



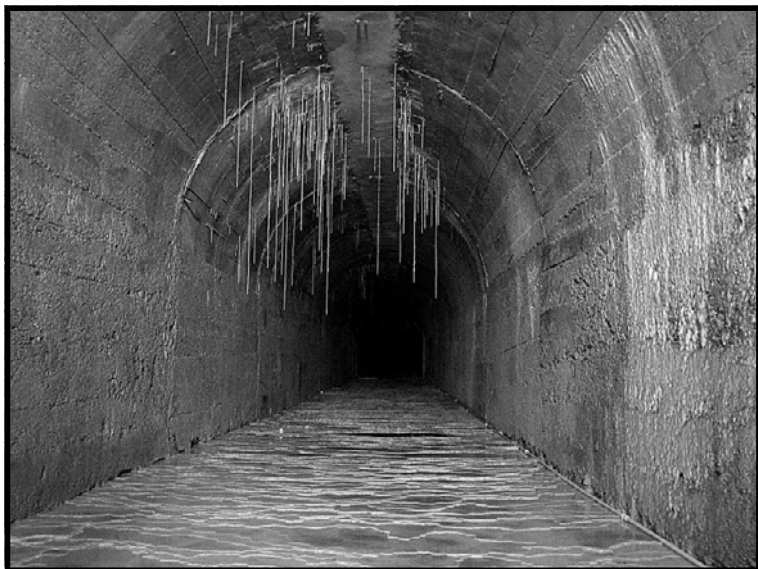
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**THE COMPLEX OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT TUNNELS  
NAMED  
«KLEINE BERLIN»**



Trieste, 2004

Walking up along via Fabio Severo, on the side of the petrol station, you can notice the entrance of four tunnels on the wall below via di Romagna.

These are the access to the complex of anti-aircraft tunnels named "Kleine Berlin", built during World War II.

The complex of anti-aircraft tunnels "Kleine Berlin" consists of four interconnected anti-aircraft shelters. Three of them were meant to protect the Italian civilian population, whereas the fourth is an anti-aircraft shelter destined to German civil and military staff.

## Historical premises

On June 10, 1940 Italy declared war on France and Britain, thus getting involved in World War II with Germany as its ally.

The Minister for Home Affairs ordered to build public shelters for the civilians on a national scale, in case of air-raid of the enemy air force.

Originally, public anti-aircraft shelters consisted of silted up trenches and, in case of buildings with arched underpasses, of anti-splinter walls.

Besides, all public buildings should include domestic and anti-bomb shelters.

Apart from some small railroad tunnels, at that time there were two road tunnels in Trieste: the Sandri-



Piazza Vico. On the background, the road tunnel with its anti-splinter wall.

(g.c. Fulvia Bax)

nelli and the San Vito tunnels. Here some public shelters were arranged, incorporating anti-splinter walls at the entrance. Masonries collocated on rails allowed the free movement of public and private transports in tunnels, when the anti-aircraft alarm did not go off. It emerged that such tunnels could shelter a high number of people. For this reason the Trieste administration considered the possibility of creating tunnels to shelter civilians. Besides, these shelters should be used in the post-war period too, with two entrances, destined to become road or pedestrian crossings connecting different parts of the city.

The orographic conformation of Tri-

este - situated on marl and sandstone hills - allowed to build many anti-aircraft shelters in tunnels. In December 1942 the Trieste authorities decided to build three anti-aircraft shelters for the civilian population, among which the "Scorcola hill" shelter.

### The "Scorcola hill" shelter

The project for the "Scorcola hill" anti-aircraft complex included a main tunnel starting at Roiano in via Sara Davis. It was meant to reach the present via Tibullo near the Military Hospital, including two lateral exits, the first near the square Piazzetta Belvedere, the other in via Fabio Severo.

The Emilio Colombo company from Como was entrusted the works. At that time it availed itself of a workforce of about 150 workers, most of them from Veneto and Friuli regions. The building of the tunnel started in early 1943 with the creation of four adits.

Until May 1943 only the Colombo



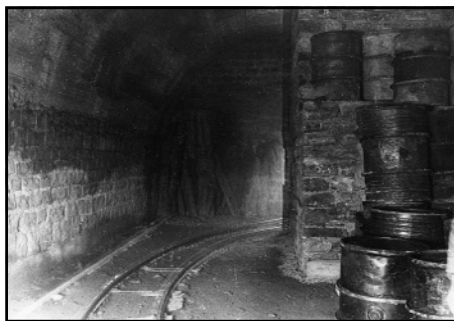
The shelter of Piazzetta Belvedere.



2.20.1943 – Via Catullo (now via Tibullo), foreground trench.



5.22.1943 – Via Catullo. Cribbing of the tunnel's entrance.



3.2.1944 – Via Catullo. Anti-splinter wall.

building yard could be seen along via Fabio Severo, while excavating the "municipal" anti-aircraft tunnel in the massive wall of via di Romagna. Today this is the III entrance of Kleine Berlin. Starting from June

the works in via Fabio Severo were intensified. Another tunnel was to be opened in the massive wall of via di Romagna: the Railway Service tunnel (I entrance).

During the war the works at the "municipal" tunnel had to be slowed down and the original project was never completed. Three tunnels were built from the "Scorcola hill" project: the one connecting Roiano with via Tibullo and two other tunnels, which had to be its lateral exits (Piazzetta Belvedere and via Fabio Severo). However, they were never connected with the main one.

There are two main reasons for the incompleteness of the project. Firstly,

the bombing of June 10, 1944, when one third of Colombo company workers did not show up and remained in their hometowns, thus hampering a successful excavation. The remaining workers were involved in clearing the wreckage. Secondly, and more importantly, after this emergency work the Colombo workers were forcedly recruited by the Germans and ordered to build their anti-aircraft shelters.

### **The tunnels of the Railways and of the Post Service**

In summer 1943 the Colombo com-

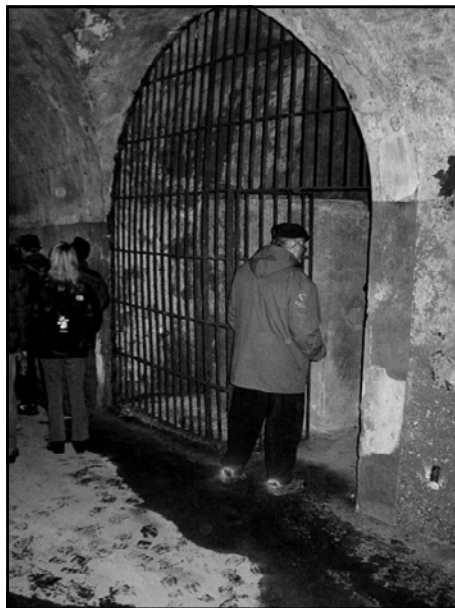


2.5.1943 – Via Fabio Severo. Drive tunnel of the municipal tunnel.

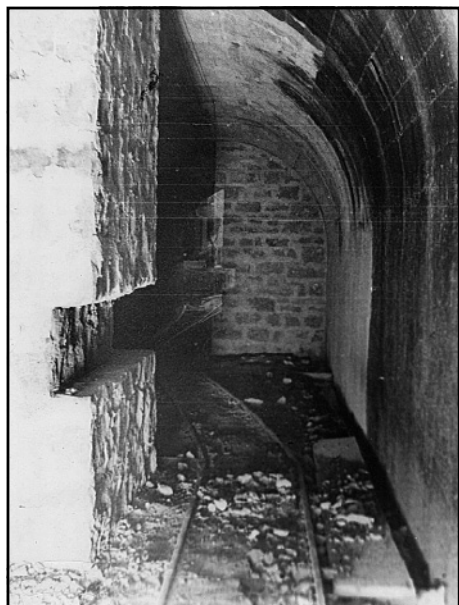
pany was working at the tunnel in via Fabio Severo. At that time, the Trieste authorities were asked by the Railway Service the permission to build another tunnel, parallel to that already on the stocks. It had to be used exclusively by the Railways staff.

The Giuliani company of Trieste was assigned the building of this tunnel. When the works started, the Post administration asked the Railways the permission to build a third tunnel, parallel and communicating with the other ones, to be used by its staff. The Post service already had the license to start the building.

In early September 1943 two building yards were operating in via



Ramification leading to the civil antiaircraft tunnels destined to the Railways staff.



2.24.1944 – Via Fabio Severo. Antiblow wall.

Fabio Severo. When the alarm signals went off, the building companies were obliged to let the civilians in the shelters. Alarms continued on a daily basis, whenever Allied aircrafts flew above Trieste, heading for Austria or Germany. The people of Trieste was convinced that their city was never going to be bombed. Therefore, each time the alarms went off, the majority did not enter the shelters. The most cautious shew up at the entrance of the tunnels to be sheltered, thus hampering the works. However, the excavations continued in the interior of the tunnels, causing discomfort to the people sheltered.

## **The “Adriatic Coastline” Operational Zone**

The Armistice of September 8, 1943 between Italy and the Allies resulted in the occupation of Nazi troops.

On October 15, 1943 the people of Trieste learned from the daily newspaper “Il Piccolo” that their city, together with Ljubljana, Rijeka, Udine and Gorizia had been included in a new territory under German rule. Such new territorial jurisdiction was called “Adriatisches Küstenland” (Adriatic Coastline Operational Zone). The civil power was to be exerted by Friedrich Rainer, the Gauleiter of Kärnten region. Trieste became the head-

quarters of this new “province”. The SS Gruppenführer Odilo Lota-rio Globocnik, born in Trieste, San Giovanni, in 1904, was called to lead the Police and continue the anti-partisan struggle.

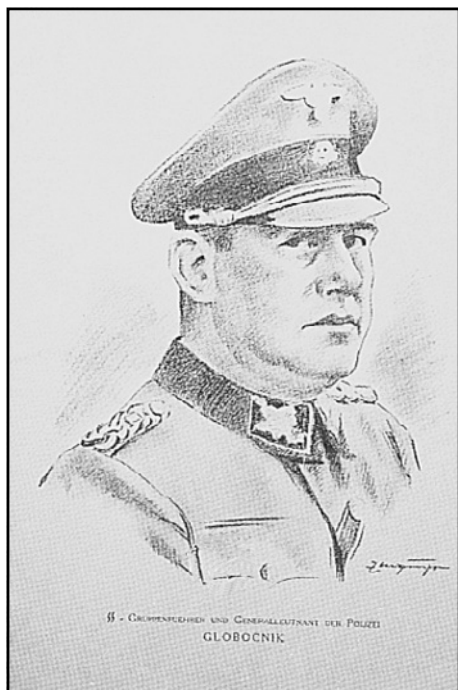
Globocnik, who worked at the Court, confiscated Angelo Ara’s villa in via di Romagna, transforming it into its own residence. Today this place hosts a condominium at N. 28.

## **The German antiaircraft shelter**

After creating the “Adriatic Coastline Operational Zone”, the Germans started to build a high number of military defenses. The works



4.20.1944 – Parade organized in Trieste to celebrate Adolf Hitler’s birthday.



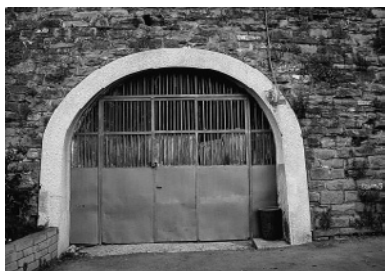
Odilo Lotario Globocnik.

were carried out by some companies cooperating with Todt, a German organization. Many works were carried out on the territory. In particular, the German authorities wanted to start the building of an antiaircraft shelter for their soldiers and civil employees operating in the Trieste Court area.

The creation of the shelter was not of the utmost importance, because when the alarm signal went off soldiers used to flee with the Italian civilians into the “municipal” tunnel, which was on the stocks. To that end, the Nazi authorities had supplied the lighting installation of the shelter. Therefore, the “municipal” tunnel was equipped with an electric system made up of bare copper wires – according to the German use – instead of



The Court Palace  
after the city fight. May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945.



The entrance of the first tunnel  
(Railways Service shelter)



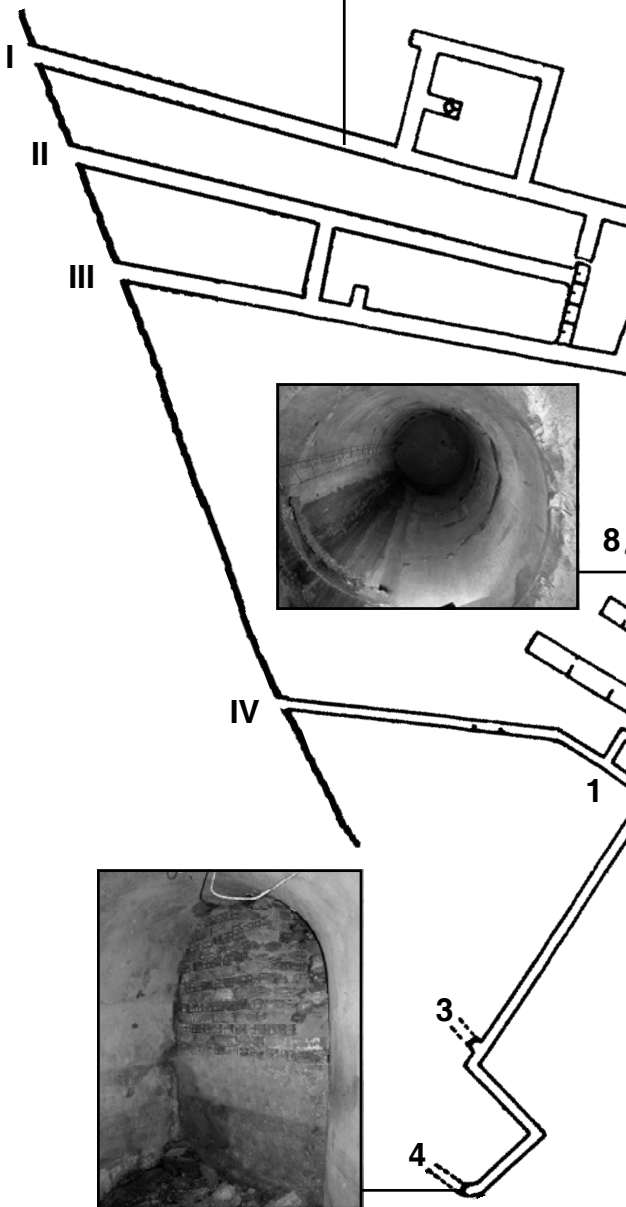
The entrance of the second tunnel  
(Post Service shelter)



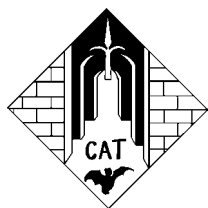
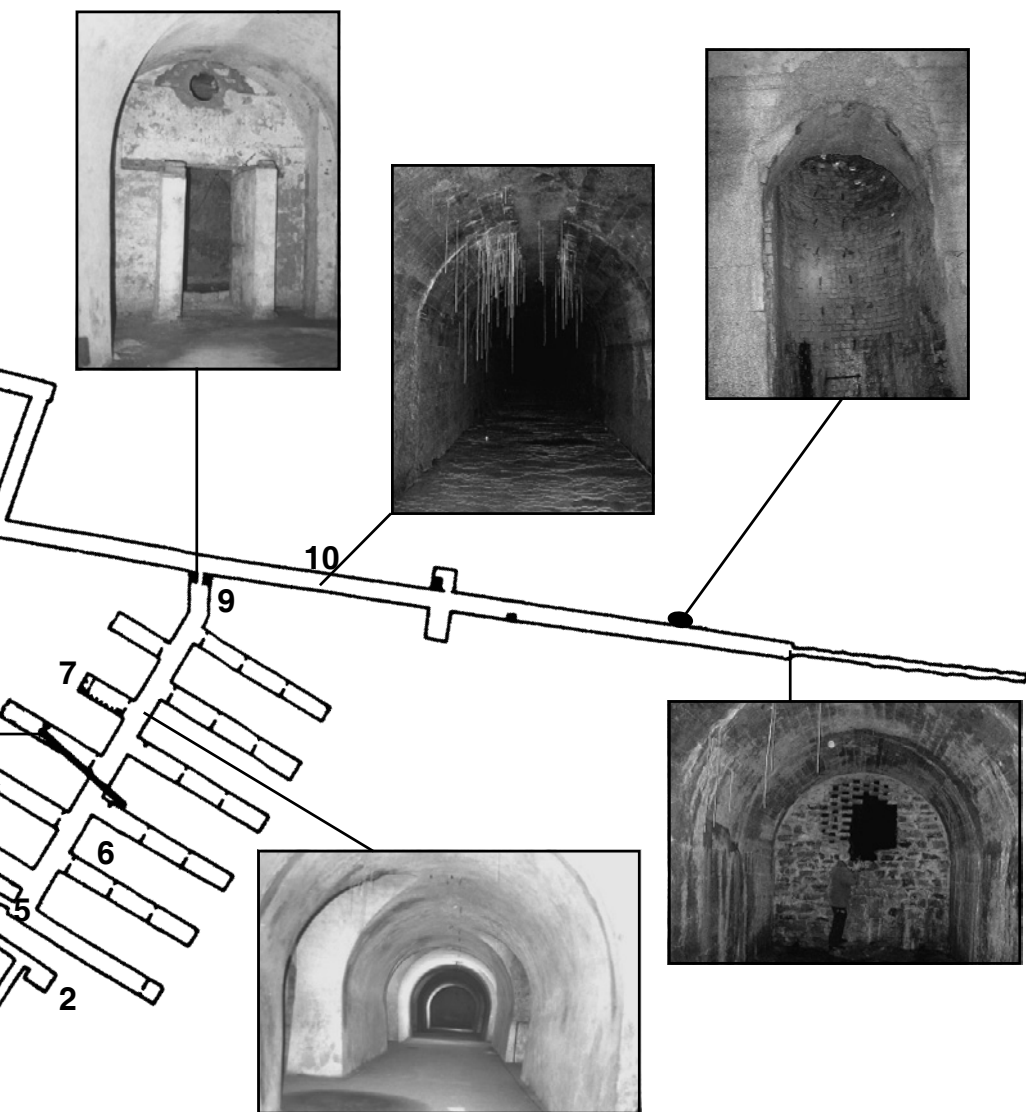
The entrance of the third tunnel  
(Municipal shelter)



The entrance of the fourth tunnel  
(German shelter)







THE COMPLEX OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT  
TUNNELS NAMED

«Kleine Berlin»



4.20.1944. Nazi military parade. On the left, a water basin to be used in case of fire.

(Photo by A. Umek)

bare lead wires, employed in other antiaircraft tunnels of Trieste.

The excavation of the shelter involved three different companies, and each of them should ignore the activity of the other two. General Globocnik had imposed them to work in secrecy, because he had thought of creating a "secret passage" between his house and the Court. As a matter of fact, the shelter's entrance of via Fabio Severo, close to the street leading to via di Romagna, as well as the passage leading to the Court of Trieste were built by land-surveyor Gerdol's company, which worked on behalf of Todt. The main tunnel and the

lateral ramifications of the complex German antiaircraft shelter was probably entrusted to Todt's company Mazorana & Co. The passage connecting Globocnik's Villa Ara with the ceiling of a lateral tunnel of the antiaircraft shelter was carried out by the Schwarz company, also working for Todt.

After the bombing of June 10, 1944 the building of the shelter became crucial. Therefore, the Germans ordered the workers of the Colombo company to collaborate with Todt in the excavation of their antiaircraft shelter, with a wide use of mines.

Some inscriptions found in the tunnel used by the Germans and reaching via Fabio Severo (IV entrance, where guided tours start) suggest that the main works were finished in December 1944. With no doubt, trimming works continued until the end of the war and for this reason were never completed. Evidence to this, current generators were never installed, even if cement basement are still visible in two places.

As regards the illumination of the shelter, the Germans had a service pipe connected to the then public utilities company ACEGAT. As a matter of fact, an electric distribution panel, still visible today, was installed near the entrance, along a passage reaching the main tunnel of the shelter.

Ancillary light, which was activated in case of lack of electricity,

was provided by accumulators confiscated to fishing vessels, which before the war used to fish accompanied by night-fishing boats.

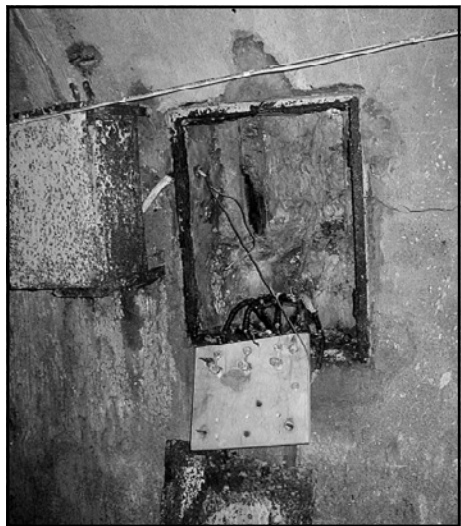
The entrance to the antiaircraft shelter was forbidden to any non-German staff. No Italian was allowed to enter it, exception made for an electrician working for the Luigi Presel company, in charge of replacing burnt out lamps, and for some other people working for the Germans.

The Germans' main concern as for the management of the shelter was the high amount of humidity stagnating in the tunnels. Therefore, they decided to resort to braziers burning coke coal in order to dry up the rooms. Unfortunately, all German antiaircraft shelters lacked

an air change device. Therefore, burnt gas was conveyed through an expelling fan to the "municipal" tunnel, causing serious problems of asphyxia for the people sheltered. Documents at the Municipality of Trieste General Archives witness the fact that Mayor Cesare Pagnini asked the Deutscher Berater (intermediate German counsellor between the Municipality and the Gauleiter Rainer) to forbid braziers in the German shelter.

In the night of April 29, 1945, Gauleiter Rainer and general Globocnik abandoned Trieste and left for Austria. Here they were arrested by the Allies. On April 30, 1945 an insurrection burst out in Trieste led by the National Liberation Committee.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> the partisan Yugoslav



Kleine Berlin. What remains of the electric distribution panel in the German shelter.

(Photo by R. Bernardis)



Kleine Berlin. Lamp used in municipal antiaircraft shelters. (Photo by R. Bernardis)

troops entered the city, surrounding the last German strongholds and forcing German soldiers to surrender. The Court, connected to



5.3.1945 – On the left, near the parapet between via Fabio Severo and via di Romagna, you can notice the entrance of the German shelter. (Photo by F. Harwey)



5.3.1945 – Barracks of the building companies along via Fabio Severo. (Photo by F. Harwey)



The present entrance of "Kleine Berlin" (on the left) at the Allies arrival. You can notice the cement cowling, later demolished.

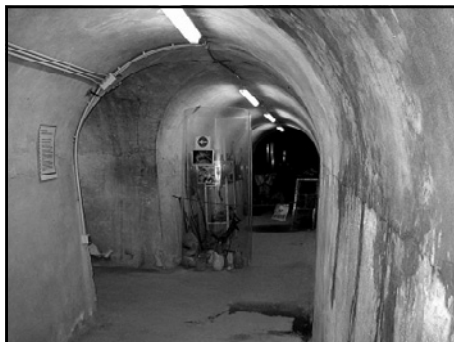
the antiaircraft shelter, was among these strongholds. No trace of a Yugoslav attempt to penetrate the corridor of the Court has been found. Probably, nobody knew about this passage. The city fight did not last long, German soldiers surrendered to New Zealand troops, that in the meantime had entered the city. After twenty months, the German occupation of Trieste territory came to an end.

### **Brief description of the rooms**

The visit of the "Kleine Berlin" complex begins at the entrance reserved to German soldiers (IV entrance).

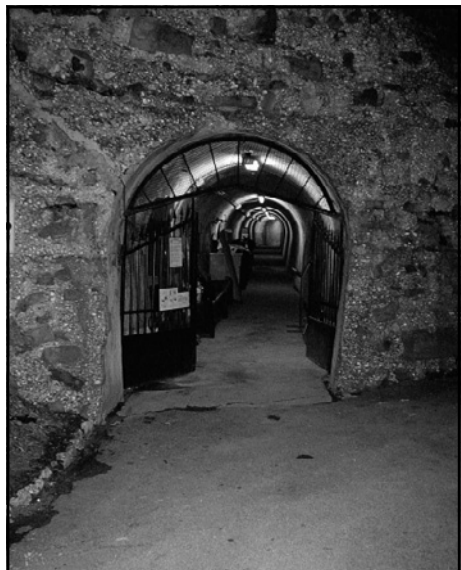
At that time, the access was equipped with a cement military cowl, destroyed in 1948 by the Trieste Deminers Group. On that occasion, the main entrance of the shelter was silted up too. This entrance was camouflaged by a cement construction and located where the sidewalk below the masonry connects via Fabio Severo with via di Romagna.

Walking down the first section of the tunnel you arrive at a crossing (1); going straight forward you arrive at a room where a cement basement for a current generator was collocated (2). Before entering the room, a little passage on the right leads to a door. After the door, a slightly descending passage leads to the former

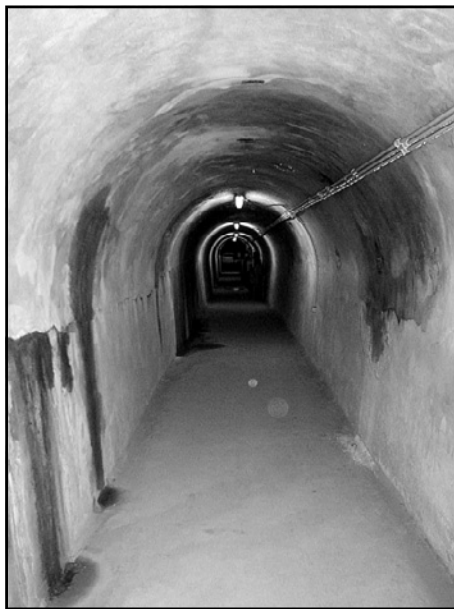


Ramification leading to the Court (on the right). On the left, you can reach the main tunnel.

main entrance of the German anti-aircraft shelter (3). Then you turn left, walk on and turn right until you get to the barrage obstructing the access to the hypogeal rooms of Trieste Court (Palazzo di Giustizia)



Gate of the current IV entrance.

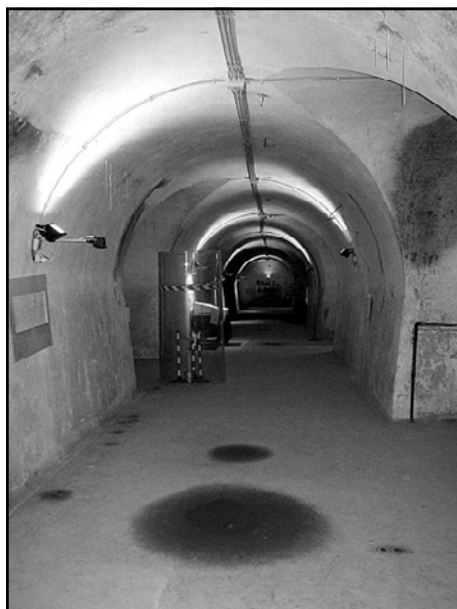


The first section of the tunnel, after the entrance.

(4). During visits, groups are rarely allowed to visit this section of the tunnel because it is full of water.

Back to position 1, you walk down the left corridor until you come across the main tunnel (5), from which eleven lateral ramifications branch off. The ramifications on the right side are all about 26 metres long (6), while the ones on the left side are between 12 and 25 metres long, exception made for the passage employed for sanitation services (7), which is less than 10 metres long.

Among these tunnels, one is equipped with a well on its vault. Such well was then equipped with a winding staircase (8), used by general Globocnik to reach his work-



The main tunnel. (Photo by P. Omari)



Masoned wall in the tunnel leading to the Court.

place at the Court from his house of Villa Ara.

At the end of the long “German” tunnel, a door (9) leads into the municipal anti-aircraft shelter (10), consisting of a 250 metres tunnel, built by the Emilio Colombo com-



The sanitation services. (Photo by P. Omari)



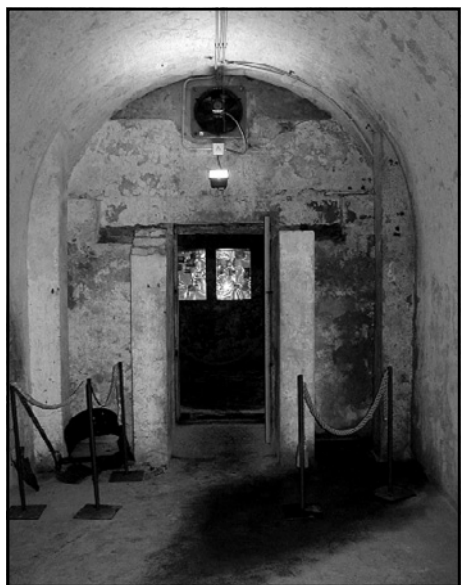
The "Globocnik well".

pany on behalf of the Municipality of Trieste.

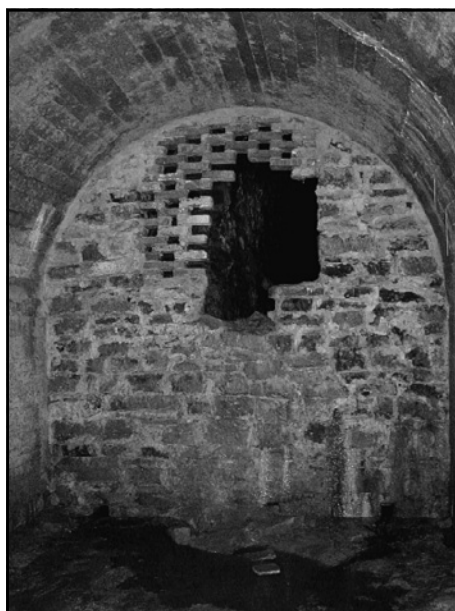
Here you can realize to what extent nature is slowly, though inexorably, taking possession of the hypogeum again. A fascinating scenario comes into sight, thriving



Section of the municipal tunnel. Concretions are visible on the walls and on the ground.



The door of the adjacent municipal anti-aircraft shelter.



Via Fabio Severo. Excavation interrupted in the municipal tunnel. (Photo by R. Bernardis)

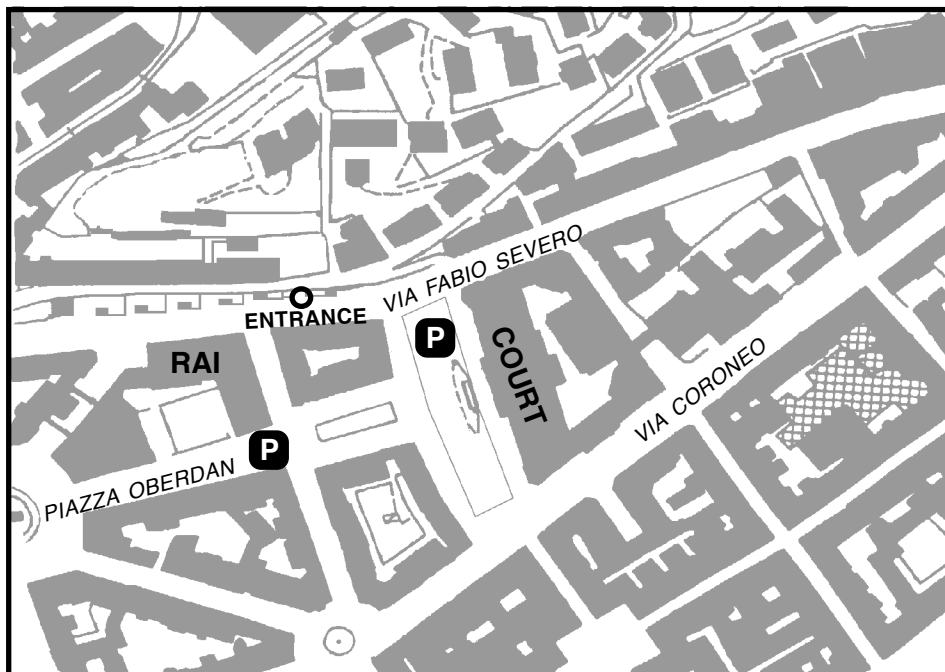


Stalagmite concretions on the ground of the Italian tunnels.

with stalactites, stalagmites and concretion cups, veiled by ceaselessly flowing water. This phenomenon is not so visible in the German section and is due to the fact that the last part of the Italian tunnel was never cemented.

The final result is extremely pleasant, giving the impression of being in a natural karst cave, instead of an artificial hypogaeum.

And what's more, the site is located in the very city centre of Trieste.



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