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In search of Swiss concentration camp victims

A postman's passion

For at least 20 years Laurent Favre has been seeking out the names of Swiss citizens who were sent to German concentration camps during the Second World War. Here is the portrait of a man for whom this byway of history is a passionate hobby.

A current view of history has it that Switzerland was able to keep out of the Second World War – to remain neutral – mainly because of its pragmatic foreign and economic policies towards Germany and Italy. This means that it can be very easily accused of fellow-travelling and even of a share

barbarism of the Nazis". A whole room full of files, books and all sorts of other documents shows that there is plenty of evidence for this.

His great adventure started more than 20 years ago. "I was always a great

René Lenzin

reader", says the postman of the little village of Dorénaz, near Martigny, Canton Valais, "and one day I came across a Swiss name in a book about concentration camps". He was 23 at the time, and neither he nor his family had been directly affected by the war. But he was nevertheless gripped by the subject, and from that time on he spent an average of 10 to 15 hours a week of his free time compiling a list of deported Swiss nationals. Favre already has



Memorial tablet for Swiss victims of concentration camps at Mauthausen, Austria. (Photo: Favre archives)

has involved searching with a tooth-comb through document after document for the details he needs. In the incredibly long concentration camp registers – where these existed – Swiss citizens were not always marked as such. In addition, this father of three has sometimes found himself short of money. He has already spent several thousand Swiss francs on his hobby, and funds are running out. An impressive number of lists of names should be sent to municipal authorities throughout Switzerland, but Favre can't afford either the research fees or the postage. A case of stamps being too heavy for the postman to bear!

But Laurent Favre is not about to give up. The amount of names he has already confirmed represent no mean success. And it was on his initiative that a tablet at Mauthausen camp in Austria was dedicated to the memory of Swiss citizens interned there. This is exactly what he wants: to have it known far and wide that there were also Swiss citizens in the camps. Sometimes he has the feeling that his efforts are valued more highly abroad than they are in Switzerland. He finds this frustrating, but he is not to be discouraged. "I'm a postman, not a professor", he says wryly as he closes his books. There is no doubt at all that he has enough work to fill the next 20 years. ■

Appeal

Anyone who knows the name of a Swiss citizen who was held in a concentration camp during the Second World War is requested to get in touch with Laurent Favre. He will be grateful for any information. His address:

Laurent Favre
Champ d'Amont
CH-1905 Dorénaz

Laurent Favre's workroom: he collects everything to do with German concentration camps. (Photo: RL)

in responsibility for all that happened. But in reply to this, Laurent Favre points out "that there were also Swiss citizens who actively rose up against the

about 150 names, and he thinks there may be at least as many again. It is very difficult to discover how many of these survived the horrors of the concentration camps. Most of the victims were Swiss Abroad – members of resistance movements who were taken for political reasons.

Favre has had to surmount numerous obstacles in carrying out his research. It

