

# Colonel Valentin Mueller

## And His role in Saving The City

### Of Assisi in World War II

André Cirino OFM



It was a hot and humid July 31, 1990 when Don Aldo Brunacci, director of the Casa Papa Giovanni and Prior of the Canons of the Cathedral of San Rufino, invited me to an evening Eucharist in the Casa chapel. After working all day with the pilgrims making The Assisi Experience, I was tired and not up to attending another mass. However, when I arrived in the chapel, I changed my mind when I saw several of the anziani or senior citizens of Assisi gathered. They gathered to remember, to remember fondly Dr. Valentin Müller on the anniversary of his death. They call him, with great respect, the savior of Assisi during World War II.

It fits well with the tribute paid to Dr. Müller by the people of Assisi in the memorial they have erected in his honor, seen on a city wall as one comes

up the road to Assisi. One cannot miss it, for it is at the crossroads of two gates leading into the city.

“Daddy went on alone to the Hotel Subasio. The desk clerk recognized him instantly and excitedly called the proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Rossi. It was a wonderful welcome from a grateful people.” In these words from her travel journal, Irmgard Müller, daughter of Dr. Valentin Müller, describes her father’s return to Assisi in 1950. Just six years after the departure of the German army, the former Medical Colonel and Commander of Assisi, returned to the city of Francis and Clare for a visit.

Ironically, the former occupier and enemy is practically given a hero’s welcome just a few short years after the war. The former Mayor, who was in office during Müller’s time, the present communist Mayor and the Bishop received him. Müller received numerous invitations from the citizens of Assisi to come visit. Upon his arrival, some women placed flowers at the hotel entrance that formerly served as his headquarters. Now he and his family are invited guests of the Hotel Subasio. And the City Council wants to erect a monument in his honor.

Dr. Valentin Müller’s presence is celebrated in the streets and squares of the city. People crowded around him, shaking his hand, embracing him. Why this adulation of a former Nazi occupier? Let the people’s stories and personal experience of the Commander explain why. In her travel journal Irmgard Müller wrote: “A woman approached us, happy and very moved, to share of the grande paura—the great fear—she had during the war. But when Il Colonnello moved into the city, the fear left her. The inhabitants of Assisi revere Müller as the city’s savior. They claim it is due to his presence that the city’s sanctuaries, medieval walls, treasures as well as its inhabitants, remained untouched. During the war the people used to exclaim: “We’ve got three protectors: God, St. Francis, and Colonel Müller.”

Therefore, what we have gathered about his presence in Assisi comes mainly from the people of Assisi themselves.

Colonel Müller was respected and loved by the citizens of Assisi. As Commander, he cared for St. Francis' city. He had a good rapport with Bishop Nicolini and Mayor Fortini. He frequently visited the friars. Everyone knew that Il Colonnello would listen to them, their problems, or injustices experienced. Desperate people would telephone him at his office for everyone knew his number, 210. Müller tried to stop the German soldiers from exploiting the people, and if he could not, he personally worked for reparation of the damages.

For example, one day two German captains commandeered two taxis, pretending there was an emergency. Müller himself followed them by motorcycle and caught up with them near Perugia. He had them return the stolen cars. After many years, Francesco Pettirossi, one of the taxi owners, has never forgotten and enthusiastically tells his guests about Il Colonnello who brought his taxi back to him. Another time German soldiers started to confiscate bicycles, loading them on a truck. Only Il Colonnello's order stopped them. And one night, Müller helped a woman and her two children who were being taunted by drunken soldiers. And to a young wife of an Italian soldier who was in a German concentration camp, Il Colonnello gave her the possibility of contacting him. Müller put her letter into an official envelope from his office, making himself, at great risk, the sender.

And the great esteem Müller had among the people was evidenced by the announcement of the partisans near Assisi, that upon withdrawal: "Colonnello Müller will not be harmed!"

The memory of Il Colonnello's important role in preserving Assisi during World War II is still alive among the city's inhabitants. In 1982, a commemorative stone monument was placed in the cloister of the Würzburg

Conventual friary, bearing the names of Mayor Fortini, Father Bede Hess, Bishop Nicolini and Dr. Valentin Müller. It was brought by a delegation from Assisi on a pilgrimage of peace during the eighth centenary of St. Francis' birth to the first Franciscan friary established north of the Alps. On their way the group also stopped at Eichstätt. After a reception at the City Hall, the Italians brought olive branches to Colonel Müller's grave, on whose tombstone the facade of the Basilica of San Francesco is carved. Above are the words: In serviendo consumor (I give my life in serving).

Bernadette Raischl



I am standing here in behalf of the family of Valentin Mueller, my grandfather, especially for my father Robert and my aunt Irmgard, Valentin's children, who cannot be here today for health reasons. I am very happy that my cousins Bernd and Stefan with his family joined us for this celebration.

Now I'd like to give you an overview on Valentin's life. I'd like to share with you very personal materials, letters for example which weren't even known to the family up to now.

Let me start from the beginning.

My grandfather Valentin Mueller was born in 1891 in Zeilitzheim, lower Franconia in Bavaria. He was one of two sons of the village carpenter and he was baptised a Catholic. When he was thirteen an uncle priest encouraged him to attend the Kilianeum, the minor seminary at Würzburg .There he graduated in 1911, being 20 years old. After his graduation he started his medical studies to become a surgeon. His studies were interrupted by World War I. There he served as a doctor and saved many wounded soldiers from the front lines. Therefore he was honoured with a silver medal for bravery. At the end of the war he was imprisoned by the British army, but he managed to get free with the help of a trick, as he liked to tell with a smile: "I took some medicine that provoked constant high temperature. So the British thought I would be infected with contagious tuberculosis and sent me home". (unquote)

After returning home he finished his medical studies. He didn't become a surgeon though, but 1919 he started as a medical doctor in his own medical practice - it was just one little room, where he worked and lived - in Emsing, Mittle Franconia.

Two years later he went to Titting nearby to work as the head doctor of a little hospital. When I prepared this talk at home I looked for old photographs and I found a photo of the altar in the small chapell of this hospital with an article, where it says that Dr. Mueller had donated it.

In 1922 he married my grandmother Maria Hofer a merchant's daughter: a beautiful, kindly and quiet woman, which was a perfect complement to my grandfathers temperament. Certainly she had to slow him down sometimes.

Together they had a son called Robert- my father- and a daughter Irmgard, who both became medical doctors. From that time a friend of the Mueller family told us: "although it was quite a bit to ride, especially because of the

bad roads, my father and Valentin came together quite often to operate on patients 'till late in the night after their normal daily work.

Dr Mueller would have called him saying: "Here Mueller mister college, today there is an emergency. Come as soon as possible. After that I've got a few easier cases. Unfortunately the patient is a poor little farmer, so no bill. I will pay for the hospital. Bring your wife. Good bye!" As soon as the two doctors had finished with surgery, mostly in the middle of the night, they came back laughing, making jokes and they seemed to be relaxed and happy about their successful work. Then we had a wonderful supper with wine and lots of tasty food. Valentin liked to make a lot of fun, and when it became too much for Maria, his wife, she would sigh and say: "Oh Valentin"!

In 1933 he left Titting and moved to Eichstätt, because he had difficulties with the Nazis -for example he was never a member of the Nazi party and he was the only doctor in the area to visit sick Jews at home in these times. In Eichstätt he opened a bigger medical practice for the whole area. He worked from early in the morning 'till late in the night. Even on Sundays the people of the region could visit him after mass. In order to give you a closer look at his personality - he was quite a demanding, exacting, but also humorous and generous person - I want to tell you another little episode:

In these times my grandfather was the only one to have a car in the area, so he drove around the villages to look after the sick people:

One day a man on the road stopped him, saying: "Doctor, I've got tooth ache!" Still standing in the middle of the road, doctor Mueller told him to open his mouth. What he saw was a totally black tooth. "I need to pull it out," he said, took his pliers and wanted to do it. But just in that moment the man closed his mouth and bit on the doctor's finger. "Au, you fool, can't you keep your mouth open?" The second and even the third try had the same result. The

man always bit the doctor. All at once Valentin Mueller smagged the man in his face and immediately the man kept his mouth open and the tooth could be pulled out. After this procedure my grandfather asked the farmer: "Why didn't you keep your mouth open right away? Did I really have to smag you?" So the farmer answered: "Why didn't you smag me first, doctor?"

In 1937 Valentin Mueller, 46 years old, bought a house from a Jewish family and paid them in cash to enable them to escape. My parents are still living in this house and I grew up there with my two brothers and one sister. My brother Dominic, a medical doctor as well, continued the practice in the third generation.

In 1939, again in the military he was elevated to the rank of Colonel and took part in the campaigns against Poland, France and Russia. From this period of time my father just recently found some letters his father Valentin used to write to his wife almost every other day. There he tells his family that he was called even to the so called enemies, the civilians, to treat sick people. In one of the letters you can understand his attitude towards people very well. 2 June 1940 he wrote: "It is always the same: as soon as I enter a house you can see the fear and the disinclination in their eyes. Then I start to speak a few words with a soft voice, touch the person's hair gently and take his hands into my hands, so they get calm, and slowly you can see trust develop and grow in his eyes. Misery, pain, disease appear and all at once they are suffering human beings, and not enemy any more. Then they show touching devotion, have great trust and all of them believe that they will recover, when I stay long enough with them. Yesterday a woman wanted to give me three eggs, another one a little bit of ham, a third one wanted to pay. And when I refused their gifts, they started to cry, took my hand, kissed it with many thanks -enough about that.."(unquote) In another letter he wrote: "Today I treated a little four years old girl, which was wounded badly: in the beginning

she shouted and cried, but within a short time she was my little friend and laughed with me.” Or “meanwhile we’ve moved to another destination, but I try to come back every other day to a ten years old girl who has a severe pneumonia and to a severely wounded woman, which I had to leave behind. You don’t believe how the people cried, when I left. When I came back the first time, their first reaction was: tears of joy. Thanks be to God – both are better now. “ (unquote)

It was quite dangerous for him to help as you can hear in another letter: “Because I wanted to do something good for a civilian, I got into a lot of trouble. But I trust that every good deed will be rewarded. “

In a further letter he indicates that he was threatened and watched within the army because of his religious attitude. He writes: “How do we need the Our Father. And how few like to pray it today. For my part I do need our Lord very much. These days I corrected another soldier who cursed. Nobody wanted to support me. However I got to stop him. Even though being alone I am not afraid. I don’t blame others for their opinions, but I don’t accept that they attack, what is holy to me.” I think that these words speak volumes about my grandfather’s character.

In 1942 he was told, to build up the first military hospital in Stalingrad. Several days before the Red Army surrounded the city, he was sent to Lourdes in order to establish a division for medical transport. As head of that division he arrived in Italy in 1943. He learned of the General’s plan to establish a military hospital in Assisi. He was interested in becoming the director of this institution and thanks to his initiative and perseverance these plans could come true in February 1944 ... Later he was made commander of the city of Assisi. Only a few months after that he became a US prisoner of war.



In 1945 he returned to Eichstätt to resume his work in his medical practice. Like in Assisi, he attended mass at the Capucins in Eichstatt every morning at 6 o'clock before work, which seemed to be very important for him. My grandmother told, that one day she wouldn't wake him up for mass, because he was up half the night because of an emergency. So she thought he would need his sleep. Valentin however reprimanded her, saying: "Why didn't you wake me up? You know how I need it."

Also in Eichstätt he was esteemed as a very generous person, who helped wherever people needed help. An old man told my Aunt Imgard: "When I was small, my mother died and my family really had a hard time: we were 9 children, a father, but no mother and very little money. What I remember as it would be yesterday, was that on the following christmas eve all at once Dr. Mueller visited us with us with his car full of toys. What a joyfull surprise for us on that first christmas without our mum."

Every day he invited two pupils from poor families to his table for lunch and also treated the poors for free.

In 1950 he was invited with his family to Assisi: The city gave him a hero's welcome, like Father Andre told you already.

Unfortunately already in spring 1951, my grandfather fell severely ill: there was something wrong with brain. He himself had noticed it. The tests he made of his handwriting at regular intervals were deteriorating fast. It was a lung cancer which had already travelled to his brain. Only six weeks after he had stopped working, he died 60 year old in a hospital in Munich. One of his last visitors was his very close friend Father Antonio Cairoli, the General Postulator of the Conventuals in Rome. When Father Cairoli got to know about my grandfather's bad condition he immediatly went to see him.

My grandfather is buried in Eichstätt in the small graveyard of the city with the basilica San Francesco on his tombstone.

In preparing this talk I got to know my grandfather much more deeply – although I never got to know him personally – anyway I am very impressed by his deep trust in God , his courageous faith and his constant energy to help people in need.

I want to finish with a 5 minutes film, which shows Valentin Mueller with his family, when he was free for a few days.

At the end of my talk I 'd like to express my gratitude and the gratitude of my family to the university, and especially to you Margret to honour my grandfather Dr. Valentin Mueller.

Josef Raischl SFO



War knows no beauty and recognizes no art. It is a question of life and death, of victory and defeat. Destruction and devastation are its inevitable consequences. Soldiers can only show mercy and compassion in thinking of their homeland. What good are guarantees? What is the use of neutral zones? Military advantage is the first rule of war in every age.

#### THE STRATEGY THAT SAVED ASSISI

F. Santucci has collected and published in 1994 in Assisi 1943-44 Documenti Per Una Storia.

Santucci's task was caring for the valuable archives of the Cathedral and Chancery. He has painstakingly examined all the documents of the many archives in the city and has succeeded in giving us a thorough view of this historical period

Protoconvent at Rivotorto - 16 June 1944, the day before the liberation, chronicle: "At about five o'clock in the evening the bells were tolling for the funeral of a deceased as is our custom, the bell tolling was prolonged. Suddenly there was automatic weapons fire against the door of the convent and the community was alarmed. A voice shouted out to them that they were being accused of treason because of the tolling of the bells, the flag flying over the church and the closed doors. The German soldiers forced them to line up and aimed their rifles at them." When one friar begged for mercy he moved one soldier. The adventure closed with a few kicks..."By seven o'clock everything was peaceful. ... In the darkness of the night we could see clearly the fires coming from Montecatini and the Costanzi mill and an immense German tank which had been set afire by the retreating troops some 200 meters away from the church. Perhaps it was these fires that caused the

Allies to turn their cannons on us, because at eleven o'clock a terrible bombardment began. It lasted for two hours. ... All the windows of the church and convent were shattered. The window frames, door frames and doors were reduced to rubble. A main wall of the house had been penetrated by a howitzer shell, which had landed in the roomful of beds, which was nothing but a mass of twisted iron. Everywhere they looked there were marks on the ceiling, chunks taken out of the walls, and holes in the eaves. Late in the morning of 17 June some cannon shells fired by the retreating German troops struck the Abbey of San Pietro and the monastery of the French Collettine nuns. Some shells even grazed the dome of Santa Maria degli Angeli. At the Porta San Giacomo two people were killed and several wounded. Several pieces of shrapnel fell near Porta San Francesco killing and wounding people. Some of the shells hit the road where the Allied troops were passing.”

In the chronicles of the Capuchin Convent in Assisi it reads like that: “16 June: This evening was infernal. The retreating Germans gave vent to their anger, setting fire to everything and ruining even more than they could. The whole plain around Assisi was alight with the dancing of the flames. Mills, silos, body shops, all types of storage areas were set afire. Bridges, stations and villas were blown apart. ... 17 June: With the retreat of the Germans the city was immediately arrayed in British and American flags ... The Germans had taken up positions in the surrounding hills and seen the British enter the city which they had not been allowed to enter ... Therefore they began to fire upon the city ...”

I hope that these flashlights into the most dangerous time highlight the danger of destruction for Assisi. I hope it also makes clear that saving Assisi was certainly not just the work of one person. More than one courageous person helped in realizing the strategy of saving Assisi.

Let me give you now an historic overview on how the war and politics were developing

25 July 1943 Fascism is overthrown in Italy. Mussolini is captured by the king – governor Badoglio takes over.

8 September When the radio announces that Italy is joining the Allied Forces British and American troops land in southern Italy. The Civil war in Italy is starting. The “occupation” by the Germans is starting.

9 September The Germans occupy Assisi.

12 September Mussolini is freed by the Germans and brought to Munich

22 Sept proclaims the Repubblica Sociale Italiana

16 October The Germans begin their purge of the Jewish ghetto in Rome.

30 October Allied planes bomb the Sant’ Egidio Airport near Assisi.

1944

7 January Seventeen Assisians die in the bombardment of Sant’Egidio.

1 March Müller is named commander of the German troops in Assisi.

23/24 March 33 SS members are killed in Rome and take terrible revenge in killing hundreds

11 May The Abbey of Montecassino is bombed and completely destroyed.

- 30 May            Bishop Giovanni Battista Montini, Vatican Secretariat of State writes a letter to Fr. Hess announcing the acceptance of Assisi being a “hospital city” – the diplomatic efforts were crowned with success.  
Not communicated officially till 21 June
- 31 May            General Kesselring, Supreme Commander of German troops in Italy, agrees to declare Assisi a “hospital city”. The Generalissimo prohibited the occupation of the city of Assisi by other troops or commands of the Wehrmacht.
- 4 June            Rome is liberated by the Allied troops.
- 16 June           German troops, together with the wounded, leave Assisi.
- 17 June           The Allies establish a new municipal government in Assisi.

The diplomatic efforts to protect Assisi start very early, in 1941. But Assisi was not saved because of the invaluable artistic treasures it housed. If that had been the real reason Assisi was saved, how could we explain the fact that the Abbey of Montecassino—of no less importance culturally and spiritually than the city of St. Francis—was destroyed. Even the statement the city owed its salvation primarily to the fact that it had been proclaimed a hospital city is not the complete truth. The aim always has been to block some dangerous development which tried to turn Assisi into an active military center,

Listen for example to a letter by Bede Hess to the Vatican summarizing the efforts as far in december 1943: “Two German military hospitals have been established in Assisi ... quite near the Basilica. Other buildings in various

parts of the city complete the hospital structure. The Subasio, Giotto and Savoia Hotels, all very near the Basilica, house German officers and troops. The airfields of Foligno and Perugia ... have already been affected by recent fighting. Airplanes from both sides continually fly over Assisi, striking the surrounding areas. ..." Hess adds some informational material to the letter: "In addition to the two German military hospitals, other buildings have been requisitioned and occupied in various parts of the city so that Assisi is taking on an increasingly military character... Many officials and pilots of the airfield of Perugia, closer to Assisi, are being lodged in the Hotels... Such hotels close to the Basilica could draw hostile air bombardment. Squads of workers from Assisi are requisitioned each day and taken to the nearby airfield for military work. The greater effectiveness of the camp itself for defensive action and placement of arms constitutes a serious threat to Assisi." Added to this was railway and road traffic—almost entirely of a military nature, danger of the possibility of storing munitions in the basement of the military hospitals, searches conducted by the Germans, trouble frequently caused by drunken German soldiers and their numerous threats to blow everything up should they have to retreat so that it could not be used by the enemy.

All of this paper work had to be done and certainly laid the ground for Mueller's work. Nobody else really could do his part. Don Aldo Brunacci states: "We must conclude that the two people most responsible for saving Assisi were Bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini, and Colonel Valentin Müller. ... With the Bishop's help, he realized that the only way to save the city would be to increase the number of hospitals in it so that it could be proclaimed a "hospital city." The Bishop worked closely with him in this matter. He

was sure that this was the only way they could save the city of St. Francis, for whom Müller, as a Catholic, had a great love.

Nicolini and Mueller were carved from the very same wood, we would say in German. To get only a brief insight into Nicolini's character listen to a Jewish refugee: "During the last period of the occupation the episcopal palace of Bishop Nicolini had become an asylum for a great number of refugees and persons who were being persecuted. Nonetheless, when I went to him to ask if, in the case of extreme difficulty, he could house me and my family, with great simplicity and a gentle smile, he said: 'There is no room left except my bedroom and my office. However, I can sleep in my office. The bedroom is yours.' "

I think this speaks volume about this true pastor. The saving of Assisi was especially due to the intimate communication between the bishop and the colonel. If there was danger it immediately was communicated between them. And Mueller, of course, was the one, who energetically put the ideas into practice.

Müller took up his assignment in February, 1944. We know that he was already present in the city on 5 December 1943 for a concert of spiritual music. On that occasion the Bishop of Assisi was seated next to Müller. Several times he was invited by the Bishop. Frequently he met the Custos of St. Francis' Basilica, (Catholic that he was, he attended daily Mass and Communion)

Müller had told Fr. Bonaventura Mansi: "You continue your work, and I'll do what I can on my part."

Clearing the city of all military activities was working this way: the people would alert the Colonel of a problem and he would resolve it right away.



Listen to Mr. Checconi noting the following to the Colonel: "Enclosed is a statement from the Abbess of the Monastery of St. Clare in which she complains that the German military has stored some 120 drums of petroleum near the sanctuary and many military vehicles park under the arches of the Basilica and the adjacent piazza. I must take this occasion to point out the danger caused by the presence of mobile radio transmitters in various parts of the city. I must also point out that the custodian of the medieval Rocca has informed me that in recent days German troops have installed a telephone line from the large tower to the small tower of the fortress itself. This certainly gives the impression that the monument may also be utilized by the German armed forces."

Müller did manage to convince the German authorities to remove the German military police from the Hotel Giotto and the aviators from the Hotel Subasio. Müller immediately tried to cut through the red tape to get the status of either a hospital city or open city for Assisi, according to international law. According to the Geneva Convention of the Red Cross, no fighting forces were allowed in a hospital city. The law of the Hague ordered that all military personnel must be removed from an open city. All of this must be accepted by both sides. But the German headquarters in Berlin delayed such a declaration until the front line approached the city in question, thus trying to avoid tactical disadvantages. So Müller's first efforts were in vain. The Medical Colonel then took matters into his own hands. He sent the remaining troops out of the city, locked the gates at night, and placed guards as well as signs on the gates and walls to keep the withdrawing German troops from entering. Müller did not have the authority to act as he did. Nevertheless, the Colonel's persistence finally paid off.

However, even very engaged people like Fr. Mansi didn't follow through completely. The Conventuals refused to let Mueller use the upper floor of the

Theological College up to 5 June. Colonel Müller was designating other buildings of the city for use as military hospitals.

On 31 May...Müller and four other officers went to San Vitale where the Bishop was celebrating a parish feast. The Colonel asked the Bishop to grant him the use of the Pontifical Seminary of Umbria as a military hospital - for the use of that large complex just below Assisi on the old road to the Porziuncola. The Bishop knew quite well that the seminary was the property of the Holy See, but because of the city's more compelling interest, he did not hesitate to grant the Colonel's request. Although the Bishop knew he should have first asked the Holy See, the owner of the complex, for such permission, he nonetheless told the German Colonel that he could certainly house wounded German soldiers in the seminary. As we have noted before, when news of that concession reached the Vatican, it provoked the wrath of Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries.

The Bishop's decision was critical for Assisi's safety. If, in fact, the regional seminary had not been conceded for the care of the wounded, it would have certainly been requisitioned by the SS or other German troops. That would have inevitably provoked a reaction from the Allies, and thus the bombing of the area immediately adjacent to the city. Therefore, in the afternoon of 3 June 1944, the Umbrian Regional Seminary received its first wounded German soldiers.

Another decisive action of the Bishop to remove the threat of Allied bombing was that "several times he used" all his influence to "prevent the occupation of the house of Mr. Tibetio Gualdi by the German military forces," since that villa was situated right at Assisi's gates, on the road to Santa Maria degli Angeli. For some time a German division had been lodged there, but they were officially used for medical work, taking care of the treatment of the

German wounded. In reality, however, more than once the Allied airplanes heading for the airfield of Sant'Egidio were greeted by anti-aircraft fire from Villa Gualdi. The Bishop called Colonel Müller, who saw to it that the German division was immediately removed from Villa Gualdi, and he placed another small hospital there.

Müller went also to Foligno for a meeting with Marshall Kesselring and expressed his concern that the retreating German troops might occupy the city. Kesselring then informed him that he would issue a special order forbidding German military troops from entering Assisi.

Müller's generous and self-sacrificing work, however, was not yet finished. When, in fact, the first retreating German troops arrived on the plain below Assisi, the Colonel placed guards around the clock at all the gates of the city, using his own hospital personnel, to prevent the German troops from entering the city. He also had a barricade placed at Santa Maria degli Angeli, also near Santa Maria delle Grazie, to make the last retreating German troops understand that they were not to go up to Assisi. Indeed, Müller knew that Assisi's salvation was in the city remaining completely demilitarized until the front had completely passed it by. As the Anglo-American troops drew nearer he received orders to evacuate the 2,000 German wounded and the hospital personnel. He took personal command of the whole operation to make sure that no harm was done to anything that was being abandoned—buildings, furnishings, equipment. The convoy of the wounded left the city on the morning of 15 June and Müller entrusted it to the command of his assistant. He wanted to remain in Assisi until the very last moment.

The Allies were already on the plain between Foligno and Rivotorto. The German rear guard arrived that very same day at Santa Maria degli Angeli. There was a risk that those German soldiers might come up to Assisi to set

up positions. Müller alone was capable of averting that danger. It is true that there were very exact promises not to do that, made by Kesselring the previous month, but there was still a danger. Moreover, the rear guard was a battalion of SS troops, known for their atrocities and autonomy. If they had decided to go to Assisi it would be the end of all the diplomatic efforts which had been going on for ten months. In fact, the presence of SS troops in Assisi would have inevitably provoked an Allied attack upon the city.

Therefore, as night fell on 15 June, Müller positioned himself outside the main gate of Assisi. From the valley he heard the sounds of demolition and could see the striking images of buildings set afire by the angry SS troops.

The next day some of the SS troops came up to Assisi. Müller and they began a heated debate, but the verbal exchange did not last long. It was long enough, however, for him to convince the German rear guard to abandon the city. Assisi was safe! Shortly after midnight on 16 June Colonel Müller and his division set out on the road leading north.

Let me close with only touching on the “Storia Medicinali”

a great quantity of medicine and medical equipment that Colonel Müller, after the retreat of German troops, left behind in the city at great risk to himself.

We don't know anything about the consequences for him by Berlin.

Unfortunately, a large part of this material was lost. By Don Aldo Brunacci I was told that Fr. Rufino Nicacci played not a very good role in this loss. He must have helped a Jewish family to bring the equipment to the North of Italy – anger of bishop Nicolini

Opening a pharmaceutical factory and so on

In 1984 the Jewish director Alexander Ramati, who came to Assisi as an Allied war Journalist after the liberation, made a movie based on his novel Assisi Clandestina, publ. in Italian first in 1982. The film, shot at original sites in Assisi, had Maximilian Schell portray Müller. Schell once said he would never again accept the role of a German officer in a film. Yet, getting to know some of Müller's person and character, he accepted the role.

The movie creates its own history, a romanzo, as Don Aldo Brunacci calles it. Especially the role of friar Rufino Nicacci, guardian of San Damiano at the time and certainly someone who supported the refugees, becoming friend also with some of them.

and since it was a jewish family and Ramati, the author and director, was a Jew, they invented that Assisi was saved by two Jews stealing a blank order of Marshall Kesselring and thereby making Assisi a hospital city. And they could afford to get James Mason as Nicolini, Ben Cross as Nicacci and Max. Schell as Valentin Mueller. And the ones who watch the movie believe of course what they see.

Bishop Nicolini after the liberation continued to follow this strategy of keeping the city free of military. And thanks be to God: up to our days Assisi is still alive and safe thanks to the courage and faith of people like the bishop and the colonel.