

Noose



A Novel

By

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(Translated from Macedonian to English and
edited by Risto Stefov)

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Noose – Preface

I dedicate this book to the memory of my family which, after the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) was scattered; with my father Tanas going to Australia, my mother Jovanka going to Poland, my brother Giorgi going to jail in Greece and me, along with the Units of DAG (Democratic Army of Greece), going to the Soviet Union.

My endeavour in writing this novel (Noose) was to describe actual events that belonged to our past which nobody could alter: Pure facts and dirty deeds.

The stories in this novel are told authentically with a sense of resentment towards the ideological powers which politicized the innocence of our generations of that time. We now have to ask the question and seek answers to: “How and who directed our destiny towards the genocide of the Macedonian people in Greece? For whom did we sacrifice ourselves, lose our centuries-old fatherland in which our souls and the souls of our ancestors were planted and for whom did we become wanderers of the world?”

My introduction of living and dead characters and events into our national tragedy is not coincidental. It is deliberate and has been taken from our hardened narrative. Who were these “foreign gods” who gave orders and designed our extinction from our own country of birth?

-From October 1944 to October 14, 1946 in the grip of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY)/Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM).

-From October 1946 to August 27, 1949 (when the Greek Civil War ended) in the grip of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG).

-From 1950 until today - Wanderers around the world.

The author

During the Second World War people from different cultures happened to pass through the village Rudino where even the poorest man in the area had the fortune of having met with them in his own lodgings. Many passed by, some invited others uninvited, some curious and others murderers, some persecuted and others with hidden intentions. During the war the people survived very cold winters and very hot summers, so hot that on occasion hot air rose from the stones looking as if they were baking in an oven. Villagers, with sunburned chests and backs, hurriedly walked barefoot to the fields to collect the crops.

Unfortunately with the war's end things did not change much. The people of Rudino remained restless and worried and it wasn't any better in any of the other villages in Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions. Fear was always present, reminding people of the terrible riots and violence that had passed. The war had taken its toll and left the people weakened, hungry,

tired, cold and tortured. After the German armies withdrew, Partisans, along the entire length of the Greek front and wherever they were found, began to establish their own authority. The villagers rejoiced in their victory over fascism.

Unfortunately there were too many deep wounds left after the war ended. Thousands of mothers wore black head kerchiefs, thousands of young women and sisters were dressed in black and thousands of children were orphaned. Fathers and mothers painfully mourned their departed sons who had died in a senseless war before their time.

Now for the first time in a long time, people, without fear of losing their livestock and valuables to the various gangs that roamed the villages and committed atrocities and robberies, began to take their possessions out of their basements and barns. The German and Italian occupiers had confiscated all vehicles and large quantities of food and many people living in large centres remained without food even after the war had ended. People died of starvation by the thousands. Hunger drove many to flood the villages and sell their valuables, sometimes even the clothes off their backs for a handful of corn or beans.

The occupiers and their collaborators had barbarically put Goebbels's words into practice: "Europe will die so that Germany can live!" The Nazi regime in Germany created death camps to eliminate its political opposition and its prisoners. That's what the communists were saying and writing. They were also saying that the new generation wanted to erase centuries of German tradition and to return to barbaric times. It was at that time too that strangers belonging to a terrorist group known to the Macedonians as the "Paudzhidi" invaded the homes of Macedonians and beat everyone to a bloody pulp. They beat hundreds of people and these people, gripped by mortal fear, fled their homes seeking refuge in the mountains. Much of the possessions that they had left behind were stolen and their properties were then burned to the ground.

(The word "Paudzhidi" comes from the acronym "PAO", a Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization whose members were comprised of former police chiefs, former Greek Army officers and other miscellaneous anti-peoples nationalist elements that had always desired the destruction of the Macedonian nation. The organization PAO cooperated with a faction of the colonists settled in the Macedonian villages after 1924. The colonists were living among the Macedonians and some were responsible for causing a great deal of damage.)

The "Paudzhidi" endeavoured to continue the forced Hellenization of the Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia and seized the opportunity offered to them by the war period, to force the Macedonians to maintain the continuity of a sense of common belonging to the Greek national collective, to its historical traditions and to the Greek heroic sacrifices. In other words, to become Greeks by force! The EAM (National

Liberation Front) coalition consisting of leftists, with the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) at the helm, managed to achieve broad unity among the Greek people. The bourgeois parties and politicians at the time were cooperating with the Germans and later with the English and worked against the EAM. (On April 6, 1941 Germany attacked Yugoslavia and Greece and became Greece's new master, expanding and imposing its new fascist views upon the Greek people. On September 27, 1941 the Organization EAM was established and called for the entire Greek population to join the resistance against fascism.)

With the Lebanon agreement of May 1944, the CPG, EAM and ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece) voluntarily and officially gave up any pretense of taking political power. The agreement recognized the government in exile, headed by Georgios Papandreou, as the "legitimate government of Greece" and as the government of "national unity".

(The ELAS or "ELASITI" were members of the military also called "andartes". Andartes was a term used by the Greeks to refer to the armed Greek bands operating illegally in Macedonia before, during and after the 1903 Ilinden Uprising. The "andartes" were organized and armed in Greece and then sent to Macedonia to spread Greek influence through acts of terror. Thus in Macedonia the term "andartes" was associated with the infamous crimes committed against the Macedonian people. The Organization ELAS was jointly formed by the EAM, the CPG and the CPG Central Committee. The first ELAS military units or "Elasiti" appeared on February 15th, 1942. The first detachment of ELAS was formed in Kostur Region on December 7th, 1942 and included 10 Macedonians, 7 Greeks and 2 Vlachs. The total number of ELAS fighters throughout Greece numbered about 70,000. On July 16th, 1943 the leadership of ELAS and Colonel Eddie Myers, head of the British military mission, signed an agreement bringing ELAS under the British Command of the Middle East. On February 12th, 1945 the "Varkiza" agreement was signed with which the left (EAM and CPG) practically handed power to the right.)

With the Kazerta agreement in September 1944, British General Skobi was accepted and proclaimed supreme commander of the armed forces and ELAS Units in Greece. All arms were surrendered and free Partisan movement was no longer possible unless authorized by Sir Ronald Skobi.

During the spring and summer of 1945 and 1946, the Plastiras government was quick to exchange Constitutional Act 1, "The imposition of punitive measures for those who collaborated with the enemy", a law which was passed by the government of Georgios Papandreou, with Act 6 "The imposition of sanctions for those who collaborated with the enemy."

It was on the basis of this Constitutional Act, that in 1945 the Special Court for the collaborators was established in Solun with minor courts established in Seres, Drama, Lerin and Kostur.

The new Greek government, it seems, had forgotten the words and commitments expressed by the former Greek Prime Minister Venizelos when he said, “The Slavo-Macedonians don’t feel like they are Greeks or Bulgarians.” Then when he allowed the Abecedar, a Macedonian primer for children, to be published he again reiterated: “If the Slavo-Macedonians require schools in their own language, then I will be the first in Greece to guarantee that their requirements are achieved.”

But now, it seems, the Greeks in Greek occupied Macedonia had forgotten all that and created these courts with the sole purpose of further tormenting the Macedonians who they called Slavo-phones, especially those whose national consciousness was non-Greek. The Macedonians were put in a difficult position because they freely spoke their Macedonian language during the German occupation. The accused were prosecuted in these so-called “people’s courts” and, if found guilty, were sent back to prison.

Some of the accused were sentenced to death and immediately executed, triggering strong protests from the commander of British forces in Athens, General Ronald Skobi and from Evmipidis Bakerdzhis, commander of General Headquarters of the Group divisions in Northern Greece. Many of the accused had already escaped but were tried in absentia anyway. Many of those tried were the so-called autonomists, members of NOF (National Liberation Front), who desired an autonomous Macedonia and had fled Greece in 1944, after which they joined Tito’s army as the “Aegean Brigade.”

Most of the cases were judgments against Macedonian villagers from the various villages from which many activists had joined the NOF and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) Organizations in 1945 and formed the foundations that led to our national tragedy. The list of charges was generally very long and covered many Acts of the Greek Constitution.

Noose – Chapter 1

Foretellers of doom.

The political committee in Bitola was dissolved around the middle of April 1945. In its place the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM) in Skopje, on April 23rd, 1945, created the Organizations NOF (National Liberation Front) simultaneously with AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front) and NOMS (People's Liberation Youth Union of the Aegean Macedonians). These organizations belonged to the Macedonians from Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia. Their first message sent was: "MACEDONIAN BROTHERS! STAND FIRM AND LOOK FOR THE SALVATION THAT NOF AND AFZH WILL DELIVER!"

(Leading Macedonian activists who were convicted by the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) and had fled Greece and gone to Yugoslavia were accepted by the CPM and the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia). Then with public support from the CPM and the CPY the Political Committee of Aegean Macedonia was constituted in October 1944. The First Aegean Macedonian Brigade was formed in November, 1944. In April 1945 NOF, AFZH and NOMS were simultaneously formed.)

1.

After the Second World War, trouble came to Rudino as unexpectedly as the early spring when suddenly the fields and meadows became green, the gardens flowered early and the mountains became infested with new revolutionaries and all kinds of gangs. One Sunday morning in May 1945 we heard the church bell ringing, informing us not of a death or a holiday but of something disturbing and strange. This was evident by the bell's irregular rings and by Vane Mingov's hoarse voice calling out: "Villagers! Oh Villagers! Go to the village square. Our people will speak to us. Don't be afraid..."

"Newcomers! Who are these people with such mindless desire for power that makes them not only vile but also very gullible? Where do you come from, comrades? Hey friends, where are you from?" voices were heard asking.

The purpose of the newcomers visiting the village was introduced by File Jazhin, Secretary of the Main Organization, a communist and member of the immediate NOF leadership. The villagers were surprised when they discovered that the reason for their summoning was to start a revolution. But when Jazhin began to force everyone to become members of NOF and AFZH, people were even more surprised and were left with their mouths

wide open. And we, the youth who had just turned seventeen, were left dumbfounded. Voices among the villagers were heard whispering: “Didn’t the war just end!?” Perhaps that was the first phase of the war but it had certainly begun a new journey for my generation.

Jazhin continued talking with a revolutionary tone of voice: “Remember your grandparents from Ilinden,” he said. “They too were not quite eighteen years of age when the first battles began and they fought with courage and dedication, becoming one of the most disciplined groups of fighters of that era. They rebelled and fought with courage as armed groups in this end of our world. Today, in this holy war, you will be led by NOF, behind which stand Marshal Tito and Generalissimo Stalin. It is time that our Macedonian cheek radiates light even at night! Nowhere has the Macedonian hero embarrassed or humiliated himself, he has always walked upright and that means a lot for all mankind, especially for us, the Macedonians.”

This is how Jazhin addressed the crowd, thus introducing this deliberate “national action” prepared by the Organizations NOF and AFZH. He continued:

“Dear villagers! Allow me to pass on to you this great joy that NOF, headed by Mitrovski, has organized its own armed units in Kostur, which are engaged in guerrilla warfare. They are the first units of our Macedonian army. NOF’s aim, directed by the Macedonian National Liberation Movement, is to apply all forms of struggle and to strive for self-determination and to unite the Macedonian people.”

2.

Ever since the first arrival of the activists in the village, Rudino was gripped by great excitement and suspicion. Six people were present belonging to the Organizations NOF and AFZH, all dressed in leather coats and brandishing Russian machine guns over their shoulders. Every man and woman in the village came to see them. There were also large groups of village children gathered in their presence. There were various stories spread about these activists. Some people were saying that they were fighters who had left ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece) and had joined Tito's army, at General Tempo's invitation. Now they had become hardened communists and were here to extinguish our sacred churches and monasteries. Others were whispering saying that the activists were there to extinguish their faith and pollute the holy water in which they were baptized. Yet others feared that the activists were there to defile their minds and ruin their love of God. Some were wondering if they were there to ruin their homes and erase their memories of God and their name.

But then a village woman spoke up. Her name was Ristana Shumenkova Bogdanova but in the village she was known as Traikovitsa Bogdanova, sister-in-law to Lina Goidova Bogdanova, better known as Lambrovitsa Bogdanova. During the large gathering Ristana said she had a question. The moment she spoke the entire crowd turned to listen to her. The activists frowned at her and changed their mood. Un-phased Ristana stepped forward onto the makeshift stage, standing upright and tall with her head held high and said: “I want to say something. Does it mean that we women will now all belong to the Anti-Fascist Front? Personally, I don’t believe that these organizations are Macedonian. If they are Macedonian why are they not called MNOF and MAFZH? (M for Macedonian). There is something unclear here! To what Macedonian front will you be taking us? Didn’t Germany just capitulate? Are there more Fascists? How are we going to establish this front and with what kind of weapons will we be fighting? And what kind of struggle will we be leading?”

What about our children? With whom will we be leaving our children? What would be an even bigger shame is when our husbands working in America and Australia find out, what will they say? America will have the right to tell our husbands, ‘What is with you people? We employ you here so that your wives back home can pick up rifles and fight against Anglo-American imperialism?!’ You are forcing us to become Godless. And in what church will we pray then? Or are you playing a mock-war with us? If we give up our God and accept to follow your leader, who then will protect us from the anger of a neglected God? The ground that feeds us will then swallow us... Like insane women – without husbands and children. That would be the ultimate evil and we will forever walk the earth tarred...”

Ristana paused for a moment and then resumed her talk against the evil that these people were bringing upon them...

“Let me ask you again, are you not putting a NOOSE around our necks by doing this?”

Ristana Shumenkova Bogdanova stood there upright and alone with her stature. With her eyes open, arms spread out, heart wide open and as if a lump had gotten stuck in her throat, she stood there in despair but without losing hope. Her forehead became moist with sweat and she thought to herself that she had better not faint. And while feeling badly and waiting for an answer, she cursed through her teeth, “Kapka da ve udri.” She then raised her arms as if she was caught in a NOOSE.

One of the women from AFZH gave Ristana Shumenkova Bogdanova an inquisitive glance and said to her: “Your God is not a living God and cannot cause you any harm... We have all decided to fight against Anglo-American imperialism and, if need be, we will all die for the freedom of our people! And you Comrade Bogdanova, with what you said, we now

know and understand that you and those like you are on the side of America.”

All at once, everyone started talking, shouting and reaching out to seize her and get her off the makeshift stage. At that moment the woman from AFZH, with a spark of a fighter in her eye and with a stern and nervous voice, said: “You are crazy – a sold out soul and here I am telling you about the communist revolution.”

Ristana at that point crossed herself and said: “God help me. Up to now we all knew that men made war. But you sister, what are you doing with that machine gun on your shoulder? Women are born to hold children on their chests, not guns that kill people! War and machine guns belong to men. The truth is that most men love war because it brings them glory and they take pleasure in fighting. Women do not enjoy war. We women are made to give birth and raise a nation, not kill one. We witnessed enough horror and barbarism in the German and Italian war; we don’t need any more wars. Why war again? Why is the AFZH calling on all Macedonian women to go to war en masse?”

Agitated by the bickering, Risto Kalchunov, at that moment, yelled at the AFZH woman saying: “You are not only wrong about God, you are wrong about us too. And you comrade should know that almost all of our men are migrant workers and are out there earning a living so that they can feed their families. And now you have declared them to be our enemies and working for the Anglo-American fascists? Why do you do that? Why do you anger and antagonize the villagers?”

Several giggling girls looked curiously at the newcomers. “Be quiet,” I said to them, “I want to hear what is going on.” I could barely keep myself from laughing because I could not believe the words coming out of the AFZH woman’s mouth. She spoke with such insolence that she reminded me of a banished bride from a good household...

We, the village boys, did not understand what was actually happening. We did not understand what was truly meant by a “revolution”. For us these were just words that File Jazhin used. I remember him whispering to me, “Look, in such a muddy situation you don’t say no! If you do, maybe tomorrow you will suffer just the same under communist rule. This is the time to say yes. You along with my son, as young people, must follow any orders given to you without objection. Were your grandfathers and mine not fighters of Ilinden? There will be no objections. You will listen and perhaps one day we Macedonians will gain our freedom...”

3.

So the people of NOF began “to lay the foundation for the ‘future’ of the Macedonian people and for Macedonia” and to fill the minds of this small nation with GREAT ILLUSIONS. Activists began to spread the

message to villagers saying: “He who today does not feel the breath of Soviet-ization (which is sweeping across Europe) will be unconditionally and quickly rejected and trapped in a future classless society: in a United Macedonia within Yugoslavia.” One activist waving a newspaper showed us a statement made by Marshal Tito in Moscow in April 1945, published by the newspaper “The New York Times”, which said: “... If the Macedonians in Greece express desire to unite with the Macedonians in Yugoslavia, we will respect their wishes...”

There was a strong cry of “Hooray! Hooray, long live comrades Tito and Stalin” to this statement. The activists spoke so convincingly that one of the villagers said: “It would be terrible to stand in the way of these loyal people of ours who have dedicated themselves and directed their energies towards our salvation and towards the love of big brothers Tito and Stalin.” Another villager, unshaven, with red cheeks, sitting on the edge of the fence with his legs crossed and hands placed on his knees, smiled and jokingly spoke slowly but clearly in his Kostur dialect. He was called Sotir Gaidov-The learned. He was the son of Pop Damian Gaidov. Sotir turned towards the speaker and said: “The real reason for your visit is unclear. It sounds to me like this is someone’s fantasy, or a good strategy of a great revolutionary, a dreamer who wants to reshape the new Balkans or this is Tito’s plan to solve his internal problems on the backs of the Macedonians.

We the Macedonians are neither the first nor the last to be used in this great Balkan experiment, which you call ‘SOVET-IZATION OF THE BALKANS’. Strange are the times we live in. Balkan wars are usually fought on the backs of the Macedonians.

Every TRUE path is very difficult to take, but I want to know: First, what kind of future and government are you offering us? What are your thoughts and, according to you, would we Macedonians be able to stop the war and the eradication of our homeland? Perhaps today nobody believes that such a war could be utilized for the benefit of strangers and for us to be left with our finger in our mouth...

Surely you must know that on February 12th this year the Varkiza agreement was signed, an agreement between the CPG, EAM and ELAS on one side and the Plastiras Greek government and Skobi, the British General on the other, and that power to govern Greece was handed over to the British. Second, it bothers me that you don’t know that what you are proclaiming today as ‘the whole Macedonian people having the desire for a United Macedonia’ was also the attitude of Pijade, Rankovic, Djilas and Vlahov at the National Assembly of Serbia, held on November 10, 1944. But then, only two days later on November 12th, 1944, when Josip Broz - Tito met with a Greek delegation, he said: “The issue of unification of Aegean Macedonia with the other parts of Macedonia was never put in place.”

How about the attitude of big brother Stalin? After the Soviet Army entered Bulgaria there was talk about a Yugoslav-Bulgarian Federation, emphasizing the unification of Macedonia, which assumed the separation of Aegean Macedonia from Greece. Was this talk not the reason why Churchill traveled to Moscow on October 8th, 1944, where he and Stalin signed a mutual agreement that Greece now fully fell under the influence and control of Great Britain? Then, soon after that, British troops landed in Greece and on October 18th, 1944 the Papandreou government in exile was installed in Greece. Then on November 5th, 1944 orders were issued to disband the ELAS units. And with that the 'SOVET-IZATION OF GREECE' became one great big lie.

And really because you don't know all these things you are running around, as our people would say 'barefoot on thorns'. And by doing that are you not helping the Greek government and the British to completely stamp out our people? For what brothers and what Soviet-ization are you talking about?" asked Sotir Gaidov, continuing: "Have you really forgotten the Yalta agreement? (A meeting between the spheres of influence took place in Yalta where it was decided that all boundaries were to remain unchanged).

So I ask myself and many people ask themselves: What will happen with the formation of NOF and AFZH in Skopje under the leadership of the CPM and CPY? Are you not, with these organizations, perhaps unconsciously, being ordered by strangers to import a revolution into Aegean Macedonia? Perhaps this would be a good time to desire the past a little less and refrain from going back in time. Do you not see how the Macedonian consciousness of themselves and their reality has been fully turned into ideological activism? Don't you see that with this, strangers are pushing us into the arms of the colonists (Greeks)? How complex can history be? Instead of seeking peace after a World War, we are now being asked to turn to fight another war, a senseless war. We are forcing our people to go to war against their will. This kind of war will never be justified! It is a deceiving enigma. Justice will be long and expensive and it could bring us genocide.

First, the Greek communists began a campaign to seize power but then ELAS turned around and surrendered its arms and turned its power over to Papandreou's Greek government, which had just returned from exile! Second, the Yugoslav communists arrested and even killed Macedonian fighters who asked to go to Solun! And today the very same people who arrested the Macedonian fighters are the ones who are organizing NOF and AFZH! Don't you think that they are pulling us into a dangerous trap? Don't you think that perhaps they are putting our fate into a NOOSE, again?

There was truly a reason not to go to Solun on January 7th, 1944 because at that time the British were already in Greece and had, and still

have, stationed some 200,000 troops, 400 aircraft and 3,000 tanks. Besides those, there were also 100,000 Greek soldiers. In addition to those, in Solun there were also about 10,000 Royal Yugoslav troops. All of them were still under the command of British General Skobi. Now I ask myself: ‘What are you doing here?’ Tito, the same person who justifiably prevented Macedonian fighters from going to Solun, almost a couple of months later, has sent you here?! You, in the name of NOF and AFZH are now calling the people to start a new war. But don’t you see that this is only a call to murder your own people? Don’t you see that this is a call for your own people to grab the arms that will slay them? Don’t you think that someone is perpetrating a great big lie on us?!

Why can’t you understand that your actions have nothing to do with the legitimacy or honour of our people? We Macedonians must not allow ourselves to be used in this way. We must not allow our people to be pushed to go to war. We must not allow others to impose an alien will on us. We have to accept the fact that in this way, through the call to war by NOF and AFZH, we have no realistic chance of success. But what I fear will happen is that, through these actions of NOF and AFZH, we will be crammed under the CPG umbrella and the Greeks are masters of manipulation. And just then we will not be able to defend our political ideals. Even as fighters we will not be able to defend our political stance which is beneficial to our people and to our homeland.

What do you think? Calling the Macedonian people to unite and join NOF and AFZH in good faith, is not someone else’s initiative supported by the CPG and the CPY? Has this idea been born and approved by our nation, the Macedonian people themselves? Will any one of us dare speak out against these disloyal patriotic ideas in front of these harsh totalitarian regimes? I don’t know about that! If anyone does, I am sure they will immediately be declared disobedient and rogue and you know such people are known to disappear and to end up in prison, in exile or, God forbid, under the ground as enemies of the people. Do you think we will find the strength to say, ‘Macedonian people, the leaders Tito or Zahariadis will not implement what they preach and promise?’

I am convinced that no one will understand the fraud you are perpetrating here. No one will be able to explain how through organizations such as NOF and AFZH some can perpetrate such deliberate actions. I remember the words my grandfather told me, ‘He who does not love and respect his own, will be used by strangers as many times as they need to use him’.”

4.

Radio London reported that a meeting of the “Big three” was held from July 17th to August 5th, 1945 in the palace Selienkof located in the town of

Potsdam near Berlin. The meeting accomplished basically nothing except that it started the so-called 'Cold War'. The anti-Hitler coalition allies consisting of Great Britain (Winston Churchill), the United States (Harry Truman) and the Soviet Union (dictator of the USSR, Joseph Visarionovich Stalin), who, in their final effort managed to defeat German fascism, ceased to love each other, setting the stage for our more recent history that only later became known as the Cold War era. It was at this conference in Potsdam that Winston Churchill also coined the phrase "iron curtain" which divided Europe into spheres of interest.

5.

The Greek reactionaries defined NOF as treacherous, autonomist and extremely "dangerous" to Greek national interests. Then in April and June 1945, at their XI and XII Central Committee Plenums, the CPG Central Committee made ignorant decisions to actually not recognize NOF, resulting in a frontal attack against its leading cadres and against all Macedonians who were members of this and other organizations. The following statement was made regarding NOF by the CPG Central Committee at Plenum XII in June 1945: "NOF, with its rapid popularization and with its military formations, is dangerously threatening the Greek character of Macedonia, Greece's positions and interests therein and Greece's territorial integrity."

With statements such as these, especially the one about Greece's territorial integrity being in "danger" from NOF, the CPG practically declared war on the Macedonians. This was a call on the Greek population in Macedonia and in all of Greece to fight against NOF in order to save Macedonia because the CPG feared that Tito had "aggressive plans against Greek Macedonia and wanted to annex Aegean Macedonia to Yugoslavia."

Noose – Chapter 2

From the arms of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) into the arms of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG).

Based on the October 14th, 1946 agreement to make changes to NOF (National Liberation Front) between Tito (CPY) and Zahariadis (CPG), CPY representative Karaivanov and CPG representative Ioannidis quickly came to the following decision: “The Macedonian organizations NOF, AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) and NOMS (People’s Liberation Youth Union of the Aegean Macedonians) were to completely fall under the leadership of the CPG and the armed NOF units were to join DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) and fall under the command of General Markos.”

(Karaivanov was a Special Intelligence Officer working for Tito, an agent of the NKVD (Committee of State Security of the USSR) and a Comintern instructor.)

(Included among General Markos Vafiadis’s immediate associates and instructors were: Gjuza Radovikj, Obrad Trninikj, Misho Vrbitsa, Velimir Dotsnikj, Svetislav Stojanovikj and Petar Lutskj, all of KOS of Serbia. (See KOS and UDBA – Actions and documents of the Secret Services.))

Again, dictate obedience and a bent spine.

1.

It rained hard in May 1946. Heavy rains came and flooded the village pathways and streets. One day a torrent of water ran like a horrific bitter river, sweeping away the smaller and weaker livestock and forcing the villagers to wade through tons of mud. This was the first major spring flood to take place in a long time. After that, frightening water demons appeared and, with their gruesome shadows and creepy screams, ate away the May nights, as though they wanted to demolish and ruin the homes of the villagers, to erase their memories and darken their minds before God.

2.

Based on what people believed, the Village Rudino was divided into two camps and that’s when discord and conflicts began. The pre-war sense of collectivity, friendship and generosity that was shared among the villagers was gone. The sense that someone was in need of something more than someone else was lost. The sense that a soul belonged to two bodies was also gone and replaced with personal “instinctive feelings.” It seemed like the majority of people were born with insufficient curiosity,

even about their own fate. New developments with the advent of NOF and AFZH brought both joy and fear. Everyone was in pursuit of their own dislocated place. When a problem surfaced contradictory solutions were applied, expecting that with ideological problems there would always be new problems.

In those days the villagers talked about the same things over and over. There were days when those around you, those who you could greet and look at, had a different expression on their faces, happy or sad. And it was a great wonder that from then to this day the Rudino villagers, as well as the villagers from the surrounding villages, did not change one bit. But from them were born informers, traitors, hypocrites, petty profiteers, bootlickers and all kinds of miserable traitors, who, for some unknown reason, acted as foreign agents and represented foreign interests. The majority of the people that the villagers called “tainted by communism” participated in all the village boards and newcomer Organizations.

They felt like they were national institutions. All this was like a festival to them, with some kind of amusement park type nationalist consciousness. The idea of calling people to join the revolution was meaningless and empty because such an idea was strange to them. The cynicism that CPY would truly care for the Macedonian people can be expressed in the following words: “In 1944-1945 Yugoslavia wanted to solve its own internal problems” and used the opportunity to do it. But there were also other categories of people who were “careful and untainted” and who removed themselves from the world of politics.

One Good Friday evening, in the spring of 1946, we sat on wooden benches in the village square in Rudino under the large tree, singing old Macedonian revolutionary songs. I noticed Sotir Gaidov’s intelligent, dark eyes circling around and then stop on my face. He looked at me and smiled gently, maybe because I was the youngest of the village bachelors. He had just returned from the island Makronisos, where he was imprisoned after being sentenced to death. There he spent a long time in solitary confinement. Makronisos was a place of pain and suffering, where convicted people were sent to suffer before being put to death.

The reason that the Greek government sent people to Makronisos was to make them give up their political and national beliefs, denounce the Communist Party and lead them into physical and mental exhaustion so that they would feel hopeless and would reach a point where they would no longer want to live. Prisoners remained in solitary confinement until dawn, until after the executions took place. One time they asked Sotir, “What kind of execution do you prefer?” Sotir told them, “I want to be beaten to death so that while I think about it I can write my last song for the woman of my heart...” The executioners then asked: “Let’s hear your song.” But clever Sotir said, “Sorry, I can’t do that because I am afraid you will burn my lips...”

Sometimes Sotir sang songs loudly about Ilinden and wrote letters to the woman he loved: "... My desire for you my dear is not to wear black, not to cry for me and not to wail when you hear the bad news."

Each prisoner was repeatedly interrogated and tortured and then asked to sign a statement of repentance, declaring that he no longer cared for their ideals and beliefs. These methods were introduced before the Metaxas dictatorship (1939-1940). Prisoners could be released and sent home and even avoid the death penalty if they gave up their ideals. Sotir Gaidov did exactly that but after that he was no longer trusted; not even by his closest friends. Everyone became suspicious of him so the man lost his self-confidence.

In his statement of repentance Sotir wrote: "I declare that I denounce the Communist Party and that I am ashamed of being its follower. I also call on all the misguided young people not to trust the Communists..." Now they say that Sotir Gaidov is a man who, in such moments, does not share his thoughts or his facial expressions with others. This man is not like other people and now he doesn't even believe in God and has given up on the church and on crossing himself, just like all us ambitious people full of ideological activism.

Sotir said: "My generation was shaped by protests, by the policemen's rod, by hope generated by Communist ideas and by the 1903 Ilinden Uprising. I gave up religion, because I was very sad and to this day I carry guilt towards my father, Pop Gligor Gaidov, who was very devout to the end of his life. My idea of God was that: God should be flawless and uniquely perfect and as we Communists used to say; God is not perfect. Only the communist leaders, born of the people, could have flawless and perfect qualities. But the worst thing about many villagers was not that they no longer wanted to believe in God, but that they had recently begun to lose faith in their communist leaders; the 'new gods'."

Sotir had long ceased to believe in such gods. If I ever had the chance, I would ask him: "What do you think it means to have unhappy people? Wanderers!" We Macedonians still did not have such a great man who understood our needs, the misery of our people and who knew how to properly establish programs and national priorities for our nation. Later I was convinced that the communist movement (CPG) possessed such strategies, and most of those strategies converged with our national traditions (had the same purpose) but then the same CPG, after the Second World War, showed us Macedonians a different and very ugly face...

Now, after the Belgrade agreement was concluded between Tito and Zahariadis, the Macedonian organizations NOF and AFZH were no longer relevant to the CPY or to the CPG. It seems that both wanted them crushed

and made incapable of creating a “new national consciousness” outside of their Parties. The CPG continued to invent problems with the Macedonians creating arguments and counter arguments pushing the Macedonian people to falsify their own history and to gradually discard significant fragments from their centuries old national heritage. For example, all Macedonians who were mobilized in the ranks of DAG, the CPG called “Slavo-Macedonians”. But the frightening thing about that was that the CPG expected these so-called “Slavo-Macedonians” to speak only Greek and only use their Greek names when they were sent to Headquarters in southern Greece.

These people in the CPG had slowly become “our” gods and the “bosses” of our NOF and AFZH Organizations in all of our Macedonian villages. These people were asking the Macedonian people to become disciples of Marx. These same people, through NOF and AFZH, convinced us that religion, ethnicity and myth were pre-industrial forces which would lose their importance as factors of historic change. They used propaganda against the basic principles of conservatism, perfectly placed by William Faulkner who said: “The past is never dead. It is not even past.” Now these very same people preached SOVIET-IZATION, a strange idea, given that Macedonia and the Macedonian people were divided and that their unifying factors were the CPY and the CPG, which were based on...? “God help us all!” Were they now implementing ideas born of Tito and Stalin? It seems that they were manipulating thoughts and feelings and creating double creatures and double faces out of the Macedonian villagers and slowly making them do things that had nothing to do with our interests.

3.

One day Sotir Gaidov was sitting alone under the big tree in the village square looking at its grandiose branches. He had an expression of wonder and disbelief on his face; looking like he had been cheated. He sometimes sat under the old tree until it was dark, scrolling through his notes and searching for recollections of what he had already read and feeling as if history had just thundered by his side: Ilinden was so heroic, so great, yet so little was known. But now, years later, he looked at allegiances and loyalties with bitterness. He felt pain in his soul and he could not believe the actions of the AFZH activists, always eager to recruit more Macedonian women so that they could push them into the fire of a most disgusting type of war.

The kind of war that would leave the Macedonian house desolate, the Macedonian family and its traditions of matriarchate disfigured. And this was not done by Greeks. The Greeks didn't have the desire to form such organizations that would push Greek women into hatred and into a

murderous war. Sotir Gaidov thought about this a great deal. He thought about how Tito's Yugoslavia had pushed us into an undesirable situation; a situation not chosen by the will of the Macedonian people but a situation that would slowly and slyly push us into genocide.

Sotir stared at me coolly without saying a word. He looked very tired. Obviously he had endured a lot, all those years, closed in and isolated in those dry rocky Greek islands. I looked at him and respectfully asked: "Is there something you want to tell me?" Silently he shook his head and then said: "Nothing boy, I have nothing to tell you..." as though he lacked the words and the energy to speak, he continued to look at me with grace and confidence, as an old friend of my father's and of our family. He and my father were baptized in the same water when they were babies.

I went closer to greet him and said: "It looks to me like you want to say something..." Sotir went deep into thought. I then said: "Will you at least allow me to ask you something I have wanted to ask you for a long time?" "Okay," he said, so I continued: "Do you think that we Macedonians, with NOF and AFZH in place, will be able to determine our own future or will their actions make us disappear and be uprooted from the land of our great grandfathers?"

Sotir shook his head and began to talk: "Ah, I see that you too are feeling the same? Politics are a really cruel thing, you're here today gone tomorrow. It is sad that now, after the Second World War, we are being cheated with NOF and AFZH. We are being cheated because, as you know, the world is polarized, divided by large forces and the Iron Curtain has been lowered. It should be clear to us Macedonians, that by what NOF and AFZH are doing we could end up starting a new war for which, I am afraid, we will be sacrificing ourselves for foreign interests.

Today the whole world knows that Tito (CPY) and Zahariadis (CPG) got together in Belgrade and made plans to start a Civil War in Greece but where were the Macedonians while these plans were made? Worse than that is that after Tito and Zahariadis made these plans, Kolishevski (CPM) in Skopje gathered all the NOF and AFZH leaders and told them: 'Now you can go back to Aegean Macedonia and take orders from the CPG and please trust them because their policies regarding Macedonian issues are clear. Any question that may arise will be decided by the leadership of the Party. Be careful not to splinter as a faction within the Party and always stay under the leadership of the CPG. Work hard towards strengthening your unity with the Greek people and fight any and all forces against chauvinism, separatism and localized tendencies.'

This is exactly what was placed around our necks and how the ideological noose of communism was then tightened. This noose or slave chain was created by the CPY and bound around our necks by Kolishevski and the CPM, plunging us into this cruel, bloody and Godless Greek Civil War which, why it took place, is unclear to this day. Would you or anyone

believe that Lazo Kolishevski did not know what he was doing? Did Kolishevski not know that all the ideological leaders of the Greek Civil War were Greeks? Did Kolishevski really believe that more than 70% of the war participants were colonists (Pontians or Madzhiri) brought to Macedonia in 1924? Or did he really not know that we Macedonians did not participate in CPG policy making, or that there was not a single Macedonian in the politburo or sitting on the CPG's Central Committee? How could Kolishevski not have known that there was not a single Macedonian in the list of senior personnel (generals, colonels and political commissars) at General Headquarters that led DAG? I am sure Kolishevski knew all of these things!

Why then did he give NOF and AFZH instructions to 'induct' the entire Macedonian nation en masse under his slogan: 'Not a single Macedonian must be found outside of the Organizations NOF and AFZH!' And the basic message passed on to the Macedonian people: 'WHO, IF NOT US?' And 'WHEN, IF NOT NOW?' By doing this under Kolishevski's directive, we, the Macedonians under Greece, gave the Greeks and the CPG reason to commit "soft ethnic cleansing" against our organizations and against our people. Was there no one among us able to see what was happening there? I guess we were too busy running to the CPY and to the CPG for answers! It seems to me that this was one of the worst and deadliest ideological frauds committed against us in the history of our existence. What do you think?"

Sotir looked at me curiously and before I had a chance to answer, he said: "Ever since the world came into existence, there existed a type of people whose main preoccupation was allegiance. They were a congenial element regardless of their gender. Well, now we have the people of AFZH. But among the activists of NOF and AFZH there are also those who are intoxicated with their own power and those who have forgotten what was done to the Macedonian people and who have lost contact with reality. The power that these leaders possess, regardless of the level they are at or the leadership role they play comes from their supporters, in whose basis lays the character of distribution of power which, among other things, is self regenerating the moment they profit from it, especially those who do not directly possess any power.

These types of personalities have little concern for whether they have real friends, sincere partners, close people with whom they can share sorrow, pain, or joy. People who talk about things usually talk about things that concern them, that bother them. They talk about things that hurt them, make them anxious and insecure and disappoint them. Now, after this, there will be new ways to communicate between us Macedonians. We will be saying to each other: Who are you and to whom do you belong? And with whom have you been so far? And above us there will be those who

will fight for a new order and demand a servile attitude from us Macedonians.

To understand the causes and Tito's motive for involving himself in Greek affairs after the Second World War, requires thorough research. To assume that the Yugoslav leaders acted on internationalist impulses alone is not very convincing. Why? Because most problems began to intensify in the fall of 1948, just after Yugoslavia started to lean more towards the Western powers. For us Macedonians, this new world is a big aggressive arena, or perhaps it was always like that, but now for the first time I see things up close and I understand that the stronger you are the more aggressive you appear, the bigger muscles you have the more intimidating you look.

A new world is being created in which there is no place for small nations, no place for honesty and innocence and no place for principles. Wars are now managed by the great powers and small nations have to adapt or be left out of the ring. That is exactly what I wanted to say, which directly applies to our NOF and AFZH. If they do the right thing and give up this 'adventure' perhaps they may save our people and preserve our fatherland. History has taught us that many such people played key roles in the fate of the Macedonian people, of course, always with negative consequences. As times change they too need to adapt, to take a particular form, but remain essential in order to survive in the stinking armpits of foreigners.

Circumstances may have been different in other times, but nonetheless, they present themselves during wars as they have today, after this war. Today, it seems, circumstances appear to manifest themselves periodically, as required. This, it seems, is done in turbulent times, when the world is divided into spheres of influence by the great powers. Many key decisions have been made and important events have taken place that have affected the fate of many European people, all this done in the interest of the great powers in a world in which it would be difficult to see what future there is for the Macedonian people. I am saddened by NOF's and AFZH's lack of attention, naivety and mindlessness. They are drunk on someone else's power and propaganda and are unable to see the brutal and the painful side of what they are doing.

The principles of dominance of the bullies are again coming to the surface. Belgrade and the CPG have put a lot of pressure on the weak NOF and AFZH activists to join DAG and to make fundamental changes to Macedonian national programs. Today's scum, coming out of the bowels of the Rudino villagers, are part of the Macedonian people and are disguised in various forms ranging from "quasi-revolutionaries" to old "political figures". They are predominantly led by local Balkan centres of power and work in local Party centres similar to those of NOF and AFZH.

Such people work from the inside and understand the mentality of our people, they know their habits, ways of thinking. This makes them very dangerous. They know how to influence and wait for the signal, the red light, and upon receiving the signal they immediately go into action doing their part. They deliver blows from the inside because they know where it hurts the most. Their goal is to exhaust our people and bring them to their knees. Those were the instructions given, particularly to those who had come from Yugoslavia, to open the doors for the Greek reactionaries so that they could take bloody revenge against ordinary and innocent Macedonian villagers. And that is exactly what they did!

4.

With victory over fascism, the Varkiza agreement was signed, which called for ELAS to surrender its arms and for the installation of a new Greek government in Athens. A police force and units of the national defense force were installed throughout Greece. The British installed a new government in Greece and gave its security forces the authority to liquidate what they considered to be 'enemy elements'. The new gendarmes started arresting people and charging them with murder. Soldiers and gendarmes continued to seek and destroy communist paraphernalia and pictures of Stalin and other communist leaders. The National Guard went on various military expeditions harassing villages, beating people, arresting without warrants, pillaging and burning houses and killing people. Frightened by these sudden and unprovoked attacks, many villagers fled their villages and took to the mountains to hide; abandoning their jobs, homes and families.

A great and inhuman terror against the population was initiated in Greece particularly against ELAS, against Macedonian organizations and especially against those Macedonians who wished to maintain their Macedonian identity. The terror was mainly carried out by the special units brought to Greece from Cairo along with the King and the dictator Georgios Papandreu. The special units were trained to fight against guerrillas and as such were named "Mavroskufides" (Black Hats) who persecuted the population without mercy. Many people were beaten and shot and many more were imprisoned without trial. They did this to make it easier for the state apparatus to consolidate its power over the people. This great "tromokratia" (national terror) was especially aimed against those who participated in the so called "SNOF" movement who were hunted down and murdered without mercy.

It was this "national terror" that sparked the so-called Greek Civil War which divided our people, destroyed families, kinship and friendships and ultimately pushed us onto the brink of extinction, making many of us permanent wanderers of the planet. One side of our divide, people said the

communists were the real patriots and “saviors of our nation” and the other side said that these people were just “commie” traitors. The villagers caught in the middle were always disillusioned, always looking behind their shoulders, always being careful not to say anything that might be misunderstood. One word out of place and they might lose their head or their house may be burned down. It was exactly at those times when they needed help from NOF and AFZH. Unfortunately at exactly those times NOF and AFZH were unable to help them.

Noose – Chapter 3

Mass mobilizations de-Macedonian-ized the Macedonian home and eventually pushed the Macedonian people into the jaws of doom.

After changes were made to NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH's (Women's Anti-Fascist Front) program goals and these organizations took to the underground, their political aims became unclear. Some Macedonians continued to view them as Macedonian National Organizations but after the CPY/CPM (Communist Party of Yugoslavia/Communist Party of Macedonia) pushed them under the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) umbrella, people began to desert them. Unfortunately, NOF and AFZH continued to function submissively and obediently, intensifying the mobilization, now with unprecedented emotional contagion and servility to the CPG, calling on all Macedonians to take the road of life and death and sacrifice themselves alongside the Greek people to save themselves from physical extinction.

1.

When we arrived at the “Εμπεδά” Headquarters, the military centre for training, an officer from Headquarters was waiting for us. Then a small ensemble of people got together with the music group “Karatimiost” and sang songs for us. They were happy melodies full of fighter and revolutionary spirit, powerful enough to quiver invisible strings in the heart of a young person. We listened to the lyrics and we all felt delighted. All the headquarters officers, standing on a makeshift stage, were also singing along. Then, just as we were admiring the music, the band unexpectedly began to play “Eleno Mome” (Eleno Girl), an old admired Partisan song. Suddenly all 350 of us newly recruited young men, lined ourselves in a line dance and danced like crazy. We danced for the entire length of the song while being applauded by the clapping of hands from the officers on the stage who gave us even more reason to dance.

But as we found out we were not unique, this is what they did with all the newly mobilized groups. It was a way, as one older Partisan put it, to “recharge our batteries with fighting spirit.” First to approach us and graciously and warmly shake our hands was Rula. She was dressed in a greenish (khaki) coloured suit. Wearing her suit she felt like she was one of the biggest stars, dressed in white in the spirit of refined elegance, appearing on a podium like Marilyn Monroe, a symbol of Hollywood. Rula, with such androgynous energy, was doing this at all the underground barracks throughout Gramos. She approached us vigorously and gracefully standing upright, her head lifted high. Involuntarily, in my own mind, I saw her as an “older doe” looking for a partner. Everyone asked everyone

else: “Did you see Rula?” “She is beautiful isn’t she?” These were comments made by the Partisans from our battalion.

Rula adorned herself with a red kerchief around her neck in a fashion that symbolized loyalty and love for ideology and for the Party. She wanted to be the centerpiece; the object of attention and admiration. She lived in the belief that men should be obliged to do everything to gain her favour. If she thought that she had not gotten the attention that she deserved or the love and affection to which she was entitled, she would immediately begin to act like a “victim.” She had probably read somewhere that the colour red was erotic. “She is cunning, playing the victim to arouse the hormones of the older officers,” said Antonis without any malice and continued: “Needless to say wearing those kinds of shoes, socks and a red kerchief say a lot about a person. An elegant woman must not only be beautifully dressed and made up but she must also have good manners. She must be gracious with a gentle smile, have radiating irresistible magnetism and, above all, be attractive.”

I said to her: “You are a perfect Partisan. If a woman is a mirror of her purse in Athens, then here in Gramos a woman is a mirror of her revolver, and you are that...” She broke into laughter and gave me a hug while giggling. One time I asked her: “Are you some day going to be a general’s wife?” And she said: “I don’t know. There are no big changes in my love life.” At the same moment Antonis showed up and said: “It is still possible if she can overcome her emotions. She lives an intense and unhappy life with the choices she made.”

On the morning of October 10th I was awakened from a deep sleep by the guard who had one leg shorter than the other and a big wart on his great big, fleshy nose. Our long march lasted several days and nights and took us from Prespa to the General Headquarters in Epirus and Antihashia, located in Vovusa locality near Mount Smoliakas; the largest and tallest mountain in the region. We walked on many roads, passed over several mountains and crossed scores of rivers without having a clue as to why we were leaving Macedonia and going deep into Epirus; an unknown place.

One person among us knew why they had brought us here in such terrible weather and over such steep terrain, but would not mutter a single word. Then when we reached camp he raised his arms towards the heavens and muttered words that none of us could understand. He then went and stood upright on the edge of the highest cliff and, as if standing at the altar of God, yelled out “goodbye” and rolled down the steep cliff falling on the sharp rocks below. For days he had been saying that there was nothing to live for away from our homeland, away from our Macedonia. He had written a farewell letter but it was difficult to read covered in coagulated blood. In part the letter read: “... a lie is the most dangerous weapon of political doctrine. It does not include a single ounce of truth or power. On the contrary: the promises made to us by the so-called “reds” and by the

revolutionary File Jazhin were lies, lies told to us to speed up our self destruction...”

2.

“Live life today because you don’t know what will happen to you tomorrow,” Rula said and continued: “A person alone is like a lonesome tree at the top of a hill standing alone, being blown by the wind from every direction. The wind may blow on it, bend it and even break it but it will not uproot it. No one has died from loneliness, but everyone knows how much solitude hurts. It seems to me that this is our fate because if people are realistic they would know that no young lady would wish to live in these backward mountains. What kind of life would she have in the mountains and cold damp barracks? I’m not even sure what will happen to us and where life will take us... With whom, how and God knows why would we even want to live.” Poor, beautiful Rula, she was very disappointed opening up her heart and soul to me like that, while shivering in the dry ferns stuck to her clothing.

“A tree can be transplanted when it’s a young sapling, but I am no longer a young sapling. I was mobilized by force and now I am a Partisan!... Now there is no night that I don’t look for a way out of the solitude... If it were not for you young and wild boys, where would I find the strength to do all this? Oh my blood brother, this is war and with war comes great fear. Every woman wants her freedom and independence but, from another side, like never before, she also needs a strong man beside her to rely on. Perhaps it’s different with men.”

I was puzzled by her openness and thought to myself perhaps these are the new times when a heart can be opened and feelings could be shown. A new revolutionary era when intimate feelings can be shared, perhaps?

“I know for myself,” I replied, “and maybe it’s like that for others too, but I want to have a sensitive, loving and passionate woman standing beside me.” Rula, glistening from the October sun, gently smiled and probably continued to live with the conviction that sooner or later she would meet her prince on a white horse. She reached into her backpack, pulled out a loaf of bread, broke it in half, handed me one half and said: “I don’t know why but I think I trust you. If I ever get married I want you to be the best man at my wedding.” I nodded without saying a word.

For a moment we sat in silence watching the sun set behind the pine forest and then left for our barracks. There Kolio grabbed me by my hand and I broke a piece of bread and gave it to him. Then I told him who gave it to me. “She is attempting to bribe you with bread so that you can roll her in the ferns a few times, but like the song says, ‘you are too young and you don’t know how,’ ...” he said and began to laugh.

The fire was well fueled that night and we sang all kinds of songs until dawn. We sang “Malka moma tsveke brala, negde v gora zelena” (Little girl gathering flowers, somewhere on a green mountainside), “Tri godini, le, Kate, tri godini, aide de tri godini, le Kate bolen lezham” (Three years, Kate, three years, oh three years, Kate I am lying sick), “Da ti pukni, mila mamu naimaloto, oi lele lele, mila mamu naimaloto” (May your youngest burst, dear mother, oh oh your youngest dear mother, “Aide moito libe bolno lezhi, bolno lezhi na postela” (My darling lies sick, sick he/she lies in bed), “Angelino mome (a nekoi Rula mome), shto si tolku nazhaleno, dali glava te boli ili polovina” (Angelina girl (some sang Rula girl), why are you so sad, do you have a headache or a backache), “Ne nadevaise mori mome Rula, ias sum star chovek” (Don’t have too much hope Rula girl, I am an old man). The happiest song sang that night was by Kolio who sang “Mama mi pleti shareni chorapi, dali da gi nosam ili da gi pulam...” (mother knit me striped socks, should I wear them or look at them...) which was then taken over by the Greeks but they did not know the words so they only sang the melody.

Noose – Chapter 4

Sadness, love and war.

1.

Finally the time had come. We were lying on a thick layer of ferns in the dark. The only light shining was the last remnant of coals glowing in the fireplace and giving out small flickers of flame. Rula entered the underground barracks quietly and, while leaning on a peeled beechwood post, began to poke at us with a long stick, attempting to wake us up from our deep sleep. This was the first time in months that I had seen Rula in these barracks and when I fully awakened, what did I see? Her back part was as tight as a drum and her body was elongated like a Russian birch.

“Hey wild boys, I am back!” she announced. Her eyes were shining, reflecting the glowing embers from the fireplace and her sweet cheeks were shimmering with the contours of her face being emphasized by the small flickering flames emanating from the fireplace. Whatever the truth may have been, from her visit to our barracks, from the gentle tapping of her feet, from the mysterious look on her face, one could feel the immense sadness built up in her.

“Hey, look, the General came to visit us,” said Spiros, who wanted to court her before Rula was married, but we all knew that she had turned him down with the words, “You old rooster, you too want me to be your bride?” Now she was treating him with an apparent irony: “It seems that by habit, the old rooster is the first to crow,” she said. We all cracked up laughing; even those still not quite awake joined us in the laughter. Stunned, Spiro was left with his mouth wide open. He then retorted with visible anger: “Do you know what Plato said?” he asked. “Love is a mix of honey and poison; sometimes it’s sweet but more often it’s poisonous. Maybe you ate all the honey off of the general and now you came for me.”

Rula looked at him and said, “Do you know who my husband is?” “I am guessing. Someone like me who was bypassed by love...?” answered Spiros. “No, but you should know that love is like a virus; everyone gets it as it goes around, the General had it when he was young, during his high school days. He had no passion for it anymore, now he enjoys talking. No one can put a word in edgewise because he constantly talks. He loves to joke around and rewards loyalty. He demands recognition from all his subordinates even on an emotional level. If you don’t care for his style, you will be set aside and you had best quit your position because you will be going nowhere. I quit my position because I am brave,” concluded Rula.

Spiros was an agile man just over thirty years old. He had just completed a course in Marxism and was on the list to be appointed

political commissar. The Party had given him permission, from the highest echelons, to work on confidential matters, but now everyone bypassed him, even in their conversations. He had brown hair, a longish face with a week-old beard. Most of the time he wore baggy khaki pants and an English sweater. He kept a packet of wound dressings and medicines in his large pocket and hung a “Mills” hand grenade on his pant belt, knowing that this made him a trusted and faithful soldier in the ranks of Markos’s Partisans.

God had given Spiro the gift of quick thinking, so after Rula had finished speaking he mumbled: “Is that why you abandoned him? I know a person cannot change overnight, but you, you managed to change, it seems that you even changed your appearance.” Rula replied to him without getting angry: “I wonder if there is anyone crazy enough to say what they really think? Sometimes I think that civilization, as we know it, would fall apart if we all were truly honest. But with the General, there is always something new to learn because of his extensive experience. People say, “For a person to have a new vision for the future it is necessary for them to have a true picture of the past.”

With some irony, Spiros replied: “What experience are you talking about, is this not his first marriage? If this truly is his first marriage, what is the best advice he gave you?”

Rula looked at him suspiciously and said: “There are many things. You have to be aware of your position and of the situation. That’s what helped me with my career. For example: you Spiros, an old rooster, what could you possibly give a woman; a fighter of DAG (Democratic Army of Greece)...? God forbid, not just love? Are you thinking of a woman now, in this deadly war? If you are then there are many things for you to consider. First you have to find a woman who will love you, a lot. And you have to love her just as much. You know that unmarried men live shorter lives than women, but married men have less desire to live. Now describe for me your first disappointment in love.”

Spiros replied: “People disappoint me, not love. As of yet, I have not found true love. I want a woman who will forget her mistakes because it makes no sense for both of us to remember the same things.”

Rula smiled and said: “This is the worst line I’ve ever heard from an old bachelor. You need to understand once and for all that a woman marries hoping to change the man and if she does not succeed, then she will accept the man for who he is. Understand that a person who knows how to love is a happy person! You are lucky to have someone to love you! Don’t you think you are lucky to be loved? But you, in your life you only love yourself. To love someone else is the greatest joy. But you, old rooster...”

Feeling a bit challenged, Spiros interrupted: “What would you do if your man turned you down?” Pleased with what she had already said to

Spiros, Rula replied: "I would apologize for his imperfections. And you too can do the same if you look in the mirror, but here in the mountains, there is no such convenience. What remains now is for us to make up; we are what we are."

"How does the General know you're in love with him?" asked Spiros. "It goes without saying," replied Rula. Even though Spiros knew she would exaggerate, he asked her anyway: "Did he give you that revolver as a gift? Is this the best time of your life? You have become a gun slinger!" And then suddenly, filled with terrible jealousy towards the General, Spiros, while kneeling and hugging Rula by the shoulder, said: "Kiss me!" Rula suddenly pulled away and coldly said: "Please, get away from me!"

After a moment of awkward silence, Rula continued: "Yes, he gave me the gun. He also gave me a frame for a picture. He did that because he knows how passionate I am about him." Surprised, Spiros said: "That's very egoistic of him, don't you think? Perhaps he felt a bit insecure and was afraid that you might forget him, or, God forbid, leave him? Don't you think that such gifts are a bit selfish?" "And what kind of gift would you think would be more thoughtful?" she asked. "Diamonds perhaps?" he replied "One might throw a few diamonds around because 'diamonds are a woman's best friend', right?"

Rula calmly replied: "Yes, but with this gift he certainly wanted me to frame a picture of him, taken in his general's uniform, so that I could keep it among my most intimate things. Oh my old rooster, when the love is gone, I will have the frame to remind me of my love, also of my fears and hopes. It will be a very enjoyable gift with which to discuss the philosophy of life and its original illusions. The General says: 'The rules of life are inexplicable, but taking steps towards building a communist society, removes the torments from the working class.' He believes that 'our most important job is to fight against capitalism. Do you understand me?' the General would often ask and then add: 'There is everything in this world, but each should live their own life and not cry because they don't own this or that. One day, as a communist society, we will be happy to have the things we are now fighting for and if not us then our future generations'..." concluded Rula.

"The General firmly believes in that," piped up Margarita, standing there with her face frozen in horror. She then stared at us as she stormed out the Barracks exit. Leonidas, Andonis and I kept our mouths shut. I remember Leonidas's words: "It is wrong for a person to create pain and suffering for another person. A person must not use violence, not even on plants and living creatures." Leonidas was lying there beside me and was listening. He was educated and belonged to a family of priests, he had also taught theology in high school. They mobilized him by force, he was not here of his own will. Leonidas always kept details of his private life secret,

saying: “I don’t want to create a mystery about my personal life; it would be easier for me if I could just convince you that I am against war.”

Leonidas then added: “When I think of Rula loving that impotent general, that strange male creature, I am ashamed of her and her illusions. Rula in her assessment is completely blind, but she is probably doing this with the thought of saving her head while the war goes on... She wants to outlive the war with her beauty. That’s the impression I got from her the first night she slept in the General’s barracks, not thinking about the past and full of hope and free thoughts. Her dreams are light and placid like the dreams of a bird.

Leonidas raised his eyebrows in amazement, shook his head and continued: “Life in these most violent, brutal times is trying for a young girl. Then you have these ideological criminals taking advantage of young people. Here, in these times, a person will face their past, present and future. And those who get by would have understood nothing. Besides, this is not the time for understanding but for getting by.”

While I listened to this sad and incomprehensible philosophical interpretation, I thought to myself: “How many roads must a man travel before he feels (effect in the psyche) like a man?”

From the war and Party Chronicles

Based on decisions made by the Central Committee at the Third Plenum held from September 12th to the 15th, and on decisions made by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) from December 12th, 1947 to December 23rd, 1947, the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece was established. The same government resigned on October 15th, 1949. Konitsa, a town in Epirus was chosen to be the seat of this government and as claimed by Zahariadis, its General Secretary, recognition would be secured: “We will take the city Konitsa, we will create a government and they will most certainly recognize us.”

The unsuccessful battles to take Konitsa lasted from December 24th, 1947 to January 4th, 1948 delivering huge losses to DAG. Unable to establish Konitsa as his seat, Zahariadis decided to establish the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece in Prespa in a town called Asamati located in the Republic of Macedonia, then Yugoslavia. As for his Headquarters, Zahariadis chose a pre-war harbour building belonging to the Port Authority. The arrival of the members of the government was assisted by UDBA (State Security Bureau) Colonel Slobodan Krstikj-Ucho, a Yugoslav officer in the Yugoslav National Army.

The Provisional Democratic Government of Greece originally consisted of eight members with Markos Vafiadis as its President. The other seven members were Yannis Ioannidis, Petros Rusos, Miltiadis Porfirogenis, Petros Kokalis, Vassilis Bardzhiotas, Dimitrios Vlandas and

Leonidas Stringos. Also, twenty five officers were promoted to the rank of colonel in DAG, by decree. But not a single member of the government or DAG officers was Macedonian. The Provisional Government was not only a single party government it was also a single nation government consisting exclusively of Greek communists, even though 50-60% of its strength was Macedonian.

REACTIONS: The Greek Royalist government requested that the United States and Great Britain warn the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries of the consequences if they were to recognize the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece. Aware of the consequences of such recognition, the U.S. government promptly reacted and on December 30th, 1947 issued a request to Eastern European countries not to recognize the Provisional Government, warning them that if they did there would be serious consequences. The United Nations Commission for the Balkans also advised its member nations not to recognize the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece.

Noose – Chapter 5

To death for the throne of General Markos.

“Stupidity is eternal, but immoral,” said Socrates, “we will understand it as part of human existence, but it always must be resisted.”

1.

We were sinking in growing fear, afraid of even our own footsteps; it felt like we were putting our heads into a noose. The world was preparing to welcome the new one thousand nine hundred and forty-seventh year and we were making war. It was Monday, December 24th and no one was thinking of how we were going to attack the city. It seemed like we were invincible, trusting our revolutionary strength, feeling like no one could surpass our might, thinking that there had never been revolutionaries like us in the history of the world. The barking of the dogs was very loud.

The night was black; like a black stone. We were on our toes ready to run. We moved under the umbrella of darkness. The moustaches on the older men were freezing from their breath. From time to time we heard the quiet voices of our commanders barking out warnings: “Pay attention! Don’t talk!” A little later we came upon the shimmering lights of a guardhouse, which in the dark looked like a lake of lights. We continued to be cautioned as we approached the city which we could see from the distance. Our hearts were pounding. Most of us had never been to a city in our entire lives and now here we were ready to conquer one. The city with its lights looked huge in comparison to the villages of Gramos. As I was going down the goat path, spontaneous memories of my village, of my home flooded my mind... Finally, we had reached the end of a long journey, leaving behind forests and streams of an exceptionally hilly country rich in trees.

An unpleasant nagging north wind was blowing, freezing every drop of water and chilling us to our bones. All the pools of water we passed by were frozen and the ice creaked as we gently walked on it. Our faces were crab red from the cold.

Commander Arianos was one of those people influential in the Party and should have learned that in politics it is not crucial to be brave (scatterbrained). Now we the fighters had to pay for the lessons he never learned. Dressed in the uniform of a captured high ranking government army officer, Arianos wanted to charm us with his military speech and with his orders. He said that today we were pledging our lives for a better tomorrow. Andonis, who always had a question and liked to make remarks or offer his own suggestions, said nothing. He did not respond at all. He did not try to change the tactics or oppose the officer; he simply nodded

his head and kept quiet. We were all amazed as to how he had managed to say nothing in this kind of situation when he had never been ready to so easily put his own life on the line.

Andonis whispered in my ear: "For this kind of smooth style the basic food is attention and compliments. You can have peace with this kind of person if you feed his narcissism. He constantly wanted to abuse us in the trenches and if we refused him he would hold a grudge and resent us. He takes it very hard when you challenge him in front of others..."

Tired, wet and frozen from the long march we simply could not operate our weapons. Then Arianos got this "brilliant" idea to send us (demolition experts) to clear the way. In our fiery rush we literally almost blew ourselves up. In all this, unbeknownst to us, the Burandari (opposing forces) were monitoring our movements and kept a close eye on us. We advanced under the Commander's idea that we needed to kill all those who did not obey orders. Soon we found ourselves at a fork in the road and took the side leading down a long set of stairs towards the streets of the old part of town. As we descended and took to the wet and narrow lanes, we noticed that there were no people. The situation started to frighten us. Arianos told us that: "A great perspective of a new life was unfolding before us." And how will that happen? That was the job of the strategists; our job was to be brave and do our job. He told us, "You need to be proud of your courage and bravery." Then, at that very moment, our suicidal fury began to unfold and we couldn't help but ask ourselves: "Was there really a new life, a new society unfolding before us?"

2.

There was a lot of shooting; I could hear the sound of whizzing bullets flying by. But my comrades and I, the "minerati" (demolition-ners) as they called us, were more concerned with the cold. Life was not just nothing. I was cold and I wanted to walk around to warm up, but I couldn't because sticking my head out would have brought me closer to my death. At that moment my hopes and fears were tightly connected. Snipers were constantly shooting at us, placing us well into their sight. Several of us had already been killed and were now gone forever. The rest of us, bundled up in clothing that we had not changed in months, had been ordered to move forward. Step by step we tramped through the snow in our wet boots, tight up against our legs. We were entering Konitsa square. We could hear crying, explosions and firing of weapons everywhere. The citizens of Konitsa, committed to their duty to defend their city, had taken up arms. We were near the most prominent building in the city. It was a magnificent building, a long right-angled church with a domed roof and lined with round columns on all sides on the outside. As we walked the streets, with

every step we took we knew that this might be our last night, we saw the moon appear behind the winter fog.

3.

The pine trees that surrounded the city square were bent from the weight of the heaped snow, looking like they were mourning.

“Ognian, what is happening? Damn it, you will kill us all!” yelled my Captain Giorgi Kalkov. “Everything is okay now Captain,” I said as I picked up my backpack filled with explosive pieces and flammable materials. I had just accidentally dropped it. I heard something crack. Maybe something broke. Damn it, I may have broken the mine detector or the binoculars. The same thing happened to Stase Rimpapov and to a few others from my unit. Angry at myself I continued to walk down the road. Then Rimpapov let out a sudden sharp yell and fell to the ground. There was a puzzling look of pain on his face. His left cheek looked like it was going into spasms and was shaking.

“Can you stand up?” I frantically asked as I leaned slightly forward over him. “No... Yes,” he replied. I helped him to his feet. Captain Giorgi Kalkov also ran over to help. He was shot in the neck with a poisonous seed by a silent sniper. Suddenly he fell over on his back, his knees straightened and his body stiffened like it was cramping all over. His head hit the pavement with a loud thud. The stiffness lasted several seconds and then his arms and legs began to quiver, shake and go into spasms. He lost control of his bladder and a puddle of urine formed under him.

“Lord God!” I yelled and so did Kalkov. Then I cried out: “O grim truth!” as Stase sank into darkness. I thought of his mother and her suffering. Oh, what pain, I wanted to shout out and distance myself from this place. Stace suddenly kicked his legs out and experienced another episode of cramps and spasms. Then his body began to twist back and forth. He stuck his tongue out and retracted it again. His eyes were partly open. I thought that he did not know what was happening to him because he tried to say something. But his effort was wasted, no words came out.

I grabbed hold of his head and tried to calm him down. My hands were soaked with warm blood seeping out of his neck. Then, just as I looked at his face, I saw him bite his lower lip, sinking his teeth deep into it. Blood began to gush flowing down his chin and neck. I could see that he was begging for help through his tears. I squeezed his hand and he again bit on his lip even harder and let out his last sad cry. “Stase was dead. May god bless his soul,” I said. Captain Giorgi Kalkov who was responsible for us Macedonians also said the same thing.

There was no hatred in my heart, only horror. Yes, I would have killed his murderer, but I did not hate him. “Don’t hate a rabid dog,” my grandfather used to say. Stase may have still been closer to a child than to

a man but he knew how to share love and how not to hate. Before we had left on this excursion, now under the command of Kalkov, we never did finish singing the song “Aber doide, Donke” (a message came, Donke).

Blood was flowing all over the streets and little by little we were losing our strength and becoming ineffective. We were mobile at the will of our commanders. We were too young and, according to them, not capable of contributing anything of importance, only our cruelty towards the enemy. As I walked on the blood, bled from my friends, I told myself: “O grim truth, we are sinking in blood and darkness, with our parents and family unaware!”

4.

Deep, wide universal fear began to grow all around us as the number of dead kept climbing. Everything was in decline and rapidly falling. How could one measure the anxiety of a common person? Who would determine and tell the truth about what had happened here? “Surely there will be someone decent still left alive,” said Leonidas as his tears ran down on top of dead Stase Rimpapov. At that moment I was reminded of his words, “Do not kill! Do not cause harm! Do not carry out violence!” These were expressions of gratitude, my 17 year old peer and friend in arms used to say when we, along with 320 other children, were mobilized in Macedonia and sent to General Markos’s army to turn us into soldiers and killers and to have us sacrifice ourselves here in Konitsa.

In the whole madness of expecting a victory in the city Konitsa, we went up a narrow and dark street. Until then I had never walked over so many corpses; a sight that would cause a sane person to go into shock, that would make a grown man cringe and lose his guts and make his bones shake. “This is another black cloud over many mothers,” said Kalkov as we covered the dead bodies with frocks so that our comrades in arms that followed us would not be so shocked.

Fear and mistrust grew stronger in us. Our experience created negative feelings in us especially towards our opponent who shot at us and ambushed us from his bunkers. And as we took to the winding streets and dark alleys we all knew that we were walking into a trap expecting that at any moment now we would be blown to bits by the explosives deliberately placed there. We were walking to our death, as if deliberately attempting to sacrifice ourselves and bring about our own demise.

5.

With every passing moment we were threatened with short-lived torment or with death. Emotionally we were all tense and looked very strange. Andonis Theodorakis and I were the first to walk through the

frozen snow, which crunched under our feet, sounding like it was talking to us, telling us something very scary. Andonis spoke: “How long are we going to be fighting? Have we got something to fight over and to divide?” “Everything is clear with our destiny,” I replied. Then I remembered the verses by Aleksandar Tvardovski.

“A coast to the left, a coast to the right,
Cannon fire roars in hell,
A holy and righteous battle is waged,
A battle is waged, not for glory,
A battle is waged, for life on earth.”

There was no one in front of us. We were ordered to refrain from opening fire. We were to avoid placing our finger on the triggers of our guns until we reached our objective. But it was not the same for the other side. They constantly shot at us. Behind us, my comrades from the “minerite” and “free shooters” and those from the Infantry Battalion who were in the front line, with eyelids heavier than zeal for sleep and rest, had given their lives for a piece of peaceful sky. We were marking where the “Telermine” type mines were planted. Some we could not find because they were well camouflaged. We did not have the proper equipment to find those. We needed proper working “detectors”.

The enemy was well deployed throughout the city and was shooting at us from rows of bunkers and even from house windows. We staggered, crawled and inch by inch made progress. Finally we began to assemble in the first beautiful, white and warm houses. We staggered in darkness, going through the houses, unsure if someone was there and if they were going to shoot us. At any moment now someone from inside was going to spill our guts with a strong burst of gunfire or with a hand grenade. That’s how it was. Every fight was a balance between attack and defense. If you’re not fast enough and if your opponent is faster, you will die.

Manolis, in reprisal, said: “We are at the bottom, but the bottom is not a place where one can continuously stay without being depersonalized, without losing colour, smell and taste and without becoming inhuman. We are those who are required to die for the generals?!” They were still shooting at us, defending their city, their homes, and had nowhere to flee, and we did not partake in the thought of killing. We wanted them to peacefully surrender the city so that we could declare it the seat of the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece. In other words, the Government of Markos’s Partisans.

December in Epirus was usually dry with clear skies, full of blue, but on the north side cold waves brought snow from high up Golio Kamenik Mountain. The next day we returned to the bunkers, from where the enemy had shot at us with lit rounds of bullets which we could see flying above our heads. We did not know the streets of this city, but we decisively approached the bunkers. As we turned a corner a group of soldiers appeared before us at the exit of the street, prepared for a frontal attack. We pulled back and went into a completely empty street single file, Jovan, Spiros, Gerasimos, Kalin and Andonis all following Kolio. "Let the dying die and the living live!" shouted Gerasimos running towards the gun hole of the large bunker facing us and throwing a hand grenade at it. Someone with irony then said: "Let the Generals and the Party live!" Then Andonis whispered: "I don't want to die!" At that very moment several of our fighters arrived and took the badly wounded fighter and left with long faces. Afterwards we found out that the wounded fighter belonged to the Second Unit which was attacking from the left wing.

After many unsuccessful attacks, it took us until dawn to finally capture some waist-deep shallow trenches. We noticed that the entire place was dug up with trenches. All of us were wondering, "How was it possible for the enemy to dig so many trenches in so short a time?" Who knows for how long they had known that we were coming. We placed guards at both ends of the trench but the cold was unbearable. A strong fire appeared at one end of the dugout, flames flew high up in the air but there was no explosion. The flames were due to bottles filled with flammable liquid being thrown at us. We sounded the alarm then ran towards the flames but at the same time we feared that the fire might be bait for an ambush. The entire sky was filled with a low cloud, some was from the smoke of gunfire and the rest was cold winter fog. We spent the night shaking cold and jumping at every bit of noise.

When they were not shooting at us, we ate our canned food and felt like we were free from violence, malice and hatred. We ate and immediately experienced immense relief and bliss. Then we thought how fantastic it would be if we could really manage to install General Markos and watch him sit on his throne. We imagined how we would cry out: "LONG LIVE GENERAL MARKOS! LONG LIVE THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERIM DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT OF FREE GREECE! HURRAY! HURRAY! LONG LIVE OUR NEW CAPITAL OF THE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND OUR GENERAL MARKOS! HURRAY!"

Noose – Chapter 6

Welcoming the New Year, 1948.

1.

The wonderful city began to die out and its people were crying in fear and horror. Everyone's destiny was in our hands and in the hands of all those bearing arms. And as if cursed by God, the people of this city now had to celebrate the New Year, 1948, in their dark basements and the world knew nothing about them. Fires were burning everywhere; we were starting them, sowing fear in everyone. Instead of the smells and tastes of meat cooking (pork or roast chicken) to welcome the New Year, there was smoke and fire everywhere. In place of laughter and children's games there were tears of mothers and of captured women and children. The fresh air, for some time now, had not been there in spite of the cold winter. Everyone's conscience was dark and everyone saw everyone else only through the sight of a rifle.

Leonidas and I were on guard. The weather was bad, a lot of snow had fallen and the area was blanketed by thick fog. A bunch of black cats ran by not too far from us and it looked like their eyes were glowing red. Leonidas was quick to make an observation: "Over there masculinity is still the only weapon against death. Look at the cats! This means that nature is fighting back. The feral cats are rebelling. You know about the ancient prophecy, uncovered a while ago, that predicts that cats will commit great violence against humans. Right? This was written by the great Chinese philosopher Confucius, born five centuries before Christ, known for his wisdom and common sense, preoccupied with mystical powers and prophecy.

Confucius said: '...And panic will spread around the world when ordinary domesticated cats begin to attack people. Their rebellion will last for months and thousands of people will die.' I foolishly then asked: "Could this really be the beginning?" Leonidas replied: "I don't know!" while stiffly pointing at the cats. Nervousness is a strange phenomenon, a disorder of the nervous system, causing tremors and outbursts of emotion, outbursts for moral victory. Nervousness can lead to inhuman behavior. For a few days now we had become obsessed with killing the people in uniform who wanted to harm us. Particularly those who constantly shouted from all over the city: "Do not let them destroy your longstanding love for the people of this city. These are people with mental and psychological disorders. They are bandits led by their General Markos. Death to the bandits!"

We were fed up with their behaviour. I guess that is why our commander gave us orders to: "Shoot at all targets, static or moving,

eradicate them all, this is the only way we can succeed in installing our General Markos.” Andonis at one point said: “You know that Commander Arianos is quite mad! He doesn’t know that when someone attacks a man he attacks humanity. It will be hard to fight and even harder and worse if we don’t fight. Every day we are in his target. We have no right to make mistakes. As for the enemy, it is waiting for us to attempt to destroy it and that will give it reason to destroy us.”

The shooting subsided during the evening that day. The church looked magnificent with its beautiful colours. Life and hope sprang from the candlelight. My grandmother was probably right when she said that man is happiest when his eyes, ears and heart are full. For days now we have been waging war in the cruelest way. Everything seemed hopeless. The streets were deserted and the people were dying. Even the winter, with its white snow, was powerless against the darkness, a darkness that existed in the heart, a darkness that was quietly killing the city. Snowflakes fell everywhere, settling on us and on our weapons, and then dying...

2.

We spent the night in a large cellar but as I was falling asleep, it seemed to me like we were crammed into a cave. We were crammed into caves from time to time when we were squeezed in the dark of darkness. We were all lying on the ground, living in basements. For days now this kind of living was affecting our morale and our failure was becoming a habit. But I could always count on Leonidas for advice: “You need to be careful tonight friend,” he said to me. “Today there is a full moon. And you know what they say? People go insane during a full moon. You also know that most random killings, shootings, suicides, thefts and all that happen during a full moon... Our ancestors had special rules and a lot of advice about the do’s and don’ts during a full moon. You know that according to old beliefs, it was precisely during the nights of a full moon that the dead would climb out of their graves as vampires or as other forms of night creatures. Fairies would dance their dance in the open meadows, trolls would look for abandoned mills to occupy and witches would gather at their meeting place during a full moon.” Thanks to Leonidas, that night my sleep was filled with nightmares.

After a night full of nightmares I woke up very hungry. My gut was growling. I woke up lying on my back. In my dreams I had slept with a woman made of marble, beautiful but cold. I was happy to have awakened from these painful nightmares. Awake I felt like I had just swum in a river of warm water. When I opened my eyes I saw Rula exhausted, sitting, sleeping at the table. For a moment I thought that she was a witch or that woman made of marble from my dreams. She also woke up. While sleeping she was that innocent, mischievous, pure young lady from the city

Larissa, that I used to know. But after she awoke her face became hard and unfriendly.

“Rula! Is that you?” I asked. Suddenly she jumped to her feet and screamed: “Blood brother!!?” “What are you doing here?” I asked. She looked at me and her eyes became the eyes of a wounded and disappointed soldier. She said: “I was not free to love. I left that situation because it felt like a spiritual wasteland. I came back here to be with rugged and honest people. The kind that tame horses and look at disappointed girls. Here with you I can sing and starve collectively. I want to drink water from the same mountain spring from which a young mouth with untainted teeth would drink. Here with you I want to learn to sing and cry, like a river with deep shores. I want to take the truth to the sea. A cold veil was controlling that part of my body. I carried the horror in an underground prolonged, repeated abuse. After the disappearance of the warm world in me, there was only room for cold disgust. I disappeared; I got lost in the unpredictable waves of ice in which there is neither life nor love. I was also tortured by that famous saying, ‘I married an old man in order to advance my position and career ...’ That was the most common comment made about me by everyone, especially by the women. I definitely left the chaotic love life I was living in the camp - like in the Cave of Alibaba.

I repeat, I was tortured by that well-known saying, ‘She got herself an old man to advance her position... her career...’ This was the most common comment made by everyone, even in my presence; especially from the women... This was my banishment from consciousness. I wanted to be sufficiently prepared for love so that I could live, but I couldn’t. The secret of disappearance of appeal, according to the General, I could not shake off. Hiding the disease predominated in me. I wanted change in my consciousness. And the psychiatrist herself wanted me to do that too, but I failed to be a woman again, at the best time of my life. I wanted to bring my past femininity back but I outlived that with the general and vice versa. He has long left me alone in the damp walls of the underground barracks. Perhaps it’s a sign of the times but I could not get used to it, to exist alone in the gloomy barracks. Fear had crept into my consciousness.”

Leafing through the General’s personal letters, Rula one day discovered a letter in which the General had written a note to his lover Vangelitsa, calling her “his little mouse.” He wrote that he wanted to have a family with Vangelitsa and that “it would be our perfect little nest.” “But you need to hope that the revolution will end soon.” Rula was stunned by the letter and thought to herself: “Does the general think love is free for the revolutionaries up here in the mountains? So they think that they can protect their breeder pigeons at home and here in the mountains seek free love with the rural women whom they mobilized by force?”

Rula had realized that her love was random and accidental, but her feelings were being hurt by spiteful comments made by people. For

example, only a few days ago she was talking to an older woman in the camp when this older woman said to her: “There are lightweight men who chase lightweight women who take the easy way up to the top positions of power. To become generals... or their wives.”

“After hearing those comments I was going crazy,” said Rula. “I had to drink a lot of ‘METAXAS’ cognac to calm myself down and go to sleep. I felt like I was losing control and the ability to refrain from violence. My hands were constantly trembling; I felt uncertain of myself and experienced many nightmares. Sometimes I suspected that I might make the general my target or that he might make me his target! I had a fear that I was on my own and would have to protect myself. Never in my life had I been in such an unpleasant situation of feeling so insecure and greedy. It brought me loneliness in the barracks in Gramos.”

“I will tell you everything, my blood-brother,” she said. “I will even tell you things that up to now I could not dare tell myself, secret things that occupied my conscience in the late hours of night; dark things which I carry in my soul. Don’t doubt me. Let me finish telling you. Many times, late at night, that Tsarukas would crawl into bed close to me and put his cold hands stinking of tobacco all over me and, as long as he was not sleeping, he would grind his rotten teeth. I would pretend that I was in a deep sleep and yell out, ‘Get lost, monster! Get lost, ogre!’ And I would tremble with anger and disgust. And then I would suddenly feel degraded, victimized. I wanted to return here for a long time, to live a human life, to experience life with you ‘wild boys’. When I am with you I feel free from the inadaptability of difficulties which life brings to a young woman (now wife) which, after being forcibly mobilized in this ‘glorious and invincible’ army, brought me to this condition.”

“Up there at the top leadership,” she said, “songs, laughter, tears, life, death and love are one thing! Down here at the bottom, among the people, songs, laughter, tears, life, death, and love are another! Up there, madness rules, the madness of the throne of governance! That’s how it is up there. Up there it is mandatory that they drink ‘ouzo’ (alcoholic beverage) with ‘meze’ (appetizers), usually olives, a tradition that is practiced by senior officers, and then they drink ‘retsina’ (wine) and ‘sirtaki’. It’s a good thing I did not become a mother...” concluded Rula and stopped talking. She no longer wanted to talk about the past, about the wedding of a descent Party-Partisan. Their biggest reason for disagreement, it appears, was the twenty-five year difference in age between her and her husband. The General also forbade her from leaving her barracks (or her castle, as he called it) in Likorahi, located in the circle of barracks belonging to the high leadership.

I then asked her: “Why did you seduce the General?” Rula smiled guiltily and said: “I simply seduced him to save my head because I was forced into this war. I’m kind of proud of that, but... My ancestors came to Larissa from Simi Island, where women and wealth was kept. At Simi

Island, my grandmother used to say, women enjoyed freedom very hard to find in other parts of the country. The island was a matriarchate oasis. Women always led, even when dancing. In the marriage ritual, the groom's grandmother forced the groom to dance like a guest in welcoming his own family. While dancing, two women would invite a man to dance and the two would exchange him while dancing. That's how we women originating from the island are. The mother's name always follows the name of the girl. For example I am called Rula Dzheni or Rula daughter of Dzheni. The father's or husband's surname is not important."

"So, 'Tsaruhaz', the General's surname means nothing to you?" I asked. "Well, as you can see my blood brother, it means nothing!" she replied. "I know when a woman is so easily promised, happiness is never easy, but I also know that a woman is like a flower and there is a drop of nectar for every bee," I said. "I am stupid," she said, "and now I am paying the price of my misfortune." And just as her eyes were filled with tears and tears began to roll down her cheeks, I said: "Rula, tears look good on you." She looked at me and her voice echoed in my face. She then smiled, gave me a big hug and kissed me.

Noose – Chapter 7

Shadow of Hell – Games and death in the nights of Konitsa.

1.

We entered the church. It was a nice building built with carved limestone and ceramic materials. We looked inside and noticed a saint pressed on the cold stone giving off light. It seemed spiritual. Surprised by the glow, we touched it with our fingers and the glowing paint spread around, some of it got stuck on our fingers and it glowed as we moved around. It only lasted for a moment but it was enough time to make us feel at ease, uplifted and happy. The church was packed with fighters and they were all applauding while the music was blaring. I noticed Rula's hands shaking. Her voice was weak and she looked sad. She was trying to look feminine but her uniform and the revolver on her right hip made her look rough and hid her slender figure. Then I saw her dancing. It was vulgar. Her bouncing up and down with her heavy military boots hitting the floor tiles made her sound and look like an enraged horse, or a soldier who suffered from typhus.

Rula swallowed several gulps from her "Metaxa" cognac bottle, opened her mouth and let out a hoarse cry. "Happy New Year! To victory! Hurray! Drink wine to bring us together. Wine is a gift of God... If not to another, then you can repeat your sad life's story to yourself, which will lead you to salvation or to hell." Rula then drank a slug of wine and as droplets ran down her lips she said: "Death is not the end of everything..."

Rula's body began to contort as she made movements with her hands trying to reach her loosened, heavy army boots. She then fell and lay down on her back. Her tongue looked swollen as she tried hard to call for us to help her. I felt sorry for her. I remember her words when we were tanning one day and cleaning ourselves from lice. She said: "I am proud of my chest. It stands straight and looks great. I also love long legs.

Unfortunately my legs are short and I hate them, especially in these boots. Oh my blood brother, if only I was a bit taller! I think curvy women are beautiful..." I then said: "Nobody is perfect. But you're a pillar of feminine beauty in our army here in this region of Gramos. Be strong while the war lasts." She looked calm so I added: "But you are not thinking at all about the revolution?" She roared to tears with laughter. Tears of exhaustion and pain.

"Maybe someone poisoned her Cognac?" someone yelled out. The crowd became upset. The fresh air had long gone. In place of fragrant candles, there was gunfire and smoke. It burned from all sides. Instead of prayer and baptism, there was dancing of the "sirtaki" and the "zebekiko", military style. Everyone's conscience was dark. The politics were dark.

Rula's body curled up in a semi-circle. Her eyes opened wide. They were completely white. Her lips were stretched out over her teeth, looking as if she wanted to smile but she was in pain, her stomach felt like it was on fire. She looked at the saints as if seeking forgiveness. She wanted relief but she was swept up by panic. Perhaps she did not know what was happening to her and how long this unpleasantness would last. She was afraid, her hands were shaking. She was barely able to speak but managed to say: "I came here to be with you, to cry and rejoice with you, to suffer and love with you..." seemingly wanting validation from all of us. Her lips trembled and she turned her head away.

A priest walked up and, in a hoarse voice, said: "Only blasphemers enter God's house with weapons," and then proceeded to curse Rula with the following words. "Be damned girl, and may you be without the fruit in life." He then began to rant: "I don't know. I have no strength to judge you. What kind of people are you?! Shame on you for your dirty dancing!" Rula wanted to ask for forgiveness. "Oh, how could I, in this Christian church, be so shamelessly blasphemous? Why did I do that, I don't know?" She was feeling very bad... She crossed herself facing the icon of St. George and her body slid on the floor. There was dead silence in the church and at that very moment, a few bursts of gunfire outside marked the coming of the New Year, 1948. We all clapped our hands and called out: "Happy New Year! Long live General Markos! Long live Konitsa, our new capital of the Democratic Government of Greece!"

Leonidas was the only one who did not clap his hands. He turned towards me and said: "Eh, blood brother, look at Rula. The quality of a person and their humanity cannot be bought with money... my head is clouded by this strange dance we call life... God! Where is this treachery coming from? Create the world from the start and use the souls of yesterday's dead to restore it. Will we ever have a chance to have a friendly laugh?"

He arranged the psalms in front of the great icon of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, looking for an interpretation that covers all the people. How is it possible, he wondered, now, in the 20th century, for people to still persecute each other? How is it that the stronger uproot the weaker from their homes and those with the power of language believe in the interpretation of their own ideology? This is a frightening madness, it muddles a man's brain! Wars bring misfortune, pain, poverty...

"My dear God," he said, "up to now I have seen: water, forests, mountains, valleys with snow and in them heavy weapons. I have seen houses on fire and lives taken. I have seen columns of people: old people, women, children fleeing from their homes... but I have never seen such blasphemers..." Leonidas turned towards us, looked sternly at us and said: "You do not clap in church. Cruelty, treachery, might and desecration triumphed here tonight. This is how it will be judged. There will be less

hope for deliverance. Outside of the merciless killings, we have ruined a spiritual sanctuary. We have killed hope. We have spread hatred. Tonight we watched mad people salivate with boasting and beating their chests. They have faith in whom? In death? In annulment? God is our salvation and only God can save Rula!”

God loving Leonidas, pure of faith, could not bear any more injustice and irrational blasphemy in the temple of God, so he boldly stood up in front of Arianos and said: “Do not insult God, Comrade Arianos! I am a servant of Christ, my God and I can no longer be witness to this mess. Your idols are not gods, no they are not! Markos is not a god and someday he will humbly die. God will defend the new from the newborn saviour of the spirit, messiahs and yesterday’s anarchists. What will be your punishment? Christ is the only God. Before me is Jesus. I am looking at him and he is looking at me. He is silently watching me. This is Jesus, the man-God who has no aims, but has a spirit. Why do you rejoice in evil and act lawlessly all day?”

Leonidas paused for a moment and resumed talking: “Comrade Commander, we do not need to exist and behave like animals, we are spiritual beings. Why must you think and speak of perilous things? Why must you love evil more than good, injustice more than justice...? How do you and those who commit lawlessness justify it? They and you will one day feel fear where there is no fear. God will break everyone’s bones...”

Scorned, Arianos pulled out his pistol and said: “Continue, continue...” And we all, at the top of our voices, yelled out: “Long live General Markos and the Party!” Arianos also shouted the same slogan and then turned to Leonidas and said: “You have a bad attitude towards our bright future, towards the goal of the revolution! You are a danger and a bad influence on all the fighters.” He then gave orders to have him thrown out in the snow and to have a large block of ice placed on his chest so that he would freeze... And then with even greater anger, Arianos said: “Bastard! Go away!” He then turned to us and said: “I order you all not to communicate with him orally or in writing. I order you not to go near him because his wishes are to bring disunity among our revolutionary ranks and destroy our faith and our ideals; for which we are ready to lay down our lives. You must stay away from this schismatic!”

Leonidas turned his head towards the icon of “Bogoroditsa” (The Virgin Mary) and said: “Forgive me, Mother, as I have seen nothing. As I remember nothing. As if all was erased! Now they want to turn me into dust and ashes, to burn everything. Why?”

Arianos thought for a moment and gave his own advice: “Don’t let this kind of anti-communist element discourage you from our successes. Every beginning is difficult. Indiscipline, whim and religious intrigue from today on are prohibited. Trust in your own instincts and victory will be ours. We

will feel even worse if we lose the battle, which is uncharacteristic of fighters for communism.”

Each one of us felt a sudden mood change which led us to insanity. That night, Leonidas did not know if he preferred the solitude that surrounded him, or whether the loneliness hurt him or freed him. He curled up in a sheltered place with a mixed vision and sadness in his soul but also happy to be alive. He squatted in the dark and thought and prayed for our fate. The crowd in front of the altar began to yell: “The priest does not know how to sing and dance the sirtaki, but we will teach him...” The priest then responded: “God is with us, do not be afraid. Keep our rich Orthodox faith alive. The spirit will hold us on this earth; not ideology. We are a peaceful people. We are here from time immemorial. We will remain here, this is our town.”

After Leonidas was thrown out, the priest walked with dignity and with his head proudly held up high. He bent down a bit and, because of the place where he was standing, he could not see the beautiful Rula, so again, enraged by our insolence, he said: “Lord God, save these enraged Partisans of the atheist General Markos who wants to sit on the throne by force.” Embittered by all this, the priest, disappointed by our human inclination to be anti-God, took off his hood and said: “Oh, what a curse! What kind of people are you? The essence of our ancestors is crystallized in this church through generations, for its preservation, for its duration, like human beings, like people and like spirits.”

He then bent down and took the icon of Sv. Zlata Meglenska which had fallen down. We all held our breath. He then said: “For us the term icon falls in the theological, aesthetic and ethical category, it is a metaphor for faith, for beauty and for goodness. And now these portraits of your prince and General Markos that you have hung all over, on top of the saints, do they belong in this church? Do they belong in this town? Do they bring peace and tranquility? I just don’t know what people will think after they see this vandalism. They will see your hatred and your revenge and will be disappointed.”

Some people in the crowd began to push him, to hit him and to pluck his beard. The next morning he was found dead outside in the cold.

Anxiety and anger grew in Rula, her saliva glands were leaching saliva which remained in her mouth because she could not swallow it. She was delirious and everyone laughed at her. She said: “So, I am a fiancée. Faith! A woman should adorn the virtue of faith, fidelity, faithfulness in love and faithfulness in God... This is my house, I was born here... I came here to see my house! And who are you? Who asked you to come here? What do you want?” She then staggered towards Arianos and said: “What time is it?” Arianos angrily showed her his watch and said: “Here, look!” She then said: “Why, can’t you tell time? Like you can’t tell the forest from the

trees? Now it's time to separate! Now it's over!..." she then fell to the floor.

Spiros was so shocked by the sight that he needed some time to react. He could hear that in her mouth she was mixing prayers with curses while he was trying to arrange a compress on her hot chest. "She is dead," he then said, after which he dumped the wet cloth on the tile floor. He stood over the dead body, mourning the woman he loved. He mourned her but he could not understand why she did not love him back. A lot of times she said to me: "Blood brother, I don't want anything, except to die in an embrace of love. Take me home." Then I would ask: "To whose house?" Rula would then laugh, pick some mountain flowers, look at me slyly without answering and leave the pain of love to flow through her veins like grape juice.

When we left the church and went out to the street, I felt the power of silence and everyone wanted to grab a lump of snow, but at that very moment a hand grenade exploded with a loud blast. The snowflakes disappeared from the windows and we heard screams and people wailing in pain. Our eyes could not see (we were all blind), our lips could not speak (we were all dumb), our ears could not hear (we were all deaf), only the human heart could describe the suffering. The cries of a child could be heard passing through the frost, through the snowflakes, through the explosions. The question on everyone's mind was: "Is it possible? Just now, just as we entered the New Year...?" We could see the tragedy of interrupted love when we saw a child whimpering beside his dead mother's body and this night was supposed to be a time of joy.

Suddenly a feeling of guilt, like rust, began to erode my last hope. I had a strong longing for home. My heart and brain made me think of my family. I wanted to enjoy life and be happy in a family setting. I remembered the words of our mothers when they were protesting and refusing to send us to war. I remember them yelling: "Return our sons, we need them to harvest the crops! It is not their time to be sent to their death! We have not finished planting our seeds in the soil! Our freshly baked bread still has its delicious aroma. The fruits of our labour still have taste..."

Before I had finished my thought, I heard Andonis groaning, and beside him I heard a swishing sound of a passing bullet. He was rolling in the snow looking like a Tibetan dumb ox infected by madness. Frightened I asked: "Are you hit?" "No!" he said. There was a strange ring of a church bell. It was occurring together with a strong underground explosion coming through the narrow streets. I said to him: "Get yourself together man and come here and pray. There is no one here from the political commissars to see you." He then asked: "What happened to Leonidas? How many of us are left?" I said: "I don't know. Only Kostas is here..."

Andonis kept quiet, he looked like a shadow in the dark and again knelt in the snow and began to roll like a dumb ox.

“Why are you doing that?” I asked him. “I guess I can tell you,” he said. “They stepped on a mine. It was a frightening explosion. There was nothing left of Theoharis and of Stase Rimpapov. Suddenly I remembered that you could shoot me if I suddenly snuck up on you and you did not know it was me. When I stood up in front of a window they shot at me with a strong burst of gunfire, but only the hem of my coat was hit and I was okay. I then fell into a pile of dirt and got really dirty, I gasped and breathed the fresh air deeply. I was completely alone. I lay on my back and stayed there for a long time. Maybe they thought I was dead. I will not abandon you again.”

I could hear that he was calm and comforted by his closeness to me. “God save you,” I said to him. And he said: “You are naïve.” “Why?” I asked. “Because,” he said, “no matter how much we try to get away from this mad night God will have his revenge on us.” I asked him again: “Why?” “Because,” he said, “we have disturbed the tranquillity of these people in this city. Because we are selfish and want to turn this city into our capital and make it a throne for our General Markos and for all those other crafty people.” I then said: “May God be with you.” “Why just bless me?” he asked. “Because tonight I don’t know if we are angels or devils. Tell me what do you think? Will anyone find any of our dead or will they remain lost and forgotten forever? Or perhaps no one will be interested in looking for them. Do you think General Markos will be interested in finding them? Or will he just want to sit on his throne and watch through his binoculars and wait to be invited by our commander, to host a ceremony...”

He then asked me: “Will we fight again?” And I said: “Andonis my blood brother, I believe that after this major city is declared the capital of our military and government, if General Markos sits on the throne, the world will never be the same.” Andonis said: “If we are willing to die for anyone who wants to sit on a throne, then there will be no one left alive...” He was not entirely convinced about what he said but he did not know how else to counter my statement. Even today we ask ourselves what was the supposed meaning of the statement “the golden throne of General Markos.”

We found underground tunnels in the basements of some of the homes connecting houses together. Those who built the tunnels must have had a lot of trouble because the tunnels were very narrow, barely enough for a single person to pass, but this shows that the people loved their city. When the people found out, from the December 23rd declaration, that the Partisans were going to turn their city into a Partisan capital, they worked even harder, day and night, to build more trenches and fight to the death if necessary, refusing to relinquish it. When we found half-eaten chocolate

bars with children's teeth marks on them, inside the houses, we knew that people were truly fleeing from us Partisans... We found toys scattered all over the place, used diapers, half-empty plates of food, milk... We were searching for hours, sticking to the wall, observing. It seemed like we were obsessed and paranoid about the creation of a capital for our leadership and for the world to recognize it. But the people were gone.

The witching hour was almost over, dawn was nearing. We were ready to welcome daylight? Fear exuded creepiness... in other words fear accompanied no expectation... of the ones remaining alive to occupy the throne with General Markos. Commander Arianos wanted that the most. He was even decked out with his newest military uniform. Standing next to me was my friend Kalivas Kostas who, from time to time, would confess to me that he wanted to use his weapon to exact revenge. He wanted to kill hundreds of people. Winter, ice and despair lived in that man's chest. His soul was darkened. Jovan Kotev, one of our fallen fighters killed by a land mine explosion, was his closest friend. "My faith says Thou Shall Not Kill!" said Kostas, which should apply to everyone. Kostas continued: "Many people say that, but it's not like that, one wrong move and they will kill you."

A woman's voice was heard speaking in protest: "Why are you shooting then?" she asked. Her husband then answered: "I want to kill them because they have come here to take our city, our homes and to enslave us." Andonis whispered to me: "Did you hear that?" "Yes." I said. Andonis then loudly explained to them: "You should not use violence over your opponents. Your opponents need to be made aware of their mistake with patience and compassion... the woman is right and understands. She does not want to use violence; she wants to love her children and her home." Andonis was so thunderstruck by the spectacle that he needed time to react. He continued: "We will certainly not be in history, only those with whom we are together in this heap will remember us... they certainly will say that we were petty men, marginalized, criminals, murderers..."

Another woman's voice was heard asking: "Why did the world's evil have to come here, to our city?" A third voice, a man's voice was then heard saying: "Why did God have to create good and evil?" In the meantime we all stood there motionless, keeping quiet. We had a good view of the entire street and at one point we saw our fighters leading a disarmed civilian and kicking him as they moved along. Arianos, enraged, pulled out his revolver and aimed it straight at the prisoner's temple. Flustered, the prisoner said: "Please, if you have a heart in your chest, don't kill me." At the same time Kostas said: "I lost my friend and now his killer stands before my eyes. You damned man; I will not be satisfied until I take revenge."

Arianos then asked the prisoner: "Why were you shooting at our democratic army, you gangster? Do you know how many of our fighters

you have killed?” The prisoner then said: “I am not a criminal if I defend my fellow citizens. I am not a gangster if I defend myself and if I defend my home, my children, my elderly father and mother and my friends. It is not a crime if I must defend myself in that way where I have to shoot at you and kill you. How would you, gentlemen democrats, have reacted if you had found yourselves in a similar situation?” The prisoner looked at each one of us and asked: “Who is the bully here?” At that moment Arianos shot him in the temple and pushed him off the road with his boot.

Strong detonations and bursts of gunfire continued to be heard throughout the city. There were now volleys of cannon fire coming from positions outside of the city. The place smelled of gunpowder and there were heaps of shells everywhere; we were all afraid of snipers. The outflow of madness was wearing us out. We managed to survive until morning but we were all nauseated and full of dread. Every day, day and night we were killing and burying young fighters. We were burying the hope of our future. We who were still alive mourned our fate. A big blurred line emerged on the horizon before us, like evaporating dust, blood and fire, seeming like it was a living hell and depressing murderous mud. From time to time, horrified and frantic, people appeared at their balconies, windows and sidewalks reading the graffiti: “LONG LIVE THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREECE! LONG LIVE GENERAL MARKOS! LONG LIVE KONITSA OUR CAPITAL!”

2.

I heard Spiro’s voice say: “If you move I will kill you!” Our enemy was not very knowledgeable in military science, so Spiros without fear approached him, grabbed the handgun by the barrel and tried to pull it out his shriveled fingers. The old man held the gun tightly against the handle but Spiros overpowered him. As the old man let go, he angrily mumbled some unintelligible words. The old man’s pupils were dilated. He was slightly bearded, unshaven, his hair was white and his face was sunken in. He looked exhausted in his fur overcoat, which stunk of sour sweat and olive oil. “Comrade Commissar!” the old man said, “I have no bad intentions towards you Partisans.”

The younger man who accompanied the old man kept opening and closing his mouth without making a sound. By the look of the white, or in this case, the red of his eyes, Leonidas figured the man was frozen with fear. Leonidas took out his water bottle and offered him a drink of water. The man replied: “Ευχαριστο χριστιανε” (thank you Christian) and raised his hand as if to bless him. Leonidas, looking at the man’s clothes figured he was a priest. The two men were the priest and sexton of the “Holy Mother” church. The priest then said: “I am a Priest of the Holy Virgin and her joyful servant. My holy soul is in Christ’s hands.” He then opened the

Holy Gospel and began to bless us. Now a bit encouraged he said: “You are good people with pure souls, but we were told that you are killers and murderers working against our religion and against priests.”

The conversation ceased, the laughter disappeared and we found ourselves in a place where death with passion was contrary to man’s interests. We crawled and waited. We read warnings: “Do not trample on the gate, do not seize, do not touch...” All kinds of disturbing warnings! Then suddenly a reflection of light appeared in front of us, targeting us by large reflectors. It’s a real wonder that we managed to stay alive.

3.

The next night was the coldest. The temperature was minus 20 degrees, maybe colder. After one of my friends showed us a red partisan flag flying on Monday during the night, we became confident enough to enter deeper into the city Konitsa, which we confidently considered to be our future capital. So we went from yard to yard, entering through the narrow metal gates positioned between the great walls made of stone or brick. In front of us there were beautiful new homes. In them we found weapons and discarded uniforms belonging to wounded enemy soldiers. We also found the area to be mined with unexploded mines and bombs, which we set aside and marked the places “dangerous” to warn those coming behind us.

We felt like we were in a large cage and were expecting that at any moment something terrible was going to happen. We found ourselves under a large eave of a roof. If we waited too long we were sure that we would be shot at... All around us the area was full of mines and we needed to be very careful when taking a step. We were tired and restless, we could tell from the way we tried to take steps. We tried to concentrate but fear had made us desperate and exhausted. We had no idea what to expect next. Arianos was overcome by feelings of hopelessness. We wandered around for hours not knowing what was going to happen. Sometimes he scolded us, telling us: “Stop feeling sorry for yourselves and snap out of it”. And with a little bit of cunning, he was able to lift our morale and fighting spirit.

We were true patriots because we had the ability to rise to the occasion and set aside our personal feelings. Someone else decided to offer their advice and impatiently spoke up saying: “Give up this ‘I want!’ ‘I want!’ and focus on the job. We are fighters of the legendary General Markos and we need to show a sense of independence from body and spirit. We need to think only of victory. Tomorrow, we, the glorious and invincible army, will march around the square...” Andonis was quick to respond and whisper to me: “Look at Arianos, he walks like a peacock and asks of us not to be selfish. How can he even think that we are selfish after all that we have been through; the hunger, the exposure to the cold. And on top of that

he does not want us to talk to one another. Oh my blood brother, - sorry Ognian my mate, this night will bring nightmares to all the people in all the peaceful towns. And we, in these crusty clothes, packed together in these ditches, now have to listen to Arianos's bitter remark, without tact, say: 'After his first kill, every person – soldier will get a great rush of relaxation'."

Leonidas then said: "For as long as cherished and good will hopes continue to perish in this shameful and dishonest decade, which brought us one of the most horrible wars - World War II, people like Arianos will continue to tell their stories. Even children know to be afraid of wars because it robs them of their goodness and happiness... What we are doing here is committing high treason, but for us these are days of our last hope. But we must acknowledge that, as long as incoherent voices scream at night, people are trampled on and violated. When you hear gunfire, bodies are falling and we should be able to figure out that 'there will be no capital for us in this city' because the people are not happy with us and will not let us have their city. The people don't like us and are not proud of us. They don't see us as their liberators... Now, at this time, it is not wise to fight! This is not the time to apply the rule 'use force as a necessary prerequisite to gain value'. The use of what we see as 'necessary force' will cause us many difficulties and most unnecessary horror, whose trap will swallow us all and death will be worthless as we mindlessly seek it."

Leonidas paused for a moment and continued: "If we don't come to our senses soon, a little later, after this spree of madness is over, they will be placing thousands of wreaths of flowers on the graves of those who died futile deaths. You see patriots, professionals like Arianos, when all is well, yell and give us orders, 'forward!' These so-called patriots use patriotism as a means to survive and last through these tough times. They even boast that they are willing to die to the last one for the fatherland. Indeed, where have you seen a country without liars? Some smart people like Gandhi, for example, consider patriotism to be humane. But philanthropy does not call for killings. But these people with their own brand of humanity do call for killings; they are self-centred. May God help them!"

"Eh, blood brother?" I said. "What do you think of our leaders; don't they seem like self-centred people disguised as great patriots?" He said: "No, they say they are communists!"

Stupid Arianos, even if he climbed on Mount Olympus he will still be stupid. Here stupidity reigns higher than reason. But the worst of it is that our stupid Major, even under these conditions, is attempting to convince us that he is not stupid. Where is our conscience, why haven't we all yelled out: 'Hey, you generals? Stop the madness!!!'"

It is peaceful today. Finally we can breathe with some ease. It wasn't like this Monday and Tuesday. We had been waiting for a long time for a nice day like this. It was peaceful like this throughout the entire front line, all night last night, but we were on constant alert. Before opening our cans of cold meat this morning, our Major Arianos informed us that later this morning the opposition government forces would capitulate and Konitsa would be proclaimed our capital. I was certain that this was going to happen because we belonged to Markos's mighty army. Our will was strong and we were not only capable of making Konitsa our capital but we could move mountains if we wanted to. I had faith in our abilities. "Today was a perfect day, the day when our strategy came to the fore," we were told by Commander Arianos who believed everything that he was told by the top political leadership and by the political commissars.

But our political commissars were buying souls, minds and dreams in this war. They patted us on the back and by doing so confirmed that we belonged to them. We, on the other hand, were flattered but unsure if we should be getting into a conversation because we were unsure if we needed to be more cosmopolitan or patriotic. The risks were high. The silence in front of them was golden. The tales of enemies and friends would soon turn into reality, even though we all knew that good and evil stood side by side. But they were opposite, evil could never become good. Good and evil were two different faces in the world, in life, in intentions, in behaviour and with that the political commissars were able to manipulate us.

But the people knew, as my grandfather used to say: "Beauty and goodness go hand in hand. A good person is nice to the people. Whoever chooses evil is ugly and does not like the people."

Noose – Chapter 8

Twelfth Day (January 4th, 1948) in the struggle for General Markos's throne.

1.

During the morning of the twelfth day, we were awakened by strong explosions that took place in another part of town. It was dawn, January 4th, 1948 and I was sitting on some wood beams that smelled like freshly cut pine. Our red flag, which we had hung in the main square since the first days of our arrival, was now gone and in its place hung a great big, scary looking NOOSE. The noose was made of thick rope and, being blown by the strong wind, it swung from side to side.

Over on the hills I could see government army soldiers moving. They had occupied the heights around Konitsa and were preparing to attack the city. They had us surrounded and through the fog they flew "Spitfire" fighter planes which poured bursts of gunfire on our positions. The airplanes slowly shrank as they flew away, seeming as though they were disappearing into the sun – leaving behind only their thunderous sound which slowly fell silent, and, as quick as lightning, they would again return and descend over our heads to spill more bursts of gunfire and drop more deadly bombs.

There was long silence. At that moment Colonel Sofianos Iliadis arrived at the front line with his security people. He was concerned about the situation and was not sure what was happening so he wanted to investigate everything himself. He had no confidence in the others and was looking nervous. His goal was to remove even the smallest risk of acquiring the last strongholds of the government army. After many inspections, and with no room for the slightest of error, he came to his conclusion.

He said: "I am a soldier and it is not easy for me to share my insecurities with you but I need to tell you that we have lost the battle. It was natural because it never is easy to capture and defend a city with only a single regiment composed of newly mobilized villagers.

Today will be a day of life or death. Protect yourselves. Today it will not be easy to escape our enemy's retaliatory attacks. If we were realistic about our planned strategy, we would not have allowed such big promises to be made."

Noose – Chapter 9

Running in white death.

1.

We were running in all directions. We were fleeing for our lives when we heard cries of hatred. Andonis, Spiros, Sotir, Kolio, Petre, myself and many others were fleeing for the hills of Mount Kleftis. Kolio suddenly groaned. He had been shot on his left hand. Fearing for his life he fell to the ground and started crawling in the snow. We were being pursued by the “Burandari” (enemy soldiers) and by armed civilians from Konitsa. They were running after us like rabid dogs. They were constantly yelling: “Shoot the bastards! Drive them out of our city! Aim well and kill them! God is with us, the city is ours. Kill them! Kill them all!”

One of their officers was yelling at us: “We will catch you, you cursed bastards, we will catch you and roast you over a spit... You cursed bastards, may the plague get you all. You have defiled our city, you have robbed us of the happiness of our celebration of the New Year. You antichrists, you have defiled our church, you have upset the dead... you will pay for your crimes! They are rebels, even God is against them and they need to be uprooted... They are dangerous.” I got goose bumps listening to this guy.

We moved fast on Mount Kleftis, as we climbed up on one of its hills. Through a clearing we could see a pine grove stretching for a long way in the distance. At the edge of the woods we saw a wounded deer running, being pursued by a pack of wolves which caught up to it and brought it down. We were all distracted by the sight and angry at the rapacious wolves. Walking quickly through the deep snow Leonidas was first to speak: “The wolves are just like us...” he said.

In front of us, just as we passed through the clearing, we could see a wide open, almost flat slope at the bottom of the hill. The entire slope was open space all covered in snow with very few trees in between. There was a strong north wind blowing, it was dry, cold and aggressive. We moved fast through the open space, running for our lives. The whiteness of the snow and the open space magnified our worries, making every minute noise sound like a ring tone of mortal fear. And even though Leonidas was occasionally gripped by depression, he was the only person with a clear mind who felt confident that we would make it alive.

At one point Leonidas said: “I love this open white space, only in this whiteness can man be free from the thousands of thoughts that plagued his mind in the street battles of the city. Thank God, we fled the horror that found us. We buried the hatred and fear behind us. And may no person dig them up for centuries, not even with God’s help...”

We began to descend downhill. The trail suddenly ended but we continued descending. Going through this flat whiteness was like walking through life itself. There were snow drifts and patches of bluish ice everywhere. We hung on desperately for dear life. Beyond the blueish and gray ripples, it seemed like the boundary between heaven and earth had disappeared. Andonis slipped but Kostas was quick to catch him and so began our battle with the cold frozen mountain.

We fought hard to get to the trees as soon as possible, but the mountain lay in our path, to be more precise it lay there with indifference; it did not even notice us. Unfortunately the fighter planes did and with their engines thundering and machine guns bursting gunfire, they angrily pursued us, flying over our heads. The airplanes constantly hovered over the white valley. First slowly making a semicircle and then on their return trip, at lightning speed, unleashing a deadly barrage of bombs on us. Then as soon as they had come they disappeared into the blue, looking like predatory birds. The airplanes flew all day, thundering through the mountain and making every explosion echo and resonate; disturbing the tranquility of the countryside, causing panic among us.

The day was very cold. It was biting cold to the bone this day in January and we could feel it in our hearts. In front of us we could see Poliksena Kiriakou having difficulty walking. She was a health care worker in our battalion. By the look on her face she looked very tired and was in a lot of pain. Her chest was uncovered, she had difficulty breathing, her neck was blue from the cold and her hand was covered in ice. But as she continued struggling with every step, she insisted on helping the wounded.

We finally reached the long frozen slope of the valley. Unfortunately I stepped into empty space and slid down. I rolled over but continued to slide. Then just as I was recovering I saw Leonidas sliding by me. He was bulkier and sliding a lot faster than I was. He had this horrified look on his face and I prayed to God he did not run into a tree... After that we paid more attention to where we stepped in the snow, making sure the crust was strong enough to support our steps. Leonidas crossed himself and prayed while I removed icicles from his hair and eyebrows.

“Come with me,” said Captain Giorgi Kalkov in a mysterious tone of voice. He then pulled me towards a grave dug in the frozen snow behind a small fir tree. “I know you loved each other like brothers, so I want you to bury him,” he said. Beside the grave lay my blood brother Jovan Kotev. His left foot had been wounded by aircraft fire and over the hours he had bled to death. His face was blue and looked rigid and full of pain. I cried as I covered him with lumps of snow. At least this way his eyes would not be pecked by the vultures and other birds of prey and his body would not be torn up by hungry wolves. I turned towards the colonel and said: “As of now I don’t give a damn about the damn revolution.”

Captain Kalkov and Major Arianos did not say anything or react to my comment. Only in the most secret part of Arianos's left eye could I see some indecision as to whether he should slap me on the face or outright kill me like a dog in the frozen snow. I justified myself for going to the other world, but here I was in the presence of Colonel Sofianos who was the kind of person who wanted things to flow naturally and spontaneously and despised all those who looked at human destiny naïvely, especially all of us who, according to him, were really immature children and should not have been involved in this war.

The Colonel said: "May he rest in peace and may his glory be eternal!" We then all said the same thing and went towards the hill. By then most of our comrades had penetrated the extent and were arriving at our position. Among them was Colonel Micho Poliologou whose orders were to defend the road and crossing over the Burezani Bridge and to block the road to Mount Kalpaki. The men brought news that one of our battalions was still surrounded by government troops on Mount Kalpaki and many of our fighters were pinned down, frozen and could not escape.

2.

The sun had already disappeared behind the mountains. A huge cloud of blue fog had descended over Konitsa valley and was slowly moving westward. Its edge was looking red in the weak sunlight. Suddenly it became much colder and it seemed that the night would be extremely cold, which was usual for this time in winter. It turned dark quite fast as a raging storm moved in blowing a strong wind and dropping snow on the surrounding hills. We heard someone sigh; it was more like a moan. We heard it again and it was definitely a moan. Then suddenly a pale face appeared in front of us, coming from the clearing in the trees. The eyes on the face looked hollow and there were signs of pain and suffering. It was one of our fighters.

"Wolves! We were attacked by wolves," he said in an exhausted and barely audible voice. "A whole pack of them, over there... Save yourselves! Some of our fighters have been dismembered. They were too weak to defend themselves but some managed to save themselves by fleeing downhill," he said and trembled from the trauma he had experienced. We gathered together in a circle. But our mighty, hasty and angry Arianos, with eyes like a dog and a heart like a deer, pushed his way into the middle of the circle and stayed there shaking with fear until dawn... Leonidas was quick to point out that: "These animals are struggling to feed themselves, not to wage war. We, on the other hand, our only goal here is to kill people. What a great big scam this is!"

Leonidas thought for a moment and continued. "Mankind's oldest stories, myths and tales of heroes, are all about death and killing. We in this war were chosen to die because someone imagined it that way. They imagined a form of collective hatred in an all imagined conflict. They knew and were familiar with all the fashions of this war. And these fashions were diseases attacking dignity and justice and causing humiliation and frustration of the ultimate kind. These fashions created an atmosphere of collective self-mutilation. The idea that humans were good by nature was now gone. Every day I listened to Arianos say: 'We are revolutionaries, supporting pillars of this country, of this nation! Shoot, kill, let us destroy them all, only this way we can rid ourselves of the evil in this world, only this way we can get rid of the criminals.' I closed my eyes. Something inexplicable still haunted me... That angry whine was what was pushing us into silence. I believe that God knows what we are thinking. 'God is this how we are going to die?' I asked myself."

We stood there for a long time but the night seemed endless. Deep in the recesses of my own mind I could hear funeral songs, which in my ears rang like church bells and blew like the trumpets of the Last Judgment. The government soldiers had retreated, taking advantage of the weak light to pursue us, then returned to their camp just at the exit of town. When they reached their camp their commanders reported to General Zafiropoulos, and he in turn spoke to them with great satisfaction: "This is how you run a modern war, with maximum coordination, not ad hoc like the way the rebel forces of General Markos are run. And here are the results for everyone to see. That (pointing at the NOOSE) is where fifty-five of his men were crucified and hung. They were "guilty" because, by order of General Markos, they forcibly drove hundreds of innocent people out of our city so that they could take it and turn it into his capital and put General Marcos on the throne, and for that they paid with their lives and died a miserable death. And who were these people? By identifying their bodies, we found out that they were innocent village children... These bandits however should realize that evil cannot simply be chased away, it needs to be torn, to be uprooted..." concluded General Zafiropoulos top commander of the government forces.

A priest sitting in the first rows hesitantly interrupted the officer and said: "General, our religion does not allow for such revenge. Your retaliation today would encourage their movement and their leader, General Markos, would become a model for fanatics and fanaticism would be justified. We the people of Konitsa need to observe salvation and to see the return of virtues which are rooted in patriarchy, family and the church. Calling for revenge and declaring war against everyone means opening a new labyrinth of hatred. And in such a situation there is too much at stake and there is no simple explanation. If we do that then even God will give up on us. The only weapon that can defeat evil and hatred is respect for

those killed and love for these young people who became prey for Markos's army.

3.

I was sitting at the end of Pavle Shumenkov's bed, who, since we were small children, we called Dimo. Perhaps we called him Dimo because the name written on his birth certificate was "Dimos Pavlos". We were all renamed by the Greeks but we recognized each other by the families to which we belonged. We knew each other as belonging to the Shumenkov, Kosenkov, Rimpapov, Ristanov, Kotev, Kirkov, etc. families but for some reason we called him Dimo. We called him Dimo mostly because that's what our teacher Kaklamakis who taught us Greek used to call him. Shumenkov, more and more longed for home, I could see that something was not right with him; something was worrying him and giving him nightmares.

The doctor passed by us without examining him. "He hates me!" said Dimo. I answered him: "It's all in your head. Doctors don't hate anybody. They adhere to the Hippocratic Oath which states, 'Nature heals and the doctor takes care of the patient'." We sat facing one another with our knees touching. Dimo sat there silent. I said: "I am ready to believe you if you tell me to believe you but first you must swear to what is most holy to you." He then said: "You swear that if you tell on me your tongue will dry up and fall off and you will remain permanently mute." "I swear!" I said. Dimo then spoke and said: "Yesterday during his visiting rounds, while the doctor kept quiet the duty officer called me a 'hypochondriac'. The doctor then explained to the officer that: 'Fear is a primary emotion and those who cannot control it... their life may depend on it.' He then rattled off a bunch of technical words for fear."

Dimo went silent again, but only for a moment. After that he told me more: "The doctor also said that, 'in every war psychosomatic illnesses are on an increase, especially in young people.' The officer then looked at me and, with a humbling look on his face and in front of everyone, said to me: "You are a fighter in Markos's glorious army. Coward! You should be ashamed of finding yourself in the ranks of our army. And you are related to the Macedonians that yielded the greatest military commander - Alexander the Great!"

I said to Dimo: "Calm down! Be happy that we just escaped death!" Dimo kept quiet but his face showed that he was hiding something more serious. Perhaps it was too painful for him to speak. It seemed like he was mourning the death of our comrades and perhaps his own death as well. He decided to speak again: "My death will not be a consequence of old age, disease, or exhaustion. I am already dead, killed by deception. I was killed by those who wanted to make Konitsa their capital city, by those who

wanted to sacrifice us, the innocent children. You know that of the 320 of us that they sent here to Epirus, only 70 of us survived and most of us are with permanent injuries. The generals, on the other hand, dream of celebrations and heroism. And what do you think would happen to us? Do you think we will be free? They have captured our minds. Do you think we are free? No! They filled our souls with anger and hatred, shoved guns in our hands and sent us off to kill people. And now you are not you and I am not me! If you kill a few people do you think your god will be satisfied? Do you think you will be freed? Your heart will forever remain enslaved and your soul will be dark and filled with anger. Or do you think they will celebrate you?"

He paused for a moment and began speaking again: "Who is your God and my God, if you destroy the homes of the people in Konitsa do you think you will be forgiven?... We, Markos's Partisans, may move freely in the mountains but our hearts have been captured, enslaved... The key to your heart and mine is in the possession of someone who only knows our God. Do you think that Macedonia will think of singing the way we sang for her? I fear our weakness and our Macedonian silence. I fear lawlessness, confusion and chaos. I am afraid of war, the future scares me, I am scared of living without knowing, without a clear future. I fear that the generals purposely planned and started this civil war. I hate fear, uncertainty, hatred and people losing confidence in life. I fear I will lose my great grandfather's house. I fear the curses of the people whose homes we destroyed. I am afraid of the lack of awareness of reality and our own responsibility in it. I fear that we do not know the truth about this war and why 320 young Macedonians were sent all the way to Epirus. And just like that; we the innocent should be ready to die so that Konitsa can become the capital of the generals..."

He paused. Then he began talking again: "Even now I cannot believe that NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front), who carried themselves with international delusions and great hopes for us Macedonians, believe that our salvation can be found in a classless society and that right there is the key to freedom for Macedonia?! And here is your bloody finale, as you witnessed it happening in Konitsa. We Macedonians, however, should once and for all realize that they and our NOF and AFZH people are consciously allied, tied together, and I have no idea how much they truly care about you and about me and about the lives of our friends in this hellhole. Oh, my blood brother this bloody torture chamber will be chronicled in the black book of communism and I am afraid we Macedonians will not be mentioned in it."

He looked at me and said: "We have an invisible leader who has shown us the path to human misery. This is the only answer I can give you to justify what we have done, for the evil we have committed and for what is happening! I fear that evil and destruction are loud and reason is silent. I

am afraid that when we return home (if that ever happens) we will not find anything left of our ancestral homes... This Macedonian catastrophe will leave long lasting scars in all of us. You know what our grandmothers and grandfathers used to say: 'It is a great evil to not do good'."

I was thunderstruck by his way of thinking, but I already knew all that and I, more than anyone, was not willing to divulge it or discuss it. I wanted to comfort him so I said: "You know that a lot of our people are dead and many are without arms, legs and have severe disabilities." He looked at me and said: "When I think about how it was I am unable to sleep all night. My heart beats fast, my thoughts scare me and I feel like I am dying. I am overcome with nausea, my body starts to shake, I sweat profusely and feel waves of hot and cold all over me; I am afraid I will die. My fear magnifies during the night and I experience panic attacks. I want to escape from this bed but I do not know to where... I don't want to be with anyone. I cannot think. I have lost trust in everyone. I feel bitterness in my gut and I don't want any food."

He bowed his head down and secretly said to me: "We are not returning home. We have become homeless children, dust in the winds of war. That hurts in my chest. It hurts me to know that so many of our friends died in Konitsa, it hurts me terribly. They are gone forever... In my heart I feel like a lone wolf running, howling. My grief is eating me from the inside, keeping me awake at night..."

He gave me a sign to come closer. I leaned over and he whispered: "I do not believe we will achieve victory. If they bring us into another such street fight again, it will be over for us... It is so sad that all of our friends gave their lives so that the generals can live in style. How many of us must die before we realize that too many have already died! How many ears, hearts and minds must hear, feel and realize the screams of mankind; the SCREAMS of our own youth? And what about those who we left behind lying dead on the streets of the city? Their wish was to spend the New Year at home together with their families. What do you think; we came to this battleground for glory, to make Macedonian history?! The answer my friend is spinning in the wind, spinning away."

I heard his entire confession just as he spoke of it, in a whispering voice. It has been said that hidden in a whisper is the mumbling of a scary fate, a concealed human tragedy. Towards the end, his thoughts began to grow dim. He raised his shoulders indifferently and kept looking at me. I said: "May God be with you!"

4.

The Nurse Chrisanthi had a face shaped like the moon; she had cute and sympathetic cheeks like a chimpanzee, reddish-brown penetrating eyes and a firm body. She was not a classic beauty but she radiated kindness and

affection even when she performed the most complex dressings. Her eyes had an unusual magical look about them. This one morning unfortunately she brought us news that Dimo had hung himself from a tall young pine tree with a noose he had made himself. He was found hanging barefoot, being rocked by the wind... He left a farewell letter which in part read: "It is difficult to think of good and of beautiful things when you are preoccupied, every minute of every day, thinking of how to survive... Today, our view of life was destroyed..."

God, I should have gone to see Dimo again. I closed my eyes, opened them again but I had no tears to shed for him. I said out loud: "This is our fate!" Behind me I heard Leonidas's voice. He said: "Destiny, according to Laiosh Zilahi, is something which acts before it manifests itself in space, before it turns into an event. Various parts of the action need to be in order, to harmonize deep inside, before they convert to a visible event. Naturally, that's when we say it's 'fate' and by then it is usually too late to influence it. You have been saying for some time now, 'accustom your soul to small tragedies so that it becomes immune to a big one'. However, nothing can kill the inside of a person more than the tragedy of seeing a loved one dead."

Before leaving, for a moment or two, my consciousness was in shock from the news we had just received. I felt horrible, shaken and sad and refused to accept the dark nature of his death. I had to ask: "Was he dead?" "Oh, my blood brother, I did not have the strength to see for myself, but my soul will forever mourn for him..." she said. I don't know why, but Dimo's death hurt me very much. I thought about him for a long time. Many of my friends took their last breath before my eyes, but I have a separate place in my memory for him.

5.

One day while spending time in the hospital rehabilitating, a group of us gathered together to discuss the pros and cons of the gun. All the patients in our department had combat experience and all they talked about were the battles they had fought. The most common question was, "Why were the Germans armed with machine guns and we were not?" We also thoroughly discussed the shortcomings and flaws of certain rifles and machine guns. One of the weaknesses of the guns that we considered was the inaccurate aiming sight. It was outdated and awkwardly placed on top of the gun barrel. We all agreed that the strengths of a gun included its chrome barrel that would not rust and did not require regular lubrication. Having chrome barrels on guns would have solved many problems and avoided the hardships encountered with cleaning the guns. Everyone agreed on those points. Regarding the rifle butt and grip we all agreed that

wood was the best material for that. Unfortunately in later models wood was replaced with metal, at least in the butt part.

We all concluded that the designers, when designing rifles, subconsciously expressed more the concepts of the culture to which they belonged than they did the practicalities of its use. Guns made in the United States, for example, by tradition had to perform, show virtuosity and be impressive. The Japanese guns had to be of good quality but they could not remove the impression that they were reworked, although good copies. The German tradition, we agreed, was to build guns that endured, similar to those in Russia, but with many elements of comfort. As the old saying goes “the more complicated the device the more vulnerable it is”. Russia has always looked for functionality in its designs; other things were of less importance.

We spent most of our time analyzing the efficiency of the bullet tip and concluded that it was the “guarantee” of success because it rotated in the body it hit and caused the fatal wound. Of all of us Arianos was the most satisfied with our analysis and discussions about the gun. Unfortunately he was unable to speak and could not say a single word because he had been shot by a bullet in his lower jaw. Our discussion, however, made him proud because we, even in our leisure time, discussed the essential problems of war...

6.

We had an unexpected visit in front of the underground barracks by a young man named Vioreli Dzin Dzni Dzif; he was a Vlach. He had been caught just three days after the attack on the city Konitsa and was captured with his pick and other digging tools, which he used while searching for hidden treasure. We all avoided him because he was identified by our political commissars as a suspicious person and a capitalist. I was sure of that when several of our people went somewhere and did not want to be in his company. But Vioreli Dzin Dzni Dzif did not care, or perhaps he did not know that he was followed by Spiros, our political commissar. The suspicions about his activities were based on the fact that Konitsa was a very old city which had many hidden treasures. I am not talking about submerged ships near the shore, which carried gold or very expensive porcelain. I am talking about the myth of the rich Italian general who did not have a successor. That wealth in today’s calculations (1947) would have amounted to several billion pounds.

The first case of gold fever appeared about five years previously, during the funeral service of an obsessive miner who was looking for the hidden treasure in a dense pine forest, a place mentioned in the military archives, where the Italian Headquarters in Epirus was located for several years after Greece’s occupation took place during the Second World War.

It was alleged that vast quantities of gold were collected and hidden there. According to reliable intelligence sources, when the Italians were leaving in a hurry they buried the treasure 5 metres north and 7 or 17 metres east of the great white pine that was cut on the south side with a large blunt ax and written on it was “Alberto” the warrant officer’s last name.

Among the miners, who usually worked at night, at midnight when the moon was directly above, was Vioreli Dzin Dzni Dzif. But now he claims that he still was unable with any certainty to find the white pine... So far thousands of people from Konitsa who had access to the military archives could not find such treasure. But their failure to find it only fueled other people’s desires to look for it, so another oral version of the myth began to circulate. Even the Konitsa authorities got involved and decided that the wealth belonged to the government and should be sent to Athens and added to the state reserves.

There were all kinds of stories being spread and no doubt Vioreli Dzin Dzni Dzif was also involved in spreading them. After he was captured he became somewhat confused and as if without thinking he suspiciously asked: “If you really have come here for the gold, I would like to join you. I will show you the map of the Italian camp, which will help you find the gold faster and avoid frustration and waste of time.” That’s when Spiros the political commissar and Arianos burst out laughing. Arianos then said: “We fight for socialism and this man wants us to look for treasure! What a joke? I repeat what a joke!”

7.

And as such the days and months passed us by as new wounded were brought in and news from the war continued to arrive; sometimes good, sometimes bad. Several months later during a cold and rainy spring night I found myself alone with Leonidas in the underground barracks. He said to me: “You see what they’ve done to us? They made us not want to talk about our own pain but want us to go into a deep flawless analysis about the effectiveness of the murderous bullet... Who knows what they will make us yet...”

Leonidas was looking like a famous aristocratic personality. When they handed us our food he would look around and then make a grimacing face, showing disgust at the smell of the pot of stew or at the stink of fish, garlic, or cheap tobacco. I noticed that Dimo Shumenkov and Rula would often do the same thing when smelling the food. But Rula only did that before she married General Tsaruhas. About Tsaruhas and Rula, I want to mention that we did not finish our talk in spite of carrying on deep into night.

At dawn, just as the clouds parted and the sun came out, Leonidas stuck his head out of the window and said: “Today I will take you for a

slow walk to the top of those rocks and I will show you the camp of our elite leaders and generals.”

Noose – Chapter 10

Life and judgment of the generals.

1.

One night before welcoming the New Year, General Tsurahas lay awake and at about five o'clock in the morning got up and placed a small pot filled with water on the fireplace to boil himself some tea. He ate some toasted bread (paksimadi) with butter and then lit a cigarette. He felt energetic but a bit unstable. He then picked up a detailed farewell letter from Rula, which he had already read. He rolled over on the thick mattress filled with dry ferns, bit the upper part of his hand and began to read: "Dear General, I am puzzled as to why you did not want to remain in my heart?"

He paused, adjusted himself and continued: "Live life now because we don't know what will happen tomorrow... I expected you to be a lover with a vivid imagination, with many passions and strengths, and you, what did you do? Every evening you picked up communist propaganda written by the Party Leader Zahariadis and, by the dim light of the kerosene lamp, read it over and over again; you old fox, that's how you earned your rank as a General..., and that's how you got the best underground barracks in Gramos – Tsurahas's barracks in Likorahi Camp, the most important barracks in the area. I, on the other hand, am a human being who loves people so I have decided to return and be with them..."

He looked up, thought for a moment and continued reading: "But I am troubled, like the 320 young people who have been brought here to your Headquarters from Macedonia for you to send into chaos and to ask of them to achieve the unachievable, here in the wild where there is no rule of law. General, your commitment to your Party makes you very cruel. I did not know that this would be my first such love, and perhaps last in this world. With its disappearance I was tossed into the abyss. Despite my great suffering in this damp underground barracks I mysteriously found serenity in the thought of being back with those 'wild boys'. But please tell me honestly, for once, did you renew your old love for Vangelitsa after my arrival as your hostess at your barracks in Gramos? Now that I am not there you can do and say whatever you want, even in your dreams, you can even spread yourself all over the barracks."

The general smiled. Even though he was a hunchback he persistently tried not to stoop. He also combed his brownish hair up to cover his bald head. He got up and looked in the mirror that was hanging on a wooden post and said: "Here is an old Party member who still rejoices in every new day and in each new step toward Communism, and the Party knows how to reward. Now I am General of the famous Democratic Army of

Greece (DAG).” As he kept looking at himself in the mirror he caught sight of the black bags hanging under his eyes and his sunken and sagging cheeks. But at that very moment something strange happened; the wooden post with his mirror hanging on it fell and the mirror broke. But, even though he was a staunch atheist, he said to himself: “A broken mirror brings seven years of bad luck.” He then put the wooden post back, tapped on it and said: “For good luck. When your luck favours you and you want to talk about it, knock on wood. That way the evil spirits will not be able to hear what you say and will not become jealous.”

These words he remembered from his grandmother. At one time people believed that spirits lived in trees because the brilliance of lightening could not penetrate the tree. The General also remembered that the church provided shelter to all kinds of people hiding from all kinds of evil, because the church’s safety was symbolized by the church’s great big wooden door. Unfortunately, now the General found himself inside a barracks without a door. When he snapped out of his thoughts the General said: “God’s work.”

It was the last day of the year 1947. The General remembered being with the Leader Zahariadis and with General Markos that crazy night, preparing to welcome the New Year 1948. It had become a tradition for the leadership to gather together in the cold cave after a win, but this time the occasion was to welcome the New Year. It was night. The huge tree stump extracted from under the snow was smoldering in the fireplace in the darkness of the underground barracks. In the quiet the General was listening to the gurgling sounds of water moving underground, coming from all directions. He was listening to the sounds of all kinds of birds outside and to the continuous roar coming from inside his head. It was fear.

Thick smells of roasted pig, lamb and Kalamata olives were coming from the festively decorated cave. General Tsarukas became upset when he remembered the conduct of all those bearded officers, commanders and political commissars and their screaming every time they drank a shot of Vodka or a glass of retsina. He was especially upset seeing the men drinking vodka, as a specialty only at the Leader’s receptions. All the time these men and women were chomping on something: baked lamb, roasted chicken, even on an entire roasted pig. There was so much chomping there was no time for the men to wipe their greasy beards. And from their greedy chomping the men’s bellies and women’s thighs and backsides grew quickly. After much chomping, some would come out of the cave to get some fresh air and stretch, moving snowflakes out of the way and preventing them from falling in their natural order. Some came out to talk about the beautiful women belonging to the generals. Rula naturally was always in their conversations and in their desire to roll with her in the snow.

These people had a great desire to portray themselves as fighters of the new society. This was because they were the new society's first members and new masters of the dim underground barracks. These underground barracks dwellers wanted very much to be seen and talked about as the "sly ones", and from their own stupidity they created a monument of their "slyness." Their own "fraud" they called freedom, from which there was a need to conclude that everything in the realm of freedom and limitless opportunities led towards communism.

One of these underground barracks dwellers belonging to high command, working on a long study, wished to ask a question: "How can a nation endure living in the underground barracks of Gramos?" He came to the conclusion that it was easy to enter, but dreadfully long to exit. It was like having to wait on the platform for a freight train to pass. He established that darkness would become one's friend and that was a natural living environment of the underground barracks, which was not recommended for people to live in because, over time, they would develop the characteristics of a wicked mole. Another phenomenon, explained in the study with additional analysis and support, was the plentiful consumption of greasy foods which had a tendency to damage the brain. Besides causing clogging of blood vessels, greasy food, he alleged, could seriously damage the human brain, therefore large amounts of fat would reduce almost all brain functions. But more so, greasy foods would cause resistance to insulin resulting in diabetes.

After reading this extensive study, the Leader became worried. What frightened him the most was the brain damage already incurred in some of the top leadership. Signs of damage apparently showed up in several generals, one of whom was sent for treatment all the way to Siberia. The second thing that caused concern for the Leader was diabetes appearing in his revolutionary activists thus weakening and robbing them of their fighting spirit. The third thing he feared was the spread of fear, or the "black cough" becoming rampant. The Leader went as far as calling this "an alarming situation". The Leader, however, to the last moment had great hope in General Tsarugas coming to the rescue. But General Tsarugas was not there. He was sitting in his barracks silent and all alone, occasionally talking to himself, saying: "Now the Leader sitting calmly in the 'cave' is cheerful, working on a trusted plan and I'm sure he is asking: 'Where is General Tsarugas with the beautiful Rula, to shine' ...?"

General Tsarugas thought for a moment. His hand automatically reached for his waist. He pulled out his revolver and placed it close to his temple. He kept silent. "No! No!..." he then said to himself. "It might still leave me alive and I will then have to suffer." He then raised his eyes to the ceiling of the barracks and kept looking. It was a moonless night. He ran his fingers over the ammunition hanging on the wall and said, "I am so ashamed and so sad." Tsarugas found himself in a vulnerable position

without any help... He feared that if he cried out for help his tears would be replaced with a cynical smile. He remembered being at a meeting when a young officer, who had been drinking, approached Rula and said: “Be a lady, be sexy and don’t take life so seriously...”

Tsaruhas often thought about writing a farewell letter to the Leader and letting him know how he felt. “How? What kind of letter would that be? Should I tell him the truth? I will write it! I will write a nice letter, no insults, just human feelings, decisive and positive. I will tell him that Rula was a different kind of element in the Party who would have caused us great damage, which is why I sent her away... and I did this because I care...” he said to himself. Looking into the cold December, foggy distance through the machine gun shaft, he sighed and began to cry. He was now all alone and his future looked bleak...

The glasses were just raised, not yet empty, when the duty officer, Captain Tassos Karanikas entered the cave and, for a moment, waited for them to finish their drinks before he made the announcement: “Συντροφέ Αρχιγε (Comrade Leader) General Tsaruhas was found hanged in his barracks without any signs of violence.” The Leader finished drinking the rest of the Russian vodka out of his shot glass and said: “Did that beautiful Rula leave him? Βρε ο βλακας (that stupid man)?? Playing at being a solid unwavering communist.”

2.

Likorahi, January 15, 1948. A meeting of the Military Council was scheduled to take place in the spacious barracks following the bloody defeat at the city Konitsa. The purpose of this meeting was to analyze military details of the disastrous defeat and determine why the famous Democratic Army of Greece, under the command of General Markos, failed to take the city. The strategic and political goal of the Partisan fighters was very clear; to overthrow the Royal government authority, by defeating the government army. In parallel with that their purpose was to raise awareness, faith and sympathy for DAG. But of no less importance was the secondary goal: to convince the governments of socialist countries that DAG was capable of taking and holding onto towns and thus push for recognition of the newly created Provisional Democratic Government.

Logotetis Georgios (Samaridis), Chief of Staff for DAG Military Operations was responsible for reporting on all strategic and tactical views. At the top in Military Headquarters, he was an old - new face in politics, skillful in language, but one got the impression that he was somewhat unfamiliar with military practices. Tragically he was responsible for putting together the plan to attack the city Konitsa. When he spoke nothing was understood, he was a lost man in the field of military matters. He had arrived early that day and was pacing in front of General

Markos's barracks feeling somewhat uneasy. With his high qualifications, Logotetis was the kind of man who would put a person under a bad light for the slightest delay to a meeting, especially to a high level meeting such as this one. This was a habit of his after having to work underground. But now Logotetis was trying not to forget what was important in order to emphasize it in front of the senior military forum, that in war there are two areas and the basic peculiarities of warfare are strategy and tactics.

These two components accounted for a single and consistent moral system and were the strongest and most important factors in the history of war. And this is exactly what he had written in his notes in his study of military theory when he studied Russian military giants such as Suvorov, Kutuzov, Zhukov and Voroshilov... but he managed to leave out Chapaev, whom he had studied the most, because the scholarship of our generals was almost the same as that of the famous Chapaev. So, Logotetis tried hard to remember that if you fight to win, you need to develop a strict strategy and great tactics.

Hanging on the wall in the barracks was a sign on which, written in large letters, was the slogan: "ΠΡΟΣ ΤΗ ΝΙΚΗ! ΖΙΤΩ Ο ΔΣΕ!" (To victory! Long live DAG!). Zahariadis was used to being cheered but at the moment he was expecting high ranking people from Military Headquarters to arrive, people who were considered to be the best part of that society and the future of the people. The applause shook the barracks as the officers clapped loudly and shouted: "Long live Comrade Zahariadis! Long live the greatest son of the working people!"

"Comrades!" said Zahariadis smiling and making a motion for the meeting to begin. Logotetis, who in Headquarters was a respected senior officer, had a great sense of responsibility. He was a strict and trusted man of the Communist Party. They said about him that: He could compel a person to continually rework something for as long as the person was told that it was not perfect. And that was confirmed when Logotetis spread out a large page on the table, exposing the many colorful arrows on it. Logotetis then said: "The red arrows indicate our attacks which should have totally broken the enemy. The green arrows are enemy strongholds." Someone from the group of attendees spoke up and said: "From a strategic standpoint, the entire action was thoroughly and carefully planned. In one word it was a 'chapaevski' attack."

Waving a sheet of paper Logotetis began to read a whole array of definitions that explained the basic rules of military strategy and tactics. "Real knowledge! I expected this from a smart person like you Comrade Logotetis!" said General Markos as he took a puff of smoke from his "Papastratos" brand of cigarette. The Leader knew General Markos as a man who fanatically moved toward his goal. His readiness was confirmed by the raising of his hands up high and by the thoughtless persistence of a great stubborn person. The Leader once called him the genius of the

stubborn people and attributed to him animal characteristics. He often said to him "...General, you are as stubborn as a mule crossing a bridge" or "General, you are a stubborn ass." But the General continued with business as usual and thought that his stubbornness was as sweet as honey and with it he gave meaning to his career, he defined it, he worked it.

He was a nationalist, intelligent, with a great deal of informal education, sly and dangerous. The Leader knew that only a few daft officers still believed that Markos's stubbornness and his muttering expression were an expression of high intelligence and political maturity, which he used for his own interests while stepping on others. For the Leader his gallop, like the god of Gramos, was and is in the wrong direction. And what bothered the Leader the most was the fact that Markos could not understand who needed to be a god. The Leader followed him for a long time, especially after he had made him a General and the head of DAG. One time he even called him: "A muddy mystic with no particular education or strategic readiness; an ideal type that does not understand things and who has become the masked prisoner of obsessions." Zahariadis often laughed in discussions with Markos when Markos categorically rejected his views. "Look, General of mine! They speak of you as an ignorant and immature person. You prefer the collective personal experiences of humanity. Up to now I have not met a less objective person than you."

The plan was so well-developed that even the entire government with its ministries was functionally established in the gymnasium located inside the city Konitsa. Things were so well planned (which were derived from the functions of ministries) that each ministry would have its own location. Even what was to be written on each door had been decided. For example;

First floor: Vice President and Minister of Interior – GIANIS IOANNIDIS.

Second floor: President of the Provisional Government of Free Greece and Minister of DAG - General MARKOS VAFIADIS.

Third floor: Minister of Justice - MILTIADIS PORFIROGENIS.

Third floor: Minister of Foreign Affairs - PETROS RUSOS.

The City Hospital: Department of Health - PETROS KOKALIS.

The City Hotel: Ministry of Welfare and care for working people - VASSILIS BARDZHIOTAS.

The City Café: Ministry of National Economy - LEONIDAS STRINGOS.

In one part of the Post Office: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock - VLANDAS MICHOS.

Logotetis, in a calm tone of voice, explained that the attack involved two battalions with about 3,000 fighters, one independent battalion and four battalions deployed in the depth of the area of the city Konitsa, shown on the diagram with arrows. He took a deep breath, looking a little sad, as if wanting to express some sympathy for the failure, and said: "This is the first time our Democratic Army employed cannon shelling using two cannon batteries deployed over the city," showing their locations on the diagram. After that he gave information used by General Headquarters showing the defences of the city Konitsa defended and guarded by an infantry battalion, one regiment of armed citizens who loved their city very much and some police forces. "All in all," he said, "the opponent had less than 2,000 soldiers. The attack began on December 24, 1947 and lasted until January 4, 1948."

He paused and then said: "Losses: our side received 700 partisan casualties of whom 250 died. The government military casualties were 513 soldiers from whom 104 died." He stood at attention, to show respect, and said: "Our attack on Konitsa failed!"

3.

"It is truly astounding how much you know, Comrade Logotetis!" said General Gusias, adding to the congratulations from the Leader to General Markos. Gusias was a small and fat man, with a nurtured interior, well-fed with the best food and drink. On the exterior he wore an officer's uniform, sported a moustache, was well groomed, wore cologne and was seamlessly buttoned top to bottom. Up to now he had been unimportant and was feeling a bit hesitant of becoming involved in anything. He was however an old compromiser and a "chef" of political intrigue among the combinations of cadres in the Party. But now, here at Gramos, he had reached the top of an established system of relations and combinations; and he had become dangerous. But now he was at play for technical reasons, even though so far in the military field he had been a totally unremarkable military figure, who would have found it hard to even carry on as a sergeant.

The leader used to talk about him saying: "Gusias is a man who can camouflage his anger and express it in an indirect manner in the form of constant talking, spitefulness, nasty and sarcastic responses, ignoring or interrupting conversations etc." But the leader also knew that Gusias was an excessive drinker and enjoyed his food, which dampened his feelings and alleviated his anger. Some of the officers used to ask one another: "Who is this guy?" And the answer was always: "He is everything, except a politician and a person educated in military matters."

Colonel Sofianos was not completely convinced about the effectiveness of the "plan" but did not know how to approach the subject

so he chose a longer route, using different arguments. He said: “In that plan, truly the only things missing are the footsteps of the ants. Everything is neatly drawn by Logotetis. We however fought a war, we were not playing soccer. Real bullets were whizzing over our heads.” Suddenly the barracks echoed with howls of laughter. Everyone laughed, Logotetis observed how everyone’s Adam’s apples danced while they were laughing. The Leader and General Markos also laughed. But then the Leader knocked on the table with his fingers and the barracks went silent. They all stopped laughing like well-trained puppies before their master.

The colonel continued: “How many of us will be facing our conscience, just to be able to tell their mothers. And you know how many were gone from our ranks: according to the report, which the officer from Headquarters just showed us, there were about two hundred and forty-five dead and more than fifty heavily wounded by sniper bullets.” After Colonel Sofianos, Georgios Gianulis wanted to speak. Gianulis was an honest man, well-intentioned, firm with the moral values of a good officer. He was open, communicative and desired to be close to the people. He was capable and experienced in guerrilla warfare. He had a good character, strong convictions, strong will and was loyal to the Party.

When he got his turn to speak, Gianulis said: “Colonel Sofianos is being perfectly honest. He is an exemplary soldier and he values the fighters like he values himself. We are all disappointed by this plan and from what we can see there is no reason for joy, only for regret having fallen into such a military trap, which we experienced with many casualties and lost many young lives. Our great ambition was applied at the wrong time, ending in disaster. We brought this major failure on ourselves. What kind of excuse are we going to give to the hundreds of mothers whose sons we killed?! This is no less evil than what Herod did in Bethlehem, although this is a smaller figure, it still reminds me of the murder of 14,000 holy children. We will never be able to pay for our sins for what we did to these young and inexperienced children.

Colonel Sofianos shivered and said: “Nothing happened today that has not happened before. But today we sacrificed children and scornfully proclaimed them to be heroes. This act that we committed, as leaders of this war, will take us into ruin.” Markos and Zahariadis’s eyes opened wide because they could not believe what they were hearing coming out of Sofianos’s mouth. The leader drank a few gulps of water and for a long time kept silent. He then spoke: “People?” he asked, baffled and shaken, he continued: “No, no, if it is true then it is a disaster for the Party. Here we need to look for the blame in the military cadres, but by no means are we to blame the Party. It is true that they were not trained soldiers, better said, they were people, children; children under seventeen years old. We don’t need that. It could not happen to us.”

At that moment he refrained from expressing anger. He freed himself of the unproductive frustration and asked to take the stand and properly direct his anger. In his own style and way he wished to explain and shed a different light on the situation in which they discussed military strategy, but suggested they first take a long break.

4.

Their faces looked terrified. There was silence in the barracks and the only thing being heard was the wind howling through the window like a sick dog. “I did not expect such criticisms from you Colonel Sofianis,” said Logotetis with an angry tone in his voice. “But you, yourself told me that you don’t know anything about war and that even at your age you could not have mastered all the military strategies and tactics, like a teacher of geometry.” “I drew all that from reading the work of the great Russian generals. I can’t! I can’t understand why you want me to be disqualified? And what would have happened if I worked with literature from the capitalist countries?” replied Logotetis. The Colonel smiled.

Noose – Chapter 11

Shadow of the Immortal Lion of Vicho and the Great Migrations: from Roumelia and Thessaly. (Ιροηκί φάλαγγα).

1.

Just as we arrived at Mount Pieria we set up a guard post at a spot beside the tall pine tree forest and soberly waited for the “heroic phalanx” to arrive all the way from Roumelia and Thessaly. We had a great view of the entire area from here but about half of the horizon was quiet and swimming in fog. I looked towards the south with my binoculars, where the enemy army was expected to be, but I did not see anything. I looked again all over the sheltered side and still nothing. All I could see were sunken mounds of soil and a savage bloodthirsty wolf roaming around. Captain Giorgi Kalkov whispered to me: “They sure know how to camouflage themselves...”

I could see rocks crumbling and gravel rolling down from the dark folds of the cliff. The hills were acquiring goose bumps, as if all the evil was going to flow down to the valley. Kalkov, warmed by the March sun, leaned on one of the pine trees and took off his lice infested shirt. But somehow he acted funny as if he was disturbed by something. At certain moments I could see his face twitching. I pointed my binoculars at him and watched his face twitch and his veins swell. He was a cheerful man with a smiling face. He was respected by all. He belonged to a famous family of freedom loving people, especially his grandfather, a renowned Ilinden leader.

I met and got to know Giorgi Kalkov in 1945 in Kostur Region, in our end of Mount Vicho. He looked like a revolutionary leader sporting a beard and belts of cartridges around his waist and chest. This was how members of the NOF (National Liberation Front) Units used to move around the Macedonian villages in those days; spreading information about our holy struggle for a united Macedonia. In pursuit of his duties, to pacify us “rebels” and stop us from going to the Republic of Macedonia, assigned to him by NOF and the CPG (Communist Party of Greece), he arrived at the “Antihashia” Headquarters in November 1947. We demanded that we be allowed to sing our Macedonian songs which the Greeks prohibited us from doing. They would often use the excuse: “Don’t do that because the population here in these Greek regions does not know who you are.”

One day, after Kalkov arrived, the Headquarters commissar placed us all in a line up, introduced him to us and said: “Dear young fighters, I am giving you an honest Party word that we Communists, after we gain our freedom through our struggle, will allow you to sing your songs as you

desire. We Communists, who are followers of Lenin and Stalin, guarantee you that. Long live the revolution, brotherhood and unity between the Greek and the ‘Slavo-Macedonian’ people! Long live Comrade Zahariadis and Stalin.” At that point Kalkov was promoted to Captain of the DAG forces and assigned to the Headquarters responsible for the Macedonians, where most of us called him “Voivoda” (leader).

As I kept looking at him through my binoculars, I waved at him but he could not see me. I could see him enthusiastically put his sweaty shirt back on then take a photograph of his family out of his pocket book and look at it. I could see him gently brushing the photograph with his hand. He was reminded of the faces of his wife and children. He seemed happy looking at the photograph. He then kissed the images of each person in the photograph and placed the photograph back in his faded pocket book. I became sad when I saw tears in his eyes. I cautiously said: “Voivoda, I see that you too are a sentimental. Try not to see everything with your heart.”

He looked at me and continued to lean on the pine tree in the deafening mountainous silence, feeling guilty, insecure and still attempting to grapple with the Konitsa and all other defeats. He was one of those volunteers who fearlessly joined the Kostur Region Partisan Units committed to fight to the death for patriotism. Now there he was squatting like an alienated warrior. His memories had been pouring like a mountain stream, pushing and pulling him through the rapids. There was not much here in Pieria and Gramos to do but think about those tough revolutionaries from Kostur and Lerin Region who joined the struggle because they wanted to defend Macedonia. Not for a black eye, but to save her from the urgency, to bring a better life to the homeland. Unfortunately most of those fighters died under the knife of the ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece) Andartes (Greek Partisans). Their death was a great loss and a tragic division of a nation into Partisans and Andarte Communists.

Their deaths upset the delicate balance in the Macedonian ranks. Those who survived fled Greece and, lured by General Tempo, went to the Republic of Macedonia where they joined Tito’s army as the famous “First Aegean Brigade” formed in October 1944, thus saving their lives from the Andarte knife. (The “First Aegean Brigade” was formed in free Bitola on November 18th, 1944 by combining two of the battalions of fighters that fled Greece. The First Aegean Brigade was deployed in Western Macedonia on December 28th, 1944 in Kichevo, Gostivar and Tetovo where it was tasked to fight against Albanian Balisti gangs led by Dzhemo and Mefail which were formed during the Italian-German occupation. Then by Marshal Tito’s special (strictly confidential) order number 236, the First Aegean Brigade was demobilized and dissolved on April 2nd, 1945.)

I sat beside him and kept quiet for a long time. At one point I asked: “Voivoda, I don’t understand why you were posted here and put in charge of us Macedonians?” Suddenly his face changed and he looked at me with astonishment. His forehead lifted, but barely noticeable, and his lips quivered. “I swear to you I truly don’t know!” he said. “Believe me,” he said, “this kind of military function in this war is ridiculous, a person like me is a tragic character and, as the Greeks say, this kind of person is *αγνώμων*, meaning a person who does not have one’s own thoughts, is not independent, is indecisive, inexperienced, naïve, stupid, foolish, can’t make up their own mind, etc. In other words his spirit has been broken and he has lost everything that made him the person that he was.”

He paused for a moment, looked away and continued: “I am a person of two truths and without any official status. My job is to make sure none of you know what is truly going on and at the same time, push you to organize yourselves in the name of the revolution. My blind and vague actions, as a responsible person for you young Macedonians, became apparent in the fighting in the city Konitsa, when I pushed you obedient young boys to your death. I realized then that my actions led me to a tragic mistake, a kind of mistake that I now have to live with and suffer remorse.”

He paused again, thought for a moment and said: “What is the truth? The truth about us Macedonians is constituted in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and in the Communist Party of Greece (CPG). In the beginning I tried to keep quiet, but I decided I could no longer stay silent.” I was completely taken by his comments and I could not understand the expression on his face or the look in his eyes. Then, with exceptional boldness I asked him: “Voivoda, does it seem to you that we are living with hatred and war from all sides? Are we fighting a war which is not to the benefit of Macedonia? Have we become deaf, dumb and blind to everything you promoted after your return from Yugoslavia and to the fact that you were led by the CPY / CPM (Communist Party of Macedonia) from April 1945 until the October 1946 ‘brotherhood and unity’ deal?”

Now one thing was becoming very clear to me and that was that we had fallen into the hands of fraudsters. I now realized who had deceived our people and who had pushed us into these mountains to be persecuted like wolves. He looked at me inquisitively and said: “That’s the way it is, perhaps unfortunate, but it is a fact and the facts themselves are articulate enough. The problems that fell on Macedonian shoulders are extensive and given the kind of people that we are, it’s a good thing that the soil can support us,” he said to me and continued: “Today, after the Second World War, there is a precarious balance held in the Balkans. We should not have any illusions that the European forces and our closest neighbours will allow the unification of the Macedonians. Now even the southern Slavic

people are against us. We should not have got involved in this war from the beginning...”

He looked at me and then said: “Our truth has long been drowning in the whirlpools and rapids of the CPY and the CPG. Dishonesty has become the rule of law since 1948 and brutality is the sole method used when dealing with us Macedonians. They don’t even care for those Macedonians who sacrifice themselves for their interests. They see us as dogs and we should never forget that.”

He paused for a moment, looked away and continued: “According to historical accounts, the Macedonian version of NOF (National Liberation Front) was founded in Skopje by the CPM Central Committee by order of the CPY. For more than a year since then, the CPY / CPM used NOF to conduct a huge propaganda campaign to recruit Macedonians under the slogan ‘Not a single Macedonian should be left out of the anti-fascist organizations NOF and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front)’. As a result, many supporters were recruited even at the beginning of the war in 1946, which led the Macedonian people on a one way street to their demise. The situation turned from bad to worse when Lazar Kolishevski invited activists of NOF and AFZH to Skopje and told them: ‘Now go back to Greece (Aegean part of Macedonia) and follow the directives of the CPG.’ In other words let the CPG lead you... and the many other things he told them. Since then I have been wondering and I cannot find an explanation as to why we continued on this course.”

He looked at me with an inquisitive look in his eyes and asked: “Is that not vassalage? Is it not true that we Macedonians got a new master to serve? Ever since then our Organizations have become irrelevant. With the so-called “Brotherhood and Unity” they made it possible for our identity to be destroyed. From Macedonians the CPG renamed us to “Slavo-Macedonians”. Today most of us are here, in the depths of Greek territory and are being forced not to talk in our Macedonian language and not to sing our Macedonian songs. They demand of us to use our Greek given personal names in all spoken and written communications.”

He paused for a moment, perhaps to suppress his emotions, and continued: “Now that Tito is squabbling with Stalin, they all look at us as their enemies. And on top of that we are being called Tito’s agents. A few days ago I found out that some of my fighter friends, with whom I was in Tito’s army, were executed, but I don’t know why. I don’t know anything any more, not even what has happened to my closest friend Vasil Bogdanov. All staff officers from Tito’s army, who were here at DAG headquarters assisting General Markos, have left, but we Macedonians stayed. We stayed to fight with the hope that we would fight for Macedonian ideals. Unfortunately by doing so we sealed our own fate.”

He paused again, thought for a moment and resumed talking: “Another sad thing about this war is that they mobilized all the able men and women

into the DAG units but left the very young children and elderly all alone to fend for themselves. Another difficult and terrible thing for us Macedonians, especially during 1948, was the collection of our children. They sent our children to Eastern European countries under the care of the Party. You know they will eventually turn them into ‘janissaries’. I hear they hung a medal around the children’s necks with Marko’s image on one side and a number on the other.”

There was a sad look on his face as he continued talking: “You know that by doing so,” he said, “they have deprived our children of their names and if they forget their names they will forget their relationship to their fathers, mothers and families. In no time at all these children will become the children of the Party and of Markos. They uprooted the children. They robbed the Macedonian homes and families of their children and the children from their parents, cultural traditions and heritage. The children will now become part of the POLITICAL FAMILY. But let me be honest with you here, all these symptoms of our decline are a result of our false expectations and incorrect view of the world.”

He stopped talking, looked around and then looked at me as if looking for answers. He then said: “An objective past does not exist for us. In other words, today we are victims and accomplices in our own uprooting from our historical memory, from our identity, from our traditions, from our songs and from our homeland. Now we have no one’s support.” He looked depressed as he gazed down at the ground. He stopped talking. Now was my chance to say something: “Voivoda, in 1947 when they brought you to the ‘Antihashia’ Headquarters and, in accordance with Party lines, they put you in charge and made you responsible for the Macedonians, all 320 of us revolting young people from the Kostur and Lerin Region villages saw you as our saviour. Now we get to experience the same wrecking waves of our ugly and ignorant fate together. More than half of us have disappeared and will forever remain guarding Konitsa and the surrounding hills. Is there a need for all of this to be viewed as indifferent? Should we trust the promises of those who robbed us of our children and destroyed the Macedonian home? Now there is nothing left of NOF and AFZH and of CPM and Tito. Now it is only us, scattered in the battlefields of Gramos and in the depths of Thessaly and Epirus, experiencing our intimate and personal drama.”

He looked up at me and said: “It makes me sick to think about our ruined families and the kinds of senseless deaths our Organizations brought upon us, especially those thoughtless and irresponsible people from AFZH who in front of our eyes took away countless numbers of our children. It rips me apart to think about our endless national shame and the suffering of those countless young, Macedonian mothers. They are our wives, our sisters existing inside these fronts aggravated by fear, apprehension, despair and depression. And every time they hear the

whistle of a bullet, in their prayer they ask that it be their final rescue. I think it is a sin to be silent about these things. We Macedonians in this generation have been born without sufficient interest in the destiny that awaits us. As the old saying goes, 'In order to defeat evil, you must first find it, recognize it and understand it.' But now it's too late... Do not be afraid of death, but be afraid of the evil that found you in life."

He looked up towards the sky at the tip of the great beech tree and, while thinking about how we were ruined, he wanted to say: "Ask the wind which leaf of that branch will be the last to fall..."

2.

I stood there stunned. I looked around searching for people but the place was a wasteland, a slaughterhouse... I realized that no one was going to pass in this damn place. The Voivoda was silent for a long time breathing slowly but deeply. He was hit by the first barrage of flying bullets. It was around seven o'clock in the morning when our unit was sent to a frontal position on the highest slope of Mount Pieria, near the hilltop in Kundazhupia Region. Kalkov struggled to snap out of it but the pool of blood under him kept swelling. Age-wise, Kalkov was a middle-aged man but had the heart of a warrior. Finally he spoke and said: "The bullet came from behind, I was shot in the back while facing the enemy, but I am not giving up no matter how much the wound from an evil bullet hurts! I am Voivoda "vishenski" and my only resolve in life is to shed my blood for Macedonia."

I said to him: "I remember you like this from the past, with a big beard... and there were so many of you with big beards then, but why now, why after 1948, here in Gramos, why are they killing you like Tito's officers?" He bowed his head and hugged me by my waist and said: "I am dying under alien skies in the mountains of loneliness, beside the young Macedonian soldiers who left their bones here. They died bravely under my watch. We Partisans are all without helmets, without hats and even after our death the wind will still wave our black and blond hair."

Many wounded were passing by us with their heads wrapped in red dressings, supporting one another along the rocks and trees. Someone was praying out loud. Roxana the nurse touched his head, stroked his hair and helped him stand up and straighten his shoulders. Kalkov, holding his picture of his wife and children, kept kissing it with passion. He then swallowed hard, suppressed his tears and said: "Oh, where are you MACEDONIA?"

Noose – Chapter 12

An Army without a compass: fierce battles between communist officers.

1.

We spent several days in the temporary camp headquarters and then took the road to the front line in Batra Region, due to arrive in two days. High above behind us the sun was sinking in the abyss between two hills. Tired from the day's journey the sun was melting behind the horizon, sinking behind the mountains, bloody red in colour, looking painful, losing its gleam. Then, just for a moment, the wind blew and lifted itself upwards towards the sky, the earth became dark and the clouds came down low and landed on the earth. The road became invisible and filled with leaves and branches and on it there was nothing else but branches and grey leaves.

I am a young man. I am almost nineteen years old. I am a warrior in Marko's army; my life rests in the hands of those who decide my fate. On my shoulders I carry a heavy burden, but I thank God that I am still alive, though living a meaningless life. I have watched the rain and blowing snow erase everything; there is not even a mark or a cross left to mark the death of my fighter friends. They were killed by the crazy roar of cannons and are now asleep for eternity. Their spirits are free, but ... Their way is illuminated towards the stars where they are headed, never again to return to their mothers... Every day I roam these hills, I have lost my strength and breath. From early dawn till late dusk, like a pursued wolf, my spirit wanders these lands. I get nothing from life but I still have to pay. I am thinking: how much joy belongs in this world? But I do not know where to find the answer!

From sunrise to sundown I look up into the sky but my stare is always blurred; there is nothing there for me to discover for today or for the future. Anger is boiling inside of me; I am enraged and very much outraged. But I somehow manage to forget about my childhood, about my friends who were left behind in the battlefields, supposedly for greater things – for my heart, my name and their names, our destiny, our story. But some vague hope of love still keeps me going... Standing beside me is Leonidas counting the prayers for salvation; from torture, from assault, from fraud, from wrongdoing and from lies. He does not know who will give us back our hope and who will show us God's truth in the midst of this evil... the grim truth, soaked in blood and darkness, hidden in these sunken mounds...

In front of us are our enemies aiming their guns at us, both we and they are hungry for each other's blood. We argue, shout at each other and call each other murderers. Perhaps this evening they will attack... I have an inexplicable fear. A fear of being lost, as if someone else's thoughts are

washing my mind and, in the deep uncertainty, I fall in the dirty soil in the trench, but not by my own will, I then wait for a murderer to stab me with his bayonet. Many times I felt like whimpering like a child. And every day here dug into the trenches, I wait and watch all around me making sure no murderer jumps me. The next morning, a new day begins and the cycle repeats again; we are alive. But I am restless and feel pain, I constantly think of my wounds; are they healing or maybe getting worse? Ten days have passed and I should have changed the dressing a long time ago; those were my orders. I said to myself: "Please God let it be healed or at least scabbed over," but something was gnawing at me, what if it opens and starts bleeding again? My grandfather used to say: "Hope lies in uncertainty."

With great hesitation and doubt I begin to slowly unwind my bandage while looking at it with a grim look on my face. I am being brave about it but my forehead is moist with sweat. Under the third fold of the bandaid there is a white layer, a white sheet of paper. This reminded me of my blood-brother Stase Donev, when he bound my wound he said: "I am wrapping your wound with a letter and a picture of Elena Bogdanova. I am putting them in a place where it hurts you most so that you will never forget her. You just remember what I said!" So I said to myself: "My fate is my curse..." and in that same blessed moment I unwrapped the picture of Elena with her sweet smile and, as I look at her, it seemed like she was saying: "Don't be sad! Don't let anyone touch your wound! I am your torchbearer and I want to be your medicine exclusively..."

I unfolded the piece of paper and began to read the writing on it: "When I sent you this letter I asked a thousand times to see you, to be with you forever. Every night, I feel more lost, more desperate, more bewildered. I can't wait for the day when I too join the Partisans so that I can find you and be with you. For the first time in my life I feel conscious of myself. I will never forget you. How handsome you were! I will never forget your shy eyes and your long, gentle boyish face. We are almost eighteen years old and do not deserve to be so far apart and so isolated from each other. You were feeling alone! And you left me all alone amid the wild meadows in the village. There are nights when I listen to the wild winds and I think of you out there. Please do not forget me, I will never forget you. I will look for you wherever you are my love... Your Elena.

I looked at the rising sun and said: "Never, I will never surrender to despair because of one beautiful military DEATH.

2.

Crawling on our stomachs we approached the plateau and heard constant echoes of machine gun and automatic rifle fire. The moment we reached the top of the plateau between Batra and Golio Kamenik, under

the tall beech trees, we came face to face for an instant with the enemy, staring at each other. We were expecting to be shot at by deliberate sniper fire. We were so afraid we were scared of our own footprints. Through the trees we could see a small hill on our left side. There were so many enemy soldiers on it that it looked like an ant hill. Then suddenly we heard Captain Katsis yell: “Charge! Επανοτουη (attack)! We all charged at lightning speed, striking like a pack of wild lions. And without hope, without expectations, we won half the battle.

We were greeted with loud bursts of gunfire and explosions, which took our breath away. Bullets whistled over our heads and we all found ourselves in the cross hairs of machine gun fire. We rushed in and began to penetrate through the thick branches. We heard loud voices. All sides were shouting charge, charge and at the same time throwing hand grenades at each other. We heard the voices of wounded calling for help. Fleeing government soldiers were indiscriminately firing at us, mercilessly killing us. It was a blood bath. It would be rare for anyone to have seen so much human blood and so much death in such a short time in this hand to hand combat using bayonet, bursts of gunfire and hand grenades. It was a blood bath and there was a lot of blood.

The warm wind from the west was causing us anxiety and was disrupting our concentration. I was very young compared to the headquarters scouts and grew very weary of watching people being killed and from being pushed to kill in order to survive. I was sick and tired of watching people die. Beside me, with his finger on the trigger, was Major Tipadi. The veins on his forehead were swollen and pulsating, as if at any moment his heart was going to explode. I said to him: “It is time to contact Colonel Gianidis and I hope I find him sooner!” I watched government soldiers with swords in their hands stabbing the bodies of the fallen, wounded men as they rushed towards us.

I dashed through the thick branches and with incredible speed, very quickly I found myself in Command Headquarters, but the Colonel was at the first front line on the left wing of the front. He was observing the front with a group of officers. I found him quickly with help from his subordinates. I informed him that Major Tipadi required military assistance and that the entire front line sector was under a ring of fire. I then quickly prepared to return with a message for the Major from the Colonel which said: “Action has been taken. It is important that you defend and hold the location because the front line Batra is of utmost strategic importance for the entire front of Gramos.” The Colonel then spoke by telephone with Major General Ipsilantis and provided him with more details.

“...our military units were unexpectedly attacked and badly smashed before dawn and I am unable to organize a counterattack. We have sustained heavy losses.” I begged the Colonel to do everything possible to

help the new troops in order to prevent the fast pace advance of one of the government divisions and stop it from conquering the highest hill, elevation 2,522 metres, because that hill was one of the most important strategic points in this area. The entire east and west region around the front line could be seen from there. At the end he said: "Yes, the danger will be great if their advance is not halted." He then gave me a miserable look and became upset. After that I left and ran through the woods to get to Major Tipadi as soon as possible. Rifle fire was becoming louder which meant that the enemy was getting closer. I became confused in the loud noise and for a moment I felt as if I was passing through hell. My fear for my life became stronger than my fear of death. Finally I was back. Major Menelaos Tipadi was lying down quietly but breathing slowly and deeply. He looked at me inquisitively and shed a few tears. He said: "Give me some water. Water... please..."

He had been shot by a powerful "dum-dum" bullet which had a devastating effect at the exit wound. It was around seven o'clock in the morning on August 11th when our unit was heading for the front line at the highest slopes of Mount Gramos near the hills Kiafa and Arena. The thirty year old Major had the heart of a lion but was now struggling with all his might to stay alive as the pool of blood from under him became larger and larger. He reached out to me with his hand and said: "Do not give up on me!" He then swallowed some water and with tears in his eyes said: "Yane, be careful, you are too young for this war." He then pulled out a picture of his beloved and kept kissing it with passion. After some time he closed his eyes and lay there like a statue made of marble, facing the sun. I sat there staring at him with my head blurred and my heart filled with grief; I did not know what to do.

3.

I was looking at the man as a measure of all things. I realized that no one was going to pass by this damn place, so as distressed as I was, I began to look for branches to cover the dead man's body. I wanted to prevent his corpse from being nibbled on by the various scavenging creatures. As I searched all I could see were dead, wounded and maimed bodies everywhere. Some were fighting hard to hang onto life, others just bled to death. Now there were no longer lies, truths and physical feats; there was only grey. When the Colonel saw me from the distance, he wanted to yell at me but when he saw me drenched in blood, he lost his voice. With tears in my eyes I said: "The Major is dead, he died fighting fearlessly." Looking sad, the Colonel bowed his head, gave me a hug and expressed his condolences.

We passed through the trenches and then stopped to look at the hills of Gramos, specifically at the tops of Kiefa and Moro. Sitting and looking at

the sky the Colonel, with a bitter tone in his voice, said: "I would love to talk to all the fighters who left their bones here under the sky in front of this great legendary mountain. They died bravely under my command. We are all Partisans without helmets, without hats and with the wind waving our black and blond hair." Now our forces were pulling out, the Colonel could see that for himself. He looked at the clock and said: "Everyone is aware that we lost the battle, there is no need to speak of that, the question now is how can we pull out quickly with minimum casualties?"

Our fighters were leaving and many had their heads and body parts wrapped in red bandages. The wounded relied on each other for help to pass through rough terrain. Some were praying and others were just crying. The nurse frantically ran from one wounded person to another to give them first aid. Then suddenly, I was amazed to see Vioreli Dzindzif, the hypochondriac, behind the bushes. Vioreli Dzindzif was one of those people who had lived in fear of everything all his life. He was obsessive about all sorts of illnesses and always magnified the normal feelings in his body. Now he was here behind the thickness of the trees, coming out as if leaving some headquarters laboratory. He was standing tall and armed with a "Thompson" machine gun, looking as if his fears and troubles had left him. "Blood brother, be strong!" he yelled out looking at me and continued: "Oh, you are a sight for sore eyes." He then made some strange gestures with his hands and said: "I was looking at these six 'Burandari' (Greek government soldiers), moving their hands fast trying to clear the thick branches. I hid behind a bush and carefully pushed my rifle barrel through the dense branches. I aimed it at them and then remembered what Arianos had taught us; 'Kill a few so that you can become bold and not be a coward'. So of course I did. What do you think?"

He paused for a second. I did not reply. He continued: "The Burandari barely made a dozen steps before I cut them down to pieces. I took this machine gun from them, see? And do you know what the Detachment Commissar said in front of the detachment that mocked me only yesterday? He said; 'Well, you saw for yourselves. This is how you come to own a perfect machine gun. Each machine gun obtained this way is a win for us partisans of General Markos'!" Well, in the case of Vioreli Dzindzif our "human behaviour experts" were totally wrong. They were unable to predict whether he was a good person or a good for nothing person. It is true that they spent a lot of time attempting to prove that he was a bad person, a capitalist, because he liked gold, but Vioreli proved them wrong, as it turned out, he was a hero after all and a man true to our ideals.

It was now quite clear that Vioreli, for this feat, was expecting to receive some sort of promotion in Markos's Army. But after he did get a promotion to corporal he became arrogant and hardly indulged in conversations that did not favour the revolution. One day, perhaps

unconsciously, we began to ask ourselves where all this evil and spiritual ugliness came from? Why must ugliness emerge in place of beauty and, with its cruelty, ruin our lives in this unique world of Gramos. Perhaps there is another life, another world, behind this life and behind this world? I often sat and wondered why Vioreli had become somewhat hardened and less mysterious, less sensitive and more evil and rude? But as I understand it, someone helped him accept this new life as we lived it here between pride and anger and not believing in a good and omnipotent God.

4.

We began to read the morning bulletin that had just come out of the wire. First Breaking News: Colonel Georgios Gianulis killed. The Lion of Gramos (that's what we all called him), the hero of the Democratic Army, was killed in a brave and heroic fight in one of the most important battles of Gramos. Second story: The legendary General Markos, Supreme Commander of DAG, is very ill. The Politburo and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece have decided to send him to the USSR where he will be treated and will stay until he fully recovers. The Politburo decided to relegate General Markos's responsibilities to Nikos Zahariadis, General Secretary of the Party.

"Do you know why?" asked Leonidas. "No!" I said. "Because here at Gramos there should only be one omnipotent god but none of the communists understand that. Don't you think that's true?" he asked and waited for my confirmation with his mouth open... "Maybe it's all done in the name of justice," I replied leisurely. "Do you think so? Or perhaps this is done under some crude calculation...?" he asked.

It was the second half of August 1948 and Gramos was engulfed in battles. Major General Ipsilantis, the other day, after the fall of Batra to enemy hands, received a letter from General Gusias, commander of the 670th Army Military Division of Gramos. Written in the letter was: "Να συλλάβεις, να δέσεις και να στείλεις το Γιάννουλη στην έδρα." (You are to arrest, tie down and send Gianulis to Base Headquarters.)

Just as he unfolded and read the letter Ipsilantis became furious and restless because he was convinced that "the top leadership" was going to execute this celebrated leader. He found himself in a terrible dilemma; to follow the order or not? His conscience told him not to follow the order because Colonel Gianulis was a true hero and a personal friend. He had known him for a long time and together they had fought many terrible battles. On the other hand, it was his duty to execute the order, especially since it came from a senior military commander and from right here at the

front. He wrestled with his dilemma for about 15 to 20 minutes, pacing back and forth, but finally he arrived at a decision. He decided not to arrest him. "I am not going to arrest him, bind him, or deliver him. I am not even going to answer such a letter and I don't care what happens!" said Ipsilantis.

He felt much better after having decided. Concerned about what had happened, his friends and associates from General Headquarters wanted to know what had happened and why he was so upset? One of them asked: "What happened? Why are you so upset?" They had not seen him get so upset even during the worst battles. Ipsilantis explained the situation and after he told them about his decision they all appeared to be happy. The same day Gianulis left and went to visit the front line in some isolated place in Kiafa locality. Also the same day Gusias, General Colonel Lambros Kanaridis and a group of guardsmen caught up with Colonel Gianulis, arrested and tied him down. His fiancée, who at the time was with him, was in shock. She sat beside him, placed her head on his shoulder and refused to leave. Afterwards they took them to the Army Base at Division 670 Headquarters.

At headquarters, Gianulis locked eyes with newly appointed General Gusias but felt very uncomfortable and lonely. Gusias, staring down at him, kept asking why he was still waiting and why would his conscience not allow him to beg for forgiveness, or beg to be pardoned. The Colonel felt humiliated in front of Gusias and, looking at Gusias's rigid, grey face, was filled with disappointment. What was happening to Colonel Gianulis was unbelievable; from the moment that he was suddenly grabbed he was directly told that a court martial awaited him. Up to that moment Gianulis's military career was spotless and climbing towards a promotion to General, accompanied by many medals for bravery. The Colonel was not only brave but had truly earned his rank, which he deserved, but now no one knows what had happened to him or to his fiancé. When Ipsilantis found out about this he said: "Boys, we will no longer be able to see Gianulis."

Eight or nine days later, Ipsilantis received a phone call and was invited to attend a meeting at General Headquarters. All military officers attending were greeted personally by Zahariadis and Bardzhiotas, his political commissar, as they entered the large barracks. Ipsilantis was greeted with the words: "General Ipsilantis, please explain why you disobeyed General Gusias's orders?" Looking directly at the Leader the General said: "Which order Comrade Nikos? That was an ordinary request, not a military order." The Leader looked straight into his eyes. Ipsilantis knew that such a look meant that the Leader did not trust him. The Leader was not satisfied with the answer and, with a firm tone, said: "It was an order, not an ordinary request! Shame on you General! You were rash and went too far with your ambitions. Your stubbornness could

cost you... Don't mess with us... We are much more informed about things than you think,” and as he finished talking he continued to stare at the general. At that moment Gusias approached. Gusias was a short, bald man in his forties with a round head. He was wearing a new General's uniform. Then, after looking at Ipsilantis, his lips distorted in a scornful way and after attempting to smile, said: “You talk too much, Ipsilantis, when you know you should be keeping quiet!”

Upon my return from the trial with headquarters intelligence officer Georgios Furkiotis, I learned the truth about Colonel Gianulis's execution, which he carefully described to me. Then Ipsilantis (ΑΛΕΧΗΣ ΡΟΣΙΟΣ - Υψηλάντης) wrote it as follows: “Η δολοφονία τον Γιαννου'λι και η θεία δίκη. Και τώρα, ας ιδου'με τον επίλογο της δολοφονίας τον Γιαννου'λι στις 20 Αάγου'στον 1948 όπος μου τον αφηγήθηκε μάρτυρςς ο αξιωματικός πγηροφοριών της 670 Μονάδας ο Γιώργος Φουρκιώτης.

“Σε μια μετακίνηση τον Επιτελείου της Μονάδας σε μια στάση, ο θησέας Σαρή (ασφαλώς Σαρή τον Γου'σια) τον εριξε μια πιστολιά απο πισω, και ο λεβέντης ο Γιανουλης ο έπεσε αι μοφυρτος... Τότε,” συγχίζει ο Φουρκώτης, “λέ στον Επίτροπο της Μονάδας Κναφαριδίη Λάμπρο, ‘τι είναι αυτά Λαμπρο, που γίνοντ’... ‘Παψε, χαζέ’ - μου λει ο Λαμπρος – ‘θα φας και συ το κεφάλι σου’...” (“In a move of the Headquarters of army division 670, during a break, Tiseos Saris (by a certain order from Gusias) shot Gianulis at close range from behind and Gianulis the hero fell covered in blood... Then,” continued Furkiotis, “I asked Lambros Kanakaridis the army division political commissar, ‘What are these things Lambros? What is happening to us fighters?’ He replied: ‘Silence you fool, because you will also lose your head’...”

Noose – Chapter 13

OMINOUS 1948 - facts and dirty aims... The CPG (Communist Party of Greece) created a Macedonian political family from the vigorous and venerable Macedonian families and then destroyed it and left the Macedonian home childless. The CPG leadership's action to evacuate the children was motivated and explained as "the need to rescue the children from the horrors of war"; an act which was to be carried out at the request of the children's own parents. So what does this mean? This means that the CPG, with help from the Macedonian organizations NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front), acted on facts but with dirty aims.

To obtain a realistic and objective picture of the general Greek policy towards the Macedonians one has to understand that the Greeks have one singular policy towards the Macedonians regardless of which regime is in political power; be it the monarchists, republicans, liberal-democrats, authoritarians, communists, etc. Their aim is to destroy everything Macedonian; name, identity, language, culture, etc. The CPG, looking for a way to absolve itself from any responsibility for its unlawful "child-collection" program, a genocidal endeavour, made sure that it was a voluntary program and all decisions were made by the parents, regardless of how they were persuaded.

So the CPG, as it had done with so many other important issues, worked through NOF and AFZH to convince the population that such an evacuation was necessary and used NOF and AFZH activists to convince parents to carry out the evacuation. But it quickly became obvious that "humanitarianism" was not CPG's only motive. The CPG and DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) military leadership had other, hidden objectives for these children. The CPG needed these children as reserves for DAG to replace their parents as they were killed off in combat. Being unable to solve its recruitment problem inside Greece, as was the case in 1948, the CPG and main instigator of the Greek Civil War then turned to mobilizing the children. And as Plato once said: "The price good men pay for not participating in public affairs is that they end up being governed by ruined people."

1.

It was already mid-March and preparations for collecting the children were under way, but the mothers whose husbands were away working in America and Australia had not received permission to send their children away. That last night no one knew what was hiding inside Lina Bogdanova's soul. That day she was decently dressed and left the

impression that she was a conscientious person and confident in herself. She was loyal, honest and very much attached to her husband Lambro who, at the time, was working in America. And for that reason she had to be very careful. "It is important that our husbands also have a say in this 'yes' or 'no' to send or not to send our children away," she said to one of the AFZH activists. "There is nothing more sacred, there is nothing sweeter than to have your child with you, to stop your heart from wilting. I beg you... I cannot give my children away without the knowledge and consent of my husband Lambro. I can't just give up my children and then run around like I'm crazy. Why did we give birth to them? For the Party?" she pleaded.

"She is right," another middle-aged woman shouted and pleaded. Others followed suit. Lina spoke openly and said the same thing to the AFZH activists and to all those who came to convince her: "Excuse me, my words may seem strange to you but that's the way it is... It is better that my children die here with me than somewhere in Europe. I want my children, to whom I gave birth, to stay here, at home with me. I don't want the communists and the people from the AFZH to take them away and destroy our family and our roots." Lina became very, very bitter towards the AFZH activists when one of them said: "Lina, what is this all about?" and looked at her with a cold look in her eyes. "We and the Communist Party are fighting for the good of the people, for a better tomorrow. I think we Macedonians should be first in line to give everything we have and with that we will achieve freedom for all the Macedonian people."

Without hesitation Lina replied: "These people here, including myself, have watched what's going on for years and it doesn't seem to be the way you say it is, so please I don't want to hear any more of your stories." "You don't believe the Party?" shouted the AFZH activist with a surprised look on her face. Lina replied: "We Macedonians don't even know how far to go in this war to find the place where we belong. So why should I believe you? So that we can play victor and victim games? So that I will give you my children? What kind of people make willing sacrifices of their own children?! My grandfathers, grandmothers and all our people raised these children and now you want us to give them to the Party? As my father used to say about the suffering of our Macedonian people: "OUR CHILDREN ARE THE PILLARS OF OUR FAMILY, A GUARANTEE TO OUR SURVIVAL AND LIFE IN OUR ANCESTRAL HOMES!" concluded Lina. "Lina, come to your senses!" replied Donka, the AFZH activist.

2.

That fateful night, after the noise subsided in the village streets, all Lina could think about was how to save her children. She lit her kerosene

lamp, sat on the bed and watched her children sleep while listening to the clock tick away the hours. "It's three o'clock in the morning and it's still dark outside," she told herself. "I can escape with them into the night but I don't know where to run. I might run into a patrol and then I will lose my children for sure. What terrible times are these when a person fears evil more than death..." She was not sure what to do. She did not want to make a mistake so she went to the icon of Sveta Bogoroditsa (St. Mary) and crossed herself. She prayed for her salvation... The same two thoughts kept creeping into her mind: "Why shouldn't I do it? Why should I do it?"

She quietly went to the fireplace. She felt very lonely and the loneliness around her was absolute but in the dark recesses of her mind there was a single desire that hurt even more, what to do about her children. She took the kettle off the tripod and spread out the blazing kindling. She took a few steps carefully, pausing to take a breath. The kettle with boiling water stopped gurgling. Lina went closer to her children and watched them sleep. Look how nice and peaceful they look sleeping, she thought to herself. Her thoughts continued to flow uncontrollably one after another. Sometimes she would unconsciously say: "Well? What are you waiting for? Only this way you can save your children..." Everything that she could not tolerate to watch or to respect in others was in her, the life in her heart was open and the transparent life in her soul was another world, mysterious... A mother reaching out to her children? Where does that "satisfaction, weakness, excitement" come from?...

She stopped again and, looking confused, told herself: "I will decide! It will not be long... Their pain will pass faster than me losing them? I will not willingly give my children to those AFZH paupers to make soldiers of my children and push them to fight and force them to kill for their own interests... They killed my father because he was a priest. And what if they are maimed and crippled? But at least they will be alive..." She thought and wondered and her wonderings, like a thorn stuck in a healthy foot, would not stop pulsing. She hesitated and for a moment she forgot everything. "I should not be thinking of the worst. It will stay with me..., and before my husband I will remain faithful and true to my children... Exactly like that; consistent and reliable," she said to herself.

"When Lambro left for America he said to me: 'Lina, I want you to bring up our children while I am away at pechalba (migrant work) making some money for our future...' and now these damn paupers are making him into a fascist and an American spy..." She stopped talking to herself, the silence felt awkward. Lina shut her eyes but only for a moment to gather her strength and then suddenly she tipped the kettle and water spilled on the feet of her children. Then when she heard the sick and frightened screams, she fell on top of the children and spilled the rest of the boiling water on them and on herself. She screamed even louder and said to herself: "Maybe everyone will be better off if we are all dead..."

Frightened, the children squeezed themselves into her lap, and she, powerless, gently and with tears in her eyes, kissed their burned feet, thinking to herself: “Who knows why it seems that way, but if I cry, it means that I behave like a good mother. And there is no reason to blame myself. And the children have no reason to be angry at me, they will stay with me...” “We love you... we will always love...” I could see it in their shining eyes, shining with unimaginable fear. “You are mine and no one is going to take you,” she said to them while repeatedly kissing their burns, even after their blisters broke and blood started pouring out. But worse than that was when, at dawn, she heard the different voices of the activists saying: “You wicked woman, what evil have your children done to you for you to do this to them?” and she said to herself: “I did not kill them. They will be alive.”

3.

Sotir Gaidov, Lina’s brother suddenly appeared at her door. He directed his gaze at the bed where the scalded children were lying and saw the horror in their weeping eyes. He then sat across from his sister and wanted to personally hear the truth from her. Lina looked at him with wide open eyes and he addressed her with the words: “Sister, where were your eyes? What happened? Oh, the horror!” Lina, trying to hide her fear and motherly pain, said: “I do not know if I behaved properly... I may be cracking up!” Then suddenly she looked like a child, confused and embarrassed. “But I think you will understand,” she said. “How would you feel if they took something from you that you loved very much and you knew that they were going to do it in front of your eyes? I swear to God... If they take my children I will go mad... Perhaps I have sinned... I may be frantic but I will not give away my children. They are mine and Lambro’s who left me to bring them up and not to give them to anyone.”

She was strong and persevered more than all the women in the village but she was unable to express her true feelings and explain her actions to her brother. “Oh, my brother, for a long time now our lives have not been in God’s hands but in the hands of our persecutors. So how can I give my children to the Communists who beheaded our old father Gligor Gaidov down at the brook and we found him robbed of his life just because he was a priest. Our father wronged no one, he was a priest who served God and prayed for all the people.” Puzzled by her rambling Sotir asked: “Sister, what exactly are you trying to tell me? I was told that you tripped, stumbled and spilled the kettle with boiling water. Is that true?... She gave him a strange look and with fear in her voice she said: “I am not giving my children to anyone... I watched over them all night.”

The children began crying again but not as loud as when they were scalded. Their uncle Sotir looked at them with a sad look on his face and

felt sorry for them. Their names were Elena and Mito. A woman dressed in a uniform stormed up the stairs and entered the room. It was the AFZH woman and she was accompanied by two activists who were planning tomorrow's actions to collect the children and transport them to Yugoslavia and their mothers to the DAG front lines. The moment Donka, the AFZH woman, entered the room she started blinking her eyes reacting to the bright flames emanating from the blazing fire in the fireplace.

The AFZH woman moved away from Lina so that she could have a better look at her and, as a concerned organizer of the holy struggle and accountable to the Party and to General Markos, make her assessment of the situation. After having had a good look at Lina she said: "We and the Communist Party are fighting for a better tomorrow. I think we Macedonians should be the first in line to give our best and by doing so we will achieve freedom for the Macedonian people. Only by doing our best can we guarantee that and show that our people are loyal to this holy war. For example yesterday, Temelkovski, the Trsie village teacher, collected all the children into a group and took them all the way to the border without any problems. Afterwards their mothers left to join the ranks of DAG, respecting the decisions of NOF, AFZH and the CPG."

After that the AFZH woman had some questions: "Have you alone decided to commit this heinous act or did someone, perhaps one of the enemies of our holy war, put you up to this? Is that it or is it something else? Tell the truth! Perhaps there was another woman with you? Everything you tell me will be kept in strict confidence. Perhaps she can help us with the investigation?" Hurt by the woman's words, Lina closed her eyes and said: "You people destroyed our lives and now you want to take our children." The AFZH woman looked at her with a cold stare and said: "It is stupid of you to talk like that. What could this possibly mean to you? You are only repeating the words of our enemies." She then nodded her head, gave a slight smile and, together with the other activists, left.

Sotir, with his hands on his hips, stood there and watched the whole thing. Then shaking his head he pleaded with his sister to calm down. Finally, at dawn, when the village children were all taken away like lambs to the Yugoslav border, everyone calmed down and gave Lina odd stares. But disappointed by what they themselves had done, full of grief they found some hope in Lina's decision not to give up her children.

Noose – Chapter 14

Visiting the camp called “Strength of suffering” where parents of forcibly mobilized children were held.

1.

It was a cold January winter in 1949. It rained and snowed most of the time and then the weather turned very cold and windy. The wind was so strong it was blowing tents and temporary shelters down. It was a terrible time; we experienced casualties, deprivation and starvation. All the villages were empty. Everyone was feeling anxious wondering where the people had gone? What could have possibly happened to an entire nation of people? To make matters worse, more and more bad news kept coming from Gramos and Vicho. Our outlook began to look bleak with each passing day. We were exhausted and losing confidence. Confusion and chaos among the parents continued well after the evacuation of their children. Many of the young Macedonian children, following their evacuation in March 1948, had disappeared. The children were initially taken to shelters in Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland but soon afterwards the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) ordered to have a select number returned and sent to the front lines in Gramos and Vicho where many were killed unbeknownst to their parents.

Many of the parents, whose children were forcibly mobilized, were arrested and psychologically tormented, but a group rebelled and formed the organization “Strength of suffering”. Their objective was to save their children who were marshaled by force by the CPG, DAG (Democratic Army of Greece), NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) and sent to the fatal battlegrounds. When we approached the camp grounds we had a strange impression, perhaps because it was outside of the forested area. The whole camp was surrounded by razor-sharp barbed wire and had a stench of rot and harsh smoke.

Standing on the grass under a tree on the other side of the fence was an old white-haired woman whose eyes and nose were red from crying. She was crossing herself under the tree on which a NOOSE hung. It seemed as if she had witnessed something horrible and now it was burned in her heart and mind forever. The poor old lady, I remember her like it was yesterday. Small, frail-looking, completely lost in her black clothes under her black head kerchief, which she would wear for the rest of her life. She was outside of the “house of the dead”. That’s what they called the underground barracks where the old people used to stay, looking like living cadavers. I felt sorry for the old woman. I wanted to cry but I couldn’t. I thought that if I cried it would be easier on me. “No one here

trusts her tears,” said the watchman who sluggishly paced around the fence.

We stood in front of the closed door made of wooden stakes interwoven with wire. They called this door the “door of the dead” because of all those who went in, no one came out alive. Sitting on a bunch of stones, frozen stiff was Sotir Gaidov. He was unshaven and unwashed and on his upper body he wore a woolen coat and a stained vest. On his lower body he wore dark pants that glistened with oil and grease. These were the clothes he had worn when he was a groom. On his feet he wore an old pair of military boots completely worn out. Sitting there he was curled up looking rigid and clumsy. A bad odor, like half-dried sheep skin, was emanating from him. He hated everything for no reason at all. A sea of sorrow was swimming in his blood. His heart and mind were silent. He awoke only to the echo of gunfire and waited to hear the message about who had just been killed.

As I stood there watching him I asked myself: “Is this really Sotir Gaidov, the Priest’s educated son?” “Good day, Uncle Sotir! You are here too?” I asked him. My voice startled him. He lifted his head and gave me a cold stare. We both stood there looking at each other in silence. Finally he spoke: “We are all here, all of us who rebelled and would not agree to give up our children. We refused to give up our children. No one was going to take our children away; not Frederica, not the communist commanders and not our own AFZH people, who, as intruders entered our houses and forcibly took all the children away. You, Traiko,” he said to my friend Traiko Bogdanov, “as a communist, what do you say to all this... to what the Communists are doing? Do you know that your sister-in-law Lambrovitsa is being sued today, what are you going to tell your brother Lambro tomorrow?...”

There was silence! Traiko froze and became mute. Sotir continued: “Queen Frederica’s aim was to take the children from their parents and force the parents to desert the Communists. Now here we are all branded as traitors by the Communists and await our death. At the same time no one knows where our children are and where in Europe they have taken them. But they still insist that they are saving them. This is like in the old saying: ‘I lit your house on fire so that I can save it’.” “Lord God!” said Traiko, holding his automatic rifle in the ready position and continued: “So, you say that Queen Frederica’s aim was to take our children so that we would defect from DAG and renounce our communist ideals? And the Communist aim was to take our children so that they could keep the fathers and mothers hostage? You say that they seized our children to solve DAG’s reserve problems and supply it with new fighters?”

Traiko paused for a moment, thought and said: “Well my sister-in-law was right. Both sides have begun a campaign of genocide against us Macedonians.” Sotir stood up, glanced around and began to speak:

“History is not only about the past. Our rational and patriotic conscience should not have allowed us to just be spectators, to just wonder, to bury our heads in the sand and keep quiet when we saw trouble and danger. It should have forced us to speak out about this evil, to challenge the Communists. Do you know what the Communists are aiming to do to us? Behind their campaign to save our sons and daughters they have hidden treacherous intentions. They intend to supply DAG with more Macedonian fighters and push the entire Macedonian population into war. Not too long ago the communists, through our Organizations NOF and AFZH, mobilized a population that was never mobilized before. After collecting all the children they rationalized that ‘now that the mothers are free from having to care for their children, they too can join the ranks of DAG and be dispatched to the front lines to fight’. And true to their word, after they collected the children they forcibly mass mobilized all the Macedonian women and sent them to either fight at the fronts or serve behind them.”

Sotir paused, looked at Traiko and said: “When it comes to the Macedonians, the Greeks have one essential purpose; to destroy them!” “In other words, Greek measures against the Macedonians are indistinguishable regardless of where they come from, be it the bourgeoisie or the Communists?” asked Traiko. “Yes!” said Sotir. “For years the communists have been trying to convince us that they would reject what Athens was doing, but in the long run they showed themselves to be exactly the same as all other Greeks, harbouring the same aims against us Macedonians. Well, you can now see for yourself what they are doing. Our extermination has now come to light!”

Strange thoughts began to creep into Traiko’s mind. Anger began to build in his chest. There was no moment that passed when he did not think “we are doomed”, “we are done for”, “we are dead”... For a moment everything around him became blurred, wrapped in fog. He was devastated by the thought that he, without knowing, was actually supporting a cause that would hurt him and his people. He was not haunted by the death of his own dreams but by the thought that there may be a greater punishment than death.

2.

Inside the camp it looked like preparations were being made to celebrate some great holiday. The prisoners were pushed to work harder as the guards barked at them: “Fast! Faster! Keep working! Keep moving!” They were cleaning the paths to the camp and tightening the tents. They cut wood for the huge fire pit and started boiling the cauldron with the beans. Everything was carefully organized. Early in the morning the next day a judge and two people from the Macedonian political organizations, Filip Jazhin from NOF and Fana Tapantsieva from AFZH, arrived at the

camp escorted by a dozen armed DAG fighters. As mid day drew close the people residing in the camp began to gather at the nearby freshly cut meadow.

The order given, immediately sparked a violent reaction from the crowd. Everyone started talking at once. They shouted out loud and wanted to run to protect Lina Bogdanova. Then there was silence but only for a few seconds. After that the entire crowd roared with a single voice. "Is this possible? To kill innocent women? Then kill us all!" were hundreds of voices thundering all through the crowd, echoing through the camp known as the "Dlabika Jama" (Hollow Pit). Sitting there silent and looking grim was the fifty year old Todor Pelifanov. Despite his age, he once spoke with a loud voice and with great hand gestures. Leaning on his dogwood walking stick he said: "It is difficult for us to live here without our children. Our trauma is too great. I am going to other people's graves to cry." He then asked: "Am I also an enemy of my people because I have two sons working in America and lost one son fighting for DAG on the Gramos front?"

Todor tried to move but unexpectedly fell to the ground. He said to himself: "Our life looks like suicide." Everyone stared at Todor but he gave them the impression that he was bored and going to sleep when he closed his damaged white eyes. After this touching fraternal bonding they all started talking with each other. At that same moment the spark of a vigilant communist flashed in military judge Karanikas's eyes. His voice became harsh and he yelled out: "I am a national military judge and I conduct the court with facts. Lina Bogdanova, born in 1904 (maiden name Lina Gaidova, daughter of Pop Gligor Gaidov - liquidated in 1945, at age 65 as an enemy of our ideology) comes from a very religious family which stood against our communist ideology. Since the very beginning of our revolution Lina has been against our strategic objectives and therefore she is being condemned as the enemy of the liberal-minded people. She has shown to be a great enemy of our holy struggle and works for the interest of Anglo-American imperialism, probably because her husband Lambro Bogdanov, born in 1900, has been in America since 1936. We are not making claims but it is certain that he works for the Americans and his sons Pavle and Vasil are senior officers in Tito's army, and now they too have become bitter enemies of our struggle."

The judge paused, looked around and continued: "We the Partisans of General Markos have been led by the Communist Party to fight for a better tomorrow. I think that the Macedonians should be the first in line and do their best. By doing so they would achieve freedom and self-determination. It was by no accident that the defendant Lina scalded the feet of her two children, son Mito Bogdanov, born in 1935, and daughter Elena Bogdanova, born in 1933. She did this to stop them from joining the ranks of DAG, from fighting for the ideals of the CPG, whose aims are to

liberate Greece from Anglo-American imperialism. She did this when the entire nation was throwing itself into the fight for our sacred liberty, led by our wise leader Zahariadis.”

Lina Bogdanova, the defendant in this case, stood there blinking her eyes as the judge asked her a question: “Tell us the truth; did you do this by yourself or did someone else teach you what to do? Or perhaps you hate your own children?” Hurt by the judge’s words Lina said: “Why are you asking me such stupid questions? They are my own children to whom I gave birth, so why would I want to give them to the communists or to the AFZH woman so that they could send them to the battlefields to die?” Lina’s voice was so weak and so sad that it was barely audible. One had only to look at her face to realize how much she was suffering. “So, I gather you alone decided to perform this heinous act and thus consciously took the side of our enemies in this holy war of ours,” said the judge. Lina’s eyes welled with tears as she listened to the judge’s words.

Of all the people watching the trial, only Sotir Gaidov, Lina’s brother, turned his head away so as not to WATCH HIS SISTER CRY. In a sad voice he said to me: “What kind of destiny is this? We have always known about the cruelty of the various nationalist Greek governments but these communists are turning out to be even more brutal!” At that very moment Traiko Bogdanov, Lambro Bogdanov’s younger brother, a declared communist, turned to me and said: “Sotir is right! We Macedonians have been tricked! They have divided us with their lies and have turned us against one other; brother against brother. It would be a good idea to look back and review whether we should continue to sacrifice ourselves for the interests of these strangers! We have become deaf, dumb and blind, thank God for the good earth that supports us.”

At that moment other voices were heard yelling and all attention and eyes were directed at Lina Bogdanova standing there looking dignified while the judge was attempting to coax her into saying that she had been assisted by associates of hostile organizations. But Lina, to the end, stuck to her story insisting that she had acted alone: “They are my children...” she said, “and they do not belong to any Party... they are mine and Lambro Bogdanov’s children. And I want everyone to know that I want to die true to myself as Lambrovitsa Bogdanova.” The judge was totally confused. He could not believe that the woman would harm her own children so as to prevent them from joining DAG. “I will ask you for the last time,” he said. “Where are your children now?”

“My son Mito is with his father in America,” she said. “One night I alone took him over the mountains to the city Lerin and when I returned home I was arrested.” Lina began to cry and said: “My daughter Elena ended her own life... She was unable to bear the taunts and criticism from the AFZH women for not volunteering to fight in what you call your holy freedom. I would not let her and for that she blamed me the most...”

Lina stood there magnificently in silence, like a commendable warrior, then slowly walked under the NOOSE hanging under the oak tree. It was a great surprise to everyone, so great that the entire crowd went dead silent... Lina then said to herself: "Oh my God they will hang me!" Judge Karanikas said to himself: "Did you think you would be forgiven?" He then yelled out: "Death to fascism and to our enemies!" Mala Prespa, fall, 1949.

3.

I had the opportunity to observe thousands of cases in developments involving Macedonians. The more I observed NOF and AFZH involvement with the Macedonians the more I grew disgusted with that genocidal war. On August 12th, 1949 the entire front line from Vicho to Bela Voda was burning and our troops were leaving the front. At that time I asked for permission to go and visit camp "Hollow Pit" for one last time and see what had happened to the people. When I got there the camp was deserted and only the NOOSE hung swinging back and forth, blown by the wind. The place was littered with rags scattered all around the meadow... The sun began to set behind Mount Vrba and, on the far horizon, where heaven met earth, the land above the Prespa valley began to turn dark changing the character of the lake and the landscape all around it.

The shadows of the big trees in the valley were vast, seeming like they were the shadows of the people that had been hung there. The spacious Prespa valley was quickly becoming dark, the entire sky over all this landscape was clear and bright blue, but I was feeling repulsed; I found myself feeling somewhat banished and cursed. The thought that I had left my relatives there in that camp, powerless, made me sick. Dragging himself behind me and roaming with a machine gun hanging on his shoulder, but a bit astounded, was Traiko Bogdanov, who, for a long time stood there and watched the NOOSE on which his sister-in-law Lina was hung...

Now, years later, I was reminded of Sotir Gaidov's question: "When a nation is influenced by aggressive ideological propaganda and gains political power how many people will it kill?"

Noose – Chapter 15

Thousands of children aged 16 and 17 were mobilized into DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) in 1947 and became victims in one of the cruelest guerrilla wars known to mankind. Escape from cruel death.

1.

It was a hot day, suffocating, like many days before that, but there was a breeze in the movement that needed to be taken into account. The Greek government was organizing an army under the command of General Van Fleet, the famous American general and specialist in guerrilla warfare. The government army consisted of a total of 60,000 troops organized into 6 divisions in all branches. Included in the government armaments were 200 tanks and armored cars and about 100 aircraft of all types. The Partisan force, commanded by Vlandas, had a total of 9,863 Partisan fighters and 40 cannons. The government's offensive against DAG began with an attack on Mount Vicho and by August 13th and 14th DAG sustained massive losses with 1,859 fighters dead, wounded, missing, or captured. The government force sustained only 256 dead and 1,336 wounded. On August 15th and 16th DAG units began to retreat to Albania, but within days about 6,000 of the fighters were regrouped and transferred to Gramos to continue fighting. It was during this time that the slogan "Gramos will become a cemetery for the Monarcho-Fascists" was coined.

For several days the huge government army, under the command of U.S. General Van Fleet, had been vigorously pursuing our positions but not by classical means. Instead of using his infantry Van Fleet employed his air force to hurl firebombs at us; igniting the entire front line. We were in panic, like frightened wild animals. We were turning into dangerous animals. We were not fighting; we were just defending ourselves trying to avoid the rain of fire, trying not to get burned, trying to survive. The bombs kept on falling but not to kill us, only to frighten us to death. We were tortured by the air we breathed. Our stomachs ached, our feet burned and the yellowish clouds made us cough so badly that we all felt as if our intestines would pour out of our mouths. Thousands of burned soldiers fled from the front line position, horrified and full of fear...

The front line all around us was scorched and covered in black smoke. Vlandas, our Party appointed commander, hiding behind a rock, kept yelling through a funnel: "Fight! Fight! If we Communists are defeated here it will be the death of all of us. Fight! I encourage you to fight on behalf of the Party and on behalf of our leader Zahariadis." But nobody

listened. We were all crazed and angry from our ordeal and hoping for some divine power to intervene and save us. It was dark everywhere even though it was the middle of the day. We could not hear the artillery or the rifle fire pounding all around us because of the stamping hooves of the rampaging, frightened horses running for their lives. I watched Leonidas pacing back and forth in front of me reciting prayers he had learned as a boy.

Many of us were already deaf from the blasts we had experienced on the front line battles at Vicho, Bukovik, Bela Voda, Mali Madi and Lisets. We felt powerless and full of hatred in this onslaught. They were persecuting us and wanted to kill us all. We ran from the top of the hill towards the bottom and saw sharp rocks sticking out at the base of the hill. That's where they had dropped two large flaming bombs. Famine was a nightmare in our daily lives, in our terrible struggle for survival, in our unbearable loneliness. We took shelter in the dense forest and at one point we rolled under a tree. Our friends were dead and we could not help them. During the night I saw things that I will never forget.

It was high noon. The sun was baking hot and we were sweating profusely. Our eyes were burning from the sweat as we tried to wipe it with our dirty and bloody hands. The days were hot and the dead were still unburied. I was restless and in pain. Suddenly I was gripped by fear and began to shake. I was afraid that the worst was yet to come. Leonidas called me over and pointed me to a silhouette in the far distance. I was overcome with sadness as I watched the dark silhouette, especially when I realized it was a woman clenching a child in her arms. As I kept watching the woman my heart began to beat faster. "Is it possible... could that be Roxana the Nurse?" I asked Leonidas.

When we came out of the dark forest we ran into rugged terrain. The hills were rocky and treeless and just below the rocks were deep and wide crevices covered with drooping branches, probably used for camouflage. About fifty yards in front of the entrance to an underground bunker, was a machine gun nest. All around the bunker large piles of earth mixed with ammunition and miscellaneous weapons were scattered, but here and there we saw parts of human bodies. When we reached the end of a long trench we found a boy, barely a young man, with his left leg blown off, lying in a pool of blood. Barely conscious with parched lips he said: "Water, water..." I gave him my canister and after taking a few sips he became invigorated. Lying beside him was a sack full of circular pendants with General Markos's image on one side and a number on the other.

"Who are you?" asked Traiko Bogdanov. "I am the commander of the youth squad and these pendants here in this sack belong to my fellow fighters," he answered. "And what are those numbers?" asked Traiko. The young commander looked at us with fear in his eyes as Traiko, with a raised voice, said: "They have hung numbers on our children? God help

us, numbers on human beings? Wow! In what century do we live?" The silence was interrupted by the young commander when he said: "You need to know that all those body parts you were stepping over belong to the youth squad, formed by the mobilization of the older children sent earlier to the various Eastern European Republics; Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary..."

Angered by all of this Leonidas interrupted Traiko, who was about to say something, and said: "It is inhuman what they have done, especially if they did it with the Party's knowledge!" Traiko then angrily added: "This is trading with human lives. These are our children, which the Party and Zahariadis have told us were taken to be saved... This is indeed painful. The beginning of a new period of Macedonian sacrifices. If this continues we Macedonians will find ourselves in a situation where, for the first time in history, we would have allowed an entire nation, our nation, to be destroyed without doing anything to stop it."

Traiko paused for a moment, looked at me and said: "The lie has always been in advance of the truth and the truth has been lagging in time so you can imagine how long it would take for the Macedonian people to learn the truth. How long would it take? How long did it take for our children, who were supposedly taken from us to be saved, to become nameless and numbers only recognizable by the Party? How long did it take from the time they were taken away to be saved to the time they lay dead in the trenches?" Traiko then turned, faced east, crossed himself and said: "Imagine General Headquarters being informed from the battlefield that the following fighters were killed fighting bravely: numbers 13, 34, 24, 29, etc... Oh my God... Let us pray to the almighty to help us stop this madness and let us pray that we stop believing in Zahariadis's worn out slogans."

(Zahariadis's first optimistic scenario: "The Macedonian people can have self-determination." In other words he offered the Macedonian people a vision of an independent Macedonia??!! Then during the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) Central Committee's Fifth Plenum, held on January 30th and 31st, 1949, Zahariadis discarded that idea. In other words he discarded the idea of an 'independent and united Macedonian state within a Balkan federation'. After that on February 3rd, 1949, during the NOF (National Liberation Front) Central Council's Second Plenum, he modified NOF's principles to include 'a future under Greece for the Macedonian people'. But that promise too was broken: On March 7th, 1949 the CPG's Central Committee released a statement denying having anything to do, with regards to the Macedonian question, with either the January 1949 Fifth Plenum or the February, 1949 NOF Second Plenum. So, history should have taught us that any promises made during war may not be worth the paper they are written on.

Zahariadis's second optimistic scenario: "Create a Communist Party for the Macedonians under Greece." SUBTLE MANIPULATION OF THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE AND THEIR HISTORY. On March 27th, 1949 a founding meeting was called by 163 Communists, delegates of NOF's Second Congress, who unanimously agreed to form the "Communist Party of Aegean Macedonia" (KOEM), a separate organization but part of the CPG. Some would say that this was one of the CPG's "brightest gestures" because the CPG "truly" cared for the Macedonians. Why don't we leave this one to history to show how truly "bright" a gesture it was and how much the CPG "truly" cared for the Macedonian people...)

Our old people used to talk about how oppressive the Ottomans were and would often say that the Greeks were even worse. My grandfather used to say: "The Ottomans did not have faith, but they had pity, the Greeks have neither faith nor pity."

Traiko Bogdanov, now even more upset, turned to the half-dazed young commander and asked: "Please tell me, I had a son sent to the People's Republics (Eastern Europe) maybe he was here with you. His name is Giorgi Bogdanov." The wounded man looked at Traiko, sat up a bit, showed him the sack and said: "Sir, may God bless his soul, here is his pendent, he was number 12. He was among the ones who were mortally wounded but I don't know exactly where his body is right now. I am sure it is here somewhere by the ditch you just passed..." Upset, Traiko tossed his machine gun to the ground and ran back along the trench looking at all the dead bodies, searching for his son...

2.

All the stories of children wearing pendants around their necks with a number on one side and with General Markos's picture on the other turned out to be true. Only a select few people at the top knew who these boys were; their names, their parents and where they came from. To everyone else they were just numbers. The young commander continued: "We were rushed to the Tulgesh pavilion from everywhere, like a swollen river, where we joined with many others in the huge yard. The first thing we did was look for our siblings and friends; brother looking for brother, brother looking for sister, but the most difficult part was trying to find our 'mothers'.

There were many children there who did not know their own name, surname, date of birth, place of birth, or the names of their mother, father, grandfather, or grandmother. From the moment we were gathered at the camp across the border and for the years we were away, like shadows, we kept searching for our loved ones and for our identity. We felt alienated as if General Markos slowly was becoming our father. That's exactly what

we would say when our teachers asked, 'To whom do you belong?' and we would all yell out, 'To Markos,' and when they asked, 'To whom does Markos belong?', we would all yell out, 'To us'."

He paused for a moment, took a deep breath and continued: "But for some reason, perhaps to make us all equal, or who knows why, when we were stationed in Kalimaneshti they decided to take away our names. Our name was the last symbol that reminded us of our home, of who we were and of where we belonged. That is when they hung a circular metal plate around our necks with a number engraved on one side and General Markos's image on the other. That pendant replaced our Macedonian name and our identity. I was number 520 and when they summoned me in Romania I had to answer back with the words 'Chinch sute douzen shi o' (five hundred and twenty)."

He paused again, thought for a moment and continued: "Towards the end of 1948 we were taken to Poland by train. There at the border we were greeted by Polish officials, medical staff and various other services. The Polish people there were very kind to us and at the same time they were dumbfounded as to why children of Partisan parents fighting in the Vicho and Grams battlefields would have no names? When we arrived at the "Baburka" dormitory we were given new clothes. Our old clothes were collected and tossed in a great big pile which looked like the clothing of an enslaved army. The only thing we kept from our old clothes were the pendants hanging around our necks. Life was often full of cruelty and fierce games."

He trailed off for a moment and began talking again: "We considered the Poles to be good people and respected pan Piotr Pshezhinski the most. He also respected us and would often call us 'descendents of a doomed army'. He was an old, experienced Pole, a former businessman and philanthropist. He himself had spent many years in camps and felt sorry for us. He often used to say that we shared a similar fate because he too wore a number around his neck when he was held captive, but his pendant did not have the image of a leader. 'Your destiny is more difficult because you carry General Markos around your neck, a man who came to your country as a colonist and enjoys all the rights, while you and your parents, indigenous to those lands, are persecuted...' I kept quiet. What could I say? I just kept looking at the pendant with indignation and horror. Well it was NOF and AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front), our own people after all who promised us that this was a war of liberation and now all these children are numbers, part of a nameless army."

The silence was broken when Traiko Bogdanov, the grief-stricken father, began to cry and scream. At that point the wounded young commander said: "Looks like Bogdanov found the dead body of his son Giorgi. Giorgi was a brave boy but kept crying out for his father to come and get him." "When and how did they bring you to the front?" asked

Mitre Zhitarov, who also had two very young children and a young wife sent to the Eastern European countries. His wife Ristana was an “omadarihitsa”, a corporal responsible for taking care of ten children. The wounded young commander with the missing leg began to twitch with pain as he resumed telling his story: “A few months after the people from NOF, AFZH and the CPG gathered us and after our departure from our villages we were sent to the Eastern European states to be saved from a certain death and from hunger and illness. But the same people who took us to save us brought us back into the hell of this war. It started around the end of 1948 and early 1949.”

He held his breath for a moment in anticipation of more pain, let out a sigh and continued: “It was March 15th, 1949 at 8.30 pm when they called us to gather together in a large group. The Dormitory Director told us that after lunch a delegation from the CPG Politburo would be arriving at our dorm. Then exactly at 16.00 hours a big limousine pulled in and before our visitor had a chance to enter the main door we began chanting slogans and singing Partisan marching songs. As soon as the limousine stopped, Miltiadis Porfirogenis stepped out. Porfirogenis was a member of the Politburo of the CPG Central Committee and Minister of Justice in the Provisional Democratic Government. After the festive dinner, which we enjoyed very much and during which we kept quiet, the Director announced that he wanted all boys and girls aged 15 and 16 to attend a meeting in the same hall at 20.00 hours and all others would go to bed by 19.30.”

He paused, adjusted his wounded leg and resumed: “At 20.15 hours our guest entered the hall and we gave him a long applause and greeted him with the slogans: ‘Viva Markos! Long live the CPG! Long live free Greece!...’ The minister then took his place and sat down, after which we also sat down. He then stood up again, towering like a mountain over us children and in a quiet voice began to tell us about DAG’s combat successes over the monarchist forces. He said: ‘DAG has in its hands 25% of the whole of Greece. Each village has a popular government, national boards, national courts, rural cooperatives, established national hospitals and cultural and folk societies. The people feel free and we estimate that within days the cities Lerin, Kostur, Voden and others will fall into our hands. We know that 1949 will be the YEAR OF VICTORY!’ We were so happy at that point that we began calling out: ‘Long live free Greece! Markos won! Markos is victorious!’ Then after we had finished yelling he resumed talking:

‘Dear youth, sons and daughters of our heroic fighters of the democratic army, I was sent here by the Politburo of the CPG Central Committee and by our Interim democratic government to invite you all to come back to our fatherland and join our holy struggle which is in need of young people, young fighters, worthy of their fathers and mothers who

regularly achieve combat success against our enemy the Monarcho-Fascists.’ The Minister took a sip of water from his glass and with a hidden smile on his face, continued: ‘By coming back you will have the chance to see your beautiful villages, your parents, relatives and all your friends. Therefore I urge you all to ‘voluntarily’ return to free Greece. Please step up and sign up for your return right here.’ The Minister had a list with all our names on it.”

The wounded young commander was in pain. He paused to regain his strength and began talking again: “We all lined up one behind the other and signed the list beside our names. The list contained the signatures of 31 boys and 8 girls. After that our guest addressed us again: ‘I want to let you know that volunteers from Romania and Bulgaria have already returned to ‘free Greece’ and, in a relatively short time, had been issued weapons and have joined the famous ranks of DAG as regular soldiers. Many of your friends from the other democratic countries are also on their way to our homeland and shortly you will be able to join them. But I want one thing from you: do not say a word to anyone about your repatriation. Not to the locals, not to your caregivers, not to anyone, understand? If anyone does, he or she will be considered an enemy of our holy struggle.’ The next day, after lunch, we ‘volunteers’ were gathered together and the director told us:

‘From now on until you depart, every night you will have night training in the field to learn how to fight at night. Not a word to anyone about your return to Greece, not even to your younger brothers and sisters. Anyone who dares to speak will be expelled from the dormitory and severely punished,’ he said to us.”

At that very moment we heard a loud shot. Zhitarov suddenly grabbed me by my arm and we both dropped into the ditch and ran like mad. On the way we ran into Traiko Bogdanov. He lay there dead beside his son’s dead body. He had shot himself because he could not bear the pain... I tried to delete this horrific memory from my mind; seeing a father and son ending up like this...

4.

Leonidas, mad and upset, said: “The number of reasons for abusing child soldiers are many. Here is what the Party has been saying: ‘We are conducting a revolution and we need to give them Kalashnikovs in place of notebooks. They are inexpensive to maintain because most eat less than adults and are more obedient. They can easily be mobilized and ordered around. The capitalists are doing the same thing. They can be sent to the front and assigned various functions in military service. They can serve as living land mine detectors. They can be used in the camps to perform slave labour, prepare meals and clean. They are docile and more easily

manipulated and because of that they will work and do jobs that adults refuse to do.’ This is disgusting!”

Leonidas looked me in the eye and continued: “According to claims made by psychologists, children can easily be turned into killing machines because they are capable of ignoring reality much easier than adults. ‘Child soldiers are very good fighters because they don’t think of anything else but their own task. They fight with no thought of returning to their families and they are not afraid of anything,’ said a rebel officer in the Congo. There are always a few children who may voluntarily join the fighters, either to exact revenge or due to hunger. But in order to become such fighters they first need to be physiologically broken and brainwashed. They do that by putting the children through terrible initiation rituals which include forcing them to kill and torture ordinary innocent people...”

Leonidas paused, thought for a moment and continued: “But here is how the Party and its Leader Zahariadis looked at this issue during our historic military meeting held just recently: ‘It was noted that the Leader experiences pleasure when he leads others and when he attracts their attention. He, as a youth, experienced joy in his superiority over others. Step by step, in an informal way, Zahariadis climbed his way up to the top of the leadership during his career with the Party. He made progress on his own like a feudal lord. This was his way... That’s how Communists are groomed... Anyone who is familiar with the soul of a young man will know that the young man likes to hear stories about combat and fighting. All revolutions have been led by young people...”

Leonidas smiled and said: “His fast climb to the top has turned his head, given him invisible powers and brought him success, but in the wrong direction. It has made him reckless in thinking that he can handle military and strategic issues. During one of the sessions the Leader, to appease everyone’s concerns, took the position of a wise man and said: ‘When a victory is described in detail, it ceases to be distinguishable from a defeat. In both cases you have losses but here you have described the losses in such detail that you took away the meaning of victory. Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism always pushes a person, as a conscious creature, before itself, to constantly set goals and objectives. Struggling to achieve these goals, the person looks into the future and thus denies the present. Once a person accomplishes one task, they seek another and so on until the end of life. We are revolutionaries and do not expect new visions and new victories for communism! That is important for the young. They are the future of this country. The realization of these visions is actually the realization of our goals, the happiness of mankind and the working class.’ That’s what Zahariadis said.”

Leonidas paused, took a deep breath and then said: “The biggest fear in the Leader’s mind was negligence and the Party membership losing its class consciousness. At the end of his speech Zahariadis exclaimed: ‘Long

live the Red Army fighting for world peace, freedom, democracy, socialism and a bright future for humankind.’ Those were his last words.”

After the historic military meeting, the Leader (acting modestly, as if the entire world was silent) made changes to the military Headquarters and appointed Giorgios Gusias to the position of General. Gusias was an ignorant person and not respected by others. Some wondered how and why a shoemaker like him would be made a general and who had brought him here? And why was the Leader appointing ignorant people to important positions? Some were saying because it would be easier to remove them and others, upset and confused, remembered the saying in the Gospel: “The road to destruction is wide and long.”

* * *

After arriving at Headquarters, General Gusias changed the rules and replaced everyone with his own choice of people. The only one he did not replace was Samaridis whom he left in his old position and for whom he expressed peculiar respect. The General’s aim was to bring discord among his subordinates. His biggest dream was to create a network and to control everything to the smallest detail. Because he adopted new rules and methods for doing work, he opened new opportunities for, what he called “professional advancements.” So people had a choice to adapt to his rules and survive or be removed. For as long as the General’s “newly chosen” people accepted his rules and did not do a lot of “whispering”, the General was generous towards them and ready to wrap his short arms around them.

One of the high ranking officers that Gusias removed, after toying with the idea for days, called on Gusias to ask him how long he was going to hide the truth that he was incompetent as a military strategist and tactician. The officer said: “The ugly envy you carry inside of you is hidden in the form of fraud. You have expressed desire for something that does not belong to you and you feed off the successes of others... You may be faithful to the Party but everyone knows that you are only a shoemaker, but military science, knowledge of the theories of strategy and tactics, you have none.” Gusias blushed and reached for his revolver.

Noose – Chapter 16

End of the war: After being involved in a hellish war for eight hundred and seven days and after the Greek Civil War ended, I was disarmed in Vitkuki, Albania on August 31st, 1949. After that the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) gave me a one-way ticket on a boat trip to the USSR (October 24, 1949).

1.

It was past midnight when we passed through the village Breznitsa. We hiked uphill and behind us we left the church and cemetery where we buried Traiko Bogdanov and his son Giorgi. The moon looked serene as it radiated light over the land and was occasionally abstracted by dark lines of black clouds, smoke and dust. We were very tired and felt like the last ounce of strength had been sapped out of us. We maintained our courage and before dawn we arrived in a dense forest above the village Besfina. This was our designated destination. The next day we were expected to be at Peroo to mine the bridge after the withdrawal of our fighters, in order to stop the Burandari (government soldiers) from passing. There was no need to place guards on duty as we were far from the front line. But, as we lay there tired and exhausted, no one gave it a second thought to remove the backpack from his shoulder, loosen his belt of bullets, remove his boots, or express interest in finding a nice comfortable place to lie in the dense forest. Once we were given orders to rest, we all immediately dropped to the ground and fell into a deep sleep.

The next day it was already noon and no one in the camp had awakened from their deep sleep. We continued sleeping as if we were intoxicated by some strong narcotic. The rays of the August sun were mercilessly beating on our bodies, especially on my uncovered left leg. The sun was baking our bodies and our exposed faces. I was hot from top to bottom and still I was unable to wake up. It was perhaps because I felt that I was alive. It seemed to me as if I had fallen from the sky or from some unknown world, unable to sober up and find where I was. I made an effort to open my eyes, but without success. My eyes remain closed, glued.

One of my arms and both of my legs had fallen asleep, they were numb and stiff and I could not feel them. They felt like they were not mine. I could not move them at all. Suddenly I had this subconscious fear and hurriedly attempted to move my fingers but they felt as if they were not connected to me. I continued to struggle, attempting to move my legs but they too refused to obey me. In the absence of my arms and legs, I felt much lighter and if I had wings I felt as if I could fly. Of course, that's what happens to a person when he finds himself relieved from his incomparable past mental and physical fears, which we experienced in the

past seventy days and nights in the front line of Gramos and Vicho. But now we found ourselves in the rear and far from the front line.

I managed to get rid of the stiffness but with much difficulty. I struggled to recover and sober up quickly. I felt sluggish, afraid and hopeful, hopeful because I had slept for so long. Everything around us was lukewarm, impersonal, lacking conflict, lacking passion, no one was celebrating yet I was overcome with joy, as though reflecting the environment. Perhaps this was the most beautiful moment after the long battles at Gramos, where the sun had darkened, the soil had sunk and the land seemed to open up and swallow all that was creepy, crawly, swimming and flying in the face of the earth. Now it seemed like the good life was back and present all around us. We had all experienced bad days at the Gramos front line and we had left many of our comrades there forever.

The sun began to set over the peak of Mount Vrba. It slowly disappeared behind the mountain. The night that followed was hot and full of dark and eerie shadows cast by the dense trees in the moonlight. It seemed as if they were all watching us, staring at our faces. One of our miner (saboteur) platoons, under the command of Colonel Vratsano, was dispatched down the stony ground near the village L'k to take several rowboats and go to the bridge in Peroo. We managed to mine the bridge with more than enough explosives, just before dawn. After that we lay the cable under the road to a safe distance away and camouflaged it. We worked like it was just another ordinary job, even the refugees who walked by us ignored us. At that time the lake water level was low and a lot of mud had collected below the water and on the shoreline. In some places the mud was green with grass, reeds and young willow trees growing out of it. The water was clear and calm as it flowed from the little lake to the big lake in Lake Prespa. After that we hid in temporary trenches that we had dug for ourselves and stayed there until we received orders to activate the explosives.

2.

A decrepit, shaky old bald man, tired and exhausted from walking, passed by us and when he saw us sitting there said: "Run, flee to save yourselves, you are young and don't deserve to die. The Burandari (government soldiers) are coming, burning villages and killing people..." It is impossible not to have compassion for people suffering while fleeing from the war. A column of people all dressed in black walked towards the Yugoslav border. They were all silent and from time to time their dry eyes,

that could not shed any more tears, shed a drop of blood. Fear of being beaten or even killed by the Burandari, the refugees kept coming, marching in an endless column. I looked at the bluish smoke hovering in the distance and wondered what was burning. Then I remembered: early in the grey morning I had heard noises and the crowds began to appear, dark figures mixed with domestic animals running together. The crowd steadily grew larger like a ball of snow rolling down a slope. In the distance, people and animals flowed together like a colourful river as they crossed the narrow strip of land between the Prespa lakes.

They fled their homes half-dressed and dressed themselves as they ran down the road. There were women and children running as well as old people unsteady on their feet. Many of the old and very young looked weak and sickly. They roamed the stony and dusty roads screaming, crying and moaning with tortured souls and lacking sleep. They had left everything and fled in panic: before the burning, before the hanging and before the death of their loved ones. Thick smoke lingered above the ground burning the nostrils of all living beings. They fled slumped forward and left the bare hills, the brooks, the burning trees behind them. In their paths lay the bodies of mutilated dead fighters. The tongues of flames in the burning fires seemed to wave like the scarves of fairies at play. People, singed by the fires, coming out of the smoke were asking themselves, "Where to now?"

The soil looked wet, as if blown by the dry winds of spring which melted the snow over the black earth and soaked it with moisture. The people too were victimized by the war, beaten, killed and driven out of their homes leaving the soil soaked in blood. I heard noises, it was the crowing of ravens and death was slowly creeping along the ground following a man. Wrapped in a cloak of horrors, indifferent, impersonal, mute, a raw black hand reached for the man, but he fought back armed with determination, stepped up to the light of life and with the blood of his heart, moistened his lonely, unfamiliar long road... The fleeing women walked very slowly and often stopped when one of the mothers carrying a child retreated into the roadside bushes. I watched the women: frantic and hopeless, some dazed in confusion. They looked at each other with long faces and misty eyes but they did not speak. They all took something out from their bags, put it in their mouths and squeezed their jaws seeming as if they did it without blinking their eyelids.

For those who were not suffering from dysentery, the journey had turned into an endless, tiresome wait by the roadside, under a heavy trickle of rain. The air grew thick and grey and there was no place for happiness or sadness; everyone was plagued by despair. There was no one in the roadside meadows. One of the saddest sights was the case of the refugees when a woman told me: "When they were calling that the Burandari were coming my husband took two of our children and I took the other two. We

fled to escape. But in the scramble I dropped my youngest, that I was carrying. I could not go back quickly enough to save her. Now I had lost my husband and the other two, I don't know where they are." The woman cried and chewed her nails, walking aimlessly in circles, forgotten even by the wind that waved her skirt above her knees, forgotten by those fleeing.

She kept shouting: "I love her, I love her," over and over again telling us about the poor little trampled baby. She was holding the other one in her arms. She left during the night and died further up the road. An eerie restless silence covered our stretch of the road. The women looked frightened, confused and desperate. "What did the woman die from?" asked a pompous woman in uniform belonging to the AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front). "She has no wounds, she must have died of exhaustion," replied another woman walking barefoot and nodding her head. "Who is she?" asked another woman while staring at the dead body. The AFZH woman ordered the women to bury her at the side of the road and to continue walking while it was still night and before the airplanes come back and start attacking. But no matter how much one hurries, a person would want to hear, see and understand: "Why does man torment man?"

There will never be happiness for these people; the every day kind of happiness experienced at home is gone forever... They no longer have a place to call home, a homeland. The most needed place, right? But be it as it may, none of them will forget to shout: "Where are you, where are you my homeland?" None of them had left of their own will... And behold, they ceased to be trees with deep roots in their homeland. They ceased to be fertile roots. Up until then they were only interested in their piece of land, on which they had grown like trees with deep roots. They loved their piece of land immensely because it nourished them. And now the wind had blown them everywhere like leaves ripped out from a tree... suddenly these people were gone like water spilled on sand... they mourned their expulsion that carried them like clouds in a violent windstorm. It is not okay for a person to have his thread of life torn apart. But what can he do? What can he do when his experiences are strung like pearls of various beads, white, black, heavy and light? These kinds of pearls are unique, unlike any other, but may resemble those of many other people, but not by weight and colour. And now these pearls will be strung out of this life... and it will be difficult for a person from one country to build a nest in a new country.

3.

The wind was blowing from the south carrying the loud explosions of weapons, giving us headaches, insomnia and causing us great irritation. The bomber airplane was flying slowly. The noise it made came in hard

and distinct waves. It circled above Peroo and then dropped a few bursts at the column of refugees and partisans as they were withdrawing from the front lines. At the same time we could hear several anti-aircraft guns firing and a moment later the plane dropped something black from its tail and began to lose control. Moments later there was an explosion. After 12:38 pm, after the airplane had crashed in the rocks above the bridge, there were no other bombers for a long while and the column of refugees continued to climb the uphill unabated. The only thing boiling after that was the sadness in the people for having to leave their homes.

A large column of tanks and armoured cars appeared under the village Rabi on August 14, 1949 at 15:30 pm and headed straight for the bridge. Less than 5 minutes later Colonel Vratsanos, stationed at a monitoring point, in a sharp tone of voice gave the order to immediately activate the explosives. Suddenly there was a blinding flash of light as if the heavens had just opened up and dropped hell down on the ground. The entire place became hot and I felt like I was standing in front of a burning outdoor village oven. Then a strong explosion was heard that shook the earth. It frightened me and I thought this was my end. By instinct I jumped onto the soft soil, grabbed hold of some reeds and ended up on top of some bulrush, alive and well. Stones, reeds and other debris, pushed by the explosion, flew over me as I lay there silent, staring at the bridge slowly falling into the water. The beams holding up the bridge broke and the bridge fell into the water. Water from the small lake quickly rushed in, mixing with blood, dead bodies and military equipment.

The collapse of the bridge robbed our opponent of the opportunity to pass his great army in pursuit of our extermination. It also robbed all those people hiding in the reeds from the opportunity of escaping. Everything in the people broke down after that; their love and hate, their joy and sadness, their happiness and pain and their hope and hopelessness. I left the trench that I was in and walked down a road that led to an unknown world. I was touched by time as I drifted across the expanse looking for an exit to escape. I watched my own hand go down and touch the soil as I prayed looking for answers... And then, strangely I did not ask myself, and now I wonder why and for who did we blow up the bridge that linked our people together! At one point it seemed to me that I too was involved in that great evil. We were responsible for cutting short the lives of those who stayed and of those who fled.

Before the bridge detonated and went down, a woman in black stood at the chasm for a long time holding a slender bundle of flowers. She stood there in silence with her eyes open and arms spread out, desperately waiting for someone to return without losing hope. I wondered: "Whose

mother was she?" The night became black and still she waited in darkness with a painful desire, but for whom? I don't know. I also don't know why the person she was looking for crossed the bridge and she stayed behind. This bothered me and it stayed with me for years making me wonder, "Who was that woman? Was she a mother looking for her child?" Sometimes when I hear someone scream my thoughts return to that time and place and I find it difficult to escape it, to forget it. I hold my ears until they turn blushing red and say: "My hands are clean." I repeat so that my homeland can hear me: "My hands are clean!"

We lived alienated lives, just waiting for time to pass. I could not forget those days, not even in the deep winter during dry nights in Tashkent... There was no night that I was not reminded of the smell of sweat and blood on things scattered all over the road. People walked barefoot on broken glass and the wounded and crippled, sitting like rocks on the roadside, prayed for a quick death. Only the mothers were active, going with their children looking for shelter. Here we witnessed a man's painful steps, sorrowful and uncertain of his next station in life. In front of him were human footprints stretching forever, they were going somewhere... wounded and mutilated people hid in the reeds in a daze, looking like frightened frogs that had just jumped out of the water and rolled in the mud and hid in the ooze while red-hot bombs were falling in the lake.

Like a migrating flock of birds in spring, the refugees, numbering in the thousands, lined the edge of the Albanian border and turned their eyes towards their homes. And as they looked at the billowing smoke in the distance they said their goodbyes... they were very sad, fatigued and exhausted... They lay on the rocky ground in the heat of the sun for days waiting for morning to get warmed and for the evening to get cooled, sunburned they waited for their destiny. Most of them were homeless people whose houses had been burned to the ground; they were elderly people, women and children and a fighter here and there separated from his or her unit, demolished in battle. The days dragged on and the people were getting hungry. The blowing wind howled and screamed and brought the taste of ash to our mouths. The howling wind made us feel infinite sorrow. The wind howled and whirled all around us, smelling of burning.

In the distance we could see what looked like a lit torch, it was the movement of the water in Lake Prespa. Several rocks, as if wanting to witness the horror, poked their heads out of the water disturbing its bright surface. Abandoned fishing boats lay in the sand being splashed by the lake's waves. At that moment I felt like my heart was filled with great sorrow. This was the first time I ever heard the womb of the earth speak to

me saying: "Farewell my son, farewell my child, know the time has come, you must go, go... go."

The big guns went silent. The dogs stopped barking. I turned north and left everything behind. It was night. I looked at the stars and took the starlit road. Step by step I walked. I ate a whole bag of green apples and with fear in my heart I boarded the ship "Krasnaia Zvezda" on the way to the USSR. All I remember was my love for my native home.

Noose – Chapter 17

Unbeknownst to ordinary mortals, for mysterious and unexplained reasons, many things have happened to us Macedonians, some good but mostly bad. These things are historic events that have also happened to us before and the reason they happened to us again is because we have been too lazy to have learned about them. Then, when we discover that these things have happened to us before, we tend to brush them aside and call them coincidences. Instead of relying on the experiences and wisdom of our ancestors, we have allowed ideological activists and strangers to burden us and warmongers to bring us long lasting tears. Now, after half a century of smouldering under the ideological web, we are finally looking for our story but in the secret files of other people's politics who made a tomb for heroes out of Aegean Macedonia during the Greek Civil War (1945-1949).

1. Overview (historical chronicle of war and politics): Yugoslavia had continued to pursue strategic interest in Aegean Macedonia as an option. Macedonian politics, responsible for endorsing Yugoslavia's existence during the Second World War, were aimed at gaining control over the territory of Vardar Macedonia and remaining within the new communist Yugoslavia. The recognition of the Macedonian people by the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) as a separate nationality was ideally suited for domestic purposes since the Macedonians were neither Bulgarians nor Serbians. This of course went against the wishes of the Bulgarians who denied the existence of Macedonians and renewed the Macedonian hatred for the Serbs. As a unique nation, the Macedonians earned the right to join their fraternal Slavic peoples (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Montenegrins) in the Yugoslav federation. The other CPY goal, regarding its politics towards Macedonia, was to expand Yugoslav communist hegemony. Tito's post-war aims were not modest. He wanted Juliska Krajina including Trieste from Italy, almost half of the Austrian province of Carinthia, the inclusion of Albania in the Yugoslav federation and the Greek and Bulgarian part of Macedonia, and sought to occupy them by military means if necessary.

Macedonia's new politics towards the CPY gave the Yugoslav communists an ideal weapon for attaining their goals. By recognizing the Macedonian identity and Macedonian culture as unique, gained them the attention of the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia who for years were under pressure by Greece to be Hellenized. The campaign for the reunification of all of Macedonia was started by the Yugoslav partisan leaders sometime during the Second World War, even before they gained control in Vardar Macedonia. The fluid and chaotic conditions prevailing in the Balkans after the Axis power withdrawal incited the movement. In the final months of consolidating his power in Yugoslavia and Vardar Macedonia, Tito sought to use his advantages, but was wary of intervening

in the Greek situation because his relations with the Greek communists had become strained. In May 1944 all fighters belonging to the Macedonian units (which ELAS threatened to liquidate) joined Goche's SNOF units.

While Goche was having a quarrel with ELAS headquarters about what to do with the weapons seized from the fighters, Yugoslavia sent its agents and small units throughout Northern Greece (Macedonia) to call on the Macedonians to join Tito's army. This started a mass exodus of Macedonians leaving the ranks of ELAS and transferring to Tito's army. The Greek Partisans reacted with reprisals against the Macedonian people. Worse than that, the Greek Partisans captured all Macedonian fighters left in their ranks and interned them in southern Greece. They then declared the entire promotional material from Yugoslavia illegal.

So, what was the diplomatic game in early 1945, just after the Second World War, for the future of Macedonia?

Where did the top leadership of Federal Yugoslavia stand regarding the Macedonians? First evidence of this came to light when Marshal Tito gave an interview for the "New York Times" in Moscow on April 26, 1945 and said: "If the Macedonians in Greece express a desire to unite with other Macedonians, Yugoslavia will respect their wishes." Here is what Ivan Shubashich, Tito's opposition and then Prime Minister in Federal Yugoslavia, was thinking in early 1945 regarding the Macedonians. He was thinking of forcibly evicting the entire Macedonian population out of Aegean Macedonia, which he estimated consisted of around 100,000 people, which in his opinion would resolve the "Macedonian question"; a big problem for the development of good neighbourly relations between Greece and Yugoslavia.

During a diplomatic reception, when Shubashich was Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, he explained his revised plan for Yugoslav Macedonia to Alexander C. Kirk, an American political adviser, who at the time was stationed at the joint military command in Europe. Kirk, on February 26, 1945, then sent a telegram to the U.S. Secretary of State describing Shubashich's plan for Macedonia as follows: "He said he is of the opinion that there will be an inevitable problem in Macedonia... He said that nobody questioned the desire to free Macedonia within Federal Yugoslavia. He also explained that Bulgaria will not oppose this plan, and argued that the issue with Greek Macedonia will be a bigger problem. He said that about 100,000 Macedonians lived in Greek Macedonia who would be moved to Yugoslav Macedonia so that the problem with Greece will be resolved." (Source: American diplomatic history, documents kept at the University of Wisconsin.)

The Communist Party of Greece (CPG) was quite upset with the Yugoslav flirting because the reunification of Macedonia was a delicate subject for the Greek communists. In June 1944 the Headquarters of the

Macedonian Partisans in Yugoslavia issued new instructions to its activists and military units inside Greek Macedonia, warning them not to let “Macedonian issues” spoil their fraternal relations with ELAS. But at the same time they were reminded that the resulting National freedom and equality (now experienced by Yugoslav Macedonians) was a desire for all Macedonian people. The dispute between the Greek Communists and Goche came to a climax in October when he found himself face to face being pursued by ELAS units. Instead of fighting and risking bringing the war home, Goche, along with 800 of his people, crossed the border and went to Yugoslavia. Unfortunately Tito treated Goche and his people with the same suspicions as he would treat any other pro-autonomist group of Macedonians. After its arrival, over the next several months, the group was placed in semi-internment and the year after the CPY began to rely on it for its own operations in Greek Macedonia. It was exactly from these people that the organizations NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) were formed in Skopje on April 23, 1945.

Over time the CPY seemed to have slowly lost interest in Greek Macedonia. The only exception was the press attack against Papandreou's government in November 1944 in response to the unleashing of terror against the Macedonian people. It was a bitter editorial attack against Papandreou's politics but beyond that it did not care about what was boiling in the Greek pot. There were several factors that influenced this change of attitude in Yugoslavia. At the beginning of 1945, Tito, who at that time was in close contact with Moscow, may have concluded that it was more important for Greek Communists to come to power than the desires of the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia. Also, all Macedonian combat units in Greece were strongly inclined towards autonomy and Tito was somewhat limited by the existence of Shubashich’s rival government which still enjoyed some support from the Western Powers. At the time caution was a necessary factor. Only after all these circumstances changed did the CPY reactivate its concerns for Greek Macedonia.

2.

The author ΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΑΝΤΑΙΟΣ in his book “ΝΙΚΟΣ ΖΑΧΑΡΙΑΔΗΣ - ΘΥΤΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΘΥΜΑ” on page 414 describes events about the general secretary of the CPG Nikos Zahariadis as follows: “In 1924, when Zahariadis and a group of party cadres who had completed their studies in the (KOUTV) Party high school in Moscow, returned from the USSR to Greece, the Third Extraordinary Congress of the Socialist Party of Greece was held and during that Congress they renamed their Communist Party to the Communist Party of Greece (CPG). That Congress also cleared up some issues of internal opposition, accepted the decisions of the Third Communist International Congress and those of the Balkan Communist

Conferences. It specifically accepted the decisions of the Seventh Conference of the Balkan Communist Federation during which the ‘Macedonian identity’ was recognized. And this was the first NOOSE placed around the neck of the CPG in the name of the ‘International Proletariat’.”

Zahariadis at the time made mention that we Macedonians, may the lord keep us safe, did not believe in such treachery. At that time, Zahariadis, for a person in political power, was very popular with the Macedonians. Many Macedonians were happy and felt lucky to have such a leader to guide them on the road to victory. Macedonians sang songs about him, both when they were happy and when they were angry. And I can’t emphasize enough how much that “CIVILIZED HYPOCRACY” of ours hurts me today! And as Zahariadis explained to the author Anteos: “Outside of the Bulgarian delegation, Yugoslav and Greek delegates voted for granting Macedonia and Thrace autonomy, believing that it was their International duty to do so and to complicate the Bulgarian views of these regions.” (The great revolutionary Georgi Dimitrov was head of the Comintern and Bulgaria. Georgi Dimitrov, whose name can be found in all encyclopedias around the world, comes from a Macedonian family. He was head of the Communist International in Moscow and became head of the Bulgarian state in post-war Bulgaria.)

Unfortunately, it did not take too long for the CPG to withdraw from its previous position on the Macedonian national question. The only reason, it would appear, that the CPG got involved in the Macedonian question in the first place, was to serve its own interests in the development of the Greek liberation movement and to place it under its control. The CPG worked hard, even through SNOF, to attract the Macedonian population into EAM and the CPG and to convince it to fight for its strategic goals. The depth of the Macedonian tragedy in the Greek Civil War (1945-1949) was a result of Zahariadis’s many manipulations which were actually in favour of the Greek government. His actions certainly proved to the Greeks that the NOOSE he was preparing was not for the Greek people but for the Macedonian people.

ZAHARIADIS’S RECOGNITIONS AND DISCLAIMERS

It was during the CPG’s Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee, held on January 30-31, 1949, that the slogan “an Independent and United Macedonian State within a Balkan Federation” was ejected. Then on February 3rd, 1949, again under Zahariadis’s initiative, a NOF Second Plenum of the Central Council was held, during which the new principles of NOF were proclaimed, calling for the Macedonians to remain under Greece.

The following was stated in the NOF Second Plenum resolution: “The Second Congress will be the Congress during which the new programming principles of NOF will be proclaimed in which the age-old aspiration of our (Macedonian) people, i.e. the unification of Macedonia into a single independent state, will be realized. The Macedonian state will be equal to all other states within a Federation of People’s Republics encompassing all Balkan people. This will be the Macedonian people’s grand achievement after many years of struggling and bloody fighting. The Macedonian people’s uprising will be proclaimed during the NOF Second Congress where all forces will be tested and the Macedonian people will be united around NOF. Then, together in a joint struggle with the Greek heroic people, they will bring victory against the Monarcho-Fascists and the American imperialists. The Second Congress will especially focus on the enslaved Macedonian population in cities such as Lerin, Kostur, Voden, Enidzhe Vardar, Gumendzhe, Seres and Drama where they will rise to an irreconcilable struggle against Monarcho-Fascism and the Anglo-American occupiers and quickly gain their freedom and fulfill their deeply rooted aspirations in their struggle to create a People’s Republic of Macedonia”. This meant opening new horizons for canceling the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest and Macedonia’s division!

DISCLAIMER OF BALKAN FEDERATION AND TRAMPLED PROMISES

On March 7, 1949 the CPG Central Committee released a statement denying that there ever were any CPG decisions made regarding the Macedonian question during the CPG’s Fifth Plenum or during NOF’s Second Congress held on February 7th, 1949. So, once again history should have taught us that promises made during war are not always what they seem. What was Zahariadis’s motive for all this? Was he attempting to evaluate our relative maturity and find out what we actually wanted with regards to our national question after a three-year struggle? Because the actions of NOF and AFZH, under the CPG, from April 23, 1945 to October 1946, remained unclear for the CPG and for the communists in Greece. Zahariadis, responding to criticism, confirmed that he had a dual purpose when he had done all this: First, he wanted to include the Macedonians en masse in his struggle and, second, he wanted to neutralize any separatist inclinations in the group of former Macedonian NOF and AFZH leaders who had fled to Yugoslavia and were calling for Macedonian fighters to desert DAG (Democratic Army of Greece). They had no business bleeding in someone else’s war.

In fact, the harshest opposition against the Macedonian involvement in the Greek Civil War came from those who had organized NOF in the first place and who were sent to Aegean Macedonia a year before the Greek

Civil War started. Their argument was that Macedonian involvement would result in “ethnic cleansing” and other genocidal reprisals against the Macedonian population, which would affect all neighbouring Balkan countries. And just as predicted, at the end of the war, the Macedonian people in Greece did experience genocide. Meaning, Yugoslavia (the Communist Party of Macedonia and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia) and Greece (the CPG) were against any border revision and demanded strict observation of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest.

During a CPG delegation visit to Belgrade, led by Miltiadis Porfirogenis, member of the CPG Central Committee and Minister of Justice in the Provisional Government, A. Rankovich, the host of the delegation, was quoted as saying: “...creating a Macedonian state within a Balkan Federation would be an act directed against Yugoslavia’s integrity.” (Borba, April 27, 1949). There are analysts who also believed that Yugoslavia incited the Macedonians in order to bring the Soviet Union into the Balkans! But this was denied by Stalin himself and later by Tito. So the only option left was to “let the fires burn further...” With regards to this Stalin said: “Let these acts remain partisan, non-violent, slow, but let them poke about in capitalism.” Tito too initially shared Stalin’s position on this and wanted to stir things to the max. After that everything became clear...

Zahariadis continued to manipulate the Macedonian people until the last days of his political power in which he lavished as General Secretary of the CPG. In March 1956 after Soviet intervention, during the CPG’s Sixth Plenum, Zahariadis apologized by saying: “If I had been informed about Tito’s actions then as I am informed today we would have never reached for our weapons and the war would have not taken place.” Zahariadis was relieved of duty as General Secretary and later was stripped of his membership from the Communist Party of Greece. After that he was sent into captivity in Siberia until his tragic death in Sorgut in 1973.

3.

The Greek government had aims to commit genocide against the Macedonian people right from the start. The Greek government formed in exile in Cairo, headed by Papandreou, requested from the CPG and ELAS, particularly from CPG secretary Siantos that he “liquidate all non-Greek (Slavo-phone) political organizations and military formations in northern Greece. It would be a historical error of the Greek people and of the Greek state if the Slavo-phone formations of SNOF and SOB participate in the

liberation of cities like Kostur, Lerin, Voden and other territories now occupied by the Germans and Italians.”

REACTIONS AND OTHER EVENTS IN THAT PERIOD IN GREECE

1. On April 17th, 1946 the Solun rightist newspaper “Nea Alithia” (New Truth) published an article entitled “Our Sudeten”, in which it wrote about the Macedonians and qualified them as Sudeten and as such, the newspaper said, ...in the interest of peace and security in Greece they need to be liquidated.”

2. The newspaper “Ethnikos Kirikas” wrote: “Greece should soon expel 80,000 Slavo-Macedonians”. The same was said in the weekly Republican newspaper “Eleftheros Typos” on January 28th, 1946 in the article entitled: “Let the Slavo-Macedonians leave our Macedonia - let them go wherever they want to go.”

THE POSITION OF THE WESTERN POWERS WAS CLEAR, BUT THE RUSSIAN POSITION WAS MYSTERIOUS AT BEST: “LET THEM MUCK AROUND IN CAPITALISM, BUT NOT FOR VICTORY” AND SUPPORT THEM – “ONLY BY WORDS”. YUGOSLAVIA HAD A DOUBLE POLICY – IN PUBLIC IT RESPECTED THE INTEGRITY OF GREECE, AND IN SECRET IT URGED THE MACEDONIANS FROM AEGEAN MACEDONIA TO MAINTAIN THE ARMED STRUGGLE.

The major allied forces, in principle, did not oppose the creation of a Macedonian state, but disagreed among themselves on what a future Macedonian state would look like. The USSR pressed for a merger of the Macedonian territory within Federal Yugoslavia. The United States and Great Britain did not want unification of Macedonian territories because it was not in Greece’s favour. So, in order to prevent any plans of reuniting Macedonian territories, Britain took it upon itself to play the main diplomatic role in deciding the future of the Macedonian state. After that the United States took over Britain’s role and followed the same diplomatic path. Here is what Barns, an American diplomat in Sofia, had to say in a telegram to the United States, sent on January 26, 1945, whose content was very familiar to the Bulgarian government: “His Majesty’s Government is not of the opinion to approve the exclusive formation of a federation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. But we are ready to agree with the federation of all the Balkan states composed by current allies and their enemies, and with the possibility of involving Turkey. Also, His Majesty strongly opposes the creation of a United Macedonia, which

would include Greek territory, but we are prepared to endorse a future Macedonian state within Yugoslavia...

His Majesty has made it clear that any annexation of Bulgarian territory to the federal Yugoslav state of Macedonia without UN consent would be considered an act for which His Majesty is of the opinion that the Bulgarian government has no right to do". The British threat against unification of Macedonian territories belonging to Greece and Bulgaria was accepted by the United States as a perfect act, even though the United States argued that the desire of the local people should be respected. In a telegram, dated February 24th, 1945 sent to the British Embassy in Washington, the U.S. replied that "the U.S. position is that the prewar borders of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece on Macedonian territory must be respected. Revisions can only be made by desire from the population and with international support."

As can be seen here, the United States, at least in principle, showed some respect for the desires of the local population, but at the same time gave in to British pressure and broke its own principles allowing Britain to dictate policy in the Balkans. "The U.S. government agrees," said the telegram, "that in the view of the British government there is no legitimate basis for supporting Macedonia to become an independent and sovereign state, as part of Yugoslavia or of a great Slavic Union, and to give it Greek territory when that territory is understandably Macedonian." By this act Britain won over America to protect its pet, Greece. The British pressured the allies, as well as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and strongly shook apart all Yugoslav-Bulgarian plans for a United Macedonia in Federal Yugoslavia. In conclusion, British political influence on the future of Macedonia and the Macedonian population under Greece, sadly, legitimized the division of Macedonia.

And what was the British Ambassador's position in Athens? Mr. P.A. Liper, back in November 1944, suggested that 120,000 Slavic - Macedonians be resettled north of Greece's northern border. Liper made this suggestion to Anthony Eden, UK Minister of Foreign Affairs, in a letter dated November 24th, 1944. He said that this was necessary in order to "cleanse Greece" of its Slavic minority. Because without it, avoiding amputation of the Slavic territory in Western Macedonia and its annexation to the Slavic Federation would be virtually impossible. And if this land is lost it would be an economic disaster for Greece. (FO 371/43649 HP 00201 R. 20431/1009/67.)

3. Historical data also shows that in 1945 and after the Second World War, 35,000 ethnic Albanians (Chamuriots) of the Muslim religion, who were placed under Italian command, were driven out from Greece for allegedly cooperating with the occupying German authorities. Greece then, with the following excuse, declared that this chapter of its history regarding Albanian-Greek relations was closed: "They cooperated with the

Italian-German occupiers during the Second World War and these war criminals were punished under Greek law.”

Noose – Chapter 18

Roots of evil and dark secrets of genocide hovered over the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia during the Greek Civil War (1945-1949).

1.

The train headed for Belgrade had just arrived at platform number two in Moscow. There were many people on the platform. Beside me there was a middle-aged man holding a beautiful blond woman by the shoulder. He gazed far into the distance and looked like he was daydreaming. He was sad at times, seeming as if he was saying goodbye to Moscow for the last time. I was with a group of “wanderers” (Greek Civil War refugees) returning from Tashkent to Macedonia. We stood in front of a train car and waited for the conductor to open the doors so that we could board the train. When we were seated in our compartment I noticed that the man that I had been watching outside was sitting with us. The woman he was with kept staring at me (the man, whose hand she held under her arm, probably said something to her). She was dressed in old style Russian clothing from head to toe. I suddenly felt awkward and strong feelings began to rise in me as the man kept staring at me. I was sitting opposite to him and at one point I smiled. There is much charm in a smile I thought to myself. We all spoke Russian in the compartment but at one point the man remarked: “How did the Lerin dialect find itself in the Russian language?” he asked. I looked at the man and thought to myself: strange..., this man looks like he belongs to the Bogdanov family...

I looked at his handsome, serene wrinkle-free forehead and at his hand placed on his knee. I smiled a little but I was simply stunned by his likeness to the Bogdanovs. “I am Pavle Bogdanov. Do I know you?” he asked me. I smiled and said, “Know me? I am Yane Ognianov.” Bogdanov thought for a moment, bowed his head and then, with a serene look in his eyes, examined my entire face. By then the train had departed. Bogdanov began to speak but was addressing no one in particular. “I don’t believe this is real,” he said to himself in a quiet voice and continued, “I can not believe that I have just met my late sister Lena’s lovely boyfriend here in Moscow.” He turned to the beautiful blond woman who happened to be his wife, as I later found out, and said: “If my sister Lena was still alive maybe Yane would have been our brother-in-law. Bogdanov’s blue eyes were directed at me when, with immense sadness, he said: “But unfortunately the war did its thing. So much misfortune and so many countless fates in the world and nothing, as if nothing mattered about us Macedonians. We were so helpless when we were faced with such great malice. I know everything about my mother Lina and about my sister Lena, but I know

nothing about my brothers Vasil and Mito and absolutely nothing about my father Lambro.”

He paused for a moment and continued: “So very little is known about the Macedonian tragedy, but from historical documents it is safe to say that I now know who was responsible for hanging and stretching the ideological chain of communism around our necks. Forged by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and tied around our necks by Kulishevski, this chain was the cruelest, bloodiest and most ungodly part of the Greek Civil War. It was a slave chain – still unclear to this day. It created a new way of identifying Macedonians: ‘Who do you belong to and who are you?’ The struggle for the ‘new reformation’ required servitude from us Macedonians,” said Pavle Bogdanov - a senior officer and graduate of the USSR “Frunze” military academy. After the end of the Second World War Bogdanov, along with many other young officers from Tito’s army belonging to the “Aegean Brigade”, as well as other officers from all over Yugoslavia, were among the first to be sent to the “Frunze” military academy. But during the time of the Imformburo (when Stalin was squabbling with Tito) he opted for Stalin and remained in Moscow where he worked for the Institute of Military and Political Sciences.

2.

“At the end of the war everything began to come out; all the fateful secrets about the Macedonians: wars, terrorism, civil unrest and all the things that had caused temporary disorders. But eventually, as it turned out, it was discovered that all these activities were waves of planned globalization (a division of spheres of influence) after the Second World War. In fact communism was attractive for many reasons, including the idea of universal justice and humanitarian social relations. It was the answer to the great World War crisis and to the spiritual crisis after the First World War, and later to the genocide of the Nazis and to the conviction that the end of Western dominance over the world was approaching. At the end, we found ourselves in a world divided by the Yalta Agreement, communism was for some the only realistic choice for central Europe,” concluded Bogdanov. I remember his eyes staring at me with a sincere and kind look as he spoke. I was convinced that he knew the truth about our dire fate so I decided to ask him a few questions:

“What do you know about the Macedonian organization NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front)?” I asked. “What expectations and what limits to those expectations did these Organizations actually have for the Macedonian people from the outcome of the Greek Civil War? Did these Macedonian organizations have a vision of where they wanted to go? Why were these Organizations not called ‘Macedonian’, i.e. MNOF and MAFZH, since they were calling

exclusively upon the Macedonian people to go to war en masse? Can we Macedonians, even now after the Greek Civil War has ended, find out who started this ‘Macedonian syndrome’ calling for our self-sacrifice that took place from 1945 to 1949? Did our bloody story, the story of the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia begin with the illegal decisions of NOF and AFZH? What exactly was the plan for NOF and AFZH when they were formed in Skopje under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM)? Did the leadership of NOF and AFZH, perhaps unconsciously, by order of strangers, import the “revolution” to Greek occupied Macedonia!? And through NOF and AFZH the good old principle ‘if you are not with us you are against us’ was applied? Was ideological activism an alibi for further destruction of the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia? What exactly happened to us? Why and for what reason was this need for ‘massive retaliation’? Tell me, are we Macedonians responsible for this disastrous venture!?”

Pavle Bogdanov gently adjusted himself and with a serious expression on his face, said: “The Civil War in Greece actually showed itself to be a dirty war, a part of many unclear reasons which turned out to be deadly for the Macedonians at the red gallows. There was no dual leadership in spite of NOF and AFZH’s propaganda that they were a military and a political factor. The NOF and AFZH leadership followed foreign directives and did not know where they were going. They had no idea why they pushed the Macedonian people into the war. When the war ended they had no idea where their people ended up and they themselves did not know where they were. They were following foreign directives and all the time they were traveling without a compass. The reason they were not called MNOF and MAFZH, it would appear, is because they were not indigenous organizations created by the Macedonian people. We, regarding the Greek Civil War had two stories: One story is that the CPY and the CPM formed NOF and AFZH and pushed us into the war! But these organizations were not indigenous and not born of the real Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia. They were created by the CPY when the CPM was under the influence of the CPY and was unable to do anything to prevent it, but at the same time the CPM did not have enough knowledge of what was going to happen. It did not know of the planned genocidal catastrophe that awaited the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia.”

Bogdanov paused for a moment, thought, and continued: “The other story is that the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), which the entire time led us as Slavo-Macedonians, demanded of NOF and AFZH that we Macedonians give them our total loyalty and sacrifice ourselves for them. Then at the end of the war, they accused the NOF and AFZH leaders of being Tito’s agents. In other words they ideologically and slyly used us and then dumped us all over the world. In fact there is only one truth: the

ones that began the genocide and the others that carried it out, through combat and ruthless manipulation. It was an artful lure to sacrifice the Macedonian people.” Puzzled, I asked: “Are you saying that NOF and AFZH were just a mobilizing service rather than a political or military factor? And the people were lied to?”

“Yes!” he said. “Those organizations never represented any factor; they just served the Greek leaders who fought the war. NOF and AFZH accepted their naïveté and carelessness about their own destiny and made decisions that helped strangers organize and carry out ‘soft’ ethnic cleansing. They unwittingly de-populated the Macedonian people from the Greek occupied part of Macedonia. They were not aware of the limits as to what was possible and what the Macedonian people actually could gain from this war. NOF and AFZH, through the instructions of strangers, violently thrust the ‘red stake’ into the hearts of the Macedonian villagers in Greek occupied Macedonia. Zahariadis personally manipulated the Macedonian people with the Macedonian question, especially during the Greek Civil War and that was because the Macedonian politicians, since the beginning of the war, by directive, worked as subjects of the CPY.”

Bogdanov paused for a moment, looked directly at me and then continued: “Then came the internal schism and they began to attack one another. At the end they fought among themselves to save their own heads. At the end of the war their patriotic loyalty compelled them to revert back to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia or become victims of the CPG. And that also happened. This shows us not to expect anything from a person who does not fight for the interests of his or her own people, especially if that person has entered into some sort of outside communist collective. We Macedonians failed even before we become aware of our national faults. Our people got stuck in the gap between the roles of victims and winners. The Greek Communists and Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) leaders viewed all our Macedonian NOF and AFZH leaders (who in 1945 were sent to Greek occupied Macedonia from Yugoslavia at the discretion of the CPY and CPM) like ticking time bombs that no one knew when they would go off and how much damage they would cause.”

After a short pause he continued: “After the war all NOF and AFZH leaders were sent to Siberia. The Greeks did this very slyly; leading the Soviets to condemn the Macedonians by the higher law of the USSR.” “It was truly like that,” I agreed and asked him to tell me more. “Most of us fighters,” he said, “especially those who have become wanderers of the world are being trampled by history and time. When it came to issues of scope regarding our tragedy, our fighters were very disappointed by NOF and AFZH. It’s terrible what happened to us Macedonians in that tragic war...” he said quietly and continued: “Yes, I will say it openly. It became obvious that these organizations were spreading alien propaganda, disastrous for the Macedonians. The Macedonian people were never

informed and are still not informed about all the things that the CPY and the CPG did to us. It is a fact that the CPG behaved like a bully towards most of the NOF and AFZH activists. They had absolutely no political power and were unable to perform properly under dreadful pressure.”

I was boiling mad by now so I interrupted and asked: “I am interested to know why, if our national identity was so strong, we were not afraid of being expelled from our homes? What will happen to us now?” Bogdanov calmly continued: “What more can we expect will happen to us, more than being left homeless and wanderers...” His voice became deep and gentle as he continued: “Thinkers say that ‘people who do not learn from their past experiences will find it difficult to plan their future.’ If we follow our own history we will learn that strangers had led us in the past without us Macedonians even realizing it. This is not the first time that we have been manipulated by outsiders and by ideological associates. So, one would need to ask: ‘What have we learned from our history?’ Obviously we have not learned about the authentic Macedonian existence of our ancestors. Yes, this is true, especially for us Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia. We will need to open the book of problems and publicly apologize for our past mistakes so that they will be a lesson for our youth in the future. Do not forget the most elementary thing, that above all, our people here in Greek occupied Macedonia have centuries old roots and have lived with dignity! If we continue on this path of being irresponsible, unable, incompetent and unethically celebrate all these twisted events and call them “coincidences” or if we justify to ourselves that “there is no escape from this fate” then we will never be free from those persons who, again and again, brought the Macedonian people to the verge extinction.”

Bogdanov paused for a moment, looked at me and continued: “It is a fact that those who wanted to destroy us knew (know) more than us, but we on the other hand know almost nothing about them!! Even today we hide their dirty activities. Even some of our historians are advising us to keep quiet, “not to cut the branch...” Really, does that not explain the phenomenon of our awareness? Really, are we not vassals? Really, is it not true that in 1946 the Macedonian organizations became servants to a new master under the slogan ‘brotherhood and unity’? Yes, the spine of these Macedonian organizations was broken and they became vassals; subordinates, dependents and servants to the new master (CPG) and made unprecedented concessions! If one of our main national identity attributes is our national language, then how could NOF and AFZH, under the slogan ‘brotherhood and unity’ (1946), ‘recant’ our national identity? Were those Macedonians in the DAG units who were recruited and sent to the depths of Greece, allowed to speak Macedonian? Of course not! So what kind of ‘brotherhood and unity’ is that? In fact they were obliged to speak ‘Greek only’ and not Macedonian and on top of that they were obliged to use their ‘imposed’ Greek names and not their Macedonian

names. This means that eventually, like a beaten donkey, we accepted and got used to the political violence against our own national identity. Over the course of the war, while we blindly suffered persistent attempts from them to negate all of our Macedonian features, on a psychological level, we looked at the CPY and at the CPG as our saviours.”

Bogdanov paused, shrugged his shoulders, and continued: “What kind of rare happiness did we experience?! And to think that all the time we sang songs about our ‘father’, our leader (of the CPY or the CPG) and making him the most unique person of all people in our lives... Yes, we definitely thought of strangers as our saviours. We created an array of complexes and symptoms of separate neurotic characters: some belonging to the CPY and the others belonging to the CPG. These mass widespread complexes, created in early 1945, represented the most serious obstacles in our attempts to redefine ourselves and to put in place a viable national strategy in order to survive on our ancestral lands without having to join someone else’s hellish war. In the end someone had to be guilty for the CPY / CPM and the CPG to have thrown us into the ideological waste! How do we heal our pain, our constant, persistent and permanent pain: for our home, for our dear ones who left their bones on the battlefields in the Greek Civil War? How do we heal?”

Historic chronicles (Review of developments in 1945)

NOF, AFZH AND NOMS SLOGANS WITH “STRATEGIC DIRECTIVES” FOR “MASSIVE RETALIATION”

The advertisement said: Spread our organizations, NOF and AFZH want all Macedonians, wherever they are in every village, every town, quarter, cottage and farm house to join us. No Macedonian man, woman, or child should remain outside of the influence of NOF, AFZH and NOMS.

Since June 1st, 1945 these Organizations exhibited warlike symptoms and a year later the Greek Civil War was officially initiated. “Only by being organized can we destroy fascism and obtain our rights and the right to full self-determination,” said one slogan. “Forward! All Macedonian women join the Anti-Fascist Front for Women (AFZH) for the total destruction of fascism, for our freedom and for our rights,” said another slogan encouraging women to tear down their slave chains. This unfortunately was going on after fascism had already been defeated. The entire world knew that victory over fascism was declared on May 9th, 1945 but it seems that no one had told the Macedonians because they continued to use their worn out slogans that they had incorrectly borrowed from someone else’s war. Meaning, this is how the Macedonian people found themselves (standing), dumbfounded and crushed before this last fateful

call. They knew that countless Macedonians had already disappeared with the use of the diplomatic trump card and that did not help their cause. Now mass participation was demanded of them so that they could be ground-down into the so-called “revolution”, or as the NOF and AFZH activists called it “the extension of the Ilinden Rebellion”.

Who exactly were our allies in the Greek Civil War? No one! Not even the CPM because it was totally subordinated to the CPY. In other words, our involvement was a Macedonian nihilism full of errors and rivers of blood. Let us examine the facts: To achieve this strategic goal, a form of armed struggle was needed to be applied. This became evident when NOF established Macedonian Partisan Units on April 28th, 1945. The establishment of Macedonian forces by NOF and AFZH and the politics of CPM / CPY for amassing the entire Macedonian population were ruthless.

Here is what Truman had to say about that: “...If Greece falls under the control of an armed minority then the entire Middle East could easily fall under confusion and anomalies. The disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have profound effects on all European countries whose people are struggling... If we do not help Greece at this critical moment, the consequences will be severe, as much for the West as they would be for the East. We are obliged to take immediate and decisive action.” If Markos’s political strategy and tactics were to re-establish the armed resistance using experienced fighters from ELAS, then where do we look for the logic in such a political process? NOF and AFZH used a combination of political demagoguery and sentimental manipulation to attract the villagers and popularize the struggle. And by doing so they created our well-known distorted symbiosis: false beliefs and expectations - flat on promises.

Following the strategic aims of the CPM / CPY, NOF and AFZH created 5 provincial, 10 district, 3 urban and 32 regional leadership organizations with 120 professional staff, all members of NOF, AFZH and NOMS. Over 220 villages were organized (half of these villages were destroyed during the Greek Civil War - m.3.), in which 170 rural and urban organizations operated. Also during the same period a number of military formations were created including battalions. From an historic perspective, NOF and AFZH continued to use the same slogans even though they were outdated and even though victory over fascism had already been declared, but it seems that that did not matter for the Macedonians. But as a result of that, the Greek government enacted special laws to violently attack organizations such as NOF and AFZH, creating an unprecedented terror campaign that lasted to the end of World War II. This was done, even before the Greek Civil War was officially

proclaimed on March 31st, 1946, as a result of decisions made during the CPG's Second Plenum held on February 12th, 1946.

Instead of facing reality, the leaders of NOF and AFZH, as creators of these Macedonian organizations, were trying to create reality. In other words, they were responsible for creating the conditions which led the Greek government and its institutions to introduce counter measures such as terror, arrests and legitimate migration processes, which eventually resulted in the Macedonian eradication. Many of these conditions were based on official statements made by Marshal Tito like the one he made in Moscow, on April 26th, 1945 for the "New York Times" when he said: "...If the Macedonians in Greece express a desire to unite with other Macedonians, Yugoslavia will respect their wishes..." This gave the Macedonian people and the CPM Central Committee incentive to continue the struggle but at the same time such statements also gave the forces in Greece, which opposed the Macedonians, incentives to introduce extreme countermeasures and criminal action against the Macedonian organizations and people.

There is no doubt that NOF's and AFZH's (CPM / CPY) optimal aim was to gain complete control of all the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia and put into operation a national front in order to achieve its program objectives. But many analysts are asking the question, if there was such a strategic goal, acceptable to the CPM / CPY, then why, only three months before, had the highest bodies in Yugoslavia opposed the slogan: "Let us turn our arms towards Solun!" and the slogan "to Solun and not to the Srem Front?" So in short, the unjust agreement imposed in Yalta brought disorder, cruelty and more bloodshed to the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia and to all Macedonians who found themselves divided by four states. After the Yalta Agreement the idea of the communists taking over the world became weaker than ever before. And during that period both the CPG and the government in Athens were against the formation of NOF and AFZH.

Here is how the organizations NOF, AFZH and NOMS, created in Yugoslavia - Skopje, were welcomed in Greece by the left forces. Two months after NOF's formation the CPG leadership, during the CPG's Twelfth Central Committee Plenum (June 1945), made a resolution declaring Greece's northern border unchangeable: "We firmly oppose any territorial claim against Greece by any party. Preserving the territorial integrity of the state is a first task of every Greek patriot." See: (DO KKE APOTO 1931-1952, pp. 110). Further down it says that England is a "great friend" of Greece. In other words Britain's military and political presence is accepted as an essential service in insuring the Greek position regarding the border to the north. So this should be quite clear to everyone regarding how and by whom we accepted the rhythm of global indoctrination which offered no turning back. And as a result we lost our historic opportunity to

achieve national rights in Greece, which were defined by international law. Was all this a foreign double standard for the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia?

NOF AND AFZH WERE FORMED ON APRIL 23rd, 1945. THEY WERE ORGANIZED AND LED BY THE CPY / CPM PRIOR TO THE GREEK CIVIL WAR, AND BEGAN PREPARATION FOR WAR THUS INFECTIOUSLY LEADING THE MACEDONIANS TO FALL PREY TO FOREIGN INTERESTS.

(Review of looming events in 1946)

Severe persecution of leftists by the Athens government reshaped the development of left forces (CPG and EAM) and political events in early 1946. Being deprived of their political avenues, thousands of former fighters, officers and supporters of the CPG and ELAS resorted to rising against the new government in Athens in an armed resistance. Under the leadership of the CPM / CPY, NOF on the other hand, in 1945, began to carry out mass mobilization of the Macedonian people who had become members of these organizations. This shows that there must have been something planned for the future of the Macedonian population even before the Greek Civil War started, which eventually, through a carefully planned strategy and tactics of strangers, led the Macedonian population to its eradication.

(Athens-Prague-Moscow-Belgrade)

(The following facts represent crucial moments in the history of NOF and AFZH - from the military archives: USSR, Yugoslavia and CPG).

In the words of ΔΙΜΙΟΥΡΓΩΣ, author of the book “The Greek Civil War” (30/31 March 30/31, 1946 to August 30, 1949), on March 20th, 1946 Zahariadis left Athens and went to Prague. He used his time while traveling to talk with communist leaders from whom Zahariadis also sought support for his armed insurrection. But, as it turned out, almost no one gave him their support or approval which made his move look foolish. The most important leaders he spoke to, which included Torres of France and Toliati of Italy, told him that “it was dangerous to resort to arms.” Georgi Dimitrov also pointed out to him that “the international situation does not allow for a new outbreak of armed conflict, which in fact would directly interfere in the affairs of the Western allies in the BALKANS.” But all these leaders knew that Zahariadis, who after being imprisoned for nine years in the Dachau concentration camp in Germany, had returned to Athens in May 1945 for a reason, which left a strange impression with them. Zahariadis arrived in Greece on a British aircraft and soon after took

over his former duties as General Secretary of the CPG and immediately began to work.

During his meetings in Prague Zahariadis had learned much about Marshal Josip Broz - Tito and the “success of his guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia and about Tito’s aims to expand his ‘revolutions’ throughout the BALKANS.” Zahariadis, especially upset about this, on his return from Prague visited Belgrade and upon his request was received by Marshal Tito. During their meeting they exchanged the occasional Russian word without a translator and when Tito toasted him, he asked: “What do you think about the future of the Balkans?” To which Zahariadis replied: “Marshall, that’s exactly why I come to you at the urging of many leaders who respect you for your success with your guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia.” Tito explained his political position to Zahariadis in detail and told him that the people are willing to fight and take power away from the Anglo-American imperialists. Tito was unable to conceal his satisfaction and in the presence of his comrades Rankovich, Kardelj, Djilas, Tempo, Kolishevski and others, said: “Life does not go back. Revolutions bring progress, development of societies and productive forces. I, on behalf of the Communist Party and the people, promise to give you extensive assistance and whatever else you need to organize a people’s army. You know, during World War II we thought that such a revolution should be taking place in Aegean Macedonia and it is not by accident that precisely such a revolution is taking place today. Forces of Greek citizens – Macedonians are currently led by our very experienced centres which have a long revolutionary tradition. We are preparing these forces and the forces in the camp in Bulkesh to place them under your command.”

Tito then turned to Kolishevski and said: “Lazo, write down the following and do everything to make sure that the forces under the slogan “brotherhood and unity” are placed under the command of the CPG to be used for the revolution.

a). NOF and AFZH to be connected to the CPG and to break with you (CPM). Do not interfere and do not order them when and how to fight for a united Macedonia - now is not the time before this revolution. And of course change their struggle program goals and objectives to reflect those of the CPG;

b). NOF to establish a central authority and to be accountable to the CPG Regional Committee;

c). All armed Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia to be placed under the command of the CPG military leaders;

You see how the English and Americans do it in Greece. But all this, Comrade Nikos, will have to be approved by the old man - Generalissimo Stalin, for such an act of revolution to be enacted.”

But Tito knew Stalin's position very well: "Let them muddle in capitalism," and was pretty sure that he would accept Zahariadis's proposal. Zahariadis at that point excitedly said: "I am ready and willing to take this to the Generalissimo and seek his support." Then Tito toasted the next revolution and said: "Be determined, don't be afraid, don't be afraid of any casualties and conquer all difficulties and you will succeed in your intentions. The revolution requires it of you. Everything needs to be firmly held in your hands and you can count on us with great certainty!"

Towards the end of March 1946, after his stay in Yugoslavia, Zahariadis left for Moscow where he had talks with the Soviet leaders. During one of his meetings, Stalin, Molotov and Andrei Zhdanov approved Zahariadis's proposals, which he made on behalf of the CPG. After that Zahariadis had a secret meeting with Stalin during which Stalin instructed him to "gradually begin the armed action from the villages towards the cities in order to prevent a premature military intervention by the British and to give him time to work on a means of finding a compromise". Stalin, while filling his pipe with tobacco, looked at Zahariadis directly in the eyes and asked: "Do you see Marshal Tito as the future leader of a Balkan Federation?" Confused, Zahariadis wanted to avoid the question but replied anyway: "The Marshall is a great strategist and an internationalist," he said. "And I have received a promise from him that he will give me 20,000 armed and ready fighters who were 'hunted by the Monarcho-Fascist armies'."

Stalin then said: "According to my information, Marshal Tito, in only a year, has organized the Macedonians for a heroic struggle in Aegean Macedonia, in Greece and has established successful Macedonian organizations. Examples of these are NOF-National Liberation Front, and AFZH – Macedonian Women's Anti-Fascist Front which are directly led by the CPM / CPY. All these fighters were pursued by Markos after World War II. All those fighters who constituted the 'Aegean Brigade' are now in Greece and are struggling for a united Macedonia. What are you going to do with all these Macedonian military and political formations? The old sense of a united Macedonia will persist in them until 'the socialist revolution in Greece' prevails and after that they will be fine. Socialism is the same everywhere..." concluded Stalin. Zahariadis then took out a sheet of paper that read: "Agreement between the CPG and representatives of the Macedonian state." According to this agreement "the Slavo-Macedonians from Greek Macedonia, on the one hand, have pledged to support the CPG during the elections in its bid to gain power. With this power lies the only hope for a favourable resolution of the Macedonian

Question. On the other hand, they pledged to help the CPG in cases where incidents between the left and right may arise during the elections.”

Stalin then said: “Macedonians are heroic fighters known to be strong people.” But Zahariadis confirmed that, “They can easily be manipulated and are victims of history.” Zahariadis also informed Stalin that all military formations and political organizations known as “brotherhood and unity” belonging to Marshal Tito will now be placed under CPG control. “Marshal Tito has international insight in the struggle against Anglo-American imperialism,” said Zahariadis, to which Stalin replied, “So, you have agreements regarding the revolution! That’s good. Then proceed as you think it necessary. Now go and prepare a draft resolution of your decision for the CPG Central Committee.” With that Stalin wanted to appear as a moderate, good, unobtrusive and generous leader giving the impression that he was an admirer of the revolutionary thoughts of other leaders in the camp of socialism. After the meeting Zahariadis said: “The CPG has ceased to seek a peaceful solution to the Greek issue and now will devote itself to seize power by force of arms!”

Stalin was well aware of Tito and Zahariadis’s agreement: “Tito’s main concern was to protect the new federation.” From this new development Tito’s position became clear to Stalin. Tito knew that Yugoslavia was 50% influenced by the West and strongly endeavored to keep the Yugoslav federation intact, as was emphasized many times by the Yugoslav Security Service and by the Yugoslav Army General Staff: “...it is best to keep the war out of Yugoslav borders and to wholeheartedly assist, than to have it inside Yugoslavia.” This was acceptable even to Stalin because it preserved the socialist camp created after World War II. But neither Stalin nor Tito were prepared or willing to take action to bring victory to the Greek communists or to reunite Macedonia. Stalin in fact could not foresee providing “strong military action” to Greece in the near future and made no particular promises of support but he did recommend to Zahariadis that when it comes to forming a People’s Liberation Army it is best to respect Tito’s advice.

The next day Zahariadis went to Belgrade to work out organizational details with Tito regarding assistance and cooperation. He also asked Tito to define all problems, characteristics and prospects associated with the Democratic Army and measures to be taken to prepare for a future war. Zahariadis was received in Moscow as a bold revolutionary leader. Stalin sat in the great hall on a hand-knitted chair, puffing on his pipe with a smile on his face while the other leaders, including Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich, Suslov, Baria and Bulganin, members of the Communist Party of the USSR Politburo, drank “Pertsovka” vodka. The waiters busied themselves offering the guests all kinds of snacks. Stalin, at one point, looked at Zahariadis and, with a smile on his face, wished him success in his upcoming revolution. Zahariadis then calmly

and obediently stood up in front of the Generalissimo and, in broken Russian, uttered the following words: “Glubokovazhaemi tovarish Iosif Visarionovich, bolisoe spasibo. Zhelaiu Vam krepkoe zborovie i ushte mnogie leta da ne vodite vo sotsialismot kon pobeda na komunizamot. (Deeply respected Comrade Josif Visarionovich, many thanks. I wish You good health and may You, for many summers, lead us in socialism towards the victory of communism.) Your advice will be our roadmap that will lead us in our struggle against Anglo-American imperialism, until the working class in the world achieves its final victory.”

On April 8, 1946 Zahariadis returned to Belgrade and was received by Tito. When he stood before the Marshal, awe stricken, Tito told him: “If we are already revolutionaries and internationalists, our duty is to help ‘revolutions’ and I don’t see any reason why we should be against the revolution in Greece, which you have taken measures to realize. For that I can only congratulate you, Comrade Nikos. Gather everyone who can hold a rifle. That is normal in every revolution and the people want that.” Tito then lit a cigar and continued walking through the spacious room and when he returned to his table he asked Zahariadis: “What is the mood of the youth?” Zahariadis replied: “Great!”

* * *

On August 24th 1946, a number of CPG Central Committee Politburo members, led by Ioannis Ioannidis, transferred from Athens to Belgrade. Markos Vafiadis, who in June 1946 was appointed General and organizer and leader of the partisan groups by Zahariadis, also left Greece and moved to Belgrade where he received instructions from the CPG Central Committee Politburo. In September 1946 they all returned to Aegean Macedonia and on October 28 of the same year, established DAG’s Headquarters. At this point the leadership of NOF and AFZH was terribly confused (like sold slaves). Their bright faces turned dull and obediently committed themselves to the Party, promising that they would do everything in their power to enlist all the Macedonians in the ranks of the Democratic Army. At one point one of them said: “We will awaken the dead if necessary and let them also join this holy revolution so that we can all charge together, living and dead!” In his speech in Bitola, Kolishevski opposed the idea of a United and Independent Macedonia outside of Yugoslavia or as a protectorate of the Great Powers. That, according to Kolishevski, would constitute “the destruction of the current Macedonian federal unit.”

Sometime after the CPY and CPG came to an agreement (October 14, 1946) Lazar Kolishevski, the CPM Central Committee secretary, invited all NOF Board members and told them: “Now you go down there (in the Aegean part of Macedonia). The CPG is your leader. Have faith in it. Its policy on Macedonian issues is clear. Any question that may arise will be handled by the CPG Party leadership. Be mindful and do not splinter within the Party, remain under its leadership. Fight to strengthen your unity with the Greek people and fight with all your might against chauvinism, separatism and localized tendencies.”

Tempo with his new political message

In his campaign speech in Kumanovo on October 16th, 1945, Svetozar Vukmanovik, a candidate of the Kumanovo District, resolutely opposed all those who viewed the unification of Macedonia outside of Yugoslavia, or a Macedonia united under the auspices of the Great Powers. According to Tempo, all those who supported this idea were the same people who were responsible for the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia from 1941 to 1944. In other words, the Macedonian factor was removed so that everything was in agreement with CPY politics, which had a lot of influence on Macedonian communists in the Vardar part of Macedonia... So a Macedonian movement with a pro-Yugoslav orientation was now born in this historic evolutionary process. In other words, the Yugoslav position for a United and Independent Macedonia was now NO! But uniting the other parts of Macedonia (Pirin and Aegean Macedonia) within Yugoslavia (as a mother country) was still YES! Meaning the Vardar part of Macedonia was to declare itself the Piedmont in the unification but within the composition of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. This was Yugoslavia’s position?! Meaning, now someone wanted to turn the ‘primordial national Macedonian charge’ into a ‘national wound’.

SO CLOSES THE TRIANGLE BETWEEN: STALIN, TITO AND ZAHARIADIS. FROM A POLITICAL GAME TO A MILITARY DISASTER. BUT WHY COULDN’T WE MACEDONIANS, FROM 1945 TO THIS DAY, HAVE ESCAPED FROM THAT MOST TERRIBLE AND DISASTROUS COMMUNIST TRIANGLE?

For as long as I listened to Bogdanov, I relaxed my muscles. I now realize that I was a slave for so many years without knowing it. I closed my eyes and whispered to myself: “I should have known this a long time ago! The Macedonian people should have known this a long time ago! This should have been told to the generation that participated in DAG and to the later generations. Without this truth the Aegean Macedonian people

and all Macedonian people will remain stuck in the dark street of history with no end..." Alien gods have led their own world politics and interfered in other people's affairs, constantly planning revolutions and strikes, but we, even after the genocide, became the only victims - World WANDERERS.

3.

We traveled all day and all night. It was Friday. The train had just entered Subotitsa and stopped on platform 4. A Yugoslav Army officer, all decked out in a military uniform, accompanied by two adjutants, entered our compartment and said: "Which one of you is Professor Pavle Bogdanov?" "I am!" answered Bogdanov. There was silence. Everyone in the compartment remained breathless as they watched the officer and his armed adjutants. The officer stared at Bogdanov with a long and sharp look and said: "There is a car outside waiting for you." "Why is there a car waiting for me?" asked Bogdanov. "It is not my job to inform you about your political sins!" the officer snapped sharply "You were an officer of Tito's army and not of Stalin's!"

Pavle nodded his head on his way out of the compartment, knowing very well that the spirits of his past would haunt him for years. I reached out and said: "I don't believe we will be seeing each other any time soon..."

Noose – Chapter 19

Life and vision without rhythm; the first collision of fates after a meeting between criminals and victims at the “Chair” shelter in Skopje.

(Here, stripped of our glory, we live in great humiliation, taken by force where we don't want to go.) Danilov, a student.

1.

The fog was so thick over the stone bridge that I had to be cautious and stick to the stone fence. There were people in front of me, behind me and all around me rushing to go to wherever they were going. I caught up to the man wearing an old coat, staggering in front of me just before we arrived at the “Social Centre” and we both lined up in front of the desk where there was a sign that read: “Aegean Counter”. Now it is difficult for me, even impossible, to say when exactly in my life I had ever heard the word “Aegeans” with a big “A”. I read the sign for a second time and said to myself, “Do you see how much evil fate has brought us... Around this counter alone?” I don't remember ever hearing that word before, not in the home of my parents, not during the Greek Civil War (1945-1949), and certainly not in the USSR. That word made me angry, bitter and isolated. It made me feel guilty without having anything to be guilty about. It made me feel like a stranger and pushed me outside of my historic place. But still I can not explain why that is, what made me want to reconstruct the whole truth about our Macedonian drama and prove that we are all “Aegeans” and that we all feel joy, fear, pain, love, anger, hurt and abandonment. Inside we are all the same. But we at the shelter still relied on the image that was installed in our heads: “how to act in a perfect communist society.”

The man who stood in front of me smelled of tobacco and stale water. His cheeks were strangely red and his tired, shifty and wild eyes shone like hot embers. He looked at me suspiciously and said: “Are you new here?” “Yes!” I replied and noticed the movement of his hands and his restlessness from which I deduced that he was agitated and lacked mental and physical energy. He seemed to be flogged by dark thoughts and was full of disappointment. He seemed disturbed and his eyes looked like they were full of guilt. He seemed to feel worthless. Sometimes his gaze showed impatience and a desire to conceal something, some neurological problem perhaps. Again he turned, looked at me, and said: “Are you by any chance Yane Ognianov?” “And who are you?” I asked, thinking that I didn't need to explain myself to anyone about who I am and where I come from. But when I looked at him more closely, I recognized some of his facial features, but still I was not sure who he was.

He did not answer but reached out to hug me. He came closer and said: "I am from there (Greek occupied Macedonia) and I remember everything, I was born like everyone else but I belong there. Also, that which I remember is brilliant. I am Vasil Bogdanov, your comrade in arms. We fought together in the battles in Gramos. I am the late Lena Bogdanova's brother." And I thought to myself, wow this is Lina Bogdanova's other son. I was simply stunned. Lena Bogdanova's other brother, wow! I suddenly felt cold all over. I knew this man was an officer in Tito's army who the Greeks had charged as Tito's agent. He worked for the military police (Peoples Department of Security) and later enlisted with KOS (counterintelligence sector of YNA). His activities were discovered by the Greek Intelligence Services in 1948 and he was presumably executed by order of our brigade's Military Headquarters.

We now reside in the same barracks, No. 8, but he stays in a room at the end of the long corridor. He lives alone, all alone, deliberately pushing his life to the brink of death. About his return; people said it was a "happy return from the dead". When he arrived at the shelter he had completely lost his memory, he remembered nothing. This is what was written in his hospital release from UDBA (State Security Services). But just now he spoke to me about life, death and eternity... No one asked him for anything because he would not give or accept anything from anyone. Vasil Bogdanov would not even speak to anyone. He is very odd that way. But from his sternness and strong expression he looked like he was carrying a lot of secrets that weighed on him. Next door to him was Pitomir Dobroliubov, a NOF (National Liberation Front) activist who for years yearned for his beloved Donka. And as the saying goes: "Happy is he who still knows how to love..."

I did not know any of the residents in this shelter so I knew nothing about them. Many were withdrawn, seemingly living without passion, and life without passion is desperate – nothing to look forward to. Desire is the driving force of life. And now after the war people here in the shelter felt like they were trapped. From day to day, from year to year they felt less and less happy. They would like to be in their own homes and be free and have a good life.

2.

Yes Minche Jazhin is the famous NOF activist, Filip Jazhin's youngest brother. Now he calls himself Pitomir Dobroliubov. He was present at Lina Bogdanova's trial and execution. He was there when they hung Lina Bogdanova and after the war he changed his name and surname because he thought by doing so he would find some peace. Now he is a different man. He is not like the other residents here in the shelter. He plays the Russian balalaika. He also plays the violin which he learned to play by simply

watching and listening to others play it. He was a member of the camp orchestra in the Siberian prison camps. Nowadays it is rare to see Minche Jazhin together with anyone, even Vasil Bogdanov, even though they live next door to each other. One day Bogdanov decided to tell Jazhin his story the way he experienced it in Goli Otok and the way he was condemned by Yugoslav law. Since then Minche Jazhin became Pitomir Dobroliubov, who always went to the public toilet, head uncovered, with his white hair scattered all over the place, agitated and pompous with an ominous expression on his face, a result of his past experiences. One day he told his own story in detail and in a deep and hoarse voice speaking in the Lerin dialect.

This is what he said: “We gnawed the same bone and for the same bone we gnawed each other. We bit each other like mad dogs. The communists used us for political trade and convinced us that it was real politics. Now I recognize and admit that, as a member of NOF, I am to blame for misleading the Macedonian people. I don’t feel bad for the CPG (Communist Party of Greece), because of it I was convicted under the Russian Federation Criminal Code and was issued the number 049 which I wore through the Siberian winters like I was some kind of race horse that anyone could ride across the vast tundra. Today, in front of all our people, I want to say that our organizations NOF and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) were the biggest culprits responsible for the Macedonian mass participation in all military and political actions that the CPG and DAG undertook. My sins are great; I don’t want to carry anything from those times, not even my name... NOF and AFZH were powerless without the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) and the CPG and so was the DAG military leadership. NOF and AFZH were loyal and subservient to the CPY and CPG. We were totally oblivious regarding the tragic and comical role we were playing as we became the means for outsiders to manipulate our people.”

He paused for a moment, thought, and continued: “It was January 4, 1950 when we arrived in Moscow. That date is carved in my soul. They first stuffed us in the Lefortovo , Lubianka and Butirka prisons like we were the greatest enemies of socialism. It was very cold that day. The cell was filthy; it probably had not been cleaned since the October Revolution. It was full of hair, semen and finger and toe nails left there by people who opposed Stalin. I lived in that cell for two and a half years or 900 days and 900 nights. I was really surprised and amazed when I figured out that I had actually spent 20,600 hours of my life in that four walled cell in the Russian cold and still managed to survive and remain sane. At times I felt really sad especially when someone died in the neighbouring cells and was wrapped in a rough blanket and thrown into a truck to be carried off who knows where. Sometimes I could not dream and I didn’t know why. At those times I was in total silence like I was living in another world. I was

afraid of people. And I know when a person is afraid of people it means this person has wronged God. I felt like people were also afraid of me and as a Christian I wondered: if a person has a living soul then that person should not be afraid.”

He paused, looked into the distance and with a sad tone in his voice continued: “What really makes me angry,” he said, “is that I am here without having committed any sins against my people. Is there a crueler penalty than this? Well, to this day I do not know why I was imprisoned for 20,600 hours in “Butirka.” The cold was unbearable, but worse than that were the cries and screams of those in pain. And all this took place in Moscow, in the most beautiful city of communism, the most beautiful city of our future. The greatest isolation of humanity is loneliness. The loneliness was tearing me apart and I started to sink into oblivion, I lost all hope and I hungered for nothing. I believe it was in July 1952 when they gave me a bag of dry food and some cans of meat and, together with many other prisoners all looking like scarecrows, loaded us in a number of rail cars and a few days later we arrived in the city Taished in Siberia. There, I was escorted by Russian troops armed with bayonets. I felt like a large animal on its way to slaughter. I left the horror of living alone like a caged wild animal behind and came to Siberia to work in desolation and survive on a plate of borsch a day. I came from there my friend! There I learned all the words precious to the government. There I also learned all the words of hatred and afterwards I erased everything, I even changed my name with only one goal in mind; to find my Donka and start a family and a home.”

Suddenly Minche stopped talking. He looked very angry. His eyes began to vibrate. He asked: “Who am I now? With my new name and surname? Nobody! A man living all alone, passing his days playing the balalaika every day.” He still remembered the expression on Donka’s face when they accidentally met at one of AFZH’s functions. Ever since then and all throughout the war they had been madly in love. They saw each other often and had been together many times and would have made a very happy married couple. Minche took out a photograph of himself and Donka both wearing a DAG uniform. They looked like they were very much in love, the memory of which Minche could not extinguish even after ten years. This love left him scarred for life, for which there was no cure. It left his soul lonely and desolate. He did not dare to even think that maybe Donka had given up on him! He was burning with jealousy when he heard rumours that Donka may have been grabbed by some Greek who now lived in Tashkent. But Minche, deep inside, did not want to believe all that and to this day is still waiting for his Donka. He lives on the go believing that one day he will find her. He believes she is here, lonely and

sad, drifting around among the wanderers. He tries to force himself to think of happy thoughts but his mind constantly drifts into unclear and strange traps. He spends his nights thinking, searching for a life of joy and desires, thoughts that give him pain.

“Oh God what did I not say?” he began talking again. “I said many things to our people to convince them to join the struggle, including the idea that this war was a continuation of the Ilinden Uprising. I lied to our people to convince them that this war was a worthy cause for which to give their lives and to perish for Macedonia. What was I thinking? It will take me a thousand hours to tell you my entire story, my pain. My memories will give you shivers... It’s best that I keep the dark part of my story to myself. But let me say that there I did learn how to play the Russian balalaika. Also let me tell you that my heart became like a crumpled shirt after I lost my beloved Donka who used to kiss me, smelling like beech tree leaves. Now I am alone, all alone to whisper at the sunset.” He pulled out his hand with spread fingers and breathing rhythmically he murmured the words of the Russian song “under Moscow’s faith.”

He stood behind his window looking at the newly arriving wanderers. After that he went to his iron bed with its covers and mattress smelling of urine from the sick people who laid on it and from the old people who smeared themselves with camphor and “Russian water”. Here, drowsy and with a desperate heart, he played his balalaika and sang the song “Serbez Donke.” “Oh my God, how can life be so unfair?” he asked himself before falling asleep and letting his soul wander in the boundless landscapes of his dreams. The moon crawled into bed with him and reminded him of the nights he had spent together in the black forest of Mount Vicho, embraced by Donka. He was now struggling to learn our beautiful songs so that he could play them on this strange instrument. He knew that all the people that were there, the Germans, Poles, Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Czechoslovakians, Hungarians, Mongolians, Chinese, Koreans and Yugoslavs, who had learned to play the balalaika, had also learned to play their songs on it.

He bowed his head, wiped the sweat off his forehead and said: “I don’t ever want to set foot on Russian soil for as long as the great leader’s successors are living there. For years now I have been struggling to figure out “how I could have broken the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation when I was fighting in my own country Macedonia (Greek occupied Macedonia)! I do not ever want to go there, where I was stripped of my elementary human rights without even being given a chance to defend myself. My soul was full of bitterness and I was sick and tired of having to eat kapusta (cabbage) every day. Even now I get sick when I am reminded of the hanging mottos having specific political messages aimed at ‘educating’ us... I am old and I want to forget everything except the

Russian people and the Russian songs which fascinate me and which I will play on this balalaika for the rest of my life...”

Now when Minche plays the balalaika he assumes a certain position and holds the balalaika slightly upward above the horizontal position just as he played it in the Siberian Orchestra under the direction of Ivan Petrovich Kokotkin. He recalled Kokotkin’s words when he was told to: “Play with emotion. Emotions teach a man to reason...” Now only sometimes, during moments of solitude when he has his moments of vigour, he plays. His music is simple but excruciating, closely accented with anger and sadness and a few tears. He plays all his songs when he learns that a new group of wanderers has just arrived and hopes that among them is his beloved Donka.

3.

Sometimes, during the occasional meeting with Vasil Bogdanov, Minche would stop and talk for a long time, but never about himself. He always spoke about our common tragedy. He often spoke about those who had dried blood from past wars on their hands. One day Vasil Bogdanov said to me: “This was not a war of our choice. We were told what to do and their words were a powerful monologue. Cynicism has become hypocritical and criminal. In this war we Macedonians did not know how far to go and how to find the place where we belonged. The cynicism of the Yugoslav concern for the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia can be expressed in a few words: ‘maybe Yugoslavia in 1944-1945 had the desire to avoid a civil war inside Yugoslavia or maybe Yugoslavia wanted to solve its future Macedonian problems with Greece.’ Our life after the war unfortunately became worse than death. We all suffered immensely and became marked by this war forever. We suffered much abuse and nothing was clear throughout the Greek Civil War. It was a life with no rules. Those who tortured us should have looked at their own hands. At the dried blood on their hands...”

He paused for a moment to gather his thoughts and continued: “For some we were heroes and for others traitors. Some lived to cause us pain and others thrived to throw us out of our homes. We were not wanted that’s why we became victims. Perhaps we sacrificed ourselves for the salvation of all Macedonians, or perhaps not...?” He shrugged his shoulders, bent his mouth as if wanting to stop talking but then continued again: “We Macedonians, the way we were divided, would have been damned if we took a stand during the war and we were damned anyway for remaining static and expressionless. Now we are living in shelters not knowing whether to be happy or sad. You know that for human beings there is really nothing more valuable than to have freedom of thought, freedom of wandering and freedom to be ourselves and to have our own

identity. Especially now, after the war, after the worst is over and there are no more imprisonments. Yes, the worst may be over, but there are still some inexplicable things about these shelters. When a human being is enclosed within four walls, not by choice, no matter how beautiful the walls, they still feel like a prison. A person will not feel free as long as they are enclosed in a place without the possibility of leaving. But let me say that it is better than being locked up in a treeless dry island or in a dense forest in Siberia! I don't know. Maybe I am too much of a pessimist, or perhaps I am overly suspicious, but I would say that we will have a hard time fitting in, in this social life as timeless wanderers.”

Bogdanov was tormented by the catastrophe our people had experienced. He was even more tormented by the well-kept secret about what had happened to thousands of his countrymen – conveniently called Aegeans. He was so tormented that he began to forget things. Towards the end he could not even remember his first love... The only thing he remembered was that his beloved girl had a mole on her back. He gave up all his dreams because they troubled him and gave him the shakes. He trembled like the water in the sea, blown by the wind. He often thought of the dry islands from which there was no news. He lowered his head and after thinking for some time he said: “Sometimes I think that I would have been better off if I had never been born.”

4.

We, the older residents who lived in this shelter the longest, are from Tashkent, Zgorzelets, Belo Yani, Voivodina and Piteshti. We had all spent time at Indrizovo Prison thanks to the services of UDBA who questioned us, not about all of our past, but only about our heroic struggles at Gramos and about our loyalty. They collected all our red Party books and we thought that soon happy days would follow and maybe it would help us forget the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist system, but nobody told us anything about our future. But spending nights in the shelter had its own way of answering questions. After that nobody touched us again.

5.

One day a number of old people were sitting under the eaves of a barracks. There was not a single cloud in the sky and the air smelled of freshly cut grass. It was spring and May Day, the day of the proletariat, was just around the corner. The warm sun and mild air drew people out to visit with nature. We the wanderers, on the other hand, one by one gathered under the eaves of the barracks to argue about events that had taken place during the war. “It is strange now to remember those who once were more alive than we are!” said Paskal Rogozharov as a way of

introducing the next subject of discussion and continued: “Every day I listen to you debate about the war and about our self-sacrifices. People! Today we should not be looking at ourselves as the vanquished, we should be examining where we went wrong! We need accountability not new fog and uncertainty. It is time for accountability! Today we live in the thread of politics. After our return to the Republic of Macedonia we found life somewhat unclear. We were told that in order to survive today we must not look, not listen and not talk. Our inflated expectations of others (CPY and CPG) brought us nothing but trouble and disappointment. We can get the same love as citizens where we came from (Greece) as an oppressed people, thrown into the ideological waste after the Greek Civil War. It is time that we tell all our dark secrets about the politics of these Parties (CPY and CPG). Without a clear story we are and we will remain in oblivion.”

He paused for a moment, looked around and continued, “We have had various cycles of booms and crashes and madness and panic. Until a few years ago greed ruled: dictates and dirty aims. Now, as wanderers living in shelters we live in fear. Nobody knows how long this cycle will last, perhaps until our records are formalized? We clearly don’t know for sure what will happen to us wanderers now. Will we be passed on to another god? Will we see an end to our suffering? We all know that the heads of NOF and AFZH were welcomed here as deserving people and we, the fighters, all had to pass through the apparatus by spending time in prison. Why? I don’t understand why that is? Is the army bad and the leadership good for these people? I wonder: ‘Will there ever be an end to this double morality?’ Will there ever be an end to our investigation knowing that these leaders themselves (appointed by the CPG to be responsible for the Macedonians) forced us to fight to the death (in the units of DAG) for foreign interests? Is there any hope for our rehabilitation?”

“There will be,” interrupted Mitre Kalchunov and then continued, “if from now on we here faithfully pray, as you put it, to the new god. Do you want to know the truth?” Someone yelled out, “What truth?” The interruption left everyone with their mouths open. “The truth about us who they call ‘Aegeans’ with a capital ‘A’,” replied Mitre and continued: “Could we have entered some sort of Balkan confederation with our families destroyed? Especially now at the end after they took our children? After the CPG and Zahariadis created an ‘official Party family’ out of us during the Greek Civil War? Sending the husbands and wives to the front and putting the children in nurseries under the care of the Party to be used as future victims. But now this is a new cycle in our life. Do you remember the communist slogans proudly echoed during the war? And now we have become wanderers. Who now would like to hear those slogans? Do you? Nobody now recognizes our years of suffering up there on those cold mountains! Who now is going to believe or care about what

we did then? Only now we are slowly discovering that democracy is the same as dictatorship, fascism is the same as communism but with several parties. Now I would like to ask you all: ‘Are you truly happy after all this?’”

6.

As the “wanderers” became aware of these questions, they, time and time again, repeated them and each time the questions were repeated new questions seemed to surface and eventually the overriding question became: “What is the State’s reason for keeping all these people in shelters?”

“After my desertion from a camp in Albania I was arrested by the Greek Intelligence Service and found myself in Skopje,” interrupted Vasil Bogdanov, going on to say: “Yes, it was a time of ideological schizophrenia. I returned to Yugoslavia during the spring of 1949 and was asked the following question: ‘Who do you support Stalin or Tito?’ Without losing a breath I said, ‘I support communism and the great Stalin.’ I was arrested by an UDBA agent right there and then and taken to the ‘Matka’ jail. I spent many grueling months there. This was my second exile from my homeland. I did not know what to do, I was lost. Scary thoughts were constantly going through my head. One day, in exasperation, I tore my red book and threw all my awards into the fire... I had come to the realization that I was condemned, not only by my own people but also by God. For a person, his or her place of birth is the most powerful factor in the defense against foreign propaganda, but this war has proven that there is a desire to destroy our Macedonian identity and the very fabric that makes us Macedonian.”

Bogdanov paused for a moment and continued: “It was through the layers of such propaganda that the politics dictated by the CPY / CPM and CPG began to be disseminated among us, expressing relations between Belgrade and Athens. Deep in all this the Macedonian people were completely hidden, especially us Macedonians who had joined the ranks of DAG en masse and who were expected to sacrifice ourselves for them. In other words, the very same people who pushed us into the war remained friends.” “Yes, that is correct!” interrupted Minche Jazhin, continuing: “As the newest members of the Federation we Macedonians in the Federal Republic of Macedonia proved to be weak and gave up on our interests in the Aegean Macedonians because of the Balkan Pact, with the signing of the infamous Popovic-Averof Agreement.” (A military alliance between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey was signed in August 1954 in Bled (Yugoslavia). The Balkan Pact was established in 1953 at a time when Yugoslavia, for a short time, was threatened by the communist block

countries. This alliance did not last long so in 1961 the three countries agreed to annul it.)

Vasil Bogdanov then said: “Our ‘Aegeans’ who were in UDBA used to interrogate me every day about everything. They were building their careers that way. Suddenly, after all the years they had been my friends and fellow fighters in the Aegean Brigade, they bent their tails and overnight turned their backs on me. At such times you came to the realization that politics is a powerful and an absolutely relentless tool. It steps on everything in front of you in the name of some high interest or to gain some advantage in the service of the military police. I have never before experienced such pressures as those experienced in those days. Many of the major positions in UDBA were occupied by our (Aegeans) people who never fought in the Greek Civil War or who were deserters and who left us fighters and the Macedonian people in the hands of strangers or in the hands of our enemies. After serving in their ranks I was convinced that we Macedonians were just victims...”

Bogdanov looked around and then continued: “Every ruler has his own strategy and wants his subjects to stand firm as one, united behind his every initiative. ‘Divide and conquer’ is an easy strategy to deal with. When a leader becomes a ruler he can easily direct his feelings against an internal or an external enemy, so that he can easily control the temper and excitement of the masses. This is how ‘united in hatred’ is created and too bad for those who are outside of this crowd. I now understand that very well... This was Stalin and Tito’s politics in order to save socialism in Yugoslavia, which soon became acceptable to the Western Powers, especially since they (Tito and Stalin) did not interfere with their eradication of the communists in Greece. One of the reasons for taking such a position was undoubtedly the fact that the USSR had informed the Greek communist leadership that it was against an armed seizure of power in Greece: Churchill’s negotiations with Stalin led to an agreement, unknown in Greece at that time, according to which the country (Greece) had completely crossed into the British sphere of influence. Thus the Soviet Union had bigger fish to fry in Eastern Europe.”

Bogdanov paused, opened his eyes wide, looked at everyone and continued: “So many of our ‘Aegeans’ who had turned their heads towards Belgrade, in my opinion, were not liked at all. Some were even offended by the way the work of NOF and AFZH was interpreted, saying that the activities of the Macedonian fighters in the DAG units had no patriotic character. NOF and AFZH did not become a political or a military factor for the Macedonians during the war. NOF and AFZH only served to mass mobilize the Macedonian people and then they were pushed to the sidelines by the CPG. I saw this with my own eyes and, guided by the principle that our people should know about it, I remained objective and impartial when I spoke about it. This war unfortunately crushed the

Macedonian way of life in Greek occupied Macedonia. It robbed the Macedonian home of its children and sent everything else to hell. The Greek Communists skillfully led our people through NOF and AFZH; formed at the initiative of Yugoslavia and then surrendered to the hands of the CPG. In my view, because of our ‘obedience’ we allowed things to ‘get out of hand’ so much so that they passed the point of no return, things became irreversible... All this aided in turning Greek occupied Macedonia into a graveyard of heroes!”

Bogdanov continued: “The CPY / CPM and the CPG were not leading sensible politics toward Macedonia, particularly towards the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia. For years communist leaders aimed their sinister politics towards the Macedonian people. Macedonians were made victims by both sides (CPY and CPG) with politics aimed at our demise rather than at granting us freedom. The libertarian feelings of the unfortunate Macedonians were endlessly exploited. Many innocent and honest Macedonians died in the battles during the Greek Civil War. Such were the politics and remained as such even after the war had ended. It is as clear as daylight to me now and there is no need to prove that they (CPY and CPG) entered this war for the purpose of making victims out of us to deposit us all over the world... And today I ask you, ‘What does it mean to be a small nation?’ The same awareness was still there after my return to Skopje. At that time politics were managed by the Central Committee of the CPY, the only party in power. It was even worse in the ranks of the CPG, as we have now found out. It was the same in the USSR. Nobody was allowed to comment regarding the decisions they made or positions they took. But they on the other hand, like high priests, had the right to conduct business over the entire Yugoslav space. Everyone was convinced that it must be done this way.”

Bogdanov paused, took a long breath and continued: “But we Macedonians were constantly moved through the fields like chess pieces, sometimes black sometimes white (sometimes with the CPG other times with the CPY). This went on for the entire war period. It seems like we had always been pawns – sometime black and sometimes white, moved here and there with the occasional officer but never as kings. We proceeded across the fields as servants throughout our lives to the drum beat of foreign leaders: Tito, Zahariadis, seeking to score another victory over a real or imaginary opponent. We all have suffered the same fate and traveled the same road towards death but has anyone learned the real secret as to why? It seems to me that we the Macedonians of this generation have not done our homework and have not left ourselves enough space to stitch our own fate. It seems to me that we blindly followed foreign propaganda which led us barefoot into a patch of thorns. We have allowed foreigners to lead us through historical squalls and gale storms and as a result we have affected and drastically altered all of Aegean Macedonia. Finally and

most importantly, in my opinion, we Macedonians are finally realizing that in our recent past we have suffered immensely. Our Macedonian habitat has been destroyed and we have suffered direct violence and amassed many casualties. We sacrificed ourselves for ideals that don't exist; there are no sacred things, there are no moral constraints. Everything was done for someone else's interests (as we were told: 'in the interest of the Party'), for someone else's advantage. Everything was done for the leader!"

Bogdanov continued: "I am mad because with our loyalty and with our souls we helped strangers destroy us. May God protect the courage and future of those who remain near the graves of their loved ones. We were tricked because we underestimated the wisdom of our ancestors, who for centuries kept the Macedonian culture alive..." Bogdanov concluded his talk in a quiet voice with a tone of sorrow and dignity... He tried to suppress his deep emotions with a smile. He then asked me for my wish. I said: "My wish is to return to the old hard woods. I dream of long words in short moments, of cold night kisses after a difficult day, of drops of sweat like tears during harvest and of flying birds in love..."

From the military Chronicles

The closer the Greek Civil War was coming to an end the more the Albanians were forced to take account of their own involvement in Greek activities. This could have compromised Albania and exposed it to dangers of being attacked by NATO. Because of this, on May 5, 1949 Mehmet Shehu, Albanian Minister of the Interior, gave orders to disband the camp near the Greek-Albanian border, where Greek citizens sentenced to death by the Democratic Army courts were kept. Most of the prisoners there were Macedonians sentenced to death for spying for the Yugoslav intelligence services, to be executed on the spot. Relations between the two Parties (CPG and the Communist Party of Albania (CPA)) worsened especially after DAG lost the battle of Vicho, fought from August 10 to 16, 1949. Shortly after the battle was lost, Mehmet Shehu informed Yannis Ioannidis and Michos Partsalidis, members of the CPG Politburo and Central Committee, that their tactics were leading DAG a step closer to disaster and if these tactics were to be continued in Gramos there too they would have a disaster. Mehmet Shehu recommended that in his opinion the "Provisional Democratic Government should be disbanded."

On July 10, 1949 Tito closed the border with Greece. The CPG, under the directive of the Communist Party Central Committee, on July 23, 1949 broke off relations with Yugoslavia. After that the following events took place in Albania:

On August 22, 1949 a meeting was held in Korcha between Zahariadis from the CPG on one side and Enver Hoxha, Mehmet Shehu and Kapo from the CPA on the Albanian side. Current issues were discussed and an

agreement was reached to allow the retreat of about 5,000 DAG fighters into Albanian territory after the battles at Vicho were concluded. From there the fighters were to transfer to Gramos and join the DAG forces fighting in Gramos. Commitment and consent from Albanian authorities was required in order for the transfer to take place. Enver Hoxha posed the following question during the meeting: “What will you do if the Athens government attacks you with full force?” Zahariadis replied: “We will fight to the last one. Or perhaps we will withdraw into Albania.” At that point Enver Hoxha expressed fears that if such a thing were to happen it would seriously expose and complicate Albania’s international position. Mehmet Shehu knew that the Soviet Union was not going to support such a proposal so he recommended that Zahariadis dissolve DAG soon. Zahariadis on the other hand persistently kept silent on the issue so Shehu reaffirmed his position again by saying: “It is time for you to admit defeat and then there will be no reason to transfer forces, especially crippled fighters, from the battlefields of Vicho to their final burial grounds in Gramos.”

Noose – Chapter 20

After returning from Goli Otok; from Siberian Camp 025 in “Tajshed”; from the camp in “Makronisos”; from the camp in “Matka”; from the city of Tashkent; Vrotslav; Tulgesh; and from Belo Yani.

1.

It was a strange day that day. Our conversations were gloomy. “Our story,” said Vasil Bogdanov, “is unfortunate. I had just started to notice a thousand things that I had not noticed before. Now I am beginning to understand what we had been thinking earlier. The misfortune that our people experienced made thousands of people think about the various reasons why the genocide had taken place. But only those who, after many years of exile and difficulty, became makers of their own destiny would have fully understood those reasons. We Macedonians were born in this country and were deeply rooted and nobody could uproot us. But the foreign propaganda conducted about our centuries-old desire to be independent was sick and unparalleled...” “What kind of results did our desire to be independent yield through NOF (National Liberation Front) and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front)?” someone asked. Bogdanov spat to the side and said: “The results are clear. These organizations made a breakthrough in our collective consciousness. That ideology entered the collective consciousness of the Macedonian peasant and become an inevitable picture of the general euphoria and fear. Now the peasant had an alternative way of thinking. Nature does not recognize political boundaries. Whoever has the most power will be the most favoured leader and he will be recognized as the rightful ruler of the country and the people.” “Who was ruling us wanderers? What can you tell us about that?” yelled out another voice. “What can I tell you? There is nothing to tell you!” replied Bogdanov. “Why don’t you want to talk about that? the voice asked. There was silence!

I didn’t know anything about Vasil Bogdanov. He seemed very withdrawn and mysterious. His body had endured much abuse over the years. His face was darkened and full of shadows; a sign of suffering. He sighed and stood straight in silence for a while. He then looked at me and with a tiny smile on his face, said: “A man without a home is like a bird without a nest. My fate is a mirror image of the fate of many of our people who, after returning to Yugoslavia, had to pass through UDBA’s filter and KOS’s scrutiny in the ‘Idrizovo’ prison. The NOF and AFZH leadership on the other hand was greeted with open arms and given houses and work. Every fighter was asking him or herself this question: “How can the leadership be so ideologically eligible and we the fighters so ineligible!?” I know we should not be expecting too much but aren’t they the people

that turned us into wanderers? And as wanderers we will forever continue to live in the SHADOW OF THE PAST.”

2.

Those who were sent to Stone Island, otherwise known as Death Island, could not understand or explain why they were sent there. Their punishment, they knew, had something to do with some “Informburo” Resolution whose purpose was reserved for the Party to explain. They could not understand why they were labeled “traitors”, sent to solitary confinement, beaten, tortured, put on a freight train like cattle, housed in camps of fear and horror, “re-educated” and so on, for doing the things they were ordered to do! (Rock Island used to be called “Izola Kavala” (Bald Island) by the Italians because it was completely bare and full of stones. It looked like a stone heap tossed into the sea with its peak rising to 220 meters above sea level.) “Everything went dark” continued Bogdanov “when they brought me in front of a freight train car. I felt my way on board on my own. I was greeted with threats, fear, darkness, desolation, agony, pain, grief, despair, injustice, fierce criticism, dirty looks and beastly orders as I took the first step on board the dark car. I sat on blood and tears; I heard quiet whispers, cries, protests and maimed people hopelessly moaning. When I arrived on the island, I was tired, exhausted, humiliated and felt like my human dignity had been trampled on.”

“Every stone in Stone Island was a monument. Every grass blade was the soul of someone killed. There I heard every echo of death and every gunshot. There I felt cold fists of powerful hands hit me on the head after each thought. I said to myself, ‘Go ahead hit me! This is your gift. Only this way you can build your greatness!’ I listened to orders given: ‘Everyone must spit!’ The first guy snorted and spat slimy, stinking saliva on me. I felt disgusted as the slimy, salty liquid streaked down my face. While the saliva from the first guy was still sliding down my face the second guy snorted and after him all my fraternal people... I felt guilty for deserting, for leaving my brothers and comrades on the battlefields of Gramos. I felt remorse for not being killed there. I was afraid of the unknown and of the bloody trail of deception. A KOS commander standing in front of me asked: ‘Who did you cooperate with?’ I told him: ‘With all my closest associates and General Markos Vafiadis’s instructors and with the majors Vladimir Dechikj, Gjuza Rodovikj, Obrad Trninikj, Petar Licikj and Colonel Slobodan Krstikj Ucha and with others, all from KOS.’ ‘Until when?’ he asked. ‘Until Markos was removed from duty on August 28, 1948, when radio ‘Free Greece’ gave out information about the CPG Extraordinary Plenum claiming that ‘...Hrisa Hadzhivasiliu and Markos Vafiadis were seriously ill...’ I replied. ‘So that’s it, eh, you

Stalinist dog!’ he said and ordered me to march. I said, ‘I am not hiding anything comrade Major.’

“With my feelings dulled and lacking self-confidence I started walking towards the rubble. Beaten with sticks, yelled at and spat on, I felt tortured deep down inside but in my chest it felt like I was filled with something masculine. Angry and with my teeth clenched I said to myself ‘and there is death in death’. If I had been killed for choosing life and looked down the Adriatic blue, the sun would have to lavishly splash its lustre on me. The sea subsided and its waves became silent and less angry. The stone, tired from my body, was silent and absorbed my sight. I am a man without a home, away from my homeland, like a bird without a nest. The anxiety in my heart kept asking questions. But there were no answers. Identity was power and conflict on this naked island. Everything that happened on this island was pre-planned and imagined, even death. There was silence... The sunny blueness was waving like silk. A blade of wild grass was swaying in the breeze. It bend and arched and then straightens up again. Excitement was rising in me: ‘When will my pain and torment end?’ I asked myself.”

“Stamko Bogdanov, my grandfather on my father’s side, died for Macedonia as a young leader of the Ilinden Uprising. Pop Gligor Gaidov, my grandfather on my mother’s side, disappeared under the knife of the Communists. My mother suffered death by hanging. I don’t know where my grandfathers or my mother are buried. I don’t even know where the living Bogdanovs or Gaidovs are at this moment. Is there no end to this bloody victory, to this ill success? My father went to America to work to make some money so that he could build a new home for the Bogdanov family but now he too has disappeared. All the Bogdanovs are gone. There is no one living in our old residence. There are no people, no houses, no barns and no hope of us ever returning to our village! In our absence who knows who will settle in our ancestral home, the home where my great-great-grandfather was born. For months I have been lying in solitary confinement waiting for my death or for my death penalty to be recanted. My troubles are without end. Life is asking me to continually produce illusions. I continuously search for burning secrets, walking down the path of death. Life cannot be without a dream and without a dance under the full moon. The only thing I have left now is my faith in God to help me overcome this cruelty. This is my last human mechanism for my survival.”

“Every day, barely breathing, barely able to hold back my tears, I examine the past layers of my life as I walk barefoot, looking strange. In the morning I whisper the anthem as I stare up at the blue sky. One day I saw a flash in the distance that spread like the gold tears of a wounded seagull. I stood motionless for a long time watching it, waiting for it to vanish... I am in the last phase of my life when only through death victims become myths and contribute to the development of human culture... The

prisoners with crushed knees and injured elbows rise like stepped on blades of grass in the morning after it rains. We all have the same fate. We walked up some paths to the crest of a hill, we kept going, but the executioners escorting us had one thought in mind: 'We need to kill in order to live.' That's how it was; every generation builds its life on the bones of the dead. One day I saw a man's dismembered body, all dried up, mummified and turned into wood, with his eyes fixed on the rock. It made me think; I, a fighter from Gramos, thrown into the red hell of oblivion, had never seen anything like this. Why now, here on this stone island do I have to witness such never before seen horror: his hands were raised up and pointing to the sky. Motionless during a moment of strength or perhaps during a prayer for redemption for the inhumane torture he had received. Whatever I touch, time touches me back. I am unbelievably intimate with my patience and my worrying. I constantly drift back and forth from the brink of oblivion and madness. Every day it is asked of me to revise my position but I don't know what my position is!?"

"You need to accept everything, now! That's how life is... 'It is time! Do you hear me?' yelled an officer. 'It is time for you all to line up; you bunch of lazy no goods! What are you waiting for you Stalinist bastards?' We go through the same ritual every day. The officer walks up and down in front of us hitting the bare rocks and our backs with his whip, all the while carefully watching us and keeping quiet."

"What else did they make me do? I can tell you things that took place in those days that will make you shiver. For example I was forced to carry almost dead bodies to the cemetery in the dark of night. Alone, in the moonlight, I carried these still living bodies to a mass grave while they were moaning and whimpering. I could see all the bodies in the mass grave by the light of the pale moon. Sometimes I would lie down to catch my breath but could not avoid feeling the sinking pain and sorrow for these people and for my own broken body... But the worst thing they said to me that made me angry was: 'Hey you! Aegean bastard! You who purposely deserted to make the revolution in Greece fail!'"

"Many terrible things happened to me when I returned from the island. The thing that made me most anxious was when someone said: 'Here is the guy from Stone Island... the Aegean!? The liberator! First he was with the Greek communists and after that he joined Tito and became an officer of the Yugoslav National Army. He then was sent to KOS to work as a scout in the Greek Civil War to fight with the Greek Partisans. Then in 1948 he fled from there and came back to Yugoslavia. Then when he was asked who he supports, Tito or Stalin, he said 'The great Stalin.' And then right into prison in Goliot Otok.' The 'marble', that's what they called the

naked island that left an open wound which I have to carry for the rest of my life. Every day I hear those voices and I keep silent. Only the government knows why I keep silent. It forbids me from mentioning anything whatever it may be. I am afraid, I admit it... I don't hold it against them but I am amazed at all those who stare at me and want me to talk about my past."

"But sometimes someone's scream will enter my head and will remain there forever. I hold my ears, I hold my cheeks and I wish to chase the scream out of me. We never imagined that the war would leave in us an indelible physical, especially ethnic, black trace. To this day I tremble in fear when I hear the terrible words 'Greek Civil War'. I watched and experienced it with admiration from afar and from up close. The life of my heart is open, transparent. But the life of my soul is a different world altogether; mysterious and a whiteness where many evils were committed. Everything that I couldn't stand to watch is in there but now it is too late, especially for heroism."

One day, after many years had passed, an important letter arrived for Vasil Bogdanov and he asked me to read it. The letter was from his father Lambro and from his youngest brother Mite, who during the war had fled to America and knew very little about his mother and sister Lena except that they were killed by the Partisans. Before I opened it he said: "You don't know how I feel about being far from my father, my brother and all of them...?" I began reading: "Dear son Vasil. Your brother Mite and I have come looking for your mother and your sister's bones... we don't know anything about Pavle." He persistently kept quiet as I read the letter, sometimes showing a tiny guilty smile on his lips. Oh, fate, God, fate, bad ordeal. No one knows their ending...

* * *

The past had come to an end. There was too much pain associated with the Bogdanov family; the father Lambro Bogdanov had asked that that door be closed forever.

Dossier

Testimonials about the Greek Civil War (1945-1949) given by Jovo KAPICHIKJ, Yugoslav General of UDBA (State Security Services) and Yugoslav Deputy Federal Minister of Internal Affairs.

**From the TV show “Tsentar”
by Vasko Eftov
2008**

V.E.: According to our information, as a representative of UDBA, you came to Macedonia several times and were responsible for the coordination of the revolution that took place in Greece, in Aegean Macedonia.

General: Yes, I was that person. On behalf of Yugoslavia and on behalf of the state, I, as an assistant to Interior Minister Aleksandar Rankovikj, did this job. I led all the Yugoslav activities in Greece, in Macedonia. Some points were in Macedonia and other points were here. In other words it was my job to send weapons, food, clothing, medical assistance and experts to assist in organizing the war, creating units and establishing a hospital in Katlanovo. Similarly we took 10,000 of the children that were sent to the Eastern European countries. (Ivan Karaianov was special deputy scout to Tito. He was also an agent of the Soviet NKVD and a Comintern instructor. Immediate associates and instructors of General Markos Vafiadis were: Gjuza Radovikj, Obrad Trninikj, Milo Vrbitsa, Velimir Docnikj, Svetislav Lutsits and Petar Stojanovikj, all KOS agents from Serbia. Slobodan Markovikj was charged with the task, illegally if necessary, of safely extracting General Vafiadis from Belgrade. (See: KOS and UDBA - Actions and documents of the secret services).

V.E.: Did Tito ever want to help the Macedonians in Greece and later attach Aegean Macedonia to Yugoslavia?

General: No, Tito did not think of joining... Look... that struggle with the Greeks in Greece was the work of the Macedonians. You wanted that done because you were thinking that it was a Macedonian minority. What does Solun have to do with Serbia and Montenegro?

V.E.: In other words it was Lazo Kolishevski who was asking for that.

General: Yes Lazo, but others also thought it was possible, that the situation in Greece was right and a breakthrough towards Greek Macedonia was possible.

V.E.: Did Tito want that?

General: The Government approved it, whether Yugoslavia wanted it or not it had no interest in going to Solun.

V.E.: And did Macedonia have any interests there?

General: Macedonia had interests. There was a centre in Macedonia that dealt with that issue politically. The whole Eastern world was involved, considering that Greece was weak and that the West did not have a lot to deal with on that issue. It was possible, not necessarily to separate that part of Solun but, for Markos and Zahariadis to come to power and as such for the people to make a new Greece, similar to Yugoslavia.

V.E.: Was there a chance that that could be accomplished in Aegean Macedonia?

General: There was no chance.

V.E.: Why?

General: Because we did not want to fight a military war.

V.E.: Why didn't Yugoslavia enter into war?

General: We were a marginal country that could have come under attack by those who were prepared to do everything for Greece. Yugoslavia had no interest, except for Macedonia. Macedonia had interests, the Macedonians saw it as part of their national territory. They considered those lands as belonging to the Macedonian nation. That's how it was!

V.E.: Have you ever been down there as part of some covert operation as a staff officer attached to UDBA?

General: I have not been inside the territory of Greece, but I was in Bitola, in Skopje, in Ohrid and to some border points where we had to transfer materials over the border. We were not making war there; we were just opening the border.

V.E.: In other words, you were just transferring goods across the border.

General: We transferred material and closed the border. They took it and used it in their fight, etc.

V.E.: Did the Macedonian UDBA enter Greece and do battle with the Greek army?

General: That I don't know, whether our troops clashed with the Greeks? No, that is not true. We had our officer-instructors. There were several officers. It is not true; our military never intervened... There was a time when one of our small units crossed the border into Greek territory because it was lost, not to attack, not with a detachment to attack Greece. And then the Greeks captured and killed all of our troops. It happened.

V.E.: Did anyone pressure Tito to participate in that part of Aegean Macedonia?

General: No. That was done solely under his own initiative. It was an illegal act outside of the UN; it was not approved by them or by any other international forum. It was contrary to work underhanded as if nothing was done, even though Yugoslavia was a major factor. All of that went through us and in Yugoslavia I was the person who led the process with a number of people in Skopje and some others in Belgrade.

V.E.: Who obligated you to do that?

General: Who obliged me? Aleksandar Rankovikj of the State Security Service. (Aleksandar Rankovic was a Partisan nicknamed Marko, born on November 28, 1909 near Obrenovach, Serbia, creator of KOS and UDBA, responsible for many deaths.)

V.E.: Did he have a good relationship with Kulishevski?

General: Well, Lazo was... He was with Rankovikj, etc. They worked on it together. Tsvetko Uzunov, of whom I know, worked there. I know – that which was for Yugoslavia was my job and not for Macedonia.

Macedonians there organized themselves. And that's the way it was.

Internationally the war was illegal. We invaded Greece, an independent state, on account of Macedonia and at the wish of the then Macedonian leadership.

V.E.: How much ammunition and weapons did you send down to the fronts?

General: A rail car of arms. It was not one rifle or one machine gun; it was wagon loads of weapons. There were no planes, but there were cannons. There were no tanks, because they are heavy weapons, but there were many light weapons. The many weapons were concentrated in Panchevo and from Panchevo were sent by train to different parts in Greece. The border was opened, our soldiers freed part of the border and the ammunition was placed inside for the Greek Partisans to claim, like it was nothing. Then our soldiers would return and the border would be closed again.

UDBA General Jovo Kapichikj who consciously and responsibly acted on behalf of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1948, and who organized the supply line and supplied the Greek Civil War with weapons and ammunition, would not disclose what exactly Yugoslavia's interests were in that war. He did not even disclose how the Macedonians were pushed to participate en masse in that war through the activists from NOF and AFZH who were organized by the CPY and then left the CPG to deal with them. Now, after 60 years have passed, he concludes that: "It was impossible for things to change in Greece despite the senseless bloodshed!" The reason for that is because the West had no intention of ever leaving Greece. So it was a stupid, absolutely a stupid idea to have started a war there. Such an act was never agreed to at the Conference in Tehran. I repeat: It was never agreed to that Greece would go to the Eastern Block of countries during the Yalta Conference. That never happened!

We are all suffering from Balkan nationalism and we all should understand: A SICKNESS PROVES THAT WE ARE ALL THE SAME – WE ARE ALL PEOPLE, BUT THE GENERAL MOST PROBABLY KNEW WHO AT THAT TIME WAS CAPABLE OF IGNITING THE GREEK CIVIL WAR AND WHAT KIND OF INTERESTS YUGOSLAVIA HAD. HE, EVEN NOW, PROBABLY KNOWS HOW CAPABLE OR INCAPABLE THE MACEDONIANS WERE BEFORE THAT TIME BEFORE TITO AND BEFORE RANKOVIKJ TO POSE THE QUESTION ABOUT THE ACCESSION OF GREEK OCCUPIED MACEDONIA!?! *

* From the chronicles:

“... A few days before the New Year in 1945, the Second Session of ASNOM was held in Skopje, designated extraordinary, which Josip Broz Tito, the great leader did not attend. In his place he sent the Slovenian Edvard Kardelj - Bevts. Mystified by the greatness of his guest, Kolishevski humbly listened to him and Kardelj without being intimidated, before leaving he left Kolishevski with some unpleasant things to think about. The war (WWII) is nearing its end, Kardelj told Kolishevski, and with it the days are nearing when accounts must be given about who did what. Macedonia’s accounts have five major minuses against it: the latest is the starting of the uprising, most comfortable was the mining of the occupation, Macedonia had the lowest destruction, it had the least casualties and, finally, it did not participate in the liberation of Yugoslavia. Frantic, Lazo asked Kardelj what could be done to change the situation. Kardelj replied: ‘The first three things you can not correct, but the fourth and fifth can be remedied. To do that you need your military police (OZNA) to immediately start arresting and shooting people. You also need to immediately send a large unit of fighters to the Srem Front’.”

But what does it mean to be silent before the distorted history of the Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia? How long are we going to hold allegiance to strangers?

The communists (CPY and CPG) have supported us as much as the rope on the gallows supports a hung man. Those who bear allegiance have been doing this to us for six decades and they are still doing it to us now. When will it all end?

Epilogue

All the generals and politicians who led the Greek Civil War, and even some historians who were attached to the government, knew what had happened to the Macedonians in that war, everything else was politics. Exactly for that reason the novel “Noose”, six decades later, has treated the Greek Civil War (1945 to 1949) as a subject of literary analysis and of military-political and historical importance. These are events of our past, which could re-occur in our present and which have multi-layered deposits of dramatic consequences of our uprooting from our homes in Greek occupied Macedonia and of turning us into “WANDERERS”, as individuals, groups, or entire communities. And regardless of the topic and the sources that this novel relies on, events are described as they developed from day to day, especially in times of war, until the later years in the camps and prisons.

The people who experienced the war are able to only occasionally forget their discomfort and anxiety but such moments are rare and are not a measure of their lives. What is described here touches on the moral significance of events formed on the awareness at an individual level. Described here is also the psychological turmoil that is part of our historical destiny, bestowed upon us and on the entire Balkans by the Great Powers. This novel also covers the history of “the political visions”, or at least the topology of it, including an overview of the human situation and destiny in which the heroes, no matter what the initial motivation, regardless of actions and ultimate goals, are always searching for the meaning of life in order to confirm the subjective qualities of their own being.

The heroes confess their beliefs and attitudes in an environment (military or alien) in which psychology and spiritual climate are living and growing entities of ideological activism, which test personal worth, personal risk and details of a person’s moral commitment. This novel describes the suffering of these “condemned” people and their journey in that struggle, unbeknownst to them, working for foreign interests. From another perspective, the novel examines the fate of the displaced – the torn people who wander through the world of human existence in exile, who have been taken and turned into victims. It also examines the political cynicisms, the triumphs, the pragmatism and the hypocrisy of diplomatic agreements.

Many of the “heroes” who participated in these dreadful wars have paid for their loyalties and beliefs in “nationalism” – by death during combat in the units of DAG and by suffering and dying in camps and prisons during and after the wars. But some remained alive to testify and let us know what it was like to have failed in their conscious effort to assert their own identity. What happened to these people, to this

generation, was a complete tragedy mainly because they were left with no exit out of their situation; they had no chance to succeed by resisting. These people were pressured to enter into conflict with a historically murderous force and to experience the trauma that carried them through a time of lawlessness and complete lack of human dignity. These people were faced with a broken system with no reasonable human relations. A false consciousness was instilled into them which eventually pushed them into the hands of the executioner and turned them all into victims. This was done to them by the cruelty of people, some of whom belonged to the same group as themselves. There was no natural human consciousness in that. Groundless and historical misconceptions, such as human origin, have also played their part. In other words, we will meet people in the pages of this book that have personal and official arbitrariness, discreet authority, human life and those unprotected and constantly exposed to the impact of legislative power.

According to statements made by UDBA General Jovo Kapichikj regarding the Greek Civil War: Yugoslavia won the battle, the Greek government won the war and the Communist Party of Greece lost both the war and its freedom. But after the war was over Greeks returned to their homes and the Macedonians, who through the organizations NOF and AFZH sacrificed themselves together with some communists, suffered horrendous casualties, estimated at 20,000 killed and more than 60,000 exiled, destined to become WANDERERS of the world with no right to return to their homes because they were not Greeks by birth. The novel "Noose" has been written with special care and love and with a sense of respect for the fighters, of whom many gave their young lives on the battlefields of Gramos, Konitsa, Klefti, Hashiata, Epirus, Pieriata, Vicho, Lerin, Voden, Negush, Mali-Madi, Burno, Siniachko and in many other battles. The author has reconstructed the entire truth about the genocide perpetrated against the Macedonians and about the loss of the Macedonian people's right to return to their ancestral homes.

"Facts" play an integral and dominant part in this political novel. Facts play a dominant role in the literary analysis of the cruelty of war. Facts play a role in the most frightening, worst moments for those young individuals, with sad destinies, mobilized in the military and who spoke of elementary moral values, humanity and compassion when referring to the Macedonian family. The tragedy of the thousands of mobilized young people is touching, which led the author to ask the question: "Who put the NOOSE around the neck of the Macedonians?" Destiny was a paradigm for those boys and girls (children without childhood) who were forcibly mobilized, forced to fight and do what was required of them in a guerrilla war. The novel has done an extensive analysis of the iniquity perpetrated against the Macedonian people. This is a story about the loss of a

birthplace, of bitter love, of the eternal search for roots and of the deep and sincere sorrow experienced by the author himself.

About the Author

Stoian Kochov was born in 1930 in the village Turie, Lerin Region. During the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) he was an active participant in the DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) units. From 1950 to 1957 he lived and studied in the USSR until his return to the Republic of Macedonia in 1957. Stoian graduated from Belgrade University and after that moved to Skopje.

Stoian authored the following works (all in Macedonian): Meeting (stories, 1989), A dead army (poetry, 1992) (Only) the sacrifice of the Macedonian people under Greece (critical essays, 1994), Dead face of war (poetry, 1996), Giorgi Pejkov - Macedonian warrior throughout the history of DAG (1945-1949) (monograph, 1996), Wanderer (novel, 1997), New Year in the underground barracks in Gramos (novel, 1998), Punishment without guilt (novel, 2001), Eve of destiny (short stories, 1998), Ideological activism over the Macedonians under Greece (critical essays, 2000), Sin of the offspring (novel), Essays and literary interpretation (critical essays, 2002), Presentiment (story), The gravedigger from Lerin (novel, 2001), Balkan Saga (novel, 2004), One way ticket (historical critical essays, 2004), The great return of the wanderers (novel, 2006), Macedonians lost in red hell (historical critical essays, 2007), The warrior and Margarita (novel, 2008).