1883	Belo Polje (G.Milanovac)	Usselo	22/01/1919	<b>35</b>
71	Radović	Branko		Lužnice	Apeldoorn	19/01/1919	<b>#</b>
72	Raičić	Sreten			Enschede	22/01/1919	<b>26</b>
73	Ranković	Dragojle			Nijmegen	19/01/1919	<b>19</b>
74	Ristanović	Milorad			Enschede	15/01/1919	<b>40</b>
75	Simonović	Miloš		Brusjak	Rotterdam	11/01/1919	<b>23</b>
76	Simonović	Vasilije		Varvarin	Apeldoorn	27/01/1919	<b>#</b>
77	Stanković	Aleksandar		Kovačevac	Apeldoorn	24/01/1919	<b>#</b>
78	Stefanović	Mihajlo			Nijmegen	20/01/1919	<b>16</b>
79	Stefanović	Živan		Rakinac	Apeldoorn	19/01/1919	<b>#</b>
80	Stevanović	Sreten		Ljupten	Dordrecht	19/01/1919	<b>49</b>
81	Stojadinović	Đura		Azanja	Apeldoorn	20/01/1919	<b>#</b>
82	Stojanović	Dimitrije			Enschede	23/01/1919	<b>38</b>
83	Stojanović	Dragutin		[Smederevska] Palanka	Rotterdam	07/09/1918	<b>‡</b>
84	Talović	Milutin			Nijmegen	22/01/1919	<b>20</b>
85	Vasić	Stevan		Brdarica	Apeldoorn	28/01/1919	<b>#</b>
86	Vukadinović	Milentije		[Male/Velike] Pčelice	Dordrecht	19/01/1919	<b>47</b>
<b>87</b>	<b>Vukosavljević</b>	<b>Đorđe</b>		<b>Kragujevac</b>	<b>Apeldoorn</b>	<b>22/01/1919</b>	<b>#</b>
88	Vuković	Velizar		Golubac	Apeldoorn	21/01/1919	<b>#</b>
89	Živanović	Božidar			Dordrecht	30/01/1919	<b>53</b>
90	Živanović	Ivan			Nijmegen	20/01/1919	<b>3</b>
91	Živković	Luka			Nijmegen	19/01/1919	<b>6</b>

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