

## THE RESISTANCE IN THE VALLEYS OF LANZO

Even in the valleys of Lanzo, after the armistice on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1943 hundreds of disbanded soldiers, anti-fascists workers, students, local and Torinese intellectuals, formed resistance groups. Between the hamlet of Colombero and the one of Mecca of Monastero di Lanzo settled two groups, consisting of about seventy soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army of the Alps. In hamlet Muanda 'd Franco (outskirts of Germagnano), Armando Tessore (Naldo) picked up company of about thirty members. At Mezenile operated four groups that gathered more than two hundred men: one made of villagers in Pugnetto, one other under the orders of Vincenzo Geninatti Neni (Cent) and Giulio Pocchiola (Giulio) in the hamlet of Consolata, another one in the village of Rangiroldo commanded by Giovanni Battista Gardoncini (Battista) and Giuseppe Rigola (Ragioniere), members of the of the Communist Party of Italy, another one in the village Monti led by Felice Mautino (Monti) and consists of military and civilian young people, both Jews and members of Catholic Action. Three different companies finally acted in Ceres, in the hamlets Piani, Bracchiello and Chialamberto . Since November, the number of adherents to these early formations of the Resistance began to grow, mainly as a result of the call up ordered by the fascist Social Republic (RSI) that threatened the absentees with the death penalty: the “cooperativa” in hamlet Sabbione of Mezenile became a true district enrollment and the raids multiplied to get weapons and everything they needed to survive. In this same period, the Communist Party (PCd'I) called coordination and organizational meetings in Pessinetto and Mezenile, attended Battista Gardoncini, Giuseppe Rigola, Vincenzo Geninatti Neni, but also other young people who would have then had a prominent role as Nicola Grosa (Nicola) Mario Batistini (Andrea), Giuseppe Casana (Pino), Luigi Capriolo (Righi) and Oreste Pajetta (Alberto). Violent fascist raids did not take long to hit the country, to discourage people from supporting, in active or passive mode, the partisan groups. In early October, the people of Ceres were threatened with retaliation and saved only by the mediation of the bishop's vicar, while in Traves, Pessinetto and Mezenile several civilians were arrested and deported to Germany. On January 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, on Traves struck an action supported by armored vehicles, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians and the burning of the hamlet of Biò; the action was repeated two weeks later, as a reaction to a partisan ambush against a convoy in the village of Roc Berton of Germagnano, destroying villages of Rozello and Catelli, as well as the small towns of Chiaves and Monastero di Lanzo. At the beginning of March, while railway workers and local workers were joining the general strike called by the Committee of National Liberation of Upper Italy ( CLNAI ), the groups- which numbered in all about five hundred poorly armed components - organized a raid against the German garrison of Ciriè and delivered speeches in the streets as much as in front of stations and factories. The reaction was realized in Nazi dismissals and deportations to concentration camps, as well as an extensive raid conducted by about three thousand soldiers. The operation started in Lanzo, where were discovered and arrested some wounded partisans hiding in the hospital, and went so far as to Chialamberto, Ala di Stura and Lemie, resulting in the killing of dozens of rebels and civilians, imprisonment of a thousand people and the destruction of several houses. On 18<sup>th</sup> March, as a result of the arrest of military commander partisan Gustavo Ribet (Luserni), the group leaders and the cadres of the regional CLN gathered in Viù and decided to entrust the task to Andrea Batistini, assisted by Gardoncini and Rigola; during this same meeting, taking into account the experience gained from the recent raids, it was decided not to give battle near the villages to avoid retaliation to population. The apparent prevalence of communist influence in the local Resistance, however, caused a rapid expulsion of groups linked to the Action Party, under the orders of Felice Mautino , Pietro Ferreira (Pedro) and Giulio Bolaffi (Aldo Laghi), who moved to Val d'Aosta and to the valleys of Susa and Cenischia, joining divisions later called “Giustizia e Libertà” (Justice and Freedom). In these months, the partisans, strengthened by the continuous afflux of young draft dodgers and of Carabinieri deserters from the posts of Ciriè,

Caselle, Turin and Venaria, they managed to overcome a third Nazi mopping up. The German raid went on the one hand to Val di Viù, attacking Col San Giovanni, and the hamlets Niquidetto and Favella and capturing twenty rebels, and on the other hand, after burning the villages of Rangiroldo and Mezenile, reached Ceres and then Chialamberto and Balme to block contacts between Val Grande and Val D'Ala. The formations of the area were framed at the beginning of summer in the Division II " Giuseppe Garibaldi ", which after the death in combat of Giuseppe Rigola was entrusted to Battista Gardoncini, divided in 11<sup>th</sup> brigade "Torino", located in the Val d'Ala and led by Pietro Sulis ((Pietro), in 19<sup>th</sup> Eusebio Giambone ", located in the Val di Viù and led by natale Rolando (Rolandino), in the 20<sup>th</sup> Paolo Braccini ", which is located in the Val Grande and conducted by Alberto Tibaldi (Spagna), and in the 46<sup>th</sup> "Massimo Vassallo" lined up between Chiaves and Monastero di Lanzo and assigned to Piero Sasso (Pierin 'dla fisa). Following the liberation of Rome and the Normandy landings, which forced the Germans on the defensive, was planned for the night between 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of June, the first offensive of all the partisans of the mountains around Turin, backing up a general strike called by CLNAI. Seven hundred men of the Second Division, supported by contingents of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division installed in the upper western Canavese, attacked the Nazi garrison in Lanzo. Although the town was protected by 1,500 troops, two tanks, artillery and a non-stop machine-gunning plane, the attack lasted all day and, even without the surrender of the enemy, served to clear the valleys from the fascist garrisons, handing it over to a Resistance so aware of his own strength to proclaim the mountain territory "free zone ". The "free zone" gave the territory, after more than two decades of dictatorship and regime, the first practice of political - administrative conduct for and with the people. Was appointed in Ceres the Civil Commissioner, who, free from any interference of brigades' commands, prepared the local CLN (National Liberation Committee). In turn, they designated the Municipal Councils, composed of representatives of various political forces, in Traves, Pessinetto, Mezenile, Ceres, Ala di Stura, Balme, Cantoiria, Chialamberto and Groscavallo. In some cases, these Councils were able to articulate widely their work through committees, such as in Ceres, where there were set up to five of them to supply food, livestock, assistance and charity, duties, taxes, audit of accounts and take care of evacuees. The Commissioner had to immediately confront with the lack of food, which affected not only the local population, but also the thousands of evacuees, and about six thousand partisans, and was all the more serious in a poor of resources area. It was in this context that the government established the procedures for redemption of requisition vouchers, borrowing and compensation for damages to the victims of reprisals, offering as evidence of the loan guarantee certificates launched by the CLN to the struggle for liberation. It was controlled stretch of the railway line Germagnano - Ceres; was published a weekly newspaper "broken shoes" (famous phrase of a struggle song); it was constituted a criminal court, whose hearings held in public places such as the cinema of Ceres or the town hall of Ala di Stura, also applying the Military Penal Code of War in death sentences against partisans and civilians; were even canceled from the CLN the stamps of RSI. A health system put hospitals at the disposal of the partisans and emergency services for the benefit of civilians: in the requisitioned villa Cibrario in Margone, Dr. Attilio Bersano Begey ran 60 beds, an operating room and several rooms for isolation, which availed itself the 19<sup>th</sup> brigade, but also some formations of the Val di Susa; the hospital of the 11<sup>th</sup> brigade was placed in Balme and that of 20<sup>th</sup> at Pialpette. During the summer, the food situation became dramatic, prior to the failure of supplies from Turin and then for the block of communications by the fascists in Lanzo. The Commissioner promoted two meetings in the valleys, each of which was attended by farmers and ranchers who, while not accepting to be part of the CLN, they intended to collaborate with it, and settled two special committees, one for the valleys Ala and Grande and one for the valley of Viù, which assessed supplies of food and livestock, deciding the percentage to be given to the hoards. It organized a popular provisioning centre, which established a tripling of the monetary value to be paid to farmers, allowing them to discourage the black market and to offer the people a greater quantity of food. Food rationing Committees were responsible for organizing fatigues in the plain, Mario Foieri (Mario) leading, in convoy, they went to Caselletto from Fiano, to Almese

and to Col del Lys, dropping to Viù; on foot, often with the help of mules, hundreds of volunteers, villagers and partisans, carrying cargoes of wheat and rice along the path from the hamlet of Moncolombone, where they were the warehouses, to Croce pass and to hamlet Maddalene. In early September, the fascists unleashed the operation "Strassburg", which ended the "free zone". Tactical Unit of the Department of Italian SS, then replaced by Ost -Bataillon 617, occupied Coassolo, Monastero di Lanzo and Chiaves, without being able to prevent the passage of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division into Val Grande, made possible by the resistance of the 46<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Occupied Pessinetto, the Nazi advance was also slowed in Ceres, where the 11<sup>th</sup> brigade, supported by 80<sup>th</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, fought to protect a retreat that followed different paths. The 20<sup>th</sup> brigade, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, climbed the Val Grande, from Girard pass crossed to the French valley of Arc, now free, from German occupation and in Bonneval was largely disarmed and the partisans interned by the Forces Françaises de l'interieur. The 11<sup>th</sup> brigade remounted the Val d'Ala, crossed the Collerin pass and reached France, getting by the Forces Françaises de l'interieur a similar treatment, they refused, preferring to return to Italy through Autaret pass. The 19<sup>th</sup> brigade traveled back along the valley of Viù and divided, part to Val di Susa, part through various alpine passes to the valley of Arc; many men enlisted later in the Allied Foreign Battalion 21/15 V.E., while others returned to Italy. Completed the return of the partisans in the valleys, late October, they started to rebuild the formations, they could count on a number of actual much lower than in summer. The Second Division was given – after the capture of Battista Gardoncini during the operation Strassburg – to Pietro Sulis and articulated in the 11<sup>th</sup> brigade assigned to Giovanni Sandre (Nani), in the 20<sup>th</sup> given to Paolo Cat Genova (Genova) and 46<sup>th</sup> attributed to Aldo Giardino. In accordance with the command of the Second Division, Bruno Tuscano also formed in Chialamberto a column of "Freedom and Justice" named Renzo Giua. Several young villagers were finally classified in a team of patriotic action (SAP), which had liaison tasks, information and defense of the hydroelectric power plants. During the winter, after the commander of the Allied forces in Italy, General Harold Alexander, had issued a proclamation calling on the radio the partisans to suspend action on a large scale until the following spring, the Nazi-fascist pressure became more intense and forced to displace the Resistance forces in the hills of Turin and Monferrato. In the valleys only small units remained: 11<sup>th</sup> brigade groups in the area of Ala di Stura, Traves and Mezzenile; in Val Grande, about fifty men in Forno Alpi Graie and between Chiaves and Coassolo 35 members of the 20<sup>th</sup> brigade. Since January 1945, 3,500 fascists of Division "Monterosa" policed countries and struck with frequent raids and reprisals on the civilian population and the partisans. During the mopping up of Val Grande, the column "Renzo Giua", which had found refuge in the mine Fragnè upstream of Chialamberto, was wiped out. The survived forces of the Resistance still managed to make frequent missions to connect through the Alpine watershed, to coordinate with allied commands and supplies of weapons. In March, on the initiative of the Military Command of the Volunteer Corps of Freedom (CVL) of Piedmont, all the formations in Lanzo valleys and Canavese were unified in the territorial zone III, under the command of Giovanni Picat Re (Perotti). The effectives 2,432 were distributed among the brigade "Giuseppe Garibaldi", which operated in the valleys of Lanzo, and the divisions "Matteotti-Giorgio Davito", 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine G.L. and 8<sup>th</sup> Alpine Autonomous, active in the Canavese. Once again April 10<sup>th</sup> a fascist ambush surprised some men of the command of the brigade near Corio Canavese, causing the death of the vice-commander Oreste Pajetta and five other partisans. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> the insurrection started in Lanzo, Viù and Ceres. Three days later, the formations of the area III marched towards Turin following the stream of Orco, while finding an obstacle in two German divisions, 35,000 soldiers, who were retreating. The brigade clashed in Caselle with German troops and then reached Venaria, where he installed a garrison in the factory SNIA - Viscose; therefore, divided its forces by sending them to occupy the factories Fiat Aeronautics and Grandi Motori, Elli Zerboni, the German headquarters, the barracks Valdocco and the strategic hill of Superga. In those days when Nazi forces in the valleys surrendered, two hundred French troops of the Armée des Alpes Détachement crossed the Arnas pass (Operation Pingouin), aimed to occupy the Piedmontese alpine side and Valle d'Aosta. The partisans remained in the

valley, under the orders of Nicola Grosa, stopped and escorted the new invaders firstly in Balme then in Lanzo, where they were detained until the allied commands were definitely made clear the issue of the Western Alps border.