

# **Gjavato – Chronicle**

**By**

**Dimovski Gjorgji & Kochankovski Jovan**

**Translated by**

**Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart**

Bitola 1964

Dimovski Gjorgji – Kochankovski, Jovan

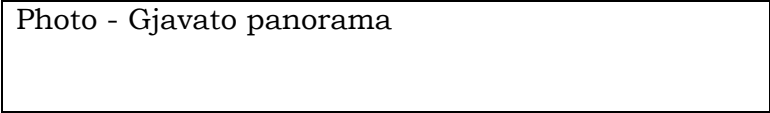
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Photo - Gjavato panorama



*To the first fighter from Gjavato, Trajan Belev-Goce, in recognition of his effort  
and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his heroic death, we dedicate this chronicle.*

*The Authors*

### **Translator's Foreword**

*“There are not many texts about my parents’ village, Gjavato so when I found Gjavato – a Chronicle I thought it would be good to translate it so that the descendants of this pechalbarsko village around the world could read a bit about it. The focus is on the efforts against the Ottomans and then the efforts of the partisans. The partisans and the politics of post war Macedonian are a part of a cultural divide that exists between me (born in that Macedonian community centre of Wollongong) and those born and raised in Macedonia. There are also differing points of view about whether the post war period was good for all villagers – the migration of such large numbers might be one indicator to take into account. I was kindly provided a copy of the book by Aleksandar Donski (taken with his phone at great effort!) because he understood the importance to me. Thank you AD. Unfortunately some pages are illegible so there are some gaps in the work. If I get pages 56, 57, 96-98, 107 I will make corrections.*

*I have added some links to resource information for the interest of readers. I have not added the photos from the original; readers should look at the original scan to see these. See <http://www.pollitecon.com/Assets/Ebooks/Gjavato-Hronika.pdf>*

*Another resource which I found of interest is the Macedonian Wikipedia:*

*<https://mk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%83%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE>*

*I urge readers interested in this topic to speak to their older relatives and record their recollections and photographs. If you are reading this because of an interest in family tree research (like me) you will find that the Macedonian, Bitola Chapter of the Archives are hard to access and research.*

**Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart**

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***By way of a preface***

*The author of this work presents the events involving the village Gjavato from its existence to the eventual liberation of the village – November 1944 and the establishment of people’s rule over it, on the basis of the oral histories of the surviving NOB (People’s Liberation Battle) fighters and those of contemporaries of older times on this terrain, and on the basis of the literature and a substantial number of original documents.*

*The authors succeeded in developing the content, and the collection of information about events, by following the necessary methods for this kind of work.*

*The division of the effort into was done appropriately according to skill. The described events are supported by documentation (either oral history or archival material) which are cited with footnotes.*

*Reading this work one can see the role of the village in the NOB, in context of the partisan movement and individuals, and its capacity and the conditions it faced. The fact that this activism takes so many pages to describe is worthy of recognition and is demonstrated in the effort that the authors had to put in. Throughout the text, the authors sought to be concise in their description of events without distracting the reader with excessive detail.*

***(Extract from the review of the academic collaborator from the Institute of National History Socialist Republic of Macedonian, Vlado Ivanovski)***

The new settlement of Gjavato is 37 km northwest of Bitola. The village is located at the foot of the pass called "Derven" (Gjavato) which presents both a natural border between the Prespa valley and the Bitola region. The village is on the northern foothills of the Baba mountain, the area called "Vrteshka" and Bigla mountain, north of Gjavato itself. The route Bitola – Resen – Ohrid is a key route in the south western part of SR Macedonia and important to the village. Secondary vehicle routes connect the village to the east with Dolenci, to the north, Gopesh, to the northeast with Svinjishta and, through which the main route Bitola – Resen – Ohrid with Kazhani, to the west with Malovishte and to the northwest with Sopotsko. Over a secondary route to the south, the village connects with Capari.

Gjavato is a mountain village.

The name of the village comes from the Greek word, diavaino which means "I pass" and from there diavatos or pass and from there slavified to Gjavato. At such mountain passes a tax was collected and it was called 'gavat' and in this instance, it was collected at the pass between Bitola and Prespa valley.

Events in Gjavato from Ottoman times have been connected to its specific location as a village on a mountain pass. Its responsibilities and privileges arose from that location. The villagers from Gjavato had to keep guard of the pass against attacks from various thieves, troublemakers, those outlawed by the Ottoman rulers etc, and on the other hand they were excused from the obligation to pay the levies and special taxes as "dervendzhi" or "minders of the pass." They achieved that following a request made directly to the Sultan. In 1513 on 19 July, the Sultan Selim I renewed his berat exempting Gjavato villagers from all taxes. Mehmed III did the same in 1595. In 1609 because they regularly and successfully completed their service in the Gjavato gorge, the exemption was again extended<sup>1</sup>.

The privileges granted by the executive organs of the Turkish government were not always observed by it, and they frequently made demands to which the Gjavashtani reacted in various ways. For example, in 1621 they refused to provide guard services because of the forceful collection of the "nuzul" tax which is described in the statement of Solak Beg the collector of this tax made before the court in Bitola. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the villagers giving support to some who fought against the Turkish rulers. One example was the support given to the Gjavato arambasha (Turk. harambasa) Belche and the participation of the Gjavashtani in the battle against the Turkish forces who tried to capture him, evident from the following: in 1638/9 the Muhazor Jusuf and the Martolos Osman "announce that Belche the Outlaw lived in the village Gjavato Bitola region." The government sent an army to capture him in the village. Taking Belche's side, the villagers fought the Turkish army armed with "guns, arrows, swords and rocks"<sup>2</sup>.

In one statement from that time it says: "After a battle with the villagers which lasted for a few hours, the Martolos Osman managed to decapitate Belche and the others escaped<sup>3</sup>. Because of the help that the Gjavashtani gave to the outlaw

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No. 4, p 52. All of the Sidzhili can be found in the Okol. historical archive – Bitola.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Glasnik of INI, year V, No. 1-1961, p111.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 6, p 43.

Belche, the court sentenced villager Mitre Nikle to death. The Martolosses responsible for capturing outlaws in the Bitola region said: "Mite Nikle is a resident of a village which has been exempted from taxes on the basis that they will maintain the gorge and road safe from outlaws. Instead they were collaborating with them and helping them. When the Martolosses surrounded the outlaw Belche these villagers armed with a variety of weapons, and with Mitre Nikle leading them, fought the government's forces<sup>4</sup>. In this battle, the villagers Ilija Gale and Petre called on the villagers to fight saying: "strike the Martolosses"<sup>5</sup>. In the same year, the Gjavashtani testified in the court that after the killing of Belche there were no more outlaws among them<sup>6</sup>. However, the situation did not settle, accordingly, shortly after 1604, Gjavashtani declared that they would take measures against the identified outlaws<sup>7</sup> "who carry out thefts in the towns and villages"<sup>8</sup>. They also made this declaration in 1650.

Because their privileges were not being recognised, on 20 March 1686, the Gjavashtani petitioned the Sharia Court for the privileges given to them by the Sultan's berat as a mountain pass village<sup>9</sup> to be observed.

In 1686 the frequency of the raids by outlaws in the Bitola Kadiluk increased. As a result of that Recip Osta Mubashir sought the Bitola kadija to send a force to guard the mountain pass and for the Resen kadi to do the same.

These circumstances continued in XVII, XVIII, and XIX centuries.

In 1712 with the objective of preventing raids by outlaws (ajduci) the Rumelija Valija (governor of the Vilayet /Province) issued an Official Order ("buruldija") to the kadis, the janissary serdari, the village guards (zaptii), the Derven/mountain pass Boluk-Bashi and others.

In 1717 Ali-Boluk-bashija was installed as the Martolos Bashija.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, every six months (usually from Gjurgjuvden (Feast of St George celebrated 23 April) to Mitrovdan Feast of St Dimitrija 8 November) or the other way) the kadija appointed (or extended the appointment) of a Boluk-Bashi, by official directive, (with a determined number of sejmeni ) to guard the mountain pass against bandits, highway robbers and ne'er-do-wells. The Sijils record the names of such Boluk-bashis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

1800-1801 the Boluk-bashi is Ismail from the village Persil with <sup>10</sup>170 sejmani.

1803-1804 Boluk-bashi is Ebu Bekir from Bitola with <sup>11</sup>100 Sejmeni.

1804-1805 Boluk-bashi is Abdija from Pribilci with<sup>12</sup> 100 sejmeni.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 6, p 43.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 6, p 56.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 6, p 128.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 7, p 11.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 12, p 75.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Sidzhil No 15, p 116.

<sup>10</sup> From "Turkish document on the history of the Macedonian people," Book I, p 27 Skopje.

<sup>11</sup> From "Turkish document on the history of the Macedonian people," Book II, p9 Skopje.

<sup>12</sup> From "Turkish document on the history of the Macedonian people," Book II, p 27 Skopje.

1810-1811 Boluk-bashi Jafer from Bitola with<sup>13</sup> 100 sejmeni

1818- Boluk-bashi is Osman from Bitola with <sup>14</sup>45 sejmeni.

And while the privileges of the Gjavashtani were extended over and again, the Ottoman documents from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries demonstrate that various duties/taxes were nonetheless levied on them.

### **How Gjavato of today came about**

Gjavato was not always in its current location. According to the stories passed down from generation to generation, the village used to be located at Derven, the mountain pass itself which in historic documents is called Gjavato. This is confirmed by the existence of evidence at Derven of a former settlement with foundations of the houses of their ancestors, as well as a church and graveyard.

The residents of the village at that time occupied themselves with agriculture: (growing rye, barley and wheat) raising livestock (goats and sheep) and carriage of logs (balvani) from Oteshevo to Bitola which were used to build houses. Because of the location of this village Turkish armies and Boluk-Bashi passed through it. The villagers suffered the most from the plundering by Boluk-Bashi and bands of thieves, which at some point burned the village to the ground. As to the reason for burning down the village, the legend says: "Two thieves with two bags of money stayed overnight in a house in Gjavato. The men in the house killed the thieves to steal their money and buried their corpses in the forest between Sopotsko and Gjavato at a locality called "Trebrush". The investigation made by their associates uncovered the murders and they burned down the village in revenge.

The legend provides a simple explanation for the move of the villagers and the destruction of the village. However, the real reasons were the uncertainty of life, inadequate assets, the disregard of the villagers' exemption from taxes and imposition of duties and the more favourable conditions in the location where the villagers had their huts for tending sheep, and the more fertile soil below Derven. So, the reasons for relocating were mostly economic. Moving away from Derven happened not in one go but rather gradually over a period of time starting in about the 16<sup>th</sup> century and ended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most villagers moved to the huts they had had for sheep herding. The legend says that there were 9 of these huts and were located in the same place as the current 9 maali /neighbourhoods in today's Gjavato. A smaller number left the old village and settled in Sopotsko where today there is a maala called "Gjavatska maala" and some settled in the villages of Brajchino, Bela Crkva (literally white church), Podmochani and Mogila.

In the new location the following maali were formed:

Pejchinva  
Saveva  
Kiprova (Topeva)  
Brajcheva  
Mitrova  
Dumova

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<sup>13</sup> From "Turkish document on the history of the Macedonian people," Book III, p 28 Skopje

<sup>14</sup> From "Turkish document on the history of the Macedonian people," Book III, p 28 Skopje

Gjumisheva  
Madzharova  
Mitranova (Gulabova)

According to statistical details the number of residents in the village was as follows:

Year	Number of houses	Number of residents
1881	280	572 <sup>15</sup>
1890		572 <sup>16</sup>
1891	240	Nil specified <sup>17</sup>
1900		1500 <sup>18</sup>
1905		1800 <sup>19</sup>
1921	424	1972 <sup>20</sup>

Immediately before the Ilinden Uprising the village had 240 houses with about 1500-1800 residents.

### **The villagers' occupations**

A large proportion of the residents set off for gurbet that is economic migration to Constantinople ("Carigrad"), Smyrna, Romania ("Vlashko"), Bulgaria and some to Serbia. There were two or three migrant workers from just about every home. As migrants they worked as gardeners, kiradzhija/barterers (trading cheese, olives, butter and similar). In doing this they learned Turkish, Greek and something of Armenian. Almost everyone who was a migrant worker borrowed money from merchant lenders Kosti and Nake Dalenga from Magarevo, Tale the tenant, Lane from Rotino (a Turk – Chiflik Sajbja or "estate owner"). The loan usually had to be repaid with interest (fajde) 4 or 5 times greater. If it happened that the borrower could not repay, his assets would be seized.

Those people who remained in the village, 20-230 houses occupied themselves as barterers trading fish, apples, grapes and other fruit according to the season. They bought the goods in the Prespa Ohrid area and traded them in Bitola or traded them for wheat in the field villages. The mountain location of the village required this sort of trade as it was poor in fertile land. That is why farming was secondary. Those that farmed planted rye, barley, wheat and corn. The dairy animals they kept were sheep and goats. The families well known for this type of livestock keeping were Gulabovski, Tuntevski, Grbevski, Krkovski, Topevski, Bendeovski, and some others. However, most of the villagers were poor. They made huge efforts to survive alongside Turkish oppression and drudgery. They were used as forced labour for the Turkish Chiflik Sajbji (estate owners) in Kazhani and Dolenci.

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<sup>15</sup> Etnographie Macedoine – Philipopoli – 1881.

<sup>16</sup> C. Gopchevih "Old Serbia and Macedonia" Part I Belgrade 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Sbornik for the narodni umotvorenija, nauka and knizhnina, izdava MHP, kn. IV – Sofija 1891.

<sup>18</sup> Vasil K'nchev: Makedonija – etnografija and statistika, Sofia 1900.

<sup>19</sup> DM Brancoff – La Macedoine et sa population chrei eune Paris – 1905.

<sup>20</sup> Prethodni rezultati popisa stanovishtva U kraelvini CXC, 31.1.1921, Sarajevo, 1924.



## **Church and Cultural Conditions**

At the start of the 1880s Gjavato had its own school. Teaching was conducted in the Greek script and the teacher was Jani from Malovishta. The patriarchate sought at any cost to have influence over Gjavato, and it did this in the school and the church by making concessions such as using Greek letters but writing Macedonian words, words in the local dialect. Along with this patriarchal politics the village leaders opposed its local representative priest Jani on behalf of all the villagers. This is demonstrated in the call by the villagers for the priest Jani to conduct services in a language that they could understand – Macedonian. When the priest resigned he was compelled to leave Gjavato and returned to Malovishta.

After chasing away the priest-teacher Jani, teaching for the children was suspended for a period. Then, Filip from Lera arrived to be the teacher for Gjavato and Gjorgi as priest from Voshtarani. They both conducted their vocation in Macedonian, understood by the local population. The school had 4 grades. Both girls and boys attended school. The books they used included: “Bukvar”(primer), “Smetanka”(arithmetic), “Chitanka” (reader) – first, second, third, and fourth, and among other education resources there was “Natural Sciences”, “Calligraphy”, “Church Singing, “History” and others. In addition to teaching, the children were taken to church where they read the Apostles, “Vjeryju”/Prayers and other hymns.

The children wrote on stone tablets /“plaki” and in their belt they kept a “divit” (Turk.: a rectangular tin box for ink) which held ink and a quill. The readers were in the Bulgarian language and the teacher translated the words into Macedonian, according to the recollection of a student at the time, Stojan Topev. The priest remained until the Ilinden Uprising. The teacher moved on before. Naum Petrov from Pesoshnica Lerin region and Anta from Ohrid arrived in Filip’s place. They continued the teaching started by Naum. The school in Gjavato accommodated the Gjavato children and also those of Kazhani and Dolenci. Classes were conducted morning and afternoon and there were also corporal punishments. The worst ones of those was kneeling on sand or corn with arms raised or caning on the hand with a switch, or occasionally permission not given to go to lunch (those with this punishment were locked in the school). The school year concluded on 24 May (the day commemorating Sv Kiril and Metodij). At that time the children were examined in front of their parents.

The teachers were paid by the Exarchate and the school was governed by a church-school board that was comprised of villagers. Before the Ilinden uprising it was comprised of Ile Chatalov, Bose Radev (Pavlev), Apostol Apostolov, and some others. On completion of 4<sup>th</sup> grade the education of most children in Gjavato ended. Elder Stojan Topev said “Those who wanted to continue could go to Stambol. That is what happened with Vangel Simonov-Bozhanin from Gjavato who completed his studies and became a bishop /”vladika” under the bishop name Boris. His education was paid for by the Exarchate. The Exarchate helped those children who sought help. We did not ask for any help and so were not given any.” According to the older Gjivashtani the chasing away of priest Jani and the acceptance of the exarchate teacher was with the goal of “pulling our Macedonian people away from the Greek patriarchate.”

## **The establishment of VMRO and the Ilinden Uprising**

After the formation of VMRO in 1893, the movement spread to Bitola drawing all honest people who were unhappy with the Turkish ruler and sought national freedom. The spread of the Organisation to Gjavato started around 1897-8. Boris Sarafov came to the village representing the Organisation with some others, disguised as barterers/kiradzhi or merchants, selling farming tools such as scythes etc on credit. That was the way they built trust among the people and created conditions to get closer to them and tell them about the Organisation. They usually stayed at the house of Kole Tuntev who became the first in the village to be a member of the organisation, the first to swear an oath ("Prv pod kletva"). It was not a coincidence that he was the first member – he had long been fed up with Turkish rule. Afterwards the propagandists of the Organisation came to Tune's as well – a farmer and kiradzhija. The meetings were held secretly, usually at night and in a home. At those meetings new members joined the Organisation, giving an oath. In addition to Tuntev and Tune, the older members from Gjavato included Kole Tuntev, Ile Chatalov, Mitre Grbev, Naste Popchev, Apostol Gulabovski, Mitre Krkov, Jonche Apostolov.

VMRO created its own revolutionary court in Gjavato. Its task was to resolve disputes among the villagers and to fine those who went to work as labourer for the Turks. That court attained such authority that the villagers no longer used the Turkish courts and used the Organisation's court for complaints.

The Organisation was joined by many in Gjavato. Its meetings were often held in Naume Kacev's house. According to Risto Chekanov they said that "there will be an uprising to free Macedonia from Turkish rule." Apart from getting ready ideologically, the committee (Komitet) also collected arms, forming a village guard to look out for the Turks, to keep in touch with the VMRO committees in the neighbouring villages as well as making military preparations – exercises with arms etc.

They bought arms from Ljubojno, Nivici, across the Prespa lake, from Konjsko and other villagers and from Kazhani. They even bought arms from some Turks (from the families of Kerim Genchov and Abdula Bachov). After that, weapons were acquired through the committee and from Bitola. The weapons acquired included guns, and different sorts of rifles (Fusil Gras Modele Rifle/gra, Bolt action rifle/barutni, Kapaklija rifle (first ottoman rifle to have a percussion cap), Russian Kranka rifle/called krimki, and Martini/ martinki). The weapons that were acquired were concealed in a hole made especially for the purpose in the village at a locality called "Glavishte". The Organisation in Gjavato made its own bullets. They melted the lead/olovo in basins and made bombs with bottles filled with gunpowder. This took place in Mite Ogrenov's house.

The Gjavato Organisation kept links with Gopesh, Smilevo and Zlatari. They kept links using couriers – Risto Chekanov, Tashku Gromarov, Todor Murdzhev and others.

The leaders of VMRO who most often came to Gjavato included Gjorgji Sugare, Dame Gruev, Parashkev Cvetkov, Slavejko Pop Arsov.

The Gjavato Organisation also had women members: they took messages (letters) and other items in flask, bags, earthenware jugs etc, as well as arms and

munitions. Among the most active Mara Koljupacheva, Srebra Prodanova and Neda Choneva etc.

In this period when the Organisation is growing in numbers, dealings with the Turkish rulers worsened. During this time two women were forcible made to convert to Islam: St Batkova and L Filipova, Simon Bendev, Vangel Bendev and the village priest born in Capari were killed.

The migrant workers overseas learned of the activity of the Organisation – Gjavato migrant workers in Constantinople (Stojan Topev, Petre Jurukov and Vasil Dodov), and migrant workers in other places. At the request of the Committee many of these migrant workers returned to Gjavato to join to uprising. 4 months before the Ilinden uprising the Committee formed military companies/Cheti. Gjorgji Sugare organised them in a military manner. A week before the uprising, Gjorgji Sugare arrived with Risto Caparec – a tailor and Naum Popov a shoemaker, to fit out the village companies.

These preparations did not go unremarked by the consulates in Bitola. The Austrian ambassador Kral in his report of 19.VII.1903 said: "The revolutionaries are zealously occupied with working on shoes in the town as well as secretly in the villages<sup>21</sup>."

The fighters in the companies lived in their own homes. The village gave 273 fighters in 5 companies with the following War leaders/Vojvodi at their lead: Apostol Gulabovski, Mitre Grbev, Naum Bendev -Bosbekar, Mitre Krkov and Naum Petrov- the teacher in the village. The companies at the locality "Glavishte" again took an oath and "kissed the flag."

2-3 weeks before the uprising, a trench was dug to protect the village at its front and on the road to Kazhani.

## **THE UPRISING**

On Ilinden, the Gjavato insurgents attacked the neighbouring village of Dolenci. Ten people, Macedonians from Dolenci escaped the attackers. The battles against the Turks lasted 2-3 hours and the village was taken. On 3 August the fighters were on the mountain and that evening they set fire to the haystacks and huts belonging to the Turks from Dolenci. After that, for a few days, no military action was taken. During that time the insurgents passed the nights in the village anticipating that a return attack and during the day they camped in the mountain. On 9.VIII Captain Sugarev attacked a convoy with munitions and food at the entry to Gjavato which had been heavily armed. Drawn by the fighting Turkish forces soon appeared and the insurgents were forced to shelter in Gjavato. While there, they dominated with field cannons after which the place was plundered and set alight. There were 20 dead among the insurgents, the Turks had 10 dead and injured, and among the villagers who did not take part there were injuries and 20 people (including women and children) were tortured.

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<sup>21</sup> Izveshtai from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, in translation, Edits and comments D Zografski, Skopje 1955 p 44

After the army of the Bashi-Bozuk and forces left the village, the companies again entered to the village and the road to Resen was closed for a number of days<sup>22</sup>.

The statement of the Austrian consulate in Bitola, Kral, included comments from the villagers: "On 27 old style, a Bashi-Bazuk from Kazhani was sent to Gjavato. The insurgents fought him for a full 10 hours and he had to withdraw. That night artillery fired on Gjavato so the insurgents stayed on the mountain and the villagers joined them there. The village was burned to the ground apart from two houses which the fire missed by chance. The destruction of the village by fire was confirmed in the statement of the Serbian consulate in Bitola Mihajlo Ristik<sup>23</sup>.

The population was left without homes. The Organisation arranged for them to go to neighbouring villages Gopesh, Smilevo, Oblakovo, Metimor, Malovishte, Capari and Strezhevo where the villagers were warmly welcomed.

The insurgents who died in the battles of 27.VII included: Mitre Shabanov, Riste Chetnikot (not from Gjavato), Stojan Kondev, Naume Minikot (from Dolenci), Risto Purdev, Simon Razmov Bozhanin and others. Other villagers who were not directly fighting as insurgents who died include: Laze Filipov, Mishe Jurukov, Goshe Zdravev, Toleica Bendeve, Apostolica Apostolova, Goshe Bubev, Mitre Macinov, Spiro Joshev and others. The Turkish army lost 5-6 soldiers and the same number again were injured.

During the uprising the Gjavato insurgents fought in the battles on Pelister, Smilevo, Slepche and other places. In the village Slepche the Gjavato company lost about 30 souls.

The Gjavato insurgents remained in the mountain, armed, until early October when they got an order from headquarters to collect the arms together. The collected arms were hidden in places not known to all the insurgents but only to those who were responsible for the task. The insurgents joined their families in the neighbouring villages.

There is an anecdote among the insurgents from the time of the uprising. When the Gjavato fighters descended on the Chiflik Sajbiite/Estate Owners from Dolenci they called out:

"Where are you, Beg Estate Owners? We will remove the head covering of your women and take your land.

The Turks who were in hiding in their houses called back:

"Don't do this Jordan, the Sultan will give you land by negotiation.

### **AFTER THE UPRISING...**

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<sup>22</sup> Izveshtai from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, in translation, Edits and comments D Zografski, Skopje 1955 p112.

<sup>23</sup> Izveshtai from 1903-1904 of the Austrian representatives in Macedonia, in translation, Edits and comments D Zografski, Skopje 1955 p103. Ilindenski Zbornik 1903-1953 Skopje 1953, s. 27.

Very hard days followed for the Gjavato villagers after the Ilinden uprising was quashed. Spread out among the neighbouring villages they received minimal help – flour from the USA, clothing for the children from Serbia, blankets etc. The rebuilding of the village started at the end of 1904 and in 1905 about 30 houses were built without any help for the villagers from anyone. Many did not return to the village but went to live in Bitola. In these harsh conditions, the number of migrant workers leaving increased. The largest number went to the USA. They stayed there for 5-8 years and returned to see their families and help them. It was unusual for families to join the migrant workers in the USA because their wages were very modest and if a family member got ill they were forced from work. That is why the migrant workers went on their own.

In 1905 Gjavato was visited by a mission comprised of the English, Russian, Serbian and Austrian consuls. In discussion with the villagers according to Stojan Topev the English consul said, in connection with the uprising, “Why did you shoot the Sultan’s forces?” The villagers were embittered by the words of this consul and did not say anything in reply.

Apart from the uprising being unsuccessful and the hardships that followed after its being quashed the duke Laze Macanov sought to support the villagers by saying to them: “Let’s not forget the Organisation, the fight must go on.” But because of the conditions in the village (displacement, disconnection to the organisation, low supplies of food for everyday life etc) there is little activism in this period. When VMRO continued its activism (Prilep and Rila Congress) the movement of the Gjavato companies were noted including the company of Pando Hadzhi Arnautolov from Veles.

Nikola Bubev was deported from the village to the Armenian city Dija Bekir. He was freed after a year. There were no other deportations.

### **HURIET/ LIBERATION**

In Gjavato they learned of liberation in 1908 from Jonche Krushjancheto who had his own company. Delighted by the announcement of liberation, Laze Macanov, Petre Konsulot and Risto Chekanov joined the company. Joining in the celebration this company set off from Resen for Bitola. While resting in Kazhani the company was warmly received and were hosted to a nice meal by the Turks. When they reached Bitola they were greeted by music and the leader of the company Jonche the Muslim women covered in headscarves threw flowers. A meeting was held at the Bitola barracks by the Macedonian and Turkish armies. A Turkish officer spoke at the meeting and said “ there will be no tyranny anymore. Now there is freedom. All the armed forces should hand their arms over to the Turkish army.” Jonche dismissed his company saying they should get together on the hill near Snegovo and bring their arms with them. The company members met at the agreed place with their arms and from there went to Oblakovo where Jonche disbanded the company and told his people to go to their own families and told them to keep their arms with them, not to hand the arms over, as the weapons may still be needed. The three Gjavashtani did as ordered and returned to Gjavato.

## **BALKAN WAR – BATTLES ON DERVEN**

Performing successfully in the battle against the so-called Vardar corpus of the Turkish army, in 1912 the Serbian armies neared Bitola. At the entry to Bitola itself the Turkish strategists Zeki Pasha and Dzhavid Pasha made a plan to try to defeat the attack from the north. The Serbian forces nonetheless applied pressure and began the well-known battle for Bitola. One unit of the Moravska Division II got an order the night between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November from army command to cut the road to Bitola – Ohrid (in the direction of Sopesh-Kazhani). Having regard to the strategic importance of Derven, it was occupied by the Serbian army. On 4 November battles were fought there without any change in positions. On the following day, 5<sup>th</sup> November, taking advantage of the fog, the Turkish army from Resen made a surprise attack on the sector Gjavato watchtower “Dolgi Rid” from which the Serbian army withdrew. For a short time, the Serbians took their former positions again. That afternoon the Turkish forces were spotted closing in on Kazhani. After some short battles with a small Turkish unit on Derven and its defeat, the Serbian veterans wanting to hold Derven under fire moved their forces more to the north. That night the Turkish artillery managed to pulverise the withdrawn parts of the Serbian army, and the Turkish corpses were dragged out “without interruption from the Serbian advanced forces who, exhausted by the battles, the poor food rations and the cold rain which began to fall that night leading to apathy<sup>24</sup>.

The second day, 6 November, in the morning, the Serbian army entered Gjavato. The Gjavashtani took no part in this battle. The Serbian army entering Gjavato after a short time managed to establish Serbian rule in the village. The president of the council was Milan Aleksik – Serbian but a good man. He took care to put in place the measures that the government (collecting together the arms which remained in circulation from the uprising) at the same time he was trying to help the villagers where it was possible. The Serbian Nationalist Chetnik Vojvoda Vasilije Trbik (*Formally the Chetnik Detachments of the Yugoslav army also the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland and the Ravna Gora Movement was a Yugoslav royalist and Serbian Nationalist movement and guerrilla force*) arrived and was violent toward the “suspicious” villagers of Gjavato. Spiro Filipov, Vasil Chatalov, Lasojca Purdeva and others were under suspicion that they had hidden arms were captured and buried alive or tortured. These and similar tortures and beatings were carried out in the open sight of the villagers. Seeing the inhuman behaviour of the chetniks toward the peaceful population of the village one officer of the Serbian army took action with his company to prevent the violence.

The Serbian government in Gjavato sought villagers to join. One group not wanting to join escaped over Pelister to Greece and from there to the USA. Another group that regarded the ruling force as foreign but favouring Bulgarian propaganda went into the mountains just before the withdrawal of the Serbian army in the first world war. The group from Gjavato included: Mitre Topev, Sotir Geshtakov, Stevan Tasev Belev, and others from neighbouring villagers. These rebels sent messages with other villagers about when where and in which house they were staying and that nominated house would be obliged to prepare food for them and shelter them. They

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<sup>24</sup> Zh. Stanisavljevih, Bitolska operacija 1912, Belgrade, 1952 p 326.

did not shave and grew their beards. One of the rebels, Stevan Tasev Belev turned himself in to the village rulers and told them which house they had been sheltered in. Taking account of what the consequences for the village would be if this were to come out he arranged a search while at the same time warning the rebels to leave the village. They were very stubborn. Not only did they not leave the house but they resolved to start a battle. The second time they were invited to leave they started a battle which lasted 10-15 minutes after which they withdrew. The Serbian army then killed Laze Purdev, Blazhe Rashejkov and Ile Chatalov for being accomplices to rebel forces. In addition, the three houses where the rebels most often sheltered were burned to the ground.

## **1915 AND 1918**

The first world war touched this corner of the world too. In 1915 the Serbian army was attacked by the Bulgarian army in this area. The Serbian forces were pressured from the north and east and withdrew toward Resen-Ohrid. A small battalion (on horse and on foot) withdrew through Gjavato with the two cannons, shot by the Bulgarian army. In the new situation, the outlawed company led by Mijal Mukev which until then had been hiding in the village, joined the Bulgarian units.

On 21 November 1915 a regiment of cavalry travelled in the dawn from Gopesh through Dolenci and entered Gjavato. The discovered Serbian soldiers dispersed throughout the village. They had different experiences: those 10 or so soldiers who were staying with the Chatalov family managed well; they were fed and well-dressed and so were not identified and managed to travel to Bitola. Another group sheltering with the Topev family behaved appallingly to the family. In this time, at this time those outlaws who had joined the Bulgarians enslaved them and shot them where the school was located. They were then buried there. Some other small groups sheltered in the church. When they were discovered their weapons were taken and were taken as prisoners to Bitola

Bulgarian rule was established in the village. And the mayor was Vasil Dodov. He remained in that role until the capitulation/surrender of Bulgaria in 1918. For that whole time Bulgarian and German armies were stationed in the village. The Bulgarian army was one regiment strong and its soldiers were distributed in barracks near the Gjavato church and the seniors in the various houses. The German and Austrian soldiers were placed in the homes and especially in the Gulabova and Brajcheva maala/neighbourhood and the Bulgarian military officers were located in the remaining 7 maali/neighbourhoods.

For the whole time of stay by the armies, they took wheat, sheep and other food stuffs from the villagers. The soldiers often stole more than they were allocated especially during the surrender in 1918 when they took away sheep and other valuables.

Gjavato bore the army requisitioning their food and thefts during the first world war but no other actions.

The first allied soldiers entering Gjavato were French colonial troops and then later the Serbians came. The French colonial troops and the metropolitan troops in Gjavato showed themselves to have a low moral standard in their conduct especially toward the women and girls.

After the military operations were completed in the first world war Serbian rule was imposed again in Gjavato.

After the first war the Gjavato population redoubled its efforts. The greatest difficulties faced were in getting passports. The passports were issued in Belgrade but were hard to get, and costly – 5 napoleons (French gold coins) for one. They overcame that difficulty by borrowing money. Most of them left for the USA – especially to Indiana (about 40 people). They worked as labourers with very modest wages. They were paid to work 10 hours and worked 12-14. For that reason, when there were strikes by workers seeking greater wages and a reduction in the working hours. They were vilified for this conduct and they even had clashes with the police. It was through this experience that the Gjavato migrant workers developed worker consciousness. Some of them became sympathetic to socialism as they had heard of in the Soviet Union. That sensibility firmed up in them after reading the socialist pamphlets and newspapers “Workers News”, “Capital and work” “People’s Voice” “and from “History of the SKP (b)” and others.

### **ELECTIONS 1920<sup>i</sup>**

In the elections of CHC in 1920 Gjavato had candidates representing a range of political parties – democrat Lazo Krkov, radical Mitre Chunkov, socialist Vojislav Tucanovik – a teacher in the village – a Montenegrin and a representative of the Muslim organisation which was ethnically Turkish from Kazhani. According to recollection of Apostol Murdzhev who a socialist agitator, all the surrounding villages participated in these elections and Vojislav Tucanovik was elected representative of SRPJ (k). In 1920 he was led away by the government and overnight he disappeared and government people were inserted in his place.

### **THE MIGRANT WORKERS IN USA**

The Gjavato migrant workers joined in the worker and union movements in the USA and bit by bit they developed class consciousness. Trajan Belev stood out among them (in USA in 1921), Mitre Chatalovski, Apostol Murdzhev, Vasil Talev, Ognen Stankov, Vangel Chekanov and others. Belev attended a political course in Detroit.

The progressive Gjivashtani in the USA were opposed to the VMRO of Todor Aleksandrov. As they were opposed to that organisation and favoured instead a Balkan federation they heckled and threw eggs to disrupt the effort of that VMRO. As workers they preferred union movements and attended meetings, joined the actions etc. At one workers’ meeting Trajan Belev called out slogans supporting the Soviet Union. As a consequence he was jailed and later deported. Mitre Chatalovski was also deported as a political activist.

### **6 JANUARY DICTATORSHIP**

In the local elections of 1928 Naum Dodov and Jonche Krkov were candidates in Gjavato. Krkov was elected.<sup>ii</sup>

Gjavato was impacted when in 1929 the constitution was suspended in Yugoslavia and a monarch-fascist dictatorship was put in place. The government needed a person who would act on orders. The mayor was, on the recommendation of Petar Zhivkovich, appointed president of Gjavato. The regime had the president in the



true sense of the word. He was connected to all the police chiefs and officials. He and the manager Gajik openly took from the villagers. Each migrant who returned from USA was compelled to pay him a “tax” which the villagers believed made the president and manager rich, leading to clashes with the villagers. There was such an encounter between the president and the returned migrant Kole Bendev:

“When I returned from USA in 1930 I felt free, self-confident and without fear. That led me to clash with the president. One time in the little inn, the president walked in, everyone stood up in accordance with the etiquette that the president himself had established but I remained seated and he stated he was dissatisfied by my conduct and told me to stand. I rejected his request which riled him more. In the quarrel between us which followed he insulted me saying that I had earned nothing in the USA. Later, at his direction I was taken to the municipality. When I got there he threatened me but because there was no legal basis to do so, I was not locked up.

The battle between youths longing for freedom and the president as an organ of the dictatorship was ongoing.“

The conflict got worse when J Krkov as the president of the regional commander wanted to form a shooters youth group. The municipal president held the appointed meeting for the establishment of that youth group and the election of the committee for it in impure Serbian. He requested that older people be appointed to the group’s management and for he himself to be the president. The youths Ognen Stankov, the brothers Todor Tashko and Mitre Chatalovski, Krste Iliev, Kole Bendev, Sotir Bubev, Dimitar Filipov, Tome Bendev, Boris Tuntev and some others withdrew and agreed not to join as members while Jonche Krkov was president of the group. On behalf of these youths, Krste Iliev spoke at the meeting that the group was for youths and that its management should come from among the young members. Krkov would not accept this suggestion and continued to seek to be the president. At that, the youths responded to him: “As you want to be its president, you can be it without us.” Not a single youth from Gjavato joined the youth shooters group apart from some Krkov relatives and some ethnic Turks from Lera. The president then declared the youths anti-regime elements and sent a report to the regional chief. That chief ordered that the youths be taken to Bitola where they were imprisoned in some barracks or other. They were kept there for a long while but paid a monetary fine of 70 denari and were released.

After that the village was divided into two groups. One with the government, and the other, the majority of the village with the youths. The youths took every opportunity to expose the president and with that, the government. When Mitre Chatalovski asked the president why he was pursuing the youths when he too was from Gjavato Krkov told him he would prosecute him for his liberal actions in the USA.

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Autumn 1929/1930 the Gjavato migrant workers in USA (Gary Indiana) got a letter from home telling them that the government intended to declare the old Gjavato – Derven where the Gjavato villagers will had their land, to be for the beys and sell it to Zdravko Isajlovik- pensioned officer. To blackmail the villagers the president hinted that the land on Derven would be taken. The migrant workers in the USA,

50-60 of them complaining to the Yugoslavia consulate by their representatives Stojan Topev and Mitre Chatalovski managed to prevent this proposed embezzlement and showed Krkov to be a man who only pursued self-interest.

In 1932 the villagers made a formal accusation against the president. The investigation revealed he had carried out many embezzlements with village funds. For example, the president sold off, for personal benefit, the wire that was to be used to build the fence around the school yard when the school was being built, (funded as a contribution from the sale of corn raised by the villagers and that was to be divided among them). Despite the evidence, Krkov was not convicted. The lawyer who acted for villagers was bought off and did not do his job properly.

1930-33 there is a staunch opposition to the government embodied in the president who was given an ugly nickname.

During this time the political activism of Trajan Bendevev who returned from USA as a politically developed person made an impact on the village. The impact was greatest on the most progressive villagers. Bendevev spoke to them often telling them about the Soviet Union and the workers struggle in the USA. This attitude among the youth was felt in the elections and pre-election battles.

In 1934 there were municipal elections which included the villages Kazhani, Dolenci, Ramna, Lera, and based in Gjavato. Before the elections the government tried to frighten the villagers in Gjavato. According to Todor and Mitre Chatalovi the police would go from house to house at night with bayonets on their rifles terrorising and threatening the villagers. The threats were put as follows:

“You had better vote for Jonche Krkov or you had better think carefully about it;”

“We will not give you permits to cut trees in the forest to sell;”

“You will have issues with us.”

Despite all the threats, the forward thinking Gjavashtani were not frightened. They went to each maala to agitate against Krkov in groups of 3-4. They said to the villagers:

“Do not be afraid; no one can do anything to you. Not even the police. They are employees of the government and if they do anything wrong they will answer to the King Aleksandar.”

Concealing their message behind the name of the king, their agitation against Krkov continued until the day of the election. Tome Bendevev, Boris Tuntev, Mitre and Todor Chatalovi, Kole Bendevev and some others stayed at the election place the whole day (from morning to night) to ensure that there would be no wrongdoing.

Krkov lost this election and Pande Bendevev (a more liberal candidate) won. He remained in the position until 1937. He was not a member of any party but he was honest, lived a withdrawn life because he was popular amongst the villagers. Another candidate was Simonov Bozhanin – an official. Because of his oppositional during the election he was dismissed from his role.

## **ELECTIONS 1935**

The political activism of the progressive Gjavashtani before the 5 May elections. The candidates were Vojislav Protik-lawyer in Bitola – democrat, Petar Kosovik -radical, and on the list on behalf of the United Opposition Petar Veljanov- trader from Bitola.

For this election campaign Josif Hristovski-Dzvoncharot and Kiro Milenkov, student came with Trajan Belev from Bitola to Gjavato. They passionately agitated against the government and Stojadinovik. As they had distributed leaflets, they were persecuted by the gendarmes. Following behind they had found leaflets at the place of Nachov Stefan in Gjavato which had been distributed by them. For this reason Stefan had been taken to the gendarme station in Kazhani where he was beaten. Petar Veljanov won in the elections.

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In 1936, the councils in Gjavato and Capari were merged with a base in Kazhani.

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In the 1936/7 school year Todor Angelevski from Lavci was appointed teacher popularly called by the villagers Tosho the Teacher (Tosho Daskalot). At that time Tosho was already one of the progressive teachers. Those he collaborated with were the teachers in the region: Boris Strezovski, Penko Zdravkovski, Ilija Jankulovski, Mitrovik Dragoljub, and others. Tosho found a fertile ground for political activity in Gjavato. That environment above all included the group of Gjavashtani with whom Tosho became a close collaborator especially Trajan Belev and Jonche Murdzhevski. He gained a position of trust and respect in the village. He was very honest and was always interested in the problems that the villagers experienced and this meant that he was much loved, even more so because he came from a wealthy family but was on the side of the poor and against the government.

### **CANCELLED ELECTIONS**

Political clashes kept happening in Gjavato but would occur especially around elections whether local council elections or parliamentary. In the 1937 local council elections for a merged council covering a greater territory, Jonche Krkov put himself forward as a candidate again supported by the government through the Municipal Mayor Danial Konstantinovik.

With the benefit of activism of Trajan Belev and Tosho Daskalot the village opposition takes on a better organised and more political character. It becomes more revolutionary and takes on tangible political actions. Demonstrations were organised in Capari where 120 Gjavashtani took part. Mitre Chatalovski spoke at the demonstration. His main target was Jonche Krkov and exposing his performance as president. Apart from other things Mitre said in his speech: "We have not come to Capari to drink wine and rakija but rather with one aim and that is to elect one individual who will represent us before the King's Regency. To elect an honest individual who will protect our interests." The gathered villagers from Gjavato and Capari decided on Mitre Vasilov from Capari and Todor Gagov from Gjavato as candidates. While still in Capari the villagers had agreed to keep back 100 votes in reserve to determine the election in favour of one of their candidates. However, the votes were allocated to Jonche Krkov leading to his win by 66 votes thanks to the votes from the Turkish population in the council which was favoured by the government and because the Odzha from Lera used his influence on the Muslims in favour of Krkov.

Anticipating the poor outcome of the elections and that they had two candidates, the Gjavashtani could not reconcile to the win of Jonche Krkov, at 10 minutes

before the conclusion of the elections, they created an incident at the election polling place which caused the result to be cancelled and the elections called afresh. Todor Chatalovski one of the participants in this incident in connection with this, recalls: "At the election polling place (held in the buffet) I entered with Tashko Chatalovski, Sotir Bubev, Tome Bendev. Jonche Krkov was there and he asked Tashko:

What do you want?

We all came – answered Tashko – to see the results of the elections

I will show the results to whomsoever I want, but not to you – answered Krkov.

At that, Tashko immediately took the kerosene lamp and broke it and at the same time took the polls and began to tear them up while Sotir Bubev and Tome Bendev finished the tearing. I put the torn polls into my pockets so that they could not put them back together after we left. Then Tosho and Jonche started to fight leading to a general melee. The inkwells were spilled. At the time of the incident, gendarmes had arrived at the station and when they were informed what had occurred they immediately set off for the polling place. After we had torn up the poll pages we returned to see what was going on. But they locked up Tashko and Sotir. That very night they were taken to the gendarme's station where they were restrained by chains on their wrists to the bed. The gendarmes threatened them but did not beat them. On the second day they locked us (ie Todor Chatalovski and Tome Bendev) and we ended up in the same place. We were taken on foot from Kazhani to Bitola – a road of 18 km. We were taken to the council where the mayor pestered and slapped us."

During this time the supporters of the prisoners made complaints and implored the commander of the division/divisziija. After three days of imprisonment the prisoners were let go and they were permitted to defend their charges while out free. The prosecutor was Vojislav Protik whereas, the defender was the lawyer from Bitola Jovan Altiparmak who did this without payment. The fine for Tome Bendev and Todor Chatalovski was 2000 dinars – on a 2 year condition, and Sotir Bubev and Tashko Chatalovski were also fined 2000 dinars but on a 1 year condition<sup>iii</sup>.

Trajan Belev and Tosho did not directly take part in this political action by the progressive political activists from Gjavato but the action was the natural consequence of their political work amongst the villagers of Gjavato.

The villagers developed the idea of fresh elections. They took place a month later. This time the Gjivashtani and Caparci managed to decide on one candidate instead of two. That was the Gjivashtanec Todor Gagov as the other candidate, the one from Capari, withdrew in favour of Gagov. At the election, Jonch Krkvo was defeated by more than 500-600 votes.

### **STRIKE IN THE MILL**

There was a mill on the stone road, in the village of Kazhani (today there are just ruins) owned by Dimche Toljevik from Struga. In 1938 6 people from Gjavato and one from Capari worked in that mill. Their working day was 10-16 days long and their daily pay was 8 dinars. The workers also had no social security and so when there was an inspection the owner hid them. Once on the way to Resen Dragi Tozija

who was a student in Belgrade stopped by. Stopping to rest, Tozija started to talk to them and found out about the conditions they worked under in the mill and encouraged them to fight for their workers' rights. As the workers were not organised into unions, they had to become members so that they could be protected and supported in their demands by the Union. To that end one of the workers who was authorised by his colleagues arrived in Bitola where he became a member in the URS unions. They got membership books and paid their membership dues of 5 dinars per worker. Following this, the workers sought from their employer Tiljevik to enter into a work agreement with them but he did not agree. After 20 days of leaving work the workers succeeded in getting their daily pay increased from 8 to 20 dinars and for all of them to have social security. This strike occurred around the same time as the strike in the Bitola mill "Dragor."

Photo of the Kazhani mill

### **1938 ELECTIONS**

The political struggle manifested in all of the previous elections got a strong boost at the parliamentary elections of 1938. The candidates for this election were: Jovan Altiparmak – lawyer from Bitola and Vojislav Protik also a lawyer as representatives of the regime, and Petar Veljanov a trader from Bitola as a representative of the United Opposition. The candidates took advantage of various propaganda sources argued intensely among themselves. The Gjavashtani had always been opposed to protik who was supported by the former president and his supporters.

At this time Trajan Belev was one of the most prominent political opponents of the regime. Dressed as a poor man he went into the neighbouring villages and provided information to the villagers against the government whether through general conversations, through speeches or distributing leaflets. As he had a talent for public speaking and making a connection with others, Belev was very successful in his efforts and increased the size of the group of like-minded people.

As a candidate Protik had an inglorious showing in the parliamentary elections. Wherever he showed up in the village, obstacles were put in his way. For example: sometimes the air was let out of the tyres on his car, another time, tins were tied to his car and he was laughed at. When he was giving a speech the villagers called out:

"Protik lies, lies a lot

But none of his lies help him."

Among the opponents of the two candidates there were frequent fights, bribes, and attempted bribes. Protik offered a large amount of money to the progressive Gjavashtani, cut in half, on the condition that they would vote for whoever they wanted but would not agitate against him and not interfere in his campaigning. This reasonably appealing offer was rejected by them with the words: "we will not sell ourselves for money." At these elections Jonche Altiparmak got more votes, from those who had been bribed and also those persuaded by him.

In Gjavato in the course of the political battles connected to the election against the regime the following stood out: Trajan Belev, Tosho Daskalot, Ilija Jankulovski, Dimitrija Filipov, Kole Bendev, the brothers Todor, Mitre and Tosho Chatalovski, Metodija Macanov, Krste Iliev, Todor Perdulov, Sotir Bubev and many others.

### **BUY-SELL COOPERATIVE**

As a consequence of the work of Trajan Belev the progressive Gjavashtani and the teachers, especially Todor Angelevski – Tosho Daskalot, in 1938 with the goal of opposing the private village merchants formed a cooperative for buying and selling goods. On the other hand the initiators wanted the Coop to be used as a place to gather the villagers together and to seek to influence them in progressive thinking. The preparations for a coop were undertaken under the guidance of the progressive teachers from the village. In accordance with the government regulations, a founding assembly was convened which was attended by about thirty people. Those villagers with the most assets who were regarded as prominent owners of this sort of activity thought of it sceptically and did not attend the meeting. All the same the meeting was held at the premises of the school. A managing committee was established from those that did attend:

Kole Bendev – president

Ilija Jankulovski (teacher) – bookkeeper

Metodija Macanov (labourer) – shopkeeper / magacioner who was also well read.

At the start only 10 families joined up. But the number kept creeping up and after a few months over half of the families in the village were members. The coop used the premises of the former council. The start-up capital was formed from the membership fees of each family at 100 dinars each. This money was used to buy the initial items needed for the work of the coop and products that the villagers wanted to buy (salt, sugar, oil, kerosene and so on). After the establishment of this coop, the private traders in the villagers filled up their shops with goods to compete with the coop and try to stop it succeeding. Despite these efforts the coop operated and even flourished. Some of the villagers were better able to get their articles and this made those who established it think about growing it, while at the same time the number of members grew.

The premises of the coop grew tighter by the day as the stock that it offered grew and the remaining area was not enough to turn around in. For that reason the members started preparing the former school building (burned by fire) to move the coop to. In this too the progressive teachers Todor Angelevski and Ilija Jankulovski were the first in this activity. The remaining teachers including the principal mocked the effort in rebuilding the premises for the coop to move to. Thanks to the well organised work, the coop members helped by villagers who were not members especially including the youth from Gjavato the building was quickly repaired. A café called “Gjavato Youth” was opened at the site. The objective for which this coop had been established had been reached.

During 1939 the coop played the role that the organisers had wanted for it before it had been formed. It was a place where almost all people and youth could gather. A big contribution to this was the radio bought using a loan (operating on batteries) and the formation of a library which held mostly progressive literature. The

population had the greatest interest in the news about international events such as the expansion of Germany at the expense of other countries, the position adopted by England, USA, USSR toward Germany at the commencement of the second world war with the attack on Poland, the stance of Yugoslavia toward those events and so on. There were discussions about those matters, people took positions on these political and military events. Trajan Belev, Tosho Daskalot, Ilija Jankulovski took leading roles in these discussions, explaining the objectives and the ideas behind fascism. They started discussions on lie in the Soviet Union and Belev, as a long time adherent to socialist ideas was always open and promoted the socialist way of life, that is life in the Soviet Union. As a result of this type of discussion he was under suspicion and his home was searched and then Belev locked up in the gendarmerie station in Kazhani. There he was interrogated and accused but he thought of a clever way to remove himself from the accusations. He was released a short time after being locked up because there was not sufficient evidence to charge and convict him.

Some books were bought for the coop library by progressive authors and publishers. The most widely read publications were those of the “Nolitovite” editions which also included prohibited literature which was shared secretly with only those most progressive and trusted people in the village. Reading became quite popular especially in the winter months. Most popular were the books about new society types that is about the socialism and life in the USSR, the dealings between people and the mechanisation of the means of production, the collective farms and so on. After they were read, those books led to discussions in the coop. The shop keeper M Macanov thought to provide a book to each person that would satisfy that person’s interest. As shopkeeper and librarian, he was monitored by the people in government, and he also had to be very careful about who he gave what book to. In the village, people also read books from the personal library of Todor Angelevski which was a very rich collection, such as for example, “Leb,” by A Tolstoy, “Shirom Sveta” , “USSR in pictures and words,” “What I saw in the Soviet Union,” “Laws of Nature and the Power of people,” published by “Sedma Sila” and other books which dealt with the problems faced by people in capitalism and socialism.

In Gjavato the political agitators Todor Belev and Tosho Daskalot were the most influential. They gathered the most progressive villagers around them which with their actions during the election campaigns identified themselves as an anti-regime group. Tosho shared with them the large amount of progressive literature he had, and also shared were the books from the coop’s library, creating interest in reading but also discussing the books they had read. The discussions all had the same objective and that was the propagation of the communist ideal. These ideals were especially appealing to the village families that were poor/pechalba families.

Photo of Todor Angelevski

It is interesting that Tosho as a teacher in the school in Gjavato openly sometimes used teaching to influence and promote USSR sympathies, at that time the only symbol of socialism in the world. Some of his students provide an example: “During lessons on agriculture Tosho would often stand in front of the map of Europe and would put this question to us:

- Children, which is the biggest country in the world?

and we, accustomed to this question, would call out

- Russia!

Looking at the broad green expanses of Russia on the map there grew in us a sympathy for this huge Slav nation.”

The principal of the school counselled Tosho about these sorts of talk with the students.

This activity by Belev and Tosho and through the coop led to the progressive villagers getting closer, to have discussions and form perspectives in relation to the development of society and political events. All of this together led to the blossoming of conditions for the establishment of a party cell.

### **FORMATION OF THE PARTY CELL**

Bogoja Fotev the member of the Local committee from Bistrica was assigned the task of forming a party cell in Gjavato. The party cell was formed in the month of March 1940. Its first secretary was the teach Todor Angelevski and Trajan Belev and Ilija Jankulovski were members. However it really came into being when Cane Svetiev and Josif Hristovski-Dzvoncharot arrived in Gjavato in August for an audit. From the meeting that was held in Laze Jurukov’s house the members of the cell in Gjavato are known. They were people who had worked in educational groups, Trajan Belev, Todor Angelevski – Tosho and Ilija Jankulovski that is the first members of the party cell established by Bogoja Fotev. From August 1940 the party cell in Gjavato was comprised of:

1. Trajan Belev
2. Todor Angelevski – Tosho Daskalot
3. Ilija Jankulovski
4. Kole Bendev
5. Krste Iliev
6. Dimitar Filipov
7. Metodija Macanov
8. Todor Chatalovski
9. Mitre Chatalovski
10. Tashko Chatalovski
11. Sotir Bubev

At this meeting local man Trajan Belev was appointed secretary of the party cell, an older communist, political aware, authoritative – a people’s man who among the villagers was known as a poor man but upstanding who was always on the side of those whose rights were being denied. Belev, in his straightforward and close communication with the people aimed to popularise the struggle by KPJ.

At the meeting they talked about what a communist should be like. It was said that he should be exemplary for the villagers in his honesty, integrity and political awareness. They also discussed the nature of the work of the party cell that is, its organising operations. In addition, at this meeting, the leaders said that they should continue to work with the more progressive youths and to take steps to form a SKOJ organisation.



From September 1940 the party cell follows a regular organisational operation. The meetings were held once a week, in the houses or agreed places outside in the village so that they would not be noticed by the other villagers and the government. At the regular meetings they worked through ideological themes, lectures were given on the history of SKP (b) which in Gjavato taken only from the last chapter. In addition they read articles from banned KPJ newspapers: "Proletariat," [Proleter] "Spark," [Iskra], "Communist" [Komunist], of which they received only one copy. By distributing leaflets to people's doors, sticking the same leaflets at the water springs, and writing slogans on the walls, the KPJ members created a sense in Gjavato that the Party was pursuing the struggle and lived with the same problems as the working man. Such actions were usually done on Saturday night.

Implementing the task of getting more youth to be members of SKOJ, the party cell paid particular attention to activity with the youth. For such work Metodija Macanov was selected as being the most suited. Earlier on he had in fact already been in contact with the youth as the shopkeeper and librarian in the coop.

The events in the world from day to day became more and more turbulent. That is why the interest of the villagers to hear the radio emissions grew. The coop was now continuously visited especially at night when the news could be heard more easily. The news most commonly listened to were those from Moscow, Sofija and sometimes Belgrade. When the radio apparatus had been acquired the gendarmerie based in Kazhani started to carefully follow what stations were being listened to. For that reason the party organisation took particular care. It arranged for its members and especially the progressive youth Jonche Murdzhevski, Bendeovski Gora, Mijal Grbevski, Lazo Lasovski and others to keep guard around the coop while they were listening to the news.

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Some months after the formation of the party cell Pero Jovanovski-Tikvarot came to Gjavato for an audit. In his presence the party cell had a meeting discussing the position of the Party cell and the issue of its expansion – accepting new members. On the issue of accepting new members there was a discussion: whether those who had voted for Stojadinovik could be accepted as members of the Party. They concluded that that did not have to be an obstacle if they were people who could be genuine members of KPJ.

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The Gjavato party cell maintained a tie with Bitola and Resen. This tie was maintained at first through Trajan Belev and later through Kole Bendelev, who as a chauffeur could more frequently go to Bitola and Resen. In addition to directives he transferred party materials, people – party instructors and the like. Bendelev maintained ties with Stevan Naumov-Stiv, Bozhinovski Peco, Topalovski Ilija, Kole Kaninski and other party organisers. In addition to the direct ties, there was a channel that passed through Gjavato, via the party cell, which was the Bitola-Prespa link.

Autumn 1940 the secretary of the Provincial committee of KP, Macedonia Blazho Orlandik came to Gjavato for an audit. The meeting between him and the members of the party cell was held in the house of Gjorgji Jurukovski. The main topic of

discussion at this meeting the expansion of the party cell in Gjavato as well as the formation of a SKOJ group of the youth education groups which existed in the village and in the neighbouring villages. After this meeting Kole Bendelev took Orlandik to Podmochani, Prespa.

The leaders of the party cell in Gjavato were assigned the task of gathering together sympathisers, putting together education groups and the establishment of party cells in neighbouring villages. The Gjavato communists using various means (village weddings, market days, and so on) were in regular contact with the more progressive villagers and worked out who they could count on. In this Trajan Belev was most active who, with the help of the other communists managed to form education groups in other villages (Rotino, Bratindol, Dolenci) and a party cell in Lera. Implementing this task the Gjavato party organisation went beyond the bounds of its own village.

In parallel with implementing this task Belev and Tosho Daskalot as the most prominent in the area in Gjavato often also worked one on one with sympathisers. Entrusting them with specific tasks and in seeing them fulfilled they could verify which individuals they could accept as members of the KPJ. In the autumn of 1940 the following were accepted as members in this way: Jonche Murdzhevski, Boris Strezovski – who, even though he lived in another village, was accepted into the Gjavato party cell because his own village did not have a party organisation. The comrade of Tosho, Anka Obuchina was not officially accepted into KPJ but during this time she implemented many party tasks.

The newly established party cell in Lera together with the party organisation in Gjavato and the educational groups in the other villages represented a party core which enabled future strengthening of the influence of KPJ on the remaining villagers in the villages in this part of the Bitola region.

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At this time (the 1940/41 school year) Todor Angelevski lived in the house of Gjorgji Jurukovski. Tosho brought to this house a hand operated printing press (shapilograph) with which he could reproduce political material. The press was hidden in the ancillary parts of the house. Only Gjorgji and his daughter Dana Jurukovska knew about the press and they helped Tosho in the printing and transfer of the material. Tosho distributed the material himself.

Working with the youth that were involved in the education groups Trajan Belev, Jonche Murdzhevski and Metodija Macanov managed to establish a group of youths with which later was formed into a SKOJ organisation. The first SKOJs from Gjavato remember this: “Many times with Trajan Belev, Jonche Murdzhevski and Metodija Macanov mostly in the coop but also in other places we would meet and discuss particular events in the world, we read some particular brochures and those issues which were for us unclear or strange issues, they provided an explanation. They also gave us some tasks with which they were probably testing out our capability and also our commitment to communist ideas.”

In this way a youth group was formed that relentlessly helped the communists. Involved in education groups they were trusted candidates to be members of SKOJ.

In March 1941 under the management of Jonche Murdzhevski the first SKOJ group in Gjavato was formed. The membership, with Murdzhevski as secretary and member of KPJ included:

1. Mijal Grbevski
2. Laze Lazevski
3. Naume T Tuntevski

In this group the party cell found a capability and base for disseminating their illegal work.

In parallel with the efforts to attract the male youth there were also efforts to attract female members. However that was more difficult because of the patriarchal thinking about the conduct between young males and females. For example, it was considered immoral for a young woman for a woman to shake hands with a young man. Tosho Daskalot and Jonche Murdzhevski had some success in breaking down these attitudes. As a lodger Gjorgji Jurukovski's house and through his [\*\*\*\* illegible photocopy – p54] group of progressive youth. The result of this work was the formation of gradual connection between the male and female youth.

#### **APRIL WAR**

The Gjavato villagers learned of the events that occurred in many cities in Yugoslavia by listening to the coop radio. At that time most of the military conscripts were mobilised – including the most prominent activists, Trajan Belev and Tosho Daskalot. They found out about the April war/battle (the bombing of Belgrade and other military events) through radio broadcasts. As the gendarmes had for a long time banned them from listening to radio broadcasts from foreign radio stations, and they thought they would be monitored, which was shown in the spreading of news through the village, they locked up the Gjavashtani Gjorgji Ogenov Stankov (sympathiser of KPJ) and Todor Chatalovski, member of KPJ. Further, on the day of the fascist attack on Yugoslavia 6 April 1941 they were temporarily taken away. The imprisoned men were in the gendarme station and were left three days without food. The commander of the gendarme station thought the prisoners should be shot but with the assurance of the gendarme sergeant Lazo Vujaklija, married to a Macedonian woman, they were freed.

Before the battle even started, at the part of Derven which falls toward Resen preparations were being made such as cuts, making of escarpments, rails and a road was made allowing for passage of one vehicle. The schism which had gripped the upper levels of the Yugoslav army who were only interested in saving their own lives and making no effort to organise an action, it also evidenced in the plan for withdrawal of the headquarters from "Bregalnica Divisional Area." Under pressure from the German armies, it withdrew and went from Derven toward Ljubojno, and from there to Greece. That schism and sense of being disorganised was also felt by the military units. Left to their own devices, the soldiers withdrawing from Bitola toward Derven, alluding to the monumental situation they were in, sang the song "Oh Mother why was I born so poor:"

"I have a rifle but no bullets, that's how poor I am;

I have shoes but no shoelaces, that's how poor I am."

Petar Machkik, the mobilised teacher and a reserve officer from Bitola said about the situation on Derven: “From the village Asanti where I was with my Company/cheta I got an order to go to Gjavato (Derven). We got there on 7 or 8 April. There we met artillery soldiers who were coming from Struga and they said that the front has been dissolved. Not believing that, we ordered them to return to their units and some did that.”

Derven at Gjavato had to be defended by one regiment but it was really only a fortified battalion in which there were: 5 infantry units and one machine gun unit. In the region near Derven which sloped toward Bitola (including the mountain spring to the pass itself) was the head of this battalion. On that terrain at every 200m there were obstacles. The battalion had sufficient ammunition and heavy artillery, rifles and machineguns. The antitank equipment had been left in Bitola, and all the connections with town, Bitola had been cut as of 8 April. The Bitola Divisional Headquarters arrived before the military collisions on this terrain in Bitola and it was in effect withdrawing before the Germans at the suggestion of the officers who had possessed this terrain for the purposes of defending it. The Divisional Chief of Staff avoided giving direct explanation of any sort but instead gave the following command: “Continue” and left with his staff/Shtab.

Overnight on 9 April there was a battle between the German forces and the battalion led by reservists and lower ranking officers. That night the German forces managed to take Resen as the stronger force. In these battles there was a significant number of killed and injured soldiers. According to the information provided orally by Gjivashtani and villagers from other neighbouring villages there were about 50-60 Yugoslav soldiers killed and injured. The number of German soldiers killed and injured is not known. The remainder of the Yugoslav soldiers escaped into the mountain. In this chaos, many Yugoslav soldiers entered Gjavato from Derven where they took off their uniforms and dressed themselves in civilian clothing and, so disguised they [.. missing words top p 56....] soldiers and all that was left were dead horses, discarded arm uniforms, ammunition, sanitary material, tent remnants, rifles and other items.

Many villagers from Gjavato and neighbouring villages taking advantage of the moment of this riot and rushed to collect whatever they could from the discarded items, and anything they could use in everyday life, such as: tent wings, overcoats, blankets, and similar. The members of KPJ, SKOJ and Party sympathisers gave particular care to collect the arms (rifles, machine guns, ammunition, bombs, sanitary items, tent wings, bayonets etc). The collection of arms implemented a party directive carried to Gjavato by Trajan Belev. He explained to people individually the importance of gathering the military equipment. The message was to collect as much as possible. All of the party and the SKOJ members but especially the SKOJ members met this task effectively and seriously. Belev as secretary together with his son Metodija and Jonche.... [sentence on top of page 57] missing] collected arms and took them either to the village or into the mountain.

(It should be noted that Metodija always helped his father even though he himself was not an organiser).

With the implementation of the directive a treasure load of arms was gathered in Gjavato. The arms and other items were hidden in the home of Gjorgji Jurukovski, in the garden of the Chatalovski brothers in the barns of Mijal Grbevski, Laze

Lasovski, Todor Nachov, and a big part of the arms were hidden at the place called “Turska Cheshma” [Turkish Spring].

### **LIBERATORS IN ACTION**

After the capitulation of the old Yugoslavia and its fragmentation, Macedonia was split into two. The larger part was occupied by Bulgaria and the western part was occupied by Italy. Gjavato was near the artificially established Bulgarian-Italian boundary. The arrival of the Bulgarian occupier was marked by the establishment of a Bulgarian administration for which they used key local people from the villages. The first mayor was Alekso Nachov – politically unaligned and known amongst the villagers as an honest person. He was not mayor for a long period of time. He resigned after two months. His resignation as mayor was seen by the communists as an honest man removing himself from being a servant of the occupying regime. They reached this conclusion because he would warn them to be cautious of the Bulgarian police and government who were taking a close interest in the people in opposition to the occupying government. After the resignation of Nachov the Bulgarian government thought that Vasil Dodov would be a good candidate as mayor regarded as a “trustworthy” from the first world war when he was the mayor in the village during the short duration Bulgarian occupation.

Immediately after the occupation, there was a certain delay in the Party organisation in Gjavato due to the lack of permanent relations with the Local Committee and also because some of the members experienced some hesitation. Further, the party cell on its own initiative, that is, following the initiative of Trajan Belev continued to be organised and operate. Its activism was demonstrated when it opposed the eventual election of Vasil Dodov as mayor. There was division in the village in connection with the election of a new mayor. The older villagers respected V Dodov while, because of the activism of the communists, a majority of the villagers were for Krste Iliev who was elected. His mandate was of short duration, as, following the fusion between the Gjavato and Capari councils, Krste Iliev fell and after that the role of mayor was filled directly by the occupier.

From the very start you could feel a ‘liberation’ mission under the occupier’s rule in Gjavato. All of the villagers were placed under a coupon system. No household could mill grain on its own as the miller could only operate under a permit from the government. The harvest from each modest piece of land in Gjavato was controlled and a significant part of the wheat produced was requisitioned. There was not enough bread, and there were also not enough other foodstuffs such as oil, kerosene, rice etc. The population was particularly impacted by the shortage of salt and they had to make bread with brine instead.

This economic situation made the people have conversations like “is this what freedom is like?...” Meanwhile the requisitioning continued spreading to other aspects of economic life. Wool, meat, milk, and other similar goods were also collected. Living animals was counted and each villager was required to complete a “Declaration” about the livestock they held and submit it to the government. A check was then undertaken at each home. No one was allowed to take their livestock to pasture before the check was undertaken. To the extent that there was any breach of this rule, the individual was punished with a monetary fine, confiscation of their coupons and possible three months in jail.

The village supporters of the occupying Bulgarian government were directly engaged in this requisitioning including: mayor Vasil Dodov, field keeper Bozhin Tuntev, Laze Konsulot, Vangel Grbev and some others.

As a result of the general environment of hardship and disquiet, Gjavashtani who had a donkey or a horse would go to buy apples or fish in Prpespa and exchange these goods for wheat with the villagers from the plains villages where the harvest was better and there was abundant wheat. They did this in secret from the occupying government. Another thing that younger people did, particularly the labourers, went to work in road construction. In September-October 1941 autumn, the following workers from Gjavato worked on the road Gevgelija to Udovo: Jordan and Kole Apostolovski, Mijal Grbevski, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Metodija Chunkov, and Cane Stojkov. In their work, they undertook sabotage, they complained that the food was poor, and in one case, 7 wagonettes were dropped into the Vardar river.

Another group of labourers from Gjavato worked on the Novachkiot road (at Novaci). Among them were Jonche Murdzhev, Temelko Ristov, Naum Tuntevski and others. Here too the food was similarly poor, and the pay was very poor. These circumstances led to frequent clashes with the supervisor. Most interesting are the dialogues with Jonche Murdzhevski:

- You work very casually
- With food such as this, what work do you expect – and for little pay, you get little work, answered Murdzhev.
- You have to obey like soldiers, said the supervisor.
- We are not soldiers, was the reply.
- Yes you are soldiers, the shovels and hoes are your arms.

When in the afternoon, food was dished out as lunch, before the eyes of the supervisor, he poured out the food and said:

- Is this food? You expect us to work with food such as this?

With workers behaving like this Murdzhevski stood out as a fighter against the exploitation and protector of the exploited and this made the workers very fond of him. This courageous behaviour made him popular and authoritative.

### **THE ILINDEN DEMONSTRATION IN BITOLA**

The Bulgarian occupier in Bitola started to prepare a celebration in anticipation of Ilinden 1941. It wanted to use Macedonia's national holiday for its own propaganda purposes. In opposition to this celebration, the Local Committee arranged a demonstration in which the communists from Gjavato took part. They were Jonche Murdzhevski, Mijal Grbevski, Stojan Bendevev and Todor Chtalovski. They went in the procession with the demonstrators from "At Pazar" to the "Sv Nedela" church where the Bulgarian police disbanded the demonstration because they were calling out pro Macedonia slogans and as a result had an anti-occupier character.

Apart from participating in the demonstration, some young people (male and female) from Gjavato had come to Bitola but did not take part in the celebration that the occupier had arranged. They stayed in the upper park of the town where a young Bitola resident spoke to them about the meaning of Ilinden as a Macedonian national day.

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The Bulgarian government so that it could win over the population of occupied Macedonia, used the Macedonian migrants in Bulgaria as agitators. One such person was the Gjavato emigrant, also Bulgarian bishop, Boris Simonov Nevrokopski. Educated by the Exarchate and at the same time its educator, on 28.8.1941 the village church day Golema Bogorodica, he prepared to arrive in Gjavato. the government arranged a celebratory welcome. The bishop, with a large number of people accompanying him and security arrangements, arrived in Gjavato. The organisers had to meet him below the village, where he moved to the church. After the arranged programme there was supposed to be some new ceremonies in the church. However, the Gjavato party cell made preparations to reduce the welcome and to reduce the effect of the visit of this Gjavashtanec, who was also a man of the regime. That happened as follows according the recollections of Gjavashtani who were there: when the bishop spoke in the church, he took the opportunity to blacken the name of Bolshevik Russia as a country before the ordinary people, a country where religious worship was not permitted where the churches were closed down of they were used as shops and similar uses. The goal of his speech was clear, to make the villagers turn their backs on communists ideas and recruitment. At a moment when there was a silence "like the grave," Jonche Murdzhevski, Mijal Grbevski, Laze Lasovski demonstratively left the church with other young sympathisers of the ideas against which the bishop was speaking.

When the bishop saw that he had no influence with the youth, he sought to at least have some influence with the older villagers, attacking the Gjavato youth as being infected by communist Bolshevik ideas.

After the ceremony outside the church, some women believers approached the staff of the bishop to kiss it to show him respect. But even in this the bishop was obliged to endure bitter words called out loud by Jonche Murdzhevski, so that everyone could hear him:

- What are you kissing people, that staff is just wood.

With these shouted comments and the demonstrative walk out by the youths the formal celebration did not amount to what had been conceived for it by the organisers, who were dissatisfied with the event.

A group of 30-40 women took advantage of the presence of the bishop in the village who were not organised but who were adversely affected by the economic situation and the party agitation against the government. They approached him with the goal of acquainting him with their situation. With their oral complaints they acquainted him with the fact that there was hardship because of inadequate food products, telling him that for example, because there was not enough salt, they were obliged to bake bread using brine. When the bishop had heard them out he said to them "that they had to understand that it was a time of war and they had to endure because B'lgaria is thinking of you." All of the promises made by bishop Boris to the Gjavato population came to nothing. This completely closed the mouths of those in the village who had been aligned to the Greater Bulgaria side.

## **MIRCHE ACEV IN GJAVATO**

Bulgarian propaganda was felt in the village. So, after a time, some of the communist members took the view that with the arrival of the Bulgarian occupier, Macedonian national liberty had been achieved. Following that, the long-time activists stopped their revolutionary activism in the party cell. Those included: Dimitrija Filipov, Sotir Bubev, Krste Iliev and later Metodija Macanov. They abstained from future activism but they did not become provocateurs.

A Regional Committee directive to hand weapons over to the Bulgarians, arrived in Gjavato. The party cell discussed this directive. Those present were split on the directive. All the same, as it was a directive from the Regional Committee a share of the hidden weapons was handed over to the Bulgarian government and, on the part of the communists. The remaining villagers gave up the rest of the hidden weapons. Two truckloads of hidden weapons and ammunition were collected from Gjavato. However, nearly all of the communists kept back some weapons and ammunition.

In the month of November 1941 a member of the new Regional Committee of KPJ for Macedonia arrived in Gjavato. Mirche Acev. He held a meeting in the barn on the land belonging to Trajan Belev. At the meeting, there were – Trajan Belev, as secretary of the First Regional Committee of KP, Kole Bendev, the secretary of the party cell in Gjavato, and Jonche Murdzhevski the secretary of SKOJ in Gjavato. Some communists from Lera also attended the meeting.

Mirche Acev spoke at the meeting about cleaning up the party organisations in Macedonia with Sharlo faction, the capitulation of Sharlo (handing over of weapons, sabotage of resolutions of CK KPJ, politics of passivity and so on). After that, those present were familiarised with the politics of CK KPJ for an armed uprising and the uprising in Macedonia – the action in Prilep, he told of the need for collecting weapons, broadening political organisation and SKOJ with new members work with the villagers to raise fighting spirit, preparedness of the members for accept illegals and so on. Simply put, he gave express directions and immediate tasks for the work of the communists in this region.

After this meeting so that the tasks allocated could more successfully be implemented, people in Gjavato were give specific responsibilities. Tashko Chatalovski was responsible for collecting weapons, Todor Chatalovski for organisational issues, Jonche Murdzhevski for work with the youth and so on. In relation to forming a detachment several people from Gjavato said they were ready to join – Trajan Belev, Kole Bendev and Tashko Chatalovski.

In the autumn of 1941 using a connection through Mijal Grbevski, Peco Bozhinovski and Vangel Todorovski Majorot came to Gjavato. They took three rifles from there and took them to Bitola. After a while, Peco Bozhinovski and Vangel Nechevski- Tunelot took a further two guns from Gjavato which were also taken to Bitola.

There people gave to the party cell in Gjavato the task of continuing to collect and even buy weapons and ammunition.



## **TWO PARTY CELLS**

After Mirche Acev came to Gjavato the party cell analysed the work it had done with the people to date for expanding the membership of the cell and they concluded that there were some active members who could be members of KPJ.

On 24 November 1941 Vangel Todorovski-Majorot came to Trajan Belev's house in Gjavato. He asked Belev to call a meeting in his house of those people who could be suitable for membership of the Party. Trajan Belev then went to each candidate's home and asked them to come to his house at the time he nominated. At the meeting there were: Vangel Todorovski- Majorot, Trajan Belev, Jonche Murdzhevski, Gjorgji Jurukovski – candidate, Laze Lasovski, Mijal Grbevski and Naume Tuntev – Members of SKOJ. All of these were tested through tasks that had been allocated to them by Belev, Murdzhevski and Tosho Daskalot.

At the meeting, Vangel Majorot first gave them a picture of Goce Delchev and told them that Delchev had fought for Macedonia and that the members of KPJ were continuing his fight. After that, he told them about the battles by the partisans in Serbia, their successes and told them that such battles awaited the Macedonians. He explained that the Macedonians would not be alone in that battle but would be together with the other peoples of Yugoslavia who were already accumulating successes against the occupiers. That joint battle was presented by him as a precondition to victory. He said that the Soviet Union supported the battle of our people against the Bulgarian occupier and at the same time explained about the need for confidentiality in their organisation. Those who were present listed carefully. At the end he told them that from that evening they were members of KPJ. Those were

1. Jurukovski Gjorgji
2. Mijal Grbevski
3. Naume J Tuntev
4. Laze Lasovski

He then gave them a short pamphlet but none of them can recall the title of it.

After that, the meeting ended.

The conditions in Gjavato – the village is divided into a number of maali/neighbourhoods – and working secretly they decided to form a new party cell including the new members. It was to be called “The Youth party Cell.” Jonche Mudzhevski was appointed the secretary of the youth party cell who received directives from Trajan Belev on work to be carried out. Later, Gjorgji Jurukovski and Mijal Grbevski were transferred from this youth party cell to the so called “old” party cell because their houses were at the opening section of the village and Boris Strezovski was transferred to the new party cell from the old one.

The two party cells had connections with Prespa and transferred fliers and other materials to Sopotsko using Trajan Belev, Jonche Murdzhevski, Naume J Tuntev, Kole Bendelev and others. The fliers and other materials allocated to Gjavato were marked “Z.” The party members and members of SKOJ distributed the fliers through the village. The fliers and leaflets were not distributed immediately. Often they were hidden in the houses of KP and SKOJ until a suitable moment came about for distribution.

## TWO SKOJ GROUPS

A week after the formation of the youth party cell that is toward the end of November 1941 the Party Organisation in Gjavato achieved another success. The youths (male and females) who had until then been in education groups formed two SKOJ groups. That suited the work of the two party cells.

One of the groups included:

1. Mijal Grbevski – secretary and member of KPJ
2. Stojan Bendev
3. Tode Nachov
4. Dana Jurukova
5. Slavka Filipova
6. Ljuba Chatalova
7. Blaga Chatalova

The second group had the following members

1. Laze Lasovski
2. Cane Stojkov
3. Menka Lasovska
4. Cane Shturev

The increased number of SKOJ Members enabled the expansion of the work among the youth of the village. Implementing the policies for getting more young people from the village to join up, the party organisation at the end of 1941 with the teacher Boris Strezovski (from the school year 1941/2 was in Gjavato) organised a choir. So that their work did not attract suspicion Strezovski call the secretaries of the SKOJ groups, Mijal Grbevski and Laze Lasovski and sent them to the district police chief in Bitola to seek a permit to form and operate a choir in Gjavato. Laze Lasovski and Mijal Grbevski told about this:

“Boris Strezovski called us and said – the best approach to political work with youth will be if we form a youth choir. But to set it up and run it, we have to get permission from the Police. So, you will go to the district police chief and tell them that as young people you are keen to learn to sing Bulgarian songs and you use that to persuade him to give you a permit. One day, both of us went to see the chief. When he saw us he asked

- [*in Bulgarian*] How are you boys?
- Chief, sir, we are from the village of Gjavato and we have a request for you. As we want to learn Bulgarian songs, we decided to form a choir. But we were told that, if we are to get together then only you could give approval.
- \*[*in Bulgarian*] That is very good, but who will lead it?
- We have a teacher in the village, who is very keen on this activity, and he is ready to help us – we said to him.

Kozarov, pleased by the youths wanting to learn to sing Bulgarian songs gave us written approval so we could form a choir. With that written approval we returned to Gjavato.

Boris Strezovski with the help of the SKOJ members and the party members started the choir. Jonche Murdzhevski joined Boris especially with gathering youths to join the choir as well as singing in it.

The choir had 35 young men and women. Mijal Grbevski was responsible for the youth line even though he was not at all musical. At the choir gatherings while teaching songs to the choir, Boris Strezovski (although in poor health) also worked politically with them. With that the choir was a convenient and lawful youth activity where political work could be carried out with the youth.

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At the end of 1941 (start of December) Laze Lasovski like many other villagers, went Bitola with a load of timber to sell at market. As he was selling without a permit the forestry controller, sought to confiscate his timber. To openly show his dissatisfaction Lasovski unloaded his timber in the Bitola bazaar and threw it straight into the Dragor river. The party organisation in Bitola mentioned this in one of the leaflets that it published and distributed.

In the remaining leaflets that were distributed in Gjavato the ones that were ready by every household was the leaflet which set out the real position under the occupation – the coupon system and the requisitioning in the villages.

At this time, Jonche Murdzhevski and Naume J Tuntev found a handy way to agitate. Before going to the Bitola bazaar in Bitola they put together red paint and brushes. They got up early in the morning before the others going to market along the road and painted slogans on the kilometre markers. When those that had been to market returned, they saw the slogans “Down with the Bulgarian occupation,” “Long live SKOJ,” “Down with fascism,” “Long live KPJ” and similar. This gave the impression that the influence of KPJ was felt all around.

### **ILLEGALS IN GJAVATO**

After the action of the Prilep partisan detachment on 11 October 1941 in Prilep, a group from that detachment arrived as illegals in Gjavato at the end of December of the same year. Trajan Belev brought them there. This group of illegals was comprised of Kiro Krstevski-Platnik, Venda Nikolova and Ordanski D Joska-Sandanski. They remained for a while with Trajan Belev and after that with the teacher Boris Strezovski who lived in the house of Spiro Pichalevski. They remained as illegals for 45 days “they, said Zora Beleva – lived in our house, hiding in the cellar during the day and moving into the main room at night. Trajan and I gave them food.”

Mirche Acev visited the illegals during their stay and he stayed overnight in Trajan Belev’s house. Acev and Belev conducted long discussions, “the whole night” and after that, Mirche Acev went to Dolenci, Lera accompanied by Belev who after 3 days returned to Gjavato.

Of the illegals, over the winter, only Venda remained, now in the house of Kole Bendev as “his niece from Jankovec” and moved around legally. She secretly provided assistance to the young women.

In December 1941 the illegals Josif Josifovski-Sveshtarot and another were transferred to Podmochani through Gjavato. Using a party connection Tashko Chatalovski took them to Bitola and in Podmochani joined Simo Nestorov.

At the beginning of 1942, (January) Trajan Belev individually and at a meeting, put a sort of survey. He put this question: Why are we comrades? Will we fight or not?" the answer from all of the members was positive. Not a single person was found to be opposed to an armed uprising.

With this survey Trajan Belev saw that the party organisation in its entirety is in favour of armed resistance. So he put forward a task to be completed – a part of the collected weaponry to be taken to the place "Glavishte." Putting this task into action, Tashko Chatalovski cleaned and packed the rifles that were at his place. He left them at the barn /pondilata where the oxen were kept. The prepared weapons could not be taken to Glavishte because there was a blockade on the village. There was a danger that the weaponry could be discovered, and with that, the brothers Chatalovski. For that reason, they made a plan to avoid the danger. They put the rifles into a wagon loaded with manure, headed for the garden. When Tashko Nachov who was not psychologically well developed, saw the wagon, he decided to lead the oxen and headed off with the wagon. The soldiers stopped him. He however continued on his way as though the shouts from the soldiers did not relate to him. A soldier then raised his rifle and aimed, ready to shoot. Seeing what was about to happen, Mitre Chatalovski called out to the soldier with these words:

- Leave him alone, he is not normal!

Tashko Nachov turned around and, offended started to throw rocks at Mitre and the soldier saw that he was dealing with a person who was not normal and so let him go. And that is how the rifles were transferred to the garden and after the blockade was lifted, to the hut. The danger for the Chatalovski brothers passed. However, there was another danger – Trajan Belev could be exposed.

With his activism as an organiser of the party cell in the neighbouring villages, the police became suspicious of him. During the blockade, Belev was in the village – at home. When he noted movement by the police, agents and the army, he said to his wife:

- These guys are after me!

This irritated Trajan.

According to his wife Zora, he had told her that even before the blockade, his collaborator in Bitola had been jailed (the person is not identified) and there was a possibility that he too would be arrested.

**Photo of the house of the Chatalovski brothers – a house of many activists**

Belev got ready quickly and descended through a cover into the cellar and managed to escape by following the river without being seen by anyone. From February 1942 Trajan Belev became an illegal. As an illegal, he became a member of the Regional operational headquarters and was often in contact with the party cells in Gjavato and in the neighbouring villages.

After Trajan Belev became an illegal Jonche Murdzhevski maintained the ties with Bitola.

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On one market day (start of March) Gjorgji Jurukovski came to Bitola and met Trajan Belev in a Ljubojno inn. Taking advantage of this meeting, Belev gave Jurukovski activist material which he had taken to Gjavato hidden in the saddle on his donkey.

After a day or two, Jurukovski was tasked by the party to go to Rotino urgently and informed Orde Chopela and Trajan Belev that the road was blocked and to take account of that in their movements.

### **NEW MEMBERS OF SKOJ**

The choir was most active in the winter of 1942 (January to March). Through the choir SKOJ accelerated its political work among the youth. The expression of that work can also be seen in the anti-religion action during Vodici /the Epiphany 18 January 1942. The church tradition for this day is for the cross to be thrown into a specially made pond and several people try to find it. The members of KPJ, particularly the youth workers, agreed that they would not join in this tradition. This anti-religious act which the elders in the village was disapproved of, made a huge impact on the young people, and lifted the standing of the progressive youths, the SKOJ members.

All of the activism gave rise to conditions for future increases in membership of the SKOJ organisation in Gjavato. In February the following were admitted as members of SKOJ:

In the group of Mijal Grbevski

1. Tode Chunkovski
2. Jordan Jurukovski
3. Kole Apostolov
4. Fana Chunkova
5. Ljuba Papaleva
6. Menka Filipova
7. Ica Chatalova
8. Fana Dimova

In the group of Laze Lasovski

1. Simon Glavinchev
2. Todor Krkov
3. Klime Geshtakov
4. Stevan Shturev

Two others were also admitted but later removed because they were not serious about membership.

As the first group increased in numbers after a short time, the young female members separated into their own group for which the secretary was Mijal Grbevski while Stojan Bendelev already a member of KPJ became the secretary of the first group. In the Spring of 1942 there were 3 SKOJ groups in Gjavato.

All 3 SKOJ groups lived a regular organised life. The meetings were held every 15 days and weekly as required. They were held in the house of Gjorgji Jurukovski and in the Chatalovski brother's garden, Mitre Chatalovski's place, and the barns belonging to Todor Nachov, Mijal Grbevski, in Laze Lasovski's house and at "Glavishte."

Laze Lasovski's group held SKOJ meetings and often did clever things – they carried a gramophone with them and said they were going to listen to records. They held the meetings without raising suspicion with the government.

It is interesting to note that Mijal Grbevski's SKOJ group held a meeting that was spotted by a Bulgarian police officer – a Gjavashtanec. However, even though he realised why they were meeting he did not tell his superiors in Bitola.

At the meetings they read leaflets, bulletins and similar. After reading them, the reading material was thrown through windows or doors to the villagers, even in the mayor's house, the church and to those who sympathised with the occupying force. The leaflets were brought by Mijal Grbevski from Bitola and he got them from Jorgo Ristevski- Mandzhurot, and other times from Beno Ruso and others according to the recollection of Stojan Bendev, this reading material referred to "the situation at the fronts, agitation to achieve not giving wheat to the occupier, participation in and support of NOB in Yugoslavia and so on. During this time the party cell kept in contact with Sopotsko through Laze Lasovski and Mijal Grbevski. All of the communists in Gjavato had the task to attract more sympathisers. Each one was obliged to work with at least 3 sympathisers to give them tasks and to see if they could be considered for communist membership. Just about every member of KPJ and SKOJ set up such a group.

### **READING ROOM**

In addition to the choir, the party organisation thought up other ways to undertake political and cultural educational work with the older Gjavashtani. They concluded that they would achieve that if they opened a reading room because the government would not get in the way of that. It moved from an idea to being implemented. The communists worked to raise members. The reading room was formed on 12 March 1942 under the name "People's Reading Room – Goce Delchev." At establishment, the following were members:

1. Boris Strezovski
2. Kole Bendev
3. Metodija Macanov
4. Ilija Bendeovski
5. Krste Iliev
6. Tirche Apostolov
7. Todor Chatalovski
8. Vasil Dodov
9. Todor Gagaov
10. Mitre Chatalovski
11. Simon Krusharov
12. Ilija Kocev
13. Hristo Belev
14. Nikola Zhulev

15. Lazar Shturevski
16. Ivan Simonov
17. Apostol Purdev
18. Hristo Dodov
19. Trajan Prodanov
20. Gjorgji Jurukovski

The Reading Room was done by the party organisation. And while they included government people as members (for example the mayor) the president and the vice president were members of the KPJ. The governing board of the school were elected:

1. President – Boris Strezovski – teacher and member of KPJ
2. Vice President – Kole Bendev, member of KPJ
3. Treasurer and librarian – Metodija Macanov
4. Secretary – Ilija Bendev

There was also a supervisory board comprised of three members.

The motivation to increase knowledge of the Bulgarian culture and literature, the reading room was assisted by the government. However because the governing board was comprised of progressive people, the reading room did not actually serve that purpose, but rather collected and purchased literature (to the extent possible) revolutionary material.

The reading room was a gathering place for almost all of the villagers, serving the purpose that previously was served by the cooperative.

The work of the reading room was easily camouflaged and with the Mayor Dodov becoming a member then suspicion of its “other” objectives faded.

The reading room served its purpose. It was a place where people could easily gather, reading material could be gathered, and the population could be educated. At the same time, it also served as a place where people could exchange ideas and party political activism.

### **“WE WANT BREAD, OIL...”**

The shortage of food products in the village was felt more and more. This led to dissatisfaction among the villagers which manifested in different ways.

Trajan Belev as an illegal and keeping contact with the party organisation in Gjavato suggested to the communists that every reaction and expression of dissatisfaction by villagers against the government should be supported by them and be turned into a discussion against the occupier.

Such an opportunity arose in Spring 1942, in March. A number of women from the village came to the cooperative to buy goods (flour, salt, oil, sugar and so on). However the cooperative did not have the items. On hearing that they started to react and other women joined them. Mitre Chatalovski, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Apostol Murdzhev and others suggested to the women that they should not seek redress from the cooperative but rather from the government in Kazhani. The group of women and a decent number of men set off at once for Kazhani. They stood in front of the council and shouted: “We want bread, oil, sugar, salt, rice.” Hearing the

shouts, the mayor Tudzharov came outside of the council building and said, “Be patient, we are waiting on Bulgaria. When the goods come, we will give them to you.” With these words, the mayor saw the villagers off. The dissatisfied men and women returned to the village. On the road they again spoke to Mitre Chatalovski, Gjorgji Jurukovski and Apostol Murdzhev and so they decided to go to Bitola. They agreed on a meeting place, the inn run by Spiro Pechalev. Word of their agreement reached other Gjavashtani. The next day a big group gathered at the inn; about 50-60 Gjavashtani, men and women. From there the group walked along the main street to the Commissariat. There they met another group of villagers who had arrived with the same goal as theirs. A part of the Gjavato group, principally strong women, (Naumejca Lasova, Parushka Chatalova, Vasilica Pechalova, Florinka Shtrakojlova and others) entered the office with their demands: bread, oil, sugar, salt etc. the answer was similar to that given by the Kazhani mayor:

- Be patient because Bulgaria has everything, but the trains are not running and that is Macedonia does not have any groceries.

In relation to such a response to their demands for the basic foodstuffs needed to live the villagers were left with the following anecdotes:

- [*Bulgarian language*] There is everything is at the train station but there is nothing for the people.
- [*Bulgarian language*] Bulgaria has everything but it is hard to find
- [*Bulgarian language*] Bulgaria has wheat for the whole world.

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On 12 April 1942 the Bulgarian occupying force arranged a very formal welcome for the German officer Adolf-Heinz Bekerle on the road between Bitola and Ohrid they proposed to welcome him in Kazhani and wanted that the villagers from Gjavato to attend along with villagers from other villages. The party organisation and SKOJ prepared an action to boycott this welcome, in which they succeeded. Many Gjavashtani did not attend the welcome.

### **ORDE CHOPELA IN GJAVATO**

Implementing the policies of the temporary leadership of PK for Macedonia for the strengthening of party organisations and the policy for an armed uprising, MK in Bitola took measures to assist. In that connection, Orde Chopela, member of MK and the Military committee visited Gjavato. He held a meeting in the house of Gjorgji Jurukovski. As the first task of all the organisers he asked them to collect weapons and while there he examined the weapons that the organisation had concealed in Gjavato.

<b>Photo of the house of Gjorgji Jurukovski in which the party meetings were often held</b>
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After the meeting, Orde left and on the next day 2 April 1942 he was found by the police in Bitola and heroically died.

Todor Krkov member of SKOJ from the region “Vrteshka” – Baba mountain took a trunk weighing about 50 kg and full of ammunition. Although the terrain was covered by snow and was hard going, Todor Krkov, covered in sweat, avoiding the main roads he brought the trunk to the village without being noticed. The concealed weapons from other places too was gathered in the village. From this



weaponry about 35 rifles and bullets were taken to Lera and handed over to the members of the Lera organisation. The weapons were taken by Jonche Murdzhevski, Stojan BendeV, Mijal Grbevski, Laze Lasovski, Cane Stojkov and Simon Glavinchev. A part of the weapons – about 10 rifles – was left in Tode Nachov's barn. These measures were in connection with the preparations related to the Partisan detachment.

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In April, in the preparations for the detachment Jonche Murdzhevski and Kole BendeV were called from Gjavato to go to a meeting in Bitola. The meeting was held in the lodgings of Blazhe Dimitrovski-Rogozinaro. They were asked at the meeting how many partisans Gjavato could provide. Jonche Murdzhevski said that of partisan membership, they could count on some communists. He named the following: Laze Lasovski, Mijal Grbevski, Tashko Chatalovski, Kole BendeV, Gjorgji Jurukovski and himself, Jonche Murdzhev.

After this, the Gjavato party organisation was given the task of finding a location for the barracks for a detachment that was to be formed. In connection with this Jonche Murdzhevski went up to the mountain twice, once with Tashko Chatalovski and the second time with Naume J Tuntev. Two sites were selected – the place called "Suleiman's Rock" and the place called "Old ovens."

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The Bulgarian occupying force went to the village and demanded that tobacco be planted by the villagers, promising large earnings. The party organisation worked out the real objective of the government, which was to make a huge profit, so the party organisation agitated against the initiative. However some villagers were persuaded by the dishonest promises, planted the seedlings. When the seedlings were ready to plant, (in the month of May) the SKOJ organisation sabotaged significant areas sown with tobacco seedlings.

Photo

View of Gjavato

The "X" marks Jonche Murdzhevski's house. In that house 7 June 1942 there was a meeting of PO where Stiv Naumov was present.

## **STIV IN GJAVATO**

Although the first detachment "Pelister" was broken up, the Local committee in Bitola and beyond, pursuing the line of KPJ for armed uprising, they were working in establishing a new detachment. During the preparations the secretary of MK Bitola Stevan Naumov-Stiv, came to Gjavato on 7 June. A meeting of the party organisation (both party cells) was arranged in the house of Jonche Murdzhevski. As Stiv did not know the house where the meeting was to be held the father of Jonche, Apostol Murdzhev took him to Gjavato during the day. Old Apostol Murdzhev told Stiv to pay attention as there was a wedding in Gjavato and the guests might notice him. In reply, Stiv, coolly replied to him not to worry and just suggested a way that they could carefully move around. The old Apostol had to walk in front with Stiv following at a distance. In the event that something suspicious was spotted, Apostol had to kneel and that would signal to Stiv to be

even more careful. Proceeding that way, they moved alongside the Bulgarian police who were at the wedding, without a care, but carefully. Stiv, as an imposing figure, blonde and not tanned by the sun, he stood out to the gathered villagers because he was not related to anyone and also was not from Gjavato. However, taken over by the celebration, the people paid no further attention to the man that the police were closely following. The arranged meeting was held during the daylight hours. The first item that Stiv dealt with at the meeting was weapons. He said that more weapons should be collected, by whatever means, even buying it if necessary. Then they discussed the situation with the fronts. Even though the fascists had reached the Caucasus and taken some Soviet territory, Stiv managed to build confidence in NOB in Yugoslavija and the battle in the Soviet Union and its allies.

In the Gjavato party organisation there had long been a discussion on whether the SKOJ group should be accepted as members of KPJ? Some members were of the view that joining young women as members in KP, rather those young women whose parents were organisers and activists was risky. They thought that way because an increase in the work of the young women might lead to the discovery of their parents who were members of KPJ. While Stiv was in Gjavato after the meeting they had arranged in the village, there were discussions with the secretaries of the SKOJ groups. Among other things, the question of the women SKOJ members was raised. Stiv was of the opinion that they should be admitted to the Party provided that they showed that they merited membership through their activism and otherwise worthy of membership. He even thought it would be a good idea to have a meeting with them where he himself would attend. However the unexpected encounter with Dragan Bubev prevented the meeting and Stiv continuing stay in Gjavato. Dragan Bubev was a Gjavato youth – a defender and Bulgarian agent and known as such by his peers, whether SKOJ members or party members. They even occasionally took advantage of him. However Bubev saw that his “friends” were working on “something” illegal, which was drawing the youth closer and closer, he wanted to prevent it with the proposal to form an organisation called “Defender” in the village. He did not succeed in this.

After the unexpected encounter with Stiv who was accompanied by Mijal Grbevski, gave an order that Bubev should be liquidated. They got revolvers from Dolenci to complete this order, with a leaflet containing the following: “This is what awaits every traitor of the people.” The leaflet was to be left on the dead body of Bubev. Lazo Lasovski and Mijal Grbevski made the plan for liquidating Bubev but it did not come to that.

### **GJAVATO AND THE DETACHMENT “DAME GRUEV”**

In the middle of June 1942 in the Lera vineyards the Regional committee held a meeting where tangible tasks were identified for the establishment of the detachment. They discussed buying footwear, socks, clothing, jumpers and so on. Once the tasks were allocated to the party organisation, the collection of clothing began.

On 7 July 1942 on the mountain Bigla the detachment “Dame Gruev” was formed. Once it was formed under the Regional Operational headquarters, Gjavatashtanec Trajan Belev-Goce visited. Fighters from Prespa, Bitola, Bitola region, Prilep and other areas joined the detachment.

Supplying the detachment with food, clothing, weapons and ammunition, in addition to MK, was the task of the party organisations in Prespa and the villages of the first region, which included Gjavato. In a short time after the formation of the detachment the Regional Committee received from the named villages, three loads of wheat, honey and other materials. The party organisation through Stojan Bendev, Mijal Grbevski, Lazo Lasovski, Cane Stojkov took these goods to Dolenci (Spiro Ivanovski and Mijal Chakov) engaged with the SKOJ members their own wives and some relatives, that is, people who were not organised but sympathisers of the movement, to mill the wheat and make bread. The prepared food was taken in many trips to the detachment through meetings at the place "Suleiman Kamen" with the commissar for procurement for the detachment Bozhinovski Peco – Kocho. When the detachment got food, the people that took it would provide information and news about what was happening in the village, with the government, the behaviour of the population toward the government and the number of army and police and similar.

The people who took the food to the detachment when necessary, also took letters and similar items into town.

## **ILINDEN 1942**

The Bulgarian occupying force prepared to use Ilinden 1942 again for its propaganda purposes. It prepared for a celebration in Smilevo the birthplace of Dame Gruev and the village in which the Regional Congress in 1903 resolved to arrange an armed uprising. At the celebration it was expected that alongside the representatives of the local occupying force (both Smilevo and Bitola) it was expected that the Bulgarian Minister for Internal Affairs Gabrovski would also attend.

During the preparations for the welcome the workers who were constructing the road between Obednik and Boishta were required to clean the road between Obednik and Smilevo. Jonche Murdzhevski was one of those workers. Jonche saw the welcome as propaganda from the occupying force he organised the worker so that they would not clean the road. Murdzhevski told the workers that Ilinden was a Macedonian and not Bulgarian special day while the welcome that they were being required to clean the road for was a Bulgarian activity.

The village party organisations in this region and the detachment made a resolution to avoid this plan of the occupying force. Toward that goal, the Headquarters of the detachment resolved that the first action of the detachment would be the holding of a meeting at Smilevo. The party organisations were allocated specific tasks to assist in this. The Gjavato communists were asked to cut the telephone lines between Kazhani and Resen. The task of the Gjavato party organisation and SKOJ was completed by Lazo Lasovski and Mijal Grbevski. They had to acquire special pliers to cut the lines and Mitre Chatalvski had them. They themselves decided the point at which the lines would be cut. All the same, the most convenient spot, from a connection viewpoint, was "Kirenec" near Derven. While the party members Mijal Grbevski and Lasovski Laze cut the lines the SKOJ members Nachov Tode and Chumkov Tode were keeping watch. They had the task of keeping an eye out for the regular Bulgarian patrols. They cut the lines in the morning at about 4 am without being noticed by anyone.

The Gjavashtanec from the detachment who took part in this action was Trajan Belev – Goce.

The Ilinden action of the detachment was a success. It struck a chord with the villagers in all of these villages and gave encouragement and support for the movement against the occupier and its terror. Those who supported the occupying force regarded the action as the work of “chicken keepers;” the ordinary people regarded the action as one carried out by fighters for the people, and they also saw the partisans as the descendants of the Ilinden fighters, who would bring to them national and social freedom. Voices began to spread in Gjavato that the number of partisans in Smilevo was more than 200-300 people, even though there were only about 20 people in the detachment. Then people said that at Smilevo the partisans did not speak Bulgarian or Serbian but their native Macedonian; that they were not thieves, thugs or bandits as the Bulgarian government described them but are people from the surrounding villages that they were well dressed and armed – all positive messages. In connection with this action of the detachment, the Gjavashtanec Kole Bendelev recalled what was said in Gjavato: “The action in Smilevo in 1942 struck a positive chord with our people, and the Bulgarian force then threw themselves at us collecting rates and taxes at the mills. The villagers began to say that instead of giving the wheat to the Bulgarians, they should give it to the “smilevci” as they called the partisans. The people who were not organised but were sympathisers were particularly strong on this. I heard the same at the market in Resen, and from Resen villagers. I also heard that the partisans were armed with the most modern weapons, better than seen on the Germans.”

The action by the detachment in Smilevo was successful when viewed either as a political or military action, especially raising the people’s faith in a successful struggle against the occupier.

### **JOINT ACTION**

Summer 1942. The Prilep partisan detachment “Dimitar Vlahov” found itself in a difficult position on Mukos and were targeted by concentrated actions by the Bulgarian army. The Prilep organisation wrote a letter to the Bitola operational headquarters, they proposed a future “strategic action” to disorient the enemy<sup>25</sup>, that is an action which would take its attention away. That would help the Prilep detachment to move to another area.

Photo of the building of the police subdivision in Kazhani

The headquarters of the detachment “Dame Gruev” accepted this proposal. They discussed where such an action should take place. They asked some activists from Gjavato about this as well. They thought the action should take place in the village Gopesh on the holy day “Preobrzhenie” the feast day of the village when a lot of people from surrounding villages would gather there. Jonche Murdzhevski conveyed the proposal but Stevan Naumov-Stiv was of the view that the action had to be taken at the Bulgarian border subdivision in Kazhani as a more significant

<sup>25</sup> ##### Zaednichka Akcija, Nova Makedonija from 1961

political and military target. From when they resolved to attack the Subdivision the preparations were carried out under Stiv's direction. To carry out the action more successfully, Stiv told the Gjavato party organisation to develop a sketch of Kazhani marking the more important points to attack. The teacher in Gjavato, Boris Strezovski carried out the task effectively. Pretending to be passionate about the Bulgarian government, he was often in the company of Bulgarian police – he even learned how to shoot with their weapons. As a member of KPJ he sought to learn the secrets of the Bulgarian police to help the movement. He developed a sketch of the most important places to target in Kazhani and he did it very accurately. He sketched: the Subdivision, the house of the senior military officer (sergeant major), council, the shop for produce, the bridge, communications, the roads to enter the village and similar points. The points were noted in Macedonian and in Latin letters, which the Bulgarian government and people did not use. In addition to the sketch, with the help of the public servant in Kazhani Branko Kavkale there were added some points which were of importance.

The night of 19.8.1942 after comprehensive preparations Stiv made a plan to implement the action. The plan's implementation started at "Karejci" in the meadow below Kazhani owned by Mitre Perchev from Gjavato. The detachment, the members of KPJ and SKOJ from Gjavato and nearby villages arrived. At the meeting point each person was given specific tasks to carry out. Naume J Tuntev and Cane Stojkov were allocated the task of cutting the wires between Kazhani and Resen. A second group stayed in Karejci with the action that, after the attack with horses, to take the captured weapons and the cheese from the government dairy. Of the Gjavato communists in this group, Gjorgji Jurukovski was involved. Jonche Murdzhevski and Tashko Chatalovski had the task of going to the Pitropchevata Mill to be prepared to take the wounded and any prisoners. To implement the action, the detachment was divided into 3 groups. Each group had its own leader. All of the leaders were communists from Gjavato: Bendeovski Stojan, Grbevski, Mijal and Lasovski Lazo.

Insert photo

Leaders of the groups which undertook the action at Kazhani (Stojan Bendeovski, Laze Lasovski and Mijal Grbevski)

The action started. The armed conflict lasted until dawn. As sunrise had started, the 3 detachment groups regrouped in a pre-arranged place, the Lera forest base. On hearing the announcement: "In your places," the other groups of villagers who were participating in this action, withdrew to their own villages. The Gjavashtani also did this.

Immediately after this, the Bulgarian army and police blockaded the terrain in the whole region. The regard that the villagers had for the partisans lifted even more and the sympathies of the population were clear; demonstrated in the increase in membership and those

Arming themselves. In the village, people were saying that the station attacked a whole brigade armed with cannons and other modern weapons.

The Bulgarian government was very disquieted following this attack. An army force and a motor police force came to Gjavato from Bitola. Through some pro Bulgarian

elements in the villages, they asked about what was going on in the village. Each person who was encountered was asked to say if they personally saw anyone who was involved in the attack on Kazhani, whether anyone from the village took part, whether anyone from another village or the town took part. However, they got no details from any of these people about any role that Gjavashtani had in the action. On the other side, the participants in the action acted as though they were unaware of what had happened, saying “first time I am hearing about that.” They also told others about the action as though the questioning they had received was the first time they were hearing about it. There were no imprisonments and beatings during this period in the village. A large part of the army and the police continued to search in the forest. But their efforts came to nothing. They could not find anything. Secrecy and vigilance were at an all-time high.

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Soon after the attack on the secondary station in Kazhani the disquieted Bulgarian government in Bitola issued some strictly confidential orders to all of the regional police chiefs, the regional administrators, the police administrators and the presidents of the town and village councils (On 22 August 1942 three orders were issued on the same day: No 592, 602 and 603). By means of these orders broad action was sought to oppose the “danger of the Bolshevik propaganda<sup>26</sup>” and the orders provided that the recipients were free to select their own means<sup>27</sup> for achieving the objective.

In addition they were asked to organise “in every council area armed groups of 15-20 people”<sup>28</sup> of the local population to fight the partisans.

In all the councils and other settled places the strictest measures to be taken to secure the villages<sup>29</sup>. They were particularly asked to secure the villages at night and for the security to be increased and strengthened.

In the settled places of the District ... a police hour should be put in place which must be adhered to strictly<sup>30</sup> and “the strictest measures should be taken in relation to the families of those who have left to join outlaw bands (the official term used to refer to the partisans) and when it is confirmed as necessary, people from those families to be imprisoned... or to be sent as prisoners to the camps<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 452- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>27</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 453- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>28</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 455- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>29</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 456- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>30</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 456- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>31</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 459- Belgrade 1952.

By the order of 27 and 28.VIII.1942 given by the District cooperation was sought by the various levels of government, the army and the police in the battle against the partisans.

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Even before the attack was planned, some of the Gjavato communists joined the detachment "Dame Gruev." They were: Jonche Murdzhevski, Lazo Lasovski, Naume J Tuntev, Mijal Grbevski, Stojan Bendeovski and other sympathisers. However, after the action, even though they tried to join they were not accepted, because their absence from the village was expected to give rise to police suspicions that those Gjivashtani might be involved in the attack. For that reason, the members of the party organisation and SKOJ remained legal.

### **BETRAYALS AND ARRESTS**

Soon after the attack on Kazhani the party organisation in the First region was concerned at being detected. The person seeking them out in this region was the regional secretary Serafim B Naumovski called Cano. The arrests started...

On 22.VIII the following were arrested: Todor Chatalovski, Kole Bendeov, Boris Strezovski and other communists from the neighbouring villages. After a day in jail, all of the communists from Lera including Cano, were released. Boris Strezovski was also released while the remaining prisoners were kept in the garrison's prison in Bitola. The surprising and quick release of the named people from prison represented a surprise for the party members and SKOJ members from Gjavato. After this Cano put out a statement nothing dangerous was occurring.

The attacks which followed showed that the situation was not as Cano, the regional secretary, was representing. The arrests quickly increased...

On 29.VIII Jonche Murdzhevski was jailed.

After the arrests, the group of younger communists remained undetected. Together with the illegals Trajan Belev, Todor Angelevski-Strogov Josif Josifovski – Sveshtarot they held a meeting above the village in the mountain. At this meeting the illegals were informed of the arrests and sought to join the Detachment. Belev and the others suggested to them that they stay in the village and continue the work as they had been doing to date. they did not think that Cano could find them. At this meeting a further meeting was arranged for 6.IX.1942. however, this meeting was not held, because on that very day, the Bulgarian army and police blockaded the village and jailed them. The following were jailed: Mijal Grbevski, Laze Lasovski, Stojan Bendeovski, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Cane Sojkov, Naume J Tuntev, and Boris Strezovski again. (The police were searching for Naume J Tuntev and went to the house of his namesake who was a Bulgarian soldier. Not believing his father's words that his son was a soldier and thinking he was hiding the individual, they beat him).

It should be noted that the SKOJ organisation in Gjavato was not detected. Mitre Chatalovski was also not detected while his brother Tashko Chatalovski hiding in the village escaped arrest. However, the search in the first region was widened to Prespa.

A court process was arranged for those jailed in Bitola where the following sentences were handed down for those from Gjavato:

- Sentenced to death by hanging:
  1. Jonche Murdzhevski – hanged after the sentence in the Bitola jail
  2. Boris Strezovski – hanged in the Bitola jail
  3. Trajan Belev – sentenced to hanging in absentia
  
- Sentenced to life in prison:
  1. Todor Chatalovski
  2. Naume J Tuntev
  3. Kole Bendev
  4. Gjorgji Jurukovski
  
- Sentenced to 15 years in jail
  1. Mijal Grbevski
  2. Laze Lasovski
  3. Stojan Bendev
  4. Cane Stojkov

The sentence was served in Idrizovo until 18.VIII.1944 when the Third Kumanovska Brigade freed them.

#### **GJAVATO AFTER THE KAZHANI ACTION**

After the action in Kazhani that was discussed above, the situation in Gjavato changed significantly. The party organisation's activism could almost not be sensed, as, of its members, only Mitre Chatalovski and the SKOJ members remained unidentified. Mitre Chatalovski and the SKOJ members were interrogated in Kazhani but since then no one had been jailed or prosecuted. The imprisonments, prosecutions, hangings and interrogations had a negative effect on their ongoing activism. The parents of the SKOJ members also had an influence on the activism not being renewed. Trajan Belev through his wife tried to revive the activism in the village but that did not happen.

Despite this, the government took steps to paralyse the movement in the village. Relying on some villagers who were pro-Bulgarian, the government organised some counter insurgents. Each one of them received a payment of about 2-3,000 leva per month. The counter insurgents were armed with rifles. Their task was to be alert in following everything that was happening in the village, especially at night time – (every bark of a dog in was a basis on which certain homes could be monitored and the people questioned). The Gjavato counter insurgents often left the village and went to other villages including Prespa where, together with the Bulgarian army and police they often made assessments of the peaceful population.

The counter insurgents in Gjavato included:

1. Vangel Grbev
2. Vasil Grbev
3. Laze Konsulot
4. Kole Ruski



Some of them later withdrew after seeing actions taken in Prespa and under the guidance of Trajan Belev.

In addition to the armed counterinsurgents, there were 50 rifles brought to the village which were used by the newly established village guard. Every night 5-6 armed villagers had to crisscross the village from 18:00 hours until dawn. This was one measure to secure the village. The village guards changed and there had to be one from each house so that the sympathisers and supporters of NOB also had to be village guards. Todor Zhulev-Begot, Gjavashtanec, tells a story of an interesting event – “I,” he said, “was carrying out guard duties with a rifle on my shoulder when, that same night, I don’t know the exact time – Trajan Belev came to my home. My family called me and I returned home, I fed him, I told him what was news in the village and sent him off.”

Considering the full suite of measures, the government created a sense in the village that they were being followed, that there were suspicions about everyone and frequent interrogations. Most frequently, where there were interrogations, they were most frequently held in Kazhani. Mitre Chatalovski was interrogated because it was alleged that he had fed 25 partisan souls and sent them to the villages Dolenci and Lera. This was a baseless and unfounded allegation made by the counter insurgent leader Vangel Grbev. Chatalovski defended himself by stating the Grbev was two-faced and that he was always on the side of whoever was in government: with the Turks he was a Turk; with the Serbians a Serb, and now he was the greatest Bulgarian. Cane Shturev was interrogated and beaten in jail, following an accusation that he took part in the attack on Kazhani. Trajanka Jurukovska (the wife of G Jurukovski) was also interrogated and tormented. They confiscated her identity card (lichna Karta) as well as her coupons for food products and fabric. She was persuaded to become a traitor that is, in the event that Todor Angelevski- Strogov and Trajan Belev-Goce came to her house, that she should betray them. In her house, there were frequent searches undertaken. Her daughter Dana Jurukovska was also tormented. All of the jailed Gjavashtani were tormented. Their food coupons were confiscated.

The SKOJ members who had frequently been seen in the company of Jonche Murdzhevski, Mijal Grbevski, Naume J Tuntev, Laze Lasovski, Stojan Bendeovski and others.

Trajan Belev-Goce’s family was singled out and terrorised. It comprised 6 people of whom only his wife Zora Beleva and his son Metodija were able to work. The remaining two daughters and son were little and not capable of contributing. This family saw no peace. Everything until imprisonment they were constantly interrogated and monitored. Their house was blocked off many times, under suspicion that they were providing accommodation to illegals and partisans. It went so far that other villagers did not speak to Beleva if they saw her at the Spring or other places; they avoided her.

[pages 96-98 are missing – may be blank]

The tormenting continued into 1943. The interrogations, terror campaigns, the humiliations and blackmail continued without interruption. All the same, the families of the convicted prisoners who were put outside the law, did not end up hungry. They were helped by their families, sympathisers and Mitre Chatalovski

concerned himself with making sure that they got foodstuffs, money, wheat and so on. So, for example, in February 1943 he went to Rotino from where he secretly brought 100kgs of wheat which he later shared out amongst the endangered families whose men were in jail.

At this time in Gjavato, the Spring of 1943 the adherents to the Bulgarian government organised a welcome for general Marinov who came with an entourage from Bitola. He gave a speech at the school. Among other things he derided the activism of the communists and even boasted that they had communists in Bulgaria but had gotten rid of them in a timely way. They would “forgive” the local communists because they were immature. With this speech he was trying to show (and also to show the Bulgarian government in the same way) “kind heartedness” and with that he alluded to the convicted Gjavashtani who had been “forgiven.” The government had put on a lunch for him and then they left the village, taking valuable historical materials with him which he took to Bitola. Those included valuable old books held in the church. It also included school and other village archival material.

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As Gjavato is close to Derven, in June 1943 in the village school the German soldiers installed a radio station with a crew of about 20 soldiers.

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In July in the house of Trajan Belev-Gove a census was taken. The census was carried out by the police and the mayor Vasil Dodov. Two or three weeks later the Belev family was interned in the village Kolarovo – Petrichko. Zora Beleva herself recalled the internment: “It was the morning; the children were having breakfast. With the sickle on my shoulder I set off for harvesting and the children had to come with me to bundle up the hay. The cart was harnessed for setting off. I got to the barn and the mayor Vasil and two Bulgarian police officers turned me back from the road. They said – “Get some things together for the children because you are going.” I returned, took some clothing for the children a blanket and a small rooster. They gave me just 2 loaves of bread for the journey. Soon the neighbours gathered. They began to cry. I said to one of the neighbours, Trajan Sirmin “Trajane, harness the oxen, take them and work with them if you want; if we end up alive we will come back for them. If not, you work out what to do with them.” The internment was to last 8 months but they were kept for 12 months, a full year.

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Through all of 1943 the terror of the Bulgarian occupying force in the village also showed itself in other ways, such as requisitions on wheat, livestock, a ban on free movement, milling of wheat and similar. The bans were put in place to stop the villagers eventually helping the partisans. That is why the government issued so called “Open lists”/ Otkriti Listovi (permissions for movement) without which the villagers could not even go to their own land – fields, meadows or gardens.

During the harvest, although a passive village, Gjavato was subjected to requisitions. For this matter, in addition to the government public servants, village teachers were also engaged. Immediately after tying the hay bales, the requisitioners counted them. With some families they waited at the threshing of the

wheat and weighed it, noted the weight and then took a portion. According to the villagers there was a bit of speculation going on. Those with more assets got by more easily (offering bribes) and the poorer villagers were obliged to handover the requisitioned wheat to the kilo. In this regard, what happened with Dodov Stojan was characteristic. He was three kilograms short of the requisitioned amount. He had to buy some wheat to make up the difference, because he did not have it. Livestock was also counted. The villagers were not allowed to kill or sell livestock without approval from the government.

The autumn 1943 the Gjivashtani saw the collapse of the “Axis.” They watched as rivers of Italian soldiers loyal to Badoglio poured across the pavement, and they swapped clothing for bread, eggs and other foods.

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During the Bulgarian occupation, the following Gjivashtani were in the service of the uniformed police:

1. Mitre Cokov
2. Stojan Gulabov
3. Soter K Bubev
4. Lambo N Chklanov
5. Metodija Cv Klochov
6. Boris Lasov

These police officers did not serve in Gjavato but in other parts of the country.

The Spring of 1944 two planes machine gunned the German column which was located on Derven and 3 or 4 German trucks caught fire. The summer of the same year the weakness of the occupying force could be felt. At the same time, activism in the village revived.

In August 1944 in the locality called “Shabanovi Livadi” a big gathering of 150 -200 Gjivashtani took place, with the same number again from the surrounding villages. Trajche Gruevski spoke at this gathering – he was a member of the Second Regional committee of KP and secretary of the regional committee of SKOJ. He spoke about the objectives of NOB, the role of the Macedonian people in it and the successes of the NOV and about the need to form organs for the new and genuine people’s government. He also said that in the new government, honest people had to be selected, people who would help the People’s Liberation army and will work in the interest of the population. After his speech the villagers from Gjavato and the surrounding villages Malovishte, Kazhani, Dolenci, Gopesh, Ramna, Lera selected a People’s Liberation committee (“NOO”) with a seat in Gjavato. From Gjavato 9 people were elected to the committee and of the rest, there were 3-4 members per village.

The following were selected to this committee from Gjavato:

1. Mitre Chatalovski – president of NOO
2. Spiro Topev
3. Kocho Bandula
4. Boris Bubev
5. Ile Budzhev

6. Metodija Tosunov
7. Vasil Lajmanov
8. Vasil Tanev
9. Jordan Glavinchev

This NOO represented the new government in this region. It was concerned with procuring food products for NOV (bread, meat, lard etc) and also clothing and money. After that the NOO members got information from the population about movement, strength, preparedness etc of the enemy force and using the NOV couriers, conveyed the information to NOV.

In this time, parts of the Bulgarian army withdrew from Resen and headed for Bitola. Mitre Chatalovski in the name of NOV (sent by Trajche Gulevski) as a parliamentarian took a letter to the Bulgarian commander of the Bulgarian unit in Kazhani which was withdrawing. The Bulgarian commander read the letter and then spoke by telephone with general Marinov from Bitola and got an order not to negotiate with NOVJ. For that reason it did not come to collaboration for a joint battle against the Germans.

At the end of August 1944 of the Gjavashtani who were serving their punishment in Idrizovo, some joined the NOV units (Mijal Grbevski, Lazo Lasovski, Stojan Bendev, Naume J Tuntev) while others (Kole Bendev, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Todor Chatalovski) returned to the village. They were allowed to continue to work in the background.

In this situation, on 5.IX.1944 the former Gjavato mayor Vasil Dodov, after taking council money and rifles left for Malovishte to hide from the rise of NOVJ.

The new government, after the first half of September 1944 implemented a mobilisation of all of the people aged between 18 and 40. One group on 8.IX and the other group on 10.IX the mobilisation was implemented in order and there was no notice of deserters. They were:

1. Dragan Apostolovski
2. Sandre Tanev
3. Dragan Kuzev
4. Peco Durmishov
5. Trajan Chatalov

While Boris Budzhev who had been a Bulgarian soldier left the Bulgarian army while on leavy and joined the NOV.

All the mobilised and volunteered people went into the VIII and IX brigades.

Five Gjavashtani as Bulgarian soldiers, after the surrender of the Bulgarian fascist army joined the newly formed Macedonian brigade "Goce Delchev" comprised of Macedonians who had served in the Bulgarian army in Bulgaria.

## **THE LAST BATTLES ON DERVEN**

In the final operations for the liberation of Macedonia, VII brigade with the strength of 4 battalions and one ##- p107 side cut off - ## headquarters company/cheta conducted operations on the terrain near Gjavato – Derven. It operated on this terrain from the end of August until the liberation of Bitola, Prilep, Ohrid (start of November 1944). Its operations took place in this area because of the strategic

importance of Derven which was why so many enemy columns passed by there, particularly the German forces which tried to bring Greece and Albania into its "E" army group<sup>32</sup>.

The management of the mentioned brigade in accordance with the order from the Main Headquarters for NOV and PO for Macedonia, did everything it could to prevent the German withdrawals to Greece and Albania through this area especially over the main arterial route: the road from Bitola to Resen, especially at Derven.

The plan of the German generals (Schueuerlen and later Lanz) was to break through over the road Bitola – Prilep and on. However, after the liberation of Prilep on 2 August 1944 by the 5<sup>th</sup> Macedonian Partisan Brigade the German units were forced to change the direction of their withdrawal toward Bitola – Ohrid. Those on Derven found themselves under attack from the VII brigade.

On 17.IX a German motor column was attacked in an ambush. The surprised German soldiers took on the fight but it left them with 40 dead. The brigade had no losses. From this battle the brigade took advantage of military material left behind by the Germans and it was used to equip the new fighters in the brigade<sup>33</sup>. Soon there was another conflict. It was on 20.IX.1944 when on Derven after a 2 hour battle the German forces were forced to return to Bitola. This event was significant. In the battles, the Germans lost a truck while the number of lives lost and wounded remains unknown<sup>34</sup>.

To make the withdrawal difficult and if possible, stop the withdrawal of German soldiers, the Headquarters ordered the VII brigade, Gjivashtani, together with the villagers from surrounding villages, destroyed the road east and west near Derven<sup>35</sup>. the Gjivashtani regularly dug the road and destroyed bridges. Trenches were dug across the entire road at distances each of 5-6 metres.

As the German forces were unable to withdraw during the day, they tried to do it by night. At night between 21 and 22.IX.1944 parts of the VII brigade managed to break through the leading vehicles of the column of 150 trucks which had to go back to Bitola. Two trucks were stripped. On the second day, 2.IX., trying with all of its might to get through Derven, the enemy undertook a campaign from Bitola gathering a large number of trucks, with three combat vehicles and three armoured cars in the lead and about 20 trucks with soldiers. The brigade fought with these enemy forces for about 6 hours. The enemy had a lot of losses – wounded and dead, damaged and destroyed trucks. However, the German column managed to get through Derven with about 300 of its trucks as they had managed to repair the road at night. The battle did not end and on the next day, 23.IX.1944 it turned

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<sup>32</sup> Pregled NOR u Makedoniji 1941-4 Belgrade 1950 p 105.

<sup>33</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga IV, p 85 - Belgrade 1952.

<sup>34</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 107- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>35</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 108- Belgrade 1952.

“fierce and bloody, and the enemy was forced to strengthen the guard by adding new bodies and weapons and at the end, managed to protect the passage<sup>36</sup>.”

During the time of the battles on Derven the Germans bombarded Gjavato with mines. That created panic in the village but no one was killed.

Fearing that the village might be set on fire the Gjivashtani evacuated into the surrounding villages, Lera, Metimer and Svinjishta. The only people who remained in the village were the board, some activists such as Kole Zhulev, Boris Bunevski, Mitre Chatalovski and others. As the evacuation of the village caused the backup to weaken significantly, the Board was ordered to get the villagers to return to their homes so that in each home there was at least one married couple per home. At the call of the Board, a significant number of villagers returned to the village. The returned villagers supported the VII brigade which was stationed at the locality “Sulejmanov Kamen.” The villagers themselves took food (meat, bread, butter etc) by horse and cart. Apart from food they brought clothing (socks, shirts, knitted jumpers etc).

The VII brigade remained on this terrain for close to 2 months, until the start of November.

For this whole time, there was no refusal by any household to provide assistance to NOV. each contributed what they could according to their available resources. Some gave bread, some potatoes, some clothing and some jumpers etc.

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During the night of 2.X.1944 the Second battalion of the VII brigade again fought with the front of a German column which was coming from Albania. In the battle, 22 Germans were captured but the battalion had no losses. The brigade Headquarters learned from the captured German soldiers about the direction of the movement and the strength of the German forces. In essence they were a part of a mountain army corp. Their plan was that they would get through Derven and head toward Bitola.

Being aware of the direction in which the enemy was moving, the enemy numbers, the extent to which they were armed, NOV took actions over a broader area. Following the 4 day battle at Sir Han and Gjavato the enemy forces got to Bitola but at a cost of 120 dead, 10 destroyed trucks and one destroyed tank<sup>37</sup>.

After this time one group of Germans which had been withdrawing to Bitola broke into Gjavato and started to take things by force – horses (they took 4), oxen, hay, pigs (2), eggs, meat and other things. They then set fire to the barn owned by Spire Jurukov and one small shop, aiming to frighten the population of Gjavato.

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In the second half of the month of October 1944 the party organisation was already renewed, and later SKOJ too felt its activism increase. At this time, the secretary pf

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<sup>36</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 108- Belgrade 1952.

<sup>37</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga I, p 137- Belgrade 1952.

the party organisation was Ljuba Natalova and the most active in the village were Mitre Chatalovski, Boris Bunevski, Metodija Tosunov, Tome Bendev. Later, after returning from jail, the following resumed their activism: Kole Bendev, Todor Chatalovski and Gjorgji Jurukovski.

The named activists had constant contact with the VII brigade and with that the political commissar Vlado Strezovski who was given an update every 24 hours on the situation with numbers, arms, and movement of the Germans. On the initiative of the party organisation the telephone lines were cut between Kazhani and Resen, a distance of 7 km with the objective of cutting the region where the enemy units were moving and also to collect telephone wire.

In addition at this time, conditions arose in Gjavato for the formation of massive political organisations – People’s Front. The Women’s Anti-Fascist Front and the People’s Liberation Youth Union, at the liberation of the village at the end of October 1944.

In the leadership of the People’s Front:

1. Kole Bendev
2. Vasil Tanev
3. Vasil Lajmanov

In the leadership of the Women’s Anti-Fascist Front:

1. Zora Beleva
2. Lujza Bendeva
3. Kata Apostolova
4. Mara Shulankova
5. Pera Kekeva

Even though all of the over 18 youths were mobilised, in Gjavato a branch of NOMSM was formed. In the leadership were:

1. Metodija Belevski
2. Cane Shturev
3. Menka Lasova

All of the socio-political organisations actively helped the new government and NOV in its closing operations in this corner of Macedonia. The Women’s Anti-Fascist Front was mostly occupied in knitting socks, gloves, pullovers, laundry, making bread etc.

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Keeping public order and security in the village from the end of October 1944 a voluntary people’s police force was formed. In it were the following Gjivashtani:

1. Gjorgji Jurukovski
2. Mitre Shulankovski
3. Todor Perdulov
4. Mitre Dzhodin-Chkljamov
5. Gjorgji Budzhev
6. Riste Alushov
7. Mitre Stojkov

In keeping public order, the police force was responsible for observation, and checking there were no deserters and any instance of deserting observed was to be reported immediately. There were no instances of deserting in Gjavato.

Immediately after the formation of the voluntary police force in Gjavato, Gjorgji Jurukovski and Kole Bendev were allocated the responsibility of establishing the same in Capari, Dolenci, Lera, Gopesh, Malovishte, Kazhani.

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At the start of November 1944 the NOO which had been formed previously with a seat in Gjavato developed into a Municipal NOO. The president of the Board was Kole Bendev. The Board operated in Gjavato, Kazhani, Malovishte, Dolenci, Ramna, Lera, Metimer and Svinjishta.

After a while, Gjorgji Jurukovski replaced Kole Bendev. The Board concerned with itself with procuring food for the population, repair of roads and bridges, school issues etc.

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In liberated Gjavato a question arose about certain Gjavashtani who had been connected to the occupier and undertook activities aligned with the enemy during the People's uprising. The most prominent collaborators were former mayor Vasil Dodov and the counter-revolutionary Vangel Grbev and Laze Konsulot. While Vasil Dodov manage to hide in Bitola, Laze Konsulot hid in the ceiling in the church. The former managed to escape jail while the latter was jailed. Vangel Grbev was liquidated without being prosecuted.

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At the end of 1944 a school was opened in Gjavato where the children could learn in their own mother tongue. The first teachers in liberated Gjavato were: Boro, Bogdan and Olga Banishki and Veljo Todosievski. The principal was Boro Banishki. They ate at people's homes, they established literacy groups among the population so that about 40 adults learned to read and write who had previously been illiterate. The contributed to the cultural life of the village which developed and grew after liberation.

### **GJAVATO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FINAL OPERATIONS FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE COUNTRY**

In 1944 with the voluntary approach to NOV and mobilisation, the number of Gjavashtani-participants in NOB increased in the final operations for the liberation of Yugoslavia. They participated in various military units and were transferred from one unit to another, as required.

We provide a review of the participants:

1. Alushov Trajanov Metodi (Tode) shepherd, in NOV from 1944 XI Brigade 42 Division, and later in XVIII Brigade
2. Alushovski Lamov Zhivko – farm worker. In NOV from 9.9.1944 Battalion “Goce Delchev” artillery brigade. Awarded a medal for bravery
3. Angelev Vidinov Metodi – farm worker. In NOV from October 1944 in the III Ohrid brigade.



4. Apostolovski Borisov Kiril – farm worker. In NOV from 7.12.1944 XI Brigade in 49 Division (transport battalion ) brigade for transportation of 41 division. Medal for service to the people
5. Batkov Trajan Spire – farm worker. In NOV from 1944 XI brigade – border division (Sv Naum)
6. Bubevski Borisov Metodi – farm worker. In NOV from November 1944 XI brigade
7. Bendev Lazev Stojan farm worker. In NOV from September 1944 VII brigade. Recognition: Order for bravery; Medal for bravery; Order “Brotherhood-Unity” and a medal for service to the people.
8. Grbevski Lazarov Mijal, labourer, in NOV from September 1944 VII brigade. Recognition: Order for bravery; Medal for bravery; Order “Brotherhood-Unity” and a medal for service to the people
9. Gagovski Todorov Vasil farm worker. In NOV from 8.9.1944. VII Battalion 49 Division, II brigade in 48 Division, I brigade IV division KNOJ
10. Geshtakov Lambev Klime – farm worker. In NOV from 9.9.1944 – I Battalion “Goce Delchev” artillery brigade
11. Glavinchev Gorgiev Marko, labourer. In NOV from 8.9.1944 VIII brigade.
12. Gulev Jonchev Ile farm worker. In NOV from September 1944 IX brigade
13. Gulabov Bogdanov Najdo farm worker. In NOV 8. 9.1944 XI brigade.
14. Gulabovski Lambev Trajan farm worker. In NOV from 15.10.1944 XI brigade
15. Grbevski V Riste farm worker. In NOV from 8.9.1944. VIII brigade 49 division. Heavy artillery brigade II section
16. Dodov Trajanov Naume – labourer. In NOV from 8.9.1944 VII and V brigade
17. Dodovski M Vangel – farm worker. In NOV from 8.9.1944 XI and XII brigade. Medal: service of the people
18. Dodovski Spirev Stojan – farm worker. In NOV from 9.9.1944 battalion “Goce Delchev” artillery brigade. Medal for bravery.
19. Dodov Vasilev Boris – labourer. in NOV from 3.VIII 1944 in VII and I brigade. Honoured with: Order for bravery. Medal for bravery. Order for Service of the people
20. Jonchevski Vasil – farmer. In NOV from 8.IX 1944 in XI brigade
21. Jurukov Petrev Sandre – labourer in NOV from November 1944 XI brigade 41 Division
22. Jurukov Todorov Laze – farmer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 in IX, VIII, and VII brigade. Medal – service of the people
23. Jurukovski Krste – farmer. In NOV from 5.IX 1944 XI brigade 44 Division
24. Jurukovski C Trpche – farmer. In NOV from 9.IX.1944 VII brigade XV corps. Medal for bravery
25. Krusharov Kimev Riste – farmer. In NOV from 1944 VII brigade.
26. Nachov Aleksov Milan. 24.IX.1944 battalion “Goce Delchev” artillery brigade. XV corps. Medal for service to the people
27. Lalevski Simonov Boris – farmer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 VII brigade 49 Division
28. Lasov Todorov Micko – farmer. In NOV from 10.IX.1944 V brigade. Medal for service to the people. Order for bravery
29. Lasovski Stavre Laze – farmer. In NOV from 9.IX.1944 in III, XIV and XIX brigade. Recognition: Order for bravery and Order for service to the people
30. Markovski V Radovan – farmer. In NOV from 1944 XI brigade 44 brigade.

31. Nachovski Kimev Metodi – farmer. In NOV from 3.IX 1944 VIII brigade, VII brigade of 49 division and **prishtabska** company of 48 division. Medal for service to the people
32. Perlevski R Gjorgji – labourer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 VIII brigade
33. Perdulov Markov Blazhe – labourer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 VIII and VII brigade.
34. Purdevski Petrev Slavejko – general labourer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 VII brigade 49 Division. Order for service to the people.
35. Tanev Vasilev Stojan – farmer. In NOV from 1.IX.1944 in VII brigade, II brigade 42 division. Medal for bravery
36. Tuntev Jonchev Naume – labourer. In NOV from IX.1944 in VII brigade. Recognition: Order for service to the people.
37. Tuntevski V Krste – farmer. In NOV from 9.IX.1944 in VIII brigade 49 Division
38. Filipov Jonchev Stavre – farmer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 VII brigade. Medal for bravery
39. Cibalevski Kotev Stojan – general labourer. In NOV from 9.IX.1944 battalion “Goce Delchev” artillery brigade
40. Chatalovski Nastev Tashko – farmer. In NOV from IX.1943
41. Chumkov Kolev Gorgi – farmer. In NOV from 1944 XI brigade.
42. Chumkovski Nikolov Metodi – general labourer. In NOV from 8.IX.1944 in IX and VII brigade of 49 Division
43. Iliovski Vasko – farmer. In NOV from 1944 in battalion “Goce Delchev”
44. Dodovski Jordan – farmer. In NOV from 1944 and in battalion “Goce Delchev.”
45. Jurukovski Todorov Laze. In NOV from 1944 in VII brigade
46. Tuntevski J Gjorgija – labourer. In NOV from 1944 in 42 division
47. Klochovski Cvetkov Dimitrija. In NOV from 1944 in 15 corps
48. Simonovski Lazarov Nikola. In NOV from 1944 in the protection battalion XV corps
49. Tuntevski Trajanov Riste. In NOV from 1944 in XV corps
50. Budzhevski Stojan. In NOV from 1944 in XV corps

In addition to the direct participants in the Yugoslav NOV units at this time in Gjavato the number of supporters grew. Their work was to meet the needs of the NOV units which operated on the same terrain. Amongst them, there were some who stood out, who had been involved in the movement, were recognised.

From Gjavato there were the following:

1. Murdzhevski Apostol – Order for service to the people
2. Jurukovski Gjorgi – Order and medal for service to the people
3. Chatalovski Mitre – Order for service to the people
4. Chatalovski Todor – Order for service to the people
5. Jurukovska Trajanka – Order for service to the people
6. Bendev Kolev – Order for service to the people and medal for service to the people
7. Budzhev Mitrev Ile – Order for service to the people
8. Dodova (Chatalova) Luba – Order for service to the people
9. Shulankovski N Mitre – Order for service to the people
10. Beleva Zora – Order for service to the people

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In NOV in the battles for liberation of the motherland the following Gjashtani died:

1. Atanasovski M Ignat
2. Belev K Trajan
3. Budzhevski P Boris
4. Murdzhevski A Jonche
5. Strezovski Boris
6. Chumkovski S Todor
7. Cibalevski T Trajan
8. Dodovski G Boris

## **TRAJAN BELEV-GOCE**

Our recent history especially the NOB history and the People's revolution, is written in the blood of steel of thousands of fighters for freedom and independence. A standout amongst them especially from the villages under Pelister in the Bitola region, is the imposing figure of the first the fighters, Trajan Belev-Goce.

The poor and migrant family of Kosta and Chona Belevi lived in Gjavato. Immediately before the Ilinden Uprising Kosta approached one of the revolutionary companies in the Gjavato region while Chona went to Bitola when the revolution sparked. In Bitola she gave birth to Trajan in 1903. And for that reason he can be called an Ilinden child ("dete Ilindenche"). After a short time the Belevs moved to Capari and from there after a short time they returned to Gjavato. Little Trajan acquired his primary school education in Gjavato. Not having the conditions to continue his schooling, he, like the other village children, felt the bitterness of life. With his older brother Risto, Trajan was forced to work to support his family as his father had left to work overseas. He worked as a farmer and barterer.

At the age of 18 Trajan married. Life forced him, even though he was young and recently married, to leave his home hearth and feel the bitterness of migrant work. His first year as a migrant worker 1921 was spent in France; the following year, 1922 without a passport and dressed as a waiter, he left France so he could go to USA. At that time Trajan had already had a son but working as a migrant did not permit him to rejoice in his first born Metodija. In USA Trajan met with people from his homeland, including some Gjavashtani – who were all migrant workers and included Mitre and Vangel Chatalovski, Trajan Tomov, Ognen Stankov, Apostol Murdzhev and others. Belev joined in the workers union movement. That enabled him to raise himself up and become class aware.

In USA Trajan attended the meetings at which there were discussions about worker solidarity, worker rights, boycotting opportunists in the worker movement. As a worker and a revolutionary he was always a brave and uncompromising internationalist. He was active in all of the worker gatherings. So, for example, at a gathering in Gary Indiana, where about 2000 workers were present, Belev pledged supported for the red Soviet flag which had earlier been unfurled by a Spanish woman, calling for it to be flown above the whole world.

He attended a political course in Detroit for about three or four months and then he took part in demonstrations in Chicago where he got into fights with the police. As a result of his activism and rebelliousness, Trajan ended up in jail several times.

In 1932 Belev prepared to travel to the USSR illegally. However, he was discovered and deported from USA as an undesirable for the country. Then after a ten year stay in the USA Trajan Belev returned to his homeland.

Arriving in Gjavato he married again. He selected Zora Joncheva for his partner from the village Perino, Resen region. (In this marriage he had two daughters – Velika and Vera and another son Cane) his first son Metodija grew up with them). And even though the former Yugoslav government did not recognise this marriage, it did in fact exist and was happy. (The marriage was recognised in 1946; posthumously for Belev).

At this time, Trajan Belev's political activism started to be felt in the village. During the election battles a group of progressive, young villagers gathered around him. On the 5 May 1935 elections together with Josif Hristovski -Dzvoncharot and Kiro Milenkov – student, he declared himself an agitator against Stojadinovik. Because of that he was persecuted by the gendarmes. As a result of his political activism the village opposition became more organised and politically aware in its character and that was especially during the 1938 elections. Dressed poorly he went to the neighbouring villages and as he was witty, friendly and a good storyteller he had great success in agitating and gaining advantage for the opposition at the time.

Belev remained in Gjavato in 1938. His income was mostly from bartering goods /kiradzhilok. He travelled among various villages and traded fish, pears, apples etc in exchange for wheat, necessary to support his family. In 1938 after the elections he left for Belgrade where he took part in demonstrations in connection with the "concordat." While he was away his family lived very poorly as the four children were not at a working age. That same year and still without a job, Trajan and Gjorgji Ognenov returned to Gjavato. Soon after this, Ognenov died. Belev arranged a burial for his much loved friend who thought the same way that he did, and many villagers attended. Because of arranging this burial Belev was fined 1,000 dinars by the police which was a very large sum at the time.

Belev became more and more active, along with the teacher Todor Angelevski – Tosho Daskalot. This attracted the attention of the government to Belev and he was treated as suspicious. The gendarmes searched his house, and then locked Belev up in the gendarmerie in Kazhani.

In 1939 with the teacher Todor Angelevski Belev increased his activity so that he could establish a party cell in the village. In that regard he was aided by the newly established Coop in the village (for sale of goods) where the villagers gathered, where Gjavashtani had various discussions. In these discussions Belev was especially active, talking up socialism and the USSR. Those whose thinking was most aligned to Belev were the sympathisers of KP – future members of the KPJ.

The summer of 1940 Belev was taken on a military exercise in Prilep. From August the same year he became the secretary of the party cell in Gjavato. His election as secretary was not by chance. What impressed the voters was his modesty, his closeness to the people and his revolutionary outlook. As the secretary of the party cell he kept in direct contact with the Local Committee of KPJ in Bitola (December 1940 and January 1941). Belev is also a member of the Local committee and responsible for contact with Prespa. He could not remain a member of MK because of his increasing engagement with the party operational tasks. So for example, among other things, he took tasks for himself to work with communists from Gjavato to form a party cell in Rotino, Bratindol, Dolenci, Lera and other villages. In carrying out this task Trajan demonstrated dexterity and success.

Belev, even though fully engaged, also took on the matter of youth groups. The result of this activity was the formation of SKOJ in Gjavato. SKOJ enabled the work with the youth to broaden.

After the well-known battles on Derven in April 1941 Belev as secretary of the party cell he took a directive that they should collect military equipment and with his son

Metodija and Jonche Murdzhev and participated in the collection of that material. Trajan hid some of the military equipment in the walls of his house.

During occupation of the country, as MK was not issuing orders so, on his own initiative, the Gjavato party operated in a well organised way. When in the summer of 1941 the First Regional Committee was formed Trajan Belev became its secretary. November 1941 Mirche Acev came to Gjavato. Belev as secretary of the Regional Committee organised a meeting with the secretaries of the party organisations and SKOJ of the region. The meeting was held in the hut on Belev's fields. During that time he was ready to set off and join the partisans but his activity away from the frontline was far more valuable.

In December 1941 Belev stayed over in Bratindol. He was given a task to carry out with Tome Angelevski to go to Prilep with the goal of bringing to the Bitola area surviving fighters from the Prilep partisan detachment which had attacked the police station 11 October. He went to Prilep by train on 26.XII.1941. They returned with the illegals at night-time, on foot. He took two of the Prilep partisans to Gjavato – Ordanovski D Joska – Sandanski and Nikolova Venda – Dzvezda.

At the start of 1942 Belev carried out a sort of survey among the party organisation in Gjavato, asking about preparedness for a policy of armed uprising. He and the Gjavato communists were united in this. Belev's impact was not felt only in Gjavato. His activism was felt in all of the villages below Pelister. He moved over an area with a wide radius. In Bitola, Lera, Prespa. Everywhere. He had wit, he was close to the people, he was uncompromising in his ideas, and had high morals, he was always encouraging people into actions, in work. His closeness to the people, his mindfulness and ability to transform everyday conversation into activism was his greatest strength and that is why people liked him. His broad mobilisation and agitation activism were noticed by the Bulgarian government who began to follow him. When in February 1942 Gjavato was blockaded by the Bulgarian army and police there was a danger that Belev would be discovered. He escaped this danger but from then on he was in effect an illegal. At the beginning of his illegality he remained for a while in Lera and then he went to Bitola. In Bitola he stayed with the baker Temelko Ristevski (originally from Lavci) then later at the home of Dora Fundali (who as a stenographer worked at the Bulgarian police station was not under suspicion). The people with whom he came into contact while he stayed with Temelko recalled Trajan as a "man who did not speak about himself at all – not who he was, not what he was, not what he was called nor where he came from; but that is why it was easy for him to join political conversations<sup>38</sup>."

According to the recollections of Trajan's friends – fellow fighters, his discretion was impressive. In relation to that, the young SKOJ member and high school student Peco Lutovski – Malchik recalled: "When I met him for the first time in the winter of 1942 he introduced himself as a fisherman from Prespa." Even though he was healthy he often left the coffee shop with a limp. He often stayed in my unit and when he encountered the landlady he introduced himself as my friend which would often make the landlady wonder and say: "How can he be your friend when he is older than you?"

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<sup>38</sup> Braka Konstantinovi and K Cigarovski: Anegdoti p 7 Bitola, 1961.

On one market day Belev, as an illegal, found himself in Resen, on a day when that town was blockaded. When the blockade concluded, Belev, dressed as a villager with a cap on his head and a forged identity card in his pocket, left Resen and in leaving approached a police officer and had a chat which ended up as an anecdote. The chat went like this:

- What was this all about, sir?
- I was searching for communists and “shumkari (foresters),” explained the police officer with a frown

Trajan Belev was “surprised:”

- Communists – parachutists; shumkari-mumkari; such things, thank God, do not exist in our villages.
- What do you mean you don’t have them, jumped up the police officer, and began to list the names of the Macedonian partisans from the Capari fields and Prespa. He even listed Trajan’s name. Belev adjusted his cap.
- Yes, that is how it is, officer sir. I made a mistake. I too have heard about Belev. They say he is a dangerous communist. He beats the police officers like mice. Yes, yes, you must kill him, without question. If I were in your place I would never forgive him. yes, yes.
- The police officer mumbled something and Belev left<sup>39</sup>.

This anecdote is a clear example of Trajan Belev-Goce’s adaptability and level headedness.

The searches in Trajan Belev’s house in Gjavato by the Bulgarian police became more frequent. The first search that took place after he became an illegal unearthed a book written in English. Trajan was very sad when he found out about it. The more frequent searches did not discover anything further.

Belev, walked freely through the streets of Bitola even though he was an illegal. He would often meet Gjavashtani who were coming to the market. They knew the police were searching for him and that if they were to hand him over they would get recognition and an award from the government. No-one did this though. Trajan did not have personal enemies.

Some villagers believed the Bulgarian government when they said that if Trajan were to give himself up that nothing would happen to him. They suggested to his wife Zora Beleva to go to Bitola and to take those “guarantees” to him that nothing would happen if he were to return to the village. With the intention of doing just that, for the first time in her life she went to Bitola. She remembers that occasion: “When I came to Bitola I found Trajan in an inn where he was sitting with some villagers from Bratindol, drinking. Just near them, at another table, sat some Bulgarian police officers. When Trajan saw me, he gave me a sign not to approach them. We met after the police left. I told him that the children were crying, they could not sleep, they would not eat, that they were asking after him, and I told him to return because nothing would happen to him. At that, Trajan briefly replied: “Who has been lying to you?! Wait for me. After 4 years, I will return if I am alive and well.”

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<sup>39</sup> Braka Konstantinovi and K Cigarovski: Anegdoti p 7 Bitola, 1961.

Belev did not stop carrying out party tasks. That is why he was always moving around, especially on the terrain of the First regional committee, where he maintained contacts and attended party meetings in Lera, Strezhevo, Gjavato and other places.

When the detachment "Pelister" was disbanded in May 1942, Belev was in Brusnik, and from there he took a special trip to go to Gjavato to acquaint the party membership with this development.

After the well-known assassination of the police chief Kjurchiev that Stiv Naumov carried out, there were huge numbers of arrests in Bitola. That is why Belev went to Gjavato and the surrounding villages. In Gjavato he stayed with sympathisers of NOB, particularly at the home of Trajan Batkov, and Todor Zhulev-Begot.

Belev took active part in the preparations for the formation of the partisan detachment "Dame Gruev." Whether in the selection of terrain for its formation or location of camps, or the collection of other materials that were necessary for the detachment. In July 1942 Belev was already a member of the Regional operational headquarters with the function of Alternate political commissar. In the formation of the Detachment he was present as a member of the Headquarters. According to the recount of P Lutovski-Malnik Belev taught the fighters of the Detachment to handle weapons. Belev took part in his first action with the Detachment, the action in Smilevo on 2.VIII.1942.

Another example which can testify to Trajan Belev-Goce's bravery, cool-headedness and self-assuredness is recounted by Lutovski: "Once with Trajan from Ramnishte we went to an agreed place to take food to the Detachment, Trajan with a revolver hanging on a cord around his neck, confidently walked without worrying that anything bad would happen. I asked him:

-Goce, what will we do if someone suddenly calls out, "Halt!"?

- If someone calls out we will easily finish what we are doing; it is worse if he does not call out," was Goce's answer. His bravery comforted us and that is why the fighters in the Detachment liked him.

After the action of the Detachment at the police station in Kazhani and the betrayals in the First region, Goce was almost always with the Detachment.

In the court processes after the betrayals organised by the Bulgarian occupying force Belev was sentenced to death, in absentia.

The searches of his house continued. He was notified of the betrayal in advance, including the betrayal by Serafim. At first he could not believe what he was hearing about Serafim. But when an attempt was made to poison the Detachment it all became clear to Belev. Belev informed the Lavci villagers about Serafim's betrayal so that nothing similar would happen in that village.

At the beginning of September 1942 Belev was with the Company "Jane Sandanski." With Hisim Alba-Miki and Aruesti Aron Belev was given the task to put the Company into contact with the Detachment "Dame Gruev."

The beginning of November 1942 Goce and Miki came to Lera to see the how things were following the betrayals. They were noticed by some contra-chetniks from Lera



who began to track them. So they went to Gjavato and then went to the Detachment “Dame Gruev” which was in Zlatari.

From “Dame Gruev” Belev returned to “Jane Sandanski.” In the middle of November 1942 he was involved with “Jane Sandanski” in the action at the rail station Srpci-Beranci. In this action Goce with a revolver shot the street lamp throwing the Bulgarian soldiers into a panic. After this action and during the night the Detachment with a quick march returned to the mountainous region near Bitola. The Bulgarian army was not able to take an effective action against the Detachment which had already moved to another region. After the action, the fighters of the Company spoke to Belev and asked him:

- Goce, how did it go?
- Listen, forget about the action we pulled on “Ganjo” because they will exhaust themselves searching for us.

Toward the end of 1942 Trajan Belev-Goce was in Lavci and in January 1943 with Beno Ruso tried to establish contacts with some sympathisers or SKOJ members from the First region. Some Smilevo hunters saw them carrying that work out in the area between Metimer and Smilevo. The hunters notified the police station in Mramorica. A pursuit involving the contra-chetniks from Smilevo was immediately arranged. Withdrawing toward Lera, Trajan was injured and left some blood traces in the snow. The pursuit in Lera was joined by the Lera teacher who was a Bulgarian. For that reason, Trajan and Koki withdrew to Gjavato where they were welcomed by Trajan Batkov. The pursuit arrived in Gjavato. Some of the pursuers followed the blood trail above Gjavato while the rest searched the houses in Gjavato. They eventually arrived in the home of Trajan Batkov who, even though he knew what awaited him if the hunted were found in his home, he said to the searchers in a self-assured way: If you find anything amiss in my home, may I be beheaded.” He persuaded the pursuers to some extent with his comments, and they satisfied themselves with a superficial search of his premises. Until the evening Goce and Koki remained in his barn, and that evening they managed to get up into the mountain by the river as the village was still under a blockade.

Two weeks after this Belev returned to Gjavato where he remained for 3 days with the aim of taking measures to revive the activism of the village. However because of the population’s terror and fear of the government he did not get a positive response. At the end of February Belev left the Gjavato region and went to Drmeni and then to Italian occupied territory in Pokrvenik where he joined the Detachment “Dame Gruev.” In the middle of March 1943 Belev, Sermen and Dobri Milevski returned to the First region. These few details about Belev’s activities after the action in Kazhani demonstrate how active he was and how much he moved around, covering a wide radius and operating over a broad area.

The party and the Chief Headquarters knew Trajan Belev-Goce’s capabilities well, and his attitude to the work of liberation and lifting political consciousness and this was decisive in his being given greater responsibilities. Specifically with a resolution of CK KPM for a more effective development of NOB, Macedonia was divided into operational zones and forms headquarters for the zones, Belev became a member of the Operational headquarters of the Second Operational zone and the commissar for procurement. He remained in that role until August 1943. In that time, at the height of the heat of NOB in Macedonian, with a Resolution by the

Headquarters of the Second Operational Zone, in agreement with the Chief Headquarters of PO for Macedonia, the battalion "Mirche Acev" was formed, Trajan Belev-Goce was appointed the Alternate political Commissar for the battalion. In that role he participated in all of the actions and battles that the battalion undertook in famous Debarca and Kichevo. In these battles, Goce always exemplified heroism. This will never be forgotten by those who fought with him and survived. In one such great battle with the Ballisti and Germans on 8 November 1943 at Klenovec, Kichevo region, Trajan Belev-Goce heroically died. He died as befitted an inexhaustible fighter, as a revolutionary and hero. About 20 others died alongside him. In a report of that time it says:

"...the enemy with about 1000 people commenced an offense campaign with 600-700 people, on Izvor and Kopachka, one column of Brzhdani-Slivovo and one from Mavrovo-Lazaropole-Jama. We, the main forces (two battalions) had them on our right flank that is Brzhdani, with the goal of destroying the side column and surround the enemy main force. Then a heavy battle developed in Izvor, Klenovec, Malkovec and Popovec. Especially at Izvor and Klenovec the enemy was heavily hit. There were more than 70 injured and many wounded. We had 20 dead among whom were the finest leaders – Goce, Gorche and Vojvoda Mite<sup>40</sup>."

Trajan Belev died at the age of 40. He died doing what he dedicated his whole life to. His death represented a huge loss for the battalion and NOV. He died during the height of NOB's operations. However, the nature in which he died remains an eternal example for future generations of youth.

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<sup>40</sup> Zbornik dokumenata and podataka o NOR Jug. Naroda. Tom VII, knjiga 2, p 164-5 - Belgrade 1952.

## **THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE PROVIDED INFORMATION TO THIS CHRONICLE**

**The period before Ilinden:** Apostol Murdzhevski, Stojan Topev, Naste Jurukovski, Spire Topev, Risto Chekanov;

**Ilinden period:** Stojan Topev, Risto Chekanov, Spire Topev

**The political period between the two world wars:** Apostol Murdzhevski, Metodija Macanov, Zora Beleva, Kole Bendev, Ilija Jankulovski, Mitre Chatalovski, Todor Chatalovski, Gogi Jurukovski

### **On the village Coop:**

Metodija Macanov, Ilija Jankulovski, Stojan Bendev, Kole Bendev, Milan Grbevski

### **On the establishment of the party organisation in the village:**

Ilija Jankulovski, Cane Svetiev, Bogoja Fotec, Mitre Chatalovski, Kole Bendev, Todor Chatalovski, Metodija Macanov

**About the battle on Derven 1941 and collection of weapons** Petar Machkik, Stojan Bendev, Todor Chatalovski, Kole Bendev, Milan Grbevski, Laze Lasovski

**On the formation and activity of SKOJ:** Milan Grbevski, Laze Lasovski, Stojan Bendev, Dana Jurukovski, Ljuba Chatalova (Dodova), Cane Shturev, Naume J Tuntev, Todor Chatalovski, Metodija Macanov, Cane Svetiev

**On the activism of the party organisation and SKOJ 1942 and joint action with the detachment "Dame Gruev:** Dana Jurukova Apostol Murdzhevski, Naume J Tuntev, Boris Sterjovski, Cane Shturev, Laze Lasovski, Stojan Bendev, Mijal Grbevski, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Petar Lutovski, Peco Bozhinovski, Kole Bendev, Mitre Chatalovski, Todor Chatalovski, Vangel Nechevski

**Za periodot od provalata to 1944:** Mitre Chatalovski, Dana Jurukovska, Zora Bendeva, Trajanka Jurukovska, Ica Chatalova

**On the liberation of Gjavato – NOK – mobilisation and participation in the closing battles of the NOVJ:** Peco Gudovski, Pasko Bunev, Trajche Gruevski, Boris Lalev, Mitre Chatalovski, Mitre Cokov, Todor Zhulev-Begot, Gjorgji Jurukovski, Kole Bendev, Cane Shturev, Boris Bunevski, Naume J Tuntev, Stojan Dodovski, Apostol Gurabiev, Todor Chatalov, Metodi Chumkovski – president of the union of fighters from Gjavato.

**Apart from oral recounts, information was also obtained from the Archive CK SKM (notices from participants and activists in NOB from this corner of Macedonia recorded by audio tape):**

Gjorgji Doti p3

Holochev Krum p 18

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Gruevski Trajche p183-184

Todorovski Kole-Kamenko p183-684

Nanevski Trajan p 48-53

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 Milevski Dimche-Dobri p180-182  
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 Kotevski Boris p3  
 Petrovski Stanko p27-28  
 Buchevski Stavre p28-29  
 Jurukovski Gjorgji p36-37

### **Primary material**

1. "List of members in the leadership of the reading room – Goce Delchev – Gjavato – original document – unpublished – owned by Todor Chatalovski
2. "Testimony about the communists from Gjavato sent to the Regional police chief in Bitola – original document – unpublished and owned by Todor Chatalovski
3. Recollections of the Vojvodata Gulabovski Apostol from Gjavato, Bitola region – recorded from him – Naroden Museum Bitola
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6. Collection of Folk Jokes, knowledge and stories, published by MNP, book IV Sofia 1891
7. Spirovski Ilija, Illegals and partisans in Prespa, in Nova Makedonija of 2.VII-1920, VIII 1961
8. Apostolovski Mihajlo, The Final Operations of NOV for the liberation of Macedonia, Skopje 1953  
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TRAJAN BELEV-GOCE

The footnotes, sources and literature

Consulted people, sources and literature

Berat	the name of the licence ( <b>patent</b> ) which granted their non-Muslim Ottoman bearers, the <i>beratlı</i> , a variety of <b>tax exemptions</b> and access to <b>European law</b> . They were also known as "honorary <i>dragomans</i> ". The access to European law helped its agents dominate European commerce.
Nüzül	Nüzül was designed as a form of requisitioning from farms, to feed Ottoman armed forces; large quantities of food were needed to support Ottoman armies in the field. Flour was a major constituent in the 16th-17th century. Producers were expected to deliver nüzül to the required destination, and were not paid for this.
Muhazor	<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_divisions_of_the_Ottoman_Empire">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_divisions_of_the_Ottoman_Empire</a> <a href="https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire/The-decline-of-the-Ottoman-Empire-1566-1807">https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire/The-decline-of-the-Ottoman-Empire-1566-1807</a> <a href="https://media.economics.uconn.edu/working/2011-18.pdf">https://media.economics.uconn.edu/working/2011-18.pdf</a>
harambasa	Head of criminals
Martolos	<i>martolossi</i> were like the <i>aganzi</i> (= <i>ağındjî</i> ), i. e. the pioneers and sappers, who formed the advanced guard of the Ottoman army, with the difference that the <i>martolossi</i> were Christians; they were also used in Anatolia during the wars against the after the first world war, the population in Gjavato grew. Karaman and Uzun Hasan.  <a href="https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-1/martolos-SIM_4973?lang=en">https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-1/martolos-SIM_4973?lang=en</a> <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martolos">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martolos</a>
Kadi	A kadi (Arabic: قاضي qāḍī; Turkish: kadı) was an official in the Ottoman Empire. The term kadi refers to judges who preside over matters in accordance with Islamic law, but in the Ottoman Empire, the kadi also became a crucial part of the central authority's administrative hierarchy.
Serdar	Serdar (Ottoman Turkish: سردار; from "Sardar") was a military rank in the Ottoman Empire and a noble rank in Montenegro and Serbia. Serdars especially served at the borders of Ottoman Empire. They were responsible for security of lands.
Boluk-bashi	(Turkish: <i>bölükbaşı</i> ) was an Ottoman officer rank equivalent to captain (see Military of the Ottoman Empire). The holder was in command of a <i>bölük</i> , a sub-division of a regiment. <sup>[1]</sup> It was higher than <i>oda-bashi</i> (lieutenant).
Sejmeni	young armed men <a href="https://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Сејмени">https://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Сејмени</a>
Ajduti	bandit, brigand
Sijils	Sharia register
Gurbet	Short term migration to work and return.
Bashi-Bazuk	
Kiradzhija	Barterer
Buruldija	Official order
chiflik sajbja	Estate Owners Part of tax farming system
Austrian Consul	<b>Austrian</b> consul Kral, adopted an interventionist approach to the events, using the principles established at the Berlin Congress as per the inviolability of sectarian communities to suggest that Macedonia be reorganised in the manner that Lebanon had been in the 1860s. See HHStA PA , XII /"Memorandum" A. Kral to Gołuchowski, dated <b>Monastir</b> , 20 November <b>1903</b> . 97. For contradictory reports from an Austrian and French Civil Agent about

	<p>the local Christian reactions to these reforms</p> <p>At 217: Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State  books.google.com.au › bookshttps://books.google.com.au/books?id=h2-sAgAAQBAJ&amp;pg=PA217&amp;lpg=PA217&amp;dq=name+of+the+Austrian+ambassador+in+Ottoman+Turkey+Manastir+in+1903&amp;source=bl&amp;ots=f4_iR8JOVo&amp;sig=ACfU3U1Xv4pc6J_LQGF1I_axkuGfAs0uPw&amp;hl=en&amp;sa=X&amp;ved=2ahUKEwj-NekhfDsAhWVe30KHVe4BQkQ6AEwEXoEAcQAg#v=onepage&amp;q=name%20of%20the%20Austrian%20ambassador%20in%20Ottoman%20Turkey%20Manastir%20in%201903&amp;f=false</p>
Rila Congress	<b>The Rila Congress</b> is a congress of the <a href="#">Macedonian Revolutionary Organization</a> , the first general congress after the <a href="#">Ilinden Uprising</a> and the series of district congresses throughout <a href="#">Macedonia</a> . It was held in October <a href="#">1905</a> in the <a href="#">Rila Monastery</a> and lasted a month.
Serbian National	Formally the Chetnik Detachments of the Yugoslav army also the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland and the Ravna Gora Movement was a Yugoslav royalist and Serbian Nationalist movement and guerrilla force.
“Dijar Bekir”	See Macedonian Treasure magazine featuring a personal account of Bubev’s banishment to Dijar Bekir.
Adolf-Heinz Bekerle	A politician and SA officer and diplomat who played a significant role in the Holocaust in Bulgaria.
Ganjo	A character from Bulgarian literature – a country bumpkin.

<sup>i</sup> Elections to the constitutional assembly; founding and outlawing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

<sup>ii</sup> Suspension of the constitution by King Alexander Karadjordjević; declaration of a royal dictatorship; renaming of the SHS state to “Kingdom of Yugoslavia;” administrative reorganization into banovine.

<sup>iii</sup> Not clear if it is a 1 year good behaviour condition or time to pay the fine.