ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

THE ITALIAN ARMY IN SLOVENIA

STRATEGIES OF ANTIPARTISAN REPRESSION, 1941-1943

AMEDEO OSTI GUERRAZZI

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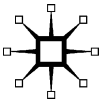

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Preface

For years, American and European historiography has been questioning the antipartisan repression policies in the territories occupied by Axis troops during the Second World War. Works such as those by Richard C. Lukas on Poland,[1] Lutz Klinkhammer on Italy,[2] Mark Mazower on Greece,[3] and Felix Römer on Russia,[4] have proven to be extremely important in understanding the policies and strategies of the Third Reich in Nazi Europe. Furthermore, non-Italian authors have also examined Italian policies in depth, publishing books that have led to extremely significant results. Tone Ferenc,[5] Davide Rodogno,[6] James Burgwyn,[7] and Thomas Schlemmer[8] have shed some light on the behavior of the Royal Army in France, in the Balkans and in Russia. In general, the questions that tend to be answered by this line of research regard the relationship between civil and military authorities, the role of the collaborators, the relationship between "hot" violence and "cold" violence,[9] the role of propaganda and indoctrination in the unleashing of violence by soldiers in the field and finally, the relationship between "fascist" violence and "traditional" military violence.

Over the past few years, following in the tracks of Enzo Collotti and Teodoro Sala,[10] several excellent works have been published in Italy as well, for example, Eric Gobetti's work on Croatia.[11] In regard to Slovenia, the book by Marco Cuzzi,[12] which is often referred to here, has made it possible to more deeply examine the relationship between civil and military powers, and the role of collaborationist militias and the military operations. This research is part of this historiographical vein, and several arguments will be explored in relation to the origin and use of violence against the population of a country occupied by an Axis army.

Italy attacked Yugoslavia in April of 1941. The aggression of a sovereign state, its dismemberment and the subsequent annexation of a part of it, had no political, historical or moral justification. It was a unique episode in the Axis war, the junior partner's attempt to establish a new "Empire on the Adriatic," to use James Burgwyn's definition,[13] and a "new Mediterranean order," in the words of Davide Rodogno.[14] It was an attempt to subject a neighboring population to the logic of power politics. The Royal Italian Army occupied the southern part of Slovenia until the armistice of September 8, 1943. Its inhabitants found themselves subjugated and colonized by the neighboring Italians, suddenly transformed into subjects of the King of Italy, of Albania, and of the Emperor of Ethiopia. Convinced that they were introducing a new and better form of civilization, Italian state officials established a regime of occupation that, in their view, was quite "generous." They were greatly surprised when they were forced to realize that the Slovenes had no intention of allowing themselves to be either subjugated or colonized by the Italians, and they responded to the violence of the invasion with an armed conflict. After a brief period of calm in the summer of 1941, the Resistance began to organize and carry out strikes against traitors and occupying troops, killing isolated soldiers, sabotaging the railways, and attacking the more exposed and less protected garrisons. The reaction of the Italians was extremely determined. Those who had died in combat or had been executed by firing squad numbered in the thousands. Those deported numbered in the tens of thousands, and of these, again, the percentage of deaths was high. A few years ago, the German historian Gerhard Schreiber wrote, "In Slovenia… the ruthless and unjust abuse perpetrated against the civilian population by the occupying Italian forces was the cause of indescribable suffering, although we can say that it was an 'exceptional case' and an almost inexplicable one."[15]

The purpose of this study is to seek explanations for this "exceptional case" through the study of the practice of repression, and by analyzing the orders given by the high commanders and their execution by subordinates in the field. We will try to understand the type of violence used by the soldiers, whether it was a form of violence that was "cold," planned at the higher levels and executed over extended periods of time, or whether it was "hot" violence, an immediate response to the brutality of the fighting and operations.

By examining the documents, we will also try to understand the relationship between the soldiers and Fascism, and what role that relationship played, by analyzing the behavior of the soldiers of the Royal Army and the Blackshirts of the Volunteer Militia for National Security, if and how the propaganda of the time was accepted by the military and, more importantly, how much of this propaganda has remained in the postwar public memory. Furthermore, we will try to understand whether or not the military was responding to a criminal policy desired by the Fascist government, with a practice that was, at least in part, autonomous or whether they, in turn, were carrying out a policy that adhered absolutely to the directives that came straight from Mussolini, directives that, as we shall see, were characterized by a total disregard for any form of international law. In short, we shall attempt to understand whether the policies to repress the Resistance in Slovenia were of a "Fascist" type, in other words, deeply steeped in ideology and applied with particular zeal by "political" units, or whether they were strictly military policies, marked solely by the desire to militarily crush the enemy. Finally, we will attempt to verify, as far as possible, the extent to which public memory concurs with the facts that emerge from the documents.

The main sources for this work are the documents produced by the Italian soldiers themselves. Yugoslavia was occupied by the Second Army, and the Eleventh Army Corps was the unit of the Second Army responsible for "Italian" Slovenia. The documents of these two commands were therefore fundamental, together with those dependent divisions that were most involved in the repression, the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, the *Isonzo*, and the *Cacciatori delle Alpi*. All these documents are on file at the Army's Historical Archives Office (AUSSME). The Central State Archive (ACS) in Rome preserves, in the form of microfilm, the documents gathered by the Germans in Yugoslavia after the armistice and recovered by the Americans. This is collection T 821, which consists of approximately 500 spools, 50 of which concern the Balkan front. These documents were then handed back over to the Italian authorities and are kept in the AUSSME, in collection M 3. Other particularly important sources are the documents relating to alleged war criminals, in the historical archive in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Asmae), which include the defensive memoirs and accounts by those generals that Tito's government, in fact, intended to have

extradited and put on trial for crimes committed during the occupation. A considerable part of these documents has been published by the Slovenian scholar Tone Ferenc, and therefore reference will also be made to his books, but with a mention in a footnote of the original archive location, when possible.

Some of the generals who fought in Slovenia also wrote memoirs, books or gave interviews to the press to provide their point of view. These include General Mario Roatta, commander of the Second Army in January 1942 (he replaced Vittorio Ambrosio who does not appear to have left written records); Mario Robotti, commander of the Eleventh Army Corps until December 1942 and then commander of the Second Army until the end of the war; Taddeo Orlando, commander of the *Granatieri* division until the autumn of 1942; Giacomo Zanussi, Roatta's deputy chief of staff. These accounts are obviously important not only for reconstructing the events, but even more so for the construction of the Italian public memory of the occupation of the Balkans. There are very few accounts by junior officers or soldiers, which would be vital to reconstructing the soul of it, the everyday wartime life and experiences. To overcome this lack, accounts from other parts of the former Yugoslavia occupied by the Italians will also be used.

Abbreviations

ACS	Archivio centrale dello Stato (State central archive)
Ansa	Agenzia nazionale stampa associata (National Agency Associated Press)
AUSSME	Archivio Ufficio storico Stato maggiore dell'Esercito (Archive of the historical department of the army general staff)
Asmae	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
b.	busta (folder)
CcNn.	Camicie nere (Blackshirts)
CCRR	Carabinieri
Doc.	documento (document)
DS	Diari storici (historic diaries)
Fasc.	fascicolo (file)
FF.AA.,	Forze armate (Armed Forces)
Gaf.	Guardia alla frontiera (Frontier Guard)
GILL	Gioventù italiana del littorio Lubiana (Italian youth of the Littorio of Ljubljana)
GM	Guerra mondiale (World War)
MVAC	Milizia volontaria anti comunista (Anticommunist voluntary militia)
NCO	Non commissioned officer
OF	Osvobodilna fronta (Resistance front)
OND	Opera nazionale dopolavoro (National afterwork agency)
p.	page
PNF	Partito nazionale fascista (Fascist national party)
RSI	*Repubblica sociale italiana* (Italian Social Republic)
SPE	*servizio permanente effettivo* (effective permanent service)
VOS	Varnostno obveščevalna služba (Security intelligence)

Introduction to the American Edition

During the Fascist regime, the Royal Italian Army (the *Regio esercito italiano*), which was considered in the 1920s and 1930s as one of the most powerful in the world, was occupied almost continuously in counterinsurgency operations.

From 1922 to 1932, the Italians had to address the insurrection of Cyrenaica, the eastern part of Libya, which had been conquered in 1911–1912 following the war against the Turkish empire, but which during the First World War had been practically abandoned. For the "reconquest" of Cyrenaica, the Italians used the best technology known to the period, with wide use of armored cars, radio, trucks, aviation, and toxic gas. Despite a vast expenditure of matériel, the Italians did not manage to beat the rebels until 1932. In 1930, in fact, a repressive policy was put into action that struck the civil population, that is, the logistical base of the Arab guerrillas, with a strategy that would later be followed by practically all the colonial armies in the subsequent decades.[1] The main designers of this strategy were General Pietro Badoglio, nominated governor of the colony by Mussolini, and General Rodolfo Graziani, who commanded the troops on the ground. We will find both these officers directing the Ethiopian war, with equally brutal methods.

The population of the highlands near the coast was deported to concentration camps in the desert, with devastating forced marches that decimated the columns of prisoners. The deportation was carried out without any distinction between "rebels" and ordinary civilians, as Graziani himself admitted in a 1937 book that had wide circulation in Italy.[2]

In the lagers built by the Italians, around 40,000 Arabs died. If to these we add the close to 20,000 Libyans who fled to Egypt, we have

a general reduction of the population from 225,000 inhabitants in the 1920s to 142,000 in 1931.[3] According to the eminent Italian historian Giorgio Rochat, "the deportation of the peoples of the Gebel and their subsequent slaughter constitute perhaps the most serious crime of Italian colonialism… One can speak of genocide, because the society of the Gebel was destroyed from its foundations."[4]

During the same period in Somalia, the governor of the Italian colony, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, one of the founders of Fascism and a protagonist of 1922's "March on Rome," with which Mussolini had come to power, had begun a series of operations aimed at "pacifying" the territory, committing, according to Galeazzo Ciano, the son-in-law of the dictator, "massacres as cruel as they were useless."[5]

In Eastern Africa, during and after the conquest of the Ethiopian empire (proclaimed by Mussolini in May 1936), the Italian army was to have addressed the uprising in the widespread areas that had not accepted the new government. In this theater of war, too, the Italians widely used the most modern means and techniques. In Ethiopia "order" was restored with terror and with ample use of poison gas, flamethrowers, aviation, and concentration camps. The reaction to every "rebel" Ethiopian attack was always especially violent, with episodes of savage brutality, with the evident aim of terrorizing the population and making it clear that if a "white" was touched, the consequences would be tragic. When in 1937 some Ethiopian partisans tried to kill Viceroy Graziani, the same Graziani of the Libyan actions of seven years previously, the Italian reaction was appalling. In the capital, Addis Ababa, the Italians, and in particular the Fascists organized by the local secretary of the party, went on the hunt for "the indigenous," killing thousands of people (estimates vary greatly, from a few hundred mentioned in Italian sources to 30,000 from Ethiopian ones). At Debra Libanos, a sanctuary of the Coptic church, where it was thought some of the would-be assassins were hiding, General Pietro Maletti shot between 1,500 and 2,000 people, including monks and priests (some of them very young) and invalids who were worshipping at the sanctuary.[6] In Ethiopia, too, deportation to concentration camps was widely used. The most well known was that of Danane, on the Somali coast, a sort of inferno where in six years around 6,500 Ethiopians (men, women and children) were confined, of which more than half died there.[7]

The methods normally used during the operations of the "great colonial police" were extremely simple. According to the testimony of an officer, in fact, the strategy consisted of "burning villages that had not submitted and shooting anyone bearing weapons who might fall into our hands, even if we do not take into account the crueller aspects of such a procedure, seemed the simplest solution to bring about submission."[8] In Africa, in every one of its colonies, the Italian army always used the same tactics, which were characterized by a brutal violence toward the civil population with the intention of terrorizing it and isolating the fighters from it.

Italian society has so little struggled to confront this truly "dark side" of its history that the first attempt to make an overall calculation of the victims of the Italians was only made in 2010 by the historian Filippo Focardi, summing up various partial works of research that had been undertaken previously. For Libya, the number of victims is said to be 100,000, while for Ethiopia the number seems to oscillate between 400,000 and 500,000. During the Second World War, in the Balkans, deaths caused by Italian aggression were about 100,000 in Greece and about 250,000 in Yugoslavia.[9]

The problem under examination here is not the complex Italian relationship with memories of Fascism and its crimes, which will be discussed in chapter 6; the problem is the Royal Army's incapacity to fight and repress Yugoslav guerrillas despite the huge inheritance of experience accumulated during the previous 20 years. As the book will say, Italians, despite the massive deployment of the armed forces (more than 60,000 men used to control a territory whose inhabitants barely numbered 300,000—that is, for every three male Slovenians of any age there was one Italian soldier), they could not manage to get the upper hand with the partisans, and, indeed, suffered startling and humiliating defeats. And yet a very large number of Italian officers leading the army in the Second World War had been formed in the counterinsurgency campaigns in Africa. The most well-known case is that of Rodolfo Graziani, who went from a simple colonel in Tripolitania to becoming vice-governor of Cyrenaica and then viceroy of Ethiopia, before being beaten by the British in December 1940. Many other "colonials" reached the peaks of their careers before being sent to the Balkans, like General Pirzio Biroli, governor of Montenegro, and Gastone Gambara, commander of the Eleventh Army Corps in Slovenia, famous for

his weak performances in Libya in 1941–1942, which won him the nickname "Dov'è Gambara," "Where's Gambara?," by the German Afrika Korps. Ugo Cavallero, who had fought in Eastern Africa in the repression of the guerrilla resistance, became, in 1941, the supreme commander of the Italian Armed Forces until the beginning of 1943.

Some of these, led by Graziani and Gambara, continued to serve Mussolini in his last adventure, that of the Italian Social Republic (the *Repubblica sociale italiana* or RSI), the puppet state set up by the Germans in northern Italy after the armistice of September 8, 1943, and continued to fight against the Resistance, this time the Italian Resistance. In short, these were officers who had made their careers out of repressing insurgents, and who had made violence against civilians their normal tactic. In comparison, the Germans were newcomers, still wet behind the ears, who only had the war in Spain as their starting experience. And indeed, the Wehrmacht regarded their Italian exemplars with great interest, as studies published in Germany show: studies about the first really modern war of conquest and maintenance of a large territory, the war in Ethiopia.[10]

Despite all their experience, and all their allies' expectations, the Italians failed miserably. This failure requires a few words of explanation. The Royal Army entered the Second World War (the nation declared war on France and the British Empire on June 10, 1940) with deep structural limitations. To give one example, the Italians were not able to produce a "heavy" tank over the whole duration of the war, and the *Aeronautica*'s most widespread model of fighter plane, in 1940, was still the antique Fiat Cr. 42 biplane. It is not possible here to examine all the limits of the Italian armed forces, but it is nonetheless necessary to explain briefly what forces were deployed in Slovenia in 1941–1943, and what their intrinsic limitations were.

The problems that afflicted the Italian occupying forces were principally of three types: technical, cultural, and social. Let us begin with the first type.

Infantry divisions were the bodies principally used for the occupation of Slovenia, specifically the Sardinian Grenadiers (*Granatieri di Sardegna*), the *Isonzo* division, the Alpine Hunters (*Cacciatori delle Alpi*), and the *Macerata* division, as well as some minor units,

and infantry. They were infantry divisions of the standard model, even if the *Granatieri di Sardegna* and the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* were considered elite divisions due to their long history. The *Granatieri* were the oldest part of the Italian army, having been founded in the 1700s by the Savoy dynasty, and were selected based on height. The *Cacciatori* was a division that descended from a volunteer corps founded by Giuseppe Garibaldi, the famous hero of Italian unification. But the excellence of these divisions was limited to their fame and, perhaps, to their training, insofar as their arms and equipment were entirely identical to those of other normal infantry divisions.

An Italian division in 1941 was very different to a German or British one. Between 1936 and 1938, the Royal Army, on the initiative of Alberto Pariani, the undersecretary of War, had imposed a thorough reform of its organization, based on the theory of "high-speed war." The theory foresaw that Italy, which did not possess either the necessary raw materials or the industrial structure to bear a long war, necessarily had to fight and win rapidly, through an extremely aggressive "lightning strike" against the enemy carried out with the greatest speed and violence possible, the Italian equivalent to the German Blitzkrieg. To do this, the army had to become as agile and quick moving as it could. To this end the divisions of the land army, the base units for the maneuver, were transformed from "ternary" into "binary" divisions, that is, composed of two infantry regiments rather than three, as in the rest of the world, so as to make them more agile and easier to command.[11] To make up for the lack of men and force of impact, on the eve of the Second World War every division was joined with a "legion" of Blackshirts, that is, a force of 2 battalions of about 1,200 men of the *Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale*, the Voluntary Militia for National Security, the armed force of the National Fascist Party founded by Mussolini in 1922.

If the theory of the "high-speed war" was sound, the methods with which the army could turn it into practice were slender indeed. A "normal" infantry division, in 1940, was made up of 12,000 soldiers, 614 noncommissioned officers, and 449 officers, who, in order to travel, could only rely on their own feet. For all these men, and for their matériel, only 108 trucks, 71 motorcycles, 13 cars, 6 transport vehicles, and 4 "special cars" were available. Transportation of luggage and supplies was taken care of by 3,424 mules. As for artillery,

each division was expected to have 80 45-mm mortars, 8 20-mm antiaircraft machine guns, 8 47/32 antitank artillery guns, 8 65/17 artillery guns (a lightweight infantry gun), 24 75/32 field artillery guns, and 12 100/17 guns, lightweight howitzers.[12] According to a military school manual of 1939, the standard infantry regiment had only 3 transport vehicles for the service platoon and 3 small motorcycles for the communications platoon. For the antitank artillery company, with 8 guns, mules were provided, as was the battery with 4 65/17 guns. Each regiment was composed of 3 battalions, each one of which being made up of three companies which themselves each had, at least theoretically, one machine gun for every 12 men and 3 45-mm howitzers. The battalion was also made up of a machine-gun company with 12 of these weapons.[13]

This long description of weapons serves to underline the fact that Italian infantry divisions did not possess any of the fundamental weapons for a counterinsurgency war, and particularly for one in the mountainous and wooded territory of Slovenia. There were almost no normal transport vehicles like trucks, not to mention continuous-track trucks, or indeed any kind of armored troop transport vehicles: armored cars did not exist in this campaign, as only a few were produced and distributed, and even then only to divisions operating in Africa. Submachine guns were never actually distributed and the number of heavy machine guns and mortars was very low.

In other words, Italian soldiers in Slovenia traveled on foot, with rare exceptions, or in trains, and generally fought with rifles, hand grenades, and very few heavy machine guns.

As regards the quality of this matériel, the 65/17 and 100/17 artillery guns were left over from the First World War, while the 75/32 field artillery gun had been designed in 1934, even if all the most modern versions had been transferred to other units fighting on more difficult fronts, such as the African and Russian. Even if they were well behind and almost useless in fighting the British army and its Matilda tanks, these guns, like the 47/32 antitank gun, were probably more than sufficient as accompanying weapons for counterinsurgency warfare.

The heavy machine guns built in Italy at the time were the Fiat 14/35 and the Breda 37. Both had a firing frequency far inferior to that of their German equivalents (450 shots a minute for the Fiat; 200–250

shots a minute for the Breda).[14] The submachine gun, however, the Beretta Model 38, was considered particularly efficient, but only a few versions were constructed and distributed, and then only to specific units, such as parachutists and carabinieri (CCRR).

The standard weapon for the Italian soldier was the rifle, which for the entirety of the war and on all fronts was the Mannlicher-Carcano Model '91, later to be famous as the weapon of Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy. The '91 was a manual-repeating firearm, previously used in the First World War, with a useful range of 600 m and a magazine containing six cartridges. It was not inferior to the standard weapon of the German infantry, the 98K.

With regard to the uniforms of the First World War, the single difference had been the introduction of a new helmet and the substitution of the jacket with closed collar with a new look characterized by a folded collar, shirt, and tie. The quality of the uniforms, following the practice of using "autarchic" materials (that is, materials invented to compensate for the lack of imported textiles following the economic sanctions ordered by the League of Nations after the invasion of Ethiopia), had notably declined, however, and, as countless memoirs recount, the stitching gave way very quickly, especially after being exposed to the rain. Moreover, Italian soldiers did not have socks, but were obliged to bind their feet with "foot cloths," long strips of cotton or wool. The ends of the trousers had to be similarly bound with long strips of cloth, the "leg bands," that if too tight impeded circulation, and if too loose fell down over the feet.[15] This basic clothing problem made life difficult for millions of Italian soldiers during the whole course of the Second World War, and it would have been solved with a not particularly difficult invention: the sock.

A further limitation, particularly difficult to understand in the case of the army of Italy, the country of Guglielmo Marconi, was the inefficiency of the radio which, as many memoirs note, worked poorly, above all in the winter and when the weather was wet.

According to Lucio Ceva, the quality of the weapons was not quite as shoddy as many books written by ex-soldiers make out;[16] instead, the real problem was the quantity of munitions and firearms, a judgment shared in part by Giorgio Rochat.[17] The verdict of these two authoritative historians is obviously to be kept in mind, even if in the Slovenian theater of war the deficiencies seem

particularly apparent. The lack of armored cars and of armored transports for infantry, and the scarcity of mortars as well as heavy and light machine guns, put Italian soldiers in the difficult situation of fighting a war as particular as an antiguerrilla campaign with weapons and transport more appropriate for a trench war like that of 1914–1918. All these limits can be traced to the backwardness of the Italian economic system, which was in turn the product of a backward society, late to arrive at industrialization and in any case occupying a land totally without raw materials. But the limits were not merely structural; they also derived from important cultural deficiencies which, according to the American scholar MacGregor Knox, derived from the lack of military culture that characterized the birth and development of the unified Italian state. Among the various problems that afflicted the Italian armed forces, throughout its history, Knox lists the following: "Provincialism, fragile military traditions, a lack of technical skills, dependence on foreign sources for energy and prime materials, bad management of existing resources, incompetence and venality within big industry, a thin military culture that prevented the armed forces from imagining scenarios of modern war and even more from preparing for them; strategic myopia, dispersion of energy, passivity, logistic inefficiency, and a more or less marked operative and tactical incapacity of the armed forces are such closely-interwoven elements that to analyse them separately would be an unrewarding task."[18]

For our part, as this is not a complete study of the Italian armed forces during the Second World War but only in a limited and particular theater of war, that of Slovenia, we will seek to analyze some of these limits within the framework of their repercussions for the Slovenian front.

Antiguerrilla war requires, apart from efficient and specific armaments, great tactical capability of troops and NCOs and an extraordinary capacity to adapt quickly, to react, and to initiate, as well as a talent for invention and imagination on the part of the officers. Troops operating in zones "infested by bands," to use the German terminology, were to have received specific training and should be led by extremely adaptable and capable officers of particular initiative. In short, these should be troops perfectly trained to follow the orders of officers who were both prepared and favored with personal prestige.

The Italian army, given the vast experience it had gained over the 20 years preceding the invasion of Yugoslavia, seemed the classic case in which all these characteristics should have developed better than in other armies. The result was quite the contrary.

According to doctrine that evolved in the 1930s, the fulcrum of the Italian armed forces should have been the infantry. For the Lieutenant Colonel Emilio Canevari, an officer who had a certain repute as a publicist and critic of military matters, an army's "centre of power" was its infantry.[19] For General Gabriele Tumino, professor of "Military Culture" at the University of Palermo, as late as 1940–1941, the only weapon capable of imposing its "own will on the enemy" was the infantry, for which he suggested a use that displayed ideas that had not evolved very much since the First World War. For this general, in fact, the issue of primary importance was "number," followed by "patriotic spirit," "discipline," and "strong military and warrior skills."[20] Also indicative was the suggestion of the General-Count (for so he signed himself) Ottavio Zoppi, for whom the rifle could not be substituted by the machine gun, while the bayonet had to remain as a symbol of the "resolute will to attack" ("risoluta volontà dell'abbordaggio") of the soldiers.[21]

The central point of Italian war doctrine in the 1930s was the frontal attack of the infantry, which was to be sustained by "morale" and an aggressive "spirit." In 1939 this theory was summed up in a volume that collected the writings of the highest-grade generals in the armed forces, among whom Marshal Pietro Badoglio (head of the chiefs of staff); General Ubaldo Soddu (undersecretary of War); and Domenico Cavagnari (undersecretary of the Marine); Giuseppe Valle (undersecretary of Aeronautics). According to all these officers, it was the aggressive "Fascist spirit" instilled in the troops that would guarantee victory for Italian arms in any upcoming war. Indeed, according to Soddu "the morale element" would be superior to any "material means,"[22] while even for General Valle the most important aspect of Italian aviation was "the man of Mussolini."[23]

What the Italian military command had in mind, in 1939, was a trench war that would be won by the army strongest in terms of morale and most convinced ideologically and, given that Fascism had transformed Italians into warriors, the next conflict would see the triumph of "Italian and Fascist" arms.[24]

The technical specialization of the soldiers and the modernity of the weapons were not important; what mattered were numbers (as can be seen in Mussolinian "mottoes" of the time such as "numbers are power" and "eight million bayonets"), and aggressiveness, and all this despite the fact that at Guadalajara, in the Spanish civil war, the Italians were trounced by republican forces, thanks in part to the use of a few Russian tanks.

The lack of updated studies on the use of infantry had its effect on antiguerrilla strategy. According to a recent study by Ferruccio Botti and Virgilio Ilari, in the 1930s a certain interest began to develop in the strategy of repressing insurgencies. However, the only book that is cited by the two scholars is *Verso il Fezzan*, by Graziani, a memoir rather than a technical study.[25] It was not until 1942, according to these authors, that a circular signed by the then head of the army chiefs of staff, Vittorio Ambrosio, addressed the matter directly. Along with the circulars of Mario Roatta, also in 1942, which will be discussed in the following pages, Ambrosio's circular was one of the only traces of tactical study undertaken specifically for the Italian army's counterinsurgency war during the whole period of the conflict.

Ambrosio's circular, number 36000, entitled "Episodic Fighting and Guerrilla Activities," was a 64-page pamphlet divided into four chapters. The first chapter was introductory and underlined that by then, guerrilla warfare had become "endemic" in Italian-occupied territories; the second explained the methods used in guerrilla warfare; the third described the principal counterinsurgency strategies; and the fourth discussed the range of troop training. As regarding the strategy, Ambrosio considered intelligence operations and the diffusion of propaganda among the population of occupied territories to be of fundamental importance, with the aim of isolating the guerrillas. In the case of territories where the guerrillas were particularly strong, Ambrosio suggested the formation of powerful strongholds in the main inhabited centers and the use of strong mobile columns during raids. In short, he recommended control of the territory and specific targeted actions as an essential basis for all occupation strategy, along with intelligence gathering and political activity through propaganda.

The circular, despite being well written and in line with the Italian army's capacities at the time, arrived too late to fill the gap

of analysis and study of the guerrilla problem, and too late to remedy the lack of troop training, a lack that largely reflected both the mentality imposed by the Fascist regime and the long-term structural limits of the Italian army. Moreover, in the archival documents consulted for this study, there are no notes or references to this circular, which thus seems to have been ignored by officers in Slovenia, who instead made wide use of the instructions issued by Mario Roatta in the contemporary circular 3 C.

Speaking with Mussolini about operations on the Greek front, in March 1941, the chief of staff, General Cavallero, observed, "In front of a well-prepared defensive system, with gun outposts, we need troops that know how to perform infiltration tactics and which are led by a strong framework of officers. We do not have these conditions, and thus instead of performing infiltration tactics we must throw ourselves against the enemy and overwhelm them with force."[26] That is, Italian soldiers, instead of trying to go around the enemy or infiltrate their positions, had to perform frontal attacks, getting themselves slaughtered in the process. Cavallero's observations are picked up by all the many other generals who wrote their memoirs after the war as well as by the no less numerous memoirs of lesser officers and soldiers. For example, Mario Roatta (previously chief of staff), considered the soldiers' training "terrible."[27] Mario Caracciolo di Feroleto, however, told of being constantly highly criticized for his "mania" for training.[28] According to Emilio Faldella, the terrible results produced by troops in Albania had been due to the "slight importance given to combat training, [and also due to] a lack of method, of training camps, and of arms, but also due to the foggy mentality that [believed that] in combat, intuition and personal courage mattered more than training."[29] This was a judgment shared by General Quirino Armellini, according to whom the Italian army was "good for parades" insofar as Fascism had given a decisive contribution to the extremely poor preparation and training of the soldiers,[30] as well as General Giacomo Zanussi.[31] The judgment that the Royal Army was "good for parades" was generally shared by the Germans, among whom was Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, who had long fought in the Mediterranean theater alongside the Italians.[32]

The Italian army under Fascism, according to the analysis of Giorgio Rochat and Giulio Massobrio, had a basic function, that

of guaranteeing internal social order.[33] The analysis of these two historians was later picked up by the journalist Giorgio Bocca in a book, which is still valid in some of its parts: "An army of the barracks and a police-army, created to guarantee public order, which is to say the established order, the order of the bourgeoisie in power. Its training consists above all in closed order, in the displays of parades, that is to say in order to save [money], so as not to waste munitions, fuel, and arms, but also because the ruling class idolises this form, which is aimed at class intimidation."[34] Also according to Rochat and Massobrio, the chief of staff, General Ugo Cavallero, in 1943 continued to create infantry divisions to spread through Italy with the purpose of repressing any insurrection against Fascism or the monarchy.[35] When, immediately after the declaration of the armistice on September 8, 1943, the Germans attacked the Italian army, the officers of various local commands within Italy very often refused not only to fight them, but also to distribute weapons to the ordinary citizenry, both middle-class and working-class, who demanded them in order to resist the Wehrmacht, and all because the officers were terrorized by the idea that "the Communists" might use them for a revolution. This happened, for example, in Milan, where the Italian commander of the city asked the Germans to occupy the city "to guarantee order." For these reasons the soldiers were not trained: because for the maintenance of internal order, and to repress any possible revolts, all that was necessary was that minimal training to obey orders and use weapons correctly that was imposed on soldiers during the call-up.

In general, the upper echelons of the Italian officers, as we have seen, tended to lay all the blame for lack of training on Fascism, in order to lift blame from themselves, as if for 20 years they had not done anything but merely submit to the impositions of the regime without taking any responsibility. Even if the responsibility for the desperate situation of Italian soldiers is still a cause for debate, what is certain is that historians both Italian and Anglo-Saxon (James Burgwyn, MacGregor Knox, Martin Kitchen, Giorgio Rochat, and Mario Montanari, to name just a few authors) have widely taken up the argument, pointing out that the training of the Italian infantry was absolutely deficient in regard to other armies of the same period.[36]

Thus, according to historians and memorialists alike, soldiers were very badly trained, but the situation did not improve with

officers and noncoms. About the latter there are no specific studies. According to Mario Roatta the noncommissioned officers were few in number and ignored by the officers.[37] According to Knox, they were few in number, poorly prepared, and above all could not advance in their careers,[38] a fact that for obvious reasons limited the commitment and prestige of this category.

However, the situation of the officers was even worse. The officer corps was divided into two categories: career officers, that is, those in "*servizio permanente effettivo*," effective permanent service ("officers in SPE"), were prepared at the Military Academy in Modena, a prestigious school with a long tradition behind it. Nonetheless, General Giacomo Carboni, who had been commander of the academy in 1940, in his memoirs defined the teaching material as a "mummified monstrosity."[39] According to another important officer, General Umberto Spigo, who had been secretary of the Supreme Commission of Defence, the recruitment of career officers took place in a "varied, random, chaotic, undisciplined" way. "Many of these officers making a career in the military did not see themselves as having a mission, but a *sistemazione* [a cushy lifetime post]."[40] General Quirino Armellini, like many of his colleagues, put the blame on Fascism if the "officers in SPE," who had been excellent up to 1933, lost prestige and above all capability thanks to the regime and its demented military policy.[41] Rommel, who saw them in the field, judged them "terrible."[42] Giorgio Rochat summed up the education of career officers under Fascism: "One could say that the officers had good basic talents, faithful to the king and the army, and devoted to the service. However they resented two traditional limitations, on which judgements all agree. First, an insufficient training due to lack of funds, weak weaponry, an absence of training grounds for manoeuvres (old defects of a larger army budget), and because the trench war remained the [only] dogmatic and schematic reference-point within the conservative range of choices that established the reorganisation and running of the army. Second, a cult of obedience to superiors that became passiveness and inactivity on the part of commanders at every level that even official doctrine preached."[43] And another scholar, James Burgwyn, summarized in this way the officers in Northern Africa: "Innovative thinking on the part of…military subordinates had been stunted by years of rigid schooling in World War I tactics.

They therefore lacked the technical training and imagination for planning or fighting a modern war movement."[44]

Another important detail that greatly limited the efficiency of the Italian officer corps was the habit of lesser officers to wait for orders from their superiors before taking any initiative whatsoever. While in the Wehrmacht, for example, a system existed that permitted, indeed required, officers on site to put their orders into effect with a notable liberty of tactical choice, the Italians waited for written orders for every detail. It is hardly necessary to stress how this habitual inability to make immediate and rapid decisions might worsen the performance of Italian troops in counterinsurgency operations. Examples of this passivity, not only among the junior officers but also from the higher echelons, can be found in the army's behavior in Slovenia, as we will see over the course of this study.

However, the mass of junior officers were not "officers in SPE," career officers, but were "complementary," put into service when war required it. Some of these officers were "recalled," that is, they were peaceful middle-class citizens who had been lieutenants or captains during the First World War and were now catapulted into command of a battalion without having received any other experience of battle or of army life. These "recalled" officers, in practice, not only did not know the ABC of modern war, but also had not even the faintest idea of how weapons worked. Another large part of the "complementary" officers were university students or recent graduates of the *scuole superiori* who, after a short training course lasting six months, became *sottotenenti* (lieutenants).[45] In short, the very structure of the officer corps, according to Lucio Ceva's definition, was "a mushroom growth" ("*a fungo*"), with an enormous head made up of generals and senior officers, and relatively few junior officers.[46] This structure had been conceived of by the highest authorities of the armed forces in order to guarantee career advancement and thus significant economic improvements. The result was that while senior officers' careers were assured, field officers capable of leading a unit into battle were too few.

The technical and cultural problems, therefore, can be summarized to explain the incapacity of the Italian armed forces to create an efficient war machine, and these were exacerbated by Fascism. Ill-armed, ill-trained, and worse-equipped men were led by all too

often incompetent officers. Obviously there were exceptions, with units who could fight very well and managed to win remarkable victories, above all bearing in mind the structural limitations of the Italian army, but they were unusual. Normality, as we will see over the course of this study, was represented by the divisions that fought in Slovenia.

Up to this point we have considered the limitations of the armed forces that are well known to historians both Italian and foreign. Less known and less studied are some of the social and political limitations of the Italian army. These are not limitations due to the backwardness of the Italian economy, which have already been brought to light by MacGregor Knox, but due to the backwardness of Italian society in its relationship with the state and the collectivity. Obviously, this is not the place to go into too much detail on this point, which would take us too far away from our argument, but we can note those aspects that had the most effect on the efficiency of the Italian armed forces in Slovenia.

It was an intrinsically classist army, in which an abyss existed between soldiers and officers. The most notable example of this separation was in food. Italian soldiers did not have the right to a mess hall until the 1970s, and ate out of tins when they could, even sitting on the ground. Officers had a separate mess where they were served by waiters in white gloves. The problem was that, alone among the world's armies, this distinction survived even at the front itself, giving tangible proof of the caste difference and of the egotism of officers who, even facing extreme danger, would not give up their privileges. This difference was, however, considered normal by Italian soldiers, as it reflected the values traditionally transmitted in civil society. When Italian soldiers came into contact with the Germans, for whom the mess was the same for every military grade, they were stunned and enthusiastic about the greater democracy that they perceived in the Nazi army.

The problem was that there was, for this great divide, no corresponding distinction of skill or charisma. Recruitment problems have already been described in the previous pages, but to all these structural limitations there must be added the limitations endemic to Italian society, specifically the festering sore of *raccomandazione*, political sponsorship. As every memoir describes, though strangely left unmentioned by historians, the system of advancement through

the ranks, along with the choice of posting and type of job itself, was heavily influenced by the unwritten rule of *raccomandazione*, which meant that one's career was determined by the influence or actual power of one's friends or family. The system, in practice, worked (and still works in all branches of Italian society) via a selection that was officially transparent and legal, through competitions or seniority, but in reality decisions were made based on the pressures put on the commission, or the agency that had the task of choosing a person for a particular post, by friends, relatives or political "protectors" of the various candidates. In the end, the candidate with the best curriculum or the most preparation was not chosen; the successful candidate was the one who could count on the most powerful friendships or family ties. The system was so deeply rooted that on the cover of the envelope of Mussolini's private post was inscribed "*raccomandante*" and "*raccomandato*" ("recommending" [the sponsor] and "recommended" [the recipient of the favor]). The damage that such a "selection" system caused are so evident that it hardly needs underlining.

Not only that, but in archival sources as well as in memoirs, the army chiefs, the Fascist party, and the officer corps (and the noncoms as well) are all described as deeply corrupt. Thefts from the soldiers' food, for example, were described in detail in conversations between Italian officers imprisoned in Great Britain. The rumor that the various Fascist bosses had made themselves shockingly rich was perceived by public opinion and by the soldiers as a given fact. That the commander of the Italian armed forces, Marshal Cavallero, was corrupt, and that he gave weapons contracts to friends of his who made guns that did not work, which is to say that he sent his soldiers out to fight and die merely to enrich himself, was a commonplace open discussion. In other words, it was a widespread opinion that the greed of the highest levels of the armed forces was limitless.[47] It is not important to determine how much truth there was in these rumors spreading among the troops (and indeed false information spread very easily in all armies); what is striking is that more grotesquely the political and military elite of the country were depicted, more the rumors were taken seriously, notably lowering the morale of soldiers who were expected to fight for these figures so universally described as incapable and corrupt.

These problems, traditionally present in Italian society already, were exacerbated by Fascism, through which "political" *raccomandazioni* were ever more important, given the unchecked power of the various bosses, and because such corruption was tolerated even by Mussolini, who kept a secret file on his corrupt underlings, Fascists and soldiers alike, in order to keep them under his thumb.

To sum up, it is plausible that Italian troops fought badly also because, in general terms, they were led by an officer corps that was ill-prepared, socially distant from their men, and lacking in charisma. In every army, complaints about the incompetence of superiors are normal, because often soldiers consider that their commanding officers are useless or stupid. However, it is likely that the particular incapacity of the Italian officer corps and the corruption that was perceived as widespread created the conditions for Italian soldiers to have deep distrust in the armed forces as an institution, something that makes the "Italian case" special, and perhaps unique, in the wider picture of the Second World War.

Explanations for the low efficiency of the Italian army in repressing the Slovenian resistance, and for the extreme violence exercised in trying to fight it, can be found in the cultural, technical, and politico-social limitations of Italian society. Italian generals, incapable of fighting a guerrilla war due to their lack of preparedness and that of their troops, activated military maneuvers that were considered normal by the Royal Army and that had already been used effectively in Africa. They thus unleashed a real "war on civilians," devastating villages, burning houses, and shooting and deporting civilians, exactly as they had done in Libya and Ethiopia in the preceding years.

I

The Annexion

On April 6, 1941, at six in the morning, the Axis powers, without any declaration of war, attacked Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, operations were particularly rapid. The Italian Second Army, commanded by General Vittorio Ambrosio, was involved on the "Giulia front," that is, on the part of the border between Italy and Yugoslavia that corresponded with Slovenia. The Second Army was made up of the Fifth and Eleventh Army Corps. The Fifth Army Corps had, under it, the *Sassari*, *Bergamo*, and *Lombardia* divisions, while the Eleventh Army Corps, under the command of General Mario Robotti, was formed of the *Re* and *Isonzo* divisions. There were few clashes and already by April 11 the Italians had their first successes with the occupation of Logatec and Sussak. On the same day, General Mario Roatta (at the time head of the army general staff), in a lightning strike, entered Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, with two platoons of motorcyclists, in order to take the city before the Germans did. On April 15, the front completely collapsed, and Yugoslav troops began to surrender en masse. On April 18, at noon, the unconditional surrender signed at Belgrade the day before came into effect.[1] The Italian losses, on the Slovenian front, were fairly minor: 302 men wounded, killed, or missing, according to the 1978 book of the *Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito*,[2] and even less according to Marco Cuzzi's 1998 study: 12 dead, 16 wounded, and 21 missing.[3] This shows how particularly swift the campaign in Slovenia was, that the dead were few and the battles, clearly, were far from hard fought. Yugoslavia had dissolved and its army dispersed. "This end was reached in less than two weeks," commented the official magazine *Cronache*

della guerra, not without reason.[4] As the Italian general Giacomo Zanussi wrote after the war, "There was no reaction: here the absence of reaction does not have a relative or approximate meaning, as one might believe, but peremptory and absolute."[5]

After the signing of the armistice, the Italian armed forces remained in Slovenia. The occupation of what was to be Italian Slovenia was undertaken by the Eleventh Army Corps, under General Mario Robotti (see figure A.1).[6] He could count on two large units: the *Isonzo*, which had already taken part in the campaign and was under the command of General Federico Romero, and the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, led by General Taddeo Orlando, which had substituted the *Re* division that had been sent to Croatia. Robotti could further depend on other corps, like the Frontier Guards,[7] and other extra-division units. The part of Slovenia occupied by the Royal Italian Army was divided into three large zones: the western, which contained Ljubljana, was occupied by the *Granatieri*, the eastern, with its capital at Novo mesto, was under the *Isonzo*, and the area bordering the old frontier was patrolled by the Eleventh Frontier Guard group (GAF) (see figure A.2).[8]

While the occupation's military authorities, on April 12, published its first decrees insisting that weapons be handed in,[9] the Italian government had to decide how to manage the new territories. Its confusion about what to do comes through very clearly in an article, also from *Cronache della guerra*, dedicated to the "New Order" in Danubian Europe, in which the constitution of the independent state of Croatia is cited, and references are made to the demonstrations made on behalf of Italy by the people of Dalmatia and Montenegro, but which remained resolutely mum on the Slovenian situation.[10] In the Vienna talks of April 21–22, the Italian foreign minister Count Galeazzo Ciano and his German counterpart Joachim von Ribbentrop[11] divided the ex-kingdom of Yugoslavia between them, even if it was the senior partner who got the lion's share. Ciano heard it said that the division of Slovenia had already been defined as "irrevocable" by the Führer. The result was that all the mines and industries fell into German hands, while the Italians were left with the southern part, larger but poorer.[12] As reported by Ugo Cavallero, the supreme commander of the Italian Armed Forces, Mussolini said that "after the defeat of Yugoslavia

we found ourselves with half a province in our hands, and, it should be added, the poorer half. The Germans indicated a border to us: we could do nothing but take note of it."[13] On May 3, Mussolini created the "Autonomous Province of Ljubljana," inserting it directly into the borders of the Kingdom of Italy, and thereby eliminating any doubt over its political future.

Historians have been hard pressed to explain exactly why the dictator decided to incorporate into the nation a territory that was entirely lacking in interest, economically speaking, and which was also presumably hostile, in which there were only a few hundred ethnic Italians. The direct annexation of Slovenia, according to the historian Marco Cuzzi, was due to Mussolini's desire to keep German troops as far away from Italian borders as possible, creating a sort of buffer zone.[14] According to James Burgwyn, the annexation had been decided on so as to eliminate Communist and nationalist cells that supported Slovenian irredentism in the Italian territories of the Venezia Giulia. "No longer would there be a 'Slovenian question,'" writes Burgwyn, "because Slovenia had simply ceased to exist."[15] In the opinion of another historian, Stevan Pavlowitch, the Italians "annexed it, probably because the Germans had annexed their part."[16] Rolf Wörsdörfer, however, has taken up a section from Ciano's diary, to suggest the hypothesis that "instituting an Italian government . . . the regime of Mussolini promised itself advantages in the conflict with nearby Germany, ally and rival: in particular the Rome government hoped that a moderate occupation regime careful to collaborate with the traditional Slovenian elites could, from Ljubljana, influence the rest of the country, and above all those areas under German occupation."[17] In fact, Ciano meeting Marko Natlačen, the "ex-bano,"[18] on April 19, said that he found him "miserable because of the fate that had befallen that part of Slovenia which remained under German control."[19] On April 29, after having worked with the Interior Minister Guido Buffarini Guidi on the annexation project, Mussolini's son-in-law was able to note with satisfaction in his diary, "It is inspired by very liberal ideas. It will succeed in attracting sympathies in Germanized Slovenia, in which the gloomiest excesses have been recorded."[20]

In short, a series of motivations of an "internal" nature, like destroying Slovenian irredentism that had created problems for Italy since the end of the First World War, and "external" ones,

like creating a contrast with the brutal occupation policies of the Germans, pushed Mussolini to annex Slovenia as an "autonomous province." As for the official reasons, however, the Fascist press had more than a few problems in trying to justify the annexation of a people that had no reason to be forced into a foreign state, even with limited autonomy. Among the reasons used by the press were the area's colonization by the ancient Romans, memories of the vanished Patriarchate of Aquileia, and, finally, as the Fascist boss Giuseppe Bottai's cultural magazine *Critica fascista* wrote, the Slovenian people had never been a nation.[21]

The scope of the present work is not that of studying the civil policy of Fascism, but it is nonetheless necessary at least to note that Italian conduct, in this early phase, was marked by a certain moderation. The chief authority in the occupied territory was not military but civilian, a high commissioner: this role was filled by Emilio Grazioli, previously federal secretary (*Federale*) of the party in Trieste, and a Fascist of long standing. Grazioli had a group of armed forces under his command: the CCRR, the police, the *Guardia di Finanza* or finance police, and the *Milizia confinaria*, the border guard. Not only that, but he could also avail himself of the Royal Army in order to maintain public order, if necessary.[22]

The new "province" of the Kingdom of Italy enjoyed a certain cultural and linguistic autonomy. Mussolini, on the phone to Grazioli on April 28, 1941, said that the occupiers were to have "left [the Slovenians] tranquil…We won't even force them to join the Italian army; they can be volunteers if they want."[23] The *Consulta*, an organization formed of prominent residents of Ljubljana that was intended to work side by side with the Italian authorities, was even received by Mussolini at palazzo Venezia in the summer of 1941. The kindly face of the Italian occupation, however, hid the intention "to Italianize the annexed territories more or less completely and for more or less the long term."[24] The policy of the civil authorities was that of conquering the hearts of the Slovenians via a "moderate" treatment, and at the same time to flood the territory with Fascist institutions.[25] Grazioli decided to bind the wealthier classes of the new province to the Fascist regime, stressing their common anti-Bolshevik fears, and was fairly successful, in the beginning. According to Tone Ferenc, the annexation decree was "welcomed with sincere or hypocritical gratitude by the Slovenian

bourgeoisie."[26] It should also be borne in mind that in prewar Slovenia, conservative or even openly Fascist political parties were numerous and widespread.[27] The historian Marina Cattaruzza writes that what was to become Slovenian collaborationism "was rooted in the political culture that had developed in the country between the two World Wars."[28] Perhaps for this reason Grazioli, once *Federale* of Trieste and familiar with border politics, was able to delude himself into thinking he had received a favorable welcome. According to a Fascist, but anonymous, source, Grazioli worked as "if three hundred and fifty thousand Slovenians had been waiting for us for a long time and as if, after the first embrace (for so the initial welcome was depicted, on high), they were calling for our political enlightenment and a new social organization."[29] The high commissioner, however, could not ignore the fact that prewar Fascist policy in the Venezia Giulia had created very strong anti-Italian hatred and resentment. Italian irredentists and nationalists had always defined the "Slavs" as an impending threat, which needed to be fought with whatever weapons were available.[30] Ruggero Fauro, a Triestine irredentist and volunteer in the Italian army during the First World War, wrote in 1914,

> Where the people are homogeneous, the foreigner is considered something completely different and often, particularly if he is the enemy, something monstrous and wicked. But among us, the Slav or the German often lives in our own house, and can be a good man who is polite to you, smiles at you, and caresses your children. How can anyone know that even that man is an enemy who must be hated and fought without quarter?[31]

The Fascism of the Venezia Giulia was born with the assault on the *Narodny dom*, the meetinghouse of the Slovenians in Trieste, which was burnt to the ground by the Fascists in July 1920, sealing, among other things, the alliance between soldiers of the Royal Army and the local Blackshirts, brought together by common hatred of the Slavs.[32] The policy of denationalization followed by the regime forced thousands of Slovenians and Croats to emigrate, losing their jobs, friendships, and loved ones. The historian Jože Pirjevec wrote that "victorious Italy, which occupied and then annexed Trieste, could not and would not guarantee the Slovenians inserted into their frontier an acceptable treatment."[33] The Slovenians forced to

abandon Italian territory in the period between the wars, above all the adolescents, "grew up in the context of a comprehensive Yugoslavism ('jugoslovenstvo'), which saw as its enemy not Fascism but the Italian nation in its entirety."[34]

Despite these antecedents, the Fascists presented themselves as the constructors of a new order that in the Balkans was to have "joined in brotherhood" the Italians and "the Slavs gravitating toward the Adriatic,"[35] and probably expected, at least, not a hostile reception from the Slovenian bourgeoisie and the "upper classes." The *Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini's newspaper, headlined a May 5 article describing the welcome accorded by the Slovenians to Italian troops on parade "Ljubljana in celebration."[36] The Information Office of the Second Army, on May 12, 1941, wrote in a report for its officers that "the recent annexation has, at base, solidified the aspirations of the masses: respect for Slovenian traditions and language…has accentuated their sense of faith in our institutions, which was already apparent in the attitude of [our] authorities and population in general." The report went on to describe the violent acts committed by the Germans in northern Slovenia, and Nazi displays of hostility toward the local clergy, "which makes [the local population] appreciate to an even greater extent the liberality which inspired the rules that governed the annexation of the province of Ljubljana to Italy."[37]

The disappointment must have been palpable, therefore, when after only a few weeks the population gave clear signs of hostility toward the occupiers, and the Slovenian Resistance began to attack collaborators and Italian officials. Instead of administering a peaceful territory and a populace that was happy or at least resigned to being governed by force and by Roman justice, the Italians found themselves having to face a particularly insidious type of struggle, which was to confirm the worst prejudices about the "uncivilized nature" and untrustworthiness of the Slavs, a barbarous people without culture.

Postwar Italian memoirs have greatly emphasized the effect that the USSR's entrance into the war had on the birth of the Slovenian Resistance. This connection permitted the justification of the occupation as part of the war against Communism and made the activity of the occupiers, if not worthy of praise, then at least defensible in the face of public opinion in the years of the Cold War.

Mario Roatta, for example, wrote, "It was following the Axis entry into war against Russia that acts of armed hostility . . . began in the Balkans against occupation troops."[38] The general then asserted that "the idea that spurred on the principal agitators . . . was not that of liberating the country *tout court*, *but Communism*."[39] Various historians have taken up this interpretation. According to Teodoro Sala, it was from the end of June 1941, that is from the beginning of "Operation Barbarossa," that the Slovenian Resistance began to unite around the Slovenian Liberation Front, the *Osvobodilna fronta* or OF.[40] According to Burgwyn, however, "simple patriotic duty to free the country from the Fascist invader provided no less incentive underground work."[41] The OF had already begun to form in April 1941 and was largely dominated by the Communists, even if there were members of other parties within it (at least until the beginning of 1943).[42] On June 22, concurrent with the German attack on the USSR, the OF constituted a General Staff for Slovenian partisan formations and on September 16, 1941, it formed the Popular Committee of Slovenian Liberation, which was to have exercised power over the liberated territories.[43] Even though it was not yet particularly dangerous, the activity of the Slovenian Resistance worried the Italian authorities. At the end of the year, the partisans had already recruited 1,500 members.[44]

In the summer of 1941, secret reports of the Italian information services began to indicate stubborn hostility on the part of the Slovenians, who did not seem particularly content to have been "colonized" by the new Roman legions. Already on June 19, 1941, three days before the start of "Operation Barbarossa," a note for the Intelligence Office of the *Granatieri* division indicated a rise in anti-Italian and subversive propaganda. According to this note, the occupation had permitted the unification of the whole political spectrum, from the Communists to the conservatives, in a single nationalist front, of which the Communists were the principal exponents.[45] On July 2, the Intelligence Office once again stated that the success of Communist propaganda was not due to "the difficulty of relations between the wealthy classes and the working classes," but was, in its goals, "purely nationalist."[46] The day before, July 1, it was the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps himself who informed his superior officers that the behavior of the Slovenian population, particularly in Ljubljana, was changing. The symptoms could be

seen in the ever-colder manner of the Slovenians toward the Italians and in the "ever more numerous outbursts of discontent." As well as indignities and insults, the level of hostility had even resulted in an attack, with firearms, on a militia patrol. According to Robotti, the Slovenians were increasingly enterprising due to the international political situation (a clear reference to the war in Russia), and due to the excessive kindness of Italian troops. The general ended by ordering his officers "always to suppress . . . every demonstration against the name of Italy."[47]

In this period, partisans began to be equated with Communists, which could be used for propaganda purposes both with Slovenian conservatives and with Italian public opinion as well as with the soldiers themselves, to whom the equation offered the "noble" goal of battle against world Communism, in order to justify the annexation of the "province of Ljubljana" and the repression of the Yugoslav resistance. An anti-Bolshevik obsession was a staple of high-ranking Italian officers. Anticommunist propaganda was used from 1941 by Robotti, and Roatta, in 1946, reused it to defend his personal position.

However, it was not only a propaganda tool or a weapon of self-defense, but also it was a sincere phobia, as was shown by the survey undertaken in July 1941 by the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, which was made in order to determine which soldiers might have Communist sympathies. The survey, in short, limited itself to listing the recruits who were not members of the National Fascist Party, without bringing consequences of any kind. However, it is a very clear indication of how deeply rooted the fear of Communism was among the heads of the army, and how fundamental anticommunism was to the ideology and the policy of Italian officers.[48]

Anticommunism, moreover, could partially explain the ever-increasing suspicion felt by the leaders of the Eleventh Army Corps toward the whole Slovenian population. On July 14, Robotti sent further orders to the troops not to fraternize with the local populace and above all not to engage in political or military arguments with the Slovenians.[49] On August 2, in the Drava barracks in Ljubljana, he met the colonels and other officials, to whom he gave orders for the repression of the first signs of rebellion. Robotti was particularly concerned about the relaxed attitude of the soldiers, who clearly did not consider themselves to be in dangerous

territory. In the zones of operation, Robotti said, officers needed to "react to the sense of slackness and tolerance that has produced the phrase *bono taliano* ('good Italian,' in broken Italian)," and to bear in mind that "we are in an enemy country, surrounded by people who only apparently behave properly." In the face of pervasive Communist propaganda with the sole aim of inciting hatred against Italians, it was necessary not to "have tenderness—tolerances are forbidden—strike hard."[50] Apart from requiring greater attention and harshness from his subordinates, Robotti asked his direct superior, General Vittorio Ambrosio, the commander of the Second Army, for greater powers and, effectively, a free hand in order to be able to put prisoners before the firing squad without too many bureaucratic problems. These requests were sent with a letter to the high command of the Second Army on September 4, 1941. The letter described a grim situation in Slovenia. The Resistance, according to Robotti, after various fruitless attempts to sabotage the railways and telephone lines, had moved on to attacks against persons. The most serious episode took place in the village of Breg, between Radohova vas and Št. Lovrenc, where a lieutenant and a soldier were killed in an ambush. Given episodes of this gravity, Robotti asked to be allowed to take hostages, to extend the responsibility for attacks to the general local population, and to be able to shoot suspects immediately, "on the very site of the crime and without following long judicial procedures."[51] An attack on September 6 felled two other Italian soldiers, and two days later Robotti restated, with a circular to the commanders of his depending units, that they were in a war zone, even if not officially declared so, and that the response had to be forceful and immediate. "It is best that some of these Communist elements pay, even if they are not openly or completely guilty, rather than that our soldiers should undergo their activities as saboteurs."[52] Robotti was worried, as well, because public order remained the domain of the high commissioner. However, Grazioli's inability to manage the zone was growing more and more clear, greatly irritating the officer class. Robotti, on September 3, openly criticized the status of province granted to Ljubljana, which put it under the control of the high commissioner.[53] This mistrust was fully returned by the high commissioner. General Giacomo Zanussi, in his memoirs, speaks of Grazioli and Robotti as "cat and dog," and says that "there was nothing that one of the two could

do that the other did not rush to criticize."[54] The conflict between the two powers was resolved in the fall of 1941. The escalation of violence, and the harsh criticisms coming from the Germans and the Italian officers,[55] had pushed Grazioli to take radical initiatives in order to show he was able to maintain order. On September 13, he published, in the *Bollettino ufficiale* or official government bulletin of the province, an announcement that imposed the death penalty on those responsible for attacks and those who had taken part in subversive meetings or assemblies or were in possession of anti-Italian propaganda material. He instituted a Special Tribunal, made up of three members, which was to pass immediate judgment on the accused.[56] On September 20, he also introduced *confino* or internal exile as a punishment for "politically dangerous" persons. At the end of the month, Grazioli, with the armed forces at his disposal, organized a raid, the first we know of in Slovenia, in the area of the massif of Mount Krim, which was one of the strongholds of the Resistance, south of Ljubljana. According to Mario Cuzzi, from whose book we take this information, the raid was a failure, and marked the end of Grazioli's hopes of maintaining control over counterinsurgency operations, permitting Robotti to exclude him from "any military operation."[57] In the meantime, Robotti's high-ranking officers worked to undermine the authority of the high commissioner. Robotti, on September 29, sent a long letter to Ambrosio stressing the troops' dissatisfaction with the excessive weakness of the civil authorities, which did not allow them to react with the necessary decisiveness to propaganda and Communist attacks. The soldiers, said Robotti, were asking themselves how it was that rebels captured bearing weapons were not punished by the judicial authorities, not even for the "merciless assassins of our soldiers and of loyal Slovenian elements that, correctly serving us, assist us?"[58] Given that the September 13 announcement had already introduced the death penalty, Robotti asked why the civil authority did not execute the prisoners given to it by the military?

From the end of September onward, operations against the partisans were planned and executed exclusively by the military, that is, by Robotti as commander of the Eleventh Army Corps. Despite the fact that public order was constantly getting worse (on September 25, a general of the former Yugoslav army and collaborator of the occupiers, Leon Rupnik, was wounded, and on October 5,

two Italian soldiers were killed), Grazioli tried once more to prevent military power from being extended at his expense; a failed effort, because on October 3 a Royal Decree was issued, extending to Ljubljana the declaration of a state of war, to which were joined an Announcement from the Duce (il *Bando del Duce*) on "Penal arrangements for territories annexed to the Kingdom of Italy" and a further announcement that elaborated on the first one, on October 24.[59] On November 7, 1941, in a meeting in Ljubljana between Grazioli, Robotti, and other officers (among whom were the commanding generals of the *Isonzo* and *Granatieri di Sardegna* divisions), it was decided to give "*la massima autonomia*," the greatest autonomy, to the military when conducting raids.[60] From that moment on, the army would take on all responsibility for the repression.

2

Ambrosio

If the purpose of the civilian authorities in Slovenia was to "Italianize" the new province, the duties of the Eleventh Army Corps formed part of the wider responsibilities of the Second Army, to which it was attached. These responsibilities were excellently summed up by Giacomo Zanussi: "To give a certain margin of security to the territories that had become part of the Kingdom…; to guarantee the free movement of train and road communications, and, at the same time, to ensure the gas supply so necessary for the country (the so-called 'petroleum railways' Fiume–Ogulin–Karlovac–Zagreb and Zagreb–Ljubljana–Trieste)."[1] Soldiers found themselves involved in an exhausting struggle for control of the territory, the lines of communication, and, in particular, the railway lines, which were extremely difficult to protect from acts of sabotage. For these duties Slovenia was divided, roughly speaking, into three zones, with the *Isonzo* division guarding the eastern section, the *Granatieri di Sardegna* controlling the western area and the capital, and the Frontier Guard had the responsibility of patrolling the area of Logatec, on the old Slovenian-Italian border. This task was made considerably more difficult by the terrain itself, practically covered in mountains and forests, with the single exception of the "basin," the valley around Ljubljana. However, even this single, and small, flat area lies in the shadow of the Krim massif, which rises to over 1,100 meters. The province of Ljubljana was thus ideal for protecting and hiding large numbers of partisans, who well knew how to profit from the peculiarities of the terrain.

To maintain control over the area in the most widespread possible manner, the military had spread garrisons throughout the province, whose number rose to 123.[2] In these garrisons, the troops were involved in an endless and tiring effort to control the railway lines and the "works of art," that is (above all) the bridges and railway tunnels. From a table prepared by the commander of the *Granatieri* division, from December 1941,[3] the tasks given to the soldiers emerge clearly. More than a third of the force present, excluding soldiers on sick leave or other types of leave, was charged with the daily surveillance of targets, which today would be called "sensitive," in fortification works or in raids. A large number (e.g., 189 *Granatieri* of the Second Regiment) was responsible for the difficult and heavy task of protecting the railways, which meant exposing themselves to partisan attack as they patrolled the tracks in small groups of men.

In the fall/winter of 1941–1942, Italian soldiers were, for the most part, spread out in a large number of small garrisons, isolated from the rest of the world, encircled by a hostile population, exposed to partisan attacks, excluded from the "big war" but heavily involved in a "dirty war" lacking episodes of heroism or chivalry, ignored by the Italian people, and absent from propaganda, which hid the Slovenian situation from public opinion as much as possible.[4] We will see, further on, what daily life was like in the garrisons. For the moment it is necessary to emphasize that this strategy of occupation proved itself most ineffectual. In division reports of this period, it is notable that the officers clearly considered that general rebellion had broken out. For example, the Second Battalion of the First Regiment of the *Granatieri* was responsible, from October 6 to 26, 1941, for a long series of raids on Mount Krim. The results were fairly positive (10 rebels killed and 55 captured), but they also revealed the strength of the partisan bands.[5]

In the same period, the Resistance had struck a harsh blow against the Italian army, attacking a garrison at Lož. This was a town close to the southern border of Slovenia, in a valley today crossed by State Highway 213, which links it with Stari trg pri Ložu, toward the south, and on to Croatia. At 17:30 on October 19, five groups of partisans, which had hidden inside the town's houses, burst forth suddenly, attacking all the units of the garrison, which was held by the Frontier Guard. The Italians returned fire, killing

three of the attackers and making the rest retreat. While this battle took place in town, the lieutenant colonel who commanded at Stari trg decided to come to the garrison's aid, departing in a truck. However, having arrived at the outskirts of Lož, the truck was attacked by a sixth group of partisans posted along the highway, which wounded the officer and another seven men. At this point, the Slovenians retreated, taking with them an Italian officer and a soldier as prisoners.[6] In the nearby town of Bezuljak, the following night, the partisans entered the town, overcame the guards at the gunpowder magazine, and managed to blow it up. The result was three dead and many wounded Italian soldiers.[7]

During the following raids undertaken by the *Granatieri* on Mount Krim, the soldiers taken prisoners at Lož (indicated in a different report as numbering 7) were freed, while the rebels suffered 1 death and 22 men were captured.[8] Afterward some of those captured, among whom was Ljubomir (Ljubo) Šercer, were shot at Ljubljana on December 22, 1941. However, the fact that the Resistance was able to take as many as seven prisoners and hide them in one of their camps, even if only for a few days, could do nothing but worry the Italian commanders. Although the first serious Resistance attack had been fended off, and the Krim raid had freed the Italian prisoners, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps realized that he needed to react decisively to the imminent danger. On October 21, Robotti summoned all the main unit commanders to Ljubljana. After having described the two episodes, and concluding that the Italians found themselves "in a decidedly hostile country . . . surrounded by people who hate the Italians," he gave a series of orders. Among these the most important were those of maintaining all garrisons in a constant state of alertness, organizing an operational core that was ready to intervene and react to attacks in an "energetic" way: "if necessary," continued Robotti, "ending with the destruction of the inhabited areas."[9] The Italians began to wake up to the fact that they were facing an organized and structured insurrection, commanded by capable men and able to plan a serious guerrilla war. General Orlando, on October 22, sent his subordinate officers a circular in which he underlined that "the attacks . . . have evolved and have assumed—as on 19 October—the character of real military strikes, minutely organized and perfectly conducted." The way in which the attack on Lož had been conducted

moreover demonstrated the connivance of the civil population. Thus, it was necessary that the garrisons take certain precautions in order to avoid other nasty surprises, like keeping the troops in a state of alertness, preparing mobile units capable of going quickly to the aid of garrisons under attack, subdividing and linking up the troops' quarters, preparing defensive checkpoints on all access routes into towns, always giving senior officers an armed escort, and, above all, making sure that "the reaction to any possible offensives in the towns should be decisive and energetic, without any hesitation or false mercy." If an attack was confirmed inside a town, the general continued, it was a clear sign that the inhabitants were accomplices. "Whoever attacks us in that case may or may not be the guilty party, but is certainly an aider and abettor. Do not hesitate to take even radical steps, as long as they are taken immediately."[10]

On November 19, a section of the Military Tribunal of the Second Army was established in Ljubljana, while the special commission set up by Grazioli in September was quashed,[11] a symptom of the new policy of repression as well as of a radicalization that was affecting even Italian justice. In the *Diario storico* or historic diary of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, in the entry for November 11, 1941, there is a long description of the Slovenian partisan bands.[12] According to this document, the bands were formed of 50–70 men, working in groups of 15–20 units. The bands were formed of a permanent core of four officers, the commander, the vice-commander, the political commissar and the provisions officer, and by a variable number of followers. These last were usually students and unemployed laborers. The officers all came from the ranks of the former Yugoslav army, while the political commissars came from the Communist Party, and were "feared for their ferocity." The strength of the bands lay in their extreme mobility, in their perfect familiarity with the terrain, and in their capacity to transform themselves, if necessary, from fighters into "peaceful citizens." After a particularly important strike, the bands tended to dissolve, in order to reform in another area, perhaps far away, to escape the reaction of Italian troops.

The attacks were meticulously prepared both in the choice of targets and in the preparation of the attackers, who were often given written instructions or sketches that explained their various

functions. The attack groups were formed of squads of four or five men, each one being equipped with a machine gun, rifles, and hand grenades. Once access to the place being attacked was blocked, to prevent the arrival of reinforcements, the attack squads tried to take the enemy officers out of action, if possible surprising them while on leave or sleeping. The attacks took place preferably along the roads. During the ambushes, two or three machine guns were used for cross fire "when the unit has already passed one of the weapons and has fallen into the trap." After the attack, undertaken with "great audacity and aggression," the groups melted away and often dissolved.

Based in part on this text, Orlando and Robotti sent Ambrosio a long note in which they outlined the situation of Ljubljana province and made some suggestions about "means for a rapid pacification."[13] From June 22—so the text begins, which Tone Ferenc dates to the end of November 1941—there had been, among other things, 69 attacks against garrisons or isolated soldiers, "followed by the ferocious murder, the wounding, or the capture of officers and soldiers," 28 attacks on the railway lines, 39 interruptions of the telegraph lines, 2 attacks on "works of art," and 15 homicides or attempted homicides of Slovenian collaborators. The political center of the revolt was Ljubljana, where university professors and intellectuals directed the movement, while the guerrilla bands were scattered outside of the city, principally on Mount Krim. Guerrilla operations were described in the same terms as in the *Diario storico* of the *Granatieri* division. To resolve the problem, Robotti and Orlando described as absolutely useless any "a priori" raids across a whole area, dividing the area into different sectors and sifting the terrain with a "chain" of soldiers, because the terrain itself made a continuous "chain" impossible, and because the rebels had all the time in the world to hide their weapons and transform themselves into peaceful peasants. However, even a "reactive" raid, that is, one performed immediately after an ambush or an attack, had proven ineffectual. The only attack considered useful was one conducted after a thorough briefing based on information provided by informers or infiltrators. That said, the two generals asked for the replacement of the head of the information office (probably that of the army corps), who was described as absolutely not up to the job. But above all, the two generals considered necessary in

order to crush the rebellion, "the use of force, which should intervene without indecision: fair, inexorable, and immediate, to repress any manifestation of banditry or act of rebellion." The Slovenians, indeed, after 20 years of "Serbian domination," did not understand anything but violence, and were absolutely incapable of appreciating "any generosity." Only with the use of force would "this handful of Slavs" be subjugated.[14]

Apart from writing reports to his superiors, Robotti also directed his attention to his underlings. On November 21, 1941, he summoned his officers for a long report in which he outlined the situation. After describing various disciplinary lapses and a certain laxity among the troops, Robotti heavily emphasized the soldiers' and officers' lack of "bite." In this regard, he referred to an episode that took place in Sv. Križ, where 30 partisans besieged in a house managed to get away, leaving only two of their own dead. A result this disappointing could only be due to the incapacity of the Italian commanders. More, Robotti lamented the fact that the Italian soldier was "*spesso troppo buono*" ("often too kind"); to harden him to the enemy, Robotti suggested that propaganda be increased and especially to describe episodes in which partisans committed atrocities on civilians and Italian soldiers who had fallen prisoner, in order that the troops realize the "strictly Balkan mentality" of the partisans. The soldiers were thus to avoid any intimacy with the local populace and even with the indigenous authorities, to maintain an attitude that was marked by "correctness and decisiveness, both based on an awareness of our superiority."[15]

This document has a certain importance, because it is the first one so far discovered for Slovenia in which episodes of "Balkan ferocity" begin to be described, a theme which would later be obsessively developed in Italian propaganda. These episodes would be used, both during the conflict and after the war, in memoirs and in the official policy of the Italian government to justify every excess committed by the Italian troops.

The distinct sensation of being in a completely hostile country had been reinforced by the peaceful demonstration organized by the Resistance on December 1. To protest the occupation, word passed among the populace that they were to get off the streets and out of public places from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. The Italians were to find themselves suddenly alone in a city, Ljubljana, that wanted to

demonstrate all its disdain for the occupiers. It was a success. The historical diary of the *Granatieri* division says that "from 19 to 20 in the city of Ljubljana the inhabitants completely abstained from city life."[16] Even Grazioli, writing to the minister of the Interior, admitted the "almost complete abstention on the part of the population from circulating and attending public spaces from 19 to 20 hours."[17] The partisans also set off a time bomb in a secondary street, provoking a reaction from the Italian military. This episode was an occasion for a new disagreement between Grazioli and Robotti. The high commissioner, indeed, in his report to the Interior minister, described a convulsive volley of shots fired by soldiers who had completely lost their heads. The result was that two citizens were killed, while a group of Catholic students that was passing, apparently some time afterward, was surrounded, beaten up, and forced to march with the soldiers through the center of the city, until the "organs of the police" permitted them to be released.[18] Apart from demonstrating the terrible relations between the high commissioner and Robotti,[19] this letter brings to light the extreme tension felt by the soldiers, who did not stop after killing two people who most likely had nothing to do with the attack (it seems fairly implausible that someone planting a time bomb would remain in the area to see its effect), but continued to fire at the windows and then attacked the group of students. According to Mario Cuzzi, who has reconstructed the whole episode, the demonstration had the consequence of rendering "definitive and irreparable the split between the civil and military powers in Ljubljana."[20]

In January 1942, the Italians organized a counterdemonstration that was meant to "respond" to that of December 1. From 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. on January 26, the anticommunist Slovenians were to have abandoned the streets and other public places to protest against partisan violence. The population reacted by pouring into the streets and cafés at that hour, and when soldiers and Fascists ordered the people to leave, "the crowd, with ostentatious indifference or even hilarity, went calmly and unhurriedly to their homes."[21] This initiative at Ljubljana made Fascists subject of ridicule, while at Novo mesto, as can be read in a letter from Robotti to Ambrosio, things went slightly better. However, on January 30, 1942, Robotti once again told his subordinates that "everyone must be considered our enemy."[22]

The fiasco of the anticommunist demonstration had been preceded by other attacks by the Resistance. In the night of December 4–5, a garrison of *Granatieri* at Preserje, along the railway line, was attacked. The partisans killed four *Granatieri*, wounded three others, and captured another, who was immediately released.[23] The following day, at Ljubljana, five Italian soldiers were killed in an ambush.[24] On December 12, another bomb went off in the famous piazza with three bridges in Ljubljana, Prešeren Square; this attack, too, further heightened the tension.[25] The situation, in the eyes of the occupiers, was taking a serious turn for the worse, and it would be necessary to react with force. The atmosphere in the capital, by mid-December, had further worsened with the end of a trial in Trieste, where 60 Slovenians were found guilty of armed insurrection. On December 15, 5 of these were shot at Opicina near Trieste.[26] The news had a profound effect on public opinion, as the citizens of Ljubljana had mobilized to ask for their pardon.

On December 27, Robotti gave new orders to division commanders, which represent another important stage in the escalation of violence. After various tactical arrangements, he wrote, "I order that to every violent and bloody attack ("*azione di ferro e di fuoco*") committed by the rebels, we react with the same violence and decisiveness." These are not specific orders; they simply remind soldiers to fight with the necessary "bite." But the language is significant, as it reveals Robotti's exasperation. The next point is more important, because the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps gave permission to his underlings to destroy settlements in reprisal for partisan attacks. "If an offense begins in one house, this must be paid for, even if our reaction might cost—for the defense and the prestige of our troops—the settlement its [physical] integrity."[27] This was an order not to spare the civil population, which would see its houses razed to the ground, or burned, to express the troops' frustration and to intimidate possible civilian allies of the Resistance. In this case, no distinction was made between combatants and noncombatants. All Slovenians, if they happened to be in a combat zone, were potential victims of Italian revenge.

A few days later, on January 8, 1942, a meeting was held at the headquarters of the *Granatieri* division, at which all the superior officers of the Eleventh Army Corps were present. Here, Robotti expressed himself even more explicitly, asserting that the reaction

to Resistance attacks "must not spare [the partisans'] civilian allies and their houses. It is impossible that the rebels could attack a barrack, or a guard post, without the populace knowing. And if the people are afraid of dying at the hands of the partisans if they talk, let them have the same fear of dying at our hands if they do not talk."[28] On the same day, Ambrosio's directives on how to treat the partisans were outlined:

> To act decisively against the rebel bands; summary interrogation of suspicious elements and shooting of the guilty.
>
> (These directives obviously apply to Croatia in which there are no limits imposed by the civil authorities; however they can, with certain limitations and adaptations, serve as norms for our activities.) For the rest, Article 301 of the Military Penal Code authorizes us to act energetically and very rapidly against rebel elements…
>
> Do not take prisoners: in general they represent a dead weight which gives little or nothing, and they give the rebels themselves the certainty—or the hope—of relative immunity.[29]

Such orders precede—as Burgwyn has emphasized[30]—those later sent out by the subsequent commander of the Second Army, Mario Roatta, with his notorious circular 3 C, which was released in March 1942. As is apparent, Roatta did nothing but follow the strategy already indicated by his predecessor: to face a rebellion that he did not know how to repress, he chose to use terror on the civil population.

This radicalization becomes apparent, as well, in the propaganda produced by the Italian army for soldiers in the Balkans. Initially, the conquest and occupation of Slovenia was justified with the Nazi-Fascist cliché of the need for the "young peoples" of the Axis to expand their territory, and with the Italian desire to break the chains of "infamous Versailles."[31] In this "revisionist" context, the Slovenians, too, came to be described as basically satisfied at no longer being subjected to an "unnatural" regime and at beginning to play a role in a new imperial community. However, the Resistance uprising and the armed struggle gave the lie to this argument, and the propaganda line shifted to that of the defense of European civilization against Bolshevism. In this framework, the Slovenian population could be considered a victim of Communism, while the partisans were nothing but mercenaries in the pay of

Moscow.[32] The "trench" newspapers presented the Italian army as the defender of the populace against "Communist brigands," and printed images of soldiers sharing their rations with local women, or army doctors healing children.[33]

Nonetheless, the necessity of justifying the new policy of repression, which since the start of 1942 included the destruction of entire villages in the area of military operations, and the desire to instill greater "bite" in Italian soldiers shifted Italian propaganda toward depicting the Slovenian population as participants in armed struggle, and thus, in a totalitarian way, complicit in the Resistance. Teodoro Sala has analyzed the propaganda in soldiers' newspapers, which in Slovenia were *La Tradotta del fronte Giulio* ("The military train from the Giulian Front") and the *Picchiasodo* ("Hit Hard"), both of which were heavily anti-Slav.[34] Propaganda was spread not only by the press but also orally by officers in the field. General Orlando, in October 1941, ordered his soldiers to consider "all the inhabitants… our adversaries."[35]

In various outlines of conversations prepared for officers, at the beginning of 1943, by an unknown officer (perhaps a propaganda officer attached to the Second Army), one reads that it was indispensable "to feed the soldier hatred against the Slavs, enemies of the Fatherland," that "the Slavs have always been anti-Latin and anti-Italian," and that "Russian means Slav, which means Communist: denier of the Fatherland, family, and religion."[36] In a second outline, one discovers that it is necessary to remind the soldiers that "the Italian people know how to grit their teeth, how to suffer… how to hate."[37] The contradiction lay in presenting the Italians as defenders of the Slovenian population, which was, however, described at the same time as being entirely on the side of the partisans. To explain their presence in Slovenia, propaganda used the defense of civilization against Communism, but to justify violence against civilians, it needed to identify the entire population with the Resistance. This was an irresolvable logical contradiction.

Being in a foreign and enemy land, the soldier had to demonstrate "tough determination" ("*grinta dura*"), as the leaders repeated, as well as Roatta in particular, who in the famous phrase of the circular 3 C had urged that an end be put to the phrase "*bono taliano*."[38] "This," meaning the circular 3 C, as David Rodogno writes, "was the attempt made by a general and not by the secretary

of the National Fascist Party, to inculcate a conqueror's mentality in the troops."[39] Once again, Roatta was not inventing much; a circular from the high command of the Eleventh Army Corps, from November 1941, asserts that the "*bono taliano*," the good Italian, needs to become the "*temuto italiano*," the feared Italian.[40] It had been Robotti who had wanted to erase the term "*bono taliano*," as one of his reports from the start of November 1941 to the leaders of the Second Army:

> To these ad-hoc methods of [military] action, I gave precedence to my continual and harsh personal activity of imposing the conviction, on all the troops, of the necessity not to deceive themselves about the general feeling of the majority of these peoples, who tended to be hostile to us and who saw, and see, in this form of rebel brigandage a new possibility of seriously blocking our occupation and who hope for events that might modify the current state of affairs. My activity was also necessary in order to transform the incurable bonhomie of our soldiers, always carried away by our race's generosity of spirit to take the Slovenian peoples into confidence and trust.[41]

Propaganda heavily insisted on this necessity of "hating" the enemy, obviously something important in war, and to this end made wide use of the imagery of prisoners tortured by the partisans. Another argument used to evoke hatred in Italian soldiers was the "unfair" wartime behavior of the Resistance. A guerrilla war, with its nighttime attacks, ambushes, and withdrawals, was painted by Italian propaganda as a war "of cowards," a treacherous means of warfare.[42] Robotti, in a circular of June 1942, spoke of instilling in soldiers "that sacred hatred" toward those fighting a war "paid for with foreign money."[43] In July of the same year, Robotti sent a circular to division commanders that ordered them to collect all those documents that could "bring to light . . . the wicked activity undertaken by the Communists."[44]

It is very difficult to understand the degree to which propaganda affected Italian troops working in Slovenia. Probably, the argument that had the most effect on the soldiers was that of the necessity of fighting Communism, which gave a logical sense to the struggle in the Balkans and which in any case redeveloped slogans that the Italians had been hearing for 20 years and more. *Antibolscevismo*

was a familiar theme, and furthermore Bolshevism was a plausible explanation for the barbarity of partisan attacks. "Slav and Communist" was a synthesis that embodied many of the soldiers' fears, and it could push them to fight "without false mercy." In his analysis of the propaganda produced for troops on the Russian front, Thomas Schlemmer formed a convincing hypothesis to explain the efficacy of this type of argument: the fight against Bolshevism, presented as an aggressor against Italian civilization, allowed the soldiers to perceive their war as a defense of their society and indeed their families. Schlemmer writes that "thanks to these models of legitimation, the Italian soldier [exchanged] the role of aggressor with that of a defender who was fighting a just war. In this way many Italian soldiers could experience the war in Russia as *their* war."[45]

The few available sources demonstrate how proud the soldiers were to fight Communism and to be merciless warriors. For example, an *Alpino* (a member of the Italian Alpine troops) sent a drawing to the *Tradotta del fronte Giulio* that depicted him in the act of attacking a partisan, who was shown wearing a cap decorated with the hammer and sickle. The caption he offered was "Partisan[46]: 'Good Italian *Alpino*.' The *Alpino*: 'What do you mean, good *Alpino*! Now I'll cut you to pieces.'"[47] Another soldier, in February 1943, sent a short article to the same newspaper (that of the Second Army), which in part reads, "Here the enemy does not wear a uniform, he is an outlaw, a bandit, a traitor." He concluded, "When, at the end [of the war], you will return to your dear ones, in the exultant Fatherland, you will take from your wallet the crumpled 'red star' (the only uniform of this enemy) that you tore from the three-pointed hat of a partisan, the day he tried to skin your hide. And you will smile!"[48]

The reports of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, on duty in Slovenia from July 1942, generally describe relations with the civil population in terms like "cold and mistrustful."[49] Through the depiction of the Slovenian population as conniving with the partisans, the soldiers themselves had obviously become "cold and mistrustful."

But more than the letters sent to the press by soldiers, private letters, intercepted by the censor, can give a small glimpse into their mindset. Unfortunately, the reports of the censor's office that

survive date only from 1943, but the number of letters checked by censors is relatively high. Among many of this kind, an extract from a letter written by a sergeant in a "special battalion" seems to me particularly eloquent: "Like you, I hate the enemy and woe betide one who falls before me. They are wicked and incivil, and I will be inexorable with them."[50] In the case of this soldier, propaganda, and the experience of the war, had produced a notable success in fomenting hatred toward the Slav enemy. But further proof of the efficacy of propaganda for the troops lies in a report of the high command of the Eleventh Army Corps, propaganda subsection, from July 1942:

> If previously some of the soldiers might have thought that the Slovenians were fighting for nationalistic motives, which might give pause to some soldiers, now the Communist origins and purpose of the O.F. [the Resistance] are now clear. Now everyone can see the necessity of a merciless fight without quarter against the agents of Moscow, their followers and accomplices hidden among the civil population. To convince the troops, the work of the officers has been successful, and conducted by word of mouth as well as publications (as in the *Picchiasodo*, the newspaper of the troops of this Army Corps).[51]

This means that officers had realized that for many soldiers the purpose of the war was not very clear, and above all that classic propaganda that made a necessity of claiming living space for the "proletarian nation" had not worked very well. The soldiers were thus indoctrinated with pervasive and effective anticommunist propaganda, aided by the fact that the enemy obviously *was* Communist. The subsequent step was important: stressing the need to attack "the agents of Moscow…hidden among the civil population," which was a call for deep mistrust of the civil population.

Thus, believing that the whole population was complicit in the Communist Resistance justified any degree of reaction, even toward the "bourgeois," who would normally be considered sympathetic to anticommunist activity like that of the Italians. The soldiers were not only convinced of being besieged in a hostile country, a belief that in any case was well founded, but were also persuaded by their own superior officers that the partisans did not fight according to the rules of war, but attacked treacherously, fleeing open combat,

hiding among civilians, and killing and torturing prisoners. To soldiers and officers who had completely lost any sense of why the war was being fought, propaganda explained that it was a struggle between two races and two civilizations. As a result, soldiers could be certain of finding an ideological justification for every violent action against civilians.[52]

Even from the reactions of the soldiers and officers in the field it is possible to hypothesize that the propaganda and the assiduous labor of indoctrination by superior officers may have had an effect, and that the soldiers were capable of displaying that "tough determination" that would make the Slovenians forget the phrase "*bono taliano*." In various memoirs, traces remain of the gratuitous violence performed by soldiers and officers on the civil population. A doctor of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division told, in his memoirs, to have seen a group of *Alpini* destroying a public office, and commented, "This is the product of the psychosis of violence that strikes fighting units: men lose control over nothing, and unleash a destructive madness."[53] An army officer, telling of his experience of counterinsurgency operations after the war, wrote, "The heavy use of men and weapons ended, every time, with the burning of some remote farmhouse and the shooting of innocent peasants, guilty of presumed links with the partisan movement."[54]

Archival sources describe episodes that attest to the way the soldiers often made careless use of weapons. On November 15, 1941, a patrol of *Granatieri* working at the railway station of Rakovnik stopped two Slovenians. According to what the soldiers later said, one of the two men arrested pointed to the other, saying, "This is the one who fires at the Italians." At this point, the other man decided to run, but was stopped by a hail of bullets from the patrol, which killed him on the spot.[55]

The High Commissioner Grazioli, in January 1942, was obliged to write to the Ministry of the Interior to complain that "every Garrison Commander, no matter whether the garrison is big or small, orders mass arrests of persons, searches and checks. Everyone acts on his own individual initiative."[56] The behavior of the Questura of Ljubljana was no better, and indeed, according to Robotti, was excessively violent, raping and torturing its suspects, and thus put the prestige of Italian arms in danger.[57] Notwithstanding that, lieutenant general of the militia Renzo Montagna, in December 1941,

continued to paint the *questore* (the head of the civilian police) and the high commissioner as indecisive figures who were "too kind" to the population, and who had granted too much freedom "to those who [were] unprepared for its enjoyment."[58]

This negative attitude toward a policy they considered "too weak" toward "the Slavs" emerges from comments made by the soldiers themselves when they returned to Italy on leave, and which were heard and summarized by informers belonging to the political police. Their reports are numerous but fairly monotonous, and describe a feeling of contempt toward the local population in Slovenia and one of impatience toward the Italian government, which refused to impose order using draconian methods. A report from Milan, from May 1942, says,

> Everyone was in agreement, officers and soldiers who were posted with their units in Montenegro, in the former Serbia, in Slovenia and in Greece all complained about the weakness of our policy and the consequent rebellion of those peoples, who were hostile because they were being paid by the Soviets and the Anglo-Saxons more than for any other reason…
>
> Our losses in men must be higher, on a monthly basis, than those on the various war fronts, so the members of our Armed Forces must be dejected and discouraged not only because their skins are daily put at risk without any satisfaction, but also for our loss of prestige with those peoples, against whom the greatest rigor, and, if necessary, terror is invoked.[59]

Other reports, however, make a comparison between the Italians and the Germans, the latter being able to impose a certain level of respect with an extremely rigid policy, which ought, according to the men quoted in the reports, to be applied by the Italians in some way as well.[60]

In October 1942, Robotti was forced to intervene after a lieutenant had taken a fairly despicable action. After yet another attack, the officer had summoned "some members of the upper classes" and had threatened to have them all shot if there were further attacks. Robotti interposed himself and promised that the hostages would be chosen only by the highest command levels and that in any case it was necessary to distinguish between those who were guilty of terrorist activity and those who were members of the OF,

the Slovenian Resistance.[61] The commander of the Eleventh Army Corps had, however, forgotten that he had sent orders on April 7, 1942, that the lieutenant had merely applied, though in rather coarser terms than Robotti had intended. Robotti's circular to the division heads said, "Referral to circular 3 C armed command first part according to letter B. Indicate to me urgently, for every dependent garrison, a list of names of hostages who will pay for military aggression with their lives. These lists must be compiled giving precedence to elements of certain guilt and rebel or Communist activity," and on down to simple suspects. "This request *habet* an urgent character."[62] In July, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps had repeated these orders, writing, "I note once again the necessity, given the difficulty of capturing the brigands in great numbers, of suppressing without mercy not only the guilty, but also the suspects."[63] No doubt a lieutenant ought not to have taken counterproductive measures against members of the same social class that the heads of the Second Army turned to as bulwarks against Communism, and he had certainly acted with excessive zeal, but he had not acted against orders.

According to Davide Rodogno, daily life in wartime accustomed Italian soldiers to trivialize violence and to get used to death, without which neither Fascist ideology nor the upper levels of the military would have had a real effect on these factors. Rodogno writes that "for a reason that was not directly linked to Fascist ideology, regime propaganda, or the orders of highers-up, but instead had to do with the context of the occupation and to the conditions and evolution of the conflict, as well as the internalizing of violence and adapting to brutality, the implementation of violence and brutality followed: this was the normalizing of a homicidal instinct."[64]

Certainly, the practice of repression had an important role in rendering the experience of death a daily and perhaps banal event. Executions by firing squad, for example, involved hundreds of Italian soldiers, and thousands more watched. In general, one thinks of executions as a fairly "clean" form of violence and as an "aseptic" method of inflicting death. In reality, memoirs of Italian soldiers describe extremely cruel episodes of this kind of execution, which must have had a strong influence on the psyche of the soldiers.

The following quotation, written by a medical lieutenant of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, active in Slovenia and Croatia, describes the shooting of suspects during this period:

> The fourteen were taken out of the town. They were all fairly calm, poor people. Perhaps they thought they would be taken to build earthworks. We took them about a kilometer, during which the dad of the two children and the other young man, whose documents I had stolen, was able to find them. I gave them [the children] back to him, hinting that they go back immediately, *brz* [*brž*], quickly. Probably they understood, because they left like a shot and were never seen again. But nobody noticed, because everyone, officers and soldiers, were completely brutalized. No one decided to stop, but at a certain point along the path that we were taking[65] there was a raised area that formed a sort of stage. We stopped them there: thirty reluctant soldiers were lined up along the "proscenium" and the twelve remaining unfortunates were lined up further back, on their knees, and with their shoulders turned toward the firing squad.
>
> Then pandemonium broke out. Everyone shouted with quivering voices, strangled with terror, without even the strength to try to flee, which some would certainly have succeeded in doing, because none of us wanted to slaughter them. They shouted: *Zivio* [*Živijo*] *Italia, zivio Mussolini, officers, carabinieri*, and little by little the cries became ever more shaky and ever more strangled. After that there were no more cries, but the bellows of animals maddened with fear.
>
> All of a sudden the voices were annihilated by the discharge of rifles, which reverberated within our stomachs like a huge punch. Only a few fell, because the soldiers did not want to hit their targets, they did not want to kill. The shouting began again, mixed with the cries of the wounded. There was a further discharge, others fell. At the third, finally they were all on the ground; soldiers and officers fired as if enchanted.
>
> There was so much blood and there were so many groans on the stage of that shameful tragedy, and many of those who had been shot struggled to raise themselves up on their arms, like lizards with their tails broken.
>
> And then I don't know what happened: everyone went away from the scene of the massacre. I alone stayed behind, I alone, and, as if in a dream, without knowing how I got there, I found myself on the

> stage with my pistol in my hand. I fired. I fired into the back of the neck of the nearest one who had raised his head and it was as if I had given him a great punch. The head fell back suddenly and suddenly the colour of the face changed from the pink of the living to the ash-grey of the dead. I fired all the shots I had in my pistol, and, by that point completely out of my head, I continued to pull the trigger of the empty pistol, which had fallen open, with the slide all the way back. After that I don't remember anything. They told me I'd been petrified and that I had walked in silence along with the others, for hours, without speaking and with glassy eyes.[66]

The journalist Giovanni Ansaldo, during his imprisonment in Germany after the armistice, collected various accounts from his colleagues about the war in the Balkans:

> Episodes from the occupation of the Balkans: the execution by firing squad of 24 Slovenian hostages, which took place on 12 November '42 in Ljubljana, as a reprisal for the assassination of Natrosen [Natlačen], a Catholic Slovenian boss who had stood with the Italian authorities, forming a sort of anti-Communist White Guard. The 24 hostages were shot at dusk, in the heart of Ljubljana, on the same spot where Natrosen had been killed. In groups of four by four, they were made to leave the barracks of the Finance Police. As often a group would exit early, it happened more than once that a group of those about to die watched the shooting of the previous groups, who were loaded, bleeding, onto carts. The last groups—as night was falling—were shot in the beams of car headlights.[67]

Pietro Brignoli, chaplain of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, described many episodes of death by firing squad in his book *Santa messa per i miei fucilati*, emphasizing how killing harmless civilians had become the everyday practice of soldiers involved in raids, which in the summer of 1942 involved all the units of the Eleventh Army Corps, as we will see. Brignoli's descriptions, too, are harrowing. On July 19, for instance, four civilians executed without a valid motive threw themselves "around the neck of the chaplain and bellowed like mortally-wounded animals."[68] The civil commissioner of Logatec, Rosin, is even more explicit: "It is noted that in the towns, horrendous and heartbreaking scenes occur in which women, men and children drag themselves on their knees before our soldiers, begging them with hands closed [as if in prayer],

though in vain, not to burn down their houses, to leave their loved ones alive."[69]

But is it really possible to "get used" to this sort of violence? Sack, theft, perhaps even rape can become "normal" in an extreme situation like that of a war of occupation, but mass executions? Even a homicidal maniac like the commander of an *Einsatzgruppe*, Otto Ohlendorf, maintained that the practice of execution by firing squad was not sustainable by "ordinary men."[70] The Nazi response to the traumas suffered by the troops who committed civilian massacres (which included thousands of women and children) was the gas chambers. There are no reports of the psychological traumas suffered by Italian troops who performed mass shootings, and above all we will never know how those who ordered and carried out mass executions justified and explained their actions; the available sources say nothing on the subject, or at least nothing has been found on the subject so far.

Even admitting that it is plausible that practice and daily familiarity might have in some way "accustomed" soldiers to kill civilians—and they were, moreover, following orders—it is not possible to agree completely with Rodogno's judgment that Fascist propaganda had nothing to do with the war's brutalization. The continual incitement by Robotti and Roatta to kill, as we will see, cannot be undervalued. There were too many draconian orders and urgings to show how tough and inflexible they were for troops not to feel some effect.

The Italian example, as treated by Rodogno, might be unique in the overall picture of the Second World War. The work of Mazower, Bartov, Dower, and Margolin,[71] in fact, have shown the essential importance of political and racial propaganda in convincing the troops in the field that the enemy was not worthy of any respect, and that the entire enemy population needed to be considered an active and integral part of the conflict.[72] German soldiers who had fought the Greek Resistance, for example, although stained with terrible crimes, were certain that they had behaved correctly. Mazower writes, "What is true is that the majority did not see themselves as fanatics or extremists. On the contrary—and this phenomenon was certainly not confined to the German army—they usually identified their opponents as fanatics, and by portraying themselves as the restorer of order, were able to justify a regime

of extraordinary brutality to their own satisfaction."[73] American soldiers in the Pacific, heavily indoctrinated and convinced that the Japanese were nothing more than "yellow monkeys" found it perfectly normal to kill prisoners, to modify flamethrowers so that the enemy would die more slowly, and to collect parts of their enemies' bodies.[74] Russian soldiers who advanced into Reich territory were convinced by their superiors that all the Germans were complicit in Nazism and that all the women should be raped.[75]

As we have seen, Italian propaganda, too, heavily stressed both the Royal Army's role as "restorer of order" and the total connivance of the civil population of Slovenia with the Resistance. To this framework, which permitted soldiers to see themselves as fighting a *defensive* war, should be added the traditional anti-Slavism of nationalist and Fascist propaganda. These factors were certainly shared by the Italian and German armies in the Balkan theater, but the differences between the two should be noted: the two officer corps were entirely dissimilar, to the detriment of the Italian one, much less efficient and worse prepared than the German officer corps, and therefore much less charismatic and less capable of maintaining discipline; and the difference in efficiency of the whole military apparatus, which might have had a part in creating a strong sense of frustration in Italian soldiers and offices, incapable of putting the brakes on the Resistance and thus more likely to attack the civil population. Indeed, the very strategy that the chiefs of the Second Army decided on (which was directed against "aiders and abettors") was a consequence of military weakness, which forced soldiers in the field to attack even those who were merely suspects and their families.

In short, it was not "war," seen as an abstract absolute, a necessary and inevitable evil, an ahistorical event that makes all men equally violent and equally innocent, but *the* war of (Italian and Fascist) aggression, with its ideological characteristics and its military specificity, that led Italians to justify violence and to permit its unleashing.

3

Roatta

Mario Roatta took command of the Second Army on January 19, 1942. He had been chosen, according to his underling Colonel Zanussi, because he had just produced a long report for Ugo Cavallero on the Balkan situation, and was thus accredited as an expert on the subject. The general chief of staff had wasted no time in defenestrating him from the post of army chief of staff, where he represented a dangerous rival, and putting him in a difficult situation. Cavallero, however, according to Zanussi, considered Roatta to be the right man to unsnarl the intricate Balkan tangle and defeat the rebellion.[1]

Along with Roatta arrived a decree from Mussolini the very same day, which gave the military full powers to defend public order in the provinces of Zara, Split, Kotor, and Ljubljana, as well as in the areas annexed to the province of Fiume.[2] The moment had clearly arrived, as far as the Italian supreme command was concerned, for the resolution of the Resistance problem in the former Yugoslavia once and for all. A new commander, unanimously considered intelligent and able not just militarily but also politically (a necessary quality to manage the complex Balkan situation, where the difference between friend and enemy was rarely clear), and new powers that definitively eliminated the struggle between the military and civil authorities.

As soon as he was installed, the new commander of the Second Army had to solve the problem of the siege of Korenica, a town in the Second Zone, the part of the independent Croat state occupied by Italian troops in summer 1941 beginning. The garrison was held by a battalion of the *Re* division and had been isolated by the partisans

at the end of December. Subsequent attempts to relieve the garrison resulted in a series of particularly bloody failures. On January 23, two columns had left from the south and the north to try to free the besieged, but were thrown back by the partisans who killed many of the Italian attackers. In the sector, from December 29 through to the end of January, army losses mounted to about 1,000 men, of whom about 300 were missing.[3] The siege dragged on until the end of March. Colonel Angelini, the commander of the regiment of the *Re* division trapped at Korenica, published a memoir after the war that described, in epic manner, the defense of the settlement, and referred in apocalyptic terms to the violence of the Yugoslav partisans. Speaking of a patrol of Blackshirts overcome by the partisans, he wrote that "the enemy's rage grew even fiercer, more implacable and cruel, against the few survivors, who were all massacred on the spot and horribly mutilated."[4]

Putting a whole battalion under siege showed that the Yugoslav Resistance was able to maintain its lines for months and could face Italian units in open war. This was no longer counterinsurgency war, but a battle on the open field. Even using all their forces in a given sector, the Italians could no longer be at all sure of victory. Giacomo Zanussi, the officer who conducted the operation of "unblocking" the garrison, wrote that the damage to the morale of the troops in the whole Balkan theater because of the protraction of the siege was extremely severe.[5] Roatta, having just taken command of the Second Army, realized that it was necessary to free the garrison at all costs.[6] The siege ended on March 29 with the entrance into Korenica of an Italian column that freed the garrison, and with the subsequent Italian abandonment of the city. As soon as the operation was over, Roatta sent a proclamation to the troops of the entire Second Army reminding them that the enemy was not capable of opposing forces that were "decisive and well-run." Robotti added that the Slovenian rebels

> always [had been] beaten by us even when they were of superior numbers. All that remains for us is to continue in our firm and implacable desire to hunt down every group, every band, without pause, as soon as they are seen, of these brigands paid by Communism, without forgetting our men, victims of their vile attacks, and even less the commander's order: not a tooth for a tooth, but a head for a tooth.[7]

In February 1942, in my opinion, another important level in the escalation of brutality and violence was reached. It was during this month that the first prisoners were shot after a skirmish.

A long report from the army corps command, from February 1942, describes in detail the repressive activities of the period.[8] The month opened with a partisan attack on the railway station of Verd, to the southwest of Ljubljana. The station was defended by two groups of *Granatieri*: 9 men in the underpass near the station and a garrison of a further 21 men, including 2 officers, in the station itself. During the night of February 2, at 1:10 a.m., the garrison was attacked by a band of partisans from the "Ljubo Šercer" detachment, made up of between 70 and 80 men, well-armed (with 3 machine guns and 24 submachine guns), and in part wearing Italian uniforms, with other members of the band in plainclothes, and still others dressed in the uniforms of the disbanded Yugoslav army. In any case, they all wore caps with the red star. The partisans were intercepted by a patrol near the station and a firefight began. The *Granatieri* were blocked in their defensive structures while the partisans broke into the station, destroying its systems and blowing up a platform with explosive charges. A cargo train carrying liquids, which was arriving at the station in the meantime, was riddled with partisan gunfire, though with little result. After almost an hour of fighting, the partisans left Verd, with one of their own dead on the ground and an Italian sapper (*geniere*) as a prisoner, though he was released a few hours later. Some of the *Granatieri* were wounded, including an officer. The following day a column of *Granatieri* and sappers headed into the area with the aim of "following the rebels, engaging them, destroying them along with those who may have helped and hosted them." A unit of sappers arrived in Zavrh, near Borovnica, where it engaged rebels who had taken refuge in a building. The sappers surrounded the building and set it on fire, in which three partisans died and five were captured. Of these, two had been wounded. "Of the five [rebels] captured, on the orders of the Army Corps which with its immediate and rapid intervention had made this first and efficacious result possible, four were shot (*passati per le armi*), while the other was kept as an informant, as he knew many things." In the meantime, a column of *Granatieri*, which had already been given the order to raid the area of Mount Krim, moved into the area between Borovnica and Rakitna. A partisan,

met by chance, was wounded in a firefight, and then the base camp of the band that had attacked Verd was found. On the way back, the *Granatieri* burned down some of the houses "suspected of hiding the rebels" in the towns of Pikovnik, Beč, and Pristava, at the order of the division commander. Another column of *Granatieri*, moving toward Kozjek, arrested a man who turned out to have Australian citizenship and was carrying 36 shells. He was furthermore accused by other Slovenians as belonging to a partisan band. The story continues, "At Kozliek [Kozjek] nothing special was found, so the unit restricted itself to burning down some of the houses belonging to those inhabitants about whom there were well-founded suspicions. From Kozliek the unit went to Pader, which suffered the same fate, and afterward joined the other column."

According to the report of the "I" nucleus of the division, despite the locals' friendly attitude toward the Italians, on the way back "the unit burned down barns and shacks located in the surrounding villages."[9] Two other raids brought no concrete results.

Summing up, the partisans, who openly carried weapons and who had an established sign (in this case, a cap with a red star on it) so they could be identified as regular fighters according to the Hague Conventions, attacked the Italian garrison at the best time to catch them by surprise, that is, at night. Though they took one prisoner, they set him free not long afterward. The sapper unit that raided the area did not have even one of their men wounded, but shot four prisoners, at least one of whom was wounded, on the orders of a superior. On the march back, though the soldiers were not attacked, they burnt down houses and barns on the basis of mere suspicion. In this case, we are not talking about "hot" violence, undertaken in the passion of the moment, or a reaction to violence or gratuitous atrocities. This was simply planned violence, against all the rules of war, and ordered from above.

According to Tone Ferenc, the first Slovenian "*passato per le armi*," that is, given over to the weapons or, less euphemistically, shot on the spot, was a boy surprised in August 1941 while he was cutting a telephone line.[10] According to the information contained in a "statistical mirror" prepared by the leadership of the Eleventh Army Corps up to the end of May 1942, rebels "given over to the weapons" without due process by military tribunal were: 1 male killed at Ponikve on November 28; 1 at Žužemberk on January 4;

1 at Škocjan on January 6, and then the 4 who were killed in the reaction to the attack at Verd. In March, the number of deaths by shooting reached 22. In April, there were 4 partisans who were "given over to the weapons" but in May the number rose again to 42[11]

Thus, it appears that the army had not carried out a massacre of prisoners before February 1942, and from November to January had shot three prisoners in total during raids. So if the Verd episode remained an isolated incident, it was nonetheless the first of an escalation. With the arrival of spring, the violence exploded once again, as the statistics show.

Other examples, from February to March 1942, make particularly clear the Italian army leadership's responsibility in the increasing brutalization of the war in Slovenia. Robotti, in February 1942, personally intervened to force the retraction of a complaint that had been made against a soldier accused of having wounded a Slovenian citizen during an arrest. This man had only been suspected of having set up a red flag, and the soldier had probably gone too far in his use of force. Robotti was of the opinion that "provisions that might intimidate and diminish the aggressiveness that I have managed to give to my soldiers" should never be adopted. It was better, said the general, that "soldiers sin in excess rather than in deficiency."[12]

One of Robotti's reports to the leadership of the Second Army, from March 14, 1942, requested heavy disciplinary sanctions for a captain of the *Granatieri* who had refused to shoot two prisoners, despite the fact that "with page I/7535 of 6 February and 02/10403 of 27 December, superior officers had determined that captured rebels, like all those persons who happen to be surprised in the houses in which the offenses began, must immediately be shot,"[13] and despite the fact that the order had been repeated to him verbally by another officer sent to him personally by Robotti. The commander of the army corps was also irritated with Orlando, who had in some way "covered" his captain, asserting that he had received news of what had happened only later, and that he had "postponed the draconian measures" so as to have time to interrogate the two prisoners. The captain, who was named Scarpitti, was punished with a month in prison. The two prisoners were eventually judged by a military tribunal convened for the occasion and shot.

The commander of the *Isonzo* also felt Robotti's ire. On May 31, the command of the Eleventh Army was informed by division

command that some Slovenians had been kidnapped by the partisans over the previous few days. A note in the margin by Robotti reads, "The *Isonzo* division must be told to obtain the elements to undertake reprisals against this crime! We cannot have a double standard for the *Granatieri* and the *Isonzo* divisions."[14] Two months later, as we shall see, Robotti asked that the general leading the *Isonzo* be replaced, as he was "lacking in energy."

Despite the Duce's proclamation of January 19, and then the orders in the circular 3 C, the military still needed to deal with the high commissioner, who, by now relatively powerless, tried to slow down the devastation produced by the soldiers who were undermining whatever tiny bit of consensus could be saved among the civil population.[15] After a raid on the height of Mokrec, about 20 km south of Ljubljana, in March 1942, Grazioli had complained about the destruction of villages. Robotti had thus had to write to the leadership of the Second Army in order to justify his reprisals, which he brought about, as he said, from "an exact evaluation of the inhabitants' guilt." But above all Robotti intended to stress how Grazioli erred in carrying on with his "sweet manner," which apart from going against the prescriptions of the circular 3 C, inhibited the repressive activities of the soldiers.[16]

On April 19, Robotti, once again enraged with Grazioli who had intervened in a scheduled execution, wrote a letter to the high commissioner suggesting that "we ought to arrest the suspects, too, even those most seriously implicated, but the ones who are certainly guilty like this man (one of the 3–400 vulgar assassins contained within the city walls of Ljubljana)—let's let them go, shall we? Don't you think?"[17]

Another example helps us to understand how the leaders of the Second Army were responsible for the escalation of violence. In June 1942, the commander of the Second Regiment of *Granatieri*, commenting on the circular 3 C, recalled that "in the past…acts of reprisal [had been carried out] against habitations and possessions of partisans or of civilians known to favor the partisans," which probably means that soldiers were given to fire and pillage. These "acts of reprisal," according to the lieutenant colonel, had been "authorized first, then sanctioned by Superior Authorities."[18] From this point on, the document continued, it was necessary to commit reprisals only in the cases indicated in the circular, also

because to continue to loot (the text indicated sewing machines, cameras, etc. as material that absolutely was not to be touched) and the indiscriminate torching of buildings would have damaged the reputation of the regiment.

At the end of February, Robotti and Orlando planned the construction of the "walls" of Ljubljana. The idea was to crush the insurrection by isolating the provincial capital, within which, it was suspected, the masterminds of the Resistance could be found. Not only that, but also there were plenty of unemployed members of the working class in Ljubljana, and these were considered all Communist sympathizers, as well as university students, another social group the Italians saw as particularly dangerous.

On the night of February 23, Italian troops surrounded the city with a barbed-wire barrier, guarded by machine guns and illuminated with electric lights. At the gates, which were set up on every street leading into town, guard posts were established. Once the barrier was closed, the whole city was searched by soldiers and police (the *Questura* had received significant reinforcements), thousands of people were stopped and searched (Grazioli spoke of more than 20,000), and hundreds (perhaps 800 or 900) were arrested. Among these were the organizational secretary of the Central Committee of the Slovenian Communist Party, Tone Tomšic, along with his wife, and the wife of the Communist boss Edvard Kardelj. Tomšic was shot on May 21, 1942. The Ljubljana operation was endorsed by Roatta, who gave Robotti precise orders to take brutal action, asserting that Mussolini had told him to adopt "energetic and exemplary" measures.[19]

On March 16, Roatta decided to send his prisoners to a concentration camp set up for the purpose, in the village of Gonars near Udine in Italian territory.[20] Thus began the story of concentration camps for Slovenian civilians, perhaps one of the most tragic in Italian history. Tens of thousands[21] of Slovenians were deported to a series of structures where they lived, or died, in inhuman conditions until the armistice of September 8, 1943. After the Italian surrender, many of these imprisoned civilians were freed, but others ended up in German concentration camps. In March, according to Tone Ferenc, Robotti considered deporting even the family members of partisans. The most famous camp was that on the island of Rab, in the territory of Fiume, which reached a height of 7,451

internees in the autumn of 1942, counting men, women, and children. Living conditions at Rab were atrocious and the mortality rate extremely high. One piece of data that is particularly striking, and might give a faint idea of camp conditions, is contained in a report by a medical captain who visited the camp at Rab in October 1942. According to this report, from September 18 to October 18, 209 persons died, of which 64 were children.[22] Slovenian historians have not managed to find specific numbers for the dead in the camp, but estimates are around 1,200–1,300 from July 1942 to September 1943.[23]

In the following June, Robotti, on Roatta's orders, organized another big raid on Ljubljana, which by then had become a kind of huge concentration camp itself. Robotti, writes Burgwyn "had a particularly zealous accomplice in General Taddeo Orlando, commander of the '*Granatieri di Sardegna*' division, who assiduously carried out Robotti's orders by evacuating all manner of university students from Ljubljana."[24] According to the orders sent out by Roatta, the categories "to be cleared out of Ljubljana" and interned in concentration camps were (1) unemployed workers; (2) refugees, the homeless, ex-soldiers, and persons who slept in public dormitories, houses whose residents had been evicted, and homeless shelters; (3) unemployed students without family, and all university students; (4) all the teachers, employed persons, professionals, parish priests, and workers who had moved to Slovenia from the Venezia Giulia after 1922; (5) all Italian ex-soldiers, originally from the Venezia Giulia, who moved to Yugoslavia after finishing military service; and (6) all those who, regardless of category, proved to be members of the revolt movement.[25]

During this operation, 17,076 Slovenians were arrested, of whom 2,663 were sent to concentration camps in Italy. Thirty-one hostages were shot by the Italians at the same time. Burgwyn maintains that at the end of July close to a quarter of the adult males of Ljubljana had been "taken into custody" by the Italians.[26] According to a report signed by Orlando, published in a 1946 book, the criterion was that of "clearing out certain specific categories of persons, without regard for their political convictions," not neglecting to verify their guilt. Among these categories, the students represented the greatest problem for public order, and Orlando wrote of having "taken out of circulation" a good 2,000 of them.[27]

Historical studies of the concentration camps created by the Royal Army to contain "ex-Yugoslavs" are numerous and the bibliography of the subject deserves a good look.[28] It should be kept in mind, however, that the whole operation took place within the context of a Fascist war and at the orders of the dictator, but was conceived, brought about, and managed by the military without any influence from the high commissioner, either positive or negative, while Mussolini limited himself to giving general instructions.[29] This was an especially violent form of repression, planned by the chiefs of the army to use hunger and illness to crush the prisoners' urge to rebel. Gastone Gambara, who substituted Robotti as head of the Eleventh Army Corps, commented on a report about living conditions in the camps, "Concentration camp does not mean fattening camp. Sick individual = individual who does not cause trouble."[30] One can only conclude with the words of Burgwyn, according to whom, "under the 2nd Army's watch internments and concentration camps represent the single most frightening abuse of human life and violation of civilized norms in Italy's campaign against the Partisans."[31]

Roatta's arrival as head of the Second Army, in January 1942, marked a turning point in the Royal Army's strategy in Slovenia. Roatta tried to change the whole system of territorial control via the "*Primavera*" plan, which radically modified the troops' tasks. The "*Primavera*" plan was meant to reduce the number of garrisons to 12, in the main cities. These garrisons would become impregnable,[32] but the basic idea was not that of a withdrawal—quite the contrary. Soldiers in the garrisons were meant to lose the siege mentality that they had taken on, and go out in active search for the enemy in hostile terrain. This was thus a move from a strategy of waiting to a more aggressive one, meant to cut down the rebellion with rapid surgical strikes. "The garrisons, thus reinforced, should be able to resist enemy attacks just as they should be able to conduct coordinated manouvers in adjacent, unoccupied zones."[33] It was to be the Italians who would decide where and when to attack.

The circular 3 C gave precise orders about how to fight the partisans, and it has been commented on frequently. However, it is worth covering its salient points, which were meant to instill a more aggressive spirit in the troops ("not a tooth for a tooth, but a head for a tooth"), and, above all, "covered" subordinate officers in case

reactions were excessive with point 41, where Roatta reminded his soldiers that "it is well-known that excesses of reaction, undertaken in good faith, will never be prosecuted."[34] It was, effectively, a blank check for soldiers involved in counterinsurgency operations. The circular also foresaw the possibility of taking hostages to be shot in case of attacks against Italian soldiers, that of deporting the family members of suspected partisans to the concentration camps, and that of destroying houses in the vicinity of attacks.

On April 7, a further clarification, the so-called order 7000, was issued, which said ("Allegato 'A' al foglio n.7000 del 7 Aprile 1942—XX°"),

> While operations are underway, uninjured males will be treated as rebels (see below), even if not found bearing weapons:
>
> - if they were captured in the immediate vicinity of rebel groups, in such circumstances as to make clear that they have taken place in armed battle;
> - if they were captured not in the immediate vicinity of the rebels, but in the zone in which fighting has taken or is taking place, and are wearing military uniforms or parts thereof, along with signs of membership in the bands, objects of military equipment, munitions and explosives;
> - wounded males (once healed) and uninjured males younger than 18 years of age, captured under the above-mentioned conditions, will be sent to the relevant tribunals (extraordinary and ordinary).

The rebels, according to the same order 7000, needed to be "treated" in the following ways:

1. Rebels caught bearing weapons will be shot immediately on the spot, with the following exceptions:
   the wounded
   uninjured males under 18 years of age, who will be sent (once they have healed) to the "extraordinary" tribunals
   women, who will be sent to the ordinary tribunals
2. Those who qualify under subsection 1 of n.1 of the first appendix of circular 3 C (treatment of civilians) will have the same treatment, with the same exceptions.[35]

The change is not so much in the orders as in the language used by Roatta. These orders gave a free hand to the soldiers in the field, performing raids. Any adult male who was surprised in the combat zone, with a suspicious attitude, could be shot and the officer who would assume responsibility could be sure that his order would be approved. No one could be punished for having shot civilians, as long as they were adult males, and fit into the categories described by the circular 3 C.

Nonetheless, the same order 7000 set fairly precise limits. Houses could only be destroyed in places "in an abnormal situation" close to areas where attacks had taken place and the responsible parties had not been discovered.[36]

The occupation force's anger was so heated that the leadership even contemplated using poison gases to fight the Resistance. The author of this suggestion is unknown, but was quite probably Roatta or Robotti. The former, on March 12, 1942, wrote to the head of the army chiefs of staff (at the time, General Ambrosio) that the use of gas, from a legal viewpoint, was justified by the fact that the partisans could not be considered "legitimate belligerents."[37] However, continued Roatta, its use was unadvisable, so as not to involve civilians, and also in order not to create a dangerous precedent.[38] Robotti expressed the same opinion, but did not refer to civilians, only the danger of a "precedent."[39]

Were these orders criminal? The convention of The Hague, in 1907, was drafted to protect civilians, and conceded that they could "spontaneously take up arms to fight invasion troops," even if civilian fighters had not had the time to organize themselves and establish a "fixed badge [of identity] recognizable at a distance." Nonetheless, the convention said very clearly that this was legal for the population of a territory that was "not occupied"; the formulators of the convention were likely thinking more of irregular troops recruited into the ranks of a regular army that fought openly in a war between two still-extant states. The example that they probably had in mind was that of the French troops of the revolutionary *Levée en masse* or the Italian *garibaldini*. A guerrilla war in a defeated and occupied country, no longer with an established war front and without a government responsible for the Resistance, seems not to have been taken into consideration. The Italians could easily believe that since Slovenia was occupied its citizens no longer had the right

to rise up.[40] As an ex-*Granatiere di Sardegna* wrote in 1995, "And yet [Yugoslavia's] rebellion, after its defeat and surrender, and its guerrilla warfare: were these not in breach of every norm and rule of international law?"[41] The Italians were not, therefore, waging open warfare, but were conducting a "great police operation," subject to the Italian penal code. Moreover, Italian law permitted the suspension of obligations deriving from international conventions if, as Burgwyn writes, "the enemy belligerents . . . did not adhere to the standards set by the Fascist government."[42] Up to 1945, moreover, international conventions were limited by the *si omnes* clause, which meant that they were only valid if every belligerent had ratified and respected them. For this reason, as we shall see, Italian soldiers and officers, after the war, placed such an emphasis on the presumed tortures and prisoner massacres said to be committed by Slovenian partisans. In accusing the Resistance of war crimes, the soldiers themselves would immediately be cleared of any incrimination.[43] The army chiefs were probably aware that this was mere propaganda, but the soldiers in the field, just as probably, were really convinced that they were facing pitiless enemies who would torture them as soon as they took Italian prisoners, and in the face of horrors like that, every excess was justified.[44]

It is plausible that the heads of the Second Army believed they were following the rules. The Hague Conventions did not consider the partisans legitimate belligerents, and as a result the only valid law in the province of Ljubljana was that of the Kingdom of Italy. Thus, the death penalty for those who took up arms against authority, or who might help those who opposed the same authority, was entirely justified. As Burgwyn writes, "Thus it was quite easy for Roatta to take full advantage of the Fascist manual and ignore the protection afforded civilians by The Hague Conventions."[45] Regarding the shooting of hostages, the consultant Commission for the Rights of War of the Italian prime minister, presided over by Dino Grandi, on July 23, 1942, expressed its opinion that such shooting was justified only in the case of "absolutely exceptional circumstances," thereby leaving the legitimacy of the punishment to the judgment of the soldiers in the field.[46]

As we will see later, Robotti and Roatta continually incited their underlings to perform executions by firing squad (as with the tragic and famous phrase "*si ammazza troppo poco*" ["not enough

slaughtering"]), with the added reason that the only method of calculating the results of counterinsurgency warfare was the body count, widely used by every army fighting against spontaneous uprisings. Killings, even of civilians, were considered legal, so no one opposed them. However, Italian law considered stealing, sacking, and indiscriminately burning buildings to be illegal, and so Robotti and Roatta strove to limit this "bad habit." In short, these were not bloodthirsty madmen, but soldiers trying to combat guerrilla warfare with all the means at their disposal, and which they considered legal at the time. However, once the violence was set off, army leaders could no longer hold back some of their subordinates. To put it another way, Robotti and Roatta wanted their soldiers to kill "cleanly," set fire to houses in a "prudent" manner, and to deport "only" the families of partisans or suspects, without, however, touching their belongings. However, after having convinced soldiers that all the Slovenians were barbaric assassins, and after having given them carte blanche to kill them, it was no longer possible to avoid episodes of excessive violence.

The overall problem kept worsening: the whole war against Yugoslavia was completely illegal. Italy had no right to attack its neighbor and to occupy and annex part of it. Having opened hostilities without declaring war, the Fascist government had broken every international law. It was the occupation that was illegal, and hence all orders to repress the Resistance, which was fighting against an illegal act, were themselves illegal. The military, doing its duty by obeying orders from the legitimate government of Italy, was not guilty of this illegality; the culprits were the policymakers in the Italian government, or, more precisely, Mussolini.

The Slovenian Resistance was also preparing its "*primavera*" plan. As the warm season got closer, the partisans restarted their activity, which had its most startling coup with the attack (March 13) on the CCRR general Oxilia, the military attaché at Zagreb, whose car was hit by heavy gunfire near Grosuplje, in Slovenian territory. The general survived the attack, but an officer and a CCRR were killed. Other attacks against trains took place at Ljubljana and Novo mesto. The Italian reaction, according to Marco Cuzzi, was "very harsh, in some cases excessive. The frustration of Italian soldiers had reached troubling levels, and had unleashed bitterness and hatred among the soldiers toward the populace."[47] *Granatieri* and Blackshirts, in

the week of March 18–25, went through the area outside Ljubljana, setting fire to villages and killing civilians on the slightest pretext. On March 18, a column formed of *Granatieri*, Frontier Guards, and Blackshirts made an assault on Mount Mokrec. After encircling the entire area, the soldiers began to climb toward the peak. An anonymous report on the operation does not describe the way the fighting unfolded, but does set out the results of the raid. The Italians lost a soldier, while two rebels were killed and one was captured. It was the civilians who suffered the most: all the men of the area and the priest of Kurešček were arrested, and on the way back from the raid, the soldiers set fire to all the villages in their path and stole all the livestock and forage.[48]

Another raid took place on March 23, again conducted by Blackshirts and *Granatieri*, this time on Mount Pugled. In the days immediately prior, a border militia patrol had been attacked by a rebel band in the area. *Granatieri* and Blackshirts were quickly charged with purging the territory and avenging the fallen. The Third Battalion of Blackshirts, now part of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, began the raid and around 4:00 p.m. was attacked by the partisans. The skirmish was fairly bloody and ended only with nightfall. The day after, the Blackshirts, joined by a company of the *Granatieri*, continued the raid, capturing various persons and shooting three of them: "In the pockets of one of them, objects of clothing belonging to the border militiaman murdered the day before were found and recognized, and another who, hiding in a bed, was wearing a double pair of pants and Yugoslav military stripes and yet another who showed signs of having carried a backpack on his shoulders for many hours."[49] That same day, March 24, the Blackshirts were replaced by *Granatieri* who began the raid on Mount Pugled. Once again, the height was encircled and the soldiers began to climb, maintaining a chain formation, which was meant not to leave any free space for partisans to escape. The raid continued all the way to the mountain peak on the morning of March 24, but ended up a total failure, as no trace of the partisans was found. A CCRR patrol had to go into combat near Podlipoglav, but that was all. General Orlando then sent a message to the commander of the *Granatieri*, urging him to avenge the dead and start the search again because "negative or not completely positive result would contrast with traditional energy and

capacity *Granatieri di Sardegna*."[50] In the afternoon the Italians tried to repeat the operation, in the hope of intercepting someone, but it was another fiasco. The commanding colonel of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment therefore decided to punish the inhabitants of Podlipoglav, "who had been conniving with the rebels," burning down the entire village. The day after, the *Granatieri* shot another two people, one on the orders of the intelligence office, and the other on the colonel's orders because "he had been found in possession of two bayonets, a bag of biscuits, two gas masks, two camp blankets, and a military-type jacket. He was, further, according to the inhabitants of S. [Sv.] Lenart, a fervent Communist."[51] It is not improbable that the colonel, who had not gotten any result from his raid, had found himself in the position of "having to do something," and decided to shoot these two unfortunates merely to be able to show some sort of "success" to his immediate superior. This is a typical example of "cold" violence, even if carried out immediately after a skirmish. The *Granatieri*, indeed, had not lost any men—they had practically not fought at all and had absolutely no reason to take reprisals out on the local populace. The motivation for shooting one of the two captured men, moreover, was so feeble as to be ridiculous, if the consequences had not been so tragic.[52] On March 25, Orlando was thus able to send a satisfied report to Robotti. Even if an error by the CCRR had permitted the partisan band to vanish, the operation had accomplished the "conquest of the battlefield," the "discovery of the uniforms of the border militiaman killed in the preceding days," the "complete destruction of the existing organization," the burning of "many houses" with "useful monitory consequences for everyone," and to the arrest of numerous individuals who would be able to furnish new information.[53] As we have seen, this destruction pushed the high commissioner to protest.[54] Even Roatta realized that the situation risked slipping out of control. On April 7, he wrote, with order 7000, to the commanders of the army corps, reminding them that, on the basis of the orders contained in the circular 3 C, houses could only be destroyed in the areas close to battle zones and only when their civilian occupants had collaborated with the enemy. Despite these orders, Roatta wrote, "very recently, entire villages have been destroyed, following simple skirmishes or during raids carried out without a shot being fired." All this, he continued, was simply counterproductive.

"If we, having entered villages without encountering obstacles, put them to the flame, we do not only commit an excess not carried out by the rebels, but we confirm rebel propaganda."[55] On April 13, Robotti wrote to the commanders of subordinate units restating that the "destruction of entire villages" could only happen if the populace had clearly participated in the Resistance, and that in any case such an action could only be ordered by Robotti himself.[56]

The "conquest of the battlefield," one of the criteria for determining who has won a battle in regular wars, is completely useless in repressing guerrilla warfare. The month of April was "characterized by a startling series of attacks by the VOS [the *Varnostno obveščevalna služba,* a partisan organization] against seats of organizations of the Fascist Party (GILL, OND) and their Slovenian exponents."[57] On April 1, some troops of the Fourth Blackshirts Battalion stationed at Velike Lašče were attacked near the village of Maršiči, suffering four dead and six wounded, without managing to inflict any losses on the partisans. Only on April 2, were the Fascists, continuing the raid, able to get their hands on "a certain man" who wore a Yugoslav uniform under a raincoat. This "certain man" was immediately shot.[58]

In a meeting held by Robotti at Trebnje on April 20, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps complained of the excessive forbearance of his underlings: "There are still too many confirmed guilty men, arrested and transported. In the face of our dead, when you have engaged rebels and confirmed that they are such, that is armed, it is useless to fool yourselves into thinking you can make them talk. Let them be shot by all means. I'm speaking of the men. Let the women and children always be spared, even if found in guilty houses."[59]

On April 24, Robotti and Grazioli signed a proclamation that threatened with the firing squad, within 48 hours, "elements who have been ascertained to be Communist or to be facilitators of activity contrary to the activity of the State," if other attacks were confirmed on Italians or Slovenians who "in whatever way collaborate loyally with the Authorities and are bound by their orders," and if the guilty parties were not found.[60] On April 30, yet another meeting was held in the offices of the High Commission, with Grazioli, the *federale* of Ljubljana Orlando Orlandini and a delegation of soldiers present, among whom were Robotti and Orlando.

This time even Grazioli said he was convinced of the necessity of intensifying the repression, also because he had not long before had a conversation with Mussolini who had "fully approved of the letter and the spirit" of the proclamation of April 24.[61] On May 6, a new proclamation was published that once again threatened reprisals for attacks and kidnappings.[62]

The Resistance responded with a counterproclamation on May 7, 1942, which threatened collaborators as well as "the women and families of the occupiers" with death if the executions promised by Grazioli and Robotti took place.[63] The Italian authorities were not intimidated by this, and between May 11 and 29, 40 people were executed by firing squad in Ljubljana.[64]

In the meantime, the military had begun to put into practice the "*Primavera*" plan, attempting to be more aggressive and to march out of their garrisons to flush the rebels out of their strongholds without waiting for their attacks. On April 14, a company of M 14/41 tanks,[65] the heaviest tank produced in Italy at the time, arrived in Ljubljana. On April 22, Orlando gave orders to the men of the Second Regiment of *Granatieri* to raid Mount Pugled and to shoot "all the men found in the encirclement if they are attested rebels…, otherwise let them be held for investigation."[66] On April 27, it was the turn of the First Regiment of *Granatieri* to move in a raid on the town of Preža. Near the town a company of explorers killed two partisans in a firefight. "Successively," continued the regimental commander's report, "to the raid in the town, the five encircling companies proceeded to rake through the surrounding underbrush concentrically. As they advanced, nine other individuals were killed, one of which was armed with a Mauser musket and another with a pistol, all in suspicious postures. The dead were all found without documents."[67]

On May 1, Orlando was once again forced to order raids on the area of Mount Pugled given the presence of strong rebel bands holed up there. Yet again the order said, "Healthy men found between the two reference lines and the barrier line, if they are recognized as rebels, must be shot ("*passati per le armi*"), or otherwise should be held for further examination."[68] The *Granatieri* of the Second Regiment threw themselves spiritedly into the task, and on May 5, eight people were captured, of which four were immediately shot.[69] In the following days, a unit of the regiment carried the action

forward into the area of Horjul. After having raided the territory and having killed six partisans, the unit was returning to Ljubljana at the orders of its commander, Colonel Latini. Near Dobrova, on the road to Ljubljana, the column had to slow down due to a bottleneck. Partisans, posted in the surrounding heights, had been waiting for this moment to attack. Bursts of machine-gun fire mowed down 33 *Granatieri*, including Colonel Latini, and wounded a further 78.[70] The regimental chaplain described the episode in the following terms:

> When the column of trucks [of the *Granatieri*] reached a very narrow valley, it was caught in a storm of machine-gun fire from all sides. The panic that seized the soldiers, taken by surprise, kept them from organizing any sort of defence: those trucks that did not sustain tire damage sped ahead; but one, unfortunately, overturned, blocking all those that followed.
>
> It was a real massacre.[71]

The division reacted violently: 26 "rebels" were killed in the next few days by the First Regiment in the area of Dobrova-Zadel-Babna Gora-Veternik, and another 14 "in the punitive action carried out on the 11th inst. [May 1942] in the town of Crni Potok [Črni potok]."[72] The chaplain explained how the condemned were chosen for execution:

> The first battalion, after the drubbing it received, got the order to remain out [of garrison] in order to raid the area.
>
> All able-bodied men, in the houses, in the woods, wherever they were found, were captured: they were about seventy in number. Then a summary judgement took place; the result: fourteen men condemned to death.[73]

Once again, this appears a clear-cut case of "cold" violence. The harshness of the reaction was certainly due to the regiment's defeat and losses, but the shootings took place days later. The unit, according to Don Brignoli, had time to choose the people they condemned to death.

On May 12, a worried Robotti wrote to Roatta to summarize the situation in Slovenia. According to the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps, the Resistance was by then able to attack

Italian columns en masse and to besiege garrisons. In other words, the situation was moving from a guerrilla war to open warfare. Furthermore, the violence toward Slovenians who collaborated with the Italians was ever more brutal, with the killing of women and children, "episodes that underline the characteristic and innate ferocity of this people and of the well-known and bloody sadism of the Balkan peoples." The Resistance controlled more and more of the territory, thanks, as well, to the continuing reduction of the number of garrisons. To remedy this situation Robotti requested more men and more transports, including a whole battalion of M-series tanks and armored trucks, to close the frontiers, reinforce the garrisons, and secure the roads and railway lines, which were under constant attack. "I know that I am asking a lot," concluded Robotti, but "the burden of this mass of troops that I am asking for will be limited to the time strictly necessary for striking a decisive blow against the enemy."[74]

On May 22, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps launched another alarm flare, indicating the ongoing growth of the rebels, who now controlled the areas of Mount Krim, Mokrec, Molnik, and Pugled, and the hilly zone between "the valley of Kocevje [Kočevje], the [river] Krha [Krka] and Trebnje and the Italo-German border." To fight this threat, which now loomed over Ljubljana itself, Robotti once again requested fresh troops but above all, this time, demanded to "be free to act and not to have to answer for every gunshot and every energetic repressive act that my troops fire or commit in obedience to my commands to act with energy and to respond severely to Communist atrocities." Robotti wanted to have a free hand in repression and that any and all "interference" from Grazioli should be permanently annulled.[75]

Robotti was quite right to ask for new troops to lighten the load on the soldiers who had to defend the railways. The entry for May 1942 in the "*Diario storico*" of the *Granatieri* division, for example, daily noted attacks on the lines, like on May 18, when a patrol was overcome on the stretch of tracks between Lašče and Dobrepolje.[76] The following day, exasperated by yet another attack on the train from Preserje to Ljubljana, members of the company of the Frontier Guard attached to the division entered Preserje, killing 8 persons "who were trying to flee with munitions."[77] From June 7 to 10, the *Granatieri* were charged with a raid which turned into an open

battle. Ten Italians were left dead on the ground, and 16 were wounded.[78] In the days following, two Italian bombardiers carpet bombed the area of Tisovec killing "about a hundred rebels."[79]

In the territory under the control of the *Isonzo* division, things were going no better. Between June 5 and 7, units of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment *Como* found themselves in serious trouble from partisan attacks that managed to draw Italian soldiers into ambushes along the roads, killing some infantrymen and an officer.[80]

The situation was getting dramatically worse, and, what was particularly bad news for Robotti and Roatta, Mussolini was getting irritated. In a well-known conversation with the commander of *Supersloda*, as the Second Army was now called (a short form of the phrase *Comando superiore forze armate Slovenia-Dalmazia*), the Duce asked if it were necessary to eliminate the high commissioner to make the military's task easier. According to what Roatta told his immediate subordinates, Mussolini then said they should "remember that the best situation is one in which the enemy is dead. Thus you should take numerous hostages and shoot them every time it is necessary."[81] To disappoint the supreme commander of the army, who was not coincidentally the Duce of Fascism, meant putting their very careers at risk. The two generals knew this perfectly well, and they also knew that not to succeed in crushing the rebellion would be to expose themselves to ridicule, and episodes like that of the train for Gonars (see below) did not help.

On June 28, a train that was taking more than 600 Slovenians from Ljubljana to the Gonars concentration camp, escorted by about a hundred troops (*Granatieri*, finance police, and Frontier Guards), was attacked during the trip just after Borovnica. The partisans made the train stop using a signal light, and then opened fire, preventing the escort from leaving their railway cars. Forcing the padlocks that closed the doors of the cattle cars, the attackers got all the prisoners out. The train thus arrived empty at Postumia the next morning.[82] Roatta sent a scorching letter to Robotti. "I consider it necessary," wrote the commander of the Second Army, "to beg for Your Excellency's attention to the gravity of the fact, which exposes the work of our Armed Forces in Slovenia to ridicule."[83] Robotti's reaction is not known, but he probably wrote a letter of a similar tone to Orlando, who was obliged to respond, on

July 8, indicating the CCRR as those responsible for the organization of the convoys.[84]

Apart from these slaps across the face, Italian soldiers at this time had other reasons to worry. The first episode of execution by firing squad of Italian soldiers captured by the Slovenian Resistance date from May 1942, as far as research currently indicates. This was the massacre of six CCRR on Mount Molinjek. Taken prisoner on the outskirts of Želimlje, eight CCRR were taken onto the slopes of the mountain, stripped, and shot. Two survived and managed, though wounded, to make it back to the garrison at Velike Bloke.[85]

In May–June 1942, as the historical diaries of the divisions reflect, the Eleventh Army Corps was in clear difficulty. The Resistance seemed not only able to manage its territory, but also was at the point of making it impossible for the Italians to leave their garrisons and patrol the railway lines. Rather than occupying troops, they seemed more like besieged troops. The explanation for this dire situation is that Italian soldiers were completely unprepared for counterinsurgency warfare. Troops posted to Slovenia suffered from all the defects typical of the Royal Army: poor training, worse equipment, and officers not always up to the task.[86] What emerges from the documentation is that these factors, and only these, were the reasons for the Eleventh Army Corps' difficulties.[87] However, military historians have heavily stressed the structural limits of the Italian armed forces during the Second World War. According to MacGregor Knox, the Italian army had no military culture. Faith in the mere force of will ("*ferrea*," "iron," according to propaganda), in "clever improvisation," and in the courage of individual soldiers had all weighed heavily, according to the American historian, in "fomenting the army's disdain for training squads and units, a universally-recognized disdain."[88] Arms were absolutely insufficient, not so much in quality as in the quantity and availability of modern weapons, like submachine guns, necessary for the kind of war that was being waged in Slovenia. "Overall," wrote Giorgio Rochat, "the armaments of the Italian infantry in 1939 were at more or less the same level as those of other armies. The problem was that many of these weapons were not available in adequate quantities."[89] Finally, officers, who had not had specific training for this type of war, and who were in any case too few, often were not up to the task of managing the situation,[90] as the examples below will

show. This is not a judgment against the courage of Italian soldiers, who often showed themselves fearless in the face of danger and who demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity with their fellow soldiers in battle; this is simply an attempt to understand why there were so many defeats and so few victories despite the vast disproportion between the means available to the occupying forces and those of the Resistance.[91]

Examples of poor performance in attack or defense, poor organization, and chaos in the ranks, are numerous and the documents that describe them are written by the Italian military itself.

A company of *Granatieri*, in January 1942, left Ljubljana to raid the area of Župeno, about 20 km to the south. After 5 km, the first truck broke down. Once in sight of Rakitna, the whole column had to abandon its trucks because the road was too narrow and snowy. An attempt to contact the command center to warn it of the delay was unsuccessful, because the radio did not work. The lieutenant who was in charge of the company went ahead with a small escort and managed to reach Begunje, near Cerknica, where a general of the Frontier Guard warned him that the unit needed to get back to barracks before nightfall. The lieutenant tried to get back to his unit, though confused because he did not have any orders to return to barracks before nightfall, but ran into a group of partisans and got into a gunfight. The day after, the unit returned to base. The result of the operation: one wounded *Granatiere* and the recovery of a full recharger for submachine guns that had been abandoned by the partisans.[92]

On June 13, 1942, a company of the Second Regiment of *Granatieri* was ordered to go to Borovica to take part in a battle against some partisans who had barricaded themselves into a village, Breg, 2 km outside the city. The lieutenant commander of the company went to the station with his 146 men to take an armored train, at which point the *sottotenente* who was in charge of the convoy admitted to him that his men had not had any experience of service on that kind of transport. The *Granatieri* lieutenant was obliged to send some of his own soldiers to man the train's weapons. Having arrived at Borovica, the *Granatieri* found the Frontier Guard garrison in a state of great confusion. "They told me," said the report, "that they had been attacked from midnight onward and that the shooting had lasted until about 6:30 in the morning." The

lieutenant telephoned to Breg to inform the garrison of his arrival, but the major in charge of that garrison responded that he had no need of help. As he remained in Borovnica, the lieutenant received the order to capture all the healthy men in Breg aged from 16 to 48 years old. While he was carrying out this order, the lieutenant of the *Granatieri* found out how the "battle" of the previous evening had gone: "I learned that there was a continuous gun battle lasting about seven hours; shots came from everywhere and according to the soldiers, even from the houses in town, while the citizens, shocked and terrified, declared that it was [only] the soldiers had fired." According to the lieutenant, the testimony given by the civilians was confirmed by the position of the holes in the walls of the houses. "About 525 hand grenades had been thrown and endless bullets from submachine guns, machine guns and indeed for the 100-mm gun had been used."[93]

This was not the only case of a gunfight between Italians. On April 25, 1942, Grazioli had sent a letter to Interior Ministry describing numerous episodes of deaths and wounds caused by "friendly fire," and concluded that "there is a general tendency to fire without knowing who [the troops] are firing on, with the likelihood of wounding our men instead of the enemy."[94] One of the episodes he described involved some *Granatieri* who had mistaken the garrison of Kočevje for an enemy hideout.[95] The mistake had caused two deaths.

A report from the Ninety-Eight Blackshirts Assault Legion ("Camicie nere d'assalto") tells of the following episode: on April 25, 1942, the battalion received the order to raid an area near Mount Mokronog, where a band of about a hundred men had been reported. Two of the Blackshirts, one company of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment, a platoon of machine gunners, and a mortar platoon, all took part in the raid. This was a theoretical total of 600–700 men, if the units had been at full strength. On the morning of April 26 at 5:30 a.m., the Italian soldiers, on the orders of the commander of the Blackshirts battalion (a *seniore*), surrounded the woods where the partisans were supposed to be. Let us read the account of the "battle" by the *seniore* himself:

> At 5:40 AM, before beginning the raid, considering the extremely dense forest and bearing in mind that we had received precise

> information of the certain presence, within the woods, of about a hundred rebels, well armed and encamped…, I fired 15 mortar shots into the woods so as not to put our units a risk in a dangerous area which could have had fatal results if the rebels had really been there.
>
> After the mortar fire the area was carefully searched in every way, without finding any trace of the rebels.[96]

As we have seen, between June 5 and 7, units of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment *Como* had been defeated near Gabrovčec. Robotti wrote to the division commander that operations had been conducted "without the most elementary preparation" and there had been no "tactical organization."[97]

Robotti, on June 13, 1942, summoned the commanders of the army corps divisions in order to analyze the situation in order to find "the indispensable remedies."

> The truth is this: our troops do not fight, or, at most, fight badly; to continue to delude ourselves would be as vain as it would be dangerous. The majority is worth very little, and this in a situation like the present one, in which the ability, the courage and initiative of single should prevail; our losses are suffered with heroism, but this, no matter how worthy of praise, in a pure sense, in a practical sense is not important.
>
> We need to fight better: there are young commanders who are excessively alarmed, just as there are middle-grade commanders who do not know how to lead. Regarding this specific point: either the commanders are worthy of their rank and post and thus can stay, or, if they are not, they should be removed.
>
> Recently a battalion of the *Isonzo* division declared itself lost, when at the end of an attack it had suffered overall 7 dead and 13 wounded. The big words: surrounded, besieged, lost, come not from the troop but from the commanders, and thus is very serious.[98]

Even Taddeo Orlando, in the same meeting, expressed many criticisms: "The majority of officers lack the necessary serenity which is the fundamental gift of the soldier facing war and its unforeseen dangers."[99]

On July 2, Orlando had to send a circular to urge his men to fight at night. This circular was necessary because, as he himself wrote, "The units must not barricade themselves into their camps at night,

and if they are taking part in operations they must not passively close themselves into a protective formation, accepting *a priori* that the enemy take the initiative."[100]

The problems due to the minimal attention toward the most elementary safety precautions, both in attack and in defense, were the reason why Robotti had to write so many circulars; he was tireless in advising his officers and insisting that they pay more attention. Already in November 1941, Robotti had been forced to intervene to point out the air of indifference of the soldiers responsible for the protection of the railway lines. The problem was not only one of poor discipline ("dirty sentinels, perfunctorily dressed"), but also of the lack of vigilance by their superior officers.[101] The officers' laziness created terrible organization within garrisons and defensive outposts. On December 5, 1941, Robotti had sent a circular reminding his officers that the rebels had been able to overcome a guard post near Podpeč because the hut that acted as a barrack was not sufficiently protected. Of eight men, four were killed, three wounded and one captured, as the enraged Robotti pointed out.[102] In January 1942, it had been Taddeo Orlando's turn to send out a circular that condemned the habit of the soldiers on guard of abandoning their post to go and warm up in their encampments.[103]

In February 1942, as we have already seen, the unit at Verd had been attacked and overcome. According to Robotti, the partisans' success was due to the garrison's poor organization, which had made the attackers' job easier. "A more complete defensive arrangement of the station and the guard post is often not done because our soldiers are not convinced of its absolute necessity," concluded Robotti.[104]

On April 19, 1942, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps was forced to return to the same theme. The protection of guard posts was insufficient, the barbed wire resembled "garden fences," and no other types of defenses, such as barricades of felled trees or palisades, were produced. "I had the impression," continued Robotti, "that many of these works had been made more with the intention of passively carrying out orders than with that conviction, that war mentality, and that *grinta dura*, (tough determination) that I insist should be well rooted in everyone, both officers and troops."[105]

This lack of preparation made the strongholds extremely vulnerable. The small garrisons, above all, had the tendency to let

themselves be overwhelmed by the partisans as Robotti's telegram of September 2, 1942, attests, "In the night two attacks on railway carried out by rebels were completely successful with derailments and long interruptions of service Stop With 3.000 men protecting the railways such things only happen after annihilation of patrols and guard posts Stop Unmistakable sign the service is carried out inattentively Stop."[106]

Robotti was probably unfair to his soldiers. This was not due to "service carried out inattentively" but, more likely, carried out with poor training. As one of Taddeo Orlando's circulars describes, Italian soldiers, during nocturnal attacks, fired wildly into the air, thus permitting the partisans to identify the location of the heavy weapons, so that the partisans could approach silently in the dark and neutralize them with hand grenades.[107] Some officers, apparently, did not have the least idea of how to react to such attacks and were not able to teach their troops that necessary economy of weapons use and rationality under fire that are essential for defense.

The inexperience and incapacity of some garrison commanders forced Roatta in person to publish in June 1942 the circular 5 C on the organization of garrisons. In this document, the commander of Supersloda listed all the examples in which artillery had been placed incorrectly, which he had noted during his incessant tours of inspection, painting a truly depressing picture of the organization of Italian garrisons. In his final remarks, Roatta wrote, "Generally speaking the defensive works are disastrous, and *absolutely inappropriate for a modern army* [emphasis in original]. Some units, despite having been in place for months, have built defences that any decent troop could build in two hours."[108]

Robotti's observations about offensive operations were no less discomfiting. On May 7, 1942, he published a circular to remind the troops to take security measures. "One can see that half a patrol would be killed with a single burst of machine-gun fire—as has happened recently— . . . it is fair to deduce that these troops were not marching in the formation most appropriate for the terrain."[109]

At the end of May 1942, after having seen a unit attacking a partisan position, he published a new circular, in which he listed all the defects he had seen while observing raids. Soldiers never left the streets, thus always giving up the tactical advantage, but above all he noted "too much confusion, too much noise, too many clusters

of patrols along the road," underuse of mortars, and absolutely no use of artillery.[110]

On August 23, it was Orlando's turn to write to his officers to point out that too often in areas that had been just raided, "storehouses [of the partisans]" were later discovered "still intact," a sure sign that the raid had been performed in a fairly lax manner.[111]

On September 19, two months after the "grand raids," Robotti wrote yet another circular:

> This morning in Rovte, where some units were undertaking raid operations, I was able to observe very serious lacunae in the protection of patrols scattered along my route.
>
> It is difficult for me to imagine a more irrational and illogical use of these patrols which, having drawn too close to inhabited areas, had been, among other things, directed by the commanders along the edge of the streets, pressed up against embankments, buildings, and obstacles of every kind which, practically speaking, would have not only limited but completely blocked all possibility of a quick and efficacious reaction.
>
> All the patrols, without exception, had this absurd placement: not one—not even by mistake—had taken itself off the street to a dominant position, to observe and to fire.
>
> I have absolutely no intention of tolerating this method of doing things any longer, responsibility for which must be given to commanders of higher rank, and I say that this is the last time that I will restrict myself to asking those responsible for a more scrupulous performance of their duties. From now on, I will take very severe disciplinary measures against them.[112]

That a commander of an army corps should obliged to check the position of patrols during raids, and that the commander of the Second Army should similarly have to write about how artillery should be placed in garrisons, was evidently due to the fact that too many officers, superior or inferior, were not capable of giving precise, rational, or effective orders to their troops.

Apart from sending out circulars, Roatta and Robotti also tried to intervene by removing from command various senior officers whom they considered lacking in the necessary qualities of leadership. In preparation for the raid of summer 1942, Roatta wrote a long letter to the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps in

which, given the importance of the operational cycle, he asked if it was necessary to replace any of the "principal dependents," that is division commanders, divisional infantry commanders, regimental commanders, chiefs of staff, and so on.[113] Robotti took this opportunity to request the removal of various officers: the commander of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts legion (of whose case Lieutenant General Montagna, the highest-ranking officer of the militia in Slovenia, was informed);[114] the commander of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment; the three battalion commanders of the same regiment; and the commander of the *Isonzo* division. Of the latter, Robotti wrote that he had had "a tendency to cover decisions that were his specific responsibility by asking for orders from his superior officers," and that he had an "alarmist" state of mind that led to "completely static form of command."[115] The *Isonzo* division commander's limits were, however, the result of the Italian system of training and command. Italian officers were always given extremely rigid orders, which had to be followed step-by-step, in contrast with, for example, German officers, who were only given the objective, which they could and should reach in full autonomy.[116]

An even more depressing picture of whole of the officer corps of the Second Army comes from an anonymous report prepared for Vittorio Ambrosio (at the time supreme commander of the Italian armed forces) in April 1943. Some of the highest-ranking officers were characterized by their poor capacity for command, slight interest, weak control, low energy, indecisiveness, and a notable lack of rectitude, dedication, and in some cases, honesty. They were also marked by a tendency to overestimate the enemy, and for an excessive concern for an easy life. The NCOs were characterized by their weak command capacity, poor technical preparation, and their feeble authority, energy, and decisiveness.[117] It was surprisingly hard to keep military secrets, but this was because many officers told everything to their Slovenian lovers.[118]

From these examples, one gets the impression of an army with a command-level crisis, and above all one that was extremely lacking from a technical and organizational point of view. As James Burgwyn summarized, "The senior officer class was overaged, mired in its tradition insulated from Italian society, and immune to technological innovation. The junior officers frequently exhibited élan but little training in modern tactics."[119]

Despite all these problems, desertions from the ranks, flight and betrayals among the troops were very few, which demonstrates the soldiers' attachment to their duty, while the general picture mostly reflects the failure of the Fascist regime, the principal organization responsible for this disastrous situation.

Problems linked to the low efficiency of the officer corps might also explain why Italian troops were guilty of so many sackings and robberies committed against the Slovenian people. Even given that every occupying army sacks and robs (and the violence suffered by the Italians between 1943 and 1945 is a good example of how foreign armies are inclined to commit this type of crime),[120] the documents of the Eleventh Army Corps and related memoirs do not show a particularly positive picture of Italian soldiers.

The problem is, even today, very difficult to confront, because theft and sacking are considered particularly ignominious crimes for the military. The shooting of hostages and the mistreatment of prisoners and of the wounded may or may not have been considered war crimes, given that it was quite possible to ignore the rules set out in international conventions if both sides did not adhere to the same rules. Nonetheless, sacking and robbery did not and do not have any excuse.

The 1941 military penal code was extremely clear. Below are the articles that forbade robberies and sackings:

> Art. 186. Sacking. Whoever commits an action which leads to sacking in towns or elsewhere, even if taken after an attack, is punished with death with degradation [from his rank].
>
> Art. 187. Arson, destruction or grave damage in enemy territory. Whoever in enemy territory, without being enforced by the necessity of military operations, sets fire to a house or a building, or destroys by any other method, is punished with prison for no less than 15 years.
>
> If one or more persons dies as a result of these actions, the death penalty with degradation is applied.
>
> The same dispositions apply in the case the burning or destruction or grave damaging of historical monuments, works of art or science, or buildings dedicated to religion, charity, teaching, the arts or sciences, even belonging to the enemy state.
>
> Art. 118. Theft. The soldier or other person in service with or embedded in the Armed Forces of the state, that committing a theft,

> takes possession, without necessity or authorization, of foodstuffs, items or clothing or equipment, or forces the same to be given to him, is condemned with military prison for up to 5 years.
>
> If the deed is committed by two or more persons, the penalty is raised by a third to a half.
>
> If violence is used, the penalty is military prison for from one to eight years.
>
> Art. 189. Failure to prevent theft. The officer or NCO who does not use every means at his disposal to prevent the crime described in the previous article is punished with military prison for up to a year.

In other words, while firing squads might be justified in some way, thefts, sacking, and arson were expressly forbidden and punished, with very harsh penalties, by the same Italian authorities. But from the documents it does not seem that the repression of these crimes was particularly decisive.

This is a spiny argument for another reason: Italian propaganda of the period, which sought to justify the occupation of Slovenia as the defense of the local populace against "Communist brigands."[121] This propaganda later, through the memoirs of soldiers and others who had been thoroughly saturated with it, has occasionally even affected the writing of the history of the period. If, however, the soldiers were far from "good" as propaganda said, and on the contrary were happy to act as thieves and pillagers, the whole ideological structure put in place after the war by memoir writers does not stand up to examination.

The problem, as always, began in the officer corps. The previously cited report on the Second Army, from April 1943, denounced the corruption of the leadership (and of the civilian officials), who had given themselves over to contraband in high style: "Objects of value, foodstuffs, furs, liquor, cigarettes, silver objects, and leather are the principal elements of this clandestine commerce, which greatly enriches not a few persons, even of high rank, and disgusts the masses who are obliged to watch and stay silent."[122] The high commands were the first to give a bad example. Even Giovanni Ansaldo described in his diary a notable bad habit that was widespread among officers in the Balkans: "The majority of officers gathered here . . . speaks of the years of war as if they had been years of Bengodi.[123] The adventures, the flings, the trade, the happy eating binges of Dalmatia, Greece, and France: all these wander

through their speech; it is clear that for these men of very modest life and fortune, wartime was a time for squandering and for living large."[124]

Furthermore, in Slovenia the Eleventh Army Corps followed a policy of provisioning of garrisons which resulted in the exploitation of local resources without great regard for the needs of the inhabitants. On May 22, 1942, Robotti published a circular among his dependent divisions in which he gave instructions about how to confront a possible siege. If that happened, "our line of conduct must be directed toward the creation of the logistical autonomy of the garrisons with the rational exploitation of all local resources which, in case of need, will be requisitioned anywhere, taking them, if necessary, even from the needy local populace."[125] These orders gave carte blanche to local commanders, who had to be ready for anything, even if the civilian population had to pay the price.[126]

If the officers were not immune to such behavior, the troops, too, did not seem entirely free from theft and looting. For example, as early as June 1941, the managers of a canvas factory in Kočevje had reported the soldiers who had broken into the warehouse, removing several meters of fabric. Another complaint, from the same area, reported that soldiers pastured their horses in the fields and took away Slovenian citizens' firewood without too much trouble.[127] The *Granatieri* on guard around the perimeter of the Ljubljana containment fence threatened Slovenian women with the withdrawal of their *laisser-passers* if they did not hand over part of the milk they were bringing into the city from the country.[128] Grazioli, in 1942, complained several times to the Interior Ministry about the behavior of the troops. In January, after having reported that every garrison commander was ordering arrests and mass deportations, reminded the ministry that he had "also asked for the Military Commands to pay attention to the numerous thefts that are carried out to the detriment of the local populace and to the useless setting of fires."[129] In March, he sent a detailed report that told of various episodes of sacking, like that of Borovnica on March 6, when a unit of the Frontier Guard had surrounded the house of a wealthy local, even threatening him with machine guns so they could carry off food and beeswax.[130] In April, one of his reports to the Interior Ministry concluded by indicating that "during searches carried out

by units of the Armed Forces, numerous thefts have been carried out, of every kind, to the detriment of private persons."[131]

In January 1943, some Blackshirts of the First Company of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts Assault Battalion, after a firefight, entered a house from which the partisans had already fled, leaving behind an old man and some women. In his report, the centurion commander of the company wrote, "The *gostilna* [trattoria] where the same brigands had camped out was searched, and a salutary lesson was given to all the members of the family, limited to them because only an old man and various women were found there."[132] What this "salutary lesson" for the women consisted of was not made explicit, but it is not difficult to imagine what form it took.

These episodes, even if they were isolated, demonstrate the contempt shown by at least some members of the Italian military to the local civilians, defeated and subdued. There were further examples of this attitude among other occupation troops in a defeated country. However, the propaganda officer of the *Cacciatori* division wrote in October 1942, on the subject of relations between soldiers and civilians, "Good, without any display of friendship. The soldier has become accustomed to living among peoples of a race inferior to his own, what surrounds him is not worthy of much consideration and he does not display any displeasure at being separated from them."[133]

Crimes, however, with an officer corps that was prepared, energetic, and above all not involved in their commission, were normally isolated and stopped. According to some documents, though, it was actually the field commanders themselves who permitted criminal activity to take place. For example, in July 1941 in Croatia, the command of the Sixth Regiment of *Bersaglieri* was forced to send a circular to his subordinate officers to remind them of the necessity of maintaining "correct behavior in public" and to respect "the property of others." That these obligations had not been understood by Italian officers was proven by "recent events in Croatia, in part kept quiet by benevolent superior officers to protect the good name of the units and the regiment, as well as the not insignificant sums spent buying the silence of agencies [*enti*] and private persons, whose property had been damaged by our dependents." The regimental commander went so far as to ask his subordinates if some of them were perhaps not used to behavior

that permitted "such serious infractions."[134] As the war continued, obviously, and with the necessity of carrying out raids and "punitive expeditions," things could only get worse. Even in memoirs, traces, however scarce, appear of this barbarous form of vendetta against the civil population. According to Zanussi, the roundups "ended up as pillages, and most often the innocent paid the price, rather than the guilty."[135] The doctor of the Fifty-First Regiment of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* admitted, in his memoirs, to have given in to theft. The *Cacciatori* began to pillage after entering a village that had just been put to torch by their fellow soldiers, and were enraged after having found and freed prisoners who had been tortured by the partisans; they could not give vent to their feelings in any other way. The doctor personally took possession of a bedcovering, threatening the old woman whose property it was with a pistol. "It didn't even cross my mind that I had committed an armed robbery," concluded the doctor's account.[136] We have already cited the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment who, in June 1942, had to threaten his soldier with serious punishments if they started pillaging during their raids. The most disturbing thing about these orders, however, is the admission that "during past raid operations carried out by the Regiment against the rebels, sometimes acts of reprisal then took place against habitations and belongings of partisans and civilians who were certainly helping the partisans. Such acts of reprisal had been authorized beforehand, and then permitted by the Superior Authorities."[137] Thanks to the acquiescence of officers, soldiers felt authorized to pillage, with the result that Don Pietro Brignoli discusses in his well-known account *Santa messa per i miei fucilati*, after describing countless episodes of sacking and pillaging: "Our common people are a people of great heart, but in some cases the war has dragged them down to the level of brutes. What does it matter that a poor widow might have only one hen and a few potatoes? The soldier will take them from her, never mind her cries. And he will destroy and kill without remorse, at times, even outside the exigencies of war."[138]

With the raid operations of summer 1942, acts of gratuitous violence multiplied. The civil commissioner of Logatec, Rosin, sent Grazioli horrified reports about the behavior of the soldiers, which say, among other episodes, that "in Nova vas . . . the devastating fury of the *Granatieri* was shocking. Before setting fire to

the houses, the soldiers gave themselves wildly to plunder. The Brigadier of the CCRR tried in vain to stop them. The Captain of the CCRR assigned to the Grenadier Command Division barely managed to restore order, but he had to fire several shots to intimidate the soldiers. No officer of the *Granatieri* intervened to help him."[139] Pietro Brignoli wrote that on July 25 the *Granatieri* entered a town and there committed "the usual massacre, by part of the troop, in the houses and fields, despite the ban on touching anything."[140]

Casanuova describes an episode from July 1942:

> We were close to a large town, Sodrazica [Sodražica], and until late at night one could see the great glimmers of fire and hear gunfire in that direction.
>
> The 52nd had found a large munitions depot there. The soldiers had set it alight and the fire had spread to much of the town. The troop, excited by the explosions and flames, went strangely crazy and began to pillage the place. The transport column of division command, which was to have moved to the sidelines in the town, had to retreat so as not to be caught by the flames and in any case the soldiers were in an uproar and two of them had raped a little girl of less than fourteen years old. Something that had never happened before in the *Cacciatori*. A wave of madness swept over our soldiers, who until then had always behaved properly and humanely. Now they were off the chain and no longer obeyed the orders of their officers.[141]

The story continues with the direct intervention of the general commander who had to fire a musket into the crowd of soldiers. "They told us that everything had quickly returned to its proper order and that some soldiers had been shot sitting there."[142] The daily telegrammatic report of the Eleventh Army Corps, however, said, "Yesterday [the *Cacciatori* division] hurried to break enemy resistance area Sodrazica [Sodražica] and occupation of said place Stop. Rebels killed in combat 6 and 35 executed by firing squad Stop. One submachine gun, some rifles, mines and explosives captured Stop. Many houses destroyed Stop."[143] The *Diario storico* of the division states, "The 51st infantry reached the Sodrazica—Rumarsko [Runarsko] road in the evening;…Our losses: none. Enemy losses: certified dead, 10, along with many wounded taken

away; executed by firing squad, 35; elements captured for internment, 38; one submachine gun and six rifles captured; in some places houses belonging to Communist brigands were burned."[144] In the previous 24 hours, the division's losses were confined to 17 soldiers hospitalized for malaria. No mention is made of any executions of soldiers.

Excerpts of letters, published in Piemontese's book, describe episodes of pillage during raids, which took place with the complicity of officers.[145]

In vain did Robotti and Roatta try to somehow restrain the troops who had become too violent. Robotti, on September 1, sent a phonogram in which he wrote that "the troops continue to steal and plunder" with the toleration of their commanders, who were "only concerned with exonerating their own men." Robotti thus made an appeal to the "conscience of gentlemen" so that the officers would take action against this "very painful fact."[146] Orlando, on August 5, had to recall the soldiers of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment who were looting the potato fields.[147]

On August 1, the parish priest of Travnik wrote to Robotti to say that soldiers had burnt down five houses, but because of the wind, the fire had spread across the whole town, destroying another hundred buildings.[148] It was not an isolated case. Orlando, on the same day, wrote to his officers to complain that soldiers of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment had destroyed the village of Hrib as they had set fire to the houses of rebels without containing the flames, even putting the divisional food depot in danger. The same thing had happened, not long before, in Nova vas, this time threatening the unit's transport vehicles.[149] It would seem that the soldiers were not even minimally concerned with limiting the damage they caused. But the most serious episode of violence of which Italian troops were guilty, and the responsibility for which cannot be debited to their superior officers, is described in Robotti's teletype of July 30, as below:

> I have received word of the deplorable behavior of the troops of the mobile nucleus [of the *Macerata* division] of Colonel Bruno in the territory and town of Sodrazica [Sodražica], particularly regarding torture of women and stealing of goods. I beg you to carry out rapid and harsh investigations, which should be extended to the behavior

> of Colonel Bruno, also in reference to his leadership of troops in the action against the rebels of the Sodrazica area. My impression of the Ribnica garrison is quite uncomforting due to the great disorder [it caused]. Take energetic action. Be sure to do so. General Robotti.[150]

From an analysis of samples of the sentences of the Military Tribunal of the Second Army, Ljubljana section, it would not appear that episodes of plunder and sack were punished with particular severity. The sentences are preserved in seven volumes in the Central State Archive in Rome. In the first volume, of 280 sentences, 30 are in regard to Italian soldiers, of which 8 were about thefts from Slovenians, while the others dealt with insubordination, abandonments of posts, and culpable injury. This is a rather slender number, bearing in mind the violence of the same period. Moreover, none of these sentences are for murder or arson. None of them are against officers, either. The highest-ranking accused was a sergeant.

All these examples of poor discipline, lack of efficiency, and weak authority on the part of the officers of the Royal Army are the necessary premise for understanding why violence escalated during the summer operations of 1942. Officers, as well as being technically unprepared for counterinsurgency warfare, no longer had their troops under control. Enraged by their losses, unable to catch up with the partisans, officers too often gave their soldiers a free hand, and from then on it was impossible to rein them back in. On September 10, in fact, Robotti once again had to reprove his officers in a major report, because "there are still too many thefts and acts of sabotage committed by the soldiers." The officers, according to the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps, did not suppress "bad habits" severely enough, but they "had to stop."[151]

Robotti's frustration was due to his lack of faith in his officers and troops. In the face of a Resistance that was growing in strength and audacity, in the face of episodes like that of the train to Gonars that exposed the occupation forces to ridicule, and facing the risk of being fired for poor performance, Robotti gave draconian orders that his troops applied without too much consideration of their legality or efficacy. Evidently, Robotti considered that if he could not destroy the enemy in battle, he would have to use terror to convince the populace to stop helping the partisans. This

was the *extrema ratio* of every army in trouble. Once again it must be stressed that this was not a "hot" violence, or of a reaction to "Communist atrocities," which actually had happened (as in the cases of the shooting of the CCRR or the many murders of the family members of Slovenian collaborators), but a planned, "cold" violence against the whole Slovenian people.

4

Summer 1942

On June 8, Roatta wrote a rather worried letter to Robotti in which he insisted that the general "reestablish order in the province." Roatta's intentions were specific. They were to destroy "the central directing organization" of the "subversive movement," a fairly important phrase because with it Roatta recognized that the Resistance had a single and acknowledged command structure, one of the criteria used to identify the enemy as a "legitimate belligerent." To obtain this result, among the methods to be used were the preventive internment in concentration camps of anyone who might be recruited by the "rebels"; the protective internment of collaborators in danger; the killing of hostages; reprisals, including the destruction of houses or villages, but only in the cases set out in the circular 3 C; the work of "dividing" the rebels, arming anticommunist Slovenians ("setting one against the other"); the "massive" movement of residents out of specific areas. From a strictly military viewpoint, Roatta gave highly detailed directives on the organization and garrisons and raid operations, but above all gave the clear order "always to move forward with the greatest energy and decision, and to kill our adversaries inexorably and immediately along with those who help them. During the raids, whoever makes any hostile act, or gives any help to the rebels, shall immediately be shot."[1]

What Roatta was planning, and in part carried out, was a radical program of repression: mass deportation, the destruction of entire villages, and the shooting of civilians.[2] The reaction of the Royal Army was to fall most cruelly on the entire population of "Italian" Slovenia. If the part of this program involving mass deportation

did not take place, that was only because the Italian state did not have the means to carry out the intentions of the commander of the Second Army.[3]

Robotti, for his part, immediately set to work; on June 9, he sent his subordinate commanders an order to collect hostages to be shot in case of attacks on persons or things. "Bear in mind," said Robotti to his officers, "that for every Slovenian killed corresponding executions will take place of an individual who is certainly guilty of terrorist or Communist activity. For each Italian killed, of two of the aforementioned elements."[4]

In the meantime, the Fascists tried to sort things out in "their own way." In the first 15 days of June, two Italians were killed by the partisans, a female official of the *Fasci femminili*, and an official of the National Fascist Party (PNF). These attacks, as described in the "Notiziario informazioni n.62," the bulletin of the command of the Eleventh Army Corps, "they irritated some radical elements of the Fascist community of Ljubljana, which in reaction abandoned themselves to violent acts, quickly repressed by the energetic and immediate intervention of the Military Authorities." However, "in reprisal for the criminal murders of the two aforesaid Fascists, respectively seven and fifteen certain Communists were shot; this harsh lesson sends a severe warning to the rebellious party."[5] Compared to the "hot" violence of the Fascists, which had, however, probably been limited to the destruction of shops and beatings (or at least we have no record of deaths), the "cold" violence of the soldiers seems more brutal. Fifteen people shot for a single Italian killed is a greater number than the German reprisal after the via Rasella attack, in Rome in 1944.[6]

On June 29, Robotti presented Roatta with a plan for raiding the entire province, a plan that the commander of the Second Army approved, defining it as a "harsh blow to the enemy."[7] This was merely the application of Roatta's order from the June 8 meeting; it was intended to put an end, at last, to the guerrilla war in Slovenia.

To reinforce the Eleventh Army Corps, two large units arrived: the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division and the *Macerata* division. Furthermore, perhaps to satisfy the Fascists, at the end of June some units of Blackshirts under the command of General Renzo Montagna, "Consul" of the militia, were assigned as reinforcements for Robotti's troops. These were the Seventy-First and the

Eighty-First Blackshirts battalions, of the Second Legion *Superga*, the Eighth, Fourteenth, and Eighty-Fifth "M" battalions, and two reserve battalions. Part of these troops were to have formed part of the "Montagna" group and were to have replaced the *Granatieri* at Ljubljana, the *Isonzo* at Šentvid, and the Frontier Guard at Velike Bloke.[8] The "M" battalions, on the eve of the raid, were put into a mobile group at the orders of General De Rienzi, on Robotti's specific orders.[9] For the "political" preparation of the summer operations, it was decided to "purge" Ljubljana of citizens considered dangerous. In June 1942, the Eleventh Army Corps, as we have already seen, deported thousands of Slovenians captured in the capital to Gonars.

At the end of June, everything was ready for the grand raid: four complete divisions, a group of the Frontier Guard, and at least ten militia battalions were to have cleansed the entire province, beginning with the massif of Mount Krim, and moving southward to the border with Croatia, where the Eighteenth and Fifth Army Corps would form a barrier to prevent the partisans from escaping.[10]

While the preparations intensified, news arrived of the students' astonishing escape from the train to Gonars. As we have seen, Roatta felt this humiliation keenly, pointing out that the whole Second Army had been exposed to ridicule. The reaction of Orlando, the principal figure accused of responsibility for this loss of face, was to organize a brief raid on the outskirts of Ljubljana. In an "energetic raid" on Šentjošt on July 4, the *Granatieri* and the Frontier Guard inflicted "heavy losses" on the partisans.[11] But the interesting thing is that, probably piqued by the his superiors' criticisms after the train incident, Orlando published a particularly critical circular (he was temporarily commander of the Eleventh Army Corps, as Robotti was on leave), which reads,

> I have discovered that rebels or individuals found with hand guns are sent by the inferior commands to the ordinary military tribunals.
>
> Regarding this point, I repeat the explicit order of the attachment B to the secret order 7899 of the Supreme Command Armed Forces "Slovenia-Dalmazia", sent with order 02/3104 of 22 April of this year.
>
> Only the wounded, women and males younger than 18 years old must be turned over to the aforesaid tribunals.

> All the others must be shot on the spot.
> General Taddeo Orlando.[12]

While preparing the raid, General Robotti, having just returned to Ljubljana on July 4, after a short leave,[13] sent contradictory messages to his troops. On July 14, perhaps worried about the brutality of his own soldiers, he sent a circular in which he insisted that the "*mordente*," his soldiers' "aggressiveness" or "bite," should not "degenerate into the sterile and harmful destruction of houses and goods, in chaotic and agitated firefights, especially at night, or in reckless reprisals."[14] On July 15, Robotti and Grazioli published a notice advising the Slovenian population that everyone who carried out hostile acts against Italian troops should be shot, along with those caught in possession of weapons or explosives, and everyone who assisted the rebels, as well as all healthy males found near combat zones without a valid explanation. Moreover, houses from which shots had been fired at the troops would be destroyed, along with those that had sheltered rebels and those where weapons and ammunition had been found.

The order of the day of July 16, before the raid, reminded the soldiers that the "beautiful march" through "the fields and woods" of Slovenia, that had the purpose of "catching and punishing the violent assassins of our brothers. Be once again legionaries of civilization and of the high ideals of Rome," continued Robotti poetically, reminding the soldiers of their duty to strike the enemy but to respect the weak "who were guiltlessly involved."[15]

On July 17, the fighting began, and would end in mid-September. Operations were divided in cycles. At the end of August, Marco Cuzzi writes, 1,053 partisans had been killed in combat; 1,236 had been shot by firing squad; and 1,381 had been captured.[16] A report of the Eleventh Army Corps, describing the successes obtained from July 16 to September 15, gives different figures: 965 killed in combat; 791 shot by firing squad; and 1,136 captured or surrendered. Italian losses were given as 5 dead officers; 10 wounded officers; 42 NCOs and soldiers dead; and 133 wounded.[17]

Analyzing the reports of the different units, we find the following information. In the operations of the "Slovenia" cycle, which presumably refers to the same period, the *Granatieri* had killed 278 enemies, had captured 126, and had shot 213. They had destroyed

171 houses and 54 camps.[18] The *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, in the period from July 16 to August 25, had killed 74 partisans, shot 127, and captured 435.[19] The *Isonzo* division, in the same period (July 16 to August 25) had killed 56 partisans in battle and had shot 38.[20] In following three operative cicles (ending on September 24), the same division had killed 53 partisans in battle, shot 4, and captured 154.[21] The *Macerata* division, in first four operative cicle (up to August 24) had killed 15 partisans in combat, shot 2, and captured 24.[22] The various Blackshirts units, which moved in autonomous columns, had killed 13 partisans in combat, shot 50, and captured 65.[23] The mobile nucleus of the Eleventh Group of the Frontier Guard had the highest ratio of partisans killed in combat to those shot. They killed 49 in battle, shot 141 Slovenians, and captured 11.[24]

As for the Italian losses, the Frontier Guard, up to August 17, had 4 wounded; the *Macerata* (up to August 17) had 2 dead and 4 wounded; the *Granatieri* (from July 16 to September 4) had suffered 1 dead and 6 wounded officers; 8 dead and 29 wounded NCOs; and 9 dead and 34 wounded soldiers; the *Cacciatori* (up to August 25) 15 wounded; the *Isonzo* (up to August 25) 1 dead and 1 wounded. There were no deaths among the Blackshirts. The data provided by Tone Ferenc[25] is not very different from the data I found, and it referred to the entire operation, that is, up to September 15.

These numbers, however, do not describe either those who were shot or the reason for their shooting, or why there was such a great difference between units. Beginning with the latter question, it should be remembered that the *Isonzo* and the *Macerata* were mostly used to block the escape routes, while the *Granatieri*, the *Cacciatori*, and the Blackshirts were used as mobile groups. Overall, most of the fighting was done by these large units and the mobile columns of the militia.

The behavior of the Frontier Guard remains incomprehensible, however, as it distinguished itself for its number of shootings and for its apparent scarcity of firefights. If we take as a criterion the number of losses in order to understand the number of firefights, we note how the Eleventh Frontier Guard group suffered only four wounded, two of which on July 16, one on August 4 and one on August 6. Furthermore, the Eleventh Frontier Guard stood out for the number of mass shootings. On July 31, they killed 34 persons, and on August 6 another 22, all at the same time. A higher number

was reached by the *Granatieri*, who on August 6 killed 35 people but on that day the division also suffered 4 dead and 9 wounded, and had killed more than 60 partisans in battle, an indication that the conflicts had been rather bloody. Even the *Cacciatori* killed 35 people at the same time on July 25, without having suffered any losses up to that point, but had killed 22 partisans and had captured more than 50 persons. In comparison, the Blackshirts seem moderate. The 51 people shot by the *squadristi* were few indeed if compared to the 201 indicated by Ferenc for the Eleventh Frontier Guard.

Even if we follow the numbers day-by-day for all of the units engaged in this work, it is impossible to find a direct connection between losses suffered and persons executed. Thus, it is impossible to explain the mass shootings as the result of the violence of combat. For example, the *Granatieri*, on July 31, suffered 1 dead and 1 wounded, and killed 24 partisans in battle, but they did not execute anyone, not even the day after. On August 6, they shot 35 persons, without having fought any battle or having sustained any losses, despite the fact that 33 partisans surrendered to them. The *Cacciatori*, on August 21, had 9 wounded and killed 19 partisans, but did not execute anyone in subsequent days.

The *Cacciatori* division, which was left to carry out a raid on Mount Mokrec, on July 20, found no opposition, as report on the operation of the period states; however, "numerous individuals, armed or unarmed, were captured and shot."[26]

It is possible to follow the traces of smaller units as well. For example, the garrison of Straža (a town to the South west of Novo mesto), was made up of artillerymen of the Second Battery of the Sixth Artillery Regiment of the *Isonzo* division. Between July 16 and August 23, they carried out nine raids outside the garrison. They engaged in no battles and never met any armed partisan. On July 23, they arrested and shot a person who was "certain guilty of connivance with Communist brigands"; on August 14 they shot a partisan informer; on August 16 they descended on Podhosta area, a village 5 km from the garrison, capturing 98 "healthy men," of whom 15 were shot.[27]

The Zamesko garrison, also part of the *Isonzo*, and made up of finance police and CCRR, killed 11 "communist brigands" on September 17 during a raid on the woods that surrounded the

village, without suffering any injuries. It was the first raid that the garrison had conducted in weeks.[28]

The Fifth Frontier Guard group distinguished itself by its particularly cruel behavior. This unit was under the orders of the Fifth Army Corps, in collaboration with the Eleventh Army Corps, in the area between Slovenia and Croatia. We have seen that Tone Ferenc (see table 4.1) counted 175 partisans killed in battle and 245 shot. The daily reports of the commanding general show a particular enthusiasm for attacking groups of persons who were suspected of helping the partisans without regard for sex and age. On July 17, at the very beginning of operations, a mobile column (the "A" column) of the frontier guard made "visual" contact with a "camp of women, children and animals," that the general considered "armed formations fleeing before our energetic pressure," and ordered them to be captured.[29] On July 20, the *Carnaro* Battalion, of column "A," captured 6 men, 3 women, and 1 child.[30] From July 20 the destruction begun. By July 22, the group had destroyed 243 houses, killed 4 partisans, and executed 13 more.[31] On July 25, the most shocking episode took place. A group or rebels, including some women, hid in a cave to escape the raid, in the area of Strma reber. The soldiers suspected that there were also children in the cave and asked the group to send them out, but Slovenians refused. "The [partisan] garrison was destroyed with flamethrowers," wrote the general in his report,[32] in which he estimated to have killed around 50 people. On July 29, without having met any resistance, the Frontier Guard reached its assigned goals. Despite the ease of the operation, the

Table 4.1 Partisan casualties by different units

Unit	*Partisans killed in combat*	*Partisans shot*	*Partisans captured*
Granatieri	277	213	138
Cacciatori	No data	342	?
Isonzo	109	53	164
Macerata	42	47	78
Eleventh Frontier Guard	11	201	2
Blackshirts	?	51	?
Mobile Reserve	64	58	140
Fifth Frontier Guard	175	245	?
Command Eleventh Army Corps	1,807	847	1,625

soldiers destroyed 200 houses and shot 22 "guaranteed partisans in plain clothes."[33] On July 31, the general sent Roatta this following summary: 123 enemies killed in combat; 194 shot "as guaranteed collaborators [of the partisans]." Italian losses amounted to 1 dead and 14 wounded, of which 12 were wounded "very lightly and did not need to be sent to the hospital."[34] Among the Slovenian dead were 47 person shots at Babno polje, at the same time, on July 30.[35] On August 1, the soldiers found a partisan base. In this *logor* (camp), as the general called it, 10 men (of which 3 were killed in battle), 19 women, and 23 children were captured.[36] From July 12 to August 22, the Fifth Frontier Guard group had killed 172 men in combat and 245 by firing squad; had captured and interned 4,300; had destroyed 1,854 houses and 21 camps; and had captured 1,200 pigs and 750 cows. Five submachine guns were captured, along with 120 rifles and 8 pistols. The Italians, by September 2, had lost 42 and 33 were wounded.[37]

Given these results, the commander of the Fifth Army Corps expressed his particular satisfaction to the commander of the Fifth Frontier Guard group and to the troops "who have so brilliantly taken part" in the raids.[38]

Once again this was not a "hot" violence, a response to the brutality of combat, a mindless but understandable reaction in the context of exhausting and bloody operations, but this was more probably a "cold" violence, for which the army heads were responsible, who had planned the massacres in order to terrorize the population.

We have seen how, on the eve of the operation, Robotti had reminded his men to act in a harsh but fair way. Once the battle began, however, Robotti's tone became much harsher. On July 18, Robotti explained to his subordinates what sort of person was to be shot. Anyone who fitted the description laid out in the ordinance of July 15 was to be killed, and the norms were to applied "with the greatest energy and without false mercy…I do not admit that persons guilty of the above [crimes] should be sent before tribunals or put in camps; they must be suppressed." The third point of the ordinance, which decreed death for healthy males found in combat zones in a suspicious posture, was to be interpreted in the narrowest manner. Only those who surrendered their weapons in areas where fighting was not taking place were to be spared: "Whoever

surrenders during combat," Robotti concluded "will not benefit from this treatment."[39]

Roatta, on July 23, gave fairly peremptory orders to officers involved in raids. After having seen troops in battle, he had stated that not all the officers "were convinced of the absolute necessity of the most aggressive repression." For this reason he urged division commanders to tell their underlings "either to be convinced that they should do as I say, and thus should apply my and your orders without false mercy. Or if they are not convinced that they should proceed in such a way [as I have ordered], then they should say so, in order that they be given other tasks."[40]

Roatta's incitement must have worried Robotti quite a lot. On the same day summarizing the situation, he urged his division commanders to do better: "I note once again the necessity, seeing the difficulty capturing the brigands in large numbers, of suppressing without mercy not only the guilty but also mere suspects."[41] On August 5, Robotti wrote to his officers that he had heard of the capture of "*briganti comunisti*" without the accompanying information that they had been shot, and reminded them that his orders should be carried out "greatest energy and no false mercy. And I would like to remind you also that, following suspected and possible temporary demobilization of the partisans, many of the peaceful workers of today are the brigands of tomorrow, who will be shot."[42] To the commander of the *Isonzo* he personally wrote, "I order that Hrastj Jugorie must immediately razed to the ground and its healthy men shot."[43] Furthermore, Roatta had an "authoritative" incitement from Mussolini himself, who said, in a meeting of the army's highest echelons at Gorizia on July 31 (including Cavallero and Ambrosio), that "we must respond with an iron fist [*col ferro e col fuoco*]" to the partisans' terrorist attacks.[44]

On August 3, Robotti held a meeting with the superior officers of his divisions, to remind them why the troops were fighting:

> The Slovenian population to which Italy had given a political statue and a civil and economic administration which in previous centuries it had never enjoyed, has completely made common cause with the brigands.
>
> This population hates and disdains us. It attributes our generosity to incompetence. It will never love us… To crush their silence

> we must begin to create a greater terror than that provoked by the rebels.[45]

It was necessary to respond with terror to the hatred and "disdain" of the Slovenians. It was not sufficient to attack the rebels; it was necessary to terrorize the populace, which had made common cause with the partisans. It was necessary to dry up the water in which the fish of the Resistance swam.

On August 4, Robotti sent out his most troubling order. With raids imminent, Slovenia had been covered with flyers that urged the partisans to surrender. Whoever would turn himself in to the Italians, "before and outside the battlefield," and turned in weapons, would be spared. Robotti, with a circular to all his subordinate commanders, wrote, "I order that, of the partisans who turned themselves in with weapons and who had been promised to be spared, those who have been accused of particularly serious crimes or were certainly guilty of serious crimes or if they were recognized as communist leaders, should be shot."[46]

The appallingness of this order must have been clear to Roatta as well, who immediately intervened to block it. On August 13, he sent a circular to all the commanders of the army corps, which reads, "The guarantee that we will spare lives must be maintained absolutely," for whoever surrenders before battle or off the battlefield. Among these, those who had been recognized as responsible for violence, massacre, and pillage, that is, common crimes, should be reported to the relevant military tribunal, but in any case could not be condemned to death.[47] At around the same time, however, absolution arrived. On August 12, Roatta had sent his "*vivo elogio*," his compliments, to the commands and to his dependent units for their work in the operations, and "forgave the said units the disciplinary punishments already underway."[48]

Orlando sent a phonogram (sometime soon after August 13) to his subordinate commanders that repeated Roatta's order and expanded, "The Supersloda command reasserts that all rebels surrendering before battle must be spared. This order must also be interpreted in favor of those surrendering without weapons."[49] This same man, on August 27, sent a concise but very clear telegram to his subordinate commanders: "Members of the O.F. Committee [i.e., leaders of the Resistance] must be shot."[50]

On August 16, Robotti sent out the order to "arrest for internment all able-bodied men from the towns of the raided areas, previously under rebel control."[51] It was the direct consequence of his previous orders. All the inhabitants of the areas subjected to raids, according to orders already given, were conniving with the Resistance and thus there were no "civilians," but only "collaborators" who, in one way or another, must be punished. In reality, as we have seen, it was an order that made sense within the framework of a policy of terror. Italian military leaders knew very well that it was not possible for all the inhabitants to have been collaborators; they also knew it was not possible to differentiate between collaborators, partisans, and simple civilians. Thus, they gave the order to imprison all "able-bodied men" so as to be sure that did not leave any suspect behind, but above all, according to Robotti's words, to make sure that the Slovenians were more frightened of the Royal Army than they were of the partisans. On September 11, an anonymous note (which came from the command of the Eleventh Army Corps), once more condemned the "excessive weakness" of Italian units that had been fooled by the partisans, who had gone back to their houses, claiming to have been enlisted by force. "This is absolutely false," the note continued, "because in the area between Grosuplje and Trebnje, just as in other areas to the north of the Ljubljana–Novo mesto railway, the Slovenian populace had spontaneously enrolled in great numbers in partisan formations the previous spring."[52]

These orders did not only come from Roatta and Robotti. Even the ones given by Orlando were fairly explicit. At the end of July, a *sottotenente* of the Second *Granatieri* had fallen in combat. On July 30, Orlando sent a telegram to the regiment commander with which he expressed his condolences over the death of the officer and concluded, "The regiment will know how to take bloody revenge for this valiant fallen officer."[53]

On August 18, the commander of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division transmitted Robotti's order to his officers: "Army Corp command informs us. Our preparation [with] artillery and aviation has already caused more than 150 dead and many wounded. We know that the partisans have been ordered to dissolve their units to flee our raids by hiding in the woods. Close circle raiding meter by meter and shoot everyone you find."[54]

These orders had another result: practically every officer could take the responsibility of carrying out executions by firing squad, even if he were not of higher rank. A battalion commander, on July 31, shot 11 persons.[55]

In the face of such abrupt orders, soldiers in the field were forced to show results to their superiors. However, their successes were relatively modest. We have seen how poorly Italian soldiers were trained for counterinsurgency warfare. On July 23, in a document we have already quoted, Robotti summarized the situation and complained of the pathetic results: "Overall, there is no reason for us to be cheerful," Robotti wrote. The large size of the territory and "the fox-like cunning" of the partisans "have combined to reduce the results we hoped from our work."[56] On July 30, Robotti in a telegram was obliged to reprove his division leaders that the troops were conducting raids in too superficial a manner. "Troops doing this do not obtained the desired results, because they do not raid, they merely walk Stop Remember that purpose is not that of chasing the partisans before us but of encircling and destroying them Stop Please give orders that more closely reflect this idea and redo raids [in] areas already raided Stop Be sure Stop."[57]

The civilian officials, too, who were in any case happy to show the military in a bad light, passed very negative judgments on the raiding methods. As Rosin wrote to Grazioli, Italian soldiers who were not able to get their hands on the partisans vented their anger on civilians. The partisans, in fact, knew of raids in advance and escaped.[58] This is confirmed by Robotti's request to Roatta, on July 12, to move the date of the beginning of the raid due to word getting out.[59] Rosin described pillaging, unjustified burnings of buildings, and aerial bombardments of towns completely lacking in military objectives: "The burning of the village of Ravne, which destroyed 31 houses, was caused by incendiary bombs and explosive fired from an airplane. The populace, which fled terrified, was mowed down by gunfire from above. An old woman and a twelve-year-old girl were killed and many men were wounded and burned."[60] Don Brignoli, writing of the bombardments, says, "Towards ten in the morning our artillery and a group of alpine artillery opened a hellish fire, from a hilltop, on a small town in the valley. A few women and children were killed: the rest of the population fled into the woods."[61]

A military doctor, according to Rosin, suspected that the soldiers did not want to crush the Resistance in order "not to lose the income owed to the soldiers serving in areas of war operations."[62] Apart from being warned in time, according to Rosin, the partisans were helped by the Italians' raiding methods: "The troops had sifted through the woods wherever possible but they did it in stages and sector by sector, in the same way that fields are tilled, giving the rebel a chance to move from one sector to another and thus to escape capture."[63]

In the divisional historic diaries one reads, moreover, that different units did not manage to proceed with necessary coordination, leaving gaps between them. The commander of the *Cacciatori* division on August 21 noted in the *Diario storico* that "the tactical link with the units of the *Granatieri* division was not created, the latter division being at fault."[64]

This was not the only episode of its kind. On July 18, the units of the Fifty-First Infantry of the *Cacciatori* had tried to connect with the *Granatieri*, which was supposed to happen in the town of Iška vas, with no result because "the town was found destroyed by fire and uninhabited and no unit was on site or in the neighboring areas."[65] Furthermore, the entire operation had been preceded, on July 16, by a huge artillery and aerial bombing,[66] completely useless against formations that worked without material defenses.[67]

On July 29, Robotti was forced to respond to the harsh criticisms of his immediate superior. Roatta's letter has not survived, but Robotti's response, written in his defense, makes perfectly clear what problems were found in the course of operations. Roatta had probably asked that operations take place using light and very mobile columns, while Robotti had gone with slow and heavy raids, which had allowed too many partisans to escape. The commander of the Eleventh Army Corps replied,

> The program which, after a deep examination of the situation, I have planned and sent to His Excellency, responded to the idea that, due to the particular tactics of the rebels, it was not possible to catch huge enemy formations and to perform classic annihilation operations. I had foreseen—and events gave me reason to have done so—an episodic fight against small groups found while scouring the terrain. A heavy and tiring action, not a brilliant one, made

> harsh by the nature of the rough terrain which enabled ambushes, which required much stronger forces than the ones I have available in order to move forward rapidly.
>
> Against an enemy that is fluid and not bound to the roads, encircling must be done by covering the terrain, going forward in the elementary, but certain, formation of marching shoulder to shoulder. An action across a large area, as His Excellency proposed, would leave too much free space for enemy units to escape from us because, among other things, we must not fool ourselves into believing we have surprise on our side.[68]

It is a strange admission of failure. Without the element of surprise, despite more than 60,000 men at his disposal, Robotti admitted the impossibility of finding and destroying partisan groups. It is not surprising, therefore, to read the notes written in pencil, probably by Roatta, in the margins of Robotti's letter: "As a proof of impotence *a priori* this isn't bad"; and immediately below: "Unacceptable criticism."

High-ranking officials on the spot harshly criticized the military operations. Pièche, the general of the CCRR, observed, "It is a ridiculous farce which could be numbered among the deeds of the Bourbon armies." Luca Pietromarchi, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote in his diary, on July 31, "We must free ourselves of the Second Army. Only in this way could the shame and dishonour be brought to an end."[69]

These comments are confirmed by the data in the reports of the units undertaking raid operations. In all these documents one notes an enormous difference between the men killed, in battle or by firing squad, and the weapons recovered. For example, the *Granatieri* on July 29 killed 17 partisans in battle, shot 1, burned 37 houses, and captured a submachine gun, 8 rifles, and 1 hand grenade.[70] Two days later, the *Granatieri* killed 2 partisans in battle, shot 9 persons, and captured 1 rifle.[71] On August 1, the *Granatieri* executed 3 persons by firing squad, killed 23 in combat, captured 3, and found only 6 rifles, 2 pistols, 2 bayonets, and 1 hand grenade.[72] On August 10, they shot 5 persons, imprisoned 122, and destroyed 2 houses and 5 encampments without finding a single weapon.[73]

In an overall summary from July 29 to August 13, Orlando wrote that his *Granatieri* had killed 93 partisans in battle, had shot 92, had captured 20 (of which 13 had turned themselves in), had imprisoned

331, and had captured 1 machine gun, 3 submachine guns, 87 rifles, 14 pistols, 31 hand grenades, and 46 bayonets.[74] In the end, without counting the people taken prisoners, for 205 partisans or suspected partisans killed, a 105 firearms were found, including pistols.

From August 14 to 23, the numbers are more or less the same: 100 partisans killed in combat, 36 shot, 83 captured, 138 imprisoned, with the grand total of weapons captured being 30 rifles, 7 pistols, 17 hand grenades, 10 bayonets, and 2 knives.[75] The statistics are similar for the other units. I will include only one example, so as not to bore the reader: the Fifty-First Infantry Regiment, on July 24, had killed 10 partisans, had shot 35, and had captured 1 machine gun and 6 rifles.[76] The Italians had suffered no losses.

According to the summary written by the command of the Eleventh Army Corps, from July 16 to September 15, the troops had killed 1,756 persons, had captured 1,136, and had recovered 695 rifles, 60 pistols, 33 submachine guns, 8 machine guns, 9 45-mm mortars, and other weapons. This amounts to 800 firearms for 1,756 dead.[77]

How were the victims chosen? In some cases lists of "Communists" or "collaborators" were provided by local informers. For example, the commander of the First *Granatieri* Regiment, on July 28, was able to give division command a list of "collaborators" in the towns of Velike Bloke, Bloška Polica, Grahovo, Žerovnica, Žimarice, Radlek, and Nova vas. The information was sometimes very specific: "Communist of Nova vas, Jutihar Ivan, a baker who brought rebels flour and cows stolen from Italian soldiers." The same report also contained generic pieces of information: "In the town of Bloska [Bloška] Polica the inhabitants were all communists."[78] Orlando, on August 12 was able to inform his subordinate commands of the name of a sergeant of the *Granatieri* who had deserted and was now working as a propagandist among Italian prisoners.[79] The local informers were often parish priests. A list prepared by the *Granatieri* division command, of August 22, cited 28 places were parish priests and chaplains could be found who might be asked to give information.[80] The next day, Orlando gave instructions to his officers on how to handle these religious informers. He suggests that they not directly ask for the names of the Communists, but to "induce them, unobtrusively, to send someone they trust to give us the names. In this way the parish priests will always remain able to

reassure their parishioners that they had not given lists of names, thereby saving their prominent positions."[81] The mobile group of the Eleventh Regiment of the Frontier Guard, having arrived at Stari trg, had found in the parish priest a "source of information of the first order." The priest considered that the area was infected in two-thirds by the "Bolshevik syphilis," and advised "drastic remedies."[82] His advice was taken; that same day the Italians shot 24 persons.[83]

Very often the criteria were fairly "broad." On July 19, the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment informed division command of the execution of four persons. The first was from Preserje but had been found at Rakitna; the second and third had been shot because "near their houses military uniforms had been found." The fourth had been shot because "near his house [had been] found various cartridges and two small military bags (*giberne*)."[84]

The same commander wrote on July 23, to the division's tactical command, that during a raid on the hamlet of Jeršiče "in the house of a certain Korosec [Korošec] was found a gas mask from the former Yugoslav army. The inhabitants, Korosec Franc son of Franc—Korosec Janez son of Franc—Korosec Josef son of Franc, have been shot. House razed to the ground. Identity cards attached."[85] When his subordinates had doubts, Orlando resolved them with orders like the following: "Referring to message 220/c, execute my orders and shoot them."[86] According to Pietro Brignoli, the Italians reached the point of shooting civilians merely to satisfy their superior officers, who wanted to see more results. On July 19, four persons were shot because "a senior figure in the army corps went that morning to see the colonel, and harshly criticized him because it seemed to him that the colonel was behaving with too much gentleness."[87]

The units did not spare the partisans' camp hospitals. According to a daily report of July 18, of the Eleventh Army Corps "in the areas raided by our troops up until now we have found . . . command centers, encampments, barracks, infirmaries and warehouses which were destroyed by our troops."[88] On July 25, the mobile nucleus of the *Isonzo* division in the area of Novo mesto destroyed "rebel infirmaries and burned 4 houses. One rebel killed."[89]

We have seen how Roatta's orders, and particularly those connected with the circular 3 C, ordered women and the wounded

to be spared. Nevertheless, the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* shot some captured women. On September 23, 1942, the Third Battalion of the Fifty-Second Infantry Regiment discovered some caves, near Makovec, where some partisans were hiding. The subsequent combat was particularly hard and three Italian infantryman were wounded. The following day the Italian "asphyxiated" the occupants. The *Diario storico* of the division does not describe how this was done, but probably with smoke. It reads,

> The body of a communist brigand was found in the said cave; he, having offered violent resistance, killed himself before being asphyxiated; he seems to have been a known agitator and a chief. Three of the four women captured in the same cave have been shot.[90]

A few days later, on September 29, the *Diario storico* observes that, for the Third Battalion of the Fifty-Second Infantry Regiment, "two communist brigands and four armed women have been shot."[91] On October 23, the Second Battalion of the Fifty-Second Infantry Regiment shot a "communist brigand . . . captured wounded."[92]

From these episodes we can deduce some hypotheses about the relationship between the Blackshirts and the military. According to a wide range of memoirs, often used as historical sources,[93] relations between the militia and the army were not good. Furthermore, the militia was often described as being little disciplined and barely trained. Andrea Rossi, the only scholar who has addressed the topic so far, underlines that "as early as 1941 the MVSN [the militia] distinguished itself for its repressive zeal, its merciless treatment of civilians, and because it never withdrew from what was unanimously considered the worst of the 'dirty work' of occupation armies, executions by firing squad."[94]

However, the episodes and statistics mentioned above do not display significant differences either in discipline or in the violence carried out in combat. An analysis of *Diario storico* of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts Assault Battalion, which was part of the *Isonzo* division, does not show any difference between the behavior of the Blackshirts and that of the army's soldiers. For example, on August 2, 1942, two companies involved in a raid on the town of Makovec caught a partisan band by surprise, which had its base in

a villa inside the village. The attack on the villa ended with 1 dead and 3 wounded on the Italian side, and 13 partisans dead along with 11 prisoners captured by the Fascists. Once the battle was over, the Blackshirts shot 5 partisans, from among the 11 prisoners, set fire to 28 houses, and sent the remaining 6 prisoners to the garrison command of Mokronog.[95] As we can see, the losses and the violence of the battle lasted for several hours and was only brought to an end through the use of mortar shells. The Blackshirts performed violence that had nothing specifically Fascist about it. There is no difference between the Blackshirts' violence and the army violence performed in the reprisals. According to the American scholar Mark Mazower, "the uncomfortable truth is that the counterinsurgency war was more the product of a certain European way of fighting than of Nazism itself… Of course, there was one crucial difference: in the past civilian authorities had sometimes managed to exercise a moderating influence on the military… Under the Nazis, it was the civilians who were extremists."[96]

In Italian Slovenia, the civil government tried to soften the policy of repression, as the military had no remorse in applying the most ferocious methods of fighting the Resistance. The Italian case is complicated by the fact that it was Mussolini in person who pushed the army toward radicalizing the repression. However, in the field, civil officials like Rosin and Grazioli often showed themselves to be more politically flexible, and very critical of the army.[97] Other problems emerge between the command of the Eleventh Army Corps and the lieutenant general of the militia, Enzo Montagna.

On October 26, 1942, Robotti sent a long report to Roatta about the Blackshirt units working in Slovenia. A battalion of *squadristi*, the *Nizza* (Nice), working within the city of Ljubljana, distinguished itself by its terrible training, arrogance, and lack of discipline. Furthermore, the militiamen were convinced that "the battalion is permitted to do everything, even to strip women naked at checkpoints under the pretext of searching them."[98] Montagna, however, according to Robotti "plotted" politically to take the role of supreme commander in Slovenia. To underline his difference from the army and particularly his greater efficiency, Montagna had applied extremely harsh methods to inhabitants of the capital: "I am not soft on the Slovenians," wrote Robotti, "but I can not conceive that one could terrorize a populace just to make a

pedestal for oneself."[99] Robotti, in conclusion, suggested that the *Nizza* battalion and Montagna both be sent out of the province. On October 31, Roatta partially accepted these suggestions, moving both the Montagna group and the *Nizza* battalion out of Ljubljana, but not out of Slovenia.[100] For his own part, Montagna, after the war, wrote extremely harsh criticisms of Ambrosio and Roatta, accusing them of having conducted the war poorly in order to bring about the fall of Fascism.[101] This was, however, a typical Fascist argument (Montagna later joined the Italian Sociale Republic and was one of the judges who condemned Galeazzo Ciano to death), which "explained" the defeat and collapse of the regime as being due to internal betrayal.

Certainly, the *Nizza* battalion was an especially undisciplined unit, and Montagna perhaps was an extremist, but the hostility between Robotti and the militia chief seems more to have derived from a struggle for power than from a clear ideological difference between the two. Both were convinced that to crush the Resistance it was necessary to terrorize the populace. Furthermore, there are no documents that attest to hostility between the lower ranks of the two groups. Soldiers and Blackshirts worked together, with the same goals and methods, without conflict.

The raid of summer 1942 was certainly the denouement of military operations in Slovenia. But it was also the high point of violence carried out against civilians. If we examine the available numbers of persons executed by firing squad (which obviously must be taken as approximate), we can see that in the period up to May 1942, 85 Slovenians were shot, and in the period between July 15 and September 15, 1942, 847 people were shot, but this number went down to 331 for the entire year September 1942–September 1943.[102] This surprisingly low number of executions (surprising considering the preceding numbers) is partially explained by the fact that beginning in 1943 soldiers were no longer employed in large raids; but they nonetheless continued to execute prisoners by firing squad with a certain regularity. The violence carried out in summer 1942 later became a sort of model that was followed even without major battles or large-scale operations. After a height of killing, a period of daily executions of civilians followed.

Another new element of the repression, starting in the operations of summer 1942, was the heavy use of air attacks, and particularly

bombardments. The Second Army had, in July 1942, a small air corps available, made up of 2 fighters, 39 bombers, and other transport and recon planes.[103] The disproportion between bombers and fighters was due to two factors: the absence of enemy fighters, which made it unnecessary to escort the bombers, and the use of air attacks, which was employed, above all, to bombard towns from high up.[104] This was another symptom of the escalation of violence and force that the Second Army used against civilians.

Another result of the summer operations, which ended at the end of September, was the units' general exhaustion. The effort made by Italian troops was certainly notable. For months, units made tiring marches without rest, without leave or moments of relaxation. Spread out over the Slovenian mountains, the soldiers began to show signs of weariness. Even as early as July 31, 1942, the monthly "P" ("propaganda") report of the Eleventh Army Corps underlined various deficiencies suffered by the troops, like the absence of any kind of "theatrical entertainment." The lack of any kind of comforting luxury, like spirits or chocolate, also began to be felt, because the military warehouses were empty and such things were almost impossible to acquire privately. The uniforms began to fall apart, particularly the leg bands, whose absence gave the soldiers a far from dignified appearance.[105] Two months later, the report described further problems due to the lack of creature comforts (the absence of film projections, for instance), and the general ever-growing weariness of the troops. Uniforms were falling apart along with footwear.[106] At the end of November the situation got even worse. "Returning to the garrisons after sixteen weeks of intense and fruitful operative activity, the soldiers of the Army Corps did not get even one day of rest." The troops ate little and poorly, the equipment was in a deplorable condition, and there was not enough soap or candles. In the most isolated garrisons the soldiers could not even wash themselves.[107] The reports coming from the smaller units were even more pessimistic about the morale and conditions of the troops. According to the commander of the Second Battalion of the Fifty-Second Infantry Regiment (*Cacciatori delle Alpi* division), in a letter of October 1942 to his regimental commander, after nine months of uninterrupted fighting the soldiers were simply too tired to go on.

> Coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina… the battalion was transplanted to the woods of Slovenia, where it has been conducting raids for three months, amongst hidden perils and discomforts of every kind, sleeping on the bare earth, or in the mud, often without water to drink, often eating only one ration a day, with clothes in rags, full of parasites, suffering the nocturnal chill, with only one blanket each.[108]

The general impression was not particularly positive. The troops were extremely tired, even if reports described morale as quite high. Despite the huge effort of the army in summer 1942, the raid had not crushed the Slovenian Resistance, which as early as September was reorganizing itself. On September 18, Robotti informed his division commanders that "after the disorientation of the last month, the O.F. is trying to renew its activity, which is shown by the regrouping of the chiefs and small groups who managed to escape our raid."[109] In spite of his bombastic closing remarks ("Excellent! We will seek them out and slaughter them even if we have to chase them to Hell itself!"), the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps did not have troops available who were capable of large-scale operations. The soldiers were tired, depressed, and inclined to barricade themselves in their strongholds, according to a report of the general commander of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, who said, in November 1942, that he had been able to force his soldiers out of their fortresses only after a "daily labor of persuasion, and in some cases of coercion of both commanders and troops."[110]

Robotti lost the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, which was moved to Croatia, precisely when the Resistance went back on the offensive. On September 22, a company of the *Isonzo* division was attacked near Tanča gora, in the area of Črnomelj, by about a thousand partisans. The battle lasted for several hours and ended with the death of 60 Italian soldiers, with a further 24 missing.[111] The episode was not only serious in itself, but showed that the Slovenian Resistance could still organize large and battle-hardened formations, and inflict numerous losses on the Italians. The existence of a band of a thousand men (even if this number may have been inflated by the Italians to explain their defeat) suggests that the partisans must have controlled a territory large enough to feed so many combatants, demonstrating that the raids of the preceding

summer had failed in their goal of bringing the whole province back under the occupants' control.

In October, another heavy defeat damaged Italian morale. On October 2, a column of the Third Battalion of the 122nd Infantry Regiment (*Macerata* division) left the Brod na Kupi garrison to foray toward Delnice, in Croatian territory, as part of raid operations conducted alongside the Fifth Army Corps. The column was made of about 200 men and a 75/27 cannon. Given the nature of the route to be followed (a road sunk between high and steep mountains), the commander of the column preferred to separate his men into groups to make them less vulnerable to attacks. This went against the usual procedure, which kept the column intact and protected it with platoons flanking it on both sides. Having reached Delnice, at 13:45, they began their return march. After arriving at Donje Tihovo, the tail of the column was hit by heavy gunfire. The commander was one of the first to fall, while he was trying to organize a defense, "which was possible only for the head and center of the column insofar as…the tail had been almost completely overcome." The arrival of a column from Brod na Kupi and the assistant of artillery saved the rest of the unit. By the end, 3 officers were dead, 3 were wounded, and 64 NCOs and troops were killed and 45 wounded, of which another 2 would later die in hospital. Four soldiers who were taken prisoner were freed immediately afterward by the partisans. The garrison of Brod na Kupi was enraged. Convinced that the entire population was complicit in the attack, the commander ordered the town to be raided house by house; he arrested all the able-bodied men, who were sent to the division command; he shot a civilian who had been pointed out by informers as a participant in the attack; and he ordered the sentinel to fire on anything that moved outside the walls of the garrison. Following this order, by October 5, four people had already been killed.[112]

On a larger scale, the Italian response was to raid the area of the Gorjanci, a mountainous territory between Slovenia and Croatia. The raid performed by *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, *Isonzo*, and *Lombardia* divisions ended on November 5. Cuzzi wrote, "It was the last large-scale military operation performed by the Italians in Slovenia. However it could not be said to have at all represented a final solution to the partisan problem, so desired by the high command."[113]

Cuzzi's observation would seem to be entirely confirmed by data prepared by a command of the *Cacciatori* division, which indicated, for the period from October 25 to November 4, the results of the raid: six partisans killed and four who surrendered.[114]

As we have said, the situation of Italian soldiers in Slovenia at the end of 1942, was one of great tiredness and of a loss of aggressiveness. The soldiers wanted to stay safely inside their garrisons to wait for something to end the endless and frustrating conflict. The loss of aggressiveness or "bite" ("*mordente*") was criticized by Robotti who, in a report of November 19, addressed to his division commanders, underlined that the soldiers of the Ljubljana wall never left their strongholds, and that "a similar phenomenon could be seen in the garrison troops which never go out at all if not at battalion force."[115] Despite Robotti's urgings, Italian troops avoided large-scale operations for all of 1943, limiting themselves to smaller raids. In practice they returned to the previous tactic of numerous garrisons, to keep at least the town under control, and the lines of communication open, especially the railways.

This did not make the life of the Italian soldier any easier. Especially in small garrisons, in remote areas, the atmosphere was, to say the least, depressing. Eric Gobetti, author of a recent volume about the Italians in Croatia, has quite rightly said, "Instead of the carefree lightheartedness of *Mediterraneo*,[116] the Italian occupation in Yugoslavia recalls the grim atmosphere of *Apocalypse Now*."[117] The most effective description of the desperation that Italian soldiers felt comes from the anonymous report of April 1943, which we have previously quoted several times:

> A lieutenant, in one of these little forts lost in the woods, had been there for 15 months, isolated from the world, with his 2 NCOs and 20 soldiers. He has no more desire, or strength to read, or write, or speak. Wild hair, long beard: nothing interests him but his bottle of grappa, which he shakes into his mouth almost in an attempt to overcome the exasperation of the distressing wait for a tragic end.[118]

The impression of this unknown officer, and of Eric Gobetti, is confirmed by the reports of the provincial censor commission "69 R," of Ljubljana. The reports of this commission, for 1943, obsessively repeat that soldiers stationed in Slovenia are tired and cannot stand

the war any longer. Excerpts of letters contained in the reports are all the same, and repeat the same words, like those of an artilleryman who in April 1943 had written to a friend, "I am fine, but I am really tired, let's hope that this will be the last year. Now we can say out loud that we are tired, everyone knows it."[119] An artilleryman of the *Isonzo* wrote to a friend in Italy, "The situation keeps on getting worse because the number of rebels continue to grow, and we keep on losing men from our company. I am frightened of being killed, good bye then, I cannot take it anymore, I am tired of living this life which never ends, and sometimes demeans me."[120] One could quote these letters at length, but they are all more or less the same. The soldiers complained of their long tour of duty, of the lack of leave, of hunger, fleas, filth, and the general uselessness of war against the partisans.

In the very few pages of memoirs dedicated to daily life (normally soldiers were more eager to describe battles), the general picture is extremely negative: "I was in a place called Kocevie [Kočevje]," wrote a *Granatiere*, "when the winter of 1942 arrived. It was a harsh winter with moments of Siberian cold; we were poorly protected in frigid wooden huts, badly dressed and worse fed. At night we went out on patrol or stood on guard at various checkpoints."[121] An artillery officer who had fought in Montenegro writes that the soldiers ate the feed given to mules, because the tins of meat were half full of gelatin and the biscuits were full of worms.[122]

We must add fear to the demoralization due to inactivity, hunger, and filth. A garrison could sometimes be isolated and attacked by the partisans, and even taken. We have already spoken of the Korenica garrison, in Croatia, besieged for five months. On November 26, this happened to a garrison in Slovenia, at Suhor, which suffered a massive attack. The garrison, composed of two platoons of MVAC (the *Milizia volontaria anti comunista*, Slovenian collaborators of the Italian occupiers) and a platoon infantryman of the *Isonzo*, was attacked in the evening by large, well-armed forces. The defenders barricaded themselves in the house of the parish priest and in a school, where they managed to defend themselves for several hours. At 6:00 a.m., the partisans exploded a mine, which opened a breach in the wall of the priest's house. The division commander's report, in its dry manner, well expresses the tension and fear of the combatants: "The situation got worse from there: no reaction

could be heard from the school; even it was burning; the fire in the parish priest's house spread rapidly; beams and walls began to collapse; . . . to continue to resist inside the building had become impossible."[123] The soldiers escaped the house and attacked the partisans with bayonets, leaving dozens of dead on the ground.

Obviously, not every partisan attack resulted in the garrison being overwhelmed. The *Cacciatori*, for example, managed to push back a strong partisan attack, made up of 1,200 men, on January 14, 1943, on the garrison of Šentvid. In this case, as well, the losses were not trivial: four dead, three wounded, and three missing.[124] These attacks showed the Resistance's great offensive capacity, and made the Italians ever more timid, also because, despite the passage of time and the accumulation of experience, the units' effectiveness had not improved, as we will soon see.

5

Gambara

This is the general picture that Gastone Gambara found on December 16, when he arrived to take over the command of the Eleventh Army Corps in Robotti's place. Cavallero's reasons for sending Gambara, of all people, to Slovenia are unclear, particularly after Gambara's less than brilliant performance in North Africa, where the German allies remembered his name with irony.[1] On his return from Africa, Gambara was investigated in regard to his management of certain funds. He was cleared of the accusations of tampering for personal gain; however, he was harshly rebuked by Mussolini for his careless execution of the task assigned to him.[2] Roatta was replaced, according to Zanussi, because the Germans no longer wanted him underfoot in Croatia,[3] but there is no witness from that period to tell us why Robotti was chosen to assume command of the Second Army Corps, notwithstanding the fact that he had been unsuccessful in crushing the Resistance and bringing peace to the province of Ljubljana. We can only assume that he was chosen by his superiors in the high command, or perhaps by Mussolini himself, because he had shown an "an iron hand" in his management of the search and destroy operations.

Gambara, probably aware of the demoralized state of his troops, chose the already well-trodden path of covering the terrain with garrisons, and limiting the losses by avoiding large-scale search and destroy and police operations.[4] In concrete terms, the Italians had chosen to wait it out until the end of the war. They had also begun to "Slovenicize" the repression, in other words, to make increasing use of the MVAC (voluntary anticommunist militia) formations in an attempt to contain Italian losses. The Slovenian militia was born

in the summer of 1942, with the search and destroy operations in the province during that period, and it later saw some development, growing to a number of approximately 4,000 men, commanded by Italian officers.[5]

One of Gambara's first orders was the circular of January 11, 1943, in which he condemned the behavior of the units that had abandoned their comrades in danger "(a small garrison heroically resisted for 24 hours without help from the garrisons on either side)," and they were reminded that such behavior was flagrant treason. Gambara concluded with these meaningful words, "In the face of excessive caution—synonymous with a foul word (that I don't wish to utter) I am inflexible."[6]

But perhaps Gambara had found a situation that was irreparably compromised. In the frequently quoted report made by an unknown officer in the territory of the Second Army Corps in April of 1943, we read,

> It is often the garrisons that are attacked by the rebels, after having had their strengths precisely assessed. Generally speaking, the defence is always fleeting due to apathy, lack of confidence, panic and lack of instructions and preparation. These attacks generally end with the entire garrison being captured and the storehouses being ransacked.
>
> Reinforcements don't arrive and if the commander takes the initiative to send some, these reinforcements, which are almost always motorized columns because of the great distances between garrisons, are often arrested and go missing during the transfer along the obligatory stretches.
>
> One Colonel, when informed that a column had been attacked, told the officer: "I haven't moved, ever. I'm waiting to go home and if I manage to get there, I'm going to light a candle to the Madonna."
>
> With this method of operation, the rebel forces became stronger rather than weaker in number, and our soldiers, in the depth of their souls, began to mistakenly believe that the partisans were unbeatable.[7]

An example of the extreme inefficiency of the system for sending help to the garrisons can be found in the battle that took place in the Metlika zone, on the border with Croatia, in the sector involving the *Isonzo* division.[8]

At the end of January 1943, sizable partisan forces were reported to be moving toward the zones of Gradnik and Suhor. According to the information, these were the Tomšič and Gubec partisan brigades, units that were particularly hardened and experienced in warfare.

The command of the *Isonzo* division then decided to organize a tactical group to intercept the enemy formations. On the orders of Major Orefici, from whom the group took its name, the First Battalion of the Twenty-Third Infantry Regiment and the Third Battalion of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment (both from the *Isonzo* division), the Ninety-Fifth Blackshirts Battalion, two artillery sections armed with 75/13 weapons, and a MVAC division were brought together. The *Raggruppamento* or special operations group was formed in Metlika, and it was from there that it departed at dawn on January 29, heading toward Vivodina in the northeast. The partisans attacked the group midway between Metlika and Vivodina, north of Vidošiči, in a mountainous zone. However, the attackers were fended off and suffered heavy losses, estimated at 36 men, while the Italians complained of only 1 death. At 16:00 the Orefici group managed to reach Vivodina, where it spent the night. The following morning (January 30), on orders from army corps command, Orefici resumed the journey toward Krašić, heading east. While they were en route, at 12:00 the Italians were attacked again near Radina Gorica by partisans from Jezerine. At 15:00, the commander of the *Isonzo* division, on hearing the news, ordered all available units from the garrisons of Novo mesto and Črnomelj to concentrate their forces on Metlika. From here, the units were supposed to reach Ozalj, where they were to join up with units from the Blackshirts *Nizza* Battalion and an artillery section under the command of the Lieutenant Colonel Lodi, who was to take command of the new tactical group. The order was fairly rational. Although they were quite far away, Črnomelj, Novo mesto, Metlika, and Ozalj were all connected by a railway line, which would have made it possible to move more quickly.

In the meantime, the Orefici group was finding the situation increasingly difficult. The commander was forced to organize his troops to defend the hills between Radina Gorica and Bukovica. Analyzing the maps, the situation seems paradoxical. The partisans, in fact, were attacking from Jezerine, a small town on the

plains, while the Italians were forced to take refuge in the hills surrounding the city.

At 20:10, the *Isonzo* command received the news that a third column was organized to help the Orefici group. This third column was formed by units of the *Lombardia* division (the Vetrano motorized column) coming from the east, and had begun moving toward Krasic. The column also included tanks, but despite this, after a few hours, at 23:25 all traces of them were lost.

At 21:10, Lieutenant Colonel Lodi arrived in Metlika with the men from Crnomelj, who were made to continue on to Ozalj. An hour later, the men from the garrison in Novo mesto also arrived in Metlika, and they too were made to continue on to the rendezvous station.

In the meantime, the information coming from the Orefici column was becoming increasingly dramatic. Despite the fact that night had fallen many hours before, the partisans continued to attack. At 01:00 in the morning (on January 31), Orefici communicated that he had 29 dead, 20 missing, and 50 wounded. Just past midnight on the January 30, the commander of the *Isonzo* division gave Lodi the order to move out at the break of dawn, and head toward the combat zone. At 02:30, the artillery units of the Metlika and Ozalj garrisons opened fire in the attempt to curb the partisan attacks. At 03:15, the commander of the *Isonzo* infantry division (General Cerruti) went personally to Ozalj to direct operations.

Lodi's column, that was supposed to have moved out at 05:00, however, was unable to move because the reinforcements coming from Novo mesto did not arrive in Ozalj until 05:20, due to a three hour delay in the trains. The troops did not begin to move out until 06:00, and during the march suffered several enemy attacks. Lodi's group, finally, managed to arrive in the combat zone at 16:05 on January 31, more than 24 hours after the *Isonzo* command had received news of the attack on the column. In the meantime, the Lodi group suffered 45 dead, 88 wounded, and 14 missing. Meanwhile, there was no news of the Vetrano column.

Although the Lodi column had made visual contact with the Orefici group, it was unable to move any nearer to it, because in order to reach it, the column would have had to pass beneath a ridge occupied by the partisans. Therefore, he preferred to have his men hold a defensive position while they waited for night to

pass. At 05:00 on February 1, the Lodi column began to move out in order to make direct contact with the Orefici column, which they were unable to do until four hours later, due to the partisans' relentless resistance. In the morning, they also received news of the Vetrano column, which had begun the attack on the enemy positions around Jezerine.

In the afternoon, the Italians took initiative, with concentric attacks on the partisans' positions. However, the appalling coordination between the Vetrano columns and the two Lodi-Orefici columns made operations particularly difficult; in fact, while Cerruti attacked with his men in the direction of Jezerine, the Vetrano column was retreating toward Kučer. Finally, at 23:15 on February 1, all the units had succeeded in reaching Kučer and safety.

The method of repression, perhaps due to these blatant defeats, also changed considerably.[9] Gambara personally gave precise orders, in May of 1943, in an attempt to limit the reprisals as much as possible, reminding them that the final decision, however, for every operation of this type, was up to him.[10] On March 3, 1943, Robotti gave the order to the Sixth Army Corps, involved in the Weiss operation in Croatia, to refrain from shooting any more captured partisans for the purpose of facilitating the exchange of prisoners.[11] The order was then extended to include Ljubljana as well, on March 23.[12] The *Lombardia* division command, recently transferred to Slovenia, interpreted these orders as an authorization to attempt to exchange prisoners with the local partisans. The initiative was halted by Gambara who, on May 27, ordered the execution by firing squad of partisans captured in Slovenia.[13] However, this did not stop them from making contact with the aim of convincing the "communist bandits" to surrender.

The occupation of Slovenia continued along these lines until September 8, 1943, in a steady series of partisan attacks, the Italian troops leaving the garrisons briefly, and an endless series of senseless killings between Italians and Slovenians and between the Slovenians themselves. There were no large-scale actions to be remembered, no great victories or heavy defeats. Cut off from their home country, scattered around a hostile territory, depressed and demoralized, the Italian soldiers in Slovenia were an easy prey for the Wehrmacht after the armistice.[14]

6

Memory and Oblivion

The accounts of the Italian military in Slovenia, if compared to those of the veterans from Russia and Africa, are practically nonexistent. As we have seen, in order to obtain accounts of wartime experiences in Slovenia, it was necessary to refer to the stories provided by veterans from Croatia and Dalmatia as well. The reason behind this lack of accounts is difficult to explain. We can hazard a guess as to the reasons. First and foremost would be the difficulty in rationalizing and providing a motive for the personal and collective roles of Italian soldiers engaged in a war lacking any ethic, strategic or political. Fascist Italy occupied and annexed a territory without any "higher" motives for doing do, even for those times. While they had gone to Spain to defend Christian civilization from Bolshevism, to Ethiopia with the usual explanation of "the white man's burden," and to Russia to destroy, at their roots, the anti-European Communist groups that were against the corrupt Western democracies, and had been fighting to reestablish a principle of international justice, in Yugoslavia, the motives were solely those of imperialism that also revealed itself to be weak and beggarly. Also in comparison to the other Balkan theaters of war, there was a significant motivational gap when it came to Slovenia. While in Croatia the Italian soldiers were able to recall their defense of the ethnic minorities with pride, in regard to Slovenia and Dalmatia, Burgwyn writes,

> Whatever humanitarianism one finds in the 2nd Army's treatment of violated peoples in Dalmatia and Croatia vanishes in the annexed areas of Slovenia and Dalmatia. Whereas the Serbs in Croatia beseeched the Italian for protection, the Slovenes and Dalmatian

> Croats greeted them with hostility. When rebellion surged, the 2nd Army replied with counterinsurgency. Unrestrained military brutality had supplanted the Fascist lordly manner. Not much effort was made to distinguish between Partisans, *favoreggiatori*, or blameless civilians.[1]

Furthermore, the soldiers from North Africa, for example, were able to recount the glorious deeds at the battle of El Alamein, the honorable surrendering of weapons in Ethiopia, the glorious end of the First Army in Tunisia, and the epic events of the retreat on the Don River. As for Slovenia, there were no such stories to tell. The one great "battle," at "Notrajska," as Marco Cuzzi calls it, or in other words, the search and destroy operations of the summer of 1942, ended in a series of brief exchanges of fire and the shooting of a thousand civilians.

Furthermore, the events following September 8 on the "eastern border" are some of the most painful and humiliating for the entire Italian population in the zone, and not only for the military. The capture and deportation by the Germans of the Eleventh Army Corps, for example, although just one of many episodes in the collapse of the Royal Italian Army, was certainly not something that would be remembered with pleasure.

The Yugoslav retaliation, up to the occupation of Trieste, with its tragic episodes of barbaric violence, mass deportations, and the mutilation of what was deemed to be national territory acquired with the First World War, facilitated the victimization of the Italians, making it possible to wipe out blame for past sins, with results that were sometimes surprising. Focused on the Foibe massacres, the Italian collective memory has even forgotten episodes as tragic as the stories of the Italian soldiers detained in prison camps by Tito, which have only recently come to light thanks to the book by Costantino Di Sante.[2]

Politics has also contributed significantly to canceling out the memory of the occupation of Slovenia. Those very difficult negotiations on the eastern border, which, as we know, only ended in 1975 with the Treaty of Osimo, have had the effect of giving the memory precise political aims on both sides of the border. In Italy and Yugoslavia, reconstructions of past events were used for propaganda purposes, as if past injustices could justify new and perhaps

even worse ones. And so, while the Yugoslavs published Giuseppe Piemontese's book in Italian, the Italians became entrenched in the obstinate and exclusive reevocation of the Foibe massacres.[3] This is the context in which Italian soldiers reconstruct their memories of the war in Slovenia, a process that might best be approached by working backward.

In 1978, the Army's Historical Office of the Chief of Staff published what could only be defined as the official history of the operations of April 1941 and the subsequent occupation. There are two pages dedicated to the search and destroy operations of the summer of 1942, and there we find a mere list of battles without any notes on the losses.[4] Even more interesting is a page of general considerations on the repression policies:

> The defence of the Yugoslav territories during the Second World War gave rise to entirely unfounded accusations against the Italian commands and units engaged in that difficult task. If we respect what has been stated, it is clear that the only justified charges would be those that indicated proven violation of the conventional rules. We can say without fear of contradiction that those rules not only were not broken, but were applied with extreme caution. Is there a critic ready to cite cases that would appear to prove us wrong? Well then, we shall anticipate him by admitting that episodes did occur in which those international rules were violated. But we can also add that those cases that were the exceptions were promptly and harshly dealt with…We could, on the other hand, remember an infinite number of heinous crimes in which the victims were our soldiers and the small garrisons.[5]

What follows therefore is a brief list of crimes committed by the partisans. Salvatore Loi's concept is therefore quite simple. The war in Yugoslavia was riddled with atrocities committed by both parties, but the partisans, in particular, never respected any of the conventions, and for this reason, due to a reciprocity principle, the Italians had the right to not respect the rules. If the Italians were at times excessive, it was a reaction, to summarize Loi's way of thinking.

The only source cited by Loi regarding episodes of cruelty is the book by Enzo Cataldi, *La Jugoslavia alle porte*, from 1968.[6] This author had fought as an officer with the *Granatieri di Sardegna* in Slovenia, and in 1990 he published the division's story for the

veterans' association.[7] In *La Jugoslavia alle porte*, a pamphlet heavily influenced by the cold war climate in which it was written, as well as justifying the annexation of the province of Ljubljana with the lack of ethnic cohesion in Yugoslavia, Cataldi reports some episodes of Slovenian atrocities against Italian prisoners. "A thousand episodes could be remembered here, taken from the historical archives of the units and from our wartime notebooks from those bitter bloodstained days."[8] Cataldi claims to have personally witnessed the desecration of a fallen soldier's body, and there is no reason to doubt his account. This writer, however, has yet to find in the archives anything to confirm the allegations of torture and execution of prisoners (if we exclude the shooting of the eight CCRR discussed previously). It is not a simple subject to tackle, because for the other zones of ex-Yugoslavia, the episodes in which Italian soldiers were victims of atrocities are absolutely taken for granted by historians, and often documented as well, and therefore the Slovenian case would seem to be absolutely atypical and difficult to explain. Oddone Talpo refers to various episodes of atrocities, including the order given by the command of a battalion of partisans stationed in Croatia, demanding the execution of all the Italian soldiers held in a prison camp.[9] Gobetti writes, "It's true—and Yugoslav sources also confirm it without hesitation—that the officers and Fascists (the blackshirt units) were almost always executed as if presumed guilty of war crimes."[10] Teodoro Sala, who certainly could not have looked kindly on the Italian war crimes, speaking generally about Yugoslavia, writes that "[to] the violence of the attackers, those who were attacked responded: there were a number of cases of atrocities committed against Italian soldiers and officers, prevented or limited in principle by the extremely severe justice of the partisan formations."[11] Tone Ferenc claims that "the partisans did not usually slaughter or execute Italian prisoners of war (except for Fascists)";[12] or "The partisan army refrained from executing captured Italian soldiers, except for the blackshirts and government officials."[13] However, neither of these statements that obviously refer to Slovenia, are supported by notes, and therefore we do not know what sources provide the basis for Ferenc's claims.[14]

In the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the documentation collected to draft the Italian "White Paper" on Yugoslav atrocities, there is also a long and detailed report by an officer

of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, on the massacre at Ambrus. According to the report, in March of 1943, a Blackshirts unit was overpowered and some of the prisoners were tortured and killed.[15] However, in the *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori* division, there is no trace of this massacre.[16]

In Robotti's description of the situation in Slovenia, in a direct report to the Second Army Command, from May of 1942, he talks of the growing threat posed by the Resistance and the blatantly real war actions taken by the partisans. But in terms of the *ferocity* of the Balkan fighters, Robotti mentions episodes of entire families of Slovenian collaborators being murdered, while the worst thing that happened to the Italians and Germans living in the zones was having their homes looted. To sum it up, in a report not destined for propaganda, no episode of violence toward prisoners of war is mentioned.[17] We must also keep in mind that after having described the situation, Robotti asked Roatta for more troops and more weapons, and therefore it would have been in his interest to paint a tainted picture of the state of things in the province.

Instead, traces of some Slovenian atrocities are found again in the military archives, in the propaganda of the Eleventh Army Corps and the Second Army. On November 21, 1941, a meeting was held at the command of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division. Robotti, after having touched on several points, said,

> Propaganda among the troops against these bandits; often our soldiers are just too good. This enemy that they're up against, it's best that they know what kind of men these are. Tell them what they need to know. Talk to them, then, explain what kind of "Chouannerie" they have to fight against. Tell them about the episodes…
>
> In regard to the episodes:
>
> I) that of the First Lieutenant Blasi;
> II) that of the officer and the three soldiers of the 73rd Infantry captured in Delnice and killed some time later *by an old woman*, the town's schoolteacher;
> III) the episode of the mother who was gutted while still alive, and her baby sewn back into her abdomen alive.[18]

On June 19, 1942, after the Resistance had threatened to execute hostages by firing squad, Robotti sent a circular to the subordinate

units in which he advised the men against being caught off guard by ambushes and to avoid capture by the partisans, who had already shot prisoners. In this regard, the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps mentioned the CCRR and the *Guardia di Finanza* in Studenec ig, shot after having surrendered.[19]

In July 1942, Robotti asked his subordinates to respond to the propaganda from the Osvobodilna fronta—the Liberation Front—(which was spreading rumors of "alleged acts of vandalism and barbarity committed by our soldiers"), by collecting documents and accounts "to demonstrate the atrocities committed by the Communists, toward both us and the civilian populations."[20]

Robotti reaffirmed these concepts again several months later when, as commander of the Second Army, he had a leaflet distributed. It was signed by him and in it, he urged the soldiers to "remember all the treachery and evil deeds of the partisans who cruelly murdered your brothers, the fierce tortures inflicted by them on your comrades who have had the misfortune to fall into their hands." After describing some episodes personally verified by him, Robotti ended with, "Remember these atrocities committed by people who are unworthy of the name of fighter, who are only worthy of the name 'Communist bandit.' And do not call them by any other name."[21]

On the radio too, ample space was given to the topic of the torturing of prisoners by the partisans. Gambara, in May of 1943, wrote to the command of the Second Army, "In the radio propaganda as well… there has been counterpropaganda focusing particularly on the treatment by *b. [riganti] c. [omunisti]*—communist bandits—of our prisoners, and some of them in the next broadcast will be brought to the microphone to answer questions on the subject put to them by the announcer (with outlines prepared beforehand)."[22]

Tone Ferenc, in the notes to the document quoted here, writes that he found no confirmation of the episodes recounted by Robotti. Instead, in the documents we consulted, there are episodes of Italian soldiers taken prisoner and immediately released. Obviously, the traces are too faint to be able to speak of this being a common practice. However, there is no evidence, at least in the documents consulted by this author, of mistreatment of prisoners or the shooting of officers and Blackshirts. As for other zones, there are documents from the "I" office of the *Re* division (operating in Croatia), which

interrogated the Italian soldiers who escaped imprisonment or were exchanged for partisans. In the interrogations the soldiers say that they were often treated badly, that they were stripped of their uniforms, sometimes beaten, and forced to work in the harshest conditions. However, the accounts of shootings are almost always reported to be hearsay.[23]

Despite the lack of documentation to certify episodes of atrocities carried out by Slovenian partisans, the propaganda was accepted as being based on real events.

In May of 1943, Taddeo Orlando was taken prisoner by the British in Tunisia. He was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in England where his conversations with other imprisoned officers (including General Berardi, of the *Sassari* division, who had fought in Croatia) were secretly recorded. In the interception logs, there are very few references to the war in Yugoslavia, however, one of the few is the legend of the mother who was gutted: "I was told that in that episode, a woman's womb was opened up—the baby came out alive—macabre!"[24]

Lieutenant Colacicchi, another prisoner of war in England with Orlando, was interrogated directly by the British about Italian war crimes. The officer replied with the legend of the "pot of eyeballs":

> In the opinion of Colacicchi, the appointment of Roatta as Chief of Staff in the Army is very popular in the camp, as all hold him in high esteem. Admittedly, he was very firm in Jugoslavia, but such firmness was absolutely essential. Colacicchi states that the conduct of partisans called for brutal action, because of their inhuman treatment of Italian soldiers, e.g. collecting their eyeballs and presenting them in a large bowl to Italian H.Q.[25]

The rumor also circulated in Italy. An official of the political police thus summarized an account from a veteran of Montenegro: one of his accounts involved 20 *alpini* (Italian Alpine troops), who were found literally sliced to pieces, mutilated and their eyeballs ripped from their sockets.[26] The legend of the eyeballs was made famous in Italy by Curzio Malaparte (in his famous novel *Kaputt*, first printed in 1944), who, however, attributes the practice to the Ustaše under Pavelic, who apparently showed him the famous dish.[27] On the one hand, the military had internalized the propaganda that they

themselves had produced, but on the other hand, they needed to believe it and then use it again after the war to defend themselves from the accusation of having behaved in a criminal manner.

This entire account was then rationalized by the Italian military leaders in 1944. They were called upon to respond to the requests of the various countries at war with Italy, that in Moscow, from October to November of 1943, had decided to try criminals from the war of the Axis countries in those countries where they had committed their crimes. This also meant that Taddeo Orlando, who in November of 1943, was sent back to Italy to assume the role of undersecretary to the minister of War in the Badoglio cabinet, risked being tried in Yugoslavia for war crimes, along with Roatta, Robotti, and practically all the highest-ranking officers who had fought until 1943 in the Second Army.

In the summer of 1944, the matter of crimes in the Balkans was stirred up by the Italian left-wing newspapers, "*l'Avanti!*" and "*l'Unità*," which published photographs of partisans who had been tortured and hung.[28] But the issue became truly thorny when Yugoslavia, in February of 1945, presented a long list of presumed war criminals to the United Nations War Crimes Commission.[29]

In the months prior to that, the Yugoslav radio had begun to raise the question with a series of broadcasts denouncing many of the high-ranking Italian officers, including Taddeo Orlando and Mario Robotti, as criminals.[30]

The Yugoslav state commission report denounced, for Slovenia, the death by firing squad of approximately 1,000 hostages, the murder of approximately 8,000 other people, the burning of 3,000 homes, the deportation of 35,000 civilians, and the devastation of 800 villages, going on to specific facts and indicating that those responsible were mainly Roatta and Robotti.[31]

As I have said, some officers who had served in the Balkans were leaders of the Italian cobelligerent army and, obviously, had no intention of letting themselves be handed over to the Yugoslavs. Furthermore, Italy was beginning to receive the first news of the treatment reserved by the Yugoslav Resistance for the Italian soldiers who had fought with the partisans, and those who had been held in concentration camps, where the conditions were appalling. All of this news simply made the Italian military leaders and politicians increasingly inflexible. Obviously, the end of the war, in May

of 1945, and the beginning of the "Trieste question" made the political climate between Italy and Yugoslavia incandescent.[32] Then in 1946, Piemontese's book was published, and it summarized Italian policy in Slovenia as follows:

> The occupying Fascist forces covered themselves with infamy: they burned hundreds of villages and tens of thousands of homes, they stole an enormous wealth of livestock and various things of value, they murdered hundreds of peaceful farmers who were working the fields, they destroyed hospitals, they interned 35,000 innocent inhabitants in the camps of Gonars, Treviso, Padua, Renicci etc, as well as the island of Arbe (where another 4,700 died from physical exhaustion or premeditated annihilation at the hands of the commander Colonel Cuiuli, worthy imitator of the beasts of Belsen, Auschwitz and Dachau). Overall, approximately 7000 people died in concentration camps.[33]

The Italian Foreign Ministry (in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence) responded with a publication entitled *Note relative all'occupazione italiana in Jugoslavia* (Notes on the Italian occupation in Yugoslavia). Apropos of Slovenia, it states, "The natural correctness of the Italian troops, the highly rigorous and absolute control exercised in order to respect private property, and the instinctive warmth of the Italian soldiers, helped to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, and for this reason the local population regarded the Italian troops with esteem and admiration, and the troops regarded the Yugoslav people with trust and sympathy."[34] With regard to the Resistance, the text reads as follows:

> The Partisan struggle in Slovenia, at least for about a year, took on the aspect of real political banditry, rather than that of a guerrilla war led by irregular formations. Given the high density of the Italian occupation and the tight police network established there due to the fact that it was a province of the Kingdom of Italy, it was difficult for the partisans to immediately form large bands and carry out real warfare actions. For a long time, they carried on the struggle in small nuclei, easily masked by the civilian population with whom they cohabited, committed to carrying out a series of acts of sabotage, treacherous attacks on patrols and isolated soldiers, executed with absolute contempt for any humanitarian principle, and, more than anything else, a number of actions to the detriment of that part

> of the local population accused of collaborating with the authorities and with the occupying Italian troops. In regard to the fratricidal struggle that took place in Slovenia, it should be kept in mind that a good part of the local population was hostile toward the partisans and that it was for this reason and only for purely local purposes that autonomous formations such as the Bjela Garda (White Guards), rose and joined the Italian troops to maintain order.[35]

Then in regard to Slovenia, the Italian publication reported some episodes of atrocities committed by the partisans. These were cases involving the murder of collaborators or the torture of Italian prisoners. The first, the murder of a policeman, occurred in November 1941, while the other four had taken place between September and December of 1942.[36]

Between December 1947 and January 1948, the Yugoslav embassy in Rome communicated a series of "explanatory statements" to the Italian government, with which they asked for the extradition of a long line of soldiers and civilians who had participated in the occupation of Yugoslavia. Included among these were the likes of Achille Marazza and Taddeo Orlando, as well as other officers of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* and the *Granatieri di Sardegna* units.

As to the reason that none of these people were extradited to the countries that, in addition to Yugoslavia, had been occupied by Italy, we have some essays by Filippo Focardi, Costantino Di Sante, and Davide Conti, and it would serve little purpose to go over this ground again.[37] What is worth mentioning here, in order to understand the creation of a public memory of the war in Slovenia, is the self-defense employed by some of these military figures.

Roatta was one of the generals who, in his reconstruction of the Italian war, dedicated more space to operations in Yugoslavia, also because of his position on the Balkan front. In his *Otto milioni di baionette* (1946), a book considered to be quite controversial with respect to army preparation during Fascism, he devoted 24 pages to the "Campaign in the Balkans and its consequences." According to Roatta, most of the Yugoslav population did not prove to be against the occupation by Axis troops in the least, and only after Operation Barbarossa began did the Communists decide to unleash the type of particularly fierce and bloody guerrilla warfare that affected not only foreigners but also the local population itself.[38] The Italian

soldiers had limited themselves to maintaining order and protecting civilians, and when they were forced to respond to the attacks, they had always done so "in accordance with what was permitted—in similar occurrences—by the laws and customs of war," while "[the partisans] generally behaved in the most savage way, torturing and slaughtering hundreds and hundreds of unarmed Italian soldiers, taken prisoner or wounded, and arriving at such extremes as (in well-known and precisely and exactly documented circumstances), impaling, emasculating, and ripping the eyeballs out of the sockets of dozens and dozens of them." In conclusion, "This, and this alone, is the truth."[39] Giacomo Zanussi, a close associate of Roatta's in Yugoslavia, chose the reciprocity principle to defend the Italians. Tito's partisans, because of their crimes, had no right to accuse the Italians of war crimes. "The imaginary inhabitants of the moon"—the General concluded his reasoning—"would perhaps have had the right to do so, but them, those very people, by god, no."[40]

Robotti, in July 1945, sent to the Ministry of Defence a long defensive account, a total of 27 folders, in which he rejected any wrongdoing. According to the former commander of the Eleventh Army Corps, in fact, the Italian generals had only been doing their duty, severely applying the higher directives (and here he mentioned the "orders from Rome" and the circular 3 C), and he, in particular, had always avoided taking "revenge, though I would have had every right to do so, for the warfare, crimes and torture against my soldiers, whose lives I was supposed to preserve, but to end the brutality toward the Slovenians, Croats and Dalmatians themselves."[41]

In July 1947, Taddeo Orlando wrote a defensive account of his memories and sent it to the minister.[42] In this long manuscript (five pages), Orlando gave indications as to those in the command of the Second Army responsible for the repressive orders, such as the execution of all civilians captured near the armed conflicts or found in possession of parts of military uniforms.[43] In cases where he had to carry out these orders himself, he always stalled, sending suspects to military courts, rather than having them shot then and there. Orlando therefore concluded that the circular 3 C had never been applied, even by subordinate officers, or at least when the situation allowed it, and instead they continued to operate according to the announcement of November 7, 1941, again issued by the command of the Second Army.[44] However, the ones who were tainted

by horrendous crimes were the partisans, whom the *Granatieri* had fought to defend the civilian population. His soldiers, continued Orlando, had always respected the rules of war and military honor, despite the fact that "the adversary that we had to fight never respected these rules."

The "explanatory statement" of December 1947 sent to the Yugoslav embassy in Rome, called for the arrest and surrender of Taddeo Orlando, declared a war criminal and accused of crimes against peace and humanity. The request was justified by the fact that the general was registered under no. 149 of list 12 compiled by the United Nations War Crimes Commission. Attached to the request, there was a report subdivided into four points. The first point regards the creation of large barbed-wire enclosure around Ljubljana, which has already been discussed. The points from two to four read,

2. General Orlando ordered the shooting of a large number of hostages. According to reports by Orlando himself to the High Commands this number reached 118 individuals in the period from 5 May to 30 July, 1943 [*sic*: 1942].
3. During the offensive in Raska, when the above-mentioned division carried out operations at the end of July and the first half of August 1942 in the region of Dolenisko [Dolenjsko] south-east of Ljubljana, ten villages were completely sacked and burned, while a large number of fires and lootings were committed in other villages. During this offensive in Raska, the units of the division unscrupulously carried out Robotti's order to shoot the prisoners who belonged to the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. The report sent by General Orlando to the commander of the XI Army Corps confirms that all captured partisans were shot. In his reports, he stated that between 31 July and 7 August of 1942, 337 partisans were shot.
4. In September 1942, the division took part in operations that involved the region that goes from Dreznica-Jasenak [Drežnica-Jasenak] to Gorski Kotar, advancing along the Ogulin-Plaski [Plaški] road for Brezno and Kapela toward Dreznica. The division's units completely looted and burned Dreznica, as well as the nearby villages of Brezna [Brezno] Mrmor, Tomini, Vukelici, Sekici, Merovici, Zrnici, Redulovici, Trbovici [Vukelići, Sekići, Merovići, Zrnići, Redulovići, Trbovići] and others.

> During this action 3,000 people were interned, and more than 800 from the neighbouring villages. All the livestock, food, furniture were collected and transported to Ogulin.
>
> No habitation in the region remained undamaged.[45]

In January 1948, Orlando was interviewed by the Ansa news agency. In his very long reply, which reiterated the allegations of atrocities committed against Yugoslav partisans, he defended himself with these words, "I defy anyone to provide a shred of evidence, just one, of a case in which I gave an order to have a captured partisan shot: no one was shot by my division."[46]

The construction of a public account that placed the violence of the Italian soldiers on the same level as the violence of the Yugoslav partisans served to prevent alleged Italian war criminals from being tried by the courts, whether Italian or Yugoslav. Some of the major figures in the repression of the Yugoslav Resistance (Orlando, Roatta, Zanussi) constructed an extremely effective master narrative that still persists to this day in the Italian public mind. The war was "dirty" and hard. There had been excesses, but it was the fault of the Slavic-Communist partisans, who had unleashed first the civil war and then had hammered away relentlessly at the Italians. In such a war, crimes were committed by both sides, but because the Yugoslavs did not judge their crimes, the Italians had the right to not to judge theirs either.[47] Thanks to the principle of nonreciprocity, in 1951 the question, from the legal point of view, could be regarded as closed.

Recently, historians have frequently wondered about Italian war crimes. The circular 3 C is definitely the most sensational and well-known case of criminal orders issued by senior officers of the Royal Army.[48] Analysis and dissemination of this circular, especially in recent years, has led to a wide debate on Italian occupation policies during the war of the Axis countries. It is not a case of determining whether the circular on the repression of guerrilla warfare was or was not legally criminal. It is the historian who must understand whether the military figures who wrote them and those that executed them were aware of having committed a crime, in other words, whether or not they perceived it as an illegal act. In this author's opinion, the leaders of the Second Army were absolutely convinced that they were not committing any crime, and that

their behavior was justified by the conventions and customs of war. This can be understood by the different measures used to judge the behaviors of their troops: when they killed, they were in the right and were rewarded, when they looted, they were in the wrong and had to at least be stopped. However, the fact of not having imposed extremely harsh punishments, as set out in the Italian military code of war, for the indiscriminate lootings and burnings, places them once again on trial. They knew that the troops were looting, but did too little to stop them, apart from sending out circulars. With this, the author of these pages has absolutely no intention of positively judging the shooting of innocent hostages, and instead condemning the theft of two pillows, but simply wishes to say that for the Italian soldiers in Slovenia in 1942, the theft of a sewing machine was far more serious than the shooting of a civilian, and it was precisely for such thefts that those who committed them and those who allowed them should have been tried and convicted, which, for the most part, did not happen.

A separate consideration regards the shooting of wounded combatants and the destruction of the hospitals. We have seen at least two cases in which Italian units were responsible for such actions. In addition to openly going against the circular 3 C, the shooting of wounded combatants clearly contradicts the customs of war and what is commonly considered as military ethics. Following the war, the commander of a regiment of *Granatieri* was called to appear as a war criminal by the commission of the Yugoslav state. The Italian commission, which was created by a decree of May 6, 1946, listened to the defense of the officer who had been accused, among other things, of having destroyed a partisan field hospital. We leave it to the reader to judge the incident, reporting the charges, and the officer's defense in the appendix.[49]

Memory is a complex mechanism, and public memory even more so. What is striking, however, in the Italian case relating to Slovenia, is the almost complete erasure of the events that took place between 1941 and 1943. Despite the books by Don Brignoli and Mario Casanuova and the research by Tone Ferenc, public opinion in our country completely ignores what kind of war our soldiers were forced to fight, and particularly ignores the fact that the good "foot soldiers" were driven to loot, burn, and shoot the goods and people of Slovenia. In the sources from archives, as we have seen,

judgment of the soldiers' behavior, and more often that of the officers, is often negative. Of course, the daily accuracy leaves no such obvious traces, and we cannot make generalizations about all the units and the accusations leveled by Rosin or the anonymous officer who traveled through the Supersloda area in April 1943, but we might try drawing some conclusions.

The Eleventh Army Corps was a very poorly trained military formation. Many of its commanders had probably built their careers on primarily political merits. Its officers were few and poorly prepared. Its weapons were unsuitable for a counterinsurgency war, and its means of communication were obsolete. It had inadequate coordination with the air force, and its doctrine of employment was backward and mainly based on "moral factors," that is, on the ardor and aggressiveness of the troops indoctrinated by Fascism. All of this can be blamed primarily on the Royal Army's preparation for war under the Fascist regime, which over 20 years had undermined the foundation of efficiency of an army that had emerged victorious from the First World War. The soldiers lacked motivation, they were not technically prepared, and they were badly employed, badly trained, poorly armed, poorly equipped, and poorly lodged.[50]

The Royal Army had before it an aggressive, well-directed, and above all, highly ideologically motivated Resistance that defended their country and knew the terrain perfectly.

Robotti, the main officer responsible for suppressing the guerrilla warfare, knew the limits of his own units perfectly well, and responded with typical antiguerrilla warfare techniques: scorched earth, to eliminate the partisans' supply sources; terrorized the civilian population, to eliminate the aiders and abettors and instead obtain information; and used "body count" to quantify the successes or failures of their own troops. A form of warfare that involves "cold" violence, planned from on high, leaves no room for "mercy" for the people. This strategy, however, required troops that were strictly organized by a prestigious and well-prepared officer corps, capable of immediately curtailing any lack of discipline, or any excess of violence.

The officers of the Eleventh Army Corps, however, did not have these qualities. They carried out orders to kill without much hesitation (though with some exceptions), while failing to punish the lootings and gratuitous violence with the required energy. This

attitude had serious consequences for the troops, who were already thoroughly frustrated by a war that never seemed to end and their inability to cope with the Resistance. These factors caused an increasing sense of anger in the troops, and in some cases they vented their hatred and fear on the civilian population.

The violence against the population, at various levels, has a number of explanations. The leaders of the Second Army put into practice a strategy, planned at the table, which was incapable of crushing the partisan fighters, and so hurt the civilians. The troops had bad leadership and bad organization, and always vented their frustration on civilians, partly as a consequence of the fighting, partly because they were ideologically indoctrinated, and partly because they were pushed by the officers themselves. The Italian war in Slovenia, in brief, was not only certainly a "Fascist" war, but it was also a war of "classic" counterinsurgency, fought with the "classic" techniques that had already been thoroughly tested over centuries of war.[51] However, to the ruthlessness of all the Western armies, Italian fascism added a racist ideology and military inefficiency that permitted and forced the Italian military to use violence against civilians.

Appendix

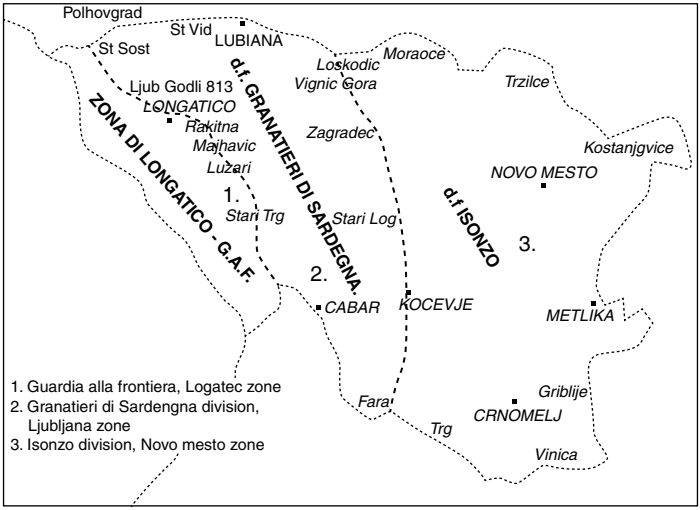

Figure A.1 The areas of competence of the units of the Eleventh Army Corps, form an Italian army map, 1942

Figure A.2 The Slovenian Resistance, according to the Italian army, from a 1942 map

From Yugoslav Information Office (1945), Italian Crimes in Yugoslavia (London: Yugoslav Information Office), pp. 58–68.

The Northern Area

The attack on Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941. General Ambrosio was then in command of the Italian 2nd Army (succeeded in 1942 by General Mario Roatta). The area of his command exactly corresponded to that of Tamaro's study of 1918 "Comando Superiore FF.AA. (Forze Armate Slovenia-Dalmazia)." In the portmanteau form "Supersloda" it became the symbol of Italian Imperialism in Yugoslavia. For the term "Slovenia" was merely an alternative for the earlier term "La Venetie Julienne" used by Tamaro. Disregarding the Croats of the Istrian Peninsula, the area to be conquered at the head of the Adriatic (the eastern shore of which in Italian imperialist eyes = Dalmatia) was precisely the Slovene country.

On 11 April 1941 General Grazioli was appointed Supreme Commisar of the division of Slavs of what the Italians dubbed the "provincia di Lubiana", or Ljubljana province (i.e., the hinterland of the Julian Region) to work in close conjunction with the armed Italian forces, as the "civil" occupation authority.

We shall first consider Italian crimes in this northern area, remembering that by Article 43 of the Hague Convention of 29 July 1899 it was Grazioli's task and his duty, to preserve law and order, and, utilizing the best of his ability the laws of the territory occupied, to protect the civilian population.

On 21 September 1941, Ettore Messana, the questore, or police authority in Ljubljana, on Grazioli's orders issued instructions to the men of the "Royal Italian Army" by which they were to use all methods necessary to ensure subjugation of the Slovene people. The following methods were particularly specified: to bribe individuals to betray others, to resort to physical intimidation to obtain secrets regarding resistance movements, to imprison, intern, pillage and kill.

The reign of terror thus instituted against the civilian population nevertheless proved inadequate. The Slovene people was not subjugated. During the winter 1941–42 Yugoslav resistance grew everywhere. In the Slovene lands, a powerful branch of the National

Liberation Movement (national in two senses, being a movement for the liberation of Slovenia, but a constituent part of Yugoslavia) was built up. This came into full action before the close of the winter. Against it, in March, a wave or terror of a new order was instigated under Mussolini's direct orders.

Roatta's headquarters were at Sušak, on the southern edge of the Slovene area and Istria. Under him, in the II-nd Army, Roatta had the XI-th Army Corps, which operated in the northern portion of his Italian-annexed territory. This, until 15 December 1942 was under the direct command of General Mario Robotti. From that date until the first Italian collapse on 9 September 1943, the command was transferred to General Gastone Gambara.

The XI-th Army Corps comprised the following divisions: the Infantry Division "Isonzo" with headquarters at Novo mesto, under command of General Federico Romero from 11 May 1941 to February 1942 General Emilio Coronati until 20 July 1942, and General A. Maccario until capitulation.

The *Granatieri di Sardegna* Division, with headquarters at Ljubljana, under the command of General Taddeo Orlando.

The *Cacciatori delle Alpi* Division, with headquarters at Ljubljana, under the command of General Vittorio Ruggero.

The Lombardia Division, with headquarters at Karlovac, in Croatia, under the command of General Biddau.

The Macerata Division, with headquarters at Ribnica.

The Guardia alla Frontiera Group, with headquarters at Kocevje.

On 1 March 1942, Roatta issued a comprehensive order, by Circular 3C, which introduced a totally new principle into the Italian repression of the Yugoslavs of occupied or "annexed" areas. Grazioli's order was directed against the civilian population. Roatta's order was directed against the civilian population as potential supporters of the National Liberation Army itself. It was to expel the fascist invaders and to subdue their quisling assistants that the Yugoslav peoples, following the collapse of the old Yugoslav Army, took up arms to create a new Yugoslav Army. Against this Yugoslav resistance the Italian command now proposed a vast and systematic extension of the recognized means of warfare in excess of existing usages.

Here it is important to emphasize that from the outset of its organization the Yugoslav National Liberation Army bore in mind the provisions of the Hague Conventions of 29 July, 1899 and 18 October 1907 respecting belligerents. In these the distinction between franc-tireurs and regular soldiers is laid down, namely, that a regular army is organized, under the command of properly appointed officers, and wears a sufficiently distinguishing uniform which has been made known to the enemy.

British readers will remember this point in connection with the L.D.V. Detachments, later the Home Guard of Britain. At the German suggestion that L.D.V. men would be treated as francs-tireurs, the British Government took the proper steps to make as certain as feasible that the enemy recognized the regular insignia of the L.D.V.'s.

That the Italian Commands were fully informed concerning the Yugoslav Liberation Army, there can be no doubt. By Report No. 1/3211S of February 4, and Report No. J/5120/8 of February 23, 1943, official copies of both of which reports are in Yugoslav hands, Roatta communicated further details concerning the organization of what he refers to as the "Esercito Nazionale Liberatore Jugoslavo"—or "Yugoslav National Liberation Army". On 16 March 1943 under No. 08/1825, the headquarters of the *Isonzo* Division sent in a special memorandum on the tactics employed by this Yugoslav Army.

Moreover, on a number of occasions, upon Italian suggestion, local truces were arranged between Italian and Yugoslav units for negotiations concerning exchange of prisoners. By these negotiations the Italian command gave full recognition to the Yugoslav forces as to properly constituted army.

Despite these facts, a whole series of Orders and Circulars issued by the various Italian Commands, all based on the original circular issued by Roatta, repeated that all prisoners-of-war except women and men wounded, or of under 18 years of age, were to be shot out of hand. For example, in an order issued by General Taddeo Orlando, No. 02/3104, of 28 April 1942 stands:

> Soltanto I feriti, le donne ed i maschi minori di anni 18, devono essere denunciati ai predetti tribunali. Tutti gli altri devono essere immediatamente fucilati sul posto.

Accordingly,

> Wounded, women, and men of less than 18, must be handed over to the prescribed tribunals. All the others must be immediately shot on the spot.

This order was repeated for all divisions and other units under Roatta's commands. In addition, General Maccario, on 23 March 1942 by Order No. 02/1537—issued on direct instructions from General Mario Robotti, Commander of the XI-th Army Corps—ordered that all members of partisan families and their immediate neighbours were to be shot.

On 6 May 1942 Grazioli and Robotti issue a joint proclamation providing for the shooting of groups of hostage, if the guilty were not found within 48 hours of any incident caused by "communist brigands".

On 20 May 1942 Grazioli ordered the clearance of all vegetation or any buildings on a belt of 40 meters wide on either side of any railway, road or other communication line.

These and numerous other similar orders, were of no avail.

On 29 July Mussolini resorted to a further intensification of the terror. At the great rally of troops at Gorica, to which reference has already been made, he strove to inflame the new force of 60.000 picked troops prepared for a major punitive offensive against the Slovene people, "Against those who, on this side or beyond the old frontier, are still cherishing impossible dreams, the inexorable law of Rome" was to be applied.

In preparation for this punitive offensive, on 9 July General Coronati ordered the internment of whole families, or even villages, if considered suspicious, and on 15 July Grazioli and Robotti ordered the cessation of all public traffic and threatened that any hostile bearing towards the Italian forces was to be punished by death. When the offensive had begun Robotti, under direct instructions from Grazioli, made it punishable by death for any person to be found in possession of any National Liberation Army literature.

Thus not merely legally in civilian life, but de facto, under Italian martial rule, spreading the "civilization of Rome", life became impossibly difficult for the Slovenes. Crime was piled upon crime

by the Italian invader. Whereas earlier in 1942 some degree of mercy was shown to wounded prisoners-of-war, to women and young prisoners too, in effect this degree of consideration for the rules of war and the customary laws of human decency in warfare was annulled by the orders providing for the shooting out of hand of "suspicious" persons, or any persons bearing National Liberation Army propaganda material. Not merely were wounded prisoners-of-war not spared; Yugoslav military hospitals were deliberately bombed.

Exemplary Italian records for such acts are in the hands of the State Commission. To give one instance, in July 1943 Colonel Sordi sent a telegram No. 3232, requesting the bombing of the small village of Sopoti; though it was well-known that a Yugoslav military hospital was situated in the village. On 12 July General Maccario responded by ordering the destruction by bombing of the village, including the hospital.

Finally, guilt for these flagrant violations of military law and custom is clearly admitted by the attempt made by the Italian commands to conceal what was being done. Various orders (e.g., Maccario's Order No. 05/1063 of 3 March 1943 Maccarios's second Order No. 02/393 of 5 June 1943 and Rossi's Order No. 08/1063 of 3 march 1943) were issued giving instructions that wherever Yugoslav soldiers or civilians were shot out of hand, they were to be cited in army returns as "killed in armed conflict."

It remains to place on record some of the sacrifice which this policy of Italian conquest by arms cause the Yugoslav population of the affected districts

Report No. 4 of the "State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of the Invaders and Their Assistants," states: "During the period of Italian occupation, from 11 March 1941 to 8 September 1943 in the Ljubljana district alone, the Italian forces shot 1.000 persons as hostages, did to death with great brutality over 8.000 persons (even many who had already been acquitted by the infamous Ljubljana Italian Military Court), burned down 3.000 homes, completely razed and pillaged 800 villages and despatched 3.500 persons to various concentration camps in Italy. (Total population of this area 300.000). Tens of thousands of Slovenes passed through the hands of the Ljubljana Questura (Police Headquarters), where they were subjected to most terrible tortures, and women were

raped and brutally used to death. The Military Court in Ljubljana sentenced thousands of persons to imprisonment for long periods or for life, and of these it is known that on the Island of Rab over a 4.500 persons were later done to death by starvation."

A second quotation from Report No.4 will illustrate the conditions which at this time prevailed in Slovenia:

> By Report No. 350 of 27 July 1942 Emilio Casanogo, Civil Commissar at Cernomelj, informed Grazioli that he had razed 120 homes in the neighbouring villages, and that 280 persons were under arrest in Cernomelj and Metlika ready for internment. By Report No. 317 of 1 August 1942 he stated that the number of prisoners had risen to 500, that homes were burning all round him, and that General Maccario was taking part personally in the 'operations'. One week later, on 8 August 1942 he informed Grazioli that by orders of Colonel F. Ciancabilla, Commander of the 23rd 'Como' Infantry Regiment, a number of houses in the neighbourhood of Crmosnjca had been razed, and 200 men had been arrested, bringing the number of men of between 18 and 55 years of age under arrest in Cernomelj up to 900 persons.

Significant of the atmosphere in which all this was accomplished, are the Casanogo's following observations: "I will not try to tell you of the despair of the families of the interned persons—but, in conformity with your orders, have withheld from any interference…Although I admit that innocent persons were in question, I was obliged to remove them."

As another example, the following quotation from Report no. 4 may serve:

> As example, we will quote the case of one of many hundreds of villages destroyed in the ill-famed Fascist offensive which was begun on 16 July 1941 against the Slovene people, that of Babno-Polje in the Cabar district. The first wave of the occupational armed forces in its passage through this village, took nine peasants who were hay-making to be guides—a few days later their corpses were found at Jermen-dol. The second wave of the Italian armed forces arrested 98 male persons in this village, of whom 40, after indecent torture, were machine gunned on Mount Vrazjo-Vrhov. Four other men were thrown alive into the pit in which this village were interned, of whom 19 died on the Isle of Rab. Houses in this village

> were razed to the ground on three occasions, two on July 25 and 30, and finally, on orders from Lieutenant Vergno, the village was completely destroyed.

As examples of what was meant by "cross-examination" under the principles of "Roman justice", the following quotation from Report no. 17 may be given:

> Marshall Madoglio, Captain Giovanni and Carabiniere Spor, tortured Toman Antun, Stane Kovac and Jozica Simoncic. For some hours they were kept hanging by chains on a wall, they were beaten in the region of the kidneys until they fainted, needless they were driven under their nails, for eleven days they were given no food, and finally they were stood against a wall, while a farce of pretended shooting was played before them. General Gambara was directly concerned in this.

Finally, in this matter of organized cruelty, the following passage from Report No. 17 may be given in order to illustrate the universality of the crimes from village to village in the Slovene lands.

> Colonel di Negro, Commander of the 1st Regiment of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* and lieutenant Giuseppe Tomo, at the end of August in the village of Travnik shot five peaceful civilians whom they had taken with them as guides, while at Loski Potok they killed four school-teachers and eleven peasants, burning down 87 houses and 138 other buildings in the village. At Sdrenja Vas, they burned down seven houses, at Hrib four, and at Retje four. Tomo robbed and interned a large number of people, particularly in Segova Vas. Colonel Pausini, on 6 June 1942 burned down three farm properties in the village of Dragi, robbed 16 peasants and shot eight villagers. In June 1942 Lieutenant M. Angelli ordered the burning down of 70 buildings in the village of Ravnam and the flogging and arrest of all the men. At Kocevska Reka seven civilians were shot. At Podgora the property of twelve persons was burned down, and in the village of Golo on 23 July 1942 twelve innocent villagers were shot…etc.

In addition, it must be recorded that beside the destruction of human life, enormous material damage was deliberately caused.

The situation in this respect in perhaps best characterized by only two extracts from Reports of the State Commission:

Report No. 4 quotes from the report of Colonel F. Ciancabilla, Commander of the 23rd "Como" Infantry Regiment, No. 3576, of 3 August 1942 which he informed his Divisional Chief of the "mopping-up operations" performed in the Cernomelj district by the commander of the Carabinieri, Captain Fernando di Furia, "who placed 73 families, numbering 251 persons, under arrest, and seized numerous live-stock, and other goods. His personal concern was to trace and seize property and anything of value, and he achieved brilliant results".

Finally we may quote from Report No.12, mainly concerning the work of the Supreme Commissar of Italy fore the Ljubljana area, Emilio Grazioli, who "when he left Ljubljana after the fall of Fascism, plundered the Palace of the Ban, removing rugs, candelabra, furniture, about 35 kilogrammes of gold, a number of sacks of coffee, and many other various goods, which had fallen into his hands as a result of the confiscation of the property of 'rebels'".

"Judicial" crimes

Whereas in Reports Nos. 2, 12, 16 and 17, as we have seen, it was impossible for the State Commission to separate civilian repression from military repression, since from the outset of the occupation by Italy of further Yugoslav territory the civilian authorities worked in closest contact with the military authorities, the crimes reviewed in those reports have primarily a military character reports Nos. 25 and 28 deal more particularly with crimes committed by the Italian State, which though frequently involving or making use of the armed forces of the State, and being moreover crimes resulting from the latent state of war over twenty years in the Julian Region later which with the invasion of more Yugoslav territory, became open warfare, bear a civil or political character.

Both in the material presented in Report No. 25 and in that presented in Report No. 28, the temporary frontier existing for over twenty years between the two areas of annexation, as well as the dividing border of time between that which was done before the invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 and that which was

done after that date, have been disregarded by the persons committing the crimes, and therefore, with added reason, are here disregarded.

Report No. 25 deals with the activities of the notorious Italian "Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato" (Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State). A considerable part of the activity of this Tribunal was the prosecution and persecution of Yugoslavs, principally Slovenes and Croats, not only those who were Italian subjects in the Julian Region, but together with these, many Yugoslav subjects arrested in the Region, as well as Yugoslav subjects in the area newly occupied in April, 1941.

The trials in the court established by this Special Tribunal were conducted in disregard of all recognized principles of court procedure, in that persons brought before them were condemned without the accusing authorities being called upon to submit any proofs of their accusations.

These trials form part of the whole machinery of Italian crime against Yugoslav nationals and the Yugoslav State.

Report No. 25 cites as many as 33 different group trials as examples of Italian methods. Three examples will be given here.

On 14 December 1941 a Slovene University lecturer, Dr. Lavoslav Cermelj, together with 59 other young Yugoslavs, were tried at Trieste before a Special Tribunal for a motley list of irredentist acts, including an alleged attempted assassination of Mussolini. Five of the accused were executed; the remainder were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

The second great trial was staged in Rome on 25 June 1942 against 22 accused, seven of whom had escaped. Nine were executed, seven others in captivity being sentenced to 30 years penal servitude each.

The third great trial was staged in Rome on 13 October 1942. Five were executed, the others sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

Altogether, in the course of its activity…the Special Tribunal sentenced 20 other persons to death, 31 other persons to 30 years penal servitude, 21 other persons to 24 years penal servitude, and excluding those sentenced to death or life imprisonment, 160 other persons, a total of 2,341 years penal servitude, or an average of 14½ years per person.

Documents from the Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari esteri (Asmae)

Series: Affari Politici 1946–1950, Jugoslavia, b. 39

Lègation de la Republique Populaire de Yougoslavie
Rome
N. 384/47
NOTE VERBALE

La Lègation de la République Fédérative Populaire de Yougoslavie présente ses compliments au Ministère des Affaires Etrangerès et, se référant aux dispositions de l'art.45 du Traité de Paix avec l'Italie, a l'honneur de demander, au nom de son Gouvernement, l'arrêt et la livraison aux autorités de la République Fédérative Populaire de Yougoslavie, pour y être jugé, ROATTA Mario, qui est déclaré criminel de guerre par la décision F. N° 111 du 6 juin 1946 de la Commission d'Etat pour l'investigation des crimes des occupateurs et de leur collaborateurs et est accusé des crimes de guerre et des crimes contre la paix et l'humanité, spécifiés dans l'annexe à cette Note.

On rappelle que Roatta Mario est enrégistré par la Commission des Nations Unies pour les crimes de gerre, liste n.105.

La Légation de la République Fédérative Populaire de Yougoslavie saisit cette occasion pour renouveler au Ministère de Affaires Etrangères l'assurance de sa haute considération.

Rome, le 16 décembre 1947

Annexe au n.384/47

ROATTA Mario, ex général d'Armée, Comandante del Comando Superiore FF.AA. Slovenia-Dalmazia (II ARMATA) avec siège à Sušak. Enrégistré par la Commission pour les crimes de guerre de Londres, liste 5, n° 105.

Il a été declaré criminel de guerre par la décision F. N° 111 du 6 juin 1946 de la Commission d'Etat pour l'investigation des crimes des occupateurs et de leur collaborateurs:

1) parce que, comme Commandant en chef de toutes les forces armées italiennes sur le territoire de la Slovenie et de la Dalmatie, il donnait des directives et émanait des ordres,

obligatoires pour tous les commandants subalternes, pour l'exécution de crimes de guerre;

2) parce que, se basant sur ces orders et directives, les unites de l'armée italienne sous son commandement ont commis des sistématiques et nombreux crimes de guerre, à l'occasione desquels de milliers d'hommes ont été fusillés (seulement en Slovenie environ 1000 otages et environ 22 prisonniers partisans ont été fusillés);
3) parce que de centaines de villages ont été incendiés et de dizaines de milliers d'hommes envoyés dans des camps de concentration (de la seul Slovenie on y envoya, par suite de ses ordres, 35.000 personnes). Dans le camp de concentration de Rab seulement il y avait 4.500 morts, pour la plus part del vieillards, femmes et enfants;
4) parce que des pillages en masse de la population civile ont été executes.

A titre d'exemple on pourrait citer l'ordre N° 550 du 11 janvier 1943 que le general Roatta a émané en sa qualité du commandant de la II. Armée et en rélation d'un nettoyage métodique de la zone de Karlovac—Knin jusqu'a la ligne Glina—Bosanski Novi Sanski Most—Ključ. Dans cette ordre il est dit, entre autre, que tous ces qui seront pris dans cette zone pendant la lutte, soit sous ou sans les armes, soient passés pae les armes; que tous les hommes valides, ages de plus de 15 ans, sans aucune exception, soient internés; que tous les combatants de l'Armée de la Libération Nationale yougoslave doivent être fusillés.+

Des orders et de directives dans ce sens Roatta a donné aussi dans ses actes comme la 'Circulaire 4 C' du 1. avril 1942, le n° 7000 du 7 avril 1942, le N° 11.780' du 23 août 1943 etc.

Ces circulaire ordonnaient le fusillage des otages dans le délai de 48 heures, si les responsables pour des actes de sabotage ne sont pas trouvés, et l'internmenet des families entières et des villages entiers et la confiscation des vivres et du bétail.

Entre autres nombreux exemples on peut citer aussi que le 15 septembre 1942 quatre femmes ont été fusillées parce que, contrairement aux orders du general Roatta, elles se rendaient dans le bois de Bribir pour y cueillir du feuillage. Des unites militaries de son Commandement déposaient des bombes à main devissées

dans les vivres de la population paysane qui fuiyait devant le nettoyage, ainsi que plusieurs personnes, en revenant chez elles, ont perdu la vie. Un de ces cas s'est concrètement verifié dans le village de Mazin, dans le district de Gračac, vers la fin du mois de janvier 1943.

Par conséquent, le general Roatta est responsible pour des crimes de guerre et des crimes contre l'humanité, meurtres et massacres, terreur sistématique, fusillage des otages, torture et deportation, pillage et confiscation des biens, pronunciation de sentences collectives, devastations délibérées et destruction de propriétés, tentatives d'anéantissement de prisonniers de guerre (art. 4, 5, 21, 23b), c), d), et g9, 25, 46, 47 et 50 Ratio legis de la III. Section de la Convention de la Haye de 1907, et art. 5 a), b) et c) du Statut du Tribunal Militaire International.

Lègation de la Republique Populaire de Yougoslavie
Rome
P. N. 400
NOTE VERBALE

La Lègation de la République Fédérative Populaire de Yougoslavie présente ses compliments au Ministère des Affaires Etrangerès et, se référant aux dispositions de l'art.45 du Traité de Paix avec l'Italie, a l'honneur de demander, au nom de son Gouvernement, l'arrêt et la livraison aux autorités de la République Fédérative Populaire de Yougoslavie, pour y être jugé, ORLANDO Taddeo, qui est déclaré criminel de guerre par la décision F. N° 111 du 6 juin 1946 de la Commission d'Etat pour l'investigation des crimes des occupateurs et de leur collaborateurs et est accusé des crimes de guerre et des crimes contre la paix et l'humanité, spécifiés dans l'annexe à cette Note.

On rappelle que Roatta Mario est enrégistré par la Commission des Nations Unies pour les crimes de gerre, liste 12, n.149.

En lui communiquant ce qui précède la Légation saisit cette occasion pour renouveler au Ministère de Affaires Etrangères l'assurance de sa haute considération.

Rome, le 18 décembre 1947

Annexe au N° 400

ORLANDO Taddeo, Général de Division, Commandant de la Division 'Granatieri di Sardegna' laquelle jusqu'au septembre 1942

faisait partie de 11 éme Corps d'Armée dont la siège était à Ljubljana. Il était executeur et complice dans les crimes commis contre la population et les biens des regions occupies de la Yougoslavie. Ces crimes consistaient en meurtres, massacres, arrestations et deportations de la population, incendies, pillages et devastation délibérée des biens, meurtres des prisonniers et ôtages. Par consequent le general Orlando Taddeo a comis des crimes de guerre et contre la paix et l'humanité et a pris part á l'execution de tells crimes. (Voir l'Art. 5 B) et C) du Statut du Tribunal militaire international de Nürenmberg). Il est enrégistré par la Commission des Nations Unies pour les crimes de guerre á Londre, liste 12, no. 149.

Voici, á titre d'exemples, les particuliers de quelque crimes commis par les unités de la division mentionnée soud le commandement du général Orlando Taddeo et conformement à ses instructions et ordres:

1. Entre le 24 juin et le 1 er juillet 1941, les unités de la dite division, comformement aux orders du général Orlando, ont organisé et executé un grand 'rastrellamento' dans la ville de Ljubljana. Ce nettoyage, qui état fait dans le but de l'internment des patriots, était en connection avec une action générale d'internment de la population dans la part occupée de la Slovenie, executée par les autorités italiennes d'occupation en été 1942. A cette occasion la perquisition et le contrôle des cartes d'identité fut faite à 20433 personnes, dont 2858 furent déportées dans les camps de concentration, ce qui, ensemble, aves 3000 d'internés auparavant, depasse un quart de la population masculine capable à travailler de la ville de Ljubljana.

2. Le general Orlando avait ordonné le fusillement d'un grand nombre d'ôtages: selon les rapports d'Orlando lui-même aux Commandes supérieures, ce nombre rejoignait 118 personnes dans le période du 5 mai jusqu'au 30 juillet 1943.

3. A l'occasion de l'offensive á Raška, quand la dite division opéraitau Sud-Est de Ljubljana dans la région de Dolenjsko vers la fin de juillet et la premiére moitié d'août 1942, dix villages furent complétement pillés et brûles, tandis qu'un grand nombre de pillages et incendies furent commis dans des autres villages. Au cours de cette offensive à Raška les unités de la dite division appliquaient l'ordonnance sans scrupules de Robotti sur le fusillement des prisonniers appartenants à l'Armée de la Libération Nationale yougoslave.

De rapport que le general de la division Orlando avait enovoyé au commandant de l'11 éme corps d'armée, confirme que tous les prisonniers partisans ont été fusillés. Il est mentionné dans ses rapports que 337 patrisans ont été fusillés entre le 31 juillet et le 7 août 1942.

4. En septembre 1942 la division prennait part aux opérations dans la région de Drežnica—Jasenik á Gorski Kotar. Elle avancait de la direction de Ogulin—Plaški passant par Brezno et Kapela vérs Drežnica. Les unités de cette division ont pillé et incendié Drežnica complétement aussi que les villages voisins de Brezna, Mrmor, Tomići, Vukelići, Sekići, Marovići, Zrnići, Radulovići, Trbovići et autres encore. Au cours de cette action 3000 personnes eviro ont été interneés, plus 800 personnes des villages voisins. Tout le bétail la nourriture et les meubles ont été pillés et transportés à Ogulin. Aucune maisons dans toute la region n'est pas restés sans être endommagée.

NATIONAL AGENCY ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME 18 JANUARY 1948
News for the press Documentation service

Ansa 108 STATEMENT TO ANSA BY GENERAL TADDEO ORLANDO AND BY THE UNDERSECRETARY HON. ACHILLE MARAZZA REGARDING THE YUGOSLAVIAN GOVERNMENT'S ACCUSATION AGAINST THEM INDICATING THEM AS WAR CRIMINALS

An editor of the Ansa met General Taddeo Orlando who, as is known, has been summoned by the Yugoslav government as a war criminal in order to discover his thoughts on the matter. He immediately said:

"I have never wanted to give interviews on this subject, because as a man I must answer to my own conscience and as a citizen and a soldier I must answer to the government which can and must judge me"; and he added: "I understand that, abroad, politicians may consider and make certain accusations, but it saddens me that this should be done by Italians against men of their own country, against whom no proof of any kind exists that might give credit to presumed criminal acts committed in a time of war."

General Orlando, after having described the episode of his division's surrender in Tunisia, which took place with military

honors from the Allied armed forces, continued: "In Slovenia the Italian soldier left a good impression of himself and excellent memory. When Ljubljana was occupied, and elevated to become an Italian province, my division was sent to protect the territory. There were no episodes worthy of note and a current of good friendship between the populace and the division's soldiers, so much so that, when the division left the area, many civilians stayed in contact with officers and soldiers, and the Bishop of Ljubljana continued to ask for my help, requesting me to intervene on behalf of various activities to help people and to free them from prison, activities which I never stopped doing, even though they were no longer part of my duty, but that of the civil and political authorities, and more often than not my intervention had a positive result."

General Orlando, after having described various episodes which demonstrated the good relations that existed between the civil population and the garrison, with his hand on his heart said: "but at a certain point the situation underwent a radical change, and from that moment the local political atmosphere begun to heat up, and the so-called partisan movement was started for political reasons. Events, which up until then had never happened, begun to disturb what one might say was a peaceful 'modus vivendi'. Two Carabineri were killed with 30 dagger blows; 4 *Granatieri* who had been captured in an ambush were found castrated and skinned…" At this point general Orlando shows the editor of Ansa some photographs depicting these dreadful scenes and: "Here," continues the general, "these poor dead men are those very *Granatieri* who offered their rations" (and the general presents other photographs) "to needy people, children, old people…"

…

"Another episode: during a battle with a formation of irregulars, one of our units captured, among others, 70 Slovenians: through investigations I understood that these individuals were part of a group of 300 Slavs which, a few days previously, while they were travelling on a train that was meant to take them to a concentration camp, the train itself was split in two following an accident; they remained in the area, unable to flee due to their injuries; they were then—I do not know if they did so voluntarily—enrolled as part of that irregular formation. In this case I should have certainly

ordered the application of the international rules of war, that is, they should have been shot. I wanted instead [illegible] in that case to be generous and, speaking kind words to them, I reminded them how the Italians had sent food to their villages as well as help of all kinds and I concluded: 'Go, I give you freedom, go back to your work, your families, you are men and good citizens.' After a few days one of them came back to me and said: '*Signor generale*, I tell you that the kindness that you have done us is the strongest propaganda possible in favour of how the *Granatieri* behave themselves here.'

But, unfortunately, serious cases continued to occur and the army command sent out categorical orders directly to battalion commands for the rigid application of the sanctions set out in international law against irregulars who, found with weapons in their hands, must be considered *francs-tireurs* and therefore shot. Naturally, the commands of the army corps were aware of these orders of the high command, and via reports that the units periodically compiled, they could state how generously these same orders came to be applied. And actually from some of these documents, left behind by our some of our army chiefs, that in Yugoslavia—and unfortunately also in Italy by some people—an equivocal impression could be created, because in those printed pages there is a column numbering those who were 'shot or killed in combat', and it is easy to assign the numbers in that column to those who were 'shot', while those numbers really indicate those who 'fell in battle'; and furthermore," adds the general with evident indignation, "in those documents there are also the numbers that indicate how many of our men fell in ambushes and in combat, but no one speaks of this…"

"I challenge anyone," exclaims general Orlando "to give one piece of proof, only one, of a case in which I ordered a captured irregular to be shot; no one was shot by my division, and this despite the orders of Army High Command, which had also sent out a warning to the populace which said that anyone who had used weapons against Italian soldiers would be considered *francs-tireurs* and immediately judged.

I considered it more humane to institute special military tribunals in the area, because I wanted, even in the cases in which the special war law should be applied, and for which the death penalty was foreseen, that there should always be a tribunal to judge the accused, with all the elements of proof and every possibility

of defence for the accused himself. I will say more: in the face of our slaughtered fellow soldiers, tortured by the irregulars, I have often seen my *Granatieri* tremble with rage, ready to avenge their comrades so barbarously killed, but, with paternal words, I have always softened their hearts and persuaded them against their just desire for revenge; I told them that any violent act would be fair, but it would have at the same time blotted the Italian tradition of kindness and generosity. And to convince them I urged them to think about those fallen comrades as if they had been hit by an enemy mortar or an aerial bomb. This according to some, is my criminal spirit."

General Orlando, who displays controlled emotion while describing these sad episodes, concludes: "I am aware of always having been an upright man, a human general in war and peace. Two commissions have already studied my past; they have judged my behaviour; among these men there were also some from that [political] current which wanted to be hostile to me; but everyone agreed to declare that no fault, no abuse, and no crime could darken my soldier's rectitude and my Italian conscience; my conscience toward which I repeat, I must respond for everyone of my deeds as a man, as I must respond to the government of my country for everyone of my acts as a soldier."

Series: Affari Politici 1946–1950, Jugoslavia, b. 39

Colonel…, commander of…in Slovenia and Croatia, is accused by the Yugoslav State Commission to have ordered the shooting at Loski Potok of 8 farmers and to have ordered the looting of the local bank. Another 11 farmers would be killed by his regiment on 21 July 1942.

Moreover he is accused of having ordered the shooting of 5 citizens at Travnik and another 5 at Loski Potok, of whom 4 were teachers. With regard to these last, the colonel…declared that 3 of them had been identified as very active propagandists and organizers of armed revolt, for which the punishment was that they were to be shot as soon as they were captured. Instead, he put them in front of a tribunal made up of officers of the regiment, to be judged. He asserts that the fourth teacher had accused the other three; and

that if he had been set free, he probably would have been killed by the Yugoslavs.

As for the Travnik episode, he declares that his regiment had never been there; regarding the accusation about Loski Potok, he declares that those persons died in battle.

Another accusation made about . . . is that of having destroyed a field hospital at Felenci Zleb. He affirms that it was a small cave where 14 wounded were found, helped by a nurse and a man; the woman, instead of surrendering, killed everyone and then herself. Someone, by chance having escaped this death, had told the story to Italian officers.

Colonel . . . was also accused of the shooting of 19 farmers at Segova. He affirms that his units never crossed that village. According to a document of the Eleventh Army Corps (from which his regiment depended), his unit had killed "another 7 rebels apart from the 22 already mentioned."

The commission observes that the accusations made against Colonel . . . , numerous and specific, did not find a sufficient explanation in his declarations: those regarding Felenci Zleb, moreover, are of particular seriousness.

[The commission] thus considers it necessary to report him as a war criminal to the relevant tribunal, before which he will better be able to undertake his defense, if necessary.

Notes

Preface

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6. D. Rodogno (2002), *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri).
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11. E. Gobetti (2007), *L'occupazione allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Carocci).
12. M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito).
13. Burgwyn, *Empire*.
14. Rodogno, *Ordine*.
15. G. Schreiber (2000), *La vendetta tedesca 1943–1945. Le rappresaglie naziste in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori), p. 25.

Introduction to the American Edition

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2. R. Graziani (1937), *Pace romana in Libia* (Milan: Mondadori), p. 272. Fascist publicity exalted this political genocide as truly "Roman" and "Fascist." U. Caimpienta (1936), *Il generale Graziani (l'Africano)* (Milan: Aurora), p. 209.
3. L. Ceva (1999), *Storia delle forze armate in Italia* (Turin: Utet), p. 231. There is also an ample bibliography in English. For example, A. Ahmida Ali (1994), *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830–1932* (New York: New York State University Press).
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7. Dominioni, *Sfascio dell'impero*, p. 182. There is a good extant bibliography in English about Ethiopia. Among many, A. Sbacchi (1997), *Legacy of Bitterness* (Asmara: Red Sea). On the Danane camp see pp. 131–135.
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17. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 189.
18. M. Knox (2002), *Alleati di Hitler. Le regie forze armate, il regime fascista e la guerra del 1940–1943* (Milan: Garzanti), pp. 171–172.
19. E. Canevari (1935), *La lotta delle fanterie* (Cremona: Cremona nuova), p. 15.

20. G. Tumino (1941), *La nazione e la guerra* (Palermo: Pezzino), p. 233.
21. Preface of Ottavio Zoppi to Canevari, *Lotta delle fanterie*, p. 11.
22. *Le forze armate dell'Italia fascista* (1939) (Rome: La Rassegna Italiana), p. 113.
23. Ibid., p. 275.
24. On the importance of "morale" for military thought of the 1920s and 1930s, see V. Ilari and A. Sema (1988), *Marte in orbace. Guerra, esercito e milizia nella concezione fascista della nazione* (Ancona: Nuove ricerche), p. 43.
25. F. Botti and V. Ilari (1985), *Il pensiero militare italiano dal primo al secondo dopoguerra* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), p. 347. The same thing happens in a book by one of the most important Italian military historians, himself a soldier, M. Montanari (2005), *Politica e strategia in cento anni di guerre italiane* (Rome: Stato maggiore esercito), in which he cites *Cirenaica pacificata*, also by Graziani, while not a word is said about the occupation of the Balkans during the Second World War.
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37. Roatta, *Otto milioni*, p. 97.

38. Knox, *Alleati di Hitler*, p. 150.
39. G. Carboni (1952), *Più che il dovere. Storia di una battaglia italiana* (Rome: Danesi), p. 123.
40. U. Spigo (1946), *Premesse tecniche della disfatta. (Dall'euforia al disastro)* (Rome: Faro), p. 50.
41. Armellini, *La crisi*, p. 73.
42. E. Rommel (1952), *Guerra senza odio* (Milan: Garzanti), p. 195.
43. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 176.
44. Burgwyn, *Mussolini Warlord*, p. 34.
45. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 180.
46. Ceva, *Storia delle forze*, p. 262.
47. A. Osti Guerrazzi (2010), *Noi non sappiamo odiare. L'esercito italiano tra fascismo e democrazia* (Turin: Utet), chapter IV. In his "Diaries" the minister of Foreign Affairs and son-in-law of Mussolini, Galeazzo Ciano, described Cavallero as a real scoundrel.

1 The Annexion

1. All this information from S. Loi (1978), *Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), pp. 50 and following.
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3. M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), p. 24.
4. A. Tosti, "Le operazioni contro l'esercito serbo e greco," *Cronache della guerra*, April 26, 1941.
5. G. Zanussi (1946), *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia. Giugno 1940–giugno 1943*, vol. I (Rome: Corso), p. 96.
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8. Map from AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055.
9. T. Ferenc (1994), *La provincia "italiana" di Lubiana. Documenti 1941–1942* (Udine: Istituto Friulano per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione), p. 123, doc. 1.
10. Tre stelle, "Nuovo ordine nell'Europa danubiana," *Cronache della guerra*, April 26, 1941.
11. R. Wörsdörfer (2009), *Il confine orientale. Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955* (Bologna: il Mulino), p. 175.
12. T. Sala (2008), *Il fascismo italiano e gli Slavi del sud* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia), p. 25.

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14. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 27.
15. J. H. Burgwyn (2005), *Empire on Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books), p. 44.
16. S. K. Pavlowitch (2008), *Hitler's New Disorder. The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst and Company), p. 86. In reality, the Germans merely occupied the northern part of Slovenia.
17. Wörsdörfer, *Confine orientale*, p. 175.
18. Marko Natlačen was the "bano," the leader of the so-called Drava Banovina, a province of the kingdom of Yugoslavia that more or less corresponded with modern Slovenia.
19. G. Ciano (1990), *Diario 1937–1943* (Milan: Rizzoli), p. 504, entry for April 25, 1941.
20. Ibid., p. 506, entry for April 29, 1941.
21. On these historic "motivations" see D. Rodogno (2002), *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri), p. 112.
22. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* p. 58.
23. Ibid., p. 134, doc. 4.
24. Sala, *Fascismo italiano*, p. 23.
25. Ibid., p. 31. For Grazioli's policies see also Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* pp. 42 and following; Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, Chapter II.
26. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* p. 37.
27. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 66.
28. M. Cattaruzza (2007), *L'Italia e il confine orientale* (Bologna: il Mulino), p. 218.
29. Quoted in Sala, *Fascismo italiano*, pp. 30 and following. Sala dates the text to July 1942. On July 13, 1941, Grazioli sent a telegram to the cabinet of the Interior Ministry saying the following: "Today have visited ten towns Logatec valley. Rural populations gathered spontaneously in piazze and along route they made renewed displays attachment and recognition of DUCE and Fascist Italy." ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102.
30. On Italian public discussion about the eastern border, see M. Pacetti (ed.) (1977), *L'Imperialismo italiano e la Jugoslavia. Atti del convegno italo-jugoslavo* (Urbino: Argalia).
31. R. Fauro (1914), *Trieste* (Rome: Garzoni), p. 9.
32. M. Mondini (2006), *La politica delle armi. Il ruolo dell'esercito nell'avvento del fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza), p. 75.
33. Z. Pirjevec (2009), *Foibe. Una storia d'Italia* (Turin: Einaudi), p. 75. On the Fascist press and the "Slavs" after the war, see A. Martella (2006), "Gli Slavi nella stampa fascista a Trieste (1921–22). Note sul linguaggio," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* n.1 (2006): 11–48.
34. Wörsdörfer, *Confine orientale*, p. 152.

35. "Lubiana provincia italiana," *Cronache della guerra*, May 10, 1941; Calani, "Con Roma," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 4, 1941.
36. Camuri, "Lubiana in festa," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 5, 1941; "La nuova provincia annessa all'Italia," "*Luce*" newsreel, May 8, 1941.
37. AUSSME, M 3, b. 53, circular of the "I" Office of the Second Army, May 12, 1941.
38. M. Roatta (1946), *Otto milioni di baionette* (Milan: Mondadori), p. 171.
39. Ibid., p. 173. Even the memoirs of members of the Salò Republic greatly emphasize the fact that the Italian occupation had established a bulwark against the irruption of Communism into the heart of Europe. For examples, see B. Coceani (1948), *Mussolini, Hitler e Tito alle porte orientali d'Italia* (Bologna: Cappelli) and Benito Mussolini (1944), *Storia di un anno* (Milan: Mondadori).
40. Sala, *Fascismo italiano*, p. 36. Giuseppe Piemontese places the first episodes as early as May 1941. G. Piemontese (1946), *Ventinove mesi di occupazione italiana nella provincia di Lubiana. Considerazioni e documenti* (Ljubljana: no publisher), p. 3. On the birth of the Slovenian Resistance, see G. Bambara (1998), *La guerra di liberazione nazionale in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Milan: Mursia), pp. 93 and following.
41. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 100.
42. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, p. 142.
43. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp. 135 and following.
44. Wörsdörfer, *Confine orientale*, p. 180.
45. ACS, T 821, spool 224.
46. Ibid.
47. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* p. 140, doc. n. 7.
48. ACS, T 821, spool 224. Anticommunism, obviously, was not specific to the Royal Army. The Wehrmacht widely used anticommunist propaganda, for example, in Greece. See M. Mazower (2008), *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin), p. 159. It seems almost unnecessary to underline the use of propaganda in the USSR. See O. Bartov (2001), *Eastern Front, 1941–1945. German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Houndmils; Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave), Chapter III.
49. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* p. 146, doc. 9.
50. Ibid., pp. 156 and following, doc. n. 12.
51. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055. The text is also in Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* pp. 168 and following, doc. n. 18.
52. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* p. 172 doc. n. 19.
53. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 140.
54. Zanussi, *Guerra e catastrofe*, p. 240.
55. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp.140–150
56. Ibid., p. 141.
57. Ibid., p. 141.
58. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055.
59. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 143.
60. Ibid., p. 148.

2 Ambrosio

1. G. Zanussi (1946), *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia. Giugno 1940–giugno 1943*, vol. I (Rome: Corso), p. 222.
2. T. Ferenc (1994), *La provincia "italiana" di Lubiana. Documenti 1941–1942* (Udine: Istituto Friulano per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione), p. 544. On the map, 123 Italian garrisons are shown.
3. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 509.
4. It is completely useless, for example, to look for articles on Yugoslavia in the whole collection of the magazine *Cronache della guerra* after May 1941. The frustration of Italian military leaders in Slovenia is attested to by the fact that Orlando, obeying the orders of his superiors, asked his subordinates to photograph all their military activities, including setting fires and executions by firing squad, to bear witness to "all the sacrifices we put up with." ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular of Orlando of March 13, 1942. Research in the online archive of the *Istituto "Luce,"* which produced newsreels which were projected before every film, in Italy, confirms this impression. The "*Luce*" made three newsreels in 1941 about Slovenia, and then nothing at all until 1944.
5. AUSSME DS II GM, b. 1055, "Rapporto situazione relativo al periodo dal 15 ottobre al 31 ottobre 1941 XIX-XX." Marco Cuzzi speaks, for the whole complex operation, up until October 26, of a "certain success" obtained by the *Granatieri*. M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), p. 143.
6. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Verbale della riunione tenuta dall'Eccellenza Comandante il giorno 21 ottobre 1941 XIX presso il comando XI C.A."
7. Ibid.
8. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, "Rapporto situazione relativo al periodo dal 15 ottobre al 31 ottobre 1941 XIX-XX."
9. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Verbale della riunione tenuta dall'Eccellenza Comandante il giorno 21 ottobre 1941 XIX presso il comando XI C.A."
10. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 509, circular of Orlando, October 22, 1941.
11. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 150. On the activities of these two tribunals, see T. Ferenc (1999), *"Si ammazza troppo poco". Condannati a morte—ostaggi—passati per le armi nella provincia di Lubiana: 1941–1943. Documenti* (Lubiana: Istituto per la Storia Moderna), pp. 7 and following.
12. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 509.
13. The document is in Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* pp. 227 and following, doc. n. 36.
14. In February of 1942, the information service of the *Granatieri* division was improved through the use of infiltrators in the prisons. Problems came, however, from the lack of cooperation provided by the CCRR, who passed on information obtained from prisoners via interrogation only late and after long insistence. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, "L'azione dei ribelli del 1° febbraio e la reazione da parte delle truppe del C.d'A."
15. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Rapporto del giorno 21."
16. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 509, note of December 1, 1941.

17. ACS, T 821, spool 271, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, December 3, 1941.
18. Ibid.
19. Robotti, on December 17, wrote to Ambrosio that he had received a copy of Grazioli's letter to the Interior Ministry "from a confidential source that I do not name so as not to expose him to possible reprisals." Clearly, Robotti had his informants within the High Commission. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, letter of Robotti to Ambrosio, December 17, 1941. Robotti, on November 19, had needed to reply to a letter from Orlando that accused the civil authorities of being too weak. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, letter of Robotti to Orlando, November 19, 1941.
20. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 154.
21. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, letter from Robotti to the command of the Second Army, January 30, 1942.
22. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 52, p. 313.
23. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, circular of Robotti, December 5, 1941. A detailed description of Orlando's reports to his officers can be found in Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 41, pp. 264 and following.
24. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 154.
25. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 40, p. 255.
26. M. Cattaruzza (2007), *L'Italia e il confine orientale* (Bologna: il Mulino), p. 236.
27. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 45, p. 282.
28. Ibid., doc. n. 48, p. 293.
29. Ibid., pp. 296 and following. The document is also cited in Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp. 161 and following. According to Cuzzi, Ambrosio had dictated these directives following a conversation with Mussolini on December 30, 1942.
30. J. H. Burgwyn (2005), *Empire on Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books), p. 357.
31. M. Appelius, "La nemesi di Versaglia," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, April 8, 1941; M. Appelius, "Rivincita della giustizia," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, April 12, 1941.
32. T. Sala (2008), *Il fascismo italiano e gli slavi del sud* (Trieste: IRSML), Chapter. II.
33. For example, the article "Fame," *La tradotta del fronte giulio*, June 6, 1943.
34. For example, the article "Al partigiano comunista addosso sempre!," *La Tradotta del fronte giulio*, May 23, 1943, in which one reads, "*Gente che non ha nulla in comune con noi, sporchi, alcolizzati, lazzaroni, traditori, insensibili al male fisico come a tutte le finezze della nostra razza*" (People who have nothing in common with us, dirty, alcoholic, beggars, traitors, unaware of physical ills as they are to all the refinements of our race).
35. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 509, circular of Orlando, October 22, 1941.
36. AUSSME, M 3, b. 65, "Indirizzi di propaganda. N.1."
37. AUSSME, M 3, b. 65, "Conversazione alle truppe. Schema n.2."
38. The phrase "bono taliano" or "bono italiano" had already been stigmatized by Robotti in August 1941. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 12, p. 156. An

Alpino, who had attended a speech given by Roatta at the beginning of 1942, wrote that "his speech could be summed up with the direct quote of 'enough with the *dobro italiano* [the good Italian],' shouted by him." G. Bedeschi (ed.) (1985), *Fronte jugoslavo-balcanico: c'ero anch'io* (Milan: Mursia), pp. 439 and following.

39. D. Rodogno (2002), "La Repressione nei territori occupati dall'Italia fascista tra il 1940 ed il 1943," *Qualestoria* n.1 (2002): 67.
40. ACS, T 821, spool 224, circular of the high command of the Eleventh Army Corps, November 6, 1941.
41. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, report of Robotti to the high command of the Second Army, November 2, 1941.
42. For example, the article "Imboscata nostro pane quotidiano," *La Tradotta del fronte Giulio*, November 1, 1942. In this case, as well, the Royal Army's propaganda was exactly the same as that of the Wehrmacht in Greece. M. Mazower (1995), *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press), p. 160.
43. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, circular of Robotti, June 19, 1942.
44. ACS, T 821, spool 214, circular of Robotti, July 25, 1942.
45. T. Schlemmer (2009), *Invasori, non vittime. La campagna italiana di Russia 1941–1943* (Roma: Laterza), p. 73.
46. Translator's note: the Italian word translated here as "partisan" is *crucco*, which seems to come from a Croatian word, *kruh*, meaning "bread," which would have been what starving Croatian prisoners of war would be calling out for. In the First World War it was used as a denigratory term for soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the enemies of Italy, and might loosely be translated as "Hun." However, the same word transferred its meaning in the Second World War to indicate members of the Balkan resistance, retaining, of course, all its original freight of loathing and menace.
47. ACS, T 821, spool 440. This spool contains various drawings, not published by the newspapers of the period, of partisans depicted as beggars with the hammer and sickle on their clothing.
48. ACS, T 821, spool 440, typescript titled "Fante in guerriglia." This was probably never published.
49. For example, AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1036, "Relazione mensile sullo spirito delle truppe e della popolazione dei territori occupati," July 26, 1942.
50. AUSSME, M 3, b. 48, "Commissione provinciale di censura 69 R, Relazione quindicinale dal periodo 1–15 aprile 1943 XXI."
51. AUSSME, M 3, b. 51, "Relazione mensile 'P,'" July 31, 1942.
52. Giorgio Rochat writes, on the subject of respecting the rules of war, like respecting the wounded and civilians, "The army that does not respect these rules, like the Nazi army, exposes itself to reactions of equal brutality." G. Rochat (2005), *Le guerre italiane. 1935–1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi), p. 366.
53. M. Laureati (1977), *Dall'Albania alla Slovenia con il 451° ospedale da campo della "Cacciatori delle Alpi"* (Foligno: Campi Grafica), p. 244.

54. U. Dragoni (1983), *Fiaschi in Jugoslavia. Ricordi polemici della campagna di guerra 1941–1943* (Alessandria: Il Quadrante), p. 75.
55. AUSSME, M 3, b. 475, report of the commander of the internal company of the Fourteenth Battalion of the CCRR "Milano," November 16, 1941.
56. ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, January 12, 1942.
57. "A trusted informer tells me that the Questura of Ljubljana uses methods that go against any humanitarian form toward political detainees, undermine the prestige of the Italians and of those who represent the law. In particular: during the nights of 15–16 and 16–17 December two young female detainees, under thirty years old, one of them a university graduate, were taken from prison in order to be brought to the offices of the Questura. Here they were tortured in order to drag information out of them and they were thus raped; a detainee was so badly tortured that he had to be taken to hospital, where he died; another man was beaten on the soles of his feet so badly that he lost consciousness; another had needles shoved under his fingernails and beaten without end. I informed His Excellency Grazioli of the above and he not only admitted it but let me know that he was inclined to investigate and isolate the presumed culprits." AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, note reserved for the chief of the general staff of the Second Army, January 13, 1942, signed by Robotti.
58. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 43, p. 277.
59. ACS, Divisione di polizia politica, "Materie 1926–1944," b. 215, fasc. "Zone occupate dalle truppe italiane," report from Milan, May 21, 1942.
60. ACS, Divisione di polizia politica, "Materie 1926–1944," b. 215, fasc. "Zone occupate dalle truppe italiane," report from Rome, December 2, 1941; report from Ancona, December 17, 1941.
61. ACS, T 821, spool 61, circular of Robotti, October 18, 1942.
62. ACS, T 821, spool 277, circular of Robotti, April 7, 1942. My italics.
63. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, circular of Robotti, July 23, 1942.
64. D. Rodogno (2002), *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri), p. 220.
65. Translator's note: the author of this passage continually uses the passive or neutral voice, for example, "*il sentiero che si percorreva*" ("the path that one followed"). Rather than use this awkward formulation, I have replaced the verbs with active forms, but the reader should bear in mind that the author himself seems uncomfortable with describing himself as taking an active role in the events he describes.
66. M. Casanuova (1965), *I°/51* (Florence: Il Fauno), pp. 130–131.
67. G. Ansaldo (1992), *Diario di prigionia* (Bologna: il Mulino), pp. 145 and following. On October 13, Robotti, with a teletype message, had informed the heads of the Second Army that "on this date 24 elements certainly guilty of Communist activity were shot, as a reprisal for the brutal slaying of the ex-bano Natlacen [Natlačen] stop." ACS, T 821, spool 277.

68. P. Brignoli (1973), *Santa Messa per i miei fucilati. Le spietate rappresaglie italiane contro i partigiani in Croazia dal diario di un cappellano* (Milan: Longanesi), p. 27.
69. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. 22, p. 154.
70. R. Overy (2003), *Interrogatori. Come gli Alleati hanno scoperto la terribile realtà del III Reich* (Milan: Mondadori), p. 146.
71. M. Mazower (2009), *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin); O. Bartov (2001), *Eastern Front, 1941–1945. German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave); J. Dower (1986), *War without Mercy. Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books); J. L. Margolin (2009), *L'esercito dell'Imperatore. Storia dei crimini di Guerra giapponesi, 1937–1945* (Turin: Lindau).
72. A different view, on this topic, is expressed by S. Neitzel and H. Welzer (2011), *Soldaten. Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer), pp. 288–298. This book was published when the Italian version of mine was in print.
73. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, p. 160.
74. Dower, *War without*, Chapter III.
75. M. Strazza (2010), *Senza via di scampo. Gli stupri nelle guerre mondiali* (Campanile Villa d'Agri: no editor), p. 146.

3 Roatta

1. G. Zanussi (1946), *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia. Giugno 1940–giugno 1943*, vol. I (Rome: Corso), pp. 180 and following.
2. The text is in T. Ferenc (1994), *La provincia "italiana" di Lubiana. Documenti 1941–1942* (Udine: Istituto Friulano per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione), doc. n. 53, p. 331.
3. O. Talpo (2000), *Dalmazia. Una cronaca per la storia (1942)* (Rome: Sme), p. 36.
4. G. Angelini (1946), *Fuochi di bivacco in Croazia* (Rome: Regionale), p. 79.
5. Zanussi, *Guerra*, p. 187.
6. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, "Riassunto di quanto è stato esposto dall'Eccellenza il Comandante della 2^ Armata nella sua visita a Verconico del 28 gennaio."
7. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, "fonogramma a mano" of Robotti, April 1, 1942, to the commander of the *Isonzo* division.
8. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, "L'azione dei ribelli del 1° febbraio e la reazione da parte delle truppe del C.d'A."
9. ACS, T 821, spool 224, report of the "I" nucleus of the second regimento of the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, February 5, 1942.
10. T. Ferenc (1999), *"Si ammazza troppo poco". Condannati a morte—ostaggi—passati per le armi nella provincia di Lubiana 1941–1943. Documenti* (Ljubljiana: Istituto per la Storia Moderna), p. 21.
11. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, report from the operations office of the Eleventh Army Corps to the high command of the armed forces, Slovenia-Dalmazia, May 27, 1942.

12. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, circular of Robotti, February 6, 1942.
13. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, report of Robotti to the command of the Second Army, March 14, 1942.
14. ACS, T 821, spool 277, "Stralcio per l'ufficio operazioni" May 31, 1942.
15. On March 25, Grazioli sent a report to the Interior Ministry that described various episodes of theft committed by Italian soldiers on Slovenian civilians. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, March 25, 1942.
16. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, report of Robotti to the command of the Second Army, March 23, 1942.
17. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, letter from Robotti to Grazioli, April 19, 1942.
18. AUSSME, M3, b. 501, circular of the commander of the Second Regiment of the *Granatieri*, June 4, 1942.
19. On the closing of Ljubljana, see M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), pp. 174 and following; J. H. Burgwyn (2005), *Empire on Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books), p. 141.
20. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, circular of Robotti, March 16, 1942.
21. A report of Robotti to the high command, December 16, 1942, numbered the Slovenians interned in camps at about 17,400, and about another 2,000 still in Ljubljana and "about to be sent to the camps." ACS, T 821, spool 389, report of the high command of the Second Army to the high command, December 16, 1942.
22. T. Ferenc (2000), *Rab—Arbe—Arbissima, Confinamenti—rastrellamenti—internamenti nella provincia di Lubiana 1941–1943. Documenti* (Ljubljana: Istituto per la Storia Moderna), doc. n. 328, p. 282.
23. Ibid., p. 35.
24. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 105.
25. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, circular of the command of the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, June 25, 1942. The same document is in Ferenc, *Rab*, doc. n. 175, p. 173.
26. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 142.
27. G. Piemontese (1946), *Ventinove mesi di occupazione italiana della Provincia di Lubiana. Considerazioni e documenti* (Ljubljana: no publisher), p. 67, document of July 4, 1942.
28. The most recent book to whose bibliography we can refer is that of A. Kersevan (2008), *Lager italiani. Pulizia etnica e campi di concentramento per civili jugoslavi 1941–1943* (Rome: Nutrimenti).
29. Burgwyn, *Empire*, pp. 360 and following.
30. Ferenc, *Rab*, doc. n. 355, p. 326.
31. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 359.
32. Ibid., p. 179.
33. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 178.
34. Piemontese, *Ventinove mesi*, p. 56.

35. The complete text can be found on the website www.criminidiguerra.it. The original in ACS, T 821, spool 499. For a comment on this order, see Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 183. According to Giorgio Rochat, the phrase contained in the circular 3 C was meant only to refer to operations in reaction to aggression. G. Rochat (2005), *Le guerre italiane. 1935–1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi), p. 370. The whole text of the circular can be consulted in an appendix of G. Oliva (2006), *"Si ammazza troppo poco." I crimini di guerra italiani 1940–43* (Milan: Mondadori).
36. ACS, T 821, b. 499, ordine 7000, April 7, 1942.
37. A reflection on this point can be found in Burgwyn, *Empire*, pp. 354 and following.
38. AUSSME, M 3 b. 84, letter from Roatta to the army chief of staff, March 12, 1942.
39. AUSSME, M 3, b. 84, letter from Robotti to Ambrosio, March 20, 1942. A synthesis exists in Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 358.
40. There are, however, examples of authors who considered the war of insurrection legal. See, for example, M. Monterisi (1938), *Diritto di guerra terrestre, marittimo e aeronautico* (Milan: Hoepli), pp. 92 and following.
41. E. Cataldi (1995), *Le stagioni balcaniche. Il II battaglione complementi Granatieri di Sardegna nella guerriglia jugoslava (gennaio 1942–settembre 1943)* (Rome: SEA), p. 77.
42. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 242.
43. This position has recently been reasserted afresh in Oddone Talpo's book. According to this author, the partisans did not obey a recognized government, did not openly carry weapons, did not have a recognizable symbol on their clothes (only the "proletarian brigades" bore the red star on their berets), they did not wear uniforms, and they executed a tactic, that of sudden attacks and ambushes, that was "intentionally treacherous." "But legitimate or illegitimate as they may have been, their principal sin was that of not obeying the rules and habits of war, especially toward the wounded and prisoners, particularly when they were dealing with Blackshirts." Talpo, *Dalmazia*, p. 570.
44. Among the German soldiers fighting in Greece, for instance, legends about partisan violence toward prisoners were widespread. See M. Mazower (2009), *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin), p. 159. Such legends contributed not a little to convincing the troops that the brutalization of the conflict, reprisals, and civilian massacres were, in the end, necessary and could not be considered war crimes.
45. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 283.
46. The commission gave its opinion at the request of the Greek government in summer 1942. AUSSME, L 13, b. 105, letter signed by Dino Grandi, July 23, 1942, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
47. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 184.
48. AUSSME, M 3, b. 84, anonymous report of March 26, 1942.
49. ACS, T 821, spool 216, report of the commander of the III battaglione camice nere da montagna. March 26, 1942.

50. ACS, T 821, spool 216, marconigramma of Taddeo Orlando, March 24, 1942.
51. ACS, T 821, spool 216, report of the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment to division command, March 26, 1942.
52. In the list of victims of the raids, Tone Ferenc indicates only one dead at Veliki Lipoglav, March 24, 1942. His name was Jakob Zupančič, and he had been born on June 11, 1908.
53. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 677, report of Orlando to the command of the Eleventh Army Corps, March 25, 1942.
54. See note n. 15.
55. ACS, T 821, spool 499, circular of Roatta, April 7, 1942. Roatta continued, "Without counting the fact that, despite all measures to the contrary, during the destruction already cited, individuals committed plunder, certainly not good for our prestige or to win favor with the populace."
56. AUSSME, M 3, b. 475, circular of Robotti, April 13, 1942.
57. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 189.
58. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 677, report, April 2, 1942.
59. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 67, p. 384.
60. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. 18, p. 110.
61. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 195.
62. Ibid., p. 195.
63. ACS, T 821, spool 218, proclamation of the Principal Command of the Slovenian Partisan Units, May 7, 1942.
64. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 199. In September 1942, Robotti threatened to shoot "10 guilty detainees" per "every victim of the Communists." AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, "Verbale del Gran rapporto tenuto dall'Eccellenza comandante in Videm Krka il 10–9–1942-XX."
65. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter of the division command of the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, April 13, 1942.
66. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 677, order of Orlando, April 22, 1942.
67. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 677, report of the commander of the First *Granatieri* Regiment, April 27, 1942.
68. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, order of Orlando, May 1, 1942.
69. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, report of Orlando to the Eleventh Army Corps, May 6, 1942.
70. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, historic diary of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, note of May 7, 1942.
71. P. Brignoli (1973), *Santa Messa per i miei fucilati. Le spietate rappresaglie italiane contro i partigiani in Croazia dal diario di un cappellano* (Milan: Longanesi), p. 15.
72. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, report of Orlando to the command of the Eleventh Army Corps, May 18, 1942.
73. Brignoli, *Santa Messa*, p. 16.
74. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, letter from Robotti to the high command of armed forces in Slovenia-Dalmatia, May 13, 1942. The text can also be found in Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 73, pp. 397 and following.

75. AUSSME, M 3, b. 85, letter from Robotti to the high command of armed forces in Slovenia-Dalmatia, May 22, 1942.
76. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, historic diary of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, note of May 18, 1942.
77. Ibid., note of May 19.
78. Ibid.
79. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 204.
80. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1317, historic diary of the command of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment *Como*, notes from June 4 to 7, 1942. Robotti wrote a scathing letter on June 7 to the commander of the *Isonzo* division, in which he complained that "the most elementary preparation is lacking, which would have imposed a concentration of superior forces…, and not only that, but the tactical organization of the action was also lacking." The commander of the *Isonzo* complained about the surprise tactics they experienced, the lack of capable officers, and the lack of efficient use of all the available weapons. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, letter from Robotti to the commander of the *Isonzo* division, June 7, 1942.
81. Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* doc. n. 75, p. 404
82. The report on the matter can be found in AUSSME, M 3, b. 325.
83. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, letter from Roatta to Ambrosio, July 2, 1942.
84. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, letter from Orlando to Robotti, July 8, 1942.
85. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, report of Robotti to the high command of armed forces in Slovenia-Dalmatia, June 1, 1942.
86. On the limits of the Italian army, regarding the training of officers and soldiers, see G. Rochat and G. Massobrio (1978), *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin: Einaudi), pp. 282 and following. On the period before the First World War, M. Knox (2007), *To the Threshold of Power, 1922/33. Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorship*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), p. 108.
87. Often, in memoirs, the authors explain Italian defeats with the soldiers' lack of motivation due to their weak Fascist "faith," or due to a sense of mercy toward the populace being attacked.
88. M. Knox (2002), *Alleati di Hitler. Le regie forze armate, il regime fascista e la guerra del 1940–1943* (Milan: Garzanti), p. 62.
89. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 189.
90. On the structural limits of the Italian officer corps, see also L. Ceva (1999), *Storia delle forze armate in Italia* (Turin: Utet), p. 262; Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 178; Knox, *Alleati di Hitler*, p. 62.
91. It was Robotti, however, who criticized the soldiers for letting themselves be disarmed by the partisans too easily: "We must convince the soldier that the rebels are not at all untouchable by fear, that a prone and weak attitude offered by the victim, could also be a shot in the back, in the delinquent certainty that the victim had been rendered harmless and inoffensive…It is moreover necessary that the commanders of the smaller units do as much as possible to encourage the less courageous, undermining their fear of

the worst and evoking that *amour-propre* that gives birth to courage and exasperation even in the most peaceful characters." ACS, T 821, spool 215, circular of Robotti, January 29, 1942.

92. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, report of Lieutenant C. to the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment, January 20, 1942.
93. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, report of Lieutenant P. to the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment June 13, 1942.
94. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, April 25, 1942.
95. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, telegram from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, April 16, 1942.
96. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1317, report of the commander of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts Assault Battalion, April 27, 1942.
97. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, letter from Robotti to the commander of the *Isonzo* division, June 7, 1942.
98. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Verbale del rapporto tenuto dall'eccellenza ai comandati di divisione o capi di S.M. il giorno 13 June 1942."
99. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 998, historic diary of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division, attachment 29, June 13, 1942.
100. ACS, T 821, spool 214, circular of Orlando, July 2, 1942.
101. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, circular of Robotti, November 15, 1941.
102. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1055, circular of Robotti, December 5, 1941. The captured soldier was later released.
103. ACS, T 821, spool 215, circular of Orlando, January 22, 1942.
104. ACS, T 821, spool 215, circular of Robotti, February 8, 1942.
105. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1056, circular of Robotti, April 19, 1942.
106. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, circular of Robotti, September 2, 1942.
107. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, circular of Orlando del August 21, 1942.
108. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, circular 5 C del June 10, 1942. Roatta was famous for the brutality of his circulars. Zanussi, *Guerra*, p. 159.
109. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1317, circular of Robotti, May 7, 1942.
110. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, circular of Robotti, May 24, 1942.
111. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, circular of Orlando, August 23, 1942.
112. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, circular of Robotti, September 19, 1942.
113. AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, letter from Roatta to Robotti, July 3, 1942.
114. AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, letter from Robotti to Montagna, July 4, 1942.
115. AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, letter from Robotti to Roatta, July 4, 1942
116. F. von Senger und Etterlin (2002), *La guerra in Europa. Il racconto di un protagonista* (Milan: Tea), p. 367; see also Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, p. 176.
117. AUSSME, H 3, b. 3, "Promemoria n.2. Missione compiuta nel territorio di Supersloda (2 Armata). Croazia—Slovenia—Dalmazia. 4–12 April 1943," p. 16.
118. On the technical preparation of Italian officers, a separate book ought to be written. One of the principal causes of episodes of inefficiency, according to archival sources and memoirs, lay in the ironclad Fascist law of

raccomandazione or sponsorship, according to which only those who had powerful friends could manage to make a career. This also happened in Yugoslavia. See U. Dragoni (1983), *Fiaschi in Jugoslavia. Ricordi polemici della campagna di guerra 1941–1943* (Alessandria: Il Quadrante), p. 10. The memories of the witnesses were further confirmed by a circular of the undersecretary of the Ministry of War, Antonio Scuero, of July 22, 1941, which condemned the increase in "pressures and recommendations though indirect and irregular channels," mostly committed by career officers, who preferred such a system to one that followed the regular *via gerarchica*. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular n. 54060.

119. Burgwyn, *Empire*, p. 278.
120. See, for example, M. Strazza (2010), *Senza via di scampo. Gli stupri nelle guerre mondiali* (Campanile Villa d'Agri: no publisher), Chapter. IV.
121. For example, the *Tradotta del fronte Giulio*, on June 8, 1943, published the article "I soldati sono buoni," which described a young boy who asked for help from Italian soldiers after the Communists had killed his parents, or indeed the vignette on the front page of the same paper, from January 19, 1943, showing an Italian infantryman protecting a woman with a small child threatened by two "Communist brigands."
122. AUSSME, H 3, b. 3, "Promemoria n.2. Missione compiuta nel territorio di Supersloda (2 Armata). Croazia—Slovenia—Dalmazia. 4–12 April 1943," p. 6.
123. Translator's note: Bengodi was an imaginary village in a tale of Boccaccio's, in which food was so abundant that there was a mountain of grated Parmesan in the middle of it, with cooks atop the mountain who would make ravioli and cook them in broth before rolling the cooked pasta down the Parmesan hill to the greedy diners below.
124. G. Ansaldo (1993), *Diario di prigionia* (Bologna: il Mulino), p. 55.
125. AUSSME, M 3, b. 85, circular of Robotti, May 22, 1942.
126. In Greece, however, there were also episodes of pillaging. On the subject, see A. Kedros, (1966), *Storia della Resistenza di Grecia* (Milan: Feltrinelli), pp. 130, 242.
127. ACS, T 821, spool 224, letter of the civil commissioner of Kočevje to the garrison commander, June 9, 1941.
128. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter of the commander of the Second Regiment to the battalion commanders, June 15, 1942. Following high commission reports of these facts, the regimental commander gave precise orders to crush "abuses of this kind." Ibid.
129. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, January 12, 1942.
130. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, March 25, 1942.
131. ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, April 25, 1942.

132. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1320, report of January 18, 1943, of the commander of the First Company of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts Assault Battalion.
133. AUSSME, M 3, b. 56, "Relazione mensile del servizio 'P' dal 13/9 al 12/10 42."
134. AUSSME, L 13, circular of the command of the Sixth *Bersaglieri* Regiment, July 17, 1941.
135. Zanussi, *Guerra*, p. 204.
136. M. Casanuova (1965), *I°/51* (Florence: Il Fauno), p. 61.
137. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter of the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment to the battalion commanders, June 4, 1942.
138. Brignoli, *Santa Messa*, pp. 126 and following.
139. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. 22, pp. 155 and following.
140. Brignoli, *Santa Messa*, p. 34.
141. Casanuova, *I°/51*, p. 135.
142. Ibid.
143. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, report of the Eleventh Army Corps to the Supersloda command, July 25, 1942.
144. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1036, historical diary of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of July 24, 1942.
145. Piemontese, *Ventinove mesi*, pp. 91 and following. The letters quoted by Piemontese are the only direct sources published after the war of which I have found no copies in Italian archives. Moreover, Piemontese's book was published for propaganda purposes, and thus it would be reasonable to doubt the trustworthiness of these letters. However, the official documents he printed in an appendix are all traceable to Italian archives, and thus we do not need to doubt the authenticity of these testimonies.
146. AUSSME, M 3, b. 475, phonogram of Orlando, September 1, 1942, 20:20. Extracts of the historical diary of the *Granatieri di Sardegna* division and of other divisions who took part in the operations of summer 1942 have been published by Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," part III.
147. ACS, T 821, spool 221, phonogram of August 5, 1942.
148. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, letter of the parish priest of Travnik to Robotti, August 1, 1942.
149. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular of Orlando, August 1, 1942. Orlando wrote, "Reaction against Communist brigands must be implacable and inexorable but must not degenerate into a reckless and disorganized destruction without distinction between the guilty and the innocent, something which produces results entirely contrary to those which we are promising again through these rigorous methods."
150. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, teletype of Robotti, July 30, 1942. Also cited in Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 223. According to Cuzzi, there were no consequences for those guilty of such crimes. On July 26, the daily report of the army corps said, "Mobile nucleus Macerata division. Continue raid area Sodrazica [Sodražica] at the same time movements *Cacciatori* division Stop Killed in combat 2 rebels and shot 2 others. 2 rifles, 25 loaders and 2 bombs Stop Attacks on garrisons in Kocevjano continue Stop." AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058.

151. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, "Verbale del gran rapporto tenuto dall'eccellenza comandante in Videm Krka il 10–9–1942-XX."

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1. AUSSME, M 3, b. 84, letter from Roatta to Robotti, June 8, 1942.
2. A thorough consideration of policies toward civilians of Ljubljana province can be found in B. Mantelli (2004), "Gli italiani in Jugoslavia 1941–1943: occupazione militare, politiche persecutorie, crimini di guerra," *Storia e memoria* n.13 (2004): 23 and following.
3. In a meeting held on June 14, 1942, at the headquarters of the High Commission, Grazioli informed Robotti that "in Rome it has been noted that there are difficulties in admitting a considerable mass of persons into the country who are to be interned, but for whom no concentration camps have been prepared. Thus the adoption of the provision suggested by the Military Authority is linked to the solution of the problem by a Central Authority." AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, minutes of the meeting at the High Commission of June 14, 1942. See also M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), p. 210, who dates the meeting to June 18.
4. ACS, T 821, spool 277, circular of Robotti, June 9, 1942.
5. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, command of the Eleventh Army Corps, "Notiziario informazioni n.62. Provincia di Lubiana," June 15, 1942.
6. Tone Ferenc indicates at Ljubljana, on June 11, 7 persons shot. On June 13, he mentions a further 15 persons shot, once again at Ljubljana. T. Ferenc (1999), *"Si ammazza troppo poco". Condannati a morte—ostaggi—passati per le armi nella provincia di Lubiana 1941–1943. Documenti* (Ljubljiana: Istituto per la Storia Moderna), p. 238. On via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine, much has been written. Among the most recent are L. Klinkhammer (2006), *Stragi naziste in Italia, 1943–44* (Rome: Donzelli) and J. Staron (2007), *Fosse Ardeatine e Marzabotto. Storia e memoria di due stragi tedesche* (Bologna: il Mulino).
7. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 216.
8. ACS, T 821, spool 61, "Raggruppamento dei reparti CcNn assegnati all'XI C.a. (non indivisionati)."
9. ACS, T 821, spool 274, order of the command of the Eleventh Army Corps, July 12, 1942.
10. A synthesis of the plans can be found in Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp. 220 and following.
11. Ibid., pp. 216 and following.
12. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058, circular of Orlando, July 2, 1942. In the list of Tone Ferenc, two persons are recorded as having been shot at Šentjošt above Horjul, July 3, 1942. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," p. 254.
13. ACS, T 821, spool 62, coded teletype of Robotti, July 4, 1942, to the Supersloda command.

14. ACS, T 821, spool 217, circular of Robotti, July 14, 1942.
15. ACS, T 821, spool 217, daily orders of the Eleventh Army Corps, July 16, 1942.
16. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp. 228 and following.
17. AUSSME, M 3, b. 84, "Risultati ciclo operativo conseguiti dal giorno 16 luglio al 15 settembre."
18. AUSSME, M 3, b. 475, "Attività della divisione dal giugno 1940 all'ottobre 1942."
19. AUSSME, M 3, b. 468, report of division command on the operative cycles 1–2–3–3b, October 17, 1942.
20. AUSSME, M 3, b. 472, "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla divisione dal 24 agosto al 22 settembre 1942/XX (ciclo operativo 'Slovenia'—complessi operativi 1°–2°–3°–3° bis)."
21. AUSSME, M 3, b. 472, "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla divisione dal 24 agosto al 22 settembre 1942/XX (ciclo operativo 'Slovenia'—complessi operativi 4°–5°–6°)."
22. AUSSME, M 3, b. 477, "Relazione sul ciclo operativo in Slovenia (complessi 1–2–3- e 3 bis)."
23. These numbers are taken from the daily bulletins from July 16 to August 25, 1942, in AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1058. There is no data for July 20 and August 5.
24. Data for the Frontier Guard is taken from the above source.
25. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," p. 26.
26. AUSSME, M 3, b. 468, command of the infantry division *Cacciatori delle Alpi* (22°), "Ciclo operativo della Slovenia—complessi n° 1–2–3–3 bis. relazione operativa."
27. AUSSME, M 3, b. 472, command of the infantry division *Isonzo* (14^), "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla divisione dal 16 luglio al 23 agosto 1942 (ciclo operativo "Slovenia"—complessi operativi 1°–2°–3°–3° bis)." According to Tone Ferenc, in Podhosta, on August 16, 16 persons were shot. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," pp. 281 and following.
28. AUSSME, M 3, b. 472, command of the infantry division *Isonzo* (14^), "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla divisione dal 24 agosto al 22 settembre1942/XX (ciclo operativo "Slovenia"—complessi operativi 4°–5°–6°)."
29. T 821, spool 62, phonogram of July 17, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
30. T 821, spool 62, phonogram of July 20, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
31. T 821, spool 62, phonogram of July 22, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
32. T 821, spool 62, phonogram of July 25, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
33. T 821, spool 62, phonogram of July 29, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
34. T 821, spool 62, encoded marconigram of July 31, 1942, to the Supersloda command.
35. T 821, spool 62, telegram of July 31, 1942, to the Supersloda command. A description of the massacre at Babno polje can be found in Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," pp. 24 and following.
36. T 821, spool 62, encoded marconigram of August 2, 1942, to the Supersloda command.

37. T 821, spool 62, Report of the commander of the Fifth Army Corps to Supersloda, September 2, 1942.
38. Ibid.
39. ACS, T 821, spool 217, circular of Robotti, July 18, 1942. The full text in Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. n. 18, pp. 149 and following.
40. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular of Taddeo Orlando, July 23, 1942, which ascribed to Robotti the order's text. Tone Ferenc attributes it to Roatta. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. n. 20, p. 152.
41. ACS, T 821, spool 219, circular of Robotti, July 23, 1942.
42. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular of Robotti, August 5, 1942.
43. AUSSME, M 3, b. 325, telescritto di Robotti del July 23, 1942. Si tratta di due villaggi distinti.
44. U. Cavallero (1948), *Comando supremo. Diario 1940–43 del Capo di S.M.G.* (Bologna: Cappelli), pp. 297 and following.
45. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular of Orlando, August 3, 1942, which contains Robotti's speech.
46. ACS, T 821, spool 274, circular of Robotti, August 4, 1942. In Italian, the text is as follows: "*Dispongo che dei partigiani presentatisi con armi, at cui est concessa salva la vita, siano passati per le armi quelli per i quali risultino accuse particolari gravità aut colpevoli delitti accertati aut se riconosciuti capi comunisti alt.*"
47. ACS, T 821, spool 505, circular of Roatta, August 13, 1942.
48. ACS, T 821, spool 62, teletype of Roatta to the commands of the Eleventh and Fifth Army Corps, August 12, 1942.
49. ACS, T 821, spool 221, phonogram of Orlando, undated.
50. ACS, T 821, spool 221, telegram of Orlando, August 27, 1942.
51. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1036, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of August 16, 1942.
52. ACS, T 821, spool 274, anonymous note of September 11, 1942.
53. ACS, T 821, spool 221, telegram of Orlando, July 30, 1942.
54. ACS, T 821, spool 272, order of Orlando to regimental commanders, August 18, 1942.
55. ACS, T 821, spool 221, phonogram from the command of the First Battalion to regimental command, July 31, 1942. This may have been the First *Granatieri* Regiment.
56. ACS, T 821, spool 219, circular of Robotti, July 23, 1942
57. ACS, T 821, spool 274, circular of Robotti, July 30, 1942.
58. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. 22, p. 154.
59. "I ask for a '*nulla osta*' to move to the morning of the 18th the beginning of the said program, also because word has passed through the populace that the start would take place on the 15th." AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, teletype of Robotti to Roatta, July 12, 1942.
60. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," doc. n. 22, p. 156. This was a practice, however, used previously in the war in Ethiopia where, despite the prior use of poison gas, various Italian aviators chose to bomb civilians. A. Cipolla (1936), *Da Baldissera a Badoglio* (Florence: Bemporad), p. 544.

61. P. Brignoli (1973), *Santa Messa per i miei fucilati. Le spietate rappresaglie italiane contro i partigiani in Croazia dal diario di un cappellano* (Milan: Longanesi), p. 25.
62. Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*," docs. n. 21–22. The quotation is on p. 154.
63. Ibid., doc. n. 22, p. 155.
64. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of August 21, 1942.
65. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of July 18, 1942.
66. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 222.
67. In an anonymous note on the prevalent spirit of the *Granatieri* division before operations, one reads that "in the above-mentioned situation, an artillery and aerial preparation of the kind foreseen might perhaps lead to damage to our prestige." AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, "Impressioni riportate da una breve visita al comando df. 'Granatieri.'" July 11, 1942.
68. AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, letter from Robotti to Roatta, July 29, 1942.
69. Both these quotations in J. H. Burgwyn (2005), *Empire on Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books), p. 149.
70. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, report of Orlando, July 29, 1942.
71. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, report of Orlando, July 31, 1942.
72. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, report of Orlando, July 31, 1942.
73. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, report of Orlando, August 10, 1942.
74. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, "Specchio statistico risultati 3° ciclo operativo dal 29 luglio al 13 agosto 1942 XX."
75. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1005, "Specchio statistico risultati complesso operativo 3 bis dal 14 al 23 August 1942—XX"
76. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of July 24, 1942.
77. AUSSME, M 3, b. 84, "Risultati ciclo operativo conseguiti dal giorno 16 luglio al 15 settembre."
78. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter of the commander of the First *Granatieri* Regiment to division command, July 28, 1942.
79. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, circular of Orlando, August 12, 1942.
80. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter from Orlando to the commanders of the First and Second *Granatieri* regiments, August 22, 1942.
81. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, letter from Orlando to the commanders of the First and Second *Granatieri* regiments, August 23, 1942.
82. T 821, spool 62, report of the Eleventh Frontier Guard group, July 30, 1942, to the command of the Eleventh Army Corps.
83. Ibid. In the area of Pugled, as well, the *Cacciatori* division had gathered, in August 1942, a good deal of information on partisans in the area. AUSSME, M 3, b. 501, "Notiziario informazioni—Allegato 1 all'ordine di operazione n° 13226 del 10/8/1942/XX."
84. ACS, T 821, spool 219, report of the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment to division command, July 19, 1942.

85. ACS, T 821, spool 221, phonogram of the commander of the Second *Granatieri* Regiment, July 23, 1942, at 17:40.
86. ACS, T 821, spool 221, phonogram of Orlando, August 4, 1942, at 17:30. The marconigram to which Orlando was replying has not been found.
87. Brignoli, *Santa Messa*, p. 27.
88. ACS, T 821, spool 62, daily report of the Eleventh Army Corps, July 18, 1942.
89. ACS, T 821, spool 62, daily report of the Eleventh Army Corps, July 25, 1942.
90. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1189, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, notes for the dates September 23 and 24, 1942.
91. Ibid., note of September 29, 1942. Soldiers of the *Isonzo* also shot a woman, in November 1942. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1318, *Diario storico* of the *Isonzo* division, note of November 3, 1942.
92. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1189, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of October 23, 1942.
93. Here I may refer readers to A. Osti Guerrazzi (2010), *Noi non sappiamo odiare. L'esercito italiano tra fascismo e democrazia* (Turin: Utet).
94. A. Rossi (2004), *Le guerre delle camicie nere. La milizia fascista dalla guerra mondiale alla guerra civile* (Pisa: Bfs), p. 54.
95. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1318, *Diario storico* of the Ninety-Eighth Blackshirts Assault Legion, note of August 2, 1942.
96. M. Mazower (2009), *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin), p. 353.
97. In an already-cited letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, the violence performed by the military was considered "stupid." ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, categoria A5G (II GM), b. 129, fasc. 102, letter from Grazioli to the Interior Ministry, January 12, 1942.
98. ACS, T 821, spool 61, report of Robotti to Roatta, October 26, 1942.
99. Ibid.
100. ACS, DS II GM, 1058, letter from Roatta to Robotti, October 31, 1942.
101. R. Montagna (1946), *Mussolini e il processo di Verona* (Milan: Mondadori), pp. 33 and following.
102. The total number of executions until May 1942 in AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, report of the operations office of the Eleventh Army Corps to the Supersloda command, May 27, 1942. Data for the other periods have been deduced from Ferenc, "*Si ammazza*."
103. AUSSME, M 3, b. 83, "Situazione forze e personale di aviazione alle dipendenze di Supersloda al 30/7/1942 XX."
104. AUSSME, M 3, b. 1060, "Norme tattiche dei partigiani," which reads, "Considering that our planes generally drop bombs from high in the air, the inhabitants are hurriedly rushed out by the partisans when our planes draw near."
105. AUSSME, M 3, b. 53, "Relazione mensile 'P,'" July 31, 1942.
106. AUSSME, M 3, b. 53, "Relazione mensile 'P,'" September 30, 1942

107. AUSSME, M 3, b. 53, "Relazione mensile 'A,'" November 28, 1942.
108. AUSSME, M 3, b. 56, "Relazione mensile sul servizio 'P' per il periodo dal 13 settembre al 13 ottobre 1942 XX." The commander of the Third Battalion of the same regiment, on October 9, wrote, "The condition of the Battalion's clothing is miserable, and the troop is obliged to work with its uniforms in tatters; the same if not worse can be said of their underclothing. This state of affairs, along with the lack of a second if not third blanket, is very clear proof of why the number of hospitalized troops is now continually rising." Ibid. "relazione sul servizio 'p' per il periodo dal 9 settembre al 9 ottobre 1942-XX°."
109. ACS, T 821, spool 271, circular of Orlando, September 18, 1942.
110. AUSSME, M 3, b. 477, "Sintesi operativa dal 18 luglio all'8 novembre 1942/XX."
111. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, pp. 234–235. A brief description in AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1059, teletype of the command of the Eleventh Army Corps to Supersloda, September 23, 1942. This document speaks of 2 officers and 44 soldiers dead; 1 officer and 29 soldiers wounded, some of whom died later; 2 officers and 34 soldiers missing.
112. All this information from the report of the commander of the 122nd Infantry Regiment in ACS, T 821, spool 273, "Rapporto sul fatto d'armi avvenuto a sud di Brod na Kupi il giorno 2 ottobre 1942 XX°."
113. Cuzzi, *Occupazione italiana*, p. 248.
114. ACS, T 821, spool 270, "Statistica risultati ciclo operativo 25 ottobre—4 novembre 1942—XXI." These statistics are, however, put in doubt by the "Bollettino del giorno 3 novembre," which says that the division shot nine persons. ACS, T 821, spool 273.
115. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Direttive impartite dall'Eccellenza comandante nel rapporto tenuto presso il comando di C.A. ai comandanti di G.U. il 19 November 1942 XXI."
116. This was a 1991 award-winning film which somewhat misleadingly depicted the carefree life of a small Italian occupation force on a Greek island in 1941.
117. E. Gobetti (2007), *L'occupazione allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Carocci), p. 190.
118. Also cited in Ibid., p. 190.
119. AUSSME, M 3, b. 48, "Relazione quindicinale del periodo 1–15 aprile 1943 XXI, sulla censura della corrispondenza."
120. AUSSME, M 3, b. 48, "Relazione quindicinale del periodo dal 16 maggio al 31 maggio 1943 XXI, sulla censura della corrispondenza."
121. Statement of the *Granatiere* Antonio Finco, in G. Bedeschi (ed.) (1985), *Fronte jugoslavo-balcanico: c'ero anch'io* (Milano: Mursia), p. 207.
122. M. Gigli (1993), *Classe 1921. Ricordi della guerra 1941–43 in Jugoslavia* (Rome: SEAM), p. 27.
123. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1318, "Attacco presidio di Suhor."
124. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271, *Diario storico* of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* division, note of January 14, 1943.

5 Gambara

1. "Crüwell, to whom it appeared clear that the enemy could only be annihilated with the cooperation of the Italians, continued to send telegrams asking, 'Where is Gambara?' They failed to appear on the battlefield, however, and for those fighting in Africa, the words in that telegram became proverbial." E. Rommel (1952), *Guerra senza odio* (Milan: Mondadori), p. 82, n. 1.
2. ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio riservato, b. 73, f. "Gambara."
3. G. Zanussi (1946), *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia. Giugno 1940–giugno 1943*, vol. I (Rome: Corso), p. 281.
4. M. Cuzzi (1998), *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), p. 256.
5. For MVAC formations (voluntary anticommunist militia) refer to Chapters II and III of M. Cuzzi's book, *Occupazione italiana*.
6. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1189, circular from the command of the "*Cacciatori delle Alpi*" division of January 11, 1943.
7. AUSSME, H 3, b. 3, "Promemoria n. 2. Missione compiuta nel territorio di Supersloda (2ª Armata). Croazia–Slovenia–Dalmazia. 4–12 aprile 1943," pp. 27 and following.
8. The story of this battle in AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1320, *Diario storico* of the *Isonzo* division, notes from January 29 to February 1, 1943; ibid., appendix 46, "Relazione sulle operazioni svolte in zona Vivodina," February 11, 1943.
9. This is the thesis of the Slovenian scholar I. Juvančič, quoted in T. Sala (2008, *Il fascismo italiano e gli slavi del sud* (Trieste: IRSML), p. 43.
10. ACS, T 821, spool 277, circular from Gambara on May 4, 1943.
11. AUSSME, M 3, b. 78, telegram from Robotti to the command of the Sixth Army Corps on March 3, 1943.
12. G. Piemontese (1946), *Ventinove mesi di occupazione italiana della Provincia di Lubiana. Considerazioni e documenti* (Ljubljana: no publisher), p. 85, document from March 23, 1943.
13. Ibid., p. 86, document from May 27, 1943.
14. S. Loi (1978), *Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito).

6 Memory and Oblivion

1. J. H. Burgwyn (2005), *Empire on Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books), p. 257.
2. C. Di Sante (2007), *Nei campi di Tito* (Verona: Ombre Corte).
3. The bibliography on the subject is boundless. Among others, the most recent are M. Cattaruzza (2007), *L'Italia e il confine orientale* (Bologna: il Mulino); J. Pirjevec (2009), *Foibe. Una storia d'Italia* (Turin: Einaudi).
4. S. Loi (1978), *Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Stato Maggiore Esercito), pp. 209 and following.
5. Ibid., p. 161.

6. E. Cataldi (1968), *La Jugoslavia alle porte* (Florence: Club degli Editori).
7. E. Cataldi (1990), *Storia dei granatieri di Sardegna* (no place: Associazione Nazionale Granatieri di Sardegna).
8. Cataldi, *Jugoslavia alle porte*, p. 101.
9. O. Talpo (2000), *Dalmazia. Una cronaca per la storia (1942)* (Rome: Sme), p. 571. For Eric Gobetti however, this massacre is not confirmed by the sources. E. Gobetti (2007), *L'occupazione allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Rome: Carocci), p. 192.
10. Ibid., p. 190.
11. T. Sala (2008, *Il fascismo italiano e gli slavi del sud* (Trieste: IRSML), p. 257.
12. T. Ferenc (1994), *La provincia "italiana" di Lubiana. Documenti 1941–1942* (Udine: Istituto Friulano per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione), p. 117.
13. T. Ferenc, *"Si ammazza troppo poco". Condannati a morte—ostaggi—passati per le armi nella provincia di Lubiana 1941–1943. Documenti* (Ljubljana: Istituto per la Storia Moderna), p. 27.
14. It is also true, however, that no doubt can in any way be cast on Tone Ferenc's authority on the subject.
15. Archivio storico diplomatico degli affari esteri (Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Historical Archive), series *"Affari politici 1946–1950, Jugoslavia*," b. 39, fasc. 16, "*Massacri di Ambrus e Sv. Caterina in Slovenia (marzo 1943).*"
16. According to a "hand-drafted phonogram" from the division command of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* to the army corps command, undated but from mid-March of 1943, the garrison at Ambrus, Blackshirts, had brilliantly fended off the partisan attack, with 2 dead and 20 wounded. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271 appendix 53 to the "Diario storico" of the division. Mirroring losses of March 1943, the division indicates 14 deaths in the losses of the Fifty-First Infantry Regiment, and 2 of those were Blackshirts. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1271, "Elenco delle perdite subite nel mese di marzo 1943—XXI."
17. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, report by Robotti to the command of the Second Army of May 12, 1942.
18. ACS, T 821, spool 271, "Rapporto del giorno 21"; underlined in the original. The document, in almost identical form, was published by Ferenc, *Provincia "italiana,"* pp. 216 and following, doc. 34. In a note Ferenc writes that he was unable to verify the truth of these episodes.
19. AUSSME, DS II GM, b. 1057, circular from Robotti on June 19, 1942. This is about the shooting of six CCRR on Mount Molinjek. See above, p. 63.
20. ACS, T 821, spool 214, circular from Robotti on July 25, 1942.
21. ACS, T 821, spool 439, leaflet entitled "Soldato della 2° Armata," signed by Robotti, presumably from April of 1943.
22. AUSSME, M 3, b. 65, "Relazione attività di contropropaganda per il mese di maggio." May 26, 1943.
23. ACS, T 821, spool 296. On this subject, also see Gobetti, *Occupazione allegra*, p. 192.
24. Public record office, War office, 208/4185, SRIG 38, May 26, 1943.
25. Public record office, War office, 208/4179, GRIG 114, October 18, 1943.

26. ACS, Divisione di polizia politica, "Materie 1926–1944," b. 215, fasc. "Zone occupate dalle truppe italiane," reported from Florence on June 4, 1942.
27. "As we were talking, I saw a wicker basket placed on the desk, to the left of Poglawnik. 'Are those oysters from Dalmatia?,' I asked Poglawnik. Ante Pavelic lifted the lid of the basket and showing me that seafood, that slimy, gelatinous mass of oysters, and smiling, smiling that good and tired smile: 'It's a gift from my loyal Ustaše: these are twenty kilos of human eyes.'" C.Malaparte (1963), *Kaputt* (Florence: Vallecchi), p. 429.
28. F. Focardi (2002), "L'Italia fascista come potenza occupante nel giudizio dell'opinione pubblica italiana: la questione dei crimini di guerra (1943–1948)," *Qualestoria* n.1 (2002): 160. On August 22, 1944, the communist newspaper *l'Unità* showed a picture of a partisan killed and buried by the Italians in Montenegro. The comment said, "Here's a document—in thousand—of the atrocities perpetrated by generals and fascists in Montenegro . . . A radical epuration is necessary in the army."
29. F. Focardi and L. Klinkhammer (2004), "The Question of Fascist Italy's War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* n.9/3 (2004), p. 333.
30. AUSSME, I 3, b. 53, transcripts of Yugoslav radio broadcasts on January 20 and 28, 1945.
31. The report in C. Di Sante (ed.) (2005), *Italiani senza onore. I crimini in Jugoslavia e i processi negati (1941–1951)* (Verona: Ombre Corte), pp. 103 and following.
32. The chief of the general staff, Marshall Giovanni Messe, in November of 1944, asked the Foreign Ministry to "strongly intervene" in order that Italians in Yugoslavia would be protected. F. Focardi (2006), "Criminali impuniti. Cause e responsabilità della mancata Norimberga italiana," in Luigi Borgomaneri (ed.), *Crimini di guerra. Il mito del bravo italiano tra repressione del ribellismo e guerra ai civili nei territori occupati* (Sesto San Giovanni: ISEC), p. 147.
33. G. Piemontese (1946), *Ventinove mesi di occupazione italiana della Provincia di Lubiana. Considerazioni e documenti* (Ljubljana: no publisher), p. 5.
34. Ibid., notes, p. 6.
35. Ibid., pp. 22 and following.
36. Ibid., pp. 23 and following. This regards the capture and torture of a policeman and a foot soldier on November 6, 1941, the discovery in Musulniski Potok of some caves with the corpses of tortured Italian soldiers; the massacre of some prisoners on October 14 1942 in Dresnika [Drežnica]; the discovery of several mass graves of Italian prisoners in Dresnika; and the massacre of a group of Blackshirts in Dob, December 27, 1942.
37. Di Sante (ed.), *Italiani senza onore*; F. Focardi (1996), "'Bravo italiano' e 'cattivo tedesco': riflessioni sulla genesi di due immagini incrociate," *Storia e memoria* n.5/1 (1996): 55–83.
38. M. Roatta (1946), *Otto milioni di baionette* (Milan: Mondadori), pp. 171 and following.
39. Ibid., pp. 178 and following.

40. G. Zanussi (1946), *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia. Giugno 1940–giugno 1943*, vol. I (Rome: Corso), p. 15. Zanussi's position was then widely reported in the official publication of the Italian army. Loi, *Operazioni*, p. 8.
41. Archivio storico diplomatico degli affari esteri (Foreign affairs diplomatic archive), Series "*Affari politici 1931–1945, Jugoslavia*," b. 146, "*Relazione*" by Mario Robotti from July 16, 1945, pp. 15 and following.
42. Archivio dell'Istituto campano per la storia della Resistenza (Campania Institute archive for the history of the resistance), fondo Palermo, b. 53, "Promemoria" signed by Orlando in July of 1947.
43. Orders had been given as a result of the concealment of weapons by the partisans and their dressing as peasants and farmers when they needed to shake off enemy troops.
44. The command of the *Granatieri* division, April 6, 1942, issued a circular in which the circular 3 C was defined as the "Gospel" of the Second Army. ACS, T 821, spool 218, circular n. 5752/Op., April 6, 1942.
45. The document is in: Archivio dell'Istituto campano per la storia della Resistenza, fondo Palermo, b. 53. The Yugloslav embassy in Rome, in January 1948, called a press conference to publicize allegations against Orlando and other Italian officers. D. Conti (2008), *L'occupazione italiana dei Balcani. Crimini di guerra e mito della "brava gente" (1940–1943)* (Rome: Odradek), p. 215.
46. Archivio storico diplomatico degli affari esteri (Foreign affairs diplomatic archive), series "Affari politici 1946–1950, Jugoslavia," b. 39, Ansa, "Dichiarazione all'Ansa' del generale Taddeo Orlando e del sottosegretario on. Achille Marazza in ordine alle accuse mosse loro dal governo jugoslavo indicandoli come criminali di guerra," Rome, January 14, 1948.
47. Focardi, "Criminali impuniti," pp. 129–135, 156.
48. One of the most recent books published on the subject is by A. Del Boca (2005), *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza), with a chapter devoted entirely to Slovenia.
49. See the appendix to this volume, p. 17 and following.
50. According to Davide Rodogno, "the exasperation of the Italian occupation policy often turned out to be the other face of its essential weakness." D. Rodogno, "La repressione nei territori occupati dall'Italia fascista tra il 1940 ed il 1943," *Qualestoria* n.1 (2002): 45.
51. M. Mazower (2009), *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Penguin), p. 353.

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