



THE

Hungarian Historical Review

NEW SERIES OF ACTA HISTORICA
ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

Environments of War

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 3
2018

Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences



The Hungarian Historical Review

New Series of Acta Historica
Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae

Volume 7 No. 3 2018

Environments of War

Gábor Demeter and András Vadas
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

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“Fighting Where Nature Joins Forces with the Enemy:” Nature, Living Conditions, and their Representation in the War in the Alps 1915–1918¹

Daniel Marc Segesser

University of Bern

daniel.segesser@hist.unibe.ch

First World War propaganda, but also popular movies like Luis Trenker’s *Berge in Flammen*, for a long time presented the image of the war in alpine territory as a place, where solitary heroes fought a war in a magnificent natural scenery that was so different from the carnage of the western front. Based on recent research that has shown that the latter was not true, the following contribution focuses on the perception and representation of nature and natural phenomena in contemporary publications, diaries, and letters from Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. It analyzes the relationship between soldiers from many countries on the one hand, and nature as well as natural phenomena such as avalanches, fog, or rain on the other. The contribution discusses the reactions of officers and soldiers to nature and the respective natural phenomena and offers new insights on everyday living conditions of officers and soldiers in a landscape with harsh conditions that had never before been a battlefield for such a prolonged period of time.

Keywords: First World War, environmental history, nature, weather conditions, Alpine territory

Slightly above the Passo dello Stelvio, close to Rifugio Garibaldi and Piz Trais Linguas, the following inscription in German as well as Hungarian can be found:

Faithful unto death to its Emperor and Apostolic King, fatherland, and home [...] the IV Reserve Battalion of the 29th Hungarian Infantry Regiment under the command of Captain Kalal and Lt.-Col. Edler von Kunze gloriously and without giving way even one step defended [...] the Stilsferjoch [Passo dello Stelvio] as well as the snow-covered, barren, and icy heights between the Piz Trais Linguas, the Scorzuzzo, the Naglerspitze, and the Krystallkamm in the war years 1915, 1916, 1917, and 1918.²

1 I thank Oswald Überegger and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. They have helped me to improve this contribution.

2 Cf. Image 1: All translations from German and Italian are by the author.

Still today, many people passing the Passo dello Stelvio come up to this commemorative plaque, which has been moved a few meters onto Swiss territory, and lay down wreaths to honor the memory of those for whom it was erected in 1918 by the commanding officer Freiherr Moritz von Lempruch.³

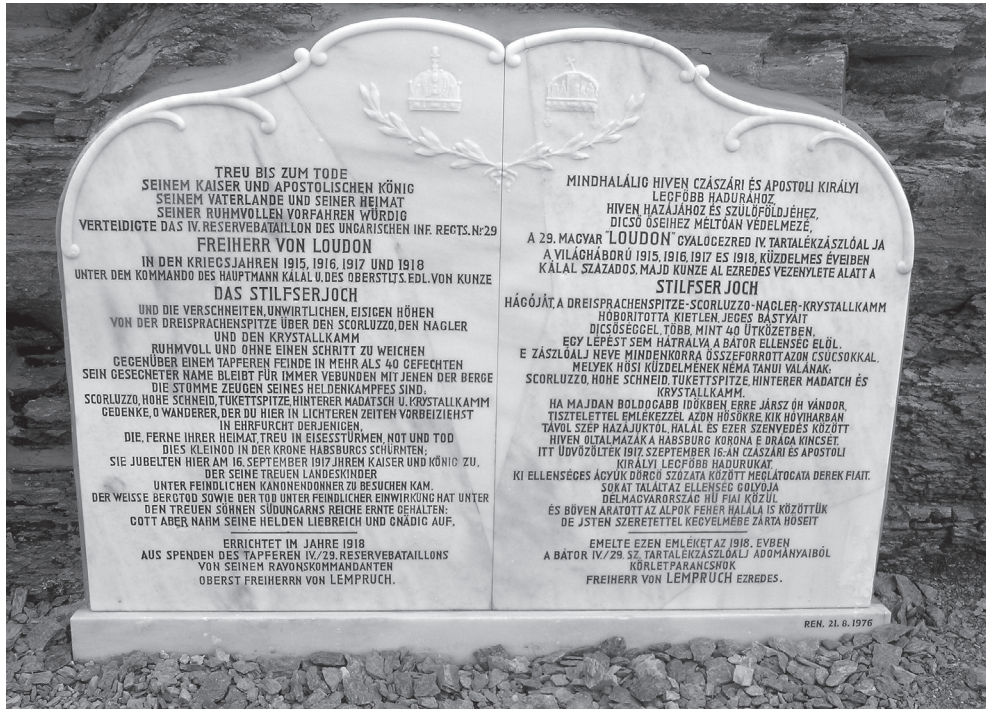


Photo 1: Commemorative plaque for officers and soldiers of the IV Reserve Battalion of the 29th Hungarian Infantry Regiment on Piz Trais Linguas
(Photograph by the author, August 2017.)

Dangerous, Barren, Awesome, and Beautiful: An Introduction to Nature's Role and Natural Phenomena in the War in the Alps 1915–18

All of this is part of an ongoing fascination amongst a large numbers of visitors to the former war zone between the Umbrail pass in the west and Mt. Krn in the east with a war that for a long time has been portrayed as an unconventional battlefield, so different from the many other fronts of the war.⁴ Although historians like Isabelle Brandauer, Christa Hämmerle, Marco Mondini, or Markus Wurzer

3 Accola, *Der militärhistorische Wanderveg Stelvio-Umbrail*, 57–58.
4 Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege*, 235. Cf. recently Reis Schweizer, “Ein Krieg in Eis und Schnee,” 6–7.

have shown that life and fighting on the alpine front was not so much different from the brutal reality of other fronts,⁵ the majority of the literature dealing with this part of the war—published mainly by non-professional historians⁶—offers interpretations that stress either the heroic character of the men involved, the sacrifice they made, or the perseverance they showed. In similar ways efforts of today's regional tourist offices present the former battlefield in several outdoor museums as an awesome experience of nature, but in which the reality of war is no longer present.⁷

In this context nature is usually presented simultaneously as dangerous and barren as well as awesome and beautiful, not least because it was the essential prerequisite for the existence of the mountaineer warrior, who fought out this war individually rather than as part of an indiscernible mass. The impressive natural scenery formed the aesthetic aura for a war fought out personally, with death coming suddenly and in the sight of one's homeland's highest summits rather than in the mud of the frontline in the west or the east. And yet, the mountainous landscape was represented as even more dangerous than the enemy. Officers and soldiers not only had to fight the enemy's armed forces, but also the forces of nature which were even viewed as the ultimate conquest to be made in some sort of sportsmanlike alpine competition.⁸ In a manner similar to the description of the mountaineer warrior, who is at the same time archaic and modern, nature too is likewise described as active as well as indulgent, as both destructive and majestic and as a force, which "joins forces with the enemy."⁹

This was also the way that nature was presented in wartime propaganda as well as in interwar era movies, novels, and publications. In contrast to many places on the eastern and western front as well as in the Balkans, many of the alpine areas were rather well known to the general public as a consequence of pre- and postwar tourism promotion. In contrast to other places where winter battles took place, such as the Carpathians or the Caucasus,¹⁰ it was fairly easy to get stories

5 Brandauer, "Kriegserfahrungen: Soldaten im Gebirgskrieg," 385–400; Hämmerle, "Opferhelden? Zur Geschichte der k.u.k. Soldaten an der Südwestfront," 155–80; Mondini, "Kriegführung," 367–84; Wurzer, "Der Dolomitenkämpfer Sepp Innerkofler," 371–85.

6 On the co-operation of historians on all levels cf. Segesser, "Wellen der Erinnerung und der Analyse," 46.

7 Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege*, 235–36; Rapp, "The Last Frontiers," 231–47.

8 Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege*, 248–49; Günther, *Alpine Quergänge*, 258–62.

9 "Italy's Heroic Campaign: Fighting where nature joins forces with the enemy," *The New York Herald* (European Edition), March 12, 1916, 3.

10 Cf. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow* and Ford, *Eden to Armageddon*, 121–37.

about this part of the war out to the public early on, a fact that has shaped the memory of the war in alpine territory up to the present. In their publications, people like Walter Schmidkunz and Luis Trenker,¹¹ Fritz Weber,¹² Gunter Langes,¹³ and Heinz von Lichem,¹⁴ following views common among the Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein, presented a picture of the war in which the enemy on the one hand was a traitor, while on the other his mountaineering achievements had to be acknowledged.¹⁵ It is probably in this context that Lichem also claimed that according to the testimony of the surviving commanding officers, as well as of accounts of soldiers from all sides, about two-thirds of the 150,000 to 180,000 war victims of the alpine front died because of the rigors of the high altitude (including disease), with 60,000 deaths on the alpine front being attributable to avalanches alone.¹⁶ Looking at figures given by Heinrich Menger in 1919, who speaks of 2,840 dead officers and soldiers for the winter of 1916/17 for the Tyrolean and Carnic front,¹⁷ and at the official data in the official history of the Austro-Hungarian army, stating 880 dead for November and December 1916,¹⁸ this figure seems to be too high¹⁹ and may probably be attributed to the fact that—apart from statistical problems²⁰—the impact of the environment was amplified to fit with the argument that men on the frontline were not just fighting the enemy, but an enemy far bigger, that is, nature.

It is in light of this latter question of perceptions that this contribution explores what officers and soldiers of the time wrote about nature as well as natural phenomena, such as avalanches, fog, or rain, and how they coped with weather and climate in locations where no one before had ever tried to stay for the entire year. It will not be possible to present the entirety of perceptions of

11 Trenker, *Kampf in den Bergen*. As he made it clear in his preface Trenker published the book in collaboration with Walter Schmidkunz, whose wartime publications will be discussed below. This work formed the basis of Trenker's movie, which bears the same title. Cf. Alexander, "Der Dolomitenkrieg im 'Tiroler' Film," 228–37.

12 Weber, *Feuer auf den Gipfeln*.

13 Langes, *Die Front in Fels und Eis*. The first edition was published in 1932.

14 His major work is Lichem, *Krieg in den Alpen 1915–1918*.

15 Rotte, "Politische Ideologie und alpinistische Ideale," 130–40.

16 Lichem, *Krieg in den Alpen 1915–1918*, vol. 2, 142 and vol. 3, 109–10. For figures on victims on the alpine front in general cf. Rotte, "Politische Ideologie und alpinistische Ideale," 138.

17 Menger, "Alpenverein und Weltkrieg," 185.

18 Glaise-Horstenau, *Das Kriegsjahr 1916: Zweiter Teil*, 700.

19 Cf. Brugnara et al., *December 1916*, 1–2.

20 Mortara, *La Salute Pubblica in Italia*, 20–26; Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 165–71; Leoni, *La guerra verticale*, 468 (footnote 22).

nature and natural phenomena, but in exploring rarely used and partially only recently published diaries as well as letters and contemporary publications from Austria, Italy, and Switzerland that disclose natural phenomena in wartime, this contribution will attempt to give a transnational picture—and thereby try to overcome the criticism of Hans Heiss that Austria and Italy have remained in a state of friendly ignorance of each other, working back to back.²¹ In diaries officers and soldiers recorded their own impressions of nature over time and in real time. Either as manuscripts or in some cases as published versions diaries survived, but many were also lost.²² What is clear is that not all officers or soldiers kept diaries. Therefore only a specific extract of experiences is left to us, which often stems from people who had an affinity for writing. This latter aspect is also true in regard to the second type of source, letters written to relatives at home; although, as Mondini has shown for the Italian side, many illiterate soldiers turned to writing during the war with the help of their literate comrades.²³ Contemporary publications, often written by people closely attached to official bodies such as the Austro-Hungarian Kriegspressequartier, can therefore be considered to represent the official or semi-official discourse on nature in alpine territory. In some cases—mainly in publications in newspapers—they were, however, also written to keep the home front informed and reassured. The first part of this contribution will give a quick overview on the war in alpine territory in the years 1915 to 1918 before looking at the three types of sources, in order to map out the existing presuppositions and stereotypes. A short conclusion will complete this article.

The War in the Alps, its Historiography, and its Development

So far Marco Armerio, Tait Keller, Selena Daly, Diego Leoni, and Mario Podzorski have been among the few professional historians who specifically discussed the perception of nature in their studies. Armerio and Keller claimed that as a

21 Heiss, “Rücken an Rücken,” 101. Kos, Review of *Krieg in den Alpen*, 261–62 also wonders to what extent the contributors from Austria and Italy really took notice of each other’s research.

22 Such was the case of Moritz Freiherr von Lempruch, whose diaries, as probably many others, were lost in the last and chaotic days of the war. Lempruch, *Der König der Deutschen Alpen*, 2. In other and probably the majority of cases the reason, why the diaries were lost is unknown. Some are also still privately held and therefore not easily accessible. Cf. Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 8 and Grote, ““Mir geht es gut und ich hoffe dasselbe von dir sagen zu können?” 20.

23 Mondini, “Papierhelden,” 186–88. Letters were, however, less often preserved than diaries. Cf. Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 16.

consequence of the Great War, the “Alps were celebrated as the natural bastion of the nation, the ultimate borders of the Italian community,”²⁴ or “a bastion for Germany and Austria [...] a national sanctuary and a ‘Volkssanatorium’ [...] where martial and mountaineering ethos [fused].”²⁵ While Armiero mainly concentrated on the memory of the war and only included a few testimonies mainly of veterans,²⁶ Keller’s studies contain an analysis of several contemporary sources from the war years. However, he mingles information from such sources with accounts of the interwar period, which weakens his conclusion that “soldiers on the Alpine Front felt their spirits rise when they saw the mountains” and that those “on the home front believed that the mountains aided the war effort [...] giving] strength and courage.”²⁷ In her article Daly looks at the experiences of mountain combat by Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, thereby concentrating on one specific experience.²⁸ Leoni gives an impressive account of the daily lives of soldiers in the war in alpine territory. He makes great use of diaries and letters, but when relating to nature his focus is more on its impact than on perception.²⁹ Podzorski analyses daily lives of Swiss soldiers in Val Müstair and on the border triangle between Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Switzerland in the region between the Punta di Rims and Piz Cotschen. He gives an impressive overview about the daily routine, sentry and patrols, construction work, cutting wood, repairing roads, accommodation, food and drink, leisure time, health issues and hygiene, contacts with soldiers from the belligerents, and last but not least, nature (as weather and landscape). His study is, however, limited to Switzerland, which was neutral and whose military therefore only had a limited experience of the war itself in the form of border violations and the watching of operations of the belligerents.³⁰

The war in the Alps formally began on May 23, 1915 with Italy’s declaration of war against Austria-Hungary. The largest part of the frontline between the Passo dello Stelvio in the West and Tolmin in the East consisted of mountainous terrain with heights mainly between 1,000 and 2,000 meters above sea level, but sometimes reaching almost 4,000 meters in the Ortles region and 3,000 meters

24 Armiero, *A Rugged Nation*, 87

25 Keller, “The Mountains Roar,” 268. and 270.

26 One exception was a quote from Cesare Battisti that will be discussed below. Cf. Armiero, *A Rugged Nation*, 98.

27 Keller, “The Mountains Roar,” 268; Keller, *Apostles of the Alps*, 89–118.

28 Selena Daly, “The Futurist mountains,” 323–38.

29 Leoni, *La Guerra Verticale*, 126–211.

30 Podzorski, “Kriegsalltag und Kriegserfahrungen von Schweizer Soldaten,” 87–124.

in the Dolomites.³¹ Operations along the alpine border did not, however, begin immediately, although some of the troops had been deployed to their positions before the war began.³² The Italian High Command had decided to proceed cautiously on this part of the front and rather concentrate on offensives in the lower Isonzo/Soča region, where it believed the chances for a breakthrough were best.³³ For sure, this was largely due to the fact that up to the 1880s the military high command had not considered alpine territory a possible battleground, and consequently fighting in high altitude was to a large extent a novelty to modern warfare.³⁴ Already long before the war the Austrian military high command had decided to build fortresses at strategic positions blocking the entry into the main valleys of Trentino, Tyrol, and Carinthia, even if this meant giving up some parts of its territory, such as Cortina d'Ampezzo.³⁵ Although two major offensives—the so-called Austro-Hungarian “Strafexpedition” in 1916³⁶ and the battle of the Ortigara in 1917³⁷—were mounted, for two years in its eastern part and three years in its western part the frontline did not change much until the end of the war. Soldiers were compelled to fight and survive year-round in an environment in which human beings usually only lived and came into contact for a very short part of the year.³⁸ At the beginning of the war the terrain was mostly unknown to the soldiers deployed into these areas and there had been almost no military training for fighting and surviving in high altitude before 1914. On either side, the number of troops who even to a small extent had been trained for mountain warfare was small. Troops therefore at first had to adapt to this new way of warfare, a fact that offered opportunities for the mythologizing of figures like mountain guide Sepp Innerkofler. Over time, however, technology took over also in high altitude and officers as well as soldiers adapted to a way of warfare previously unknown, but no less brutal than on the western front.³⁹

31 Jordan, *Krieg um die Alpen*, 87–98.

32 Schmidkunz, *Der Kampf über den Gletschern*, 7–10.

33 Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 147–57.

34 Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 159–60; Leoni, *La Guerra Verticale*, 39–51.

35 Jordan, *Krieg um die Alpen*, 130–41; Schmid, “Kriegführung,” 357.

36 Arlt, *Die “Strafexpedition.”*

37 Pieropan, *Ortigara 1917*.

38 The extended period of time spent in these harsh conditions made the experience on the Alpine front different from that of other mountainous theatres of war mentioned above in Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow* or Ford, *Eden to Armageddon*, 121–37.

39 Hämmerle, “Es ist immer der Mann, der den Kampf entscheidet und nicht die Waffe ...,” 42–43; Leoni, *La Guerra Verticale*, 131–44; Menger, “Alpenverein und Weltkrieg,” 171–72; Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege*, 243–45; Wurzer, “Dolomitenkämpfer,” 371–85.

Making Sense of the War and its Natural Environment in Official and Semi-official Publications

Not least in view of the growing number of victims caused by the war, but mainly because by the end of 1914 it became clear that this global war was not going to be short, governments of all the major belligerents actively began to make sense of the war. In the case of Italy the Habsburg authorities used the image of the traitor, who had to be fought on the heights of one's native mountains, while for Italy the war against the Danube monarchy was presented as one of freeing Trento and Trieste from the yoke of the tyrant in Vienna.⁴⁰ This propagandistic effort did not remain without effect on the officers and soldiers in the frontline, although not all of them were responsive in the same manner. Amongst those using demeaning terms for the enemy was Karl Ausserhofer, who spoke of "Bözl" or "Katzelmacher" in his diary when referring to Italians.⁴¹ Even more explicit was Franz Josef Krug, who specifically called the Italians "traitors" and "greedy for booty." They would, however, never be able to tear down this mountain rampart that was well defended against the "archenemy."⁴² Karl Hane,⁴³ Walter Schmidkunz,⁴⁴ Emilio Campi,⁴⁵ and Nicola Ragucci⁴⁶ on the other hand avoided demeaning terms and only spoke of the enemy, the "Italians" or the "Austrians," respectively. Ragucci went a little further, eulogizing his own soldiers as "soldiers that the world ignores [...]! Unknown heroes! Worthy descendants of ancient Rome!"⁴⁷

In contrast to many others, writers and artists were often able to avoid being recruited as frontline troops. Instead they served as official and semi-official war

40 Procacci, "L'Italia nella Grande Guerra," 8; Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege*, 237–38.

41 Ausserhofer Diary, e.g. June 23, 29 and 30, July, 6 to 9, August 16, or September 3, 1915 for "Bözl" and July 10, 19 and 20, August 5, or September 4, 1915 for "Katzelmacher;" Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 112–41. Cf. *ibid.*, 45 for an explanation of the two terms.

42 Krug, *Alpenkrieg*, 5, 14, 15, 17–18, 21 and 28.

43 Hane Diary, e.g. May 1, 15, 16, 22, 23, 26 and 28, June 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 15, 25, 28 and 29, July 3, 5 and 9, 1916. On May 24 and 30 as well as on June 8 and 9, Hane used the term "Welsche," which for some was demeaning, but probably not to Hane. Only Battisti is called a traitor on July 9, 1916. Tschakner, "Kriegstagebuch," 51–52 and 63–78.

44 In Schmidkunz, *Der Kampf über den Gletschern* the enemy is almost absent except for a mention on 14.

45 Campi Diary, e.g. June 7, 9 and 16, July 7, 11 and 22, and August 4, 6, 18, 22, 26, 27 and 31, 1915. Magrin and Fiorin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 93–113.

46 Ragucci Diary, e.g. August 29, September 12, 19, 24 and 25, and November 2, 1916. Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 16–44. It is not surprising that Ragucci mentions the enemy the least, because as a medical doctor in a military hospital he was not close to the frontline.

47 Ragucci Diary, October 20, 1916. Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 30.

correspondents, photographers, and painters and became part of the propaganda effort of the belligerents.⁴⁸ In this function they published realistic, fictitious, or semi-fictitious reports about the war, mainly with the aim to reassure the population at home that all was well and that, if men fell, they had given their lives for a good cause. Of course the primarily male reporters were not entirely free in what they were writing, but in regard to their representations of nature there was some leeway as the following analysis will show. The authors chosen all grew up in middle-class families and were officials, professional officers, teachers, or journalists. As such they were most certainly influenced by the positive and often nation-centric view of alpine nature that was dominant among the bourgeoisie of many European countries.⁴⁹

It comes as no surprise that the mountaineer Walter Schmidkunz, who was an active member of the Deutsch-Österreichischer Alpenverein as well as the Wandervogel-Bewegung,⁵⁰ was amongst those whose description of nature and natural phenomena was most pronounced. Being a war correspondent of the Kriegspressequartier between August 1917 and October 1918, his book *Der Kampf über den Gletschern* was published in three editions between 1917 and 1918. He opened with romantic language, speaking of the “deserted wilderness made up of snow and granite,” of the “icy heart of the Adamello,” of a spuming stream, where bear and fox say goodnight to each other, or of the eternal mountains,⁵¹ only to continue with the weeks of wet and cold, the night of a stormy foehn, fog, avalanches, hunger not quenched by a hunted chamois buck, or the difficulties of discerning an enemy attack from noises of natural phenomena, such as the falling of a rock, or the light of a star from that of an enemy lantern.⁵² Schmidkunz’s presentation of living and fighting in high altitude was ambivalent, showing both nature’s splendors as well as its dangers, but of course his chapters, which he wrote as if he had been present himself in the actions he described, always ended on a positive note such as a sunrise, which brought back warmth to freezing soldiers, whose cry of joy told nature as well as the enemy that they were still in control.⁵³

48 For Austria cf. Reichel, “Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit,” 67–74.

49 Cf. Mathieu, *Die Alpen*, 138–65.

50 Grimm, “Schmidkunz, Walter.”

51 Schmidkunz, *Der Kampf über den Gletschern*, 8, 20.

52 *Ibid.*, 9–10, 14, 17

53 *Ibid.*, 20–22.

In a similar manner popular writer Franz Karl Ginzkey⁵⁴ spoke of the “romantic surging of valleys and heights, half flogged by rain, half kissed by the sun,”⁵⁵ the “brilliance of [...] the hilly high plateau of Folgaria,”⁵⁶ or the beauty of mountains like the Rosengarten and the Latemar,⁵⁷ only to describe a “witches’ cauldron full of uncertainty and lurking death”⁵⁸ as well as emplacements reclaimed by hard labor out of solid rock. In this latter case man and nature are combined by Ginzkey to create a bulwark that men never could have built themselves.⁵⁹ The bulwark or mountain rampart was also an important symbol that Franz Joseph Krug used. He was a former editor of the *Grazer Tagblatt* and an officer from the frontline in Carinthia. Supported by the command of the 10th Army and the *Karnisch-Julische Kriegszeitung*, he was very eager to tell the people at home about the so-called silent front in the Carnic Alps, where heroic soldiers stopped the enemy from entering the homeland, while at the same time fighting the forces of nature. In this “unique double war” against the enemy as well as against the “adverse forces of nature in high-altitude mountains,” a large number of “maximum performances” were necessary not only to “wage war against the archenemy, but also against the tremendous forces of nature in winter.”⁶⁰ Krug, however, not only pointed to the heroic deeds of soldiers and officers in difficult circumstances, but also mentioned the fact that every benefit had been drawn from engineering, in order to enable officers and soldiers to wage war.⁶¹ Visiting Swiss Colonel Karl Müller,⁶² the German director of the Alpine Museum in Munich Carl Müller, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti were even more fascinated by the way modern (and urban) technology worked in the mountains and how infrastructure originally built for tourists could now be used for wartime purposes.⁶³ For Carl Müller the war and its technology was able to overcome problems that had seemed insurmountable in peacetime:

54 Cf. Atze, “Franz Carl Ginzkey reitet für Österreich,” 194–207.

55 Ginzkey, *Die Front in Tirol*, 30.

56 *Ibid.*, 37.

57 *Ibid.*, 64.

58 *Ibid.*, 62.

59 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

60 Krug, *Alpenkrieg*, 5, 20–21.

61 *Ibid.*, 19.

62 Cf. “Totenschau Schweizer Historiker,” 209.

63 Müller, *An der Kampffront in Südtirol*, 21–22, 27 and 78–80; Müller, “Von den Wundern der Südfrent,” 150–56; Daly, “The Futurist mountains,” 327–31.

The war in alpine territory has become lord over [all the problems]; there are no constraints and there is no resistance. Using the most refined resources of technology, but also the help of the simple power of untiring human hands supported by ordinary tools, but animated by formidable energy [the war in alpine territory] has subdued steep pinnacles as well as rugged glaciers and made them subservient to man, without taking account of the casualties it takes and despite the fact that subjugated nature does not want to acquiesce to the yoke and again and again revolts against its conquerors, destroys their works often enough, and tries to take revenge on body and life of those who try to enslave it.⁶⁴

To some extent Müller's words resembled those of Marinetti, who in a much more ideologically oriented language, also tried to "enslave the mountains to Futurist ideals [and] visions of industrialised modernity."⁶⁵

Marinetti also tried to exploit the positive associations that were attributed to the Italian alpine soldiers, the so-called Alpini, equalizing the efforts of the Volunteer Cyclists, to whom he belonged, with those of the venerated Alpini, who were the protagonists of "a warrior myth" because they were "descendant[s] of mountain stock, which allows only the strongest, the most able and most determined to survive."⁶⁶ Amongst those praising the Alpini to the utmost was Cesare Battisti, a former deputy of the Cisleithanian Reichsrat, who fought on the Italian side, before being caught and executed in Trento in July 1916 for high treason. For him

mountaineers and mountains form just one thing. The terrain merges with the people. You will find thousands of men from the plains, who have never paid any attention to the form of the terrain, who do not know six inches of earth without pavement; but the mountaineer has a feeling for the mountain, he has a geographic sense of the area he lives in. [...] An Alpino from Valtellina, who explained [to his comrades the reasons for war, said: "Let us go to liberate our waters." Do we really have to tolerate that the sources of our rivers are in the hands of the enemy?⁶⁷

64 Müller, "Von den Wundern der Südfront," 150.

65 Daly, "The Futurist mountains," 328.

66 Daly, "The Futurist mountains," 332, quoting Mondini, *Alpini*, viii.

67 Battisti, *Gli Alpini*, 30–31. The translation of the author differs slightly from the translation made by Armiero, *A Rugged Nation*, 98 for some parts of the quotation.

Battisti's aim was to show that these soldiers, growing out of a different community, loved their country and their people, but nevertheless remained a harmonic family, in which the person was more important than his military function. It was the alpine environment that generated such a quality within the men of the Alpini battalions.⁶⁸ Battisti was not alone in this assessment. Between 1915 and 1917 the Italian high command almost tripled the number of Alpini battalions and also created a substantial number of new mountain artillery batteries to support them. Nevertheless it proved unable to use these valued special forces in a manner adapted to warfare in the mountains. Except for their success in taking Mt. Krn (Monte Nero) in June 1915, the Alpini failed as much as the infantry along the Isonzo/Soča Valley.⁶⁹ The myth nevertheless remained intact. Not least therefore the Futurist Marinetti stressed the fact that his unit survived the same conditions with less supplies than the Alpini, implying that he and his unit were able to overcome even greater hardships. Marinetti's major aim in this context was to escape from the perception of futurism as a preserve of the urban middle class and to align himself with the simplicity of the common soldier, with whom a majority of Italians seemed to sympathize. At the same time he tried to prove that "industrialised modernity" was still superior to nature.⁷⁰

While Schmidkunz, Ginzkey, and both Müllers had been part of an orchestrated propaganda effort of the belligerents and Marinetti as well as Battisti tried to prove their irredentist credentials, Jakob Heer's texts were published out of a different motivation. He was a teacher and part of the Infantry Battalion 85 from Glarus, which was stationed in different parts of Switzerland to guard its mountainous border.⁷¹ The publication of his texts in the local newspaper *Glarner Nachrichten* aimed to inform and put at ease relatives back home as to the fate of their loved ones, who had to serve in an unfamiliar environment.⁷² Heer generally presented an ideal picture of nature, pointing to the echo of cowbells, the romantic mountain landscape, the picturesque and monumental

68 Battisti, *Gli Alpini*, 24–25.

69 Isnenghi and Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 160–61; Mondini, "Kriegführung," 369–70.

70 Daly, "The Futurist mountains," 333–34.

71 The battalion was stationed on the south-eastern border of Switzerland in the Engadin, the Splügen-San Bernardino region and last but not least on the Umbrail close to the frontline at the Passo dello Stelvio.

72 Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 3–4. The author died on 2 November from the Spanish Flu and his brother decided to put together all the texts that his brother had published during the war in the local newspaper *Glarner Nachrichten*. Cf. [Jakob Heer], "Die 85er." *Glarner Nachrichten* September, 25, 1915; Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 67.

setting, magnificent air, skiing competitions, or even the great number of very old Swiss stone pines, left in place to protect the valley from falling rocks and avalanches.⁷³ Sometimes, however, Heer also considered real war, like when throwing stones down a slope, even though there were no enemy troops there;⁷⁴ when he grumbled about the weather, referred to historical figures like Jürg Jenatsch and writers like Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, or criticized the fact that the local population had used up natural resources such as wood to an extent that was detrimental to society.⁷⁵ When called upon not to write about positive aspects only, Heer stressed that Swiss soldiers had no reason to complain. They should not forget their privileged situation, living in peace in the midst of a terrible war.⁷⁶ In September 1916 Heer came close to the battlefield at the Passo dello Stelvio and was rather depressed when he pondered the fate and living conditions of Austrian and Italian soldiers. He therefore showed great sympathy for refugees and deserters, offering them bread and cheese.⁷⁷

Joining Forces with the Enemy? Nature and Natural Phenomena in Wartime Diaries from Austria and Italy

In contrast to contemporary publications—whether government-inspired or otherwise—war diaries do not contain that many reflected accounts, but can be considered self-testimonies written shortly after events, forming a sequence of notes, thoughts, and moments summing up what happened. As a consequence mental leaps and gaps are often present in diaries, unless their authors edited or changed them after the war.⁷⁸ Five diaries, by Karl Ausserhofer, Emilio Campi,

73 [Heer], “Die 85er.” *Glarner Nachrichten* July 3, 8 and 17, September 8 and November 27, 1915 as well as February 8, 1916; Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 15, 21, 23, 40, 44 and 59–61.

74 In this context [Heer], “Die 85er.” *Glarner Nachrichten* July 24, 1915 or Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 25, refers to the Old Confederation’s battle of Morgarten. Müller, *An der Kampffront in Südtirol*, 20 also refers to the use of stones to stop an enemy attack, but, although also Swiss, he does not refer to Morgarten, probably because his account was mainly written for a German audience.

75 [Heer], “Die 85er.” *Glarner Nachrichten* July 24, August 7, September 8 and November 27, 1915; Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 26, 28, 41–42. and 45.

76 [Heer], “Die 85er.” *Glarner Nachrichten* December 18, 1915 and September 9, 1916; Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 50–51 and 63 was glad that he had so far not had to kill an enemy and thereby make a wife a widow and child an orphan.

77 [Heer], “Die 85er.” *Glarner Nachrichten* September 9 and 25, 1916; Heer, *Das ist Deine Schweiz*, 65–67.

78 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 5–6, who calls those who were edited or changed “forged diaries” (“unechte Tagebücher”). Cf. Frommelt. “Vorarlberger Kriegstagebücher,” who points out that it is not always easy to make out the difference between “true” and “forged” diaries.

Karl Hane, Joseph Mörwald and Nicola Ragucci, were chosen for this study.⁷⁹ Each has been edited by a professional historian and contains at least a short introduction about the authors as well as on the state of the diaries. This helps to understand the context in which the diaries came into existence and gives an idea about the way the authors approached nature and what interpretative patterns influenced them.

Three of the diaries are from Austria and two from Italy. Ausserhofer was a farmer from South Tyrol born in 1880. Due to his age and his being a Landsturmmann, he was not sent to the eastern front in 1914, but remained on duty close to his hometown, before being assigned to the Dolomite front (Fanes Valley, Son Pouses, Lagazuoi, Asiago) for the remainder of the war (1915–18).⁸⁰ Campi was a military chaplain with the battalion *Pieve di Cadore*, a local unit from the alpine zone in Italy, which formed part of the 7th Alpini Regiment. Campi had been born in 1888, consecrated as a priest in 1911 and sent from his parish in the region of Verona to his new position in the Cadore, where he often stayed with his troops close to the frontline.⁸¹ Hane was a teacher from Vorarlberg, born in 1892, who served as a cadet and non-commissioned officer in the area between Rovereto and Lavarone.⁸² Mörwald was a gardener from Upper Austria born in 1894, recruited into the artillery and on his way to the eastern front, when his unit was redeployed to the region around the Plöckenpass in the Carnic Alps, where he served until the armies of the central powers broke through at Caporetto/Kobarid in October/November 1917.⁸³ Ragucci was a medical doctor and pharmacist from Naples. He was the oldest of the diarists, born in 1863. In 1915 he was called up again and served as a major in the Italian medical corps, first in Aversa and Naples, before being sent to the Field Hospital 040 in Cortina d'Ampezzo in August 1916. While neither Ausserhofer nor Mörwald had any intellectual background,⁸⁴ Ragucci was friends with some writers and painters like Edmondo de Amicis and Luigi de Luca, a fact that very probably influenced the writing of his diary, which is more deliberative than those of Ausserhofer

79 The author is aware that there are many more diaries, as e.g. Leoni, *La Guerra Verticale* shows. As this study focuses on the perception it seems, however, better, to concentrate on less examples, about whose authors more is known.

80 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 32–38.

81 Fiorin, “Il diario di don Emilio Campi,” 24 and 31–52.

82 Tschalkner, “Kriegstagebuch,” 50–51.

83 Schubert, “Das Kriegstagebuch des Josef Mörwald,” 9–26.

84 Schubert, “Das Kriegstagebuch des Josef Mörwald,” 9–11; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 21–37.

and Mörwald.⁸⁵ As a priest and a teacher respectively, Campi and Hane had some intellectual background, which may explain their reflection, though neither of them at the time had connections beyond local intellectuals.⁸⁶

In contrast to wartime publications, diaries were much less coherent and there was a considerable fluctuation in length as well as in the numbers of entries. Using the example of Karl Ausserhofer's diary, Sigrid Wisthaler has shown that the fluctuation in entries on the one hand depended on the conditions at the front. In October and November 1916, Ausserhofer was confronted with an extremely cold autumn and early winter, a fact that explains why his entries for that period were very short. Similarly and probably because of lack of supplies in April and May 1918, Ausserhofer stopped making daily notes and often summarized events for several days in one entry.⁸⁷ Wisthaler also tried to assign Ausserhofer's entries to different categories such as weather, military service, food and leisure time, perception of the enemy, self-perception, clothing, hygiene and accommodation, emotions, sickness and death, family and civilian population, depiction of landscape, hope for the future, comrades, and religion. According to her calculation, the first two ranked highest for the period that Ausserhofer spent in the frontline, while food and leisure time, emotions, sickness and death, family and civilian population, and hope for the future were aspects that Ausserhofer mainly discussed in his diary when away from the front in military hospitals, during rehabilitation, or while on leave. For Wisthaler, it is clear that the particular context was an essential prerequisite to explain the topics that Ausserhofer wrote about. Weather phenomena were essential, while he was in the frontline, as they were a precondition for surviving in high altitude.⁸⁸

With the exception of the case of Karl Hane, where some information is available,⁸⁹ no such detailed analysis exists for the other diaries, but the tendency is the same. Fog, rain, hail, and (for those who were in the mountains during winter) snow were among the natural phenomena that Hane most often mentioned, not least because several times he had to sleep in wet clothes or could not sleep at all.⁹⁰ Campi and Mörwald also complained about bad and especially cold weather when it kept on going like this for over a month up

85 Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 9–12.

86 Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 24–29; Tschakner, "Kriegstagebuch," 47.

87 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 11–12. and 167.

88 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 12–15.

89 Frommelt. "Vorarlberger Kriegstagebücher," 127–44 and 150–51.

90 Hane Diary, May 26 and 29, as well as June 4, 1916; Tschakner, "Kriegstagebuch," 68–69. and 70.

in the mountains.⁹¹ Hane, Mörwald, and Campi were therefore very glad when “eventually good weather”⁹² eased the situation and hoped it would stay that way for at least some time.⁹³ In such situations they also spoke of (a most) splendid weather.⁹⁴ Because of his serving in a field hospital, Ragucci’s notes tend to be a little more deliberative. Nevertheless, apart from talking about the wounded—sometimes at length, especially when he felt very much with a specific person⁹⁵—the weather also took up a large share of his entries. As he was serving through the harsh winter of 1916–17,⁹⁶ Ragucci’s emphasis was most often on the massive snowfall in and around Cortina d’Ampezzo. This was especially the case in November and December 1916, when Ragucci was not only preoccupied with the communications of Cortina, but when he also wondered about the height of snow that had amassed on the barracks of the Alpini close to the peaks of the Tofane.⁹⁷ While in such contexts Mörwald mainly referred to the shoveling of the snow,⁹⁸ Ragucci found time to reflect on it, calling it “awesome and impressive,” when he found that 1.25 meters of snow had accumulated on his terrace overnight.⁹⁹ He also spoke of the silver slopes of the valley and the sea of snow that covered the area around his hospital.¹⁰⁰

In such circumstances of heavy snowfall, numerous avalanches came crashing down. Such was the case in February and March as well as November and December 1916. Mörwald called this a “terrible snow weather,” or the “terror of winter,” and described the “thundering and rolling” of avalanches.¹⁰¹ Ausserhofer, whose diary for February–March 1916 is lost and who was on leave from 12 November 1916 onwards,¹⁰² nevertheless already spoke of the “lasting

91 Campi Diary, June 22 and 23, 1915 looking back at the weather between May 27 and June 23, 1915. Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 95; Mörwald Diary October 15–17, 19, 23 and 25–27, and November 13, 1915 as well as February 2 and 11, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 56–57, 59 and 72–73.

92 Hane Diary, June 5, 1916; Tschalkner, “Kriegstagebuch,” 70.

93 Mörwald Diary, 8 November 1915; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 58.

94 Campi Diary, July 4 and 6, 1915 and February 6, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 99–100 and 125; Mörwald Diary, February 5 and 6, as well as March 14, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 72 and 83.

95 This was the case especially in the two cases of lieutenant Zoli and second lieutenant Abate, whose agony as well as ups and downs Ragucci describes at great length. Ragucci Diary, January 19–27, and March 17–28, 1917; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 70–74 and 80–86.

96 Brugnara et al., *December 1916*, 1–3 and 6–7.

97 Ragucci Diary, November 9, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 34–35.

98 Mörwald Diary, e.g. February 9, 16 and 17, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 72–75.

99 Ragucci Diary, December 11, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 50.

100 Ragucci Diary, November 10–11, and December 2, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 35–36 and 45.

101 Mörwald Diary, February 14, and December 11 to 13, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 76 and 155–57.

102 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 8 and 167.

bad weather” and “a terrible mass of snow,” with avalanches that killed 6 people of his company and many more in other places during that early period.¹⁰³ Campi also commented on snowfall, specifically in September, October, and December 1915 as well as February and March 1916, which caused frostbite and made paths difficult,¹⁰⁴ but also offered a lovely panorama.¹⁰⁵ Although he was hampered by heavy winds, dense snowfall, and barren paths, Campi decided to spend Christmas 1915 amongst his troops and in the proximity of the Zygismondi cabin. He recorded that in spite of the difficult conditions, he was glad to have shared this moment with men on the frontline rather than staying in his comfortable hotel room.¹⁰⁶ In February and March 1916 Campi’s desire to be close to his soldiers made life very difficult. At first he had to bury a number of soldiers that had been killed by the avalanches that had overwhelmed a number of barracks and emplacements.¹⁰⁷ Finally he contracted a cough, a headache, and high fever in the same area where he had spent Christmas.¹⁰⁸ He could not be evacuated, as neither the paths were open nor was the cable car operating: “we are blocked by snow, without food, without wood, the mail has neither reached us nor departed. [...] Our situation becomes more critical and more dangerous as time goes by.”¹⁰⁹ Only on 16 March could he finally leave the mountains.¹¹⁰

Campi was not the only one affected so closely by avalanches. Mörwald had similar experiences in February–March as well as December 1916, suffering from frostbite that could not be treated, as snowfall and avalanches blocked his unit for almost 10 days.¹¹¹ In December 1916 Mörwald just returned from his leave when he was again caught in heavy snowfall, avalanches having destroyed some barracks and the unit’s two kitchens.¹¹² The next day Mörwald and his comrades unsuccessfully tried to dig out their gun that had been buried in snow. The day after an avalanche hit part of their camp, and Mörwald and his comrades succeeded in saving 24 soldiers and their NCOs. They could not,

103 Ausserhofer Diary, November 5 to 9, 1916; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 167.

104 Campi Diary, September 2, 13–27, October 1 and 23, 1915 as well as December 24–25, 1915; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 113–15, 118 and 122–23.

105 Campi Diary, October 18, 1915; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 116.

106 Campi Diary, December 24–25, 1915; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 122–23.

107 Campi Diary, February 24–28, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 125–30.

108 Campi Diary, February 28 – March 5, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 130–31.

109 Campi Diary, March 6, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 131.

110 Campi Diary, March 16, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 133.

111 Mörwald Diary February 17–27, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 74–78.

112 Mörwald Diary December 10–11, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 155–56.

however, save another man who was stuck on a slope on the other part of the valley. It was extremely difficult for Mörwald and his comrades to hear the cries for help and not be able to do anything for that man, who finally died during the following night.¹¹³ Avalanches did of course not come down as far as Cortina, but nevertheless Ragucci was also affected by their outcome, as many of the wounded were transported to his hospital. Without knowing what had already happened, on 13 December 1916 Ragucci commented in his diary on the “great proof of courage and readiness to make sacrifices that the marvelous young men have to submit to in this horrible period. Today it is not the ordinary enemy that you are fighting, but today you are fighting the snow; you don’t seize the gun, but the best weapon currently is the shovel.”¹¹⁴ Late that night Ragucci was informed by the divisional command that a high number of wounded would be transported to his hospital, the first reaching it the following day with ventral bruises and bone fractures. Transport proved difficult, however, especially as the snowfall continued. Ragucci was therefore very pleased that the snowfall stopped during the evening of 15 December, and for the following day he spoke of “splendid weather,” which was a great respite for him.¹¹⁵

Snowfall and rain, however, were not the only weather that distressed officers and soldiers. They also had to be on their guard against fog, or more specifically what the fog could hide. In Ausserhofer’s diary we read of the opportunities afforded to the enemy to approach the emplacements without being seen.¹¹⁶ For Mörwald, bad weather such as fog could, however, also be a protection in a difficult situation such as after the fall of the summit of the Cellon just above his emplacement at the end of June 1916.¹¹⁷ Ragucci’s description of nature—such as in the case of the defiant and solemn peaks of the Cinque Torri¹¹⁸—was closer to that of the published sources discussed above. On the other hand he was much closer to death in his hospital and his descriptions of dying soldiers are much longer than those of either Ausserhofer, Hane, or Mörwald.¹¹⁹ As a priest Campi also had to cope with dead officers and soldiers fairly often, but he

113 Mörwald Diary December 12–15, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 157–59.

114 Ragucci Diary, December 13, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 51–52.

115 Ragucci Diary, December 13–16, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 52–53.

116 Ausserhofer Diary, July 5–9, 1916; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 157.

117 Mörwald Diary, June 27 to 30, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 114–17.

118 Ragucci Diary, October 13, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 28.

119 Ragucci Diary, October 12, 20 and 25 to 28, 1916; Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 26–27 and 30–31. Most of the time Mörwald just spoke of dead soldiers – Mörwald Diary, June 23, 27, July 15, August 5–6 or December 15, 1916 – avoiding to mention names such as on May 23, 1917; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 112, 115, 121, 130,

usually referred to them in a religious manner, because this was as much his job as his vocation.¹²⁰

There were, however, experiences of nature that were also quite exceptional. Amongst them there is Campi's climbing of the Cima Undici on 13 May 1916 and his celebrating mass on the Terza Tofana on 17 September of the same year.¹²¹ Hane's exceptional experience with nature was quite unique, and none of the others analyzed here seem to have experienced anything like it. He was struck by a lightning and gave a very detailed description of what happened. Although Hane's record of the event was written down in hindsight, when he was in hospital, his account is very detailed, which is rather unusual for his entries. As a rule Ausserhofer, Campi, and Mörwald only gave short accounts of storms or heavy rain, mentioning at most the severity of the storm or the fact that they got wet.¹²² The same was true of Hane, at least up to 11 July 1916.¹²³ That day was very hot and for Hane very dull, that is, until he saw a storm coming from Monte Zugna. He tried to turn his tent canvas into a raincoat. While calling on his officer cadet to turn off the telephone, he was struck by lightning, which he experienced as:

a loud noise, a strong shock onto my knee, and a feeling as if someone had been cruising on the skin of my feet with a red-hot iron. From the pain I cried out loudly. The foot was lame, but soon recovered some strength. The grass around us was on fire. The officer cadet dead. [...]. Horrible! I am saved! What fortune! But pain! [...]. The officer cadet held the shell of the telephone in his hand when the lightning went through his head. He cried: "Extinguish the fire, I am burning!" Then he turned pale and was dead! I remained conscious. The lightning went through my loaded gun, but it did not go off, as Dobmayer [a good friend of Hane] later found out, looking at the surface quality you could just see where the lightning had gone down, and then passed onto my knee. [...] My coat and jacket have a small hole, just as big as a

159 and 187–88. Similarly Ausserhofer Diary July 6 and 9, September 25 or November 9, 1916; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 157 and 166–67.

120 Campi Diary, e.g. August 5, 8 and 19, 1915; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 108–09 and 111.

121 Campi Diary, May 13, and September 17, 1916; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 135 and 147.

122 Ausserhofer Diary, July 8, 9 and 14, 1915, June 21, July 27, and September 21, 1916; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 115–16, 118–125, 154–160 and 166; Campi Diary, July 7, 1915; Magrin and Forin, *Il cappellano del Cadore*, 101; Mörwald Diary, July 14, and August 13, 1915, June 4, July 1 and 15, 1916; Mörwald, *Feuerbereit*, 42, 46, 109, 117 and 121.

123 Hane Diary June 10, 11 and July 5, 1916; Tschakner, "Kriegstagebuch," 71–72 and 77.

Heller coin. Trousers, underpants, shirt, and leggings were in tatters, charred and burnt from knee to hip.¹²⁴

Hane was finally evacuated to hospital, where he had to undergo a long treatment, because large parts of his skin had been burnt. He therefore never returned to the front line, and like Ausserhofer did not talk about the natural conditions or natural phenomena while in hospital or in rehabilitation.¹²⁵

The Dwindling of the Image of the Magnificent Alps: Wartime Natural Phenomena in Exemplary Letters from the Frontline

Like diaries, letters are also a form of self-testimony, but in contrast to the former they have a specific addressee, are not for the writer alone, and usually reflect on what he (or she) can tell the recipient.¹²⁶ As letters were less often preserved than diaries,¹²⁷ this contribution will only focus on a few of them written by German artillery captain Carl Franz Rose to his wife and children.¹²⁸ Rose was sent in 1915 to the Italian front as part of the German Alpenkorps to support the weak Austro-Hungarian artillery units, first on the plateau of Lavarone, then in Sesto, and finally until January 1916 in Corvara. Like Schmidkunz, Rose was also a mountaineer and therefore showed a strong love of nature.¹²⁹ This became very clear already in his first letter of 2 June 1915, where he commented on the “magnificent alps [... with] fine cows [...] luscious meadows [and a] splendor of flowers.”¹³⁰ Nature was glorious, all the rest—especially food and the Austrian comrades—lukewarm.¹³¹ In letters to his wife and his son Heinz, he spoke of the “superb Dolomites” that the two would have to come to see after the war. Rose, however, also mentioned how dangerous as well as difficult fighting in high altitude was, and how well the horses and mules served the troops.¹³²

124 Hane Diary July 11, 1916; Tschakner, “Kriegstagebuch,” 78.

125 Hane Diary July 13, 1916 to May 3, 1917; Tschakner, “Kriegstagebuch,” 80–85. Cf. Ausserhofer Diary, July 12 to September 13, 1916; Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 158–66.

126 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 6.

127 Wisthaler, *Karl Ausserhofer*, 16.

128 Rose, *In Schussweite*.

129 Rose, *Schussweite*, 13–24.

130 Letter of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire June 2, 1916; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 39. In a similar manner Ragucci wrote to his wife in the only surviving letter of August 20, 1916, shortly after his arrival in Cortina. Ragucci, *Ospedale*, 11.

131 Letter of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire June 2, 1916; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 40–41.

132 Letters of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire June 2 and 7, August 13, September 15 and 26, 1915; letter of Franz Carl Rose to his son Heinz August 7, 1915; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 40, 44, 94–95, 101,

Nevertheless the constant climbing was tiring and Rose especially disliked the cold nights and bad weather. He was therefore glad that as an officer he did not have to stay outside most nights,¹³³ and not very happy when he learnt that he would have to stay in the mountains in winter. Rose's conviction that the war was a good thing waned more and more: “[It is] dreadful being so alone, almost impossible to bear. And now it looks as if this is going to continue for a long time! It seems that things do not go according to the will of the High Council [the German government], as I was told in Berlin back then. This is a misery and I will not take part in this for much longer.”¹³⁴

He nevertheless accepted it and asked his wife to send him the necessary clothing.¹³⁵ With some irony he commented that “men from the flat country became alpine mountaineers, learning to ski,” only to complain about the large quantities of snow as well as the problems with heating the provisional dwellings that had been set up.¹³⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, you can state that the experience of nature and everyday life in the war in alpine territory was very complex and diverse, but also to a considerable extent influenced by presuppositions and stereotypes. Publicly—and this later became the master narrative—many stressed the splendor of the mountains and the way in which mountains, though dangerous, became symbols of national defense that could in some cases even tangibly support those fighting in high altitude. Carl Franz Rose is a good example of a man who came to the mountains with a romantic view and told his family about the monumentality of the alpine scenery. In his case it took some time to realize and describe also the negative aspects of a life at high altitude, in the cold, with fog, rain, and snow. Ragucci's testimony was quite similar, and as he was always able to return to his hospital, a former grand hotel, his experience of nature and weather conditions was less

116, 125 and 134. Rose and his wife really visited the war-zone after 1918, as a photograph in Rose, *In Schussweite*, 27 shows.

133 Letters of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire 18, 26 June, 1, 3, 13 August, 8, 26 September, 2, 18 October and 21 December 1915; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 53, 65, 81, 83, 85, 97, 102, 112, 121–22, 127, 149.

134 Letter of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire 12 December 1915; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 146.

135 Letters of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire 22 August, 8, 26 September and 2 October 1915; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 105–6, 113, 122, 128.

136 Letters of Franz Carl Rose to his wife Claire 26 September, 21, 23 December 1915; Rose, *In Schussweite*, 125, 148–52.

negative over the long term than that of Rose. Men like Ausserhofer, Hane, and Mörwald were less deliberative. They almost never talked about the splendor of the mountains. Their eyes were fixed on everyday fighting and the weather—good weather giving respite, bad weather making life even more miserable. There are several essential factors that explain their ambivalent representations of nature: class, intellectual connections, upbringing, education, and personal attitudes; the daily changing conditions; and the various contexts behind why all these men wrote. Further research is necessary to verify the findings of this exemplary study. By analyzing a more important number of contemporary documents and linking them more closely to the existing master narrative in the current historiography, it will then be possible to gain a more sophisticated understanding of a theatre of war that was as much different as it was similar to the other fronts in this global war. In this context it is important to be more aware of the diverse perceptions and understandings of nature in a war where nature itself seemed to have joined forces with the enemy.

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