What happened after 8th September 1943 (day of the Armistice between Italy and the Allies)?

After the announcement of the Armistice, the Italian army was in a state of disarray. When they were not captured by the German army and sent to Germany as prisoners of war, officers and privates left the barracks in North-eastern Italy and tried to go back home.

In addition, the barracks in Monigo opened doors, and the prisoners, both civilians and soldiers, were set free.

According to the Slovenian historian Ferenc:

> *After the Italian defeat, the leaders of the Liberation Front who were among the repressivi internees, took control of the camp and sent several patrols in exploration to get a clear idea of the situation in Friuli. Only one of them returned, reporting that the German army was now taking over the whole region. The Liberation Front Committee issued instructions to leave the camp and the internees, divided into groups, moved towards the Collio, where most of them joined the partisan groups*. (Ferenc) [1]

This narrative appears to be linear but, if we read it more in-depth, it raises many questions:

1. If on 1st July 1943, according to Ferenc's estimate[2], only 5 out of 2190 prisoners were *repressivi*, which is to say politically suspects, how is it possible that they had followers among the *protettivi*[3], who are their natural enemies?
2. Even if they left in groups, two thousand people on the march could not pass unnoticed, since they had to stop for rest, water and food. The exodus of most of disbanded Italian soldiers after the Armistice left a strong mark on the collective memory. Why did this not happen in this case?
3. If the Liberation Front, a partisan organization, had taken the lead, why did they not come into contact with the first Italian partisan groups? Perhaps because there was no time?

It is possible instead that a large part of the prisoners was deported by the Germans to labour camps in Germany; in Padua (where there was a similar camp), the internees were transported to Vienna by train. There they were divided into groups and sent to different destinations, some to Ljubljana (a few to join the *domobranci*), some to Zagreb[4]. Something similar happened to some of the intellectuals who came to Treviso, and whose fate we know about: Saša Kump, Drago Šega, Črtomir Zorec; possibly even one of the children of the famous Slovenian gynecologist Aloyz Zalokar, Ivan, ended up in Dacau.

A witness, private Ivan Gulič from Trieste, who was sent to Monigo recalls the 8th September in his memoirs:

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[1] Ferenc Tone, *Rab-Arbe-Arbissima: confinamenti, rastrellamenti, internamenti nella provincia di Lubiana, 1941-1943: documenti*, Ljubljana, Institut za novejso zgodovino Drustvo piscev zgodovine 2000, pp. 38-39.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 27.

[3] For the meaning of the term, see the Introduction (paragraph 1).

[4] Ferenc, *Rab cit.*, p. 39.

Chaos broke out in Monigo concentration camp. The first to leave were the officers of the command post, the guards got rid of their weapons and fled. [...] I took my wooden suitcase, which was now even more important to me, and I left too.
We said good bye to our camp mates and ... wished them good luck! At Treviso train station I managed to get on the train to Mestre. It was overcrowded. Everyone was shouting "The war is over!" I thought of Lieutenant Colonel Anceschi and his threats to us. [...] Finally we arrived in Mestre. There, too, chaos reigned. People seemed mad with joy, women offered fruit, I took some. The trains were stopped, and some of them, loaded with weapons, were dispatched to Yugoslavia. [...]
The station was full of people in plainclothes, soldiers getting rid of weapons, entire families with children. Everyone was running away, no one knows where. The loudspeaker announced train departures and destinations. Gunshots could be heard. Someone said that the Fascists, who (had joined) stayed by the side of the Germans , were setting up ambushes and shooting at anyone. [...](Ivan Gulič)[5]

While most people tried to return home, several dozens of Slavs remained in the barracks. In fact, on 6th February 1944 Colonel A. Scala, an officer of the Commander in Chief Staff, wrote to the Ministry of Interior of the Italian Social Republic saying that there were "38 people of Croatian, Slovenian and Montenegrin descent, who – due to the risk of retaliation by compatriots - refused to return to their countries of origin"[6].

A different hypothesis is that some of them remained because they had a relative still hospitalized or were themselves ill or that they preferred to work for the Germans.

The Police chief General Inspector Salvatore Ferrara will say that the barracks, occupied by the Germans,

are still available to the German militaries and have been turned into into a driving school. In the camp there are about 600 recruits of our Republican army, who are taught by German troops to drive cars. There's also the Todt, German Organization with several workers "[...] In the camp seven men of Slavic descent remained voluntarily, who were hired by Tod and are regularly paid. They are free to move around at their own will. There is no staff assigned specifically to the surveillance of prisoners. The German unit, which is the command of the camp, consists of about 100 men and some women. At the entrance there are two sentries, one German and one Italian. (Salvatore Ferrara)[7]

In conclusion, the end fate of Monigo camp is not clear and its image of being an exclusive camp for Slavs is uncertain. In fact, even English-speaking prisoners of war, assigned to the PG 103 (see the specific chapter) fled from it.

[5] Ivan Gulič, *Številka*/Numero *141451* (trans. Kostanca Mikulus) Trieste, Glasnik Slovenskega kulturnega društva Tabor, knjižnice "Pinko Tomažič in tovariši", 2010.

[6] Maico Trinca, *Monigo. Un campo di concentramento per slavi a Treviso (luglio 1942 – settembre 1943)*, Treviso, Istresco 2003, p. 87, photostatic reproduction. It is possible to read the Minister's reply, which appoints the General Inspector of Police Salvatore Ferrara to prepare a report on the matter.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 88.

It must be added that, towards the end of 1943 it was considered the idea of transforming the site into a concentration and transit camp for the deportation to Germany of Jews and political opponents, as it had been done for Fossoli.

During the night between 5th and 6th December 1943 the great sweep up of the Jews of Venice took place, which involved 163 people, of which 114 were women, in compliance with the order issued by Minister Buffarini Guidi on 30th November, to arrest all the Jews present, whatever their nationality, and to seize their assets. The end part of the document reads as follows: "For the time being the Jews are to be gathered in provincial concentration camps waiting to be moved to other special concentration camps". Obviously, the Monigo camp, located less than 40 kilometers from Venice, was identified as suitable for the purpose because of its capacity.

The head of Treviso province Luigi Gatti, former Fascist federal secretary, replied with a telegram that this solution was not possible because the Monigo barracks had been requisitioned by the German militaries[8]. However, the Interior Ministry had received the communication that the Venetian Jews had already been placed in Monigo, and that there was a plan to bring in political opponents as well. Gatti denied again the fact, and reiterated that the camp was under German control.

Nevertheless, at the current state of knowledge, we cannot exclude occasional detentions of Jews, especially Venetian ones, before they were transferred to a Polish or German concentration camp.

[8] Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, Massime, b. 138, fasc. 16, Campi di concentramento. “Considering that the last arrivals of displaced people have eliminated all receptive capacities and that Monigo concentration camp has been requisitioned by the German authorities for military needs, it does not seem possible to receive Venice Jews and concentrate those of this province in a suitable location”.