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# Heroes or Terrorists? War, Resistance, and Memorialization in Tuscany, 1943-1945

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# HEROES OR TERRORISTS?

WAR, RESISTANCE, AND MEMORIALIZATION IN TUSCANY, 1943-1945

by

LYNDA LAMARRE

(Under the Direction of Charles S. Thomas)

## ABSTRACT

This thesis will delve into the unfolding of the Italian Resistance, from an underground association to a militant organization, which aided and facilitated the Allied advance to northern Italy. Particular emphasis will be placed on the actions and consequences of the Resistance in rural Tuscany and their affect on the local population. It will examine the changing views of Italian society, from the immediate post-war era and the decades that followed, with a brief examination of the cinematographic influences on the social views. It will include the debate over who deserves a commemorative monument and the divided and changed memory regarding the Resistance. Finally, the author will examine the current debate over the most appropriate way to memorialize the complicated and tumultuous struggle to free Italy over sixty years ago.

**INDEX WORDS:** Partisans, Italian resistance, Fascism, Tuscany, World War II, Massacres, Retaliations, Memorializations.

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by

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

ANPI	Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani
CLN	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale
CTLN	Comitato Toscano di Liberazione Nazionale
DC	Democrazia Cristiana
GAP	Gruppi di Azione Patriottica
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PDA	Partito d'Azione
RSI	Repubblica Sociale Italiana
SIM	Servizio Informazioni Militari
SOE	Special Operations Executive



## GLOSSARY

**Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani.** Italian National Association of Partisans.

**Attendisti.** Those who wait.

**Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale.** Committee for National Liberation.

**Comitato Toscano di Liberazione Nazionale.** Tuscan Committee for National Liberation.

**Democrazia Cristiana.** Christian Democrat Party.

**Duce.** Leader.

**Gruppi di Azione Patriottica.** Groups of Patriotic Action.

**Movimento Sociale Italiano.** Italian Socialist Movement – the post-war neo-Fascist Party.

**Padrone.** Master.

**Partito Comunista Italiano.** Italian Communist Party.

**Partito d’Azione.** Action Party.

**Rastrellamento.** Raking. The search for eligible men for conscription.

**Repubblica di Saló.** Saló Republic. Other name for the Italian Social Republic, the puppet government set up by Hitler with Mussolini as figure-head, with its capital in the town of Saló, Northern Italy.

**Repubblica Sociale Italiana.** Italian Social Republic.

**Risorgimento.** Resurgence. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century movement for Italian unification that culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

**Ronda.** Military patrol.

**Servizio Informazioni Militari.** Service of Military Information.

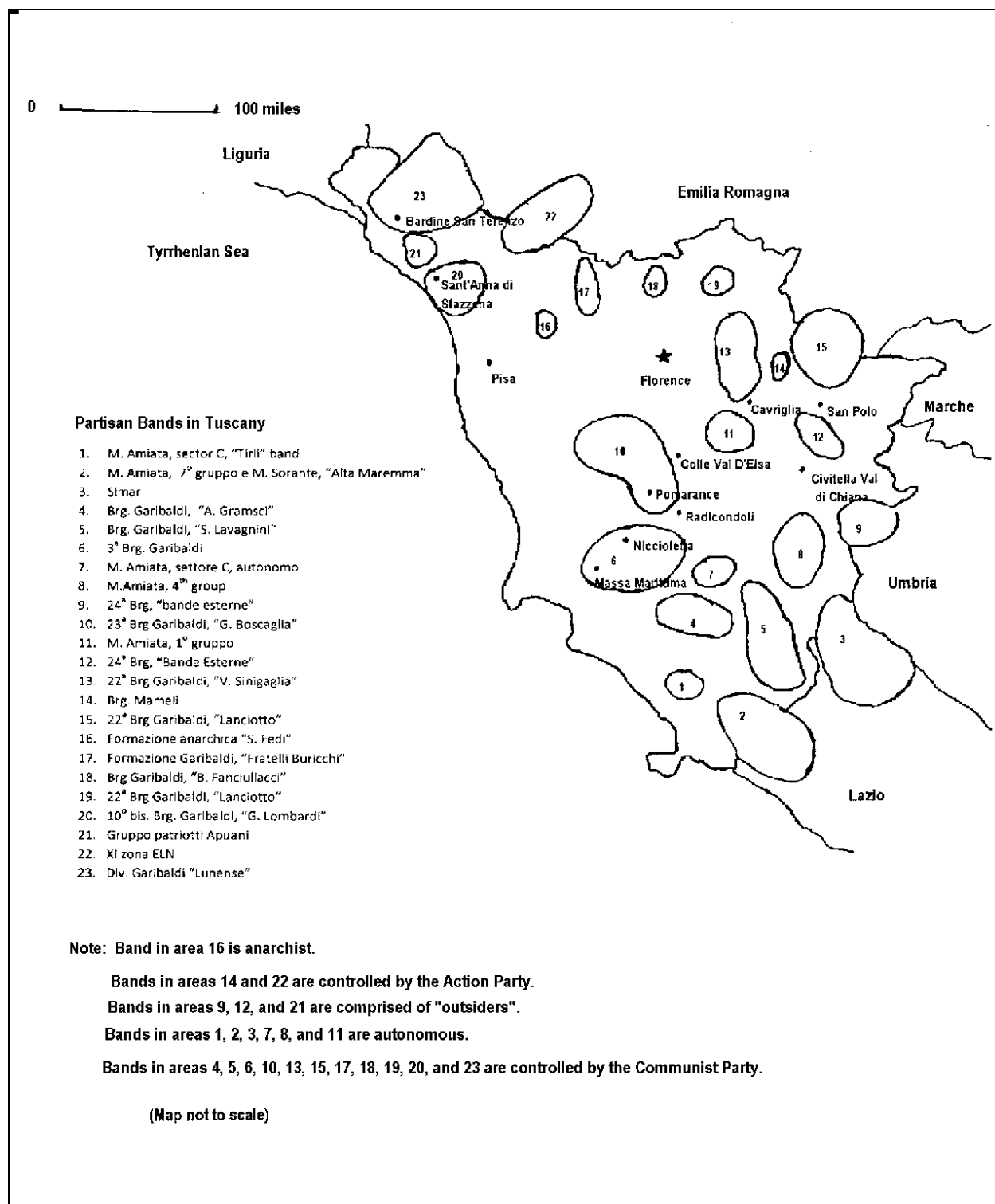
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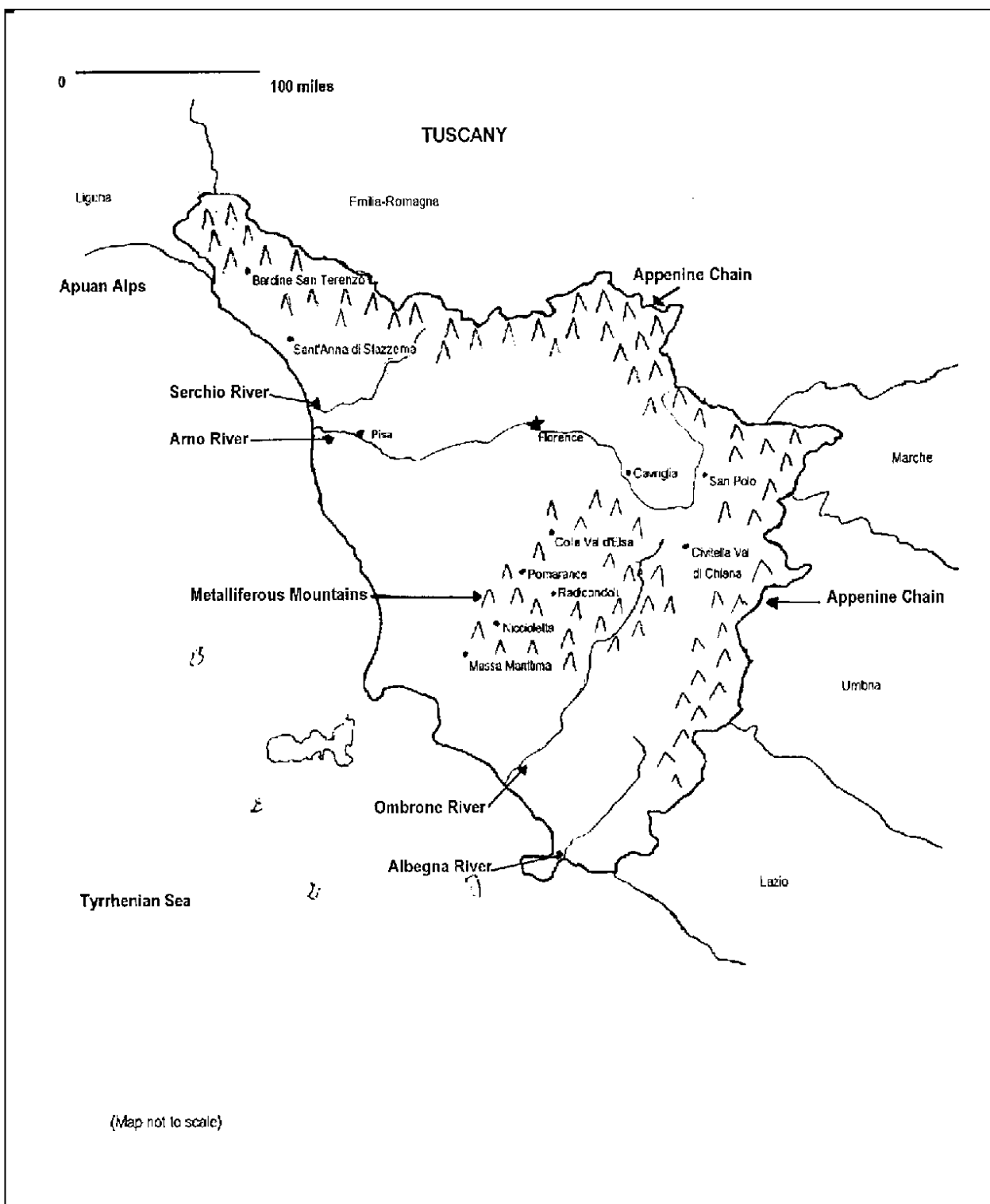
Map 1

Map of Italy with two major German defensive lines and Italian cities of interest.



## Map 2

Map of Tuscany with locations of Partisan bands and areas of massacres.



**Map 3**

**Topographic map of Tuscany.**

## INTRODUCTION

Is the Italian Partisan in the Second World War a hero or a terrorist? Until a few years ago the question would not have been debated. Most agreed that the Partisan was a hero fighting to free his country of the brutal invader who, through the use of terror, had transformed his independent people into quasi-slaves with no say in their government, lives, or personal behavior. It was during the summer of 2007, at a café in Marina di Pisa that a group of local patrons carried out a heated debate regarding a pending commemoration of the Resistance movement. The debate was over which Partisan group truly deserved to be recognized for an act of sabotage in the city of Pisa. The discussion was passionate, as is typical of any Italian political or sports debate, and while the volume continued to escalate and men continued to promote which group they believed to be the true heroes, an old gentleman mumbled, “Heroes, what heroes? They were terrorists, all of them. They were no better than the terrorists of 9-11. All cowards!” His comments sparked questions about the reason for his resentment. His response was that the Partisans had brought more suffering to his town than the Fascists or Germans ever did. According to his account, the Partisans stole from the locals, brought trouble to the town that had previously been ignored by the Germans, and after committing petty crimes against the locals and the Germans, ran away to the hills and safety, leaving the local civilian population to deal with the repercussions. They did not act honorably but behaved like thugs who took advantage of the situation to subdue the local population, depriving them of whatever they deemed necessary to the Resistance’s

effort. Instead of protecting the innocent civilians, they sacrificed them with their bravados.<sup>1</sup>

So, is the Partisan a hero or a terrorist? The question is very simple. The answer is anything but simple; it depends on one's political view, personal experiences, and time in history. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines Partisan as one who displays "a firm adherence to a party, faction, cause, or person; especially, one exhibiting blind, prejudiced, and unreasonable allegiance." This meaning describes those who joined the Partisan movement for political ideology but leaves out large sections of people who joined the movement for a myriad of reasons which were not necessarily political. Merriam-Webster's second definition of Partisan is "a member of a body of detached light troops making forays and harassing the enemy; a member of a guerrilla band operating within enemy lines." This description of military operations ascribes a nationalistic quality to the Partisans as freedom fighters who were trying to defeat the Germans and Fascists.<sup>2</sup>

The Italian Partisan has been portrayed by many as a patriot, motivated by political ideology, who fought the Fascist regime and the enemy invader who suppressed the Italian people. The Partisan is often romanticized by being depicted as a fighter, who through self-sacrifice, continued endangerment, and acts of heroism fought to liberate Italy. In reality, those who initially opposed Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s were

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion by unidentified individuals witnessed by the author.

<sup>2</sup> *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "partisan," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/partisan> (accessed March 23, 2009).

quickly silenced by Mussolini's administration through exile, imprisonment or death. Those who eluded the Fascist control went into voluntary exile or stayed underground until the fall of Mussolini and the Fascist regime.<sup>3</sup> The biggest single event that prompted the formation of various groups of Italian combatants didn't take place until the fall of the Fascist government on 25 July 1943, when the resisters saw for the first time a real opportunity to take control of their lives and fight for the freedom of their country.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a hero as "a mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent with great strength or ability; an illustrious warrior; a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities; one that shows great courage." The definition of a terrorist is "one who uses violence or the threat of violence, against the civilian population, usually for the purpose of obtaining political or religious goals." The definition of terrorism has undergone a transformation with time. The original meaning of "terrorism," a term coined during the French Revolution, was the embodiment of virtue and democracy, purposeful for the creation of a better society; a definitely positive description. It was only with time that the term was negatively transformed into representing random and indiscriminate acts associated with abuse of office and power.<sup>4</sup>

If a Partisan performs an act of sabotage against a much stronger and better equipped enemy, does his courage make him a hero? If that same act of violence against

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<sup>3</sup> Additional information on pre-dictatorship anti-Fascist movements can be found in Charles F. Delzell, *Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Stanislao G. Pugliese, *Carlo Rosselli: Socialist Heretic and Anti-Fascist Exile* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); R.J.B Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Dictatorship 1915-1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3-4.



the enemy results in injury to the civilian population, either through the act itself or enemy retaliation to it, is the perpetrator a terrorist? Even worse, is the Partisan a terrorist against his own people? None of the above descriptions can explain what constitutes a Partisan and the complex make-up of what became the Italian Resistance movement. Partisanship was a multifaceted issue at the time and continues to be debated, with an ever-changing impact on Italian people and their history.

The description of Partisans, heroes, and even terrorists does not pertain to a myriad of people who were directly or indirectly involved in the Italian Resistance movement. Beyond the minority of fighters who intentionally joined the Resistance for political ideology were a majority of individuals who involved themselves with the movement due to circumstances and/or basic moral beliefs that induced them to perform acts considered subversive by the enemy. The deeds included basic “Christian” or humane acts toward fellow humans, whether Italians or escaped Allied prisoners of war, that had no political motivation. Some became involuntarily caught up in the Resistance through threats or circumstances, others made a conscious decision to put themselves and their families in danger by “doing the right thing” and protecting those they considered persecuted innocents or heroes fighting a Goliath.

This thesis will delve into Italian Partisanship, with particular emphasis on rural Tuscany. It will briefly examine the cinematographic influence on the changing view regarding Italian society from the immediate post-war era and the decades that followed. It will include the debate over who deserves a commemorative monument and the divided and changed memory regarding the Resistance. Finally, the author will examine

the current debate over the most appropriate way to memorialize the complicated and tumultuous struggle to free Italy over sixty years ago.

## CHAPTER 1

### TURMOIL AND CONFUSION IN ITALY

#### Brief history of events leading to Fascism and the rise of Mussolini

Benito Mussolini rose to power fairly easily. The Italian unification (1861-1870) had drawn borders around the new nation state of Italy but did nothing to unify the people.<sup>5</sup> Most industry was still concentrated in the northern part of the country while the south had few roads, lacked railways, and remained primarily rural and agricultural. The northern Italians considered the southerners ignorant and backward, while the southerners viewed the northerners as just a new set of *padroni* (masters). Cultural differences were enormous; the north had a definite Germanic trait imposed by years of Austrian rule while the southern culture was a mixture of Greek, Arabic, Spanish and French influences. Carlo Levi's book, *Christ stopped at Eboli*, describes both the northerner's concept of the southerner's almost primitive culture and the southerner's distrust of the

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<sup>5</sup> Detailed information on nationalism and the rise of liberalism in Europe can be found in: E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789 – 1848* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962); Melvin Kranzberg, *1848: A Turning Point?* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1959); W.E. Mosse, *Liberal Europe: The Age of Bourgeois Realism 1848 – 1875* (London: Thames and Hudson LTD, 1974). Specific information on the Italian Risorgimento can be found in: Albert Russell and Krystyna Von Henneberg, *Making and remaking Italy: the cultivation of national identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Kent Roberts Greenfield, *Economics and Liberalism in the Risorgimento: a study of nationalism in Lombardy, 1814-1848* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1934); Attilio Marinai e Giovanni Pirodda, *La cultura meridionale e il Risorgimento* (Roma: Laterza, 1975); Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: state, society, and national unification* (London: Routledge, 1994).

northerner. Levi was a northerner who was “exiled” to the southern town of Eboli in 1935 for being anti-Fascist.<sup>6</sup>

The religious-political gap was very distinctive; in the north, intellectuals pushed for social reform and political involvement in a constitutional monarchy which would allow people’s participation in the progress of their new nation. Most southerners were not accustomed to involvement in government and were more interested in owning a piece of land and being left in peace. In the north, religion was separated from politics, while in the south, the Church maintained a stronghold on the people. With the exception of the enclave around the Vatican palace, the Papal States had been annexed during the unification of Italy. The Pope was offered nominal sovereignty, church income, and guaranteed exemption from taxes; however, the king would have sovereignty over governmental affairs. The Pope refused these conditions and preferred a self-imposed internment in the Vatican. He also prohibited “good Italian Catholics” from participating in public affairs in Italy. The issue of Papal versus monarchical sovereignty affected the daily lives of Italians who could not commit their loyalty to one over the other.<sup>7</sup>

The “Roman Question” put pressure on many Italians who were trying to maintain their status as good Catholics while working out their place in current politics. In addition to the dissimilarity in socio-economic, political, and cultural statuses, Italians were divided by language. While the Tuscan Italian was recognized as the “official”

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<sup>6</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli: The Story of a Year* (1947; repr., New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 143.

Italian language, each region had its own distinct dialect with the result that most illiterate or poorly educated people from one region could not understand those from another.<sup>8</sup>

None of these issues had been resolved when Italy entered World War I. In the years leading to World War I, Italy was part of the Triple Alliance (with Germany and Austria-Hungary) in an effort to protect its northern borders from Germanic invasion. Initial adherence to the Triple Alliance had come as a result of Italian frustration over the French annexation of Tunisia. However, due to the unpopularity of its alliance with Austria-Hungary, which had opposed Italian unification, Italy eventually joined the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, and Russia) after secretly signing the Treaty of London on April 26, 1915. The treaty guaranteed Italy the annexation of the Trentino region, Trieste, South Tyrol, Istria, Dalmatia, Fiume, and a portion of German colonies in Africa.<sup>9</sup> The Italian military were poorly trained and equipped but fought on the side of the Allies against their old foe, Austria-Hungary, and its ally, Germany, hoping to share in the partition of Africa and achieve the status of colonizer. The Italian military suffered over 600,000 dead and over 950,000 wounded in the conflict.

At the end of the war the Italians lost trust in the government that had led them into a conflict with the promise of gaining what they perceived as rightfully Italian territories guaranteed to Italy in the Treaty of London but not fully delivered. Italy

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony James Joes, *Mussolini* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Treaty of London, 1915. Parliamentary Papers, London, Li Cmd. 671, Miscellaneous No. 7, 2-7. <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/london1915.html> (accessed March 29, 2009).

annexed some of the promised territories, but neither Dalmatia, nor Fiume, nor Albania was given to Italy at the end of the war. Neither did Italy inherit German colonies.<sup>10</sup> Italy supported the war effort with heavy foreign loans, but after the war other nations had also exhausted their treasuries, and one of the key components of the Italian economy, the tourism industry, floundered. Confronted by falling revenue and rising unemployment, the value of the lira fell to one-thirtieth that of its pre-war level.<sup>11</sup> Many Italians began looking at the Soviet Union as an example of economic success, and left-wing ideology spread.

In the atmosphere of utter discontent, with increasing workers' strikes, contempt for the government, and disunity among the Italians, Benito Mussolini stood out as the deliverer of hope to the Italian people. He began as a prominent journalist who left the Socialist Party after it denounced Italy's involvement in World War I during the war. He then founded a nationalist and strongly interventionist newspaper, the *Popolo d'Italia*. After the war, he built the Fascist movement around himself, focusing initially on nationalism, order, and veterans' interests. Fascism promoted government control over most social programs and aspects of life, but unlike communism, it allowed private property and enterprise. The promise of social reforms appealed to the lower classes, while the assurance of continued private enterprise appealed to the middle classes. Mussolini sent out gangs of thugs to incite riots with the Communists and then used his

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<sup>10</sup> John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 18-19; United Kingdom. "Parliamentary Papers, London, 1920, LI Cmd. 671, Miscellaneous No. 7, 2-7."

<sup>11</sup> Francesco Giavazzi and Luigi Spaventa, *High Public Debt: the Italian Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 190; and Michele Fratianni and Franco Spinelli, *A Monetary History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 122-124.

Blackshirts to restore order. In October 1922 he ordered his forces to march to Rome and take over the government. King Victor Emmanuel responded by giving Mussolini the position of Prime Minister in an attempt to avert a possible civil war. Mussolini continued his manipulations, consolidated his power, and by 1927 was dictator of Italy. His charisma, his eventual endorsement by the king, his proposal to truly unify the Italian people and restore national greatness and prosperity, and his promise to restore a Roman Empire and develop the economy of the nation, made him the man in whom many Italians put their hopes and trust. Mussolini placated the left wingers with the initiation of social programs. He incorporated some socialist ideas in his plan to advance Italy, to include expanding health services, promoting youth programs for the poorer population, expanding roads and railways into southern Italy, and bringing industry to the south.<sup>12</sup>

Mussolini also solved the “Roman Question” with the Lateran Agreements of 1929 that recognized the Pope as sovereign over the Vatican City State in return for Papal recognition of the existence and sovereignty of the Italian Kingdom that maintained Rome as its capital city.<sup>13</sup> The agreement included a financial compensation to the church for the loss of its territories during the *Risorgimento* and the recognition of Catholicism as the state religion of Italy. Most leading Fascists were instinctively anti-Christian, and not a single important Fascist was known to be a devout Catholic.

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<sup>12</sup> Duggan, 217.

<sup>13</sup> “Holy See and Italy: Lateran Pacts of 1929, <http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/treaty.htm> (accessed March 27, 2011); Holy See and Kingdom of Italy. "Lateran Treaty." February 11, 1929. [www.vaticanstate.va/NR/rdonlyres/3F574885-EAD5-47E9-A547-C3717005E861/2528/LateranTreaty.pdf](http://www.vaticanstate.va/NR/rdonlyres/3F574885-EAD5-47E9-A547-C3717005E861/2528/LateranTreaty.pdf) (accessed March 27, 2011).

Nevertheless, Mussolini realized the political importance of the Church in governing the Catholic masses and used the Lateran Agreements to increase his personal prestige and power.<sup>14</sup>

In the beginning most Italians were not bothered by Mussolini's dictatorial regime or his use of terror against political dissidents. Many believed he brought stability and a promise of prosperity to a nation which had been in a state of disruption for seven decades since the unification of Italy. Hannah Arendt makes a distinction between dictatorial terror and totalitarian terror. The former occurs when the dictator threatens authentic opponents but not harmless citizens without a political opinion; the latter occurs when all citizens are threatened regardless of political opinion. Italy, at least at the beginning, fell under the category of dictatorial regime. Aldo Capitini describes the dictatorial terror and the progression of Fascist power within the high school in Pisa (Tuscany), where students of diverse political thoughts went from freedom to persecution in just one decade, while Niccolo Mezzetti describes the brutal treatment by the Fascists on the alabaster workers in Volterra (Province of Pisa) because of their Resistance to Fascism.<sup>15</sup>

The cult of personality established Mussolini as the *Duce* (leader), strong, bold, and able to transform Italy from a poor and backward nation into an empire to be

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<sup>14</sup> James Joes, 215; Giorgio Angelozzi Gariboldi, *Il Vaticano Nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milano: Mursia, 1992), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1976), 322; Aldo Capitini, "Antifascismo alla Normale di Pisa" in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 17-21; Niccolo Mezzetti, "Festeggiavano la Festa del Lavoro Bastonando Brutalmente i Lavoratori" in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 36.



reckoned with. The *Duce* had an imposing physical presence; he communicated with his body and was the epitome of modern masculinity.<sup>16</sup> Mussolini began the Italian rebirth with the Corfu incident in 1923. Italian forces constituted part of a multinational military detachment authorized by the League of Nations to settle a boundary dispute between Greece and Albania. Four Italian soldiers were murdered in an ambush on August 27, 1923. Mussolini demanded monetary compensation and the execution of the guilty. The Greek government was slow in complying with Mussolini's demands so he retaliated by bombarding the Isle of Corfu and killing civilians. The League of Nations initially condemned Italy but ordered Greece to pay the monetary damages.<sup>17</sup>

Italy gained little by the scuffle, but the pallid international response suggested to Mussolini that the world community was not going to interfere in Italy's intimidating tactics. Nevertheless, Mussolini did not pursue expansion of the empire until his power and the Fascist regime were consolidated in Rome. After a decade-long effort, in 1932 he suppressed rebellious tribesmen in Libya using extreme force and mustard gas.<sup>18</sup> By 1935 the *Duce* felt it was time for Italy to invade Abyssinia (Ethiopia), expand Italy's empire, and take its rightful place as a world power.<sup>19</sup> Italian aggression that year was

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<sup>16</sup> Sergio Luzzatto, *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini's Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy*. Translated by Frederika Randall (New York: Metropolitan Books – Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 16.

<sup>17</sup> John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Duggan, 233.

<sup>19</sup> A general overview of Italian Fascist Foreign policy can be found in: Renzo De Felice, *Interpretations of Fascism*. Translated by Brenda Huff Everett (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Renzo DeFelice, *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente: arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini* (Bologna: Societa' editrice il Mulino, 1988).

condemned by the League of Nations, and severe economic sanctions were imposed. Public condemnation of the Italian invasion by Great Britain and France did not save Ethiopia; it did, however, encourage Mussolini to retaliate in 1936 by joining with Adolph Hitler and declaring the “Rome-Berlin Axis,” a seemingly natural bond between two powers which shared an overtly revisionist international agenda, distrust of Bolshevism, and militaristic nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

Mussolini’s new direction brought with it ominous changes in domestic and racial policies. In 1938, the Fascist government enacted a series of anti-Semitic measures which clearly mimicked those of Nazi Germany. The laws removed Jews from government jobs and prohibited Jewish children from attending public schools. These measures were seen by many Italians as an arbitrary infusion of racial policy from beyond the Alps, and many Italians initially simply did their best to ignore them. Over time however, resentment and revulsion over this baffling turn in Mussolini’s policy would fuel the growing resistance to Fascist policy in Italy.

### **The Mismanagement of War**

Italy entered World War II as Germany’s ally on June 10, 1940. Due to poor leadership, inadequate equipment, and, on occasion, poor motivation on the part of the common soldiers, sailors, and airmen, the Italian military suffered serious reverses. Inter-service rivalry between the Italian army, navy, and air force further hampered the effective prosecution of the war effort. Mussolini’s own role in overseeing war-related

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<sup>20</sup> Gooch, 316.

matters was likewise disruptive. He had taken personal control over the armed forces in 1933, committed to the *Fascistisation* of the military, and believed he had the necessary skills to manage the war effort. However, he based his decisions on intuition rather than consultation with experienced military officers, and he did not address the pressing issue of Italy's outdated war equipment. Instead he insisted that high morale, not technology, was the key to success.<sup>21</sup>

The litany of failures was long. The Italian army's poor showing in the French Alps in the summer of 1940 was followed by a debacle in Greece in the fall. In spring 1941 Italy lost its East African Empire. That same year Mussolini committed over 200,000 Italian troops to Hitler's Russian campaign. In the winter of 1942-1943, most of these forces would be annihilated during the Stalingrad campaign, a sacrifice that seemed particularly senseless to an increasingly Germanophobic Italian populace. Finally, and most famously, between June 1940 and May 1943 Italy lost Libya, its colony for over thirty years.<sup>22</sup>

Morale among Italian soldiers continued to decline as they questioned the purpose of continued impossible objectives. As early as March 1943 an Italian artillery officer tried to explain the attitude of the Italian fighting man in a letter to his girlfriend. He

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<sup>21</sup> Information on the weakness of the Italian armed forces is detailed in John Gooch's *Mussolini and His Generals*; Frederick P. Miller et al., *Royal Italian Army (1914-1946): Royal Italian Army, Military History of Italy During World War II, Military Production During World War II, Italian Invasion of France, Italian Invasion of Egypt* (Mauritius: Alphascript Publishing, 2009); Albano Castelletto's, "The Last Horse Warrior." Translated by Philip Monteleoni. *World War II Magazine* (January 2004 Issue). Detailed information on Italy's technological and industrial shortcoming can be found in Richard Overy's, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: Norton and Co., 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Duggan, 237-238.

tried to define morality and conscience and the need for the individual to adhere to a set of instinctive values comparable to the environment in which he lived.

Even thieves and assassins give a certain value to life and live according to their code. To them, life would not have the same value if they were forced to live under a different code. The Germans give proof of this because they fight for their world and each individual feels its presence and is willing to do whatever it takes to protect it. The same goes for the Russians, and even the British and the Americans. The Italians do not have this imperative. Our moral structure is weak and we do not have the same sense of duty. We have no sense of direction because we have no-one to guide us. We have plenty of courageous men but lack able and responsible individuals.<sup>23</sup>

Adding to the soldiers' moral conflict was the contradictory stance of the Catholic Church which through centuries of political division and foreign occupation remained the one unifying link of the Italian people. Catholics were taught to obey authority but also to have compassion and mercy for all men. The Church failed to denounce the atrocities committed by the Fascists and the Nazis which added to soldiers' sense of loss of leadership and guidance.

By summer 1943 it was Italy's turn to face invasion. On July 9, Allied forces invaded Sicily. The military setbacks also masked a more serious problem within Italy. By this time Mussolini's popularity in Italy had plummeted and many Italians were no longer willing to blindly follow and obey him. Their growing resentment of his pseudo-Nazi policies induced Italians from a variety of backgrounds to participate in protecting those persecuted by the Fascists. Many Italians refused to turn in names of known Jews when the anti-Jewish laws were passed in Italy in 1938. In the city of Pisa there were no

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<sup>23</sup> Bianca Ceva, *5 anni di storia italiana 1940-45 da lettere e diari di caduti*. (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964), 194.

signs of Jewish persecution until the evening of October 28, 1942 when Jewish-owned stores were defaced with writings describing Jews as traitors, spies, parasites, etc., or by breaking the glass windows of the shops.<sup>24</sup> When round-ups began in 1943, entire communities participated in protecting Jewish refugees. A prime example is the town of Nonantola in Emilia Romagna, where in 1943 ninety Jewish children were hidden in the seminary, parish nursery, and private homes until they were safely conducted to Switzerland. All the townspeople kept quiet, and none of the refugees were compromised.<sup>25</sup> The overwhelming majority of Italians would not be accomplices to the deportation and possible murder of the Jews.

The Italians may have suspected but did not know the particulars of the German “final solution,” just that Jews, Jehovah Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other targeted groups were being deported to concentration camps. Italian officials were given no detailed information regarding the deportations and when they tried to inquire were only told that those groups were a threat to society and had to be removed. Italian soldiers returning from the Russian front brought news of some of the horrors. The Italian resolution to not participating in the atrocities was to propose a concentration camp for the Jewish refugees within the Italian controlled area of Croatia. In June 1942

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<sup>24</sup> Vincenzo Lupo Berghini, “Le Leggi Razziali a Pisa,” in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 43.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Bravo, “Armed and unarmed: struggles without weapons in Europe and in Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2005): 471.

General Mario Roatta, commanding general of the area of Slovenia and Dalmatia, suggested interning the Jews in Italian territory to protect them against deportation.<sup>26</sup>

Italian soldiers, diplomats and civil servants refused to obey the orders. This act of defiance by Italian officials took place in September 1942 and is indicative of the dissent that was spreading among even the higher officials.<sup>27</sup> Mussolini was unmoved and mandated the Jews in areas of Italian control be subject to deportation. The *Duce* agreed to the deportation of Serbian Jews; however, he protected Italian Jews and forbade their deportation until September 16, 1943 when the first consignment of Jews was shipped from Italy to Auschwitz.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the military debacles and disillusionment over the Roman rebirth, and the revolting racial laws, another major source of discontent among Italians was the disappointment over labor issues. The labor reforms Mussolini imposed had not improved the lives of the common workers but gave more control to the ruling class. Many of the health and youth programs were beneficial but were also used to indoctrinate the young boys to the Fascist ideology, a fact the Italians did not ignore. In the atmosphere of utter discontent, the Communists sparked Italian Resistance even before

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-43* (New York: Rutledge, 1990), 50-53.

<sup>27</sup> Steinberg, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle. The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 245.

the formation of Partisan combat units; as early as March 1943 factory workers in Turin and Milan began the first large-scale strikes to occur in Axis-dominated Europe.<sup>29</sup>

By 1943 Italy had been at war for eight years; the Italian military had been fighting with outdated weapons and insufficient supplies in battles it was not equipped to win, and it had been poorly led. The fighting had taken place on foreign soil, to expand an empire in which the common man would not benefit. Many Italians felt like puppets being led by another *padrone* in a struggle not theirs. Mussolini, it seems, had brought order to Italy at the cost to the Italians of their personal freedom and their honor. The amount of confusion and split alliances is best described by Iris Origo, who stated that by the spring of 1943 Italians were divided into a myriad of groups to include the Germanophile Fascists, the moderate Fascists, the anti-Fascists (which included Monarchists, Republicans, and some Communists), the Army, the Vatican, the House of Savoy, and the discontented/resentful masses.<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, the three distinct groups that had previously supported the *Duce*, schemed against him by the summer of 1943. The first group of collaborators to withdraw their support comprised of the Crown, clergy, and state bureaucracy. The second group included high-ranking military officials who suffered the humiliation of forcing their poorly trained and equipped troops into battles they were doomed to lose. The third group consisted of members of the National Fascist Party and included

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<sup>29</sup> Dante A. Puzzo, *The Partisans and the War in Italy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 18.

<sup>30</sup> Iris Origo, *War in Val D'Orcia: An Italian War Diary, 1943-1944* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984), 25.

Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, the current Foreign Minister. It was the third group that eventually changed the course of events and led to the fall of Fascism.<sup>31</sup>

Mussolini helped initiate the immediate chain of events that led to his dismissal. In mid-July, in the face of the steadily deteriorating situation in Sicily, Mussolini met with Vittorio Ambrosio, Head of the General Staff. The *Duce* informed Ambrosio that he intended to ask Hitler permission to withdraw Italy from the conflict. Two days later Mussolini informed the king of his intention to get Italy out of the war as soon as he brought Italian troops back within the Italian borders.<sup>32</sup> Faced with Mussolini's open admission of the bankruptcy his policy, the king searched for a means to remove the *Duce* and thereby facilitate Italy's exit from the war.

The final push came from the leaders of the Fascist Party looking for a change. The Fascist Grand Council met on the evening of July 24 to consider Italy's future with Mussolini. Several members concocted a plan for Mussolini's removal. At the meeting Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Governor of the Italian Aegean Islands, blamed Mussolini for Italy's situation, stating that the *Duce* had surrounded himself with yes-men instead of those who would speak the truth.<sup>33</sup> In an extremely tactful and manipulative presentation, Dino Grandi, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, ostensibly turned the blame away from Mussolini by stating that it was the *Duce*'s commitment to

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<sup>31</sup> Delzell, 223.

<sup>32</sup> Vinicio Araldi, *La Crisi Italiana del 1943* (Milano: Silva, 1964), 211.

<sup>33</sup> Araldi, 125.



the military that forced him to leave the ordinary daily administration in the hands of less capable men, which resulted in the deterioration of the civilian population.

In fact, Grandi's proposal that Mussolini redirect his attention to the civilian population was a clever ploy to get the *Duce* to remove himself voluntarily from military command. He pointed out that it was no longer possible to separate the responsibility of the current state of affairs from the supreme command. The king, Grandi asserted, had benefitted greatly from Fascism without assuming any of the responsibilities. Grandi proposed that it was time for the king to take command of the military and for the *Duce* to take off the uniform and return to being the great leader of the party to restore order in Italy. His speech was non-accusatory toward Mussolini, giving him an out, while lauding him as a great leader.<sup>34</sup>

Grandi's motion to remove Mussolini as head of the military and return full constitutional powers to the king passed with a vote of nineteen to seven.<sup>35</sup> The following day the king summoned Mussolini for a meeting. He informed the *Duce* that Italians had lost faith in Mussolini. The king personally guaranteed Mussolini's safety

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<sup>34</sup> Araldi., 127.

<sup>35</sup> Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, was among those who voted to remove him from power. Mussolini was present during the discussion and the vote but was not concerned and merely considered it a suggestion. He was convinced he retained full powers. Mussolini later retaliated by having Ciano executed as an enemy of the state despite Edda Mussolini-Ciano's pleas to her father to save her husband's life. Edda also tried to bargain her husband's diaries for his life but Mussolini would not forgive Ciano's betrayal. Edda knew the diaries would expose Mussolini as mentally unstable, a fickle man who made important decisions on a whim, in reaction to the smallest provocation, rather than basing his decisions on sound research or recommendations. A detailed account of Mussolini's reaction to the meeting can be found in Ciano's diaries. Fabrizio Ciano, *Quando il Nonno Fece Fucilare Papa'* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1991), 94; Hugh Gibson editor, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943*; the complete, unabridged diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian minister of foreign affairs, 1936-1943 (New York: Garden City N.Y. Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1946); and Galeazzo Ciano, *Diary, 1937-1943* (New York: Enigma Books, 2002).

and had him taken in custody by General Angelo Cerica, head of the *Carabinieri* (Italian national police force). Mussolini was relocated several times, all in secret, to prevent him from contacting supporters or Hitler to request help. His whereabouts were also kept secret to prevent interference by the Germans who at the time had over eight-thousand well-armed soldiers in the city of Rome and an armored division stationed at Tivoli, just sixteen kilometers away.<sup>36</sup>

### **The forty-five days that changed everything (25 July to 8 September 1943)**

With the complicity of the king the Fascist hierarchy managed to dispose of Mussolini; it did not, however, produce a workable plan to get Italy out of the war. Marshal Pietro Badoglio, new head of state, believed he could negotiate with the British and Americans and change the demand for the unconditional surrender of Italy to one of partnership in the war effort. He needed to secure that partnership before breaking ties with Germany. This effort was made more difficult by the growing German military presence in Italy; by mid-summer Germany had seven combat divisions totaling 100,000 troops in the peninsula and occupied all of the significant airfields.<sup>37</sup> Failure to coordinate the reversal of alliances threatened to transform Italy from a German ally to occupied territory of the Nazis.

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<sup>36</sup> Araldi, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Roberto Battaglia, *The Story of the Italian Resistance* (London: Odhams, 1957), 41.

The transition did not go smoothly. Hitler was furious when informed of the coup. According to Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, the Fuehrer's first reaction was to enact a contingency plan that would deploy a division of paratroopers from Southern France and drop them just outside Rome; there they would arrest the king and his entire family, as well as Badoglio, and bring them to Germany. Hitler would then restore Mussolini as the head of the Italian government.<sup>38</sup> Per the diary of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler was not sure whether Mussolini would agree to head the government in opposition to the king but thought that if the king were in German hands the *Duce* would have no choice.<sup>39</sup> This plan did not materialize, due largely to the initial failure of the Allies to react to the overthrow of the Fascist dictator.

In an effort to buy time, Badoglio assured Germany that Italy would remain in the war. Hitler, however, had no trust in the king or the men who replaced Mussolini, and he immediately began reinforcing the German military presence in Italy. Badoglio's announcement that Italy would remain in the war also had a negative effect on the Italian people. The Italians held the *Duce* solely responsible for taking and keeping Italy in the war. They hoped that the removal of Mussolini would bring peace to Italy and the return home of the Italian military. When the factory workers at the Piaggio Plant in Pontedera (Tuscany) heard the radio announcement of Mussolini's arrest on 25 July 1943, they

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<sup>38</sup> Gaetano Afeltra, *I 45 giorni che sconvolsero l'Italia: 25 luglio-8 settembre 1943. Dall'osservatorio di un grande giornale* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1993), 126.

<sup>39</sup> Araldi, 183.

stopped working, destroyed all Fascist propaganda in the factory, and began celebrating, believing Fascism had fallen and the war ended.<sup>40</sup>

To the average Italian the announcement that Italy would remain in the war meant that the change in leadership essentially brought no new hope or improvement to the population. The declaration that Italy would remain an ally of Germany also complicated negotiations with the Anglo-Americans who already distrusted the Italian government. Prior to the overthrow of Mussolini, monarchists and other anti-Fascists attempted to negotiate with the British Secret Service who refused anything other than an unconditional surrender. The overthrow of the Fascist regime surprised Great Britain and the United States who were unprepared to discuss an alliance with Italy. At the time of the coup, the Allies had six complete divisions and several independent brigades in North Africa that were as yet uncommitted to the Sicilian enterprise. These could have possibly made their way to the Italian peninsula. The missed opportunity of an immediate alliance between Italy and the Anglo-Americans prevented an eventual unopposed Allied invasion which might have resulted in the swift expulsion of German troops from Italy.<sup>41</sup>

The influx of additional German troops could have been avoided by closing the Brenner Pass or if Badoglio had stood up to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander in Chief of the German Army in Italy. Kesselring met with Badoglio

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<sup>40</sup> Manlio Citi. "La Resistenza Operaia alla Piaggio di Pontedera" in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 106; Richard Lamb, *War in Italy 1943-1945: A Brutal Story* (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Lamb, 12.

immediately after the overthrow of Mussolini and stated he wanted to increase the number of German troops in Italy to counter further Allied invasion. Badoglio replied this had nothing to do with him but was a matter for the War Office. His response gave Kesselring a free hand in the matter, and the paratroopers that Hitler initially wanted to drop over Rome came over land along with many other troops, including several elite SS formations, which occupied the entire northern peninsula and took over the railways and official buildings. It was clear this was not to help Italy but to threaten its independence.<sup>42</sup>

Badoglio did nothing to prevent the German invasion, nor did he take immediate initiative to work out an armistice with the Allies. His inaction prompted Raffaele Guariglia, the Foreign Secretary, and General Giuseppe Castellano of the General Staff to make separate and independent attempts to negotiate with the Allies. An initial meeting between Guariglia and Allied diplomats took place in Tangiers on August 3rd. Additional separate meetings by Guariglia and Castellano with Allied diplomats took place in Lisbon later the same month.<sup>43</sup> Neither had been given official authority to negotiate which added to the confusion and distrust on the part of the Allies. Attempts to negotiate continued through the month of August. The actual agreement was unofficially reached on 13 August but brought to Rome on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The in-fighting among Italian diplomats over who had the authority to finalize negotiations resulted in loss of time and postponement of the conciliation. With Badoglio apparently uninterested in taking

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<sup>42</sup> Araldi, 184.

<sup>43</sup> Lamb, 15.

charge, Guariglia gave Castellano the authorization to finalize the negotiations with the Allies. The agreement included a clause stating that Mussolini would be handed over to the Allies.<sup>44</sup>

The actual document was brought to Cassibile (a town in Sicily where General Harold R.L.G. Alexander, commander of the Mediterranean Theater, made his headquarters and General Dwight D. Eisenhower was currently located),<sup>45</sup> for signatures on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the same day the Allies crossed the Straits of Messina, but the armistice was not publicly announced until September 8, 1943. The greater Allied land invasion of the Italian peninsula began on September 9, with landings at Taranto and Salerno. That same day the king and Badoglio fled to southern Italy and the protection of the Allies. Badoglio's last act before fleeing Rome was to issue a proclamation stating:

Having recognized the impossibility of continuing an uneven fight against the overwhelming opposing power, with the intention of saving additional and more severe tragedies to the nation, the government has asked General Eisenhower, head of the Allied Anglo-American forces, for an armistice. The request has been accepted. Consequently, every act of hostility against the Anglo-American forces on the part of Italian forces must cease in all locations. However, the Italian forces will react to eventual attacks by any other source.<sup>46</sup>

It was implied that the "any other source" was German. That same evening Radio London announced the Italian unconditional surrender. It also proclaimed that all Italian

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<sup>44</sup> United, States. "Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1943. Volume 3 Multilateral 1931-1945. Article 29. Department of State Publication 8484. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969." Sep 3, 1943. <http://www.comandosupremo.com/ArmisticeI.html> (accessed May 5, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Atkinson, 188.

<sup>46</sup> Araldi, 190; and Origo, 99.

commanders and soldiers had been informed that they would receive the help of the Allied soldiers if the Germans tried to disarm them.<sup>47</sup>

In the continued chaos, Badoglio and his ministers failed to turn Mussolini over to Eisenhower. Within days of the armistice the Germans had occupied central Italy, and on September 12, they rescued Mussolini in the Gran Sasso and took him to Germany. On September 23, 1943 Hitler placed Mussolini in charge of a puppet government in German-occupied Northern Italy as head of the neo-Fascist Italian Social Republic, the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI), known unofficially as the Saló Republic, after the small town on Lake Garda where Mussolini maintained his new “capital”.<sup>48</sup> Italy was split in two: the southern portion which had been liberated by the Allies was under the control of the king and Badoglio, while the center and northern portion were part of the new Italian Social Republic, headed by Mussolini and under German control. Italy now had four nominal governments: the Germans in the north, Allies in the south, Fascists set up by the Germans, and the Badoglio government set up by the Allies.<sup>49</sup> In reality the only two real governments were the German in the north and the Allied in the south. There were also two Italian militaries: the one under Fascist Mussolini, set up in the north by the Germans, and the one under Badoglio in the south.

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<sup>47</sup> Stefano Gestro, *La divisione italiana partigiana “Garibaldi”: Montenegro 1943-1945* (Milano: Mursia, 1981), 75.

<sup>48</sup> Delzell, 263.

<sup>49</sup> Origo, 96.

### **The Italian military collapse in September 1943**

The king and Badoglio left Rome to set up a provisional government in Brindisi. Other members of the new government and high-ranking military officials also abandoned Rome to follow and participate in the new administration. The exodus of any and all that had power or authority to command left the military devoid of leadership. With nobody left behind to coordinate initiatives or give precise orders, the Italian military disintegrated.

The Allies and the Germans hastened to fill this leadership vacuum. General Eisenhower's radio announcement of the military armistice with Italy also urged Italians to aid in the liberation of their country and promised them aid from the Allies.<sup>50</sup> The Germans, for their part, were determined to restore the deteriorating strategic situation that they now faced in the Mediterranean. They swiftly initiated a plan to deal with the changing circumstances, fittingly termed Operation ACHSE (Axis). Those Italians who would fight alongside them would soon find employment with Mussolini's puppet state. Those who opposed the Germans would be disarmed, enslaved, or shot.

The circumstances surrounding the Italian armed forces that September, therefore, were chaotic in the extreme. With Italy split in two, soldiers, sailors, and airmen had to question which was the legitimate government and to whom they owed their allegiance. Foreign troops were now pouring into Italy, the Allies from the south and the Germans

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<sup>50</sup> Gabrio Lombardi, *L'8 Settembre fuori d'Italia* (Milano: Mursia & Co., 1967), 39.



from the north. Especially regarding the latter, the question of whether to join them, fight them, or simply disappear could become a matter of life or death.

Developments in Rome that September graphically demonstrate the dilemma that Italian soldiers faced. On September 8, 1943 there were four Italian divisions and only two German divisions in Rome. The Italian position appeared strong, as the Italian soldiers could count on the support of the Italian people while the Germans could not. Nevertheless, Marshall Enrico Caviglia, senior Italian military representative in Rome, signed a truce with General Siegfried Westphal who had assured him of the safety of Rome upon the surrender of all Italian arms. The following day the Italian Motorized Armored Corps, consisting of the Piave, Ariete, Granatieri and Centauro Divisions, was ordered to fall back to Tivoli to ensure the safe conduct of the royal entourage to Pescara.

The commanders of the Piave, Ariete, and Granatieri Divisions disobeyed orders and with the aid of a spontaneously formed Italian militia, inflicted heavy casualties and damage to the German forces. However, when they prepared to enter Rome they were stopped by Marshall Caviglia who felt that Rome was indefensible. Lacking instructions from the king or Badoglio, he opted for what he considered the best choice for the safety of Rome; he ordered the Italian troops to cooperate with the Germans. According to an escaped Italian officer of the Genova Cavalleria who sought refuge with Iris Origo, of the 4,000 Italian officers who supposedly voluntarily joined the Axis forces and were put on trains headed for Germany, approximately 3,200 escaped before reaching Florence.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Origo, 101.

Developments outside of Rome often took a different turn. In the wake of the announcement of the armistice the Allies, many Italian soldiers simply sought to go home. The experience of Giovanni Pesce in the town of Aqui, Northern Italy was anecdotal but typical of many Italian soldiers outside of Rome. On the night of September 8, the soldiers in Pesce's unit shed their uniforms, and local women gave them their husbands', brothers', or sons' civilian clothes to wear. The Italian military were trying to escape the German and Fascist round-up to avoid transfer to the Russian front or becoming slave labor in German factories. The Germans surrounded the Italian barracks, and the local population came to the rescue of the Italian soldiers. The civilians surrounded the Germans and disarmed them; they then passed the arms to the Italian military, while yelling at the Italian military to escape.<sup>52</sup> Similar events transpired in Tuscany. Origo describes several accounts of giving civilian clothing to escaped Italian military, to include Italian soldiers and airmen who made their way back to Italy from foreign battlefields.<sup>53</sup>

Other Italian soldiers were not so lucky. For many officers, the option of donning civilian clothing smacked of cowardice, desertion, and a betrayal of professional values, a circumstance which made blending in with the civilian population difficult if not impossible.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, many soldiers, officers and enlisted men alike, came under immediate pressure to support the Germans or, once it was established, Mussolini's new

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<sup>52</sup> Giovanni Pesce, *And no quarter: an Italian Partisan in World War II*. Translated by Frederick M. Shaine (Ohio University Press, 1972), 11.

<sup>53</sup> Origo, 116, 158, 166.

<sup>54</sup> Pesce, 13.

puppet state in northern Italy, the so-called Social Republic of Italy (RSI). Initially, approximately one percent of the armed forces chose to collaborate with the Nazis. Over 600,000 who were ensnared in Nazi or Fascist round ups refused collaboration and were deported as slave laborers north of the Alps. Hitler would not allow the captive Italian soldiers to be considered as prisoners of war because he recognized only the Fascist state as legitimate, not the Badoglio government. This meant that the interned soldiers were not covered by the Geneva Convention; they did not receive Red Cross packages, and many died of starvation, illness, and overwork.<sup>55</sup>

Eventually these conditions prompted some of the internees to reconsider their refusal to serve Mussolini's government. Hitler finally allowed 12,000 Italian "volunteers" from the internment camps to join the republican government but insisted that the remainder of needed recruits come from Italy.<sup>56</sup> Mussolini lowered the age of conscription to eighteen and used his Fascist troops for *rastrellamenti* (rakings). They searched houses and establishments for youths trying to escape conscription, the penalty for which was death. The Fascists were so desperate for men to enroll that they granted convicts freedom if they joined the army.<sup>57</sup> Over time the *Duce* launched a massive propaganda campaign and used his loyal Black Shirts to rake in new recruits for the republican army.

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<sup>55</sup> Umberto Carli, "Contributo alla Resistenza ed all Liberta' dei Military italiani internati nei Lager Nazisti" in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 72-73.

<sup>56</sup> Lamb, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 308.

Unfortunately, the foregoing range of experiences—simple desertion (often followed by enlistment in the Resistance), recruitment by the Fascists, or enslavement at the hands of the Germans—does not complete the story of the Italian military collapse of September 1943. A distressingly large number of Italians were the victims of German atrocities that stemmed either from the Germans' generalized rage over what they saw as an act of national betrayal or from actual acts of resistance by Italian soldiers and civilians. According to one estimate, by September 10, 1943, just two days after the official surrender of Italy to the Allies, over 3,000 Italian military had been killed by the Germans or the Fascists, and these numbers grew in the weeks that followed.<sup>58</sup>

The most notorious massacre of Italian soldiers occurred on the island of Cephalonia, part of the Greek Ionian islands, where the Italian Aquila Division was stationed, commanded by General Antonio Gandin. After the Italian surrender to the Allies, General Gandin received conflicting orders from his superiors. On September 8, General Carlo Vecchiarelli, commander of Italian troops in Greece, ordered Gandin to refrain from attacking the Germans if the Germans did not attack him. He issued no directives in case of a German attack. On September 11, the Italian War Office in Rome issued a decree that the Germans were to be treated as enemies. After a series of negotiations between the local Italian and German commanders, Gandin and his men decided to fight the Germans, but they were outgunned and outmanned by the Germans, and without additional supplies they soon ran out of ammunition. Of the 12,000 Italian soldiers stationed on Cephalonia, over 1,200 died in combat against the Germans, but

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas R. Brooks, *The War North of Rome: June 1944 – May 1945* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 121.

over 5,000 were executed after they surrendered. Similar occurrences took place at other Greek locations such as Kos and Corfu.<sup>59</sup>

Italian soldiers on the peninsula were also massacred but in smaller numbers and more sporadically. On September 10, 1943 at Nola, near Naples, two German motorcycle soldiers tried to disarm Italian soldiers; when the Italians refused to surrender the Germans opened fire on them. The Italians returned fire and killed one of the German soldiers. The next day Italian soldiers sent a delegation to the German troops stationed at Nola. Although the delegation waved the white flag in sign of surrender the Germans opened fire killing one Italian. The next day they executed ten Italian officers.<sup>60</sup>

A similar incident took place further south, in the region of Puglia, where the Italian Ninth Armored Corps received orders from General Filippo Caruso to consider German troops as the enemy and to react accordingly. On September 11, two German soldiers fell in an ambush and were killed. The German command sent 400 troops to Barletta to search for the responsible parties. They entered the Office of the Traffic Police and took 11 patrolmen and 2 street-sweepers, lined them up in front of the post office and gunned them down in retaliation for the deaths of the two German soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

The reprisals of September 1943 frighteningly foreshadowed events to come, both in Tuscany and in Italy as a whole. They were also instrumental in the recruitment of the

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<sup>59</sup> Franco Giustolisi, *L'Armadio della Vergogna* (Roma: Rizzoli, 2004), 253; Lamb, 125-138; Atkinson, 243.

<sup>60</sup> Editorial, "Ricordare i martiri del 1943," *Il Nolano*, 14 October 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Paolo Tolve, "67o anniversario dell'occupazione nazista: le iniziative," *Corriere dell'Ofanto*, 14 October 2010.

Resistance. Within a couple of months, actions such as those in the Ionian Islands, Nola, and Puglia would swell the ranks of the Partisans to as many as 25,000 as civilians and former soldiers alike sought refuge in the woods and hills of Italy. German brutality toward Italian military and civilians would continue to grow in ferocity and frequency as the Allies pushed the Germans northward from Naples. The number of Resistance fighters throughout Italy had grown to 80,000 by the time the main battle lines reached Tuscany in the summer of 1944.<sup>62</sup> There the familiar cycle of occupation, resistance and reprisal would manifest itself repeatedly before the summer was through.

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<sup>62</sup> Brooks, 121.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMPONENTS OF THE RESISTANCE

The Italian nationals who joined the Resistance movement can be divided into three overlapping categories: the anti-Fascists who joined due to political ideology, the common people tired of dictatorship who believed they were acting morally, and the youth who were escaping conscription and probable transfer to the Russian front. Philip Cooke simplifies the components of the Italian Resistance even further by dividing it in two categories, the organized and spontaneous Resistance, with the organized being the anti-Fascists, to include the Communists, and spontaneous being those who had previously supported the Fascist regime.<sup>63</sup>

#### **Politically motivated: Communists and left-wingers - backbone of the Resistance movement?**

There were four main strands of Italian left-wing Resistance to Fascism. The first developed early (1925-1934) and was formed by left-wing liberals, excluding the communist party, who formed an anti-Fascist concentration in France. In 1939, following the Ethiopian and Spanish wars, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) emerged as the strongest anti-Fascist group, although some members became disillusioned with Russian communist ideology after the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939. The consolidated left-wing liberals formed the “Lega Italiana dei Diritti dell’Uomo” (Italian League of Rights of Man) which operated out of Paris from 1924 through the Fascist

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<sup>63</sup> Philip Cooke, “The Red and the Blue: The Depiction of the Italian Partisan Resistance in Fenoglio’s *Il Partigiano Jhonny*,” *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 91, Issue 2 (Apr. 1996): 368.

years and sought to organize Italians in exile, stimulate Resistance, encourage clandestine press, and offer aid to victims of Fascism. With the fall of the Fascist regime in 1943 the final phase, the armed Resistance, finally began full-force.<sup>64</sup>

Several liberal organizations that were not affiliated with any particular political movement formed following the rise of the totalitarian Fascist regime. In 1920 the Circolo di Cultura, an apolitical social organization, was founded in Florence on a moral impulse against Fascism. One of its most noted members was Carlo Rosselli, a socialist who believed Italy would be ushered into a new renaissance which would embody a democratic, socialist republic. He founded several anti-Fascist papers in Florence. Due to increasing restrictions imposed by the Fascist regime, he fled first to Tunisia and ultimately to France, where he continued his anti-Fascist work until 1937 when he was assassinated by French Fascists.<sup>65</sup>

Benedetto Croce was another of the early non-communist liberal thinkers. He was the Italian Minister of Education from 1920 to 1921 but was ousted from that position by Mussolini's regime and replaced by Giovanni Gentile. Unlike many of his counterparts, despite his objection to the current regime, Croce did not openly criticize the Fascist regime and felt that open defiance at that time would be counterproductive. He remained in Italy and was never arrested by the Fascists, probably due to his social

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<sup>64</sup> Delzell, 43.

<sup>65</sup> Pugliese, 176.



status (he came from a wealthy and influential family), although he remained under constant surveillance.<sup>66</sup>

Antonio Gramsci was influenced by the philosophy of Benedetto Croce as well as that of Karl Marx. Originally part of the socialist party, he believed that Italian socialism needed to emulate Lenin to succeed. In 1922 he traveled to Russia where he gained political experience and established contacts and sponsorship for a united Italian communist party. At the same time Mussolini was developing his totalitarian state and abolishing all political parties except the Fascist. Gramsci moved to Vienna to continue his work on the development of the PCI, but in 1926 he was arrested by the Fascists and remained imprisoned until 1934 when he was released due to poor health.<sup>67</sup> He influenced many Italian communists including Luigi Longo, one of his contemporaries and a fellow co-founder of the PCI. Longo moved to France in 1922 to escape the Italian Fascist Regime. After the fall of France he was arrested and turned over to the Italian Fascists. He was released the day Mussolini was deposed from power. He immediately joined a Partisan group and assumed command under the name “Gallo.”<sup>68</sup>

Many believe the Communists were the backbone of the Italian Resistance movement because of their continued efforts to organize and network. As noted earlier, Communists had taken the lead in work stoppages prior to the 45-day crisis. They were

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<sup>66</sup> Bosworth, 328.

<sup>67</sup> Further details of Gramsci’s life, philosophy, and influence on Italian politics over the years can be found in: G. Liguori, *Gramsci conteso: storia di un dibattito 1922-1996* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Luigi Longo, *I centri dirigenti del PCI nella Resistenza* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1973), 38.

led by Luigi Longo, then head of the Communist Party. He had the financial and political backing of the Soviet leaders and was an experienced organizer; he also had the sympathy of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Although exact figures are still disputed, the A.N.P.I., *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani* (the Italian National Association of Partisans) represents the Communists as leaders of the most numerous Partisan brigades, comprising 38 percent of the total Resistance, with the other 62 percent comprised of displaced Italian soldiers, draft dodgers, escaped Allied POWs, other political anti-fascists, and otherwise common citizens. Guido Quazza, estimates that only 10-15 percent of the Partisans were long-term political enemies of Fascism, while the remainder only developed opposition to Fascism during the war.<sup>69</sup> With little organization and overall networking the Resistance was theoretically divided between those led by the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN) which replaced the *Lega Italiana dei Diritti dell'Uomo*, and those led by the king. Since the king displayed little initiative in the struggle, he was not recognized by many of the anti-Fascists.<sup>70</sup>

Political parties banned under Fascist rule continued to function clandestinely during the dictatorship. With the fall of the Fascist regime the underground parties came together to organize the Italian Resistance. The lack of communication between the government and higher military officials and among the military hierarchy prompted the

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<sup>69</sup> Philip Cooke, *The Italian Resistance: An Anthology* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Mirco Dondi, "Division and Conflict in the Partisan Resistance," *Modern Italy* 12, no. 2 (June 2007): 226.

anti-Fascists to form the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (Committee of National Liberation – CLN) which gave birth to organized Resistance.<sup>71</sup> The CLN was formed in Rome on September 9, 1943. The new organization comprised the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party, the Action Party (a republican liberal party), the Christian Democrat Party (the Catholic party), the Labor Democrats, and the Liberals. The organization was a coalition, but individual parties took control of specific Partisan bands and placed party members as leaders of the Partisan groups. The three main Partisan groups were the Garibaldi Brigades (Communist Party), Giustizia e Libertá Brigades (Action Party), and the Matteotti Brigades (Socialist Party).<sup>72</sup>

Representatives of the Republican Party did not join the CLN due to their anti-monarchical prejudices, but republicans did join the Resistance movement as independents. Members of the far right, such as the Bandiera Rossa Roma; apoliticals, such as Stella Rossa; and anarchists such as the Battaglione Lucetti participated in the Resistance as independent units, wanting to fight for Italy's liberation but not associating themselves with the CLN. The different political ideologies and organizations created some discordance among the Partisan groups, and there were clashes between them. In the interest of attaining the common goal, radical units tried to stay out of each other's way. The first bands of resisters were formed by ex-soldiers and young men avoiding the Fascist draft and were referred to as rebels by the occupying regime. With the creation of

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<sup>71</sup> Battaglia, 48.

<sup>72</sup> James Holland, *Italy's Sorrow: A Year of War, 1944-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 122.

the CLN the Resistance became more organized and was eventually joined by many who had no political motivations other than the ridding Italy of German domination.

**Common people doing the decent thing: locals, women, and clergy.**

The continued anti-Fascist underground network led by the left-wing kept the hope of Resistance alive and somewhat organized and induced thousands of northern factory workers to strike despite the totalitarian Fascist regime. Political ideology was not the only motivation for the uprising of the civilian population. Italians were disillusioned with the Fascist Regime and its delusions of grandeur; they wanted their men back home, and a return to normalcy. One of the turning points for the common people followed the Axis powers' defeat at Stalingrad when the Italian Supreme Command issued a statement to the Italian people that the Germans had seized all transportation, provisions and medicines, and abandoned the Italians to die.<sup>73</sup>

The act of betrayal by the Germans further convinced many Italians it was time to withdraw from the conflict and start rebuilding their nation. Many had already begun a passive Resistance to Fascism prior to its collapse in 1943. They would continue to oppose the Germans and the RSI using moral courage and techniques to diffuse violence. This allowed them to maintain a minimum quality of life and some degree of independence.<sup>74</sup> Passive Resistance progressed to active defiance spontaneously

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<sup>73</sup> Battaglia, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Bravo, 468.

throughout Italy and ranged from small acts, such as not properly addressing a Fascist or Nazi official, to open armed conflict.

The civilian population seemed to support the Resistance efforts in different ways. Across the nation the most common act of support came from women who gave civilian clothes and food to the resisters. The women had a natural network. They were the ones who brought food and care to the relatives and the infirm, and they had a freedom of movement not allowed to men. Unica Garemi Guelfi gives a detailed account of the women's network in Pisa.<sup>75</sup> This freedom enabled them to act as "mules" to transport information, food, and weapons to refugees and Partisans. Many Italians attribute the women's spontaneous acts of protection toward the refugees and Partisans to natural maternal instincts and assume the women acted with kindness and nurture in the hope that other women elsewhere would treat their husbands, sons, or brothers with the same care. Giorgio Vecchiani, a Partisan and current director of the A.N.P.I. of Pisa disagrees with the theory of maternal instinct as the reason for the women's participation in the Resistance because there were also women who collaborated with the Nazis and Fascists.<sup>76</sup>

Most clergy did not participate in armed Resistance or even the transport of weapons but limited their participation to hiding, housing, feeding, clothing and simply caring for those in need. The position of Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) has been hotly

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<sup>75</sup> Unica Garemi Guelfi, "Le donne nella resistenza," in *Resistenza ai giorni nostri* (Pisa, A.N.P.I., 2005), 112-115; Origo, 108.

<sup>76</sup> Giorgio Vecchiani, interview by author, Pisa, Italy, June 11, 2008.

debated and Vatican documents of the era are not yet accessible to scholars. Opinions vary from those who believe Pacelli was a racist and supporter of the Nazis, to those who believe he secretly instructed the Church to help refugees. Giorgio Gariboldi supports the belief that the Pope and Vatican did all they could to save innocent people from persecution and that the Church was in a precarious position, where open opposition to the regime would have resulted in loss of independent status for the Church. This would have further limited the Church's ability to help the persecuted. John Cornwell took the opposite stance and wrote a controversial book supporting the theory that Pope Pius XII was a racist, who supported the Nazi cause and used the totalitarian regimes to promote his climb in the church hierarchy. A more neutral stance on the Vatican's position is presented by Michael Marrus in his "Understanding the Vatican During the Nazi Period."<sup>77</sup> At the lower level of the Church hierarchy, however, there can be little debate that Church officials were actively engaged in acts of resistance. There, despite the Papacy's official proclamation of neutrality and nonintervention in political matters, local clergy participated in harboring Jews, Partisans and escaped prisoners of war.

### **The escaped Allied POWs.**

During Rommel's victorious campaigns in North Africa, Italy became the repository for Allied prisoners of war. By September 8, 1943 there were over 70,000 Allied POWs in Italy. When Italy quit the Axis many Italian prison guards deserted or

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<sup>77</sup> Giorgio Angelozzi Gariboldi, *Il Vaticano Nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milano: Mursia, 1992); John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008); Michael Marrus, "Understanding the Vatican During the Nazi Period." Shoa Resource Center, the Internal School for Holocaust Studies. 2008. [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Marrus.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Marrus.html) (accessed Nov 12, 2008).

released the prisoners. At prisons where the guards did not desert, the POWs took advantage of the confusion among the Italian military and simply escaped.<sup>78</sup> With the great exodus of Allied POWs from the prison camps in Italy, many Italians supported the escaped prisoners in any way they could. Peasants and shepherds gave the escaped prisoners civilian clothes to wear and hid them in the fields and hills. In return, the escaped POWs helped with farming chores, relieving some of the shortage of manpower suffered by the Italians. The wealthier people contributed monetarily toward the clothing, housing, and feeding of the Allied escapees. Iris Origo gives many examples of both peasant and wealthy contributors in her diary *War in Val D'Orcia*. The Germans and Fascists tried to deter aid to the escaped POWs by placing a 1,800 lire price for each POW and threatening anyone sheltering POWs with the death penalty.<sup>79</sup>

By mid-November 1943 the Germans transferred 24,000 Allied POWs from the Italian camps to Germany. By May 1944, when the Allies broke the Gustav line at Cassino, the Germans could no longer spare men to hunt down escaped POWs, and there was a surge in Partisan numbers in the mountains of central and northern Italy. Many escaped POWs seized the opportunity, and by early October nearly 6,500 made their way to the Allied lines while over 4,000 reached Switzerland.<sup>80</sup> The main goal of most POWs was to rejoin Allied troops and resume the fight; however, the Allies did not have the logistics in place to aid and absorb the escaped POWs. It was more advantageous to the

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<sup>78</sup> Brooks, 118.

<sup>79</sup> Origo, 81; Brooks, 119.

<sup>80</sup> Roger Absalom, "Allied escapers and the *contadini* in occupied Italy (1943-5)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10(4), (2005): 417.

Allies to have the escaped POWs remain behind enemy lines, join the Partisans, and collect and deliver intelligence data for a more effective Allied coordinated effort.<sup>81</sup>

The Allied commands were slow in trusting the Partisans, partly because Italians had previously been their enemies and partly because the Partisans did not trust the King and Badoglio's government. At the very least many Partisans believed the king had abdicated when he escaped to southern Italy and left the troops and civilian population to fend for themselves. Other Partisans viewed the king and the marshal as out and out deserters while the Allies recognized the two men as the only legitimate Italian government. The Allies were also wary of the Italian army military intelligence service, the *Servizio Informazioni Militari* (SIM) as Peter Tompkins, member of the OSS, remembers: "I had no faith in the professionals not only because of their record in the war against us, but because I suspected and with good reasons they would invent large portions of their intelligence."<sup>82</sup>

The United States initially dropped supplies and ammunition only to areas where Partisans were led by Allied agents and started dropping supplies to other Partisan units

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<sup>81</sup> Additional details and stories of escaped Allied POWs in Italy can be found in Tom Carver, *Where the Hell have you Been?: Monty, Italy and one Man's Incredible Escape* (London: Short Books, 2009); in George Millar, *Horned Pigeon: The Great Escape Story of World War II* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co, inc., 1946); in Brian Fleming, *The Vatican Pimpernel: The Wartime Exploits of Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty* (Wilton, Cork: Collins Press, 2008); in Stuart Hood, "Partisan Memories," *History Today* 51, no. 8 (Aug 2001): 9-15.

The impact of the intelligence supplied by the Italian resistance to the Allies is described in Peter Tompkins. *The OSS and Italian Partisans in World War II*. June 27, 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/spring98/> (accessed Feb 14, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> Vittorio Gozzer. "OSS and ORI: the Raimondo Craveri and Max Corvo Partnership," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Vol 4, Issue 1, (Spring 1999): 35.



only after the Italian Resistance had proven itself. In addition to the mistrust issue, initial coordination between Allies and the Italian Resistance was unstable with no clear policy for guidance. The British operations were directed by the No. 1 Special Force, part of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), while the American operations were directed by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which had a separate chain of command.<sup>83</sup>

### **Youth also swelled the ranks of the Partisans.**

By the time Mussolini's puppet Saló Republic had been established on September 23, 1943 most of the Italian military had been disarmed, and what remained had largely defected to the Allies. Mussolini nevertheless sought to reconstitute an armed force for the new regime. There were no uniforms available, so the new conscripts wore civilian clothing. Their commanders were Italian but it was clear to them from the start that the Germans were in charge.<sup>84</sup>

By the beginning of 1944 there were Italian soldiers fighting alongside the Germans on the Russian front, Italian soldiers in German-occupied Italy - the *repubblichini* (Italian soldiers of the RSI) - imposing Fascist rule in Northern Italy, and Italian soldiers fighting alongside the Allies in Southern Italy. In the battle of Anzio there were Italian soldiers fighting on both sides. In addition to fighting foreign enemies

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<sup>83</sup> Julie Le Gac, "From Suspicious Observation to Ambiguous Collaboration: The Allies and Italian Partisans, 1943-1944," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 31, No. 5, (October 2008): 725.

<sup>84</sup> Valerio Signorini. "Davanti ai Tedeschi Cantammo 'Bandiera Rossa.'" *Resistenza Toscana*. Jan 31, 2008. [http://www.resistenzatoscana.it/documenti/davanti\\_ai\\_tedeschi\\_cantammo\\_bandiera\\_rossa/](http://www.resistenzatoscana.it/documenti/davanti_ai_tedeschi_cantammo_bandiera_rossa/) (accessed Mar 24, 2009).

(whether Axis or Allies) Italians were fighting each other in a civil war with the republicans under Mussolini fighting the monarchists under King Emmanuel and Marshal Badoglio. Adding to the confusion, there were Resistance fighters in the mountains of central and northern Italy, the Partisans, fighting the Nazis and Fascists. Youth subject to conscription in the RSI were faced with the prospect of joining the military and being sent to the Russian front to fight alongside the Germans, stay in Italy and fight their own countrymen, or risk the death penalty by escaping conscription and hiding out or joining the Partisans.

### **The Resistance organizes**

The Resistance movement was initially limited to passive responses to the authorities in the form of work slow-downs, non-support of fascist activities, and subversive leftist political discussions. In his book *Quelli della Stella Rossa*, Sirio Ungherelli gives detailed accounts of how the Resistance networked under Fascism, from recruitment to sleeper cells, and eventually armed conflict. In *The Path to the Spider's Nests*, Italo Calvino also describes how the GAP infiltrated the towns and cities and recruited Partisans. In the early stages of Partisan development, the groups had a linear chain of contact; one knew the name of his handler or coordinator and the name of the person he handled but no additional names. This was for security; if a person was arrested and tortured he had limited knowledge to divulge. When the Resistance assumed a more active role, the organizational structure changed from linear to cellular where one

knew the name of his handler as well as that of a small group of collaborators who formed the cell.<sup>85</sup>

Partisan groups generally were located in the mountains and farmlands, while the GAPs recruited, organized labor strikes, and coordinated logistics in the towns and cities. Prior to the deposition of Mussolini and the 45-day crisis, the majority of the population was discontented but not ready to actively participate in an actual Partisan war; however, their temperament led them to aid in the Resistance activities once they started. The dispersion of the Italian military, the alliance with the Allies and the Allied landings in Italy were the catalysts for the organization of the Resistance movement.

A portion of the disbanded Italian military, without specific political affiliation other than loyalty to the king and the “recognized” government, started collecting arms and ammunition immediately after the public announcement of surrender on September 8. They did not know exactly what the course of action would be, but were experienced enough to expect a long struggle for the reunification and liberation of Italy. The military were trained for combat; many had survived under extreme conditions and were prepared to initiate a fight to free Italy of the German invaders. Numerous young civilians were also prepared to join the military in the struggle to liberate Italy, but some military leaders were convinced that war of any kind was strictly a matter for soldiers. This

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<sup>85</sup> Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun. Rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 38; Sirio Ungherelli, *Quelli Della Stella Rossa* (Firenze, A.N.P.I., 1999); Ottorino Guidi, “Organizzazione e Attivita’ Antifascista a Pisa Durante il Ventennio Fascista,” in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri*, (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 23.

attitude, which permeated in the first months of Resistance organization, created a “Resistance within the Resistance.”<sup>86</sup>

The various political parties, which had been underground and illegal, started to emerge out of their silence and hiding. They gave a sense of direction and purpose, but most significantly a voice and visibility to the phenomenon of armed Resistance. On September 9, with Rome already occupied by German forces, the CLN in Rome appealed to all Italians to join the Resistance and fight to free Italy. The CLN in Rome tried to take command of the liberation movement but in fact it was the CLN in Milan which would effectively assume control of the organization of the Resistance.<sup>87</sup>

Within the CLN there was division and controversy. The organization did not effectively collect money, supplies and weapons until the spring and summer of 1944. In the beginning it acted more as a government, dividing the different tasks in sectors, organizing the military, financial, logistic, and propaganda departments. The two largest political parties within the CLN, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the Partito D’Azione (PDA), disagreed with the plans of action. The PCI called for systematic and continued assaults on the Germans and Fascists which would serve as propaganda and grow its ranks. Under the leadership of Luigi Longo, in October 1943 the PCI formed the Garibaldi brigades. The PDA wanted to restructure the disbanded military and have a volunteer “patriotic” army that included volunteer civilians. Under the leadership of Ferruccio Parri, the Giustizia e Liberta’ brigades were formed. Parri became one of the

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<sup>86</sup> Santo Peli, *Storia della Resistenza in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 27-29.

<sup>87</sup> Peli, 41.

leaders of the CLN and held the first negotiations with the Anglo-Americans who were skeptical of dealing with a communist leader.<sup>88</sup>

Individual commanders at times opposed the mandates from the CLN and took action independently. Political cohesiveness did not always exist as some fighters joined a particular Partisan group because of its geographical location rather than the political affiliation. The individual groups morphed continually, splitting and creating new groups with different names and under different commands. The schisms were due to a myriad of reasons and not limited to political controversy. Confusion also permeated the government. Fascists who had been in charge were now taking orders from the Germans. Those who felt a continued loyalty to Mussolini and the Fascist dream had to feel betrayed by their former German allies and their fellow countrymen who followed Badoglio. Adding to the disorder, separate groups of Fascists and Partisans took advantage of the pandemonium to impose their rule and take advantage of the local population. Many personal vendettas took place and an anarchical atmosphere prevailed.

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<sup>88</sup> Dondi, 227; Peli, 41-45.

### CHAPTER 3

#### RESISTANCE IN TUSCANY

With the exception of the Po Valley to the north and the Puglia region in the south (the heel of the boot), Italy is a predominately mountainous country. The Alps crown the country in the north and range in altitude between 13,000 and 15,000 feet. The Apennine Mountains form the backbone of the country, running from the Liguria region down to the toe of the boot in Calabria and range in altitude between 7,000 and 9,000 feet. The region of Tuscany is situated on the northwestern coast of Italy just north of the Lazio region and Rome. There is flat land where the Arno River flows out to the Tyrrhenian Sea and some flat land along the coast, but the majority of the region is comprised of rolling hills and mountains which range from the Apuan Alps in the north to the Apennines in the east. The metalliferous hills encompass the heart of the region and cover the area of Livorno, Pisa, Siena, and Grosseto. The locale is peppered with silver, copper, lead, and pyrite mines which have been exploited since the time of the Etruscans. The area also includes extensive cave systems which offer shelter and hiding places.

During the mid-twentieth century there were extensive roads and rail-lines along the coast; but further inland, the roads diminished as the terrain got rougher. Consequently, travel to and between small hill and mountain towns was neither easy nor fast. The relative isolation of the towns regularly promoted some autonomy but also left the local authorities with unsupervised power over the local population. The political ambition of the authority in charge often determined the severity or laxity of control over the citizens. In some locations the local *carabinieri* were only concerned with maintaining the law and let the people live and run their lives independently. In other

locations the local Fascist authorities exercised extreme control over the population and used their power for personal gain and vendettas. Consequently, the elements of Resistance in Tuscany developed according to the particular history of each area.<sup>89</sup>

The overall Resistance in Tuscany went through two distinct phases. Its membership initially consisted of remnants of the Italian dispersed military, fugitive Allied POWs and others who were interested in escaping Nazi and Fascist round-ups, civilians who were openly defying Fascist policies, and of course, the members of the political left who had been building a network for subversive activities. Initial Resistance activities also reflected this variegated make-up of fighters. From September 1943 until early summer 1944, Resistance fighters concentrated on expanding their own numbers, assisting fugitives (Jews, POWs, and draft evaders), coordinating work slow-downs and strikes, building an infrastructure, and harassing the local Fascist officials. The Tuscan Resistance generally avoided open engagements with larger Axis units, particularly with the Germans. The second phase started in early summer 1944, with the Allies fighting their way north through Tuscany, and the Germans intensifying their defenses in an attempt to slow down the Allied advances. With open conflict now in Tuscan territory, and the Partisans better organized and equipped, they coordinated their efforts with the Allies. Resistance fighters began sabotaging German equipment and taking an active role in the fight against the Nazis and Fascists.

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<sup>89</sup> The ranges of local authority in small towns are well documented throughout Origo, *War in Val D'Orcia* and in Tullio Bruno Bertini, *Trapped in Tuscany: Liberated by the Buffalo Soldiers* (Boston: Dante University Press, 1998).

Conditions in Tuscany mirrored the confusion at the national level. Mario Chirici, a republican, split from his Partisan cell in Istria, Croatia, to return to Tuscany and the area of Massa Marittima on the Tuscan coast. He formed several groups, starting with the Massetano band, which became the 10th company *Guardia Nazionale Giuseppe Garibaldi* and later grew into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Garibaldi Brigade. His groups were backed by the Communists from the CLN in Livorno, but he welcomed people of all political affiliations as long as they shared anti-fascist ideology. The CLN, however, pushed political cohesiveness. After the February 16, 1944 battle between the 3<sup>rd</sup> Garibaldi Brigade and the Fascists, which resulted in defeat of the Partisan group, the CLN backed the formation of a separate group, the Boscaglia Brigade, which welcomed those of different political affiliations and was the unit that Aroldo Salvadori later joined.<sup>90</sup>

Between the fall of 1943 and spring 1944 the Partisan formations in central Italy carried out some acts of sabotage but failed to involve significant numbers of the civilian population. The Communist Party coordinated with the CLN, and on March 1, 1944, every factory in Northern Italy ceased production at the same time. The Italians were protesting the German deportation of Italian workers, equipment, and raw materials. Two days later GAP organizers in Tuscany received the orders, and local factory workers

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<sup>90</sup> Giovanni Baldini, "Mario Chirici: Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted July 14, 2003, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/biografie/chirici\\_mario/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/biografie/chirici_mario/) (accessed January 18, 2011). Aroldo Salvadori, interview by author, Rosa di Terriccioli, Tuscany, June 9, 2008.



and miners began to strike. This was the first successful nationwide protest since the installation of Fascism two decades earlier.<sup>91</sup>

The Germans faced a problem in ascertaining jurisdiction over the civilian population in Italy with rivalry between the *Schutzstaffel* (SS – Nazi Party formations which had both police and, by 1944, military functions) and the regular army. Hitler resolved this in favor of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring’s regular army forces. The SS and police would remain responsible for the operations against civilians but under Kesselring’s direction. By spring 1944 Field Marshal Kesselring was feeling the increasing impact of the Resistance movement as recorded in his diary, *A Soldier’s Record*.<sup>92</sup> Added to his frustration was the fact that the Partisans did not wear distinguishing signs or uniforms while carrying out their acts of sabotage and then either retreated to the mountains or within the local population. In addition, many civilians were helping the Partisans in various ways, either voluntarily or through compulsion, which made them equally responsible (in the eyes of occupation authorities) for Axis casualties and for subsequent repercussions. In response, Kesselring issued the so called “impunity clause,” not as an act of reprisal but as punishment against the bandits that in his opinion violated international law and contradicted every principle of clean soldierly fighting. Emphasizing the German actions as punishment for crimes rather than arbitrary

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<sup>91</sup> Battaglia, 88-92.

<sup>92</sup> Albert Kesselring, *Kesselring: a Soldier’s Record* (1957; repr., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), (hereinafter cited as Kesselring, *Soldier*).

reprisals was supposed to lend them legitimacy as defenders of order rather than brutes flexing their muscles.<sup>93</sup>

When Italy capitulated to the Allies, Germany was forced to reorganize its military and transfer potentially essential troops from the Eastern and Western Fronts to Italy. The otherwise orderly and well-organized German armed forces went from fighting a well-defined enemy (in the Allies or occupied peoples) to suddenly fighting a prior ally. Furthermore, the fights did not necessarily follow conventional rules of warfare as the Germans found themselves fighting Partisan guerrilla tactics. The Partisan bands started out small, sporadic, and with little organization, but after the fall and winter of 1943 the Resistance gained in numbers and momentum, and started coordinating their attacks and acts of sabotage with Allied military advances.<sup>94</sup>

### **One man's story: Aroldo Salvadori.**

The experiences of Aroldo Salvadori dramatically illustrate the early patterns of development of the Resistance in Tuscany.<sup>95</sup> They show the link of the Gruppi di Azione Patriottica – GAP (groups for patriotic action, the military arm of the Communist Party) network with the dispersed resisters, the initial logistic problems, and the issues of trust and loyalty. Aroldo Salvadori lived in a small village of Berignone in the province of

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<sup>93</sup> Albrecht Kesselring: *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring*, trans. William Kimber, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1960; repr. London:Greenhill Books/Lionel Leventhal Ltd, 2007), 229-230, (hereinafter cited as Kesselring, *Memoirs*); Pezzino, 176; and Brooks, 133.

<sup>94</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 224-225.

<sup>95</sup> Salvadori, interview.

Pisa, Tuscany. He was seventeen years old and had already passed his physical examination for entry into the military on the fateful date of September 8, 1943.

Tuscany was under German occupation, and after Mussolini was restored to power by the Germans he lowered the age of conscription in an attempt to rebuild his Italian army.

Aroldo's parents encouraged him to escape since nobody really knew who was in charge of the national government, and locally the Fascists were flexing their muscles. They feared if he joined the army he would be sent to the Russian Front to fight with the Germans.

In early spring 1944 the *carabinieri* of the town conducted a "raking," looking for eligible young boys for conscription. When Aroldo could not be found, the *Carabinieri* arrested his father for failing to turn in his son.<sup>96</sup> Aroldo remained hidden for two weeks but could not handle the guilt over his father's arrest. With his father in prison there was nobody to protect the family or earn a living, and he believed the Fascists would continue to harass his mother and siblings. He was offered amnesty to turn himself in, which he did.<sup>97</sup> He was escorted to Pisa, the nearest large city, and was brought to the police station where he was interrogated for hours.

During the interrogation he was asked what he had in his *sack*. His mother had packed three breads, some sausage and cheese. The interrogator left the room and upon his return he told Aroldo that in exchange for his *sack* of food Aroldo would be allowed a

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<sup>96</sup> Origo gives examples of family members being arrested because conscripted members failed to report for duty. Origo, 104 & 112.

<sup>97</sup> This meant that if he joined the military he would not face jail time as a deserter.

fifteen-day leave to settle his affairs prior to going in the army. Aroldo did not know if this was a trick but had no choice but to trust the guard. He knew that the soldiers and city people were suffering from hunger so he agreed to the exchange. The guard left the holding room, and when he returned he handed Aroldo an official document ordering him to present himself to the military center in Florence from where he would be sent to a cavalry unit stationed at Cassino, southern Italy. He gave him permissive leave and a fifteen-day pass to go home prior to reporting to the transition unit in Florence.<sup>98</sup>

When Aroldo exited the prison he did not know which direction to take. He had never been in the city and was going to walk home but did not know where to go. He was standing on the sidewalk, looking lost, when an older gentleman asked him what he was doing. Aroldo immediately told him he wasn't escaping but had legal documents allowing him to go home. The older gentleman walked him to the bus station so he could ride the bus to Pomarance, the province closest to his home town. The bus driver recognized Aroldo as the young man who had previously been accompanied to Pisa by two military guards and assumed he had escaped. He told him to hide in the luggage compartment on the top of the bus. Aroldo remained in the luggage compartment for the entire trip, approximately ninety kilometers, and then ran to his home village.

He found his home full of neighbors who had come to console his family after his departure. They thought he had escaped again, but he showed them his military pass and they all celebrated his return home. When the celebrations subsided and the time to report back to the military was nearing the townspeople spoke to him about what would

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<sup>98</sup> Salvadori, interview; and Aroldo Salvadori, *La Liberta' Sopra Ogni Cosa* (Rosso, 2008), 22.

happen if he returned to the military. The Allies had been fighting the Germans for control of Monte Cassino for months and casualties were high. It was only a matter of time before the Allied forces prevailed. If Aroldo was not sent to the cavalry unit in Cassino he would end up fighting for the Germans in a foreign land, when he could be protecting his own territory at home fighting the Nazis.

This council was persuasive to the young boy. Along with two other young men from his home town, with whom he had grown up, he started to look for hiding places and escape routes in the woods surrounding the town. The three friends decided to hide out and not report for duty when their time was up. At the end of the fifteen days the *carabinieri* started harassing Aroldo's father because Aroldo had not returned to duty. His father was able to stay out of trouble by stating that he made Aroldo present himself to the army; if he had escaped after that, the father was not responsible and did not know where his son was. This tactic was widespread: it cleared the parents of any responsibility for the deserting son so that the government did not withhold their food vouchers or imprison the parent.<sup>99</sup>

The three boys went to the woods to hide out. They had each packed a blanket and a few extra pairs of socks, and they had one rabbit to cook. When they reached a cabin along the Cecina River they thought they would be safe and started to cook the rabbit. Just across the river there was a large ammunition depot belonging to the Italian navy. There were some workers and some Italian and German soldiers. Suddenly the boys heard three shots ring through the air and they abandoned their food and escaped

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<sup>99</sup> Origo, 115.

further into the woods. They came upon a farmer's house and asked for shelter. After they told the farmer their story, he agreed to let them stay but did not want them in the house for fear of punishment if they were found. He told them to hide in the stable and he would bring them food. They spend the night in the stable sleeping in the food trough and left the following morning.

They went to the hills where a coalman lived with his wife and son who had escaped service with the *carabinieri*. After a few days a man they had seen in their town from time to time, and who was known only as "the merchant" came to the coalman. The merchant was known to associate with everybody and had even been seen playing cards with the forest rangers, who were Fascists, so they were afraid he would turn them in. Instead he approached them, showed them his handgun, and told them he was trying to organize a group to resist the Nazis/Fascists when the time came and to try to protect their families. He asked them to join him and stated that if they just continued to hide out or return to their village they would eventually get caught and killed. At that time the boys had not even heard of the CLN, as only higher-ranking organizers were in direct contact with the Resistance organization. The merchant told them their task was going to be building huts on the mountain where they could observe military movements below, collect information to pass on, and receive instructions. He was not familiar with the territory and needed someone from the area.

Aroldo and his companions built six huts on the side of the mountain where they had a good view of the ammunition depot, the main road, and could observe military movements. Once the huts were built, Partisans started arriving and joining them. The merchant continued bringing in men who were part of the Resistance movement. In little

time there were at least thirty Partisans in the group. Food was supplied to them by the CLN in the form of sacks of corn flour so they could make polenta. They were instructed not to make fires during the day because they would be easily spotted, but could make small fires at night so they could cook. Instead of using wood they used a little charcoal which made a more contained fire. The CLN would bring sacks of grain to a particular farmer, who in turn would bring the grain to the local mill to be ground into flour. The mill was approximately seven kilometers from the Partisan hideout. Aroldo and three other men would walk to the mill at night to collect their *sacks* of flour and make their way back to their hideouts in the dark.

With the hideouts built and the food supply arranged, it was time to arm themselves. The initial weapons inventory was totally inadequate for a group of thirty Partisans who had a total of three revolvers, a couple of hunting rifles, and three muskets of questionable value. The CLN, however, managed to collect arms and ammunition from the disbanded Italian military and distributed the weapons to their organized groups. Aroldo's detachment, now called "La Prima Squadra di Berignone," was supplied by their CLN organizers in Pisa who hid weapons and ammunition on a horse-drawn cart covered with cauliflower. The cart was brought to the same mill where the Partisans got their flour. At one point, when going through the town before the mill, the horse could not pull the wagon up an incline in the town. Townspeople surrounded the wagon and were trying to buy the cauliflower stating they were hungry. The driver pleaded with them to leave the vegetables alone because he was committed to deliver them elsewhere. To maintain order in the town, the local fascists helped push the wagon up the hill so the

driver could proceed on his route. The irony of their action has been a bragging matter for many years.<sup>100</sup>

The salvaged weapons were not all new World War II models; the rifle assigned to Aroldo was an old World War I 91-model gun. However, there were also some Breda machine-guns in load. With the Partisan group adequately armed, they were able to start aggravating the local Nazis and Fascists. The local fascists and *Carabinieri* had been harassing the local civilians with their *ronde* (military patrols) looking for deserters and escapees. By the end of 1943 the Partisans were sufficiently organized and equipped to begin their campaign to curb Fascist action. The Partisans were not supposed to act on their own but await orders by the CLN regarding what actions to take, where, and when. Normally their attacks on the Fascists, Carabinieri, or Nazis were in response to the former either sequestering people or taking goods from the civilians. With scarcity of food already a problem even among the farmers, the requisitioning of grain or livestock in any amount added to the suffering of the civilians. It was the Partisans' responsibility to protect the people.

Aroldo's Partisan squadron received their orders from the CLN in Massa Marittima. The CLN had received numerous reports of Fascists abusing the local population in a town called Montieri where several civilians had been beaten or imprisoned by the local authorities. In coordination with other Partisan squadrons, who patrolled the streets leading to town in the event of German interference, Aroldo's group cut telephone lines and bombed both the power station and the Carabinieri headquarters.

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<sup>100</sup> The story of the weapons in the cauliflower cart was corroborated independently by another partisan interviewed by the author in Pisa. (Vecchiani interview, 2008).



The Germans did break through the Partisan lines, and the squadron received orders to retreat. Aroldo had been temporarily deafened by the sound of the bombs and did not hear the order. He nevertheless made his escape along with another Partisan through the cemetery. They managed to find their way back to their hideout and were put on guard duty, assigned to the big machine gun. During the night they heard noises, demanded identification, and when they received no response, they began firing. When the rest of the Partisans heard the commotion, they also began shooting and some sparks ignited the straw on the bedding. A fire developed from the ignited straw and reached their ammunition pile which caught fire and blew up.

It was obvious their camp was no longer a safe place since the fire and explosions could be seen and heard from a great distance. They quickly discovered their leader had betrayed them and given their location to the Fascists. At this point, the second-in-command took charge and gave them the choice to either disband and try to make it on their own, or follow him. Out of the thirty men, twenty-five went with the new commander, while the others, including Aroldo went on their own. Aroldo hid out in caves near his home. As it turned out, the new commander turned in his twenty-five men for a bounty. They were summarily executed in the town of Cecina. When Aroldo found out what happened to his companions, he went back to the woods, up the mountains of Carline in the province of Siena, and joined one of the local Garibaldi squadrons, nicknamed after Guido Boscaglia, a Partisan who was wounded, captured by the Germans, tortured, and beaten to death when he refused to give the names and location of his companions.

When Aroldo reached the 23<sup>rd</sup> Garibaldi squadron, they did not know who he was. They apologized to him for the treatment he was about to receive but they needed to be sure he was not a spy. Their leader, a man named Bargagna, who was from Pisa, gave him a piece of bread and some water and locked him in a hut. They would keep him locked up until they could verify his identity and affiliations. Aroldo knew he was at great risk because if he could not prove his identity and the fact that he was a genuine Partisan they would kill them. The Partisans could not take any chances of betrayal, and if in doubt they would err on the side of safety. There was no pity; the life of one was not worth risking the squadron.

Aroldo lucked out, one day and a half after his capture a courier arrived. Aroldo knew the man who was from his same town of Berignone. The courier vouched for him, and Aroldo joined the squadron. His group was comprised of seventeen people and was led by a man named Leone. Aroldo became the cook for the squadron and a person they counted on for his knowledge of the area. Aroldo was given the code name *Guerra* (war) and a Sten machine gun. Although he was the cook, he often was used as courier. He eventually received better arms, but when faced with enemy fire, fear was always present.

By this time the Allies began parachuting materiel to the Partisans so they could help in the liberation of Italy. These drops included radios, ammunitions and supplies. The Americans also dropped food supplies, canned meats, beans, chocolate, blankets clothes and shoes, a real treat for men who had been cold and hungry for months. The Partisans were now fully armed, well fed, and were in position to effectively execute the orders they received from the Allies via radio. In June 1944 the Allies informed the Partisans that the Germans were emptying the grain silos and oil containers in the town of

Radicondoli, province of Siena, to transfer the food and fuel to Germany and leaving the Italians to starve. Aroldo's squadron went to the town of Radicondoli, surrounded the town and began a battle with the *Carabinieri*. The Partisans took control of the town, opened the silos, and distributed the grain to whomever wanted it. Townspeople and farmers got their fill of grain.

The Fascists stationed in the city of Siena were apprised of the situation and headed to the town of Radicondoli to force the townspeople to return the grain. The Partisans were again alerted to the pending Fascist counteraction and returned to the town. They took over the town and successfully defended it against the Fascists. They remained in the town for the following three weeks to defend it against any Fascist reprisals. After about twenty days they spotted a German tank and foot soldiers headed toward the town. The Partisan commander gave the order to retreat into the woods because the Germans were retreating north and would only be passing through. He did not want a confrontation between the Partisans and Germans with a possible reprisal against the civilian population. The Partisans went into the mountains but over the next couple of days American bombers attacked the area. When the Partisans descended the mountain into the nearest town they found the Americans. The Partisans led the Allies to the town of Radicondoli and remained there to defend the population against any remaining Fascists in the area.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESISTANCE AND REPRISALS: THE BLOODY SUMMER OF 1944 IN TUSCANY

In May 1944 Allied forces at last broke through the Gustav Line at Cassino. At the same time British and American forces broke out of their narrow enclave at Anzio and began an offensive that would carry them to Rome and northward. With the fall of Cassino and the Gustav Line to the Allies, the Germans built several lines of defense on their retreat northward (Caesar Line, Albert Line, Heinrich Line), but their stronghold was to be the Gothic Line which went from the northern tip of Tuscany (near Carrara) on the Tyrrhenian Sea, eastward across the Apennine Mountains to the Adriatic Sea. In an effort to slow the Allied advances, Kesselring ordered maximum destruction of bridges, roads, tunnels, power stations, ports, and virtually anything else that would facilitate the Allied advance. He proposed applying the scorched-earth tactics to the city of Rome but on June 3rd, 1944 he received orders from the Führer that Rome was not to be destroyed.<sup>101</sup> By the time the Germans were forced to retreat to Tuscany, their aim was not to defeat the Allies or even hold their position in central Italy but to slow down the advance of the Allies. Likewise, after the fall of Rome, the Allied push up the Italian peninsula slowed down. The Allied principal task in Italy was not necessarily to gain ground but to engage and contain the greatest number possible of Germans which would weaken their more essential forces in France and on the Eastern Front.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Atkinson, 568; Holland, 207.

<sup>102</sup> Atkinson, 582.

By the end of May 1944 both the Germans and the Allies dropped leaflets in Tuscany. The Germans warned of severe punishments for anyone aiding Partisans or Allied POWs, punishments which included confiscation of food and cattle, burning of homes, and executions. At the same time the Allies urged the Italians to dodge their country's draft into the RSI Army and aid the Partisans in their acts of sabotage against the Germans. On June 7, General Harold Alexander sent radio messages encouraging the Italian Resistance to take action and kill Germans.<sup>103</sup> The Partisans increased their acts of sabotage and harassment while the German army was being pushed further north by the Allied advances. At the same time, the Germans knew of the Allies' constant air-raids over Germany and had the added concern for the safety of their own families. By June 1944 the Germans had been under constant stress of retreat and skirmishes. Their resentment toward the Italians for switching sides, the increased Partisan activity, and Kesselring's orders sparked a spontaneous increase in violence toward the civilian population, and the looting of food, transportation and money.<sup>104</sup> No one was safe. In the region of Tuscany 65 priests in separate instances were arrested, tortured and killed for aiding Partisans, prisoners of war (POWs), and Jews.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Holland, 187-189.

<sup>104</sup> Giovanni Contini, *La Memoria Divisa* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1997), 30.

<sup>105</sup> Odino Pieroni, "Il Contributo del Clero Pisano alla Resistenza," in *Resistenza ai Giorni Nostri* (Pisa: A.N.P.I., 2005), 176.

### **German retaliation for acts of defiance.**

By the time the war came to Tuscany in the summer of 1944, the German army had already developed a reputation for unbridled ferocity when it came to dealing with acts of resistance. Some of the first spontaneous acts of open defiance toward the Germans on the part of the civilian population took place in the city of Naples on September 28, 1943. With no formal organization and guided solely by their reckless optimism, the Neapolitan youths slashed tires and fouled the fuel lines of German vehicles, set fires to military stores and fuel dumps, and attacked individual German soldiers and took their weapons. Their guerrilla warfare techniques spread and became the standard tactics of the Partisans.<sup>106</sup> In retaliation for this defiance and to deny Allies the resources of the city when the Germans evacuated it, the Germans destroyed the city's aqueducts and sewer lines, destroyed generators and electrical systems, destroyed the civilian transportation system, cut telephone lines, razed hotels, demolished flour mills, looted the hospitals and stores, burned the University of Naples and all its contents, and opened prisons to release dangerous criminals into the population. In two months (September and October 1943) the Germans killed almost 1,600 people in the region of Campania, of which over 600 lived in the city of Naples.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Robert Katz, *The Battle for Rome: The Germans, the Allies, the Partisans, and the Pope. September 1943 – June 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 67; Puzzo, 24.

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds Packard, "Allied Report on Naples Tells of Nazi Atrocities," *The Milwaukee Journal* (October 24, 1943); Paolo Pezzino, "The German Military Occupation in Italy and the War against Civilians," *Modern Italy* Vol 12, No. 2, (June 2007): 178.

Minor acts of sabotage followed but several months later a pivotal occurrence set a chain of events in motion. On 23 March 1944, members of the GAP in Rome set off a bomb that killed 32 German soldiers. Hitler authorized a reprisal for the attack and the execution of ten Italians for each German killed. Herbert Kappler, German commander of the Security Police in Rome, rounded up three-hundred fifty Italians. The hostages included ordinary civilians, Jews from the local community, Italian prisoners of war, previously captured Partisans, and some inmates from Roman prisons. The victims were taken to the Ardeatine caves where they were executed. German military engineers set explosives to seal the caves and bury the piles of bodies.<sup>108</sup>

Although there had been previous sporadic Partisan activity, it was the Rome incident that forced the Germans to consider the Italian Resistance a real threat to the German command. On April 7, 1944, Kesselring proclaimed to his armies that in dealing with the Resistance excessively drastic measures taken by his own forces should never be punished. As Resistance activity increased, Kesselring responded by issuing a second order on June 17, 1944 which guaranteed immunity for the commanders who adopted excessive methods in fighting the Partisans. In the “impunity clause” Kesselring communicated that “the fight against the Partisans must be fought with all means at our disposition and with increased severity. I will protect those commanders who exceed in their methods of fighting the Partisans.”<sup>109</sup> Nowhere was this increased ferocity more

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<sup>108</sup> Atkinson, 480-482.

<sup>109</sup> This communication effectively gave unrestricted power to the individual German commanders to deal with the local insurgents as they saw fit. Kesselring, *Soldier*; Gianluca Fulvetti e Stefano Gallo. *La Guerra, L’Occupazione, La Resistenza, La Liberazione a San Giuliano Terme. Mostra Fotografica Documentaria sul Periodo 1940 – 1950*. (Pisa, ETS, 2008), 51.

evident than in Tuscany, the region most affected by German retaliations against the civilian population as repercussion for Partisan activity. In Tuscany there were 229 episodes of massacres with over 3,800 victims, mostly males. Of those massacres, 204 were carried out by German troops, but only 38 (18.6 percent) were committed as reprisals for Partisan actions, so a large number of murders were committed as acts of retribution for disobeying orders, racial discrimination or other causes not connected to Partisan activities.<sup>110</sup>

### **Atrocities in Tuscany**

Aroldo Salvadori's experiences reflect the dilemma that many youths faced at the time. He joined the geographically closest group that would accept and train him. Even with its political disunity, the Resistance movement offered some order and protection for young men who otherwise did not know whom to trust.<sup>111</sup> Training the Resistance was one thing; finding the physical means with which to resist was quite another. Weapons and ammunition were scarce, and initially many raids on Nazi and Fascist installations were undertaken simply to steal the necessary armaments. Due in part to a shortage of weapons, some of those who escaped conscription were never directly involved in fighting but restricted their participation to collecting food and clothes, cooking, or gathering wood.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Pezzino, 178-179.

<sup>111</sup> Origo describes the chaos, the four governments and two armies, the self-rule of each community, the resistance movement and the ordinary Italian people. Origo, 96-98.

<sup>112</sup> Salvadori interview.



Aroldo started out as a cook for his Partisan group, but as the fighting increased and came to his camp, he found himself forced to fight in self-defense. As the Allies got nearer and hope for ending the war grew, he actively harassed and fought the Germans and the Fascists.<sup>113</sup> Others embraced combat more enthusiastically out of desperation to expel the dictatorial regime and gain some control over their lives. Whether they became *attendisti* (those who waited), or actively fought against the Nazis and Fascists, they at least remained within their own country and justified their actions as protecting their families and territory.

The Fascists' tyranny against the local populations became even more severe when the Germans created Mussolini's puppet government and imposed stricter demands on the Italians. The Fascist local commanders took revenge on any locals who had defied them during Italy's recent 45-day crisis. Even the "moderate" Fascists became more militant in an attempt to appease the Germans and maintain their positions of control. The Fascists and Germans struggled to maintain control over the population, and with the ever-advancing Allied forces the Partisan movement erupted.

The Italians were well aware the Germans had adopted the scorched-earth policy. In an attempt to preserve their livelihood and natural resources, the miners of Niccioletta started to hide machinery, tools, explosives and provisions. The Partisan 23<sup>rd</sup> Garibaldi Brigade had been operating in the area and on June 3, 1944, sent a detachment into the town to help organize their Resistance. The townspeople did not consider the local Fascists dangerous, so they were only loosely guarded. Consequently, the wives of some

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<sup>113</sup> Salvadori interview.

of the Fascists managed to escape the guards and contact the Fascist command in the next town. Meanwhile the Partisans had organized the miners in shifts to guard the mines, equipment and local Fascists, then left the town.

On June 13, over three hundred German and Fascist soldiers surrounded Niccioletta. They found a list with the names of the miners assigned to guard the mine and equipment and arrested all those named. In addition to the seventy-seven miners on the list, they arrested locals suspected of being Partisans or sympathizers, and transferred one hundred fifty men to the town of Castelnuovo, over 50 miles northward, supposedly for forced labor at the geothermic station. At Castelnuovo the prisoners were confined in the local theater. The following morning they were divided in three groups, the first to be executed, the second for deportation, and the third to be sent back home. The Partisans and miners listed to guard the mines were chosen for execution. The rest were divided by age; the young were deported, the old sent home. The *III Polizei-Freiwilligen-Bataillon Italien*, the Italian voluntary SS serving directly in the German army executed seventy-seven men for their involvement in the Resistance movement.<sup>114</sup>

In the province of Arezzo, in the southeastern part of Tuscany, several towns were subjected to Nazi-Fascist atrocities as reprisals for Partisan activity. On June 18, 1944, in the town of Civitella a group of Partisans of the Renzino Band attacked four Germans soldiers to get their weapons. They killed two of the Germans, wounded one, and one escaped. The townspeople hid in the woods immediately after the attack on the Germans

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<sup>114</sup> Giovanni Baldini, "La Strage dei minatori di Niccioletta," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted September 9, 2004, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/la\\_strage\\_dei\\_minatori\\_di\\_niccioletta/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/la_strage_dei_minatori_di_niccioletta/) (accessed September 20, 2010).

for fear of retaliation but no immediate action was taken. The local priest convinced most of the townspeople to return since the German commander had assured him there would be no repercussions since the Germans killed the responsible Partisans in a firefight.<sup>115</sup>

The Germans entered the town on the morning of June 29th. The only townspeople to run off to the fields were the draft-dodgers trying to escape capture. The rest of the civilians felt sure of their safety as guaranteed by the German commander. The Germans gathered the civilians and marched them through town. The women and children were sent out of town while the men were assembled in the piazza and were executed in rows of five. The Germans then brought out the machine guns and placed them on the bridge at the bottom of the town and began to shoot indiscriminately, killing civilians, and to set many houses on fire. The Germans then went to two nearby towns and massacred additional men. In all 244 men were executed: 115 in Civitella, 58 in Cornia, and 71 in San Pancrazio.<sup>116</sup>

Less than one month later, on July 16, 1944 in the nearby town of San Polo, 48 civilian men were murdered in an act of retaliation. A German deserter, caught by the Nazis, revealed that German soldiers had been captured by local Partisans. Fascist and

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<sup>115</sup> Giovanni Baldini, "Le Stragi di Civitella e San Pancrazio," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted August 14, 2003, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/le\\_stragi\\_di\\_civitella\\_e\\_san\\_pancrazio/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/le_stragi_di_civitella_e_san_pancrazio/) (accessed October 1, 2010); and Contini, 55.

<sup>116</sup> Messina, Dino. Civitella, l'anti Marzabotto. *Corriere della Sera*. April 9, 1997. [http://archivistorico.corriere.it/1997/aprile/09/Civitella\\_anti\\_Marzabotto\\_co\\_o\\_9704094425.shtml/](http://archivistorico.corriere.it/1997/aprile/09/Civitella_anti_Marzabotto_co_o_9704094425.shtml/) (accessed October 1, 2010). Mannino, Salvatore. Strage di Civitella, stretta di mano 66 anni dopo. *La Nazione*. July 7, 2010, [http://www.lanazione.it/arezzo.cronaca/2010/07/07/354172-strage\\_civitella\\_stretta.shtml](http://www.lanazione.it/arezzo.cronaca/2010/07/07/354172-strage_civitella_stretta.shtml) (accessed October 1, 2010). Giovanni Baldini, *Le Stragi di Civitella e San Pancrazio*.

German SS units commanded by Marshall Hans Plumer rounded up sixty-five civilians, including women and children. After torture and interrogations, they were forced to dig three pit graves. The captives were then thrown in alive. The Partisans were placed in the pits with their heads above ground and with explosive charges attached to their bodies. They were then blown apart. The local priest requested permission to give the victims a proper burial but his request was refused by the Germans because the victims were “people without honor.” Two days later the Allies arrived on location and were informed of the atrocities. Two Italian doctors, Aldo Martini and Carlo Silli, supervised the exhumation of the bodies from the mass graves on July 17 and 18, 1944 at the request of the local parish priests. They found evidence that many of the men had been beaten, all were in civilian clothes, and none had traces of wounds from a weapon indicating they were buried alive.<sup>117</sup>

The most notorious German massacre on the civilian population in Tuscany was the massacre at Sant’Anna di Stazzema in the province of Lucca.<sup>118</sup> The Germans had imposed an order for civilians in the area to evacuate to the city of Parma, across the Apennine mountains. Hundreds of the displaced from the surrounding valley took refuge in the hill town of Sant’Anna di Stazzema quadrupling its population. On July 30, there was a fight between the 10<sup>th</sup> Garibaldi brigade and the Nazis which resulted in a

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<sup>117</sup> Ugo Jona, *Le Rappresaglie NaziFasciste sulle Popolazioni Toscane* (Firenze: A.N.F.I.M., 1951), 107-108; Editorial, La Strage di San Polo. *Arezzo Notizie*. July 10, 2010. [http://www.arezzoneotizie.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=53002:la-strage-di-san-polo&catid=83:varie&Itemid=1100](http://www.arezzoneotizie.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53002:la-strage-di-san-polo&catid=83:varie&Itemid=1100) (accessed September 1, 2010).

<sup>118</sup> The movie “Miracle at Sant’Anna” gives a very realistic portrayal of the intricacies of the time and place showing both good and bad on the part of the Germans as well as the Italians. (*Miracle at St. Anna*, directed by Spike Lee, Touchstone Pictures, 2008).

German withdrawal. On August 5<sup>th</sup> the Germans posted 24-hour notices of evacuation in the town, but the Partisan band Bardelloni posted notices on top of these that told the population not to evacuate and that they would protect them. On August 12, 1944, Evelina Berretti Pieri was in labor with her third child. She asked her neighbor to call the midwife but Anton Galler, captain of the German SS, showed up instead. He slashed Evelina's abdomen, pulled out the child, and then killed both mother and child who were still attached by the umbilical cord.<sup>119</sup> What followed was a four-hour massacre. The civilians had been caught by surprise. Not only was the town high in the hills, but the Partisans had promised their protection. Major Walter Reder, of the German 16<sup>th</sup> SS Panzergrenadier-Division, commanded the troops involved in the massacre. Over 560 civilians, including women and children, were killed that morning. After the bloodbath the town was torched.

It is still debated whether the Sant'Anna massacre was a retaliation for Partisan activity or simply a random act of terrorism by the retreating German army. In the immediate period after the war, most remaining locals blamed the Partisans for the act of German retaliation. There was some debate regarding a German posted order of evacuation that the Partisans removed and replaced with their order to remain. The anti-Partisan sentiment lasted until 1955 when the town of Sant'Anna received the medal of military valor which transformed the location into a symbol of the Resistance. Court cases followed, and in 2007 the Cassation Court in Rome ruled the massacre not a

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<sup>119</sup> Giustolisi, 118-119.

reprisal but a premeditated act of terrorism. However, even after this final ruling, many locals still privately blame the Partisans for bringing the tragedy to their town.<sup>120</sup>

The Germans continued their carnage in neighboring towns as they retreated further north. On August 20, 1944, at Bardine San Terenzo in the province of Massa, in retaliation for additional Partisan activity which killed a German colonel and his driver, 53 people were tied to posts or vehicles and shot. Reprisals continued for the next four days, and a total of 369 people, mostly women and children, were killed; in addition, 454 houses were totally destroyed in a frenzied vengeance by the SS, led once again by Major Walter Reder.<sup>121</sup>

The atrocities were not committed only by the Germans. After a meeting on August 24, 1944 between Major Reder and Italian Colonel Giulio Lodovici, vice-commander of the Black Brigades, one hundred Italian Republican troops took over “cleaning up” the problem area of Vinca in the province of Carrara. As a continuation of round-ups for Partisan activity and support for the Resistance in the Massa-Carrara area almost two hundred women, children, and elderly were executed, bringing the total civilians massacred in the area to over five-hundred in a four-day period.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 133-135; Paul Salsini. "About Sant'Anna di Stazzema." *A Tuscan Trilogy*. <http://www.atuscantriology.com/sant.php> (accessed August 20, 2010); *La Storia Siamo Noi*. Giovanni Minoli. <http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/puntata.aspx?id=539> (accessed Oct 1, 2010).

<sup>121</sup> Lamb, 73, and Giustolisi, 102. Giovanni Baldini, “Le violenze di San Terenzo – Bardine,” *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted August 6, 2005, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/le\\_violenze\\_di\\_san\\_terenzo\\_bardine/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/le_violenze_di_san_terenzo_bardine/) (accessed October 4, 2010);

<sup>122</sup> Giustolisi, 103.

### **Florence, the political turning point**

On June 4, 1944, Rome was liberated by the Allies without the participation of the Italian Resistance. That defining event prompted the CLN to launch a massive propaganda campaign to incite Italians to actively participate in the liberation of their own country instead of having to be rescued by foreigners. The Germans were pushed further north into Tuscany by the Allies, and between June and August 1944 the civilian involvement in the Resistance increased exponentially. The Partisans participated in acts of sabotage, harassed local Fascist officials, collected and passed information to the Allies, and clashed with the Germans. The Germans had imposed a scorched-earth campaign during their forced retreat north but Florence had been declared an “open city,” a city declared demilitarized during war, so under international law, gained immunity from attack. Doctor Gerhard Wolf, German Consul of Florence, convinced the German ambassador in Italy to declare Florence an open city in an attempt to save the local art and architecture.<sup>123</sup> On July 28, 1944, the Germans issued the order to the Florentine people to evacuate the city. The following day the RAF dropped leaflets, and the BBC instructed the citizens of Florence to stand united and prevent the destruction of bridges and other vital installations.<sup>124</sup>

Many citizens barricaded themselves and refused to leave their city. The Partisans offered to show the Allies a way into the city through the sewer systems but the

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<sup>123</sup> David Tuaev, *The Man Who Saved Florence* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966). The entire book is a description of how Dr. Wolf schemed to save the Jews, art, and architecture of Florence from German destruction and pillage.

<sup>124</sup> Brooks 114; Holland, 286.

Allies turned down the option. The Resistance fighters made extensive use of the sewer system to infiltrate Florence and carry out subversive activities. They used them as a conduit to bring wounded Partisans to the city hospital and back out when they had recovered. The hospital staff hid Partisans and escaped POWs in a quarantine ward so the Germans and Fascists would not enter. Eventually an informer notified the Germans of the Partisans' use of the sewers, and on August 24, the Germans blew them up to close them off and prevent further use.<sup>125</sup>

There had been sporadic Partisan combat activity in the Florentine city since the capitulation of the Italian government on September 8; however, it was the continued networking of the GAP and the flow of information via Radio Cora that made the most impact. Radio Cora, subventioned by the Partito d'Azione, was used to maintain contact between the Allies and the Resistance. It fed intelligence reports to the Allies, and was used by the Resistance to direct Allied supply drops where needed.<sup>126</sup>

By August 4, the Allies had reached the outskirts of Florence but were unable to enter the city. The Comitato Toscano di Liberazione Nazionale (CTLN) in Tuscany gave the order for a general insurrection, and the citizens and Partisans fought to eliminate the control of the Fascists over the last pockets of the city. The CTLN called in the combat Partisan units from the surrounding areas and on August 11<sup>th</sup> the Florentines

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<sup>125</sup> Giovanni Baldini, "L'Ospedale di Careggi," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted November 26, 2005, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/l\\_ospedale\\_di\\_careggi/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/l_ospedale_di_careggi/) (accessed March 9, 2011); Alessandro Bargellini, "Attraverso le fogne," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted November 8, 2005, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/attraverso\\_le\\_fogne/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/attraverso_le_fogne/) (accessed March 4, 2011); Brooks, 114.

<sup>126</sup> Giovanni Baldini, "Radio Cora," *ResistenzaToscana.it*, entry posted Mar 6, 2003, [http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/radio\\_cora/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/storie/radio_cora/) (accessed March 9, 2011).



were reinforced in their struggle to free the city. The Partisans and Florentine citizens continued their fight against the Germans and, after the Germans' departure, against the pockets of Fascists who remained in the city. The culmination of the Resistance's efforts in Tuscany occurred when they liberated Florence on September 1, 1944, after three weeks of constant battle. The psychological ramifications from the liberation of Florence were huge. Italians had not just won a small battle or liberated a minor town, but managed to liberate the regional capital from both Nazis and Fascists, and had taken over government of the city. In their effort to liberate Florence, the Resistance suffered over six hundred casualties with 205 dead and 400 wounded. The Resistance's success of ousting the occupying army prior to the arrival of the Allies proved their willingness, ability, and right to fight and self-govern.<sup>127</sup>

### **Paradoxes**

With the escalation of atrocities, some Partisans began to question whether they were responsible for the massacres. Were their efforts against the Germans worth the repercussions that the civilians suffered, or would it have been better to await liberation by the Allies? They questioned how many innocent victims they were responsible for and if the massacres would have even occurred had the Partisans not harassed the Germans. In his autobiography, David Irdani, a Partisan, asked himself that very question but never gave an answer. The author of this thesis questioned one of the

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<sup>127</sup> Peli, 58 and 94.

interviewed Partisans on this matter. When asked if he ever felt responsible for retaliations against the civilians, he responded that the responsibility and culpability rested solely upon the Germans and Fascists who committed the atrocities. The Partisans only waged war against the soldiers, never against the civilians, so they should never be held responsible for the actions of the murderers.<sup>128</sup>

The actions of a few Germans were equally paradoxical. Some German soldiers, disgusted by the horrors they witnessed or were forced to partake in, found solace and a sense of redemption by joining the Resistance. In his book *Sabbiuno di Padermo*, Alberto Preti describes the experience of three German soldiers who join the Italian Resistance.<sup>129</sup> A number of Germans joined the Partisan groups and took to the mountains; others helped the Italians in a non-combative manner. On 24 August 1944 don Luigi Janni, priest of the town of Vinca, Massa Carrara, was going up the mountain with his father to meet some of the Partisans. On their way they noticed columns of Germans headed toward their town. The priest hurried toward town so he could intervene or give comfort in case of need. Some German soldiers spotted him and tried to protect him by telling him to escape because their commander was evil. The priest was captured and executed.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> David Irdani, *Un'Estate: Gambalesta, Fraiser e alter alchimie* (Lulu, 2007), 36; Vecchiani, interview.

<sup>129</sup> Alberto Preti, *Sabbiuno di Padermo* (University Press, Bologna 1994).

<sup>130</sup> Pesci, don Giuseppe. "I sacerdoti toscani vittime dei nazifascisti." *Resistenza Toscana.net*. May 18, 2003. <http://www.resistenzatoscana.net/documenti/clero.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2010).

Another act of protection on the part of a German was that of Colonel Valentin Müller, a German medical officer and a Catholic assigned in Assisi. He knew that the monastery at Cassino had been destroyed and as the front moved up to central Italy the only way to save Assisi was to make it a hospital city. He used his influence to convince German higher officials to use Assisi as a major medical center for German troops in Italy in summer 1944. Assisi was spared from destruction because of Müller's efforts.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Francesco Santucci, *The Strategy that Saved Assisi* (Editrice Minerva Assisi), 10.

## CHAPTER 5

### MEMORIALIZATION

#### Memory changed over time

Memory and public opinion change with the circumstances. At the peak of his popularity, when Italians were still mesmerized by Mussolini's great speeches promising a renewal of Roman power, the *Duce* was symbolic of Italian youth and vigor. He survived several attempts on his life which gave him the aura of divine protection.<sup>132</sup> After years of failed military missions and unfulfilled promises of improvements in the lives of ordinary Italians, public opinion turned against him. By 1942, the *Duce* was no longer seen as a strong soldier but as a failed military leader. His romantic escapades were no longer glorified but viewed as the actions of a coward and adulterer. When he was removed from power on July 25, 1943, there were spontaneous open demonstrations against him, and women openly accused him of murdering their sons by sending them off to useless wars.<sup>133</sup> After his execution in April 1945 his body was defiled. It was then hidden and remained so until September 1957 when it was transported and interred in the cemetery of Predappio, Mussolini's birthplace. While in power Mussolini represented the rebirth of the Roman Empire; his death represented the death of Italy. Curiously, and in utter defiance of his consistent record of failure, his mausoleum has become a site of

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<sup>132</sup> Luttazzo, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Luttazzo, 35.

pilgrimage for the neo-Fascists who go to honor him and predict his spirit will rise again.<sup>134</sup>

In reality Mussolini's execution was a necessary clean cut with the past. Italy was one of the few countries in Europe to make justice on its own; the Italians did not leave it up to the Allied courts. The forces of the Resistance took matters into their own hands to reclaim their identity.<sup>135</sup> In Italy, as in other occupied countries, at war's end there were spontaneous acts of retribution against those held responsible for the people's suffering. Women collaborators had their heads shaven, while male collaborators were beaten or hanged. Investigations were conducted, trials held, and some Fascists were held accountable for their actions and even given the death penalty but few were executed. In 1946 an amnesty was signed by the Communist Party Leader and the Minister of Justice freeing most of those convicted. By 1950 no Fascists remained imprisoned for their activities.<sup>136</sup>

Part of this reflects postwar changed in international politics. Immediately after the war the Allied Forces investigated war crimes, criminal acts, and abuses of power by the Nazis and Fascists, both in and outside of Italy, and collected hundreds of documents. Interviews and investigations were conducted in the region of Tuscany by the United States Fifth Army. However, soon after, in the interest of normalizing relations between

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<sup>134</sup> Luttazzo, 213.

<sup>135</sup> Candiano Falaschi, *Gli Ultimi Giorni del Fascismo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973), 51.

<sup>136</sup> Massimo Storchi, "Post-war Violence in Italy: A Struggle for Memory," *Modern Italy* 12, 2 (June 2007): 240.

Italy and West Germany, solidifying the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) alliance opposition to the spread of communism, and as a result of mismanagement by the Italian administration the cases were hidden in a closet for decades. *L'Armadio della Vergogna*, the closet of shame, became Italy's little secret.<sup>137</sup> The "Italian Nuremberg" trial that was briefly contemplated from August 1945 to April 1946 never materialized for three reasons: First, authorities feared that it would complicate Anglo-American relations with the new Italian elected administration which leaned toward the left. Second, there were differences of opinion between the United States and the Soviet Union over who held supreme judiciary authority for judging war criminals. Third, the Allied powers, the Italian government, and the Yugoslav government disagreed over who should judge Italian soldiers accused of war crimes in the Balkans.<sup>138</sup>

Tendencies toward public amnesia concerning the issues of Resistance and reprisals prompted the Resistance fighters and victims to assume responsibility for memorializing the events of 1943 to 1945 themselves. At the end of the war the leaders of the Resistance became preoccupied with preserving the documentation of Partisan warfare. They could not put their trust in the national institutions that during Fascism had "Fascisticised" the Risorgimento documents. With no adequate or trustworthy official repository, the former Resistance fighters pushed for the development of institutions to study the history of the Resistance. The initial phase of the creation of the *Istituti per la*

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<sup>137</sup> Michele Battini, "Sins of memory: reflections on the lack of an Italian Nuremberg and the administration of international justice after 1945," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 357; Francesca Cappelletto, "Social Relations and War Remembrance: Second World War Atrocities in Rural Tuscan Villages," *History and Anthropology* 17, 3 (September 2006): 246.

<sup>138</sup> 357 Battini, 357.

*Storia della Resistenza*, Institutes for the History of the Resistance, was overseen immediately after war by Partisan leaders, communists, and Catholics but over time came under the tutelage of the CLN. They collected and archived over three million documents which were made available to those studying contemporary history. The document inventory was second only to that of the state archives although each locality maintained its own documents and there was no central repository.

While there were political disagreements over who was responsible for what, and who should be honored or not, there was a greater push for some return to normalcy, reconstruction of houses and factories, and strengthening the economy. Italy was devastated, many homes and work-places were destroyed, and people were hungry and looking for jobs. Everyone had suffered in one way or another, and it seemed useless to complain or compare what one had endured. The author's grandfather, Giuseppe Senatore, had been taken prisoner in Africa, while her uncle, Pasquale "Lino" Senatore, a decorated Italian sailor who had shot down a British plane, was later taken as a prisoner to India. Neither could talk of their experiences as prisoners of war and their suffering when they returned home because the family in Italy had suffered equal fear, abuse, and hunger. The latter had endured Nazi and Fascist round-ups and abuses, had scrounged for food and had ultimately been thrown upon the mercy of others for charity. No one in Italy, it seems, had a monopoly on suffering.

Leaders searched for unifying trends to bring the Italian people together. Immediately after the war there was a need to exculpate the Italians from their association with Fascism. This was accomplished by depicting all Italians, including all age groups, all social groups, and all political parties (even the Fascists), as *brava gente*, good people,

and by limiting the accusation of killer to the “others,” particularly the officers and men of the SS.<sup>139</sup> The Italian military were not honored nor included in the roles of the suffering. The role of the Italian army, its successes, its failures, and its participation in early wartime atrocities in Africa and the Mediterranean were simply ignored. Their past of noble fighting for their country was tainted by their association with Fascism and the Axis powers.

Not only were Italians as a whole now portrayed as *brava gente*, but many citizens claimed to have been part of the Resistance, either by direct action or in support of it. However, the great adherence to the Resistance that flourished in the immediate post-war era began to dissipate. Over the first fifteen years after the war the Italian “cult of the Resistance” was weakened in part due to a purging of ex-Partisans from police departments and prefects, in part due to the new parliamentary collaboration between the Christian Democrat Party (Democrazia Cristiana), DC, and the Neo-Fascist Party (Movimento Sociale Italiano), MSI, who equated the Resistance with death and sacrifice and portrayed both soldiers and Partisans as victims.<sup>140</sup> In 1947 the Communist and Socialist parties were expelled from the Italian government so the left felt a need to gain legitimacy. The Communists in particular pushed for an erasure regarding the violence in the war of liberation in the collective memory. In its place they promoted the definition of the Resistance as the “second Risorgimento” in official publications, thus promoting the idea of a unified Italian struggle against a foreign enemy. This transformed the image

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<sup>139</sup> Bosworth, 501.

<sup>140</sup> Stephen Gundle, “The “civic religion” of the Resistance in post-war Italy,” *Modern Italy* 5, no. 2 (2000): 118.



of the meek, good Italian, who did what he could to survive, into a patriot who fought for the liberation and independence of his country.<sup>141</sup>

In 1961 the Soviets erected the Berlin Wall and the Cold War peaked. With many Italians leaning to the left, the Allies felt a need to appease the Italian Communists to prevent the further spread of Communism in Europe, or worse, a communist take-over in Italy. For the next two decades the Italian Communists appropriated the memory of the Resistance as their struggle to rid Italy of the Fascist and Nazi oppressors. The Allies and the Italian right and center leadership did nothing to prevent the propaganda. The Resistance, with an emphasis on the Partisans, was glorified. The early resisters to Fascism which included Benedetto Croce, Carlo Rosselli, Antonio Gramsci, and Luigi Longo were largely ignored in favor of honoring those who participated in the military Resistance that took place between September 1943 and April 1945.<sup>142</sup> The Communists' success in appropriating the credit for the Resistance and liberation of Italy was exemplified by the commemoration of April 25 (Liberation Day), the beginning date of a general insurrection against Fascist and German rule, rather than June 2 (Republic Day) as the holiday to celebrate.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Storchi, 242.

<sup>142</sup> James Edward Miller, "Who Chopped Down That Cherry Tree? The Italian Resistance in History and Politics, 1945-1998," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 4, 1 (Spring 1999): 38.

<sup>143</sup> On April 25, 1945 the CLN called for a general insurrection; in reality, the main insurrection took place in the city of Milan, but the Communists celebrate this date as the culmination of the Resistance's efforts to end Fascist and German rule in Italy. On June 2, 1946 the Italians voted to end the monarchy and make Italy a republican state; as such, that date should represent the birth of the new republic. The new constitution was approved in December 1947 with addendum XII explicitly prohibiting of the reorganization (under any form) of the dissolved Fascist party. However, after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, changes in the Italian Communist Party, and the formation of new Italian political

## Divided Memory

Italians have a divided memory about their role in the war. The unifying memory is of the period before the war that they remember as the golden era. They somehow forget about the climate of suspicion and terror under the Fascist rule but instead remember a peaceful, harmonious time.<sup>144</sup> The author's own grandmother, Vincenzina D'Argenzio, who was totally apolitical, often spoke of the Fascist Era as a time when people could safely walk the streets, even at night, and when the trains ran on time. She claimed everyone who wanted to work had a job and life was orderly and peaceful. In her memory the only ones who suffered under Fascism were the criminals and political dissidents. Normal hard-working people had nothing to fear.

For many the memory is divided over the role of the Fascists under Mussolini up to July 1943, and the role of the Fascists under Mussolini's Republic of Saló. The die-hard Mussolini supporters blame the costly defeat, abandonment and subsequent loss of over 100,000 Italian soldiers as a turning point and downfall of their *Duce* on Hitler's obsession with the Eastern Front. They claim it was Mussolini's loyalty to his ally and sense of duty that precipitated his dismissal by the king. Hitler's subsequent rescue of Mussolini and the *Duce*'s placement as head of the puppet government of Saló, with no real power or means, led to the further deterioration of the Fascist Party and power. They hang on to the belief that Mussolini could have led Italy into a second era of grandeur.

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organizations, the anti-Fascism sentiments began to weaken and there was a new emergence of revisionist history about Fascism. *La Costituzione Italiana* (Pisa: Pisa University Plus, 2006).

<sup>144</sup> Cappelletto, 250.

Then there are the Fascists who were mesmerized by Mussolini, hoped for a new, stronger Italy, but were soon disappointed by both the methods and the outcome of the Fascist regime. After the establishment of the Saló Republic, Germany demanded men and material from Italy which caused dissention among the *repubblichini*.<sup>145</sup> Other Fascists were that in name only, having adhered to the party only to make life a little easier and seeing no alternative. Their memory of the Fascist Era is full of contradictions and conflicts, a time of fear and submission.

Anti-fascists blame the Fascists, along with the Nazis, for acts of violence on the Italian civilians during the war. The Italian Social Republic or Republic of Saló was responsible for over 10 percent of the atrocities committed on the peninsula with their violence directed against political dissidents and those avoiding conscription.<sup>146</sup> This number does not include the atrocities committed by the Italian military on foreign soil. The Tuscan people in particular are divided in their memory of who was responsible for the atrocities committed in their region. There is divergence with the locals of Civitella who blame the Partisans who killed the two Germans for provoking the act of retaliation from the Germans.<sup>147</sup> According to research conducted by Francesca Cappelletto, cultural anthropologist at the University of Verona, survivors assign responsibility for the tragedies according to their relationships with the perpetrators. Local perpetrators were thought to have been forced to carry out the atrocities, while outsiders were viewed as

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<sup>145</sup> Ceva, 292-293. *Repubblichini* is a derogatory term to describe the Fascists under Mussolini's puppet government of Saló.

<sup>146</sup> Pezzino, *The German Military*, 179.

<sup>147</sup> Cappelletto, 249.

directly responsible. Civitella had no Partisan units in its immediate vicinity; however, there were two autonomous units and two “outsiders” units within a 10-mile radius of the town (Map 2). This opinion referred to both Partisans and Fascists, so the question was not one of politics but of relationship with the locals. Still according to her research, in an unidentified village neighboring Sant’Anna di Stazzema, the villagers blame the small groups of Fascists who were ruthless and constantly quarreling for power and who pushed the Nazis to extreme measures in an effort to end the local feuds. The townspeople of Sant’Anna di Stazzema proper blame the Nazis, since there was no Partisan activity in the town and the reprisals were just an excuse to execute the atrocities. The townspeople could not accept the idea that their own neighbors could be responsible for the atrocities.<sup>148</sup>

Paolo Pezzino, professor of contemporary history at the University of Pisa, conducted a study of the massacres that took place in Italy where the survivors almost always remember the SS troops as the responsible parties. His research in the region of Tuscany showed there were 229 episodes with a total of 3,824 fatalities and in fact, close to 90 percent of the massacres (204) were carried out by German troops. The interesting aspect is that only 38 of the 204 massacres were committed as reprisals for actual Partisan attacks, while 60 massacres took place during searches for Partisans, 40 during German troop retreats, 38 during forced civilian relocations, 3 as racial motives, and the

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<sup>148</sup> Cappelletto, 248-252.

rest as warnings.<sup>149</sup> These numbers reflect the acts of a frustrated retreating army taking its revenge on a civilian population.

Although the regions further north suffered higher numbers of Partisans killed, Tuscany had the highest number of civilian deaths due to massacres by the Germans and Fascists. There are several reasons for the high civilian death count in Tuscany. First, the 16<sup>th</sup> SS was formed of mostly German soldiers pulled from the Eastern Front. Many of them had participated in or witnessed the blood baths of the killing fields in Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia.<sup>150</sup> These soldiers had also participated in the atrocities against civilians in their total war in Yugoslavia and Hungary and witnessed violence in concentration camps, and had demonstrated a disregard for the conventional rules of warfare. Second, the Germans were being pushed north by the Allies after their defeat at Cassino and loss of Rome, but the combat Resistance movement was in its infancy, poorly organized and equipped, and therefore only waging random acts of sabotage and destruction. This allowed the Partisans to irritate the Germans but not engage in meaningful large armed conflicts that would result in great losses. Third, the Partisans in Tuscany were neither numerous enough nor organized enough to protect the civilian population from German and Fascist reprisals; consequently, the Germans were able to take their frustrations out on the Tuscan civilian people.

The region of Tuscany was undergoing a myriad of contradictions and changes. It was mostly rural, still practicing *mezzadria*, a share-cropping system in place since the

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<sup>149</sup> Pezzino, 179

<sup>150</sup> Pezzino, 183.

middle-ages, but the Tuscans overall had a higher level of education and more social freedom than people from southern Italy. The factory workers and miners were influenced by the political organizations of the north but maintained autonomy and adjusted ideals and actions to suit their regional culture and needs. The social fabric of Tuscany had more of a middle class and had lessened the distance between the *padroni* and *lavoratori*, masters and workers. The evolving society was not uniform and each community developed socially according to its surroundings and individual populations. Thus, it is not surprising that individual communities, which could be geographically near one another, remember and/or blame atrocities and massacres on different culprits depending on their relationship with the parties involved.

### **The monuments**

“The world must remember their dead because memory equals honour.”<sup>151</sup> The Italian word *monumento* is translated into English as both monument and memorial making these words seem interchangeable; however, a monument is erected in someone’s honor and is a place of celebration, while a memorial is erected to remember a person or event and is a place of mourning. This distinction becomes important because over time many *monumenti* were erected that evoked strong feelings of resentment from various groups, and the *monumenti* became an issue of political contention.

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<sup>151</sup> Cappelletto, 247.

Immediately after the war the Italian communist party (PCI) erected hundreds of monuments and shrines to the Partisans. Street names were changed to honor those who had bravely fought for Italian freedom against superior forces. The majority of those portrayed in the struggle and named as martyrs were communists. The non-communists gave credit to the Allied military for liberation from the Nazis, but the Italian people needed to redeem themselves from the embarrassment that had been Mussolini and needed to replace their tainted history with a heroic one. Renaming the streets also served to inaugurate a new political era and create a new public consciousness by influencing the citizens on what to remember and what to forget.<sup>152</sup>

In the 1960s, in an effort to pay tribute to all causes and sides, some multipurpose monuments were erected to honor the heroes of World War I, World War II and the Colonial Wars together. This was done in part to save money. By incorporating the fallen of the colonial wars, Italians were honoring their dead without glorifying their own time of tyranny (when Italians committed atrocities against the people they conquered). The *Monumento ai Caduti*, monument to the fallen, was to honor all military that perished during the conflicts. By incorporating all the wars of the century and not listing the names of individuals, they emphasized death and loss rather than the heroes. This amalgamation made no reference to regimes or ideals and was supposed to appease all

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<sup>152</sup> Krystyna von Henneberg, "Monuments, Public Space, and the Memory of Empire in Modern Italy," *History and Memory* 16, no. 1 (July 2004): 42; and David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols. The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 113.

sides of the controversy over who deserved a monument. The result of this neutrality, however, was that the monuments told no stories and did not attract anyone's attention.<sup>153</sup>

In addition, emphasizing the loss of fallen soldiers was seen by the Left as competing with the memory of the Partisan and civilian casualties, which in their opinion deserved the given honor. Until the Resistance and innocent civilians had been properly acknowledged and honored, any time, money, or effort devoted to the fallen military was viewed as a return to tyranny and Fascism. The Right did not push for the acknowledgement of the military because the very honor of the military was being questioned. Specifically, the role that the Italian military played in the atrocities committed in the Italian colonies, Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Balkans, Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia was questioned.

Politicians shifted the emphasis from that of responsibility and justice to that of unifying the nation, and of honoring those who fought to liberate Italy from its oppressors and the innocent civilians who were massacred by the unfeeling, inhuman German war machine. However, even this movement was fraught with division and conflict. The Left insisted on raising monuments to honor those who fought for the liberation of Italy, the Communist Party in particular, appropriating the credit for Italy's deliverance. Other political parties that had Partisan formations during the Resistance were largely ignored or conveniently omitted from the distinction of liberators. Still this failed to unify Italian sentiment, as part of the population held the Partisans responsible for the atrocities committed by the Nazis and Fascists for supposed retaliations for Resistance activities.

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<sup>153</sup> Von Henneberg, 51.



Individual communities began erecting memorials to the innocent civilians and non-combatants who died at the hands of the Nazis or Fascists during the liberation of Italy; casualties due to Allied bombardments were not included. More division ensued, with some wanting the distinction of the “before and after” September 1943 casualties, emphasizing the “after” September 1943 as martyrs for the Resistance cause. This again brought emphasis not on Resistance as a whole, or as ideology from its inception, but on the role of the fighting resisters that emerged after the fall of Mussolini’s Fascist government. It also arrogated the massacred civilians to the side of the Resistance, whether they had adhered to it or not. Non-Partisan citizens who were victims of the total war waged by the retreating Germans were now being glorified or at least appropriated by the Communists as sacrificial victims.

In some communities in Tuscany, where the population was divided over whom they considered responsible for the atrocities committed - Germans, versus Fascists, versus Partisans - it became even more important to separate memorials. Many citizens did not want the names of the massacred civilians listed on the same memorial with names of Partisans whom some considered to be the responsible parties for the atrocities committed. In their opinion, it was the Partisans’ unnecessary actions against the Germans that prompted the retaliations in Civitella; as such, they did not want victims and responsible parties honored together. The main town memorial erected by the Association of Civilian Victims of War, commemorates the dates and number of victims, identifying them as victims of a massacre, but does not name the perpetrators. The memorial is not political but placed to honor the victims.

In direct contrast, the memorial erected in the town of Niccioletta specifically blames the Nazi-Fascist soldiers for assaulting their town and transporting to Castelnuovo, and consequently killing 77 civilian workers. Likewise, the memorial in San Polo specifically blames the Nazi-Fascists for the “barbarian slaughter” of its victims. The memorial in Bardine San Terenzo is dedicated to all the fallen and specifies the war of 1915-1918, the war of 1940-1945, and the civilian casualties. The words massacre or victim are not included. On the ossuary of Sant’Anna di Stazzema the plaque commemorates the town martyrs and states the memorial is erected to express love and forgiveness in response to the madness that put down 560 innocent victims. There is no reference to who is responsible for the atrocities.

In most towns the plaques are placed at the site of the atrocities, and in some towns there are several plaques in close proximity, some placed by organizations, some placed by family members of the victims. However, there is still resentment among some groups who do not want their relatives or companions listed with “other” groups. The need for separate and distinct memorials is exemplified in the commune of Caviglia, a town half-way between Civitella and Florence, and that has no reported mass atrocities. However, the townspeople chose to have one discrete memorial erected for each group: Italian Christian and Jews victims of German prison and labor camps, fallen Partisans, military veterans, civilian victims, and massacred civilian victims.

Memorials took on different forms, from elaborate sculptures to modest plaques. They also appeared at different venues, although most part were placed at the sites of the losses or committed atrocities. These memorials were supposed to be places of mourning and remembrance for the fallen, but when the A.N.P.I. proposed to place a plaque as a

memorial to two killed Partisans in the commune of Ciggiano additional political issues emerged. The two fallen Partisans were killed in front of the property of a known Fascist family, the Pratesi; members of that family still reside there. The Pratesi had been known as Fascists during and after the war, so Mr. Pratesi stated that affixing a plaque onto his property would only serve to incite hostilities against him and his family, or at the very least, encourage political demonstrations in front of his house. His refusal to allow placement of the plaque on his property provoked a condemnation from the A.N.P.I., which felt that allowing the plaque at the site would show respect and acceptance of the Partisans as valuable contributors to Italian liberation.<sup>154</sup>

In 1970, much further north, in the region of Lombardy, the town of Lissone celebrated the anniversary of the liberation (25 April) by commemorating the Partisans who fought the Fascists and the Nazis. Three and one half decades later, the same town erected a monument in the city cemetery to commemorate all the fallen of World War II. The newer monument elicited vehement opposition by members of the local A.N.P.I., who denounced the inclusion of the names of Italian soldiers who fought for the Fascist regime beside those who fought for Italian freedom or died in the German concentration camps.<sup>155</sup> Thus the dispute over monuments, memorials, their location, and who should be honored continues.

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<sup>154</sup> Victoria Belco, "Remembering Which Victims: Disputed Memorials and their Process in Post-WWII Italy" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott, Lowes Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Convention Center, Philadelphia, PA, August 31, 2006).

<sup>155</sup> *La Nostra Posizione sul Nuovo Monumento ai Caduti*. [http://anpi-lissone.over-blog.com/pages/La\\_nostra\\_posizione\\_sul\\_nuovo\\_monumento\\_ai\\_caduti-84304.html](http://anpi-lissone.over-blog.com/pages/La_nostra_posizione_sul_nuovo_monumento_ai_caduti-84304.html) (accessed Jan 25, 2009 )

## The media

In many ways the media profoundly influenced how Italians feel about their recent history. From the very inception of cinema, movies were used to indoctrinate the crowds. Mussolini used the media to create an atmosphere of patriotism and give Italians a feeling of power. Movies like *Camicia Nera*, Black Shirt, in 1933 were meant to show Italians how their country was modernized by Fascism. *Il Cammino degli Eroi*, The Walk of the Heroes, in 1936, and *Sentinelle di Bronzo*, Bronze Sentinels, in 1937 were two films glorifying Italians for “civilizing” the Ethiopian savages.<sup>156</sup>

In the immediate post-war era, numerous films were made that portrayed Italians as *brava gente*, good people who had been victims and suffered together. In *Roma città aperta*, Rome Open City, in 1945, the Italian people’s will to achieve freedom after twenty years of tyranny was described. *Fuga in Francia*, Escape to France, in 1948, dealt with two issues of the immediate post-war era; the fact that Fascism had not really been removed from Italy, and emigration as the only true prospect for finding work. Italy’s post-war depression and the seemingly desperate lives of the people was portrayed in *Ladri di biciclette*, Bicycle Thieves, in 1949, where a man desperate to work and support his family stole a bicycle after his own was stolen. The movie showed the

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<sup>156</sup> *Camicia nera*, Giovacchino Forzano, 1933; *Il Cammino degli Eroi*, Corrado D’Errico, Istituto Nazionale Luce, 1936; *Sentinelle di Bronzo*, Romolo Marcellini, Fono Roma, 1937.

extremes to which men would go to provide for their families. The films reflected the current political situation and the desperate economic conditions of war-torn Italy.<sup>157</sup>

Most war movies portrayed the Resistance and Allies fighting the common cause of expelling the Nazis from Italy. *Paisá*, *Paisan*, in 1947 described the Allied advance from Sicily to northern Italy, the problems in communication and collaboration between the Italians and Americans. *La Ciociara*, *The Women*,<sup>158</sup> in 1960, was the story of a woman trying to protect her teenage daughter during the war. The film was about her struggles with the locals and Germans, but also brought up the issue of crimes committed by Allied soldiers. After the war the woman and her daughter were raped by Moroccan soldiers under the Free French, so the idyllic portrayal of the liberators as total heroes was tarnished. The movies became a type of monument in honor of those who fought the Nazis or supported the Allies and a memorial for those who suffered at the hands of the Allies. The Italians were still being portrayed as *brava gente* whose lives were succumbed by the war.<sup>159</sup>

In the lead years, 1960s to early 1980s, so called for the number of bullets and bombings used by the left and right extremist groups, movies largely ignored the Italy post-war era. The media offered a combination of comedies, satires, and spaghetti westerns to detract from the political situation. One exception was *Pasqualino*

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<sup>157</sup> *Roma citta` aperta*, Roberto Rossellini, Minerva Films Spa., 1945; *Fuga in Francia*, Mario Soldati, Carlo Ponti, 1948; *Ladri di biciclette*, Vittorio deSica, Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche, 1949.

<sup>158</sup> The actual translation of the film title into English should have been *The Woman from Ciociaria*; however, Hollywood's translation was *The Women*.

<sup>159</sup> *Paisá*, Roberto Rossellini, 1947; *La Ciociara*, Vittorio deSica, Carlo Ponti, 1960.

*settebellezze*, Pasqualino Seven Beauties, in 1975, the story of a would-be hood who portrayed himself as a young gentleman, acted as a snob, and expected his mother and sisters to act like ladies. Through a series of circumstances he ended up as a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany. In order to survive in prison, he not only prostituted himself to the disgusting female commandant, but he ended up killing his companion.<sup>160</sup> The movie portrayed the desperate extents to which common Italian people went for survival. It did not overtly put the blame on either Germans or Fascists, but portrays a series of events that lead Pasqualino to perform immoral acts. At a time when the political Left was glorifying their participation in the Resistance and their contribution to the liberation of Italy, Italians who had not actively participated in the Resistance, or who had committed decadent acts in their fight for survival, could identify with Pasqualino and find solace knowing that others had gone through similar struggles. They were not weak and corruptible but had been overpowered by forces beyond their control and so remained *brava gente*.

The 1990s collapse of the Communist Regime in Eastern Europe brought change in the Italian political atmosphere. The left's push for glorification of the Resistance movement lost some of its momentum and the portrayal of all Italians as anti-Fascists was beginning to be disputed. The political and historical discussions began to include the notion that some Italians were in fact Fascists, or at the very least, were partly responsible for the triumph of fascism by passively accepting Mussolini's rise to power. *Il Sangue dei Vinti*, Blood of the Defeated, in 2008 portrayed the tremendous division and

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<sup>160</sup> *Pasqualino settebellezze*, Lina Weretmüller, 1975.

confusion of the Italians during the war. The father was a World War I veteran and amputee who taught his children the value of honor and valor. The oldest son was a policeman in Rome, in the last days of German occupation, with Allied bombings, and questions regarding who represented the real government and who was in charge. He coped with the total chaos that surrounded him by ignoring the pandemonium and concentrating on a homicide. This was his way of bringing some order to daily life. His younger brother was an Italian soldier who did not know whom to obey, and ended up joining the Resistance movement. The sister, who still lived with the family in Northern Italy, was appalled that her younger brother was turning his back on the Italian allies (the Germans and Fascists) and had become a traitor in her eyes. She joined the Socialist Movement and took up arms to fight with the Fascists. The movie portrayed all sides and gives the viewer a realistic view of the confusion and ugliness that permeated in Italy at the time and the struggles and choices people made.<sup>161</sup>

Interestingly, none of the above-mentioned movies focused on glorifying the Italian Resistance; in fact, the Resistance was largely ignored by the Italian film industry that focused on the solace of the general populace and avoided outright political controversy. Instead, it was an American film, Spike Lee's *Miracle at Sant'Anna* that has sparked a recent controversy. The portrayal of a Partisan as a traitor, one who is driven by greed instead of loyalty and honor, has sparked the protests of many Italian Partisan veterans who view the movie as defamatory and an abomination. The Partisan traitor in the movie is blamed for the massacre, more so than the Germans who commit

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<sup>161</sup> *Il sangue dei vinti*, Michele Soavi, 2008.

the actual shooting, because he has betrayed his own countrymen. His portrayal taints the image of the Resistance that the Left has worked so long and hard to achieve.



## CONCLUSION

So who were the heroes and the villains? Despite many studies and researches into the complex issue of the Italian Resistance during World War II, there is no all-encompassing or agreed-upon opinion of the war or the Resistance's effort. After Italy's fateful capitulation to the Allies the war itself became even harder to understand and define. Italy was split in two, geographically and politically, with different foreign powers to contend with, and with an added civil and class war that further divided the nation.

The Italian military was one of the primary groups largely ignored by the media and the scholarship. In the last decade some studies have been dedicated to the Italian soldiers who resisted the Germans after Italy's surrender to the Allies. The Italian soldiers' complex dilemma, lack of leadership, and the ultimate sacrifices of those who were either murdered by the Nazis or deported to labor camps made them worthy of honor by at least some of the population. This group was given a quantity of attention by the media, and many Italians who had brothers, sons, or fathers in the military at the time could identify or at least sympathize with their plight. However, over the past five years, in talking to Italians of all ages, this author has found that the Italian military in Northern Italy, who adhered to the RSI out of a sense of loyalty to Mussolini, are still mostly thought of as inhumane savages who looted, raped, and killed their own countrymen. Their sense of loyalty to Mussolini and to Italy's prior ally Germany is viewed as misguided, a direct result of decades of brain-washing, with no moral value and not worthy of honor or respect.

For the most part, memorials for the fallen soldiers have been very general, with dedications reading “to the fallen of the wars”, meaning the wars of the twentieth century. Some memorials may go so far as to specifically mention the soldiers who stood up to the Germans in defense of Italy and its liberation but only a handful are dedicated to the soldiers who fought for the RSI, although they also were Italians, following orders they believed to be legitimate. As late as 2006, law number 2244, which would have granted the Fascist soldiers recognition as lawful fighters, was refused due to public opinion. However, that status was given to the Partisans after the war.<sup>162</sup>

Although the two Italian militaries had their share of dilemmas and confusion, their actual location and adherence to particular military units served to identify them as either RSI or part of the Resistance effort. In contrast, identification of non-military resisters is harder to determine. While many agree that the classification of Partisan is restricted to those who participated in armed conflict against the Nazis and Fascists, the identification of who actually participated in the Resistance is still debated. The degree of involvement in the Resistance varies with the individuals, locations, and opportunities. Some, who during the period of 1943-1945, did nothing to assist the Resistance but maintained silence about information that could have possibly harmed the Partisans, later included themselves in the designation of “resisters”. Others assisted by giving food and clothing, which they also gave to POWs, Jews, refugees, and other needy people. While the benefactors’ simple acts of humanity and compassion benefitted the Resistance, they hardly designate them as part of the Resistance. Nevertheless, some claim that the

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<sup>162</sup> Storchi, 245.

charitable acts put the benefactors at risk of reprisal and that they therefore deserve to be included in the Resistance. The role of the women and the clergy has also been a topic of intense research. Studies have uncovered varied layers of involvement that range from “protecting” the Partisans by simply ignoring their location and existence, to acting as mules, and ultimately directly participating in conflicts.

The ultimate questions, who were the heroes and the villains, have no single answer. In each geographical location, within each group of people there were heroes and villains. Though the Nazis are generally depicted as the tyrants, there were Germans who refused to obey orders to massacre and who did what they could to protect the innocent. The Fascists are generally grouped with the Nazis; however, there were also some Fascists who fought to protect the civilian population from its enemies, be they the Nazis, Allies, or Partisans. Likewise, for decades the Partisans have been portrayed as the heroes of the Resistance, who through personal suffering and sacrifice achieved the liberation of Italy. However, there are accounts of independent bands or individuals, who under the blanket classification of Partisans took advantage of the civilian population by robbing or threatening them in the name of the Resistance. There were heroes and villains in all classification of groups and making a general assumption about a group based on the acts of some individuals does a disservice to all.

War is a time of extremes, when humans are pushed to act in ways they probably would never consider under normal circumstances. In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt explains how circumstances can make any simple individual commit atrocious crimes. She exemplifies her statement by describing the role of the Jewish leaders in the Holocaust, their willingness to comply with the Nazis to avoid panic or

further suffering of the Jews, and the role of the Nazis who ordered and/or committed the atrocities.<sup>163</sup> Likewise, Nazis and Fascists in Italy committed unspeakable crimes against the civilian population, some of whom had aided the Partisans, but some were massacred for no explainable reason. The massacres were conducted by individuals who probably would never have conceived such acts had they not been pushed to the extremes by the effects of decades of political propaganda, prolonged deprivation of human essentials, and exposure to the brutality of war.

The intricacy of not having a definite description and timeline that encompasses the various group involved in the war in Italy also creates difficulty in ascertaining numbers. Assorted official sources differ drastically in the reported numbers of military, Partisan, and civilian Italian casualties in World War II. In regards to military casualties most sites do not break down the pre-1943 and post-1943 numbers, nor do they break them down by geographical location, or government affiliation; their numbers range from 132,000 to 330,000 with one site giving a number of 60,000 soldiers killed prior to 1943. The number of civilian deaths during the war ranges from 80,000 to 145,000, but again, there is no definite breakdown on location, timeline, or distinction between massacres and casualties of war. Finally, the number of Partisan casualties ranges from 44,000 to 65,000 but with no differentiation of Italian Partisans in Italy versus outside the borders, or foreign Partisans fighting in Italy. Paolo Taviani, an Italian soldier who joined the Resistance during the war, a scholar, and cofounder of the DC, reports the total number of Partisans killed at 44,720, total civilians killed in reprisals at 9,980, the highest number

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<sup>163</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 117.

of Partisans killed in the region of Veneto at 6,006, and the highest number of civilians killed in reprisals in Tuscany at 4,461.<sup>164</sup> Although individual numbers are disputed most agree that the highest number of Partisan casualties was in the Region of Veneto, while the highest number of civilians massacred by the retreating German army was in Tuscany.

The recognition and memorialization of fighting heroes in Italy has changed several times over the six decades since the end of the war. Some groups have been totally ignored while others have gone from vilified to being honored. Most of the memorials and monuments are dedicated to the Resistance. The monuments erected to honor the Partisans have been considered by some as strictly Communist political propaganda and have induced repeated feelings of resentment by those who hold the Partisans responsible for atrocities committed in their area. Further north, and toward the end of the war, Partisan activity was coordinated with Allied advances, with increased examples of Partisan combat activity and the resulting detriment to the retreating German army. However, in the region of Tuscany, Partisan activity was in its infancy, with no initial support from the Allies, and with little more than minor harassment and no significant casualties to the German army. Consequently, many argue that the price paid by the Tuscan civilians for the actions of the Partisans is disproportionate to what the Partisans in Tuscany were able to accomplish.

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<sup>164</sup> Paolo Emilio Taviani, "Che Cosa Fu Realmente la Resistenza," in *Valori della Resistenza* (Roma: Civitas), 5-13; Holland, 530; Lewis, 119; Puzzo, 82; Federazione Regionale Toscana Associazioni Antifasciste. "Storia Contemporanea: Istruzioni per l'uso," *Resistenza Toscana*. May 18, 2003. [http://resistenzatoscana.it/documenti/storia\\_contemporanea\\_istruzioni\\_per\\_l\\_uso/](http://resistenzatoscana.it/documenti/storia_contemporanea_istruzioni_per_l_uso/) (accessed Mar 9, 2011).

Still others feel that the massacres in Tuscany would have taken place regardless of Partisan activity, and were terroristic acts of a resentful retreating army. Their claim is based in part on the notion that some massacres occurred in areas with no Partisan activity, and that the Germans were retaliating against a nation who had betrayed them and caused a turn in proceeding of the war. The Germans' "total war" was their attempt to maintain some control over the people and territory still under their occupation. What the Partisan activity in Tuscany lacked in terms of resulting German casualties, it well made up in the patriotic awakening of many Italians. The small victories achieved by the Italian Resistance in Tuscany encouraged northern Italians to actively engage and combat the Nazis and Fascists. Not only did the Tuscan Resistance manage to organize and fight against the much stronger foe, it proved to the Allies that Partisans were not a bunch of marauders; rather, they were trustworthy, dependable, willing, and able to fight for the liberation of their country if given some logistic support. The Resistance's liberation of Florence was pivotal in demonstrating to the rest of the Italians that they could defeat the Axis powers that held them down. More than for combat value, the Italian Resistance was essential for an Italian "cleaning of the soul". By claiming ownership of the Resistance, Italians could disassociate themselves from the Fascists and the Germans, otherwise regarded as the losing parties, and transform from a people being liberated by the Allies, to saving face as co-liberators of Italy.

The Resistance continues to be glorified and in 2008, at the celebrations of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defense of Rome, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano encouraged Italians to remember, reflect, and convey the legacy of the defense of Rome and the Resistance. He spoke of the two aspects of the Resistance: The first was of young men

who fought in the Partisan formations because of rebellion, redemption and hope of freedom and justice; the other was of the Italian military that refused to join the German military after Italy's capitulation to the Allies out of their sense of duty to the king's government, loyalty and dignity which resulted in over 600,000 Italian soldiers being deported to German labor camps.<sup>165</sup>

While honoring the Resistance has been the popular and "politically safe" stance to take, some modern Italian organizations are pushing for a unifying thread to celebrate their country's freedom which honors the Italian people as whole rather than specific groups alone. Others are pushing for an acknowledgment of the Italians' responsibility in and for the war as well as recognition for the Resistance fighters and the sacrifices of the civilian population. Only by acknowledging all the players and their responsibilities in the tragedies of war can there be an open, honest discussion on Fascism and Resistance, and how this influences the modern Italian politics and culture.

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<sup>165</sup> Editorial, "Rafforzare memoria della resistenza," *LaStampa.it*, 8 Sep 2008. <http://www.lastampa.it/redazione/cmsSezioni/politica/200809articoli/36300girata.asp> (accessed 13 Jan 2009).

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