

# **MY PARTISAN LIFE**

**By KOSTA ALABAKOV**



photo was taken on 10 October 1945 – my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday,

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Kosta Alabakov and this is my story.

I wrote it at age 83 (year 2011) as a permanent record of the difficult times that I and many other fellow Macedonians endured as "partisans" during the two separate wars –

The first war was the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, between 1941 – 1945, also known as ELAS and

The second war was with the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG), between 1946 – 1949.

I was born in 1927 in the village Bouf, Aegean Macedonia and I come from a family of two sisters Tomka and Fana and one brother Done.

My father German left the family in 1937 to travel to Australia, leaving our mother with 4 children, one only few months old, to survive on our own.

At the beginning of the World War 2, at the age of 15, I was taken by the German army but later released and I joined the partisan movement. I became an active soldier in 1943 (age 16) at first, in the ranks of ELAS and later with DAG and experienced all the hardships of the war.

In 1947 my older sister Tomka, migrated to Australia to join our father.

In 1948 I took my family and moved to the Republic of Macedonia where at first we lived in a small village Gajranci and later moved to the city of Veles.

In 1949 I married Anastasia, who also came from Bouf and we have two children, daughter Lena and son Robert.

My brother Done migrated to Australia in January 1954 and in 1957 I moved my family to the city of Bitola, where I mostly worked on building sites.

In 1967 with my family I too emigrated to Australia and joined the rest of the family where I now still live, enjoying the love of my 6 grand children and 6 great grand children.



## **MY VILLAGE BOUF**

The name Bouf (English translation “owl”) was given to the village by the Turks, who occupied the region for a long time. The story is that when they first arrived in the area they saw many owls, so they called the village “Bouf”.

Bouf is one of the larger villages in the region of Aegean Macedonia and is located between the two large mountains of Baba and Bigla. It is 10 kms south-west from the Greek city Lerin and 28 kms from the city Bitola, in the Republic of Macedonia. It is surrounded with the following villages – (east) with Gorna Kleshtina, Kladobari I Kabasnica (west) with Psoderi and German (south) with Ramna Shuma and Armensko and (north) with Rakovo and Bitusha.



In 1946 the village had 325 homes with 2,250 people. It had two rivers, Laleshka and Laycharska with many other smaller rivers flowing near the village: Raychenska, Vlashkogumno, Osoy, Selski Rechishcha, Tayma and Priso. All these rivers joined to become Sinivirskata, which continued to flow through the village Gorno Kleshtina, then into the Eleshka then Crna and from here it flowed into Vardar, which continued towards the Greek city of Solun (Thessalonica) and finally into the Aegean Sea.

The Bouf people were hard working and they were also generous people because they always helped each other in difficult times. In 1875 the villagers built the first water system, about 5kms long and in 1907 they built the school, with a basement and two floors, which was attended by the young prep children where they were taught in Greek language, even though at home they only spoke Macedonian.

The village was predominately an agricultural village with most people working on the land and Bouf was famous for the “binde” potato. There were also many businesses: 4 cafes, 1 bakery, 4 cake shops, 5 shoe repairers, 2 blacksmiths and 1 shop for cottons and buttons. And because Bouf was built on a steep landscape the normal method of transport was with horses and donkeys.

## **I LOST MY SHOE**

As a child of about 10 years of age I remember wearing “cows hide” shoes, made at home in a fairly primitive way, when shepherding the bulls. One day it rained non-stop for the whole day and I got so wet that I didn't realize that my shoe laces broke and one of my shoes had fallen off. I didn't feel anything and kept walking with my socks, may be for the whole day. That night when I got home and tried to take my shoes off I realized that I had lost one but I kept quiet as I knew I would get told off because my mother did not live with us. The next morning I asked my grandmother if she knew where my shoes were and when she asked me where I left them last night I pointed to a spot near the bed. She said something like “Oh, may be one of the dogs or the cat may have taken it away” and gave me her shoes saying that she would make another pair for herself. I left the house with brand new shoes feeling pretty good that I lied well and didn't get found out.

## **I FOUND MY JACKET**

When I was young, I used to wear a jacket, which I loved because it not only kept me warm but I felt that it looked good on me. It was also very special because my mother made it for me by hand, from the wool she collected from our sheep and some that was given to her by her mother, grandmother Stefojca. I remember wearing it at all times when I went to work in the fields working or as a shepherd on the mountains. But one day I left it somewhere and I could not remember where so when school started I was without the jacket.

Each Sunday we all attended church and one day as I walked in I saw my jacket hanging on the wall. I was so excited and ran home to tell my mother about it. Straight away she went to see the priest, who told her that someone had found it somewhere in the fields and brought it to the church. I was so happy to have found my favourite jacket back.

## **MY EARLY SCHOOL DAYS**

Earliest memories of my childhood in Bouf are from about 5-6 years of age, playing with my friends, dressed in traditional uniforms, shirts and jackets made by hand and wearing the traditional shoes (pinci). The first photo below is from my class of 1934 (I am circled) and the second one is from our school building, which was built in 1907.



One day I ran into the house and accidentally stepped onto the freshly cooked pastry (zelnik), which my mother had left on the ground and that night when we had dinner she gave me to eat the piece which had my foot print.

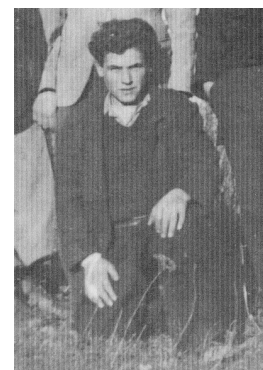
I also remember when the chimney caught fire not long after my grandfather Gjorgi died and feeling scared because when he was alive he always used to say "When I die I don't care even if the house burns down". I thought he had come back and lit the fire himself.



I started school at age 6 and at first I found it very difficult because at school we had to speak Greek but, up until then, we only spoke Macedonian at home and in the village. I remember the teacher showing us pictures of things and animals and telling us how to say them in Greek. However, it wasn't long before I started to learn the language and I ended up finishing primary school with reasonable results.

During summer, when school was out I normally worked as a shepherd, looking after animals such as horses, sheep, bulls and cows. This was normally done with a group of other boys and we all looked after each others' animals. Our group had about 10 kids and each one of us was responsible for 2 bulls. We all went together to the same grazing area for the day, where we played, swam and at times cooked pumpkins, potatoes and corn. As I got older I became a shepherd for sheep, which were milked twice a day – once in the morning and once at night. Some times I also had to work in the fields with my uncles digging, planting and whatever else was required to be done.

I remember one day while I was too busy playing with my friends when I completely missed seeing my two bulls disappear into the nearby forest. At the time I didn't worry about it that much because normally the animals would always come home on their own at the end of the day. I looked around for them, I couldn't find them so I just went home hoping to see them there. But when I got home and noticed they weren't there I realized that they went missing and I got scared, panicked and didn't know what to do. I knew I had to tell someone so I went to my uncle Risto. He wasn't happy but he picked up the lantern and asked me to lead him back to the spot where I saw them last. As soon as we got there we found them still grazing. He grabbed me by the ear and said to me "Here they are, now go and get them!" I rounded them up and together we headed back home. I was feeling so happy that we found them and I sang all the way back. That night I slept well but from that day onwards I always made sure I kept my eyes on the animals.





## LEFT ON OUR OWN

In 1937 my father decided he no longer wanted to be married so he kicked my mother out from the family home and made her go back to her own family home, whilst we (the kids) remained with the Alabakov extended family. I was 10 years of age, my sister Tomka was 12, my brother Done 8 and the youngest sister Fana was only 6 weeks old.

Not long after this, our father emigrated to Australia leaving us with our grandmother Efa (my father's mother) and our two uncles Ilo and Risto (my father's brothers), where we lived for the next 6 years.

During this time my brother Done and I worked with the animals and my sister Tomka worked in the fields with our aunts. Grandmother Efa looked after the youngest Fana. When my sister Tomka finished primary school she was sent to study "home economics" in the main city Lerin where she stayed for 3 years.



Our mother Mitra



Our father German



Tomka



Myself – Kocra



Done



Fana

I was missing my mother terribly so one day I ran away from home and went to live with her. But I was only allowed to stay with her for about 6 to 7 months because my uncles applied to the local court and they made me go back and live with them.

Returning back to the Alabakov family meant that I had to continue to work as "sheep shepherd". One day, I don't know how, but I lost 7 sheep that separated themselves from the flock and wandered into the mountains. The next day I found them dead, killed by the local bears. One of these belonged to my uncle Ilo. When he found out about it, he got angry and attacked me and gave me a belting that I can't even remember how I survived. He kept hitting me, punching and even kicking me when I fell down. He beat me so badly that and in my anger I decided there and then that I would get even by killing him and my plan was to do it with an axe at night, while he was asleep.

I was very angry with him and I kept thinking about the day when I will do it but for some reason one day I decided to confide this to the village mayor. He took an immediate interest and sat me down to explain why I should not do it. He told me that if I did what I planned I will end up "rotting" in jail for the rest of my life. I said that I would run away with the partisans but he told me that this would be worse, because when the partisans found out, they would just kill me without asking any questions. This convinced me not to do anything so I just tried to forget about the beating.

The family owned land which was about one hour walk from our village. One day my uncle Risto loaded up two horses with hay for me to take back home to the village. On the way one of the horses, whilst trying to grab hay behind him, pulled the whole load down and I couldn't re-load him as I was too young and on my own. I tied one horse by the side of the road and went back to the land with the other horse where my uncle was to tell him about what happened so he could come and help me load the horse again. He got angry with me, grabbed me by the ear and virtually dragged me back to the place where I left the horse. I couldn't scream and there was no one around that could help me. We loaded the horse again and I came home. My ear had swollen up and that night I could not sleep at all because of the pain and it hurt me for a long time.

My grandmother Efa was taking care of my baby sister Fana and she had been complaining for some time that she was finding it difficult so together with my uncles they decided to give her away even though my mother was still in the village.

My sister Tomka and I didn't want her to be given away so with my mother's knowledge we decided to ask our uncles to let us have the "old" Alabakov house (photo taken in 1977 with my daughter Lena and Fana's daughter Lidia) as well as some of the land and animals. However, when we approached them they both threatened us with something like "If your mother comes back here we will kill her!". Tomka got scared and she didn't want to go any further with this but I wasn't going to take this from them any more and decided to do something about it. I went to the village mayor and he took me to the police "chief" in the



village and they both told me that we are definitely entitled to the old house and some of the land and animals that belonged to my father. I told them that my uncles wouldn't like it and they are likely to do something to us but the mayor said for me to tell them that if they have any problems with this to go and see him in person.

The next day I decided not to go to work with the animals, instead I went to the old house, which was a mess, full of rubbish and hay for the animals. I started to clean the house and threw everything over the porch. Grandmother Efa came and she told me not to be stupid and not to do this crazy idea. Until then I liked her and I had never said anything bad or did anything wrong to her but this time I got so angry with her I stopped, looked at her and told her to get out of my house because if she didn't I would throw her over the porch, so she left. My sister Tomka came in and she too tried to talk sense into me because she knew what my uncles were like and she was worried that I would get hurt.

I was angry... I threw at her the broom and yelled "Here start sweeping and don't forget tonight we will be together with our mum again". She got so excited that we will have our mother back with us and she started to sweep and cried with happiness. I wanted to get our mother back for a long time and this time she was coming back that night. All I could think was about all of us being together again. We cleaned it as much as we could and I told Tomka to go and get our mother and I went back to then "new" house to collect whatever belonged to us. My aunty Kostadina dropped in and brought us a loaf of bread and cheese for dinner. In the house I found an old lock and used it to lock the front gate so no one could come into the house during the night.

## **MY FAMILY TOGETHER AGAIN**

Finally, after 6 years we were all back together again - my mother, my sister Tomka, my brother Done and my little sister Fana – one of my happiest day of my life.

The next day my brother Done went to work and I went to see my two uncles Ilo and Risto. I wasn't afraid to confront them and told them that I would like us to divide what we had with them because I wanted us to live separately from them. At the time we had 2 bulls, 1 mare and 26 sheep. Because one of the bulls was very strong we paired him with 10 sheep, the other bull we paired with the 15 sheep and the mare was paired with 1 sheep and the dog. We did a draw and we got the mare with one sheep and the dog and they got the two bulls with the cows. They also gave us only one container of wheat, their excuse being that we didn't work in the fields. It was not fair but we had to accept it.

I was employed by some of the richer families in the village to work in their fields and they all paid me with food. For my brother Done we approached a family for him to look after their two bulls during the day and for this he too got paid with food. My sister Tomka worked with our uncles and she was fed by them. At one stage I asked the family that I worked for if they can give me some more food as advance payment until such time as our land would start to produce the food. My mother also went out and worked as a farm hand and whatever food she was given she would feed my brother Done and my sister Fana.

The following harvesting season we managed to dig out a lot of potatoes, peppers and onions. With the old donkey that my mother saved I delivered 6 loads of wood to the village Klabuchishte and with the money from the sale of the wood we bought a piglet which our mother fattened up and we later killed for food.

We were ready to work our own land so we decided to ask my uncles to split the land that we had in the village. They agreed but they kept the best fields for themselves and gave us the least productive one. However, it no longer mattered to me because we managed to keep the family together with our mother and none of us went without any food.

That year the vines were dry and did not produce any grapes. The following winter, with my mother we went every day to a place called Prisoa to get the land ready for the next season. We had to dig rows 60cm wide and about 70-80cm deep. It was tough but we never gave up. We didn't have much food and most of the time my mother would break up bread in a plate, sprinkle it with pepper and pour water over it. It wasn't the best food but we ate it. We were digging up to 10 hours each day and making a slow progress.

To help us, one day my sister Tomka gathered her friends, who brought their own digging tools and while singing they dug the whole area for us. My mother cooked a pot of beans with hot chillies and placed it in the middle so that they could all help themselves.

Finally, we were ready to start planting the grapes but unfortunately we never got the chance because the war broke out and the German soldiers arrived. No doubt some other family ended up using this land.

My mother walked to another village where our cousin Done lived and begged him if he could give us his old donkey. Unfortunately, he told her that not long ago he had released it into the mountains as he no longer had any need for it but because my mother wanted it he went looking for it in the mountains where he had left it. He found it and brought it back. The donkey was not in a very good condition full of fleas and insects and he looked like he was almost ready to die. Nevertheless, my mother brought the donkey back to our house and she spent the next couple of months nurturing and healing it. She fed it well each day and covered his skin with some home made potions. It wasn't long before the donkey improved and we could start using it in our everyday lives.

Later, when we escaped and left the village for good we left the donkey to our grandfather Stefo, who sold it at the market for 3 gold coins. He kept the coins so he can give them to us when he saw us again but unfortunately, we never did see him again and I never found what happened to the gold coins.

One day in the autumn of 1943 I left home, without telling my mother, to join the partisans and in 1947 my father arranged for my sister Tomka to join him in Australia. My mother remained in the village with Done and Fana and she continued to work on other families' farms to make ends meet. They lived in poverty.





The photo is of my mother Mitra (first right) at her brother's wedding.

From left to right: her brothers Vasil, Kostadin and Gele with his new bride Naumka.



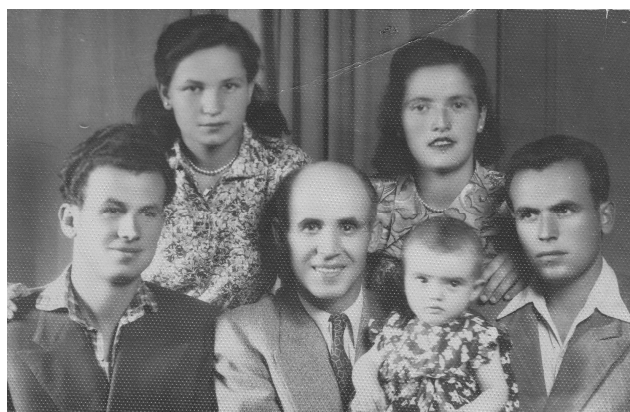
Tomka with our father in Australia (1947)



Family photo (around 1970)



America (1934) – seated are our grandfather Gjorgi (left) and our father German (right) .



Family photo - our father came to visit us (1952)

## **MY FIRST CONTACT WITH THE GERMAN ARMY**

When the Germans arrived in our village, I was about 15 years of age. They rounded all the young men with horses, including myself, to transport their ammunition around the countryside. They first took us to Lerin and there they dressed us up in German army uniforms.

For the next six months they continually moved us between villages until we finally settled in the village Ipiro, where we didn't do much, we just hung around and took care of the horses. We mostly slept in the open air but if it rained they allowed us to sleep in one of their tents. They fed us all from one large pot and I remember the food wasn't tasty at all.

Finally, they made us move out again towards the Albanian border and there we ended up in the town Erska, where they told us to leave the horses and asked us to change from the German uniforms back into our own civilian clothes. Then they loaded us on trucks and drove us back to Lerin, where we started from. In Lerin, we were told to collect our own horses but because I knew they could not tell which horse belonged to whom and I had taken liking to a nice little horse, I told the guard that he was mine. I still had my German uniform on so he just gave me that horse without asking any questions. They told us to go back to our own villages and to return their uniforms in one month's time.

I took the horse back home but as much as I liked him shortly after that we had to give him up in return for some food and an old donkey. The donkey we got for him turned out to be a very lazy animal so much that when the family pig ate his "testicles" the donkey did not move at all. My grandfather Stefo (my mother's father) then decided that because he was no good to us he killed him and used the skin to make some shoes (pinci) for us.

## **MY FIRST COURIER TRIP**

In January 1943, at age 16, the local partisans gave me and my friend Kole Opashinov a letter for us to deliver to the neighbouring village Armensko. We took off early in the chilly and misty morning and the snow had fallen to about 50cm. As we arrived at the hill between Bouf and Armensko out of nowhere the German army appeared on the road in front of us. They saw us and fired couple of warning shots in the air and called out to us to come down to the road. We were scared and I quickly took the letter from my jacket, pushed it deep down into the snow and we walked down to where they were. They brought a Greek interpreter who asked where we were going. We told him that we were on our way to the village Armensko to visit our relatives. They searched us with our hands up in the air, but they did not find anything. They told us that we had to go with them to the village and when we got to the higher side of the village they stopped and sent Kole to go into the village by himself to bring back the village mayor. I had to stay with them and they warned Kole that if he did not come back they would kill me.

I was very cold because I did not have proper warm clothes so they sat me behind a wall out of the way of the cold wind. We must have waited there for about two hours when Kole finally came back with the mayor and the German officer told us, through the interpreter, that we were free to go. Kole and I took off, very happy with ourselves virtually running because we were worried that they may shoot us in the back. We quickly went over the hill and entered the Bouf region and it was only here that we felt safe and realized how lucky we were to be still alive. When we arrived in the village we met with the secretary of the partisan group and told him what happened. He smiled and told us to go and have a rest and not to worry about the incident, as it never happened.

## **I BECAME A PARTISAN**

In April 1944, at age 16 and a half, I left (ran away from) home against my mother's wishes and joined the ELAS partisans. On 2 August 1944 in the village Pozdovishe, we formed the Macedonian partisan group "Bigla". As it's Commander they appointed Dimitar Tupurkov – Titan, father of the current politician Vasil Tupurkov – Cile and his assistants were Mihail Keramitchiev and Ilo Dimov – Goche. I was one of the youngest partisan in that group, so Goche made me his "personal courier".

Unfortunately, this group did not last long because for some reason it did not suit the Greek partisans and they insisted that we are disbanded. I remember one cold autumn day, we were in the village Statica when the Greek partisans' delegation arrived to meet with our group leadership to discuss the break up of our group. Even though it was very cold and wet, it had rained all night long, all of us partisans stayed under the eaves of the houses waiting to see what the outcome would be.

At about 2 in the morning, Goche came out of the house held his gun up in the air with both arms and called out "We won't give in". All of us, as if with one voice, yelled back "Oora". The Greek partisans' delegation left the village and our battalion took off towards the top of the Bigla Mountain, where we settled in. The next day, just after lunch in the distance near the village Trsja we saw something black moving. We knew it was them coming after us. We knew this would happen but at this stage we weren't prepared for a fight. Our commander Dimitar decided that we can not to take them on and we quickly moved on to another hill between the villages Bouf and German. We then kept walking until we arrived at the border near the village Lubojno and all the way here we could seem following us. They were led by the legendary Commander Januli but finally they gave up and left us alone.

On 13 October 1944 we had to leave the territory of Aegean Macedonia and crossed the border into the Republic of Macedonia, near the village Lubojno, Prespa. The battalion was instructed to head towards Bitola, on the highway near the villages Velushina, Graeshnica and Dragosh as a back up to the Macedonian army, who were engaged in a fierce battle with the German army to free the two main cities of Bitola and Prilep. When we got there, we kept attacking them continuously until they finally withdrew. Once Bitola was freed, we entered it and settled in the barracks Stiv Naumov. On 16<sup>th</sup> October the Vodenski battalion arrived, which numbered about 600 partisans because along the way it joined forces with another battalion Lerin-Kostur and the group Goce Delchev from Bulgaria with about 200 Macedonian fighters. Every day we saw new fighters arrive from the Aegean Macedonia and it wasn't long before we had grown to about 2,000 partisans.

With these growing numbers it meant that we had to re-form into a bigger group and that was the beginning of the FIRST MACEDONIAN-AEGEAN BRIGADE.



this photo (I am the third one from right with the arrow pointing at me) was found in the photo album of General Markos, one of the Commanders from DAG and it appeared in the book published in Serbo-Croatian book by Dragan Klakich "General Markos lost win"



## **FORMING OF THE FIRST MACEDONIAN-AEGEAN BRIGADE**



Ilija Dimov - Goche



Ilija Dimov - Goche and Markos Vafiadis

On 18 November 1944, at the spot Tumbekafe, in Bitola, the current location for the Bitola Football Stadium, the partisans from Vicho lined up very proudly in front of their leaders Malimadi and Kaimakchel for the official forming of the First Macedonian-Aegean Brigade. Ilija Dimov-Goche was appointed as the Commander and Mihail Keramitchiev as the Political Commissioner. The brigade had three (3) battalions and one group with heavy artillery. The leadership presented this new brigade with a trophy and a large red flag with the words "First Macedonian-Aegean Fighting Brigade". We all swore our allegiance to the cause and each one of us, one at a time walked under the red flag and touched it. I am sure that everyone that is still alive from that group will feel in their heart that proud moment – it still moves me when I think about it.

From the back we heard someone started singing the old favourite "all that is dear and precious to me" and we all joined with the traditional dance (oro). At the front of the dance was Goche proudly carrying the flag in his hand when he started to sing. We continued to sing and dance for the rest of the day and to this it remains as one of the proudest day of my life.

The following day the brigade was sent to Struga and the village Labunishte and there we settled in the barracks Markovi Kuli. At the end of the year we moved on towards Bitola and there we were joined with the second battalion from Prilep. We continued towards Gostivar and our intention was to clean up the region of the last few Albanian fighters, known as "balisti", that were left in the Shar mountain region. It was freezing cold weather and the snow was about two metres high with temperature minus 35c. We were hungry and cold as we didn't have the right clothes for this type of weather and most of us were full of fleas. But we still went into the battle and chased the few remaining "balisti" out of the area. We killed their two famous leaders Jemo and Mefail. But the brigade also had it's first casualties – two injuries and one dead partisan, Trajko Nikolov from the village Resen.

In April 1945 the brigade took off from Gostivar towards Skopje. Initially, we walked but when we arrived in the next city of Tetovo we all jumped on the miniature railway, known as "small kiro" but unfortunately, we over loaded it and the train could not move. No one was willing to jump off until someone called out that there were some "balisti" up the road so then we all jumped off to prepare for the fight and train took off and left us behind. Once we realised that we were lied to so the train can go on it's own way we all started to chase it down the road. Some of us finally caught up with it, jumped on it and because now there were fewer of us it managed to keep going.

When we arrived in Skopje, they settled us in the barracks in Kale and each day we had to go to the local aerodrome to rehearse for the forthcoming 1<sup>st</sup> May celebrations and the arrival of the Yugoslavian leader Marshal Tito. He did come and I saw him in person as he walked past all of us. After the celebrations they loaded us back on the trains and took us to Bitola. We gathered again at Tumbekafe, the same place the First Brigade was formed and here it was officially disbanded.

## YUGOSLAVIAN NATIONAL ARMY (JNA)

Following the disbandment of the brigade, the soldiers were allocated to various groups within the Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) and this photo is of me in their uniform.

I was allocated to the group responsible for the protection of the borders, near the village Dragosh and with me was my very good friend Vangel Divitarov. The weather was cold and we stayed in the village Kishava but when the spring arrived and the weather improved we went back to the army base.

I wasn't happy here and I wanted to be back in my own region so in 1946 with Vangel we decided to runaway from JNA and go back to re-join the partisans in the Greek territory. So one night we both took off and walked all the way back to near my village Bouf. There Vangel decided to go down to the village because he did not have a gun and I stayed in the mountain on my own waiting for him. He headed to the place Taima, where he met with Sime

Kamburo and Kole Patkata. They decided to stay there for the night, in one of the many huts in the area, but unknown to them someone told the Greek army and during the night they were surrounded and in the morning the hut was set on fire. Sadly, Vangel died in the fire but the two others managed to escape.

I was now on my own so I decided to join the local partisan group, which was active in that region but shortly after that the group was told to go across the border, into the Republic of Macedonia. I didn't want to go back with them because I already had been there but I had no choice because I knew I couldn't survive in the region on my own. Once we crossed the border and entered the village Dragosh the group stopped to rest for a while on the side of the road. As we were resting I saw two soldiers come pass. They must have seen me as I was still dressed in the Yugoslav army uniform and reported me. Within one hour the army jeep arrived with two officers, they showed me their ID and told me to go with them. I didn't fight them. They drove me to Bitola and took me to a building near the main "clock tower" where they put me in a small empty room. Another officer came in the room and gave me bread, marmalade and bottle of water. He told me to get comfortable because I was staying here for the night and if I wanted to go to the toilet to simply knock on the door and the guard would look after me. I don't think I slept well that night but the next day a soldier, armed with a gun, came into the room and asked me if I was ready to go to Skopje.

We went to the railway station and got on to the train for Skopje. On the way we struck up conversation and I found him to be very friendly. In Skopje he took me to the army head office where I noticed the person in charge was my old friend Goche, for whom I had acted as a courier. I asked the soldier if he could take me to him and when Goche saw me he ran towards me, hugged me and said "Hey Alabache, how are you!"



## **BOUF PARTIZANS FROM THE FIRST MACEDONIAN-AEGEAN BRIGADE**



Myself – Kosta Alabakov



Stavre Branov



Poleksija Todoroska



Vangel Klashovski



Filko Minovski



Sime Srbinovski



Sime Trgachov



Goche Cvetkovski



Jovan Cincev



Lazo Chokrev



Krste Shapadovski



Risto Gjorshev



Toshe Todorovski



Sime Skumanov



Vangel Divitarov



Tome Gjorshev



Lazor Vasilevski



Done Cvetkovski



Vangel Kolov



Kosta Karulev



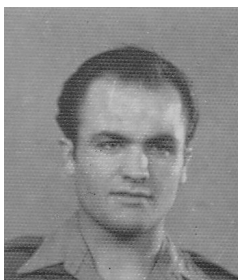
Kosta Gichov

I was unable to find photos of Spiro Todoroski, Kosta Zelevarov, Kosta Muchov and Ilo Bejkov.

Sadly, of all the 25 partisans that joined the first brigade I am the only one still alive even though some of them were younger than me. Some died fighting in the mountains, whilst others died from natural causes.

## **BOUF PARTISANS LEFT AS INVALIDS DURING 1946 – 1949**

The war left many Bouf partisans as invalids. The following people are the only ones that I found photos.



Dr Tororaki Pantev Branov  
Currently living in Skopje



Pavle Kosta Petlichkov  
Currently living in Bitola



Goche Ilov Todorovski  
Currently living in Bitola



Goche Krste Markovski  
Currently living in Skopje



Done Dimev Trgachov  
Currently living in Bitola



Cane Risto Todorovski  
Lived in Canda – now deceased



Atanas Pantelia Srbinski  
Lived in Kichevo – now deceased



Fanija Panteva Monovska  
Currently lives in Bulgaria

## **FINAL LETTER TO MY FELLOW PARTIZANS**

With this letter I wish to make a closure by saying goodbye to the 24 friends and fellow fighters who took part in the fight against the Albanian “balisti” in the hard and cold winter of 1944:

*Dear Friends and Dear Poliksena,*

*I want to remind you all about those hard but beautiful experiences we had in our young years. I remember when we formed our first brigade in that cool autumn day near Tumbekafe in Bitola. And when we were selecting the prettiest “partizanka” and when voted by putting up our hands. And how happy we were when they announced “Poleksija from Bouf” as the prettiest. And how we picked her up on our shoulders and paraded her around the barracks.*

*And when we took off for Shar Planina, happy that we proved that we were proud and fearless fighters with our leader Toshe Todorovski.*

*Dear friends and my fellow fighters even though we were not adequately dressed or equipped and very hungry with plenty of fleas in our bodies we were always happy with a song and a dance in our hearts. In spring 1945 we came back to Skopje and they put us in the parade where we had to march in front of Marshall Tito.*

*More happiness when they told us we are heading back to Bitola hoping that from there we would go back to Greece and our beloved Bouf region. However, I know that our happiness was cut short because they disbanded our brigade and split us, sending us all over the place and we never got a chance to see each other again.*

*My dear friends with this letter I say good bye to you all.*

*You are my friends, you are my fellow brave fighters and you are my Bouf people. I tried hard to find photos of all of you but I could not find them for all of you because I could not locate any members of your families. I wrote something brief for all of you – what I knew and I what I remembered about you.*

*Dear friends I have written this letter as my last one to all of you because after me there is no one else left. I wish everyone that reads my memoirs to think of us, to remember us for what we did and why we did it.*

*And when they see photos of us I want to them to simply say “I salute you – you have died for Macedonia”.*

*I now say my final goodbye with the partisan wish “Death to the fascism – freedom for the people”*

Kosta Alabakov – Melbourne, Australia (2011).



## **JOVAN ALABAKOV**

Jovan Alabakov (pop Stefanov) was born in Bouf and became a well known revolutionary figure. He was responsible for killing the well known "traitor" Nikola Vlaot, from the village Psoderi. The killing was planned by a small group of villagers and Jovan was nominated to do it. He shot Nikola in the local cafe where he used to drink every night and after the shooting, Jovan rushed home, hid the gun and said to his wife "This is where the gun is. If any of our family becomes a fighter, give them the gun". He then said goodbye to her and his kids and took off to go overseas, never to see them again.



Initially, he went to Bulgaria and from there to America, where he settled.

Many years, after the war was over, when he heard that his son Kiro and his wife had their second boy, Jovan decided to come back to the village to be with his family again. He invited all his friends to the local café for last drinks but unfortunately, at the cafe he suffered a massive heart attack and died, never to see his family again.

When the war started, of the 13 Alabakov families in the village, I was the first one to become a partisan. In 1944 I came back to the village, Jovan's wife (grandmother Joinca) took me to the back of the house, measured something with her feet and pointed to a spot asking me to dig. With a shovel I hit the spot couple of times and made a small opening. She put her hand in the hole and pulled out something wrapped up in a cloth. She opened it and showed me the gun, which was full of grease. She turned to me and said "Here Kosta, I have kept a secret your grandfather Jovan gave me for 30 years. I now give it to you, so now it's up to you...." I took the gun, cleaned it and made it look like brand new. The gun had 7 spots for bullets but it only had 3 bullets. I grinded 4 bullets from my own gun and forcefully inserted them in the holder without thinking if they will work. Shortly after this, my friend Filip Vasilev, from the village Armensko and I were walking past the little church near the village when we came across a small Greek army patrol. It was dark and this was the first time I had a chance to use Jovan's gun but when I pulled the trigger I felt like my hand had been blown off my arm. I clicked again but there was no response. We ran off and hid into a small flour mill where under the light I looked at the gun and saw it had blown up. It was no good to me so I threw it in the river, ending Jovan's memories.

After the war, grandmother Joinca and her family came to Australia and settled in a small town in Western Australia called Geraldton, where she died.

## **NERET PARTIZAN GROUP**

The first Macedonian partisan group to be formed during DAG, was in 1946, near the Neret Mountain and the Commander was Petre Markov, from the village Neret, an old fighter from the ELAS period.

One day Petre gave his watch to the local ranger to get it repaired by the watchmaker in Neret. They agreed to meet again in the same place the following day so the ranger can return the watch back to Petre. The next day, Petre and his fellow partisans settled down at the place where they were to meet, lit the fire and fell asleep waiting for the ranger. Even the guards had fallen asleep. Unknown to them, the ranger told the Greek army who surrounded the partisans and attacked them. They killed Petre but most of the partisans managed to get away. The Greeks took Petre's body to the village Neret and left it in the centre for all to see and some even spat on him. I was told that one villager went past the body and spat on it but one of the local police kicked him in the back side saying: "Why didn't you do that when he was alive? You are so brave to spit on a dead body"

From here Petre's body was taken to Lerin, where they tied him to a jeep and dragged him around the city as a way to frighten the people so they can be discouraged from joining the partisans.



## **MEETING PAVLE RAKOVSKI (GOCE)**

Following the split from the Greek partisans, new Kaimakchlan Battalion was formed with Pavle Rakovski as its Commander. On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1944 the battalion was attacked by the Greek partisans and they had to retreat and come across the Yugoslavian border into Bitola.

At the time, I was already in Bitola and this is where I first saw Pavle, who was a tall man and dressed in army uniform. The next time I saw him was in 1946, in the village Trsje, where Pavle came with the Voden delegation and I was given the job to lead them across to another village.

We headed off during the night and arrived in the village Setina in the morning, where the weather was fine. We stopped here for a break and then continued towards the village Papadja. Once we got there I left them there because I had to go back. But before I went Pavle stopped and asked me where I was from. I told him from Bouf – to which he smirked and said "Ah, we washed our clothes in the same river, eh?" We said our goodbyes and we never met each other again.

I later found out that he originally came from the village Kleshtina and the reason for his comment to me was because the same river flowed through both our villages. Pavle originally was a school teacher and he played in an orchestra with the well known clarinet player Kara Timijo. When the DAG war started Pavle was recommended to be a commander of a battalion but Greek Zaharijadis refused it and made him an ordinary soldier because he considered Pavle caused the split with the Greek army in the ELAS period. Many others like Pavle that were in the ELAS war were also treated disrespectfully in the same way.

Pavle died on 9 November 1990 in Skopje and I read about his death in the newspaper Nova Makedonia (New Macedonia).



## **MY FIRST BATTLE**

In the summer of 1946 a group of us, about 70 in total, were stationed in the place Porta, at the bottom of Vicho Mountain. Early in the morning the guards reported that a large Greek army, whom we referred to as “boorandari”, was moving towards us. We all jumped in a hurry, collected our things and headed towards the top of the mountain. Here we were asked to collect as many rocks as we could find and laid in waiting with the rocks next to us. Quickly the word got around that the boorandari were coming at us from all directions and we had to prepare for a fight as there was no way out of there.

From where I laid, I could see the large “black” group moving towards us. The order was given not to shoot until they got to within 50 meters from us. It felt like they didn’t know that we “kachapijadi”, what they called us, were here because they were walking up the mountain fairly freely and without protecting themselves. Their bugle echoed as they were getting closer to us. We were told to get ready and once they got within 50 meters from us we all just let them have it with our guns. This was an incredible sight and feeling, the noise of the ammunition humming past and seeing bodies’ drop to the ground. I saw lots of them being shot and as the boorandari took off downwards I saw many bodies left behind. We stood up and started throwing rocks at them. Some of their injured were being dragged down with them and others were simply left where they fell.

We were told to stay put because we could see them re-grouping and shortly they came back and attacked us again. But we were ready for them and hit them back just like the first time and again we pushed them back. They waited for a while and attacked us for the third time but we were again able to defend our position and sent them back. They must have decided they had enough, left us alone and went back to the bottom of the mountain to re-group for possibly another attack on the next day. But as it got dark we moved higher up the mountain, where we did a head-count and we were still 70. We had two partisans with light wounds and one with a more severe injury – broken arm, just above the elbow.

By now we were extremely tired, hungry and very thirsty. We had a meeting to decide how to get out of their “circle” to safer grounds. Various suggestions were made, one of them was for us to take chance and run into the forest through the village Elovo but our Commander Kalko finally decided that we should go via the “corridor” near the village Porta. We all took off slowly one by one in a long line and when we got close to the village we were ordered to take off our shoes and carry them around our necks. We kept walking very slowly and very quietly and finally we managed to escape their circle under their noses. Once we passed them we put our shoes back on again and continued towards the village Visheni. Just outside the village we met a small group of boorandari. When they saw us they called out “STOP!” but we just simply charged at them with one loud “OORAA!” - they got scared and took off. We didn’t even see which way they went. We marched on to just above the village Zelovo and then past Kolomplati then across to Statica and Psoderi and finally arrived in the Bouf Mountain, near the spot Jachmeno. We got in contact with the “Bouf Youth Organization”, which were very active and they quickly brought us food and water. From here I was sent to go with the injured to Bitola, because my main job was as the courier for the region Vicho-Buf.

One of the injured was Veljan Karachovski, who was badly injured when he bravely attacked and killed the Greek General who led the boorandari in their attack on us. I took him to the hospital but when I had to leave him there he hugged me and whispered to me “Brother Kosta when I wake up from the operation can you wait for me here? I want to be able to see you sitting next to me when I am in bed because I will have no one to rub my forehead”. I waited for him and after a five hour operation they brought him back to his bed. When he woke up, I gently rubbed his forehead. He looked at me and held my hand tight and we both started to cry. One of the nurses came in to see why we were crying but she too was moved by our experience and she too started to cry with us. I remained in Bitola for three more days and each day I made sure I visited Veljan in the hospital. But I had to go back to my group so I left him there.

Veljan did get better from his injuries and rejoined the partisans. He died on 26 December 1947 in one the battles in Konica. This is Veljan’s photo.



## **LONG WALK TO BAPCHOR**

One cold winter day in 1946, eleven of us partisans took off from the village Prekopana and headed for the neighbouring village Bapchor, normally a 3 hour walk. I was the youngest in the group. That day it was so cold that we couldn't take our hands out of the gloves. The temperature was well below 35% with very heavy fog and we couldn't see very far in front of us. The snow was frozen and at places it was very heavy and deep. We all took a turn to be at the front, to push the snow with our chest and feet and the rest following one at a time in a line. It was a very hard walk and we walked for a long time. As we walked we could see foot prints, initially we thought they belonged to the boorandari but after seeing them for the second and third time we realized that they were our own. We were lost and we had been walking for a long time in a circle.

Eleven hours later, we finally we arrived in a place that looked familiar to us, the region of Porta. We were exhausted and very hungry without any food. But even if we did have food we wouldn't be able to eat it as it was so cold that we could not get our hands out of the gloves to handle the food. Our breaths froze on the scarves that some of us had around our heads. Although we were dressed with the heavy army coats we couldn't stop our teeth shattering from the cold.

We decided that we had to get to the village Bapchor because we knew if we stayed out here any longer we could freeze to death. And finally after 11 hours of walking we arrived in the village Bapchor. It was dark and we all had to go to a separate house and knock on their door and ask them to take us in for food and sleep. We didn't have to worry about the Greeks because the villagers were mostly Macedonians who supported the partisans. We always knew that we would be safe in Bapchor.

We stayed here for two more nights and when we all felt well rested we decided to move on and we took off for the village Turja. The weather had not improved and the snow was 3m deep, which made our walk extremely difficult. On this trip I was joined by a young partisan, who was from the village Trsja. His father was against him joining us but I met with him and explained that I would take extra special care to protect his son. However, as we were leaving the village Prespa, one of the partisans, Peter from Africa, was mucking around with an old gun, which went off by mistake and shot the young partisan in the leg, just above the knee. When I took him back to his parents injured his father got angry with me screaming "I knew this would happen, I knew it". Luckily the injury wasn't serious and the young man healed very quickly. I remained in the village for few more days because I needed longer rest from the long and hard walk. After resting I had to continue on, but this time I had to walk on my own during the night because I had to bring the report to the Bouf Youth Group from the earlier conference that took place in Belkamen.

I tried to ignore the cold weather conditions and the heavy snow cover and kept walking until I got back to the Bouf region where I met with my fellow villagers Patkata and Vangel Fermanov. The next day they arranged for me to meet other youth groups to brief them as well. I couldn't stay in the region for too long because the Greeks had forbidden the villagers to carry food outside the village so that they are not feeding and assisting the partisans. As a result of this new rule the shepherds had to go to work without food. We stayed in a very small hut, which was very cold. Here we could not light fires because the Greeks may see them from the distance so we decided to find a better location. That night we headed off again and found another abandoned place further up that was well protected so we settled here and lit up the fire. This place was much warmer because it was not in the way of the wind and behind the door we found a blanket and couple of old coats. The ground was covered with dry grass so we could lie on it without getting wet. We felt the fleas all around us but our bodies were used to them by now so we didn't complain. The food we had with us quickly ran out and we decided to go and look for more food. Someone in the group knew there was a flour mill close by so we headed towards it. We found it and inside there we found little flour left on the wheel, which we collected in an old pillow case. On the way back to our base we passed an empty house, the villagers had already fled because of the war. My friend Vangel caught a chicken, which made lots of noise but he quickly fixed it by breaking it's neck. Behind the hut we saw growth of nettle, which we collected and brought back with us.

Vangel was the cook so he placed snow in the pan and lit the fire. Once the snow melted and the water boiled he mixed in the flour and quickly made "kachmak", a traditional dish which also required salt and oil. We didn't have any of those but once cooked Vangel poured the mixture on a newspaper and placed in the middle and we all got stuck into it using our fingers. As we ate it, we could feel small stones grinding in our teeth because of the dirt that was mixed in with the old flour. Patkata smiled and told us "Don't bite too hard with your teeth, just swallow it as is." We didn't have anything to soak the chicken in so Vangel plucked it dry and then put it in the pan, added some snow and left it to boil on the fire and later he put the nettle in. This was our food for the next day – chicken with nettle.

After couple of days we saw the sun come out and the weather got warmer and we decided to go down to the monastery St Marko in the village Kanasnica, which had 3 nuns and one older man. It was known as a rich monastery with cows and goats. We arrived there during the night and asked them for food. They gave us goat meat, home made sausages, few kilos of beans, flour, potatoes and they also gave us all of their bread because they were going to cook more the next day for themselves. They also gave us cheese, salt and honey.

We loaded as much as we could but because this was close to the main city Lerin, which had Greek soldiers, we had walk at night, arriving at "our home" in the early hours. The food was fantastic - we ate often and we ate well. The bread was very good because Vangel cooked it fresh every day. We remained here for 3 to 4 weeks and it felt like we were on a holiday. I remember how relaxed we were because we slept more than we were awake.

One day we decided it was time to leave the spot so during the night we headed off across the Bouf Mountain, past Ramna-Shuma across the highway Lerin-Bigla and arrived in KalugERICA. Here we slept in a house just outside the village and the next day we continued to the village Trsje, to meet up with our group. Soon spring arrived, the snow disappeared and we received new instructions.

I then returned back to my favourite place, the Bouf region.

### **MY STAY IN TURJA**

One time I became very ill and found myself in the village of Turja where I was looked after by Stefanka, an active member of the "movement". The secretary of Bouf Youth Organisation was Vangel Fermanov and he reported my illness to someone in the village. They in turn told my mother and straight away she headed off for the market in Lerin, hoping to find someone from Turja that could lead her to me. She had not seen me for a while. The first woman she met at the market from Turja happened to be Stefanka. My mother kept asking her if she knew of any partisans being sick in the village but Stefanka kept walking away from her and would not say anything because she wasn't sure who my mother was. My mother kept following Stefanka pleading with her to help her find her son. Finally, Stefanka stopped and asked my mother what her sons name was. When she heard my name Stefanka told her that I was at her house but she could not come to visit me. Although my mother was poor she bought two oranges and gave them to Stefanka to pass on to me. My mother then happily went back to Bouf.

### **SOTIR FROM KRAPESHTINA**

In 1946 small group of us were in the region of Krepeshtina and with us was a young partisan Sotir, an only son. We sent him to the village to get bread for us because we planned to move out of that region during the night. But some old lady saw him enter the village and she reported him to the Greeks, in Neret. The army quickly came to the village but they couldn't find Sortir because he hid in the family "hay shed". The Greeks then threatened his mother that if she does not tell them where he is they will burn down the house and the hay shed. She panicked and called out in Macedonian "Sotir my son, please come out or you will burn!" But one of the Greeks understood it so they rushed into the shed and with pitch forks poked around until they found him. They took him to Lerin and sentenced him to death. The day he was due to be shot the Greek priest came to the prison and said to the guards "This is how you kill!" took out his gun and shot Sotir in the head.

Later I was told by Sime Kamburo that after this the partisans came back to the village, found the old lady and took her to the Vicho Mountain, near the village Bapchor where they stripped her and tied her against a tree. Then they simply stabbed her with knives and left her there to die. They said it took her three days to die.

## **BREAK UP BETWEEN GREEK AND MACEDONIAN PARTISANS**

I was staying in the village Trsje and at about 1am the woman from the house came into my room and told me that a partisan was waiting for me outside. I got up and met him at the main gate. He told me I was required to get to the "camp" near the spot Jafkata. I quickly got ready and took off in the rainy night. I arrived there in about 20 minutes and I could hear whispers from inside the small hut. I entered the hut and inside I saw the whole leadership group with the commander from Vicho, Pando Shipkarov. Lazo Polazarov got up, shook my hand and quickly explained to me why they have asked for me – he said that Shipkarov and Papata Stratos had a disagreement and decided for a split between the Greeks and the Macedonians. He handed me a letter and said "Alabache (as he always called me) you need to get to Bitola with this by tomorrow morning". I asked "Who am I going with?" He answered: "With God!" I firstly looked at the clock, it was 2 in the morning and then I looked back at him. I could see in his face that he felt what a hard and dangerous task he has given to a 19 year old. He hugged me, tapped me few time on the back and said "Good luck and be careful when you get to Bigla". There was no way out of this for me so I responded "I will see you soon" and I took off. It was very dark and raining, with heavy thunder storms. I passed the Armensko region and arrived at the main road at Bigla. I lay on the ground for a while and listened for any movement of soldiers. I couldn't hear anything so I jumped up and quickly crossed the road. I entered the Bouf region and immediately I felt safer because it was familiar ground for me.

After walking for about six hours, I crossed the border and I was on my way towards the village Dragosh. I arrived at my friend Vangel Klashovski's place at about 8 in the morning. Here I changed into my civilian clothes, which I kept there and an hour later I headed for Bitola. It was Tuesday, market day so I joined the many people going to the market as if I was one of them. The rain had stopped and it felt as if there was different God in this part of Macedonia. At about 11am I arrived at the offices where I had to be and there I met with Gjorgi Urdov and Naum Petrov and I gave them the letter. They both read it and Naum told me to go and have a rest but to come back there the next day at about 3pm. The next day I came back as I was told and there I saw my old friend Goche. They told me that I had to lead Goche and about 60 to 70 of his armed partisans back to our region.

At about 5pm we were loaded on army trucks and they drove us back to Dragosh the last village before the border. From here we took off on foot in one line, me at the front, Goche behind me followed by the rest. We crossed the border and continued above the village Rakovo then on to the Bouf Mountain then across Bigla Mountain and finally we arrived in the village Trsja. The walk went very well because the weather was nice, no rain and we didn't meet the enemy, which allowed us to have more rest stops. We entered the village well rested at about 7am. Goche was well known to the villagers. When they heard he was back virtually the whole village came out yelling: "Go-che! Go-che...." They started to sing and a dance (oro) was started. Goche took the front and we all clapped hands. I left the celebrations and went to find the secretary Lazo Poplazarov, who sent me to Bitola in the first place, to give him the letter from Naum Peov. When we met, he grabbed me with both arms and said: "Alabache, for this when we are free we will pronounce you a HERO and we will...." The next day Goche, Shiperkov, Kalko, Kizo and Lefter re-grouped and re-allocated all partisans into new groups. There were over 300 of us and the same night they took off for a battle. Their target was the village Konoplati.

Although I was very tired from the trip and I wasn't required to go with them I did not want to miss out so I also joined them for the battle. When it got dark we attacked the building where the army and the police were staying. The battle lasted almost all night and just when we thought they were going to give up their help arrived from Kostur. However, they out smarted us instead of going via the road where we waited for them they came through the village Oshtime, over the hill of Lisec and attacked us from the back. We then had to retrieve to avoid any casualties. In that battle we had one dead and seven injuries. I was one of the injured, hit in the chin by sharpnel.

The next day we were visited by a delegation from the main Bapchor "leadership". From the Macedonian side was Paskal Mitrevski and from the Greek side was Miltijadis Parfirogenis. They had a meeting to see how they can settle things regarding the recent "split". For a Commander they appointed Aminda Arnautin from the village Lehovo and for Political Commissioner Lefteri Kachukas from village Gumenica and the assistant was Mihail Apostolski - Graniti. There was no position available for Goche and the reason given was because during the times of ELAS he was one of those responsible for the split in 1944 and was sent back to Skopje, as not suitable for the war. The photo is of Commander Pando Shiperkov.





## **MY PARTISAN LIFE**

In January 1947, a conference was planned with various political organizations, to be held in the village of Bapchor. The delegates arrived from places such as Lerinsko, Kosturso, Kaljari and Prespa but the word came back from our people in Kostur that the boorandari were planning an attack on us the following day. It was decided to move the conference to Radosh Mountain and they all left the region immediately and the conference took place there in the open air.

I was told to go to the village Trsje and wait for the delivery of the "beans" from Prespa, which I then had to organise the transport back to Bapchor. The load arrived very late in the night so we decided to move it the following day. I gathered about ten young male volunteers from the village to carry the bags on their shoulders. But as we arrived in Bapchor we heard that the boorandari were on their way so we decided to leave the bags here in the village and told the volunteers to go back home. I continued on by myself towards the village where I thought the partisans would be so I can join them.

Along the way I found a group of partisans that were left behind. One of them was Tanas Dimov, who I knew from Bapchor and he was carrying a large bag with documents, a courier and couple of other fighters. We walked together with me at the front. I noticed foot prints in the snow which made me think that may be we were close to the partisans. It was very foggy and we could hardly see our hands in front of our faces. To my right was the Vicho Mountain and I lead the group to the left. All of sudden I heard a voice (in Greek) calling out "STOP!" We all stopped. He asked me if I was alone or not and I told him there were few of us. I heard him say (in Macedonian) "Come!" His voice sounded familiar to me. I thought he was Commander Galani and we moved forward but as I got closer to him I saw the gun he was holding and it was not the one that our Commander used so I realized he was a Greek soldier.

Luckily I had my hand on my gun, ready to use it. I instantly fired a round towards him and we all lay down on the ground, which was covered with hard frozen ice. Slowly as we slid backwards on the ice we managed to retreat and took off running separately in different directions. The Greeks kept firing at us and unfortunately they hit the courier in the legs. He fell down and could not keep up with us. As Tanas Dimov he was running he panicked and threw away the bag and his jacket. In the jacket he had his personal ID card. Luckily for him the next day he went back to the spot and found the jacket but not the bag. I ran away with one of the other partisans, whom I knew as Tanas from Lagen and together we ran through the rivers and got very wet and cold. When we thought we were safe we stopped to rest. Tanas in his bag had pair of long socks which we cut in two – he took the bottoms and I took the top section and we managed to slightly warm up. That night after a long walk we found an empty brick hut where we settled in. In the morning a woman from the local village came past. Tanas knew her and asked of she could bring us some bread. She came back with loaf of bread with cheese and chillies. She also told us that the boorandari were in the village and they had brought with them a partisan with broken legs - we knew that was our courier that they shot the day before.

That night we headed for the Radosh Mountain, across the village Negovan and the next day arrived in the Ajtos region where we met the other partisans. I spoke with Commander Aminda and told him about the courier. He said that he already knew about it because the young courier was his nephew, his sister's son. He also told me that the conference concluded with positive results and all the delegates had already gone back to their own regions. He then asked me to take one of the partisans Gjorgi Sharinov with me and go back and see if we can find the bag that Tanas Dimov threw away. Two days later we arrived back in the village and at night we knocked on the door of one of the houses but the lady told us to get out because the boorandari were in the village. We went back to the mountain and found a small flour mill where the owner let us in. He lit the fire for us and we dried our clothes. He stayed up all night keeping an eye in case the Greeks came this way. We couldn't take any chances to stay here with the Greeks being in the village, so in the morning we headed for the rocky part of the mountain where we stayed for the whole day. Late in the evening we wanted to head to another village but we noticed the army in the distance so we hid again and waited until it got dark. Because the Greeks were in the area we decided not to look for the bag and I said goodbye to Sharinov and we went our separate ways – he went towards the Bapchor huts and I went towards the village Turje. We never saw each other again. Later I found out that couple of days later his dead body was found in the snow. It looked like he got lost and died from cold.

I arrived near the village but could not see any sheep grazing and I thought that may be the Greeks were also in this village. I decided to find out if they were there so I went down to knock on a door of a house, but as I got closer I heard an explosion. I thought it was the Greek army so I decided to get out of there and took off. Later I found out it was only kids exploding bullets.

It was a dark, cold night and it snowed lightly. I could not see much and I made a mistake and went the wrong way. Instead of going to Kalugerica I ended up in another village Neret, which had the Greek police and the Greek army. I got scared and panicked. I took off running back to the mountain. Once I was out of their sight I sat down in the snow. I felt a headache, as if my head would explode. I grabbed my head with both hands and pressed hard and remember saying to myself "Where to now my friend Kosta?" My mind stopped and I couldn't think. I felt lost and felt tears running down my cheeks. I didn't know what to do so I just sat there for a while. But slowly I got my senses back. I was exhausted but I didn't want to lie down as I knew if I lay down I would never wake up as the temperature was below 35%. Somehow I got some strength back and I knew that if I kept going I would reach the next village within an hour and half, where I could get hot meal and nice bed.

I arrived there at about 4am and knocked on one of the houses. The man opened the door for me and let me in. He started the fire and asked me if I was hungry and that he would cook "beans" for me. I said yes and lay next to the fire and fell asleep. He cooked the food but did not wake me, he just covered me with a blanket and left me to sleep. I woke up in about 4 to 5 hours and ate the food before I continued on to the village Trsje where I met with the secretary of the I youth organisation, Ilo Katipot. He told me that they were worried about me and sent couriers everywhere to look for me and because they didn't find me they thought I may have been either captured or killed by the Greeks. He said he was happy to see me and sent the word around of my safety.

I later went back to my Bouf region and there met Vangel Fermanov, the secretary of the Bouf Youth Organisation. It was very cold and the snow was over 2m high. The youth organization was a well organised group and they had dug "bunkers" for us partisans to use when we were in the area, so we can be protected from the cold. These bunkers were good protection for us because we could light fires without the fear of being seen from distance by the Greek army. Some times we were able to go into the village and stay in the homes but if the Greeks were in village then we mostly slept in the basements but had to continually move between houses so that we were not detected. When the weather finally broke, I left Bouf and went to stay in another village where there were no Greek army.

The owner of one of the homes that I stayed with looked familiar to me. During our conversation I mentioned it to him and he asked me where I was from. I told him I was from Bouf and he said that he knew many people from Bouf. He started mentioning names and one of them was my father's name. He went on to tell me that he helped my grandfather built our house in Bouf and that he remembered my father's kids hanging around the house. When I told him that I was one of German's sons he got up, hugged me and kissed me.

The next day a delegation representing the United Nation arrived in the village. One of them was the Yugoslavian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kocha Popovik. I went close to him to say hello and welcomed him to our region. He asked me where did I know him from and I explained that I was a soldier in the Yugoslavian army when he was a captain. He then said to me "Be careful, your people don't like those that fought for Tito like you". Once the conference ended I went back to my region.

### **GREEK POLICEMAN FROM NERET**

One day, in the village Trsje, arrived a Greek policeman from Neret - a large man with glasses and a very good talker. He told us that he wanted to fight on our side. One of our fighters, Kalko, whispered to our Commander Goche "He is no good, let me fix him up". Goche refused telling him that if we were to do anything to the policeman the Greek partisans would come after us asking us why we are shooting good Greeks. Instead Goche asked for two young partisans to take him back.

On the way back the three of them stopped to have a drink of water. One partisan put his gun on the ground and bent down to take a drink. The Greek took his opportunity, picked up the gun, disarmed them both and made them walk in front of them. Unfortunately, on their way they came across a small partisan group when the Greek panicked and shot one of the two partisans. The partisans chased him but he got away with both guns and I later heard he went back to Neret.

## **BEAR HUNT**

The villagers from Prekopana complained to the partisans about a bear that had been terrorising them and their animals for some time. They described it as a very large bear, which had killed their bulls, sheep, goats and dogs. About ten of us and two villagers, went looking for the bear at the place where they last saw it and we settled there waiting for the bear to appear.

Early the next morning, as the sun rose, we saw the bear. My friend Chakalo got his gun and laid down ready to shoot. I took the binoculars and watched the bear as it was walking slowly towards where we were. As it got closer to us, about 80 meters I called out to Chakalo "Now!" and he fired, emptying the whole round. I saw the bear stand up, growl and then just fell down. We got up and slowly approached it, when someone called out "Still alive!" and without thinking he emptied another full round into the bear's head to make sure it won't get up again. We picked the bear up and took it down to the village. It weighed more than 160kgs. The villagers cut it up and cooked the meat for us – it was the first time I had eaten bear meat.

Couple of days later the villagers told us that they saw couple of smaller bears coming out of the same cave. I went there with another fighter Ilo Katipo to look for them. We found the two cubs quickly and because they were small we picked them up and took them to another village Lubetino, where we sold each for 2 gold coins.

## **COMMANDER'S HORSE**

One morning in the summer of 1947 we were near a place called Porta. I went for a short walk in the forest to familiarize myself and I came across a dead mare with it's mouth full of insects. I took my knife out and skinned it. I then cut out some meat from it's hind legs and brought it back to our camp. My friend Chakalo cut them into smaller pieces and cooked them on the fire. The others asked me where I got the meat from and when I told them they all rushed off to cut meat for themselves. Later Chakalo said that he was still hungry and went to cut more meat but when he got there, there was nothing left but the bones.

Few days later the battalion moved towards Kajmakchalan. After a long walk, feeling hungry and tired we stopped for a rest. Some of the fighters, who were very hungry stole the commander Aminda's horse, killed it and by the morning the meat was all cooked and eaten. They hid the bones by covering them with branches and grass. The next morning, as we were moving out, the Commander could not work out how his horse had disappeared and he was also looking for his jacket, which he knew he had left on the horse. As he looked around he saw it being worn by one of the partisans and when he asked him where he got it from, the partisan gave him the excuse that he found the jacket lying on the ground. I have no doubt the Commander worked out what had happened to his horse.

## **GREEK POLICEMAN IN MALIMADI**

During our stay here in Malimadi I was told a story about the village (Greek) policeman, who was disliked by the villagers and how every morning he would get his towel, twirl it in the air and as he sang he would walk to the water to wash himself. One day, a villager Miltijadi hid behind one of the church posts and waited for the policeman to come out. As the policeman got closer, Militajdi jumped out and shot him dead. But few days later Militajdi himself was found dead. The villagers told us that the Greek army came into the village the next day and killed him as a revenge.

## **POLICEMAN JANI**

We were given an order to kill the local policeman Jani. We were told by the locals that he was in the city Lerin and was coming back to the village via Bigla Mountain. We stationed partisans near the river, at the bottom of the mountain and the plan was for them to shoot him just as Jani crossed it. But the partisan got too impatient and shot at him well before he was in range. Jani heard the shots and took off down the river. He gathered a group of people, who were also returning from the market, to surround him as a protection and slowly, slowly he made his way down the river. So Jani saved himself and we went back into the mountain without success.

## **DECEIVED BY YOUNG PARTIZAN**

One night near the village Rula, we were told that one of the partisans virtually went “mad”. He was a very young man who had just been mobilized into the movement. Chakalo and I went to have a look and found him naked, stomping and tearing his clothes. We grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground and held him down until he settled. Once he calmed down he went on to tell us that as he was having a “pee” against the tree, a woman dressed in white came to him and hit him with her sword on the back of his neck, because he was doing “it” under the tree.

The next day he was taken to the village Trnaa to a woman that apparently knew how to heal these cases. What she did was to cut/slice him under their tongue and as a consequence the partisan stopped talking and also became deaf. Couple of us were saying that he was “pretending” and someone even suggested that we should shoot him. But our Commander Sulo was a religious man and he believed in these things. He agreed to release him because of this “sickness”. Soon after his release, together with his family, he went to live in one of the eastern European countries, where he remained deaf and dumb for many years.

Once the war ended I was told that he miraculously found his voice and hearing. I never believed that he was crazy or that he lost his mind and I knew that he was deceiving us but he got away with it.

## **GREEK ARMY WANTED TO SURRENDER**

One day in the spring of 1947 we were in the village Trsje and Commander Sulo called me and told me that the Greek army was in the Bouf region and they wanted to surrender. He asked me to see if I can arrange a meeting with them. So that night I left with a group of fighters and we went to just outside of Bouf, where we got in contact with the locals and they passed on a message to the Greeks where we can meet.

The next day we went to the pre-arranged place and there met with their captain and one soldier, who was from the village Turja. At the meeting they told us that unfortunately, that day the Greek army appointed a new Commander in the area and it was decided to postpone any discussions until they worked out which way their new leader was leaning towards. They left but we decided to remain here for few more days, just in case there was a decision made by them so we didn't have to make another trip.

The next day we stopped a small bus that was coming from the village German. It mainly carried women who were bringing food to their relatives in the Lerin prison. We told the driver to let the air out from the tyres, so he could not drive away.

In the bus was a Greek army doctor. We stripped him of his army clothes and sent him walk the rest of the trip in his underpants. In the bus was also a well-dressed Greek with a small leather bag. Without saying anything, he put the bag on his shoulder and started to walk away next to the doctor. As he walked, one of our young partisans recognized him and yelled out to him. The man looked back, panicked, threw the bag away and took off running. Our Commander Sulo, took aim with his gun took and shot him dead as the Greek was running away. The bag was full with money, which he had been collecting from the villagers in the region in support of the Greek army. The shots alerted the Greek army from the nearby village who quickly came and cut off our exit from the area. We had to retreat and take a different route via the Bouf region. At the same time, more army truck and tanks took off from Lerin and when they got there they started firing at us. They outnumbered us but we managed to get away, without any casualties. The Greek army collected the dead man and returned back to Lerin.

## **PARTIZAN SHOT BY FIRING SQUAD**

Although this incident happened over 60 years ago, to this date I am still haunted by the memories of what happened to a young partisan in 1947. At the time I was about 20 years of age.

I was leading a small group of partisans and I could hear tension between a female and a male partisan, who I remember was from the village Prespa. As the leader of the group, I told them both to calm down and that we will sort out their differences when we get back to camp. To avoid any more tension I told the female to come and walk with me at the back of the group. The next day we sat around as a group for the daily briefing. The young partisan was playing with the gun and despite being told to leave it alone, he kept fiddling with it. All of a sudden his gun went off, shooting the female in both her legs. The first aid people quickly bandaged her and sent her off to the hospital. The young partisan was grabbed and separated from the group and we had a meeting to decide what to do with him.

He said it was an accident but some of the partisans swore they heard him threaten her with "Leave me alone or I will shoot your legs with my gun" so most of them screamed "death to him". It was voted by all that he should be killed by a firing squad. The next day we walked to the village Oshkima, where once again we had a follow up meeting and again it was voted by the entire group he should be shot. The Commander then asked for volunteers to shoot him and five were selected. Because I was considered to be an experienced partisan I was asked to go along to witness the killing. We led the young partisan to a spot further up the mountain and there couple of the partisans started to dig the grave while the accused stood there watching it. He was looking at the ground with tears rolling down his cheeks. He just stood there mute and motionless. I was only few feet away from him. When the grave was ready I stood next to him and asked him if he had a last wish. He turned to me, took his jumper off his back and with the tears in his eyes, looked at me and said "Friend, this is my jumper... please give it to my young son because he doesn't have one". I could never forget that look on his face. Then suddenly he turned around and jumped into the grave, tucked himself into the hole and covered his head with his hands. I then heard the gunfire, they shot him in the back, killing him instantly. I remember feeling very sad and frightened. I threw the jumper over his head as the soldiers started to shovel the dirt over his dead body. I felt numb and started to cry and walked away because I could no longer watch the dirt being thrown on him.

To this day I still think about how wrong this killing was – why did we kill that young man for such a mistake? And why did the leadership group, which was made up of older, mature and experienced fighters allowed this to happen. .. It was the saddest day in my life.

## **ATTACK ON THE GREEK ARMY COMPOUND**

One day we were in the village Zelevo, near the Bigla Mountain. Our Commander Sulo told us that the boorandari were in the village monastery and we had to get close to the village and attack them. When it got dark, we moved in as close as we could and opened fire. But as the battle started we noticed our "bomb launcher" firing once at them but twice at us. We had to withdraw very quickly because it hit and wounded four of our fighters. One of them was my friend Chakalo. He got hit in the face and he needed help because he could not walk as his head was spinning. I sent two men to pick him up. Afterwards, all the wounded were sent to the village Psoderi to be cared for by the nurses.

The following day we held a meeting to review the battle and what went wrong. Commander Sulo was defending himself saying that the problem with the "bomb launcher" was Commander Graniti's responsibility. We experienced these type of errors and loss of lives many times in the past battles but as junior officers we could not demand answers from the higher authorities. At this meeting we were told not speak about this ever again so we kept it quiet and it was never brought up again.

## **EASTER OF 1947 - VICHO TO MALIMADI**

In the spring of 1947, at 20 years of age, I became the “Political Commissioner” of the Vicho partisan group, which was mainly made up of young people. The commander of the group was Naum Dimov – Chakalo, assisted by Vane Pejov, who was a much older person.

The group had its own musical orchestra and we were camped near the village Porta. From here we could see the tops of the Vicho Mountain and the Pelister Mountain in Macedonia, both covered with white snow. It was Easter time and we could see the trees flowering around us and the weather was improving.

That morning we all woke up a little earlier because from the distance we heard gun shots. The word got back that a small group of boorandari was attacked by another partisan group in the area and because it was Easter we joked that the boorandari were given their Easter eggs. We got ready, started walking and entered the village Visheni where our orchestra, led by the well known musician Timcheto started playing in celebration of Easter. The villagers came out to join us. And we started to sing and dance partisan songs. It was traditional that the village dance (oro) was danced half with men at the front and the other half women only – they could not mix. The woman that danced next to the last male had to be related to him.

After few hours of dancing and singing we left and headed for the next village of Drenoveni. There we were billeted out to families and after lunch we all met in the centre of the village and the orchestra started playing again. The celebrations lasted until late in the night. We stayed here for two more days and on the third day we took off for one of the most beautiful and revolutionary village Smrdesht, which is located near the Albanian border at the base of the mountain Malimadi. Just as we got to the village we were pleasantly surprised because we were greeted by the “youth” of the village and they presented each one of us with a small packet. In the packet we found socks, gloves, scarf, red coloured egg for Easter and cake. Each young person took a partisan to their own homes and fed us for lunch. After lunch the whole village came out to the large centre and our orchestra started playing. We danced and sang until the early hours of the morning. We stayed in the village for another day celebrating the special day with the villagers.

That was one of the best Easter celebrations that I have enjoyed and few days that I will never forget.



I am standing third from right (arrow pointing at me).



## **BAPCHOR SPECIALTY MEAL**

In our group was an older partisan German. I don't know whether that was his real name or whether we just called him that because he came from the village German. When the Greeks came to his village he escaped from them and went to live in Bulgaria. When the DAG war started he decided he wanted to fight for Macedonia so he came back and joined the partisans. As an older person he was always giving us talks and lectures, some were interesting and others very repetitive and boring.

This particular night as we were together in a group, before we split up to go into different homes, he started again to talk and give us advice on what we should be doing and how to be careful in the village, just in case there were traitors (grkomani) in the village. I was very tired and desperate to find a house to sleep and eat, so I called out to him "Gero, enough of your talking and enough of your politics". This annoyed him a lot so he stopped, moved towards me, looked at me and angrily said "You little shit, you haven't even grown up and here you are with us partisans and you don't even know what you are fighting for!". I looked around and I saw the others faces – they were all laughing or smirking as if to say that they agreed with him.

I was young and his words got me angry but couldn't do anything about it as it was getting much too late so I just grabbed my friend Ilo Katipo's hand and dragged him with me in the dark. We went to the house where I knew the people and knocked on their door. The family let us in, lit up their fire and gave us change of clothes. When we were ready to eat, the lady of the house asked us what we wanted to eat. Without hesitation we both asked for the "Bapchor special", which was boiled eggs in a pot full of water and cooked with pieces of goat's cheese.

## **VASIL FROM ZELEVO**

This incident happened in 1947 with a young partisan Vasil from the village Zelovo. He was a large man but not experienced with weapons. He was in charge of the latest "automatic gun", a Czechoslovakian Brenda, which was light and easy to carry.

One day Vasil decided to clean the gun but he either forgot or he didn't realize that he firstly had to empty the cartridge, which held 72 bullets. As he was cleaning it, he mistakenly pulled back the "catch" and all of a sudden the gun went off, firing about 20 bullets. Unfortunately, next to him were about a dozen soldiers preparing potatoes for lunch. Luckily, they were all standing upright because he only shot them in their legs and they survived. The more seriously wounded soldiers were sent to the hospital and the ones with lighter wounds were sent back to their own homes.

The battalion got together to decide on his punishment. After lengthy discussions it was decided to "kick him out" and we told him he was free to go wherever he wanted to, but Vasil decided to stay around us. Wherever we went he followed us. Whenever we stopped he too would stop but he always kept his distance to about 20 meters. If we got into a village he would also come few minutes later he would go to a house and ask for food.

As the "Political Commissioner" for the battalion and I always walked at the back of the group and he was always few steps behind me. When we moved so did he – when we stopped - he stopped too. I was instructed not to talk to him, to ignore him and not to acknowledge him at all. But I took a liking to him so whenever he would ask me something I would answer him. If we stayed in a village and they cooked meals for us I would always secretly take some food to him. If the group stopped to sleep, we would wait for him to fall asleep as well, then we would wake each up one by one and we would leave him behind. But when he woke up, he would hurriedly catch up to us and normally he would call out to me "Kosta, you forgot to wake me up, but I caught up with you. You won't get rid of me that easy!" and he would smile. When we got involved battles with the Greeks he too would get involved and always yelling the loudest.

But one day during one of our battles with the boorandari, near the village Sheshtevo, I believe he saved us from certain death. As we were walking, behind us was a Greek sniper taking aim at us from the back. He did not see Vasil, who was walking further behind us but Vasil saw him and slowly crept up to him from behind and jumped on him. Vasil disarmed the sniper and brought him to us. From then on we took on the saying "Never fear Vasil is behind us". At this point, a group of partisans approached the battalion Commander Graniti and asked him if Vasil was allowed to rejoin us. The Commander agreed that he should and he even offered him the rank of "sergeant". But Vasil refused it because all he wanted was to be in charge of his "automatic gun". Later on Vasil was sent to the "officers' academy" and that was the last time I saw or heard of him.

## **BATTLE NEAR KALUGERICA**

In the spring of 1947, we were told a group of boorandari left Lerin and settled themselves in the cabins above the village Kalugerica. My group's instruction was to go there and attack them. During the night, we headed towards the village and when we got near we settled on the ridge of the mountain, watching their every move in preparation for the attack. When it got dark, we quietly crept closer to them and waited for the right moment.

I was next to Chakalo and together we slowly moved to get closer to them. As we walked, we both tripped on wire, that we did not see in front of us, which triggered the landmines. We both jumped forward couple of meters and yelled "Bombs, lay down!" and I heard the loud explosion. All of sudden, the army appeared in front of us, running and shooting towards us. I knew this would be bad for us as I heard voices of people being hit. I even saw bodies dropping around me. I called out "All alive get back here!" and we retreated. Of the 30 fighters only 9 of us came back. Immediately we sent a courier to the village Trsje asking for more fighters to help us. They sent us a group but by the time they arrived the shooting stopped and we knew that the army had left. We then went back to the area looking for our people. Most of the ones we found were wounded but we also found many dead. We picked them all up. The wounded were carried back to the place Lokmata, where they were met by the medical support staff, doctors and nurses. They quickly bandaged the wounded and with the help of the local villagers from Trsje, they were all transported to our hospital in Prespa. The dead were buried here near the village. Chakalo and I were left without any fighters and they sent us to join the group Sulo 1010, whose job was to protect the leadership group.

Couple of days later I was sent with a group to attack a group of boorandari, seen not far from where we were. I went there with my group and met up with Chakalo's group and together the two groups attacked the boorandari and chased them away from the area. They ran away but left behind their clothing and food. Chakalo and I just stood looking at each other and feeling satisfied with our success. We hugged and jumped up in the air together. After one month, Chakalo's second in charge had to leave his group so he asked his Commander Sulo if I could join him. He agreed to Chakalo's request so we ended up being together again for a long time. He was a good friend.

When I think back to our friendship and time together I can't recall how and when we were split during the war years up but I do remember meeting up with him again 48 years later at the big Bouf "re-union" in Bitola. We hugged again, just like we did many years earlier and cried for a long time, may be, because we knew this would be the last time we would meet. Chakalo died in 2005 in Skopje.



Naum Dimovski – Chakalo



myself – Kosta Alabakov

## **ATTACK IN THE VILLAGE NEVSKA**

In 1947 we were a group of about 3,000 partisans, known as Sulo 1010. We were told to go to the village Neveska and attack the boorandari that had settled in the motel and the policemen that were in the church.

When we got close to the village, we split into smaller groups and waited for the dark. We had to wait until at 9 o'clock. Precisely at 9pm a rocket was released to give us the go ahead. All our groups moved closer to the village and we attacked them from all directions. The church was set alight and we saw the policemen jumping, some through the door and some from the tower, yelling "Death in the name of the king!"

I was in the group that attacked the motel where the army was and we also set fire to the motel. The soldiers very quickly started to come out with their hands up and gave up without a fight.

One of our fighters was wounded and sadly, here we lost one of our favourite female fighters Astera, from village Ajtos. We reformed as one group and with tears in our eyes headed back to our position in the village Prekopana.

The same day some of the partisans brought back with them one of the Greek policeman, Manoli, who had a reputation for being notorious for terrorising and raping women in the village. When the women from the village heard that he was held by the partisans they all came out with sticks in their hands and asked us to take him to the centre of the village, so they can deal with him. Our Commander Aminda decided to let them have him. They all attacked him and within few minutes he was bleeding very badly. I was standing near him, when I saw an elderly woman coming at him and yelling "Where is the dog? Let me have him". The other women just moved away and let her get to him. She started to hit him with the stick calling out to him "You dog, this for what you did to my daughter!" I don't know what happened to him after this but I was told later that he died not long after, from the injuries.

After few days here, our group moved towards Kajlarsko and on the way we came across a smaller group of boorandari. We fired at them then took off for the mountains to get away from them.

When we got to the mountain one of the partisans lit a cigarette, which was enough for the Greeks to see where we were and they started firing towards us and they hit one of our partisans Krste Shapadovski, from Bouf (photo). Sadly, Krste died after few hours later and we buried him in the region Grchka Blaca.

From here the group headed for the Radosh Mountain. We arrived in the village Papadja Setina, where we stayed for two days. We collected as many horses as we could and went to the border and met the trucks bringing weapons and ammunition



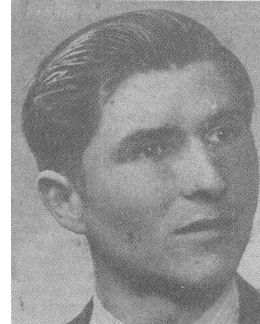
from the Republic of Macedonia. We loaded up the horses and started our walk back. I was in a small group that walked at the front and when we got to the village Setina we were told to stay outside the village as guards. Here they gave us bread and cheese but the bread was very salty so we threw it away and just ate the cheese. Later on I remember feeling very thirsty, from eating the cheese and we looked around to find water. In the distance we could hear frogs so by following their sound we found a small creek but the water was very dirty. I put my hand in the water to scoop some but I couldn't put it in my mouth, it was putrid. That night we walked to the next village Negoan. In the morning we were still walking in an open area when all of a sudden aeroplanes appeared in the sky and they started bombing around us. We all dropped and lay on the ground. Those that arrived here with the horses earlier had unloaded the boxes and had let the horses graze around them. The bombing continued all day with two to three aeroplanes at a time. It was panic stations; no one knew what to do or where to hide. The ground around us was littered with bodies, some injured and some dead, both partisans and villagers. The water in the river next to us was red. The wounded kept yelling for help but no one could help them.

That night when everything went quiet and the enemy disappeared, our group headed towards Bel Kamen.

## **LAST LETTER FROM LAZO ANGELEVSKI**

Young Lazo Angelevski was a 23 year old partisan when he was captured by the Greeks in our village Bouf. He was tortured in jail for five straight days and they threatened him that they will shoot him unless he publicly denounces his "macedonianism". And if he did distance himself then he would be sent free and allowed to live anywhere in Greece or Yugoslavia.

But although he was beaten up very badly, Lazo refused. Knowing that he only had few days to live, during his last days he managed to write on a small piece of paper a letter addressed to his uncle. This is what he said:



*"Dear Uncle Atanas, I have been captured by the "fascist" enemy and I am locked up in a cell in Lerin. At the door is a tyrant guard he is not talking to me he just stands there. My mouth is cut by a bullet, my left hand is injured and I have been beaten up.*

*My dear uncle, I know you will cry for me but mostly you will be angry with me why I didn't listen to you and stay in Macedonia. But no words can change that now, it is all done. This is my destiny and I want you to know that. I have no one else closer to me then you. I remember when we lived together and talked all night.*

*So please forgive me because I know this may be difficult for you. If you do get this letter please tell my parents everything.*

*To my father, my mother and all my friends. I send warm wishes to my sister. I know you will all cry for me. Uncle, if you get this letter I leave one wish with you. My mother, my father and my sister - please take care of them. I don't have much to write to you because you know all the things you gave me advice on. I am very grateful to you.*

*I am now waiting to die I have been beaten and tortured. They are making me talk against the partisans, the party and my nationality if I want to be free. I chose death I will never say anything against. My mouth hurts.*

*Every day I see executions. They all say goodbye with us that stay behind in jail. I hear the cell door next open up and I hear screams of "goodbye friends". They are crying for Mother Macedonia. The same is waiting for me every day, hour and night. As I am writing this letter I hear someone calling out "goodbye friends", I have no one in this world. And sometimes breakdown and cry. I am still in good mind.*

*Dear uncle, when Lerin is freed please bring my mother and my sister and look for my grave let them cry their "blood" tears may be that will soften up my bones so I can wake up.*

*I am writing this letter day and night because the tyrants check up on me every moment to see what I am doing. Today they are taking me out so I can speak against the party and the National Freedom Front. Death is waiting for me here who comes here never leaves alive. I will not give in. They told me that tomorrow is my chance to speak or to choose death.*

*I don't have anyone closer than you uncle and I know you will understand that I am writing this letter at the end of my life and I want you to know I won't give in to them.*

*I chose death. I don't fear death. Let everyone know that I have nothing to say. To my father, to my mother and to my sister I say goodbye to everyone for last time from your Lazo.*

*Death to the fascism – freedom to the people.*

Lerin 15. 08. 1948.

## **I STARTED TO SUSPECT**

One day the Commander called me in and told me that someone from head office had asked for me. I immediately went to see this person, who sat me down and asked me many questions on how I ended up with the Aegean Macedonian Brigade, why did I leave Yugoslavia to come back with DAG and what were my thoughts on the war.

At the time there was some talk around that the Greek partisans were concerned that the Macedonians in DAG, like myself, had shown allegiance with the new Tito regime in Yugoslavia, who had recently signed an agreement with Russia's Stalin. Rumour had gone around that some Commander from DAG had even killed many fighters from Goche's brigade.

This person also wanted to know from me who in 1946 sent me to bring the letter to Macedonia following the split between Pando Shipkarov and Papata Stratos. To whom did I give the letter that Poplazarov Lazo gave me, where did I meet up with Goche and which fighters did I bring back to Trsje.

Earlier during the summer of 1947 I met up with another fighter Keramitchiev who told me that he decided to leave the movement and was on his way to Yugoslavia. It turned out he was suspended by DAG and he had to leave Greece immediately. He told me that there were many more, who like him, were also suspended by DAG and they too had to leave Greece.

I started to think back to events that led to this meeting. I remembered how at recent meetings there was a lot of anger and criticism towards the leadership of the Republic of Macedonia. I noticed that every time there was a meeting scheduled I would be given a task so that I could not attend the meetings. I felt this was done deliberate to keep me away from knowing what was happening with DAG. There was no doubt in my mind that whenever we were sent to battle I was given the toughest areas. One night we were near the village Oshtima, when during the night a courier arrived asking me to meet with the local Commander, who ordered me to take about 10 men with me and to go to the hill near Luzer, between the villages Armensko and Bigla. I followed his orders and chose the men and together with my friend Ilo Srbinov we all headed off. Our order was to get to the top of the hill and wait there for the Greek army to arrive, either from Bigla or Trsje. Then our order was to start shooting at them, kill as many as possible and somehow try and escape from the region. For me this was a "certain death", because we didn't know how many Greeks were coming and how we could beat them with only 10 men. We placed a guard to keep an eye on the road and shortly he reported there was a large group coming towards us. We decided to start shooting at them from far, that way while they are running around looking for covers, we could take off and save ourselves.

When we got back I was introduced to a new officer that had recently arrived and was told that I had to hand over the leadership of my group to him and then to leave and go to another area near Vicho. When I got there I met up with the Commander Sulo, a good Macedonian fighter. We were good friends and had known each other for a long time. He told me that they are planning to form a new brigade with both Greek and Macedonian fighters and I would be given a "leadership" role with them. This brigade would be then sent deep into the country to show the people of the country that both the Greeks and Macedonians were fighting together. However, we were not allowed to speak or sing Macedonian. He also warned me with "be alert and be careful".

At that point I decided that I had to leave DAG because I could not trust the new leadership and made my plans for the escape. That morning I lied to Sulo by telling him I had to go to the village Konomplati to pick up my trousers, which I had left there earlier to be fixed by the local tailor. He gave me permission but told me I had to come back straight away. I said good bye to my friend Chakalo and took off. I went past the village Kolomnati and continued towards Ostima, then Zelevo. I stopped briefly for a brief sleep near Psoderi and the next day I arrived near the village German, where I could see the Greek army in the distance. I continued on and finally arrived in my village Bouf and went straight to my family home and found my mother, brother Done and sister Fana. I got them to get all our things together, all that we could carry and that night we all took off across the border towards Bitola, in Macedonia.

I knew this was the last time I would see my village.

## **MY NEW BEGINNING IN MACEDONIA**

That night we crossed the border and soon arrived in Bitola where we registered with the local authorities and were taken to the village Brailovo, with other “refugees”. Few weeks later they moved us to another village Gajranci, near the city Shtip, and settled us with two other Bouf families in small rooms of about 4m by 5m. There was no light and heating in the rooms and we had no food. We had no work and no money for food, so we begged from the neighbouring houses in the village. My brother Done and I also went around the gardens in the area and collected the leftover tomatoes, chillies and salads and brought them home to our mother. She would then boil them and we would eat them without any oil and salt. We had nothing but somehow we seemed to enjoy ourselves here. We kept saying to each other that when we eventually go back to our village we would eat the same food.

The local council issued us with food coupons, which we then used to get food such as oil, flour, salt, sugar etc

Later on, my brother and I started to look for jobs. I had some knowledge of building and bricklaying so we both ended up working on a building site. In a short time, we proved ourselves as good workers so we were offered more work and were wanted by others. We ended up working seven days a week and, started to get paid well and the family was no longer hungry.

After three months working here, one day a policeman came to where I worked and asked which one was Kosta Alabakov. I told him it was me. He said “Friend you have to come with me to Shtip immediately”. The city of Shtip was about 20 km away, I got my jacket and we both started walking. It was a long walk and we chatted all the way there. He took me to the building occupied by UDBA (the military police) and he handed me over to another officer, who took me down into a dark room and locked the door behind me. I sat down on the cold cement floor and looked around. On the walls I could see slugs and insects crawling all around and in the corner I saw a bucket that I could use as toilet. Somehow I survived the long night and in the morning the officer came back and made me carry the bucket to empty it in a hole outside. He pushed food in the small opening of the door but no one had come to tell me why I was kept here.

After three days here, the door opened and a young officer came in and asked me to get out of the cell. Outside he handed me a bag with clothes inside it. I knew my mother had come and brought them for me. Then he walked me to the outside and handed me over to another policeman. The policeman handcuffed me but I told him “Don’t worry I won’t try to escape”. He said “You just try and get away and you will get this” and pointed to his gun. We arrived at the railway station and here he told me that he was taking me to Skopje. We got on the train and settled in one cabin on our own. He offered me a cigarette and we both lit up. He asked where was I from and when I told him he said “They are going to fix you. You are all being collected and will be sent back there to fight ...”

the train ride went well. We chatted and whenever he lit up a cigarette he offered me one too. When we arrived in Skopje he took me to a building and handed me over to another policeman who told me not to be concerned. He took me to a cell and gave me couple of clean blankets. I asked him for a bucket but he said if I wanted to go toilet I just had to knock on the door for the guard. He made me remove my shoe laces and my belt. Later one of the guards came by and asked me if I wanted him to light me a cigarette. I said yes and gave him my cigarettes. He took it and went away. I yelled and swore at him as I thought he tricked me to get my cigarette but he came back and gave it back to me.

After couple of days, a policeman drove me with a jeep to a place, where I later found was the prison for “DAG deserters”. There I met with some of my old friends, who like me left DAG. About a month later we were all taken to another place Mavrovo where we were made to work on the construction of the power plant. What we got paid here was just enough to feed ourselves. From here they moved us to other places, depending where the work was available. I wasn’t happy here and each moment I was thinking on how I can get away from there. One day I went to the supervisor and asked him if he could transfer me to the previous location in Mavrovo. At first he said he couldn’t but after I pestered him for a while, he finally gave in and gave me a letter to take to the site’s supervisor.

They took me to the construction site by truck. However, at the first opportunity, I got off the truck and decided to make my way back home. I went to the railway station and there I saw a "working party", which was returning back from Prilep so I joined them and we all got on to the small train. We arrived in Skopje where they got off but I continued to the next stop Veles and I got off there. At the time to buy a ticket from the train station you had to have an ID card. I did not have an ID issued to me and if I was found without one I would be caught. So I decided to walk further down to the next smaller station and there I jumped on the next train without a ticket. I only had to travel a short distance, about four stops from here but at the next station a policeman came on board and he started checking ID cards. I couldn't get away, so when he approached me I told him that I was from the Aegean Macedonia and had not been given the card. I recognized that he too was from the same region and I was hoping he would help me but looked at me and said "This uniform I wear does not recognize friends. At the next station I will hand you over the police". But at the next station I jumped off on the opposite side to where the people were coming on and hid in the bushes. I waited for the next train to come and when it did I jumped on it and it took me to my destination. I got off the train and walked all the way home.

At the time there were many jobs available because the Government was building many co-operative homes. I managed to get a job as a supervisor on one of the building sites but during lunch times I would walk to the council offices to read the papers and search the job advertisements. One day I saw a job that interested me and I applied to the Ministry for it. In about two weeks they told me I was successful but I still did not have the official ID, so I applied to the Ministry, with a copy of the job offer and they issued me with a letter that I could use in place of the ID card.

Later on I was sent to do specialist courses, which I finished with good results. The Ministry then sent me to work in the city Veles for the construction firm "Babuna", where every Monday morning I would travel and then stayed for the whole week at the work sites in the near villages and came back home to Veles on Friday nights.



Me with my fellow students from the course in 1949



with my friend Panche from Kochansko

## **MY NEW LIFE IN VELES**

In Veles, the Ministry gave me an apartment to live in and on 27 August 1949 I got married to Anastasia, who was also from my village Bouf.



First photo of married life (1949)



Photo at our 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (Melbourne 2009)

Once I settled in Veles, I decided to bring the rest of the family to join me from Shtip. My mother got a job as cleaner in an orphanage home for girls, my brother Done got a job with the construction firm "Beton" and my sister Fanija continued with school.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1951 I got my Yugoslavian citizenship and I was accepted to study for one year in the "political school". My group of 1951 - 52 was the last generation to attend this school.



The photo is from the 1951 -52 "political school" in Skopje. I am above the teacher in the middle with white dress. She was married to the well known writer Vlado Malevski.



With me are Kole Shalvarinov and Risto Kirjazovski from the village Kostursko and Gjorgi from the village Prekopana.



I changed my job and got one with the same construction firm as my brother and I worked there for two years, building factories. When the work slowed down I was transferred to a village Manastir, where I worked on the construction of a power plant. However, because my family was in Veles I resigned and decided to come back to live with them.

On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1951 we had our daughter Lena and on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1954 our son Robert.



In 1955 with our two children



55 years later in 2010 with our (grown up) children



In 1955 at “hospitality congress” in Ohrid

In 19578 I was called in for “training” with the Yugoslavian Army, for one month in the city of Kumanovo. When I came back I moved my family to Bitola and I worked there with the construction firm “Mavrovo-Pelagonija”.

In July 1967 we left for Australia. In my earlier years in Melbourne in my first jobs in the textile industry I worked 12 hour shifts. One week it was from 7am to 7pm and the next week 7pm to 7am. It was hard work but I changed a number of jobs.

My last was with the telecommunications company Telecom, which later became Telstra.



This photo is from Telecom days

## **RETIREMENT**

In 1990, at age 63, I stopped full-time work and retired on a Government war pension.

## **WAR MEDAL FROM AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT**

In 2005, the Australian Government recognized my involvement in the war and presented me with a medal recognising the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the World War II. The certificate accompanying the medal was signed by the then Prime Minister John Howard and the Minister for Veteran Affairs, Ms Dianne Kelly.



## **MY WORK WITH ST GEORGE CHURCH**

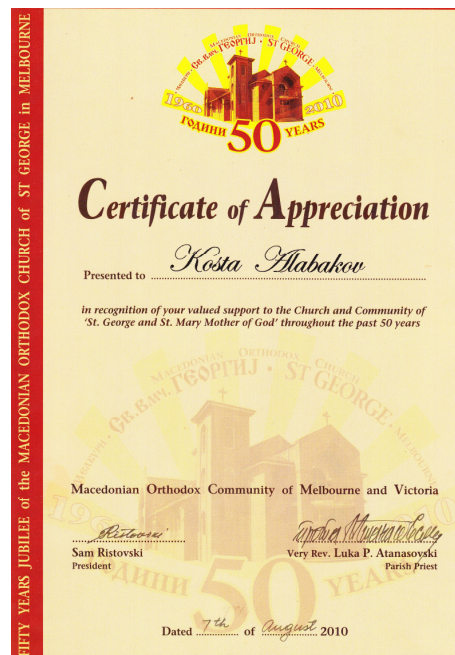
When I retired in 1990 I became a member of the Macedonian Church St George in Epping.

In the first year I was nominated (with a secret ballot) to the committee and two years later I became an assistant to the secretary.

The following period I was voted to remain in the committee and I became the secretary. My responsibilities included the handling of the finances. I remained on the committee for two more periods ie four more years.

During the years of my involvement we saw the appointment of the new Bishop Peter, who created a lot of tension towards us the church and to this day the relations have not improved.

My work with the committee was recognized with the Certificate of Appreciation, on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2010.



## **FIRST BOUF REUNION AFTER THE WAR**

In 1995 I attended the re-union and I caught up with many old friends. Here I also met with my very good friend Vasil Tupurkovski (left photo) and the then President of Macedonia Kiro Gligorov (right photo).



with Vasil Tupurkovski – Cile



with Kiro Gligorov and my brother Done

## **BOUF FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD**

In 1988 together with my two friends Minela Branov, from Canada and Dime Gagachov, from Macedonia we prepared a list of Bouf families from around the world: Canada 1,244, Australia 974, Republic of Macedonia 916, America 224, Bouf 146, Poland 25, Czechoslovakia 17, Bulgaria 8, Romania 4 and Russia 4.



With Minela Branov



Dime Gagachov



## **FINALLY**

Dear readers,

I now wish to end my life story the same way as I started it:

I wrote it at age 83 (year 2011) as a permanent record of the difficult times that I and many other fellow Macedonians endured as “partisans” during the two separate wars –

The first war was the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, between 1941 – 1945, also known as ELAS and

The second war was with the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG), between 1946 – 1949.

I hope you enjoyed reading it.



This is a photo of my family celebrating my 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday.