

The Cossacks

**Origin – Life – Downfall
The tragedy of Lienz on June 1, 1945
The cemetery**

**Excerpts from a journal and "newspapers"
A documentary**

from

**Emil Winkler,
Mayor of the city of Lienz
1938–1945**



Archive Photo 1940

Table of Contents

1. Foreword by the Association
2. Introduction: The Cossack cemetery in Peggetz
3. Construction of a 'Memorial Chapel' in the Cossack cemetery in Lienz/Peggetz
4. The Cossack Communities
5. The Downfall of a Glorious People
6. The Death March of the Cossacks
7. Commemoration of General Helmuth von Pannwitz in Lienz
8. At the Cossack Cemetery in Peggetz near Lienz

1. Foreword by the Association

This edition reproduces Emil Winkler's historical documentation in its original form. It is published as an archival source. Supplementary notes by the Association are clearly identified and have been added solely to provide historical context for today's readers.

2. Introduction

The Cossack cemetery in Peggetz near Lienz

On June 1, 1945, an unprecedented tragedy occurred in Peggetz near Lienz, on the occasion of the Cossacks' handover to the Soviets. This tragedy has long since become part of our town's history.

At the site of this tragedy, which holds the victims of that momentous day, lies a small cemetery, carefully tended by a caring hand. For many years, memorial services were held here in complete harmony. Cossacks came from far and wide to pay their respects to their fallen comrades and remember them in prayer.

But suddenly, this harmony was disrupted. About four years ago, a delegation of Cossacks, accompanied by a high-ranking dignitary of the Orthodox Church (an archimandrite abbot), approached me with a request for assistance in building a chapel at the Cossack cemetery. Recognizing its charitable nature, I agreed.

Soon, however, I realized that this plan to build a chapel opened up a virtually unbridgeable divide among the Cossacks. A strong opposition to the project quickly arose, with its reach extending as far as the USA. Heated polemics ensued, in which the two groups attacked each other and attempted to discredit one another with the authorities. Indeed, the differences went so far that they could no longer even agree among themselves about their origins: some claimed that the Cossacks were not Russians at all, but a distinct ethnic group, while others unequivocally professed their allegiance to the Russian people as loyal soldiers of His Majesty the Tsar.

Thus, this tug-of-war over the chapel's construction stirred up great emotions that captivated Cossacks worldwide. The mayor of Lienz was besieged and inundated from all sides with letters and documents. The project clearly did not meet the approval of these authorities either, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. The mayor therefore felt compelled to assign the "Cossack Chapel" matter to a dedicated official. Caught between these two groups, however, was I. Praised by one side today, criticized by the next, annoyed, not to say cursed. The day after tomorrow, I was considered equal to the other. And yet, my intentions were the best. How could the matter have been resolved in a way that was more practical, more appropriate for all parties involved? It was unpleasant. The opposing sides had become far too entrenched. Since the town of Lienz, due to the persistent differences and the divided opinions, was unwilling to make a decision, they appealed to the state government in Innsbruck and to the Federal Ministry of the Interior in Vienna – how often I myself had met with Ms. Albrecht (Department of War Graves Care) in Innsbruck, and

even personally with the responsible office of the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna. Thus, one day the files returned to Lienz, to the town council, with instructions from the Ministry of the Interior that, since it lacked jurisdiction, the town should decide for itself. The city council has now made a Solomon-like judgment:

"The cemetery must remain as it is!"

This saying came in very handy for me, as I was already in danger of being ground between two millstones. At least this whole undertaking, which often kept me busy for entire days and occupied me with translations for days on end, had one positive outcome: I was able to significantly improve my Russian skills. *(Note by the Association (2025): Emil Winkler was a prisoner of war in Russia during the First World War).*

For years now, the services at the Cossack cemetery in Peggetz have been held separately – even on different days. *(Note: Our association held its Commemoration one week later).* It is not for us to judge which of the two groups is the more appropriate one. A listener will hear the fervent and sincere prayers of both.

"For God, all people are equal! All should be brothers!"

Note by the Association (2025):

By the "two groups", Emil Winkler refers to the different currents within the Cossack émigré community which came into conflict during the 1970s in connection with the planned construction of a memorial chapel at the Cossack Cemetery in Peggetz. Essentially, the opposing positions involved representatives of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps under Ataman General Helmuth von Pannwitz and representatives of the Cossack camp under General Timofei Domanov, together with the associated civilian camp population. The later ecclesiastical developments between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate did not yet exist in this form at that time.

Approximately 25 km east of Lienz, near Irschen, stands a well-preserved monument with the following inscription:

On May 28, 1945, 7,000 Caucasians were handed over to the Soviets here as sacrifices for their loyalty to Islam and the idea of the national liberation of the Caucasus.

Built by the Islamic Religious Community, Munich

3. Construction of a 'Memorial Chapel' in the Cossack cemetery in Lienz/Peggetz

LIENZ TOWN OFFICE, EAST TYROL

– Main Administration –

9900 LIENZ, December 15, 1970

Dr. B/HG 9223

Addressed to:

1. Mr. Emil Winner,
Werkenerstraße 2,
9900 **Lienz**

2. Greek-Oriental
(Orthodox Association)
Bayernsstraße 3/1
A-5020 **SALZBURG**

3. Konstantin SCHUROPATSKIJ,
Representative of the Ataman of the Kuban Cossacks in Austria,
Neutorstraße 38
, 5020 **SALZBURG**

4. Cossack Protection Association e.V. in Germany
D-8 **MUNICH** 25
PO Box 235

5. Weapons Association of Little Russian Cavalry - Fast Troops e.V.
Lilienthalerstraße 5
D-8042 **OBERSCHLEISSHEIM**

6. Russian Corps Combatants, Inc.
349 West 46th St.
NEW YORK , 10024
U.SA

7. Kusma KOSTROMIN
Bürgerstraße 7/I
9900 **LIENZ**

8. Cossack-American Citizens Committee
1095 Grand Central
NEW YORK , 10017
U.SA

9. Austrian Black Cross
War Graves Commission,
Haydnplatz 7,
6020 **Innsbruck**

10. Cossack Association
Deputy of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps,
D-8 **Munich** 50,
Oplasterstraße 5

11. Église Orthodoxe Russe
à l'étranger
1206 **GENÈVE**
3, rue Toepffer
Switzerland

12. Rev. Orth.
Archimandrite Johannes PETERPALY
Engadinerstr. 20
D-8 **MUNICH** 71

13. The Cossack National Press Association, Inc.
SA Moskowi, Chairman
10122 Cuzman Avenue
Cleveland , Ohio 44111
U.S.A

14. To Mr. Notary
Dr. Herbert Rohrachner,
Zwergergasse 1,
9900 **Lienz**

Subject: Construction of a ‘Memorial Chapel’ in the Cossack cemetery in Lienz/Peggetz

The municipal council of Lienz, in its meeting of December 7, 1970, resolved to withdraw its commitment, granted by council resolution of June 15, 1970, to provide a plot of land of approximately 40 m² for the construction of a memorial chapel in the Cossack cemetery in Lienz/Peggetz. This decision was made because the disputes surrounding the construction of the chapel had escalated to a point that raised concerns about future disturbances and disruptions to the peace and tranquillity of the cemetery.

Since the tragic events of 1945, the municipality of Lienz has consistently striven to preserve the memory of the deceased Cossacks and would never stand in the way of a dignified design of the cemetery to maintain the memory of the victims of those weeks. However, in light of the repeated disputes and actions that have arisen in connection with the Cossack cemetery, and the disturbances of the peace at memorial services and funerals, as well as reports from the authorities of public unrest, the municipal council was compelled to take the aforementioned step.

The Mayor:
(iV) [Signature]

4. The Cossack Communities

The tragedy of the Cossacks on June 1, 1945 in Peggetz near Lienz has long since added a sad chapter to the history of our city.

As someone familiar with Russian affairs, through my six years of Siberian captivity (1914–1920), and through my mastery of the Russian language in both spoken and written form, I was repeatedly asked for information about the Cossacks, their origins, their history, their

relationship to the Russian state and the Tsar, etc., and I believed that I could provide exhaustive information based on my experience.

Over the years, among these Cossacks who escaped extradition demanded by Stalin – and who are now scattered all over the world – groups have split off in exile and created their own version of history.

It would go too far to examine the reasons for these divisions. Rather, we are concerned with following the true historical tradition – without any animosity towards one group or the other. Now, in the major historical work "The Slavs" (From Peoples to Nations) by Roger Portal (original in French, German edition 1971), Kindler Verlag, Munich, I find a treatise on the Cossacks, which I quote with the kind permission of the publisher:

Over the centuries, refugees and settlers, outlaws, had infiltrated the southern border regions of the Muscovite state, the immediate vicinity of the Turkic peoples of the steppe, that border zone known as the "dikoe pole" (the wild field), over which no state had yet gained lasting and effective power. These outlaws formed armed bands that gradually evolved into Cossack communities. The word "Cossack" appears in the 13th century for the Polovtsians, who were used as border troops by the Genoese trading cities in Crimea; it reappears in the 15th century in a more general and less unambiguous sense. Now it referred both to the Turkish mercenaries whom the Russian princes employed against the raids of the steppe peoples and to that unstable border population, which was certainly originally half Turkish, half Slavic, but which was soon Russified. This led to an influx of fugitive peasants seeking freedom and a livelihood in those contested territories. The Cossacks were subsequently forced to organize themselves into military units that, while engaged in agriculture, also sustained themselves through a mixture of trade and privateering. They controlled the caravan traffic by land and river—a route that, at great risk, connected the Black Sea, the Tatar-controlled steppe, and the principalities of central Russia—and they sold their services and support to the highest bidder.

Gradually, from the 16th century onward, they fell under Moscow's sway due to their shared faith and interests, not least under pressure from the Moscow government. The Don Cossacks had established a defensive belt against the Tatars very early on and had received support from the Russian government in this endeavor. The Ukrainian Cossacks, who belonged partly to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and partly to the Muscovite state, owed their lasting freedom to their geographical location. Their southern branch, along the Dnieper River, built the remarkable society of the so-called "Zaporosch Cossacks," a kind of military republic that would play a very active role in the conflicts between Poland, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. They rebelled against all authority but were increasingly won over to the Russian cause by their leaders. It was only under Catherine II that the Zaporizhzhia were crushed and scattered in 1775 and disappeared from the scene, at the time when the Russians finally established themselves on the Black Sea coast (Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardzhi 1774).

The intensive colonization of the southern steppe rendered that peculiar military community obsolete and led to anarchy. For the same reason, the other Cossack communities of Ukraine, which had been reintegrated into Russia under Alexei Mikhailovich, also disappeared in the

18th century. The "Sich" of the Zaporozhians, however, remained the historically authenticated archetype of a Cossack community; from it emanated a myth, half real, half legendary, in which Cossackdom appears as a free and democratic community: a bastion of supreme bravery, defenders of the Orthodox faith against the crescent moon, and a strong bulwark of Slavic culture against the nomads of the steppe.

The Cossacks, however, persisted until the 1917 Revolution. Their communities entered the service of the Russian state, and with the empire's expansion, they became instruments of its southward and eastward growth, serving as the Caucasian and Asian border guards. From the Ukrainian and Don Cossacks came the commandos dispatched by the Stroganovs from the Urals, who, under Yermak, took possession of Western Siberia. It was Cossacks who pushed the boundaries of Russian power as far as the Pacific Ocean, and Deshnev, the first to see the Bering Strait, was a Cossack.

The Russian government, which had consolidated its rule in the southern borderlands beyond the Don along the Kuban, Terek, and Jaik rivers since the 17th century, transformed these unruly mercenaries into loyal soldiers of the Tsar. Following the model of existing communities that were restructured, reorganized, or resettled, new communities were created along the Asian border at the end of the 19th century through the transplantation of Cossacks and the "Cossackization" of the eastern rural population.

In 1914 there were 11 Cossack armies ("vojsko"), which were divided according to villages ("stanica"): those from the Don, the Kuban, Terek, Ural, Siberia, Astrakhan, Orenburg, Transbaikalia, Semirechensk, Amur and Ussuri, to which three regiments of urban Cossacks were added.

Until the end of the 18th century, the Cossacks had participated in the great peasant uprisings that shook the Tsarist throne and set vast swathes of southern Russia ablaze; they provided the leaderless peasants with their military leaders: Bolotnikov, Stenka Razin, Bulavin, and Pugachev. Now they were finally integrated into the state system and ultimately became the government's loyal pillar. As the army's most reliable element, they provided the assault troops for special operations and participated in major military campaigns; but these proud, fierce horsemen in their "papacha," the black lambskin cap, feared and admired, also proved their absolute loyalty during political unrest, the blows of their "nagaika" dispersing any gathering of workers or peasants.

In their traditional appearance, the Cossacks became a popular subject for novelists such as Gogol in his famous "Taras Bulba" of 1837 or for painters such as Repin ("The Letter of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to the Sultan", 1891; this letter had been prompted by a forged document and led to the Polish-Turkish War of 1677/78).

Within the Russian national community, the Cossacks formed distinct and privileged groups, and their importance cannot be measured by their relatively small numbers. The Don Cossacks, the most important of all, inhabited a territory of approximately 160,000 square kilometres (1914) – encompassing the Donets and lower Don river basins – and numbered

1,750,000, representing 43 percent of the total population. They could provide 200,000 men for military service, were granted almost 3 million hectares of arable land as their sole property, possessed immense herds of horses, cattle, and sheep, held exclusive fishing rights on the banks of the Don and in the Bay of Azov, and were exempt from all taxes on wine and other goods.

The activities of this Cossack population now extended only to a small extent to military tasks. Their land was fertile, rich in mineral resources (the Donets coal), had access to the ports of the Sea of Azov, and participated in the general economic development; numerous schools and technical institutes trained engineers, doctors, architects, teachers, and scientists. Nevertheless, memories of the past, cherished traditions, recognized privileges, and a distinctive mentality still combined to create a unique collective bound by a sense of moral unity—in a small way, it exhibited a social structure that closely mirrored that of the Russian people as a whole.

The other Cossacks – the "voysko" – were not quite as numerous, but they equally embodied an element of variation within the rural border population. They could also represent an element of ethnic transition, for in the northern Caucasus, as well as in Siberia, there was Tatar, Chechen, and Buryat blood among the Cossacks; their dress was strongly influenced by the local style, and sometimes their language was also coloured by local dialects. The native population also occasionally formed "Cossack" units, and the crescent moon flew at several locations of the Terek "voysko." Their unity was based on service and obedience to the Tsar. All Cossack armies possessed extensive landholdings and grazing lands, and all enjoyed considerable privileges.

The cattle-herding Kuban Cossacks, the largest group after the Don Cossacks, profitably leased their land to oil companies and exploited their salt marshes. The Ural Cossacks held a monopoly on stork fishing along the Ural River and its tributaries, while the Transbaikal Cossacks controlled the sale of timber to the Siberian gold mines. Overall, the Cossacks formed a prosperous peasantry, strongly loyal to the Tsarist regime, who joined the counter-revolutionary party in the Civil War of 1917.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kindler-Verlag for their willingness to allow me to reproduce the article "The Cossack Communities" from their major work of cultural history, "The Slavs".

This comprehensive work (805 pages) can be highly recommended to anyone interested in the history of Russia from the East Slavic settlement (7th and 8th centuries) to the present day.

Emil Winkler
Lienz, December 1971

5. The Downfall of a Glorious People

Near Lienz lies a solitary cemetery, lovingly tended. It holds the countless victims of a tragedy that unfolded here during the handover of the Cossacks by the British to the Soviets. Perhaps unknown, or long forgotten, we wish to recall these harrowing days once more. But let us allow the chronicler to speak:

Under the command of British General R.M. Arbuthnot, the 78th British Division arrived in East Tyrol. The 36th Brigade of this division was commanded by Brigadier Geoffrey Mason. This brigade included the 8th Argyll-Sutherland Scottish Battalion, commanded by A.D. Malcolm. Major W.R. Davis was appointed liaison officer to the Cossack Front. The Cossack Front, which came to East Tyrol from Italy, established itself in the Drava Valley, between Lienz and Spittal. It comprised nine fighting regiments, an officers' school, 40,000 refugees, and a total of approximately 100,000 people. The 5th Reserve Regiment remained in Gemona, Italy; it was halved during partisan fighting. Small Cossack units that had remained in Italy were incorporated into the so-called Colonel Wagner Column; approximately 2,800 men were handed over to Tito and shot in a forest near Ljubljana.

Approximately 10,000 Cossacks, captured in Normandy by the Western Allies, traveled via England to Archangelsk (Kaliningrad) and were shot on the spot.

Now back to liaison officer Davis. In Lienz, the center of Cossackstan, a flurry of activity was underway. Assurances were naturally forthcoming from higher authorities that all Cossacks would be sent to British colonies to serve the Allies; under no circumstances would they be handed over to the Bolsheviks. Under the pretext that the Cossacks needed better, more modern weapons for this service with the Allies, their existing weapons were confiscated. The daily ration, carefully distributed to everyone, consisted of 400g of bread, 120g of meat, and 110g of sugar; chocolate, coffee, tea, and other items were also distributed. New equipment was issued. A large shipment of bricks arrived at the Peggetz camp—a simple stove was to be built for every five Cossacks.

Lists of names were compiled for all actors, musicians, and artists to sign, as a Cossack theatre was to be established immediately. A list of journalists and writers was also drawn up, since a Cossack magazine was to be published the very next day. Finally, all Cossack officers were invited to a conference with General Alexander to discuss their deployment in the English colonies. There were 2,756 officers present, including 35 generals, 167 colonels, and so on.

On May 28, 1945, 2,201 Cossack officers, who at the British request had appeared in full dress uniform and with all insignia, boarded comfortable buses, each with only one driver. Approximately 500 officers became suspicious and fled into the mountains. The entire transport set off. The same thing happened as with the 15th Cavalry Corps. While approaching a forest, they were surrounded by 25 tanks with 70 crew members, 140 soldiers with machine guns, and 175 motorcycles with 210 crew members. 70 men with submachine guns were positioned on the roofs of the buses. A truck with 30 men each, armed with

machine guns, was positioned in front of and behind the column. Two trucks carrying tear gas followed behind the column. Two jet aircraft escorted the column. Representatives of the Allied forces also appeared, with adjutants and interpreters, about 15 men in total. The guard force numbered 580 men, 15 light artillery pieces, 125 machine guns, and 310 submachine guns. Thus guarded, the column arrived in Spittal, at a camp fortified with wire fencing and watchtowers.

Finally, the “special troops of the German SS and special troops of the German partisans, deserters of the Red Army and traitors to the fatherland” were behind bars. (That is what Stalin called the Cossacks at the Yalta Conference, and that is how they were also described on May 23, 1945, in the presence of General Alexander.)

The officers were informed that they would be handed over to the Russians the following day as Soviet citizens. Since only 35% of the officers were Soviet nationals, and the rest were "old émigrés," they showed their papers to the British officer present, Colonel Malcolm, and demanded their immediate release. "Show these papers to Stalin," he said.

Seven officers took their own lives in this camp. Their names are known. Twelve officers who tried to escape through the barbed wire were shot. Others slashed their wrists; they were taken away – nothing was ever heard of them again.

The next morning, tanks and trucks arrived at the camp; the officers were ordered to board the trucks. They refused. Armed with special batons, the British soldiers attacked the unarmed Cossack officers. The 80-year-old Don Cossack ataman and writer, General Krasnov, was knocked to the ground; General Shkuro, who in 1919 had been awarded particularly high British decorations for his bravery, threw his medals at the feet of the British soldiers and shouted, "Rather than be beaten by this rabble, we'd rather die!" and was the first to board the waiting truck.

That's how they came to Judenburg. 350 were immediately called up – they vanished without a trace. Lieutenant Colonel Kraus, adjutant to General von Pannwitz, tried to shed light on the situation but was captured. After all the Cossack officers were summoned, three arrived with...

Soviet soldiers armed with submachine guns lined up Lieutenant Colonel Kraus against the wall and fired a volley. "Long live the Cossacks!" he managed to shout.

The route to Siberia led via Graz, Vienna, Budapest, Ploesti, Vokschanz, Kyiv, Bryansk, Moscow, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Prokopyevsk, and Kemerovo. Approximately 10% of the officers survived when Nikita Khrushchev released the remaining men from the camps.

General von Pannwitz and five of his generals were hanged in Moscow. All that remained was the Peggetz camp near Lienz and the entire Drava Valley, home to nearly 100,000 Cossacks and refugees. Expulsions began on May 29, 1945.

Twenty-six clergymen gathered on a platform with icons and church banners, and a service began. Countless people gathered. In the distance, the noise of approaching British armoured vehicles could be heard. The camp was surrounded. English infantry and trucks arrived. The soldiers first fired a volley at the feet of the worshippers, then over their heads. The tanks rolled into the crowd. The soldiers swung their clubs.

In the crush, approximately 3,000 men, women, and children were killed by gunfire, tanks, and rifle butts. About 500 threw themselves into the Drava River and drowned. Finally, the remainder were loaded onto waiting trains.

Witnesses still claim today that blood dripped from many of the railway carriages, which were almost hermetically sealed; many others saw young English soldiers weeping. After three days, silence finally fell over the Drava Valley. Countless transports rolled off to Siberia – towards their deaths.

Scattered across the globe, many of the survivors of this tragedy gather annually on June 1st at the secluded cemetery in Peggetz near Lienz to commemorate their relatives, friends, and fellow tribesmen. Representatives of the local authorities and numerous residents of Lienz and the surrounding area also frequently attend this memorial service.

Here lie those who travelled thousands of kilometres westward in the hope of finding salvation from communism.

Ronald Hingley, in his book "From Pushkin to Tolstoy" (Kindler University Press), writes: Cossacks – The reference to Gogol reminds us that Cossacks often play a role in Russian literature, without non-Russian readers knowing exactly who they were. The Cossacks were not a people unto themselves, but rather Russians and Ukrainians who had absorbed other ethnic elements. They were primarily descended from Orthodox peasants who had fled to the border to escape serfdom, taxes, or – like those who wanted to escape Polish rule – religious and national persecution.

6. The Death March of the Cossacks

The Tragedy on the River Drau Lienz, June 1, 1945 By Emil Winkler, Lienz

Slowly a procession winds its way,
seemingly endless, a picture of bitter misery,
gnawing lines up alongside wagons,
accompanied by thousands of riders,
women with weeping children,
broken, bearded old men,
witnesses to the crushing hardship
of months of deprivation,

fleeing from the grim enemy
and seeking refuge here with us,
unaware of what awaits them,
they plunge into ruin.

The Dnieper, Terek, and Don
rivers were once their homeland.
For centuries, their ancestors fought
to defend against Tartar invasion;
to maintain order and justice, to
uphold the customs of their fathers;
they founded villages and cities
and lived in prosperity and contentment.

Then another spirit came,
changing everything that existed,
redistributing goods and possessions,
disregarding the old laws; destroying
with sword and fire all
that did not obey, that did not bow down ;
spreading ruin and death and misery and horror.

At first they resisted;
but their strength waned,
so they preferred to take the field
rather than face certain death;
they left their farm and homeland
and
always carried the pain of their departure in their hearts:
the never-ending homesickness.

Their lot was surely bitter,
and their fate relentless.
Hunted, persecuted, and driven,
although discipline and order held them in place,
they were not welcome anywhere:
a rootless people without a home.

Suddenly a cry rang out:
“Cossacks, all together!
Unity too, we will defeat the enemy
united with the German soldiers,
free be the homeland from the yoke,
from the compulsion of new enslavement;
return then again
to our solid fields!”

So they went to fight
the enemy at home.
Pannwitz was their general;
he led them to victory from the front.

They fought gloriously,
setting an example for many others.

The fortunes of war are short-lived;
they change as quickly as the weather.

Woe to the army,
pursued and defeated by the enemy!
Magnanimity has no place here;
you wait in vain for mercy.
Nothing was spared them either,
the brave, valiant Cossacks.

But their due reward,
how meagre it was!
Defeated, driven by the enemy,
they came over the mountains
into our peaceful valley,
hoping to find pardon here.

But fate had other plans.
They had already been sold at Yalta.
Shame on them, in this political bargaining game
Stalin, the victor, demanded
their extradition
so he could punish them properly.

When the Cossacks heard this,
they knew what awaited them:
Siberia, Karelia, Nagaika,
these were the milder punishments;
for many,
certain death awaited mercilessly.

Whatever they undertook
to avert this bitter fate –
petitions, pleas, and requests
addressed to the highest powers,
appeals to conventions –
thwarted their justified hopes.

Fate, take your course!
There is no helper for any of them.
Good advice is hard to come by here,
for all efforts are in vain.

No door opens:
they are abandoned by all.
Cries of bright despair
fade away, they leave no echo.
Pleading for peace of heart,
they turned to a god for help,
fervently they prayed.

Before the hastily erected altar,
their priests already stood,
beseeching the Almighty for mercy,
blessing the devout crowd
in their full vestments.

All joined in
the ancient, comforting melodies;
the choir resounded mightily
from thousands of throats.
From the glittering chalices
, divine joy was distributed,
soothing the unspeakable suffering
of the poor in their despair.

Then all hell broke loose.
The English had come.
Disregarding the sacred rituals,
a work of destruction began.
The camp was already surrounded
by heavily armed tanks.
Advancing closely,
they brutally dragged women and children
onto the waiting wagons.
The men wanted to resist.
Brave ones jumped forward,
wrested the weapons from the brutes,
and confronted them.

Then the British called for reinforcements.
These too soon rolled in.
It was an unequal struggle.
Nevertheless,
the Cossacks, with their black-clad mates, fought on.
Many met their death.
In their despair, some
sought death in the waters
of the Drava River near the camps,
taking their children with them
to escape the disgrace.

No, you must not end like this.
Justice must be done to the enemy as well.
Many a young Briton
abandoned the terrible deed;
feeling their hearts
pounding with excitement
as they beheld all this misery
that now burdened their consciences.

Some turned away,
moved, hiding their tears,

grief and disgust in their hearts
, cursing the orders they received.
Some, however, managed to escape.
Often for days without any food
, they hid
as long as the danger was imminent,
until they were no longer pursued
and their lives were no longer in serious danger.

Shy, ragged, and starving,
they initially ventured very tentatively
among the people.
People felt sorry for them.
Now the nightmare was over
, and everyone had to start anew.
Everyone, state and community,
now fussed over the poor,
creating many a cosy home
so they could forget their misery.

But did they succeed?
Who can see into the depths of their hearts?
Melancholy homesickness
never truly rests !

Near the edge of Lienz
lies a solitary cemetery,
faithfully tended and protected.
Here rest the countless victims
of that innocent day.
Every year on the first of June,
they are remembered with love
in their own customary rite.

Brave men and women
found their graves here years ago.
True, immortal glory,
centuries-old lineages
end here in Tyrol.

A memorial stands as a silent interpreter
of this heinous act.
Here the Cossacks' march ends.
Here their story also ends.

Lienz, March 1971

A portion of the Cossacks, once gathered and led by General Helmuth von Pannwitz, fought in Yugoslavia against partisans and later against the advancing Russian army. At the time of the collapse, a contingent, retreating with many thousands of men and their families and just as many horses, crossed the Ploecken Pass to Lienz, hoping to be recognized as prisoners of war.

At the Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945), where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin reached the "Yalta Agreement," Stalin demanded that all Russian citizens be repatriated after the war.

The Cossacks had already fought against the Bolsheviks in the great revolution; therefore, the consequences of extradition left them with no doubt.

Thus, on June 1, 1945, the tragedy of Lienz occurred.

An addendum

Mr. Pier Arrigo Carnier, from Pordenone, a publicist, witnessed the misery of the Cossacks in Gemona during his youth. These experiences deeply affected him and motivated him to trace and research the Cossacks' history.

He writes to me:

“As you know, I have been studying the events surrounding the large Cossack 'STAN' for a long time and in great detail. These Cossacks were stationed in Italy in 1944/45 and were later handed over to the Soviets by the British in Lienz. I am also interested in the situation of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps, which was transferred to Yugoslavia under the leadership and command of General Helmut von Pannwitz and suffered the same fate.”

I have also worked as a journalist covering the far-reaching events – subversive, nationalistic – that took place in the East between 1942 and 1945, and which even extended beyond that period. I have also studied in detail, and continue to study, the events in the Adriatic coastal region.

Regarding the fate of the Cossacks and other combat groups of Russian nationality, some of whom were affiliated with the Waffen-SS and surrendered to the Allies outside Austria, I can only report indirectly:

- The two Vlasov divisions (Liberation Army) turned against the SS in Czechoslovakia to support the uprising in Prague. They were handed over to the Soviets by the Allies. Vlasov and the other generals and officers were tried and prosecuted.
- The Vlasov divisions also had Cossacks in their ranks.
- Parts of the Cossacks who surrendered to Tito's gangs in Yugoslavia were annihilated.
- The Russians who surrendered in Normandy and were handed over to the Soviets met a tragic end in the Baltic region.

- Cossacks who had surrendered to the Italian partisans in Gemona—the records of which I had searched for in vain for a long time—were, despite the partisans' promises of protection and support, gradually handed over to the Soviets by the British. They had previously been gathered at the Ancona camp, where they camped for an extended period.
- The members of the 162nd Division – the “Turkic” Division – formed in Turkestan and commanded by German officers, surrendered in Italy. They too were handed over to the Soviets.

Thus, the Anglo-Americans have largely fulfilled the Yalta agreements.

Translated from the Italian
by Emil Winkler, Lienz

7. Commemoration of General Helmuth von Pannwitz at the Cossack cemetery in Lienz

General Helmuth von Pannwitz, commander of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps, was executed on January 16, 1947, in Labinsk Prison in Moscow. He had celebrated his 75th birthday on October 14. Former officers of the German Wehrmacht and their Cossack comrades chose this day to commemorate their beloved and highly esteemed general at the Cossack cemetery in Lienz.

No one shied away from the long journey, some traveling 800 and even over 1000 km, to participate in this simple ceremony. A delegation from the "East Tyrol" veterans' association attended the ceremony, which, despite the bad weather, was also well-attended by the local population. Father Sydorenko from the Orthodox parish in Villach recited the prayers in Russian and blessed the graves, the memorial, and the worshippers.

To the strains of a chorale (Pramstaller Brass Quartet), comrades Weil and Bojtschowsky laid the wreath of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps at the monument. Alongside the Austrian flag, the traditional Cossack flags fluttered.

Comrade Weil from Gummersbach near Cologne delivered the commemorative address. He presented a detailed biography of the general, who, due to the proximity of his father's estate to the Russian border at that time, came into contact with the Cossacks at a young age. The boy spent a great deal of time with them, learning their language and their horsemanship. Thus, his future path was already predetermined at a young age. Chief Master Dojtschewsky thanked all those present with moving words.

Life was harsh for the survivors of this brave fighting force. While the Cossacks were handed over to the Soviets according to the Yalta Agreement, their officers were taken prisoner by the German Wehrmacht. Many were put on trial, and some were sentenced to death. Initially, they were sent to Siberia, where their captivity lasted 8, 9 – in Colonel Hoy's case, even 10

years and 1 week – before they were pardoned and allowed to return home in 1955. It is therefore no wonder that many who would have liked to come had to decline due to health reasons.

Besides Chief Master Paul Dilla, Kuno DuBel, Hans Wiegand, Dacek, and others – including journalist and expert on the tragic history of the Cossacks, Mr. Pier Arrigo Carnier from Pordenone (Italy) – comrade Günther Hoy, now a colonel on the General Staff in Vienna, was also present. Special mention must be made of Chief Master Frits Weil. Due to his long captivity, with its hardships and scars, he has lost his eyesight to a mere glimmer.

Despite his height of 2 meters (minus 2 cm), this man possesses a truly admirable vitality. He holds together the "whole bunch" of his former, still affectionately known, XV. KKK. He was also the initiator of the celebration.

Most of the comrades had come with their wives, and so there was a pleasant get-together with quite lively conversation at the Hotel "Post" and the next day at the Hotel "Bozner Hof".

Due to the historical events in Peggetz near Lienz, the 4th Cossack Cavalry Corps has chosen Lienz as the location for its major events. The first such gathering is scheduled to take place in Lienz at Pentecost 1975. The 350 members of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps plan to celebrate a fraternization festival with the "Soldiers' Association of East Tyrol" in Lienz at that time.

The "East Tyrol" comradeship will make every effort to give this meeting a binding, comradely character.

Note by Emil Winkler

General Vasily G. Glaskov published a book in English in 1972 with Speller & Sons, Publishers, Inc., New York, 10036: "The History of the Cossacks", in which he attempts to provide historical proof in 160 pages that the Cossacks are not Russians, but a separate ethnic group.

The two groups are not in agreement among themselves, because the other group unwaveringly professes its allegiance to the Russian Empire, to the Russian homeland, as loyal followers of the deceased Tsar.

This is the great divide, the almost unbridgeable divide that separates them.

Note by the Association (2025): This divide persists – but today for a completely different and far more serious reason. The war in Ukraine has unequivocally demonstrated that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (MP) and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under the Moscow Patriarchate (ROCA-MP) openly support President Putin, religiously justify his aggressive policies, and promote his efforts to revive elements of the Stalin era and create a

new Soviet sphere of influence. This stance is in clear contradiction to the values of our association and has therefore led to a clear separation.

9. At the Cossack Cemetery in Peggetz near Lienz

Recited by former Mayor Emil Winkler at the Commemoration Service for Ataman General Helmuth von Pannwitz on 14 October 1973.

Oppressed by the spirit of this place,
shaken by your fate,
the meaning of the word fades
as we look back today.
Here you were once laid to rest,
to your final, eternal rest.
Your free hands were chained.
Your eyes closed heavily.
To whom could your death possibly benefit,
you silent witnesses of time?
All those who come after you,
we hope, will henceforth be safe.
Here we are in your memory,
in loud and silent prayer, for only ONE, who stands above us,
can guide destinies . However hard it is to forgive, however hard it is to pardon: We ask the
Lord God in Heaven to grant us the strength. This is what we plead for today, to atone for a
wicked deed. May discord vanish: May you rest here in peace!

Emil Winkler
Lienz, 1973