Private Iwan Gankowitsch©
Regimental number: 453
3rd Division, Serbian Howitzer Artillery

born: unknown – died: 27 January 1919

Private Iwan Gankowitsch was a Serbian prisoner of war being repatriated when he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 12 January 1919.[1]

Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia at the end of July 1914 marked the beginning of WW1. By January 2015, all of Serbia was occupied by the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire) and thousands of Serbian soldiers had been taken prisoner. Data from the Red Cross in Austria-Hungary indicates that, in February 1918, there 127,500 prisoners of war and 79,000 internees in Austro-Hungarian and German camps, with more in Bulgarian camps. After the war, the Serbian government claimed that 81,000 Serbian soldiers and 80,000 internees had died in camps in Austro-Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany.[2]

International law regarding treatment of prisoners and internees was largely ignored. Prisoners suffered from food shortages, cold, lack of health care and physical punishment. Conditions in German camps were reportedly worse for prisoners from Southeast Europe (Serbia, Montenegro and Hungary) than for French and British prisoners.[3]

After the armistice, the Serbian prisoners were released and the last left in February 1919, travelling through seaports in Denmark or Netherlands or through Switzerland. The vast majority of prisoners in Germany survived their incarceration and returned home after the war.[4]

This would not be the case for Iwan. He was admitted to No. 1 CCCS on 12 January suffering from influenza. Of all those admitted that day to No.1 CCCS ". . . 65 were Serbian R.P.O.W. [returning prisoners of war] and all in very poor physical condition and very ill. . . . The death rate [for the month of January] was considerably increased by the group of Serbian R.P.O.W. who were not in condition to withstand very much."[5]

Iwan died on 27 January and was buried in Nordfriedhof Cemetery (Grave 46) in Bonn[6] three days later with the Canadian chaplain, Captain J. P. Fallon, presiding. A few days later, Captain Fallon also noted in the chaplains' diary that he had sent particulars to the cemetery authorities for the erection of a cross.[7]

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[1] "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 12 December 2016), entry for Gankowitsch, Iwan

[2] "Prisoners of War and Internees (South East Europe)," *1914–1918 Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/ article/ prisoners_of_war_and_internees_south_east_europe: accessed 28 November 2016)

[3] Ibid.

[4] "First World War Central Power Prison Camps," Scholar Works at WMU, *Western Michigan University* (http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=history_pubs: accessed 28 November 2016)

[5] "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13–1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FIND&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02016202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 17 June 2016)

[6] Initially the Serbian soldiers who died at No. 1 CCCS, when it was stationed in Bonn in January 1919, were buried in Poppelsdorfer Cemetery where the Commonwealth soldiers were buried. However, most of those who died on or after 18 January were buried in Nordfriedhof Cemetery. Commonwealth soldiers continued to be buried Poppelsdorfer Cemetery.

[7] "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 12 December 2016), entry for Gankowitsch, Iwan. No evidence has been found to indicate if the remains of the Serbian soldiers are still in this cemetery. The remains of other Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands during repatriation were removed and are now in a mausoleum that was built near the former Austrian camp Heinrischgrün in Bohemia in 1924. ("Heroes of Serbia – Memory Eternal" (http://www.heroesofserbia.com/2014/01/they-died-for-serbia-serbian-wwi.html: accessed 29 November 2016))