

THE RESISTANCE IN THE WEST CANAVESE

In the days immediately following September 8th 1943 - a date that caused at the same time the armistice with the Allies, the dissolution of the Italian army, the German occupation of northern Italy and the reconstitution of the Fascist regime with the formation of the Social Republic - a group of disbanded soldiers gathered at the pasture of Piane Alte near Corio, under the command of Major Michelangelo Musso (Colonello Milo). At the same time, a second group consisting of British prisoners of war fugitives took refuge in the asbestos quarries of Balangero under the guidance of Grosa Nicola (Nicola), while a third still made up of former soldiers, was organized by Battista Goglio (Titala) in Alpette. It was mainly the group of Corio to trouble the Nazis; in fact on October 3rd, it became the target of a raid that did not get any results because, although inadequately equipped, the partisans were able to retreat from the bases and find new hiding places at upper altitudes. In the same period, this group passed through a crisis when disputes rose between Major Musso and the Committee of National Liberation of Turin: the removal of Musso and the assignment of the command to Colonel Giuseppe Mirti provoked the voluntary departure of several partisans who, led by Alfonso Nicola Prospero (Fonso), settled upstream of Forno Canavese. After these events, the partisan groups in the area began to clarify their organisation: the headquarters at Pian Audi, led by Colonel Mirti; above Forno, the group Mount Soglio, then reorganized as battalion "Carlo Monzani", led by Nicola Alfonso Prospero; at Alpette, the Aquila company, whose leadership temporarily passed to Gino Seren Rosso (Aquilotto I) after the arrest of Goglio. The stabilization of the guerrilla presence could thus provide a valuable reference for both the young draft dodgers of RSI (Social Republic of Italy) both prisoners of war - British, Russians and Slavs - who continued to escape from the internment camps; on the other hand, precisely the arrival of new rebels raised very serious problems for the companies, which must provide food, clothing and weapons. On December 6th, the "Monzani" organized an action in a weapons depot in Lombardore taking a mortar, four machine guns and several rifles and ammunition, which were then hidden in the sanctuary of the hamlet of Milani with the approval of the chaplain Don Felice Pol. The following day, a German column attacked Forno, and having taken as a hostage some civilians, railed against partisan forces, lined up between the villages Milani and Prataglione. The inability to sustain the fight with a numerous and artillery-equipped enemy, forced the rebels to retreat, through the Bandito Pass, towards Mount Soglio, plenty of snow, having suffered the loss of four comrades and the capture of eighteen. After being tortured, prisoners were later shot on 9th September facing inhabitants of Forno, gathered against their will in front of the house of the Fascist Party. In early March 1944, the general strike called by the Committee of National Liberation of Upper Italy (CLNAI) was backed up, throughout the province of Turin, from guerrilla groups, which went down to the main urban centres to organize meetings and distribute leaflets to the population. The Nazi repression of the strikers was done with arrests and deportations and were done raids against the partisans, which in the Upper Western Canavese were pitiless especially against the village of Pont Canavese, where between the 2nd and the 10th of September many partisans were shot and others captured and sent to concentration camps with some civilians, and against Corio Canavese, where two civilians and four partisans were killed some days later. About a month later, the Resistance was upset by an episode, still doubtful. Nicola Alfonso Prospero, commander of the "Monzani", was accused of treason by the partisan command of Lanzo Torinese for initiating negotiations with the Germans in order to create a free trade zone between Ciriè and Cuorgnè. Arrested and executed April 13th with its major contributors. The incident shocked a lot the battalion allocated upstream of Forno, so that the commander Piero Maggi (Monti) encountered many difficulties in reorganizing the fighting men. Founded or not they were the accusations against Prospero, is a fact that, immediately after his killing, long raids were repeatedly done with

armored vehicles against Corio and Forno, causing the death in battle or by execution of 23 partisans. The month of May was characterized by continuous raids against the groups of rebels, that with the return of warm weather were continuously increased by the arrival of new young people and attacked German and fascist garrisons and sabotage streets and railways. After the first of May the strike in the factories of Cuornè was backed up by the partisans (Aquila company) with various initiatives, a German raid came again to the village of Alpette, with arrests and deportations of civilians as well as looting and burning of houses in the hamlets and Feie and Costa. At the end of the month then, the attack against a German column, with the capture of two officers, led the raid of Cuornè and forced recruitment or deportation of 33 civilians. The Normandy landings and the liberation of Rome, which took place in June, seemed to herald a swift conclusion of the Second World War and in fact imprinted a significant acceleration in the activities of the Resistance. Backing up a general strike proclaimed by CLNAI at the end of the month against the transferring of industrial equipment and machinery under direct German control, the partisans settled between Canavese and Chisone planned the first joint offensive, simultaneously against several strategic targets. In particular, groups of Corio, Forno and Alpette attacked the garrisons of the fascists in Pont Canavese, achieving the liberation of the whole valley Soana, and Cuornè, with the capture of 60 Italian SS. In this same period, the companies regrouped wherever as real formations, while ensuring a more detailed territorial presence. In the Upper West Canavese formed the 4th Division "Giuseppe Garibaldi", subdivided into 18th brigade "Saverio Papandrea" settled in Corio, 80th "Michelangelo Peroglio" lined up between Rocca and Levone, brigade "Manovra" staying in Forno, 49th "Domenico Viano" located in Canischio, 50th "Mario Zemo" set in Alpette and 47th "Carlo Monzani" lined up between Pont and Ronco. Giovanni Picat Re (Perotti) was appointed division commander, while a similar role in the various brigades were Aldo Giardino (Aldo), Giovanni Burlando (Primula Rossa), Claudio Borello (Moro), Giuseppe Trione (Spartaco II), Battista Goglio (Titala) and Agostino Sereno Regis (Bianchi). The changes soon convinced the fascists to implement massive mopping up, usually backed by armored vehicles and artillery, in the whole area. The attack on 10th July against Pont was powerfully opposed by the partisans, who were able to retreat in an orderly way after the attack, reporting only 4 killed and 10 prisoners against more than a hundred in the enemy ranks. On 31st July, after the ambush against a German convoy in Valperga, snapped an operation in a big way even supported by the use of aviation, which attacked Corio, Canischio, Alpette and Pont: once again, pick up of hostages, sack and burning of homes, tormented the population of the villages, while the partisans could not help but withdraw to upper elevations. In particular, the 49th and 50th tried to slow down as much as possible the enemy advance towards Ceresole Reale, to be able to move from Orco Valley to Val Grande di Lanzo August 11th through Crocetta and Piccola passes; the death in combat of Battista Goglio (Titala) caused the renaming of the 50th Brigade in 77th and its taking the name of the disappeared commander. The frustration of the fascists for the partial failure vented their anger, in the following days, on the villages of Barbania and Feletto, whose houses were set on fire. On September 5th, in the the operation "Strassburg" to destroy the free zone created by the partisans in the valleys of Lanzo, the mopping touched Corio and Forno. The most intense fighting took place between the shrines of Bandito and Lady of the Snows and allowed the formations to organize the withdrawing to Mount Soglio and then pass along the entire ridge up to Mount Vaccarezza, in Val Grande di Lanzo. Much of the 4th division was finally involved in the retreat which, through the passes Girard and Sea, would have compelled the 17th August the partisan forces to find refuge in France now freed, while only 18thbrigade was able to quickly go back to bases upstream Corio. The reorganization of the partisan forces in the Upper West Canavese after the dramatic Nazi offensive was very laborious and could only be completed in November. Not surprisingly, between the 15th and 17th of this month, a new raid came against Corio, Forno and Canischio, causing 42 dead, 12 missing, 20 wounded and 10 prisoners in the ranks of the partisans. On the sidelines of these tragic events, a whole detachment of the 46th brigade "Massimo Vassallo", part of Division Garibaldi II operating in the valleys of Lanzo, was captured at the Forcola pass, taken to Corio and machine-

gunned with some civilians: 36 new victims so went to burden the already serious toll paid by the Resistance in that terrible fall. The early and heavy snowfalls and strong enemy presence forced the 4th Division to limit their actions during the winter. Across the Alps, a dozen expeditions reached, through the passes of Val Grande di Lanzo, the Allied Command of Val d'Isera to obtain weapons, while increasing logistical difficulties forced to transfer large groups of partisans to the south of Po river and to do only some isolated act of sabotage. Only with the return of warm weather the partisans formations recovered strength and started actions again. If, between March and April 1945, the fascists managed to hit the 4th Division with a final mopping between Corio and Forno killing some commanding cadres drawn into an ambush, the formations multiplied their attacks against convoys, sabotaged infrastructures, liberated prisoners and captured enemies. In the final insurrection, on 25th and 26th April, the 47th, the 49th and the 77th Brigades attacked the fascist garrison of Cuornè and force it to surrender, while the rest of the 4th Division directed towards Turin and gradually occupied Dora railway station, barracks Valdocco and Cernaia, the telephone company and the German headquarters. However, even the imminent liberation was worth to put an end to the suffering of Upper West Canavese: the retreat of large German forces towards Valle d'Aosta passing through Cuornè caused April 30th the death of six civilians and one partisan .