

Vincenzo Modica
“Petralia”

From Sicily to Piedmont: the Story of a Partisan Commander

Translation: Nick Crofts – who had the idea and translated the introduction and chapter 1;
Vicky Franzinetti – who finished the translation.



(caption) Turin, May 1945- The Liberation Parade- Commander Petralia is marching bearing the flag of the *Corpo volontari della libertà* (the Freedom Fighters' Volunteers) (Istoreto Archive)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is dedicated to my dear and beloved granddaughters Camilla and Martina and to all young people so that they may become acquainted with a page of Italy's history

In writing this story of mine I would like to thank all those who I owe lasting and unwavering gratitude who contributed to my liberation and healing after I was taken prisoner.

A special thanks to Sister Felicita of the Immacolata Hospital in Pinerolo and to the messengers (*staffette*) Sara and Nicoletta who organised my escape from the hospital with the partisan Bertotto.

I also wish to thank the Rector of the Cotogno Sanctuary, the Reverend don Bartolomeo Stobbia, who was the first one to shelter and hide me with great warmth and help.

My warmest recollection to Miss Bollati's family for having looked after me and nursed me back to health in the Notary's house in Vilalfranca Piemonte.

I would also like to thank the Rivoira brothers and sisters who hid me in their farm in La Morra in spite of the Fascists and specifically of Captain Novena.

I wish to thank the Colombo brothers and Dr Fontana who treated my wounds regardless of the risks created by the enemy.

Thanks to young Franco Merletti who helped me with my computer.

A special thanks to my friend and partisan comrade Nullo (Bruno Pasquali) who helped me research some events that took place in the Po Valley.

Lastly, I would like to thank to the Piedmontese Institute for research on the Resistance and on contemporary society (ISTORETO) and especially to Prof Boccalatte who supplied me with many of the documents.

Vincenzo Modica «Petràlia»

The more the generations, the harder it is to pass memories down to the next one. It feels as if the process had been suddenly interrupted as if the older generations no longer partook the same life horizons. As if their experience could only be told excluding those who were not present and unable to share events. 'When the landscape of shared knowledge is lost – wrote Aledia Assmann – communication between generation and eras breaks down'.

Narration is not easy especially when it refers to a totalising experience such as the Resistance. Participants in the Resistance Movement tend to consider it a unique experience that cannot and will not be repeated, an appointment with history which meant their youth took on a historic meaning, as if it had deprived them of the personal dimension of memory and had condemned them to the role of bearing public, institutional memories for ever. As a result the tone of many former partisan narratives is imbued with this meaning and often the use of the first person singular or plural seems to deliberately make those who were born later feel uneasy, as if understanding events were precluded to them simply because they were not there.

Petralia died in Turin on the 9th of January 2003. His story is extraordinary, precisely because it is unlike other similar stories, stemming more from the need to have an exchange with others than from the urge to write his autobiography, as if he were letting memories surface following questions, rather than answering with the fragments of well-preserved self-representation. His book offers a clear and detailed memoir, a fascinating tool to develop historical knowledge: not a 'monument' but a live document deeply influenced by the existential side of his complex and fascinating character.

Giovanni De Luna

PREFACE

Vincenzo Modica's autobiographical narrative as Petralia, the Partisan Commander, is part of a genre which has never been sufficiently explored. In fact the Resistance told by professional historians lacks that emotional nuance which only witnesses can offer, a role which Modica can play to the full, at times with that spontaneity of someone new to writing, shedding the light of truth (*verism*) on each step of his youth: he started off as a student, then became a partisan fighter.

The book starts with a detailed chronology of the events leading to the Resistance, very precious information which helps us appreciate the value of the experience of a young Sicilian who was fated to become a symbol in the moral dissolution of the country after September the 8th 1943.

Vincenzo Modica left his parents' home, a rather quiet farm, and pursued his love for study, proceeding on impulse as all scholars do. However, the future held events not written into his books. World War 2 broke out while he was still a young student. As expected in a the country under the circumstances, he ended up by joining up and starting a military career. He was in Pinerolo in Northern Italy on that terrible September the 8th, far from his homeland in Sicily where the Anglo-American forces had already landed moving the front up beyond. In the South they were already breathing a post war air, as behind the frontlines there were no Nazi Fascists and their thoughts were already projected into the future, to a democratic homeland. Things were very different in the North which had become a land of Nazi conquest and order based on terror and death. It is at that point the Vincenzo Modica, the Cavalry officer, felt his contribution to the renaissance of his homeland was to find a place more among those rebels who then became known as partisans. An increasing number of Southern Italians joined and recognised him as their leader, a leader sent by fate. In fact his military skills blended with the wisdom from his family made him a precious ally for Commander Barbato with whom he was able to give a meaning to his training in managing the group of resisters.

Together, their experience developed in a war that had to be understood if not invented, as they dealt with unexpected events which the book lists in a detailed manner for the 18 lawless months, where danger was everywhere. The men in arms were (we were) the generation of young men who had grown up in the Fascist era, making us unlikely candidates for a baptism of fire. Modica took a *nom de guerre* (Petralia) as did Commander Barbato. Together they turned those badly armed youngsters into an efficient partisan Garibaldi Unit able to perform that dirty job, the war, seriously, committedly and enthusiastically. His narration leads us to the occupation of Turin by the partisans who marched triumphantly behind their Commander Petralia, flag

bearer of a famous Italian three coloured flag. His arm is in a sling because of a recent wound and as he bears the flag with his good arm one guesses how his being a Southern Italian and a Northern partisan represented the newfound unity of Italy.

This is not enough to explain why this book was written more than half a century after the Liberation, a thread which connects the various events; it speaks of his desire not to emerge personally but to address those times with realism after decades of a number of politicians and historians using the partisan struggle for their own aims. Resistance and not a civil war: this is why.

Unquestionably, reading *Dalla Sicilia al Piemonte* (From Sicily to Piedmont) one discovers how people belonging to different groups or strata of the population understood that the historical change that led to so many people to take the leap and seek freedom, and that one had to pay and fight even at risk of one's life.

The Nazis felt hounded and pushed back on all fronts which made it even fiercer. The Government of the Fascist Republic of Salò was a puppet theatre attracting those Italians who thought they could re-found Fascism not having understood what was happening. They were under the Nazis' fist and therefore did not represent Italy in any way, they were merely sad figures lacking an image and imagination, at the beck and call of the foreigner. Fighting against the Nazis also implied fighting their lackeys, servants who stood for Germany as it was then.

The Resistance was both a healthy form of patriotism and a war of liberation.

Here is a book that can be read, its historical references and the copies of documents consulted to better understand how the history of the Resistance is a cultural heritage which belongs to all the people of Italy.

Felice Malgaroli

INTRODUCTION

A young Sicilian born and bred under Fascism, a Pinerolo cavalry officer who was changed into Commander Petralia by the events that took place on September the 8th 1943, Pompeo Colajanni's (Barbato's) deputy when he led the 1st Garibaldi Partisan Division. This is the story of Vincenzo Modica, born in 1919 in Mazara del Vallo in the western tip of Sicily. It is both an ordinary and an extraordinary story, mixing every day and exceptional events, as happened to so many of the interwar generation. Born into a family of small landowners, Vincenzo Modica completed his secondary education in 1938 and then enrolled at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (*Istituto orientale*) of the University of Naples.

As all the young people of his time, he grew up in the Balilla (the Young Fascists' Organisation), the *avanguardisti* older youths (the Vanguardists), and was imbibed in values such as the Regime's definitions of homeland and nation. When the Regime appealed, asking university students to stop deferring their service, he reacted withdrawing his deferral or student temporary exemption and effectively volunteered. His choice speaks of consistency, where the myths of the *Ventennio* (the Fascist Era) blend with the moral depth guiding individual behaviour patterns.

In Commander Petralia's autobiography written over half a century later, this development is described very clearly and with great intellectual honesty. Autobiographies can be self-congratulatory and the past is redrawn in the light of present beliefs: the so called rewritten memory. It is very important for historians, but also extremely difficult to use due to the difficulty in telling experience from re-experience.

The main value of this work is its candour, the immediacy of its feelings and of the events that are described. Petralia uses a simple language and offers an easy read: he tells the story without bragging of any presumed longstanding anti-Fascism, nor does he recall unlikely political-ideological developments. With a touch of nostalgia for a distant youth he writes about his feelings as a cadet officer in Pinerolo, his appointments in Vigone and Cavour, his twenties spent on the 1941-43 atmosphere of war where news comes of the German victories in the East, but there is also time to enjoy the brothels in the city and to give the town's girls the eye. Everyday life and exceptional events blended together against the backdrop of Europe coloured by tragedy and ferment.

Specifically the 'friendly touch' which this autobiography uses helps us understand the main passages in the history of how a generation of young Fascists became democratic developing an awareness which led to the joining

the partisan struggle. As from the autumn of 1942 the castle of words which Fascism had pieced together in developing its power and image begins to falter.

El Alamein first and then the Russian retreat mark the turning point in the conflict. Allied bombings on the Northern Italian cities lead to fear and dismay. Food shortages become rife and 'brown bread' became the symbol of a situation which is not mirrored in the official propaganda. This is the context where the certainties which the Fascist Regime had instilled in its youngsters fail them. Italy is not the country of the *Arditi* (the Brave Ones) and the victory at Vittorio Veneto, there is no victorious heritage from the Roman legions and the glories of its Empire. Sadly there was a country on its knees because of the war effort, there were soldiers dying in Northern Africa, in the Balkans, in the steppes of the Don, there were citizens going hungry, the black market and air raid shelters.

Vincenzo Modica's development is straightforward and progressive: day by day, as the eyes of his intelligence open to the actual situation, so unlike the one described. The choices of September the 8th are preceded by this individual change, which took place through a moral rather than an intellectual channel, without any ideological interfaces. He spoke to his colleagues, identified the radicalisms of the overcommitted higher ranking officers, listening to those who like Barbato had already chosen sides. However, more than anything else he looked around, getting the feel of the community, understanding what the Fascist was leading to.

On September the 8th, it was more than the army that fell to pieces, more in general it was the State, the central government that disappeared. Then came the big change that was the turning point, that moment when – as historian Guido Quizzer wrote - Fascist Italy disappeared and was replaced by the country of antifascism. That was when everybody was alone faced with the responsibility of making their own decision: Modica's intellectual development had by then reached full maturity: he left the Fort of Exilles where he been sent in punishment and travelled to Cavour where he was sure to find Lieutenant Colajanni who in previous months had become a friend and a point of reference. It was the beginning of the Resistance.

As the autobiography proceeds, Petralia describes the complex events which took place in the Luserna and Po Valleys Liberation struggle with the attacks and round ups, shifting their headquarters, the reprisals command and its responsibilities and relations with the Allies. In military terms the Barbato and Petralia's Division (one of the most organised and decisive ones in the Piedmontese Resistance) has been studied by historians and there are several memoirs. The present work is an enrichment, not because it adds new details, which it does, but rather because of its framework. It never slips into a rhetorical account, using a sincere and straightforward language which has neither anger nor self celebratory tones. Modica's pages carry the Resistance

within, is part and parcel of the human and psychological mechanisms of its protagonists, inside the atmosphere of those months.

There are at least three aspects which I believe to be noteworthy:

the role of young Southern Italians: Petralia is a Southerner; his commander comes from the South as many of the men who found themselves in Piedmont when Armistice was declared. They fought alongside youngsters from Pinerolo and Cuneo who had decided not to go when called up by the Fascist Social Republic and choose to go up the mountains and join the partisans. They were surrounded by the mountain community of the region (Piedmont). These people were very diverse in terms of their historical, cultural and economic roots: they bonded, cooperated, and developed solidarity which at times grew into a friendship. There was no mistrust. Origin was not an issue, there were no differences due to it. In this struggle they were all Italians, fighting for the liberation on a National level. In this respect the book clearly highlights the role that Southern Italians played in the course of the Resistance, as well as the 'national' nature of the liberation struggle, the common denominator which all the protagonists acknowledge; their relationship with civilians, with the local communities. A very close yet complex relationship developed between the farmers of the River Po and Pinerolo Valleys. Certainly it was not a honeymoon: the Resistance meant there was a risk of reprisals and the weight of requisitioning in the two years that went from September the 8th to the Liberation led to moments of difficulty, tension and at times crisis. However, by and large, the relationship held out till the end because both shared common values. Like the civilians, the partisans too wanted the end of the war and enjoy peace. Like the civilians, the partisans wanted to free Italy of the Germans and their accomplices. Like the civilians, the partisans wanted a new nation. This shared view, a mixture of hope and expectations, is where rebellion met the community of the area they operated in. Modica's autobiography does not examine this relation specifically but let's one guess from the details of the narration, from small daily events of ordinary life in war which say more than pages of history; and skill acquisition. Guido Quazza termed the logic underlying the partisan units as a 'microcosm of direct democracy'. This emerges very clearly in the book: Barbato is not a commander in virtue of his previous military rank, he became the commander in reason of his charisma, because of the trust he elicited in his men, because of his leadership skills. Petralia became his deputy much for the same reasons, like other comrades took up the roles they were best suited for. What is normally described by analysing behaviour and action in academia is to be found here in the immediacy of the narration, offering an amazing cross-section of partisan life.

Commander Petralia waited a long time before writing his memoirs and did it when he was over 80. That notwithstanding he was able to maintain and convey fresh memories and spontaneous communication. This is why his autobiography is more than the memoirs of a partisan of the Po Valley. More in general it is a story of the Resistance from within, put forward with the honest immediacy of those who experienced the events they are describing.

This book should be recommended to those researching into local history to gain a better understanding of the 1st Garibaldi Division; it should also be recommended to all those who study the history of the Resistance, to better understand the mechanisms underlying the events. But most of all it should be recommended to the younger generations so that they may glean the essential features of that time, so that they may learn from the memory/memoirs of the past gaining insights for the present.

Thank you Commander Petralia!

Gianni Oliva

Memories of Youth

I was born at Mazara del Vallo on the 18th of October, 1919. I grew up in a family made up of my father Giovanni, my mother Susanna, two brothers, Nicola and Giuseppe and my dear sister Caterina. My father, an expert farmer and small land owner, co-operated with my two brothers in making the family live in a comfortable way. He employed one or two workers. He had constructed a spacious room behind the house that was put to use as a storehouse for the casks of wine, holding them perfectly lined up and taking care diligently of the fermentation of the *vintage*, so that it turned into the best wine. He had bought also a big winepress, I believe that it was one of the first such machines that arrived in the country, and he had put it at the back of the storehouse where he had made tubs of cement for the grapes. During the grape harvest he pressed the grapes for a third party and he worked day and night per almost the whole month of September. It was a continual movement of people, for they unloaded the grapes from the carts, adapted with tubs to carry the grapes, and carried away the barrels full of grape juice. I was put in charge by my father of keeping the accounts of the clients, the number of carts that they unloaded and the quintals (100 kg) of grapes that they pressed. This was my first job. My brothers were occupied with the harvest, Nicola on the transport of the grapes, Giuseppe in the organization of the harvest. Our fields were scattered in various districts of our county, the harvest was carried out by about a dozen women from the mountain villages near Mazara. They were sturdy women whom my brother Nicola took on each year. With the proceeds of the pressing my father managed to cover the expenses of the family, while the proceeds of the sale of the wine were invested to acquire some new plots of land.

In the years 1930-1940 the economy of Mazara, was primarily agricultural; the seashore, situated at the mouth of the Mazaro River where the harbour began was not developed as a working port. Deep sea fishing was in boats powered by oars and sail, the so-called "*paranze*". The local fishing was with little rowing boats. The life of the sailors was not an easy one. The crew of the "*paranze*" were often caught on the high sea by strong thunderstorms and some boats were swallowed by whirlpools. I remember the anguish and the weeping of the women, mothers, wives and sweethearts, who gathered on the pier and prayed waiting for the return of their men. As children we gathered there too to admire the courageous captains who skilfully managed to enter the opening of the harbor channel driven by strong winds. Since an early age I had loved the sea and fishing, and I became friends with an old fisherman, "Uncle Turi", who was a neighbour. I was fascinated by his fishing stories: even though he had officially retired, almost every morning he left the port in his little boat, skirted the nearby coast and went fishing for octopuses and Moray eels, often returning home with a big haul. I convinced

him to make me take part in some episodes of fishing, and, with my mother's permission, I had the pleasure of following him on various occasions.

We got up at dawn, went down to the port where he kept his boat moored, then let the moorings go, got in, prepared the oars and with sure strokes he rowed the little boat out of the port. The seascape was new to me: the sea opened with its immense expanse, the landscape that was mirrored on the sea gave me a new thrill.

I was drunk from the tang of the air of the morning that smelled of salt, and I admired "Uncle Turi" who had skilfully reached the fishing grounds. He then took out his tools, a kind of sheet metal pipe with two handles and the bottom of glass that enabled him to explore the sea floor, a little bottle of oil with a brush in it, tied to the edge of the boat, and a long adjustable harpoon. When we were ready he asked me to put out the oars and to row slowly, took the tube, stretched out from the boat and began to explore the sea floor. From time to time he took out the brush and spread some drops of oil to clear the glass of water, explaining that we were in an area where there were always octopus and eels, and in fact after a short time he caught sight of the prey, took the harpoon and with a sure thrust pulled on the octopus and hurried to put it in the basket. I was curious and I asked him to allow me try and see the sea floor; I took the tube, immersed it in water and looking through the glass: it was truly amazing to see. The bottom was extremely clear with alternating zones of sand, rocks or full of algae, and I saw little fish of various colours darting around. Sometimes I could also single out an octopus that flattened itself in its den, then I asked Uncle Turi to intervene with his harpoon, and his sure thrust quickly pulled it up.

The capture of the moray eel was an even more beautiful. It was not easy to find the lair where it took refuge, but once found, a 'lockout' hunt began, with various subterfuges to tease it out. Uncle Turi held the harpoon ready, and at the right moment he delivered the deadly thrust and pulled it up. It was an impressive display, to see this huge fish with shining colours struggling, hooked to the harpoon. Uncle Turi told me to be careful because the bite of the moray was poisonous. The fishing lasted almost till midday, then the sun began to get hot, the basket was almost always full and therefore we returned to port. I was tired but happy, I had spent an extraordinary morning, and Uncle Turi gave me a couple of octopuses that I carried triumphantly to my mother.

Our life as youngsters went by as it does in small towns, in winter I studied and took long walks with my friends through the main streets of the area, ready to give the girls the eye ... and sometimes one could even send a note. This was dangerous because if it fell into their parents' hands we were all in serious trouble. In summer in the morning we used to have long swims at the Tunnarella Beach, and in the afternoon we got together in the Piazza Mokarta, chatting and arguing. Often we sat at the bar to sip the sorbets and have ice creams which were a local specialty. On holiday evenings there was a big party at the central park, also known as the *villa*, at the centre of which there

was a big stand where the town band performed with great skill, playing excerpts from operas and lively symphonies. It was the custom that everyone strolled along the avenues, the girls in groups or together with their parents, and that was the opportunity to have closer encounters. Nothing out of the ordinary happened in the village, except when some of the Fascist top brass arrived and everyone had to hurry to the square wearing their uniforms. I had an 'avanguardista' (Fascist Youth) uniform. We would go and listen to the speech. For such events some antifascists were regularly marched off to prison: I remember Vito Aleo, a most affable man and the owner of the vegetable shop where often I went to shop, together with the Pernici brothers and Peppe Bianco, farmers.

Sometimes a small group of anarchists would put up posters demanding freedom of thought, but these stayed up only for a short while because the police quickly took them down, and then went to arrest the usual three or four antifascists and locked them up in prison for several days.

These are some memories of my youth.

I am now 80 years old going on 81; I stopped working about a year ago and have a token presence in the companies in companies I have shareholdings in.

I have a lot of time on my hands and I am trying to retrace the story of my life. I began emptying and tidying two old boxes containing letters, historical documents, photographs, copies of speeches made by me on various anniversaries of the Liberation. Among numerous documents I have come across the original of my service records as an officer serving in the Royal Italian Army.

Examining it, I realized that this document marks the change in the course of my life. It read:

*Service Record
Royal Italian Army
School of Cavalry
Office number*

*Conscript, born in 1919, District of Trapani deferral of service (in full time education)
The 8th of February 1939*

*Allowed to defer call up in reason of full time education (French) pursuant paragraph 5 letter B collection of provisions on deferred conscription.
The 20th of March 1940*

*The undersigned has waived the right to defer and shall be appointed to operational units
The 18th of February 1941*

*Conscripted in reason of the above and attached to the 6th unit of the Aosta Lancer Regiment in Naples
The 24th of February 1941*

The service records continue till the 8th of June 1945. From the 24th of February 1941 to the 8th of June 1945, the years packed with events involving the whole of Italian society, and which I witnessed firsthand.

The early years of the War

On the 22nd of May 1939, a formal treaty of alliance between Germany and Italy was signed in Berlin. I was 20 years old, and I had enrolled in the Language Faculty of the University of Naples French faculty, which was why I had been allowed to defer conscription.

The first and the second year of University went by normally: I spent several months of the year in Naples to attend my classes, and sat my exams. I had acquired new knowledge and new friends, including girls– but nothing serious; two girls from Perugia who attended the same faculty as I did, and a young assistant of French descent who sometimes gave me private tutoring. During the summer I returned to Mazara for the holidays and resumed the old friendships, swimming at the Tunnarella and often hiring a rowing boat with my friends Accardi and Lomonaco. Rowing, we left the port for the area in front of the centre where the sea was clean and the water clear, and there we went swimming. The sea was a wealth of colours and fish, we dived and with our hands succeeded in pulling up some seaweed. In a short time we succeeded in filling a large basket; the end result was that we had hurt our hands, because of the sea urchin spines remained lodged in our hands for the whole summer; fortunately they were not too painful. In the middle of the sea, the sun beat down on our skins, and although we were used to it in the end we suffered from sunburn. We returned home with the sea urchins but for a few days after days we had to keep clear of the sea.

My friends and I debated the situation Italy was in. In reality our ideas were not very clear, we did not realize the actual situation. Fascist propaganda led us to see and believe that all was going for the best, that the Italian army was well armed and that with the treaty of alliance signed with the Germans, an axis had been created which guaranteed security for Italy. Only our friend Accardi, the oldest, who in our conversations almost always had different ideas, pointed out to us to not let be taken in by facile enthusiasm, because the situation was not so rosy as the Fascists made it appear. Once, in a strictly confidential way, he told me that he had an uncle who was a follower of Mazzini's and that he had also read books on socialism. These chats with my Accardi, a sincere friend, left traces and memories in my life.

Summer passed, the usual long and interminable walks in the main roads of the country and the usual discussions.

The month of August 1939 was packed with new events; on the 23rd Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia signed a non aggression pact ; on the 25th Great Britain signed a treaty of alliance with Poland in response. The international situation was beginning to cloud over, winds of war looming; Germany claimed the city of Danzig and the corridor that joined it to its country. On the first of September, Hitler unleashed an attack on Poland using the excuse that Polish soldiers had crossed the border into German territory. The armoured troops of the Wermacht entered Polish territory, sweeping away the Polish army and occupying almost all their territory. On the 18th of September Russia attacked Poland from the East, in only three weeks Poland fell except for the city of Warsaw which was holding out; it was razed by the Germans after months of continuous air raids. The Germans and the Russians shared Poland, the Eastern part to Russia, the rest being annexed to Germany.

The Allies were worried about the overwhelming force of the Germans, and could not sit by and watch, and since Britain and France had already signed a treaty of alliance with Poland, on the 3rd September 1939 they declared war on Germany. Mussolini was worried, and on the first of September proclaimed a state of non belligerence at the with the Fascist Grand Council.

The international situation had become more complicated, and the spread of war seemed inevitable. In April 1940, Germany attacked Denmark and Norway. Britain and France came to their aid, Denmark was soon occupied and, after major harsh battles, the Germans defeated Norway, forcing the French and the British to retreat.

On the 10th of May the Germans began their campaign against France, first attacking Holland. The Dutch troops were rapidly routed by the German armoured forces; even the English expeditionary force suffered a terrible defeat, and only after enormous losses managed to land at Dunkirk. On the 5th of June the Germans attacked France *en masse*, at the famous battle of the Somme drew up hundreds of divisions on a front of about 360 kilometres, throwing in tanks and the air force. The French army was defeated in only four days, and was forced to retreat. The German army continued to advance and by the 10th June was at the gates of Paris.

June the 10th found me at Mazara; in the afternoon a rumour spread with an invitation that we go all to the Piazza Mokarta, where loudspeakers had been placed. The radio had broadcast that around 6.00 p.m. *Il Duce* (Mussolini) would speak to the Italian people. I went to the parade with my friends, the piazza was almost full. We wondered what Mussolini would demand of us. The signs were clear: difficult times awaited the Italian people. At 6.15, *Il Duce* began his speech, using the bombastic language he liked and announced:

This is the hour marked by fate: this is the hour of irrevocable decisions. A declaration of war has been delivered to the ambassadors of France and Great Britain.

For a few second the people in the square were struck dumb, then someone shouted the usual words against the English and the French, but most the crowd remained silent. They formed little groups commenting on what the future would be like for us Italians. My friends and I were pretty worried, especially Accardi who raised doubts about the choice of going to war. Most still thought that it would soon be over.

On the 12th of June the Germans occupied Paris; moderate optimism spread though our midst. On the Western front, the Alpine troops faced and repelled the initial attacks of the French in the Upper Orco Valley. The front held for a few days, then on the 14th June, after the French Navy bombed Vado and Genoa, il Duce ordered the 4th Army to attack in the Alps and penetrate into French territory. After hard fighting they held positions beyond the border, but the French troops resisted tenaciously. Mussolini was impatient, he knew that the French were seeking an armistice with the Germans, and wished to participate personally but he needed weight to add to the balance. So while on the 21st of June an armistice was signed between France and Germany, Mussolini ordered Marshall Badoglio to attack the length of French front across the Alps and the sea. The troops of the 4th Army fought in rain and snow and in temperatures below zero and only penetrated French territory for a few kilometers. Two days later, on 23rd June, the French asked for a cessation of hostilities. After long negotiation at *Villa Incisa* on the 25th June the Italian-French armistice was signed.

Meanwhile, my friend Accardi had been called up, promoted to NCO, and assigned to units operating in Africa. We had lost our point of reference.

We spent the summer of 1940 listening to war bulletins: Germany had begun bombing England, London was constantly under air raids. In Africa, on the 13th of September, Italian troops commanded by General Maletti attacked the Egyptian border and after a few days occupied the city of Sidi el Barrani. On the 27th of September a Tripartite Pact, the Axis, was signed in Berlin between Germany, Italy and Japan for the creation of a "new order" in Europe and in Asia.

Meanwhile the time had come to resume my studies, and in October I returned to Naples to attend university and sit exams. I found a situation very changed, there were constantly demonstrations organised by the most committed, continually screaming against capitalists and imperialists, praising the continuation of the war. At the same time Naples was bombed. At the sound of the sirens one ran to the shelters for cover. Once I was near the university and suddenly the alarm sounded, a bomb fell close by and fragments landed near me, I was afraid.

On the 28th of October, Italy declared war on Greece, and Italian troops launched an attack from the Greek-Albanian border. The first phase of the victorious advance gave us the illusion that it would proceed rapidly, but the Greeks resisted tenaciously, and the Italians were forced to stop. For about two months the front held, and a war of position and attrition began. The

corridors and the lecture halls of the university were covered by the famous manifestos "*libro e moschetto fascista perfetto*" – "book and rifle make the Fascist perfect"- which was a subtle way of inciting one to abandon their studies and take up arms. On the 9th of December the Greek counterattack began; our troops were forced to retreat, and the Greeks penetrated Albanian territory. Our army found itself in serious difficulty. *Il Duce* ordered them to resist at all costs.

At the same time the English began their counterattack in Egypt; the Italians were forced to retreat, and Tobruk and Benghazi fell. Faced with this difficult situation, Mussolini sent an envoy to Hitler to ask for the help of a German expeditionary force. In January 1941, Hitler and Mussolini with their respective foreign ministers met to examine the state of the war on various fronts, and to decide upon further developments. All over Italy the Fascists began a campaign of drumming up support for a greater participation of Italians in the war. At the university propaganda became ever more constant and continuous, courses were continually interrupted, full time students were considered draft dodgers: the country needed men for the army and needed them to leave their books and run to the aid of their comrades who battled on the front lines.

There was a group of Sicilians at the university whom I had befriended, and together we had examined the situation given that many other schoolmates had applied not to defer their military service. On 11th of February 1941 we too applied to be assigned to operational units. On the 24th of February 1941 I received my call to arms; I was assigned to the depot of the 6th Aosta Regiment of Lancers in Naples.

On the 15th of March, after a brief period of basic training, we were all transferred from the South to the 24th Field Artillery Regiment in Messina, then considered at war.

On the 20th of March 1941 I was attached to the 24th Field Artillery Regiment in Trapani to attend a course for cadet NCOs. I recall going through pretty hard times, getting used to the fatigue and the discipline required by the course. However, I succeeded in passing them brilliantly; on the 15th of April I was promoted corporal, and on 15th June, having passed my exams, I was promoted sergeant.

With the rank of sergeant, I rejoined the 24th Artillery Regiment which was stationed in the centre of Sicily.

I must make clear that the field artillery operated with medium range cannons pulled by horses, for which reason it was called the horse-drawn artillery. At the course of cadet NCOs I had learned how to use cannons, the protractor, "false aim and rise" (techniques necessary for tracking), plus I had learned how to ride a horse. The battalion of the regiment I was appointed to was posted in the town of Francavilla. I was assigned to the company under Lieutenant Alliata, a noble prince of Sicily. His presence in the unit was not very consistent. He loved photography, and as he was a man of means he had

set up a photographic laboratory and had entrusted its management to one of our colleagues who was expert in the field. The discipline, the military organization and the logistic supplies were entrusted to NCOs. Alliaata would show his face in the unit from time to time and give some orders.

I was put in charge of the lead artillery piece. I had a horse and ten men under me whose job was care of the horses used to pull the cannons and the wagon carrying the munitions. I often gathered my artillerymen to instruct them in the use of the cannon and to explain the manoeuvres necessary to put the gun into position. Once a week the whole company went on manoeuvres. Then our commander Alliaata would take part, he was a skilled horseman and marched at our head. The company had five pieces, each pulled by six horses (two sprinters, two pacers and two draught), and the wagon carrying the munitions by two draught horses.

I rode at the side of my men and ensure that all went normally. I trotted until we reached the field. As we neared the established place, the commander ordered us to sprint. After a slight panic, the artillerymen spurred the horses and raced to carry the cannon to the combat position, with the munitions wagon following close - horses, cannons, wagon moving in perfect synchrony so as to form a true carousel. It was a spectacle that has remained with me always, impressed on my mind.

Having led my men, I would get off my horse, position the cannon correctly, seat myself on the tracking seat and with the help of the protractor positioned the cannon into its firing position.

The attendants prepared the ammunition and the gun was ready to fire. The commander came to check that all the manoeuvres had been performed correctly and that the aim was precise. Often he asked us to re-position the target to test our capacity. At the end of the exercises we returned to camp tired but satisfied. Our battalion set camp near Francavilla in the countryside, in a very old building complex. There was not much leisure time: in the evening, after our service and dinner, we would gather for long games of cards and to listen to the radio for news of the war.

In Africa, an Italian-German counteroffensive had been launched from Libya with the involvement of the German Afrika Korps under General Rommel's command. The British were again forced back and Cyrenaica was reoccupied. In April, Germany and Italy declared war on Yugoslavia and began a joint operation against both Yugoslavia and Greece at the same time. By the 18th of April Yugoslavia had fallen and was divided up between Italy and Germany. On the 27th of April, the Germans entered Athens, and King George was forced to seek refuge in Britain.

While other news was arriving from Africa, on the morning of the 22nd of June 1941 the radio announced the beginning of the campaign against Russia. The Germans had attacked the Eastern front with an imposing battle line of troops on land, sky and sea. The Soviet troops had been taken by surprise and failed to withstand the sudden attack of the thousands of German cannon, tanks

and aircraft and, in a few months had been forced to withdraw along a front of about two thousand kilometers, close to what was then Leningrad. In reason of its alliance with Germany, Italy declared war on Russia and, on the 9th of July sent an expeditionary corps under the command of General Messe.

After a few months in Francavilla, our battalion was transferred to Paternò, a pleasant little town situated on the slopes of Etna Volcano. The journey lasted several days, a long column of cannons, wagons carrying ammunitions and various horse drawn carriages, travelling on the roads of Eastern Sicily. It looked as if we were a force, but compared to the German troops, equipped with self-propelled cannon and very fast tanks, the gap was enormous. Accommodation for the cannons, horses, soldiers and the like was comfortable, as we had access to a couple of huts. The stay at Paternò lasted a few months, and my memories of it are very agreeable. A very clean town; just outside the village there was an enormous expanse of orange groves, and in the morning the perfume of the citrus flowers spread through the clean air. The people were very sociable and several friendships were formed.

The drills and training of the soldiers took place: marching and climbing the summit of Etna. Often with horses and cannons they marched to the nearby villages, Biancavilla and Adrano being favorite destinations. Here there was the drill field that was used as a rifle range. There were exciting moments, one shot with real bullets at targets placed on the mountain side. One put all the theory that had been acquired during the long period of training into practice, most of the shots were well aimed and the best gun captain received praise from the commandant.

On Sundays, my colleagues and I went down to nearby Catania, a very beautiful city with broad avenues and most beautiful gardens. We stopped at a bar to enjoy the best ice cream and a nice lemon sorbets, but mostly we aimed for the brothels, popularly known as "*casini*", of which there were several kinds: luxury and standard. Our choice depended on our finances at that time...

Autumn came and went; the climate at Paternò remained temperate and the war continued on several fronts. The war bulletin announced continuous skirmishes between our patrols and the enemy in Africa. Our armoured cars – known as 'the horses of the desert' – had gone into action, penetrating for tens of kilometers to the rear of the enemy front line and returning unhurt to their bases. On the Russian front, the Germans continued to advance in the Donets basin occupying the cities of Kiev and the Crimea. To the North they had occupied Estonia, Smolensk, Novgorod and Nikolaev. They had reached to the gates of Moscow, where we had all been forced to stop. They also stopped in Leningrad, and began the siege that was to last till January 1944. On the 7th of December 1941, the radio announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Pacific American fleet anchored in the harbour was attacked suddenly by hundreds of Japanese planes, which succeeded in sinking five battleships. Other ships were damaged, hundreds of planes destroyed and some thousands of American sailors killed. On the 8th of December Japan

declared war on the U.S., Britain, Canada and Australia. On the 11th of December, Germany and Italy, in agreement with Japan, declared war on the U.S. The war had become worldwide, the overall situation becoming more and more complicated. Despite the continuing German blitz victories, no solution was in sight, and the end of the war continued to be a long way off.

In December, Paternò looked at its best, with the orange groves laden with ripe fruit and the gardens around the village turning pink. We had become friends with the owner of the gardens whose farm was immediately outside the village. At times, he invited me to visit his orange grove, where I could admire from close up the plantations, perfectly looked after, and I could taste fruit that my friend considered adequately ripe. The scent of the citrus diffused all around. At Christmas, I got a brief pass and decided to spend the holiday at home. My friend prepared a magnificent basket of oranges for me that I was pleased to take to my family.

I had applied to attend a cadet officer course; the standard practice was that one had to have passed the NCO exams and have had a period of training with a regiment. I had passed the tests, and I waited for them to call me. This happened on the 1st of February, 1942.

Admitted as an trainee cadet to the Cavalry School of AUC at Pinerolo, please present yourself on 28th February, 1942, read the telegram.

After saying goodbye to my friends and artillery colleagues, on the evening of 26th February I took the train to Turin. The trip lasted more than 24 hours; I arrived late on night on the 27th. I was very tired, so I found a small hotel near the station and went to sleep. I was up early, determined to arrive at Pinerolo before midday. I went to the station to check the timetable and discovered that there were several trains that would suit, so I decided to spend for a few hours in Turin. Leaving the station I walked across the beautiful Piazza Carlo Felice; it was very cold, there were still traces of snow on the flowerbeds. It was the first time I had seen snow – I was curious and went to touch it: it was cold and a bit frozen. Continuing my walk I discovered the beautiful via Roma which with its arcades (*portici*) sheltered from the rain and the cold. I admired the splendid shops and the beautiful shop windows which displayed their wares in style.

Returning to the station I found there was a train about to leave for Pinerolo. I got on, took a seat next to the window and waited for the train master to blow his whistle. Slowly the train left the station and soon I found myself in the open countryside. I suddenly saw something entirely new to me: snow clad fields, and from a distance the splendid mountain of Mount Viso (*Monviso*) all covered in white. I realized that I had entered another climate area and I hoped to adapt quickly.

It was about 11 a.m. on 28th February 1942 when I arrived in Pinerolo. The course for cavalry officers was at 'Conte di Torino' (Count of Turin) Barracks, which were not far from the station. I soon presented myself at the Orderly Room of the school to be enrolled. I was registered in the 12th course for

officer cadets. General Raffaele Cadorna was the Commander of the school; Colonel Giovanni Lombard his deputy; and Lieutenant Colonel G. Ajroldi was the commander of the cadet group.

On the first of March I began a period of training and selection: we woke at 6 a.m., had a brief time to wash, and then down to the courtyard for PE. At 7, a cup of barley coffee; from 7.30 to 8.30 theory lessons, from 8.30 to 10.30 horsemanship (and cleaning the stalls, carrying out the manure, preparing their litter and fodder, brushing down the horses and combing their manes) . From 10.30 to 11.30 commando school in the barracks courtyard; at 11.30 mess (usually pasta or soup, and a second course of meat or cold cuts with vegetables and fruit; desserts on Sunday). Time was limited and one had to eat quickly. From 12.00 there was at last an hour's rest. At 1.00 p.m. we gathered at the Capilli riding school for exercises on horseback.

There were very difficult moments: taking your turn, you mounted a horse, having to mount only with your hands, without touching the stirrups. You had to sit in the correct position, then you received instructions and the carousel around the riding school began: pace, trot, canter and gallop. During the latter several people fell off their horses, at which the instructor yelled at the cadet, who had to get up quickly, recover the reins of the horse and remount quickly. At the beginning this happened over and over, and one got tired of failing to mount the horse and there were a few injuries. At 3.00 p.m., to the relief of all, the riding was over. From 3.00 to 5.00 p.m., lessons in liaison, weapons and shooting. From 5 to 6 an hour's study, 6.30 mess, and at 7 free time. The cadets were always inspected by the day officer, boots and uniforms had to be in perfect order, a good number were regularly kept back for minor imperfections. At 9.45 retreat, and at 10 before going to sleep there was the review, the sergeant major on duty came through, the course leader told the cadets to stand to attention, they the cadets positioned themselves in front of their own beds in their pants standing stiffly. The sergeant major checked that the beds and the clothing were in order, specially the footwear, leggings and the soles of the shoes that always had to be clean. Once the inspection was over, the only sound was the silence and the cadets' day was finished.

For about a month all these operations were repeated non-stop till the selection took place, after which some cadets were judged unsuitable and were returned to their corps.

As a result of my service, I was appointed a cadet or trainee officer on the 15th of May. An period of intense training began, the course was divided into two squadrons of trainee officers: the first, under Captain Edoardo Vergano, consisted of two platoons of cavalry and one platoon trained in armoured cars; the second, under Captain Francesco Genala, of two platoons, both trained in tanks. The course of the cavalry cadets was clearly inferior, the modern reality of war required motorized means, and the cavalry had surrendered its place to the armoured car and to the tank. I was assigned to the 2nd Squadron, 2nd Platoon, 1st Squad, under Lieutenant Giuseppe Oreste and Sergeant Major Adriano Agosta Del Forte.

Our squadron had stopped training on horseback and had begun an intense period of instruction in motorized warfare; initially, the driving school had become the principal subject. For about twenty days, in the morning, after PE and coffee, by platoon, we made our way from the barracks to the parade ground.

We had four or five old Fiat 18 lorries with solid tyres at our disposal, which moved slowly over the parade ground. In turn, together with an instructor, we climbed up to the driving seat to begin our apprenticeship. It was not easy to drive this type of vehicle, the gears were not synchronised and one needed to know how to use the accelerator, brake and clutch well, and to be able to double declutch. After the driving school, the course returned straight to the barracks, where, after mess and a brief period of rest, lessons by Captain Pellegrini followed by Captain De Notter who trained us in weapons and shooting.

The training on the Fiat 18 lorries took place a couple of times a week, in turn the two platoons of cadets, were taken to the training field of Macello-Baudenasca, where we were learnt to drive armoured vehicles. They were little L6 tanks, but at first sight they looked to us like enormous monsters. Inside, the cockpit was very tight, the driver's seat did not have the usual steering wheel but instead two levers. After a short demonstration by the instructor, it was easy to learn and drive the little monsters, which proved very tractable: just press the accelerator and the tank went fast, and with light touches on the levers, as one moved to the left or right with great ease. After a few lessons, we almost all were able to drive well. Then we were taught to manoeuvre tanks in combat. Not being equipped with radio, the commands had to be given by hand, reaching out of the turret. It was not difficult to learn these manoeuvres and the commander was satisfied.

The manoeuvres with the tanks alternated with lessons on tactics: after coffee and the usual PE, Captain Genala gathered the troop and, with rifle, bandolier and pack and with a map, we left on foot towards the zone where we had to carry out the lesson, normally the neighbourhood of San Pietro val Lemina, several kilometers from Pinerolo. Having arrived there, the captain made us open our maps, explained the various symbols (bridges, underpasses, railway lines etc) then assigned a colour to each platoon (red against black), and indicated the objectives to be conquered (horses, armored cars, tanks, machine guns, cannon, bombers and other deadly arms which were represented with various symbols). The drill was unpredictable at times, the symbols became terrifying armaments, and victory or the defeat depended on the manoeuvrable imagination of the cadets. In the end they were not winners or losers, and, at mess hour we went back to the barracks all together. The afternoons normally were spent studying, lessons in weaponry and shooting, tactics and combat strategies.

We almost never talked about the war that was going on, only on a few occasions Captain Alciator opened the *Mein Kampf* of Hitler and from it read and commented on each page. In March and April the focus of the war had

moved to the Far East where the Japanese offensive continued with the conquest of Manila, Singapore, Java, Rangoon and the Philippines; for us also there was the Italian-German counteroffensive in Northern Africa, and Cyrenaica was reoccupied.

The course ignored the war but we did not even talk of politics. Our instructors tried hard to prepare in us the spirit that had always animated the cavalry school of Pinerolo: to produce the best officers, trained in discipline and command. Command school in effect was one of the most significant courses, for the cadets' attitude of command determined their promotion to officer.

On Sunday, after a clean up and wash, with extremely well polished shoes and leggings and clothed in our best uniform (sabre, fur hat, and white gloves), all the cadets, directed by their respective officers, NCOs and commanders of the school, perfectly lined up, gathered at the Caprilli riding school to participate in the mass officiated by the military chaplain and concluding with the hymn to Rome ("Divine Rome ..." composed in 1919 by Puccini to lyrics by Fausto Salvatori, based on these verses from Horace's *Carmen saeculare*).

The after eating we went out on an evening pass. We weren't always allowed out because each cadet had to be checked by the duty officer and if his uniform, gloves or shoes had the slightest imperfection we were sent back to the dormitory. When we were outside the barracks we got to know the town of Pinerolo, walking under the arcades admiring the pretty girls who went strolling with their families or boyfriends and smiled and stole glances to the cadets and we showed off in our uniforms. We looked at the shop-windows which displayed their goods in a pleasing manner, went into a bar and had a coffee or an ice-cream or to the cinema. If we had a few thousand liras left over we went to brothels, and then back to the barracks. In late June the summer camp started and the first big effort was to climb the *Colle la Roussa*, 2,017 metres asl.

Early in the morning all the 2nd squadron of the tank cadets, including NCOs and regular officers under the command of Captain Genala, with armoured vehicles to follow, reached the Sangone Valley and began climbing from the small village of Coazze with rucksacks, rifles, bandoleer and a bag with a map. Captain Genala, our company commander, gave us instructions before leaving on the itinerary to follow, how we should climb and rests. He then gave the signal and the entire squadron moved towards height 2,017 m asl. All of us, cadets and commanders were not used to climbing and soon felt tired.

In the journal «*Mak. Pi*», by the cadets, on page 40 cadet Franco Squaglia and humourist and cadet Antonio Ferracci illustrated our mood in taking the mountain. After the first half hour I started feeling tired and worried I would be unable to finish the climb: luckily our commanders were also unused to this type of march and so they often called for 5 minutes' rest. The cadets encouraged each other as this was the last big hurdle of the course and we had

to get over it. By the time we reached the fateful altitude 2,017 m asl we were tired and sweaty: the descent was easier, we slipped a few times, our feet were hurting and we reached the long awaited Chisone Valley and the village of Roreto where we stopped for a meal. Towards evening we stopped at the pleasant village of Barge where accommodation had been found and where we were to spend most of the camp. The days in Barge went by very swiftly, except for a few tactics lessons on the Monte Bracco as we were by now used to the mountains: drills were mostly in the valley near the village in the open countryside, the weather was good and our stay in Barge was very pleasant.

When we were out for the evening one could get to know the locals the many civilians who had sought refuge there to avoid the Allied bombings of Turin.

It was also easy to befriend the girls and develop real friendships: I remember a gypsy-looking dark girl wearing large earrings who befriended another cadet and who later became one of our best messengers in the partisan struggle. After about a week in Barge the squadron moved to Cavour and then Moretta. In early July we went back to Pinerolo ready to undergo the final and hardest test: exams.

When we got back from the camp we were met by a period of intense lessons and study in preparation of the exams. The examining board consisted of Colonel Lombard, Lieutenant Colonel Ajroldi and squadron commanders captains Vergano and Genala. The first exam was held in the courtyard of the barracks and it tested leadership skills, and we had to prove we knew how to manoeuvre a platoon imparting the correct commands which had to be given at the right time and in a clear and incisive manner. This was followed by exams on weapons, motorization and tactics, the latter being the decisive one. I stood in front of the examining board and Captain Genala questioned me: I had to prepare a tactical plan indicating the objectives and describing how it could be executed. Everything went for the best and at the end of the course on July the 15th 1942 I was told I had passed. On July the 16th 1942 I was granted leave while waiting for a posting as NCO second Lieutenant.

The appointment as NCO second lieutenant in the Cavalry School (*Scuola Applicazione Cavalleria*) starting from the 15th of August 1942 arrived in Mazara on August the 10th 1942. I left for Turin and in the Army Store I bought all I needed: uniform, boots, spurs, dress sword, ordinance trunk and so on. I was ready for my new life.

On August the 15th I reported to the School perfectly dressed in my uniform and was welcomed by Colonel Ajroldi, who informed me my destination was at the tank training unit in Vigone, a town close-by.

I left with the first available army car and on that same day I was in Vigone. I had been assigned to Captain Valli's squadron and immediately reported to him for duty. With the help of the orderly officer I found a furnished room in the

house of an elderly landlady. The morning after I took service and met my colleagues introduced by the squadron lieutenant Romano who accompanied me to the soldiers' dormitory and introduced me to the squadron. At lunch I met the other officers of the Vigone detachment (about twenty in all).

The Lieutenant Colonel, Commander of the detachment had brought his family to Vigone and often ate at home. Usually there were the three captains who commanded the squadrons and who were regular officers as well as a few lieutenants and NCO second lieutenants that had been called up or who were on their first appointment like me. The food was normally quite good, and we would chat of various things, on the life we spent in the town, a bit of gossip about the army and a few comments on the war in Africa and Russia.

In June, after occupying Tubruq, the troops of the Axis had entered Egypt reaching El-Alamein. In Russia, the Germans had occupied Sebastopol and were advancing in the Caucasus. In July they put Stalingrad under siege.

Lieutenant Parola, a lawyer from Milan who had been called up, often spoke very lucidly of the lack of weapons in our army and on the difficulties of the war with our German allies.

In the afternoon, when we had finished, we would have long walks getting to know the town and the local community. Vigone had been founded in the ancient times, as its plan and features indicated: there was a 13th century centre around which the town had grown over the centuries turning into what we could see in the present. Its arcades were especially beautiful: not too high but able to shelter from rain and snow in the winter and from the heat in the summer. It was a prevalently agricultural area, and the land was rich and fertile. On weekdays there weren't many people around but on Saturday and Sunday the piazza filled up. The dry and sunburnt faces of the farmers stood out: they congregated in small groups and spoke about their business in strict Piedmontese. The *Santa Maria* (Holy Mary) Parish Church was another meeting point at mass which was also an opportunity to see the beautiful girls of Vigone as well as the locals.

The business heart of the town was the livestock and agricultural produce market. The women arrived early in the morning, on a bike or carrying their produce on hand drawn carts: chickens, eggs, vegetables, fruit and the like. They would place their goods on the ground and soon they had sold them all and went shopping with their earnings. The livestock market was also very interesting: cattle, fattened calves for the slaughter, yearling calves, dairy cows and bulls and then they started negotiating, voice and counter-voice, hands and arms gesticulating, and they concluded sales and purchases. In the eyes of a Sicilian who was used to the habits of the South where at the end of the day, after having work from dawn to dusk, the farmers went home where their wives were waiting and exclusively performed domestic chores. Life was very different here in the North and the farmers lived in the country and in their

houses, which were in the countryside, and everyone, including the women, worked in the fields generating greater wealth.

As there weren't proper barracks the soldiers were living in accommodation in town and army life took place mostly in the open: our task was to train the soldiers, many of whom had been re-called and others were conscripts. We had to train them in the use of weapons and in driving armoured tanks.

We had marches to the neighbouring towns and villages and a couple of times a week we would move the squadron to the banks of the River Pellice to train the soldiers in the use of tanks. First we told them how to drive them: the tank had a strong hull with the caterpillar tracks resting on wheels. To manoeuvre one had to direct the wheels by acting on the breaking shoe. As well as driving lessons we also taught battle skills. At the end of the training we went back to town checking soldiers re-entered their accommodation and the officer of duty that day checked that the soldiers' meal was ready and gave instructions to the NCO on duty to check the distribution. After clearing up, the officers went to the mess to eat and that was when we had discussions.

Since there was no officers' club those of us who were not on duty would meet at the Café Viroglio under the arcades of the main square, next to the old Palace of the Princes of Acaja. The café was managed by the owner, Mrs Viroglio, who was both able and kind, ready to give us information on the town. We generally drank coffee or liqueur but some of us preferred *brachetto* wine, very good sparkling wine which the bar was well supplied with. At the end of August the tank cadets had reached a good standard so we decided to move to a more practical exercise, driving tanks in a manoeuvre with simulated combat. On September the 1st all the squadron, soldiers, NCOs and regular officers under the command of Lieutenant Romano went to the test field which was near Macello.

The tanks we were using were basically only for training and lacked on board instruments such as radio receiver, compass, periscope and gyroscope which would have been necessary for movements and to cross ditches and trenches. We coped with the lack of visibility using a long stick which the leader of the tank had. The leader stood on the tower and moved according to agreed signals with the pilot.

One at a time we were told by Lieutenant Romano that as recently appointed officers we had to get into the pilot tank and perform the simulated combat with five tanks on the field. My turn came too and I gathered the four tank leaders, went over the agreed signals³¹ which they had to give their pilots and the signals I was going to give for our tank to move. Then I got onto the tank, gave them the signal and the squadron left. The manoeuvre proceeded in perfect order and the tank leaders were answering my signals. Suddenly I was confronted with a rather deep ditch. I tried to stop my pilot with all my means, with the stick on the slit and shouting but the noise of the engine was too

strong and he could not hear. I kept putting the stick on the slit but to no avail and the tank moved on relentlessly towards the ditch.

I may have been leaning too far over the turret but once we got to the edge of the ditch I was immediately propelled out. I fell to the ground in front of the tank and heard a deafening noise and then I lost consciousness. Lieutenant Romano and the other colleagues who had followed the manoeuvres were very worried and sure they would find a corpse, so they slowly came up to me and started to poke me. There was blood and my colleagues pulled me by my legs which were luckily still intact. I was coming round and I was very pleased to hear their cries: 'He is alive, he is alive'.

They took me to the village where a Doctor Brun diagnosed a few flesh wounds on my left arm and chest, plus possibly a few broken ribs. That same night the ambulance drove me to the Turin military hospital where a team of doctors examined me. They also gave me a chest x-ray and saw that I had no severe lesion aside from the visible wounds but had suffered a major trauma in the impact with the tank. They kept me under observation for various days and on September the 14th I was sent home on a sixty day convalescent leave.

When I got back to Mazara my relatives were very concerned with what had happened to be and since I still had pain in my back they sent me to our doctor who gave me a thorough check up and assured me the pains depended on the blow I had received from the tank but that my general state of health was good. He suggested ointments, a lumbar support belt to keep my back warm and tranquillizers.

Sicily's good weather and the long summer nursed me back to health in a short time. Life in Mazara went on without any ruffles and all my friends had been called up as had my brother Giuseppe. As a result there was only my brother Nicola who was helping my father with the farm. Since I had quite a lot of time on my hands I started studying hoping I could soon sit an exam or two. I often listened to the radio and as October rolled on the news from Africa was less and less reassuring.

On October the 23rd 1942 General Montgomery, Commander of the 8th Army defeated the Italo-German forces under General Rommel at El-Alamein in Egypt. Following the defeat the forces of the Axis began to retreat.

In early November the Anglo-American troops landed in Algeria and Morocco under General Eisenhower and that same month the Soviet Army launched an offensive on Stalingrad and breaking ~~30~~ the enemy lines in the South and North and beginning to surround the city. Two hundred thousand men under the German General Von Paulus were trapped and the tide began to turn.

On November the 16th 1942 I was examined by a team of doctors at the Palermo Hospital and they listed me as not fit for active service but only for

certain services for 120 days. On the 20th of November I reported to my unit in Vigone to get back to my squadron. Captain Valli who was still the squadron commander welcomed me congratulating me for my recovery. He looked at the medical certificate and since I had been deemed fit for only limited services for 120 days he assigned me to the orderly office, checking accommodation, supplies and provisions for the troops.

I rented a furnished room with separate entrance and toilet (owned by the kind and welcoming Gasperini family) not far from the command.

At mess my officer colleagues congratulated me on my recovery: they saw me as if I had been saved by a miracle, and I had to describe what I had felt when I fell under the tank and between the caterpillars. They wondered at me having emerged virtually unscathed. A visit of Prince Humbert of Savoy had been announced and we were discussing about the heir to the throne who had no authority within the Fascist apparatus but depended exclusively on his father's authority.

The wind was turning and the Allies were on the counterattack in Africa and the Russians in Stalingrad, jingoism was calming down as usual Lieutenant Parola drew his conclusion that it was an unjust war. My new position left me lots of free time which meant I could study, get to know the town and make friends.

Many families had had to leave Turin because of the bombing: many had come to Vigone possibly because some had relatives who could put them up, others had rented rooms. In any case since it was a farming community life was quite good in spite of the rationing. The Viroglio Café was still a meeting point and the weather was still quite good. It hadn't snowed yet and we could sit under the arcades and drink a few glasses of *Brachetto* wine and look at the passersby in the Town Hall square. I had befriended young Turello who had introduced me to his family and I often went to their house. I was starting to know a few girls and we would have long walks under the *leca* plants and as Christmas approached I had been invited to a few parties organised by the young people.

It was then as I was strolling along the streets of Vigone that I noticed a tall beautiful girl with long hair and a pair of white socks that made her legs and clean-look face stand out. I was attracted to her so I decided to approach her: I noticed she had entered the tobacco shop which was close to the Viroglio Café and I followed her in hoping to speak to her.

We exchanged a few words at the exit and I asked her if I could walk her home. She told me she had been evacuated from Turin and lived with her grandmother and an aunt who worked for the Town Hall. She agreed and as I stood closer to her I realised she was younger than I had thought, in fact she was only 15. When we got to her house I said goodbye to her on the doorstep and hoped we might get to know each other better. I saw her once again and insisted on walking her home and noticed that she was not displeased. So I

asked her if we might meet again. After the Christmas holidays she disappeared and I heard she had been sent to boarding school in Pinerolo. I was to meet her again two years later after the Liberation of Turin, one Saturday evening at the *Castellino Danze*, a ballroom accompanied by her aunt. She was even more beautiful and I invited them to a table. I offered them a drink and knowing my history as a partisan and wishing to know more, they agreed. We also had a few dances and the aunt agreed for me to see her again. Little did I know she would become my wife and in October 2001 we celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary.

The news that came in December from the Russian front was not too good: the Soviets had started the offensive in the Don Region, the Germans were retreating and the Italian ARMIR (*Armata italiana in Russia*, the Italian Army in Russia) suffered a terrible defeat. A disastrous retreat began. I was mainly working at the headquarters of the squadron when one day a lieutenant arrived, leather jacket, black moustache and sparkling eyes belong to the armoured vehicle unit in Cavour. He told me he wanted to speak to the Commander and I took him: he emerged half an hour later politely said good bye and then left on his motorbike. Soon after Captain Valli emerged carrying sheets of paper which he handed to his trusted typist to copy. When the typist moved away for a few minutes I stole in and looked at those sheets: they mentioned a new military organization, listing the difficulties our army was experiencing and referring to popular organisations. I connected that information to the news that was coming from the fronts and understood something was happening in our army.

In January we heard about the attack of the 8th British Army in Africa against General Rommel's troops that had to retreat. Benghazi fell on January the 23rd 1943 and the British occupied Tripoli. In early February at the end of my limited service period I was once again examined by a medical board at the Turin Military Hospital and also by a higher board at the military inspectorate and was deemed fit for all active service and thus resumed regular service in my squadron.

Allied bombing on Turin and on the surrounding areas had become more intense and discontent was brewing, many staples were in short supply and people were complaining. In March we heard about the big strikes the Northern Italian workers had called from the Fiat employees who had been evacuated

In late March I heard my brother Giuseppe had to embark in Naples with his regiment that was bound for Tunisia ³⁵ in aid of the Italian troops under General Messe. My parents were very worried and had decided to go to Naples to bid

him goodbye. Their decision worried me so I decided to join them: I applied for study leave saying I had to sit an exam at the University and was granted it very easily. At the beginning of April I was in Naples to meet my parents and said

my farewells to my brother Giuseppe as he was due to sail soon after. My brother was given shore leave and was able to spend a few hours with us: mother was really excited and kept hugging him with her eyes welling up. After a few days we heard they were going to sail at a later date due to the intense activity of the Allied Air force which had sunk various ships in that period. My brother and the others leaving for Tunis were put on planes leaving Castelvetro and in early May, after a few days' fighting he was taken prisoner by the Anglo-Americans.

After having been to the University without sitting any exam, I decided to accompany my parents back to Mazara: I found it nearly empty as families had sought refuge in the country side against the bombing. My parents and other relatives had moved to some land we owned and had refurbished a couple of old farmhouses and outbuildings. I spent a few days with them observing the Allied planes flying over our heads and often we would find empty drums dropped from the planes. There was word that the city of Marsala, quite close to us, had been bombed. I had nearly finished my leave so I decided to go back and the goodbyes to my parents and relatives were heart-wrenching. We lived day by day and the fear of an Allied invasion was in the air. I was not to see my parents till 1945, a few months after the Liberation.

Getting back to my unit was a long and the train for Turin ran very late because of the fear of bombings. Tension peaked when we crossed the Messina Strait. One event sticks to my mind: as we arrived at Leghorn close to me there was a compartment where there were some Italian soldiers sitting. A group of German soldiers got on in Leghorn and got the Italians to give their pace up. I felt like reacting to this imposition but didn't, thinking of the consequences I might have to bear. Once in Vigone I resumed my normal duties.

My approach and feelings had radically changed, I had left my parents living in an old farm cottage and having witnessed the Germans' impositions all made me think about the meaningless of the war Mussolini had wanted.

«Look at those mountains. They will soon be swarming with real Italians»

In April the war bulletins continued to speak about our troops' bravely fighting in Tunisia and the the resistance they were opposing to the Anglo-American troops. On May the 7th the Allies occupied Bizerte and Tunis and on May the

12th North Africa capitulated and was conquered. About two hundred and ninety thousand Italian and German soldiers were taken prisoners.

Defeats in Russia and Africa were starting to raise great concern among people. Even in the army and especially among some officers there was a growing feeling that Italy should change course. We had to rise above a situation which was getting worse by the day. At the officers mess we were discussing more and more vigorously about the war and I told my story about the Germans' imposition on the train journey back from Sicily.

A group of new officers arrived in Vigone in early June and some of us were moved to new units: I was transferred to the Cavour armoured vehicles. The Cavour detachment was under the Cavalry School in Pinerolo but it was larger than the Vigone unit. The main task of the Cavour unit was to train and teach the use of armoured cars. I was assigned to the squadron under Captain Cartasegna, a knowledgeable man with a great experience who had just returned from Africa where he had taken part in several battles with armoured cars. He was a very disciplined and hard man. Second Lieutenant Latilla who had also served in Africa under Cartasegna also served in the same squadron.

I found accommodation in an inn at the centre of the town where Linda Perasso ('Clara') was the landlady and where several other officers also had rooms. We ate at a restaurant, *La Posta*, managed by Mr Giovannino Genovesio, a large man and very good cook who managed to serve us very good meals in spite of food shortages and who finished meals with his speciality: *zabajone*. I didn't know much about armoured car driving but I soon learnt with the help of my colleague Latilla and soon I ranked among the inspectors and took part in life of the squadron taking part in all services and activities.

Pompeo Colajanni, a Sicilian lawyer from Enna, was also stationed in Cavour. He was our senior lieutenant and had never been promoted to captain for political reasons. He had very good communication skills and had long been recruiting among servicemen for the underground to get Italy to leave the Nazi Fascist alliance. I recognised him and I remembered his visit to Vigone: he was the one who had met Captain Valli and given him the leaflets which I had read. Since my journey to Sicily I had started to examine the very difficult situation we were in, the Germans who were acting as if they owned the place: all this made my meeting a man who open spoke against the war and Fascism which were leading our army to disaster at mealtimes quite natural. It was one of those meetings which changes the course of one's life: he managed to gather a group of young officers who formed the *Associazione Militare Italia Libera* (Amil The Army Association of Free Italy) which he had established before being sent to the Pinerolo Cavalry School. He spread his antifascist organisation among us, in the Cavalry, in the *Bersaglieri* (a unit of running – on the double - marksmen) and the Alpine soldiers. He managed to establish contacts with the members of all parties.

I attended all the meetings he organised strolling along the avenues of Cavour and heard about the existence of parties and antifascist organisations for the first time ever: I was mesmerised by his words. Sometimes I too spoke at meals a fact which caused my squadron captain Cartasegna to react badly towards me as he did with Lieutenant Colajanni.

On June the 10th we heard about the Allies' landing on the islands of Lampedusa, Linosa and Pantelleria: it was clear that the Anglo-Americans were building a bridgehead for a coming landing in Sicily. When confronted with this Mussolini answered that they would be stopped on the foreshore. As officers we made sarcastic comments about this sentence, especially Colajanni who could see things taking a turn for the worst. He increased pressure on the Military Commands, and especially on General Cadorna, the commander of the Pinerolo School of cavalry and an antifascist at heart but also a soldier of the King's since he had had taken an oath of loyalty. Cadorna kept saying nothing could be done without the King: in fact many of the higher military officers faithful to the King thought they feared Mussolini and continued to waive giving no orders.

Colajanni strengthened his ties with local antifascists: the disbanded antifascist parties were resuming their underground activities, and national liberation committees were being established. He had contacts with Antonio Giolitti who lived in his grandfather Giovanni's old villa and especially with professor Augusto Monti who was a long time antifascist evacuated to Cavour. I too was able to attend some of those meetings and attend the enthusiasm and the passion which he imparted to Colajanni encouraging him to improve and develop the organisation.

On July the 10th, after an extensive bombing of the coast, the Allies landed in Sicily. The weak defences of the Italian troops were easily overcome and after a few days they entered Palermo. Mussolini was desperate, and met Hitler in Feltre where he begged for substantial military aid. The *Duce's* prestige was slipping away quickly and an opposition was growing within the Fascist political caste, led by the two former foreign secretaries, Grandi and Ciano. Taking advantage of the precipitating military events in Sicily to table an order of the day's discussion, known as the *Ordine del giorno Grandi*, Ciano and Grandi presented a vote of no confidence at the meeting of the Grand Council on July the 25th, asking for the return of the Statute and the resumption of Crown prerogatives.

Following the approval of the *Grandi Order* in Parliament, the King dismissed Mussolini on July the 25th 1943, put him under arrest and replaced him with Field Marshal Badoglio. An overwhelming antifascist response greeted the news throughout the country, without any apparent opposition. The news reached Cavour and people filled the streets and squares calling out to freedom and the end of the war. All the Fascist symbols were destroyed.

A sense of elation spread among the officers who had joined Amil and Lieutenant Colajanni attracted the attention of many of the higher ranks. In fact what he had foreseen a long time ago had actually happened and now they were trying to find a solution to get out of the situation we were in. In the meantime Field Marshal Badoglio had declared that the war was continuing alongside the Germans which had alarmed the antifascists who had resumed their activity in spite of the Government ban publicly demanding Italy to withdraw from the war. Feelings seemed to be running high among the Cavour military swaying against the war which looked as it seemed to be lost, and Colajanni kept holding conferences to us publicly taking a stand in favour of the end of the war and for the return of democracy. He used all available means to convince the higher officers to make a statement against the war and for the return of democracy.

General Cadorna had been transferred to Ferrara at the Command of the Ariete Armoured Cavalry and his place had been filled by General Barbo', an ardent admirer of the Germans. Colajanni kept getting the same answer from the upper ranks: nothing could be done without the King's approval. In spite of the first disappointments the Amil underground organisation continued to grow even among the higher ranks of the Army and Navy in the name of antifascism. Many of the young Cavour officers joined, Major Bartoli among them.

In the meantime the German High Commands had troops pouring in to Italy from Germany in view of a possible Italian withdrawal from the war: some of the best German armoured divisions crossed the Italian border at Tarvisio, marching down through Italy and occupying some of the most strategic positions. Colajanni understood how bad the situation in Italy was and since neither his imagination nor his revolutionary spirit ever rested during a meeting in the Cavour Square he turned to us, the group of young officers, and looking to the Mount Viso (*Monviso Mountain*) shouted: 'Look at those mountains, soon they will be full of real Italians'. We were dismayed and looked at each other in disbelief, although soon we had to change our minds as his prophecy was fulfilled. This is what Prof Monti wrote in the chapter The Resistance and the South of Italy (*Resistenza e Mezzogiorno*) his book: 30th Year of the Fascist Era and 8th year after the Liberation: all the Risorgimento from 1845 to 1945, beyond the Resistance, Spain, neo-Fascism in the USA and neighbouring areas: towards a 3rd WW) (*A. XXX E.F.:anno VIII dopo la Liberazione: tutto il Risorgimento dal 1848 al 1945: oltre la Resistenza: la Spagna: neofascismo in Usa e dintorni: verso un terzo conflitto mondiale?*, published by Parenti:

That evening I saw these soldiers congregating in the Town Hall square where they had been invited by their senior lieutenant: they were standing around the monument to the fallen in the other war. Night was falling on the low buildings on the Rocca. In the square there were men, women, youngsters, country and town folk. This is what the officer said: 'Boys. The Germans are coming and General B, the Commander of the School, is telling us to get back to Pinerolo where he clearly wants to place us all at the German's orders.

For the 'war'. I am not going back to Pinerolo, I am going up the mountain, what are you going to do?

– Lieutenant we are coming with you.

– Then say goodbye to the people in Cavour, embrace the girls and let's go.

So in the middle of the night they walked up the mountainside. They stopped at the top of the Bracco not far from the source of the River Po. And that became one of the first nuclei of the new army which was to fight the new war for the country we hoped would also be new. The Lieutenant already had a nom de guerre, Barbato, otherwise known as lawyer Pompeo Colajanni.

Following the fall of Fascism the army had full powers and soldiers had also policing powers. In early August Captain Cartasegna had ordered my colleague Second Lieutenant Lippi and myself to carry out a tactical manoeuvre on the *Rocca di Cavour* (the Rock of Cavour). We moved on foot leading about 30 soldiers and after having choosing the best paths, we started climbing in extended order.

Towards 10 we had reached the top and gave a 10 minute break. I saw to the soldiers' accommodation while Second Lieutenant Lippi entered the small restaurant, the local *trattoria* that was managed by an idle aged woman and her two young pretty daughters. Suddenly I heard shouting from inside and ran in to see what was happening. As I walked in I saw a rather depressing spectacle as the landlady was brandishing a knife and was threatening Lippi who was pointing a gun. I immediately intervened and ordered my colleague to put his gun away while trying to calm the lady and getting her to put the knife away. I tried to understand what had happened and the woman kept screaming Lippi had tried it on with her daughters to which Lippi answered he had simply offered a few compliments which the girls had clearly not appreciated. They had shouted and their mother had come out of the kitchen holding a knife in her hand. Lippi got frightened and also offended so he had reacted by taking his gun out, a rash and reproachable manner for an officer to a lady. The only thing I can say to partly justify him is that it was his first appointment, had very little experience and had identified with his policing role.

The woman knew Captain Cartasegna and she had immediately marched down to Cavour to report the fact. On our return we were immediately summoned and the Captain immediately drafted a report for the Military Authorities: Lippi was being charged with abuse of authority and I was charged because as a senior officer I had failed to avoid the incident. It was my duty to oversee the young officer Lippi.

I felt the charges against me were unmotivated and I thought it was due to rather tense relation between the Captain and myself due to the fact I had become an ardent follower of Lieutenant Colajanni's. While waiting for the court Lippi and I were transferred to Pinerolo to the Cavalry School. The day

after Colajanni came to visit and displayed great understanding telling me to be patient and that things were sure to change in the near future. After a few days we heard the Military Tribunal had sentenced Second Lieutenant Lippi to three months' military prison and I was transferred to the depot of the Victor Emanuel Lancers armoured regiment in Ferrara after 15 days' prison to be served in the Fort of Exilles. I never completed my sentence as in the meantime the 8th of September Armistice was called. On September the 3rd after they had occupied Sicily, Montgomery's British troops had landed in Calabria and Clark's US troops landed in Salerno thus beginning the occupation of Southern Italy.

I was in the Fort of Exilles serving my sentence; a battalion of the Alpine troops was stationed there and what was supposed to be a punishment served me as a period of rest and an opportunity to rethink things – a holiday I may venture to suggest. To my great surprise I had been given a little room, an orderly who served me food and saw to the cleaning.

It was possible to go out, walk along the walls of the Fort where we could chat with the girls of Salbertrand, a village nearby. I had befriended other imprisoned officers and we played cards while debating the end of Fascism for hours on end. We also spoke about the political situation and what we thought would be the end of the war.

That was the situation when on the afternoon of September the 8th 1943 we heard the loudspeakers announcing repeatedly 'Attention, attention in a few minutes a special announcement will be made by the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Badoglio'. We waited agonizing and feeling it was a tragic situation but at the end the announcement left us speechless: no precise directive, no indication, and no orders as to what our army was to do.

At the Fort of Exilles, just as in all the other barracks and Regiment Commands it was chaos. The major who was the Commander of the battalion left and hid in his house in Bardonecchia. The Fort left to its own devices was in a state of disarray. The NCOs were the only ones able to maintain some sort of order. On September the 9th the King, the Government and the Forces' General Staff took the Corvette Baionetta to seek refuge in Brindisi in the South of Italy liberated by the Allies.

It was then, in those moments of uncertainty and disarray that the words that our friend Lieutenant Colajanni had repeatedly said to the young officers as we strolled along the tree lined streets of Cavour came to my mind as a clear indication: can you see those mountains? Soon they will be full of real Italians'. Those words which at the time had^d seemed hazy and mysterious, suddenly became very real and I felt had to be borne out immediately. I spoke to an Air Force Captain whom I had befriended and who was also an antifascist.

On September the 9th we convinced a group of Alpine soldiers and loaded about 10 mules loaded with munitions and supplies. We decided to go to the

Colle Assietta, above exiles to seek refuge and to wait for events. The column was about to start off when suddenly the Major in command of the Fort came. Once he saw what was happening he began to scream and swear against us, ordering us to unload the mules, We resisted for a while but the Major who had been in touch with a German patrol in Bardonecchia and had received the order to hand over the entire battalion. For myself and my Air Force friend it was the end of an illusion: unfortunately we had been isolated and no one listened to us any more, the Major's NCOs had overwhelmed us. We consulted and were determined not to go back on what was our decision. We examined what we could still do, He was talking about his family which he wanted to Preach as soon as possible – I think he was from Parma but I lost his address and have had no news since.

The day after I decided I wanted to go back to Cavour where I was sure I would meet my friend Lieutenant Colajanni and the other colleagues who in the meantime has surely organised to resist the Germans, I was sure that the group of officers who had joined Amil with me led by Colajanni had gone up the mountain. Looking through the warehouse of the Alpine soldiers who had failed to return, we found a couple of civilian trousers and shirts. We put our officer uniforms in our trunks and wore civilian clothes. I took my service gun and put it at the bottom of a rucksack among my underwear and started walking towards Chiomonte then taking the first train to Turin.

I arrived at Turin's Porta Nuova mainline station without any problems. Porta Nuova was controlled and guarded by German soldiers in fighting gear: helmet, *pistolmachine*, hand grenades stuffed in their leather high boots.

Very few German soldiers in that sort of attire were able to frighten and terrorise the people crowding the station: there were older men, youngsters and former soldiers no longer in uniform, in a mess like me, trying to reach their destinations. I managed to get onto the train for Pinerolo where I immediately enquired about the trains for Torre Pellice and Barge. I had a little time to spare so I walked round the station enquiring on the situation. I heard that Pinerolo was occupied and that most of the Cavalry officers had been called back General Barbo' and had been made prisoners by the Germans.

I hurried back into the station, got a ticket and got onto the train for Barge and Torre Pellice. I travelled third class and walked into a compartment with two wooden benches. It was so empty that I sat rather frightened in a window seat squeezing myself into the corner. Three middle aged women entered the compartment: they were certainly farmers who had been to the Pinerolo market and were returning home after they had sold their chickens and eggs and had made their purchases in the shops. Time to get home now.

A young woman also entered and sat on the same bench but on the other side, close to the door. I was shyly eyeing the three women who looked prosperous

with their long black dresses covering what was under the seat. They continued to speak of the market of their relatives who were far away at war: husbands, brothers, sons they had no news of. They were speaking of the youngsters who had been caught by the Germans and made prisoners.

Every now and again they would cast a glance at me and I heard them speak as they had clearly understood I was one of the many young people to have cast my uniform away. The train moved and everything made us think that everything was all right when a young woman popped her head into our compartment and shouted: 'Beware, there are Germans on the train and they are rounding people up, they have already stopped several young men'. I must have turned white because the three women exchanged glances and looked at me. Without hesitating one of them took me by the arms and said in the local dialect «*Fieul curagi, ven si suta* (Come on my boy come under here)». One of the others had taken my rucksack pushing it and me under the seats, then they straightened their clothes and resumed their conversation.

A few minutes later the Germans reached my compartment, looked in, complimented the young woman, greeted my three protectors and then asked if they had seen any Italian soldiers. Obviously they said they hadn't. Soon after the train stopped in the midst of the countryside and German patrol got off. Someone said there was no more danger, the train started up again and soon after we reached Bricherasio. I thanked my protectors, got off and somehow reached Cavour late at night where I asked about Lieutenant Colajanni and the other colleagues and friends. After insisting I managed to gather information and understood that that same night of September the 10th a column of Officers, NCOs and soldiers had left Cavour on the road to Barge, taking all their weapons and two armoured tanks. I found Captain Cartasegna who was swearing against the deserters saying they would pay for it and that we all had to wait in the barracks for the orders which would certainly soon come.

The orders never arrived because they were never issued: the army was melting like snow in the sun.

I reached Barge on the morning of the 11th and I tried to find Colajanni but initially that proved quite difficult as the Cavour group was already underground. Colajanni had disappeared and Barbato had taken his place, the legendary commander of the Garibaldi partisan unit, known in the whole area.

Following repeated questions and searches, I managed to get in touch with Uncle Beppe, the Barge shoemaker who took me to his home and put me in touch with the Geymonats. Virginia Geymonat sheltered me in her house and informed me of the situation and told me where my comrades were positioned. Her house was then a point of reference for the partisan organisation; Virginia Geymonat coordinated, addressed immediate and needs for the units and made contacts with new arrivals. The day after a messenger (*staffetta*) took me to the Monte Bracco base where I finally met up with Colajanni. Conte,

Pietro, Nella Marcellino, Pajetta, Giolitti and Guaita had arrived at the base. Barbato presented me to the comrades and especially to Pajetta. He was a bit like a father confessor and told me what my life as a partisan would be. I was also told I would have to have a *nom de guerre*: Barbato suggested Petralia. That day my September the 8th began. Under that name I experienced various events, the 18 long months of the partisan struggle.

At the «ciabot della capoloira» (*The vineyard hut at the Capoloira*) of the Mount Bracco where the first base had been established, other volunteers started to arrive. There were workers and soldiers who had heard that there were groups of resisting the Germans on the mountains and they joined Barbato's partisans. Second Lieutenant Latilla, known as Nanni came, and Massimo train nicknamed Max and several other officers, NCOs and soldiers from the Cavour Unit. Several antifascists came from Turin, and in particular Carlo Broccardo known as Moretta, Luigi Battistini and Edoardo Zamacois, known as Zama, an Ecuadorian British parachutist along with Zucca.

As the volunteers increased in numbers we became short of weapons. Barbato was informed that in Upper River Po Valley at Pian del Re there was a large depot of weapons and munitions from the now disbanded Gaf (the Border Police) which was guarded by about 15 *carabinieri* (military police).

I was asked to draft a plan to recover these weapons and in the early morning of September the 21st with five carefully chosen partisans we took the old bus Barge Crissolo bus service and had to sit on the roof as it was full inside. Because of the fuel shortage the bus was running on a gasogen with a wood stove. The bus started off slowly and then gained speed but when it got to the steeper slopes of the Colletta it started to huff and puff and stopped at the sharpest bends. A lot of the passengers would get off and pushed it.

At last we reached Paesana: a lot of passengers got off and others came on boards but the coach was not as full and at last at 10 we got to Crissolo. We tried not to catch anybody's attention, hid the weapons and split into two groups. Tommasini, the driver, went with another two to find a lorry which would possibly be used to carry the weapons while I tried to gather information on the situation at Pian del Re and of the *carabinieri* on duty there. We had soon gathered all the information we needed and Tommasini had identified a Tre-Ro lorry whose owner was prepared to lend us. I had a good idea of the number of *carabinieri* and their habits. In particular I was told that the Commander was a technical sergeant of the military police (*maresciallo dei carabinieri*) who sometimes went to shop in the village. That day he happened to be in town with another two *carabinieri* and they were shopping. I got the idea of capturing the sergeant with his two guards and get him to surrender the unit. I left with my Garibaldi Unit men (*garibaldini*) left for *Pian della regina* not to arise suspicions and from there we explored the road to *Pian del Re* deciding to prepare an ambush: we positioned ourselves behind a wall that ran along the road, on a bend. Our lookout told us when the mule drawn cart and the three

carabinieri were approaching slowly as we could make out in the distance. We were on the lookout, ready to jump out from behind the wall guns in hand, telling them to stop. Our lookout told us they were about to turn and the four of us jumped out and threatened them with our guns, telling them to surrender. The sergeant and his two men were frightened and put immediately put their hands up. We said we were partisans and told them they were surrounded by hundreds of freedom fighters and they had to abandon their unit and hand over the weapons. We then disarmed them we told the sergeant to walk ahead of us as we got to the unit we convinced the other *carabinieri* not to shoot least he should be killed. As expected all the *carabinieri* surrendered and the same afternoon they left for Saluzzo.

Tommasini went to Crissolo and came back in the evening with a very beautiful Lancia Tre-Ro lorry. In the night we loaded it with all the weapons (rifles, machine guns, semiautomatic rifles, munitions and hand grenades with along handle, the ones the Germans wore inside their high boots). After we loaded the lorry and went to sleep.

In the early morning Tommasino left with his precious cargo heading toward Barge. Once we had checked out the barracks of the *Pian del Re* and had recovered other weapons, I left partisan Ulisse with a young French partisan to stand guard and started going on foot towards the Colle delle Traversette to explore the small strong-holds of the area and recover the weapons which had been abandoned there. Our young French friend intended to go to France through the Mount Viso (*Monviso*).

In the late afternoon we suddenly heard the sound of shoots from the *Pian del Re* following by billowing smoke and I immediately understood there was something going on. We looked more careful and saw a column of German armoured cars and tanks moving in a rather disorganised fashion. Ulisse had been taken prisoner as the Germans had been informed by the *carabinieri* of the presence of a large group of partisans and they had come in numbers to fight off any resistance. As night fell we saw the flames rising as *Pian del Re* was burning. We tried to climb and to distance ourselves as much as possible. It was getting dark and we did not know the mountain very well, so we lost our sense of direction. We didn't know where we were supposed to go but the only thing we were certain of was that we had to go in the opposite direction of *Pian del Re* where we could still see the houses burn. It was dangerous to walk because we could have slipped in a ravine so not having any other choice I decided to trust the mule who had certainly walked that path many times. I took the mule's tail in one hand and held the young Frenchman with the other. We followed the mule's steps for an hour, fraught with fear of falling off any moment, and arrived at a plateau. We couldn't see the flames any more, we had distanced ourselves from *Pian del Re*. The mule stopped and lay on the grass, and so did we, huddling near the animal as we only had one blanket. Dawn showed us we were near other Gaf barracks because, as I had thought, the mule had followed a known path. We were just under Mount Granero. We

could not go back and we were faced with an unknown valley which I thought should be the Pellice Valley so we decided to walk in that direction. We failed to find the path to offer the mule a smooth climb down the mountain- as we wanted to take it with us - . Initially we found a series of large frost covered slabs which made the mule's iron shoes slip, so we had to spread the blankets and get the mule to walk over it. It was a great effort and the mule moved slowly but luckily after about ten meters we found the path and the mule was able to move easily.

At the end of the slope we came across the Barbara Refuge which was occupied by GL partisans (*Giustizia e Libertà', Justice and Freedom*) who were starting to organise the resistance in the Val Pellice. We told them what had happened to us, and they were both curious and full of admiration. They offered food and drink and we discussed both our organizations: some of them already knew about the existence of a group of *Garibaldi* partisans in the Barge area led by Barbato. We mentioned the possibility of the two units cooperating and late that evening they offered us to stay over and sleep in a bunk bed. We were tired and crashed out. The next morning we were ready to go and the GL partisans showed us the shortest way: we had to climb up to Rora' then continue to Montoso and climb down the Infernotto Valley reaching Barge. By night we were in Rora' where we asked a family of Waldensian farmers, very kind and very kind and understanding people: they fed us, gave us a bed and gave our faithful mule straw and a stable.

The next morning we got up very early and I decided to try and get to Barge by night. Our courageous farmers gave us two bowls of fresh milk, two bread loaves and a piece of salami. They also added more information about the added information on the mountains we had to cross. We got to Barge in that afternoon and our comrades were very pleased to see us arrive as they had had no news for days. They had heard of the German attack at Pian del Re and of Ulisses's capture but they didn't know what had happened to us. I told Barbato about our adventure and of the meeting with the GL partisans and he told me they had begun to cooperate. I was also told that Tommasini had got there in his Lancia Tre-Ro with the weapons and munitions which were now being distributed to the new arrivals. He congratulated us on the operation. The mule was given to the quartermaster and was used for supplies. We named it Benito and he worked throughout most of the partisan war.

The Bracco base was not big enough nor was it any longer safe with the new arrivals, so most of the group was transferred to the Gabbiola area in the Infernotto Valley. Provisions became a key issue at this point: initially some of the horses from the former Nice Cavalry of Bagnolo Piemonte had been slaughtered, now regular provisions were required. Uncle Beppe Marocchia (the Barge shoemaker) and Moretta (a partisan by the name of Carlo Broccardo) organised a centre: the municipalities of Barge, Cavour, Villafranca and Vigone helped us and set up supply committees, especially for beans and potatoes. A sergeant from the Cavour Cavalry used a horse drawn *tamagnone*

(a cart used to carry grapes and other agricultural produce), the horse having been spared from slaughter. Since there was no more meat, when he came Barbato used to tell us we should eat beans that were better than meat. Luigi Battistini, in charge of the kitchen used to prepare wonderful nettle soups and stewed apples. In Gabiola, Barbato met the Felice and Eraldo Balestrieri, two brothers who were helping their aunt pick apples and convinced them to join us. They did and were very happy . Felice Balestrieri was placed in charge of the advanced base defending the valley, and his detachment was the first to carry out military actions against the Germans in the plains.

On September the 12th a group of German parachutists led by Major Skorzeny freed Mussolini who was a prisoner on the Gran Sasso Mountain. On September the 14th Mussolini met Hitler and accepted to proclaim the Italian Social Republic announcing it on Radio Munich. Between the 21st and the 24th of September the German reprisal started on the Aegean Islands, especially in Cephalonia. The Aquila division which was stationed on the island was left to its own devices without any orders. The men did not surrender and the commander decided to hold a vote among soldiers, NCOs and officers as to whether they should surrender to the Germans or fight. It was a unanimous vote to resist and they did when the Germans ordered them to hand over their weapons they resisted. The Germans were in much larger numbers and they were nearly all killed. About nine thousand six hundred officers, NCOs and soldiers died.

The partisan command heard that the sergeant who was in charge of supplies had sold the horse and part of the beans he was carrying: a patrol of partisans was sent out to find him, he was arrested and tried by a jury consisting of Barbato, Geymonat, Comollo, Battistini, Petralia and Nanni. There was a long and complex discussion: on the one hand an exemplary punishment was called for and that was a death sentence. Some of us, like Nanni and myself were not used to party discipline and thought it was an excessively harsh sentence for theft. Barbato intervened and repeated the sentence ad to be executed as an example because we did not have any jails. Suddenly he got an idea and decided to appoint me so that I could carry out a fake execution. Next morning I picked him up and told the partisans who were holding them that I would personally see to the execution, we went to the woods and there I told him that the partisan court had sentenced him to death and that I was to carry the sentence out. However I just lectured him and told him to leave the area and never be seen again. Then I shot once in the air and went back to the base: as far as everyone was concerned the execution had been carried out and the example given.

As the number of partisans increased we needed to find other sources of , supplies. Antonio Giolitti was friendly with some of the Locatelli di Moretta managers, a nearby salami plant: he convinced to them to hand over a couple of cheese wheels. I was in charge of transport with the good driver, Tommasini. We managed to get hold of a van and with another two partisans we went to

the plant. We were received at the warehouse where the workers had been instructed by the managers to hand us over a few wheels. We followed the person in charge into the warehouse and saw hundreds of perfectly aligned wheels. The man had been told to give us a few but faced with the wealth of cheese which we thought would be handed over to the Germans we told him to stand back threatening him with our rifles and loaded our van leaving for Barge. The cheese lasted us a few months and was shared among the various partisan groups, some were given to the farmers and two were left in safe custody with a priest at the Gabbiola Church. A few days later there was a German raid and many of our supplies were destroyed. Moretta remembered about the two left with the priest and tried to get them back. However, the priest had been so afraid that the Germans would find him with the cheese that he had thrown the two wheels in the cesspit. Moretta got them back and very patiently washed them over and over again and for a few days they relieved our hunger.

After the 8th of September a group of officers and a few soldiers of the Nice Cavalry based in Bagnolo Piemonte had sought refuge in the Bertone farm above Bagnolo, owned by a man called Pietro. At the beginning of October food was in short supply and because of the rough living conditions many officers had abandoned it. There were still two officers and a few soldiers. Barbato saw the opportunity to expand our partisan zone, so I was told to gain control of the Bertona and organize a new detachment of Garibaldi partisans.

I went off with Moretta and a dozen partisans: negotiations with the officers were not difficult in fact I would say they were waiting for something like this to find a way out of their situation. I told them what the aim of our units was: to resist against the German occupation, attack and sabotage behind the enemy lines. I also told them about the dangers and gave the *Pian del re* events as a case in point as well as reminding them we were all volunteers. I told them that those who didn't think they could face that life could go home, but that those who stayed had to become self disciplined, respect their comrades and local communities, obey their commanders. Commanders were elected according to their skills and knowledge. One of the two officers, Mario Abruzzese, joined without hesitating while the other who came from Turin decided to consult his family and left. He never came back. Most of the soldiers stayed behind.

I was appointed head of the detachment and second Lieutenant Mario Abruzzese was appointed my deputy, and received the name of Romanino, given he was from Rome. For me it marked a time of new responsibilities: I had a large group of young partisans under my command and they had entrusted me with the task of leading them in the struggle against the German invader. I organised the detachment so that it would work well. With Romanino we began dividing it in teams of ten men and getting each team to elect their leader. A couple were put in charge of supplies and provisions, and one was in charge of cooking. Watch duty rotas were drafted, and the older more experienced ones trained the new ones in weaponry skills. Soon new

volunteers arrived: young Montagnana 'Marco' from Turin, Monetti from Monetti, Secondino and Massimino from Villafranca. Marco was put in charge of the new team, Monetti who was a weapons expert was given the heavy Breda machine gun.

Many youngsters from Bagnolo Piemonte who had failed to report to military service wanted to join but since we lacked weapons we told them to stay home and in case of danger to find refuge somewhere safe, telling them we would call them when the need arose. In early October Radio London announced that the Allies were moving North and that they had reached Naples which had already been freed by the partisans in after the famous Four Days' Uprising. On the 27th and 28th of September the people of Naples had occupied barracks and depots and on the morning of the 29th clashes had started in the streets. The Nazis were taken by surprise and tried to organize their defence sending in tanks. They were blocked in Capodichino and Capodimonte by the insurgents. The battle spread through the city, more and more barricades were set up and the clashes turned into a bloodbath. On the morning of the 30th of September the Commander, Colonel Walter Scholl was forced to leave the city. On the 1st of October Naples was freed and the National Liberation Committee took over the running of the city. The Allies entered Naples only to find it liberated, much to their surprise. News like this made us hope our liberation would soon come and enthusiasm grew among the partisan units. In the midst of this euphoria our friends Pronino and Quaglia, men from the budding National Liberation Committee, CLN, in Villafranca, told us there were three youngsters in town who were terrorizing the farmers and pretended to be partisans. They entered the farms shouting Petralia and robbed the farmers of food and old. The honour and the prestige of our unit was at stake so I decided to intervene with a group of partisans including Monetti and Massimino. We went down to Villafranca and helped by Pronino, the local pharmacist we went to the local Sergeant of the *carabinieri* who had the reports of the thefts; having gathered the necessary information we went looking for the robbers: Monetti was well acquainted with the local criminal world and with his help we soon identified them, the loot was recovered and returned to the rightful owners. We arrested the three men and turned them over to the *carabinieri*; they were tried in court and sentenced to a few years. This raised our prestige and made us more popular among the locals; furthermore, the *carabinieri* started cooperating with the partisans. After the Pian del Re events, two units had been allocated to the border police. Since we intended to occupy the River Po Valley to transfer other partisan units there, we had to get rid of the units. On November the 6th, Barbato went to Crissolo with Nanni and Max, negotiated with the local *Podesta'* (the Fascist Head of the city) and ask him to inform the soldiers that those who would not oppose resistance would have their lives saved. Two partisan units reached Crissolo the day after, one from Gabbiola, led by Belstrieri, Giolitti and Zama, the other went to the Bertona led by Romanino and myself. We had crossed the mountains on foot and after a day's climb we had reached the agreed place and were ready to meet the soldiers under

Barbato's orders. At dawn we started to put the tow barracks under siege and Barbato approached the one higher up and told them to surrender at gun point.

At the same point Nanni went to the entrance of the other one and told the soldiers to leave the barracks but was welcomed by a machine gun volley and fell to the ground. Zama stepped in and threw a hand grenade killing the brigadier who was continuing to shoot. Shooting started in the barracks at the top too and they were soon occupied by the partisan units. The soldiers surrendered, handed their weapons and were left free to go. Nanni had been wounded in the stomach and was taken to the hospital in Barge. The doctors considered him a bad case and said he had to go to the Saluzzo hospital for surgery, a laparotomy. The command got news that after the operation he had been put into a separate room. The Germans had identified the man wounded in Crissolo and they had questioned him and placed him under the *carabinieri's* guard. Giolitti and Pietro were sent to Saluzzo to gather more precise information, from Judge Mongrando. They were told Nanni was going to be transferred to jail in a matter of days. It was necessary to get him out of the hospital as soon as possible. In a meeting with Barbato we decided to act immediately, and managed to get hold of a plan of the hospital and to locate where Nanni's room was. Mr Vignolo from Cavour lent us a milk float which Tommasini drove with Barbato, Moretta, Panicola and myself, and on that same afternoon we drove down to Saluzzo.

The plan was to enter the hospital with one wounded person and to leave with another. We parked the milk float near the hospital, put Panicola on a blanket and Moetta and I took him into the hospital. At the entrance Panicola screamed in pain and Barbato asked the porter in a rather anxious and excited voice to please direct us to the emergency room. We walked up to the first floor with Panicola still screaming and Moretta stayed to assist him. Barbato and I ran towards Nanni's room: there was a *carabiniere* at the door, we pointed our guns, disarmed him and sent him to sleep with chloroform. Nanni tells us not to harm him because he was a good man. Moretta who had been watching, went into action and Nanni was placed on the blanket; then together we walked towards the exit. Barbato who was walking ahead told the porter the patient was not in such a bad state after all and that we were taking him home. As we were going out Panicola ripped the phone lines out. By the time we had laid Nanni on the floor of the milk float evening had fallen and Tommasini left for Moretta.

We drove without our lights not to raise suspicion; after a few miles we noticed a column of light in our rear mirror: they were Germans who had been informed of the prisoner's escape and were trying to catch him. We had to leave the main road, and took a turning along a rural path and soon we hear the German vehicles pass us. A good family of farmers opened their doors to us and since Nanni was complaining about his wound and the cold we took him into the warm house. It was night and we couldn't stop, we had to find a safe

place for our injured man. Barbato knew some people in Moretta and was hoping they would put him up. We couldn't use the vehicle because that would have been dangerous, but the farmer helped us offering his horse drawn *tamagnone*.

We placed Nanni on a mattress on the cart covered in hay leaving him just enough to breathe in the middle. We reached Moretta passing through back lanes and there Barbato rang the villa of the gentleman who had sometimes put him up. However he didn't feel up to housing a wounded partisan chased by the Germans. The night was pitch dark and we were in the open countryside. In the end it was Nanni who remembered that before coming up the mountain the parish priest of Stobbia, director of the Cantogno Sanctuary had taken him in, and suggested we take him there. Moretta knew the area well and started off. We reached Cantogno at dawn and Don Stobbia the parish priest welcomed him warmly: he nursed him back to health and soon after Nanni joined us and resumed the fight.

In the area between Barge and Bagnolo Piemonte the number of partisans was increasing and it became necessary to improve the organization of our units on the Bracco Mountain, in Gabbiola and Bertona. Colonel Vito (Francesco Leone) was sent from the Turin Garibaldi command: he was a guerrilla warfare expert who had helped organise the Garibaldi Brigades in Spain. Barbato had organised a meeting of the people in charge of the units to hear what suggestions he had on partisan warfare. He recalled the features of guerrilla warfare both when attacking and when in defence. He also pointed out that a perfect knowledge of the lay of land was required, as were escape routes and monitoring the routes the enemy might take. It was also important to organise a round the clock watch around the base, provisions and create secret stashes which could be used after the Germans had rounded up and raided, and so on. His advice came in useful in the battles that were to follow.

At the end of November 1943 the Salo' Republic called up all the 1924 and 1925 youngsters but many refused conscription as they didn't want to serve in fascist Army under German Command: they hid and the most courageous left for the mountains and joined us. Our units were getting larger and new volunteers arrived at Bertona.

They were enthusiastic twenty year olds who lacked any military expertise unaware of the hardship of partisan life, in fact many had no idea of what being part of the partisan movement meant. They had to be trained as soon as possible as there could be an enemy attack any time and without warning. The older more expert men taught them how to handle rifles and hand grenades, the only spare weapons we had.

Special care was taken with munitions which were precious in short supply and had to be used nearly exclusively in case of need.

Political commissars were a new figure in the Garibaldi units: their main duty was to create civic awareness, explaining and illustrating the reasons for our struggle, making people aware of the responsibilities of those who had backed and supported Fascism dictatorship. It was necessary to achieve the main aim of the struggle underway was to drive out the Nazi occupier and fight for a free and democratic Italy. A full and informed awareness of the situation was the necessary condition for partisans to develop a spirit of sacrifice which was essential to deal with and contrast the powerful enemy and overcome the difficulties and hardship which had to be faced day after day. Self-discipline was necessary so that every partisan could manage difficult moments. According to the directives of the Garibaldi Brigades meetings were led jointly by the commissar and commander, the former in charge of civic education and good relations with the population, the latter basically being in charge of the military side of things.

In my detachment at Bertona, it was Pietro (Gustavo Comollo) a Turinese Communist worker who had been one of the ones in the surveillance of the premises of the *Ordine Nuovo*, the journal founded by Antonio Gramsci. He had been arrested several times by the Fascist police and had been forced into exile. He had lived in Russia for many years and then he had come back to Italy. Upon returning he had been arrested again and sent to internal exile (*confino*) where he stayed until the fall of Fascism. He was a wonderful and honest man a champion of his ideas.

As the units of Bertona, Bracco and Gabbiola consolidated, a new battalion was formed, the Carlo Pisacane named after the hero of the *Italian Risorgimento*: Barbato was appointed commander and he suggested the name. Supplies had become a major issue and provisions had to be guaranteed to all the units. Groups of Garibaldi partisans were sent down to the valley and the plain to requisition large amounts of goods from civilian and military depots. There were special teams trained to sabotage that began working very intensely, and the one led by the Balestrieri brothers' one was especially effective. On December the 2nd the Murello landing field drew our attention as there had been a movement of airplanes: the Balestrieri brothers cautiously approach the field and managed to get hold of about a thousand litres of petrol. During the operation they also noticed about 40 planes bearing the swastika. That evening when they had returned to the base the brothers prepared a plan of attack: our information service had told us the field was only occasionally guarded and by very few men. A few miles away the Germans guarded the Scarnafigi airport and possibly had considered it unnecessary to put a large number of men to guard Murello too. Speed was of the essence. At six the morning after the Balestrieri brothers and another twenty four select partisans set off for Murello on two lorries and a Balilla car.

Once they got there they blocked the roads to Scarnafigi and Racconigi with automatic machine guns placed on the lorries. The younger brother ferried between the road blocks. Five men disarmed the guards and each one with a

can of petrol ran onto the field running from one plane to the next lacing them with petrol. Balestrieri followed them and set them alight. Thirty two Nazi planes were destroyed and at 9.30 Balestrieri and his men came back triumphant to their base in Gabiola.

The news of the fire of the planes in Murello spread as the smoke had been seen billowing and everyone spoke about it, the farmers expressed admiration for the gesture but also expressed concerned for the possible reprisals. The Saluzzo *Carabinieri* central station sent a wire out to all their units asking them to investigate on the authors of the destruction of the planes and to question civilians too if necessary. Radio London included an item on the courageous attack in its news bulletin on Free Italy.

On December the 20th 1943 a group of Fascists arrived in Cavour to round up the 1924-25 conscripts. Balestrieri was informed and left Gabiola with a team of partisans trying to surround the village to trap the Fascists at road blocks. A volley accidentally shot from one of the machines guns informed the Fascists of their presence and they had to make a run of it. A few minutes later a car with two Germans aboard arrived in Cavour and the Garibaldi partisan Gaby blocked it: the German officer immediately pulled out his gun and shot Gaby in the stomach killing him. Balestrieri was still close by with his men when he heard the shots: seeing what had happened they intervened and riddled the car with the machine gun. The two Germans were killed. To our surprise when we searched the car we found a bag full of banknotes, two millions and a half: one of the Germans was a Major who was responsible for employing the Todt workers. The money was handed to commander Barbato and was used to fund our partisan units.

The German reprisal arrived the day after: a column of soldiers occupied Cavour and then moved towards Gabbiola looking for Balestrieri who managed to avoid them and move towards the Agliasco base higher up. The Germans took it out on the mountain huts (*baite*). In Cavour an informer led to the arrest of the Garibaldi partisan Alfredo Sforzini, who had been the quartermaster of the Cavalry Regiment and one of the first to follow Barbato to the mountains. He was tortured repeatedly by the Germans who wanted information on the other partisans but he didn't speak, He was taken to the main square at gunpoint and hung at the railings of a balcony. Before dying he shouted 'Long live Italy (*Viva l'Italia*)'. He was left hanging for two days in that square which the people of Cavour decided to name after him after the Liberation.

He was considered a second lieutenant and information officer. After the War he received the gold medal for military valour and gallantry. The German Command put up posters threatening anyone helping or sheltering partisans which suggested a round up was on the way.

Winter 1944

To have more manoeuvrability and in view of a possible German raid I had divided our unit into four subunits of ten men and each one had appointed a leader. Heavy weapons had been moved to Prabina which overlooked the area below and the Bertona base. The Garibaldi partisan Monetti had a Breda machine gun and had dug a little trench on high ground where he had positioned the machine gun. The year was drawing to an end and we were getting to celebrate it albeit in a small way. On December the 29th we had invited the Parish Priest of Villaretto to celebrate Mass at our base (he was unable to come the day after as he was celebrating with his parishioners).

Everything seemed quiet and a few days before we had had the first sprinkling of snow followed by a few days of good weather which had melted it. The paths which connected the Bertona to the new Prabina positions had dried making it quite easy to move the weapons, munitions and provisions in the Prabina mountain huts. For safety we had decided to sleep in the new base: the kitchen was the only thing left in Bertona and we were going to move it the day after our good cook Genova had prepared meals for all the unit. On December the 30th we woke up to bad news: at 8 the lookout saw a column of smoke rising above Bagnolo Piemonte. The alarm was sounded and we realised something bad was happening: I sent a patrol out towards the village to see what was happening. In the meantime the messenger, *staffetta*, Alda came from the village to see what was happening and informed us a column of German armoured cars and tanks had invaded Bibiana and Bagnolo where they had already set Villaretto's Inn on fire and were starting to comb the area, walking into all the houses, stopping the men and especially the young ones. I told the various subunit leaders to withdraw to Prabina where we started to take up the positions we had established and waited for events to unfold.

We could hear shooting in the village and our patrol had been spotted by the Germans who were climbing up to Bertona (someone may have informed) a shoot out had followed and our men had managed to get out and move upwards. By the late morning all the men of the patrol were back at the base and told us they had seen the Germans and had had a brief exchange of gunfire. They also said the Germans were burning everything in their path and that locals were heading for the mountains. It was clear the Germans would reach the Bertona, so once we had gathered the last things therewith the Garibaldi partisans and the few remaining men, we marched up to the Prabina. I was concerned that everybody had taken up their position: I was close to Monetti and to his machine gun. The only people left at Bertona were the cook and one partisan who had not wanted to come up so they could prepare a hot meal for their comrades. In the meantime Commissar Pietro had arrived at Bertona to refill us and give us some of the money which had been taken from the German car in Cavour. In Bibiana he had come across a column of German

tanks and armoured cars and had thought he should come and inform us. Since the partisans were cooking vegetable soup he stayed to help them.

Towards midday from my position at Prabina I began to see movements and a German column moving towards Bertona. Our cook and Pietro were still in the hut and could have been caught by surprise and captured. They had to be informed of the danger they were running: I told Romanino (my deputy who also had a machine gun) to go down with his men and attack the Germans on their right so that our comrades would hear the shooting and would have time to leave and join us at Prabina. A few minutes later I hear Romanino's machine gun and the weapons of his sub-unit: the operation was a success and the Germans were taken by surprise by the sudden attack, and were scattering seeking refuge. As soon as they heard the shooting Genova realised the danger and ran out, while Pietro and the other partisan followed soon after. In the crossfire our partisans and some of the Germans reached our base. Later Pietro told me he had seen the German *Alpenjaeger* at close range and had recognised their classical peak-less hats. Moretti was quivering: the Germans were within range and he could see them walking around the hut. I told him to wait for my order as we had to wait for Romanino's group to have returned and only after we were sure that they were safe and had lost the Germans. We could see other Germans who were climbing unaware they were within reach of our machine guns. Several had congregated in the plateau below Bertona.

The right moment had come and I gave Monetti the order: 'Shoot, Now!' The swift shot were soon all over the Germans and we saw many of the fall while others looked lost and surprised and sought shelter. Our machine gun kept shooting: our man Venturelli who was assisted the machine gun position kept bringing new ammunitions and all the subunits were in action, shooting against the enemy without stopping. Soon after the Germans recovered from the surprise attack, reorganised and started the counterattack. Two reconnaissance planes flew over Prabina and identified our positions and concentrated fire on the machine gun. The small deep trench Monetti had dug saved us from the enemy bullets which kept flying over our heads. It enabled us to hold a dominant position thus forcing the Germans to stay put in their positions.

The battle raged for nearly three hours: Valter Venturelli kept the machine gun with ammunitions but at a given moment he probably leaned out more than he should have and heroically fell next to Venturelli. Enemy fire was increasing and kept aiming at the machine gun. Soon after Moretti was hit in the chest and died next to his machine gun. The situation was becoming difficult. I called Ciccio, the Sicilian Garibaldi partisan who knew the machine to replace Monetti, and our machine gun resumed firing. The battle continued until I heard Ciccio shout that the machine gun was no longer able to shoot as it had got jammed because of overheating and overuse.

The fact the machine gun was no longer firing meant the Germans could leave their position and I noticed they were getting ready to surround us. I called

Romanino and told him it was time to prepare our retreat: we gathered the bodies of our two fallen comrades and hid them under the leaves. We filled our rucksacks with the remaining ammunitions and the few provisions we still had. Ciccio disassembled the machine gun, and carried it on his back. We retreated according to the planned route (Colonel Vito's advice came in useful) and we knew the area and the lay of the land perfectly. It wasn't advisable to retreat to the higher ground because I had heard shots close to the Madonna della Neve and the safest route was along the mountainside towards Luserna.

We marched along the road and soon we were out of sight and out of range of the Germans. By night we had reached Pian Porcile. Here we weighed up what we had done that day: we had lost two of our best *garibaldini* (the Garibaldi unit partisans) Walter Venturelli and Secondino Monetti but on the other hand we had given the Germans a lesson and many had fallen under our bullets. That night we doubled the guards and I too did my share: the night passed quietly and all the partisans of the unit were able to sleep. Next morning Commissar Pietro and I decided to hold a meeting of the entire detachment (unit) to discuss what had happened on the previous day. I spoke and illustrated the dangers of partisan warfare: we had lost two of ours, the Germans had captured and tortured twenty civilians and there more danger and hardship awaited us.

Soon we were going to move to another area and anyone not feeling up it could leave and go home; in fact very few left us because they were tired or demoralized, and some returned one I was soon to meet again in Luserna. A few days went by and Commander Barbato called us to the command centre as an inspector of the Garibaldi Brigades, a man called Pratolungo, had come from Turin, and wanted detailed news of what had happened on the battle and at the end of our reports he embraced us as we had made him emotional. Then with the euphoria he always had he said: 'You have disproved a myth: the Germans can be fought and sometimes they can be defeated'.

We had been at the Pian Porcile base and could not stay any longer because we were too exposed. It was not advisable to go back to the Montoso area and experience had taught us that if the Germans had gathered any additional information on our positions at Prabina they would have easily surrounded us and wiped out. We had to choose an area which could have been well defended: I had started to explore the surroundings but failed to find anything safe, then one day I went with a partisan patrol to the power station above Bordella where we could enjoy the view of the Luserna Valley. It was scarcely populated and strategically the ideal to defend.

This was Gianavello's Land thus named after a farmer who had formed a band with a few tens of Waldensian partisans in the distant past, in 1680. They made the best possible use of their knowledge of the land, and he managed to keep the Duke's troops at bay with surprise attacks and ambushes. Gianavello – a born organizer– had at the time written a handbook called *manuale di*

guerriglia (A handbook for guerrilla warfare) to keep his men together and better instruct them. In one section his handbook reads 'Small groups, twenty men in each company, a sergeant, two corporals and a captain. In those days in the Luserna Valley Giavanello was fighting for religious freedom, for his religion, for the Waldensian faith, and the *garibaldini* were fighting in Val Luserna for democratic freedom against the Nazi-Fascist tyranny.

After a meeting with all the partisans in the presence of Commissar Pietro we decided to move to the new area. The Prabina *garibaldini* who by now had become real partisans, began to take position in the Valley. The first concern of my command was to make contact with the local civilians and gather intelligence on the area. We also needed provisions and clothing. Biasin (the person in charge of the power station at Pontevecchio) gave us the first information and the first help. We were in his house when we decided where the partisans would be positioned. One large unit was moved to Galiverga where there were hospitable mountain huts. There it would be possible to carry out the military training as well as the civic and political education of the new arrivals. Commissar Carlo (Leo Lanfranco) replaced Pietro (who had been moved to another position and would be in charge of the latter.

Romanino and I with another 20 well-armed *garibaldini* set up the military command close to the power station. In a short time, many youngsters from Luserna and Lusernetta joined us: they were proud to belong to the Garibaldi units. Many civilians helped: the shoemakers made boots suited to the mountains (I owe shoemaker Jan Franchino special thanks as he made me a pair of boots which I used for a long time), dressmakers and family friends who tailored clothes and knitted jumpers to keep them warm in the cold. In Luserna there was already an anti-fascist movement which was headed by the old Pralafera and Mazzonis Company. Thanks to Rosmino's help it was easy to organise the groups of civilians who later formed the Luserna CNL (National Liberation Committee). News came that the Allies had landed in Anzio but that as they moved North their advance had been halted by the Germans at Cassino, and it would take them four long months before they reached Rome and that damped our spirits and the euphoria which had experienced.

Contacts were made with the GL (*Giustizia e Liberta'*) partisan units already active in the nearby Val Pellice. I managed to establish a good working relationship and friendship with the GL Commander Sergio Toja. Many of the meetings took place in Luserna San Giovanni which was the natural meeting point of the two valleys. The flying squad under Martina actively cooperated with our *garibaldini* led by Moretta. Jointly they managed to get weapons, ammunitions, blankets of former army soldiers and provisions, all of which were divided in equal parts.

In the course of January 1944 hundreds of volunteers came from the valleys and once again we were short of ammunitions and weapons. The flying squads were sent down to the plain to try and retrieve some from Fascist depots but

these were few and far apart episodes and we were unable to equip all the partisans. A partisan without weapons feels uneasy and suffers from an inferiority complex towards his comrades.

In early February we had an unexpected stroke of luck: Commander Zama happened to be passing through: he was the liaison officer with the allied missions and had to go to the Val Pellice to meet the GL partisan groups for a special mission. He spent the evening with us, slept in our mountain hut and told us about his mission: he had to prepare the signalling system for the air launches to supply the partisans of the Pellice Valley. We understood that the Allies would send provisions and supplies where they saw three bright lights positioned so as to form a triangle. The temptation was too great: we needed weapons and it was unlikely we would have received any supplies launched from the sky. We decided to try our luck.

Unit leader Ciccio was told to go with three of his men to the border with the Pian Pra' Plateau and to gather wood from bundles and to position them in a triangle. Then he was given one of our precious petrol cans with the order to set them alight as soon as they heard the noise of airplanes.

In the nights that followed both the four men on the Pian Pra' plateau and ourselves slept with one eye open. At last a clear starry night and we heard the noise of the planes coming our way, getting closer and closer. Pian Pra' was soon lit, Ciccio had set the bundles on fire and a triangle of light brought the plane to us. At the base we saw the fire and hoped for a positive outcome. At the first light of dawn a messenger came shouting: 'The launch, they did it!' The fires at Pian Pra' were still burning and the *garibaldini* were soon there retrieving the canisters and packages containing weapons, ammunition, clothes and a few packets of American cigarettes. There were launches in the two nights that followed and we partied. History says that I personally was called a 'launch robber' by the *Giustizia e Libertà* partisan friends. Maybe it wasn't quite like that but in any case the end justified the means in this case.

After we opened the large bins we started looking for automatic weapons. Everyone wanted the Stens, aka Hitler's saw, or the Bren machine gun, we had Sipe hand grenades and a large amount of plastic explosive. All was distributed fairly among the units and the old weapons were passed to the new arrivals while the old partisans received the new automatic ones.

Morale was high and the flying squads started the warfare in the plains. Several fascist and German blocks were attacked and sabotage was repeatedly carried out. Engineer Sergio Bellone, nicknamed *Bruno il Dinamitardo* (*Bruno the dynamite bomber*) who was an explosive expert trained the saboteur unit on the use of plastic explosives.

The intense activity which had taken place in our valley attracted the young men called up by the Fascist Republic in February 1944.

Many deserted and came to join our units so much so that by February there were thousands of partisans in the Valley. There was so much coming and going that we started to fear the infiltration of enemy spies and it became necessary to carry checks out. We decided to establish a permanent check point at Pontevecchio which is where the roads for Rora' and Galiverga forked making it easy to check partisans and civilians entering and leaving.

By blocking the valley the territory between Galiverga and Rora' was declared a free zone. There were new problems: as well as guaranteeing the military organization we now had to administer too.

The underground local authority in Rora' became a real democratic council which ran the villages with Maurizio Tourn and Giacomo Morel representing the community in cooperation with the partisan command. Rora' is a prevalently Waldensian village with a Roman catholic minority. Contacts were established with Enrico Geymet, the Waldensian Pastor and Don Ettore Micca, the Roman Catholic priest. Relationships were also established with the colony of Israelite (Jewish) refugees who lived under assumed names: Olearo (Levi), Ferraguti (Terracini) and Roncati (Debenedetti), then the Bachi, and the Amar sisters and the Levi Sacerdote family. A special thought to the Levi and Terracini families: engineer Levi actively cooperated with the partisans and his wife Carmela kept links with the party in Turin, the sculptor Terracini who as well as cooperating with the partisans painted a number of scenes of partisan life, including my portrait and Romanino's. After the Liberation several exhibitions were devoted to the sculptor Roberto Terracini for his work in memory of the partisan life in Rora' and a book was also printed.

Since food supplies had to be guaranteed both for the partisans and for the civilians, an ad hoc office was set up in connection with the central depot so as to guarantee the distribution of provisions to the various units. All the community met in the central Rora' square and in the presence of the councillors each family received flour and meat according to the number of people in the household and, when available, the men got a packet of cigarettes.

In Villa Agradi (Rora') an infirmary was set up for both partisans and civilians. Nurse Anna Barberis and the *garibaldino* Zanzara (*The Mosquito- Walter Rossi*) were in charge. A school of politics and civic education was also established as there was the need for the young ones in particular to understand why and what we were fighting for. Partisan Vinicio (Giovanni Boccardo) was in charge: he was a young well prepared young man.

The military organisation was also deeply changed, and the command base was moved above Pontevecchio in the Franchino mountain huts (aka *baite*) as we had to be close to the check point to be informed of what was happening in the valley. An orderly's office was set up and the young partisan Bertotto who was also a shorthand typist drafted reports and orders for the units. A messenger

service (*staffette*) was also available to communicate with Commander Barbato, linked to the intelligence services which kept us informed of the enemy's movements. On the Franchino there was a unit under Romanino's command with a unit operating the Pontevecchio checkpoint. They had shifts and manned it day and night: they were young and brave partisans, well-armed and ready to intervene if ever the need arose. At Bordella, the old command headquarters, there is a unit with Ulisse and about thirty men who protected the right side of the valley.

The formation between Bordella, Pontevecchio and Franchino was effectively a first line of defence: most partisans were positioned in Galiverga under Lieutenant Mario and Commissar Carlo (Leo Lanfranco) a man with a longstanding political experience who had organised the March 1943 strikes at the Fiat Mirafiori plant. Carlo and I established a friendly relationship and cooperated a lot which helped keep the men's morale high even in the most difficult moments. Several partisan units were positioned around Rora': at Rocca Rossa the unit under Penna near Angelo Pennanzio), at Pian Pra' Ezio Bessone and Alberto's units, at Ivert Mario Sereno and Paschetto's, and at the Pian Frollero above the Galiverna.

Then there were Poldo's and Abate Daga's units. Special attention was devoted to the office which was located half way between the Luserna and the Mungiva Valleys. The central warehouse was placed in a grange, under the careful eye of the *garibaldino* Dante with another four partisans under him overseeing the distribution of supplies. Anything we could get hold on in the valleys was sent to Mugniva and every day men came from the various units to pick up ration supplies. As for bread, a baker was given flour and everyday he prepared the necessary amounts. With regards to meat, we had to learn how to slaughter and prepare the cuts. A special reserve of food was left with the farmers who hid them with ingenious solutions in safe places. Actions in the plains were mainly for the stocks of calves, pigs and wheat silos which the Fascists and Germans ordered from the farmers. We were informed in due time and specially trained partisan units would arrive beforehand, took what was needed and gave the farmers requisition tokens with the image of Garibaldi, an idea of Commander Barbato's. Clearly the vouchers gave twice the amount of what had been taken leaving the farmer the opportunity to sell the rest. The vouchers were honoured after the Liberation.

In the Valley there was a new order, a sense of self-discipline both among the partisans and the civilians. In Rora' relationships in the new local authority were very harmonious: the partisans lived in their units and did not interfere with the life of the community. The women of Rora' helped the partisans, Carmela Levi with the primary school teacher Evelina Pons organised the 'women's defence groups (*gruppi di difesa della donna*)'. They went round the houses gathering bandages, sheets, eggs and wool. The girls knitted woollen socks and aunt (*magna*) Albertina with Palmira and the others cooked *focaccia* (flat bread) for the partisans. I was very pleased, I had very good people

working with me and certain nights I felt the Val Luserna was like the dream of a free and democratic Italy. At the same time I was felt responsible for the lives of hundreds of men and women, and knew I had to do my best for everything to work well. Thanks to the new weapons received by the allies we intensified warfare in the plains. Teams of saboteurs were sent up to the gates of Turin, blew up bridges, stopped trains and attacked checkpoints.

At the end of February Commissar Pietro Comollo told us he had received orders from the General Command of the Garibaldi Brigades and from the National Liberation Committee of Piedmont, telling us to support the general strike which had been called in all occupied Italy on March the 1st 1944.

I called a meeting with all the commanders and commissars to decide what was to be done and define the plan of action while the commissars took action in the nearby factories. Romanino and I decided to block the Torre Pellice train which took workers to Turin at Bricherasio Station. On the eve I had gone through the details with great care, meticulously and had selected twenty of the most courageous and well-armed men. I had told the driver Tolone to check the Fiat 626 lorry. We had to be in Bricherasio the next morning before

the arrival of the train. The next morning everything was ready in front of the Ca' Russa, we got onto the lorry but Tolone couldn't get the lorry to start. We pushed it until the square in Luserna but the lorry wouldn't start. Commissar Pietro was starting to complain fearing the action would be called off. Suddenly I saw a Topolino car coming up from Torre Pellice. I decided to block it and asked them to loan it for a few hours (we gave it back in the afternoon) and got in with Romanino and two other partisans. Piero followed us on a bike. Two of our messengers (*staffette*) had travelled on the train from Torre Pellice with the workers going to Turin. Mara and Franca noticed that in the last but one carriage there were five fascists and two German officers.

We got to Bricherasio as the train was entering the station. I sent a partisan to cut the phone wires and as I got in I saw Mara who told us about the Fascists and Germans on the train. Romanino and the other two managed to capture the five Fascists who were taken by surprise, while I improvised a speech brandishing my *parabellum*. I called to the workers to join the strike against the Nazi Fascists and tell the Turin workers the partisans were backing them. Outside we found our lorry as Tolone had managed to get it started. We got on with the five fascists who were petrified and left for Pontevecchio. We were happy as our *garibaldini* had managed to complete the wonderful partisan action, and we had captured five fascists. Commissar Pietro was happy and congratulated us suggesting we should continue with the demonstrative action.

That same afternoon units were sent down to the plain forcing checkpoints entering villages and piazzas improvising speeches. They celebrated the strikes of the Turin workers that had blocked the factories. The underground papers which our units got regularly wrote about the information from Radio London

and Radio Moscow, the Soviet troops were reporting major successes on the Eastern front. The siege of Stalingrad (which had lasted over two years) had been broken, the region had been liberated and tens of German divisions had remained trapped in the southern area. The news generated optimism and enthusiasm among the *Garibaldi* partisans. With the new arrivals the partisan forces under Barbato covered from the Val Luserna, to Montoso, the Po and the Varaita Valleys. This became the framework for the new 4th Garibaldi Assault Brigade (*4a brigata d'assalto Garibaldi*) Sforzini (the name was given to honour and remember Alfredo Sforzini, the *garibaldino* who had been caught and hung in Cavour on the 21st of December 1943).

The Brigade consisted of three battalions: Val Luserna, commanded by Petrolia and Carlo the Commissar: Valle Po, Infernotto and Montoso, under Nanni's command, Etna was the Commissar and the Val Varaita under Medici with Ezio acting as Commissar. The Val Luserna had the honour of fighting under the name of Carlo Pisacane, their *nom de guerre*. Democratic life continued regularly in the valley while the flying squads went down to the valleys to sabotage. Nazi telephone lines were cut between Pinerolo, Saluzzo and Turin and we attacked Fascist checkpoints. On March the 17th our *garibaldini* were called to take part in a daring action against the Pinerolo military district. We had an increasing need for weapons. Barbato had heard from Mara who liaised between the Pinerolo information services, telling us that young Ulisse had been posted at the District. He had been captured on September the 23rd 1943 during the action at Pian del Re and forced to join up with the Republican National Guard. Ulisse told us there was a large weapon and ammunition depot and with his help and the cooperation of his friend Reno who was also there, it was possible to organise a big heist. The action was very risky, Barbato was uncertain: in the end the mission was entrusted to Commissar Francesco (Enrico Berardione, a major and a doctor who had served in Pinerolo and knew both the military environment and the toponym of the city). A lorry driven by Tolone left at night with about twenty partisans. As well as the Luserna *garibaldini*, Giolitti, Montecristo, Etna, Moretta, Lupo and Tarzan were there; they were experienced men whose presence reassured Commander Barbato as they were leaving he told them to seize the weapons without shooting. On arrival four partisans dressed in Alpine soldier uniforms easily got into the District, took the guard prisoner and let all the partisans in. they split into two groups and Ulisse led one group towards the weapons depot. Some of the NCOs were in bed, they were taken to the brig where there were already other soldiers. Suddenly shots were heard: two officers who were playing cards in the mess opened fire when the partisans broke in. They answered and one of the officers was shot dead. The situation became dangerous as the shots had woken all the barracks up. The partisans ran the risk of being trapped, so Francesco ordered to retreat. Ulisse, Reno and many other soldiers left with the partisans. The Action had not been a resounding success but the echo of the extraordinary partisan feat by going to the heart of the enemy lines was enormous and all Pinerolo spoke about it.

The Round-ups

The relentless actions of our *garibaldini* had begun to concern the German Command and we had news of large concentrations of German and Fascist troops. Our information system told us something big was brewing against us.

I had had the road to Pontecchio mined at the Maddalena as a precaution against the attack and our friend Sergio Bellone who had already mined the Grana Bridge at the Ressiassa on the road to Montoso was a great help in that. Nanni who was the Montoso Commander had positioned his three calibre 8 machine guns to defend the road to Montoso. One had been positioned on the Cournajass Rock where it could shoot the enemy at the mined bridge. Marat, Gianni, Cesare and Milan manned the machine guns. The latter was a former Cavalry NCO and greatly contributed to the battle becoming one of the best commanders of our units. The *garibaldini* in my squad had prepared a powerful bomb – a 5 kilo tin filled with up with plastic mixed with scrap iron tied to a German hand grenade. We were ready to fight the enemy tooth and nail: all the detachments were on standby and special instructions had been given to the command squad which was on constant alarm.

Partisan Barba arrived at my command at 6am, tired and worried: he had seen a large concentration of German and Fascist troops in Luserna who looked as if they were about to go up the mountain. At 6.30 the Pontevecchio lookouts gave the alarm and shouted 'Quick, the Germans are arriving'. We got up – no need to get dressed as partisans always slept in their clothes. We ran to take our positions at the edge of the precipice of the road above Pontevecchio. The enemy had to come through here. *Garibaldino* Tascapane was on guard of the mined road and I had told him to let a few armoured cars by and then to blow the road up to break the enemy column up. He saw two vehicles go by and lit the fuse but because it was damp or because of a fault the fuse lit and then went out. There was only a fuse stump left when he saw that the Fascists and Germans were coming which meant the road had to be blown up. Tascapane lit the remnants of the fuse, the detonator made the plastic explode and there was a roaring sound echoing throughout the valley. The road was bombed and Tascapane jumped back but was covered in soil and stones from the explosion. He was wounded but the Bonetto family took him in and hid him under a pile of leaves. In the evening they took him to a family who nursed him back to health.

Romanino, myself and all the unit were perched above Pontevecchio when the first armoured car came in range. Tolone and Abate Daga released the safety catch from the German hand grenade, the tin was rolled down and ended under the vehicle. A few seconds later there was a massive explosion and the armoured car ended up in the Luserna stream. In the meantime we were

throwing the Sipe hand grenades and were concentrating fire on another armoured car which was blocked. The crew of the armoured car came out in a state of confusion due to our bombs and sought refuge in the *Ciabot*, the vineyard hut near the bridge where the two from the previous group had also sought refuge. Ulisse's unit was also taking part in the action.

They had positioned themselves above the power station and were shooting against the enemy. The Germans and the Fascists were blocked at the bottom of the Valley and kept shooting at us from down below. The battle continued for two hours till a column of Fascists who had climbed through the pipes of the power station caught Ulisse and his men by surprise. There was a furious battle and five of our partisans fell: Stefano Comba (Bertone), Giovanni Becchio (Zambo), Chiaffredo Daga (Ciclone), Luciano Schierano (Balun), Ernesto Soncin (Cavia). Ulisse was badly wounded and told his unit to retreat and was caught by the Fascists. He was thrown off the Pontevecchio Rock which to this day is known as the Ulisse's Rock. The night before the battle Ulisse had written a beautiful letter saying goodbye to his parents as if he had foreseen his own death.

The remnants of the unit retreated and from the other side of the Luserna stream I hear Moro shout repeatedly: they have killed our commander Ulisse. There was no time to waste, the other side of the Luserna stream was defenceless. And past that there was the bulk of our *garibaldini* of the Galiverga. I told Romanino to take command and to resist as long as possible, and then retreat to Rocca Berra. I slipped under the enemy bullets crossed the road and went to the other side of the Luserna stream. Moro and the other partisans from Ulisse's detachment were disheartened. True they had made the Fascist pay dearly for it killing many of them in the battle but the death of their Commander and of five of the best comrades had been a high price. I tried to comfort and encourage them. I remembered that there were the five Fascists from the armoured cars in the *ciabot* and they had to be captured and held prisoners. The boys were comforted and five of them went to the *Ciabot* where they found the frightened Fascists who still frightened and easily surrendered.

With the rest of Ulisse's detachment and the five Fascist prisoners, we walked along the valley towards Galiverga when from above we saw the enemy had broken through our lines and was climbing the road to Rora'. Some of the partisans wanted to shoot them but we were too far away and our guns would have merely made a bit of a noise and warned them of our presence. Once we got near the Mugniva I told two partisans to accompany the five prisoners to the Bric base where the other Fascists captured at the Bricherasio Station were held and told them to keep close watch on them. I didn't know the outcome of the battle and possibly those prisoners could have turned out useful. The other partisans had already reached Galiverga and had informed on the others on what had happened at Pontevecchio. Our arrival and my presence encouraged them. I gathered the unit commanders and together with Commissar Carlo who

had told me about how the *garibaldini* of Galiverga felt, we drew up a defence plan: we didn't know whether the Nazi Fascists were going to continue the round-up after their losses at Pontevecchio and in the event we moved all our provisions from the Mugniva to Galiverga strengthening our defences.

Lieutenant Mario who was in charge of the base decided to position his calibre 8 machine gun on the Galiverga promontory where he could see the whole valley and control it. We put two of the best at the machine. Just then a German tank reached Rora' and started shooting from the piazza towards the mountains hoping to hit partisan refuges. In the meantime the Fascist militia had been unleashed and were searching houses one by one. They discovered the infirmary which had been placed in an isolated house on the outskirts where there were two wounded partisans and partisan Walter Rossi aka as Zanzara (*the Mosquito*) who had tried to hide the two wounded when he saw the enemy arrive. They were discovered by the Fascists, beaten, insulted and continuously tortured and then marched down to Luserna. Civilians were told to come out, lined up along the cemetery was and threatened of death, a few houses were burned down. The priest Don Ettore Micca went towards the Germans, guaranteeing that there were no partisans in town and that the population in Rora' had been forced to suffer the presence of a few partisans: he managed to calm the enemy's fury and everyone went back to their house. No one betrayed the Jewish families who lived in Rora' under assumed names.

The partisans who had bases around Rora' retreated towards Rocca Berra. At the same time at six in the morning a column of Germans and Fascists came up the road from Bagnolo Piemonte with the support of armoured vehicles. They were going towards Montoso with the intent of surprising the Luserna Valley partisans from the back. They were in for a big surprise as Nanni's partisans blew up the road and blocked the armoured vehicles under the joint fire of their guns. Partisan Gianni Sorgia aka *Il mitragliere* (the machine gunner) hit a lorry carrying ammunition which exploded. Positioned on high ground Marino Zagni aka Marat hit the Fascists and the Germans from his dominant position hit Fascists and Germans as they were forming columns to walk on the road. Tens of them were shot down. Once they got their wits back the Germans answered with heavy weapons, but the partisans were well positioned and flat on the grass with their rifles so they imparted major losses. The battle continued until about midday and ammunitions were running low for the partisans while the Germans and Fascists received reinforcements from the German Command in Pinerolo.

The partisans retreated further up the mountain and the *Alpenjager* unit climbed up to the Montoso Mountain and try and surprise the partisans positioned on the rocks from behind. However they were attacked by Montecristo's units which led to more losses. The Germans tried to continue as they wanted to reach Rucass to ambush the Luserna partisans from behind. Milan and his men shifted and placed their machine guns at Cave where they managed to stop the Germans from continuing their advance. An enemy

sidecar was eliminated blocking the march of the column that was trying to reach the Luserna Valley. Tens of enemies died.

Commander Nanni was worried because of the shortage of ammunition knowing it would have been difficult to hold back another attack. As soon as it was dark he ordered to withdraw to the Po Valley: they marched by night and reached Oncino in the morning. The Germans gathered their dead and wounded and then went down to the valley. The farmers who had seen it spoke about a hundred or so dead and about fifty wounded counting the Fascists and the Germans.

March the 22nd at Galiverga: it was a quiet awakening although we were all in a state of alert as we did not know whether the enemy would continue the search and in doubt we strengthened our positions and waited for events to unravel. About 11 our lookout noticed smoke billowing from below in the valley: they were burning the farmers huts, the *baite*. The enemy had resumed the attack and was aiming for Galiverga. About midday the Nazi fascists reached Pian del Torno and were already within range: Lieutenant Mario who was in command of our advanced detachment gave the order to the two *garibaldini* with the machine gun to start shooting. The other partisans from the other positions also started shooting, the enemy was taken by surprise and many fell under our bullets while they scattered and sought refuge. Our artisans had orders to shoot when they were certain of hit and not to waste ammunitions, so they stopped shooting as soon as the enemy was out of range.

The Nazi Fascists tried to reorganise and to hit our positions but they failed to, and did not pass Galiverga. In the late afternoon the look-outs informed me of movements among the *Alpenjaeger* indicating the Fascists and the Germans were trying to attack us from the Valanza Refuge. Our situation was getting difficult as there were over one hundred partisans concentrated at Galiverga, and there we ran the danger of being trapped there. Furthermore, after two days' fighting we were starting to feel tired. Ammunitions were running low and it was unlikely we would have been able to repel another attack. I consulted Commissar Carlo and we decided to retreat. There was the problem of the Fascist prisoners: we didn't know what to do with our Fascist prisoners as they would have been a hindrance if we had taken them on the difficult march and we had to decide whether we should shoot them or release them. The decision to release them prevailed and we hoped it would count in our favour if there any partisans. I ordered for the heavy weapons to be hidden and for all available provisions to be shared. I also spoke to some of the local partisans who knew the mountain well on the best way to reach Infernotto.

Towards 10 pm we took advantage of the snow that had become harder and crisper and set off along Mount Friuland passing under Mount Rumella so as to reach the Infernotto Valley. It was a long and hard crossing and the snow did not always hold, so that some were into their knees or sank and some rucksacks and rifles were lost. In spite of that the march proceeded regularly.

Some of the partisans were overwhelmed by tiredness and were lagging at the back. I tried to encourage them all and not to leave the column since by dawn we had to cross the gorge and find shelter. Unfortunately about forty were unable to continue and left the column. In the early hours of the morning a '*cicogna* (stork) reconnaissance plane overflying informed the Germans who were guided by two informers who knew the mountain well: they were captured, disarmed, beaten and exhausted, tired and insulted and taken prisoners to the Luserna barracks where there were the other prisoners captured in the pellicle Valley including Emanuele Artom, Commissar of the GL partisan formation.

In his diary the *garibaldino* Oscar described the sad end of this heroic Jewish partisan who was beaten, tortured and shot. The Germans saw to it that even his ashes were not found. Twenty of our forty men were shot at Pian del Lot, sixteen in Caluso and four were sent to German extermination camps. Oscar was the only survivor as he was only slightly wounded when shot with the others in Caluso, fainted and was thought dead. He was miraculously saved and nursed back to health by the people of Casale. Oscar returned to the garibaldi units on May the 11th and wrote a long diary describing the sad death of the partisans who were captured and all taken to the Luserna barracks.

By March the 23rd, 1944 we were crossing the gorge and were a few metres from the ridge when the snow started melting, becoming much softer which made climbing increasingly tiring. In the distance we could hear machine guns as the enemy was shooting a groups which was lagging behind. I stopped and saw that the column had thinned out and lengthened. They were sinking in the snow and were barely managing to move on. I urged them to continue and not to stop and to hasten the pace as we had nearly reached the ridge and safety. By sunrise we had reached Mount Runella's crest and we began climbing down towards Pian del Mare. I counted the number of partisans who had managed the climb: there were about eighty but many had fallen back and we didn't know what had happened to them. I was told they had been seen resting behind some rocks. We hoped they too had reached safety. We were beyond the snow line and our clothes were starting to dry in the morning sun. We continued climbing down and towards midday we reached the Pai d'Valin *baite*, mountain huts. We saw that Nanni's partisans had been there the day before. We were tired and decided to stop and rest for a few hours. We ate the last of the provisions we had.

Morale was very low among my men and I tried to encourage them reminding them we had given the enemy a good battering: at Pontevecchio and Galiverga we had made them pay a high price for their attacks and had destroyed two armoured vehicles, capturing five prisoners and killing quite a few. We had had to abandon our old bases, we had lost our good commander Ulisse and several *garibaldini* had died heroically in battle. Maybe a number of the comrades who had fallen behind on the hard crossing had been taken prisoners and many of our farmer friends' houses had been burned down. The balance was not

positive but we had held our own against the enemy. This is a partisan war. I also reminded them that in the Prabina battle we had had to abandon our bases, that we had had two deaths and inflicted major losses to the enemy but we had not stopped and we had re-established the glorious Pisacane Battalion which we were proud to belong to. As survivors we would have continued the battle and soon we would be stronger and better organised than before. Our task was now to look for a safe base and wait for the end of the round up and start our fight again. The men were comforted and more hopeful so we set off for the Ponte dell'Ula. Following the advice of a local partisan we decided to camp on the ridge between the Infernotto and the Po valleys in the Muiass area where there were a number of uninhabited *baite* or mountain huts. We reached the place by dusk and I looked around: it felt like quite safe and isolated. We had a good view of all routes leading to it so we decided to stay. We had no more supplies and everyone was hungry. The *baite* were empty. Suddenly one of the men saw a feral cat, caught it killed it, skinned it and it a small fire trying not to generate any smoke. It was cooked and served. Not a lot considering numbers and people were still hungry. We decided who was on duty for the watch and went to sleep.

Early in the morning on March the 24th, 1944 I sent a couple of partisans down to the bottom of the Valley near San Chiaffredo to look for provisions and gather information on the enemy. The partisans I sent were known by the local farmers so I was sure they wouldn't have difficulty with their mission. As morning rose the detachment was busy: some were gathering wood, others were washing or shaving, others were cleaning their weapons. Suddenly the lookout told us there was a man approaching swiftly walking up the mule track. I looked and was very surprised: it was Commander Barbato who was coming from the plain marching up to the Valle Po. We embraced warmly and then he spoke to each one of the *garibaldini* and had words of praise for each and every one. He had heard about the difficult battles, the fighting and with his usual enthusiasm he encouraged us to hold tight because victory was sure and the war would soon be over. His enthusiasm spilled over into the *garibaldini* and morale was very high. He told me there was a German garrison in Barge while in Paesana there was a strong concentration of Fascists and Germans who were expected to attack the Valle Po. A few hundred partisans had retreated to Oncino, after the Montoso battle, including Nanni, Pietro, Giolitti, Montecristo and Milan. He had to reach them to warn them of the danger and in the event organise the resistance. He told me about the brave attack of the Via Rasella Gap (*Gruppi Armati Partigiani*/ Armed partisan groups) in Rome carried out on the 23rd of march against the Bozen battalion where 32 Germans had died and also described SS Kappler's fierce reprisal who shot three hundred and thirty five antifascists and Jews in the head at the Fosse Ardeatine. He left us excusing himself for not being able to stay longer, embraced me, shook the hands of all the men giving them courage and more vigour for the struggle ahead.

Towards midday we were very pleased to see two of the men that had been sent to look for provisions coming carrying two panniers full of bread on their backs as well as carrying potatoes, apples and a piece of cheese. They also had a suckling calf on a lead. The farmers had been generous as they had heard the partisans had been fighting for days on the mountains and needed help. They confirmed there was German garrison in Barge. Barbatos's visit and the arrival of food had led to a feeling of euphoria. Everybody was busy and one person was put in charge of supplies, cooks were found and two *garibaldini* who were farmers' sons were put in charge of slaughtering the calf. Nor were the lookouts forgotten: two groups of ten men took it in turns to control the area, and two by two they patrolled the sides of the Infernotto and Po Valleys. At long last we had a meal that filled us and we also managed a short rest. The day passed without any other events.

In the evening I organised the night watch and everyone had shifts including the Commander. Fires and cigarettes were absolutely forbidden: the enemy was close by and there could have been surprises at any moment. At night we slept dressed next to our weapons, ready to act within seconds. The 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th were quiet days: the two partisans who brought supplies went down every morning and regularly brought provisions back. For greater safety we decided to move further up, sheltered by rocks as we had a better view of the area from there and could control it more easily. We also managed to establish contact with our information service in Barge who confirmed the garrison was still there, while more Fascists and Germans were moving into Paesana.

Barbato arrived at Oncino and was preparing the defence with the others. Gianni the machine gunner of his unit positioned himself at the Madonna del Faggio so he had the fork below within range. Engineer Sergio Bellone, the dynamite expert, mined and blew up the bridge at the Oncino fork. On the other bank close to Ostanta, Polifemo and his group had positioned their machine gun so as to control the road to Crissolo. Milan was sent to the Piatonè where group leader Marino had positioned his machine gun and was able to control the movement of the Germans from above. Despite the controls, Anna from Oncino shuttled back and forth to inform us on any movements of the Germans. I didn't feel safe in spite of the look outs and the surveillance because if we had been discovered by the enemy we could have been easily trapped. I was beginning to think that the only way out was to cross enemy lines at night and to hide in the lowlands, the plains for a few days. I spoke about it to our Commissar Carlo who approved the idea.

On the morning of the 29th we called all the meeting and illustrated the plan. It was accepted with a unanimous vote: I asked our information service in Barge to put us in touch with the friends of the National Liberation Committee (CLN) in Villafranca Piemonte as I had other occasions when I had appreciated their organizational skills: we asked them to find us safe houses for about ten days

with trusted farmers. They sent us a positive answer so we decided that we would meet in the middle of the night of the 31st

Night was falling and we were close to the Church of Saint Grato. Once we had everything ready we prepared to go. We had decided to split into small groups of two or three partisans each. Those who had family or friends in the plains and valleys, who could be hidden would go with one or more comrades. The others were to go where our Villafranca friends had indicated. Partisans formed pairs according to friendship or affinity and I decided I would stay with Jimmy the Frenchman since I was the only one who spoke French and could have controlled his impetuosity more effectively. We also set a meeting date back, April the 11th the after Easter near San Grato.

We started the descent recommending silence and least possible noise. To avoid being too near the farms, we went down to the Ula Bridge and walked along the Infernotto stream. The night was moonlit which helped our march which continued at a brisk pace. Every now and again we heard the dogs howling and feared the noise would carry to the Germans but we knew that they didn't move in the night in the partisan areas: they too were afraid. By ten we were close to the Church of San Grato: I stopped the column and went ahead with another partisan who was well acquainted with the area. Pronino and Pocapaglia were hidden close to the church. We knew them and it was a warm meeting: they too were aware of the German garrison in Barge and told me that the Barge –Bagnolo road was clear but that we had to cross in small groups. I went back to the partisans and hugged them one by one, wishing them goodbye till the 11th of April, Easter Monday when we would meet and become stronger than ever.

We crossed the road without any major problems and soon we were walking in the open countryside. We began by each going to their destinations: many knew and walked off, I went up mule tracks with most of the group. We passed Cavour and as soon as we got to the Villafranca district we were met by the *staffette* or messengers who accompanied the various groups to the farms our friends Pronino and Pocapaglia had selected for us. Jimmy and I were the last and Pocapaglia himself who took us to a farm near Vigone. The farmers were extremely hospitable and wanted to give us a room with two beds but we refused as we didn't want to cause too much bother. On arrival we had noticed a very good barn from which we could see the entrance to the farm: I told them it would be better for them and for us in terms of safety if we slept in the barn. I was quite convincing and they gave us two blankets so we slept in the upper part of the barn. We were very tired after the long march that we slept very soundly.

The sun was high in the sky and sun beams were slipping into the barn when we woke up. I looked into the yard and so the farmer, a tall and sturdy, rather distinguished man in his forties walking round. He didn't seem to be one of the usual farmers but rather a manager of a large estate. He saw we were awake

and invited us for breakfast. Jimmy and I lowered the ladder which we had pulled up in the upper part of the barn when we went to sleep. The owner noticed but didn't say anything out of discretion. We washed, shaved and sat down at the ready laid table. We were offered a rich breakfast: coffee with milk, fresh bread, butter, cheese and ham. Clearly the farm was self-sufficient and in spite of food rationing there was everything. We had had hunger to catch up with so we ate well and thanked. Then another great surprise awaited us: they had prepared clothes and clean shirts so that we could change out of our dirty and louse ridden clothes. Our clothes were boiled and washed and returned to us when we left.

Since we didn't want to cause any further bother we withdrew to the barn. I had noticed there was quite a flow of people and farm labourers were going to the owner asking for instructions so we thought it was best to keep out of sight and not raise suspicions. The days passed quickly with Jimmy, and we spoke about the round-ups and the hopes we had of meeting up with all our partisan friends and resume the fight. We had been received two new suits with two ties and Jimmy taught me how to tie a French knot which I still use to this day. In fact it what we called a *nodo scappino*, or a Windsor knot, which he called a French knot.

Every other day a *staffetta* or messenger from Villafranca came with news from the valleys. On April the 4th Pocopaglia himself came and gave us news from Barge where our information service was especially active thanks to Uncle Beppe (Giuseppe Maroccia) and Camilla Rovano (the midwife). He had had news that on April the 1st and 2nd Germans and Fascists had attacked the Po Valley from Paesana. Barbato knew he didn't have the ammunitions to resist a long time and feared that along and strenuous resistance would have endangered his partisans so he decided to empty the area.

Oncino was connected by cable with the power station where the men commanded by Marino were camped. Milan was with them and given the skill he had displayed in the battle of Montoso he had been sent to Barbato in aid. The phone rang and Barbato told Marino not to oppose resistance. Most of the men were retreating to the upper valley and would soon reach the Quintino Sella Refuge: it was necessary to move, giving the impression it was all empty and that there were no more partisans in the valley. Milan and Marino decided to move down to the plains as they were in the lower part of the valley. Milan spent time in Sanfront and Saluzzo and re-entered the base of Montoso around April the 15th. Polifemo's unit that had courageous *garibaldini* like Lupo, Cannone, Tamagno, Boero, Camoscio, Pizzo, Carco and others and which had been based in Ostana, withdrew and crossed the Rumella snowfield reaching Galiverga. During the search the Germans had captured nine of our men who had left their groups and had been travelling on their own They had been mercilessly shot in Paesana. The news saddened us and we hoped we would be able we would soon regain our positions and make them pay for their lack of mercy.

On April the 9th we received our friend Pocapaglia's welcome visit: he told us that the German garrison had left Barge and Paesana, the area was now free and we could return. We were pleased to notice that the date of return to our bases had proved right. We asked Pocapaglia to inform the other groups and come back on the morning of the 11th to take us back to San Grato where we had established to meet the other *garibaldini*. On Easter Sunday the family of our hosts was organising a meal and we were kindly invited to join them. In the country lunch on a holiday lasts several hours, and in the late afternoon we were still sitting at the table. In the evening we decided to go back to our barn and we were returned our clothes, washed and ironed knowing that we were leaving for the mountains the next morning. We said goodbye to the whole family and especially to the mother who had tears in her eyes and warned us to be careful. The owner told us he would see us off the next morning.

On the 11th at dawn Pocapaglia was in the yard with a horse and cart to take us to our meeting point. We said goodbye to our host thanking him for his generous hospitality and excusing ourselves for any problems we might have caused during our stay. He too was very moved and wished us good luck. The horse took off trotting with the expert hands of the driver directing it through the country lanes as it was not advisable to take the main roads and have unpleasant meetings. Towards 9 we reached San Grato, got off the small gig and cautiously walked towards the square. There were quite a few people around but it was not difficult to identify the *garibaldini* who were walking around with feigned indifference. We warmly embraced our friend Pocapaglia and thanked him for his precious help. Then I signalled to the various groups to leave the square and follow me. When we were in the open countryside we counted: some were missing especially the locals who had probably been kept back by their families. They joined us at a later date. I asked my comrades how the ten days had been with their host families: they all agreed they had been very hospitable. This called for a remark: tens of farmer families had sheltered us and had run considerable risks in so doing. This confirmed our idea that the people were on our side and that they were prepared to risk and cooperate with the partisans, a fact which gave us more courage and energy to continue the struggle.

We took the Gabbiola road towards the dell'Ula bridge. I wanted to reach the Prai d'Valin bases in the upper Infernotto valley where we could start reorganising the units. Once settled in the *baite*, the mountain huts, of Prai d'Valin and started receiving from the various areas hit by the searches and clear ups. We were pleased to learn that Val Luserna Romanino had withdrawn with the Rora' unit to Rocca Berra without losses. He had gathered all the scattered *garibaldini* and had now resumed their previous positions and held the valleys firmly under control. Commander Barbato and his men had come down from the Quintino Sella and had occupied the Po Valley. Montecristo had been appointed commander of the Po Valley and Mario Pareto as Commissar.

Barbato was led by his imagination and foresight in deciding to answer enemy arrogance deciding to extend and strengthen the area of influence of the *garibaldini*. He asked Commander Nanni to move to the Langhe District with a small group of partisans was working with Zucca and a small unit. In a matter of a few months and thanks to his prestige Barbato managed to establish one of the strongest partisan units of the area. Polifemo had wandered with his unit until they reached Galiverga and now had gone back to the Montoso area. His group consisted of a group of experienced friends who had not wished to leave the mountains and who had managed to avoid the enemy attacks throughout. The time had come to recreate our formation and know how many and in what position we were.

I found myself at the centre: Montoso between the Luserna and the Po Valleys. To have a good overview I decided to position the Montoso Command in the Prai d'Valin *baite*. At the same time partisan Milan had come back from the plains and I asked him to join the command group. I also called Polifemo and some of his to join the group. They were brave and able men. It took no more than a few days to organise the necessary services: provisions, outlooks, connections and recovery of the weapons which had been hidden. The Nazi Fascists had thought they had eliminated us but on the contrary we were a compact force and were ready to rise to the challenge and fight the enemy, hardened through fighting.

We were getting rather disquieting news from the plains: a few straggling partisans, pretending to be *garibaldini* were robbing and one, aka as Captain Tempesta (*Storm*) bossing the farmers around and robbed the banks of the area. The good name of partisans was being questioned, people were getting angry: Barbato who had transferred his headquarters in the plains was worried, remedy had to be sought as soon as possible. He sent a couple of our best *garibaldini* to the plains and soon our information services identified Captain Tempesta's hiding place. They arrested him and brought him to our command. He was regularly tried and sentenced to death, an exemplary punishment.

Commander Barbato had posters put up in all the towns and villages of the plains where it said that partisan justice had sentenced Captain Tempesta to death, and that this should be considered a warning to all those who discredited the partisan struggle.

How the Resistance reorganised

The reorganisation of the partisan forces was swift in the mountains, and in late April the government of the Fascist Republic of Salo' issued a decree giving a deadline for all those who had not answered previous military call-ups, hoping to build up their weak forces. The deadline was set for May the 25th and frightened many of the youngsters who had been uncertain as to what to do: many decided to join us in the mountains. About two hundred new volunteers joined our various units. At the end of April Commissar Carlo and I decided to hold a meeting with the commanders and commissars of the Po and Luserna Valleys with the following agenda: balance of the March 1944 searches and round-ups, suggestions stemming from the experience of the recent fights, new organisation and any other item. Commander Romanino and Commissar Pippo came for The Val Luserna, Commander Montecristo and Commissar Mario Pareto for the Po Valley, Commanders Milan, Polifemo, Lupo and Condottiero for Montoso. I opened the meeting recalling the heroic behaviour of all the detachment in dealing with the predominant Nazi-Fascist forces, the great sacrifices, the efforts and the loss of many comrades who fell fighting heroically. The *garibaldini* had resisted and had made the enemy pay dearly for the attack, causing major losses of lives and weapons. As had happened with the searches they had thought they had destroyed us but as could be seen our units were fully operational after a few days. In spite of the losses our numbers had swollen with the arrival of new volunteers and the creation of the 1st Garibaldi brigade was announced. We were to be the 4th one. The tactics that we had employed during the battles was the right one, attacking by surprise, causing losses and then retreating leaving a vacuum behind without ever letting them take us by surprise. This required ongoing surveillance around our bases and a perfect knowledge of the area.

During the round up and search with hundreds of men, our bases had remained vulnerable, we had to learn from the Val Luserna experience: forty men had lagged behind during the march through the snow and been made prisoners. Our units had to become more nimble with no more than twenty well-armed men ready to go and very flexible in manoeuvres. Provisions were another sore point: many units wandered hungry round the mountains under enemy threat. Safe caches had to be prepared high up storing provisions such as water biscuits which our bakers could prepare, or tinned meat or other food. Another important service was to establish a central office to organise supplies to all units. The right men for the job had to be found.

Military training was also lacking. Unit and sub unit commanders had to train their unit commanders on their weapons and how to use them in battle. Weapons had to be cleaned and ready to use at all times. When possible men had to be trained for long marches so as to be fit in case of need. Another important subject was recruitment: new volunteers were coming and a centre where they could be all referred to and filed had to be set up. Since I had been

a soldier I suggested it should be called a recruiting centre and some may find it too military but for lack of better solutions that's what we called, it.

The centre would have to train partisans and supply them with weapons as well as then sending them to safe places throughout their training far from the battle line. As the good season was on its way so I suggested the Pian del Re in the Po valley and the *baite* in Pian Frollero in the Luserna Valley. I asked the Montecristo, Commander of the Po Valley and Romanino, of the Val Luserna. The discussion got quite heated: many were adverse to work recruiting centre and Montecristo had doubts about Pian del Re as he didn't know who to give the responsibility of the base to. We decided to find the person together: we set up the vase in Prai d'Valin appointing Polifemo (Giuseppe Biglione) and Nemo (Mario Poliotti) as a Commissar. They were able to cope well with the help of a few assistants. I said that the command base would temporarily stay at the recruiting centre to be later transferred to Montoso.

A motorbike service would connect Montoso to the neighbouring valleys and the division command. At this point Milan spoke and said that his experience after the search in the valley suggested we should have a detachment of well trained and well-armed *garibaldini* ready to intervene attacking the enemy from behind in the event of new round-ups. Furthermore, the detachment could have carried sabotage or destroying bridges, electric and phone lines as well as railways to make life difficult for the enemy. Many expressed surprise as a detachment in the plains couldn't really hide and with all the spies they would have been discovered in a matter of hours. Others said the risk was too great. They spoke reminding the others of our experience where about eighty partisans had spent ten days divided in small groups staying with farmers. Milan's suggestion was sound but required more thinking without disregarding it. At this point Commissar Carlo took the floor and said that while he agreed about weapon training he thought the political education of the *garibaldini* was as important, the development of their democratic ideas, knowledge of international events and the prospects of partisan struggle. Illustrating these topics befell to the political Commissars and when possible in the evening we should have an hour devoted to politics, debating the events of the day and life in the unit. He also reminded us that a better political awareness was vital to have a better military preparation. I finished the meeting thanking the commanders and the partisans for their cooperation and reminding them that the time had come to attack, sending our flying squads to the plains, up to the outskirts of Turin so as to hinder enemy activities as much as possible. It turned out to be one of our most important meetings, full of initiatives and will to act.

A few days later it was Mayday, Labour Day and the political commissars ordered large amounts of wood to be piled up on the tips of mountains to prepare for the celebrations. They were lit at night, large bonfires illuminating the starry sky greeting the people in the valleys. We were also defying the Nazi Fascists indicating that the partisan struggle continued on the mountains.

We had had a prisoner for a few days, by the name of Zucca, Commander of the Langhe Garibaldi Brigades, a partisan being tried for high treason. He arrived escorted by two men: then professor Dario (Ugo Nanni), a man in his fifties, thin, an intellectual who spoke four languages fluently and worked with Commander Barbato, and comrade Mazzini sent by the Turin Command, who was also in his fifties and part of the Garibaldi Brigades. They acted as prosecutor and defence lawyer. Then Commander Barbato and Commissar Pietro arrived. Barbato informed me of the situation: he had been captured during a raid by the national republic Guard (GNR- the Fascist Guards) who convinced him to take them to where the Garibaldi brigades were in the Langhe. On arrival his partisans who thought he had been freed went towards him and congratulated him and celebrated his newly found freedom. Zucca did not rebel or display displeasure and the Nazis took note of the people and places. Soon tens of partisans and civilians paid his betrayal with their lives.

Barbato ordered the preparation of a War Tribunal and all the partisans of the district and command were invited. Barbato was the main judge, Commanders Petralia and Milan as well as six randomly selected *garibaldini*. As Chief Judge, Barbato illustrated the reasons why Commander of the detachment, Zucca, had to be tried. First Political Commissar Mazzini was given the floor who was the prosecutor for the Garibaldi Brigades: without hesitation he recalled Zucca's political past as a CP activist who therefore had to set an example to all his comrades. Then the fact that he was also a commander made it worse. When he had been captured he had agreed to work for the Gestapo accompanying them in the places where the *garibaldini* were active as well as pointing to weapon and provisions hideouts.

When meeting his comrades who thought him free he could have indicated something to the men since he was in partisan controlled area he could have had the people accompanying him taken prisoner, but he had lacked the courage and he had cowardly continued his journey through the Langhe. The defendant had betrayed the trust his *garibaldini* had in him, and had done so knowing what the consequences of his actions would be, but he had never given any signs of rebellion. Once the Germans went back to Turin they let him go as they knew the partisan justice would deal with him. In his closing speech Mazzini asked for capital punishment, also reminding us an example had to be set and this is what traitors could expect. For betraying comrades and the ideals they were fighting for.

Professor Dario for the defence. He was a very good speaker who recalled some of Zucca's merits: he was a mere hairdresser who had been arrested and had spent time in the Turin le Nuove jail for his activity as a Communist. The morning of July the 26th 1943 after Mussolini's arrest he had been one of those who had liberated political detainees such as Edoardo Zamacois, a British parachutist, who was going to be shot that same morning (July the 26th). He took him home and on September the 8th they went to the Bracco to join the partisans. Throughout his time in Barge he had strongly contributed to the

creation of the first Garibaldi units showing good organizational skills and earning the trust of his comrades and of the command. Since Commander Barbato had felt the need to extend the partisan range of action he had decided to send Zucca to organise a partisan unit in the Langhe: initially results were positive as the first partisan groups had been organised in very little time, but when the group reached one hundred the first complaints began as the commander was showing signs of incompetence and weakness.

Commander Barbato was forced to send to the Langhe a group of good *garibaldini* organisers, such as Commander Nanni: clearly Zucca had been entrusted with a task beyond his ability and since he lacked good organisational skills and awareness of solidarity notions he gave into the praise and promise the Nazis made, betraying his comrades.

The defence asked for the death sentence to be commuted in a less severe one. At the end of the speeches the jury of 11 withdrew in the command hut. The discussion that followed was very heartfelt. Most were for capital punishment but many others favoured Prof Dario's suggestion of a lighter sentence. After a long discussion, Barbato as the Chairman of the jury, took the floor and pointed to the fact that this sentence had to be exemplary and a warning to all partisans. There was a vote and the jury unanimously decided for capital punishment. One of the jury members (selected drawing straws) read with the decision with an emotional voice: 'The defendant is found guilty of high treason and is sentenced to capital punishment'.

Zucca who had followed the entire trial with a sad and resigned manner, covered his face and slumped. He was carried out of the room by two partisans and taken into the hut. Commander Barbato followed, stayed for about ten minutes and spoke to him. Zucca emerged a new man from those ten minutes: he looked bold, ready to accept his end holding his head high. Milan selected the firing squad: twelve partisans from the command, six with blanks and six with bullets who took the prisoner from the hut and went to the shooting range. As mentioned Zucca was a new man and said that the sentence was right and hoped that his death would set an example to all the other freedom fighters. He also recalled that those who fought with the Garibaldi formations, and especially those who held responsibilities must never seek compromise with the enemy. Then approaching the squad he gave one his watch, another his pen and a third his scarf. Then turning to Milan he begged him to leave him give the order to fire. He then shouted: 'Long live Communism and long live Free Italy' and gave the order.

In early May the Montoso partisan group was in full activity and the first partisans were sent down to carry out sabotage on the Cuneo-Turin mainline close to Villafranca Piemonte where a steam engine was blown up. Eighteen metres of the Carmagnola-Cuneo line were blown up. Milan kept thinking of a 'big one'. Messenger (*staffetta*) Lea who lived in Murello said that in the airfield there were fourteen well preserved aircraft. He told Lea to give him

detailed information on the location of the planes, the number of guards and when they changed, where the soldiers slept and lastly where the telephone lines could be interrupted.

Once all the details were drawn up, Milan came and showed it to me. Together we decided the action which he would lead with about twenty *garibaldini* in one group and ten in the other. The larger group had to disrupt the phone lines, neutralise the guard and force the fascist and German garrison who slept in the barrack to surrender. At his signal the group of ten, led by Etna (Franco La Pira, the battalion Commissar) equipped with fire bombs had to destroy the aircraft.

On the night between the 9th and 10th of May a lorry and a car slowly drove down from Montoso to get down to Murello airfield: the mission had been kept secret till then. Before getting there Milan explained details to each and every man. The success of the operation was mainly determined by the surprise element. The last few miles they drive without any lights as an extra precaution and as they got closer to the field vehicles are parked under the trees. While all the other men got off to cautiously move towards their objectives, the drivers stayed in their vehicles with their engines idling. Etna and his men position themselves at the side of the fields ready to move at a given and agreed signal, Milan and his group approached the small barracks. Two men cut the phone lines while another four took the guard by surprise and disarm him. The electricity lines had been cut, it was one in the morning, the time for the attack. Milan signals with a torch and the other group start burning the aircraft with their firebombs. The airfield came alight with the flames from the craft and at that point they started to attack the small barracks. An exchange of fire broke the windows and two hand grenades thrown to the door made it shake. Milan and his men shouted 'Surrender or we'll blow the building up, we won't hurt you we just want your weapons'. Following Milan's ultimatum they started walking out with their hands up. There were about twenty *carabinieri* (some still in their shirts and not wearing any trousers) and five Germans. While the *carabinieri* were asked to move on, threatening reprisals if they had ever taken service again, the five Germans were tied and locked in a small room. The squad of *carabinieri* slowly walked towards the village in the light of the burning planes, the partisans loaded three machine guns, two light machine guns and several boxes of hand grenades as well as ammunitions and explosives. Quite a haul and the ammunitions and explosives were especially important to continue the fight. The enemy lost fourteen aircraft and the action was a total success, perfectly led by Milan. There were no victims and the partisans proudly left at dawn as silently as they had arrived, driving back to Montoso. The enemy never knew who had performed the attack. Following the great success of the Murello airfield attack and some other acts of sabotage, Milan suggested once more he should move to the plains with a group of *garbaldini* so as to attack the enemy with more direct warfare. Furthermore in the event of the mountain units being attacked they could have acted behind the lines.

A heated discussion followed and was also attended by Commissar Carlo: all the pros and cons were considered as it was the first time an experiment like that was being carried out. So far partisans had been performing actions in the valleys only to return to the safety of their mountain I too remembered bases.

After the Luserna round up I had gone down to the valleys with eighty men and that we had hid with the farmers for ten days. However the situation was very different now as the group of partisans had to be completely self-reliant in terms of their accommodation and food. As usual Milan had done his homework and was well prepared. He illustrated the details of his move to the plains and also pointed out that with the good season there would be fields of sweet corn and leafy trees to hide partisans moving. His plan was approved and he selected a group of 12 well trained and courageous *garibaldini* who had already been put to the test in other occasions. We set a date, time and selected the best place for a base. It was agreed that if the experiment was a success other *garibaldini* would follow.

On the night of the 12th the partisans were ready, with their automatic rifles and their rucksacks full of explosives, ammunitions and tents. I said goodbye to them and embraced them one by one. At Milan's signal they started marching down the Infernotto Valley towards the d'Ala Bridge. Absolute silence was the word as they crossed the Barge-Bagnolo road and then, reached San Martino by dawn, passing through country lanes. After a few miles there was an abandoned hut which had been chosen as the place for the first base. It was far from inhabited farm houses and it was close to Mount Bracco and to the Staffarda Woods which were an option in case of a retreat. The watch was organised and then everybody went to sleep, quite tired from the journey. The day after with the help of the partisans, Barge bikes were provided and that same night the group split into two and interrupted the Turin Pinerolo train line blowing up the high voltage lines between Villafranca and Paesana. The two actions were carried out at the same time to baffle the enemy. Sabotage continued nonstop in the days that followed. Given the very good results of the first nucleus, as agreed with Milan another group joined them until there were enough to form a battalion which we called the *Arditi* (the Daring ones).

They were positioned forming in a four sided formation between Envie, San Martino, Crocera di Barge and the Woods of Staffarda. They lived in tents in groups of five with a leader. At one kilometre from the camp there were lookouts and an information service with messengers was present in every town so as to inform on any activity of the enemy's. Mobility was the hallmark of the *Arditi* : usually they slept by day and were active at night.

Continuous attacks at the railway centres, communications, power stations to the check points and sabotage right up to the gates of Turin. In Trofarello they blew up the substation controlling all the points, then they entered the RIV warehouse in San Secondo di Pinerolo destroying all the material for the ball bearings. Actions were coordinated so as to be carried out in one night at the

same time: five or six attacks in areas which were distant from each other, so as to lead the enemy to believe there were thousands of partisans in the area. Every other day a messenger on a motorbike went up to Montoso to receive orders and to tell me what was happening on the plain. In late May 1944 many new volunteers had joined us: the threats of the Republic of Salo' who had decided they would join us in the mountains. To monitor the flow we established between the Garibaldi Brigades that were grouping youngsters who wanted to join with our man Giulio (Giovanni Gatti, born in Torino in 1896 and antifascist worker arrested in 1929 where he had spent five years in jail) who was considered an invalid because of a gammy leg, which meant he could fulfil his role without raising suspicions.

Giulio, came to Barge station nearly every day with a group of youngsters and a few mothers who wanted to accompany their sons and say goodbye before letting him go up the mountains. Outside Barge close to the Church of San Grato, while the mothers embraced their children our messenger Nettuno led them to the recruitment centre. Here one at a time they underwent questioning to better understand their personalities: first they gave their personal details, then each one was given a *nom de guerre* which became their new identity. Their new name was written in with their details in an exercise book which was buried in a safe place. After a period of training and given the time for them to adapt to their new lives, they were given a weapon and assigned to a unit, while others went to Pian del re to unarmed unit because of lack of weapons. They would join the operational units when weapons became available. The continuous arrival of new volunteers required well organised new services: mainly it was the office that had to organise feeding hundreds of men and supplying shoes, clothes and blankets to shelter them from the cold. A group led by Etna (Franco La Pira) set up a depot of provisions and clothing in safe places with trusted farmers. Information and messenger services became necessary: a unit of messengers under Riva (Giuseppe Rasetto a worker who had been a freedom fighter in Spain) with young men and women on bicycles coordinated contacts between division command offices, brigade commands and the regional Garibaldi command headquarters. Information services were coordinated by Mara (Professor Marisa Diena, author of the book *Guerriglia e Autogoverno (Guerrilla Warfare and self-Government)*).

On May the 22nd, 1944 we were told on May the 17th, 1944, the 1st Garibaldi Piedmont Assault Division consisting of the Cuneo 4th Brigade, the 15th Saluzzo and the 16th General Perotti Brigade was formed. Barbato remained as Commander of the Brigade and Pietro as Commissar. The Command consisted of Francesco (Enrico Beradinone), Antonio (Antonio Giolitti) and Mirko (Giovanni Guaita). They were assisted by Cristina (Tommaso Ferrero an officer working in the secretariat) and Briscola (Mario Toscano messenger). I was commander of the 4th Cuneo brigade with Carlo as Commissioner, Medici was the Commander of the 15th Brigade with Ezio as Commissar, Nanni was the Commander of the General Perotti Brigade and Sulis the Commissar.

The following came under the 4th:

- The 1st Valle Po Battallion, Commander Montecristo (Cesare Baudrino, Alpine soldiers sergeant major), Mario (Mario Pareto communist worker) Commissar. Located in the Po Valley, Pian del Re, Crissolo, Oncino, Paesana. Forces: one hundred armed and forty unarmed partisans.
- The 2nd Pisacane Battalion, Commander Romanino, Commissar Pippo (Ezio Tambuscio a Communist docker from Genoa). Located in the Luserna Valley, Lusernetta, Pontevecchio, Rorà, Galiverga. Forces: one hundred armed partisans and twenty unarmed ones.
- The 3rd Valle Infernotto Battalion, Commander Milan, Located in the Infernotto Valley, Montoso, Bagnolo, Barge, and in the square between San Martino di Barge, Envie, and the Woods of Boschi. Forces: about one hundred and fifty armed partisans including the eighty *Arditi* in the plains.

The Brigade Command that oversaw all the services was in Montoso. On May the 16th a nucleus of partisans from the plains under Jimmy the Frenchman captured a German captain, a lieutenant and sergeant during an ambush close to Moretta. Jimmy was over the moon and in an open top car went round the area displaying his prisoners in a rude manner shouting; ‘*Voici les Boches*’ (here are the Germans. Brimming with pride and satisfaction he took them to the brigade Command. Although we were against having German officers in our hands (I was thinking of a possible exchange with our partisans locked up in the Turin jails) I was worried. During his tour he had shown the officers to everyone and soon the German command would know where its officers were. In the meantime Milan who had heard of the capture of the three Germans had gone up to Montoso. As I had foreseen the Germans’ reaction was not long to come: on May the 18th thousands of Fascists and Germans flooded the towns of Cavour, Campiglione, Luserna S. Giovanni, Bricherasio, Torre Pellice, Bibiana, Bagnolo, Barge, Paesana and Sanfront all at the same time. Their machine guns pointing they entered houses in a threatening manner, got the women, men and children out and concentrated them in school yards or in the local Town Hall square.

Hundreds of frightened and stunned people were crowded into schools without understanding or knowing why this was happening. Soon they would know as the German Command issued an edict: if the three prisoners were not handed over by six that night fifty Italian would be shot for every German. People were petrified and they all knew the prisoners had been taken by the partisans at Montoso. Tens of relatives started climbing up to Montoso in the hope that they could plead with the partisans and convince them to release the Germans. Don Agnese, the parish priest of Barge went to Montoso, along with Don Palette, the priest of Bagnolo with engineer Vacciago, the Fascist *Podesta*’ of Luserna San Giovanni pleading for the release of the prisoners. At the Command, Milan, Commissar Carlo and I had a heated debate as there was no time to involve Division Commander Barbato. As expected we asked to

exchange the men with ten of our men held prisoners and a 48 hour truce – the time needed to move our bases.

Our proposal was illustrated to Don Agnese and to Engineer Vacciago, the *Podesta'* who was fluent in German. Don Agnese said that the Germans had located their headquarters in Barge in the hotel Cannone d'Oro and that he knew how ferocious they were in treating people. He also added he thought it unlikely they would ever accept our proposal. However, with the help of Engineer Vacciago who had offered to act as an interpreter we all decided to attempt negotiations. They went down to Barge in Engineer Vacciago's car. Anxiety was rising as time went by, the clock was ticking fast and the time of the ultimatum for the mass execution was getting closer. Men and women on the top of Montoso were crying begging us to free their nearest and dearests. I confess the situation was starting to frighten me, as a battle with the Germans would have led to a massacre. At last the two emissaries came back: they had accepted a 48 truce and as for the prisoner exchange it would be discussed after the prisoners had been released. It was a disappointing counterproposal and while we were discussing the difficult situation, Engineer Vacciago spoke to the German captain who must have been important given the way the German Command had reacted. He gave his word as an officer, that he personally guaranteed the exchange with ten Italian partisans. We had no other way out so we handed the prisoners over to the *Podesta'* of Luserna and to Don Agnese who put them in their car and sped down to the Barge German Command with their precious cargo. The nightmare was over in the occupied towns and the Germans withdrew. We decided to be cautious as we didn't trust the Germans and moved our bases to the Rocce Nere that same night. We had left many long life provisions in the event of needing to retreat.

The next morning we saw a column of Germans preparing to carry out a search and round up in the Infernotto Valley. So much for the word given by the German officers. In his short diary *La resistenza a Barge*, Don Agnese wrote: 'I always thought Germans were hard and cruel but true to their word and loyal but it wasn't so.'

As well as the liberation of the prisoners the German high command had accepted the 48 hour truce but they failed to honour that promise too: at four the next morning a Fascist Company was at the top of Gabbiola (in the Infernotto Valley) where they searched and raided all the old *baite*. Although this episode might be considered a defeat for the partisan movement, the people of the community saw it as the victory of our generosity and it increased their trust in the freedom fighters. A few days later the Germans and the Fascists left and the partisans went back to their bases. Milan went back to the plains to resume command of his *Arditi*. The struggle in the plains became more intense and some partisan groups went up to the gates of the city of Turin, attacking check points, interrupting electric, telephone and railway lines. Bridges, enemy garrisons were blown up, weapons and ammunitions found: the latter were vital for the new recruits who were coming in droves to join.

On June the 4th we received good news: the Allies had entered Rome which had been abandoned by the Germans that kept retreating. King Victor Emanuel the 3rd abdicated in favour of his son Umberto 1 (Humbert the 1st) The Badoglio Government had already resigned and a government of national unity had been appointed with Benedetto Croce, Alcide De Gasperi, Palmiro Togliatti and Pietro Nenni. On June the 6th the Anglo- American troops landed in Normandy and the long awaited second front was at long opened. The Soviet troops were also on the offensive and had freed the entire Crimea. These events were welcomed with enthusiasm by all the partisan whatever their political colours. The Government of National Unity recognised the Comitato nazionale alta Italia (the National Committee of Liberation of Northern Italy) leadership in occupied Italy. Following the orders of the Garibaldi Brigade our brigades welcomed youngsters of all political and religious faiths Jews, Roman Catholics, youths of the Azione cattolica (Roman Catholic Action Groups), Waldensians, all united with the idea of fighting fascists and Germans for a free, united and independent Italy.

The 4th Brigade was in action from the Luserna to the Po valleys and in the plains Milan's partisans relentlessly carried out sabotage making it difficult for the enemy to move. In the Luserna Valley and in Rorà the *garibaldini* of the Pisacane Battalion had taken back all the old bases and under Romanino's command (and Pippo the Commissar's) there were ongoing attacks against the German SS garrison and the Fascists who were housed in the Luserna San Giovanni barracks. At night groups of partisans went into the town and placed time fuses on detonators at various points especially close to the barracks.

The charges exploded at different times keeping enemy military forces in constant alarm. Life became increasingly difficult for the Nazi Fascists so much so that the garrison commander, a German major by the name of Lemke, asked the Val Luserna Garibaldi Command. The meeting was held at the Ca' Russa trattoria with the participation of commanders Romanino, Pippo, Milan and Tolone. Major Lemke arrived in a car with three soldiers. The discussion was very heated and when Major Lemke suggests a truce the *garibaldini* answer that they have chosen to fight the German occupier out of their own free will and that the only acceptable truce was the departure of the Nazi Fascist garrison from the Luserna valley freeing them of their presence. The meeting finished without having reached any result and the German major was baffled by the firm and determined attitude of the young partisan commanders.

It was clear that by then the enemy was in difficulty, the German and Fascist soldiers stayed put in their barracks and the partisans roamed freely in the valleys: connections with the brigade Command headquarters was across the mountains and we received supplies from Montoso daily. The flying squads followed the same route to the plains or to get hold of weapons and provisions. The main focus rested on the Luserna enemy garrison with the help of local civilians who helped: the partisans were aware of everything that was happening in the town and the following were especially active: Rosmino a

worker, Jean the shoemaker, Del Pero for the Communist party, Cecilia Pron a worker, Mrs Manara displaced from Torino, good Biasin who was the power station's caretaker. They kept contacts with tens of civilians and created a close net of people who gave information. Thanks to them the Command was informed that some of the soldiers in the fascist Luserna san Giovanni garrison were sick and tired of being under German command and wanted to desert and join the partisan ranks. However they did not know whether and how the partisans would accept them. The answer of the Garibaldi command is positive. However they are told to defect taking as many weapons as they can with them. To force their decision an actions against the barracks was organised.

Two units under Romanino and Pippo, acted by night taking advantage of darkness they crossed the bridge on the Pellice River. They knew that that the Fascists had a check point with a machine gun near the barracks. The manoeuvre required the men to fan out and take the enemy by surprise. The action was near completion when a partisan started shooting: the Fascists immediately reacted and there was a strong exchange of fire: since they could not identify the exact location of the *garibaldini* the Fascists shot like mad. The exchange only lasted a few minutes but the partisans decided not to continue: they had reached their aim which was to create havoc in the barracks, four Fascists were dead and our *garibaldino* was only wounded in the leg and recovered a few days later.

As agreed a few days later Romanino was near the Ca' Rossa Trattoria waiting for the group of deserters. They thought there might be six or seven but were extremely surprised when they saw a column of twenty fascists, all in uniform, armed with their rucksacks full of ammunitions and hand grenades. The final result exceeded expectations. The new arrivals were warmly greeted with enthusiasm and each received a *nom de guerre* and they were sent to the various units where they were where they under strict surveillance for the first few days. Soon they were to become real brave partisans. The civilians continued to keep their eyes and ears open and were very pleased the fascists had deserted. We were informed of the presence of a certain Professor Tibaldi who wrote articles on Luserna and published then in a daily called *La Gazzetta del Popolo*. Biasin accompanied them choosing side streets until they reached the professor's house. When they entered they realised he wasn't there but found his daughter Eva instead. The partisans were annoyed because a neighbour told them that Eva, the daughter, had let her father escape giving him her bicycle. Not knowing what to do, Biasin decided to take her back with them. She was told to take a blanket and anything else she might need. To avoid looking suspicious they decided that she would walk ahead just with one of the partisans called Libero. The arrival of a woman at the partisan base raised a few eyebrows and surprised many. They didn't know how to behave and waited for Commander Romanino to arrive. Once informed he decided that the girl would be kept in the partisan base while waiting for further investigations and the decisions of the Brigade Command.

We had in the meantime learnt that she was a Red Cross Nurse and asked her if she was prepared to treat Ernesto whose wound had been bandaged by the partisans and needed expert handling. Initially she hesitated but then accepted and started to work: she treated and bandaged Ernesto's leg and then looked round noticing there was a mess and that both cleanliness and hygiene were lacking. With the help of the partisans she tried to set up sanitation, and had large pots of boiling water to soak the partisans' clothes to get rid of the lice. She tried to make herself useful and in a matter of days became a respected friend of the partisans. She was a university student, used to creature comforts who was soon to realise the hard life of the partisan understanding the ideals they had, admiring their fraternal relationships and marvelling at the self-discipline among them. In the few days she spent with the partisans she was fascinated by them and felt part and parcel of their unit. I happened to be passing to inspect the Pisacane Battalion and Romanino told me about the presence of the young woman, asking me to examine the case and decide what her fate should be. Biasin and other partisans I had spoken to and the interview I had with Eva herself led me to believe she was a nice girl who had tried to avoid her elderly father any problems with the partisans' questioning him.

In fact her father the professor had written a series of articles on culture before September the 8th , but currently, like most of the people of Luserna, he was cooperating with the Resistance. Faced with such a clear cut situation I gave her an alternative: she could either stay with the *garibaldini* out of her own free will or go back home. By then she was involved in her new life and had identified with the ideals of the partisan struggle, so she decided to stay swearing allegiance to the Resistance and as a Red Cross Nurse she said she was ready to treat all wounded, be they partisans or Germans. She was accepted by the Garibaldi Command and was given the *nom de guerre* Cocco. As well as seeing to partisans and treating their wounds she helped Commissar Pippo in editing issues of *La Baita* , the *garibaldini's* newsletter.

In view of the continuous arrival of new volunteers and also to abide by the new instructions by the National Liberation Committee (CLN) we needed to reorganise the Brigade Command, supply, information and health services. Once the Commander and the Commissar had been appointed the other positions needed to be covered. Milan who was the Commander of the *Arditi* from the plains was appointed deputy commander. Lieutenant Martelli (Raimondo Luraghi) was appointed head of chiefs of staff of the partisan units of the Gesso valley. Due to family problems he had left that unit and had kept in touch with our Pinerolo Unit, and in the past he had been adjutant general of the Company so he was considered suitable. Etna (Franco La Pira) was appointed Head of Provisions (quartermaster). Pittore was appointed head of information as he already had that role in the Po valley and had been successful. Bruto (Giorgio Fonda), one of the most expert medical students to have joined, was appointed head of the Health Services. Quale capo servizio

At this point the following battalions came under the 4th Brigade: the *Arditi* active in the plains under Deputy Brigade Commander Milan, the Pisacane Battalion in the Val Luserna under Commander Romanino and Commissar Pippo, and the Po Valley Battalion under Commander Montecristo and Commissar Mario.

Battalions, units, detachments and squads were generally organised separately and depended on the higher commands only for disciplinary matters. The squad was the base of the pyramid: it consisted of ten men and when it was led by a person who had military and political training it was self-reliant. It moved as a compact formation in sabotage, attacked check points and enemy garrisons and then re-joined the detachment it belonged to.

The detachment had three or four squads and was under the command of an officer or a senior partisan. On the whole these were expert and generous men who had earned the trust of their comrades and who had been appointed by the group as commander. When the appropriate person was found the commander was helped by the commissar whose main duty was to inform about the ideals people were fighting for, understand partisans' needs and establish those principles of unity and fraternity ever promoting a spirit of fraternity and self-discipline which were necessary for a harmonious life in the detachment. Since the detachment was self-reliant it had a supply and provision service which had to supply food, clothes, wine and tobacco (when available). The messenger service kept them in touch with the battalion on a daily basis and with the Brigade Command when necessary.

Battalions were led by Commanders and Commissars who earned the trust and respect of their men taking part in all the battles and always acting as an example, able to keep their partisans with unity and discipline. Since they covered vast areas with hundreds of men under them they have well organised supply offices mostly independent of the Brigade's and seek supplies wherever they are. On the whole they had specialised teams of men who operated in the rich parts of the plains where they commandeered eat, cheese, wheat and flour that is often also shared with the families of the mountain farmers. There was a health service organised by young medical students: Kocker (Andrea Borghesio) with the *Arditi* Battalion; Citrosil (Giorgio Scevola), Simone (Pinna Pintor) and Doctor Aesculapius (Domenico Aiello) in the Luserna Valley; Rouget (Gigi Rossi) in the Po Valley and in this valley and in the areas of Barge, Revello, Sanfront and Paesana Aldo Bollati, a 4th year medical student was a great help with our wounded and sick. He also had had good practice as a surgeon at the Saluzzo Hospital as a trainee surgeon. Furthermore he had a direct contact with the Saluzzo Chief Surgeon (Consultant) doctor Marco Roccavilla, who was prepared to give a hand in the most difficult cases and emergencies.

Simpamina (Teddy Mariani) and Golia (Cesare Ocleppo) were at the Brigade Command. A daily messenger service connected the three battalions to the command every day and the linked the latter to the Division Command.

Thanks to the presence of the Chief of Staff I was able to move around in the areas where our other battalions were operational. In the Po valley the battalion under Commander Montecristo and Commissar Mario had gained control of the entire valley and in Crissolo and Oncino they already democratic popular democracy with an authority elected by the community and assisted by the partisans. In Pian del re the unarmed partisans were being organised and instructed: since the call-up of the Italian Social Republic (Fascist) they had been arriving in increasing numbers to defend the valley and some detachments were positioned with machine guns to defend it. In Oncino, on the side dominating the Crissolo-Oncino fork, near Madonna del Faggio there was Gianni's unit with two machine guns in place. To the orographic right above the Crissolo road Igli was present with his detachment and machine gun. Lower down above the Calcinere district there was a machine gun manned by Condottiero's group.

The Partisan Summer

On June the 23rd a German column arrived at Paesana and tried to climb to Crissolo. It was seen by the *garibaldino* Balin who immediately gave the alarm. Our positions were on alarm and as soon as the enemy column was within range it fell under open fire. Gianni operated the machine gun helped by Dino and Mio: they shot the lorries directly and managed to block the column beyond the fork at Oncino. The enemy was forced to retreat and a military ambulance was seen driving down the valley carrying dead and wounded. Given their failure to force their way into the valley on June the 30th the Germans heavily bombed the area to hit the partisans behind the lines trying to identify our positions. Pian del Re was bombed killing partisan Elio (Corrado Cannavina), luckily the day before Marat had moved most of the unarmed detachment to another place. Bombs fell on the a hamlet of Crissolo's (Borgata Serre): four civilians died and their bodies were pulled out of the rubble (Genre Caterina, Girola Roberto, Girola Guido, Bessone Antonietta). The wife of the carabineer sergeant Rossi (Viglione Anna), was badly hit in her house in via Umberto I 103, and died while being taken to the Paesana hospital. Another twenty civilians were wounded, two of whom badly, and taken to the hospital in Paesana. This was but the prelude to another search and round up and the *garibaldini* were put in a state of alarm, ready to repel any other possible attacks. People got frightened and ran away quickly, sought refuge at home or in the hideouts they had prepared in the event of a search.

The column of Nazi Fascists was preceded by an armoured car and followed by two tanks, another armoured car and about thirty lorries with soldiers. They

left a field kitchen and an ambulance in the square and then the column proceeded on the road to Calcinere towards the upper valley. In the meantime partisans who were reconnoitring the lower valley raised the alarm giving the agreed signal. A phone call was immediately made from the Calcinere power station to Oncino and all the partisans were alerted. Everybody ran to their position: the Germans had left most of the column behind Boschetto before the Oncino fork and sent an armoured car and two infantry squadrons ahead in reconnaissance. They were already within the range of Gianni's machine guns: he was positioned at Madonna del Faggio, and surprised the enemy with strong fire. The Germans answered by shooting from their armoured vehicles blindly against the rocks in the mountains, then retreating with their dead and wounded.

Soon after there was a second attempt to advance with an armoured car and a tank followed and flanked by foot soldiers. Once in range they were hit by the partisans pelting bullets on them and one of Gianni's shots hit the wheels of the armoured car blocking it. An officer with a couple of men tried to reach the bridge on the Po to check if it had been mined but they were showered with bullets shot by the Condottiero's unit. The Germans had placed snipers in various positions trying to flush out the *garibaldini* who were creeping flat on their stomachs from one place to the other, moving among the whistle of the bullets. Seating, tired and locked in their positions they held the enemy under gun fire for the whole day keeping it far from the bridge on the River Po killing and maiming quite a few enemy soldiers. We had four wounded.

As night fell, in Paesana, in the valley the German command ordered a curfew after ten at night and everyone was locked up in their houses or hiding places expecting a round up the next day. Everybody was afraid and expected reprisals for the losses due to the partisans. In the middle of the night yet another surprise: the Germans had decided to withdraw given their failure to break through the line of resistance but there was still a surprise in store for them: Ivan's detachment was positioned just above Paesana and had been in wait all day. They attacked the German column that had to withdraw even faster fearing other ambushes. In the morning there were great celebrations among the *garibaldini*: the Germans had been driven out of the valley and the locals also celebrated in the liberation of the village.

To avoid any surprises the Command of the valley decided to set up road blocks on the access routes from Barge and Revello. Large tree trunks were felled with the help of the local people bridges and sections of the road were mined at two, three kilometres and blocks were put in place. As the case in Oncino and Crissolo, a popular local authority ⁹²was established in Paesana. The Po and Luserna Valleys were firmly in the hands of the 1st and 2nd battalions and the 3rd battalion led by Milan did not give the enemy any quarter. Now they have vehicles and are able to run up and down the plains, well beyond Turin mainly attacking. As well as sabotage against enemy forces they also supplied the brigade's offices with provisions. In one action they managed to retrieve two

hundred kilos of cheese, 400 hundred of butter, 800 hundred kilos of sugar 200 dozen eggs. Provisions were to last the brigade for quite a while. June's activity can be seen in appendix 1 (protocol number 220 of the First Command of the Piedmont) Garibaldi assault division.

The continuous arrival of new volunteers and the increased number of detachments meant I was always on the run: I had to move more frequently, checking out old and new units. Very often there were small disagreements and jealousies which stem from living together, issuing safety orders so that safety measures were respected: look outs and watch rosters and knowledge of the area, weapon practice with an adequate preparation. One had to be ready for any alarm raised day or night as the enemy might come. I had to speak to my *garibaldini* to keep their morale high and also congratulate those who had managed to complete the missions their commanders had entrusted them with.

For my safety Commissar Carlo suggested I should have an attendant accompanying me both in the mountains and in the plains. The choice was not easy as it had to be a partisan of absolute trust and proven bravery. The choice fell on Spiros Dorbis a Greek national born at Styra in on the island of Euboea and one of the first to join the partisans. After the Liberation he married Pietro Sombbrero's daughter. Pietro was the first farmer to have made his mountain hut or *baita* available to us, la Bertona, where the first partisan unit of the Montoso was established. Spiros was my age, he was thick set and sturdy, a very strong and a great walker. He had a markedly baritone voice and managed to impose his presence. Sometimes he made people afraid but he was a very good and generous man who became my shadow for a few months.

I was informed that the political office (UPI) and the Republic National Guard (the Fascists GNR) of Turin has sent informers to the area to gather information on Commander Petralia. In fact as can be seen by the file which was found at the Police Headquarters (*Questura*) after the liberation they knew very little (see photograph number 9).

To confuse the informers I decided to add the name Franco to the surname Petralia and was now called by my new *nom de guerre*. As I was later able to appreciate information stopped and no other were added to the ones on my surname.

Down in the plains Milan's *garibaldini* had increased their activity and every night the *Arditi* carried out four of five actions at the same time: interrupting bridges, power stations and railway lines, attacks on road blocks and check points and to fascist garrisons. Ambushes were set up on thoroughfares, train engines were blown up and telephone lines were interrupted.

We were now counterattacking and the enemy was led to believe there were thousands of partisans. A few weeks earlier both Germans and Fascists were

travelling along the main roads virtually undisturbed convinced the partisans were on the mountains where no motor vehicle dared go on alone. They moved by day and the night the columns were protected by armoured cars or tanks. The garrisons in Bibiana, Bricherasio, Racconigi, Carignano and Pinerolo, had more men on the watches as they feared they would be attacked. Our people informed us that the Fascists and Germans in the barracks were beginning to be frightened. For the time being the situation had changed and the partisans were no longer under siege in the mountains but besieging the in the valleys. This type of activity required a constant supply of weapons and ammunition which we were unable to supply with our actions. Possibly because of political reasons, the Allies drops were not for the *garibaldini* but were plentiful to the *Giustizia e Liberta* partisans in the Val Pellice. In a meeting with Commissar Carlo and Milan, we decided to ask the Val Pellice Command if it were possible for us to have some automatic weapons for the time being. Milan was asked to go personally on the mission. He was received warmly as he was known for his bravery and he was also congratulated for the work of his battalion of *Arditi*. However they told him they were unable to supply him with weapons because of orders from above. Milan was very annoyed when he came back to the Brigade Command: he was bothered by the discriminatory attitude the *GL* friends had had. We informed our Division Commander Barbato of the fact: he had been working for quite a time on a project to unify *garibaldi*, *Giustizia e Liberta'*, *Matteotti* and autonomous partisan. Difficulties unfortunately arose due t the very diverse political ideas each formation had, and the valley spirit which had replaced the *esprit de corps*. The same can be said for the attitude of the Allies who refused to drop weapons and ammunition to the *garibaldini*, thus discriminating the largest and the most active of all the partisan groups thus slowing down the unity of the resistance. Our Commander was not too bothered by the attitude of thee *GL* and basically understood the situation. He asked us to be patient and confirmed he intended to have a single plan for the partisans of the area and that we would jointly attack the enemy. We left embracing him warmly, Barbato telling us have faith and saying that he would soon give news. The problem would soon be solved.

In the eleven months of the partisan war Barbato's name had become legendary: he was the commander of nearly all the *garibaldi* units of Piedmont with the cooperation of some young cavalry officers and well prepared Communist comrades. Following his intuition he had managed to create one of the bravest best organised and combative partisan formations, occupying a vast territory: the Luserna Valley, Montoso, the Infernotto, Po, Varaita, and Maira valleys, the Langhe and the lower Monferrato. Brigades, divisions, sub-decisions and there were thousands of ⁹⁴Garibaldi partisans fighting against The Germans and Fascists to free their homeland.

On July 25th 1943 prophecy when he said: 'Look at those mountains. Soon they will be full of real Italians' had come true. Barbato was an exceptional figure: he was born in Enna in central Sicily and was very proud of being Sicilian. He graduated in law in 1028 from a republican family, his uncle being the famous

Napoleone Colajanni who thwarted the scandal of the Roman Bank, a great orator who worked at the bar for a few years. In the 1930s and 40s after having completed his first appointment as an officer he devoted his time to the creation of an anti-Fascist organisation trying to unify Communists, Socialists Liberals and Roman Catholics.

He was recalled in 1940 and was sent to the Palermo Cavalry. Here he tried to establish an antifascist group among the officers and soldiers in Sicily. In 1941 the Enna Police report him for subversive propaganda and was under investigation of the 4th Army. However thanks to his superiors hiding evidence he was acquitted. In 1942 he was sent to Piedmont to the Cavalry School in Pinerolo.

At this time the was expanding from Africa to the rest of Europe and even in the Far East. The US fleet under General McArthur defeated the Japanese at the Midway Islands and it was the beginning of the overall counterattack. Barbato already saw the need for Italy to leave the conflict and seek allies in the military high commands. Hence he organised Amil (Associazione Militare Italia Libera The Military association of Free Italy) On September the 8th 1943 he refused to follow the orders issued by General Barbò, the head of the Pinerolo School of Cavalry (Scuola di applicazione di cavalleria di Pinerolo) to hand themselves over; many were captured by the Germans and transferred to concentration camps. The night of the 9th of September he organised a column of soldiers and officers in Cavour that marched towards Barge with two armoured cars and lorries full of weapons and ammunitions. There Professor Ludovico Geymonat with his wife Virginia were waiting for him. They lent them an old mountain hut (*baita*) of theirs on the slopes of the Bracco, known as Capoloira. That is where the first of the partisan units he founded was first established. Thereafter Barbato remained always present among his *garibaldini* and was known for his enthusiasm, his belief in victory which he passed on to his partisans. He was always there in easy and difficult moments of the partisan struggle.

He had positioned his command in the plains where his trusted liaison officer Cristina (Ferrero Tommaso) kept contacts via messengers with all the brigade and division commands of the Garibaldi units. Cristina was born in Polonghera, and knew the area where the 2st Garibaldi Division operated in like the back of his hand. He was loved and respected by the farmers of the area and was a guarantee for the safety of the command. He appeared to be a little delicate as he was small and thin but he had a soul made of steel. He was at the side of his commander offering his help without ever being noticed or ever complaining he was affable with everyone and able to carry out the most delicate missions. Barbato was always on the move, he visited detachments, spoke to partisans, embraced them, shook hands and tried to create an indissoluble relationship with his men. In the evening he sought refuge in farm houses or in the homes of the rich as his personality easily adapted to communication with the poor farmer who in the evening in the cow shed told stories and sometimes jokes

bonding in such a way that never betrayed anyone. He also would spend time at the mansion of the Marquis of Marcerù of Villafranca Piemonte or the Earl of Malingri di Bagnolo. At times he transferred his entire command to the Malingri's castle and that is where he met Leletta, the young high school student, daughter of the Earl Oreglia dell'Isola, with whom he spoke of politics, religion and philosophy. Leletta was seduced by his personality and admired him greatly so much so that after the Liberation she wrote a lovely book about it called *Diario di Leletta: lettera a Barbato e cronache partigiane dal 1943 al 1945* (Leletta's Diary: letters to Barbato and partisan chronicles from 1943 to 1945).

A parallel can be drawn about another great Sicilian, the university lecturer Concetto Marchesi a scholar of the world of Ancient Rome who lost his chair and was expelled because of his antifascist activity. In his brave goodbye speech as he was leaving the university, he launched a famous appeal to his students and to the Italian youth:

A generation of men has destroyed your youth and your Homeland and has thrown you among the ruins. It will be up to you to find faith among those ruins and with the strength of the action regenerate youth and homeland. You as well as the young workers of the land and factories will have to re-found the history of Italy and rebuild the Italian people. In the name of the faith which sheds light on you, in the name of the indignations which burn you, do not let the oppressor make use of your lives, rebuild your battalions, free Italy from serfdom and shame, add as a new and great symbol to the ensign of your university, that of the battle for justice and peace in the world.

Suddenly in early June Barbato called me, Commissar Carlo and Commander Milan. We had heard that he had made contact with the *GL* Command of the Pellice Valley and specifically with Renato (Riccardo Vanzetti) an American liaison officer expert in warfare who had been dropped among the *GL* units. As for the request Barbato had made to have weapons he suggested that since he could not give the *garibaldini* weapons he should be given the command of the two detachments of the *Arditi* Battalion in the plains and he would have armed them with automatic rifles. The warfare was to continue under his command.

Initially the suggestion surprised us and we failed to understand how the *GL* Command could not supply the men to act in the plain. Renato pointed out that he preferred to have experienced men that were more reliable in action.

Milan was baffled by the strange proposal and didn't want to put the lives and actions of his *garibaldini* in the hands of anybody else, especially considering he had trained them day by day in their actions against the Germans and the Fascists. It was a difficult moment in the discussion: then Barbato intervened trying to bring the parties together and I too was convinced that a compromise should be sought. It was only a matter of twenty days after which the two detachments would go back under Milan's command with the weapons and

ammunitions which they needed to continue the struggle. After a long discussion, Milan accepted and the two detachments and their commanders were called to a meeting where Barbato illustrated the delicate mission and the trust needed to fulfil the agreement with Commander For twenty days the plains of Piedmont up to the gates of Turin and Chivasso saw Commander Renato roaming with our *garibaldini* attacking Fascist and German blocks, blowing up bridges, train lines and train engines.

Close to Cavour the *garibaldini* had a fight with Germans on a Lorry: two were wounded. The Germans started by burning two houses in Cavour as a form of reprisal. When they heard about it, four *Arditi* squads led by Milan went close to the town and took the enemy by surprise killing two and wounding several others. In Barge the *garibaldino* Leonardo found himself in front of a German car in transit and started shooting and of the two soldiers was killed, while the other quickly drove the car away after giving the partisan a superficial wound. Camilla, the midwife who cooperated closely with the *garibaldini* intervened as soon as she heard about it and removed the body of the German soldier leaving it on a pavement just outside the built up area. People were aghast. In the late morning the Germans suddenly arrived in the village, the men ran up to the mountains but others who lived on the road to Cavour did not have time to flee and were rounded up by the enemy column. The whole town was isolated, the Germans threw men and women out of their homes, doused the dwellings in petrol and set fire. The people was terrorised and everyone tried to escape, gun and rifle shots were heard and the Germans killed young Piero Beccaria. Through the interpreter who worked at the tannin extract plant, the Germans ordered for men to be separated from the men. Nobody knew what misfortune was to befall on them. From a distance the men who had managed to escape, saw Barge burning, each one trying to make their own home out, to see it too was burning. After a while the voice of the German officer rose and through the interpreter they heard: 'Barge will be destroyed!'. The men were held back so as not to have who would put the fires out, the women were allowed to move but they said that if even one shot was heard from the rebels, they will exterminate the population. The women tried to put the fire out where possible taking out furniture and other bits and pieces from the house on fire. When the Germans left the town at night, eighty houses had been completely destroyed . Hundreds of people were left without a home, clothes and food. The *Podesta'* of Barge wrote a detailed report about it to the *Prefetto* (Government representative) of Turin to inform his of the ferociousness the Germans had displayed with his town

On July the 14th 1944 the Command receives some sad news: Dario (doctor Paolo Vasario) of Luserna San Giovanni and Topolino (Costanzo Carle) from Barge have been captured by the Germans. They were cycling near Cavour, Dario was going to Turin on a secret mission and Topolino was a messenger. Dario was taken to Cavour and then to the German command and to the Airasca Airfield where he was brutally shot dead that same night. Before dying he wrote two very moving letters to his wife Diana and to his mother.

Topolino, was questioned and tortured but didn't speak about his mission. He was taken to Barge near Gabbiola and in his farm he was ill-treated , tortured and questioned and then hung to death in the barn in front of his parents. The Germans were still not happy and they burned the farm down. Topolino was the messenger for the *Arditi* Battalion and every day he would go to the Division Command: he was serious and reliable and physically very strong, a very useful messenger: he knew the command positions and partisan location very well. The Germans knew that because they had been told by local spies: they alternated beatings to promises trying to force him to take them to the command. Threatened by the soldiers Topolino took them on a wild goose chase for a few kilometres. When the Germans realised what he was doing they beat him up, but in spite of the pain he never told on his comrades.

The partisan struggle was growing at the foot of the mountain and on the *Monviso* (Mount Viso) in the lower Langa where our commander Nanni (Giovanni Latilla) had been sent by Commander Barbato to replace Zucca, the *garibaldino* movement was growing. With the help of Max (Massimo Tani former cavalry second lieutenant), of Trentin (Major Arturo Besson) and of other comrades coming from Turin, Brigades and Divisions occupied a large area. In cooperation with Commander Mauri's autonomous partisans they took part in the occupation and liberation of the city of Alba.

Towards mid-July we decided to recall the *Arditi* back to the *Montoso* base due to the number of actions they had carried out. The men were tired and needed a moment's rest. They brought lorries, cars and motorbikes which they had acquired during their stay in the plains with them. The vehicles were hidden in the Montoso quarry hidden from any air attacks. An efficient repair garage was also organised. The motorized *Arditi* drove down to the valleys for sabotage at night, and in Villanova d'Asti they blew up two hundred metres of railways. On the road leading to Montoso where they drove every night they positioned a patrol and safety.

Despite all the surveillance of the road, one day the Fascist managed an ambush: the notorious Novena who was from Bagnolo heard about movements on the road to Montoso through his information service. That night he had a sealed freight carriage attached to the Pinerolo Barge train with him and another dozen fascists from the Black brigades in it. The train arrived in barge late that night, it was detached and left on a siding. Nobody was aware of its contents. At night Novena and his thugs left the train armed and with powerful hand grenades and positioned themselves on the road to Montoso where the Little Madonna was (*Madonnina*) and waited for the vehicles. A roar hit our partisans and squad leader Scintilla (*Spark*) the courageous and able driver who was known for his spirit of sacrifice and technical skills, fell dead on the driving wheel. The lorry swerved and Cecco died. Kocker, Maginot, Gino, Martelli, Angelo, Moro and another seven were wounded albeit not badly. Our partisans came to and tried to react but the Fascists had disappeared into thin

air. The thirteen wounded were seen by our doctors and were declared out of danger, recovering in a matter of days.

In view of an imminent allied landing on the Southern coast of France the Germans concentrated large numbers of to repel any passage of the Allied troops through the Alps. In late July the Susa, Chisone and Pellice Valleys were attacked. On July the 16th a German plane (aka the Stork) went on a reconnaissance flight over the Po Valley. On July the 23rd it launched incendiary bombs on Paesana which was the beginning of the attack on the Po Valley. A brigade under Commander Santa Barbara (Andrea Bruno, born in Envie and an infantry lieutenant) was strategically positioned in case of an enemy attack in cooperation with the 15th Brigade under Zama to strengthen the defence line of the lower Po Valley (see document 2 in the appendix). Santa Barbara was a very good battalion commander and was enjoyed great prestige among the partisans. He had two 81 mortars, four Fiat 35 machine guns, several automatic rifles, rifles and sever machine guns which were weapons they had acquired from the disbanding of the GaF (*Guardia alla Frontiera*- the Border Guards, disbanded in 1943). He positioned his men on the heights between Martiniana Po, Gambasca, Sanfront, Revello, Morena, and Paesana. The mountain road from Saluzzo which crossed many of these places had been interrupted in several points and all the bridges had been mined so as to delay any attack from that side.

On July the 25th the Germans from Saluzzo started the attack on the Po valley. Santa Barbara's men momentarily stopped them at the bridge over the River Po. Who were very well acquainted with the lay of the land and knew

how to slip between the rows of trees, attacking the enemy and disorienting the Germans who failed to identify the partisans and kept spraying machine gun volleys aimlessly. To advance they rounded up a few civilians and used them as shields reaching Revello with difficulty. Santa Barbara suspended attacks not to expose the town to reprisals.

On the morning of the 26th the Nazi-Fascists resumed their march towards Paesana but were stopped at the at the Morena fork where the *garibaldini* ambushed the enemy that was still shooting at random. In spite of the large number of attackers and their weapons, the partisans prevailed thanks to their knowledge of the lay of the land and the plants shielding them. The men of the area had left their houses and many were with the partisans, the women occasionally brought food to the hungry fighters who were tired and sweating because of the fighting but also elated thanks to their results. Santa Barbara got the *garibaldini* to retreat towards Sanfront: the next day the Germans resumed their march and aimed for Sanfront. Here they were met by a bad surprise: Santa Barbara had positioned a detachment around the town and they had positioned themselves on the surrounding heights.

The Germans were welcomed by the fire of the Fiat 35 machine gun skilfully manned by three Czech partisans. The Nazi Fascists tried to counterattack but were blocked by the fire of the other machine guns in the hands of the partisans who had moved to the side and shot at close range. After over thirty minutes the enemy gave up on entering Sanfront and retreated towards Martiniana taking their dead and wounded. In the meantime plumes of smoke were rising with loud explosions, as the Germans furious at their losses took it out on Sanfront and Martiniana, mining their houses and burning them down. People fled the towns and villages, and Santa Barbara was forced to interrupt his attacks: he tried to help the tired and frightened population from the Nazi Fascists reprisals. Messengers from Montoso told me what was happening in the lower Po Valley, it was such a difficult moment and the Valley was soon to be assailed by enemy fire. There were more than two hundred partisans defending the valley and my presence was more necessary than ever. Mutual trust was the hallmark of the relationship I had with the *garibaldini*, and since the road to Paesana was still viable, in view of the imminent battle on July the 27th I decided to move the command to Crissolo in the Po Valley, as I can monitor and better direct all operations from there.

It was dawn on July the 28th when the Germans resumed their march towards Sanfront, attacking partisans and the men of Costanzo Agù's detachment had been blocking the entrance to the valley continuing to resist all attacks. Machine guns were spewing continuous fire onto them, and both their positions and Ramon's which were at the same height, were identified and blasted repeatedly.

In the late morning a storm blew up, it became difficult to move and the young men at the machine gun were shooting bare-chested trying to cover the guns with their clothes. A strong explosion was heard and Ivan's *garibaldini* From Sforzini's detachment and a nucleus of eleven from Gianni's squad under Nullo (Bruno Pasquali) had intercepted a artillery trailer and attacked it launching hand grenades. An ammunition lorry blew up, a 105 cannon was destroyed and eleven Germans were killed. Under continuous fire the Germans managed to hit Ramon's positions and Nino Tosello fell with his brains spilling out of his skull. As well as him another three partisans fell to the ground and started moaning in the mud sodden ground.

The situation was so difficult Santa Barbara ordered to retreat, at towards 11, after four days the enemy managed to enter Sanfront and as usual got women, the elderly and children out of the houses, rounded them up in the main square of the town close to the hospital, and then set fire to the entire town. The days that followed saw Paesana being bombed, people leaving their homes and seeking refuge in isolated hamlets in the fields. On August the 1st after having attacked and overrun our defences on the ridge, and having pushed beyond the last resistance on the Croesio bridge, the Germans entered Paesana, pushing ahead the women and children they had rounded up in the fields and whom they used as human shields against any possible new attacks

of the *garibaldini*. As usual they got the people to leave their houses and systematically burned them down: Paesana burned and about 82% of all the houses was damaged.

I followed events from Crissolo and continued to move to monitor and inspect the detachments that were defending the upper valley. Pian del re were the unarmed men were was dismantled as it had become too vulnerable and the men were shared out among the various detachments. There was a lot of tension among the men and the local people, provisions were running low, there was no flour, enough meat because the shepherds had taken their animals to the mountain pastures, but you can't just eat meat and soon we had a diarrhoea epidemic on our hands. In agreement with Montecristo and the National Liberation Committee of the valley we managed to organise a column of farmers and shepherds, good hikers who were able to bring a few hundred kilos of flour across the mountains. It was for bread for the partisans and for the locals.

France

In the meantime the Command of the first division Barbato in collaboration with the Val Pellice GL Command decided to carry out hit and run attacks to alleviate enemy pressure: Renato and Prearo hit the Bibiana and –armed Bricherasio Fascist garrisons. Two well-armed columns of a hundred *garibaldini* and a hundred GL partisans attacked the garrisons by night and this bore its fruits as the enemy was forced to lighten the pressure in the valleys to respond to the partisan attacks to its garrisons. Unfortunately it was only passing relief as the Germans resumed the flow of troops, cannons and special machine guns concentrating them in their Paesana garrison. They tried to climb up the valley with all possible means but they were blocked by our well positioned machine guns hidden in the sides of the mountains. Gianni's men had a machine gun positioned and well hidden on the Promontory of the Madonna del Faggio; he had three machine guns, two Fiat 35s and one Breda 34) and was able to stop armoured cars too. The Germans were trying to flush out the *garibaldini* and positioned a GPMG machine gun above the Calcinere pointing at the Madonna del Faggio.

On August the 15th the Allies landed in Provence and there was a possibility the Anglo-American troops from Southern France could have entered Italy from the North-Western passage in the Alps. The Germans were concerned and on August the 21st they launched the attack against the Varaita and Po Valleys. At dawn the Val Varaita was squeezed in by a German column with armoured

tanks that nearly reached the Valcurta Bridge under the fire and the shelling of the Savorgnan *garibaldini* from above the power station. They were under Bellini's command (Enzo Grimaldi, cavalry sergeant who had climbed up the Bracco Mountain with Barbato on that September the 9th). The *GL* partisans were under Rubino's command (Commander Mario Rubino of the third *GL* Band) positioned lowdown on the crag above the road which held enemy forces at bay while the latter were trying to remove the mines. They also hit and blew up a lorry loaded with ammunition. While the German column was held on the other side of the bridge, the German units were trying to by-pass our positions to our orographic right and from the left on the Po Valley side. In Valcurta the battle was raging and one of the *GL* saboteurs managed to explode a mine under the bridge and blew it up.

While the German sappers were trying to rebuild a Lampert bridge or temporary gangway on the river, one of the artisans shot a mortar shell in the midst of a group of Germans killing and wounding. An eighteen year old enthusiastic *garibaldino* Pelvo (Luigi Savoldi) got up pointing his arm to the enemy in defiance and a volley of enemy bullets from a machine gun hit him severely wounding him. He was taken to the parish priest of Sant'Eusebio, captured by the Germans and his body found in a ditch the next day where the enemy's savagery had thrown him.

In the evening the Valley Command ordered the retreat, we could resist with the second line of defence. In fact none of the positions had been hit but we felt there had been some shortcomings in our defence strategy: in the night with Pietro and Francesco of the 1st Garibaldi Division and with Scamuzzi from the 2nd *GL* Division as well as Medici and Ezio of the 15th Brigade (about one thousand partisans) we moved to France across the Bellino Pass.

In the Po Valley the German attack continued with them the Paesana garrison shelling nonstop against the Madonna del Faggio's position: *shrapnel* was raining down on the positions. I too ended up under a dangerous shower during one of the inspections but luckily we found shelter in a nearby cave. I was encouraging the men to resist when a messenger arrived from Crissuolo informing me that a German *Alpenjaeger* from the Pellice Valley had climbed the Comba dei Carbonieri and had taken our unit on the Gianna Pass by surprise. Bill the squad leader was wounded and they were retreating: all our defence lines had all been taken by surprise and could be surrounded without an escape route. The Germans had decided to attack us from above since they had failed from below. I sent a detachment in aid of squad leader Bill so as to slow the German advance down. As I was going to the command base I met another messenger who told me about two young women who wanted to meet me, and said they had been sent by Barbato to have news on our situation. To my surprise I saw the Busso sisters, Felicita and Maria who were the Judge Mongrando's sisters-in-law. The judge from Saluzzo was the one who had helped us supplying us with the map of the hospital when we freed Nanni. They were two good-looking women from the Cavour's upper middle class: as

young officers we had often admired them and courted them. In other circumstances the meeting might have been pleasant but it was a difficult time and I had to make important decisions, so I was somewhat abrupt with them telling them to get back to Cavour as soon as possible because there was danger of a clash with the Germans. I told them to refer to Barbato that the Germans had attacked our unit from above from the Gianna Pass and probably we would have to retreat to the Varaita Valley. I held a meeting of the command with Montecristo to examine the new situation. There was no time to lose. We decided that we would have to start our retreat towards the Varaita Valley that same evening. We had news that it was still free. I sent a messenger to the Quintino Sella Refuge where there was a nurse with the wounded and the sick: I ordered them to retreat towards France. The decision command was already in touch with the French partisans who were going to send ambulances to the border. All units were told to get all the weapons, ammunitions, and provisions and to congregate at the Serre in Oncino where we would be moving from to the Varaita Valley. The 20 machine gun was loaded on a mule, the other lighter ones were carried by the machine gunners on their backs. All the unit reached the meeting point by afternoon. I sent a squad to see what was happening at Remo's (Antonio Biglia who knew the area well) towards the Cervetto Pass while his brother Romolo (Battista Biglia) stayed behind the lines and shot a few machine gun volleys. The Detachment Commander Naini (Antonio Crua, a veterinary lieutenant who had also gone to the mountains with Barbato on September the 9th 1943) was the only one to stay back. When the German thought they could freely move in the Po Valley he attacked them from Crissolo and the he too retreated.

That evening we slowly started to climb towards the Cervetto Pass: the moon was shining in a clear sky and lit up our path. It was easy to continue along those mountain paths: there was a column of about two hundred and fifty me and I tried to keep morale high. On our way we met a few mountain huts where there were shepherds who were about to milk their cows and ewes.

They were very kind and offered bowls of milk. Then we continued on our long march to the summit. At dawn we were in sight of Sampetre in the Varaita Valley. I sent a messenger to the town to see if there were partisans or Germans but neither were there: the partisans had already withdrawn and the Germans had not yet arrived. We continued our march towards Casteldelfino and it too was empty. Montecristo and I decided to divide the group into two columns: I had a hundred and twenty *garibaldini* would continue towards Bellino while he would continue until the Agnello Pass with the others. We said goodbye and wished each other good luck. The march towards Bellino with my hundred and twenty men was getting demanding: some partisans were on edge and would have liked to go back. I managed to convince them that we had to stay united and that we would continue our march towards France and then I appointed Marat deputy commander of the unit: he was courageous and enjoyed prestige, loved and well thought of by all the partisans. We arrived in Bellino and were confronted with an apocalyptic vision: tens of burnt lorries

and armoured vehicles, nearly a thousand kilos of wheat scattered all over the mountains. The partisans of the Varaita Valley had destroyed not to leave it in the enemy's hands. Many of us thought it was alright to destroy motor vehicles but that the wheat should have been shared among the farmers instead of being burnt, and that if this had been done it would have enhanced our standing and could have been a reserve for the future.

We continued our march across the Autaret Pass and then walked down into the Maurin Hollow where we found a few thousand Val Varaita partisans, camping tired and hungry. I asked of their commanders and I was told Zama was sick with Malta Fever while Pietro, Francesco and Scamuzzi have gone to Barcellonnette to negotiate with the French partisan command and meet the Allies to get weapons, provisions and to negotiate our participation in the war against the Germans. Negotiations with the French were very difficult as they wanted our partisans to go down to Saint Paul to defend it without any guarantee and sent a stock pot of pasta and beans. Nobody was deciding anything. Two young French partisans were standing guard at the vegetable soup and I decided to go to Saint Paul with my partisans, so I pulled out my Llama Gabilondo gun and took possession of the vegetable soup: only those following me to Saint Paul would get it. My partisans formed a queue and received a ladle full of vegetable soup. The lack of plates mean some had to cup their hands and eat it like that. Some of the partisans from the Chisone Valley joined my men and in the late afternoon we set out towards Saint Paul. On the way we met Pietro and Scamuzzi back from Barcellonnette who told us they had failed to reach an agreement with the French and were going to return to Italy with their men.

I had decided we would go to Saint Paul. Once there we were received by the partisans of the Ftp (*Francois tireurs partisans*) who were fighting under their commander, Tito. They welcomed us as we were expected and they really needed help. Tito helped us find a place for the *garibaldini* in a barn in town and also provided a meal. Then he and I went to the fort where he had his command. That night I slept in the fort and we discussed the situation. They were waiting for the arrival of the Allied vanguards any moment but there was danger of an imminent attack by the Germans in Barcellonnette. We agreed we would place defences in various places to defend the town with our machine guns from the heights around. Occasionally mortar shells launched from the Col de la Larche. The morning after we could hear the first American coming across with enormous Sherman tanks equipped with a 75 mm gun, three machine guns and grenade launcher. The young Americans on board were happy and well fed. We told them about the mortar shelling which was an ongoing problem in the town. A young US officer decided to go and explore where they came from. We gave him some of our partisans from the Marat Command and they got into the famous American jeep that was soon seen going over the hill. Once the German unit had been identified Marat wanted to attack and would have easily made a few prisoners among the men who were close to the mortar. The US officer radioed his command, took the coordinates

of the mortar and then was told to return to base. A few hours later the German position was bombed and destroyed by the US forces.

Several armoured vehicles arrived at Saint Paul the day after: they were expecting a German attack, and our unit of *garibaldini* with the French *maquisards* received orders to go and position themselves on Condamine, just above the road from Barcellonnette. The day idled by and still no sign of the Germans. We were in a field of carrots and took advantage of it: that morning we ate unripe carrots pulled up from the soil. Towards midday we were told to withdraw to Saint Paul where the Gaullist forces had arrived. We were told to move towards Guillèstre. Climbing towards *Col de Vars* we came across American troops who were going down on foot with armoured cars. An American soldier stopped me, saw my gun and fell in love with it. He suggests we switch: he would give me his Winchester semi-automatic for mine. I was very pleased to switch and he also added a few spare cartridges. I would take that Winchester back to Italy with me and give it to my Commander Barbato who on May 6th 1945 would head the partisan march with my Winchester over his shoulder.

Before arriving at Guillèstre we stopped at *Col Vars* at the Napoleon Refuge where we met with partisans from all over: there were Spaniards, Germans, and Dutch with whom we exchanged information on the war. After having rested and having eaten some of the tinned food the American had given us, we resumed our march and arrived at Guillèstre in the late afternoon. We were received by the Ffi (*Forces françaises de l'intérieur*) partisans. They took us to a school where they accommodated us and supplied us with food. They told us we had be in the square, ready to be transferred to the main road to Briançon which is where the German advanced was expected. Early the following morning we were ready on the main square of Guillèstre and to be sure we would be recognised as *garibaldini* we were wearing our neckerchiefs with the Italian colours and the coat of arms with Garibaldi. The morning was a series of orders and counter orders. General de Gaulle's regular troops were about to arrive and our participation was no longer deemed necessary. We noticed that the Ffi partisans' attitude had completely changed. They started roaming round us and looked at our weapons as if they wanted to disarm us, I gave Marat strict orders to fire if anyone tried to touch our weapons. The situation was quite tense and I decided to make contact with the Allied command which was near the square and luckily came across our Professor Dario (Ugo Nanni), appointed Chief of Staff of the 1st Division kept contacts with the Allies and decided to remain in France following a suggestion by the Garibaldi delegation. He had joined the 5th Ffi Battalion as a major and was in touch with the American Colonel Hamilton. I was received, there was a long discussion, the American were afraid that we might harbour spies who would inform the Germans of the French operations once we got back.

In the course of the discussion they suggested I should join the French *maquis* as a major and the partisans would camp close by on Mount Dauphin or could

return to Italy through Southern France. I had my men on the piazza and I had no intention of leaving them alone so I insisted they let me go back to Italy. At last they agreed we would leave that day and could cross into Italy as long as we spent two days at the *mine* (an old mine beneath the Sain Véran Pass where they would have sent us provisions for the time. We were happy as we set off for home. All my *garibaldini* were in good health and we were about to return to Italy without losses. We marched and met a few people who were curious about us and wanted to know where we were going. They gave us bread and water. At nightfall we arrived at destination and found an uninhabited hut and had to sleep out. We only spent one day at a *mine* as they had sent us one goat which wasn't enough for us and we had provisions for a day.

I sent a patrol to explore the border at Pontechianale, and since the area was where we had decided to go through to return to Italy; from Pontechianale we walked along the mountain side above Casteldelfino and Sampeyre and came down the Gilba Valley. The Germans had occupied Casteldelfino and Sampeyre. We had to be very careful to hide in the woods not to fall in German traps. I had sent a small group of partisans who knew the area well in advance and the others followed ten by ten. Luckily the march was swift without any hitches and that same night we walked down the Gilba Valley towards Mount Bracco and from there we climbed to Montoso. Montoso. We had been missing from the base for a little more than a month. During our absence since the command didn't know how long we would be in France for and since it needed to have a Commander for the 4th Brigade, appointed Milan as an interim with the following order (August the 29th 1944):

Interim command position- In the absence of Commander Petralia currently fighting on the Maritime Alps with the Allies, deputy commander Milan will cover the as Interim Commander of the 4th Brigade.

Obviously I regained my position as brigade Commander and thanked Milan for having ably replaced me in my absence and I asked his to give me a report of the events that had taken place in my absence. I heard that Montecristo and his *garibaldini* had come back to Italy via the Traversette passage having crossed the Agnello Pass and stopped off at the Balif Refuge. They had positioned themselves in the upper Po Valley which had not yet been occupied by the Germans. On August the 30th the 2nd Pisacane Battalion had become a division given the large number of volunteers from the Luserna Valley and the increase in their numbers. They were now called the 105th Pisacane Brigade. Romanino was the commander and Di Nanni (Riccardo Di Nanni, regular Captain of the Cavalry who had been a member of the GL partisans before moving to the *garibaldini*), Luca (Professor Ludovico Geymonat) Commissar and Pippo as his deputy. Chief of staff Martelli had moved to the *Arditi* and Captain Grant, an old regular army officer had taken his place. Initially he had joined the Fascist republic of Salo' but then he had deserted and gone with the partisans. Soon he would be replaced by Arturo (Ettore Carando commissioned Artillery Captain) . On August 21st Luserna and Montoso had been hit by the

joint attack on the Pellice and Po Valleys. The Pisacane Battalion had had to retreat towards the Pian dei Lupi while the Montoso *Arditi* had gone down to the plains in a brave move. They started sabotaging the railway lines which brought supplies to the German troops in the Western Valleys. Two hundred metres of the rail close to Carmagnola, on the Turin Savigliano mainline was blown up, the line was interrupted at Marene and the carriage of troop train between Villafranca Piemonte and Vigone was also destroyed.

On August the 27th a French plane was hit by the German anti-aircraft artillery near the hamlet of Cappella del Bosco. The young pilot was still alive and the farmers who found him took him to Bolide, the Garibaldi squad leader who transferred him to the safety of the Pisacane Brigade in the Luserna Valley.

The Germans got wind of the destruction of the plane and at night they went to Cappella del Bosco waking the *Podesta'* and the parish priest up so that they would take them to the place where the plane had fallen thinking they would capture the pilot. When they got there they only found the smoking remains of the plane that had caught fire in landing. There was no trace of the body and the Germans believe he had burned with the plane. In the meantime the French pilot was having an interview with Commander Romanino and Commissar Luca: his name was Maurice L. Vincent and he asked for help to get back to France to his group. He spent a few days in the Luserna Valley with the partisans, just the time to find the guides who would take him to France. When they arrived, he was so moved by everything that he wrote a thank you letter to Commander Romanino and Commissar Luca which he entrusted to the guides: the letter recalled the strong bonds between France and Italy and said he hoped the war would soon be over bringing back peace and brotherhood among the two peoples.

On August the 26th the *Arditi* Battalion and the 2nd Battalion returned to their bases given that the Nazi Fascists had temporarily given up the idea of attacking Montoso and the Val Luserna. Montecristo's men who were positioned in the upper Po Valley withdrew to Montoso to avoid the imminent German attack to the Traversette Pass. On August the 26th the Barge police played a trick on the Germans: a German inspector from the Spear had arrived in Barge because he had to purchase used but still good lorries. The head of the *garibaldi* police contacted him and took him round the town, showing him five civilian vehicles, negotiates a price of five million lire and agreed. After a few days the German policeman returned to Barge with five drivers and five million in cash. He wanted to pick up the vehicles but at this point the head of police got a squad of *garibaldini* to intervene: when he came to collect them they captured the German officer, his interpreter and the bag with the five million. The drivers were immediately set free, while the German officer, and the interpreters were taken to Montoso and handed to the command with the five million. The money was handed over to Commander Barbato (and funded the division for a while) while the German officer and his interpreter were exchanged for eight prisoners. On September the 7th at 3.30 pm Spezia, the

Commissar of the Battalion, the driver Romeo and *garibaldini* Bonaglia and Bruno went to Barge to shop.

Close to the town, and precisely near the Chapel of Saint Grato, they met a group of Germans on an armoured truck who were mending the phone line which the *garibaldini* had destroyed a few days previously. As soon as they saw the partisans the Germans told them to raise their hands and surrender while starting to shoot: our men didn't have the time to react and Spezia was severely wounded, Bruno and Bonaglia were unscathed and managed to flee raising the alarm. Romeo who was slightly wounded drove the vehicle and swerved in the generous attempt to save the truck and Commissar Spezia but the attempt failed and he was gain hit in the chest and captured with Commissar Spezia.

While the Germans were moving the two wounded to the Town Hall Square, Camilla, the partisan Maria Rovano the district midwife of Barge who was always alert and knew what was happening, heard the shots and ran to the square where she found the two wounded with the vicar, the *Podesta'* and Doctor Guerrini. She immediately recognised Commissar Spezia who was a friend of hers and saw that he was badly wounded with a fracture on the right femur and left thigh. Romeo had been badly wounded in the chest and was dying. So Camilla's efforts focussed on saving Spezia. She spoke and consulted Doctor Guerrini knowing that a man with a limp hanging wounded leg could not be transported, that he needed to be bandaged. She spoke to the German sergeant who had initially thought he would shot the two wounded on the square but had received orders to take them to Saluzzo.

The German wanted to leave immediately but Camilla managed to stop him with the excuse that she has to fetch the necessary material to tender to the wound. She was granted a half an hour to do it all and Camilla returned with what was needed to bandage the wound, and Doctor Guerrini saw to it. Time was running short and the Germans were anxious to leave. With the tail of her eye Camilla saw partisan movements: it was Lampo's squad ready to attack: she asked the Germans permission to perform a cardio-tonic injection on the prisoners and begrudgingly they consented. While performing the injection she whispered into Spezia's ear that the partisan comrades were about to attack: Camilla moved away as do the doctor, the *Podesta'* and that is when the Germans were showered with bullets. Just then Balestrieri's unit intervened, the Germans flee and Spezia is taken to the Montoso while Romeo (Vito Privitera) was taken to a farm at the Montoso base where he died the day after. Since Spezia' leg needed to be put in plaster, Camilla went to the Saluzzo hospital, convinced Dr Roccavilla to follow her to barge to treat Spezia's leg. Two months later he had recovered. The Germans captured the hostages to vindicate the attack. The Command of the 4th Brigade sent a letter cautioning the Saluzzo German Command.

The letter sent to the German Command had its effect, all the hostages were freed and the Germans merely sent a letter to the *Podesta'* of Barge imposing a 500 hundred thousand liras fine (see document 4 of the appendix).

Following the instructions of the Garibaldi Brigade Command, warfare behind the lines of the enemy that had occupied most of the Alpine passes was intensified and we did our utmost to guarantee the flow of provisions and ammunitions, and entire troop trains were either blown up or blocked. Road blocks were positioned of the main thoroughfares. Bridges and rails were also destroyed. The Fascist garrisons in Luserna San Giovanni and Bibiana were kept under constant pressure and attacks. The *garibaldini* of the Pisacane Brigade attacked a patrol of Italian SSs at the cemetery killing an officer and wounding some of the soldiers, and on Sept 6th they captured an SS soldier. The day after, on the 7th they took two hundred in an SS column by surprise as they were in transit towards Torre Pellice: after having caused panic in the midst of the enemy they withdrew when the armoured vehicles.

Milan, the deputy Commander of the 4th Brigade kept the Bibiana Fascist garrison under control and the *garibaldini* came down from Montoso and attack the road blocks which were placed so as to protect the garrison. Precious help was offered by Sandro (Giovanni Negro) whose family lived in Bibbiana gathered information. He was the person who managed to capture a sergeant and lance corporal. Repeatedly Sandro and the others attacked the garrison killing or wounding soldiers, and many decided to desert and come with the partisans.

After having made the agreement with Milan, an entire clock switched sides carrying all its weapons: they joined the *garibaldi* partisans and turned out to be some of very good: one called Diavolo (*the Devil*) bravely fell in battle against the Germans. The siege against the garrison continued and contacts were made with its commander to surrender, but he doesn't as he knows some of his officers would disagree.

A few days later Sandro went down to a Bibiana with Diavolo, and they were sitting on a low wall when they saw the garrison commander enter the house of a neighbour leaving an armed soldier in front of the door. After a few minutes the soldier slung the rifle on his shoulders and left. It was easy for the two to enter the house and capture the officer: he was immediately taken up the mountains and passed to the Command. His name was lieutenant Fantini and he was quite prepared to cooperate: he said he would have surrendered the garrison but some of his officers, and specifically the medical lieutenant had disagreed. Now having heard the commander had been taken prisoner he had replaced him and had confined them all to their barracks.

In an attempt to get the garrison to surrender, Milan sent the message via Fantini, offering a message of surrender conditioned to his life being saved. A meeting with the medical Lieutenant was organised in the presence of the

parish priest Don Manzon. Milan tried to convince him to surrender and to free the soldiers who wanted to join the partisans while the others could have gone home giving their weapons to the partisans. If not the *garibaldini* would have attacked their garrison in the next few days. The officer was uncertain, he took time and said he wanted to consult his superiors. The meeting reached no conclusion and two days later while the partisans were preparing the attack, the entire Bibiana garrison was left empty and the soldiers were moved to Pinerolo.

In early September the general outlook of the war suggested that an end was in sight. Events were precipitating: the Soviet troops had occupied Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria on the Eastern front. On the Western front the British had occupied Brussels: there was an insurrection in Paris and now the city was free. On the Italian front, the Allies had entered Florence which had already been freed by the partisans. The Germans retreated and positioned themselves on the Gothic line.

This was the framework when the National Liberation Committee instructed the various Division and Brigade Commands to expect a national insurrection any time. Directives were issued to unify district commands and sectors of the various formations. Following negotiations between the Garibaldi formations and the *GL* to improve operational weight in the partisan occupied areas of the Pellice, Germanasca, Luserna Valleys, Montoso and the Po Valley. A united operative command (see document 5 of the Appendix) was established.

The *esprit de corps* or the *esprit de vallée* had to be dampened often generated tensions among partisans: we had to understand we were fighting for a common cause and that we had to create a united spirit of all the resistance in view of the final push. Cooperation and a mutual exchange of opinions, especially among brigade and Division Commanders. After the Fascist garrison left Bibiana the attention of the *Arditi garibaldini* battalion shifted its focus on the Stella garrison where there about twenty Italian SSs along with the Germans. They had been negotiating for quite a while with the SS commander to organise his escape. On September the 15th after a short exchange of fire with the Germans under *Arditi* attack, they managed to desert taking two machine guns and twenty rifles with them. Attacks continued against the routes of communication and supply towards the valley the Germans had occupied with large forces. Now they had partisans behind them and couldn't even count on the Fascist garrisons most of which had fallen or had been eliminated by the continuous partisan attacks.

In this situation they tried to find a compromise with some of the partisan commands in the Po valley where Montecristo's battalion was positioned in the upper part. Initially the German Command sent negotiators suggesting

free passage across the Traversette Pass in exchange for not engaging with the partisans. Clearly the *garibaldini* refused unless weapons were handed

over. Other attempts at organising truces took place elsewhere which indicated the enemy was experiencing a difficult time. While partisans intensified attacks to hinder the enemy in all ways, new units were brought in to attack the 1st Division.

First Montecristo's battalion was attacked in the Upper Po Valley and partisans were forced to retreat towards Montoso after a two day battle. The Luserna Valley also had to deal with a German column which was climbing from down below and was attacked at Pontevecchio by the Pisacane unit and was forced to retreat in a disorderly manner suffering major losses. Given the impossibility of passing through Pontevecchio, the Germans reverted to their old tactics of attacking us from behind: they climbed to the Rocca Berra to attack the Pian Pra' and Rora' bases. However by then the *garibaldini* had become experts in mountain guerrilla warfare and split up into ten-man units, preparing ambushes and then retreating. Part of the Brigade withdrew in safe hiding in the mountains and others went to Montoso.

On the 19th, 20th and 21st Montoso and Infernotto 4th brigade positions fell under German and Austrian attack. On the morning of the 19th a column consisting of 4 lorries and a truck with one hundred and fifty to two hundred men on board, armed with mortar, climbed the road to Montoso. Other less numerous enemy forces attacked the Infernotto Valley with the intention of surrounding the Montoso partisan units. First contact was about 9.30 am when the enemy column was allowed to pass the mined bridge.

While the first lorry was passing the mine was exploded, the bridge blew up and the lorry was a write off and there was an indefinite number of dead and wounded. As soon as they got over the shock they tried to continue the attack positioning mortar on the heights near and on the road and attempting to climb along the side paths. The *garibaldini* were well positioned on the heights and easily controlled the enemy's movements. In the mean time in the Infernotto Valley, Balestrieri's detachment intercepted the German column forcing them to retreat. On the road to Montoso the battle lasted till 5 pm when the enemy decided to retreat. The day ended on a good note for the *garibaldini* : only two of our men were wounded and lightly at that, while they had suffered several deaths and wounded as well as leaving us with an Austrian prisoner captured in an ambush.

On the day after, on September the 20th as expected the enemy prepared for a major attack. As they wanted to get their own back after the humiliation of the day before. In spite of the bad weather, with artillery units and mules and five hundred men tried to climb using side passages which led to Montoso, with the support of a couple of tanks backed by a few hundred soldiers took the main road to Montoso. In Bagnolo Piemonte they positioned a battery of 88 cannons and began shelling the mountain early in the morning. Our patrol units told us the enemy was attacking in force and was definitely trying to eliminate the 4th Garibaldi Brigade. We called a meeting with Commissar Carlo and Milan to

define our strategy during the enemy attack: were we to go into battle against such a strong enemy mean the end of the Brigade? By now we were used to hit-and-run guerrilla warfare so we decided to split the men into small units led by men who knew all the nooks and crannies of the mountains leaving small groups with machine guns behind the lines so as slow down the enemy's advance.

Towards midday when the first battles began a healthy fog clad the Montoso, the sort of pea soup which made us invisible at a few metres. We were all wading in fog but luckily knew some of the landmarks and were able to find our way. The Germans were in complete darkness and often we heard their voices close by, swearing against the fog. Taking advantage of the truce the fog had gifted us with, Milan and I prepared to disengage: the only safe way out of the brigade which had been tested in the past was to go down to the bottom of the valley.

We had been told that the left side of the Infernotto Valley in the Pian dei Lupi side where Sforzini's detachment was (led by Ivan) was clear. In the night the brigade was going to go down leaving nothing for the enemy. The fog began to lift in the late afternoon and by then we had retreated to cave (Quarries) where the motor vehicles were. We could not leave the vehicles we had kept and looked after in enemy hands. We decided to destroy them: we called the drivers and got them to switch the engines on and then to launch them down into the cave Ravine. At night in small groups all the men of the brigade went down to the plain led by the *Arditi* of Milan's battalion, and all found refuge in farmhouses. The conclusion of that day was the severe wounds of Paolo (from Balestrieri's detachment) captured during the defence of the Infernotto Valley. Oddly and possibly a sign of the times, the Austrian commander sent him back leaving him with farmers so they could treat him.

On September the 21st the enemy claimed all of the Montoso, found nothing at all and as usual burned down some of the partisan bases while I found hospitality with two elderly farmers with my trusted assistant Greco. By day I moved around to check where the various detachments were positioned and by night we slept in the house, in their poor cow shed with two cows and one calf. However before we went to sleep they always offered us a steaming freshly milked bowl of milk.

The German round up was coming to an end and the enemy troops were leaving Montoso when I heard the sad news of the arrest of the *garibaldini* Genova and Pipetto of the provisions office had been arrested by the Black brigades (*Brigate Nere*). They had gone to Riva di Pinerolo to get provisions to supply the detachments in the plains. Genova knew the area well and had been involved in provisions since December 1943 moving very carefully and cautiously but this time he had certainly fallen fowl of an ambush and once recognised he had been treated in the most cowardly and terrible ways. As soon as the two partisans were captured they were not tried and hung with a

butcher's hook, the one used to hang slaughtered animals. People told us about their agony and their bodies hanging from the gallows for fourteen hours. News travelled fast and all the brigade shuddered at the atrocity of it.

We all felt the torture and the pain in our flesh and thought that soon we would make them pay for their barbaric behaviour. A few days later we climbed to the base where we tried to settle down given that the enemy had abandoned our area. Milan remained in the lowlands with the *Arditi* brigade to continue with the warfare. The National Liberation Committee (CLN) had issued a number of directives which included the safeguard of power station and industrial plants and above all of the wheat crops which the farmers had stored in the silos in the partisan controlled areas.

On September the 16th the *Ather Capelli* Fascist Black Brigade was seen and the Brigade Command was informed that they had left the Cernaia Barracks in Turin and had reached Pancalieri with ten lorries to raid a large amount of wheat stored in a spinning mill. They had positioned three machine guns to defend their position and controlled access to the spinnery from all directions. A direct attack against the Fascist positions would have certainly failed disastrously. In agreement with Milan we decided that he would prepare an ambush with thirty of his men to catch them on their way back on the Pancalera Road. They arrived and left their vehicles at a distance, then Milan and his men positioned themselves at the two sides of the tree lined road. Unfortunately they failed to find a more sheltered place. Four volunteers started to mine the road and another two were sent to inform of the arrival of the column. At three thirty the lookouts warned of the arrival of the enemy: the mining of the road had not been completed so they were going to lose the surprise effect they had hoped for. Milan was worried as he saw the outcome as uncertain. The *garibaldini* were in position and were waiting for the arrival of the Fascist lorries. The noise of the vehicles was closer and closer and then the noise of the first, then the second and then the third lorry came closer. The machine guns welcomed them, hand grenades were thrown in the wheels of the lorries that were overturned and many of the enemies were where hit by the sacks of wheat, other fell under partisan fire. A group of Fascists managed to find refuge and started shooting against Milan with a machine gun. The *garibaldino* Lili Marlen suddenly told Milan to duck and a volley from the machine gun cut over their heads. Partisans Ferrero (Franco Diena) and Tormenta (Chiaffredo Barreri) were hit. Ferrero, was hit in the chest and fell dead, while Tormenta was badly hit in the stomach: he had one hand on his wound and kept shooting with the other.

The Fascist machine gun continued to shoot and Fascist reinforcements could arrive any moment from near-by Carignano, making the situation very difficult for the *garibaldini*. Milan decided to retreat while they still could: young Ferrero was left dead and Tormenta was wounded and could not walk. Other three partisans had been lightly wounded.

Milan told Martelli to take command of the group while he stayed with a couple of others to try and treat Tormenta. A doctor had to be sought, and a safe place to operate on him. A hospital would have been better but nearly all of them were controlled by the enemy. Tormenta was getting worse by the minute and a solution had to be found as soon as possible: messenger Lea was told to go and find a cart, load the wounded man and cover him with hay to pass the Fascist road blocks. Lea managed to take Tormenta to the Racconigi hospital and told the doctors he had been hit by Allied machine gun fire. The doctors examined him but said his conditions were so bad that they declined all responsibility and said he could not be saved. Before dying he told the doctors who he really was. Word of his real identity went round Racconigi and a silent crowd of thousands of people attended the funeral.

Surgical skills and facilities had become one of our main problems: we could have saved many of our wounded if we had had a surgeon able to operate on partisans as soon as they arrived at the base. As mentioned university students helped: they were attached to the units and could deal with light wounds. In the case of severe wounds and injuries we needed hospitals or the assistance of specialists whom we sometimes had to force to help.

In late September the national Liberation Committee (*CLN*) sent us a precious help in the guise of the two Colombo brothers (Rino and Guglielmo) who were skilled surgeons. They were sent to assist the Po Valley units. Our friends were going to set up a camp hospital in Pian del re, a relatively quiet zone not under enemy attack. However their plans vanished when they arrived in Barge: the Po valley had been occupied by the Germans. In agreement with the decision commander we decided to set up two infirmaries where the sick and wounded could be treated. One of the infirmaries was placed on Mount Bracco about half an hour's walk from Barge, and the other was in the lowlands in the area between San Martino di Barge, la Crocera di Barge, Revello and Saluzzo. The infirmary in the valley was not easy to find unless one was well acquainted with the many roads and paths in the countryside. It was considered safer than the other one which was closer to Barge. The partisans who had lighter wounds were kept in the latter. Medical student Fiandino was in charge of the Monte Bracco infirmary. The Colombo brothers who had gone underground with the name of Bianchi pretended to be surveyors, civil engineers or salesmen and hid their real identities. They were at the Morra Farm (*Cascina Morra*), one of the most trusted Cavour families. This enabled them to assist the most severe cases in the second infirmary. They were well equipped with surgical material and medication which they had brought from Turin and could deal with any situation. Every other day they went to the Mount Bracco infirmary. After twenty days they had treated and healed about fourteen injured.

The Germans began a round up in Barge spreading out: one of their aims was to find the Mount Bracco infirmary very probably after a tip-off. The doctors were warned and had cleared the facility and taking the wounded away but the Germans destroyed a lot of the material. The other infirmary was also in

danger although it was considered a safe place, but another tip off could have revealed its whereabouts and it was not easily defensible. A meeting was held with the Brigade and Division Commanders with the presence of the doctors: the infirmary was closed and the more severe cases were placed with 'safe families' in an area between Cavour, Vigone and Villafranca which was known as the 'hospital area'. Partisans were to avoid confrontations with the Germans in this area triangle so as to avoid round-ups. Doctor Fontana, the Villafranca Piemonte GP was a great help in identifying the families that would take people in. For the most severe cases, two hospitals were made available in the area by the management: the Vigone (Doctor Brun) and the Barge Hospital (Doctors Guerrini and Bollati). The Colombo brothers close their diaries remembering how none of the sick or wounded died under them, but recovered or were recovering although nobody knows if it was luck or skill. The fact that no one did die is proof of the worthiness of the system we used.

Sabotage continued in the first half of October 1944: the Romeo detachment blew up three cement pylons of the Cuneo-Saluzzo-Torino telephone line in spite of the German surveillance. A group of *Arditi* blew up a segment of the Cavallermaggiore-Moretta railway line, and another dealt with the railway bridge on the River Lemina on the Pinerolo-Airasca line.

In Vigone the *garibaldino* Leo forced the engine driver to start with the four wagons loaded with goods for the enemy in tow. The engine and the four freight wagons left to itself ran and fell into Lemina River where the bridge had been blown up the day before.

The Germans developed civilian watches to guarantee safety of the columns which were supplying the enemy units garrisoning the valley. The *Podesta'* of the lower mountain areas each had to send ten men to monitor roads: they were placed at a hundred metre intervals with a weekly rota. The men had to come with their own provisions and blankets. This meant we could no longer attack the enemy columns which were passing through the area to avoid damaging the civilians.

The Last Winter of the War

Winter was drawing in and the first snow had fallen on the tip of the mountains and fog enveloped the Montoso partisan bases. Plants were shedding their leaves, and the enemy could easily identify our positions. At times we were the targets of Fascist squad incursions. They were led by spies and tried to take our detachments by surprise. I had ordered most of the brigade to go down to the plain and had found accommodation in farm houses in the area between Villafranca Piemonte, Moretta and Pancalieri. The *Arditi* that were based in the quadrilateral area continued to carry out sabotage. In view of the Liberation we expecting soon, jointly with the Command Division we decided to advance towards Turin. I sent Naini the detachment commander in reconnaissance with a group of *garibaldini* around Castelnuovo Don Bosco to examine the possibility of positioning all the 4th brigade in the hills around Turin. In the meantime I went to Pian dei Lupi where Forzini's detachment commanded by Ivan was. They were in an area with no cover straddling between the Po and the Infernotto valleys. They could be taken by surprise at any time but Ivan and his men had always appeared courageous and with imitative during the battles in the Po Valley. The detachment was self-reliant so I decided it would be the first to be moved and sent it to the Ternavasso Woods close to Poirino. General Nannetti's (a *garibaldino* hero from the Spanish Civil War) new brigade was already operational in the area. They were mainly valley units under Commander Teja. I took advantage to spend a few words of encouragement and best wishes: the detachment was mostly made up of young Turinese and I told them that in approaching the city they would soon be involved in the fight for its liberation. I also added that they should pursue with the attitude and exploits which had been their hallmark at all times, keeping up their morale and the name of Sforzini who had been a martyr of freedom. We decided to move the brigade Command to the plains, in an area we thought would be safe. We placed the new command headquarters in the farmhouse known as the Three Sisters (*Le tre sorelle*) at the centre of a marshy area close to Villafranca Piemonte. The command consisted of myself, Commissar Carlo and Captain Arturo, chief of staff.

A few days went by when one morning at dawn I heard a panting voice shouting: 'Run Petralia, run! The Germans are here'. I woke up with a jolt, grabbed my parabellum and woke Carlo and Arturo. The *garibaldino* John was in the courtyard screaming his head off. We immediately got out, told John to come with us and ran through the marshes. On the way we asked John to why he had behaved like that. He said he had been captured by the Germans a few days ago and taken to the Saluzzo jail. There in exchange for his life he had promised to guide them to Commander Petralia and help them get him alive. Since it was a marshy area which could not be reached by car, John suggested they left their vehicles in Villafranca Piemonte and continued on foot. He also added that he would walk a few hundred metres ahead not to raise suspicion.

That is why he had started to shout. A few minutes later the Germans broke into the farm but did not find anyone. Another *garibaldino* Dobrien (Dovilio Laurenti) from the police detachment had a worse fate: following a tip off he was discovered by a group of Nazi Fascists in a dairy in Villafranca. The other comrade managed to escape but Dobrien was faced by a dire alternative: he could either surrender or die. He didn't surrender but shot badly wounded two enemy soldiers but was then shot dead by a machine gun spray.

The enemy was aware that most partisans were positioned in the plains and using paid informers they tried to take our bases by surprise, making it difficult for us to stay on. Commander Naini and his men returned from the exploratory mission: they were enthusiastic of the area around Castelnuovo Don Bosco which in many respects was ideal. There were rolling hills, and one could go through isolated country paths from an isolated farm to a hamlet. It was the ideal place to continue our struggle.

Our situation was more difficult and a decision had to be made as soon as possible: I convened the Brigade Command and invited all the battalion commanders: the decision to move the entire 4th Brigade had been made, we just had to decide when and how. We began studying the itinerary on the map as we had to cross an area with many roads and railways which with a strong enemy presence. Hundreds of men and their drays would not have escaped the enemy even if they travelled by night with due caution. After a long discussion we decided to move the detachments one by one. They were to leave at a couple of days' distance sending people out to explore and messengers to monitor and see whether they could circulate and were informed of enemy movements. The Division Command was informed of our decision and approved it. On October the 12th once all the preparation was finished the first detachment to move to the Province of Asti was the *Carle Costanzo Arditi* battalion whose main task was to explore the area and prepare the ground for the other detachments.

Thanks to their experience fighting in the plains these *garibaldini* were more surefooted and agile in their movements and were therefore able to find solutions for themselves and their comrades. Milan and I stayed in the valleys and plains to organise and check the other departures. On October the 15th following a tip off by spies, a Nazi unit tried to take Commander Milan by surprise in an ambush. He was with the 'Romeo' Detachment spies, when they were about to move. Thanks to the look outs' warning, Milan and all his men managed to avoid the ambush. That night Milan and the Romeo Detachment left and with a forced march by dawn they reached the others in the Lower Monferrato (the name given to the hills around Turin). Milan positioned the *Arditi* Battalion on the areas between Albugnano and Mondonio and prepared provisions for the others. In the meantime given the difficult situation of the German occupied Po Valley, Montecristo's 1st Battalion left some units to defend the Po Valley and then transferred all the other detachments went to the plains while waiting to join the detachments that had already transferred.

On November the 16th the following order was published:

Order 1 of the Liberation Committee for Northern Italy Volunteers for freedom

All the Cuneo province divisions

Due to operational and staff management needs the 4th Cuneo, the 103rd Nannetti and the 5th Pisacane Brigades will be merged to form the 1st garibaldi Piemonte Assault Division. The Command will be as follows: Commander Petralia, Commissar Ovidio Professor Alfredo Binzon deputy Commander Teja, deputy Commissar Carlo, Chief of Staff Arturo. Teja and Carlo also remain commanders of the Nannetti and 4th Cuneo brigades. Milan was promoted commander of the 4th Cuneo Brigade, Etna in charge of provisions. Barbato became head of the Cuneo groupings (1st and 11th Divisions), and Pietro was appointed political commissar.

While the 4th Brigade moved to the lower Monferrato to have more space and flexibility, part of the area of Montoso and the plains was taken up by the 105th Pisacane Brigade. They were the saboteurs from the Trento detachment, helped by the *garibaldini* commanded by Tiro who were continuing sabotage interrupting the railway lines and blowing up bridges. On October the 12th, 1944 an Allied B-24j Liberator KH154 of the 31st Saaf Squadron, 2nd Wing, 205th RAF that had taken off from the Celone Airport in Apulia to supply the partisans in the Bra area crashed against Mount Cornour close to Rora' due to bad weather and thick fog and possibly because a lack of altimeter. When they saw the flames and heard the big explosion, a group of the Venturelli detachment, led by local mountain dwellers reached the place and saw that the collision had been so bad it was still burning. There were eight crew members (one Australian, six British and one from the Dutch Indies) and only one was still alive. He was in a desperate situation and a stretcher was improvised there and then to take him to the closest base and our Doctor Siringa (Syringe) did what he could but in spite of everything the man died the day after. The bodies of the other airmen were recovered and they were all buried in the war cemetery with military honours celebrating a Roman Catholic, Waldensian and Jewish ceremony.

Unexpectedly on November the 13th 1944, radio '*Italia che combatte*' (Fighting Italy) read out the famous proclamation by General Alexander to the Italian patriots. The text announced that the Allies' summer campaign was finished and the winter campaign was about to begin which would have slowed the pace down. The general therefore called the resistance units to interrupt, all warfare, keep weapons and keep ready for new orders.

The message arrived while all our brigades were preparing for the coming winter. The morale of the *garibaldini* was very high and we were preparing for the final attack on Turin. News to interrupt all operations and hide weapons took us by surprise and it proved impossible to halt the enthusiasm which had

grown among partisans and stop warfare: it would have been the end. Experience had taught us conscience developed only through struggle: if we accepted General Alexander's message there could have been another 8th of September when the news of the armistice broadcast on radio *Gavetta* with the slogan 'all home' had led to the army melt down. If we gave the order to cease all activities it would have been like sending partisans home if they could and when new orders arrived it meant we could not inform them. Furthermore, once home many might not be willing to pick up arms again. Then there was the issue of Southern partisans who would have been left at a loose end and could have easily fallen prey to the enemy.

In the Lower Monferrato there were thousands of partisans in the GL, Autonomous and Matteotti formations: the joint unanimous decision was to

disregard General Alexander's Proclamation. And that we were increasing warfare not to let the enemy rest. The partisans from the 19th Garibaldi Brigade had arrived in the area they too having come down from the Lanzo Valley where they had gloriously fought the Nazi Fascists. Since they could not cope with any further enemy attacks they had chosen the Lower Monferrato to continue with the struggle. We established a strong and friendly -even brotherly I might say - cooperation which was to lead to them merging with the 1st Garibaldi Division in early January 1945.

In a matter of a few days all the 4th Brigade, including the battalion commanded by Montecristo moved and took their positions just past Castlenuovo Don Bosco between Albugnano and Mondonio straddling the Provincial road. The brigade command and a select group of partisans were housed in farmhouse near Mondonio where it was possible to monitor the area carefully. The other detachments were placed in isolated farmhouses or with farmers who had generously placed their poor stables. Unlike the farmers of the rich plains, these were poor farmers: there were one or two cows in the stables, wine being their main resource. The presence of our partisans meant they could access provisions which the farmers from the plains sent up.

Milan and his men laid down the phone cables which they had seized from the Germans in the Virle attack, and soon the commands were connected by phone. Our *garibaldini* thought they were dreaming at the sight of the rolling hills and the sloping roads that wined sweetly after they had lived on the mountains having spent so much time in the mountains far from built up areas and people.

The far reaching hilly area spread as far as you could see and it would have been difficult for the enemy to block the area off. Provisions were a growing need and Etna who was in charge left some of his men in the plains and they sent supplies for the brigade. In many cases part of the supplies were shared with the poorer people. The information system was also strengthened, groups of partisan police were ever present in all the municipalities and were in charge

of law and order but also of possible infiltrations of enemy spies. In great secret and under Chief of Staff Major Fausto (Lieutenant Geuna) a forged paper centre was established: soon we had travel documents of German or Fascist personal ID cards with regular stamps and paper was faithfully reproduced.

On November the 24th 1944 twenty days had gone by and the phone connected to Castlenuovo Don Bosco rang: our information system had seen an enemy column moving towards us. Our emergency plan was immediately enacted: two units from the *Arditi* battalion placed two machine guns at the sides of the bridge on the road from Castlenuovo as the Nazi fascist lorries would have transit over the bridge. Other units with automatic weapons and machine guns were positioned at the sides of the road. Our tactic was clear: in this new area it was easy to surprise the enemy, attack and then withdraw going from hill to hill. We could hear the noise of the approaching vehicles: three lorries and a long distance coach packed with soldiers without any security measures in place. They may not have been aware the 4th Garibaldi Brigade had occupied the area.

Orders were clear: shoot when the entire column was within range. Suddenly the first lorry appeared round the corner, and soon after the coach and the other two lorries. At that point all fire was let loose on the enemy and all the partisans started shooting. There was a hellish noise and the enemy column was blocked, while the Fascist sought refuge many had been hit to death or wounded. Once they overcame the surprise they positioned a few machine guns and started shooting all over. Our task was over: enemy forces exceed ours in terms of men and weapons. If we had engaged in battle we would have lost men and weapons too. A few units were left behind and we began to retreat tailoring our tactics to the lay of land. The round up lasted three hours. On the 26th and 27th we did not have any casualties and furthermore on the 27th, Diavolo (Devil), the head of the unit, with the help of the *garibaldino* Otello managed to capture two members of the black brigades who were exchanged for fifteen civilian hostages rounded up by the Fascists. After the round we resumed our attacks: on November the 30th the *garibaldini* of the detachment under Ivan attacked the Caramagna Fascist barracks. Ten members of the Black Brigades were captured and locked in a prison. The spoils included five machine guns, ten rifles quite a substantial amount of ammunition and several clothing items. On December the 2nd the *Arditi* Battalion entered in action and captured a German officer and his interpreter, as well as seizing two machine guns and two guns. Later on the prisoners were to be exchanged with civilian hostages. On December the 10th, close to Villafranca d'Asti a troops train carrying electrical material for Germany was blown up near Villafranca d'Asti. When the train was attacked the blast certainly caused several dozen casualties and wounded but it was not possible to know exactly how many. While the *garibaldini* operating in the hilly area could do so with a degree of ease, the situation was quite different for the ones we had left to man the mountains: snow had fallen and a very cold winter was

on its way. The Fascists had changed tactics and no longer rounded up but carried out surprise attacks with squads of men dressed up as farmers wearing long tabards hiding weapons, leaving their garrisons in Luserna, Bricherasio, Moretta and wandering round towns and villages often accompanied by their informers. They took our partisans by surprise and it was difficult time for us. At dawn on December the 12th at the Bric delle Scialle, above Bagnolo Piemonte they surrounded the farm barn where there was our supply centre with three partisans who were captured and killed. A farmer who was close by was forced to witness the shooting: Angelo Savoldi, Francesco Graziadei and Giuseppe Bianco fell. The same happened to Antonio Fenoglio, the ninety year old owner. On December the 17th the Fascist reached Gabbiola (near Barge), captured and shot the two *garibaldini* Giovanni Amparola and Ignazio Re setting some houses on fire.

Also in the Luserna Valley there were surprise incursions. Partisan Gavetta (Michele Brunetti) was found and shot in the back. I was especially fond of the young partisan who was one of the first volunteers to arrive at the first detachment at the Bertona and had taken part in the Prabina battle, at the fight at Pontevecchio and in the Val Luserna round up. He had followed me in my move to France and at all times his political preparation, his generosity and reserve had always been useful and his death left a great void in me and in his comrades. The following were captured and shot: ladre (Andrea Genta), Italo (Italo Botto), Moro (Augusto Bianchi).

The enemy also carried out surprise our bases in the hill areas always using paid informers with a small number of men. On December the 21st a group of the Alessandria Black Brigades led by two officers (a provincial party secretary and a Black Brigade Colonel) of the Fascist Italian Social Republic following information they had received pounced on the Sforzini detachment and captured ten *garibaldini*. On the way back at the Gallareto fork they were luckily intercepted by a unit of the 19th Brigade and all ten of the Sforzini detachment were freed. On December the 26th close to Buttigliera two *garibaldini* were found by two car loads of Fascists and there was an exchange of fire: one was wounded and taken prisoner, while the other managed to escape and went to seek help in Marat's detachment that immediately sprung into action. Marat was killed and Siviglia was fatally wounded in his head and it was listed as the first item on the agenda. Commander Marat, a brave man, and educator and died two days later. On the 27th we held Marat's funeral and it was listed as the first item of the Garibaldi Division's agenda with the following motivation:

Commander Marat, a brave and educationalist, an example of virtue and of love for his homeland. He was one of the first to answer the call of his betrayed and vilified homeland he was always the first in every battle. He fell in battle facing the hated enemy in the attempt to free a garibaldino from the claws of the enemy. The 1st Garibaldi Division mentions Commander Marat in its agenda, he who fell for the common cause and sets him as an example so that he may

be an example and an encouragement for all in their fight against the Nazi Fascists.

The situation in the Luserna Valley had become quite difficult and there was ill ease among the partisans. Romanino who had managed to brilliantly reorganize the 105th Pisacane Garibaldi Brigade no longer enjoyed the prestige and the authority since his relationship with the Cocco had deteriorated, In view of my experience and of the prestige I enjoyed among the partisans of the 105th Brigade and the experience accrued in the Valley, Barbato who was concerned asked me to go to the Luserna Valley to try and restore harmony which was necessary to continue the struggle.

I asked Fausto, our Chief of Staff to prepare fake papers for me: an identity card in the name of Pietro Ferrero, regularly stamped Todt papers and other German papers which accounted for my journey to the Pellice Valley. I was dressed in civilian clothes, with a new coat, freshly shaven and with a haircut. On the morning of the chief of staff prepared the horse drawn trap and I left with Commissar Ovidio, Alfredo Binzoni and we left for the Luserna valley from Castelnuovo Don Bosco.

We chose a safer itinerary following secondary routes to avoid bumping into enemy patrols. However it had snowed heavily and the wheels of the trap and the horse moved with difficulty slowing us down. As we moved towards the mountains it started to snow more heavily and there was more than 3 feet on the ground. What a difference compared to two months' previously when we had come down from the mountains and had followed the same routes with all the men of the brigade to move to the Asti Province. Then the landscape had been autumnal, the countryside was still covered in maize husks and we had been able to march with a clear and strong pace and there had been no hitches. Now the landscape had changed and had we had to move there would have been major problems. The trap barely moved forward in between the snow heaps, and by the time we reached Campiglione Fenile we were tired and cold. Ovidio's in laws, the Dagotto family lived there (they had a restaurant-hotel business). It was getting dark and we agreed to stop there and continue our journey the following morning. The Dagottos proved enthusiastic of our decision and prepared two bathtubs full of water and after many months we were able to wash and clean. It was a one off and extraordinary, an event not to be repeated in the course of the partisan war. For dinner they prepared a very good meal which we ate in the company of some *GL* partisans. The Campiglione Fenile area was under the control of the Pellice Valley partisans who often stopped at the Dagotto's restaurant to gather provisions or rest. It was considered a safe place: their son Lino had played an active part in the partisan formations and had died in combat. It was not as safe at night as the Fascist and Nazis could arrived by surprise so we decided I would sleep somewhere else outside the hotel, in a room the Dagotto's owned near their

butcher shop. Ovidio and the *GL* partisans would sleep at the hotel and in the event of danger they could run to known hiding places.

Late at night Ovidio and mother Dragotto took me to the place I was to spend the night in. I had never been to Campiglione Fenile, the roads were dark, the sky was clear and full of shining stars, the moon was mirrored in the shiny snow and lit the village in a light shade. I had never walked those streets and felt slightly bewildered although Ovidio being there reassured me.

Once I got to my hiding place mother Dagotto prepared the bed with snow white sheets, and we said goodbye. Ovidio must have seen unease in my eyes and promised they would come and warn me in the case of danger. We said goodbye and I was getting ready to go to bed: I was tired, it had been a long day and the welcoming bed put me sound asleep.

A dawn the next day I was awakened by suspicious noises which came from the street, I got up and walked to the door where someone started knocking and shouting 'Petralia, Petralia there Germans and the Fascists are here'. I was worried, got dressed and examined the situation I was in: Ovidio must have been blocked and sent a friend to warn me. I put my coat on, took the gun hiding it in my pocket so that I could grab it in case of need. I went out onto the street where it was very cold, it was very foggy in the early morning light and people were milling round like shadows. I cautiously approached an elderly man who looked cold in a cloak and I asked him what was happening. He was very frightened and told me the Germans had surrounded the village while the Fascists entered all the houses rounding up men and goods. I asked him where I could seek refuge and he answered: 'In the church, go to the church!'

I didn't know the village and I blindly followed him: when we got to the church I was surprised that the church was full of people and there was a Gnr (*Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana* , the National Republic Guard), with a rifle and I realised the Fascists were gathering everyone in church to then search them thoroughly. I had got myself in a difficult situation to say the least and was wearing a gun but also had German papers: I was not going to escape the search so I had to get rid of my gun and any compromising document. I approached a wooden bench and keeled as if I were praying, then got rid of the gun and other documents under the pew and placed the German documents in my wallet. I felt a little better and tried to blend with the people who were crowding in. Everyone was afraid and I realised they had formed a small group, were whispering and were looking at me out of the corner of their eyes. I got it into my head that someone had recognised me, possibly they had seen me at the restaurant the night before. They were getting more frightened as time went by. The fog was lifting and it was getting later in the day, soon the little fascist bosses would arrive with the notorious Captain Novena to check on us. I wouldn't have had a chance, my end was in sight and I had to leave the church as soon as possible. I approached a man whom I felt I recognised and he told me he was a friend of the Dagottos': I had seen him the night before at the

restaurant and he was the one who had knocked on the door to warn me about the round up: I asked him to point me to a side entrance so I could leave the church. He was very worried, spoke to the man next to him and they decided the only way out was through the vestry. They pointed me to the access and cautiously without catching anyone's eye I walked to the small door and found myself in front of a young priest who had been following the events with great fear. I asked him if he could find me a place to hide but he raised his arms and said he didn't want to be involved. Since he kept raising his voice so I begged him to calm down and to point me to an exit. He walked me to a door which gave onto a side street at the end of the village.

I left in a hurry, the road was empty it was by now full daylight and a weak sun was starting to warm the air up. I found a door which led to the open countryside and started walking in high snow along a country lane leading to a farm. I was beginning to feel a bit better and thought I might make it when suddenly a machine gun volley of shots started showering me and one hit me in my right thigh. I felt it burning but continued to run. The *Littorio* (Italian Social Republic's Republican National Army) were hitting an easy target as I was in the middle of the snow without any shelter and then I was shot in my left arm and grazed my chest. I fell in a snow filled ditch and lost consciousness while I was losing blood. As they could no longer see me and fearing my reaction, the *Littorio* men approaching throwing hand grenades.

The noise of the grenades woke me from my state of drowsiness and I saw a dozen soldiers dressed with German uniforms around me. One said: 'He's dying, let's finish him'. I heard the machine gun click into position as the approached to finish me off when suddenly a voice said: 'Halt, papers': it was the head of the patrol speaking. Seeing I was well dressed and looked reassuring he ordered the soldiers to check my papers. They took my wallet out of my inside pocket and gave it to their commander. The officer was very surprised seeing my *Arbeitbattaillion* papers and seeing all the German stamps burst out: 'We have shot and wounded one of ours. We must take him to the hospital as soon as possible'. The prepared a makeshift stretcher and took me to the village. I woke up in the baker's house lying on a large table. I was surrounded by several *littorio* soldiers and understood they were speaking about me: a doctor was bandaging my head and trying to stem the blood, one wanted to know more and understand why I was in Campiglione. I didn't know and could not answer so I think I muttered something: a mistake so I pretended not to be able to speak and babbled along. Since they could not get an answer they said they would question me later and left a guard with me lying on the table. After a while Captain Novena came to know what had happened. He approached, gave me a look and given my very poor state ordered me to be taken to the *Littorio's* House. They left to continue the round up, a few minutes passed and I heard shooting: I was later to hear that they had shot a young man In the square, an eighteen year old *GL* partisan found with a gun in his pocket. Towards the evening and once they had raided all the houses, taking food, sewing machines, radios and other items, loaded it all on a lorry , they picked

me up from the baker's table and rested me on the bottom the lorry and left for Pinerolo. The raid was over and a few people came to nosy around and watch the macabre departure. Someone must have seen and referred to the partisan command.

We got to Pinerolo in the late evening and it was dark and I was alone with the driver, everyone had left and he didn't know what to do with me. He too wanted to get back to the barracks for dinner so after some hesitation he decided to phone the Maria Immacolata Hospital telling them there was an injured man at the *Casa Littoria* and would they please come and pick him up as soon as possible, a few minutes later a stretcher arrived on a hand pushed three wheeler. They placed me on it and soon after I was in the hospital. I was starting to feel more hopeful, no one had identified me yet and the German documents in my pockets made me hope I was going to make it. They gave me a bed in a room of fifty wounded and injured men and a nurse who was also a religious sister came to see me and seeing the state I was in gave me a glass of cognac and an injection telling me to keep my spirits up. She told me to rest and said the doctor would be coming the following morning. While thinking how I was going to answer the questions the doctor would ask me and how I would deal with the Fascists questioning me, I fell asleep placing my faith in my forged papers. When Milan heard of my capture he immediately sent some units on a mission to capture German prisoners and use them in an exchange for me. The unit led by Italo (Pierino Fontana) went near Cambiano and managed to capture two Germans on the Poirino-Torino train. During the struggle with the enemy Italo was mortally wounded: he sacrificed himself for his commander.

The nurse came the next morning with a doctor, they examined me and realised my left arm had been broken (the forearm had) and I had a light chest wound and a deeper one on my right thigh with a loss of flesh. The bone had not been touched and I could stand. They medicated my thigh; they should have put my arm in plaster but then I couldn't have moved it (I am sure they had understood what my situation was). Once they had bandaged it they put two splints in and bandaged it so as to keep the forearm stiff in a sling round my neck. They gave me a pain killer, said goodbye and wished me good luck: I certainly thought I needed it.

The day went by without too much movement or fuss in the ward as it was a holiday and I think I fell asleep. The New Year was approaching and most of the staff stayed home. The Fascists seemed to have forgotten me. Every now and again the sister came to oversee the situation. The day after in the late morning I had a pleasant surprise as two very nice girls, Nicoletta and Sara came to see me: they had come to the hospital as my girl-friend and as a relative. The play worked and while we were greeting each other warmly they informed me they were messengers *staffette* sent by the partisan command and personally from Barbato to organise my escape from the hospital. They whispered to me that the same evening or the day after I would be taken to a villa belonging to a

gentleman in Pinerolo. Sara (Maria Ocleppo) and Nicoletta (Carosso) were two good messengers and I was become more confident that with the help of the command soon my escape would be organised.

Nothing happened that day nor the day after, no one contacted me and clearly something hadn't worked. By now I was worried and had noticed that a boy in front of me was staring : I didn't understand why when at a certain point he got up and approaching cautiously to my bed he said: 'You are Petralia, don't be afraid' and added he could help me. I furiously denied and said I had no idea who Petralia was, that my name was Ferrero Pietro and I was part of the Todt working for the organisation and that I had accidentally wounded and had been brought there by the Germans. He looked at me in disbelief but kept looking at me: I also had the feeling the Fascists could come for an inspection from one minute to the next and had no news from my comrades.

Suddenly the young man got up looking more decisive and said that his name was Bertotto that he was from Bibiana, and that he was the brother of Bertotto the partisan who had worked as a typist in my command. He was in hospital because of an appendicitis, and with that he pulled up his shirt and showed me the scar. I was starting to calm down: his story was convincing and I understood he could be of use to me, I confirmed my real identity at which point his face lit up and he told me to calm down because the nun was called Felicita and she was a friend of the partisans. He would immediately get in touch with the partisan command to organise my escape from the hospital. Sudden help had arrived and I was starting to hope.

To my great pleasure, Sister Felicita came and told me Bertotto had informed her of my situation and that she would do everything she could to save me. She said to beware with the priest, not to tell him anything because he was not reliable. Everything was quiet in the hospital and the Fascists were nowhere to be seen, Novena must have forgotten his prisoner and I merely noticed Bertotto and Sister Felicita's coming and goings. On New Year's Eve Bertotto came beaming and reassured all was ready and that I would soon leave the hospital. He added Barbato himself had overseen the plan and that later that night a cart or trap would pick me up and taken me away.

At a given signal I was to get up pretend to need the bathroom. Sister Felicita's infirmary was opposite the toilets and she was going to wait there and help me get dressed. They were hours of anxiety, I kept looking right and left fearing some Fascist patrol would upset our plans.

Finally the agreed signal arrived: and with a great effort I got up. A nurse saw me and said he would accompany to the toilets, but I insisted I could manage and went towards the toilet. There I found the Sister who was waiting for me and took me under her arm and walked me to the infirmary. She told me she had clothes of Bertotto's which were more or less my size as mine were covered in blood and useless. She helped me get dressed and told me that I was

nearly there, that now I just had to manage to get to the back door where my comrades were waiting for me. She added she would follow me up close and help me if need be. With great difficulty I started walking along the corridor which was to take me to safety: it was long I felt tired and I was afraid I wouldn't make it but with my guardian angel behind me I found the strength to go on. At the bottom there were a few steps and I started to wobble. Sister Felicita who was behind me took my arm and then said; ' Courage, it's done' and helped me walk down the steps, opened the door and a we were met by cold air, the air of freedom.

Outside the door there was our messenger, Sara and a gig driven by partisan Vulcano. They helped me get up, it was cold so we wrapped ourselves in blankets and left for Cavour. Entering Pinerolo my comrades had noticed there was a road block which could be dangerous and we couldn't stop. It was night and it was New Year's Eve and the Germans were also celebrating. We went to the road block singing, pretending to be drunk. Someone leaned out of the sentry room shouting: 'Halt', but we answered wishing them happy New Year in German. We shouted in jest and since they too didn't want to interrupt their celebrations they waved us through. Vulcano gave the horse a good touch of the whip and a shout and the horse leapt forward. By now it was well into the night and the countryside was covered in a thick layer of snow. The moon lit everything up and the gig was running towards freedom. Sara told me we were going to Villafranca Piemonte to the Castle of the Earl of Marceru' where Barbato had temporarily moved his command.

Vulcano kept spurring the horse on: he was a very good driver and in no time we reached the castle which was in an isolated spot in the country and was seen as safe. Barbato was very worried and when he saw us he came towards me and embraced me like a father would a son. He was very emotional and asked me how I was, and then welcomed Sara and Volcano congratulating them for their exploit and seen the condition I was in he started to be a little concerned. Also the Marceau' family who had welcomed me with enthusiasm started worrying and my difficulty in moving made it difficult for them to find me a safe place in the castle. Given my state of health there was a short meeting and on Barbato's advice they decided I should be moved elsewhere where my wounds could be treated. They decided to take me to the Cantogno Sanctuary which was run by our friend Don Stobbia, This is where Commander Nanni (Giovanni Latilla) that we had managed to weasel out of the Saluzzo Hospital after a brilliant and courageous operation in which he was saved. Nanni had been wounded in the stomach by a machine gun volley on November the 7th 1943 during the attack on the Fascist barracks of Crissolo. Don Stobbia and his sister had nursed him back to health with great affection and he was currently leading the *garibaldini* in the Langhe district.

I welcomed this decision as I thought I would be safer in Cantogno. The ladies prepared and broth with pasta and while I finished my frugal meal the Earl was ordering his men to prepare the horse drawn landau which was an old closed

carriage that would keep the cold out. I was ready for the new journey. In the meanwhile Barbato had informed Don Stobbia and the Colombo brothers (the doctors in charge of our health organisation) of my arrival at the Cantogno Sanctuary. In the night, the landau left for the Sanctuary escorted by the brave and courageous Moretta. It had become colder and I was trembling in spite of the blankets. Due to the snow build up we moved slowly and every so often we had to stop and Moretta had to clear the way for us to go on. We arrived late at night and Don Stobbia and the Colombo brothers awaited anxiously for us. Don Stobbia's sister had placed a brazier full of embers at the centre of the room and a hot water bottle in the bed. They pulled me out of the carriage and placed me on the bed so that professor Rino Colombo, a skilled surgeon started to examine me. My right thigh had a deep wound with loss of flesh but the bone had not been touched and was not a cause of concern. He dressed it again. He took the bandages off my arm and saw the humerus (my shoulder) had been broken by the bullets. He was concerned about infections and it could develop gangrene but luckily I was not running a temperature. He decided to wait and see the night through: decisions would be made in the morning. Doctor Mario Balcet, the Pinerolo pharmacist was also there and he spent the night at my bedside. He was also given a tourniquet and told to check my arm: it swelled he had to tie it above the fracture and in this case my arm would have to be amputated. If it didn't, then the arm would have to go in a cast but no amputation was needed.

It was a long and fearful night where fear and hope took turns and we kept looking at my arm to see if it was swelling or not. Balcet held the tourniquet in his hand and kept touching my forehead to see if I was running a temperature. Time had slowed down and Don Stobbia would occasionally drop in with a hot beverage and then go back to sleep. Balcet spoke to me about the partisan struggle of the difficulties in organising the health service as it wasn't easy to cycle round the countryside to the isolated farmhouses where sick and wounded partisans were as well as the dangers of meeting patrols on the way.

It was an opportunity for me to discover the goodness and sweetness of a man who was not a warrior but a man full of humanity, with ideals of freedom that had led him to opt for the struggle against the Nazi Fascists. My gaze often fell on the tourniquet which was becoming more of an obsession as time went by, as if I the safety of my arm depended on that piece of rubber. Balcet realized my state of mind and reassured me with his quiet and unflappable reassured me and made me hope.

At last it was dawn and the morning light lit the room up, Don Stobbia's sister brought a hot coffee. We once again examined my arm with Balcet: it had not swollen, I was not running a temperature so we waited for the doctors full of hope. Dr Rino Colombo examined me carefully and decided to put me in a complete 'chest and arm' plaster. A large amount of plaster was mixed in a bowl. container, they covered me in cotton wool, and started to layer the plaster.

The covered my chest and arm and soon I found myself encased in armour and with my left arm raised. Cold and damp penetrated my bones. Don Stobbia and his sister and Dr Balcet did all they could to dry the plaster, stoves were lit, hot cloth was applied around my chest, Don Stobbia's sister prepared hot drinks for me. For a few days I suffered very much although the warmth of those who were surrounding me helped me overcome it all. Little by little the plaster dried and I was starting to feel better. Don Stobbia's sister's cooking and the priest's very good cellar were starting to warm me up. Several days went by and everything was going smoothly, the Colombo brothers came to visit me regularly and so did Dr Fontana, the former Villafranca Piemonte GP, now a member of the 4th Garibaldi Brigade. He told me the Fascists had learnt about my escape from the hospital a few days after it had happened. Novena couldn't come to terms with it: he had had a prize in his hands and he had let it slip. Since he knew I was wounded he had unleashed his informers to gather news of me.

Dr Fontana told me that following Commander Barbato's pressure and an agreement with Commanders Mario (Mario Foieri), Trumlin Bartolomeo Paschero), Lario (Bruno Mulas) and Max (Massimo Rendina), the 19th Garibaldi Eusebio Giambone Brigade was officially incorporated in the 1st Garibaldi Piemonte Division under Barbato. The Command of the 1st Division was as follows: interim Commander Zama, Political Commissar Ovidio, Deputy Commander Mario, Deputy Political Commissar Lario, Chief of Staff Max (Mario and Lario continued to act as Commander and Commissar respectively). In the meantime our Command was informed that the Fascists had suspicions on the Cantogno Sanctuary. Barbato immediately ordered my transfer to another safe house. Without hesitation Dr Fontana and the Professors Colombo opted for Luigetta Bollati's Notary house which was not a suspect. She had been one of the first people in In Villafranca Piemonte to answer the call of the Resistance right from the beginning and had joined the partisan units. The house had been the starting point for the first supplies to the partisans, a flat cart (tamagnone) full of beans, flour and potatoes. Luigetta Bollati knew the anti-Fascist feelings of the members of her community and when Dr Fontana knocked on her door asking her to shelter a wounded partisan she immediately put herself at their disposal. As a former Red Cross nurse she would have personally taken care of him.

On the night between the 8th and the 9th of January 1945, with the fresh plaster and after a terrible journey in a gig up the frozen mule paths in the middle of the snow clad countryside and I got to the warm and welcoming house without any strength left. She opened the door personally and I could read pity and surprise in her eyes. A few days later she told me that at first she feared they had brought her a dying partisan. Her care, attention and the sense of security she was able to infuse a sick man in my condition gave me the strength to cope with the pain and lead me back to health. She never lost hope in the most difficult moments: a few days had gone by and the plaster was starting to dry and one night I started having the most atrocious pains. I didn't know what to

do as the pain got worse and worse. She was sleeping in the next room and heard my cries. She thoughtfully came and gave me a pain killer but the pain wouldn't go away. She was a good nurse and understood that the plaster had shrunk while drying and was compressing the wound. She called Dr Colombo and in the meantime gave me a morphine injection to calm the pain down.

The Colombo brothers came early the next morning, examined me and immediately decided to cut the plaster. I immediately felt better, the pain had gone away but the bone had not knitted yet and the arm had to be under traction. With good Agnes's help they prepared the equipment and forced me to stay put on the bed with my left arm under weights. I stayed immobile for about ten days, in the same position. Luigetta's assistance was especially precious as she fed me, she cleaned me and assisted me morally, working day and night and never leaving me out of her sight.

The units of the 1st Division controlled a wide area which went from the hills of the Monferrato to the Po Valley covering a large portion of the plains and the Command had to have men in charge of inspections and checking them out. Commissar Carlo and Chief of Staff Arturo had been inspecting the detachments in the plains. On February the 5th 1945 Silvio (Ennio Carando, Professor of philosophy in La Spezia), Arturo's brother, who had been appointed civilian delegate was going to meet his counterpart for the Langhe.

The meeting was being held at the Define Inn in Villafranca Piemonte: they had been walking in the snow, it was very cold, they were tired and once they entered the Inn they found a table and sat on the benches. The landlady looked at them worriedly as she guessed who they were from their appearance. Arturo asked if there was anything to eat as they were in a hurry. The landlady served them a hot vegetable soup and a piece of boiled meat. Carlo said they had to be quick because the Langhe delegate was late: more than half an hour had gone by it was time to get out and go because it would be dangerous to stay on. They got up and were about to go out when they heard voices behind the door and suddenly the door burst open and four Fascists dressed in black with the skull of death on their berets entered carrying a machine gun. Novena ordered them to sit while shouting: 'I know who you are and now you have to tell us everything about your organisation and where your comrades are'. Clearly someone had spoken because the Fascists had come straight to us. Out men did not speak: they were beaten, kicked, tortured and mangled but they did not speak. They were dragged out of the Inn and pushed with the butt of their guns, taken to the market square to be shot. The parish priest (Domenico Grosso) interceded pleading for their lives but managed only to save one, young Marco who was seventeen. The others, Leo Lanfranco and the two brothers, Ennio and Arturo Carando were killed with no pity.

The day of the round up the Fascists led by the notorious Novena, also went to Luigetta's notary office but she managed to keep them on the ground floor and they didn't walk up to the upstairs where I was hidden. When she heard they

were going to shoot my comrades, she sat next to my bed and held my hand to give me courage. At the end of February the Command and the doctors decided to move me to the Cavour area in the la Morra Farm which belonged to the Rivoira family. The Colombo brothers also slept there and they would be able to assist me better.

That day I left my new family very regretfully: that is how close we had become. Luigetta had been a mother, a nurse, and an assistant while I had been there. The elderly grandmother who` was so sweet and delicate and kept an eye on the street while she crocheted, and faithful Agnese went to the green garden every day to pick the red salad under the snow and looked after me when Luigetta was away. When I had arrived to the house I was in very bad conditions, full of anxiety and fear, held under my armpits up by the Colombo brothers and Fontana and I was leaving on my own legs, walking on my own legs feeling calm and ready to resume my place among my *garibaldini* and continue the partisan struggle. Dr Fontana arrived in the afternoon to take me to my new destination. I was able to dress myself even with my arm in the sling: Luigetta looked please at herself as she saw nearly managing on my own and I said goodbye to all the family exchanging warm greetings and leaving from the back door. I was breathing the fresh air and was born again to a new life. Crossing the avenue behind the green garden I noticed the snow was starting to melt and salad heads were sprouting a few salad tufts and Agnese showed me where she would pick the red salad for me. A gig was waiting for me at the door and with Dr Fontana we left for Cavour. The roads no longer had snow on them and the ice had melted altogether. The gig could trot along although the countryside was still covered in snow it was not as thick. The air was warming up and tickled my face as we were going along: I was happy. The area was under partisan control and our patrols checked the roads so the journey went smoothly.

When we got to the farm the Colombo brothers were waiting for me at the entrance: we embraced and they took me into the house and introduced me to the Rivoira family. I immediately realised I had arrived in a very special house, not the usual farm like the ones where I had stayed during the time we spent in the plains: it was a house of the local gentry with all the comforts and located in the midst of a wonderful countryside with an extraordinary family: Francesco and Gioacchino, two bachelor brothers who worked as surveyors, three maiden sisters: Rina, Maria and Isabella. They lived in great harmony; the two surveyor brothers were also expert farmers and ran the farm, theirs being considered one of the best in the area. The three sisters were no longer young and shared the chores: one mainly cooked, another saw to the cleaning and the third, Rina, did the accounts so they completed each other.

My arrival was seen as natural I was a normal guest as were the two doctors who had arrived under false name a while before: the Bianchi brothers there to carry out a census of the countryside. I was introduced as a friend of theirs. Soon everything was stated clearly: the entire family was antifascist, they had

made their house available to the partisan command that had used it as the health centre for the area and our best doctors were housed there. The Colombo doctors left everyday on their bikes and went round the various farms seeing to the sick and wounded partisans and came back at night to the Rivoira's warm, calm and welcoming house. They gave me room on the upper floor, and left a long nightshirt on the very white sheets that had been turned back. It felt like a dream.

They also showed me that close by in the corridor there was a cupboard in the wall which I could use as a hiding place in case of danger. A very good meal was served and I tasted the famous Rivoira sister's *zabaglione* and then went to sleep as I felt tired after having bid my new friends goodbye.

The Fascists had appointed Novena *Podesta'* of Cavour because he lived in Pinerolo. He came to Cavour a couple of times a week escorted by his Fascists. He needed a skilled deputy to manage and administer the town. After he had consulted with the most distinguished people he came up with Francesco's name, one of the Rivoira brothers known for his management skills and his moral rectitude.

Novena summoned him to inform him he had been appointed deputy *Podesta'*. He was amazed as he thought he had been summoned for other reasons, but thanked for the appointment which he had been chosen for and said he would speak about it at home so that he could give an answer. He immediately contacted the partisan Command and spoke about it. The situation was difficult: in fact if he had refused the Fascists might have suspected something and might have controlled his house. So we jointly agreed he should accept the appointment and Surveyor Francesco Rivoira became the deputy *Podesta'* of Cavour. Days rolled by in the Rivoira house and I was starting to enjoy the unexpected comforts I was being offered: a well-supplied library, a beautiful conservatory from which I could admire the countryside and watch the snow melt as the first grass tufts appeared.

They had a radio and I could listen to Radio London and to Orlando's recognizable voice who kept us up to date on the war, the Allies' successes and the approaching Northern front; he also read out the messages with the agreed signals for the launches to the partisans. I was on the mend and my shoulder was knitting. However the volley had damaged the median nerve and I had lost feeling in my thumb, index and middle finger. My arm was exceedingly stiff and the doctors gave me injections to build y strength up and massaged my arm and hand. The good cooking was helping me recover and I was starting to think about returning to the Asti area and resuming command of my partisans. I mentioned this to the doctors and the Rivoiras who said I had to wait till my arm was completely healed and pointed out the dangers of my returning in those conditions. I discussed with my doctors who were well acquainted with what was happening in our *garibaldini* units: I was told that in the Luserna Valley Captain Di Nanni was in command of the 105th Pisacane Brigade and that

Mario was Commissar. Romanino and Pippo had been transferred: Romanino was at the general Command under Barbato, and Pippo had been appointed Commissar of the 4th Brigade alongside Commander Milan. In the Lower Monferrato Commander Barbato was in full activity after the incorporation of the glorious 19th Brigade in the 1st Garibaldi Division and his prestige in the area was even greater. He was loved and respected by all the *garibaldini* as well as by the partisans of the other formations. When the Piedmontese Regional Military Command (Comando militare regionale piemontese -Cmrp) decided to bring the partisan formations under one command unanimously choosing Barbato as the Commander.

On February the 14th, 1945, the 8th area was established in the Lower Monferrato with Barbato as a commander, Marelli as a Commissar (Luigi Masciardi of the *GL* formations). The Commissars of the unified command were Carletto (Carlo Mussa Ivaldi) and Renè (Renato Corrado). Commander Renato was appointed as area inspector for the Matteotti and Autonomous with the specific task of controlling, distributing and assigning weapons. Partisan activities had increased and the Nazi fascist answered with a harsh round up and search from the 3rd to the 11th of March. The partisan units from the various formations under the command of our Barbato responded brilliantly to the enemy attack applying a hit-and-run strategy, moving from hill to hill disorienting the enemy and imparting great losses.

Towards the Insurrection

One evening Francesco, deputy *Podesta'* of Cavour arrived with great news: Novena had come to the Town Hall and in a moment of relax, after asking about the running of the town, he had spoken about their fight against the partisans and how difficult it was getting, of the fact their numbers were increasing. At a certain point he also added: 'Imagine, we had captured their Commander Petralia and let him escape. We are still looking for him and sooner or later we'll find him. Surveyor Rivoira froze and just nodded. Novena was far from imagining that he was hiding in his deputy's house. The choice of accepting the position had been a good one as Novena would never have thought of searching the house.

I was recovering quite quickly although the bone had set but I could not use my hand properly and had to keep my arm in a sling. In spite of that I felt in good shape. Commander Barbato had been informed of the progress of my health. He was anxiously awaiting my return both for the pleasure of seeing me again and embracing me as because the presence had become necessary and urgent:

after my capture in January 1945 Zama had had the interim command of the decision: he was a brave fighter but had failed to blend with the partisans of the 19th Brigade and especially with Max the Chief of Staff.

They decided I should go back and resume my position: in early April, on the night between the 3rd and 4th a partisan unit wearing German uniforms and led by Commander Milan in a gas powered lorry with a wood stove driven by the *garibaldino* Lori left for Villafranca Piemonte. They stopped the lorry outside the country near the *Cappella della Fortuna*, and went to look for Dr Fortuna, the only one who knew where I was hidden. Milan explained that they had come to take me to Commander Barbato. When the doctor pointed out that it wasn't wise to go with a lorry: he explained the place had to remain secret and not even our partisans could know about it, asked them to be patient, to wait and that he would come back with Petralia. He got two bicycles and with Milan they set off for the La Morra Farm of the Rivoira brothers. They arrived at two in the morning and everything was silent, everyone was sleeping. Fontana gave the agreed signal and we opened: he explained that they had not told me in advance because of secrecy and that I too was not had not been forewarned for that reason. When I heard the sound of boots coming up the stairs I woke up and was worried and I had just got up from my bed when I saw the door open and a German officer walked in. For a moment I was frightened as I had not recognised him. He realised I hadn't and shouted he was Milan running to embrace me. In the meantime Dr Fontana walked in and the misunderstanding was cleared although I had had a major fright. Soon I was ready for the great re-entry. All the Rivoira family had by then woken up, the Colombo brothers arrived too and I said goodbye to the Rivoira brothers and left with Milan and Dr Fontana who explained to me that in the interest of safety and as a precaution we were going to cycle to the lorry and that he would have carried me on the crossbar of his bike. I told him that was fine and that I could cope with the journey.

It was a cold night, the countryside was enveloped in darkness, the snow had melted leaving a few banks as afterthoughts, I was breathing fresh air into my lungs and I was happy to go back to my partisans after nearly three months. Soon we arrived at the *Cappella della Fortuna*, where the lorry was waiting with *garibaldini* dressed in German uniforms: they came towards me embracing me, pleased to see their commander. Dori started piling wood in the boiler which soon reached the required pressure, Milan and I sat in the in the cab and the others followed. Dori sat at the driver's, accelerated and the lorry rolled off at high speed. By dawn we were had reached Castelnuovo Don Bosco. After a short break the lorry moved on to the command area which for the time being had been positioned close to Pieia in a beautiful villa belonging to engineer Ba-rabino, a Stipel (the then phone company) manager. Three months had gone by and I could see the hills I had left snow clad were now turning green, to the left I could see Albugnano, dominating the Monferrato, one the *garibaldini's* safe havens.

We arrived in Mondonio where the first headquarters of the 4th Brigade had been established and approached the Gallareto fork where the famous clashes with the enemy had taken place. I was very emotional by then as I knew I would soon be meeting my commander and friend Barbato: I could already see his happy gestures and the words we would exchange when we met. By now it was late morning, everybody was awake at the Command, it was teeming as this was the partisan headquarters. I met with Barbato who embraced me

welcoming me with the usual warmth. He introduced me to Commissar Marelli and to the representatives of the other partisan formations. I knew the hostess Mrs Barabino, a good looking woman who welcomed us in a lady-like manner. I was pleased to see my friend Nanni who had become the commander of the Langhe *garibaldini* division and had been summoned by Barbato to agree on when and how they might enter Turin: his decisions were positioned in another zone but were ideally linked to Barbato and Nanni had never severed links with his old commander.

I spent a couple of days at the command as Barbato's guest where I got acquainted with all the novelties and changes which had taken place in the organisation of the Lower Monferrato partisan movement. The creation of the joint command of the 8th zone had led Barbato and his collaborators to transmit that feeling of unity to all the partisan units, which was absolutely necessary for the final push. A single police force had been established and the command was in Cocconato under the *carabineer* Captain Tommy (Tommaso Ciravegna) of the autonomous formations and to Lario (Bruno Mulas) our Commissar of the 19th Garibaldi Brigade. Every division, brigade, battalion and detachment had a person in charge. The organisation of the partisan police was extended to all the towns thanks to the presence of former law and order staff and former *carabineers* who were the majority. It was a very efficient service.

The provision of some sort of medical service was also increasingly urgent: the number of partisans had dramatically increase and with the impending final surge our attacks and combats with the enemy were increasing in numbers. Every day *garibaldini* units went to the gates of Turin attacking enemy garrisons, road blocks and barracks. In many cases they came back wounded. Many partisans fell ill as a result of the cold and of the difficulties we lived in. In Viale a camp hospital had been set up with the help of Dr Cicchetto (Giovanni Rubino) and the cooperation of Drs Massocco and Predazzi. It had 20 beds in the former villa Perroncito, which at times was not enough so we had to resort to the Montiglio, Buttigliera and Cocconato District hospitals.

The surgeon Giacinto Giordano from Chieri who had been called hundreds of times in the middle of the night and taken to Viale or to attend to a patient in bad conditions or to carry out delicate operations which as hernias or appendicitis.

My Commissar Ovidio came to see me: the meeting was very moving and he congratulated me on a full recovery. When talking about the Campiglione incident he expressed his regret for not having avoided my capture: they too had been taken by surprise and his brother in law Giovanni and he had just had the time to hide in a hatch built in to the hotel attic while the three *GL* partisans hid in the banks of the stream that runs close to the hotel. They spent the best part of the day with water up to their waist suffering because of the incredible cold. Ovidio was not a great fighter in spite of having a gun in his belt I don't think he ever fired. On the other hand he was very good and ironing out any resentment building up among the *garibaldini*, the *GL* or the autonomous formations and could ease out disagreements among our men. His other job was to create and follow the popular local authorities that were being established in the area. He told me that the Command was in Pieia in the Fara Villa and since I wanted to join my partisans as soon as possible we decided to move to the 1st Leo Lanfranco Division Command. So I once again embraced Barbato, said goodbye to the other members of the Area Command

and set off for the Fara Villa. I met Zama who had replaced me during my absence and immediately thanked him for his cooperation: Zama and I had developed a relationship of mutual respect and esteem ever since October 1943 when he had shown his courage in how he confronted the enemy in all situations and had been wounded in the chest with the bullet piercing one of his lungs. Unfortunately his passion and impetuosity had made it impossible for him to blend in with the *garibaldini* of the 19th Brigade and in particular his relationship with the Chief of Staff Max (Massimo Rendina) were not of the best which is why Barbato had thought it necessary for me to return in spite of still having an arm in a sling. After having passed the command over to me he decided to issue an order of the day to all the Division informing the brigades under it that I had returned (see Appendix – 7).

The meeting with Max, the Chief of Staff was very warm and cordial. He had joined the ranks of the 19th when we were moving the partisans from the Lanzo Valleys to the Monferrato. His culture and cordiality had meant he was held in great esteem and also that the commanders trusted him so much so they called to be Chief of Staff of the Brigade. His appointment as Chief of Staff of the Leo Lanfranco 1st Division was the obvious outcome. He described the situation of our brigades in great detail and told about the changes within them: Piero (Piero Carmagnola) had been appointed Commissar of the 19th brigade to replace Lario who had been appointed deputy district police chief with Commander Tommy. In the 103rd Nannetti Brigade had absorbed all the detachment under Commander Berto and Commissar Peppino of the 19th brigade as also all the partisans from the Lanzo Valleys under the command of the legendary Commander Rolandino (Natale Rolando), the same one who had been appointed Commander of the 103rd Brigade. It had been incorporated into the commanded by Pinin,; a detachment on horseback with twenty horses and twenty *garibaldini* all of which was new to me.

Max pointed out they were very useful to speed up connections between the various commands which were placed on hilltops. He spoke about the harsh struggles they had had in the three winter months, but how, thanks to the unified command and the directives applied by Commander Barbato, during the round ups we had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy with fewer losses on our side. On April the 3rd we had received the circular letter from the northern Italian National Liberation Committee, *Corpo volontari della libertà*, informing the various partisan formations of whatever denomination, were going to become regular army units incorporated into a national liberation army. As a result there would no longer be definitions such as the ones we had had – that is Garibaldini, GLs, Matteotti autonomous etc – and all partisans would be known as Volunteer Freedom Fighters (*volontari della libertà*) . Political commissars would henceforth be known as war commissar. The 1st Garibaldi Division took on the name of the 1st Leo Lanfranco Division, and Brigades 4, 19 and 103 fought under the names of Sforzini, Giambone and Nannetti (see appendix document 8).

In the meantime we were receiving important news from the war fronts: on the Western front the army had already entered German soil. On the Eastern front the Soviet army had already occupied Vienna and was rapidly marching on Berlin; in Italy after breaking through the Gothic line, the Allies were marching towards Bologna where the partisans were preparing the

insurrection- Bologna was to be liberated on April the 19th 1945 by the partisans before the arrival of the Anglo-Americans.

Considering the rapid developments of the war events and the new provisions of the unification of the partisan formations into Volunteer Freedom Fighters, after having consulted Commissar Ovidio and Chief of Staff Max I ordered a meeting of the commanders and commissars of our brigade for April the 10th. The main aim of the meeting was to examine the new situation together, assessing what forces were available when the attack on Turin would be called for. I had regained full command of the division and thought it necessary to issue Order 71 (see Document 9 of the appendix) welcoming the division and informing the *garibaldini* that I had resumed my position.

On the given day the Commanders and Commissars all arrived on time and it was a great pleasure for me to see Milan and Commissar Pippo of the 4th Brigade once more: only a few days before they had come to the Morra Farm to bring me back and during the journey they had updated me on the main events and the current size of their brigade. I was bound to these commanders and to their partisans by a special feeling as I had led them in the long months when we fought in the mountains.

The meeting with the commanders and commissars of the 19th Brigade was also very friendly. I hadn't seen Commander Mario from Lanzo and Commissar Piero for three months and I congratulated Piero on his promotion to commissar. I warmly embraced Commander Rolandino, one of the bravest Commanders of the Lanzo Valley, organiser of the early *garibaldini* detachments of that area and first commander of the 19th Brigade. He had been affected by the terrible round-ups in September 1944, forced to seek refuge in France and after a few adventures in those lands he had returned to Italy with a group of the very faithful, aka the 'bad squad'. He managed to organise a group of 120 *garibaldini* and with them moved to the Asti area in January 1945, when he was incorporated in the 103rd Nannetti Brigade. Subsequently he was appointed commander of that same brigade with Renato (Sciandra Riccardo) as commissar. He was very popular and very skilled, so much so that he completely reorganised the brigade on being appointed, took action against the enemy and completed a few brilliant actions such as the attack on the city of Racconigi which was under the siege of the Black brigades. This action was led by the Brigade deputy Commander Alberto (Carlo Del Noce), and the attack on the enemy garrison in Carmagnola was to help the autonomous partisans surrounded by soldiers from the notorious *Decima Mas*, the Fascist Commandoes.

Repeated harsh fights forced the enemy to surrender leaving the partisans a large number of weapons. Presenting his brigade, Rolandino stated how proud and satisfied he was of the results obtained in a few months: his brigade consisted of five battalions and about 500 well armed partisans ready for the final attack. Mario di Lanzo, Commander of the 19th-bis brigade was a great and very brave fighter who was loved and respected by his partisans, In his book *Anche i boia muoiono* (Executioners die too) describes him with these words: «Mario Foieri top in bravery, like an ancient warrior». On September the 25th 1944 after the heavy fascist round-ups in the Lanzo Valleys he decided to transfer to the Monferrato to avoid the last group of eighty partisans being disbanded. With a column consisting of four Fiat 626 and 666 lorries, loaded

with weapons and ammunitions, led by a camouflaged open-top Lancia with an SS number plate with Aldo Caramba (who spoke perfect German) and himself on board; all the men were wearing German or Fascist uniforms they moved to the Monferrato. On board of the car there was also Dolfo (Praiotto) the political Commissar, old *garibaldino* while Trumlin (Bartolomeo Paschero) and Gino the gunner followed on the lorries with the rest of the old gang all dressed as Germans of Fascist from the Social Republic, the so called *repubblichini* in khaki uniforms. This group of courageous men who had been tempered by warfare in the mountains created the new and glorious Eusebio Giambone 19th Brigade. Mario was a man of action, a man of few words and his Commissar Piero told a story about how a few days after their arrival in Cocconato, still dressed as Germans or Fascists they attacked enemy barracks and garrisons, and on the 27th entered the Moncalieri Fascist aeronautical barracks and took a 12.7 anti-aircraft machine gun, a Breda machine gun and a Thompson as well as about fifty rifles, a large amount of ammunition as well as uniforms and a number of boots too. On September the 30th at the Villanova d'Asti attack they took a group of Germans and Fascists at the station by surprise and got hold of another two machine guns, two Beretta carbines, forty guns and a stash of ammunition and hand grenades. The raids and attacks on the barracks increase using the same system of German, Gnr, the *repubblichini*, 10th Mas or Littorio uniforms, getting weapons, and in a matter of few months they were able to equip all the new arrivals.

Pino Puliserpi, the Battalion Commissar had a specially good initiative: he convinced the two brothers, Pinin and Giovanni Farina to manufacture Sten submachine guns in their Montechiaro d'Alba plant. As from January 1945 they supplied about twenty Sten submachine guns to the 19th brigade. Theirs were rifle green rather than the black used by the British originals. Piero pointed out that the presence of Commissar Lario (Bruno Mulas) was instrumental to the growth of the brigade: he had been freed in January 1945 as part of the exchanges organised by Father Don Josè Molas – who managed to save hundreds of partisans exchanging them for as many German and Fascist prisoners who were never in short supply in the Vallunga concentration camp of the 19th Brigade. Lario had the necessary qualities and skills to deal with the community although not a great man of action: he confessed to have hardly ever shot with a gun and really not to know how to use a gun or a rifle. As for courage he never grassed on anyone when in prison, not even under torture.

Commissar Piero concluded his report pointing out that the Eusebio Giambone 19th Brigade currently had over 600 perfectly armed men organised in 7 Battalions led by brave commanders. One of these battalions had anti-tank bazookas one of the few weapons Renato received after Commander Barbato's mediation.

I was pleased to conclude that the Leo Lanfranco Division could count on about sixteen hundred well equipped and armed volunteer freedom fighters, led by courageous commanders and commissars, all tested in the battle skills in fights against the enemy. I was sure that when the moment came for the final attack they would lead their men to victory against the Nazi Fascists. While I congratulated everyone on their results, I also told the commanders and the commissars to wait for the signal for the insurrection to begin- something soon to happen. I told them not to risk exposing anyone to unnecessary risks in organising forays against the enemy. I also reminded them their presence was

necessary on the day of the final battle. We discussed a recent circular letter from the Cvl (the Command of the volunteer freedom fighters) which concerned the shift from the partisan formations of various political colours to the unified Liberation Army Command on the basis of which the Leo Lanfranco Division Command issued the order dated April the 5th 1945 (see document 10 of the Appendix). I remember how important this decision was for us and how at the end of the war we had to present a united front to the Italian people and to the Allies. All of the partisans in all the formations accepted that we were part of the Volunteer Freedom Fighters, part of the Liberation Army organized in regular army units: this was consistent with the orders of the Northern Italian National Liberation Committee (*CLN alta Italia*) recognising the need to strengthen the organisation, increase the military efficiency with all the peculiarities and the rights of a belligerent side. We also had to prepare a smooth and disciplined transition for post liberation. In view of what was said, the Northern Italian National Liberation Committee would ask the democratic Italian government to recognise the partisan formations as part of the Italian Armed Forces. I knew that it was very painful for us to cast our glorious insignia as *garibaldini*, the ones we had carried throughout the long months of struggle and that we have to set aside as we approach the final victory. I don't know if it will be easy for the old *garibaldini* to change their red neckerchiefs or remove the Garibaldi stars replacing them with the new insignia and the Cvl (Volunteer Freedom Fighters) symbols.

There was a lively debate on the new rules and nearly all the Commissars and the Commanders pointed out they had an old partisan who refused to forego the Garibaldi neckerchief which they had grown attached to in the long months of the struggle. However the Commanders undertook to persuade them to abide by the new rules. I closed the meeting informing them that since I was re-entering after a long convalescence I wanted to resume direct contact with our partisans. In the days that followed I decided to visit the various detachments with Commissar Ovidio. I closed the meeting warmly greeting everybody and reminding the commanders to not risk actions against the enemy in the days to follow. First of all I wanted to meet the *garibaldini* of the 19th brigade. Commander Zama had not been such a positive experience and his command had led to discontent. I decided it was time those brave fighters met me personally and I them.

The next day I left Max, the chief of staff at the Command, and with Commissar Ovidio we decided to start the tour with the manoeuvre unit in the Moncalvo area. Commander Mario had sent Commander Trumlin (Bartolomeo Paschero), Commissar Guido and a group of *garibaldini* to reorganise the units which had not behaved appropriately with the local communities. In no time at all they had managed to reintroduce order and discipline creating a manoeuvre unit which was admired by the local community because of its correctness and humanity. At this point the unit consisted of three detachments, had more than 100 partisans and controlled all the area of the Asti-Alessandria-Casale triangle. In this area they set up road blocks or attacked barracks and managed to capture tens of Fascists and Germans and get their hands on weapons and ammunitions which were vital for the struggle.

Trumlin and Guido were proud of these partisans who, thanks to their courage, had created a unit which was an example to all. They had been forewarned of our arrival and received us with warmth: Guido and Trumlin had

gathered a group of commanders and commissars of the detachment and some *garibaldi* partisans.

I still had my arm in a sling and shook hands congratulating everyone on the many actions which they had successfully completed against the enemy, reminding them they would soon be called to help with the final struggle. I was pleased to notice that except for Trumlin's who had sworn he would never leave his Garibaldi neckerchief, all the others were wearing impeccable uniforms. Commander Mario and Commissar Piero had invited us to Vallunga where the headquarters of the 19th Brigade was and where the prisoners' concentration camp was. Over the past few months Trumlin and his men had continuously filled this camp with new guests and were pleased to show us round and show us their trophies. After a light meal with the partisans Ovidio and I set off for Valluga with Trumlin and a couple of partisans. Commissar Piero and Giulio (Ennio De Angelis) the Chief of Staff were waiting for us. Commander Mario had left for a mission with a bunch of partisans, much against my advice and Commandeer Barbato's: in fact he wouldn't stop leading his men into action in person. The detachment «Berto Abbriata» under Celin (Marcello Appiano) was impeccable and welcomed us with a military salute: they were well armed seasoned brave men who had quickly adapted to the orders of the Cvl. I answered their military salute as usual, shaking their hands. The partisans enthusiastically told me they took it in turns to check the prisoners' concentration camp which at the time housed about 150 Fascists and Germans.

Commissar Piero pointed out that they were precious commodities for the Reverend Father Mulas, the director of the Salesian Institute in Becchi. He drove a four gear Balilla car, a gift of the industrialist Rivella; he also had a regular permit issued by the German police and circulated freely. The area Command had put him in charge of exchanges. He ferried back and forth between our areas and the German Command picking up prisoners from the Villunga Camp to barter for the freedom of our comrades held prisoners. Thanks to him thousands of our patriots escaped death.

In the meantime a disappointed Commander Mario had returned: he had gone to the Asti-Turin main road with a group of partisans dressed in German uniforms and had set up a road block in the hope of taking a few Fascist

or German prisoner, but the enemy had become too cautious and did not leave the barracks easily. It was late and after congratulating them on their work Ovidio and I left for Pieia. During the trip back I commented on our visit and said I was very satisfied since these brave partisans had a very high military standard and we could count on them in the imminent attack on Turin. On the days that followed I reviewed the other detachments with Max, my Chief of Staff. I wanted to check out the actual size and weight of our division, and I needed him to fill me in about the three months of my absence.

It was a real pleasure to travel with Max, who was a man of culture and write for the division paper '*Stella garibaldina*'. He told me about the difficulties they had in getting the paper out, lack of people writing but also lack of paper. He was a man of action and had been wounded in a mission with Commander Mario. He was very well known by the partisans of the 19th Brigade and told me that when he arrived in the Monferrato with Mario he had witnessed the

latter's heroism, and greatly admired him for it. His main thought was for the Barca partisan detachment led by the brave and reckless Moretta (Angelo Pampione). Before being appointed Chief of Staff of the 19th Brigade and then of the 1st Division, Max had lived with those brave partisans. We decided to visit that detachment first. Max had announced our arrival and Moretta saw to it that it was all in order.

He gathered all his partisans, lined them all up and introduced me to them one by one. When they saluted, as usual I shook their hands, they were all very young, class of 1925-26 and when the Fascist Salò Republic had called them up they had opted to go with the partisans and had become good fighters under Moretta's leadership. Their rifles had nearly all been taken from the enemy and they had most had experience of city warfare; however, in spite of the bravery and courage many of their comrades had fallen in action. I saw that Max was especially well loved by these youngsters and that held him in great esteem and admiration. I also noticed that some were insistently looking at my arm in the sling.

I realised they were curious and wanted to know when I had been wounded; so I told them I had fallen prey of an ambush during a round-up. Since they were in constant touch with the city, they imagined we were on the eve of the final push: they kept asking when they could expect the order to attack Turin. I was able to confirm that things were changing day to day and that the situation was evolving by the minute and that they should be ready for the insurrection. By then it was lunch time and Moretta and his partisans insisted we stay. As they wanted to spend a few hours with their old friend Max. In the afternoon, we said goodbye to all the partisans, embraced Moretta, congratulated them on their fighting spirit and their organisation, we went back to Pieia would have liked to visit the other detachments of the 19th and 4th brigades and especially the partisans of the 103rd led by Rolandino, but the situation was precipitating and there was no more time, other duties were calling me.

News was coming in about the great strike in Turin, the working class was preparing for the final struggle, all the partisan movement was on alert and we had to be ready. On April the 18th a general strike was called in Turin, the city was paralysed, factories, shops and offices came to a standstill, newspapers were not printed. The bus drivers' strike generate chaos and the Fascist were driving trams but it soon became apparent that they didn't know how and many of the carriages were driven out of the tram rails leading to disarray in traffic. The strike spread to the municipalities in the plains and to the Monferrato, especially where the influence of the partisans was strongest. People meeting in the city, town and village squares wanted news. Someone would stand on a table and improvised speakers exhorted people to hold tight because the Nazi Fascist occupation was coming to an end and soon they would all be free.

The *Comitato di agitazione* (the organizing committee for the revolt) in agreement with the CNL (the National Liberation Committee and the SAP (*squadre di azione patriottica*, the patriotic action units) also called a general strike in Chieri which was under Fascist occupation. In the morning the Rap (*Reparti anti partigiani*, the anti-partisan units) had left the town early in the morning to go to Turin in support of the Fascist militia. They had left about thirty militiamen from the Ather Capelli Black Brigade who scattered round the

city trying to put pressure on the shopkeepers telling to reopen their premises. The situation was precipitating and Chieri's youngsters were worried: they saw the time had come to give these troublemakers a good lesson so they sent the following telephone message to the Piovà telephone exchange which was received by Puliserpi:

19th Eusebio Giambone Brigade

From the Piovà public telephone exchange.

April the 18th 1945

11 am - the following phonogramme was received from Quercia:

General strike in Chieri. Shops and factories closed. The Fascists want to reopen them and threaten to shoot anyone who fails to obey this order. The Rap has left Chieri with the tanks. If you wish to come down, the time has come but make haste.

Signed Franco, responsible for Chieri's Youth Front,

Pino, in charge of Culture

Puliserpi transmitted it to the Command of the 19th Brigade that in turn sent it to the command of the 1st Division and to the areas Command. Once he had received the message, Commander Barbato consulted with Commissar Marelli and decided to implement a plan to liberate Chieri. I was called to the area command and Barbato confirmed the decision to attack the Fascist garrison. He told me to organise and lead the attack which – as he pointed out – was not just to a show of strength but was an experiment in the operative skills of the unified command and had to be considered a test run in the coordination of the various units in view of the imminent attack on Turin. Since we had taken advantage of the favourable moment, we decided the attack would be held on the following day, April the 19th. There was no time to lose: messengers on horseback were sent urgently to the Garibaldi commanders of the 4th Milan and the 19th Mario Brigades, and especially to Captain Negro, Commander of the 9th GL Division ordering him to report asap to the area command for the imminent attack on Chieri; I had indicated the area to act to stress the idea of unity as Barbato wanted us to. In the late afternoon the meeting started with all the commanders summoned: I briefly illustrated the aim of the meeting and invited the various commanders to express their opinions on how and where the attack should take place. A lively discussion followed, some suggested the attack should be by night and some by day, and Commander Mario's idea of a daytime attack prevailed. We then debated the targets and the number of partisans needed. After careful consideration of the plan of attack we decided who would take part: fifty partisans from Mario's Brigade, fifty from the 4th Brigade under Milan and one hundred from the GL and GMO Division led by Captain Negro. There were also thirty partisans of the 11th Brigade led by Guido Palareti who had recently moved close to Chieri after the hit on the Tax Offices in Turin in via XX Settembre had yielded 40 million which were handed to the 8th area command. Targets were selected the 19th and 11th Brigades were given the attack of the Fascist *Casa Littoria* which housed the garrison, the 4th Brigade was told to clock the station and sabotage the line, as well as blocking the road from Pino Torinese with two machine guns. The GL and Gmo partisan brigades were given the task of interrupting the phone and telegraph lines and block the other accesses to the city. They also had a few motorbikes for patrolling and distance reconnaissance. It was also left to them to capture

spied and monitor the city. Messengers (*staffette*) on bikes and cars would liaise with the various groups and the Command. A series of warning signals with flares was agreed. Troops were to meet the following day in Marentino at 10 am.

On the morning of the 19th the square of the small village of Marentino was teeming with partisans in uniform and there was a holiday feel about it. The locals were asking why they were concentrating there. Commander Barbato had arrived as he wanted to follow everything closely. At 10 on the dot all the units were ready to go. First the partisans who had to block access to the town left, and then at 11 we all set off: it was quite a performance, seeing a column of cars and lorries loaded with partisans escorted by motorbikes in the front and back. We stopped at the gates of the city where the command was set up: the messengers guaranteed the contact with the various units. Captains Negro's partisans were the first to enter the city as they were the ones to search and round up, block telephone and telegraph lines and set up road blocks at the various accesses to the town. They were followed by Milan's men who occupied the railways station and blocked the road from Pinerolo. The last to leave were Guio's and Mario's partisans. It had been decided that at 12 they would attack the *Casa littoria* where the 32 Fascist of the Ather Capelli Unit were barricaded in. The partisans of the 19th Brigade lined up in the front of the *Casa* while those from the 11th Brigade took place behind an elevation. At the given moment very intense shooting took the Fascists by surprise and they tried to react. Mario shouted and told them to surrender as they were surrounded and had no escape: since they were resisting he ordered Aldo Caramba to act and he launched two bazooka warheads breaking the front door and having them followed by hand grenades. The lieutenant commander of the garrison died and the enemy stopped reacting.

In the meantime the partisans from the 11th Brigade entered from the roof, while Mario and his men went in through the front door, forcing the Fascist caught between two fires to surrender. Thirty two were taken prisoners and transferred to the Vallunga concentration prison camp. The partisans lost one *GL*, Angelo Matta from Chieri and had a few wounded. News of the surrender of the Fascist garrison soon went round: people came out of their houses embracing the partisans, wanting to offer them food and drink and a great crowd was soon celebrating, sporting the three-coloured Italian flag from the windows. The jails were opened and many partisan prisoners released. Thanks to the *Sap* a number of spies and Fascist collaborationists were arrested. Commander Barbato, now in the street in the midst of the crowds was especially celebrated, everybody wanting to say hello and embrace him: suddenly Professor Augusto Monti appeared as he had moved with his young partner from Chieri to Cavour. He wanted to meet the partisans whom he had seen leave Cavour on September the 9th 1943 heading for Mount Bracco and that were back as the liberators of Chieri. His meeting with Barbato was indescribable: our Commander followed is instinct and with his natural enthusiasm he enthusiastically embrace his one time friend and adviser. He also made a fuss of his partner, and introduced him to all the partisan commanders describing his merits. I also recognised him and greeted him. By now the crowd had moved to the square opposite the *Tre Re* (the Three Kings) a restaurant and hotel and everyone was waiting for Commander Barbato to give a speech.

It was 1.30 in the afternoon and Barbato had led the liberation of Chieri with his commanders (Petralia, Captain Negro, Mario, Milan and Guido). We all stood on the balcony of the *Tre Re* Hotel, people greeted us and repeatedly shouted Barbato's name: he answered each time. He spoke thanking the brave partisans and their commanders who had been instrumental in freeing the town, referring to the major events soon to come: the National insurrection was close, the Nazi Fascist enemies would be called to answer and Italy would be free. His brief and enthusiastic speech ended with a big round of applause by the crowd. At 2.30 the signal to withdraw was given, the road blocks outside the city removed, the column reformed at the gates of Chieri and every group re-entered their base. Soon they would be called for the final battle. The day after, April the 20th, Solaro, the *Federale* (the Provincial Fascist Party leader) with a militia group and two armoured cars re-occupied Chieri and arrested about twenty citizens: Fascist reprisals were on their way. The Commando the 19th Brigade was immediately informed: the following warning was sent to the *Gnr* (the Fascist Guard) – *verbatim*:

It has come to our notice that following the partisan attack on the town of Chieri on the 19th of this month and following our round up you have captured twenty-five hostages among the civilian population. In our opinion this is against conflict legislation, in spite of it being your usual conduct. We inform you that is you so much as touch the Chieri hostages, or if they were to be killed as reprisal we would react by shooting the 36 Fascists and the 4 Germans currently being held in our concentration prisoner camp. If that is not enough we shall act against the fifty Fascist or army families in the occupied areas. As you know through experience we are not used to joke about such matters, nor do we forgive nor threaten without actually meaning it.

This is for our Brigade but we assure you that the other brigades of the area will act following the same line of conduct.

Long Live Free Italy

*War Commissar
(Piero)*

*Brigade Commander
(Mario)*

As a result all the citizens of Chieri were released and Solaro re-entered Turin with his militia. In the appendix readers will find the letter dated April the 20th from the Provincial Military Command, signed by Colonel Giovanni Cabras.

The Liberation of Turin

In view of the liberation of Turin, the organisation of the insurrection was being oiled. Let me start from February 1945 when the *CNL* which was to become the Popular Liberation Government (*Giunta popolare di liberazione*) was instated. On the 10th of that month once the an agreement had been found on the liberation of Turin, the *Comando militare regionale piemontese* –*Cmrp* (The Piedmontese Regional Military Command) issued a plan to converge the outer partisan formations on Turin. Alongside the *Cmrp*, the Command of the Turin stronghold (*Comando di piazza*) was also instated. Andreis (Italo Nicoletto) of the Garibaldi formations was the commander. He coordinated the five military sectors the city had been divided in. The strike declared on April the 18th had paralysed Turin, the authorities of the *RSI* (the Fascist Repubblica Sociale Italiana) were completely isolated, their structures falling apart. The Chieri events (on April the 19th) were an additional factor, a sort of dress rehearsal for the impending insurrection.

On April the 20th the *Cmrp* informed the partisan commands to initiate the approach to Turin. We received orders from the command of the 8th to start moving our brigades. I summoned my three brigade commanders (Mario, Milan and Rolandino). I instructed Commander Mario to move the 19th Giambone brigade to Rivodora close to the Superga hill, and Commander Milan to shift the 4th Sforzini brigade to Baldissero where I also positioned Leo Lanfranco's Division Command, while I order Commander Rolandino to keep the 103rd Nannetti Brigade in the rearguard sending forward only his *squadraccia*, the bad squad with antitank weapons. Targets were according to the orders issued by the district or zone command:

To the 19th Brigade:

- occupy the Barca neighbourhood and conquer the bridge on the River Stura; see that the enemy does not destroy the bridge;
- Occupy and defend the tobacco and cigarette plant;
- In agreement with the workers with the workers and other partisan formations occupy and defend the Fiat *Grandi Motori* (large engine manufacturing plant);
- final objective: the Podgora Army barracks currently occupied by the Black Brigades;

To the 4th Brigade:

Concentrate in Superga and descend on the Sassi neighbourhood; Occupy and defend the Sassi Bridge; – with the other formation take part in the defence of the *Grandi Motori* (large engine manufacturing).

- occupy the Eiar (Italian radio and TV company);
- occupy the Bergia Barracks in Piazza Carlina; final target: the Gabelli School where they will camp To the 103rd Brigade:
- send the «*squadraccia*» in advance to assist the 4th Brigade;
- the rest of the formation will act in reserve for the manoeuvre.

On April the 24th all the units and formations had reached their assigned locations and were positioned, ready for the final push. The command of the 1st division had moved to Baldissero and all the hills surrounding Turin were in the hands of the partisans. On the night between the 24th and the 25th of April a young messengers brought me the long expected message: 'Aldo says 16 x 1 stop. Enemy in final crisis stop. Apply plan E27 .The message in code stated that the attack had been fixed for April the 26th at 1 o'clock. That same night I sent a copy of the commands of the 4th and 19th, while Max, my Chief of Staff who was especially close to the partisans of the 19th Brigade who wanted to take the message to implement the decisions for the liberation of Turin personally to Commander Mario. He wanted to take part in the final battle with his old friends and asked me for permission to stay with them.

Immediately, all the organisation was implemented: on the 25th a detachment of the 19th brigade attacked the Superga road block, the Fascist retreated without fighting and Commander Mario gave the Battalion Commander Moretta to shift his men to the Barca neighbourhood and occupy the Stura Bridge. The bridge had been mined by the Germans and was currently guarded by a strong Nazi Fascist unit.

Moretta and his men wanted to assault it but Commander Trumlin arrived in the meantime. Since it looked as if the enemy wanted to surrender, negotiations were started through a priest. While the priest was negotiating suddenly a volley was shot against the partisans. Moretta was furious and jumped into the river with his commissar and managed to reach the other bank of the river under machine gun protection, thus managing to surprise the clock. As soon as they saw the partisans at the side of the bridge the Germans and the Fascists fled dropping their weapons.

Moretta and his men were immediately in pursuit of the enemy: they were all young and brave and soon caught up with them and captured them. There were fifteen Germans and two from the Black Brigades. While the prisoners were being transferred to the Vallunga concentration prisoner camp the people from the Barca Neighbourhood applauded and applauded them: most of their

young were in the partisans too. The bridge was safe and under partisan control so Commander Mario moved all the brigade in the Barca Neighbourhood to the designated targets. Commander Milan had moved all the 4th Brigade to the Barca Neighbourhood to Superga and together with the *squadraccia* of the 103rd Brigade they began to descend onto the Sassi Neighbourhood. Late on the 25th I received the order to go to headquarters Pavarolo for urgent matters. I got to Barbato's as soon as possible riding a motorbike with one of our men fearing the news would not be good. Our commander was extremely nervous and showed me the message he had received from the *Cmrp* via Captain Pautasso with the order not to move on to the city's targets unless specifically ordered by the general Command (see document 12 of the Appendix).

We debated the matter heatedly as we suspected it might be false and a provocation, from someone who wanted to slow down partisan actions. I informed him the brigades had already set off and that some targets had been conquered so it was unlikely that I would have been able to stop my partisans. At that point, without any hesitation, Barbato said to me: 'Petralia, we can't stop our *garibaldini*, Turin has started the workers have occupied the factories, the Fascists and the Germans are roaming the city it could be a massacre, we have to go into Turin to help them'. As a result we decide to disregard the message and to accept the consequences of continuing our march on Turin and conquer the targets we had been given. We embraced and wished each other good luck.

After having had the mines removed and having left a partisan unit to guard the Stura Bridge, Commander Mario received the visit of a customs' officer: he was asking for urgent help for the Sap and for some of the customs' officers who were defending the tobacco manufacturing plant against the repeated Fascist attacks. Mario ordered Alvaro to take his detachment immediately. Alvaro was at the Rivella Furriers. A group of Fascist militia men had managed to get in and were loading a lorry with salt while an armoured car was wandering nearby. Commissar Banfo and the *garibaldino* Toc (Bruno Pasquali) intervened and found a customs' officer, a lieutenant who said he was a *GL* partisan and had men positioned behind a machine gun in defence of the main door while the Fascist left with their lorry load of salt. To defend the plant against further enemy attacks, Mario ordered Appiano Marcello, Commander of the 3rd Battalion to occupy the Tobacco Manufacturing Plant that same night.

Once they had reinforced the road block with a partisan unit equipped with hand grenades reinforced with plastic explosive and a heavy 12/7 machine gun and a bazooka, Mario and his helpers sought a bit of rest. I returned to Baldissero with the command detachment and then moved to the Superga *parvis* where the partisans of the 4th brigade were encamped. I ordered Commander Milan to start the descent towards the Sassi neighbourhood. There was a slight drizzle but the men were happy and they were singing partisan songs. At long last the time had come, the moment they had waited

for and tomorrow the liberation of Turin would begin. Milan was cautious and so he sent a patrol ahead to check it was free and avoid enemy ambushes, It was dawn by the time we reached the first houses of the Sassi Neighbourhood and it was still drizzling: I ordered a road block on Corso Casale and asked Milan to have it guarded by partisans with antitank weapons and heavy hand grenades. The Division Command was set up in a house nearby and I sent messages to the 19th and 103rd Brigades informing them of where it was. I also instructed the men to rest for a few hours as soon we would all be engaged in the final struggle and had to be rested.

On the morning of April the 26th a messenger from the Stura Bridge informed Captain Mario that enemy tanks and armoured vehicles were moving in the distance. Mario ran there and saw that the tanks were approaching:

He got the whole brigade to position themselves in view of the attack. While the tanks moved back and forth without approaching the bridge, suddenly four partisans appeared bearing news from the Tobacco Manufacturing plant. They were caught by the tanks and caught by a group of Nazis on foot. One managed to escape and the other three were killed on the spot. Once their act of *bravado* was over, the Nazis and their tanks disappeared. Mario sent a patrol to recover the bodies which were buried with full honours. In the mean time I received a call for help from the Sap Division Command of the 4th sector. They were in a difficult situation and were asking for reinforcements for the *Grandi Motori* (the large engine manufacturers) in Corso Vercelli at the corner with via Cuneo. I instructed Commander Mario to send help and immediately the 3rd Battalion under Appiano Marcello was sent in defence of the *Grandi Motori* workers who were defending the facilities from the repeated Nazi attacks on armoured vehicles. Max (the Chief of Staff of the 1st division) had re-entered and was proud of the courage his partisan friends of the Barca Neighbourhood had shown. There was a lot to do at the Division Command the situation kept changing we had to follow the attacks and impart the necessary instructions to reach the targets. Max was a great help: on the morning of the 26th of April Milan's partisans of the 4th Brigade set off marching into the city, occupying the Sassi Bridge which the enemy had left unguarded. Towards midday two enemy tanks tried to approach the bridge and the partisans had to retreat because they had no anti-tank weapons. The *squadraccia* of the 103rd Brigade was sent out to help them and two well cantered bazooka launches made the tank unserviceable, the crew was taken prisoner and the crew from the other tank fled. The bridge was free and Milan and his partisans could proceed with their march.

At 2.45 pm of April the 26th 1945 the 8th Command issued a message stating the order received at 9 pm the previous evening (see document 13 in the appendix) was false and ordered to enter the city immediately. The order to march on Turin was confirmed by the Area Command on April the 26th at 4.15 pm (see document 14 in the appendix). It was confirmed to all the commands that same day at 4.30. Subsequently, the area Command said to send

information to Pavarolo until 8 pm, and thereafter the information centre would move to the Sassi Neighbourhood. On the night of the 26th Barbatto left Pavarolo to follow the struggle at close range: the *garibaldini*, the *GLs*, the autonomous and the Matteotti partisans had begun the battle for Turin.

The Allied mission in Italy gave the order for the insurrection on April the 26th at 10.30 pm (see document 16 in the appendix): the partisans came down from the valleys and converged on Turin. They came from the Lanzo, Susa, Sangone, Canavese and Pinerolo Valleys, from the Monferrato and the Langhe. Turin was surrounded. The workers had occupied their factories to defend them from the German tanks which were still roaming the city, the Sap formations cooperated with the workers, their forces were not enough and they were asking the partisans for help. At the *Grandi Motori* the Germans were trying to occupy the factory, but the Sap's managed to push them back thanks to a *GL* partisan unit with anti-tank weapons. I ordered Commander Mario to take the 19th Brigade and go to help and told Commander Milan to send a couple of detachments of the 4th Brigade in support.

On April the 27th at 2 pm, our *garibaldini* entered the *Grandi Motori*, occupied the factory, placed heavy 12/7 machine guns and Breda and Fiat on the rooftop of the factory. That and the two *GL* antitank pieces and the counterattack started against the Germans forcing them to retreat. While the German armoured cars were moving out, snipers were taking positions on balconies or on the rooftops nearby trying to interfere with the partisans' actions. The Sap partisans also intervened: they hunted the snipers down in houses but often the *garibaldini's* presence was required to silence them for good. At the Dora station the Nazi Fascist garrison resisted and refused to surrender to Giovanni Burlando, Commander of the 80th Brigade: the German captain asked for a free passage out of the city with two tanks and forty men. Burlando gave them twenty minutes to surrender following which he announced he would attack. The German captain refused so the battle began. The tanks started shooting trying to break the encirclement. In the meantime Piero the commissar of the 19th Brigade arrived with Guido Jannon and Aldo Caramba with his battalion. With a bazooka they attacked a tank and hit the caterpillar thus bringing it to a standstill. Burlando's men counterattacked overrunning the enemy who surrendered.

Night was falling and Piero returned to the *Grandi Motori* with all his men. Milan's *garibaldini* of the 4th Brigade set up at the Gabelli schools after having freed the Barriera Milano neighbourhood. The partisans occupied the barracks in via Asti, the Cernaia, the Monte Grappa, the Podgora and the Bergia, the latter by the 19th and 4th. The area of the city occupied by the Germans was rapidly shrinking and via Captain Schmidt the Nazi Fascists asked for a truce until the arrival of the Allies. General Trabucchi, Commander of the Cmrp answered asking them to surrender. In the night between the 27th and the 28th of April the Nazi Fascist divisions left the city protected by the tiger tanks. The *garibaldini* of the 4th and 19th Brigades that were positioned close to Corso

Giulio Cesare auctioned their machine guns as soon as they heard the noise of the enemy column. They hit an armoured car, two lorries and a motorbike, the enemy did not react and fled seeking safety.

Turin was free, people ran into the streets, embraced and welcomed the liberators, the partisans, and started flying the three- coloured flags from their balconies. But it wasn't finished yet as the head of the Fascist militia had gathered a group of rioting fascist militia thugs and had scattered them all over the city and had ordered them to organise the snipers.

On April the 28th I left the Sassi under the command of the *garibaldino* Rolandino and his gang of 'bad boys' that had to remain as a reserve for the general command. In the meantime with the detachment I transferred the Brigade Command to the Bergia Barracks going through side streets: the barracks had been freed by the partisans of our 4th Brigade . The *garibaldini* of the 19th Brigade had arrived and had occupied the Podgora Barracks close by. During our crossing of the city we had come across a number of snipers. The *garibaldini* of the Command detachment intervened immediately while some of them kept them at back shooting where the bullets came from, others entered the houses , climbed up to the rooftops and silenced them. In Piazza Carlina where the Bergia Barracks where we were welcomed by sniper crossfire. We were forced to hide pressed against the large front doors to escape the bullets. Unfortunately a couple of partisans were wounded: at the sound of the shots a group of partisans from the 19th Brigade came out of the Podgora Barracks nearby and we jointly started hunting the snipers down. When they realised what was happening they dropped their weapons and tried to get away dressed in plain clothes. Towards 11 am of April the 28th we gained control of the Bergia Barracks.

A little time later a group of the 19th Brigade asking to speak to me confidentially in private. I was extremely surprised when they told me they knew where the Solaro, the Turin *federale* (the provincial secretary of the Fascist party). Since they were insisting and I knew them to be good and brave *garibaldini* decided to follow the, In a cellar in via Mario Gioda (now known as via Giolitti), not far from there we found a man dressed in plain clothes huddling in a corner of the cellar: we asked him for his papers and he gave us his ID card. There was another name on it, it was clearly forged and I personally didn't know Solaro but several of the men of the 19th Brigade did and they challenged him about his papers. He continued to insist so we asked him to follow us to the partisan command centre. He was reluctant and two partisans took him under his arms and forced him to follow us. At the Bergia Barracks he was recognised by other partisans and could no longer lie: he confessed his real identity but said he had always been a Socialist and had acted in defence of the people.

News of Solaro's capture spread quickly: Commander Barbato came, I hadn't seen him since that famous night of April the 25th when we took on the

responsibility to disregard the order not to enter Turin. We greeted each other and congratulated ourselves on the decision. We hadn't been wrong: it was Colonel Stevens's doing and the Allies had not wanted the city liberated by the partisans which is why they wanted to delay it.

Commander Osvaldo Negarville came with the Deputy Head of Policy. A war tribunal was convened with Barbato, Negarville, Mulas, Ovidio and Petralia. The Court sentenced him to capital punishment to be hung to the tree where he had had four partisans on July the 24th, 1944. During the trial he maintained he was innocent, that he had always been a Socialist and that he had always worn a black shirt to defend the country from the Germans and had endeavoured to help the people and had be judged for that. The court left the execution to the 19th Brigade and this is what Commander Mario wrote in his diary as to how and when the execution was performed :

Commander Barbato ordered a lorry and an armed guard and to take him closet o the where he was going to be executed, at the corner between Corso Vinzaglio and via Cernaia where the four partisans had been executed. I was in the car with Commissar Carmagnola, deputy-Commander Paschero and the chief of Staff De Angelis. There was a lorry with 25 garibaldini following us the federale was standing with a priest. The road was dark with people and while we passed they shouted. 'Death to the hangman'. People spat against the lorry and tried to grab the prisoner but the partisans pushed enraged crowd away using the butt of their rifles. I regret not having brought at the least three times as many boys. We reached Corso Vinzaglio and Solaro was standing on the hood of the lorry: 'You wanted a trial of the people of Turin and you have it'- I said to him.

Corso Vinzaglio was also full of shouting cursing crowds. Solaro didn't answer, maybe he didn't hear. The garibaldini put the rope round his neck. Another group was waiting under the tree when the rope was thrown over the branch but fell on those who were supposed to catch it. They didn't manage to and they were pushed away: ten, twenty hands grabbed him and pulled, Solaro ended up in the air and ended up against the branch. Then the rope snapped, the body fell and the crowd swamped him. I shouted to the garibaldini to hold the crowd back and they all got off the lorry. Lieutenant De Angelis's face was covered in blood: a blow with a stick aimed at the sentenced man had got his head and the wound seemed quite serious. The sentence had said that the body would hang for a day just like the bodies of our comrades and that is what my orders repeated. The corpse was hung on a tree and at that point the many partisans present shot in the air and the crowd fell to the ground on fear. The shots lasted a few minutes spreading like fire along Corso Vinzaglio and via Cernaia and then it all went calm again.

I left immediately followed by the garibaldini. I immediately took Lieutenant De Angelis to the emergency ward at the hospital where they diagnosed a flesh wound in the head caused by a blunt weapon. Once he had been medicated I ordered everyone back to the barracks and that is when we met a civilian

vehicle. A rope was holding up Solaro's body tied to the roof sticks of the lorry which held him as if sitting on a bench. I then heard the body had been loaded on the civilian vehicle and paraded round the city. Dr Solaro had thus been judged by the people of Turin.(from the book *Non sono cose che si dimenticano* by Mario Foieri)

Turin was free, although we still had to deal with snipers that were hiding in various parts of the city suddenly appearing and killing. On April the 30th my friend and comrade Jimmy il Francese (French Jimmy) was shot dead: I had seen him the day before and congratulated him on his promotion to deputy Commander of the 48th Garibaldi Brigade, and, as always he was enthusiastic and full of initiatives. He found himself in the crossfire of some snipers and did not hesitate to run after them. He was killed while pursuing the enemy. He was awarded the gold medal for military valour.

A great danger was still hovering over the city: the German 75th Army Corps commanded by General Schlemmer. He was the one who had not accepted the surrender General Meinhold had signed with the partisans on behalf of the German and Fascist troops on April the 26th 1945. He had reached Liguria with forced marches and he wanted to reach the Brenner pass before the arrival of the Allies. In Cuneo the partisans led by Ettore Rosa blocked the German Divisions and forced them to change route going via the Savigliano Torino road. On April the 29th they had reached the western side of Turin and through the Diocesan Curia they asked to be allowed to withdraw passing through Turin, threatening to destroy the city in the event of a partisan attack. The Cmrp refused and ordered to reinforce the road blocks in the South Western part of the city. A detachment of the 105th Carlo Pisacane Brigade was sent to the Trento Command with anti tank weapons which we had retrieved from the Germans after taking the castle of Villastellone.

They were positioned near the outskirts of Moncalieri close to the livestock market and the railway bridge where the road from Cuneo came in. The Garibaldi units from the Langhe led by Nanni Latilla were positioned on the hills of Moncalieri. The Sergio De Vitis Autonomous Brigade was on the Moncalieri-Beinasco route, and when Trenot's *garibaldini* saw a group of armoured vehicles advancing on the main road from La Loggia, Trento ordered not to shoot until the *Panzerfaust* were launched. They were about twenty metres from them when they launched the armoured fists followed by a volley of rifle shots. Tens of mortar shots were launched from the Castle of Moncalieri and showered the German column; Nanni's *garibaldini* sprung into action and a relentless fire fell on the enemy, the Germans were disoriented and did not expect such a reaction, so they gave up the idea of going through Turin and changed the route of their withdrawal, Between Nichelino and Candiolo in the Borgata Garino they caught a group of twelve partisans from the 105th Brigade who were going to Turin, and killed them mercilessly. On April the 29th General Schlemmer's column massacred sixty-six civilians while retreating through Grugliasco.

On April the 29th 1945 the Command Division in Piazza Vittorio received a request for help from the 12th Garibaldi Division which was in difficulty as it was being attacked by a *Folgore*, the Fascist Parachute Regiment, and was in difficulty. I immediately ordered Commander Roladino who kept his brigade as a reserve to take his band of 'bad boys', the 'squadracia', and all the rest of the Brigade to help the partisans of the 12th Garibaldi Brigade. The 75th German Army Corps under General Schlemmer, was forced to bypass Turin and moved towards the area of the Canavese. This is how it was reported in the allied bulletin Report on n. 1 Special Forces Activities During April 1945 signed by Colonel R.T. Hewitt:

....To the West Biella was the first city to be freed at the same time as Aosta and Susa, further to the North. There was a great danger in the Canavese in the lower Aosta Valley and in an area immediately West of Turin where there was a concentration of enemy troops. Graziani, the commander, had been captured and his successor, general Pemsel, had signed the surrender but was exonerated from the command by his successor General Von Wietinghoff. His successor General Schlemmer, refused to surrender in spite of the repeated requests referring to his personal oath of allegiance and only accepting to surrender on May the 2nd. This extremely large number of enemies which formed the Ligurian Army was contained by the partisans in a narrow strip along the main roads until they surrendered.

The Hewitt report ended by saying:

Schlemmer would like to surrender to the Allies: he is concerned about the partisans. The wall of the Serra concerns him: his High Commands think it is the base for 50 thousand partisans and moths before they defined it a' thorn in the side of our formation in Piedmont' which hovers over and threatens us because of the relentless action of the partisan forces.

At last the enemy surrendered as they were sandwiched in between the Canavese and Aosta units pressing from above and the Biella ones wisely located lower down to block them.

The freedom fighters operate in close collaboration with the Allied missions, and had made it possible to stop a formation of seventy to a hundred thousand Fascists and Germans that later surrendered. Negotiations had avoided massive fighting, air raids and destruction.

It was the first German Army Corps to surrender in Italy, followed by the Genoa surrender and then of all the German Army on May the 4th 1945 in Caserta. The text of the unconditional surrender of the German 75th Army Corps is in the Appendix (see document 17). Once again the document confirmed the fact that the Fascists were entirely dependent of the German Command. Currently many historians speak about a 'civil war' but the documents attached clearly

show that it was a war of liberation against German domination. This is what Milan (Isacco Nahoum) wrote in *Patria* on May the 28th 1989:

Let us not falsify history: ours was a war of liberation not a civil war. Let there not be confusion between those who fought to free Italy from the Nazi foreigner and those who served them [the foreigners] even if unaware.

On April the 30th Turin was free: the National Liberation Committee (CLN) appointed Passoni as Police Prefect, Roveda as Mayor and Agosti as Chief of Police. The city was policed by the partisans and was slowly returning to normal, public services were resuming, trams were running, as were railways, telephones, electrical power stations and also factories were reopening as the workers were preparing to celebrate Mayday.

On May the 1st, the first to be celebrated after twenty years under Fascism and tens of thousands of Turinese took part. The partisans joined in the great working class demonstration sporting their green, red neckerchiefs and blue buttons of the various formations. Hundreds of red and three-coloured flags were hanging from the windows and a large and happy crowd was applauding at the sides as the march went by. The People's Police was created to uphold law and order and many partisans from the various formations joined in. Giorgio Agosti, the Chief of Police issued the following order to all the branches of the People's Police on May the 3rd following a decree of the Region's Government:

*Turin, May the 3rd 1945
To al the Offices of the People's Police
Turin*

Decision N. 07014: the Region's Government decreed that a from midnight today the city of Turin is no longer in a state of emergency (point A) and that as a result policing and other powers linked to the civil administration return to the appropriate authorities. In the interest of law and order, we ask all officials to exercise their influence with intelligent energy, clam understanding and impartiality so as to defend the life and belongings of the population, offering everyone that freedom which underlies the current spirit of democratic rebirth

The Chief of Police This message marked the end of the state of emergency in the City of Turin, and all the policing and administrative powers were returned to the ordinary authorities. That same day the Anglo- American vanguards entered Turin to find a city which was working and at work with only a few hundred people applauding their arrival. Henceforth, the Allies assumed all powers through teh Amgot: the Police Prefect, the Mayor and the Chief of Police depended on the new administration. All the partisan commanders were informed that soon they would have to demobilize and hand in all weapons. In those days the patrols of the 4th Brigade were looked for the notorious Novena, the man who had caused so many deaths in the Pinerolo area.

Suddenly through a nephew of his, who had been a partisan with us, we heard he had sought refuge in Lecce with some relatives of theirs. I sent the nephew with a group of *garibaldini* who arrived in Bari and took him by surprise arresting him. They put him in car and drove him to Turin where the men of the 4th Brigade wanted to execute him immediately to avenge the death of their commanders Leo Lanfranco, Ettore and Silvio Carando. I opposed this decision and pointed out that the war was over and that he had to be tried by a regular Italian Court which surely would have sentenced him to death and he would have been executed in front of all the Italians. To appease the people of Pinerolo who wanted to see him handcuffed a group of *garibaldini* and I personally took him round Bagnolo Piemonte, Cavour, Villafranca and Vigone. The anger of the locals cannot easily be described: they were all shouting insults at him and were demanding he be put to death. Some got to the point to offer us money to let them get their hands on him, as they wanted personal justice to avenge relatives he had had killed. In Villafranca, the innkeeper of the hotel Delfino where he had arrested and tortured our commanders, offered Novena a poisoned soup at lunch but he smelt the rat and refused to eat. When one of the partisans tried to take the plate to eat his soup, the innkeeper immediately took the plate away. He was taken to Turin and saved from the fury of the people who wanted him dead. He was then jailed and soon after went to trial in a regular Italian Court. He was sentenced to death but was freed after the Togliatti Amnesty (Presidential Decree N4, June the 22nd 1946).

A victory parade of all the partisan units that had taken part in the liberation of Turin was held on May the 6th. I had seen to it so that the divisions of the 1st Brigade took part in this major event in perfect order. And I moved back and forth to coordinate the parade. I was proud to march at the head of my *garibaldini* with whom I had shared eighteen months of hard struggles against the Nazi Fascists.

On the night of May the 5th, General Trabucchi called me to the Cmrp Command which was at the Hotel Sitea. Commander Barbato was also present and I was told I had the honour of being selected as standard bearer of the CvI flag as we crossed Turin, passing all the partisan units in review. There and then I was a little puzzled and not enthusiastic about the choice although I realised that it was a great honour to have been chosen as CvI standard bearer: I had really intended to march with my *garibaldini* on that day. Faced with my hesitation, General Trabucchi backed by Commander Barbato told me that the choice had fallen on me because I was a symbolic figure: as well as being an acknowledgement of my partisan past and for the wounds I bore, I would have been a worthy reminder of the all the Southern Italian partisans who had taken part in the war of liberation, many giving their lives. Both General Trabucchi and Commander Barbato reiterated that 'the figure of a brave partisan commander of Sicilian descent would have represented the North and the South of the country both represented by the glorious CvI flag of United Italy'. Then General Trabucchi showed me the flag which was kept in a glass cabinet reminding me of the glorious history it had. Today, thanks to the help of

partisan Lucia Testori who was the liaison officer in the Autonomous partisan formations led by Major Mauri I am able to retrace the history of our glorious flag. It had been sewn and offered by the Women of Rome after it had been decorated with a gold medal to military valour by the Ministry of War (in Southern Italy liberated by the Allies) on February the 15th 1945 (see photo 17).

On March the 21st 1945 the flag was handed to Aldobrando Medici Tornaquinci, undersecretary of Ministry of Free Italy, who had been told to hand it to the Cvl Commander in Milan. He wrapped the flag around him got into a Douglas and was dropped near Monesiglio where Mauri's Autonomous partisan formations were active. The flag was left with a warrant officer and Medici Tornaquinci was accompanied to Turin where he was a guest of the Earl of Provana of Collegno who lived in Corso Vittorio Emanuele 5. After having got in touch with the National Liberation Committee (CLN) and the Cmrp (the Committee for the region) he ordered Lucia Testori to return to Monesiglio, get the flag and take it to Turin in the next two days. The CNL had already been convened so the flag could be ready to and to General Trabucchi. Testori was extremely emotional about it given the delicate nature of her mission. When she arrived in Monesiglio she took the flag from the warrant officer who suggested she should wrap it round her as she had several Fascist and Nazi blocks to pass. She arrived in Turin at the house of the Earl of Collegno in the late morning while the CLN meeting was being held in the sitting room. Lucia went to the room next to it, unwrapped the flag and handed it to the undersecretary. The General was not present at the meeting because he had just been arrested in Milan and was replaced by Major Engineer Creonti whom Medici Tornaquinci gave the flag too (see document 18 in the appendix).

On May the 6th 1945 a parade of all the formations and units which had taken part in the liberation of the city was organised: the meeting point was in Piazza Vittorio Veneto, the largest square of the city. Altogether there were over thirty thousand partisans, members of the GAP (*gruppi di azione partigiana*) and Sap (*Squadre di azione partigiana*) Surrounding them there were thousands of Turinese applauding them, and US, Russian and British flags were hanging from the windows with the Italian ones.

On the dais there were US, British officers, the Polish mission, a group of French officers along with the CLN and Cmrp representatives and a group for relatives of the fallen. I was with the guard formed by representatives of all the partisan groups (Autonomous, GL, Matteotti, Gap, and Sap) waiting for the ceremony to begin. When the Italian national anthem was played we moved to the front of the dais where the authorities were. There was General Trabucchi with the Cvl flag and a delegation of the Cmrp. I approached General Trabucchi who passed me the flag which I kissed and then it was handed to me.

The speeches began after the flag had been handed over. Franco Antonicelli, president of the Turin National Liberation Committee spoke:after a moving

speech he welcomed all the freedom fighters who had fought in the valleys and cities of Piedmont and concluded as follows:

On behalf of the people [of Italy] the National Liberation Committee solemnly undertakes to defend you and your families and guarantee the certainty of the rights you conquered. Not only will we facilitate the passage from adventurous life to a calmer and serene working life but we also undertake to not to betray the cause which led you to take up arms. Let your families be aware that wherever there is a partisan you will find the heart of the country, honour and trust in the future. Oh Patriots you gave us your blood to conquer our freedom and we need all your strength to build the gigantic house of work, brick by brick. Long Live Italy, the Italy you liberated.

The Giovanni Roveda, Mayor of Turin thus concluded his speech.

In handing our three coloured flag which is the symbol of the unity of our country we, the people of Turin, wish to acknowledge you as the main authors, the irreplaceable authors of the liberation of our country. The volunteer freedom fighters you are here and so are all the fallen. I am not going to list them all, because the list is too long. But our heart, our thoughts sees them along side you, marching. Comrades, patriots, all the who have fallen, we, the ones still standing, will continue along the path you taught us so that we may maintain the freedom that we have conquered.

General Trabucchi was the last one to speak and here are his closing words:

You, the partisans of Piedmont, have not only freed our region but you have also greatly contributed to the favourable conclusion of the war. In Piedmont we have electricity and drinking water and our industrial plants are virtually intact as are the facilities : this is not thanks to any German clemency, but it is thanks to you because you defended the power station, the factories and the works of art, the road networks and you made the enemy afraid so they dared not implement their programme of destruction and ruin. Now the war is over and you are expecting neither rewards nor honours. You are the same as you were in the mountains, those who give and never ask. When I was captured, a simple German soldiers dared ask me why I had accepted to lead a group of ragamuffins, considering I taught at the Army School and was Head of Chiefs of Staff. I answered that no command could have honoured me more than the partisan one, and that those ragamuffins would see the back of the Germans who would run for their lives like frightened sheep. And my prophecy has come true. In years to come, even if it will be a long time from now you will be proud when you say to your children and their children: I was a partisan of the Piedmont CVL.

After the mass celebrated by Monsignor Fossati, Cardinal of Turin, the large victory parade started. With the guard of honour and the flag I reviewed all the partisan formations and units that were positioned and perfect in the large Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Everyone stood to attention and saluted as we passed. The head of the parade saw Commander Barbato (who had been appointed commander of all the partisan forces present at the parade), Commander Petralia, standard bearer with the Cvl flag. In Corso Cairoli I stopped in front of the monument to Garibaldi. Here the authorities were waiting: General Alessandro Trabucchi, all the members of the National Liberation Committee (CLN) and the Crmp and the official delegation of the British and Americans. The Divisions marched by in perfect order, as real soldiers who are used to military parades. As they passed the flag they saluted. It was so impressive that Colonel Marshall said «*C'est beau et émouvant*», and then added in English that it was worrying.

The parade included the following Garibaldi Commanders: Giovanni Latilla, Mario Abruzzese, Massimo Tani, Franco La Pira, the commanders of the autonomous formations the brothers Giulio e Franco Nicoletta, Captain Luigi Scimè and Captain Ettore Ippolito, who, like Commanders Barbato and Petralia were men of the South.

That day Italy, united in the Resistance, paraded along the streets of Turin, and all the Italians present from Sicily to Piedmont, from Mazara del Vallo to Turin. As Nino Costa's poems says in Piedmontese, the fallen marched ahead of us:

Cöi ch'a marciö 'n prima fila/sön i mòrt, i nostri mòrt (the dead, our dead are the ones marching in the front row).

About six thousand partisans fell in Piedmont and about three hundred came from the South. Their sacrifice unites the North and the South of the country reasserting the indissoluble bonds of unity.

Documentation- Appendix

CORPO VOLONTARI DELLA LIBERTA' (Freedom Fighters)
 Member of the National Liberation Committee C.L.N.
 Command 1 of the GARIBALDI "PIEMONTE" Assault Division
 Protocol: n. 220 District, July the 8th, 1944

To the Piedmontese Delegation of the General Command of the Garibaldi
 Assault Brigades and
 c.c . to the Military Command of the CNL (National Liberation Committee)
 Object: Report of the activity the Cuneo 4th Brigade

The following information completes the previous report of the 4th Brigade:
 On June the 29th at 7 pm. One of our lorries with five garibaldini two of who
 armed with Sten machine guns,

Met an armoured German lorry on the Cavour-Pinerolo road about 2000
 metres from Cavour. At thirty metres a machine gun spray was fired against
 our men but failed to hit any. Our men's prompt reaction caused two deaths
 and two wounded among the enemy. Neither vehicle stopped during the
 clash, and they proceeded in opposite directions. The German rounds hit a
 woman cycling at the side of the road who fell to the ground and was run over
 by our lorry.

June the 30th. 8 am Reactions followed the Cavour events and the German
 troops carried out violent reprisals against the civilian population and against
 the town: the Cavour stronghold was attacked and part destroyed although
 none of our men were there. Some of the houses in the Town and out in the
 country were destroyed. Women were raped. In the meantime German
 planes were bombing Crissolo causing deaths among civilians. Groups of
 garibaldini clashed with the Germans in the days that followed:

1) towards eight o'clock two of our units under the command of a liaison
 officer requisitioned a vehicle with an OT tractor; they disarmed the German
 guards and were driving along the road between Cardé and Villafranca when
 they came across a German lorry with seven men. Our officer was driving and
 launched the tractor against the German vehicle, throwing a ballerina hand
 grenade on the hood of the car, while the other men opened fire with the
 Stens. Five Germans were killed, two escaped while we had a light casualty.
 Five Mausers and two revolvers were captured.

2) At eight thirty three *garibaldini* armed with *parabellums* attacked two
 Germans killing them . We suffered no losses.. 3) At 1 pm twenty five
garibaldini armed with *parabellum* took position along the road that leads from

Cavour to Pinerolo at about 1 K before the Pellice Stream. They opened fire against an ambulance with six Germans armed with automatic machine guns a number of enemy soldiers who immediately reacted with weapons when a group of five of ours . A few minutes later a lorry started withdrawing towards Villafranca and the Pinerolo woods while most tried to reach the vehicles left on the side street opposite where the action had begun. One of our lorries, a Fiat 626, had been made unserviceable by the Germans and one of the Balilla cars had been taken. As we started to withdraw two German armoured vehicles arrived and opened fire against ours. Enemy fire was inaccurate and disorganized. Their losses amounted to two deaths and three wounded. We suffered no losses.

4) Roughly at the same time twenty five *garibaldini* armed with a rifle and a machine gun attacked a column of seven German lorries on the Cavour-Saluzzo road with about 150 men armed with machine guns, parabellums and anti-tank cannons. The outcome of the skirmish was seven enemy dead and a number of casualties. One casualty on our side.

July the 1st: our police units came across 3 Gestapo agents in Barge in a car: they killed one and the other two fled. German reprisals led to the killing of three residents and most of the village was set ablaze.

A German column on the road between Bagnolo and Bibiana, coming from Barge, was attacked by our nuclei. We still have no exact information but apparently the death toll was quite high.

The Political Commissar

The Commander of the Volunteers Freedom Fighters

II

CORPO VOLONTARI DELLA LIBERTA'
1st GARIBALDI "PIEMONTE" DIVISION
4th GARIBALDINI "SALUZZO" ASSAULT BRIGADE

Dear Franco:

Now I have tidied my back yard it is time to take a look at the division's landscape and I am pleased to see that the 4th Brigade is the as strong and magnificent as ever. And I salute this flower hoping in shared future celebrations and glory. In writing these words I hope to lay the basis for a strong future military, political and administrative cooperation and would like you to consider the coordination project so that our joint efforts may help us defend our common interests and reach our XXXX objectives sooner. The projects includes three possible activities in our units: military, political and administration/management.

The latter two are closely dependent on military activities and needs which are self-evident as far as our activities in the Po Valley are concerned. In fact the defence of the orographic right side of the mountain of the afore-mentioned Valley is covered by the formations most for whom the defence is most important, that is to say the 5th Brigade. It would be therefore best if this area fell under their remit of authority which would facilitate the defensive duty of the 4th Brigade in the PO Valley. The weapons shortage would otherwise generate major issues which would be irresolvable by our units. I am sure we all agree on this and that it is urgent to carry out a formal division of the remits of authority of the 4th and 15th Po Valley, coordinating a common defence plan with the very good Santa Barbara to enhance efficiency and offensive roles of the two brigades on either side.

As for military activity which does not fall to me, I suggest we promote a common agreement between your Commissar Mario and my Commissar Guido, agreement which will clearly have to be Okayed by both Brigade Commissars. The same should apply to the admin side: we have to reach a compromise between the two offices which will then be approved or rejected at a later date.

I welcoming the dawn of this new cooperation which we applaud, I am pleased to convey my warmest wishes and embrace you as a brother.

Please also send my best wishes to Carlo, Montecristo and Greco.

Yours devotes
(original signature)

III

4th GARIBALDI "CUNEO" ASSAULT BRIGADE COMMAND

September The 8th 1944

To the German Command in Saluzzo .

Before opening fire in Barge, the partisans ordered your soldiers to release the wounded they had caught as prisoners, giving them 5 minutes to do so. It was a loyal fight on either side.

In spite of the fact that we had also captured some of your wounded we released them. It has now come to our attention that your Command had taken hostages as a result of yesterday's events.

It

We wish to warn you of the following:

- 1). That is the hostages who are not responsible for the events are released within 48 hours as from midnight tonight, we shall execute two German soldiers for each hostage. We hold German soldiers .
- 2). We wish to inform you that we are in direct contact with Allied Command at the Italian border and that according to agreements as from September the 1st in the case of German or Fascists Commands carry out reprisals on civilians, partisan prisoners we will immediately act as follows:

For every partisan shot two German prisoners will suffer the same fate;

For ever house burnt down 5 Germans will be shot;

For every hostage shot dead, five German soldiers will be executed.

We call to you to wage a war as soldiers!

The Brigade Command

(Stamp of the 4th Garibaldi Brigade)

[The letter was also translated and sent off in German]

IV

September
12th 1944

DIENSTELLE FELDPOST Nr. 00074

To the Podestà (Head of the
Fascists of the City) of the
Municipality of Barge.

On the 7th of this month German soldiers were attacked by a group of armed civilians, Two German soldiers were wounded in the attack. According to the law of the war the town of Barge should be destroyed.

To give the Municipality of Barge and its people a future a disciplinary sanction shall be imposed.

The Municipality of Barge shall pay fine of 500,000 Italian Lire which shall be paid to the German Command by the 30th of October 1944.

A down payment of 200,000 lire shall be paid to the German Command by the 15th of September.

In the event of the payment not reaching the Command by the said dates, the houses the people were shooting from as identified by the German troops, will be destroyed.

The people of Barge may pay 400,000 Lire of the sum in work for the Wehrmacht.

Hence the municipality of Barge will make workers available on demand in the Saluzzo Pinerolo area. Orders will be given to use such workers exclusively in the Saluzzo Pinerolo area (no transfers to Germany or to the front) .

Until new orders, the Podestà (*Head of the local Fascists*) or a deputy must come to the Field Command every Monday at 10 am.

Signed:

THE COMMANDER
(original stamp)

V

National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy
GARIBALDI "PIEMONTE" COMMAND DIVISION
COMMAND

Protocol n. 340. District. September the 13th 1944

TO ALL THE BRIGADES UNDER OUR COMMAND

A joint operational command has been established for the following brigades:

Brigata Val Pellice «Sergio Teja» and *Brigata Val Germanasca* «Guglielmo Jervis» of the 6th *Giustizia e Libertà* Division.

IV Brigata "Cuneo" and *Brigata "Carlo Pisacane"* of the 1st
Garibaldi "Piemonte Assault Division

The joint Comando is equally under Commanders Renato and Petralia, and
under Political Commissars

Mazza and Carlo, also presiding the Military Tribunal.

In view of the imminent actions which will complete this year of partisan
struggle, we call on the Freedom Fighters belonging to the aforementioned
Brigades to strengthen the fraternal agreement which is necessary to free our
Country and build a better future.

4th Division Command

First Assault Division Command *Giustizia e Libertà*.

Garibaldi "Piemonte" Signed – The Commissar

Signed – Commander

ROBERTO

BARBATO Certified Copy

5th Division Commander

VI

VOLUNTEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS DIVISION COMMAND LEO LANFRANCO

Object Town Councils

District April the 7th 1945
To the Command (for Cristina)

Headquarters

As from January to date Town Councils have been organised in Albugnano-Piea-Piovà-Passerano-Castelnuovo-Buttiglieria-Montechiaro. The aforementioned town councils were elected by all the heads of households in the area including the hamlets. They are the will of the population expressed through the democratic principles which must underlie all our initiatives. Such town councils must operate on the basis of mutual cooperation among elected members, partisan authorities and civilians which has so far proved fruitful. We are confident it will improve in the near future especially if the enemy will allow us to organise better if and when searches and rounds up cease.

THE WAR COMMISSAR (OVIDIO)

VII

**VOLUNTEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS
DIVISION COMMAND LEO LANFRANCO**

Object: the agenda

Zone, April 10th 1945

TO ALL THE BRIGADES UNDER OUR COMMAND

AGENDA

Although Division Commander PETRALIA has not yet fully recovered from his wounds, but has returned to the area to resume command.

On behalf of all the Officers, NCOs and Volunteers of the "Leo Lanfranco" Division we wish him a speedy and full recovery as well as welcoming him back.

In leaving my interim position as Division Commander for other positions in the areas I wish to send my fraternal greetings to all Officers, NCOs and Volunteers of our Brigades for the help and cooperation they honoured me with.

I am certain Commander Petralia's return will give the Division the last impulse needed to crown the struggle victoriously

INTERIM DIVION COMMANDER (Zama)

VIII

19TH GARIBALDI BRIGADE "EUSEBIO GIAMBONE"
MANOUEVRE UNIT COMMAND

District, April the 4th 1945

Object: MILITARY ORGANIZATION

To all the detachment
To the Command of the 1st Assault Division

HEADQUARTERS

GARIBALDINI!

On April the 2nd party partisan formations were disbanded and incorporated in a voluntary army. There are no more differences, not even in name, between the Garibaldi, G.L., Matteotti, Autonome, and so on. We are all soldiers, all volunteers and that is all. We are all fighting for the same cause and it is thus right that there should be no distinctions among us as they could lead to divisions. Our Brigade will thus be known as the 19th EUSEBIO GIAMBONE ASSAULT BRIGADE. More detailed instructions will be sent later.

In the meantime orders are as follows:

1) Every detachment will have a commander and a there will be no deputy commanders. The detachment will be divided into squadrons consisting of ten men, under an NCO who will bear corporal stripes on his chest, to the left. Each squadron will be divided into two five man units with a leader.

2) from now on POLITICAL COMMISSARS will be known as WAR COMMISSARS

3) all the garibaldi stars, red neckerchiefs, red shirts and so on will not be used and a single badge will be distributed to all volunteers.

Commanders and war Commissars will be held responsible for the implementation of all new regulations.

Greetings. Long live Free Italy!

THE WAR COMMISSAR
(signed and stamped in original)

THE COMMAND

IX

VOLUNTEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS
LEO LANFRANCO COMMAND DIVISION

PROT. B. 270

District, April the 12th 1945

Object: Order of the day

_____.

TO ALL THE BRIGADES UNDER OUR COMMAND

ORDER 71

TO THE DIVISION

After three months of absence I am back with you. Three long months during which I was blocked in a bed, martyred and tormented by pain, with my thoughts constantly with you who were fighting during the long and hard winter, holding your heads high against the Nazi Fascist beast, which was trying to weaken your fighting spirit and destroying your brigades. In the past months the glorious EUSEBIO GIAMBONE Brigade has become part of our Division. My warmest and most sincere welcome to their Commander, Commissars, Officers and Volunteers: the brave Commander Rolandino who came from the Lanzo Valleys where the garibaldini wrote pages of heroic gestures, to the Commissars, the officers and the volunteers. My warmest thanks to the old and glorious SFORZINI Brigade which tried everything to free me, its Commander, from the hands of the Nazi Fascists, to the young volunteers ITALO and GHENGA who died in the capturing two German officers that were to be used in the exchange, to messengers (staffette) SARA and LEO, to volunteer BIANCO who bravely managed to take me out of the hospital freeing me from the Fascists.

Volunteers of the "LEO LANFRANCO" Division, although I have not recovered completely from my wounds, your commander is back with you with his rifle ready to lead his men into the final battle. Men of the SFORZINI, of the GIAMBONE, of the NANNETTI Brigades this is what will make us worthy if belonging to the most glorious of the Freedom Fighters Divisions.

My thanks also to Commander ZAMA, who replaced me as Division Commander during my absence: thank you for having kept the Freedom Fighter ranks steady and compact during my absence. I hope your experience and skill can once again benefit the cause of National Liberation.

DIVISION COMMANDER
(PETRALIA)
(the original was signed)

X

NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE
VOLUNTEER FREEDOM FIGHTERS
LEO LANFRANCO COMMAND DIVISION

Object: Order of the Day.

To all the Commanders of the
Brigades under our command

District, April 5th 1945

ORDER OF THE DAY

The 1ST Garibaldi Piemonte Assault Division with its banners, its glorious past and its heroic fallen becomes part of the National Liberation army with the name of Leo Lanfranco, martyr of Villafranca.
The National Liberation Committee, Volunteer Freedom Fighters

Although the unification of all forces means we have to relinquish our insignia it helps us understand that – however painful and regretful this may be - the garibaldini will be part of future actions under the same flag the sole banner of our homeland in harmony with others.

The name of LEO LANFRANCO” martyr of martyrs will be a guide and encouragement. He gave everything to our homeland, including his life. Ever since his youth until adulthood he fought against the oppressors of his land and freedom. He was a worker and a leader of the partisan movement, and with his example he encouraged and galvanised the spirit of our youths never wavering, never ceasing to struggle. His death, his holocaust was a milestone in the route to redemption of the Italian people.

WAR COMMISSAR (OVIDIO)

COMMADER (ZAMA)

XI

THE PROVINCIAL MILITARY COMMAND

Answer to sheet April 20th 1945

010/013 prot

Operational Unit

Object: Increased partisan pressure on Turin

To Gen. Enrico ADAMI ROSSI – 206th Regimental Military Command
P.C. 841

And copy to :

To General Raffaele CASTRIOTA G.N.R. Regimental Inspector P.C. 841

To Lieutenant-Colonel HAUFMANN –
Use of Police force
Corso G, D'Annunzio n° 70

TURIN

To Lieutenant Colonel KOLBE
Commander of the stronghold and of the 28th German Security Sector
Corso Oporto n° 16 -

TURIN

The action carried out by partisans in the area of Chieri clearly appeared to be a predetermined attack to occupy the hills surrounding and overlooking Turin.

Such an intention is confirmed by the information and repeated forays which were carried out recently against the Superga, Maddalena and Pino blocks.

As soon as the present Command hear about the attacks it would have act promptly and forcefully but failed to due to the unavailability of a mobile unit of at least 100 men who could be used as a quick response unit. I beg you General to contact the competent German high authorities because as I have already said to you in speaking I suggest the two GNR police companies currently positioned in Avigliana to protect the plants should be

brought back to Turin and placed at my disposal as a task force for immediate use.

On this occasion I am also beseeching your authoritative contribution to the Federal Commissar so that the Alther Capelli Black Brigade should at long last give me the seventy men I have been asking for and was promised to reinforce the road blocks.

This would give me the opportunity to free the OP GNR Brescia Company which is well armed, homogenous and well trained and suited to counter-guerrilla warfare , which had been disbanded and the men used in road blocks by order of the German Stronghold Command.

I would also like to add that the current situation is proving harmful, damaging the morale and soldiers of the units

The Commander
Original signature
(Colonel Giovanni Cabras)

XII

NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE
MILITARY COMMAND OF THE REGION PIEDMONT

Turin, April the 25th 1945
N. 284/op.

To the 8th Command

With reference to the information received by Captain Pautasso and in consideration that the other formations involved in plan E27 are not yet positioned, I confirm the order not to proceed towards the city targets in the city unless under direct orders of the Field Command in charge of the action

C.M.R.P. Commander
(signed and stamped in the original)

XIII

NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE
VOLUNTEERS FREEDOM FIGHTERS PIEDMONTESE MILITARY COMMAND

TO THE 7TH AREA COMMAND –MAX URGENCY

26/4/1945

2.45

Object: Immediate implementation of plan E27

The order you received last night at 21:00 hours was fabricated.

Arrest anyone who bears it. It is a provocation.

The C.M.R.P. orders all the formations to enter the city with all available forces.

2 pm

No Fascist resistance

THE RADIO IN THE CITY OF MILAN BROADCASTS UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF GERMANY.

Milan has been freed.

YOUR FORCES NEEDED TO TAKE THE CITY.

We repeat for the last time that any other contrary to the above must be considered a message from enemy forces.

Enter the city immediately seeking connection with the HQ Command of current line of communication is interrupted.

THE ORDER IS TO BE FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY

The C.M.R.P.

XIV

National Liberation Committee
Volunteer Freedom Fighters

Following the C.M.R.P. order all the partisan formations at the gates of Turin immediately enter the city quashing any resistance.
HQ – April 26th 1945

To the C.M.R.P.
Mario

To the 7th District Command
Barbato-Marelli

Received by Nello at 4.15 PM

[transcript of the original manuscript]

•
*
XV

NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE
7th District Command

District April 26th 1945 4.30PM
N 36 '26 di prot.

TO ALL THE UNITS UNDER OUR COMMAND

————
March on Turin without any further delay and quash any resistance. There is an uprising in the city and the workers are occupying the factories. Some of the Units of our Divisions have already entered the city.

Link up to the right. Objectives as established. Gather at meeting point in Borgata Sassi, in the square near the Superga railway station after 8 pm. Before 8 pm send all info to Pavarolo.

THE WAR COMMISSAR

THE COMMANDER
Barbato

(Signature and stamp in the original)

XVI

ALLIED MILITARY MISSION IN ITALY

April the 26th 1945 10.30 PM

To Commander BARBATO

The Command of the 15th Group of the Allied Army orders a general insurrection to the west of the Como meridian.

All partisans and resistance groups are called to perform the ultimate effort.

Received at 11 PM 23=

Long Live Free Italy!

[transcript of the original manuscript]

XVII

HQ of the 75th Army GENERAL COMMAND The CHIEF OF STAFF
HQ May 2nd 1945

I hereby authorize the Chief of Staff OF THE 80TH Army Corps
Colonel Major FAULMULLER
act in my name surrendering all the troops and auxiliary forces under my
command as well as deciding the details of the operation.

(Signed)
SCHLEMMER
General of the Alpine Troops

Biella May 2nd 1945

On behalf of General SCHLEMMER, Commander of the Alpine troops and
Commander in Chief of the 85th Army Corps, Colonel FAULMULLER, Chief of
Staff of 75th Army Corps, declares unconditional surrender to the Supreme
Allied Command for all the Fascist and German troops under his command.
Jointly with Captain Patrick AMOORE representing the British Military Mission
in Biella and at the presence of US Colonel John M. BREIT and of Engineer
Giulio Borello, authorized representative of the Aosta, Biella and Ivrea
partisans, also representing the Ivrea National Liberation Committee, and of
Captain Felice MONTI for the Ivrea Military Command, Walter Commissar for
the Biella District and Timo, Chief of Staff for the second sector, the following
is agreed: 1) Hostilities between the German, Fascist and auxiliary troops on
one side and the Allies and partisans on the others shall cease
immediately. The following German troops are concerned: HQ of the 75th
Army Corps, The 5th Alpine Division with the Autonomous Aosta Fighting Unit,
The "Mittenwald" training unit with two batteries of the Air Force Unit, The
German administration units for Piedmont and Liguria, Several minor Army
units and other troops (Pioneers, Railway Engineers Corps and so on)

The Fascist troops include:

The remains of the Monterosa and Littorio, the Units of the Black
Brigade and of the RAP,

The remains of the Folgore Regiment,

Turin administration (including among others the former Head of
Police of Turin Prefetto Grazioli, and General Adami Rossi);

2) At the same time this area is cleared of all partisan forces and
the administration will be managed by the National Liberation Committee in
all services and places;

3) The German and Fascist troops are taken to the local barracks by the National Liberation Committee services and these will be responsible for their food and accommodation for two or three days consisting of bread, fat and meat according to available supplies. Thereafter the Allies will see to the supplies.

It is strictly forbidden to carry out independent requisitioning and quartering.

4) The General Command is to be disbanded. The GC of the LXXV Corpo d'Armata (Army Corps) will be replaced by the Allied Supreme Command liaison bodies, the Partisan Units and National Liberation Committee forming a Liaison Command for the British Military Mission and one for the Ivrea and Biella Liberation Committee

5) Partisans prisoners still in the hands of German or Fascist troops will be handed over by 8 PM of May the 3rd to the national Liberation Committee of Ivrea at the bridge positioned 6 Ks South of the city of Ivrea.

Severely wounded men that cannot be transported will be handed over to the National Liberation Committee, or in the event of the NLC not yet being installed, will be entrusted to the care of the local parish priest.

6) The National Liberation Committees will have permits for the various Commands and every help as well as 400 (four hundred) litre of petrol a day for the transport of the wounded and other reasons.

Signed by the Chief of Staff Colonel
FAULMULLER

XVIII

[Medici Tornaquinci's speech]

In the name of the Italian Government and on behalf of His Excellency Casati, Minister of War, it is my honour to award you, the Commander in Chief of Piedmont's partisan formations, the glorious flag of the Volunteer Freedom Fighters.

As a token of recognition and gratitude for bravery, gallantry and for the heroic gestures performed on the mountains and in the valleys of Italy by our patriots who reclaimed Italy's honour by fighting a long and treacherous war for over 18 months, for having shown the world how the children of this Blessed Land of ours know how to fight and die for freedom, a holy cause, the flag I have handed you received the gold medal for military valour in a solemn ceremony on February the 18th.

On that day in the light of Rome's sunshine, in a crowded Piazza del Popolo we acknowledged the merging of patriots with all the other fighters on the land, in the sky and air. A gold medal to military valour was also awarded to the memory of 8 partisans and 7 fighters of other armies.

I was deeply impressed by the warring climate I found in the old and stable Piedmont, where the war of liberation really became a popular and national struggle: I hope that this glorious flag which you general will hand to the chief of the Freedom Fighters, will be then handed to the Piedmontese partisan units as a prize for their superb behaviour as they have shown us especially in this liberated land.

May this flag, symbol of the valour of the Italian people, soon fly in the once again pure Italian skies, at the head of beautiful brigades so that it may lead and follow domestic and foreign enemies of our homeland!

Turin, March 28th 1945