FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Diary of a Prisoner in World War I: 1914-1917

Josef □rámek
Tomá□Svoboda, translator
CreateSpace (Aug 15, 2012)
Softcover $9.99 (114pp)
978-1-4791-2681-1

At the start of World War I, Josef □rámek, a young Czech textile worker, found himself drafted into the Austrian army. As part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia fell under the empire's rule, and the twenty-two-year-old had no alternative but to serve. Loyal to the Czech national movement, □rámek wanted nothing to do with the Austrian cause, but he had no choice. From the day he finished basic training in 1914 through the end of August 1916, he kept a diary, which his grandson Tomá□Svoboda has now translated and published as *Diary of a Prisoner in World War I*. The book offers an astonishing view of one soldier's tremendously challenging, disheartening, and life-threatening experiences during a war that he and many others never wanted and never understood.

"We are going to kill people who have done us no wrong," □rámek starts. "It is hard for me to part with our beautiful homeland." Hiking from Plze□to the Serbian front, he encounters the first of many hardships. Extreme heat followed by deep mud, lack of food and water, and dysentery and lice make the trek almost impossible. After only two weeks, he admits, "I cannot go any farther. I am out of strength." The war has not yet even started for his battalion, yet the troops are already exhausted. "What will it be like when we are on the front?" □rámek wonders. His question is answered in only a matter of days, and what has seemed impossible up to this point is now minor compared with what is to come.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this young soldier's diary is his succinct, often unemotional presentation. "Serbs killed our corporal when he was on patrol," he says in one entry, followed by, "Beautiful weather. Jupa went shopping." Most of his entries are short, undoubtedly of necessity, yet he does occasionally philosophize. Even then, his words are brief: "Miraculously, I survived," he says one day, and, "It is really strange that I have been escaping an injury or death so far," on another. In a much later entry, he allows, "We are killing our best times here—what I could experience at home if there were not that damned war." Nothing can make him believe in what he is doing.

Barely three months after his enlistment, □rámek is captured by the Serbs and spends the rest of the war as a prisoner. His diary offers chilling details about his ongoing imprisonment: stretches of three, four, and even six days without food; no shoes or appropriate clothing in the freezing temperatures; deadly fevers; forced work details; forced marches; and violent treatment at the hands of his captors.

□rámek's diary is both informative and eye-opening. His grandson has done a masterful job putting it into a format accessible to a broad audience. There are some issues with the text itself, including a few oddities that are probably mistranslation, some abrupt font-size changes, and more than a few spacing errors. But overall, *Diary of a Prisoner in World War I* is a must-read for any student or aficionado of twentieth-century history. No historian could have written a more poignant tale.
CHERYL HIBBARD (November 21, 2012)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.