

NERVAL'S DIARY

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

Pula (Pola) and Porec (Parenzo), Croatia, August 13, 2000

SMS Albatros 1896–1911–1995–2000: A Tortuous Story Retold

One of the early 'Nerval Reports' in 1996 alluded to my journey to the historical battlefield of Guadalcanal Island together with my son Karl H. Jr. PhD, whose experience in naval history had introduced me to the subject of the SMS *Albatros* and her voyage to the Solomon Islands. The interested reader may turn to www.karger.com/journals/drm/nerval.htm or to *Dermatology* [1] and re-read the story.

Earlier this year I was informed by the archivist in the former Imperial War Archives in Vienna that new documents had surfaced and were kept to be given to me for further research: the remains of 3 of the 4 victims of the incident on the island of Guadalcanal, in 1896, had been found by a British medical doctor in 1908, 3 skulls and 2 femora in all. As identified later, these were the cannibalized remains of 3 persons, the chief geologist among them. After taking the Bones to Sidney, they were handed over to the Austrian authorities and buried with military honors, in a single coffin, on the 15th anniversary of the incident, i.e. August 10, 1911 in the church of *Madonna del Mare* (today Gospa od Mora) in Pola (today Pula), the home port of the Imperial Fleet till 1918.

I could not make up my mind to set out on the anniversary date and drive south, it being a *dies ater*, the *teisha b'av* (day of mourning) in the Jewish calendar, influenced as I am by ominous dates of whatever origin. So it was the 13th of the month, the Ides of August, when we approached the church, my collaborator of recent times, a medicohistorian from Zagreb, her (physician) husband, my wife and myself. The church was closed, the usher unwilling at first. Persuasion in the native language eventually got us into the church. More persuasion and conviction of the historical purpose got us down to the crypt. And there, to our surprise, two Plaques, commemorating the incident, spelling out the names of the victims and marking the burial site in the right nave of the crypt, were still in place. All the (vilifying?) assumptions from back home were wrong, neither royal or fascist Italy nor communist Yugoslavia or the Republic of Croatia of today

had altered anything of the monuments, they were just re-located. The witnesses of history, gruesome as to what they tell of the tragic Story, were well preserved and ready to tell it more in detail.

The final end of this hundred-year-long episode will be the subject of a separate article in the *Croatian Medical Journal*. It is planned to appear in print on occasion of the centenary of the erection of the cenotaph on the north coast of Guadalcanal, east of Honiara and Henderson Field sometime next year.

Most certainly the city of Pula is an attraction for any visitor by itself. A showcase of Mediterranean heritage, it presents with a huge arena from the time of Vespasianus (69–71), with a triumphal arch (*Porta aurea*) from the first century and the elegant temple of Roma and Augustus from this emperor's last years of reign (reminding me at first glance of the temple of the *Fortuna virilis* = S. Maria Egiziaca, in Rome). The Roman forum is still the center of the city. In modern times, Pula gained importance as home port of the Imperial Austrian Fleet. In 1818, the city had only 926 inhabitants, in 1890 there were already more than 31,000, and since the number has doubled again. From here the *SMS Novara* started the (last classical) circumnavigation of the globe in 1857, from here Tegetthoff sailed to his victory at Vis (Lissa) in 1866. The *Madonna del Mare* was founded in 1891, 25 years after Lissa, and sanctified on December 2, 1898, on occasion of Franz Joseph's 50th golden jubilee. The architect was Natale Tommasi (1853–1924), from the Trentino. This church became the sanctuary of the Imperial Navy and served as a sort of pantheon of its heroes and servicemen, especially also because the Naval Cemetery, opened after Lissa in 1866, is close by.

I finish my lines in spiritual proximity of Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770), my personal hero at the head of the line of teachers of my (maternal) musician-ancestors, born some miles north, in Piran, Istria (today Slovenia), and Bernardo Parentin (1437–1531), the famous painter, born in Porec (Parenzo), residence of my hosts.

1 Holubar K: Nerval's diary: Solomon Islands, 19 September 1995. *Dermatology* 1996;192:45.

à bientôt,

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