

Macedonian Front

35° Infantry Division

Some assumptions on the M.I.A of hill 1050

Italians on 9th May 1917 at the hill 1050 died like heroes, shouting loud and strong under the enemy barbed wire "Long live Italy"

Colonel Galli

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PART I

1.0 Reasons of this study

One of the aspects that always characterizes conflicts is the lack of clear data on the number of the civilian and military victims. Despite the technical progress and the increasing willingness to research/understand the destiny of the Fallen which have been recorded since the end of XIX century, also the First World war doesn't make exception and up to now the real number of the victims of this conflict is unknown: recently Prof. Fornasin of the University of Trieste (Italy) stated that the estimates of the number of the Italian victims of the Great War are overstated by approximately 90.000 units.

There are many reasons for this problem, but it mainly depends on the new military techniques used in the wars of XX century which during a battle (if not in a simple military engagement) caused big quantities of corpses often impossible to be retrieved and/or identify.

The engagement consisted of attacks and counterattacks on the same ground and the graves placed in the area of the battles/front were often destroyed by the following engagement and bombardments of the area.

Beyond that, the technical developments of the armaments used by the Armies have often caused so terrible lesions that it was often impossible to identify, or even to find, the entire corpse for the burial.

Furthermore, it is necessary to remember that after the engagement the corpses were on the ground, but not those who were buried for various causes, and this leads to the high number of M.I.A. and the fact that today it can be possible to find their remains.

Concerning the battle of hill 1050 on 9th May 1917, it is the main subject of the present study, the colonel Galli – “Infantrymen of Italy in Macedonia” – 1922, wrote: *“most MIA were not POW, but died in front of the enemy trenches.....and it was impossible to retrieve their bodies”*

Again:

“in the valley under the line of the Piton, there are many bodies exposed to the sun and rain and we can see many bodies of our fallen soldiers of the battle on 9th May and it was impossible to retrieve them because they were under the enemy barbed wire”

This fact is also confirmed by a Bulgarian officer, who speaks about the allied attack as follows:

“The brave enemy wave was next to our lines and a part of the enemy entered our trench. Others were in front of the barbed wire, while the rest of them had stepped backwards.....most soldiers died in front of our barbed wire, the rest tried to retreat, but when they were arriving in trench, they were destroyed by our artilleries.....”

Another problem related to the Macedonian front is the indifference shown by media and literature concerning the Italian contingent in Macedonia. At present there exist only some old books related to this front written by some veterans, a little official information and one historic research by Silvan Gallon (Campaign of Macedonia 1916-1919) exist. It should be noted that, in contrast to the western fronts which are studied and described with detailed information, even foreign authors didn't spend much energy on researching their armies in Macedonia.

According to my idea there are many aspects related to the Italian expedition which must be understood and among the most important ones is the understanding the destiny of the M.I.A. related to the Italian attacks in the spring of 1917.

2.0 Current situation

As shown earlier, despite the 35° Division of infantry has been the main Italian contingent involved in foreign battles, (over 50.000 men, belonging the brigades of infantry Cagliari with 63° and 64° Regiment, Sicily with 61° and 62° Regiment and Ivrea with 161° and 162° Regiment, from 8 batteries of mountain artillery, from some companies of “Bersaglieri”, etc fought in Macedonia during the WW1) it is one of the least studied and analysed Italian military contingents.

In the web there are thousands of pages, photos and documents related to the Allied, French and British, (most of them are made by history buffs out of the academic field), while there are a few or none about the Italian contingent and the existing info is often shown by web-sites as a “copy-paste”.

The collected information from literature as follow:

- The book “Campaign of Macedonia 1916-1919” by Silvano Gallon stated that the report by 61° Regiment- Brigade Sicily is the only one official document on the losses of the 35th Division on 9th May 1917:
 - officers: 6 dead, 5 M.I.A., 16 wounded, soldiers: 90 dead, 244 M.I.A., 321 wounded.
- The website frontedelpiave.it shows the names of the dead officers and M.I.A. of the 61th on 1917.
 - 6 dead: Major Ulrico Tonti, Captain Guido Ciampi, Lieutenants Pietro Manetta, Gianluigi Mazzuoli, Ezio De Marchi e Zeffirino Salsi;
 - 5 M.I.A.: Captain Giovanni Del Mese, Lieutenants Achille Genocchi, Giuseppe Bà, Ettore Tirola, Attilio Gerometta.
- The list of corpses buried in the military cemetery of Thessaloniki, concerning the previous point, shows only:
 - Major Ulrico Tonti;
 - Lieutenant Gianluigi Mazzuoli
 - Lieutenant Ezio De Marchi.
- The HQ of the Brigade Ivrea (report n. 196 by 161° and 162° Regiment on 16th May 1917) registered the losses of the 161° on 9th May 1917:
 - officers: 3 dead, 14 wounded, 4 M.I.A., soldiers: 115 dead, 396 wounded, 212 M.I.A.
- The report by the Ministry of Defence related to the Italian attacks to hill 1050 on May 1917, states: “.....the Division lost, in this battle, about 3.000 soldiers. The Brigade Ivrea lost 40 officers and 1200 soldiers...!”
- The book “Visioni di Guerra e d’oriente” by Mario Pecchio - 1922 “...the losses on May 1917 were 3.000”
- The book “Campaign of Macedonia 1916-1919” by Silvano Gallon “...the losses on 9th May 1917 were 107 officers and 2.707 soldiers (from Italian infantry in Macedonia – by Galli);
- The web-site frontedelpiave.it shows the names of the dead officers and M.I.A. of the 161° and 162° in 1917.
 - 7 dead/M.I.A.: Lieutenant Baldi Carlo, Riccadonna Paolo, Captain Cipelletti Matteo, Lieutenant Maggia Giovacchino, Brandinelli Giuseppe, Russo Antonio and Guillermin Fausto.
- The list of corpses buried in the military cemetery of Thessaloniki, concerning the previous point, shows only:
 - Lieutenant Brandelli Giuseppe.

- The report by the Ministry of Defence on 28th July 1919 states “..the losses of our contingent in Macedonia were 3.490”.
- The document n. 78 called “losses of the Italian expedition - 35° Division” states that the losses registered and identified were 2.971:
 - Brigade Cagliari: 708;
 - Brigade Sicilia: 871;
 - Brigade Ivrea: 1.278;
- The list of the Italian soldiers buried in the Thessaloniki military cemetery:
 - known: 2.759, unknown: 465
- The list of the Italian soldiers buried in the Sofia military cemetery:
 - known: about 200
- the Register of the fallen of Lombardia region:
 - about 570 dead or M.I.A in Macedonia
- The book “Campaign of Macedonia 1916-1919” by Silvano Gallon:
 - 3.226 corpses are in the Italian military cemetery of Thessaloniki - “Zeitenlik”;
 - 220 bodies had been buried first in the Cimitero of Kokkinia - Athens. In 1967, these bodies had been buried in the “Sacratio Militare d'Oltremare” of Bari (Italy) in the postwar.
 - 474 bodies had been given back to their relatives;
 - on May 1924, the magazine “Altra sponda” by the Veterans of Albania and Macedonia told that 158 bodies returned to Italy with the ship Lussin.
- The website web frontedelpiave.it publishes the losses of the Italian expedition:

61° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
1916	3	2	3	7	41	71
1917	11	21	5	142	503	248
1918	1	2	0	25	115	1
total	15	25	8	174	667	320

62° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
1916	1	2	7	8	7	250
1917	3	13	0	24	166	14
1918	1	4	0	43	143	3
total	5	19	7	75	316	267

161° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Morti	Feriti	Dispersi
1916	0	0	0	0	0	3
1917	7	30	5	211	730	383
1918	1	0	0	45	87	4
total	8	30	5	256	817	390

162° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.

1916	0	0	0	1	1	0
1917	9	30	14	209	833	365
1918	0	2	0	22	104	2
total	9	32	14	232	938	367

Table n. 1, Fallen of the Brigades Sicilia e Ivrea years 1916-1917-1918

63° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
1916	3	3	0	38	121	4
1917	8	13	1	231	781	36
1918	2	5	3	41	300	113*
total	13	21	4	310	1202	153

* 112 of them were the M.I.A. during the final attack September 1918

64° Regiment						
year	Officers			Soldiers		
	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
1916	1	3	0	13	47	30
1917	8	16	0	121	523	25
1918	3	5	0	16	107	11
total	12	24	0	150	677	66

Table n. 1/b, Fallen of the Brigade Cagliari years 1916-1917-1918

3.0 Goal

This work aims to verify the reliability of the number of the Fallen related to the 35th Division shown by the official documentation, to estimate the probable number of the M.I.A. of the spring of 1917 on hill 1050, to prove that the German-Bulgarian troops used some mass graves to bury the Italian soldiers who died in their lines and to encourage the research of these mass graves near the front line.

The questions of this research are the following:

- is there coherence between the data shown by the official sources in terms of dead, wounded and M.I.A.?
- what is the possible number of the Italian M.I.A. related to the attacks to hill 1050 during the spring of 1917?
- what is the possible number of victims (Fallen and M.I.A.) of the Italian contingent?
- is it reasonable that a significant part of the M.I.A. was buried by the enemy in mass graves near the front line?
- is it reasonable that some of these mass graves are yet to be discovered?

4.0 Innovative aspects

Several limits and obstacles affect this research and for this reason was developed a specific methodology characterized by some interesting and innovative aspects of the fields of on cognition, methodology and interpretation.

Cognitive: the present research investigates some aspects that, although are related to events which happened one century ago, are still unknown and / or, in any case, deserve further study and analysis. As stated earlier, the Macedonian Front has been almost completely forgotten / neglected both by the old newspapers and by subsequent literature and research. Each new piece of information on this Front, and in particular to the destiny of the M.I.A., is an essential contribution to the understanding of the story of this

contingent and provides proper commemoration of these young Italian soldiers who lost their lives for their Country;

Methodological: the following paragraph “methodology”, shows that the classical procedures of military historiographical research cannot be used in this case. Hence, the writer has elaborated a specific research methodology based on the verification, analysis and interpretation of the information which come from freely available secondary sources.

Interpretative: the fact that many soldiers died (hundreds) in a short period (2-3 days) suggests that the opposing party was forced to bury significant number of bodies into mass graves (perhaps a part of them still to be discovered) which lead to a great number of M.I.A. This hypothesis is verified from the comparison between the number of the declared dead and the graves actually present at the military cemeteries related to the period under examination (spring 1917) as well as with those of the other periods (36 months - 1916-1918). In case that the number of declared dead in the spring of 1917 is very different from that of the soldiers present in the cemetery of Thessaloniki and this circumstance is not verified for the other periods, this could mean the underestimation of the actual number of M.I.A. (in other words, concerning the battles on the spring of 1917, many of the declared dead were, instead, M.I.A.) that, of course, it leads to the question “where are they?”.

The used logical methodology is based on some considerations that can be represented as follows:

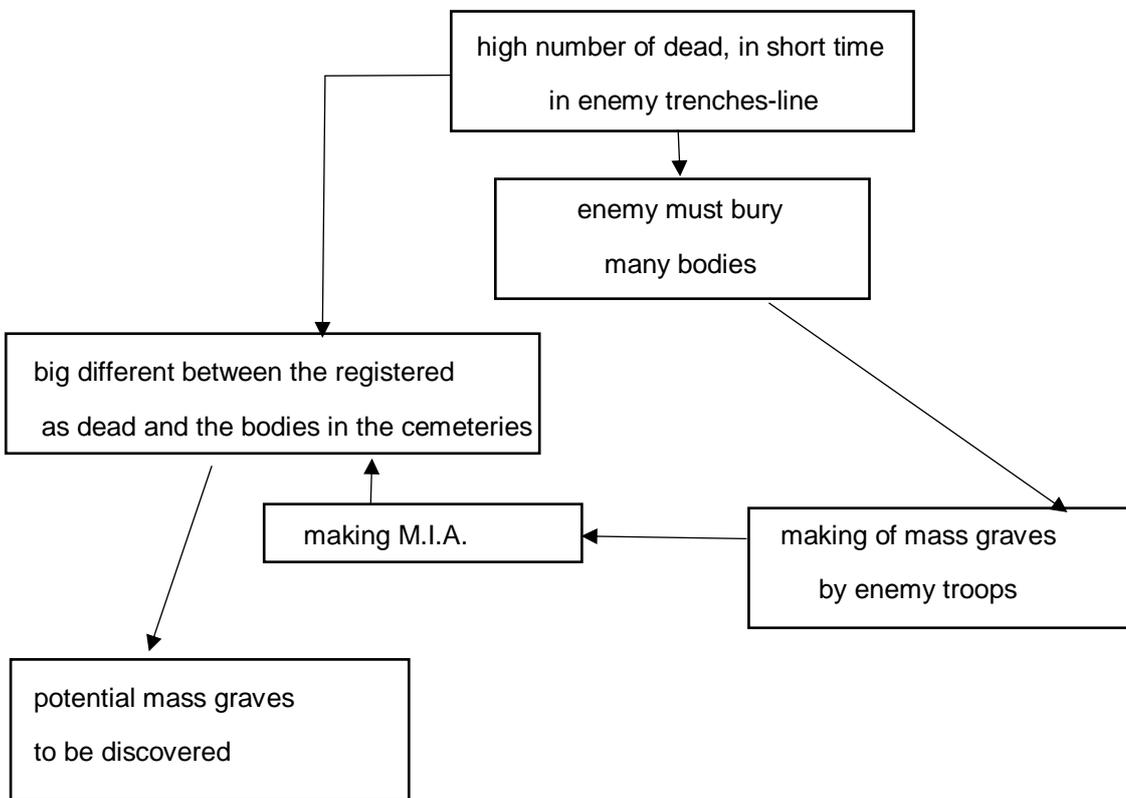


Figure n. 1 logical scheme

5.0 Methodology

Usually, historical research collects the needed information from the study and processing of data provided by the so-called primary source that, in case of military research, mainly consists in the registers of the various military units. These documents report the vicissitudes experienced by the soldier, including the participation in war operations, death in fighting and possible burial place: every historiographical research starts from the consultation of these documents.

For the present study, the primary sources are very difficult to be obtained by the writer, due to the following three problems:

- **the cost**, the present research is financed by the writer as independent researcher. No public or private funding has been provided;
- **the number of data and the area**, the Italian contingent lost almost 8,000 soldiers between dead, wounded and M.I.A, coming from all regions of Italy. The research carried out in a "classical" way would have had to manage thousands of elementary research units coming from around Italy;
- **the availability**, most information about the fallen is released by the competent authorities only to direct relatives. A research carried out on several hundred of the fallen showed that it is practically impossible to collect basic information from the municipal offices, such as the name, surname and address of their descendants (most of them moved and there are limitations of privacy legislation).

Due to these obstacles, the writer has developed and adopted a quantitative historiographical methodology based almost exclusively on the use of freely available secondary sources. He believes that this procedure can be used effectively in all situations characterized by limited resources and / or high difficulty to find the needed information. In a nutshell, this procedure can be described as follows:

Verification of the secondary sources

The use of websites and old texts has required the previous cross-checking of the correspondence of their data. This allowed answering the first research question, to verify the reliability of the total number of Fallen of the 35th Division indicated by the official documentation, and it was the basis for the subsequent analyses and hypotheses.

Determination of the study group/sample

According to the methodologies adopted in the scientific research as well as the earlier difficulties, in order to identify the significant sample it was necessary to choose the period (year) and the military units (regiments) mainly involved in the number of M.I.A (registered or potential).

5.1 Analysis steps

Determination of the average rate between dead, wounded and M.I.A.

Secondary sources often offer incomplete information. Therefore, the writer had to use a conjecture in order to reconstruct the missing information. This rate has been used to check the existing/available data also.

Analysis of the attacks of spring 1917 and determination of the presumed number of dead, wounded and M.I.A.

The two main Italian attacks at the enemy's positions of the spring of 1917 have been analyzed. The probable number of the M.I.A. in the period that most characterized the Italian experience in Macedonia is determined, according to the adopted methodology, the available data as well as those reconstructed,

To be noted that the number of the Fallen related to each attack has increased from those of the six following days, because, in the absence of other important military operations, it is supposed that they were wounded in the Battle and dead during the following days.

Comparison between the obtained results and the Fallen buried in the cemetery of Thessaloniki.

Up to the point before, the procedure is based on data disconnected to the identity of the individual Fallen. Analysis of the chosen sample determines the possible difference between the number of soldiers declared dead and the number of Fallen present in the cemetery of Thessaloniki. If this difference concerns only on the Fallen of the days subject to the present study (spring 1917) this could mean that some errors affect the official surveys and it leads to a potential, greater number of M.I.A.

Research at the National Military Archives of Bulgaria

A research was conducted in the Bulgarian National Military Archive of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria) regarding the following questions:

- do you have any information about mass graves made by the Bulgarian army near the hill 1050 during 1917?;
- do you have any information about any Italian soldiers buried near the hill 1050, Bitola, Makovo or Mariovo?;

- what is the number of the Italian soldiers taken as prisoners during 1917?

Disclosure of the presumed number of the Fallen of the 35th Division

The previous points lead to a reasonable quantification of the losses (Dead and M.I.A.) of the Italian contingent during the time (36 months) spent in Macedonia.

Conclusions

Although the procedure adopted is characterized by a significant level of errors, the writer believes that the obtained results still provide reasonably reliable indications regarding the five research questions.

PART II

6.0 Verification of the sources

6.1 Verification of the data of the existing/found bibliography

a) *Comparison between the document n. 78 called Losses registered and identified of the Italian expedition - 35° Division and the table n. 1*

Document 78		Table n. 1 from the website frontedelpiave.it		
		dead	M.I.A.	Total
Brigade Cagliari	708	489	219	708
Brigade Sicilia	871	269	602	871
Brigade Ivrea	1278	505	776	1281
other	omitted	0	0	0
Total	2.971	1.263	1.597	2.860

Table n. 2, comparison between the document 78 and the data from the web-site frontedelpiave.it

The table shows the perfect equality between these two documents

b) *Comparison between the report on July 28, 1919 by the Italian Supreme Command which informed that the losses of the 35th in Macedonia were 3.490 and the document n. 78.*

The difference between the document n. 78 and the report by the Supreme Command (2.971 – 3.490 = 519) is only apparent, in fact the first one shows the registered and identified losses, while the second one shows the losses. Reasonably, these documents are different from one another regarding the number of unidentified bodies (unknown). The military cemetery of Thessaloniki holds 465 bodies of unknown Italian soldiers, which together with the losses of the document n. 78 lead to 3.436 losses in total. In this way, the difference between these two official documents is only 54 units corresponding to 1.5% of the total.

This result shows that there is equality between the data of these two documents. However, it is possible that the table no. 1 was formed on the basis of the document n. 78, some years later.

c) *Comparison between the number of fallen in the Balkan military cemeteries and those indicated by the mentioned documents.*

The writer cannot doubt the quantities by the official reports of the Supreme Command, however, the only one certain data is the number of fallen buried in the cemeteries of Thessaloniki and Sofia, 3.424 bodies divided as follows:

Thessaloniki, 2.756 known and 465 unknown, 3.224 in total

Sofia about 200 known (without 3 nuns and some civilians)

If 3.424 bodies and 2.956 (2.756 + 200) identified bodies present in the two cemeteries are a sure quantity, the number of Fallen indicated by the official documentation differs as follows:

table n. 1 and document 78 report 2.971 confirmed and identified corpses, so the difference is 15 units (2.956 – 2.971), that means an error lower than 0.4%;

the report on July 28, 1919 by the Italian Supreme Command reports 3.490 losses, so the difference is 66 units (3.424 – 3.490) that means 1.9% error

In a nutshell, the error is less than 2% and this proves that the table no. 1, the document n. 78, the report on 28th July 1919, show the same number of fallen and that it coincides with the number of the fallen actually present in the military cemeteries of Thessaloniki and Sofia. Therefore, it's possible to state that these research sources show coherent values.

Although the losses reported by the cited documentation show the same number of casualties present in Thessaloniki and Sofia, it is necessary to anticipate that the real number of losses suffered by the Italian contingent is certainly higher. In fact, if the total losses are 3.490, given that the bodies present in the cemeteries of Thessaloniki and Sofia are 3.424, the bodies not recovered and the bodies returned to Italy would be only 66 (3.490 – 3.424), and this conclusion is in contrast to:

the evidences of the time;

the information collected regarding the returned corpses to Italy;

the fact that inside of the cemetery of Salonika most of the Fallen related to the attacks of the spring of 1917 are missing.

6.2 Verification of the reliability of the number of Fallen shown by the official documentation

In the Balkans, during the First World War, the XVI Army in Albania and the 35th Division in Macedonia worked jointly and contiguously working, for this reason they were often considered as a unique contingent. Hence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that during the registration occurred some errors regarding the bodies coming from Albania and those from Macedonia who returned to Italy after the end of the War have been done. According to the writer, in fact, the correct inclusion of the bodies returned to Italy to their respective contingents, represents a critical element in the determination of the Fallen of the 35th Division.

The writer/researcher Silvano Gallon in his cited book talks about 220 bodies buried, at the beginning, in the Kokkinia Cemetery, near Athens, and later (1967) translated to the Military Memorial of the Fallen Overseas of Bari (Italy). The writer could not check the origin of these corpses (OnorCaduti has denied any access to its documents), However, the section of the cemetery of Overseas of Bari hosting the Fallen of the Balkans is titled to Albania. For this reason, it is reasonable to think that the fallen from the cemetery of Athens belonged the 16th Army.

About the other two repatriations mentioned by Silvano Gallon, 178 and 474 bodies, it is not possible to find certain documentation, but some circumstances make it possible to affirm with certainty, that some repatriations have been made.

For example:

the list of the fallen by the 61th Regiment related to the battle on 9th May 1917 shows 6 officers declared dead, while in the cemetery of Thessaloniki there are only 3 of them;

the reports by the 161th and 162th show 3 officers declared dead but only 1 of them is buried in Thessaloniki. For one of them, Captain Paolo Riccadonna, who died on 9th May 1917, there is a photo that proves his initially burial in Zeitenlik, but now it' s not in the list of the corpses of this cemetery;

same applies to private Grimaldi, the hero of the military operation called “Col di Lana”, who died near hill 1050 on February 1917, who is not present in Thessaloniki.

Most of them are officers, hence it is logical that these bodies received special attention by the military authorities and their families who have probably asked for them. Even the following analysis of the studied sample shows that there is a significant difference between the declared Dead and the bodies present in the cemetery of Thessaloniki related to war episodes in which the recovery and subsequent identification of the corpses by the allied party (attacks and bombing enemy Italian lines) was reasonably easy (20-25% difference).

Therefore, the writer believes that, at the end of the conflict, some bodies were returned to Italy.

According to the numbers of the repatriations reported by Gallon (178 + 474 = 652), the Fallen of the 35th Division turns out to be, at least:

Fallen in Thessaloniki 3.224

Fallen in Sofia 200

Fallen returned to Italy 652

Total 4.076

Obviously if the bodies buried in the cemetery of Overseas of Bari belong the 35th Division, the total number would become 4.276.

This value shows a positive difference from 586 to 806 units $4.076/4.276 - 3.490$ (equal to 18.6/23%) from the data by the Military Authorities (report on 28th July 1919 by the Italian Supreme Command and document n. 78 by the Italian contingent). This shows that the data provided by the official documentation underestimates about 20% the number of losses of the Italian contingent obtained from other, reasonably, reliable secondary sources.

Conclusions

The earlier concepts make it possible to affirm that the secondary sources of research adopted by the present study show coherent values. However, if in terms of overall values the numbers proposed by the documents of the military Authorities are coherent with each other, this cannot be stated regarding their reliability. More complex and uncertain seems to be the number of the M.I.A. The table n. 1 indicates a total of 1.597 M.I.A., which as will be explained in details later, should include the corpses not recovered, the P.O.W and the unknown corpses. If the number of the unknowns of Thessaloniki (465) and the corpses of Sofia (200) are subtracted from the number of M.I.A. (1.597) remains the difference of 914 which includes the dead not recovered and the P.O.W returned at the end of the war. The table n. 1 and the document n. 78 report the same quantities, but according to the fact that the document n.78 was issued a few months after the end of the conflict, it is possible that it takes into account the prisoners returned to Italy and in this case 914 would be the corpses not recovered. Therefore, further analysis on the number of the M.I.A is needed.

7.0 Subject matter

Some observations on the concept of M.I.A.

Normally the counting of the M.I.A. took place at the end of the day and was based on the number of the soldiers who had not returned to their military units. In short, M.I.A. included: the dead and wounded which had not been recovered, the bodies which were impossible to identify, the deserters and those taken prisoner by the enemy P.O.W. About that, Colonel Galli, in 1922, wrote:

- *M.I.A. could mean those have been seriously injured, fallen into a place far from our lines, inaccessible;*
- *M.I.A could mean P.O.W., perhaps wounded*
- *M.I.A could mean those who have been hit by a large-caliber grenade, in fullthe body shattered into a thousand pieces.*

The number and nature of the M.I.A depended on the type of the war event involved: attack on enemy positions, attack and / or bombardment by enemy (the latter case produced the so-called unknown). The involvement of the Italian contingent in Macedonia, started on September 1916 and ended on October 1918, is characterized by three phases and each of them shows specific military activities:

September - December 1916, dynamic warfare

The Brigades Sicily and Cagliari were engaged in the so-called Krusha Balkans area for a few weeks, before being transferred to the Monastir area where they remained until the final offensive (1918). The first one to arrive at Monastir area was the Cagliari Brigade that conquered the whole southern part of the Pelister mountains, thus allowing the conquest of the city by the French troops. The Ivrea Brigade, disembarked in Thessaloniki by the end of October, after a period spent near Dojran, reached, together with Sicily, the area of hill 1050 on mid-December.

The first Italian losses were registered in mid-September
11-12 September

From the memories of Colonel Mario Pecchio "... 61 °we have the first losses: an officer and 5 soldiers killed by shrapnel"

September 14th

From the memories of Colonel Mario Pecchio "The situation is becoming increasingly critical. The enemy favored in his advance by the perfectly covered ground, tries to encircle the 64th company of the 62nd; the battle becomes on violent, furious, with terrible corpses over corpses. The ammunition begin to lack, still a bit 'and all is silent ... (omitted) ... The heroes of the company of the 62nd sacrificed themselves for the others "

September 17th

Italian report on the Bulgarian attack: 6 officers and 180 men of the 62° did not respond to the call.

The events described above are confirmed by the table n. 1 which shows:

1916, no dead and / or M.I.A of the Ivrea (during 1916, the Brigade was not engaged in important actions);

1916, the largest number of M.I.A of the 62 (the 62 Regiment of Sicily was engaged in the clashes of the Krusha Balkans area);

1916, the largest number of M.I.A of the 64th (the 64 Regiment of Cagliari was engaged in the conquest of Mount Pelister)

There is equality between the losses recorded in 1916 and the departments involved in the main war actions of the same period. The war operations in 1916 did not take place on hill 1050, hence this year is excluded from the present research, since the territorial scope of the study is only hill 1050.

January 1917 – August 1918, trench warfare.

The Division was committed to control the hill 1050. During 1917, the hill 1050 area was affected by numerous German attacks to the Italian lines, while the Italian counterattacks have been mainly in the spring of 1917:

- February 27;
- May 9-10-11

Usually, during the enemy attacks the dead and wounded remained in the friendly trenches, so their recovery was not problematic. On the other hand, when Italian infantry attacked enemy positions, the recovery of the dead and the wounded became often impossible. It is reasonable to think that most M.I.A. in 1917 (Unrecovered Dead and wounded) were related to the two mentioned Italian counterattacks.

Silvano Gallon wrote "...most M.I.A were our soldiers fallen in the German lines, then reconquered by the enemy, whose recovery was impossible by our troops.."

Some observations on the Italian soldiers taken prisoners by the enemy (P.O.W.)

The clashes were very violent and a several dozens of meters from the Italian lines (Villardri on page 111 writes: on hill 1050 the enemy trenches were 10 m higher and 30 m further from ours).

Therefore it can be supposed that most of those who did not return to the starting trenches because or dead or severe injury remained in the enemy trenches and were taken prisoners by the enemy (It's reasonable to think that our lightly wounded were able to re-enter our lines). Again, the enemy trenches were dominant over the Italian ones, so the return to the starting trenches was easy thanks to the steep descent that separated them from the opposing lines. Considering the health situation during the WW1, the severity of the injuries that obstructed the return of our soldiers to our lines, as well as the limited resources of the Bulgarian army, it is reasonable to imagine that those who were most seriously wounded were captured by the enemy and died in the days following the battle. According to the writer, it is reasonable to assume that at least a significant part of the Italian M.I.A. died in combat and was not recovered by Italian troops or died in some Bulgarian camp hospital in the following days. According to this idea, the Bulgarian troops had to manage a large number of Italian bodies and, due to the practice and the technical resources of that time, it is reasonable to think that most of them were buried in mass graves near the front, near some field hospitals or near some church. Some witnesses describe the battle.

From the diary of an Italian telegraphist

"... our soldiers shelter at the first enemy line gathering for the 2nd attack but they have to wait for the requested reinforcements, but in this time they are targeted by enemy machine guns, and artillery, not being able to repair any more in the trench were shattered by our artillery. The reinforcements come as small patrols of 4 and 8 soldiers so that the enemy could not see them, but it is useless, they still have to reach our lines that they are decimated by enemy grenades and only two out of ten reach the destination. In short, while the reinforcement groups are still sending its last soldiers, the ones previously sent are already coming back injured or are already dead! Meanwhile, those who were at the first enemy line waiting for reinforcements tried a desperate attack, seeing that the reinforcements are not coming and realizing that waiting more was only getting them killed. However, their attack is unsuccessful. They are rejected by an infernal fire: shotgun, machine guns, hand grenades and asphyxiating gases. Our soldiers are deprived of their predominance, and are even close to dead. They are trying a retreat that turns out to be disastrous. The fact that our soldiers are being targeted from all sides, and that the ground is mined causes the death of many of ours and the fear of the others, and only a third can recover in their trenches. Some lieutenants, two captains and one major are dead. Only 8 exhausted soldiers come back of one reinforcement group! Of the several platoons that assembled the assault came back one or two! What a debacle!

Memories by Captain Mario Apicella

"...they passed the broken barbed wires, jumped into the enemy trench. The trench was manned by a few forces that were killed; but the terrifying explosion of the minefields threw hundreds of bodies into the air. A frightful holocaust, which did not stop the impetus. The survivors, burning with fury, passed the trench and reached the second line. Where the terrible battle took place!"

Memories by Mario Pecchio

"...our crosses over the broken enemy reticulates and they reach the parapet of the enemy trench, ready to throw themselves on the second, more advanced one. The struggle now turns into violence body over body. From invisible hiding places, from everywhere, the enemy machine guns, which up to now were silent, suddenly reveal themselves and release their fury over our fighters, already enveloped in a terrible avalanche of iron and fire, which the German cannons and bombards overturn, crumbling, shattering the rocky ground into innumerable deadly splinters. The situation is criticalOther waves follow one another, but the enemy fires stopped them. And in the Serbian pits they finally fold, the few survivors who already occupied the enemy trenches, where it was no longer possible to maintain ... their sublime sacrifice, becomes useless, in the face of the superiority of enemy fire "

Bulgarian bulletin on 9th May 1917

"...the corpses of the enemies are everywhere ... Thanks to the granitic tenacity of our departments and those of the German allies in these two memorable days of battle, countless and ferocious attacks of General Sarrail's departments have been annihilated. Their corpses cover our trenches and the area before the positions"

September - October 1918, dynamic warfare

The Allied defeat in the spring of 1917 leads to a stasis situation during the following months. On hill 1050 the isolated clashes occurred daily, but no one ever assumed the characters of battle and even the conquest of hill 1050 occurred only after the retreat by the Bulgarian-German troops. Probably, most dead in combat have been produced by artillery strikes, mortars, snipers, and enemy patrols. The M.I.A. of the 63th during 1918 belong to the final offensive in September (112 out of 116 of those declared M.I.A in the year) during which the 35th division chased the Bulgarian troops to the centre of Macedonia, where they surrendered near the village of Sop. According to the object of the present study, even this period is to be excluded.

Below, the table n. 3 shows the number of the M.I.A and the related percentage

61°			62°		
1916	74	23%	1916	257	94%
1917	253	77%	1917	14	5%
1918	1	0%	1918	3	1%
Tot	328	100%	Tot	274	100%
161°			162°		
1916	3	1%	1916	0	0%
1917	388	98%	1917	379	99%
1918	4	1%	1918	2	1%
Tot	395	100%	Tot	381	100%
63°			64°		
1916	4	3%	1916	30	45%
1917	37	23%	1917	25	38%
1918	116*	74%	1918	11	17%
Tot	157	100%	Tot	66	100%
Total M.I.A of the 35° Division 1.601					

Table n. 3 Number of the M.I.A of the Italian regiments

The table shows that the regiments involved in the clashes during the spring of 1917 register the greatest number of their M.I.A. during the same year:

- 77% M.I.A of 61°;
- 98% M.I.A of 161°;
- 99% M.I.A of 162°.

Instead, the regiments involved in other actions show, in 1917, percentage much lower than the previous ones:

- 5% M.I.A of 62°;
- 23% M.I.A of 63°;
- 38% M.I.A of 64°.

To be noted, the low percentage of the M.I.A. of the 62th Regiment due to the fact that in the bloodiest clash, May 9th 1917, it was employed only in the early stages of the battle and limited to only one part of the hill 1050. During 1917, this regiment recorded only 24 dead soldiers, 166 wounded and 14 M.I.A.

Percentage of losses on 1917 related to 3 years							
	years	Officers			Soldiers		
	1917	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.

61°		73%	85%	63%	82%	75%	78%
161°		87%	100%	100%	82%	89%	98%
162°		100%	93%	100%	90%	89%	99%
Average		87%	93%	88%	85%	84%	91%

Table n. 4 percentages of dead, wounded and M.I.A. in 1917 on total

The table n. 4 is a simple re-elaboration of the table n. 1 and it demonstrates that most losses suffered by the three regiments are in 1917. In 1917, these units recorded about 86% of their dead and 90% of their M.I.A. (these percentages are related to 36 months).

Conclusions

According to the above concepts, most significant results are obtained from the analysis of the Italian attacks on February and May 1917, as a period, and of the Regiments 61° of the Sicily Brigade and 161° and 162° of the Ivrea Brigade, as military units. The studied sample is obtained extrapolating, from the lists of the Gold Roll of the Lombardy region, the Lombard Fallen in Macedonia belonging to the Regiments 61°, 62° (only as information), 161° and 162°. This sample includes about 570 Fallen including declared dead and M.I.A.

8.0 Average rate between dead, wounded and M.I.A.

Battles present numbers and relationships between dead, wounded and M.I.A. that cannot be traced back to mathematical formulas. However, the present case presents some aspects / characteristics that could allow exceptions to this principle. Analysing the Italian attacks in February and May 1917, it can be noticed that:

they involve the same attack and defence units;

they took place in the same restricted area (hill 1050);

they took place in a limited period of time (from the end of February to the beginning of May);

they had the same result.

Same units, same result and small temporal and territorial contest lead to hypothesize that the opposing parties have applied the same techniques of battle and that, probably, the effects in terms of composition of losses suffered by attackers are similar in each attack and for each unit. The acceptance of this hypothesis means admitting that there is a relationship (although implying a significant degree of approximation) between the dead, the Wounded and the M.I.A. that has characterized these battles..

Concerning this operation, the available sources are the following:

- 1) Official report by the 61° Regiment on the losses on 9th May 1917

	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
61°	96	337	249
	14%	49%	37%

Table n. 5/a, percentage of dead, wounded and M.I.A. of the 61° Regiment

This is the only official document on this matter, so it's the most reliable one.

- 2) Report by the 161° Regiment on the losses on 9th May 1917

	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
161°	118	410	216
	16%	55%	29%

Table n. 5/b, percentage of dead, wounded and M.I.A. of the 161° Regiment

It's not an official document, but it's made by the HQ of the Regiment.

- 3) Table n.1 on the losses on 1917

	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
61°	142	503	248

62°	omitted	omitted	omitted
161°	211	730	383
162°	209	833	365
	16%	58%	27%

Table n. 5/c, rate on dead, wounded and M.I.A. in 1917

Despite the data shown by the table n. 1 are related to the 1917 as a whole and include 3 regiments, they lead to some results not very different from those by the two previous sources.

The relationship between dead, wounded and M.I.A. that, on average, characterized the regiments of the Brigade Ivrea and Sicily during the Macedonian conflict, is represented by the following percentages: 15%, 52% and 33% to which corresponds the following average rounded ratio:

1 dead – 4 wounded – 2 M.I.A.

In other words, it means that during the attacks to the hill 1050 for each soldier declared dead there were, on average, two M.I.A and four wounded.

As previously stated, the only official data on the losses on 9th May 1917 are related to the 61st Regiment, for the other regiments the data come from informal reports and publications. The analysis of the sample (see the following table No. 8) shows that there were 36 Lombard belonging the 61st declared dead on May 6-11, 1917, while the declared M.I.A. were 64. These numbers, 36 Dead and 64 M.I.A., express the report 1 dead - 1.8 M.I.A. that confirms the proposed criterion.

9.0 Analysis of Italian attacks to the hill 1050, spring 1917

9.1 attack on 27th February 1917

General Petitti di Roreto spoke:

“..The attack took place in the evening on February 27. Our soldiers took the enemy trenches of the ridge making 75 German prisoners and quickly they reached the shelters and the second enemy line but the main column of attack was largely destroyed by the explosion of a mine, which the enemy had prepared in defence of its position, and the others had to fall back on our starting trenches ”.

From the web-site www.frontemacedone.com

“.....the Germans suddenly shine a mighty slaughter, which exterminates most 11th Italian Company; only the captain and a few men survived of the company.

However, the few survivors do not want to leave the trenches shattered and, waiting for reinforcements, prepare to resist. The enemy counterattack, conducted with much higher forces and supported by a violent machine-gun fire, does not wait long. The Italian soldiers are almost completely annihilated and only a few of the 100 men who counted the company, came back to their starting positions. The attacks and counterattacks last until the evening. The Major Negro of the 162nd Infantry Regiment, gathers the survivors of his battalion and tries around 7 pm a vigorous attack that is crushed by the violence of the German artillery and machine-guns. The survivors of the 11th Company and some parts of the 2nd heroically try resisting their conquered positions, but after an hour, struck by an enemy battery, they must fall back towards the ancient trenches. Overall, Italian troops lose almost 400 men ”.

The writer does not have other information on this operation, hence the division of the losses between Dead, Wounded and M.I.A. can be done by applying to 400 men (the total) the average relationship between Dead, Wounded and M.I.A. shown by the previous paragraph. In this way, it must be obtained that in the clash on 27th February 1917 there were:

- 57 Dead;

- 228 Wounded;
- 115 M.I.A.

The cemetery of Thessaloniki preserves 55 dead related to the period February 27 (+ a week) March 6 (see methodology adopted), that confirm the hypothesis above.

Hence, in the crash on February 27, 1917 on the hill 1050 there were 115 Italian M.I.A.

9.2 Attacks on May 9-10-11, 1917

May 9

After a heavy bombardment of enemy lines, together with a Franco-Russian attack, Italian infantry came out of the trenches and launched a frontal attack at the Bulgarian-German positions entrenched at the top of hill 1050. It was the bloodiest battle in which the corpus Italian expedition to Macedonia was involved against the Bulgarian and German troops: at the end of this very hard battle, 2,800 officers and Italian soldiers were wounded or killed. This battle was fought by the 161°, 162° of the Ivrea the 61° and by the 62° of Sicily. As stated earlier, the latter was used only in the initial part of the battle and in a limited area. Even a few units of the Cagliari Brigade were engaged (the losses of this Brigade, on May 9th were only 5 dead and 5 M.I.A. belonging the 63° Regiment).

Concerning the losses on 9th May 1917 there are some data supplied by the units involved in the battle as well as some general information reported by the publications of the time.

The reports of the 61° and 161° belong the first group:

- 61° Infantry Brigade Sicily (official data):

officers: 6 dead, 16 wounded, 5 M.I.A.;

soldiers: 90 dead, 321 wounded, 244 M.I.A,

Total 96 dead, 337 wounded, 249 M.I.A = losses 682;

- 161° Infantry Brigade Ivrea:

officers: 3 dead, 14 wounded, 4 M.I.A;

soldiers: 115 dead, 396 wounded, 212 M.I.A,

Total 118 dead, 410 wounded, 216 M.I.A = losses 744

Total data by the two regiments: 214 dead, 747 wounded, 465 M.I.A = **total losses 1.426**

The publications of the time write:

- "... the Division (the 61°, 62°, 161°, 162° and a small part of the 63°) lost about 3.000 soldiers in this battle. The Ivrea Brigade lost 40 officers and 1200 soldiers ...! ";
- "... .the losses of the attacks on May were 3.000";
- ".... 9 May 1917 the losses were 107 officers and 2.707 men out of action".

It is not clear if the losses described by such publications (2,800 / 3,000 losses), refer to the 9 May attack or they include other ones. However, according to the writer's opinion, this value cannot refer to a single day of fighting. It has been repeatedly stated that on May 9 only the 61°, the 161° and the 162° were involved, so even assuming the losses of the 162° as those of the 161° (however this appears to be in contrast with the indication: 40 officers and 1200 soldiers), the total losses would be 2.170 (682 + 744 + 744 = 2,170), hence much lower than 2.800 losses that it is the minimum value indicated by the publications / declarations of the time. According to the writer, the losses on 9th May can be estimated as follows:

According to the quantities indicated by the 61° (the only official survey on the losses on 9th May 1917) 96 dead, 337 wounded, 249 M.I.A. and to the data shown by the 161°, 118 dead, 410 wounded, 216 M.I.A, for the 162° two hypotheses can be formulated:

- 1) table n. 1 shows that the losses of this regiment in 1917 were 218 dead, 866 wounded and 379 M.I.A. On 27th February 1917 the regiment recorded 57 dead, 228 wounded and 115 M.I.A, so for the other months 161 dead, 638 wounded and 259 M.I.A. remain. If these quantities are attributed to May 9, 2.500 is the maximum value of the losses incurred by the Division.

	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
61°	96	337	249
161°	118	410	216
162°	161	638	264
Total	375	1.385	729
Max supposed losses on 9th May 2.489			

Table n. 6 Max supposed losses on 9th May 1917

- 2) Instead, starting from “.....The Ivrea Brigade lost 40 officers and 1200 soldiers ...! the 161° recorded 744 total losses consisting of 118 dead, 410 wounded and 216 MIA, therefore, for the difference to the 162° it must be attributed 496 (1240-744), which are rounded to 500. Applying to this value the average percentages of the table no. 5 (Dead 16%, Wounded 58%, M.I.A 27%) result 80 dead, 290 wounded and 130 M.I.A.

	Dead	Wounded	M.I.A.
61°	96	337	249
161°	118	410	216
162°	80	290	130
Total	294	1.037	595
Min supposed losses on 9th May 1.926			

Table n. 7 Min supposed losses on 9th May 1917

Despite the cited doubt on the dead shown by the table 1, the procedure adopted makes it possible to hypothesize that on May 9, 1917, the losses suffered by the 35° Division (dead, wounded and M.I.A) are between 2.000 and 2.500 men.

According to the earlier concepts, it is reasonable to assume that in the crash on 9th February 1917 on hill1050 the Italian losses were divided as follows: dead from 290 to 370, wounded from 1,000 to 1,400, M.I.A from 600 to 720.

10th May 1917

“..At 5 in the morning, the bombardment starts on the two Pitons, but, due to the heavy losses suffered the previous day, the French are no longer able to attack, so the attack was suspended. When the other battalions remained in the trenches, the 2nd battalion of the 63° Regiment was not informed of the suspension, hence it attacks according to the original plan. Without the support of the French artillery, 2 Italian infantry platoons were annihilated by enemy machine guns. The survivors came back to the initial positions”.

During the First World War, two platoons counted about 70-80 men, so it is possible to hypothesize 60 men lost. Applying to this value the cited relationship between Dead, Wounded and M.I.A. (1 dead - 4 Wounded - 2 M.I.A.) the obtained losses are: 7 dead, 33 wounded, 16 M.I.A.

The information collected by the writer on the losses of the attack on May 10 are the following:

- 13 fallen are buried in the cemetery of Thessaloniki, 5 of them belong to the Brigade Cagliari (the 63° and 64° were regiments of the Brigade Cagliari), while the register “Gold fallen for Italy” shows 21 dead and 8 M.I.A. belonging to this Brigade;

- in the register "Gold fallen for Lombardy region" there are 5 dead belonging the 161° and 1 dead and 1 M.I.A. belonging the 64°. Only 1 of these soldiers is buried in Thessaloniki.

The destiny of these 20 dead who were not buried in Thessaloniki (21-5 of Cagliari and 5-1 of Ivrea) is unknown: they may have been repatriated or, in fact, they are M.I.A. The data show a significant difference between the table n. 1, which indicates 61 M.I.A. of the Cagliari Brigade, in 1917, and the registers of the "Gold fallen for Italy" which reports only 16 of them. However, the limited number of the reported losses makes the potential errors in the quantification of the M.I.A related to 10th May, not so important for this research.

11th May 1917

"..At 6:30 the allied artillery begins the preparation of the attack bombing the enemy line from the Piton Rocheux to the Piton Brulé, and it continues until 8:00. At that time the infantrymen of the Ivrea took, for the third time, some lines of the Piton Brulé, but the enemy machine guns placed on the side on the Piton Rouchex and on hill 1050, stop them a short distance from the starting point. Equal fate for the French departments".

It seems that both official and unofficial data on the number of losses sustained by Ivrea on 11 May don't exist.

The only information collected by the writer on the losses on May 11 are:

- 5 Fallen buried in the cemetery of Thessaloniki;
- 19 Dead and 2 M.I.A. (only 1 of them is buried in the cemetery of Thessaloniki) of the Cagliari Brigade reported in the gold register of the "Gold fallen of Italy";
- 5 dead belonging the 161° reported in the "Gold fallen of Lombardy" (none of them is buried in Thessaloniki).

As May 10, the fate of the 23 Dead who are not buried in Thessaloniki (19 - 1 + 5) is unknown: they may have been repatriated or be the result of incorrect records in the quantification of the M.I.A. In any case, the available/collected data suggest that the losses on 11th May are not very influential if compared to the numbers on May 9th.

Conclusion

The war operations during the second week on May 1917 concentrate almost all the losses suffered by the Division on May 9; during the following two days it is reasonable to assume the losses lower than 100-150 units, to which, according to the cited report, correspond about 40 M.I.A. (the Bulgarian bulletin on 10th May 1917 cites 1 officer and 11 soldiers as P.O.W.).

The present procedure makes it possible to hypothesize that during the operations of the Italian attack to the enemy lines in the spring of 1917 (February and May) the number of the M.I.A. of the 35th Italian Division is from 760 (120 on 27th February + 600 on 9th May + 40 on 10-11th May) to 880 (120 + 720 + 40) units.

The M.I.A. of the 35° Division during the year 1917, are shown by Table 1 as 1.034. These numbers were determined based on the missing at the daily appeal of the various units, therefore they take into account the 3 situations related to the production of M.I.A., according to the classification proposed by the Colonel Galli:

- dead in battle and non recoverable corpses;
- capture by the enemy P.O.W.;
- bombing, hence consequent destruction of the body and impossibility in identification.

9.3 Accuracy of the data of the table n.1 e 1/b

Up to this point, the obtained results use the data provided by the official documentation, in particular by the table 1, on which it is possible to express some doubts both in its total values that are underestimated by 20% and in its classification of Dead and M.I.A.

Some comments

If the Italian prisoners were not seriously wounded and then died immediately after their capture, they were transferred to other areas, so if they died they were certainly buried by the enemy in some area far from the front. Those who were victims of bombing in their lines / trenches and in conditions that make it impossible to recognize them are probably included into the group of 465 unknown buried in the cemetery of Thessaloniki. In this group are also included who were previously buried in temporary cemeteries, or recovered from battlefields later or returned from the enemy and no longer recognizable at the time of the transfer to Thessaloniki cemetery.

Hence, reasonably, the M.I.A. buried by the enemy in mass graves near the hill 1050 were only the ones killed in battle during the attacks and the wounded Italian who died in Bulgarian camp hospitals near the front.

According to the table n. 1 and 1 / b, which for the 3 years (1916-1918) considers about 1,601 M.I.A, removing:

- the 368 M.I.A. on 1916, when the Division was still not deployed on the hill 1050;
- the 112 missing of the final offensive, as in another zone with respect to the hill 1050;
- the 465 unknown, probably counted as missing but should be removed from the number as their bodies even if not identified has been recovered

The 656 M.I.A. of the hill 1050 area (whole 1917 and part of 1918) include those Dead and unrecovered, the injured prisoners who died immediately afterwards and the prisoners transferred to other areas.

It has been highlighted that there are some differences, even significant ones, in the subdivision between Dead and M.I.A of the documents drawn up by the military units involved in the attacks. The fact is confirmed by the following table made from the analysis of the sample obtained from the register of the "Gold fallen of Lombardy":

	6-11 May 1917			Other months		Total	
	Declared M.I.A.	Declared dead but not present in Thessaloniki	Dead present in Thessaloniki cemetery	Declared M.I.A. present in Thessaloniki	dead or not in Thessaloniki		Dead present in Thessaloniki cemetery
61°	64	28	8	8		105	213
62°	2	0	2	15		78	97
161°	19	25	6	7		37	94
162°	8	36	2	22		97	165
Total	93	89	18	52		317	569

Table n. 8 Lombard fallen declared dead, M.I.A and buried in Thessaloniki cemetery

The table shows that during the period 6-11 May, most of those declared dead were not buried in the military cemetery of Thessaloniki, while it turns out that those who died in the other periods were buried there:

- during the period 6-11 May 1917 out of 107 (89 +18) only 18 Dead (17%) are buried in Thessaloniki;
- while in the other periods on 369 (52 + 317), as many as 317 (86%) are in Thessaloniki.

It's to be noted that many soldiers declared Dead or M.I.A and were not present in Thessaloniki in the section "other dates" refer to the attack on 27th February 1917. These evidences make it possible to formulate the following hypotheses:

the declared Dead in the period 6-11 May 1917 and not present in the cemetery of Thessaloniki

they were repatriated;

they are M.I.A.

In the opinion of the writer, the first hypothesis must certainly be rejected. In fact, it is unreasonable to think that the repatriations have been concentrated mainly in the Fallen of the clashes during the spring of 1917: the

analysis of the sample shows that the difference between the declared Dead and the buried in Thessaloniki related to the period 6-11 May is 4.5 times higher than ones in the entire period (36 months).

Also in terms of overall quantities the conclusions are quite similar.

In the cemetery of Thessaloniki, the Fallen on 9th May 1917 are only 54, while the preceding passages show that reasonably the Dead on 9th May 1917 were between 290 and 370 (214 of them come from the registrations by 61° and 161°, hence they are not affected by the potential errors in the table n.1), which leads to the percentage of present corpses between 15% and 18%. Considering the 4.000 units of total losses, and the 2,759 known buried in Thessaloniki, it appears that about 75% of the Fallen present in the cemetery are related to the other periods, hence, in a nutshell, 75% of the Fallen related to other months are present in Thessaloniki, while the corpses related to May 9 are only 15-18%.

From the registered papers of the soldiers born in the province of Varese (it is not my research, but I do not find any preconditions to consider such data as unreliable) there are 56 Fallen in combat, 27 of them are related to May 9, 1917, but only 1 of them is present in the list of buried in Thessaloniki, and none of them is present in Sofia. If only 1 of the 56 fallen of 9th May 1917 is present in Thessaloniki, it means that 1.75% of the total has been attributed to this day. The observations referred in the previous point are confirmed.

It is logical to ask: what happened to the Fallen bodies of the attacks during the spring of 1917?

The earlier concept shows, according to reasonableness, that data on the men declared Dead or M.I.A by official sources (especially Table No. 1) and specific publications, related to the attacks during the spring of 1917, underestimate the number of fallen and make some errors in the division of the corpses between these two categories.

Probably the unexpected volume of losses suffered by the Italian troops and the excitement of the battle led to declare as dead who were M.I.A. The testimonies of some Italian and Bulgarian officials agree that most clashes took place between the first and the second Bulgarian lines so it is reasonable to think that most of the dead and the seriously wounded remained in enemy territory. This leads to obvious, important consequences in terms of number of M.I.A.: many of them were recovered later and it was not possible to identify them (they belong to the 465 unknown of Thessaloniki cemetery). But it is possible that many others have never been recovered by the Italian troops or that their bodies have not been delivered by the enemy.

Conclusion

The cited procedure, which also uses the data of the table n. 1, determines the total number of the M.I.A related to the Italian attacks during the spring of 1917 (February and May) as 750-800 units. However, it has been reasonably proved that table n.1 underestimates up to 20% of the total losses and that it represents some mistakes in the division between Dead and M.I.A. The difference between the declared Dead on May 9, 1917 and those present in the Thessaloniki cemetery is probably due to some errors related to the original registration of the Dead and the M.I.A (most M.I.A. were declared dead).

It should be noted that the quantity referred to the spring of 1917 (750-800) is higher than that previously indicated due to the presence of 35 ° Division on hill 1050, for 1917 as a whole and part of 1918 (656) also because the latter does not include the ones who were not identified (unknown ones in the Thessaloniki cemetery 465).

9.4 M.I.A dead not recovered

As previously explained, the definition of M.I.A. includes:

- those who died in battle and not recovered;
- those who have been taken prisoners by the enemy;
- those who were impossible to be identified (eg. due to bombardments)

The analysis was only possible for the attack on May 9, 1917 (however the most significant one) because the Bulgarian national military archive of Veliko Tarnovo did not provide the reports of the military engagements in February 1917.

The bulletin of the Bulgarian command of the operations on 9-10th May 1917 on page 3 reports: 209 Italian soldiers were taken as prisoner on May 9 and 11 the day after.

The average between 600 as the minimum number of M.I.A and 720 as the maximum of the battle on 9th May is 660, that is about the sum of the 209 prisoners P.O.W and the 465 unknown buried in Thessaloniki. In this way the "counts" would seem to return: the M.I.A. of the battle on May 9, 1917 are the soldiers who have been taken as prisoners and the ones who died later and whose bodies was recovered, but not identified by the Italian authorities.

According to the writer's opinion, this conclusion is unacceptable because it assigns the entire number of unknown, which appeared during the total period spent in Macedonia by the 35° Division (36 months) to a single day (May 9, 1917). The corpses made unrecognizable by the continuous bombardment of the Italian lines, and the bodies buried by the Italian troops whose identification at the end of the war was impossible are only a few examples of the unrelated to the attack on May 9 who might be included in these 465 unknown corpses. Instead, it seems more reasonable to determine the possible number of unknown bodies from May 9th, based on the following procedure:

during the 36 months the table no. 1 and 1 / b reports 1.601 M.I.A, while the previous procedure assumes 720 as maximum number of M.I.A. (using the maximum a more prudential value is obtained) related to May 9 equal to about 45% in total;

the studied sample reports for all 36 months 121 M.I.A, 93 of them related to May 9 equal to about 77% in total;

The average value of these percentages (65%), leads to the conclusion that, concerning the unknown 465 corps, about 300 of them must be attributed to 9 May 1917 and 165 to the other periods.

Hence, after detracting the 209 prisoners and the 300 unknown from the 660 M.I.A, the result is about 150 bodies not recovered by the Italian troops and not returned by the enemy at the end of the conflict (they correspond to about 22% of the 660 M.I.A.).

Another general indication that confirms this percentage, even if it's related to other periods not characterized by such violent clashes of the spring of 1917, is provided by some data/research concerning 1916.

The dissertation "Prisoners of war in Bulgaria during the First World War" of Cambridge University - April 2012, reports on p. 16 the table published by the newspaper Frankfurter Zeitung on May 15, 1917, that was resumed a few days later by some Bulgarian newspapers, with the number of POWs (prisoners of war) present in the Bulgarian concentration camps on February 1, 1917. The table shows 293 Italian soldiers, who were reasonably captured during 1916. For the same year, Italian reports recorded 368 M.I.A, which means that the destiny of about 20% of them (368-293) is unknown.

After applying the same percentage (20%) related to May 9, to the attacks on February 27 and May 10-11, the result is respectively 30 (115x20%) and 8 (40x20%) bodies not recovered by Italian troops and not returned by the enemy at the end of the conflict.

Attacks	M.I.A – corps not recovered
27 February 1917	30
9 May 1917	150
10-11 May 1917	8
Total	188

Table n. 9 Bodies not recovered

9.4.1 Another necessary clarification

The Bulgarian bulletin on 9th May 1917 gives no indication on the health conditions of the Italian prisoners, but due to their high number and cited conditions of the battle (it is difficult to imagine that more than 200 young soldiers in good physical condition were not able to walk the few tens of meters downhill that separated them

from their trenches), it is reasonable to suppose that a significant part, if not the largest part of them was represented by seriously injured soldiers who probably died in the Bulgarian hospitals in the days after the attack. The Bulgarian troops had to manage the arrangement of the Italian corpses found in their lines and the recovered of the wounded who died in their field hospitals. The determination of their number is impossible, but reason leads to consider a quantity certainly relevant.

Conclusion

The corpses no longer recovered are related to dead soldiers in enemy lines and wounded soldiers who died immediately after they got in the enemy hospitals. The information available does not allow the determination of the precise number of them, but the procedure adopted lead to some reasonable information on the number of bodies that the enemy was forced to manage during the attacks on February 27 and May 9, 1917. It should be noted that the 188 M.I.A represent, in the opinion of the writer, if not the least, certainly a prudential quantity, in fact, they don't include the part of the 209 P.O.W (it is a number impossible to determine, but certainly relevant) who probably died in the days after the attack, whose corpses had the same destiny as those collected by the enemy in its lines.

10.0 Determination of the presumed number of the Fallen of the 35th Division

The adopted procedure leads to a range between 3,457 Fallen as minimum (average value between 3,424 and 3,490) and 4,076 as maximum. It's sure that some corpses come back to Italy and it's concrete the fact that some Fallen of the 35th were attributed to the contingent of Albania and vice versa, the value, probability will be close to the maximum number.

It should be underlined that this number includes only the victims in the Balkan territory, therefore, those who died in hospitals in Italy or during the sea transfers are not counted. During 1917, out of 1082 Fallen of the Cagliari Brigade, 343 died as a result of the sinking of the steamers Minas and Perseus who sailed from Italy to the Balkan peninsula.

Reasonably the losses of the 35th Division, for the period (36 months) spent in the Balkans, are about 4.000 men.

11.0 Mass graves

The investigation at the Bulgarian Military Historical Archives concerning the existence of mass graves made by Bulgarian-German troops near hill 1050 yielded negative results: there is no official information on this topic. However, I know that, a few years ago, some Bulgarian researchers have carried out inspections in the area, but with negative results, also due to the lack of cooperation from the Macedonian people / authorities.

According to a text published by a local newspaper and the information obtained by some locals, the area around 1050 has not been reclaimed (it seems that in Macedonia it is forbidden, at least for private individuals, to carry out research with a metal detector) today, no research of military archaeology has been carried out.

Same hypotheses about the possible location of mass graves made by Bulgarian-German troops, need some clarifications:

the war zone was / is almost completely without vegetation and on mid-May the average temperature fluctuates between 13 ° and 24 °;

hill 1050 and the other reliefs are rocky, so it is difficult to make deep excavations;

in the reliefs existing right immediately behind the hill 1050 there were the Bulgarian-German heavy artillery batteries. The other Bulgarian batteries were on the reliefs north of Bitola;

instead, the plain was very marshy (in fact, the malaria was one of the main enemies of both sides) and probably rich in ponds and "bugni" that, thanks to the size of the river Cerna especially during spring, may have been even a few meters deep;

these mass graves also served the Bulgarian-German field hospitals, so they had to be relatively close to them, their location required flat surfaces outside the range of enemy artillery (which did not have heavy cannons).

Conclusion

At the end of February and especially in the second week of May 1917, the need of rapid and easy burial of the large number of bodies forced the German Bulgarian troops to use some mass graves and according to the earlier concepts, these may have been located in a flat, humid area, about 4-5 km north of the front line.

Despite the obvious, important changes suffered by the morphology of this territory, it is reasonable to suppose that the cited characteristics could be found in the area between the current villages of Mogila, Dedebalci, Dobrushevo and Beranci.



Figure n. 2 Potential location of the mass/common graves

There is no information about the number of M.I.A. of the attacks on February 27 and May 9, 1917 and the lack of archaeological investigations on the field, make it possible to think reasonable the existence of some mass graves still to be discovered in the area near hill 1050.

Conclusion

The collected information will not be clear from errors or omissions. The available data do not always provide coherent, clear and comprehensive information. The writer must adopt a methodology, partly extraneous to the normal scientific rules, to overcome the limits and obstacles that characterized the studied context. However, the results obtained, even without constituting scientific evidence, allow to respond, according to reasonableness, to the research questions as well as to provide further, interesting information on Italian participation in the Macedonian territory.

The contents of the previous paragraphs make it possible to formulate the following answers to the five research questions.

First question

Is there coherence between the data shown by the official sources in terms of dead, wounded and M.I.A.?

YES.

The analyzed and used secondary sources of research show coherent numbers of Fallen, Wounded and M.I.A. However, there are obvious errors in the division between the declared dead and M.I.A. and in the quantification of total losses.

Second question

What is the presumed number of the Italian M.I.A. related to the attacks

at hill 1050 during of the spring 1917?

The collected information does not allow calculating the number of the M.I.A. of hill 1050 during the attacks of the spring of 1917. However, it is reasonable to think that the total of the M.I.A. of the attacks in February and May 1917 **were not less than 750-800 units.**

Third question

What is the probable number of victims (Fallen and M.I.A.) of the Italian contingent?

The adopted procedure makes it possible to quantify approximately 4,000 losses, corresponding to 20% more than the quantities indicated by official documentation.

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Forth question

*Is it reasonable that a significant part of these M.I.A. was buried by the enemy
in mass graves near the front line?*

YES. Despite the lack of evidence and documentation on this matter at the Bulgarian Military Historical Archive, the 188 Italian M.I.A., understood as Dead and Injured not recovered by the allied forces, in a limited time, has certainly forced the Bulgarian-German troops to use mass/common graves.

Fifth question

Is it reasonable that some of these mass graves are yet to be discovered?

YES.

The high number of the M.I.A. and the context of the studied war events, make it reasonable to suppose the existence of some mass graves still to be discovered (common grave and / or mass grave) in the area adjacent to the hill 1050 front line.

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