



The Day of the 650,000 Italian Soldiers Interned in Nazi Camps

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Si è svolta nella cornice di Palazzo Montecitorio, alla presenza del Presidente della Repubblica Sergio Mattarella, la cerimonia istituzionale in vista della **“2^ Giornata degli Internati italiani nei campi di concentramento tedeschi durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale”**. Un appuntamento solenne, trasmesso in diretta televisiva e seguito con profonda partecipazione emotiva dal Paese, pensato per sottrarre all’oblio una delle pagine più drammatiche, eroiche e al tempo stesso colpevolmente dimenticate della nostra storia nazionale.

Il valore di una testimonianza morale e civile

L’altissima attenzione che il Capo dello Stato riserva costantemente ai militari e ai civili vittime della deportazione e della violenza nazi-fascista testimonia il **profondo valore umano, morale e storico** di una vicenda che ha segnato in modo indelebilmente doloroso il destino dell’Italia. Al centro della riflessione ci sono gli **oltre 650.000 militari italiani** che, dopo

l'armistizio dell'8 settembre 1943, scelsero la via del coraggio e della coerenza.

Quei soldati, sbandati e privi di ordini precisi nei teatri di guerra europei, ebbero la forza morale di dire un «no» **secco e irrevocabile alla collaborazione con il nazifascismo**. Una scelta netta, pagata a caro prezzo, che non fu mossa da velleità partitiche o ideologiche immediate, ma da un intimo e irrinunciabile senso della dignità e della libertà personale.



La Giornata dei 650.000 Soldati Italiani Internati nei Lager Nazisti

La “Resistenza senza armi” nei lager del Terzo Reich

Quella compiuta dagli Internati Militari Italiani (IMI) fu a tutti gli effetti una straordinaria forma di **“Resistenza senza armi”**. Catturati e deportati nei territori del Terzo Reich, i soldati italiani rifiutarono ripetutamente di arruolarsi nelle file dell’esercito tedesco o della Repubblica Sociale Italiana, nonostante le lusinghe, le promesse di un ritorno a casa e, soprattutto, le terribili pressioni psicologiche e fisiche.

Nei lager tedeschi furono sottoposti a regimi di **lavoro coatto spietato**, ridotti a vivere in condizioni igienico-sanitarie disumane, bersagliati dalla fame nera, dal freddo e dalle angherie dei carcerieri. A quegli uomini silenziosi, spesso definiti gli “eroi dimenticati” della nostra storia, va la perenne e riconoscente memoria della Repubblica.

La geografia della cattività: numeri, campi e dimensioni del dramma

Per comprendere la portata titanica di questa tragedia, è necessario analizzare la complessa macchina concentrazionaria messa in piedi dal Terzo Reich attraverso i suoi distretti militari (*Wehrkreise*). La deportazione degli IMI interessò una fitta e ramificata rete di strutture carcerarie dislocate in tutta Europa:

- **The Stalag (Stammlager):** ordinary prisoner-of-war camps for enlisted men and non-commissioned officers (including Stalag III-A in Luckenwalde, IV-B in Mühlberg, VIII-A in Görlitz, XI-B in Fallingbommel, and the notorious Lamsdorf complex).
- **The Oflag (Offizierslager):** detention camps reserved for officers, many of whom preferred extreme confinement in castles and fortresses (such as Oflag IV-C at Colditz) rather than yield to political blackmail.
- **Labor camps (Arbeitskommandos) and peatbogs:** thousands of subcamps spread across industrial, agricultural, and harsh mining and swamp areas (such as the Fullen and Wesuwe complex in the Münster district).
- **Concentration camps and transit camps:** punishment or sorting facilities (including Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, and the Italian transit camp at Fossoli) through which military personnel considered politically hostile or "incorrigible" passed or were eliminated.

Within this immense repressive system, **approximately 50,000 Italian internees lost their lives** struck down by hardship, disease, torture, and the grueling pace of forced labor.

Camp Type / Structure	Prisoner Categories	Estimated Deaths / Victims	Characteristics and Main Purpose
Stalag (<i>Stammlager</i>)	Troops and Non-Commissioned Officers	The vast majority of approximately 50,000 total deaths recorded among the IMI concentrated in labor camps and <i>Stalags</i> .	These were ordinary prisoner-of-war camps established by the Wehrmacht in various military districts (<i>Wehrkreise</i>). They served as the main collection centers from which prisoners were distributed to various work sites.
Arbeitskommandos (<i>Labor subcamps</i>)	Troops and Non-Commissioned Officers (forced labor)	Extremely high mortality rate due to accidents, privation, hunger, and extreme cold.	Subcamps subordinate to the <i>Stalags</i> and distributed extensively at factories, mines, farms, railways, and marshland/peatland areas (e.g., the Fullen complex). The purpose was to systematically exploit Italian manpower in support of the German war economy.
Oflag (<i>Offizierslager</i>)	Officers of the Italian Armed Forces	Contained compared to the troops, but marked by severe psychological deprivation, illness, and isolation.	Detention camps reserved exclusively for officers. Since the vast majority of them refused to join the RSI (the "no officers"), they suffered extremely harsh conditions in fortresses and castles (e.g., Colditz), refusing collaboration despite coercion.

Camp Type / Structure	Prisoner Categories	Estimated Deaths / Victims	Characteristics and Main Purpose
KZ / Straflager (Concentration and punishment camps)	Military personnel and civilians classified as "political," irreconcilable opponents, or punished for passive resistance	Thousands of victims (part of the 50,000 total deaths).	Detention and extermination facilities managed by the SS (e.g., Dachau, Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Risiera di San Sabba). They were used as places of physical elimination or exemplary punishment for prisoners considered dangerous or rebellious to the Third Reich.

Digital tools for historical research: the LeBI portal

To transform remembrance into an accessible and scientifically verifiable collective heritage, digital archival research tools now offer a fundamental contribution. Among these stands out the **LeBI - Biographical Lexicon of IMI** (<https://www.lessicobiograficoimi.it/>), a valuable online database promoted to systematically collect the biographical data, unit affiliations, places of capture, and the individual camps or labor subcamps in which hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers were confined. Through this portal, scholars, historians, and families of deported persons can consult registers, documents, and personal files, filling an information gap that lasted for decades and restoring a name, a face, and historical dignity to those who experienced the horror of captivity.

Culture, cinema and testimonies to never forget

The institutional ceremony at Montecitorio was not limited to formal remembrance, but wanted to unite historical recollection with the expressive languages of art and culture. During the event, enriched by the presence of important figures from the world of entertainment such as actor Cesare Bocci – who masterfully interpreted and read some passages from the diaries and letters of survivors – and Giuseppe Zeno, important multimedia contributions were given space.

Among these stands out the preview of the documentary **“Baracke 13”** and the presentation of the visual and television project dedicated to great figures of the period, such as the

celebrated writer and journalist Giovannino Guareschi (who was among the interned soldiers). These initiatives confirm how fundamental it is to pass on the torch of memory to young generations. As recalled in the highest institutional seats, our freedom and our democracy are not a fortuitous gift, but were born and rooted also thanks to those **heroic individual choices**, made by ordinary men in extraordinary and desperate historical circumstances.



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