

SANDBOSTEL 29 APRILE 2019

Good afternoon, my name is Domenico Bolognese, I am 49 years old (still for few days) and I come from Altamura, a town with 70.000 people in Apulien, South of Italy.

I would like to thank the Fundation Lager Sandbostel for having invited myself and my brother Luigi here and gave me the privilege and honor to run this short speech today. Thanks to all civil and religious authorities and to all participants to this ceremony.

A tender embrace to **Zbigniew Rad-lowski**, veteran of Sandbostel (even if he is not here today) and to all sons, daughters and family members of prisoners of war here today.

Before talking about my father, I would like to bring institutional salutes from the mayoress of my town Rosa Melodia and from the President of Apulia Region, Michele Emiliano. The city of Altamura has been re-founded in 13th century by Frederick the Second from Swabe and Apulia sinks its cultural and historical roots also in the Norman/Swabian tradition. I guess that's why I am so tall, as my father was ... who knows.

Finally I bring also greetings from all members of Association Camp 65, where I am the president, a studies center that is doing extensive historical research on Camp 65 in Altamura plus other military camps in the same area. Camp 65 was the biggest fascist camp of Allied Prisoners of War in Italy during WW2 and, after liberation of Italy, also a POW camp for Kriegsmarine officers as I have personally discovered a couple of weeks ago. What a strange coincidence.

This is my second visit in Sandbostel. My first time was last summer with my family by car and we had a great welcome by Ronald Sperling. Today I am here with my brother Luigi, this time we took a plane. I am sure my father is thinking I am crazy as he, not only didn't choose to come here the first time but would not, probably, come back a second time on purpose.

My father never said the name Sandbostel, neither Wietzendorf (his final camp), nor Altdrewitz today in Poland, nor the working camp in Hamburg: a **Betòn-werk** in Liebigstrasse 46 owned by **Ohlendorff'sche Bau-gesèll-schaft**. He also never pronounced the name of Raska, the place in Serbia where he was captured by Nazis wearing the Tito's partisan uniform of the Italian Division Garibaldi.

My father decided, for the whole second part of his life began in April 1945 and tragically ended in July 1990, he decided to remain silent, not to remember.

A very common behaviour among IMI, Italian Military Internees. A voluntary amnesia or better say a self-censorship may be due to the concern that his decision, his behaviour was, as

indeed was and probably still is nowadays, not fully understood. I am not talking about “shame” but concern which is something different.

I am here today to speak about things he never said. Not an easy task.

For example he never spoken one single word of hate, rancor or even intolerance toward the German people and towards people in general. In his generosity and resiliency, other lessons learned here, he well understood that in war everybody is a potential victim and offender BUT belonging to one category or the other is ALWAYS the result of a personal INDIVIDUAL choice, regardless of someone nationality, ideology or, even worst, race.

All this he knew it extremely well: having been an occupier at first in Montenegro, a partisan a liberator after always in Montenegro and finally a prisoner of war in Germany.

Nevertheless there were 2 things he deeply hated: fascism and war. The origins of all his sufferings.

Fascism, under which regime, his generation was born and raised.

War that has devoured his youth, with its endless horrors seen during this “journey into the unknown” lasted for 4 years.

It is difficult to be sons of prisoners of war, to live up to our fathers. At the end of the day, we all have lived relatively quite “lives” compared to them, and a period of peace, here in Europe, as never seen before in the history of humanity.

We are here today and I express profound gratitude toward the Foundation Sandbostel, for having saved this place, literally from destruction and preserved its memories.

We are not only sons, daughters and nephews of prisoners of war but we are also a bit sons, daughters and nephews of this place. And to this place, ironically, we owe a lot because here in Sandbostel, thanks to incredible combinations and crossing of individual choices, our existence, our fate has been indirectly determined.

I will end my speech very touched and honored, after 74 year, to say loud the name of my father, and with it, the ones of all prisoners of war italians and not, that here and in all camps in Germany shouted NO to fascism, NO to war against their own brothers, YES to freedom, YES to democracy, YES to peace, YES to a united Europe without wars

Sottotenente Michele Bolognese, 84° reggimento Fanteria Venezia.