BANITSA
IN THE MAELSTROM OF THE WARS 1903-1949

ATANAS KATINOVSKI

Translated by

Constantine Mallin
Biljana Kuzmanovska
Valerie Sylvester

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PROLOGUE

This is a book about people in conflict. It focuses on the multi-layered multi-generational conflicts affecting the people of a small Balkan town. They are conflicts rooted in religious, ethnic, economic and language differences that affected generations of people in the Balkans. The battles have been not just military but were also competitions for the hearts, minds and souls of the people of Banitsa. I hope that it leads the reader to a better understanding of the complexities of our history. I hope that this is of particular interest to the large number of people who can trace their roots to Macedonia and to Banitsa in particular. Although the 2018 population of the village was only 590, there are thousands like me in the diaspora that can trace their origins to that small remote village.

Banitsa, or Vevi as it now referred to officially, has a tumultuous history so out of keeping with the peaceful, family-oriented up-bringing that many of us had as second-generation Canadians. Family times with our older relatives were often times of great story telling. As someone who spent many hours listening to these stories, I could appreciate the difficult and extremely challenging events that ultimately led to my parents and most of their close relations emigrating from Greek Macedonia. We heard so many stories but it was hard to put them all in order and in context.

I came across Katinovski's book on Banitsa in the main library in Skopje and I was impressed with his organization and detail. The author Atanas Katinovski, or Tane Katin as he was probably known in the village, was first and foremost a Macedonian nationalist and secondly a communist. Understandably there will be biases in the book that reflect that but his stories are usually in keeping with what I have heard and where the facts may be in dispute, I have attempted to point that out. This book is his personal accounting of the events. However, the footnotes have been added by me and are not part of the original manuscript.

At some point in the late nineteenth century there must have been a plebiscite (with much more than a simple majority) in Banitsa for the citizens to decide whether or not to keep the Greek Church, and as the author points out, the Patriarchate was not present in the village in the late1800's. Alas there was no option for allowing two churches in the village. There was competition throughout Macedonia for the hearts and souls of the natives with the competitors being the Greek Patriarchate, the Bulgarian Exarchate and even the Serbian Orthodox Church. It was difficult to say that the Church leaders were on a mission just to save souls. Churches were tied to nationalism and were often the instruments to gain influence, power, and territory.

Of course, history is written by the victors. Macedonian activists and nationalists, and the communists of Greece were by no stretch of the imagination winners. However, this story is important to help understand the complex and convoluted history of the village and its residents, and to appreciate more fully the horrendous pressures on the people of Banitsa that challenged their native language, freedoms, and well-being.

The book will take the reader from a time of national awakening in the late nineteenth century to the hard losses of the early twentieth century, the arrival of a Greek regime during the Balkan Wars to replace the Ottoman Turks, the tough times of the 20s and 30s, the war against the fascists in the early 40s and ultimately the fratricidal Civil War in the late 40s. As difficult as the earlier conflicts were, there was nothing as destructive as the Civil War. Quite literally families could be and were divided, often ending up on opposite sides. At times participation on side or the other was voluntary but often it was compelled. The partisans had no prison camps, unlike the Greek government. Justice was meted out quite cruelly by both sides however. If you refused gun-point conscription by the partisans you could be shot. If you refused conscription by the Greek army, you had to flee or be sent to prison camp or have your family punished or have your property destroyed or seized.

Unlike what the author says about grand broad-based support for the partisans in the Greek Civil War, many villagers were simply trying to keep their heads low and avoid taking sides. They were simply interested in survival and keeping their stock and land to help survive.

One wonders how the national psyche was affected when whatever one said and how one said it could attract trouble.

Macedonians were in a no-win situation much of the time. If you proclaimed your Macedonian heritage loudly and allied yourself with the communists you were viewed as a worthless by the authorities. If you fought in the Greek army, you were still seen as suspect and inferior to "real Greeks". In my opinion the tragic events in the Balkans had a lasting influence on the way my parents and others conducted their lives. Looking at many individuals from the previous generation I wonder if many of them exhibited continuing symptoms of stress to various degrees.

Macedonians have been struggling for recognition of their linguistic and cultural rights forever, it seems. This book details the efforts of previous generations to assert their own agenda and win recognition. (Coincidentally we are at a time where there may be a rapprochement in 2018 between the governments of Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia.)

As I was growing up in Toronto, there were many opportunities afforded by name days, weddings, engagements, baptisms, village society dances, picnics, etc. for extended families to come together, maintain their bonds and support each other in this new country.

A book on the history of Banitsa from a woman's perspective has yet to be written. The women were often left in the village while the men were in the army or fighting with partisans. My grandmother, whose father was the Vojvoda (leader of a group of revolutionaries) Dzole Gjergev, recalled as a child having incriminating documents being hidden from the Turkish army under her dress. My aunt recalls the fright of artillery shells damaging the house they were in. Heavy

debris had fallen on my young uncle's bed barely missing him. My mother recalled being fraught with worry when the villagers heard of the summary executions of political prisoners on the island of Makronisos where my father was first held and stationed in the Greek army in the 40's. She feared he might have been killed.

Since the days of the Ottoman Turks, men have been leaving the village to seek their fortune. After the Ilinden Uprising of 1903, my great-grandfather left to find work on the railroad in West Virginia. He stayed there several years, sending money back to support his family. He brought his son over to work as a water boy on the railroad. Later on, after serving in the Greek army in the Greco-Turkish War my grandfather went back to the USA to find work to support his wife and family of four. (He never made it back after that second trip to Ohio.) Women, wives, and children were left to deal with absent sons, husbands, and fathers for long stretches whether they were pechalbars (fortune seekers or migrant workers) or fighting as irregulars or soldiers, or in political prisons, or dead because of the many armed conflicts.

As the book notes, there have been mass migrations of Macedonians out of Greek Macedonia. With the population shifts of the last 100 years the presence of the Macedonian language in northern Greece has diminished. With the systematic suppression of language and religious freedom in northern Greece it seems that many of the remaining villagers have been assimilated for the most part. Even Christian names seem different from the older generations in which names like Luba, Dezhda, Grozda, Vanka, Slava, and Velika seemed common.

Fewer and fewer people remaining in Banitsa can speak the language of their grandparents. When the Macedonian language and culture were not being suppressed, they were left to wither away from neglect.

There is a good argument to be made that the Macedonians ending up in Greece after the Balkan Wars of over 100 years ago were treated as colonials. Language, culture, and identity were all suppressed.

Unlike, say people of colour, it has been easier for Macedonians to assimilate or be assimilated into the more powerful and wealthier culture of the Greek nation. The playbook of colonialism involves suppressing the native or local language, calling it a "dialect", refusing to acknowledge the name of the language, bringing in your own religious people and suppressing the local religion, and holding one's own language, culture and people as superior and a shining example to all. If that is not enough, then ease their way out of the country one way or another.

But should one not have the freedom to play whatever music one wishes? Can one explain why all the names on tombstones must be written in a language other than one's mother tongue? Why is there a monopoly on the type of churches one can support and attend? Should not merit be the thing by which you are judged and not your native language? Should there not be a rule of law applying equally to all citizens in a country?

Human rights belong to everyone. Whether we are part of a minority or majority should not alter our respect for all rights of expression. We all have the right to self-identify. Identity issues were often the subject of dinner table discussions with my relatives. Many of my relatives would identify as Macedonian and many would call themselves Greeks (even if they spoke Macedonian in their own homes). The conversations were almost always civil and surprisingly sometimes humorous. The nice thing about Canada is that you can call yourself whatever you want. The other nice thing about Canada is that it made it easier for everyone to put aside past issues and get along with all the people who had also emigrated from the village.

When I was young, some relatives feared that being too vocal a Macedonian could affect any Greek pension or property rights you had or could impact negatively on the wellbeing of your relatives and their businesses in Greece. My parents acted as if it was a given that a small number of our relatives in Canada would report on anyone's political views to the Greek consulate. At some village dances and weddings things could become testy if someone asked the band for a song and

dance glorifying the Macedonian struggle. The immigrants in Toronto from the village had three social clubs, a Banitza Benevolent group formed 100 years ago, a Vevi Society and a third one called Club 75 which tried to be non-political. It can be hard to be non-political though, if just calling yourself a Macedonian is seen as political.

Hundreds of Macedonians who fought as communists and died in the Greek Civil War are buried in unmarked graves in a field near Florina. Those men and their surviving comrades often had their properties seized and their families expelled from their native villages. Their houses were often razed to the ground by the authorities so they would not have a home to return to. Will there ever be a Truth and Reconciliation movement in Greece to clarify and address the misdeeds done by all sides since 1900?

There is always hope for reconciliation between peoples. For example, Dzole Gjergev reconciled with the Turks at the time of the Young Turk movement. He stopped being a revolutionary and instead was hired by the Ottomans as a policeman in Lerin. He was given the nickname of "Atesh Pasha" or Fire Lord by the Turks.

As I write this prologue, there is a new chapter being written in Balkan history now that the newly designated Republic of North Macedonia and Greece have enacted the Prespa Agreement of 2018. Although the Agreement was signed over the objections of significant opposition numbers on both sides of the border, it should pave the way for normalization of relations between the two populations and hopefully lead to more integration into Western Europe. Everybody deserves better economies paired with transparent systems of governance and justice.

I asked my father once why he did not join the partisans during the Civil War. He replied that he, like so many others, felt the leftist movement was doomed. Although they were able to recruit many people early in the course of the war, towards the end, the partisans were known to recruit villagers at the point of a gun. In fact, there is a remarkable story involving a relative. A young woman named Vangelia

was recruited forcibly by the guerrillas only to end up in a squad facing a Greek army unit in which her husband, also from the village, had been conscripted. She convinced a Greek friend in the squad to desert the partisans by putting a white cloth on their rifles and showing themselves to nearby government troops. This in itself was a risky move as it may have been taken as a trick by the soldiers. Although her father was fighting for the partisans in the Civil War, her new husband was in the Greek army.

This book will also describe a Captain Deligianis of the Greek garrison in Banitsa in the Civil War. He drove off a number of inhabitants he felt to be connected to the partisans. In the case of Vangelia, engaged to be married at that time when her mother and siblings were forced out, Deligianis said if she married her fiancé and let him officiate, then he would allow her to remain. Apparently, he personally performed their wedding ceremony as well as the ceremonies for several other couples in the same circumstance.

The history of the village was not affected by the "Detsa Begaltsi", the child refugees gathered and taken by the communists to Yugoslavia and thence to various communist countries in Eastern Europe. That piece of Balkan history seems to have bypassed the village totally as the village was controlled by the Greek government for much of the Civil War.

It is very easy for Macedonians to assimilate into the new culture of Canada. It is good however to be mindful of the positive legacy our parents and grandparents have left us. Care should be taken to recognize that often the attitudes of our parents may be taken up by the second generation without recognizing that history is fluid; it changes with time. For example, my parents' version of Macedonian was frozen in time. With the exception of taking on some English words (or Greek words in the village) it has essentially not changed in generations, while the literary Macedonian language of the Republic continues to evolve in Europe. By the same token, our support for "all things Macedonian" needs to be flexible enough to understand that we are now citizens of diaspora countries and that Macedonia will continue to change even

without us. Our political attitudes to the Balkans should not be frozen in time. As Gladstone said in the nineteenth century, "Macedonia for the Macedonians". It can now be taken to mean that the current citizens of Macedonia be allowed to create their own future, taking into account their need to deal with their own minority issues and their own relationships with their local neighbouring countries.

Throughout my professional career and in my private life I have come across many Macedonians of my parents' generation who seemed chronically ill at ease and I wonder if some were having post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of living through the mess of the 30s and 40s. War and strife can take its toll in multiple ways that outlast the actual physical conflict. That is such a broad topic and I can only draw brief attention to it. Certainly, my parents knew how to keep secrets. In retrospect I can understand that because if you were too open about your views in Banitsa it could get you beaten or killed.

Although Macedonian history can be dark, the real story of Banitsa is not complete without pointing out what a generous people they are, how they loved their celebrations, their music, their connectedness and what remarkable resilience they had to survive the immense trials of history and flourish in faraway places where they could raise and educate their children, trust their neighbours, and all now have the ability to express themselves freely in any manner they choose.

This translation is dedicated to the memory of
Blage and Vassa Mallin.

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Biljana Kuzmanovska of Skopje and Valerie Sylvester of Toronto are collaborators and co-translators of the book. Biljana teaches English in Skopje. She is also a translator, mountain enthusiast and nature lover. Valerie is a professional musician in Toronto and like me was a "repeat offender" in the Macedonian classes taught by Professor Christina Kramer of the University of Toronto. Thank you to both of them for their tireless efforts. The undersigned is a physician who after this foray into translation will not give up his day job.

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Constantine (Dan) Mallin

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xii

CHAPTER 1 Geographical Location, Climate and the Name Banitsa 1

Natural Beauty, Resources, Flora and Fauna 2
Banitsa and Its Name 3
Figure 1: Locations around the village 5

CHAPTER 2 Banitsa—An Administrative and Trade Centre 6

A Free Standing and Political Centre 6
Figure 2: Old British Military Map 7

CHAPTER 3 Basic Statistics on the Villages Within the Banitsa Area 8

Gornichevo (Keli) 8
Banitsa Station (Stathmos Vevi) 8
Zabrdeni (Lofi) 9
Tserovo (Klidi) 9
Rosen (Sitaria) 9
Banitsa—A Cultural and Educational Centre 10
Small Businesses and Trades 16
Real Estate Law in Banitsa after the Departure of Turks 18
Postal, Telephone, and Telegraph Services 20
Street Lights 20
Monuments and Memorials 21

CHAPTER 4 Banitsa After the Turkish Conquest of the Balkans 22

Banitsa under Ottoman Rule 22
Banitsa as an Administrative Centre 22
Relations between the Macedonian People and the Turks 23

CHAPTER 5 The Creation of IMRO, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and its Activities in Banitsa 26

IMRO Starts in Banitsa 26
The Appearance of Bandits, Burglars and Murderers 28
Figure 3: Vojvoda Natse Katin 36
IMRO Development in the Period of 1900–1903 41
The Situation in the IMRO Ranks after the Ilinden Uprising 42
The Campaign against the Greek Andartes and the Role of Bulgarian Supremacist Bands 43
The Young Turk Movement 46

CHAPTER 6 Banitsa During the Balkan Wars and the First World War 1912–1918 53

Banitsa's Participation in These Wars 53
Banitsa in the War Zone 56
Banitsa after the First World War 57

CHAPTER 7 Events Between the Two World Wars 1919–1941 60

The Participation of the People of Banitsa in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 60
Relations between the Population and the Greek Government 61
Migration of the Population 62
The Activity of the Working Class in the Coal Mine 62
Foundation of the Communist Party in Banitsa 63
The Metaxas Dictatorship 65
Terror and Persecution by the Greek Government 66
Compulsory Labour in the Mines from September 1940 until German Occupation in April 1941 68

CHAPTER 8 The Greco-Italian War 1940–1941 70

General Mobilization and the Participation of Banitsa in the War 70
Lost and Captured Banitsa Soldiers 71
Exiled Men of Banitsa 72

CHAPTER 9 Banitsa in the Second World War and the Popular Revolution 1941–1944 74

The Defence of the Country and Capitulation 74
Renewal of the Local Government 75

CHAPTER 10 The Emergence of the National Liberation Movement.....76

The Establishment of the Youth Organization OKNE 76
Re-establishment of the CPG in Banitsa.....77
Resistance to the Restoration of the Old Greek Administrative Authority 79
First Land Mine Victims.....84
Supplies of Grain and Other Products 85
Macedonian Language Renewal in the Church and the Ilinden Celebration.....86
Forming Partisan Staff and Reserve Units.....87
The Formation of EAM 88
Terror and Imprisonment by the Enemy.....89
Reorganization of the Youth Organization OKNE 90
Formation of the People's Court.....91
Women's Antifascist Front (AFZ).....92
Formation of ETA, the Organization for Partisan Protection 93
Actions of the Reserve Unit.....93
Formation of the NOO (National Liberation Boards) and their Activity 94
New Leadership of the Youth Organization EPON.....96
A Large Demonstration in Lerin.....97
Formation of SNOF.....97
Banitsa's Partisan Unit.....98
The Status of the National Liberation Struggle in the Aegean Part of Macedonia 99
An Attack by the Germans.....100
The District Conference of SNOF 102
Formation of the Macedonian Partisan Units 104
The Imprisonment and Murder of the Partisan Lazo Kochev.....106
Mobilization of ELAS and the Formation of a National Militia 107
Combat Actions and Diversions by the Banitsa Unit.....108
The Liberation of Lerin.....110
ELAS's Command to Dissolve the Macedonian Units of SNOF 110
Retreat to Yugoslavia.....111
Formation of the First Aegean Macedonian National Liberation Assault Brigade.....116
Activities of SOF in Banitsa after Liberation from the Germans 119
Reasons for the Failure of the National Liberation Movement.....120

CHAPTER 11 Banitsa from 1945 to the End of the Greek Civil War in 1949 123

Conditions after the Treaty of Varkiza 123
Disarming ELAS Units 124
Large Demonstration Held in Lerin 125
Terror in Banitsa in 1945 129
Formation of the Agricultural Party of Greece 131
Formation of Partisan Groups and Units 131
The Activity of the Youth Organization EPON in Banitsa 135
Forming NOF in Banitsa 136
The Monarcho-fascists Take Control of the Coalmine 137
Celebration of the Anniversary of the Victory of Greece over Italy 139
Seventh Congress of the CPG 139
Mass Rallies and Protests in the Country 141
The CPG Calls for an Uprising and an Election Boycott 142
A Large Demonstration in Lerin 143
Elections in Banitsa 144
A new wave of Persecution in Banitsa 144
Bulkes Meeting 149
Formation of a Macedonian partisan military headquarters on Vicho Mountain 150

CHAPTER 12 The Activity of the First Macedonian Partisan Unit of Lerin District 151

Important Actions under Lefter Olevski 151
A Rift Between NOF and CPG and Renewal of Agreement 152
People from Banitsa Return from Yugoslavia and Join the Partisans 153
Dine Robev, The First Fighter Killed 155
Large Participation in NOF but Return of Terrorism 156
Special War Measures by the Athens Government 158
Tragedy in Banitsa 159
Operation “Terminus” 160
Epirus Manoeuvre 161
Crime in the Concentration Camps 162
Special Measures for Banitsa 163
The Supreme Council of NOF Leads the Battle 164
Greek Democratic Decisions 165
Formation of the Provisional Government 167

The First Congress of NOF 168
The Spring Offensive: Operation "The Heights" 169
Measures for the Protection of Children 171
General Markos is Replaced 172
New Military Tactics 173
Reorganization of the Supreme Military Council and the Provisional Government 174
The Second Congress of NOF 175

CHAPTER 13 The End of Operations and Retreat to Albania 177

Defence of Vicho 177
The Battle for Gramos 181
Communique of the General Staff of DAG 182

CHAPTER 14 The Status of Banitsa After the Civil War 183

Banitsa after the Civil War 183
DAG's Soldiers Evacuated to East European Socialist Countries 184
Reunions Organized in Banitsa 186
Repatriation of the People of Banitsa from the East European Countries 187
Lefter Olevski's Remembrance about the Transport from Albania to USSR 187

CHAPTER 15 From the Poetic Works of Atanas Katinovski 189

An overview of those expelled from Banitsa 199
People from Banitsa who left Yugoslavia and went to Canada, Australia or returned to Greece 201
Overview of fighters killed in NOF-ELAS and the civil war in Greece—DAG (1941–1949) 202
Overview of the victims of fascism and monarcho-fascist regime 203
Overview of people from Banitsa who were killed in the Greco-Turkish War 1919–1922 204
Overview of people from Banitsa who were killed in the Ilinden Epic 1892–1913 205
List of people who broke the oath given to IMRO, and because of collaboration with the Turkish Army and the Greek andartes, were accused and punished with death by the revolutionary organization 205

Overview of soldiers from the First Macedonian National Liberation Assault Brigade as part of YNA, who after the demobilization stayed in Yugoslavia 206

AFTERWORD 207

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF A. KATINOVSKI 210

National Archives of Macedonia in Skopje 210
Other Literature 210
Foreign Literature 211

ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY 212

SUGGESTED READINGS 215

Photographs 217
Figure 4: Aerial View from the South-West of Banitsa 217
Figure 5: The school and the church in the fall 217
Figure 6: Summertime 218
Figure 7: Nivja 218
Figure 8: Vojvoda Dzole Gjergev and his cheta 219
Figure 9: The cover of Katinovski's original book 220

INDEX 221

1

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, CLIMATE AND THE NAME BANITSA

Banitsa is one of the largest villages in Lerin District. In Greek, Banitsa is known as Vevi, and Lerin as Florina. It is situated at the northwest foot of the Kajmakchalan mountain group and is southeast of the town Lerin and at the edge of the Lerin plain. The town Lerin is 21 km from Banitsa, which itself is near the crossroads of three main thoroughfares: Lerin–Solun (Florina–Thessaloniki), Lerin–Kozhani (Florina–Kozani) and Bitola–Solun (Bitola–Thessaloniki). The village is at an altitude of 800 to 850 metres.

Before the Greek Civil War, Banitsa was a settlement of around 2,000 inhabitants, more than 600 households and over 500 Macedonian families. Before the Second World War, the village was much larger, with over 650 houses, more than 800 households and over 4,500 inhabitants. The largest village in the Lerin district, it was essentially a small town. The maelstrom of the Second World War and the Greek Civil War led to worldwide migration, and today there are around 1,000 families with over 4,000 inhabitants in Canada, 400 families in Australia with over 2,000 inhabitants, 150 families in the former Yugoslavia with over 600 inhabitants and around 200 families with over 800 inhabitants in other parts of the world. [Ed. Note: The population of the village in 2018 was 590.] Banitsa is bordered by mountains on three sides. To the north and east is the Kajmakchalan range with the gentle slopes of Tsrvena Lokva and Golemo Klepalo. On the south is Bozhanija, and in the west lies the gentle and fertile Lerin plain which expands and connects to the Pelagonia plain running north to Bitola and beyond.

The Banitsa region is subject to the influence of both the Mediterranean climate coming from the south-west through the Banitsa–Tserovo pass and the continental climate coming from the north-west through the Pelagonia plain. The waters from the mountain range, springs and rivers, flow north through the Lerin plain and into the river Tsrna, and from there east to the river Vardar and south to the Aegean Sea.

Natural Beauty, Resources, Flora and Fauna

Its advantageous geographical location and climate endow the village and its surroundings with a unique natural beauty which is complemented by its natural resources.

Two-thirds of the village's lands lie west of the village and spread onto the rich plain of Lerin, while the other third is on gentle slopes and mountains covered with large woods that extend both north and south of the village. These features include Kajmakchalan, Tsrvena Lokva (Red Pool), Klepalo (Banger), Tsrn Vrv (Black Peak), Golem Dol (Large Dale), Bozdovets (Heavenly), Sinak (Blue), Mal and Golem Kamen (Small and Big Rock), Golema Glava (Big Head), Dolgi Ornitsi (Long Furrows) and Radosh mountain on the slopes of Vicho mountain to the south. There are rich pastures for sheep and cattle on these mountain slopes. Near the eastern part of the village stretches Bozhanija Mountain, which is rich with oak trees. The woods are a special feature of Banitsa and its surroundings. The hills and mountains are covered with beech and several species of oak such as Italian, Turkish and Holm, along with various smaller trees and bushes (white and black hornbeam, hazel, juniper, etc.) On Kajmakchalan, white and black pine and large areas of chestnut all flourish together to create a special beauty. In the area around the village, as well as in the whole of the Lerin district, one finds a unique animal world. This area is rich with diverse wildlife including wild boar, deer, chamois, brown bear, rabbit, fox and wolf. In addition, there are lynx, badger, mountain goat and also partridge (wheatear and field), wild chicken, pheasant and similar fowl. The plain is rich with rabbits, and in the fall wild geese can be found alongside the rivers.

The favourable climate and the gentle slopes around the village allow for vineyards of grape varieties for quality dessert and table wines.

Agriculture is the main activity of the village. Even before the Second World War, there were machines for modern farming: threshers, grain harvesters, haying machines and others, while the farmers' cooperative provided all kinds of assistance to the villagers.

As a result of the diminishing number of working people in the village, only the following crops are planted: grains (wheat, rye, barley, and oats), smaller areas of corn and forage crops (common vetch, vetch), watermelon, vegetables, lentils, and among the corn crops there are beans, chickpeas, hemp and flax. In the post-war period sugar cane was planted, and several factories were built for production of sugar and fruit preserves. Poppies, tobacco and other crops could be processed locally.

Fertile fields and pastureland, favourable precipitation and the abundance of water from springs and rivers, as well as ample production of fodder crops, enabled the people of Banitsa both to grow crops and to engage in animal husbandry (meat, wool, dairy products, etc.). Before the Second World War, there were several thousand sheep and goats, over 500 cows and several thousand other livestock grazing on the rich pastures. Banitsa also has a modern and developed beekeeping industry.

Banitsa and Its Name

It is known that in ancient times there was a settlement northwest of the present location of Banitsa, about four kilometres from the north side of the Solun-Lerin highway (i.e., the road Via Egnatia), in the so-called Gladno Pole (Hungry Field), which was burned down by unknown tribes. There was another settlement southwest of the village Banitsa called the Kale—an ancient fortified settlement about six kilometres into the slopes of the mountain Golem Kamen (Large Rock). Near the valley by the Kale flows a river, Dreno'a Reka (Dogwood River). Across from this settlement, from the left side of the river in the

mountain Golema Glava (Big Head), there was another settlement, called Luman, and one more ancient settlement north of the village in the area, called Ridot (the Hill). None of these ancient settlements has been archaeologically investigated. Much of the material of historical value from these ancient settlements was used by the locals for building.

The village of Banitsa is mentioned in writings of the sixth and seventh centuries AD. Here is a legend about early Banitsa. At the foot of the mountains Big Klepalo and Bozhanija there were two springs, while the area beside the springs was a marshland or a slough. To reduce the amount of water from the springs so that the marshland could be converted to pasture for grazing their cattle, the family who lived there put all of the wool from the sheep into the springs—a row of wool, a row of stones and earth and so forth. When one of the springs under the slopes of Klepalo Mountain was blocked, clanging sounds coming from the mountain could be heard for several days, until a big spring gushed forth on the other side of the mountain near the village Tserevo, and then the clanging stopped. That is how the mountain got its name Klepalo–bell-clanger.

Once the springs had been tamed and suitable land for grazing cattle created, the community started to build huts, and as the family grew, the settlement expanded, too. Since the settlement was built on marshland, it was called Batak (Slough). It is not known when or why, after the settlement of the Slavs, the name was later changed to Banitsa—a name that probably derives from the word "ban", an honorific title.[1]

A small church, Sv. Nikola (St. Nicholas), built in the eleventh century, is preserved and is evidence of the rich Christian life in this region. All icons and icon paintings were in the Old Church Slavonic.

[1]There are two other Macedonian villages called Banitsa. One is a Roma village near Strumica. The other was the site of the death of Gotse Delchev. It was abandoned after being destroyed by the Greek army in the Balkan wars. It is near Serres. Another Banitsa is located in Western Bulgaria. A" ban" is also possibly the old word for a local ruler, so perhaps a Banitsa was a local administrative centre.

After the Balkan Wars and the partition of Macedonia into three parts, this area fell under the rule of Greece. The Greek government did not like the Macedonian names of the populated areas nor all Slavic names in general. With its denationalization and assimilation policies aimed at the Macedonian people, in 1926, by law all geographical and topographical names, as well as all Slav Macedonian names and surnames of the population, were replaced with Greek names. Since then, the village of Banitsa was known by its new Greek name, Vevi, which is used today, but for the Macedonian population the name Banitsa has stuck.

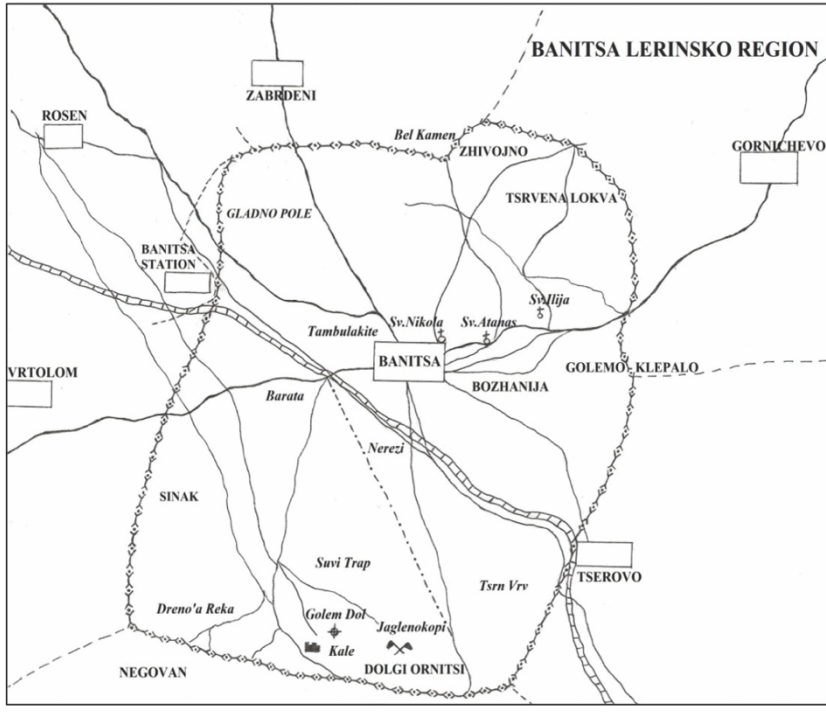


Figure 1: Locations around the village

2

BANITSA—AN ADMINISTRATIVE AND TRADE CENTRE

A Free Standing and Political Centre

Banitsa, an ethnic Macedonian village, is an independent municipality and administrative centre in the Lerin District. At one time it resembled more a small town than a village. It is situated 21 kilometres from Lerin and eight kilometres from the town Sorovicho.

The villages of Gornichevo, Tserovo, Rosen, Zabrdeni and the railway hamlet of Banitsa Station are all within the municipality of Banitsa. During the Ottoman Empire Banitsa had been a *kaza* (district in Turkish) which contained the aforementioned villages along with two others, Vrtalom and Negovan.

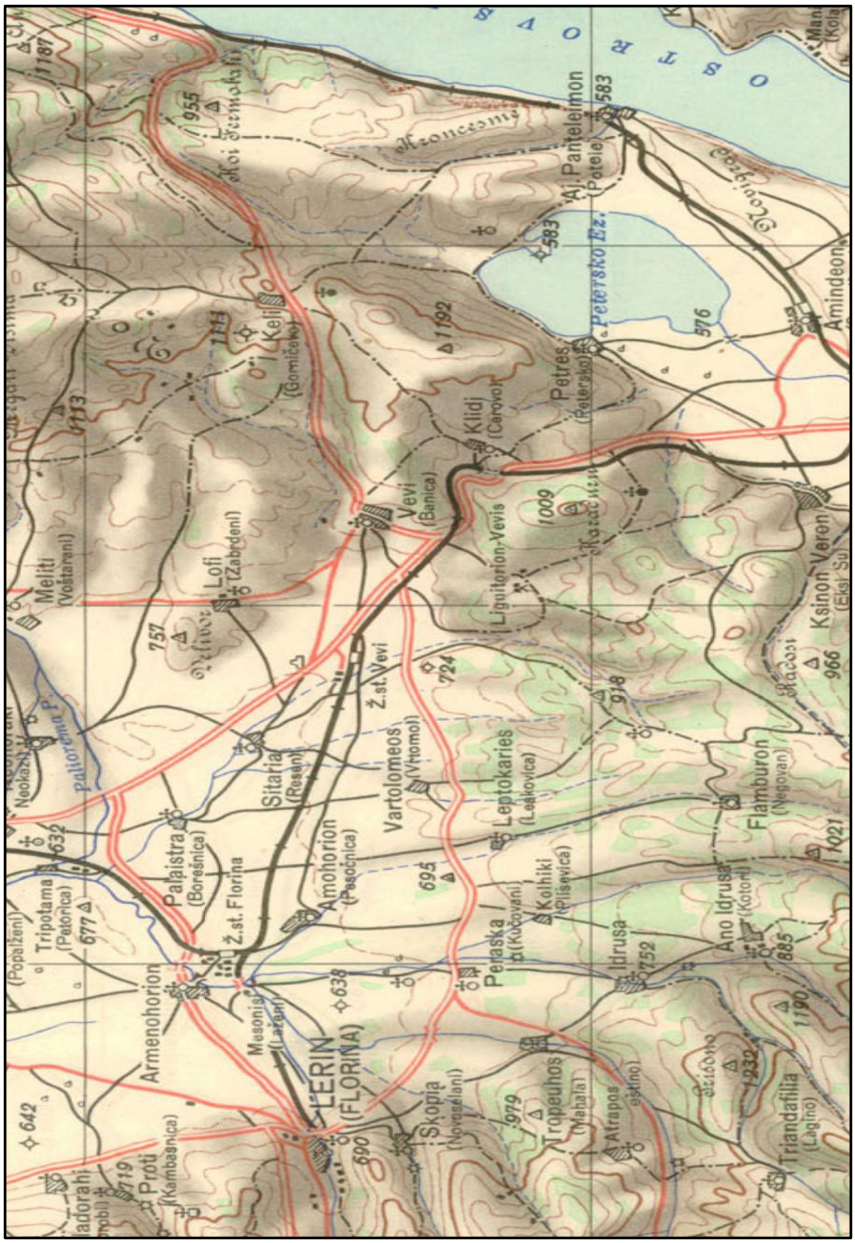


Figure 2: Old British Military map

3

BASIC STATISTICS ON THE VILLAGES WITHIN THE BANITSA AREA

Gornichevo (Keli)

The Macedonian village of Gornichevo is located seven kilometres east of Banitsa in the bosom of the mountain Nidze (also called Kajmakchalan) at 940 metres above sea level and near the Solun–Lerin motorway. According to the census in 1913 there were 1,103 Macedonians, in 1920 – 983 residents, in 1928 – 1,095 residents, and in 1940 – 1,577 residents. After the civil war of 1946–1949 about 220 residents escaped to Yugoslavia, ten families fled to Bulgaria, and around 30 soldiers went the East European countries, which led to a decline in the number of residents. According to the 1951 census, Gornichevo had 1,336 residents, 1,680 residents in 1961, and in 1971, due to mass emigration overseas, only 1,069 residents. The main income is from agriculture.

Banitsa Station (Stathmos Vevi)

This is a small hamlet very close to Banitsa at the site of the old railway station, a kilometre distant from the village. It was established in 1920 by the Greek government. There are 48 two-storey apartment buildings and the same number of families was settled there from Asia Minor in 1923. The people of Banitsa did not allow them to settle in the village proper. According to the census, in 1923 there were 151 people, in 1940 – 203 people; in 1951 – 198 people; in 1961 – 134 people; and in 1971, only 110 people.

Zabrdeni (Lofi)

North of Banitsa at the foot of Kajmakchalan, on the slopes called Velibor there is the village of Zabrdeni. It has always been a Macedonian village and even today its ethnicity has not changed. These are the statistics according to the Greek Government census: in 1913 – 358 residents; in 1929 – 306 residents; in 1928 – 418 residents; 1949 – 516 residents; 1951 – 514 residents; 1961 – 541 residents; and 1971 – 443 residents. The decrease in population is due to overseas emigration.

Tserovo (Klidi)

Situated four kilometres southeast of Banitsa, on one of the slopes of Kajmakchalan and at 840 metres above sea level, is the village Tserovo. It has always been and remains an ethnic Macedonian village. According to the census in 1913 there were 402 dwellers, in 1920 – 399 dwellers, in 1928 – 492 dwellers, in 1940 – 620 dwellers, in 1951 – 636 dwellers, in 1961 – 468 dwellers, and in 1971 – 261 inhabitants.

Rosen (Sitaria)

To the west of the village of Banitsa, near the Lerin–Solun highway, is a main crossroad (Lerin–Kozhani–Atina) and the rail line Lerin–Solun. There the village of Rosen is situated on the Lerin Plain. The village is ethnically Macedonian to this day., In 1913 according to the census there were 552 residents, in 1920 – 488 residents, in 1928 – 590 residents, in 1940 – 805 residents, in 1951 – 805 residents, in 1961 – 847 residents, and in 1971 – 714 residents. During the Civil War, eight families left the village and emigrated to Yugoslavia or today's Republic of North Macedonia.

Banitsa—A Cultural and Educational Centre

Banitsa is famous for its many churches, St. Petka having been the oldest, the biggest, and the most beautiful cathedral in the Lerin District with its stunning icons and frescoes in Old Church Slavonic which were of great artistic value. It was located in the eastern part of the current primary school's yard in the village. The Turkish Army raided and burned it down in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1900 the people started collecting material help to rebuild the church for which initiative Izet Pasha [a local Ottoman administrator] gave full consent as well as material support on behalf of the council board. However, the members of the board united with the Greek Patriarchate and in 1905 had started rebuilding it and renaming it as a Greek Church. The vojvodas (leaders of revolutionary bands) Natse Katin and Dzole Gjergev demolished it in June 1907 right before it was consecrated.

St. Nikola Church was built in the eleventh century and was located in the northern part of the village. It was a masterpiece of Old Slavonic style in its engravings, frescoes and icons. The building was burned down by the Greek andartes [Greek paramilitary forces] before the Balkan Wars, and rebuilt in the period from 1932 to 1935 but with Greek icons and frescoes. The church of St. Ilija, which was built around fourteenth or fifteenth century, has also been burned down and rebuilt several times. However, the Old Slavic frescoes have been preserved and are highly valued today. St. Dimitrija Church was built around the fourteenth century in the centre of the village and has been burned and razed but rebuilt over and over. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was burned down and never rebuilt again. Today on this location there are community administrative offices as well as a monument dedicated to the fallen soldiers from Banitsa who died in Asia Minor (Turkey) during the Greco–Turkish War of 1919–1922.

Just west of the village, at the site of the mound called "Tumbata," there used to be a church, St. Gjorgi, which was raided and burned down by the Turks on their way to conquering the Balkans, never to be rebuilt. In honour and remembrance of this church, the villagers proclaimed "Gjurgjovden" (St. George's Day) as the village Patron Saint Day to be

celebrated annually. Today's St. Gjorgi Church was built in 1864 and represents one of the most beautiful churches in the Lerin District. Up until 1919 mass was conducted in Old Church Slavonic and the Macedonian language. The church was consecrated by the Greek Patriarch in 1920 and since then Greek has been used in the church.

In the nineteenth century Banitsa had its own representative in the Prespa–Ohrid Macedonian Archbishopric, the priest Ruse Dine Kochev, who, with support and respect from the people and as well from the Turkish regime, managed to preserve and protect the Macedonian Church and Christian faith, the local traditions and the unity of the people, not only in Banitsa but throughout the Lerin District. He managed to protect the Macedonian Church from the influence of the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate.

At the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the monk, Brother Gerasim from the village of Trije, Lerin region, returned from Sveta Gora (Mount Athos) and began an extensive program of building churches and monasteries in the Lerin District as well as opening Macedonian schools in both the native and Old Church Slavonic languages. The people gave financial help as well as volunteer labour in the construction of the churches and the schools.

The first school in Banitsa was built in 1865 and opened in the autumn of the same year with classes given in the Old Church Slavonic language. It served both school-aged children and a large number of adults who wanted to become literate. The first teacher was Tipe Boglev, who had attended schools in Sofia, Saint Petersburg, and Istanbul. Another teacher was State Stojan Tashev, also well-educated and a people's favourite. He was also the 'kodzobashija' (mayor) of the Banitsa district and a representative at the Lerin Episcopacy with the title of Archimandrite. People of the whole of the Lerin region put their trust in him. The Macedonian school continued until 1919 with few

interruptions and in 1920 was opened again as a regular and obligatory school. It even had a pre-school.[2]

During this period, the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate exerted great pressure to bring the school under their control and to introduce the Greek or Bulgarian language. Both had strong connections with the Turkish rulers and were given permission to open their own schools in Banitsa. After 1903 there were two parallel schools in Banitsa. Shortly after the Ilinden Uprising and with the increasing influence of the Bulgarian supremacists ('vrhovisti')[3] within the ranks of the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and among the people, there was a Macedonian school with Bulgarian influence which was well attended.

The entire village of Banitsa was burned to the ground during the Great Battle of 1912 which took place near the village when 30,000 Turkish soldiers, on their way from Bitola to Sorovich, were ambushed by the Allies (Greeks and Serbs in the First Balkan War). In the following years of 1912–1919, schooling took place in the churches or in private homes altered for that purpose. After 1920 when the school was re-opened there were 400–500 students in the school and approximately 60–80 students per grade.

During the Metaxas dictatorship from 1936 to 1940, the mother tongue (Macedonian) was banned from speech and study. Obligatory night schools were organized for the purpose of teaching Greek to adults, up to the age of 65, who had not finished six years of primary school during the period of 1920–1936.

People who resisted attending the Greek school were forcibly taken to school by the police (*korofilatsi*) and severely punished. At the police station many villagers were physically and mentally abused, after which they had to pay huge fines for opposing Greek school.

[2]There was a very brief period when the Greek government complied with promises to provide minority language education.
[3]People who believed that Macedonian liberation could be achieved only with help of Bulgaria and unity with Bulgaria as one.

The generation born between 1910 and 1928 were able to finish the six years of primary school education, while those born between 1929 to 1933 had only a few years of primary education due to the onset of the Greco-Italian War in the autumn of 1940.

During this period there were few residents of Banitsa who finished Gymnasium (high school) or a training college, and even fewer finished university.

The people who completed high school included Blazhe Malinov, Kocho Hrisafov and Leko Hrisafov, Trifo Malinov. Tase-Atanas Babulovski graduated from Teachers' College.[4]

Pandora Pavlova Kochevska, Kata Hrisafova Malinova, Lena Dzugomanova and Marina Dzugomanova completed Home Economics School.

Dimitar Kochevski completed Army Technical College. The following graduated from university: Stavre Kochev, Nakile Kolerov and Mitse Tashev in Law; Gligor Danev and Boris Dzugomanov in Economics; and Micho Velikin in Business.

The priests Father Filip and Father Stefo completed seminary school at Sveta Gora (Mount Athos). All generations born from 1916 onward would finish a six-year education in primary school; high school comprised an additional four years.

The reason so few people continued on to high school can be attributed to the nationalistic character of the Greek regime. A university education was accessible only for children whose parents were loyal to the regime and to the few who had the economic means to afford enrolment.

[4]Blazhe Malinov went on to become a neurosurgeon in Ohrid, Yugoslavia, and Trifo Malinov became an engineer in Skopje.

After the occupation by the Greek Government, the Macedonians suffered under severe economic conditions, especially after the settlement of 650,000 Madzhiri[5] from Asia Minor in the Macedonian territory. An expropriation of a great deal of especially fertile land around Banitsa was carried out by the government, with this land then given to these forty-eight families from Asia Minor who were settled in the newly built Railway Station hamlet. Discrimination against the participants in the Ilinden Uprising of 1903 had started and many Macedonians had to flee to neighbouring or overseas countries. During the World Economic Crisis (Great Depression) from 1929–1934 many emigrants lost their jobs and many could no longer send money to their families in Banitsa and this led to their even greater impoverishment.

Workers from the coalmine in Banitsa were also let go. Profit on local produce was very low and the people were in a state of abject poverty. Many children could not afford basic school items such as books and notebooks, and the government did not provide them any help.

Banitsa had two priests who had graduated from the Seminary at Sveta Gora and who played an enormous role in keeping and protecting Macedonian traditions, language and customs. These priests suffered along with the people.

The school had a school board led by the schoolmaster (dieftindis), two teachers and two people assigned by the town council. There were 12 teachers in the school of whom only two were Macedonians from the village itself: Atanas Babulovski and Lena Dzugomanova. The rest were Greeks.

Every year there were trips made by the more senior students, at their own expense, on a student exchange system. They were accepted by another school and stayed with friends for a few days and vice-versa. It is noteworthy that all those exchanges were with schools from Old Greece, so that Greek children were coming to Banitsa. Thus, the main

[5]Christian refugees from Turkey.

point of these excursions was assimilation: to reach the young innocent minds of the Macedonians.

A group of students stayed at a youth camp in Corinth in 1937 and this event was used by the 'fifth columnists' (people who undermine another larger group such as a whole nation) and Metaxas' fascist army to train and politically indoctrinate those youth in the spirit of the fascist regime. However, the students returned from the trip utterly disappointed that they had been treated as second-class people, bullied and humiliated by the Greek students and the people overseeing the camp.

Banitsa's school had a well-developed physical education program and many sports were played at the big stadium as well as two other smaller pitches. Banitsa also had a sports football club called "Pavle Melja" (Pavlos Melas) which was formed in 1924; several generations of young people participated in the club. The club played in the North Zone of Greece and placed high in the league. There were two other teams playing in the Lerin District League. The town's young people were very interested in football and athletics in general which is why these clubs were very popular.

All the saints' days, holidays and other celebrations in Banitsa were celebrated with music and traditional dance (*oro*) in the village square. During the holiday "Vasilitsa" the people, especially the young, would dress themselves in knightly and traditional Macedonian clothes as well as other carnival costumes and would gather and go around the village, accompanied by music and singing, collecting gifts. The group would visit every house and household, and were rewarded with many different gifts, such as pieces of pork, bacon or homemade sausage (lukanci), wheat, flour, beans and money. In return the group would dance an *oro* and sing a song in the yard. This tradition lasted until 1936, when it was banned. After that, the group would only play music and dance to it, the players being Krisho Podev and Krishe Janchev. This would end late in the evening after all the houses had been visited. A dinner was prepared for all the villagers.

On the holiday called "Pokladi", the young people of the village would organize a big celebration. The girls could not participate by acting in the event, so a boy would dress as a bride and then, accompanied by two groomsmen, would go to church, where the "bride" would kiss everyone on the hand; in return for which, "she" was rewarded with as much money as the others could part with. After that they would continue to gather gifts, going from house to house.[6]

Small Businesses and Trades

As befits a large village, Banitsa had a number of tradespeople, small businesses, and services. To meet the everyday needs of the people, in 1940 there were the following trades and craftsmen:

- Tailors: Dore Janin, Pando Kujchev and Bogle Katin;
- Barbers: Gligor Popdimitrov and Tsile Hrisafov;
- Shoemakers: Risto Popalev, Koche Jovchev and Davido Janin;
- Baker: Janko Malinov;
- Blacksmiths: Risto Pedev, Atanas Harishi and Kole Veljanov;
- Retail stores: Kole Malinov, Boris Hrisafov, Mitse Malinov, Stamati Mihelis, Vasil Proskov, Kole Janin, Mitse Laev, Tole Mangov, Kiro Dzugomanov, Leko Pavlev, Vangel Vodenecot;
- Restaurants and taverns: Dore Malinov, Boris Babulov, Mihali Mihelis and Stavre Ralov;
- Photographic studio: Gligor Popdimitrov;
- Butchers: Kole Katin, Gele Vachkov, Kire Poprusev, Gire Babulov, Dine Pavlov and Kitse Pavlov;
- Taxi and/or truck-drivers: Mitse Vasev, Milanche Pavlev, Davido Janin, Kocho Babulov and Boris Sariev.
- Bus drivers: Milanche Pavlev, who operated a few lines

[6]For a thorough description of local culture please consult with Korolov's book on the village of Drenoveni.

(Banitsa-Lerin, Banitsa-Sorovich, Banitsa-Kajlari and back) and organized tours when the need arose;

- Taxi: Milanche Pavlev and David Paparusev;
- Power-operated mills with two or three mill stones: Petse Vragov and the Hrisafovi Brothers (Petse, Boris and Tsile);
- Whitewash factories: Milanche Pavlev, Kitse Mangov, Leko Abov, Gligor Danev, Kocho Babulov, Pande Velikin, Stefo Sariev, Mitse Robev and sons, and others;
- Buying and selling grain: Petse Vragov-Tudzarot.

There were many other traders who could be found selling whitewash, grapes, wine, *rakija* (moonshine brandy), coal, melons as well as many livestock products in the markets in Lerin, Sorovich, Kajlari, Kozhani, Voden and even in Solun. Banitsa had a market day on Wednesdays. There was also a well-developed livestock market.

Banitsa had a functioning co-operative with many individual producers as members of the *Sintirismos* (agricultural producers' union) through which they purchased the necessary materials, fertilizer, productive livestock, etc. Through this union, they could place their agricultural and animal products on the market, as well as receive advice in the field.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, trading in Banitsa changed drastically. New rail lines were built: in 1873 the rail lines Skopje–Solun and Solun–Istanbul; in 1894, the Skopje–Bitola line was finished; and in 1906, a Bitola–Solun line was built. This last railway line passed near Banitsa. With the advent of the railways, the camel and other animal caravans slowly but eventually disappeared. Banitsa, with its railway station, developed even further. Business with quicklime (var) and the discovery of large deposits of coal (lignite) enlivened commerce. Coal mining started in 1908 with production increasing after a mine cart rail was built from the mine to the shipping station at the railway intersection called "Barakta," where each day several thousand tons of coal were shipped in all directions. At the beginning around one

hundred people were employed, and in time the number doubled, then tripled, representing an enormous economic boon for the village.

Real Estate Law in Banitsa after the Departure of Turks

After the Young Turk Revolution, "The Beys" or "Begs" (Turkish provincial lords), aware of their weakening power, started selling barren land while keeping the more fertile fields. They carried out these sales through certain representatives who all too often deceived the illiterate peasants. The land sales were often not documented on papers known as '*tapii*' (deeds) that were valid at the time. This was done only for the more aware and insistent peasants. They were the only ones who received a *tapija* (deed), but with the many wars and fires, most of them were burned and people were unable to prove ownership, which often led to their property being confiscated and re-sold. The matter is relevant because there are still unsettled property issues between Greece and Turkey, and even today there is extortion and the selling of people's already-purchased land.

The maelstrom of the Second World War and the Civil War destroyed many of those documents with which one could prove ownership. I will give an example of what happened to my family. We owned land of about 2,400 square metres (5/8 of an acre) at a place called "Baldunka," which my family, ever since my great-grandfather's time, used as a place for threshing wheat. In 1934 a representative of Banitsa's Sinan Bey asked us to prove ownership of the place with *'tapija'*. According to their evidence and '*tapija*' at the Land Registry, this land supposedly belonged to the Bey. My grandmother, 60 years of age at the time, earnestly tried to prove that the place had belonged to the late Natse Katin for more than 40 years, in support of which every villager could testify. Of course, that was all in vain since the family's '*tapija'* had burned in the great fire of 1912. The representative placed a price of 3,600 drachmas on the land, which, unless paid within a certain period, would result in the land being auctioned and sold to the highest bidder. Left with no other recourse, we sold all the livestock we had: 40 sheep, 2 oxen, one cow, one horse, and together with all the

savings that my father Lazo Katin had sent us from Canada, we acted. With 3,600 drachmas we again bought our own land and received a '*tapija*'.

The period of war that followed took its human toll, with many villages being raided or burned to the ground. The violence ensuing under the post-war monarchist-fascist Greek regime forced many to leave their birthplace and emigrate to other countries. My family, except me, emigrated to Canada since my father was already there. My grandmother died in 1942. What was left behind was a new two-storey house built in 1941/42. The old house was destroyed during the bombing.

In the early 1950's, another representative of Sinan Bey appeared, again claiming that the property was his and asking us to prove ownership. At that time, my uncle, Risto Malinov (a brother of my mother), had been using the house for storing livestock feed. My parents in Canada could not prove their ownership since they had been exiled by the Greek authorities (together with many families who fought for the partisans), and all the documents and pictures found in their houses had been destroyed. My uncle bought the house at auction.

In 1970, when my father went to visit his birthplace, my uncle recounted the events that had taken place and offered to sell him the property. My father agreed, paid the same amount, and became the official owner once again. In a nutshell, the same land had been purchased twice, not counting the first purchase done during the Ottoman Empire.

There are numerous other such cases. Many households bought the same land several times from the representatives of Sinan Bey, all of this happening with the blessing of the Greek government. This was a part of their political aim to pressure the Macedonian population to voluntarily leave their houses and move overseas. There is no other explanation for this because the bureaucrats in charge of the real-estate registry had documents of ownership, but every time one would ask to see those documents, they would say that there was no proof of

ownership and most of the documents were destroyed during the war. Added to this was the fact that the Greek government issued a law under which all participants in the Civil War who immigrated to the socialist countries were stripped of both citizenship and their properties. Dozens of households from the village, whose members were outside the borders of Greece, were affected by the power of this law. The Greek authorities tried to settle colonists from Old Greece, but as soon as they found out about the properties and their owners, they immediately left the village, never to return. There were no other settlers.

Postal, Telephone, and Telegraph Services

The postal service, up until 1920, was run by people or messengers, whose main occupation was delivering letters, messages or money from town to town and village to village. Even during the Ottoman Empire, there had been a person employed for this service.

The postal, telephone and telegraph office was set up in 1920 and located in the school building. From 1924, Kole Kolerov was employed and in charge of all postal matters. Every day he would send and receive mail and other shipments from the passing trains. He had plenty of work since more than 500 people had left to work overseas, and some 60 to 80 served in the army. As a government employee, he also did small favours for the police and the authorities, and he himself claimed to be Greek, although he was not.

Street Lights

Banitsa would eventually look more like a small town than a village, especially after the district authorities finally installed a street lighting system with the advent of electrical power. The owner of the coal mine, Mitrendjo, had organized a power plant project back in 1928, for which he was imprisoned and his property confiscated.

In 1933, the Banitsa town council reached a consensus to illuminate the village by installing street lamps with butane gas. In 1934, after widespread participation, hard work and financial donations by the villagers, the project was completed. All the streets were illuminated by butane gas lamps placed on tall poles at certain distances. House interiors were lit by oil lamps and icon lamps. Coal miners made use of carbide miners' lamps at home. In 1935, Milanche Pavlev powered his house lights by his own windmill-produced electricity.

Monuments and Memorials

Banitsa is home to many artistic features such as the frescoes that can be found in the churches of St. Gjorgija, St. Nikola, and St. Ilija. They are a masterpiece of Slavic culture and literacy. The other churches are newer.

On the hill northeast of the village stands a granite monument erected in honour of the fallen Serbian soldiers of the Balkan and First World Wars. The monument is hollow on the inside and the bones of soldiers from the Banitsa battlefield are placed therein. West of the village, around five kilometres from the Lerin-Solun and Lerin-Kozhani crossroad, there is a monument to the fallen Allied soldiers from the First World War. It is fenced with four concrete poles connected with chains, and was built by the Greek government together with the governments of the Allied powers.

In the centre of the village is the monument to the fallen soldiers from Banitsa who were lost during the Greco-Turkish War in Asia Minor of 1919–1922.

4

BANITSA AFTER THE TURKISH CONQUEST OF THE BALKANS

Banitsa under Ottoman Rule

After the Turks conquered the Balkan Peninsula, the land was divided into '*chiftliks*' (estates) and allotted to wealthy Turkish landowners, with the local people becoming their indentured labourers or *kmetovi*.

Banitsa was the *chiftlik* of Izet Pasha and Sinan Bey, who both lived in Bitola. To manage the estate, they had their own representatives in the village: in the nineteenth century they were Trifun Kolerov and Ruse Dine Kochev, and in the twentieth it was Dine Kochev-Kjosata. The people worked for the '*bey*' (chieftain) their lands as hired labourers, sharecroppers, or tenant-farmers. As the beys' power and wealth declined, they started to sell the land to the people who had previously worked for them.

Banitsa as an Administrative Centre

During the Ottoman period, Banitsa was a '*kaza'* (juridical district) governed by a '*mudir*' (local governor) and belonged to the Bitola District. The village had a '*kadilak*' (court of law) along with several '*kadii*' (judges) who executed the law. Banitsa had its own representative in Valis, the court house in Bitola, and in the second half of the nineteenth century the position was held by Trifun Kolerov.

In the *kaza,* the political-administrative authority was executed by a council governed by a '*mudir'*. The council comprised judges, beys and other well-respected wealthy villagers, along with representatives of all the independent municipalities (*'belediye*'), which belonged to the '*kaza'* of Banitsa. The villages of Gornichevo, Tserovo, Zabrdeni, Rosen, Vrtalom and Negovan were administered within the *kaza* of Banitsa.

In Banitsa, in addition to the administrative-political council of the kaza or juridical district, there was an administrative governing board of the independent municipality of Banitsa, headed by a 'kodzobashija', a position similar to a mayor and held by a village elder.

The *kodzobashija* was one of the most well-respected and trusted men of the Turkish administration, and a loyal citizen of the regime. He was a professional administrator paid by the Turkish authorities.

There was a police station (*zaptiah*) in Banitsa under Alai Bey. The police officers were of Turkish nationality. There was also a large Turkish army base in Banitsa. This army played a major role in subduing uprisings of the people. By the end of the nineteenth century and with the appearance of IMRO (the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) in this region, the Turks were forced to re-locate the police and army bases to Lerin.

Banitsa was a centre of church hierarchy as well. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it had its own representatives in the Ohrid-Prespa Archbishopric located in Krushevo. They were Ruse Dine Kochev and State Stojan Tashev.

Relations between the Macedonian People and the Turks

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a large re-location of poor Anatolian Turks into Macedonia began. Many Turks settled in the Lerin region at this time and established new, independent communities,

but there were also Turks who integrated into Macedonian neighbourhoods and villages.

The Turkish authorities also tried to settle Turks in Banitsa itself but the villagers petitioned the bey of the chiftlik and their plea was granted. The Turkish settlement, Vrtalom, was established at this time, situated around seven kilometres from Banitsa near the Banitsa- Kotori-Lerin road. At the beginning, the newly-settled Turks bred livestock, then farmed crops, with their main product being tobacco. In the formation of the settlement, a great part of the land in the area known as 'Sinak' was taken away from local Banitsa residents and given to the new settlers.

There was a high level of distrust between the Turks and the Macedonians and very often conflicts arose. The Turks committed great atrocities during the regular army's military campaigns, joining them in looting Macedonian villages, setting them on fire and committing other acts of violence. Later, the Turks would support the Greek andartes (paramilitaries), feeding and hiding them in their villages. In 1907 the local vojvoda, Natse Katin, warned the people of Vrtalom not to support the Greek andartes.

They did not heed the warning and a sanction followed. Natse Katin and Dzole Gjergev, along with their troops, surrounded the village, attacked it and killed all those suspected of helping the Greek andartes, leaving many burned houses behind. The same treatment followed for Katranitsa, Plishejtsa and other villages.

Unlike some areas of the Ottoman Empire, there was no conversion to Islam recorded among the local population.

After the liberation from Turkish rule and the agreement between Greece and Turkey for the exchange of populations from each other's lands, which meant the removal of Turks from the territory of Greece, all the Turks from the Lerin district were re-located to Turkey. As the Turks were leaving, many Macedonians sought retribution for all the wrongdoings by the Turks which had been left unpunished.

Macedonians attacked livestock and household caravans on the Lerin-Solun and Lerin-Kozhani roads that were left unprotected by the Greeks, thus avenging themselves and taking all they could.

One interesting instance is that of the villager Gele Vachkov, who took two former raiders along with their families away from the procession and yoked them with a ploughshare to plough his field. They pulled while he poked them to remind them of the misdeeds they had done. They had put many mothers in black mourning dresses. At the end, Vachkov had even wanted to kill them, but was stopped by the other villagers. The families were then left to continue on the road to Istanbul.

After the Turks left, they were replaced by 650,000 Christians from Turkey who wanted to relocate to Greece. The Greek government settled these groups throughout Aegean Macedonia in a policy intended to both assimilate the Macedonians and also economically pressure them into leaving their birthplace for overseas countries. That was the end of the great Ottoman Empire. However, the people of this region not only didn't get their freedom, but fell under a new occupation and subjugation far worse than that of the Ottomans had ever been. The great Greek barbarian government and fascist monarchy did everything to eliminate the Macedonian population. Not only did they not succeed in this, but the Macedonians gave them a powerful lesson during the National Liberation Struggle fighting for ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army) in World War Two and later on in the Civil War for the (communist) Democratic Army of Greece. The Macedonians had over 40,000 soldiers and 260,000 supporters in the war against the monarcho-fascists and their external allies, the Anglo-American imperialists.

5

THE CREATION OF IMRO, THE INTERNAL MACEDONIAN REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN BANITSA

IMRO Starts in Banitsa

Banitsa, as the largest village in Bitola District and a major administrative centre, was often in the forefront of political activity.

The people of Banitsa had been fostering progressive ideas and organizing movements for change ever since 1886: that year the church administration of Banitsa's *kaza* petitioned the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Istanbul and the Turkish government for the resumption of independence and autocephaly for the Ohrid Patriarchate. The leader of this movement was Tipe Boglev, also known as Sulo. Under pressure from the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate, however, consent to form an independent and autocephalic (free-standing) Ohrid Patriarchy was denied.

During the spring of 1896, the commander of IMRO, Markov of Bitola, was in Banitsa laying the foundations and uniting all the movements in the Banitsa kaza, forming a local and district leadership structure.

According to later research, the man operating under the pseudonym Markov was none other than Gjorche Petrov, who lived in Bitola at the time and was the first organizer of the IMRO movement in

Bitola District. Gjorche Petrov established the IMRO movement in Banitsa and in the rest of Lerin District. Under his leadership, the first *komitski cheti* (bands of fighters) were formed. These bands were irregular military formations, and included the hajduk troop led by Natse Katin under the pseudonym Natse Babunski, who was in charge of the Banitsa region. The hajduk group had been active since 1892, but from 1896, operated as a band for IMRO in the Banitsa region, Voshtareni and later on in P'p'zhani. Dzole Gjergev was the leader of the second band of komiti (fighters), formed in 1897, and Leko Dzorlev the leader of the third troop, formed in 1898.[7]

The commander of the regional commission of IMRO was Tipe Boglev-Sulo, and the other members were Mitse Hrisafov, Mitse Kochev, Tole Dafov, Krste Malinov and the three *vojvodi* (leaders of revolutionary squads) from the village of Banitsa—Natse Katin, Dzole Gjergev and Leko Dzorlev. These commissioners were the organizers of the movement in the region as a whole, while the vojvodi and their troops were greatly feared by the Turkish army and administration.

Tipe Boglev-Sulo was a respected and popular man and, possessing a broad perspective and an excellent knowledge of the movements in the fight against Turkish oppression in the Balkans. He rejected all outside influences in organizing the movement. He engaged his sons, Tego Boglev, a young intellectual who worked as a teacher in the village Voshtarani, and Mitse Boglev, who helped him with internal administrative matters. They all contributed greatly to the expansion of the movement and the dissemination of its ideas for organized action by the Macedonian people for liberation from Turkish oppression.

Besides Gjorche Petrov-Markov, Dine Abdormanov and Kitse Matsin, both of Banitsa, also appeared later in the village as instructors for IMRO. Helping them and acting as couriers were Kole Pavlev and Done Pavlev, also from the same village.

[7]According to the editor's father, Evan Mallin, Leko Dzorlev had been a "*pojlek*", a herdsman. He got into a brawl with Dzole Gjergev before he (DG) was a *vojvoda*. Dzole accused him of cowardice, of hiding under his wife's skirt. He took Leko's rifle and joined IMRO.

Great respect and recognition are due to Gjorgi Kujchev for his work in organizing and expanding the movement and as well protecting the Macedonian Church and the Old Church Slavonic language in Banitsa, the surrounding villages and Lerin District, from the influence of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Greek Patriarchate. In the period from 1898 until 1913, he led an open struggle against all external influences to preserve and keep the Macedonian language as the language of instruction. He was a priest as well as a teacher of the Old Church Slavonic and Macedonian languages. He was mysteriously murdered by the Greek andartes during their great campaign of 1913.

The Appearance of Bandits, Burglars and Murderers

With the appearance of Turkish and other bandits and murderers in the Lerin area of Bitola Province, the populace became distressed and started organizing a defence against these villains. They organized village watchmen to look out for intruders and to alert the population quickly.

In 1892, the vojvoda Natse Katin, under the pseudonym Natse Babunski, along with his hajduk group, represented the first organized defensive force of the village. Later on, his band along with those of Dzole Gjergev and Leko Dzorlev from Banitsa were under the umbrella of IMRO.

These vojvodas together with their bands of fighters were the first organizers of the uprisings against Turkish oppression and aggression against the innocent Macedonian people. The population of Banitsa accepted the IMRO movement as a whole. They all joined the organization and everyone had their own role in its development. Unable to tolerate the violence and ruthless oppression, the difficult living conditions, the humiliation and suffering, people left their homes to join the hajduk troops of Natse Katin, Dzole Gjergev and Leko Dzorlev, who were hiding in the mountains. These troops not only fought against the Turkish army but also organized attacks and robbed

Turkish properties and wealthy tradesmen, and gave to the poor common people. Let us mention some specifics about these outlaws.

My grandfather, Natse Dzole Katin, who later took the pseudonym Natse Babunski, was born in Banitsa, the second of Dzole Katin's four sons, the eldest being Leko, then Natse, Kole and Mitse. This middle-class agricultural family mostly bred livestock. Natse married the famous beauty Mara Alushova. A year later they had a son and named him Stojche. Like the rest of his family, Natse also worked as a breeder and trader of livestock. The high taxes that the Turks had in place at the time gradually impoverished the family, and, in the spring of 1889, Natse decided to go to Istanbul in order to earn more money. There he found work as a waiter in a restaurant owed by a Macedonian from Lerin named Gele.

In Istanbul he acquainted himself with activists of the Macedonian intelligentsia and joined the movement to free Macedonia. He longed to return to his birthplace to be close to his family. Natse Katin was a big, tall man with broad shoulders, big eyes, a sharp look with thick eyebrows and a coarse black beard. He was a brave, restless spirit, a determined and hard-working man, but with a good heart and very hospitable nature. He had no problem in making friends and keeping them. He possessed good organizational skills. He also spoke Turkish and Albanian.

The Greek historian Stergiu Trijandafilidi wrote: "The vojvoda Natse Katin was a blood-thirsty man who murdered many Greeks. He was a revolutionary, a military leader, organizer, and a serious and fearless commander. He stood out from other vojvodas." On his way home from Istanbul, Natse stayed in Sofia for a period of time. There he met with other Macedonians involved in the movement such as Tane Kanchev from Gorgilievo who later on became a vojvoda under the pseudonym Tane Grozniot (meaning "fearsome"). There Natse Katin pledged himself to return to Banitsa and continue the fight for liberation of Macedonia from the Ottoman empire.

In 1890, before the holiday of St. Dimitrius or Mitrovden, celebrated on 8 November, in the early morning hours, a group of *zapiti* (policemen) did a search of Natse's house and arrested him with a warrant issued from the Central Istanbul Police Station. He was under arrest in connection with a brawl which had taken place in the Istanbul restaurant, during which Natse had managed to free two Macedonians on their way to prison. He was interrogated for a long time and many methods were used on Natse, but he did not confess to anything. He was detained for more than a year in jail in Bitola and endured the cruellest torture at the hands of the Turkish police. His elderly father was determined to get him out. Knowing the Turkish soldiers and their superiors' way of thinking and their penchant for corruption, he decided to free his son in that manner. After pulling strings and bribing many Turkish middlemen, he got to the prison guards who were taking Natse to the hearing at the District Court which was 300 metres from the jail. The prison guards received a considerable bribe to allow the escape of Natse Katin.

During his time in jail, Natse had become acquainted with many other activists arrested for their revolutionary work against the Turkish regime. It had served him well to keep up to date with the situation in Macedonia, the activities of the movement as well as the resistance against the Turkish regime and Turkey's collaborators, Greece and Bulgaria.

After his escape, Natse became a leader and formed a hajduk troop of poor, honest Macedonians cast out by the Turkish regime for various offences or unfulfilled obligations to the authorities. Natse became a vojvoda under the name of Natse Babunski, and along with his group, patrolled the mountains of Banitsa: Radosh, Golem Kamen, Vicho and Pelister. He had become a member of the District Revolutionary Committee of IMRO in Bitola. The District Committee, led by Gjorgi Sugare, gave the vojvoda Natse Katin command of the region of Banitsa.

In 1899 Gjorgi Sugarov gave him a new assignment—to be the district vojvoda of the villages where the most infamous Turks lived: P'p'zhani, Opshorino, Vrbeni, Negorichani, Bitusha, St. Petka, Klabuchishta, Dolno and Gorno Kalenik.

Natse Katin was a brave, driven, and strict military leader, greatly feared by the Turkish Army, Greek andartes, Bulgarian komiti troops and other enemies of the IMRO movement. His cheta (group of irregulars) roamed over all of Bitola Province. He went wherever his help and action was needed. He always won his battles, leaving many casualties and much material damage to the other parties while his own group suffered minimal or no casualties at all.

According to Dine Nedelkov, in the spring of 1903 all the foreign consular representatives called on the members of the Revolutionary District Committee of Bitola to appear at the French Consulate where they could present the plans and objectives of IMRO to the Austrian, French, Russian and German consuls. All the members came incognito, dressed as priests, teachers or as Muslim women, covered in veils and scarves ('feredze'), that is, all but Natse Katin, who was accompanied by his bodyguards Risto from Orizari, Dine Nedelkov and Ilo Dajkov. They arrived on horseback but did not dismount until the French Consul came out to greet them, whereupon they all entered the building.

The Austrian Consul, on greeting the vojvoda Natse Katin, gave him an Austrian medal as well as a letter of guarantee in case the Turkish patrol met him on the way back; the Russian Consul gave him a Russian cross. The vojvoda then put the medallion on his musket and the cross on his hat, on which was written the motto 'Smrt ili Sloboda za Makedonia' ('*Death or Freedom for Macedonia'*).

He met with other members of the regional committee there, who also brought forward their ideas and goals for the Macedonian struggle for independence and autonomy. They asked the consuls to inform their countries' governments of IMRO's goals and asked for material and other aid in order to win independence and achieve recognition of a free Macedonia. When this significant and historic event had concluded, all

the members of the Regional Revolutionary Committee of Bitola left in the same manner as they had come. Natse Katin, whose bodyguards were waiting outside, departed Bitola proudly and returned to the village of Poeshevo, where the headquarters of his band of fighters was based.

The Turkish administration had previously been informed by the Consuls about the meeting with the members of IMRO and had been asked to absent themselves; however, they could not have expected such a high-profile appearance as that of Natse Katin despite their knowledge of his bravado. The Turks did not get in his way and acknowledged his courage.

After the failure of the Illinden Uprising and the increased activity of the Bulgarian supremacist bands or vrhovisti,[8] the Greek andartes also appeared in the Lerin region. These andartes collaborated with the Turkish government and army, and together fought against the komiti. After 1905 their activities increased as the revolutionary movement and the action of the chetas grew weaker. The andartes attacked the komiti troops with the aid of the Turkish army and especially targeted families who had members in the chetas and people who helped them in any way. The andartes would follow the chetas and wait until they were too far away to be able to come to the aid of the Macedonian villagers; the andartes would then enter the villages, killing any members of the revolutionary committees and any accomplices in the Ilinden Uprising, and burning down their houses as well. These andarte groups appeared in the villages of Negovan, Vrtalom and Petersko in Lerin District. The first two villages are on the border of the Banitsa region, while Petersko is around seven kilometres from Banitsa near the village of Ekshiso-Gorno Vrbeni (Ekshi-Su). In the spring of 1905 the vojvoda Natse Katin, along with his troops, attacked the village of Negovan, killing all the andartes and their accomplices (‘jatatsi’), and burning down their houses.

[8]People who believed in Bulgarian supremacy and thought freedom could only come by unity with Bulgaria.

Katin sent the andartes a message, warning them not to endanger the innocent Macedonian population and that if they wanted to fight, they should fight with the komiti. He sent a special message to the andartes in the village of Petersko warning them that should anything happen to the Macedonian population of the village of Sorovich, that the village of Petersko would be burned to the ground and all of the Greek-collaborating villagers beaten up. That was how the activities of the andartes of this village were subdued.

Because of the many atrocities committed by the Turkish population of the village of Vrtalom, as well as the help they gave the Greek andartes, in 1907 the vojvoda Natse Katin with his group, along with ten more vojvodas with 300 men, surrounded the village and burned it down, killing all the andartes in the village. At the beginning of June 1907, the vojvodas Natse Katin and Dzole Gjergev took action to close down all Greek schools and take over the Greek churches, in other words, to set fire to all Greek churches and Greek church books in Lerin District. The Turkish administration in Lerin was informed of this by Trifun Mitse Kolerov and Jane Ruse Kochev of Banitsa, who had organized the construction of a Greek church in the village where previously there had only been Macedonian churches. The Turks sent in their army and the vojvodas withdrew in order to prevent bloodshed. However, on 24 July 1907, the District vojvodas Natse Katin-Babunski and Dzole Gjergev came into the village again to investigate the betrayal to the Turkish authorities. When they confirmed that Trifun Kolerov, Jane Kochev and the priest Ioan Dajkov were involved, the perpetrators were tried in front of the local revolutionary court where they confessed to their deeds and begged for mercy and forgiveness. There they were sentenced to death, and the vojvoda Kire Kachorov carried out the death sentence for the first two who were in the village. He took them outside the village and killed them. The vojvoda Natse Katin Babunski asked the priest Ioan Dajkov to go to the village of Rosen to attend a funeral; there he was arrested and executed by the komita (soldier) Dine Pendzov according to the verdict previously reached.

That same day, 24 July 1907, the Greek church was demolished and the books were publicly burned in the centre of the village of Banitsa.

The vojvoda Natse Katin-Babunski and his cheta took part in many actions against the oppressors and enemies of Macedonians in the following villages: Dolno Vrbeni, Boreshnitsa, Plishevitsa, Kleshtina, Armenoro, P'p'zhani, Buf, Kotori, Gornichevo, Banitsa, Vrtolom, Petersko, Neveska and others.

One of the major victories of the vojvoda Natse Katin-Babunski was the Battle of Banitsa in June 1903. While holding a meeting in Banitsa, the members of the Bitola Revolutionary Committee were betrayed and attacked by the Turkish army. All of the members of the district council were gathered there: Natse Katin, Dzole Gjergev, Gjorgi Popanchev, Pando Kalashev, Tane Gornichevski Grozniot and Chakalarov, along with 200 fighters brought to the meeting for security. In the morning hours of the second day of the meeting, the patrol noticed that a Turkish army group of around 2,000 soldiers was approaching the village, blocking it from all sides.

The members of the District Committee, after hearing the news of the army's approaching, reached a quick decision that all of their soldiers would withdraw down the riverbed towards the fields to the place called 'Tumbata' where the Turkish army would not expect them to go. Babunski cut through the barricade on the north side and surrounded the enemy on the west side, thus giving the others troops a chance to escape. In the battle, which lasted more than four hours, the vojvoda Gjorgi Popanchev was killed along with nine other komiti. Natse Katin, Dzole Gjergev, Ilo Kotorkin and Mitse Janev-Miskarot were wounded. The Turks suffered many more casualties.

The barricade of the village lasted until the next day. In the morning hours, when the Turkish Army entered the village, there was an order given for all the villagers to come outside their houses. The soldiers searched the houses and found not a single komita or weapon; the Army leader, in a fit of anger, then ordered the village to be burned down and the people killed. However, Izet Pasha and Sinan-Bey, who were in Lerin at the time, were informed of the Battle of Banitsa and the plight of the

people, many of whom were their labourers. Knowing what would happen to the people and the village, they went at once to intervene, and the village and the people were saved. The Turkish Army, unhappy with the intervention by these respected men, took nine people as hostages, warning the villagers not to welcome komiti troops in the future. The villagers taken were: Tsile Janin, Krste Boglev, Kitse Popdinev, Pero Popov, State Tashev, Kire Alushev, Minde Dajkov, Delo Hrisafov, and Dine Malinov. They were sent to Dijarbekir, Anatolija, in exile ('surgun'). They stayed there until the Young Turk revolution in July 1908, when they were set free and returned to the village.[9]

The vojvodas Natse Katin, Dzole Gjergev and Leko Dzorlev discovered that the snitches were members of IMRO who had fallen under the influence of the Greek andartes. At a hearing, these individuals admitted their deeds and asked for mercy. A Revolutionary Court pronounced the death sentence for Vangel (Gele) Kiro Nichev, then head of the local committee of IMRO, Kire K. Kochev and Trajko Kurtov, members of the local committee, while the charges against the suspect Dine Malinov were dropped.[10] The vojvoda Leko Dzorlev carried out the executions by shooting them near the village of Gornichevo on the slopes of Kajmakchalan only three days before the Ilinden Uprising.

The vojvoda Natse Katin-Babunski, as a member of the regional committee of IMRO, participated in the Smilevo Congress and was against the decision to proceed with the Ilinden Uprising. Nevertheless, he and his cheta joined the Ilinden Uprising in the battles for the liberation of the town of Neveska. For a few days the red flag of Macedonia was raised there before the town was re-taken by Turkish Army.

At the beginning of January 1908 in the village Buf, Lerin District, the Revolutionary Committee of the District of Bitola held a meeting with all the vojvodas of the district and the neighbouring districts. Members of the Central Committee of IMRO were there.

[9]According to Evan Mallin, his grandfather Dine Malinov never went into exile.
[10]According to Evan Mallin, a vojvoda spoke on his behalf.

Fiery Flame of the Balkans

Fiery flame of the Balkans
There, commanders fight a battle
Commanders and vojvodas
The first vojvoda was Natse Katin
Natse Katin, fearsome vojvoda
All of the Balkans feared him
All of Lerin trembled before him
Natse Katin of Banitsa
Following him Tane Kalandzov
of Gornichevo
Following him Leko Dzorlev
of Banitsa
Raising his voice Natse Katin
Natse Katin fearsome vojvoda
Hooray, hooray our brothers
Our fight is for Macedonia
Natse Katin on his horse mounted
Riding, holding the flag and carrying
it atop the hill
Golden letters written on the flag
Golden letters saying "Freedom
or Death"
Freedom or Death for Macedonia
(Folk Song)

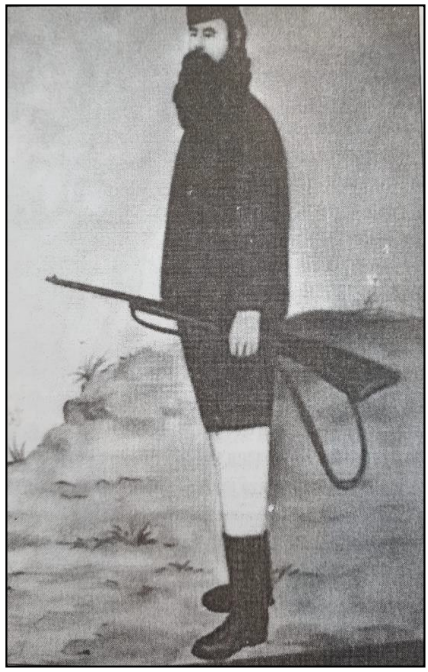


Figure 3: Vojvoda Natse Katin

This song was dedicated to the regional commander Natse Dzole Katin, also called Natse Babunski, who was born in 1872 in Banitsa, Lerin District, and who was killed on 7 March 1908 in P'p'zhani, Lerin District. It was sung throughout Bitola Province. After Natse Katin's death, however, Dzole Gjergev banned it. The song was recorded in 1984 by Atanas Katinovski, the grandson of the vojvoda Natse Katin, in Toronto, as recited by the elderly Olga Katina who was the wife of one of Natse Katin's nephews, and who lived and reached old age in Toronto.

At the meeting an analysis was made of the war and the political situation of each vojvoda and his cheta. Each vojvoda gave a report of his accomplishments as well as the weaknesses in the battle against outside enemies and internal interference. A heated discussion ensued about the reports of the vojvodas; the main complaints were directed at the reports of the vojvoda Dzole Gjergev from Lerin.

In the end, they set in motion the plans given by IMRO in the battle against the Greek andartes and the 'vrhovists' troops. New replacements were received as well. The regional commander, Natse Katin Babunski, who up until then had been in the region around P'p'zhani, was named regional vojvoda of the area around Banitsa. Other vojvodas were deployed to different areas as well.

The vojvoda Dzole Gjergev was replaced. For personal reasons and because his pride was wounded, he decided to eliminate the vojvoda Natse Katin Babunski so that he could reclaim his position. He accused Babunski of being an accomplice to the andartes and claimed that there was a letter to prove it. He presented this slanderous accusation to the local committee of Banitsa, which consisted of Risto Popjachev as president and members Kole Janin, Dine Malinov, State Tashev and Tipe Dajkov. When they asked for the letter, he told them that he had sent it to Tipe Boglev as proof to the Central Committee in Sofia, in order to reach a quick decision about the betrayal.

Having a close relationship with him, the members of the Local Committee believed him and came to a verdict: the vojvoda Natse

Katin-Babunski was a traitor and should be sentenced to death. The penalty was to be enacted immediately.

The vojvoda Dzole Gjergev was not one for waiting long. He called his personal bodyguards, the soldiers Ilo Kotorkin and Mitse Sariev, both of Banitsa, to carry out the directive, i.e., to kill Babunski. The komita Sariev asked for an explanation and Gjergev told the same story, but when he asked to see the letter as proof, the vojvoda said that it would be given to him after the execution of the order.

In the morning hours of 7 March 1908, Ilo Kotorkin and Mitse Sariev came to the village of P'p'zhani where Babunski was staying. They immediately got in touch with Kire Kachorov, who was one of Babunski's bodyguards, and after being informed of the purpose of their visit, Kachorov took them to Babunski, who welcomed them sincerely and invited them to dine with him. On the way out the door, the komita Ilo Kotorkin shot Natse Katin in the back of his head, causing him to fall down dead at the feet of Mitse Sariev. Kotorkin and Sariev immediately fled the scene before the security team could do anything because Kire Kachorov went with them.

Gjergev later killed Babunski's executioners because he could not trust them. Only Ilo Kotorkin, in whom he had full trust, was spared. The komita Ilo Kotorkin was not to be blamed for this event. The sole responsibility lay with Dzole Gjergev. Natse Katin's bodyguards spoke the truth about the murder, the murder of their favourite vojvoda and activist who had fought for 16 years to see Macedonia a free and independent country. When he died, my grandfather, vojvoda Natse Katin, left his wife Mara and their three sons, Stojche, Lazo and Slave, all under age. Stojche died in 1910 in Solun. While working on the Bitola-Solun railway he had injured his leg, developed gangrene and soon succumbed. He was married but did not have any children.

The other son, Lazo Katin, was sent to work in France by his uncles in 1918, in order to protect him from the Greek andartes who were after him. On his return to Banitsa in 1920 he married Marija Malinova. Lazo was drafted to serve in the Greek army, but returned to the village

after eight months since he was the provider for the family. He got a job as a village guard, along with Trende Malinov. He had two boys, Bogle and Natse (Atanas), and one daughter, Hrisanda. Lazo left for Canada in 1928, and in 1947 brought over his wife and daughter as well as his daughter-in-law, wife of his older son, Bogle Katin. Bogle was interned by the monarch-fascist government, but after being freed he also departed for Canada, in 1951. Lazo's younger son Natse was a participant and organizer in the People's Liberation Struggle from 1941 and moved to Yugoslavia along with the partisan units who were the First Aegean Macedonian People's Liberation Brigade, and after their absorption into Yugoslavian National Army, he remained in Macedonia.

Slave, the youngest son of the vojvoda Natse Katin, was only six months old when his father, was killed. Because of the great terror by the Greek government, his brother Lazo brought him to Canada in 1948. In 1950 all of the family moved to Canada. Slave was killed in mysterious circumstances in a car accident in Toronto.

The remains of Natse Katin and Mara Katin, who died in 1942, were transferred with new ceremonial honours from the cemetery in the village of P'p'zhani to the cemetery in Banitsa by their sons in the USA in 1947.

Dzole Stojche Gjergev was born in Banitsa in 1872. He was from a poor labourer's family. He finished primary Orthodox school in Banitsa under the teacher Dimitar Markov from Bitola. When he grew up, he became a village guard. With the arrival of the instructor of IMRO, the vojvoda Markov (Gjorche Petrov) in 1896, Dzole was among the first to join the movement. Dzole Gjergev started his own cheta in 1897 and become a vojvoda of the Banitsa region and the neighbouring villages. In 1905 he was elected as vojvoda of the Lerin-Kajlari region, and was accepted as a member of the Bitola District Revolutionary Committee. All the troops in this region were under his command. Dzole Gjergev was nicknamed Atesh Pasha ("Fire Lord"), and was feared by the Turks, the Greeks, the Bulgarians and their accomplices and collaborators in Lerin District.

The actions of all the vojvodas in Bitola Province and further afield were well organized and most of them done collaboratively. Gjergev's closest collaborator and friend was Natse Katin. It is without a doubt that in all the actions and battles that Natse Katin organized, Dzole Gjergev also took part.

Gjergev was killed in Lerin, in Petre Dramno's restaurant (*meana*). Petre was also a member of IMRO. Gjergev was shot by Pande Gele Nichov of Banitsa, in revenge for his father Gele Nichov, who had been sentenced to death by IMRO for treason. In this action Pande had the help of a Turkish mercenary, Satarntin, who was a labourer from the village of Voshtarani, Lerin District. Both of them shot one bullet through the window.[11] The assassination had been planned by the General Office of the Greek andartes in Athens. The news of this cunning assassination reached everyone in Lerin District including Gjergev's wife and his two sons, Tane and Slave, who were in Banitsa.[12] The people who killed him were left unpunished.

The remains of the vojvoda Dzole Gjergev were buried at the Church of St. Gjorgija with full honours. He was a fighter for social and economic justice and for a free and independent Macedonia. He had made only one mistake—executing Katin-Babunski.

Vojvoda Leko Giche Dzorlev was born in 1870 in Banitsa, Lerin District, to a farming family.

Leko Dzorlev, as a member of IMRO in 1898, gathered his own band of followers from Banitsa and became a vojvoda. His assigned region included Bosharchani, Krushoradi, Setina and Miokazi. He collaborated with other vojvodas from the Lerin region and from Bitola District, especially Natse Katin and Dzole Gjergev. They often worked

[11]According to Evan Mallin, his grandfather, Dzole Gjergev was shot by Satarntin only. Nichov paid the mercenary. After the Young Turk revolution, Gjergev had been hired as a policeman in Lerin by the Turks.
[12]He also had a daughter, Kitsa, Evan Mallin's mother.

together in the actions and battles against the Turkish administration, the Greek andartes and the Bulgarian supremacist (vrhovist) rebel units.

In the spring of 1903, Leko was captured by the Turkish army in the village of Dolno Vrbeni and sentenced to life in prison in Diyarbakir, Asia Minor. After the victory of the Young Turk Revolution, he was released in the summer of 1908. When he returned to the village, he was welcomed with full military honours at the railway station by Dzole Gjergev, Tane Kanchev and all the other vojvodas, along with their troops.

In Diyarbakir, Leko Dzorlev had probably met with some 'vrhovists' and came under their influence, which is why he started espousing collaboration with Bulgaria. According to the research of the old revolutionary, State Boglev of Banitsa, Leko started to work in favour of the vrhovists. He left Banitsa, never to return. He was found strangled in mysterious circumstances in his apartment in Sofia, Bulgaria.[13]

IMRO Development in the Period of 1900–1903

In 1900 there was broad acceptance of IMRO in the village, with all the men involved. The Banitsa leaders, especially the highly-regarded Leko Dzorlev, had the largest territory within Bitola Province as their responsibility. They were among the top organizers in IMRO and among the first bands within Bitola Province to be armed.

In the village of Banitsa, the Local Revolutionary Committee of IMRO consisted of the president, Vangel Nichov (Gele), with members Kire K. Kochev, Trajko Kurtov, Dine Malinov and Kole Janin, the security chief. These individuals carried authority and respect, and completed the duties assigned them by the organization with conscientiousness and passion. They helped to extend IMRO's reach to the local villages, forming IMRO organizations and armed chetas. In Gornichevo there was a cheta formed under the leadership of Tane

[13]According to Evan Mallin, only about 20 people left the village to go to Bulgaria in those times.

Kanchev-Grozniot, who provoked fear and trembling in the Turks and other enemies of the Macedonian people.

In 1903 the local cheta commander Natse Katin participated in the Smilevo Congress. On his return from Smilevo, Katin held a meeting to inform the local committee of the decisions of the Congress regarding the plans for an uprising.

On 20 July (2 August in the old calendar), Ilinden, (St. Elijah's Day), the Ilinden Uprising erupted. Every band within the Lerin region and Bitola Province participated. All the Turkish villages and the army depots in these villages were totally demolished. All the chetas headed to the town of Neveska where, after several days of battle, the Turkish army surrendered the town.

The vojvoda Pando Klashov was active around Banitsa at this time. According to the descriptions of the late Ilinden veteran, Ilo Dajkov, and the old revolutionary, State Boglev, Klashov's cheta guarded the crossroads of Lerin-Kozhani, Lerin-Solun and Banitsa-Tserevo against the Turks coming from the north, from Bitola.

The cheta of Tane Kandzov-Grozniot took position on Bigla (mountain) near Gornichevo to block the arrival of the Turks coming from Solun. Despite these chetas playing an important role in securing these major military strategic routes, these units are thought to have had no active participation in the Ilinden uprising. They were accused of not leading the local populace and not activating the reserves of IMRO.

The Situation in the IMRO Ranks after the Ilinden Uprising

After the suppression of the Ilinden Uprising, there were difficult times for both the villagers and the komiti bands. There was a period of consolidation within the ranks of IMRO. Political will and psychological morale had to be restored. Burned villages and homes had to be re-built. Moreover, there had to be an accounting in the IMRO organization. The will to fight had to be re-kindled to continue the

struggle, to be ready to take action to prevent the enemy's victory, to hit them harder and inflict more losses of men and materiel in the enemy ranks. Revolutionary activity had to continue until the final victory to free the Macedonian people from the Turkish yoke and to create an independent Macedonian nation.

The village of Banitsa was not destroyed by the fighting, and new elections were held for the local IMRO committee. Besides the old staff, Kole Janin and Dine Malinov, Risto Popjovchev was elected president, and State Stojan Tashev and Dine Dajkov were elected members. They immediately returned to their revolutionary activities and the fight for freedom.

The Campaign against the Greek Andartes and the Role of Bulgarian Supremacist Bands

Even more difficult times were in store for the Macedonians. The Bulgarians dispatched their own armed bands into Macedonia to raise the morale of the locals and to lead the struggle against the Greek andartes (irregulars) who by this time had launched political and military actions in the Lerin region.

The Macedonian chetas were waging a successful battle on all fronts, against the Turkish army, the Greek andartes (or Evzoni) and against Bulgarian chetas. In the period between the Ilinden Uprising (1903) and the Young Turk revolution (1908), the Banitsa chetas were quite active. The blockade of the villages of Vrtalom and Negovan was attributed to the chetas of Natse Katin and Dzole Gjergev together with other leaders and about 300 komiti. They set fire to houses and killed any andartes they came across in those villages, threatened to burn the village of Petersko if the andartes continued their activities, and threatened the villagers with death if they helped the andartes.

During this period these chetas also led battles against Turkish army units in the villages of Dolno Vrbeni, Boreshnitsa, Plishejtsa,

Kleshtina, Armenoro, P'p'zhani, Buf, Kotori, Gornichevo, Banitsa, Tserevo and other places.

At the beginning of spring, 1907, the activity of the andartes and the influence of the Patriarchate and the Greek Church increased. The andartes drew recruits from Macedonian households in every village, but IMRO and the chetas punished the traitors with death.

In 1903, in Banitsa, Vangel Nichov, Kire Kochev and Trajko Kurtov were killed because of traitorous activities. Stavre Dafo Kochev was also under suspicion for treason. He was part of the church initiative to build the church of St. Petka. To escape the consequences, he left for America in 1905. It was established that he had cooperated with the Greek andartes. A court martial brought in a verdict ordering his liquidation, and executioners were sent to the United States, but they could not find him; they only confirmed that he was working for the andarte movement abroad as well.

In this time period, both the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate carried out other activities. They strove to win over the teachers and clerics of the villages to Hellenism or to Bulgarian identity. Even though Banitsa had many teachers and clergy, during the period of 1907 none was moved by this influence, according to the recollections of teachers Dine Dzogov of Banitsa, Dimitar Markov of Bitola and others. Similar recollections from clergy included those of Dine Popdinev, Father Petre Perov, Father Filip Gonev, Father Ioan Dajkov, and, from Skopje, Father Dine Stanboliev and others.

Dine Dzogov, a teacher, was recruited by the Patriarchate in 1907 to open a school in the Greek language where he met with eight to ten students. Father Stamboliev was recruited by the Exarchate in 1908 and opened a school in the Bulgarian language to 20 or 30 students. At this time there were three parallel schools operating but the largest was the one offering instruction in Old Church Slavonic. The Greek school was shut down and the Greek books were publicly burned on 24 June 1907. It was re-opened in 1909 with permission of the Turkish government.

With the aim of terrorizing the Macedonians, the Greek andartes set the village of Lubetina-Sorovichko ablaze in December 1907. That village was one of the most supportive of the revolutionary movement with the whole village organized and enrolled as members of IMRO. Many women and children were lost in the fire, but the men mounted an armed resistance, thus enabling most of the villagers to escape the encirclement with their lives. According to the testimony of eyewitnesses, the traitor Gone Kolerov participated in this action.

As for the village of Banitsa and the Banicheni (the Banitsa people), the andartes could do nothing as here there were three komita bands with the illustrious leaders Katin, Gjergev and Dzorlev. Nevertheless, the andartes worked by other methods, and increasingly followed the movement of the Banitsa chetas and passed the information on to the Turkish army. The army once responded by sending soldiers to blockade the village, and conducted a house-to-house search for komiti. But because they did not find any, they harassed the villagers and committed many atrocities.

In September of 1907 the cheta of Dzole Gjergev attacked the Turkish army near Banitsa at a place called Nerezite. Natse Kurtov, an Ilinden veteran and member of Banitsa's Revolutionary Committee, was captured and killed in the fight.

In the spring of 1908, the andartes set fire to the village of Leskovets, Lerin District. The inhabitants put up an armed resistance but the enemy was more powerful and succeeded in burning down the village.

Regrettably, one must say that the andarte movement could extend its long arm even among emigrants, and some of our people fell under their influence and returned home to join them. One of them was Leko Kolerov, who returned from America in April 1908. He was the son of Trifun Kolerov, whom the komiti had executed for treason in 1907. Leko joined the ranks of the andartes as a volunteer in order to take revenge. With him he brought his nephew Stefo Kochev (his sister's son), a young intellectual. However, Leko Kolerov died in mysterious

circumstances in a Solun hotel: it was thought that he has been poisoned by a member of IMRO or some komita who had happened to be on the same ship. According to others, he died of an illness contracted at sea. Stefo Kochev returned to the village, studied Greek and in 1920 was ordained as a priest.

In May 1908, the Greek andartes attacked the village of Ekshiso-Gorno Vrbeni. The villagers put up an armed resistance and did not allow them to enter the village. Turkish army troops stationed nearby were notified as soon as possible. At that time, the Turks were fighting against the andartes, protecting the villages. They entered into the action, attacking the Greek andartes and forced them to retreat and flee to Radoshka Mountain.

The Young Turk Movement

July of 1908 the saw the start of the Young Turk Revolution, which calmed down all the warring factions in the Ottoman Empire. In Bitola Province an armistice agreement was reached by the Turkish pasha and the Regional Revolutionary Committee. A large military parade was held in Bitola in which, in addition to the regular Turkish military, all the revolutionary chetas of the entire region, led by their vojvodas, marched. The pasha of Bitola prepared a large reception and banquet for all those present, which lasted into the evening hours.

This apparent truce did not last long. The Turkish government, with the cooperation of the staff of the Greek andartes, renewed its fight against the leaders and fighters of IMRO in the Macedonian settlements. The Turks, aware that the Ottoman Empire was falling apart, wanted to keep the local vojvodas and their chetas in submission. The Greek andartes, with their megalomaniacal goal of a greater Greece, hoped to destroy the Macedonian movement, and in this the Turks and the Greeks found common cause. Bulgarian propaganda activity weakened in this period.

At this time the regional cheta leaders Dzole Gjergev and Tane Kanchev-Grozniot petitioned the Turkish authorities for the arrest of andarte Captain Stavro Kochev of Banitsa for crimes against the Macedonian people, such as the beating up of unarmed citizens, especially women and children. In August 1908 the Turkish authorities issued an arrest warrant and took Kochev into custody. Although Kochev was Macedonian, he was working for the Greeks and in their interest. Following an enquiry, the Turkish court martial sentenced the perpetrator to life in prison. After several days, Kochev was freed from prison under mysterious circumstances. There were rumours that the guards were bribed and that he fled to the USA.

After the death of some Banitsa cheta leaders, a re-organization took place. Ilo Kotorkin, an experienced komita and veteran of Ilinden, was selected as leader to replace Dzole Gjergev (who had been assassinated in a Lerin tavern). Natse Katin's cheta was taken over by Risto Pejo Jovchev.

With a new influx of komiti, Mitse Janin-Miskarot formed and led a third cheta. It was said that this unit had been led previously by Risto Jovchev who had been convicted of murder and imprisoned.

All of the bands comprised Banicheni and they were active in the Lerin area against the Turks and the andartes.

On 1 June 1910, Risto Jovchev led a big battle against the enemy. With him were the komiti Dine Nichev and Dzole Lumanov. Surrounded by these more-powerful enemies, they fought a bitter conflict until Risto Jovchev was fatally shot. The two fighters, Dine Nichov and Dzole Lumanov, were captured by the Greek andartes, interrogated and tortured for hours so they would reveal the names of their comrades, but they did not reveal them. They were shot while shouting *Smrt ili Sloboda!'*—Death or Freedom!

With the loss of commander Risto Jovchev, the rest of the band was divided between the chetas of Ilo Kotorkin and Mitse Janin-Miskarot.

In May 1911, in order to intimidate the population of Banitsa, a group of andartes under Captain Stavro's command murdered the mayor of Banitsa, State Jovan Tashev. Banitsa-born Tashev had long served the revolutionary cause and was a delegate to the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Lerin. He had the honorific of "Archimandrite" (priest who leads a monastery) as a teacher of Old Church Slavonic. He was active on many advisory boards to IMRO and was a member of both the local revolutionary committee in Banitsa and the Regional Revolutionary Committee of Bitola Province. The andartes understood him to be a major organizer of the IMRO movement in both Banitsa and the Lerin region, and in this they were correct. He had organized and led many activities against the andartes; the latter accused him of participating in the destruction and burning of Greek religious and other books in Banitsa on 24 July 1907. They also accused him of the murders of Gele Nichov, Kire Kochev and Trajko Kurtov, all from Banitsa, who were charged with treason by the komiti and shot. During this time, the andartes also killed the long-serving revolutionaries and Ilinden veterans Filip Shusharev and Kole Nedelkov.[14]

Because of the increasing activity of the andartes, in the summer of 1911, the local population and village council sought special protection of the Turkish authorities. Izet Pasha sent a battalion of Turkish troops, who patrolled the fields, protecting the villagers who then harvested their wheat and immediately took it home to protect it from being set on fire by the andartes.

That same year the andartes began slandering respected figures and Ilinden veterans, telling the Turkish government that these men were dissatisfied with the Ottoman Empire and that they were plotting an uprising against Turkish rule. The Turks sent army troops, blockaded the village, and arrested Mitse Hrisafov, Petso Hrisafov-Vragov, Leko Boglev, Tine Dajkov, Risto Perov, Kole Janin, Petko Dzugomanov and Pero Popov.

[14]According to Paul Kiriakou, Kole Nedelkov was not killed by the andartes but found his way to the USA.

They were thrown into the Bitola dungeons, taken to court and sentenced to long prison terms. Their freedom eventually came with the arrival of Serbian troops into Bitola in November 1912. In Banitsa another old Ilinden veteran was murdered—Gjorgi (Giche) Dzorlev, father of the cheta leader Leko Dzorlev. After allegations were made by the andartes, killed him in an act of revenge, thinking that the younger Dzorlev had killed Dine's father. Although there were eyewitnesses who knew who the real killer was, no one wanted to say anything to the Turkish investigators for fear of reprisals.

The terrorism in Banitsa continued. The chetas disintegrated and could not render assistance to the populace. Many families were pressured into aligning themselves with the Greek Church and sending their children to the Greek school, which had opened in the fall of 1912. The schools teaching Old Church Slavonic were closed and the andartes burned the books. The chetas moved into areas controlled by the Serbian army. There were fewer and fewer units as many fighters fell under the influence of the Bulgarian supremacists and joined their ranks. They were immediately sent to Bulgaria to be re-educated and undergo special training, and then were sent back into Macedonia armed. These fighters were convinced that without Bulgaria's help, Macedonia would not be able to free itself, and that all the chetas should join the regular Bulgarian army which would help in the liberation of Macedonia.

In the summer of 1912, 35,000 Turkish troops under the command of Dzavid Pasha set off from Bitola for Sorovich. At this time, there was a Balkan alliance between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria to fight against the Turks and the disintegrating Ottoman Empire.

At the Banitsa-Tserovo gorge the Turkish army was met by the Fifth Greek Division and by the Serbian army from the north. A bloody battle ensued, which the Turkish army lost. The population of Banitsa had been evacuated in various directions. After the victory of the allied forces in this battle, they returned home, but their village had been destroyed and burned. About 600 families were left without a roof over their heads.

Military action resumed a month later following the re-grouping of Turkish troops and the arrival of reinforcements from the territories in the north after an attack from by Serbian forces. The inhabitants had to evacuate and abandon the village several times, and this continued until November 1912, when the Turks finally left for good and the people were freed from Turkish rule. The Turks signed a treaty and withdrew from the Balkans. The villagers returned home, and in a show of solidarity, immediately began working together to reconstruct the village. Every damaged house was rebuilt collectively.

In the period when inter-military activities unfolded between the allied army and the Turkish army in the second half of 1912, the Greek andartes displayed a great deal of activity, while the remaining komiti withdrew into Serbia-held territory.

Unfavourable conditions led the Banitsa chetas of Ilo Kotorkin and Mitse Janev-Miskarot to withdraw to Voshtareni, where there were Serbian troops, and later to Zhivojno. On the orders of IMRO (and likely with the involvement of Bulgarian supremacists), the chetas were dissolved and the komiti could go wherever they wanted, home or to Serbia or Bulgaria. Most of them hung on in Voshtareni or Zhivojno for a while and then returned to Banitsa. The vojvoda Ilo Kotorkin and komiti Dine Nedelkov, Mitse Ziskov and Ilo Dajkov left for Bitola, where they remained. The commander Mitse Janev-Miskarot and his band left for Bulgaria. That was the end of the chetas of Banitsa.

Ilo Dajkov returned to Banitsa from Bitola in 1920 to resume his activities. He was persecuted and imprisoned for a time during Greek rule. He participated in NOF (National Liberation Front) from 1941 to 1944 and, at the head of the column, led his villagers in a grand celebration of the liberation of the city of Lerin in 1944. In 1945 he moved with his family to Bitola, where he lived to a ripe old age and died in 1955. He was buried with full military honours as a veteran of Ilinden.

The vojvoda Ilo Kotorkin remained in Bitola until 1926, when one night, with a villager from Ajtos, Lerin region by the name of Geroski,

he crossed over the border into Lerin. There they threw a bomb into the hotel Dietnis where Greek military and other functionaries were residing. It caused a great deal of damage and there were also fatalities. That same night they returned to Bitola and from there fled to Sofia, Bulgaria. Kotorkin died at a great old age in Bulgaria.

The komiti Dine Nedelkov and Mitse Ziskov uprooted their families from Banitsa to Bitola and lived there and died in old age, having benefitted from the secured pensions given in thanks to Ilinden veterans by the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.

In December 1912, immediately after the liberation from the Turks, Captain Stavro arrived with a group of andartes. He beat up the village teacher, Papakonstantinos, who was born in Ostrovo, Voden region, and banned classes at the Old Church Slavonic school. A Greek school was opened and all children were ordered to attend. Stefo Dafo Kochev of Banitsa, who had finished theological studies at Sveta Gora, was chosen as the teacher.

The priest Stamboliev, born in Skopje, received an order to leave the village, but that same night the andartes executed him, by hanging, in his own home and proclaimed it was suicide.

In 1913, the local vojvoda Chakalarov of Kostur district, with a band of 60, joined up with vojvoda Risto Popov of Lozivishta and his 12 komiti and together with another eight leaders and komiti, they crossed over from the region under command of the Serbian army into the area controlled by the Greek army and the andartes. Their purpose was to raise the morale of the people of Lerin and Kostur regions and at the same time to protect them from attacks from the andartes. These detachments consisted of brave and experienced fighters, and were well armed.

They were successful in many battles against the andartes, who were led by a lieutenant of the regular Greek army, Konstantinos Varfis. This fratricidal war continued because many Macedonians had joined the andarte bands. These included Bogle Kolerov, Mitse Robev, Vasil Robev and Ilo Risto Popov, all of Banitsa. Bogle Kolerov, leader of one

of the andarte groups, was wounded in a skirmish and succumbed to his injuries, the fatal bullets having been shot by the komita Ilo of Dolno Vrbeni. The andarte Gone (Bogle) Kolerov was especially praised by the Greek authorities. He succumbed to his injuries on 7 July 1913.

Nothing is known of the fate of Risto Popov and his cheta. It is assumed that they disbanded and that the men fled to Serbia or Bulgaria. In another version of events, Risto Popov and his band and others, after daily battles with the andartes, headed to Radush mountain and, near Kisiliak mountain in the area of Ekshiso, fell into battle with another group of andartes and perished there. The place where they died is called Popov's grave and this version of events is considered more reliable.

Either before or at the same time, the vojvoda Chakalarov met a violent end. He had set off with his men to the designated meeting place of Sinak to rendezvous with the leader Risto Popov. They stayed there for a while but a shepherd who spotted them descended to the village of Vrtalom and alerted the Greek andartes who were stationed in that village.

A great chase ensued and they reached them on Kisiliak Mountain above the village of Ekshiso. There they had camped to rest after their strenuous battles and long, intense march. They were taken by surprise by a large number of andartes and regular Greek army troops. They were surrounded, overwhelmed and killed. Only a small number of komiti survived and they were captured or gravely wounded. The famous and legendary leader Chakalarov was also lost in this battle. With his loyal komiti, he laid down his life for the freedom of the Macedonian people and for an independent Macedonia. The wounded komiti were shot by the andartes who had also suffered huge losses and casualties. According to the accounts of some Ilinden veterans, there were over 300 andartes and soldiers killed and over 200 wounded. The battle was fierce, spanning two days and descending into face-to-face, man-to-man combat. In this tiny space there were over 500 dead bodies, with a river of blood flowing down the mountain slopes.

6

BANITSA DURING THE BALKAN WARS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR 1912–1918

Banitsa's Participation in These Wars

The First Balkan War was declared on 8 October 1912, when the allied armies of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro inflicted heavy losses on the Turkish army, forcing Turkey to seek a truce on 4 December 1912. Final clashes took place in the region of Banitsa. The war with Turkey was legally concluded with the signing of the London Peace Treaty on 30 May 1913, in which the territory of the European part of Turkey was ceded to the allies without determining precise borders. The 1913 Peace Treaty between the Balkan allies, the so-called Treaty of Bucharest, placed Macedonia in a totally new position: It was divided and annexed by Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. This division was meant to forever prevent the Macedonian people from fighting for their right to self-determination and for their own jurisdictional development. However, mutual misunderstandings arose as to who should take and keep the largest part of Macedonia.

In 1913 Serbia and Greece make a pact, and on 29 June 1913 declared war on Bulgaria. Thus, began the Second Balkan War with the division of Macedonia as the cause. The regular Greek army arrived in Lerin and Lerin District and occupied all the militarily strategic positions, especially in Banitsa. The already-difficult economic and political situation was becoming even worse.

The Greek army began conscription by force in Macedonian villages to fill its ranks. In Banitsa, 25 people were mobilized and sent

to special training centres. They were quickly trained and sent to the front line against the Bulgarians.

In 1915 many Macedonians started to desert the Greek army and ran off to Bulgaria. Those who ran off to Serbia were captured and returned to the Greek authorities, brought before a military court and shot.

Several people from Banitsa managed to escape from the Greek andartes, who had become part of the regular army by that time. They were Lazo Gogov, Kitse Gogov, Pande Perov, Pande Alushev, Lazo Dzugomanov, Done Rapov, Kire Janin, Pando Malinov, Risto Kochev, Ilo Nedelkov and Kitse Chorlinov.[15]

Virtually all those from Banitsa who escaped to Bulgaria remained in that country. They were afraid to return to their birthplace because of the threat of court martial. Two of them, however, returned from Bulgaria to Banitsa in 1920, Ilo Nedelkov and Kitse Chorlinov. The Greek government, now definitively the occupier of this part of Macedonia, did not enact sanctions against these people. Instead, they gave them amnesty and freed them of charges of desertion.

During the First World War, from 1915 to 1918 in Lerin District the Greek and Serbian allies were joined by France. Due to Banitsa's strategic position, the French established their operational military headquarters there. A large French military hospital was built near the village of Padinite, and there, all the ill and wounded from the front were treated.

The Greek authorities did not rest, and with the help of some *Grkomani* (Macedonians who aligned themselves with the Greeks or declared themselves to be Greeks), did everything possible to suffocate the Macedonian revolutionary movement in Banitsa. Honourable Macedonian revolutionaries and Illinden veterans were betrayed to

[15]Pando Malinov was a second cousin to Dzole Mallin, who married Dzole Gjergev's daughter Kitsa. Risto Kochev later became a landlord to Evan Mallin and his family on Pape Ave. in Toronto.

French military headquarters. They were tortured, beaten, and held in military prisons, some of which were in France. In 1915, the following people were interned: Petse Hrisafov, Kole Malinov, Mitse Hrisafov, Father Filip Popov, Filip Dafov, Lazo Dafov, Mitse Gogov, Dine Abov, Natse Ziskov, Filip Abov, Nunche Abov and Vasil Ziskov.

All of the above-mentioned people were court-martialled in France. Vasil Ziskov was sentenced to death and shot, while the others were sentenced to many years in prison. They were all charged with undermining military authority and treason in service to the other side, i.e. they were falsely accused of working for Bulgaria. They were all members of IMRO, combatants in the Ilinden Uprising, and members of revolutionary committees—in other words, all were honourable Macedonians fighting for their people and the independence of Macedonia.

In the French prisons, living conditions were very difficult. Forced labour lasted from 15 to 18 hours a day and prisoners were severely punished and beaten for every minor mistake and transgression. Naumche Abov and Filip Abov did not survive the cruelty and torture and died in prison. The French authorities did not inform the families of the deceased, who had, ever since their arrest in 1915, feared them dead because the prisoners had not been not allowed to contact them from prison.

With the end of the First World War, those who survived were released and went home. Only then did the families find out about the death sentence of Vasil Ziskov and the deaths of Naumche Abov and Filip Abov. The survivors spoke of the suffering they endured in the "prisons of death". Upon their release, the survivors were hardly recognizable: they were skin and bones, and looked 100 years old dressed in prisoners' rags. It took many years and special care for their wounds to heal and for them to recover.

In the spring of 1915, only one person from Banitsa, Gjorgi Janchev, joined the Bulgarian army to fight for the Bulgarians on Kajmakchalan. In the autumn of that same year, he returned to Banitsa on a 15-day leave and, for unknown reasons, did not go back to the front.

The Bulgarian Army arrested him, treated him as a deserter, and executed him near Bitola under the pretext that he had tried to escape. His wife, Magda, and his two sons, Natse and Krishe, were left behind. This crime of the Bulgarian soldiers went unpunished.

Banitsa in the War Zone

An interesting fact is that in the period from 1912, the beginning of the Balkan Wars, until the end of the First World War in 1918, all of the people in Banitsa and the surrounding villages were mobilized to participate in the construction of strategic military roads, the digging and construction of trenches, storage caches, hospitals and various other military facilities. The villagers, together with their carts, were pressed into service in order to transport ammunition, food and war materiel to the front. From there they transferred severely injured soldiers and officers to the French hospital near Banitsa. Both men and women participated in the burial of the allies' soldiers and officers.

During this period, military activities occurred both in the vicinity of the village and in the village itself. Because of its strategic position, Banitsa was often swapped from one subjugator to another. The population of Banitsa was at times evacuated to the more-remote southern villages ranging from Sorovich to Kozhani and to the northern villages of Voshtarani and Zhivojno. Banitsa was destroyed and burned down several times and rebuilt again on the same site. There were plans to re-settle the population in other villages of the Lerin district in order to stop them from rebuilding Banitsa, with the excuse of new upcoming military activity and further destruction. The villagers did not give up. As soon as a battle was done, they immediately started re-building houses and other facilities. There was a great sense of solidarity among the villagers during reconstruction.

Many infectious diseases spread among the soldiers and thence to the population as well. Despite the medical help given by the French hospital, many villagers died of typhoid and other diseases. Unfortunately, these diseases at times even struck down several members of the same family.

Banitsa after the First World War

After the end of the Balkan wars and the division of Macedonia into three parts, Banitsa became part of Greece. The people faced a difficult period, on account of the revolutionary activity of the villagers in the period from 1892 to 1918. Fierce persecution began against the families of participants in the Ilinden Uprising, especially those families whose fighters had sought refuge in Bulgaria. Those families were forced to leave their birthplace and join their family members in Bulgaria or Serbia. In the last phase of the war, the village had been demolished and burned to the ground, and re-construction efforts were not supported by the new Greek government. A general famine occurred because the military powers confiscated all the crops for use by the military. The villagers were lacking wheat seed to plant for the following year. The last of their savings was running out, and market prices were extremely high, which meant that the black market was flourishing. The villagers asked for a loan of seed for which the promised for every one oka (1.2 kg) of wheat seed loaned a return of two to three okas from the next year's crop. Thus, began a difficult new life for the populace. Thousands of hectares of forest in the region of Banitsa had been destroyed, cut down and burned for the needs of the army around Banitsa, thus making construction and building material unavailable. Many ruined forests were never restored.

With the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest, Macedonia was divided into three parts and distributed among three nations. Greece received Macedonia's southern coastal territory of 35,169 square kilometres and a population of 1,042,059 people, of whom 329,371 were Macedonians, 314,854 Turkish, 266,755 Greek and 68,206 were Jews and other nationalities (Albanians, Roma, etc.).

The peace treaties concluded after World War I sanctioned the division of Macedonia. However, the victorious powers concluded an agreement with Greece on 10 August 1920 and imposed stipulations in the agreement to protect non-Greek populations in Greece. The Great

Greek Encyclopaedia of 1934, Volume 10, page 620, listed these obligations of Greece which arose from this agreement:

a) equality of all ethnic groups in terms of life, liberty, civil and political rights;

b) the free use of both Greek and foreign languages in public and private life;

c) the right of all ethnic minorities living in Greece to their own humanitarian organizations, churches and schools;

d) the provision of elementary education in their own languages for all ethnic minorities, without forbidding them education in Greek.

In order to comply with this agreement, the Greek government in 1925 decided to take steps to fulfil its obligations to the other ethnic groups and specifically to the Macedonians. Towards that end a commission was formed to create a primer for Macedonian elementary schools. The publishing house "Sakelariu" issued the first primer, "Abecedar," in 1925 in the Macedonian language, but in Latin letters. Immediately afterwards, copies of the book were seized and its distribution to the schools of Aegean Macedonia was cancelled.[16]

The Greeks did not fulfil their commitments to the rights of Macedonian people and tried to obliterate every trace the Macedonian character of Aegean Macedonia.

In November 1926, a law was enacted to change the names of communities (towns and villages) as well as the topographical names of rivers, mountains, etc. This law was published in Number 332 of the official Greek government gazette "Efimeris tis kiverniseos" XXX on 21 November 1926, and in Number 342 of the same gazette, the new Greek names were published. At the same time, local governments brought in regulations to change the first and last names of every Macedonian to Greek names. They gave them identity cards with their

[16] The Greek government probably chose the Roman alphabet for this primer to distance the Macedonian population from its Cyrillic heritage and Slavic neighbours.

new Greek names which were also officially entered in their birth registers.

The Macedonian people, dissatisfied with the division of Macedonia, joined socialist movements and parties as soon as they appeared, in their struggle for economic, social and national rights. With the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia and the appearance of the CPG (the Communist Party of Greece), the intelligentsia and working class began to join the CPG which had a policy to promote freedom, economic and social justice for all nationalities and minorities. The CPG promised freedom from slavery and oppression in an open struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

At this time, several different political parties were formed, ranging from liberal-democratic to far-right. Some of the residents of Banitsa joined the party of King Constantine and the People's Party (*Lajko Koma*), and but more joined Venizelos's *Fileleftero Koma* because of the party's more liberal and democratic platform.

In 1920, during the first election campaign in Greece since its occupation of Aegean Macedonia, some members of the Venizelos party were arrested, taken to Lerin and brought before the courts. Convicted and sentenced to a year and a half in prison were Dinkata Katin, Leko Katin and Tole Kochev. Mitse Robev and Mitse Katin were sentenced to two years each. The first three served their time in Lerin, the others in Solun.

In 1922, on a religious holiday, people of Banitsa went to a service at St. George's Church. A brawl broke out between the Macedonian villagers and Greek gendarmes who tried to enter by force but were prevented by Leko Dukov and Stojche Chorlinov. The policemen were beaten up by the villagers. The mayor, Mitse Hrisafov-Tudzarot, went to Lerin to complain about the conduct of the gendarmes and requested their transfer, which was subsequently done.

7

EVENTS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS 1919–1941

The Participation of the People of Banitsa in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922

The period between the two World Wars did not provide any respite to the people of Banitsa. At the commencement of war between Turkey and Greece in 1919, the Greek Government mobilized an army, and 100 people from Banitsa were sent to the front in Asia Minor. Twenty-one people did not return, all of them young men who gave their lives for Greece. These included Lazo Leko Boglev, Mitse Stefe Dukov, Metodi Dafo Dzugomanov, Gele Kochev,[17] Dimitar N. Lumanov, Harishi Kole Lumanov, Stefo Tego Lumanov, Fote Dine Malinov, Metodi Petre Malinov, Trajan G. Nichev, Marko Dzale Pendzov, Naum M. Pendzov, Gligor Filip Pochinov, Tase Filip Popov, and Pande Vasev,[18] all farmers, Stavre F. Vasev, Vasil S. Dzugomanov, and Pande Leko Kurtov, all miners, Sande Shisharov (café owner), and Gjorgi Natse Pechinov, merchant.

Most of the surviving soldiers were wounded. There would have been even more casualties; however, many young men went into hiding during the mobilization or escaped across the border into Serbia or Bulgaria. There was no proper personal identification system in place yet, so people were able to cross a porous border.

[17]There is a younger Gele Kochev (Angelo Kotsopoulos) mentioned later, a son of Krishe Kochev and a brother-in-law of Evan Mallin. He will be referred to as Gele Krishe Kochev.
[18]The editor's grandfather Dzole Malinov survived the hurried Smirna evacuation of Asia Minor by crossing the sea to a nearby Greek island in a leaky boat.

The Greek Government erected a monument in 1935 or 1936 to the fallen soldiers of the Greco-Turkish War; the monument is situated in the centre of the village in a spot called St. Dimitrija. The circle was enclosed and adorned with greenery and shrubs.

The parents of the dead soldiers and the surviving war invalids were given pensions, which were symbolic in monetary value.

Relations between the Population and the Greek Government

During this period there were numerous robberies, beatings, rapes, arson and killing by the andartes against which the people of Banitsa defended themselves with weapons, forming their own civil guards whose members guarded both the village and the surrounding territory day and night. When elections were held in the village, Natse Kochev-Kajcheto, an educated and respected person, was elected president of the local council.

After the end of the Greco-Turkish war an agreement was reached between the Greek and Turkish governments to exchange the populations of Anatolian Greeks in Turkey and the Turks in Greece. The Greek government made a schedule for where the population returning from Turkey would be settled, with the goal of placing most of them in the Aegean part of Greece, which included Banitsa, a village completely Macedonian in ethnicity. The government planned to settle 40 Greek families among the Macedonian villagers, but the people complained and demanded from the president and the local council that these families not be allowed to settle in Banitsa. The Macedonians threatened unforeseen consequences and wrote a petition to the government and their President Venizelos. Seeing the persistence and revolutionary mood of the population, the Government decided to create a new settlement in the vicinity of Banitsa, by the railway station, which is about four kilometres from the village. They succeeded in their goal as the newcomers were settled there.

Migration of the Population

From 1926 until 1930 many men emigrated to the America, but their exact number is unknown. It is assumed that over 150 people crossed the ocean to America, and there was no coming back for them. Most of them sent for their families and loved ones later on. From 1930 to 1939 many went to live in Australia.[19]

The Activity of the Working Class in the Coal Mine

The German entrepreneur Mitrendjo (who may have actually been a Vlach) and one Koraki, from the village of Kostec, Kostur Region, improved production and made plans to build a factory to turn the locally-mined coal into coke and to build a thermoelectric power plant to illuminate Lerin and surrounding villages. When the Greek government found out about this, they stopped them, confiscated the newly-arrived machinery and sentenced them to long terms in prison for tax evasion. The coal mine was taken over by a company from England in 1930. Coal mining was started, but after a big explosion underground in 1933 the company left the mine. The brothers Hrisafov of Banitsa took over the mine and operated it until 1935. These entrepreneurs paid a daily wage in kind only, equivalent to 30 to 32 drachmas for 12 to 15 hours of work, but forcing the workers to only shop at their stores in the village where goods were much more expensive than in the other shops. In 1935 the mine was taken over by the brothers Gjorgi and Lefterios Palis, Greeks from Athens, who operated it until the spring of 1944, when it was confiscated by a decision of the Peoples' Court in Banitsa. The mine was proclaimed to be a municipal resource and put under the direction of the organization ETA (Procurement Committee for the Partisans). State Boglev was the director, and the supervisors were Stojche Genev, Nune Tanev and Tone Lulov, each one responsible for one shift. The operational and administrative decisions were made by

[19]Evan Mallin's father, Dzole Malinov went back to the USA for the second and last time in about 1932 after marrying and fathering four children. He could not return and was to remain there until he died in 1951. He supported his family with regular cheques. He died just after Evan Mallin and his wife Vassa arrived in Canada. He never saw his adult children.

the director and all the supervisors. In this period the daily excavation yielded between 120 and 150 tons of coal, which was then sold for grain. The workers were paid in grain until the spring of 1945 when Palis returned and took over the mine again. Because of the difficult working conditions and the low wages they received, the workers had to be well organized to fight for their economic, social and other rights, including improved working conditions. From time to time, they went on strikes which would last from several hours to a few days. Strikes in 1934 and 1939 turned into political clashes between the workers and their employers who hired the police to protect the mining shafts and the equipment, the workers having threatened to destroy equipment and lay explosive devices (mines) in the mining shafts.

Foundation of the Communist Party in Banitsa

The first cell of the CPG (Communist Party of Greece) in Banitsa was formed in 1928. Its membership comprised Kitse Kochev, State Boglev, Nune Vasev and Dine Kachorov, as well as Giorgios Davidis from the neighbouring Banitsa Station (Stathmos Vevis). The leader of the cell was Kitse Kochev.

With Banitsa's historical revolutionary and fighting tradition and its well-developed working class of around 400 workers employed in the Banitsa coal mine, membership in the CPG rapidly increased, so that by 1932 there were eight cells and 23 entrants into the Party; by 1934 the number increased to 26 members and over 30 candidates for membership in the CPG; and in 1938, 37 members and 40 candidates. It is worth mentioning that the 'Red Aid' paid most of the dues for the coalmine workers.

Here is a review of the Party members admitted before the war:

According to the accounts of Tone Lulov, Kitse Kochev became a member of the CPG in 1925, starting in his student days. As of 1928, State Boglev, Dine Kachorov and Nune Vasev were members; from 1932, Vangel Kujchev, Vangel Zabrtski, Mitse Velikin and Blazhe

Kochev; from 1934, Tsile Tsinokov, Ilo Abov, Dine Robev, Lazo Kochev, Lefter Olevski, Trajko Kjimov, Dine Mangov, Gjorgi Kalpakov, Krishe Robev, Kire Janin, Kitse Apchev, Mitse Nedelkov, Natse Janchev, Metodi Vasev, Lide Ziskov, Blazhe Ricalov, Petse Malinov, Slave Nedelkov and Raden; from 1938, Pavle Mangov, Slave Nedelkov, Gjorgi Janin, Makile Evgin, Slave Katin, Dafo Dafov, Kole Depin Olev, Kitse Chorlinov, Metodi Apchev, Krishe Janchev and Tone Lulov.

Because of events after the 1936 Greek general election and the start of the dictatorship of Metaxas, the Party became illegal, went underground and stagnated. The Party organized into smaller groups and cells with a leader for each group or cell.

It is worth noting that in the spring of 1936, the following members were elected to the secretariat of the coal mine branch of the CPG: Lefter Olevski, secretary; Blazhe Ricalov, Lide Ziskov, and Metodi Vasev, members. The organization in the coal mine had over 30 members and 20 candidates for membership in the Party, and the 'Red Aid' paid for most of the dues for those employed in the mine. There was a strong union organization in the mine which reorganized and chose new leadership in the spring of 1936 with the following members: Metodi Apchev, president; Nune Tanev, secretary; Kitse Apchev, Lazo Vasev, Tane Gjergev, Vangel Kujchev, Dine Robev and Lazo Kochev, as members.

In addition to the secretariat of the coal mine, there were several subsidiaries or branches, which were led by the secretariat members, meaning that the senior members of the secretariat also had the job of leading the branches. About 400 labourers and other employees worked at the mine.

A celebration of Labour Day, 1 May, was first organized in 1931 in the location of the Long Furrows (Dolgi Ornitsi). The organizers were Krishe Pavlev, Slave Katin, Kitse Katin and Kitse Kochev. In the following days they were all summoned by the police and interrogated at the police station where they were pressured to say that the CPG had

organized that celebration. Everyone was adamant that it was just an outing and communal meal for the workers and that it had no political element. They were released because of a lack of evidence.

During those tempestuous times amid the political developments in Europe and especially in Greece, the CPG held its sixth congress in December 1935. There the dangers and threat to Greece, especially from fascist Italy, were described. At that congress, the CPG carried out a review of its work to date and confirmed a huge programme of objectives for the Party.

At this congress, Nikos Zahariadis was elected secretary of the CPG, having been elected into the leadership of the CPG in the 1934 plenum of the Central Committee of the CPG.

The Metaxas Dictatorship

On 4 August 1936, Metaxas took over as dictator, changed the constitution, ended democratic freedom, abolished freedom of the press, banned all political parties and subordinated parliament to his will. He most openly and brutally opposed civil democratic forces and especially opposed the interests of the Macedonian population.

Harsh times came upon the Macedonians. Tens of thousands of Macedonians were under investigation and persecution by the police and the security service. Still, Government persecution did not scare the free-minded Greek and Macedonian populations who demonstrated their dedication to opposing the dictatorship, each in their own way. This was especially the case when the government imposed obligatory study of the Greek language upon the adult Macedonian population. The resistance was obvious in Banitsa. The mine workers went on strike, and in the struggle for their rights, they were supported by the local population of all the surrounding villages, parties and the anti-fascist organized forces in the Lerin region.

The ban on speaking Macedonian, singing Macedonian songs, dancing Macedonian dances (the *oro*), and practising Macedonian customs hit the Macedonians hard. Night schools for the Greek language were organized for those adults who had not finished the obligatory six years of primary school education. The people of Banitsa resisted by not going to night school and continuing to speak Macedonian. If anyone was caught speaking Macedonian, which happened frequently as the gendarmes were eavesdropping at the windows of private homes, they were taken to the station where they were beaten up and tortured. Nevertheless, people would still declare their Macedonian names and not their new Greek names given to them by the Greek government. During interrogation, they would demand to be questioned in Macedonian because they could not understand Greek, and they would answer in Macedonian. They were charged and taken to court where they would persist in speaking Macedonian; and the judges, not knowing Macedonian, had to call for an interpreter. The convicted individuals paid their fines without hesitation. In some cases, they openly stated in court that the judges were judging for money and in order to advance their policy of assimilating Macedonians into Greeks. Most of them declared, "We are Macedonians and Macedonians we will remain!"

Terror and Persecution by the Greek Government

At Easter in 1936 the police and the Metaxas Government security forces arrested five members of the CPG in the village of Banitsa, who were then sent to Agios (Aja) Strati, a desert island in the Aegean Sea. They were: Kitse Kochev, member of the local secretariat and member of the district committee of CPG for Lerin District; Dine Robev, member of the secretariat of the trade union organization of Banitsa's coal mine; Kitse Mangov, merchant; State Boglev, active CPG member and old revolutionary; and Mitse Vasev, active member and private truck driver.

During the summer of 1936, declared guilty of undermining the state and the regime due to their activities, Mitse Mangov, miner, and

Petse Vragov Hrisafov, grain mill owner, were arrested. They were taken to a concentration camp on Falegandro Island in the Aegean Sea.

A new wave of arrests started in the autumn of 1936 and continued until the autumn of 1940, and the following people were taken from the village of Banitsa and exiled to various concentration camps in the Aegean Sea: Kole Malinov and Boris Malinov, merchants; Dore Malinov, owner of a grain mill; Lazo Malinov and his four brothers; Leko Abov, merchant; Gligor Popdimitrov, barber and photographer; Tsile Risafov, merchant; Boris Risafov, Gire Babulov, butcher; Risto Popalev, shoemaker; Pando Kujchev, tailor; Tsile Tsinokov, miner and member of the secretariat of Banitsa's CPG; Kole Janin, trader and old Ilinden veteran; Kitse Dzogov, fabric maker, Slave Kostov, miner; Filip Nedelkov and Stojche Chorlinov, farmers; David–Janin and Pande Velikin, merchants; Risto Nichov, miner; Ilo Dajkov, farmer, revolutionary and Ilinden veteran.

Thousands more Macedonians from other villages in Lerin District and the rest of Aegean Macedonia were sent into exile on the islands Agios (Aja) Strati, Hios and Makronisos, while others were conscripted into the army and sent to the Albanian border where they later took part in the war between Greece and Italy from October 1940 to April 1941.

On the eve of the Greco-Italian War, a general mobilization was ordered of men between the ages of 20 and 30, who were then sent off to the front. Production was thus minimized or entirely halted in many factories and mines since fewer workers were available. In need of continuing its coal production, the Greek government overcame the problem by conscripting young workers aged 16 to 19. In addition, and by order, the older generation of retired men were activated again and joined the many young men who had been enlisted as workers in Banitsa's coal mine in order to continue the production of lignite coal. These young men formed the first organization of OKNE (Communist Youth Organization of Greece). On 15 May 1941, elections were held for the local committee of the Communist Youth Organization, and later those boys became leading organizers and part of the young managing

cadre of Lerin District. Among them were Pavle Pavlev-Dimko, Todor Kochevski-Viktor, me, Atanas Katinovski-Goche and many others.

The seeds of revolution were sown. These young men would go on to become leaders during the whirlwind of the four-year liberation struggle, in which comrade Dimko would lay down his young life for the freedom of his people.

Compulsory Labour in the Mines from September 1940 until German Occupation in April 1941

On the eve of the Second World War, the Metaxas dictatorship reached its zenith with the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of all political parties, imprisonment and internment for some of its leaders and most of the officers who held democratic beliefs. The Communists and all of the Macedonians were given exceptionally cruel treatment. In addition to the regime's discrimination, assimilation and physical and moral torture of the Macedonian people, the regime also systematically destroyed the last Macedonian Slavic monuments (old churches, schools, Slavic script on tombstones) and everything else that would bear witness to the centuries-old Macedonian ethnicity of the region. It went as far as forbidding the people from wearing Macedonian traditional clothing, and from participating in the folklore, national songs, dances and other customs and traditions which for centuries had been passed on from parent to child, generation to generation. Macedonians were prohibited from working in the civil service, serving in the police force, and holding an officer position in the army. That privilege was given only to the Macedonian Grkomani who, during the andartes movement of 1904–1913, fought on the side of and in the ranks of the Greeks. However, they were very few in each district. They were despised by the Macedonian people as traitors, a view that was confirmed later when they willingly went to work for the German occupying forces.

Despite the inhumane treatment by the regime, the suffering and humiliation, the Macedonian people in general displayed political maturity when it came to protecting the country, they considered it their duty to defend the land even though they weren't recognized. Under the leadership of the Communist party, they took part in the fight against the fascist aggressor, Italy, and later on against Nazi Germany. Accordingly, one can say that for the Macedonians, the anti-fascist war began on 28 October 1940, because the Greek-Italian Front was manned mostly by Macedonians and Greeks from Asia Minor.

8

THE GRECO-ITALIAN WAR 1940–1941

General Mobilization and the Participation of Banitsa in the War

After the occupation of Albania by Italy, Greece realized the danger posed by Italy, and the Greek General Staff acted quickly. A general mobilization was hastily put into motion in the summer and autumn of 1940. For Aegean Macedonia, the call included all those who had served in the army from 1911 to 1940, but in old Greece, only those who had served within the ten-year period 1931 to 1940 were called up. This constituted yet another injustice: the Macedonians and others living in Aegean Macedonia, particularly the settlers from Asia Minor, were sacrificed once again.

The army of fascist Italy attacked Greece from Albania in the early hours of 28 October 1940 with eight well-armed divisions, totalling approximately 100,000 men. The Greek army had two divisions of 35,000 men to oppose the enemy across a front stretching 200 kilometres.

With the mobilization of 1940, a total of about 450 men from Banitsa were sent to the front lines in the 28th Brigade of the 9th Division.

The sudden and speedy attack of the Italian fascist army across the Albanian-Greek border inflicted heavy losses in the Greek army leading to initial gains for the Italians. But the steely, tough Greek divisions eventually halted the enemy. The 28th to 30th Brigades organized a

counter-attack, pushing the enemy back to its initial position. In a panic the enemy withdrew and abandoned Albanian towns and villages in the face of the onslaught of the Greek army, whose units were predominantly made up of Macedonians.

Lost and Captured Banitsa Soldiers

Many Macedonians lost their lives in that campaign, including five young men from Banitsa: Mitse Gligor Tanev, intellectual; Gligor Tego Minchev, miner; Mitse Dafo Pechinov, miner; Stojche Natse Ziskov, miner; and Pavle Leko Alushev, miner. The Italian army captured many Greek army soldiers in the first raids, among them 14 people from Banitsa: Kiro Leko Minchev, Stefo Leko Dajkov, Kitse Gele Genev, Blazhe Lazo Tashev, Tase Gele Petkov, Gjorgi Vane Iliev, Gligor Mitse Kjosev, Dine Mitse Mangov, Gone Mitse Delev, Petse Kire Kirov, Petse Minde Janchev, Kire Gjorgi Vasev, Blazhe Vane Kochev and Gjorgi Stefo Rapov.

All of the captured Greek army soldiers, including the ones from Banitsa, were taken to military internment camps in Italy. Later, at the conclusion of the battles with Germany and the occupation by Germany in the spring of 1941, the Bulgarian embassy in Rome claimed all the Macedonians held in military prisons and brought them to Sophia, considering them to be Bulgarian citizens. The top Bulgarian military and civilian leaders spoke to them of the mission of the Bulgarian army to liberate Macedonia and to include it within Mother Bulgaria. Afterwards they left them free to go wherever they wanted, including back to their birthplace. All of the freed Banitsa residents returned to their home town.

With respect to the Italian front, Aegean Macedonians were front line soldiers, without regular supplies of food, clothing, ammunition and other military materiel. That is to say, they were sacrificed for the Greek people, but the regular Greek First Army was held far from the front and lived a comfortable life billeted throughout Macedonian villages. The

Macedonian people made a significant contribution to the war against their common enemy, fascism.[20]

Exiled Men of Banitsa

The advance of the Greek army into Albania lasted just a short time, but during that time, satisfying military successes were achieved.

The towns of Korcha, Argirekastro and other smaller towns and villages in Albania were captured. However, the Italian army regrouped, the command staff was changed and reinforcements were received: around 600,000 soldiers, 7,600 combat aircraft and over 15,000 trucks and other means of transport were sent to the front. The Greek army's advance was halted. The counter-attack by the Italian army started and the Greek army could not withstand the strong offensive and continuous bombardment, so it began to retreat from the southern front. The failure of the Greek army was due not only to being outnumbered but to other factors including exhaustion, frostbite, incessant months of fighting, and irregular supplies of food, clothing, combat equipment and ammunition, but at this time they were able to meet some needs from the captured reserves of the enemy during retreat. The high command, headed by the King of Greece, blamed the Macedonians for this reversal at the front. The King ordered about 450 to 500 soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and commissioned officers of Macedonian origin, ("suspicious persons"), chosen by the leaders of the 28th to 30th Brigades, to be taken from their units with the pretext of being sent on leave. They were withdrawn, disarmed, and sent to the rear.

There were 30 men of Banitsa among these Macedonians. They were loaded onto trucks and taken to the Peloponnese region in southern Greece, then again moved and thrown into a camp on the island of

[20]Kirche Mallin, a distant relative and sometime employee of my father's family, was also captured and ended up in Bulgaria as a policeman. He eventually moved to Skopje where he died in middle age. So not everyone returned from Bulgaria.

Tasos.[21] After the arrival of the Germans in Greece, they were all turned over to the Gestapo. They were transferred onto cargo ships to be taken to Germany via the Mediterranean. However, the ships arrived in Piraeus, and some reached the gulf where they were attacked by Allied military aircraft. Some of the prisoners, while on a boat docked in Piraeus, took advantage of the confusion and panic caused by the attack and the abandoning of the ship to slip into the city and go into hiding. Among them were Banicheni who immediately set off for their birthplace. After an exhausting trip overland, they arrived back at the village.

However, many of the escapees were hit by machine gun fire from low-flying Allied fighter aircraft. Many drowned jumping off ships that had been set on fire by aircraft. They did not know how to swim. "Many were lost and only a small number succeeded in saving themselves by swimming to shore. Hundreds of bodies were floating in the channel, the water was bloody. It was a horrifying and appalling situation," recalled a comrade, Kjeramitchiev.

[21]Risto Abov was released from captivity in the islands according to Evan Mallin. Slav speakers in the German army, such as Poles and Ukrainians, recognized Macedonians as Slavs and not Greeks, and would from time to time let them escape.

9

BANITSA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE POPULAR REVOLUTION 1941–1944

The Defence of the Country and Capitulation

Banitsa, with its strategic location, was always a base town for the army. There were defensive positions in its vicinity assumed by the British Army in March 1941, ranging some ten kilometres southeast along of the ridge of Bozhanija. The fields were planted with a dozen rows of concealed landmines all the way from the village through to the international roadway of Banitsa-Kozhani and all the way to the mountain of Sinak. The First Greek Army was stationed in Banitsa and surrounding villages of Lerin District from autumn of 1940 and was kept as a reserve for the Albanian Front. It withdrew eastward toward Sorovich and Ostrovo. The populace of Banitsa was evacuated to the tunnels of the Banitsa coal mine, three to five kilometres away, in the locations of Derveno and Bezdoets. They hid several hundreds of metres underground. The encampment of the British Army was above them.

Action around Banitsa started on 10 April 1941 and lasted only one day because the German army came from Solun in the east, instead of southward from Bitola as had been expected. The British were attacked from the rear. The division was ambushed while sleeping in its trenches and was destroyed in its entirety. Afterwards, Hitler's officers, dressed as officers of the General Staff of the British Army, carried out an inspection and left.

As soon as the fighting was over, the villagers returned to Banitsa from the mine, opened the allied army caches and plundered everything.

Also a few train cars carrying food supplies were looted at the train station and goods were taken back to people's homes. Many homes were damaged in the conflict and needed restoration. The population also took weapons and military equipment which had been left behind and armed themselves.

Renewal of the Local Government

With the withdrawal of the Greek governing apparatus before the enemy attack, in Aegean Macedonia there was no organized government for the first two months of the occupation. Following an initiative of the CPG, the villagers of Banitsa held a general meeting in the school at the end of 1941 and elected a local council with Lazo Kochev as president, Dine Robev as secretary, and with Stojan Katronov, Gire Babulov, Ilo Abov, Lazo Vasev and Leko Abov as members-at-large.

The newly-elected council that same evening devised a constitution and an allocation of duties. It also issued an appeal to the local populace for peace and order, with the understanding that the council would attend to their needs. The discharge of weapons in town was banned with penalties stipulated for wrongdoers, including confiscation of their weapons.

The German authorities in Lerin were informed of the elections, for which they gave their approval. Regular night and day patrols of both the town and the fields were instituted by the residents.

10

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The Establishment of the Youth Organization OKNE

Since most of the CPG's members were incarcerated in camps, there was a period of time when the Party was inactive and waiting for new conditions to re-organize. There was a move toward organizing young people, who were much valued by the Party. A large number of young people who were active previously collecting donations for "'Red Aid," took an active role in the revolutionary trade unions of the coal mine, which were led by the Party. On 15 May 1941, at the house of Lazo Vasov, the first youth congress was convened with 36 young people present. The opening address was given by Vangel Kujchev. He spoke about the purpose of the organization and the tasks that lay ahead for the Communist Youth in the long, bloody struggle toward the final victory over fascism, and that the Soviet Union and the International Communist Party was on their side. It was necessary to prepare to resist the enemy by means of sabotage, direct confrontations and diversions.

Afterwards, all members were admitted into OKNE with the pledge: "I, _____, pledge to fight for justice and freedom for my subjugated people and without consideration of my strength and youth, I pledge to lay down my life for freedom. If I break this oath may I be persecuted and killed by my own people." Then each one approached the table to kiss the two crossed army knives and a pistol placed there. Following the end of the ceremony there was an election of the local committee. The following were elected: Tane Pavlov, secretary; Atanas Katinovski, deputy secretary; with Todor Kochev (Kochevski), Pavle

Pavlev, Pavle Dimitrov, Ruse Dzugomanov and Mitse Dzugomanov, members.

At the end of the meeting there were decisions made concerning their assignments among which were:

First: to immediately expand the organization with the other young people of Banitsa, who numbered between 530 and 600. Every member was charged with creating their own cell of three to five or more young people with whom they would work on ideological and political preparation;

Second: to organize an immediate collection of arms and other war materiel from the area and from families uneasy about keeping arms in their possession or simply responding to the appeal issued by the party;

Third: to immediately start training members in weapons handling and combat exercises. Dimitar Kochev was in charge of training young members and of forming combat squads and assault groups. The first training session for the OKNE members took place in the house of Mitse Dzugomanov with an introduction to pistols, rifles and machine guns. The next day, training in shooting said weapons was carried out at a location called "Urnitsite" (the ruins) of Sotir Gaskov on the ridge of Bozhanija, where a training and shooting range was built. Later on, training was carried out at the locations of "Dolgi Ornitsi" (Long Fields) and "Livajtsa." (Meadow). The weapons collected from the people were stored in the tunnels of the coalmine.

Re-establishment of the CPG in Banitsa

After the return of the leadership from internment, the Party held a meeting in the house of Micho Velikin on 20 May 1941. Three topics were discussed: the military-political situation, the new conditions of the occupation, and the division of Greece into three military occupation zones. The western part was under Italian control, the northeastern part under Bulgaria, and the remaining part, central and western Macedonia,

where most of the Macedonian population lived, over 200,000 citizens, was left under the jurisdiction of the Greek quisling government of the General Cholakonglu, which was called "Eliniki Politia" (Greek State Administration), and was under the direct control of the Germans. Other points of discussion were the world situation as well as future actions of the Communist Party. Comrade Micho Velikin presented a detailed overview of the plans and the assignments for the young members of OKNE and reported on the elections for its local committee.

Afterwards, a local committee of the Communist Party was formed and the following members were elected: Vangel Kujchev, miner, as secretary, and Micho Velikin, intellectual and merchant, as a member. Other elected members were the miners Vangel Zabrtski, Pavle Mangov, Makile Evgin, Dafo Dafov, farmer, and Gjorgi Janin, merchant.

By the end of the meeting, decisions were made about the upcoming activities of the members and their involvement in the youth wing. They also wanted to form a Women's National Front and to establish a military staff to lead and organize reserve army units and to take care of all preparations for military activities. They were to link the organization in Banitsa with the neighbouring villages, to re-organize the coal miners' Party structure, and to add new members to the revolutionary unions and the leadership. The election was approved by the local authority and it was agreed that at the next meeting a review would take place of the progress on these matters, local peace and order, and the restoration of the village and the community. These issues were addressed later in June 1941.

At the beginning of July 1941, the Party's organization in Banitsa received a visit from Comrade Lazo Trpovski, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece. The meeting was held in the house of Vangel Zabrtski. Present were the secretary of the local committee, Vangel Kujchev, and members Vangel Zabrtski and Stavre Kochev. Comrade Trpkovski was informed of the measures and activities undertaken to that point in time and the preparations for armed resistance. Trpkovski informed them of the position of the Party and the

decisions made at the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPG held on 1 July 1941. There a resolution was brought forward for the CPG to appeal to the Greek people to unite in one national front for liberation of the country. He also spoke of other upcoming tasks for the party and of the stance of the CPG on the Macedonian Question.

Resistance to the Restoration of the Old Greek Administrative Authority

At the beginning of July 1941, a gendarme (police) formation of 100 men with two trucks arrived in Banitsa in order to station itself in the barracks of the village. The guards on duty stopped the formation at the entrance of the village at the place called "Tambulkite" (the drums) and immediately informed the population with a pre-arranged signal, and within few minutes, villagers started to arrive with guns and other objects such as axes, pitchforks and anything else they could grab. Over 500 villagers gathered and some of them fired guns into the air to let the gendarmes know that they were neither wanted nor needed.

The threat of danger forced the police to turn the vehicles around and go back to Lerin. The next day, the president of the local committee, Lazo Kochev, was summoned by the occupying authorities to appear in Lerin. There he was told to convince the villagers that the gendarme detachment intended for Banitsa needed to be stationed in the village. Kochev assured them that there was no need for Greek gendarmes, that the people wanted German units instead, who would be well received. He was told, however, that he and the villagers had three days to comply.

The president, on his return, summoned the local council and informed them of the situation. However, the council did not support the position of the German Command and stood firm that the Greek gendarmes must at any price be stopped from stationing themselves in the village.

The Greek gendarmerie, not waiting for a response from the local council, the next day sent two trucks of Greek gendarmes from Lerin back to the village. When they reached the entrance of the village around 10 in the morning, they were stopped. Hundreds of villagers immediately opened fire on the trucks, which then retreated for a second time, heading towards the railway station of Banitsa where they stationed themselves.[22]

The president went again to Lerin to complain to the Germans about the unwelcome presence of the Greek police units in the village and to make his case. The Germans threatened to burn down the village and kill everyone there should the stationing of the Greek gendarmes be obstructed again, and warned that an order had been issued for two artillery brigades to be stationed at the crossroads by the village of Rosen near Banitsa ready to act when required. The president was ordered out of the chambers and on the way back he was assured that two batteries of ten artillery weapons were trained on Banitsa. The villagers agreed not to make any further problems but wanted the Greek gendarmes to remain at the railway station. The occupying powers in Lerin did not share their view, and in the afternoon hours of 29 July 1941, sent the two trucks of Greek gendarmes with an escort of motorized German police units to the barracks. The people shouted: "We do not want Metaxas' Greek tyrants and spies" as well as more abusive words directed against the quisling authorities and their gendarmes.

The president of the council, Lazo Kochev, ran and reached the villagers about 200 metres from the barracks. There he stopped them and told them of the threat by the Germans that if something happened to the gendarmes or if their placement in Banitsa were to be obstructed, the village would be burned to the ground and the population killed. The people changed their minds and returned to their homes.

A group of young people under the direction of Dimitar Kochevski, accompanied by Lazo Gjergev, Atanas Katinovski, Gjorgi Dajkov,

[22]Evan Mallin disputes this and says the townspeople did not fire on German or Greek trucks at all.

Pavle Pavlev, Blazhe Katronov, Mihail Harishi and Stojan Robev, attacked the barracks at 9 p.m. using detonators and hand grenades in order to scare the gendarmes into leaving the village.[23] This sabotage group was reprimanded for its action because it was performed without the knowledge of the Party. The attack lasted almost half an hour until the village guards came and ordered the group to cease.

On 30 July 1941, around midnight, the village guards noticed the movement of German units coming from all sides towards Banitsa, accompanied by tanks and other motorized vehicles, and near the village, they were unloading and encircling the village. The local council, after deliberation, issued orders to inform the village with the usual signal, the ringing of a church bell, that the population was to withdraw toward the nearby mountain of Bozhanija. It was done and the people started to leave their homes in the early hours of the morning without any panic. Nevertheless, the German Army had completely surrounded the village and turned the people back towards their homes. Around 4 a.m. the German Army entered the village and stationed their tanks both at the crossroads and in the centre of the village. At exactly 7 a.m., the commander of the occupying forces for Lerin District arrived in the village in an armoured car accompanied by other high-ranking German officers and their quisling interpreters. The president of the local council was summoned and was ordered to gather, within thirty minutes, all males over the age of 14 at the front of the church of St. Dimitrija near the monument. Anyone found outside this area after the deadline would be shot on the spot. The population peacefully obeyed the order and, by the appointed time, everyone there was there, surrounded by the army which was armed to the teeth. Everyone expected the worst since there were over 1,000 people gathered. The women and children started crying and wailing.

The Komandant of Lerin District gave a threatening speech praising the German fascist powers and saying that everyone must obey the orders of the Reich. Anyone refusing to obey would be publicly shot

[23]This did not occur, according to Evan Mallin. They may have thought about it but were forbidden by the Party.

along with the rest of their family, and their house burned down. He ordered everyone to surrender any weapons they had and those doing so would be set free to go home without sanctions. The quisling interpreters translated this into Macedonian for the population, and on their own initiative, made threats and claimed that they were designated with keeping peace and order in the village. A house-to-house search was started, lasting for two days, and everything that the enemy wanted was taken (gold, necklaces, money); fearing the consequences, no one dared complain about what was taken for fear of reprisals.[24]

In the fenced-in area where the population was gathered, many were tortured, Gele Petkov the most.[25] The torture lasted two days and a night. Without food and water, people collapsed in the hot July sun, which caused them to be beaten even more because of it. On 1 August, around 1 p.m., the commander ordered around 28 men to be taken and loaded onto a truck. He ordered the army to withdraw to Lerin and the rest of the people to be set free. The following men were taken, as hostages: Dine Lakov, Fote Olev, Kitse Mangov, Kole Malinov, Boris Malinov, Ilo Dajkov, Petse Malinov, Gligor Popdimitrov, Leko Abov, Slave Katin, Mitse Vasev, Ilo Janin, Mitse Mangov, Dine Kachorov, Tase Kochev, Natse Vasev Tsarot, Kalo Dzogov, Gire Babulov, Risto Popalev, Pando Kujchev, Mitse Laev, Dine Kirev, Ilo Dafov, Kitse Apchev, Gjorgi Popdimitrov, Stojan Katronov, Tole Mangov and Tsile Dzugomanov.

The German occupying forces imposed a fine of 300,000 drachmas on the village for its act of resistance, which the people of Banitsa duly paid.[26] The same night a meeting of the local council was held where it was decided that the population should stop using weapons at celebrations. It was also decided that a group of council members and respected villagers would go to Lerin to plead with some influential people and former members of the Greek parliament, especially

[24]The editor's great-uncle Petse's wife, Lazenka, lost her best shoes.
[25]Evan Mallin says this old, dishevelled, fair-haired moustachioed man had a pistol put in his mouth by a German soldier but he was not shot.
[26]Evan Mallin does not confirm this. He was out in the sheep pens, with others, avoiding trouble and keeping out of the village.

Dragumis (a Vlach), for the release of the hostages, and, if needed, to engage lawyers in case a lawsuit was opened against any or all of them.

On 1 August, this group travelled to Lerin and visited everybody who could help in some way to get the German authorities to free the hostages. Some of the people visited distanced themselves and didn't want to deal with the German authorities; others promised that they would do everything in their power to free the hostages.

The lobbying pressure of the council and villagers was seen by the German government as an organized revolt against it, and that is why it decided on the fourth day to send an army unit to arrest four more people as hostages: Dine Robev, Kole Stamatov-Kovachot, Risto Rapov-Ezho and Kitse Kochev.[27]

The large group of hostages held up bravely in Lerin prison and managed to withstand all torture and threats. Three people managed to escape while the guards were asleep. Those three, Fote Olev, Kalo Dzogov and Gjorgi Popdimitrov, fled to Bulgaria. The others, with firm resolve, forced the enemy to free the rest of them after 30 days of torture, except for Slave Katin, who was sentenced to many years in prison and sent off to Edikule prison in Solun. Dine Lakov, found to have a gun in his garden which he refused to admit as his, was brought to court and sentenced to death by shooting.[28]

This execution was carried out on 29 August 1941. Other patriots from Lerin District were also executed on this day. The first to be shot was a revolutionary miner, trade union member, and party worker. The murder of Dine Lakov was a threat and warning to the people, but at the same time it united them into organized action, preparation for armed

[27]According to Evan Mallin, Kitse Kotchev actually managed to escape arrest. He was at the barber shop getting a haircut when they came looking for him. When he himself was asked by the search party about the whereabouts of Kitse Kochev, he told his would-be captors that Kitse had just left. An Italian soldier with the Germans who knew Greek gestured to those present to keep quiet, thus helping in the escape.
[28]Evan Mallin describes him as a peaceful man and wonders if someone had it in for him.

resistance and boosted recruitment into the National Liberation Army (NOV).

At the order of the CP of Banitsa, OKNE joined in the drive to collect weapons and de-activate the landmines which were buried in eight to ten rows along seven kilometres. In April and May 1941, under the supervision of the miners Dimitar Kochevski and Pavle Kochev of Banitsa, with the help of other experienced miners including Pavle Pavlev, Kitse Apchev, Mire Babulov, Natse Olev, Slave Katin, Ilo Katin, Tane Pavlev, Blazhe Tasev and Atanas Katinovski, around 20,000 mines were de-activated, then transported and stored in Pavle Kochev's yard. People from other villages also took part in this project. The mines presented a danger to the population, and even though it was thought that they had gathered them all, this sadly was not the case as those few left in the field were hiding in wait for future victims.

First Land Mine Victims

In May 1941, the family of Kole Kochev (first cousin to Krishe/Chris/Harisios Kotsopoulos) suffered a tragic loss because of the land mines. While working in their vineyard, Kole's son Mitse and daughter Lena were killed.[29] Another son, Tase, was injured, underwent surgery and survived. The whole village went to the funeral of the two young people.[30]

The family would forever mourn the loss of their beloved son and daughter.[31]

[29]Evan Mallin heard the explosion and saw bloody clothes being thrown 200 metres away. He recalls Lena as a beautiful, fair young woman.

[30]They were cousins to Steve/Stefo Aptsis of Toronto.

[31]Evan Mallin reports that there was a rumour that a K.K. had earlier killed a surviving British soldier for his possessions. Apparently, some villagers were hiding a wounded survivor of the battle between the Germans and the British Empire troops in their sheep pen and were looking after his injuries hoping to turn him over to the Red Cross. Desperation and hunger forced many people into crime to survive those years.

A couple of days later, another tragedy occurred. The young shepherd, Zafir Abov (Dzafe), born in 1922, stepped on a mine and was killed instantly by the explosion. He had been watching over the family's flock near the area called Nerezite. OKNE lost many young lives.

Supplies of Grain and Other Products

People were afraid of the land mines especially as harvest time was drawing near. The local council addressed the occupying powers in Lerin several times requesting special units with mine sweepers to be sent to examine the fields. However, the occupying forces were deaf to their pleas both before and after the tragedies.

There were two dangers looming over the villagers. One was to step on a forgotten mine, and the other was not to reap a harvest at all. The German authorities issued an order that no one was to harvest the grain by hand; they would bring threshing machines and also designate places to gather the sheaves. However, many farmers, instructed by the local council, harvested their corn at night, thrashed it and hid the grain in barns and elsewhere. The next day, they would plough the fields, planting small grains and removing the remains of the corn.

Because of a lack of seeds, the autumn planting of 1941 was a failure as the harvest the following year was only 40 to 50% of the usual yield. Everyone had just enough to satisfy their own family's needs.

In 1942, the villagers approached the Germans and explained they could not contribute grain to them, owing to the shortage. The Germans, seeing the yields, agreed, but gave a new demand—ten tons of meat were to be provided. The local council could only gather five to six tons as farming had not been successful. That was the first and only delivery to the Germans.[32]

[32]Evan Mallin reports that Vlachs from the south had come to buy wheat at black market prices and had loaded their purchases on horseback. Some villagers had sold their wheat but come spring had nothing to process into flour and bread.

Macedonian Language Renewal in the Church and the Ilinden Celebration

Embittered by the many years of oppression by the Greek government, especially the Metaxas dictatorship, the people of Banitsa felt that the time had come to end things with the Greek government, to join the call for a National Liberation Struggle for economic, social and ethnic freedom and, together with the Greek people, seek liberty where the Macedonian people would find their place and obtain full ethno-national freedom. In order to break free from Greek authority, and especially from the Greek Church, the local council and the local committee of the Communist Party, at a meeting in June 1941, decided that prayers and masses in the church of St. Gjorgija would, in the future, be held in the Macedonian language, using the Old Church Slavonic books and the Gospel that the priest Filip Popov had kept.

On 20 July 1941 (according to the new calendar), on the celebration of Ilinden, the priest Filip held the first mass in Macedonian in St. Gjorgija Church. Before the prayer, he gave a fitting speech in which he explained the historic development of the Macedonian Church and the struggle for its recognition by both the Patriarchate and the Exarchate.

The Secretary of the Local Committee, Dine Robev (Editor's note: a handsome man according to a local lady), pointed out the historical importance of that particular day in the struggle for recognition of national and religious identity, and freedom of worship in the mother tongue. He gave special attention to the Ilinden Uprising and those who laid down their lives for freedom, and discussed the period of action by the Greek andartes, the Balkan Wars and the First World War. At the end, he spoke of Greece's occupation, the suffering of the Macedonian people and the complete assimilation to extinction of Macedonian villages. He called on the people to continue their struggle to final national liberation and not to succumb to provocations by either Bulgarians or Greeks who wanted to cause a fratricidal war.

Forming Partisan Staff and Reserve Units

The local committee of Banitsa's Communist Party, at the September meeting, decided to form a military command which would train people, especially young people, to handle weapons. Dore Janin (Janev) led this group, which also included Boris Malinov and Krishe Kochev [Ed. note: Harisios Kotsopoulos, the future father-in-law of Evan Mallin]. The command staff started working right away. In just one month they compiled a military roster which also included all single young women over 16 years of age.

On 16 January 1942, at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, an analysis of the military staffs' field work was carried out, and preparations for fighting were made. They worked on the formation of partisan units, including reserve members, and declared the need to form a National Liberation Army which would unite all partisan units in Greece.

ELAS (*Ellinikós Laïkós Apeleftherotikós Stratós)*—The Greek People's Liberation Army—was formed, in which the following goals were proclaimed: to liberate the country from foreign invaders, to protect the enslaved people and their struggle for freedom, and ensuring order until free and fair elections could be organized in which the people could freely express their will.

ELAS would accomplish these objectives by coordinated acts of partisan warfare, gradually growing into a nation-wide armed resistance against the occupation and its collaborators. They would launch continuous armed assaults on the enemy to destruction and expand liberated territory across the countryside, turning it into a military base for ELAS and then shifting military actions to the main urban centres and the occupying forces' basic communications networks.

On 2 May 1943, at a joint meeting of both the Central Committee of EAM (Greek National Liberation Front) and the General Staff of ELAS, the supreme command of ELAS was formed. Colonel Stefanos Serafis was appointed Commander-in-Chief.

The Formation of EAM

On 27 September 1941, at the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, the organization *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* (EAM), or National Liberation Front, was formed, in which several political parties took part, including the Communist Party of Greece, the Agricultural Party, the Socialist Party, the National-Democratic Party and the National Solidarity Organization, together with representatives of the scientific and cultural life of Greece. Later, the progressive wing of the Liberal Party joined. EAM became the umbrella organization for these groups. A Central Military Committee was also formed, the Supreme Military Staff, which in December 1941 developed the organization and the partisan tactics for warfare. In the beginning of October 1941, a chapter of EAM was formed in Banitsa and a local board was elected. People of all ages, men and women, who wished to fight for national freedom were included in EAM.

On 18 October 1941, a meeting of EAM was held in the school in Banitsa with over 200 people present. After the agenda was approved, Vangel Kujchev, secretary of the local committee of CPG, gave a talk on the goals and objectives of EAM. His speech was applauded. An election of the local board of EAM followed with the following results: Nune Vasev,[33] president; Metodi Anchev, secretary; members Metodi Gaskov (Mangov), Mitse Toshev (first cousin to Dzole Mallin), Dzole Vasev (another first cousin to Dzole Mallin), Dore Janev and Tone Lulov, member. (Tone later died in Yugoslavia.) This organ of EAM in Banitsa was among the first and foremost in Lerin District.

[33]He had returned in 1938 from time spent in the USA.

Terror and Imprisonment by the Enemy

Because of the activities of all the organizations in Banitsa, the German authorities, in order to intimidate the population, blockaded the village on 30 January 1942, and gathered the villagers in the churchyard of St. Dimitrija. They started with announcements and threats to the effect that they knew everything, that the villagers should stop all resistance activity, be submissive, and then nothing bad would happen to them. They called for everyone to hand over any weapons and military equipment they might have, i.e., bring them to the centre of the village. The people remained calm and did not respond to the call, nor were they swayed by the threats. Only the president of the local committee, comrade Lazo Kochev, communicated with the Germans and their underlings. The people had full confidence in him and supported his decisions fully. Another general search was conducted of the houses by SS troops. During a search, a landmine was found on the threshing floor of Pande Katin (Kochev). He stepped out of the group when summoned and took the troops directly to the cache with the mines, because he thought they had found him out. It was a misunderstanding. The Germans were stunned at how conscientiously and carefully such a large quantity of dynamite, linings, and explosive caps of 20,000 mines were stored. When asked why he had so many mines, Pavle, without feeling nervous, answered that while serving in the Greek army he was a miner and that he had collected them from the fields with the intention of using them for extracting rocks, and for making ploughshares and other agricultural tools for the needs of the household. However, nobody believed him. They started beating him on the spot, demanding he confess who had organized the mine collection and storage, but it was in vain. Pavle Kochev stood firm and did not betray his accomplices in the de-activation of the mines. The Germans loaded three trucks with explosives from the cache.

The night when the Germans left the village, they took Pavle Kochev, Pande Katin, Kotse Veshov and Mitse Mangov to Lerin, and later to the Solun prison, “Pavlos Melas”.

Pavle Kochev and Kotse Veshov were sentenced to death and shot at the end of January 1942. With that, Banitsa lost two revolutionaries and fighters for the liberation of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. Pande Katin and Mitse Mangov served time and stayed in the camp until the autumn of 1944 when the Germans departed; they were then able to return to their homes.[34]

Reorganization of the Youth Organization OKNE

On 15 February 1942, new elections of the local committee of OKNE were conducted with the following result: Atanas Katinovski, Secretary; Pavle Pavlev, Vice-Secretary; and members Lazo Gjergev, Gjorgi Dajkov, Stavro Pavlev, Kiro Dzugomanov, Natse R. Malinov, Gele Krishe Kochev and Pavle Dimitrov.[35]

At the meeting, the activities of the organization were discussed, and Atanas Katinovski, the Secretary of the Local Committee of OKNE, gave a report on the goals and objectives of the organization. During this period there were 80 members in the organization, and they were sub- divided into neighbourhood groups, with each having a member of the organization as a leader.

[34]Evan Mallin and his girlfriend, Vassa Kocheva, were both there in the yard and had looked for each other. Lazo Kochev was related to the editor's grandfather, Krishe Kochev. Pande Katin and Mitse Mangov probably escaped execution by claiming to be Bulgarian and, according to Evan Mallin, were released earlier. The two executed had claimed to be Greek, according to Evan Mallin. Pavle Kochev was married to Melisa Malinova.

[35]According to Evan Mallin, in the case of his brother-in-law, Gele Krishe Kochev (Angelo Kotsopoulos), he reports that when a brigade of partisans came, he followed them and joined them on Kajmakchalan, but his sister and parents put pressure on him to return from the partisans. He pretended illness or injury to return to the village. He had been involved in distributing propaganda leaflets for them previously.

Formation of the People's Court

Since a number of offences and property disputes had taken place in the village, EAM's local board decided that a People's Court should be formed to deal with all disputes in a peaceful manner and, if the parties could not reach a mutual agreement, the Court would engage in compulsory arbitration. In March 1942, the first People's Court of Banitsa was elected, consisting of Krishe Rapov, president; Risto Nichev, court reporter; and members Gligor Popdimitrov, Gjorgi Dzugomanov, and Blazhe Nedelkov[36]. The People's Court had a lot on its plate and represented the executive power in an effective manner during its existence until the summer of 1945.

This Court reached two historic decisions. First, in April 1944, a decision was made to take over the coal mines in the villages of Banitsa and Krushoradi and to assign supervisors to lead the production process as follows:

- State Boglev, an old revolutionary and honourary member of the Party, was assigned to supervise the Banitsa mine.
- In Krushoradi's coal mine, Vangel Kujchev, a hardened fighter and organizer of the movement, was selected to lead.

The decision was announced to the existing business owners and they were asked to give up all the real estate and possessions which belonged to the mines as they had declared it as the property of the people. The people would direct each mine and benefit from the profit.

The entrepreneur Elefteris Palis owned the Banitsa coalmine. He refused to give it up and threatened to use weapons. However, that same night he left the mine, and along with his family, went to Athens.

The coalmine of Banitsa was raided by a saboteur group led by Lefter Olevski and Dimitar Kochevski (the latter was an engineer and became a partisan officer), and consisting of 15 young people of

[36]His sister Gika married a Kiriakou, also known as Olev.

Banitsa. The raid took place on 3 April 1943, and large quantities of food supplies, dynamite, detonating caps, blankets, canvas, etc. were seized. The foodstuffs were given to the population of the village of Banitsa, with one truck of grain sent to the village of Gornichevo, two trucks to the village of Negovan and one truck to the village of Zabrdeni.

From April 1944 until the beginning of 1945, these coalmines worked as public mines and benefited the movement. The German occupying authorities did not try to regain the mines at all, knowing that they could not maintain or exploit them.

In April 1944, another decision was reached as well—all of the police and other official records from the former Greek regime in Banitsa were destroyed to prevent them from falling into German hands.[37]

Women's Antifascist Front (AFZ)

Since a large number of women participated in all the organizations, a special organization of women was formed in September 1942, with the election of a local board and two neighbourhood divisions. The following women were elected to the board: Mitra Zabrtska president, with Menka Dzugomanova, Grozda Kostova, Gina Lakova, and Sofika Dzugomanova,[38] members.

In the neighbourhood division on the left side of the village stream, the following entered the leadership: Zhana Apchija, president, with Marika Jancheva, Magda Jancheva and Matsa Katina as members.

In the division on the right side of the stream the following were active: Marija Kujcheva, president, with Ljuba Olevska and Lena Tasheva, members.

[37]According to Evan Mallin, at the time there were roaming bands of thieves stealing stock and selling it at a distance. Several villagers were also involved, according to my father.
[38]Sister to Stefo Gergev's wife.

During the election of the leadership, brief speeches were given by the members of the local board of EAM who explained the goals and expectations of the organization.

The women equally participated in all field activities, especially in collecting clothes, food, bandages and medicines, performing messenger duties, looking after incoming partisans, tending to the wounded, washing, cleaning, sewing and many other activities.

Formation of ETA, the Organization for Partisan Protection

In February 1943, an organization was formed to protect the partisans, especially the partisan units of ELAS, and also those in the liberated and partially-liberated areas, and to gather intelligence needed by the movement. Appointed to the local committee were: Pando Dzugomanov, president, with Gjorgi Kalpakov, Tsile Hrisafov, Pavle Malinov, Slave Kostov and Petse Malinov, members. Comrade Nune Vasev, President of EAM's Macedonian unit, spoke of the purpose of the organization at the meeting.

Actions of the Reserve Unit

In March 1943, a diversionary group under the leadership of Lefter Olevski attacked a police station and disarmed the police of the village of Voshtarani, Lerin District.

In April 1943, sabotage was committed at the Banitsa coal mine under the leadership of Olevski and Dimitar Kochevski. The following fighters from Banitsa were involved: Ruse and Kiro Dzugomanov, Gjorgi and Blazhe Dajkov, Atanas Katinovski-Goche, Blazhe Katronov, Lazo Gjergev, Mihail Harishi, Mitse Nedelkov, Kirche Malinov[39], Kole Malinov, Nanche Dzogov, Tane Jovchev and Lazo Popdimitrov. All were members of OKNE, but of them six later

[39]Kirche was May Mallinos' uncle.

perished while in the ranks of ELAS or DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) fighting for the freedom of their people. EAM had a presence in every town, but in Banitsa the entire population was caught up in the activities of the organization with the hope for economic, social and ethno-national freedom for the Macedonian people. This high degree of organization also needed new forms of governance, but Banitsa, despite being at the crossroads of enemy powers' activity, remained a semi-free territory; all partisan groups moved freely without fear and were able to remain overnight there because the village guards were always vigilant and well-organized.

Formation of the NOO (National Liberation Boards) and their Activity

In the liberated territories, by order of EAM, a new government was created and national liberation boards emerged as local government in each village. Such a committee was formed in Banitsa in February 1943, and by secret ballot with over 300 EAM members present, they elected Mitse Lazarev as president, Vangel Zabrtski, vice-president, and Natse Janchev, Metodi Apchev and Nune Vasev, members.

Petar Pilaev and Gjorgi Turundjev, members of the regional EAM leadership, were present. Pilaev spoke of the role and significance of the new government. The advice given to the local government was that it had a large role to play in the current struggle against the enemy, domestic traitors and Bulgarian provocateurs such as Kalchev and others who tried to arm the village and turn it against the National Liberation Board. Banitsa stood as a model of resistance to all provocations, wherever they came from, and all villages in Lerin District looked to it for leadership. With every appearance of Kalchev in Banitsa, the Communist Party and other groups led the inhabitants up into the mountains. Diversionary groups laid traps for Kalchev, but he

escaped many times. German troops stepped on mines placed on a road that were meant for Kalchev and they paid the price on his behalf.[40]

In the spring of 1943, a local committee of the CPG was elected, with Tone Lulov as secretary, Vangel Zabrtski, deputy, and with Mitse Nedelkov and Mitse Laev as members.

In the summer of 1944, secretary Tone Lulov was selected as a regional instructor for the CPG in Banitsa District, which comprised 15 villages. He was replaced as secretary by the deputy, while the members remained the same.

New members were accepted into the CPG on a daily basis as they had the desire to advance the struggle against the occupying army and domestic collaborators. By the end of 1944, the local party membership numbered about 120.

Under the orders of the reserve team of ELAS and under the leadership of Dimitar Kochev and Lefter Olevski, on 20 May there was an attack on the Lerin-Solun train line at Banitsa Station. The aim was to free the political prisoner and leader Harolambos Haralambidis, alias Atanatos, from captivity while he was being transported on the train. (After his liberation he lived in the town of Ostrava in Czechoslovakia.) The action was completed successfully. A couple of partisans jumped on the locomotive and another few climbed aboard the first two carriages where the prisoner was located. Some distance away from the station, at a pre-arranged location, the train was ambushed and overwhelmed. Four Germans were killed and a Greek spy was severely wounded. A quantity of arms and military materiel was seized. The prisoner was freed and led in the direction of Sinak Mountain near Vicho.[41]

[40]Kalchev led Bulgarian irregulars against ELAS-EAM groups. He was born in the Kastoria area (Kostur) of Aegean Macedonia.

[41]This escapade was also mentioned in Risto Stefov's book, *Macedonians in Greece* (2008). This event was not, however, confirmed by some witnesses of the time.

According to the leaders of the raid, the participants were Pavle and Tane Pavlev, Atanas Katinovski, Lazo Gjergev, Blazhe Katronov, Pavle Dimitrov, Leko Nichev, Gjorgi Abov, Gjorgi Dajkov and Ruse Dzugomanov.

In June 1943, German troops and police came to Banitsa and seized about 50 youths with the excuse that they were to be used to fight against the partisans in Albania. They were put into a compound surrounded by barbed wire and under the watch of guards. Among the prisoners were Pavle Pavlev, secretary of the Macedonian Communists in OKNE, and member Todor Kochevski. They organized an escape the same night. They cut the barbed wire in the poorly-lit compound and vanished one by one into the darkness.

Pavle Pavlev and Todor Kochev went underground and were appointed regional instructors for EPON (United Pan-Hellenic Organization of Youth) in Lerin District. Pavlev, under the pseudonym "Dimko," covered the region of Sevorik and Kajlari, while Kochev, under the pseudonym "Victor," covered the Prespa region. Atanas Katinovski returned to Bitola where he was appointed as an instructor for EPON in the Lerin district and operated under the pseudonym "Goche." The latter two survived the war but Dimko was lost in the summer of 1944. He was returning from a conference of SNOF (the new Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front) of Lerin District held at Bel Kamen in April 1944, when he fell into an ambush by the Germans and collaborators from the village of Prokopana. After a two-hour unequal fight, he killed himself with his last hand grenade so that he would not fall into the hands of the enemy.

New Leadership of the Youth Organization EPON

Because Pavlev had gone underground, there was an election held on 30 June 1943 in the Macedonian Communist Party. Ruse Dzugomanov was chosen secretary of OKNE, now called EPON, with Kiro Dzugomanov as deputy.

New members selected included Gjorgi Dajkov, Stavre Pavlev, Nitse Dzugomanov, Pavle Dimitrov, Mihail Harishi, Gele Kochev and Blazhe Katronov.

This structure stayed in place with minimal changes up to the end of 1944 until some members joined ELAS.

A Large Demonstration in Lerin

In August 1943, a massive protest was held in Lerin with over 15,000 demonstrators from in and around Lerin. About 80 of them came from Banitsa by bus and in trucks. Carrying black banners with slogans written on them, they demonstrated in the streets of Lerin against the seizure of crops and produce, against inflation and oppression, and asking for a minimum produce level to be reserved for the survival of the population. At the end, a petition seeking the release of political prisoners was presented to the mayor of the quisling Greek government. These demonstrations quickly spread to other towns in Aegean Macedonia.

Formation of SNOF

After pressure from Macedonians from the northern part of Greece, the raising of the Macedonian Question at the circuit meeting of the CPG in June 1941, at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPG in July 1941, and in talks between Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo and Cvetko Uzunov, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM), the CPG allowed the formation of a Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front, SNOF, in Aegean Macedonia. At the initiative of Comrade Tanos, political secretary of the committee of the CPG, Lerin District, certain Macedonian leaders gathered in early September 1943 at Bozdovets near Banitsa. An election of the leadership of SNOF-Lerin District took place.

Attendees included Kiro Pilaev, Gjorgi Turundjev and Trifko Popovski from Ekshiso; Kitse Kochev, Vangel Kujchev and Vangel Zabrtski of Banitsa; Todor and Tane of Kotori; Pande of Nevolani and others. These people were at the core of the resistance movement of Lerin District. The following were elected to the first leadership committee of SNOF: Kiro Pilaev, political secretary, Gjorgi Turundjev, organizational secretary and Kitse Kochev, in charge of agitation and propaganda. A motion was carried to hold local elections of SNOF in all Macedonian villages.

By the end of September 1943, the first local committee of SNOF was elected in Banitsa with Mitse Laev as president and members Metodi Apchev, Lazo Kochev, Kole Olev, Kitse Kochev, Nune Vasev and Ilo Abov. At the meeting, Vangel Kujchev, district instructor of the Communist Party of Banitsa region (with over 600 members), gave an introductory speech outlining the goals and tasks of SNOF.

Banitsa's Partisan Unit

In October 1943, the first special Banitsa partisan detachment was formed with Lefter Olevski as leader. The detachment included Gjorgi Ilo Dajkov, Kocho Ralov, Metodi Vasev, Ilo Vasev, Ilo Mangov, Gjorgi Abov, Lazo Gjergev, Petse Alushev, Dine Dimanin, Dzole Lakov, Dzole Kalpakov, Gonche Delev, Mihail Harishi, Andon Harishi, Natse Risto Malinov, Tane Jovchev, Dimitar Kochevski, Blazhe Dajkov, Lazo Veljanov, Leko Nichov, Vancho Katin and Lazo Popdimitrov.

In addition to these people from Banitsa, one man from Gornichevo, five from the village of Tserevo, four from Ekshiso and six from Voshtarani joined. The detachment had a total of 41 combatants in the organized resistance against the occupying forces and their domestic collaborators. The squad was well armed.

The Status of the National Liberation Struggle in the Aegean Part of Macedonia

In 1943, the resistance movement was organized to a high degree of preparedness. The partisans were able to shelter and literally hide a whole brigade in any village, and that same brigade would be safe from the enemy's searches. No one would betray us. However, none of us wanted to leave the enemy in peace, no matter what the cost.

It was then that the first misunderstandings and disagreements started with the Greek partisans. After an incident, we called a meeting with some leaders of the Communist Party and CPG for Macedonia, with our General Staff and some members of Central Committee of CPM (Communist Party of Macedonia). Political and military leaders of the units of the territory were also present. With four years of war, the Macedonian people deserved the right to their own independent life, paying for it with tremendous sacrifices. Due to the inconsistency of the CPG and the prevailing reactionary forces of Greece, the Macedonian people did not receive their deserved freedom.

At all times during the liberation struggle, the goals, interests and work of the Macedonian people were united with those of the Greek people. The liberation fight in Greece had the characteristics of a socialist revolution for the social and national liberation of all people who lived in Greece. The Macedonian and Greek masses united on a class basis. That only lasted as long as the CPG took into account the nature of the war, its social, class and national character, then the war was in its ascendancy. It hadn't come to any sort of clash between the Macedonian and Greek populations, who hoped to live together in equality and freedom.

Unfortunately, the liberation movement of Greece lost the class-based character it had at the beginning which was the key to its success. This was due in part to the indecisiveness and inconsistency of the leadership, especially of some leaders of the CPG who abandoned their early stand regarding the direction and conduct of the war. It turned out that the Central Committee of the CPG had an irregular and anti-Marxist

attitude toward the nationhood question, which directly affected the Macedonian population and which they viewed as unacceptable. That disagreement hindered the liberation struggle, and relations between the Greek and Macedonian populations in Aegean Macedonia deteriorated, especially towards the end of the war. Great numbers of Macedonians, military and political leaders of NOV, openly condemned the nationalistic and defeatist politics of the CC of the CPG. The Greek population was negatively affected as well. Despite the great sacrifices made to overcome the capitalist regime in the country, after the expulsion of the fascists the democratic movement suffered defeat. The reactionary forces came into power once again. After the Treaty of Varkiza, instead of progressive forces coming to power in the nation, the CPG allowed power to be taken by reactionary groups that had made almost no contribution to the war effort. They took power with help from the Anglo-American reactionary forces, which saw a capitalist Greece as the more desirable outcome. Instead of peace and harmony, people were thrown into a fratricidal war which again brought them many casualties and much destruction. The democratic forces once again made vast sacrifices, although in vain. The reactionaries won and seized complete power. The progressive Greeks and Macedonians were forced to emigrate due to persecution. In fact, they were exiled from Greece to various European countries, especially the socialist countries of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and the USSR.[42]

An Attack by the Germans

The enemy, well informed of the activities of certain comrades of Banitsa, sent an SS unit to blockade the village in December 1943. This action surprised the partisans who were at home. Dine Robev and Lazo Kochev were arrested. The two were taken to Lerin prison and later to the "Pavlo Melas" concentration camp in Solun. The CPG in Solun helped in their liberation, and, after returning home, they continued their resistance activities in the field. On 10 January 1944, Mitse Velikin,

[42]The Treaty of Varkiza was signed in February 1945 in Varkiza, near Athens, by the Greek government and the CPG for ELAM-ELAS in return for free elections. Among other things, it called for the disarmament of the partisans before free elections.

originally from Banitsa, was arrested in Lerin, where he was an underground political instructor of EAM for the regional committee of Lerin District. After his arrest he was immediately taken to "Pavlo Melas" where he stayed until the retreat of the Germans. In the enemy attack, which started in January 1944, Banitsa was the first village under attack. During the night between 30 and 31 January 1944, the village was blockaded by German and Bulgarian units. The population was gathered in the centre of the village while houses were searched and looted. Men and women, adults and children, were brutally beaten if they objected. On leaving the village, the authorities took nine people with them: Stojche, Dine, Lambe, Dimche and Krishe Kochev, Tone Lulov, Micho Mihaili, Mitse Katin and Mitse Robev. They were taken to Lerin prison but released after few days due to lack of evidence and lobbying by influential people.

On 1 February 1944, the partisan messengers Mihail and Andon Harishi were captured coming back from Vicho by the Bulgarian occupying forces at a snow-covered place called Sinjak in the vicinity of Banitsa. The shepherds Gone Dafov and Kitse Klechkov helped the Bulgarians, alleging that the Harishis were partisans. These shepherds were later sentenced to death and shot by the liberators.

In Lerin prison, the partisan messengers were beaten and tortured; nevertheless, they stoically endured the barbaric abuse and did not utter a word about the partisan units. The next day, the Bulgarians took them to the village of Bureshnitsa to shoot them in public in order to frighten the population. These brave fighters refused to be blindfolded and insisted on facing their executioners. They stayed calm at the command for readiness of the firing squad, and with tight fists cried out: "Death to Fascism! Freedom for the people! Long live the Communist Party and the Soviet Union led by Comrade Stalin! Death to the traitors of the Macedonian people!"

The District Conference of SNOF

The SNOF district conference took place at the beginning of April 1944, on the mountainous site of Bel Kamen on the slopes of Vicho. In addition to the leaders of the district committees of the CPG, EPON, EAM, and ELAS, delegates from all of the Lerin district villages were there. Of 126 towns and villages, 124 were represented at the conference by 150 SNOF delegates. Representing Banitsa were Mitse Laev, president of NOO for the town; Vangel Kujchev, instructor for the CPG district committee, Banitsa region; Kitse Kochev, member, district committee, CPG; Lefter Olevski, commander of the Banitsa ELAS detachment; Atanas Katinovski-Goche, instructor for the EPON district committee; Todor Kochevski-Viktor, member and instructor, EPON; and Pavle Pavlev-Dimko, instructor for EPON. The Germans learned of the conference and attacked Bel Kamen on the second day. At a sufficient distance from the conference, the conference's security units, led by Ilija Dimovski-Goche, met and ambushed them, causing them to retreat. Seven Germans were captured; after a brief trial by the partisans, they were shot. The conference delegates withdrew to the village of Bapchor on Vicho mountain, where an election of the district leadership of SNOF was held and Petre Pavlev was elected president.

In the evening hours the village of Bel Kamen was shelled by artillery but there were no casualties, as the village had been evacuated. At the conference, a review was given of activities to date and decisions were made on future activities.

On 4 April 1944, while returning from the SNOF conference, Pavle Leko Pavlev-Dimko, instructor and member, Lerin District committee of EPON and SNOF, was killed. He was ambushed by the German occupying forces and traitors from the village of Prekopana in the immediate vicinity of his own village. It was impossible to confirm his identity from his dismembered body since he did not carry identification. He was essentially a victim of the Bulgarian agents Kalchev and Mladenov, who had armed the villagers of Prekopana for the Bulgarian side. The population later realized this and handed the arms over to the partisans. I was the last to see Dimko. He left in the

direction of Sorovich and Kajlarsko, while I headed towards Banitsa to meet my immediate family whom I had not seen since the autumn of 1942 when I'd left for Bitola. After a day in Banitsa I returned to Vicho. While in the village of Lagen I was informed of Dimko's death. This news affected me deeply as we had been not only comrades but also childhood friends.

Pavlev-Dimko had been a loyal member of the Party, a skilled organizer and revolutionary, and a brave and fearless fighter who carried out his tasks with great enthusiasm. He had four sub-regional instructors under him. He took part in the fights to disarm the traitorous *komitadzii* and *paudji* (komitadzii were traitors who collaborated with the Greek quislings, while paudzii were local Greeks originally from Turkey who supported the Germans). He knew what he wanted, he was precise and clear, and it was easy to collaborate with him. The enemy had set traps several times before, but he had always managed to evade them by changing direction at the last minute. We lost a first-rate fighter, a young revolutionary who gave his life for the freedom of his people, for Macedonia. After his death, I was deployed and continued the struggle for freedom.

He will forever remain a shining example to the younger generations of how they must fight and how they must defend the freedom of their people.

His name was put forward as a national hero in the NOV by the Lerin District committees of CPG, EPON and EAM, but because of the split between the CPG and SNOF over the Macedonian Question, he was not officially declared a hero. For the Macedonian people of the Aegean, he is a national hero, and will remain in the memories of all fellow fighters and future generations.[43]

At the district conference, a goal was set to elect national MPs during March-April 1944 to constitute the National Assembly of

[43]He was the childhood best friend of Evan Mallin and was romantically linked to a sister of Evan Mallin.

Greece. To that end, on 10 March 1944 in the liberated territory a temporary governing body was formed, the National Liberation Political Committee (PEEA) for all of Greece. Banitsa's elections took place in in the second half of April 1944. Kiro Pilaev was unanimously elected as the representative for Lerin District. The first assembly was convened on 27 May 1944 in liberated territory in the village of Korishades.[44]

Formation of the Macedonian Partisan Units

The second important decision of the district conference was to finalize the preparations for organizing Macedonian SNOV partisan units which would be encompassed within the framework of ELAS.

In this way, in May 1944 the Banitsa unit was formed, with Lefter Olevski of Banitsa as commander and Gjorgi Kalajdjiev of Voshtarani as political commissar, within the framework of the 28th Brigade of the Macedonian division. There were 30 villagers from Banitsa in this unit formed in the fall of 1943, along with new recruits including Ilo Mangov, Kocho Hrisafov, Pando Dajkov and Nancho Dzogov. Also joining this unit were fighters from the villages of Gornichevo, Voshtarani, Tserovo, Zabrdeni and Ekshiso. This was the first regular unit of the Macedonian National Liberation Army composed exclusively of ethnic Macedonians.

The Banitsa unit inspired fear and trepidation in the enemy, and everywhere where they took action, they destabilized the enemy, especially the units of the quisling Greek government. Here is an example of the Banitsa unit's activities: in the beginning of July 1944 there was a raid on the radio surveillance station in the Tserovo monastery at the summit of Piperka, where there were 30 Germans. The radio centre was destroyed, the Germans withdrew, and large quantities of food, supplies, and ammunition were seized, as well as the radio

[44] Apart from a very few people, most of the Macedonians were not communists but rather nationalists. The western powers' aims were to secure Greece and the Mediterranean. Nationalist Greeks wished to rid their new territory of the Macedonian minority.

equipment and two mules which were transported to the brigade headquarters and company base in Negovan, Lerin District.

In the Sorovich-area villages of Ajtos, Ekshiso, Srebreno, Prekopana and others, Bulgarian agents under the leadership of Kalchev succeeded in corralling certain villagers into the fight against the national liberation movement. They even tried to influence Banitsa but did not succeed because of its freedom-loving, fighting spirit. In an attempt to ambush the Bulgarian spy Kalchev, the Banitsa fighters planted mines in the area of the Banitsa–Tserovo valley road. A convoy of German military vehicles drove into the trap. The first truck drove over a mine and flew into the air; the other two then withdrew. In total, 14 Germans were killed but the partisans suffered no injuries. However, Kalchev, the Bulgarian agent, did not appear as he was forewarned of the plan.

The Germans sought revenge for this action, and captured and hanged 22 patriots. The following day they bombarded the entire area to from the ambush site with artillery shells. About ten shells landed in Banitsa, killing Menka Ziskova, the wife of Mitse Ziskov, and Tsile-Vasil Gligor Kalpakov, who was carrying out guard duties for the village and had not abandoned his post.

Menka Ziskova was born in 1908 in Banitsa. She was a housewife, a member of AFZ and an activist with NOF, trained in handling firearms. She was killed at the age of 36, defending freedom. Tsile-Vasil Kalpakov was born in 1908 in Banitsa. He was a miner and a member of the pre-war trade union. He participated in many work actions and strikes in the mine in the struggle for social and economic rights. He was a member of the CPG from 1941 and an active member of the National Liberation Army. On that critical day, he was scheduled to be on duty in the village, a job assigned by the reserve units of ELAS. He gave his life at the age of 36.

The Imprisonment and Murder of the Partisan Lazo Kochev

During the spring offensive conducted by the Bulgarian and German units, an operations unit passed through Banitsa, captured Lazo Kole Kochev, and took him to the prison in Bitola. The intent was to get him to admit that he was a member of the CPG, a member of the People's Committee of the CPG and an organizer for SNOV in Lerin District. He was beaten and tortured for three months using every barbaric method to get him to talk, but his captors were not successful. They tried to force him to sign a statement about the interrogation but he refused with the excuse that he couldn't read Bulgarian and didn't know what was written in the statement. Taken to court, he didn't utter a word except to say that he was innocent.

For lack of evidence, the court brought in a verdict of "not guilty" and dismissed the case of the public prosecutor. Kochev was released but deported to Greece. He was free, but because of the beatings he was quite weakened and was unable to walk unsupported. He was put on a wagon by Dore Malinov, who took him to his house for several days' rest and recuperation.

The Bulgarian authorities dispatched a police car the very next day to Dore Malinov's house to take Kochev back across the border. The Bulgarian troops murdered him some 200 metres north of the border by shooting him in the back. The "not guilty" verdict counted for nothing with the Bulgarian occupying forces, or else this final outcome may have been planned from the beginning.

Lazo Kochev was born in 1910 in Banitsa. As a youth he experienced the suffering of his people, and as a young man got a job in the lignite mine where he struggled in misery and poverty earning barely to survive. He had a wife and children, and was a member of the revolutionary trade union at the mine and of the CPG from 1934. He was an organizer for the strikes of 1934 and 1939, when management conceded to the workers' demands in full.

Until his arrest in May 1944, Lazo was in the first ranks of the struggle against the occupation and against domestic collaborators. He was one of the organizers of the liberation movement not only in Banitsa but also in the entire Lerin region.

Mobilization of ELAS and the Formation of a National Militia

In the beginning of August 1944, a mobilization of military recruits from 18 to 55 years of age was carried out by the Military Staff of ELAS Reserve in order to form a national militia. Registration was conducted before a commission in the village of Voshtarani, about five kilometres from Banitsa. The commission included Boris Malinov from Banitsa and Vasil Emshiridis from the Banitsa Station settlement. About sixty people answered the call, armed and ready to fight.

By order of ELAS General Staff, these people formed the first units of the national militia of Lerin District and were under the command of Vangel Kujchev of Banitsa. Regional stations were also formed, with a set number of militias that cared for the order and security of the local inhabitants and were involved with the discovery and capture of all enemies hindering the developments of NLF and anyone preventing the National Liberation Movement from fulfilling its function in the liberated territories.

These sixty people from Banitsa who entered the national militia were assigned to six regional stations. The Zhelino station was commanded by Kiro Dzugomanov, the German (Gehr-man) station in Prespa by Dore Janin, the Negovan station by Stojan Katronov, the Setina station by Stavro Pavlev, the Banitsa station by the Banitsa municipal commander Vancho Katin, and the Neveska station by Tane Pavlev.

The Banitsa combatants enjoyed a special level of trust and were tasked with the security of Lerin District. This was the first military formation of the national militia not just in Lerin District but even more

broadly. In addition, the commander of the Lerin region became a member of ELAS General Staff of Greece, which was also an honour for Banitsa.

Combat Actions and Diversions by the Banitsa Unit

Information was received from authorities in the village of Voshtarani about Sotir Gaskov, a Bulgarian spy. He had been born in Banitsa, but he lived in village of Zhivojno in Bulgarian-held territory, and had been making inquiries about the partisans' movements. He was also suspected of taking part in Lazo Kochev's murder. Lefter Olevski's troops, after several unsuccessful ambush attempts, finally caught hold of him near the fountain in Bogdanets, on the Banitsa–Zabrdeni road and took him to Bel Kamen. After a hearing about his espionage activities at the brigade's military court, he was sentenced to death and shot as a traitor.

The German authorities sent Gjorgev, a Greek, as a scribe for the Local Government Council. He had a dual role. He acted as a spy and didn't record the true facts in council meeting minutes, and he kept certain secret lists under lock and key.

In an ambush at the Lerin–Kozhani/Lerin–Solun crossroads, the troops of Lefter Olevski captured this traitor and found with him a list of the activities of certain people from Banitsa, intended to be given to the Germans. After a hearing, he was sentenced to death and shot for collaboration with the enemy.

Lefter Olevski and his unit received an order to attack the village of Ajtos in August 1944, and to disarm the village's komitadzii (traitors who collaborated with the Greek quislings). The mission was successful, but Leko Natse Olev was killed in the fight. He was born in Banitsa in 1922, and was a mine worker and trade unionist for many years. He was member of OKNE, and from May 1941was a member of the National Liberation Movement and the CPG from 1942. He was

killed by a German unit which had come to Sorovich to help the komitadzii.

After the disarmament of these traitors in Ajtos, the group was given another mission, to attack the German radiocommunication centre situated at Visino on Kajmakchalan mountain. In the second half of August, after extensive preparation, the mission was carried out. Ten Germans were killed and fourteen captured, along with the commander of the centre, a major. Military equipment, weapons, and the radio centre equipment were seized. The prisoners were taken to brigade headquarters, located in the village of Negovan.

In September 1944, the enemy was heading in the direction of Solun from Lerin. The Banitsa detachment organized an ambush at a place called Rikni Kamila (Braying Camel), on the road between Gornichevo and Ostrovo. Ten trucks were destroyed and many Germans were killed or wounded without any partisan casualties.

In the same month, the mine-laying squad led by Dimitar Kochevski successfully carried out the task of laying mines on the Lerin–Kozhani road and the Lerin–Solun rail-line along the Banitsa–Tserovo valley, near the Babulov Bridge close to Banitsa.

In October 1944, the Banitsa detachment attacked the police station in the village P'tale and continued towards the town of Sorovich, where, along with other units, they took part in its liberation and seized a large quantity of weapons and military equipment. In the vicinity of Armenoro village (near Lerin), they planted explosives on the rail line and blew up a German train. They captured 2,000 Bulgarian soldiers and seized three cannons, ammunition, and four trucks loaded with food at the railway station. (The truckloads of food, under the control of the National Liberation Board, were sent to Banitsa and distributed to the population).

The Liberation of Lerin

On 19 October 1944, the Banitsa detachment, together with the other units of the 28th Brigade, took part in the liberation of Lerin.

On 20 October, there was a grand parade in Lerin, in which all the liberation units took part and a great gathering in which Lerin District's Party Secretary, Comrade Tanas, and the President of the regional NOO, Nikjo Velikin, both gave a speech.

Over 200 people from Banitsa were there to celebrate the victory over fascism. Surviving veterans of the Ilinden Uprising marched at the front of the parade, carrying banners proclaiming the freedom of the Macedonian people.

ELAS's Command to Dissolve the Macedonian Units of SNOF

In these critical autumn days, some disagreements surfaced between Macedonian partisan units and the staff of ELAS of the 28th Infantry Brigade. The massive gravitation of young Macedonians to join the Macedonian units did not impress the leadership of ELAS but instead upset them, and they started to react to it. A policy came into force whereby EAM and other organizations started deterring Macedonian youth from joining Macedonian battalions and instead directed them to ELAS units far from home. Redeployment of Macedonian units and their transfer to other brigades and units outside Lerin District began. The same thing occurred in Voden and Kostur District. In addition, with the excuse that an exchange of weapons was being done; pistols and hand grenades were taken from the Macedonians but they were not given replacements.

By command of the division, a request was made to move the Lerin-Kostur battalion to the town of Siatista, Kozhani region. One could sense the wish of ELAS to dissolve the Macedonian units, with the agreement of the CPG. In a few days the Government of National Unity of Greece was to come back, led by Georgios Papandreou whose

position was well known. He had announced on the radio: "For Greece, the Macedonian question doesn't exist". The CPG agreed with this position and took responsibility for dissolving the Macedonian SNOV units.

The Lerin–Kostur Macedonian Battalion, after realizing they would be dissolved, retreated to the slopes of Bigla Mountain (west of Lerin) and continued the battles against the Germans while at the same time expecting an attack from the units of ELAS, which indeed took place. The 28th Infantry Brigade of ELAS, under the command of Janulis, attacked our battalion but found resistance. Former comrades-in-arms fought against one another and in the end, with great losses, the 28th Greek Brigade's attack was broken up and they retreated. In order to avoid an even greater battle with ELAS and further bloodshed, which they expected, the Macedonian units decided to retreat to Vardar (Yugoslav) Macedonian territory on 13 October 1944, where they continued the fight against the Germans.

Retreat to Yugoslavia

The Macedonian Voden Battalion of ELAS also retreated before the danger over the Kozhuf Mountain to Kavadartsi. The next day, on 18 November 1944, from the remnants of the Lerin-Kostur-Voden battalions and from new groups of fighters, the First Macedonian Assault Brigade was formed.

The mistaken position of the CPG continued. It then declared the soldiers of Macedonian units of Aegean Macedonia to be traitors and counter-revolutionaries. At the same time, the national militia and ELAS units started persecuting the parents, families and relatives of the soldiers, sending family members into internment camps and declaring them to be collaborators with the enemy, shamefully calling them, *paleovulgari* (the lowest form of creature according to some Greeks).

Even the commander of the Banitsa detachment that was part of the 28th Brigade, Lefter Olevski, was ordered to attack the Lerin-Kostur

battalion and bring back its leaders to Lerin, dead or alive. Instead, his unit, knowing what was going to happen to the Macedonian units and people, joined the Lerin-Kostur detachment along with all its armed soldiers. As they arrived at St. Petka, they were joined by Macedonian partisans: 39 from Banitsa, four each from Tserovo and Krushoradi, eight from Ekshiso, six from P'tale, seven from Gornichevo, four from Zabrdeni, five from Voshtarani, four from Setina, two from Boreshnitsa, and four partisans from Peshosnitsa.

The following men from Banitsa were in Banitsa's unit: Lefter Olevski (commander), Ruse Dzugomanov, Petse Alushev, Natse Rapov, Lazo Veljanov, Lazo Gjergev, Ilo Natse Mangov, Gjorgi Abov, Gjorgi Dajkov (platoon leader), Blazhe Dajkov, Gjorgi Alushev (platoon leader), Kirche Malinov, Gjorgi Iliev, Nanche Dzogov, Kalo Dzogov, Trifo Malinov (political commissar), Blazhe Malinov, Tane Jovchev, Lazo Lakov, Vancho Katin, Blazhe Toshev, Micho Toshev, Lazo Rapov, Kocho Hrisafov (political commissar), Leko Hrisafov (commissar), Pando Dajkov, Petse Mangov, Ilo Mangov, Natse Risto Malinov, Dine Nedin (platoon leader), Lazo Kalpakov, Dore Janin, Krishe Katin, Kocho Rapov, Kitse Vasev and Lazo Kirev.

At St. Petka, I, Atanas Katinovski-Goche, also joined the Macedonian units, and at that time I was a regional instructor for EPON, Lerin District, and a member of the organizing committee for EPON and SOF. I ordered all the supplies of foodstuff stocked in Buf and Kavkaz for the needs of ELAS to be transferred to St. Petka to be used for the needs of Macedonian units. At that time, as an ELAS member, I was forbidden to give anything to Macedonian units and I was ordered to propagate the story that they were traitors. I joined the Macedonian units and also informed Comrade Tanas, secretary of the CPG, by sending him a letter containing the following:

> Comrade Tanas!
>
> I inform you that as of today I joined the Lerin Macedonian Battalion led by Gotse, which has withdrawn from the ranks of ELAS and is stationed

at St. Petka because of ELAS' intention to disband and disarm it. My place is in the ranks and on the side of the Macedonian leadership of SOF and SNOF, and I, as a righteous Macedonian, have dedicated the whole of my young life to the struggle for liberation of the occupied Macedonian people ever since the first days of the Revolution in 1941. It seems that my struggle was in vain, as was the struggle of the entire Macedonian people who took part en masse in the National Liberation Army, in the ranks of ELAS, actually SNOV, and who gave tens of thousands of sacrifices in the struggle for liberation of the country from the foreign invaders and domestic traitors. In doing so, we expected that we too would win a victory for our people, national independence and the right to self-determination. Unfortunately, the CPG and its leadership are following a misguided policy in the Macedonian Question and against participants in NOV and SOF, which is detrimental to the overall liberation movement in Greece. In this way, badly managed politics have led to a discord between the leadership of SOF and SNOV and the leadership of the CPG, EAM and ELAS. As for the CPG, it will have to bear historical responsibility before the Greek population and the Macedonian people. The political responsibility will be even greater if the CPG is unable to win freedom and bring the people and the working class to power. You also personally espoused these positions and policies when at a public consultation with instructors of the CPG, EAM and EPON a few days ago, where you publicly slandered and blamed the leadership of SOF and SNOV for the separation of the Macedonian units from ELAS, calling them traitors, counter-

> revolutionaries and ohranovtsi-komitadzii.[45] You also asked us to represent that policy to the people of Lerin District, which is unacceptable and is offensive to us Macedonians. Accept this as my resignation from the position of instructor for the Regional Committee of EPON. In the ranks of the Macedonian units, I will continue the fight until the final liberation of my subjugated Macedonian people.
>
> Regards, Goche
>
> Declaration, 13 October 1944.

Todor Kochevski-Viktor of Banitsa, regional instructor for EPON and member of the Regional Committee of EPON and SOF, joined the Macedonian units in Bitola.

Gjorgi Turundjev, together with his partisan group which had retreated to Zhivojno, Bitola District, also joined the Banitsa unit due to the disagreements with ELAS and EAM.

In the case of Gjorgi Turundjev, veteran revolutionary and SOF leader in Aegean Macedonia, ELAS issued an order to apprehend him, dead or alive.

[45]Collaborators of the Bulgarian fascists.

Here is a list of other members of the Macedonian units:

Village of Gornichevo

Petse Romev – commissar of a troop

Trajche Boglev	Dine Korov	Kole Totsev
Blazhe Totsev	Petse Gjegov	Leonida Gruev

Village of Tserovo

Ilo Cheganliev
Stefo Adziev
Trifko Adziev
Ilo Kindev

Village of Zabrdeni

Niche Kirkov
Jordan Tashominov
Gjorgi Tashominov
Risto Filin

Village of Krushoradi

Kosta Dzingov
Alekso Dzingov
Jane Donev
Tole Petiev

Village of Voshtareni

Pande Chokov
Tane Ashlakov
Tane Karkachev
Tane Pashkov
Pande Purchev

Village of Ekshiso

Trifko Popov – lieutenant
Ilo Turundjev
Maihail Kirkov
Trajko Adziev
Blazhe Adziev
Kitse Adziev
Stefo Robev

Village of Peshoshnitsa

Kosta Papajopulo – Avgerinos
Kiro Kolevski
Vasil Kostov
Gjorgi Kostov

Village of P'tale

Sotir Porpulov
Blazhe Alilemov
Stojan Gjatov
Vasil Tsipov
Kosta Vragoterov
Ilo Chornjakov

Village of Setina

Alekso Mundurov
Vane Ajtov
Jordan Vasov

The Voden Battalion also crossed over onto Yugoslav soil before being de-activated, and arrived at Bitola. The Lerin-Kostur and Voden Battalions and the Banitsa unit continued the fight against the occupation, taking part in the liberation of Bitola, Resen, Ohrid and Struga. After the completion of operations, they returned to Bitola.

Formation of the First Aegean Macedonian National Liberation Assault Brigade

The first Aegean Macedonian Brigade with the commander Ilija Dimovski-Gotse and the commissar Mihail Keramitchiev was formed on 17 November 1944, from the Lerin-Kostur and Voden battalions.

The Banitsa unit became part of the Second Battalion, and Lefter Olevski was appointed Commander, Boshko as commissar and I, Atanas Katinovski-Goche, as a political instructor. Later, I was also an officer of the Battalion OZNA (Department for People's Protection in Yugoslavia).

In order to reject the slanders of ELAS uttered on 10 October 1944 against the troops and leaders of the Macedonian Gotse Battalion, the leaders of the Macedonian units decided to send a detachment led by Atanas Koraveshi to return to Lerin and Kostur to tell the people the truth about the separation of the Macedonian units from ELAS, as well as to raise the morale of the people. I was in the leadership of the detachment, along with Koraveshi and the political commissar Pero.

The detachment set off from the village Dragosh over the Pelister mountain, between the villages Buf and German, towards the village of Zhelevo (west of Lerin), where it arrived around noon with a Macedonian flag waving. The members of the Greek National Militia who were in the village left it as soon as they found out that Macedonian units were coming. All of the villagers gathered in the centre of the village and Atanas Koraveshi addressed the population, while I spoke to them as a youth. We told the truth, urging that they not fall under any other influences and not heed any slanders. In the evening, the

detachment continued towards the villages of Rula and V'mbel, and it became even larger with new fighters who joined from Zhelevo. Another speech was given in village of Rula and in V'mbel the population welcomed us solemnly. We learned that units of ELAS were preparing action against our detachment. The staff held a meeting and sent a messenger to the "Gotse" Battalion to inform them of the new situation. The detachment remained stationed three days in the village of V'mbel waiting in vain for an answer and on the fourth day, in the morning, set off towards the village Smrdesh. After some speeches, we set off for village Gabresh, but at about one to two kilometres from the village on the slopes of Malimadi, we were fired on with all kind of weapons, so that the detachment commander instantly gave an order to the fighters to prepare but not to return fire yet. While we were talking, a bullet hit the political instructor Pero who fell dead right before the members of the squad's staff. Koraveshi ordered a response to ELAS's fire, and the battle lasted for more than two hours. We were fewer in number and poorly armed. However, after some time the artillery and mortars started to hit their own ranks and positions. Then we could hear voices from the Greek partisans that the people on the cannons and mortars were komitadzii and were helping their own people. We took advantage of the panic among the ELAS troops and on Koraveshi's command, we attacked them and they started running, leaving many injured and wounded behind. After the advance, the detachment retreated to its primary positions and the leadership of SNOF in the village of Smrdesh was informed of the death of Political Instructor Pero.

People came to take the body and at the funeral everyone paid their respects. The detachment continued its way towards D'mbeni, the birthplace of Lazar Trpovski, and in the evening hours we were solemnly welcomed by the people.

The next day, after a rest and clean up, and speeches, we went towards the village of Labanitsa, then crossed into Albanian territory and through Pogradec we returned to Bitola.

After the Aegean Assault Brigade was formed, it was sent towards Kichevo and was stationed near Gostivar. The second battalion, which included people from Banitsa, was stationed in village Vrapchishte, Gostivar District, where several actions took place to rid the area of Balists.[46] In an action of this kind near the villages of Lomnitsa, Gjurgevishta and Kalishta, two people were killed from the first detachment of the second battalion in the fight with the Balists. The brigade stayed on this territory more than three months and in April 1945, went to Bitola, through Skopje, where it was discharged. All the men of the brigade entered KNOJ (People's Defence Corps of Yugoslavia), in the first, second or third brigades of the 8th Division.

People from Banitsa from the Second Battalion of the First Assault Brigade joined the border units of the First Brigade of the Eighth Division of KNOY in YNA (Yugoslav People's Army). The political commission for Aegean Macedonia, headquartered in Bitola, formed the first military unit and sent it to Lerin District to protect the population from the terror of the monarcho-fascists. The leaders of the unit were Lefter Olevski and Risto Kolentsev. The other fighters stayed in YNA until the call from the CPG and NOF in the autumn of 1946 and the beginning of 1947 when the fighting began against the (Greek) government.[47] The other fighters stayed in the YNA until the summons from the CPG and NOF in the fall of 1946 and the beginning of 1947. The battle started against the government forces and the deceitful agreement that had been reached between the CPG and the government in exile. There had been notable treason by individual cadres of the central committee of the CPG in concessions made to the government in the Caserta Agreement and the Lebanon Agreement. People from Banitsa were among the first to enter DAG.

After Banitsa's troops went over into Macedonia, another unit of about seventy men was formed in Banitsa under the leadership of the commander Dimitar (Mitse) Kochevski, who, not knowing the

[46]Albanian Fascists
[47]The start of the Greek Civil War

treachery of ELAS, had taken part in ELAS against Macedonian units, especially in Sorovich and Kajlari.

Activities of SOF in Banitsa after Liberation from the Germans

It is recognized that the SOF movement led to the re-opening of Macedonian schools. There was training for new teachers and there was provision of primers and textbooks. In the fall of 1944, preparations were being made for the school year. There was a school opened in both the villages of German and Bouf. Atanas Babulovski, a former teacher in Banitsa, worked on preparations for the school opening in the village.

The splintering between EAM and SOF, the denial of the victories by the Macedonians and the formation of the Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Army (SNOV) in Aegean Macedonia interfered with the school openings. Besides forbidding the mother tongue, the new Greek authorities also banished the families of all partisans who had joined the First Aegean Assault Brigade. In 1945 the Grkomani took control of the Banitsa town council. As in a number of other villages they treated the families of partisans cruelly, not even allotting them their share of aid from the UNRA (United Nations Relief Agency) and other sources.

Even though they did not receive schooling in their mother tongue, the youth kept up Macedonian culture in Banitsa. They staged the play "Macedonian Blood Wedding". This was organized by Pavle Mangov and Tsile Ricalov. The lead roles were played by Dzole Ricalov as Tsveta and Gele Krishe Kochev as Aga. Macedonian sketches and poems were also performed at many events in the village.

On 7 November 1944 there was a large gathering and celebration of the anniversary of the Soviet Union's October Revolution and of the victory over fascism. There was a parade with socialist banners proclaiming brotherhood and equality amongst people paraded through the streets of Banitsa. Dine Robev, an instructor for the regional

committee of the CPG, Lerin District, gave a speech stressing the contribution of the Red Army to both the war and to universal socialism. The celebration lasted long afterwards with many songs and dances.

The NOO and the local branch of the Red Cross opened a kindergarten for the children and provided free food for them in November 1944. This served about 200 children from ages four to seven and for children up to nine for select families. The kindergarten operated from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and was located at Josef Janin's house, formerly the police station.

The kindergarten operated until late 1945 when the monarcho-facist government came to power in the village. Until the arrival of the monarcho-facists, the villagers had worked in harmony doing everything necessary, both young and old together. This included the fall planting season activities and the gathering of wood for winter fuel.

After the December riots in Athens and the agreement reached between the leadership of the CPG, ELAS, EAM and the former Greek administration, the partisan units disbanded, their weapons were handed, and the fighters returned home.

Thus, the glorious saga in the maelstrom of the National Liberation War and the Revolution of 1941 ended, but without enjoyment of the benefits of victory. Lying in wait was a newer, bloodier and longer war against the units of the former government in exile, the former collaborators with the occupation who were aided by the British army and by international imperialism.

Reasons for the Failure of the National Liberation Movement

From the viewpoint of my personal participation and beliefs and from the relatively large volume of material that I could examine, here are the causes for the failure of the National Liberation Movement:

- The CPG leadership had the wrong strategy for leading the National Liberation War against the Germans and domestic traitors, and this led to the restoration of the old regime.
- The CPG formed a joint military general staff with the units of EDES (Greek National Army), even though it was known that they had cooperated with the occupying forces (rehabilitation of domestic traitors).
- The leadership of the CPG, ELAS, and EAM made concessions in the Lebanon Agreement which betrayed the people, because they objectively allowed British reactionaries, the government in exile and domestic reactionary forces a legal pathway to come to power.
- The CPG consented to the decision of the Papandreou government on 21 November 1944 to form a single unified army and to disarm the units of ELAS, an army of 90,000 fighters, which deprived the people of both its protection and the gains made by the National Liberation Army.
- They did not take advantage of the mood of the people at the demonstrations in Athens and Piraeus on 3 December 1944, and allowed them to be attacked by government police, with thirty persons killed and over 100 wounded, while at the same time ignoring other protests staged by the labour movement.
- ELAS units were withdrawn from Athens and Piraeus when they should have been activated for the fight, near and far, against the British army and government forces.
- The CPG accepted the truce and final agreement of 14 January 1945, between ELAS and the British representative, General Scobie, and conceding to imperialist forces and domestic reactionary powers instead of continuing the struggle to final victory.

With the concluding of the Varkiza Agreement on 12 February 1945, there was a total ruination of the movement, capitulation, and a betrayal of the people and the gains made by the popular uprising between 1941 and 1944.

There were other factors which contributed to the reign of political instability in the country and brought to the surface those who would collaborate with the fascist occupation. With this, the country was brought to the brink of a new civil war.

11

BANITSA FROM 1945 TO THE END OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR IN 1949

Conditions after the Treaty of Varkiza

From the liberation of the country in the autumn of 1944 until April 1945, all organizations (CPG, SOF, AFZ, EPON) and other executive bodies of the National Liberation Board in Banitsa were functioning and completed their assignments in the renewal and rebuilding of the country.

The people of Banitsa began to feel anxious and worried after the bloody events in Athens and Piraeus in December 1944, because a large number of them were ELAS members and had took part in its actions throughout the country. They were concerned about their relatives, near and far. There was also justifiably a fear of wider military action across the country. The clashes had been of such a nature that they had far-reaching consequences, and these were between ELAS and the occupying British Allied forces stationed throughout the region.

The population anxiously kept track of events and of all the concessions by the CPG leadership when they concluded three agreements with the government in exile in the period of 1944 to 1945: the Lebanon Agreement, the treaty in Caserta, Italy, and the Varkiza Agreement in Greece. People didn't believe that the CPG had betrayed their movement and forfeited the gains of the National Liberation Front and the revolution, as ELAS had been the master of the situation throughout the country and was supported by the majority of its people.

The Greek right wing, which had the legitimate government of Greece in its control after the signing of Treaty of Varkiza, was aware that its rule was not secure. Its control depended on how well it could stifle the democratic movement in Greece and consolidate power. The right wingers had to consider the recent parliamentary elections and plebiscite on the monarchy (for or against the King). The bourgeoisie was aware that during the war a massively popular movement had developed against fascism and its domestic collaborators, and they could not dare to have free parliamentary elections until they made sure that conditions would be in place to satisfy their side and to secure the legitimacy to govern.

In order to accomplish that end, the movement of EAM needed to be suppressed and they needed to solidify and consolidate their new powers, to create their own state and administrative structures, their own armed military and police forces. Having no-one to rely on, they re-activated the occupation's collaborators and domestic traitors, and allowed them to continue waging terror against the people and the democratic movement in order to intimidate the population and to gain supporters for the government. This terror was especially carried out against the Macedonian people.

To carry out the above-mentioned measures, the bourgeoisie had the full material, moral and military support of the British occupying forces. The organizing of the Greek army and police was entrusted to the British officer staff.

Disarming ELAS Units

In accordance with the negotiated agreement and signing of the Treaty of Varkiza, on 12 February 1945, an immediate demobilization of ELAS soldiers began and the disarmament was completed by 15 March 1945. All members of ELAS who were from Banitsa returned home.

At the initiative of the secretary of the CPG's regional committee for Lerin District, in order to conceal a quantity of weapons handed in by fighters and from the ELAS arms cache in Lerin, the municipal committee in Banitsa was tasked with organizing the transport and storage of these weapons in the underground tunnels of Banitsa's coalmine. Under the leadership of the committee secretary, Blazhe Zabrtski and members of the Party, the following people, with their harnessed wagons, were involved: Gligor Kjosev, Slave Nedelkov, Dine Shisharev, Slave Kostov, Dine Kochev, Kitse Popov, Dzole Kalpakov, Dzole Lakov, Metodi Apchev, Gjorgi Mangov, Kole Depin, Gligor Perov and others. Twenty trucks with weapons of all kinds were transferred from storage in Lerin and hidden in the coalmine in Banitsa. This included about 200,000 rounds of rifle ammunition handed over to the Party in the village of Krushoradi which were transported by Tole Petkov and Kosta Dzengo. They also stored five truckloads of machine oil. During 1945 and 1946, these weapons were distributed to the fighters of the DAG.

Besides the fear of the armed terrorist groups that gripped the entire country, legal terrorism by the authorities themselves now began, which grew with the consolidation of power from the centre to other parts of the country. In the beginning of 1945 the number of arrested, imprisoned, and interned fighters was growing by the day (Ed. Note: this was part of what historians call the 'White Terror'). It was actually a one-sided civil war, since the people were unarmed and could not oppose the armed gangs. Protests by EAM's central committee to the command of the Allied Forces and the government did not help; on the contrary, they were the ones who encouraged and supported the terror. The people started to protest in large numbers in all towns and cities. The organization of these protest meetings was under control of the EAM organization and their representatives spoke at them.

Large Demonstration Held in Lerin

On 15 March 1945, a massive protest meeting was organized and held in Lerin, with over 15,000 people from Lerin District attending.

People from Banitsa were there in large numbers. The British Army and the gendarmes were tipped off about the meeting and blocked all the roads with barricades, thus not allowing the protestors to enter the town.

The protestors armed themselves with sticks, poles, stakes and rocks from the gardens in the suburbs of Lerin and at a given signal, entered the town over the enemy's barricades while the British army did not dare to open fire nor let the gendarmes do so. The protestors set off towards Emonia Square in front of the Hotel Balkania. Over 15,000 people chanted in unison: "We too are children of Mother Earth, and we too have the right to live." Certain chants could be heard: "We want a people's government, human rights, free and democratic governance, a tranquil and peaceful life, without terrorism from war criminals and collaborators of the occupying forces, who must face the judgment of the people." There were other calls for the withdrawal of British troops: Long live the CPG, long live EAM."

The meeting was opened by the president of the regional National Liberation Board and mayor, Micho Velikin of Banitsa, who gave the keynote speech. Other representatives of EAM spoke as well including Stavre Kochev of Banitsa and the president of SOF for Aegean Macedonia and Rigas. The secretary Tanos Furkiotis spoke in the name of the CPG.

All of the speakers condemned the terrorism, violence and rioting and called on the government to stop them. They demanded the liberation of political cadres and sympathizers of CPG, EAM, SOF and other innocent people who had been arrested. The perpetrators of the terror were to accept full responsibility, and democracy was to be established. The police, army and security units were to be cleansed of all those who collaborated with the occupying forces and of all pro-fascist members of the Metaxas regime. They shouted out slogans, "Long live the CPG, EAM, SOF!", "Down with Reactionary Government!", Allied armies out of the country!", and others.

Allied Military Command, gauging the mood of the masses, feared that the protesters might head towards Lerin Prison, where several war

criminals and collaborators of the occupying forces were imprisoned. It was a prison guarded by units of ELAS National Militia.

Therefore, they sent their own units to block the prison, disarmed the members of the National Militia, imprisoned them along with the criminals and the put the prison under control of the gendarmes. Later on, the National Militia members were taken to court, tried by Government court martial and sent off to concentration camps on deserted islands in the Aegean Sea, according to Ilija Kostovski of the village of Bukovikj, Lerin District. Clearly, no further comment is necessary.

In the afternoon hours the demonstrations ended and people returned to their homes.

After this demonstration an even greater wave of terror began. Armed gangs, the police force, special security forces units and other groups and individuals mistreated the unarmed population, in their homes, in the fields, just anywhere, attacking, beating, robbing, raping, and setting houses on fire. This was especially true for the Macedonian population, where all means were used in order to exterminate them. They were referred to as "paleovulgari and ohrana".[48] A large number of people were arrested and without trial, sent to the Aegean Sea death camps.

The population of Banitsa was kept aware of the wave of terror in the country through the news press of the Party and democratic organizations, as well as through personal contacts with other villages in and around Lerin. They feared and expected that the same things would happen in Banitsa. However, up until the beginning of May 1945, not one of them dared to come into Banitsa, until the monarcho-fascists took over control and solidified their power. Up until that time all activities of the organizations were carried out peacefully.

[48]Ohrana were Bulgarian fascists.

On the occasion of the Greek National Holiday, 25 March, celebrating the liberation from the Ottoman Empire, a large parade and meeting was held in Banitsa at which speeches were given by the Mitse Laev, president of the National Liberation Board, Nine Vasev, president of the SOF local committee, and Dimitar Kochevski, representing the CPG. All three spoke of the meaning of this holiday, about the revolution and the National Liberation War from 1941–1944. They condemned the current terrorism and called on the government take measures to stop it, as well as for the democratization of the country and the formation of a people's democratic government with participation of all democratic parties that took part in National Liberation War.

Blazhe Zabrtski, secretary of the CPG for Banitsa (after the 9th Plenum of CPG Central Committee of 5–10 April 1945 in Athens), after receiving instructions, informed all political activists to go underground and seek refuge in neighbouring countries within the socialist brotherhood, in order to avoid being arrested. Only those who were not much compromised could stay in the field. This also applied to the staff of all other socio-political organizations.

The secretary called a meeting of the local CPG, and on the agenda was the process for executing the aforementioned directive, and the decision as to who was to remain on the ground in Banitsa, and who was to leave for the neighbouring countries. Accordingly, the following people were to go to Yugoslavia: Blazhe Zabrtski, secretary of the local council of the CPG; Mitse Laev, president, National Liberation Board; Dine Robev, socio-political instructor for Banitsa's regional committee of the CPG; Risto Vasev, socio-political instructor for the regional committee of the CPG in Banitsa; Mitse Nedelkov, socio-political activist and regional instructor of the CPG; Pavle Mangov, socio-political activist, Risto Vasev; socio-political activist and instructor for the regional committee of the CPG in Banitsa; Kitse Apchev, socio-political worker and instructor for the regional committee of the CPG in Banitsa; State Boglev, socio-political activist; and Sofika Dzugomanova, socio-political activist and instructor for the AFZ in Banitsa.

At the meeting, a new secretary of the Party was elected—Dzole Rapov, its former vice-secretary. Stavro Pavlev was elected as deputy, and, Pavle Malinov was elected as a third member.

All of the above-mentioned activists went to Bitola, and later on, by order of the CPG, some of them went to Bulkes (the Greek communist village station in northern Yugoslavia). Of the Banitsa staff, members of the regional leaderships of Lerin District organizations who remained in the field included: Micho Velikin, Stavre Kochev, Vangel Kujchev, Todor Kochevski-Viktor, Dimitar Kochevski, and others.

Terror in Banitsa in 1945

The people's fears came true. At the beginning of May 1945, at Easter, a large detachment of gendarmes arrived in the village and blockaded it. The populace was in the midst of celebrating with the musical groups of Krishe Pandev and Krishe Janchev in the village centre, and at the sight of the police, started to disperse and head home. The gendarmes stopped them from leaving and surrounded them from all sides. They ordered the musicians to play the Greek Anthem and ordered everyone to dance the Imperial Dance. The people remained calm and nobody wanted to dance this oro. The gendarmes started dragging people by their jackets to dance, cursing them with insults such as paleovulgari, autonomists, etc. The population forcibly broke through the cordon of gendarmes and headed home. A general search was then conducted of all houses, with the police mistreating and robbing the population. By that evening, the gendarmes had stationed themselves in the village's military barracks and stayed there for good.

In the second half of May 1945, 160 court summonses arrived in Banitsa, with the charges that those people cited supported an independent Macedonia and were therefore undermining the state order of Greece. Panic occurred among the people because most of the summonses were for leading citizens and participants in National Liberation Movement, and most of them were either hiding in the mountains around Banitsa or had crossed the border into neighbouring

countries. Only forty people appeared before the court. They were accused of being autonomists, and their actions undermining state order. They all defended themselves, and some even hired lawyers who argued that it was all just fabrications and provocations, aimed at the Macedonian people order to harass them and ultimately exterminate them. Out of the forty people accused, seventeen were sentenced to long prison sentences without being proven guilty, and immediately sent to prison camps on deserted islands in the Aegean Sea. The seventeen were: Risto Popalev, Nune Vasev, Dore Malinov, Leko Abov, Kitse Janchev, Makile Mangov, Blazhe Krsten, Kole Tanev, Boris Dutsev, Dine Shisharev, Krishe Kochev, Ilo Rebetkin, Filip Nedelkov, Boris Babulov (military invalid from the Greco-Turkish war 1919–1922), Krishe Robev, Tsile Janev and Ilo Abov.

The people, fearful of new arrests and trials, started leaving the village, and around 200 people moved to Yugoslavia. Complete families left, and this was a tragedy for Banitsa. Some villagers, fearing reprisals by monarcho-fascists, did not sleep at home, but instead slept in the fields or up in the mountains.

Of the seventeen people sentenced, Dore Malinov and Filip Nedelkov were sent to Agios (Aja) Strati, the rest to other Aegean Sea camps. In the camp, Dore Malinov succumbed to his wounds from beating and torture by the prison guards. The veteran revolutionary, Filip Nedelkov, was also beaten and tortured by the prison guards, and after being tortured almost to the point of death, was released and sent back to the village. Medical attention and home care could not help him, and two weeks later, he succumbed to his wounds. He died surrounded by his family.

Due to this wave of persecution and the issuance of an arrest warrant, Lazo Rapov, secretary of Banitsa's local CPG council, went underground and crossed into Yugoslavia. Committee member and deputy secretary Pavle Malinov was elected as his replacement, and a third member elected, Krishe Mitse Rapov, who continued the Party's activities totally underground.

Of the Banitsa staff, members of the regional governing bodies of CPG, EAM and EPON Vangel Kujchev, Dimitar Kochevski, Stavre Kochev, and Todor Kochevski-Viktor continued their field activities underground despite the wave of terror.[49]

Formation of the Agricultural Party of Greece

Due to the adverse conditions for CPG activity, the Lerin regional CPG committee ordered all party members to join the Agricultural Party, to carry out its political activity within its ranks in addition to the activities of the EAM organization, and to establish a branch of the Agricultural Party in each village. In April 1945, a constitutive meeting was held in Banitsa, and a five-member board was elected: Krishe Robev, Krishe Janchev, Gjorgi Dzugomanov, Slave Kostov and Metodi Gaskov (also known as Mangov).

According to Gjorgi Dzugomanov, a meeting was held in the Lerin-area village of Nokazi, of delegates from all village and town organizations and under the leadership of the Lerin District CPG. Regional council member Vorijas attended, along with two others whose names Gjorgi Dzugomanov could not remember. He and Slave Kostov, regional council members of the Agricultural Party, were the delegates from Banitsa. At the meeting, tactics and methods were developed for CPG members within this organization and outside of it, between the people and the army.

Formation of Partisan Groups and Units

In the beginning of May 1944, after the victory over fascism, the First Aegean-Macedonian Assault Brigade was dismissed and all the

[49]Dore Malinov was a great-uncle of Evan Mallin, who says he was actually lucky to escape arrest. "Nito eden shamar jadi jas" (*I did not eat even one blow*). Pavle Malinov's children and grandchildren reside in Toronto now.

fighters entered the Eighth Corps of KNOJ (People's Defence Corps of Yugoslavia).

Soon after the formation of the brigade in 1944, a conference was held in Bitola with delegates from all parts of Aegean Macedonia. A political body of twenty-nine members was elected, headed by a political commission of ten members which had the task of continuing the activity of the SOF and connecting with the CPG in order to resolve the dispute over Macedonian national question and recognition of the legitimate rights of the Macedonian people for self-determination.

The political commission, in one of its sessions held in April 1945, reviewed the political and military situation in Greece, especially in Aegean Macedonia, and concluded that the situation in this part of the country was extremely worrying. Terrorism and ethnic cleansing were causing massive emigration of peaceful Macedonians into neighbouring socialist countries [50] while at the same time, the resistance of the remaining progressive citizenry was increasing.

In order to protect the populace from the terrorism of the monarcho-fascists and their marauding bands, the villagers established village guards and armed detachments to deal with defence and timely reporting in case of danger.

The political commission, with the aim of organizing the population for self-protection and the defence of the legitimate rights of Macedonians, united the existing organizations of SOF from the time of the People's Liberation Army 1941–1944, all of which were quite broken and demoralised due to the new situation on the ground. On 25 April 1945, it decided to form new organization under the name of NOF: National Liberation Front of Aegean Macedonia, which should be considered a continuation of the work of SNOF. NOF arose not only as an organization and organizer of the struggle of the Macedonian people against the nationalist and classist enemy embodied in the ruling Athens regime in Greece, but also as an antithesis of the opportunistic and

[50]Ed.note: This is a long-established form of ethnic cleansing.

mistaken policy of the CPG leadership regarding the Macedonian national question. NOF, with its aims and activities, enjoyed great authority in Aegean Macedonia.

At this time, new people were appointed to form branch divisions of NOF and help unite the population. These were Risto Kolentsev, Vera Foteva Boleva, Gjorgi Turundjev, Tane Naumovski, Micho Velikin, Todor Kochevski-Viktor, and others. Risto Kolentsev and Lefter Olevski were assigned to unite the armed groups and individuals into partisan units under the leadership of NOF. From the disbanded First Aegean Assault Brigade, a large number of soldiers volunteered to return to Aegean Macedonia to fight for their legitimate rights. In the first organized military unit of NOF, around 100 combatants joined, under the command of Lefter Olevski and Risto Kolentsev. A large number of the combatants were from Banitsa: Gjorgi Alushev, Blazhe Tashev, Dine Tashev, Dine Nedin, Ruse Dzugomanov, Petse Alushev, Lazo Veljanov, Gjorgi Abov, Lazo Gjergev, Lazo Lakov, Vancho Katin, Blazhe Toshev, Kocho Hrisafov, Ilo Mangov, Lazo Kalpakov, Ilo Natse Mangov, and others.

Among them, the following Banitsa residents went into the field as political and military leaders: Lefter Olevski, battalion commander; Micho Velikin, Ipsilantis Brigade political commissar carrying the rank of lieutenant colonel and president of the Lerin District National Liberation Board; Todor Kochevski-Viktor, instructor of EPON for Lerin; and Vangel Kujchev, commander of the national militia in the General Staff of ELAS.

Micho Velikin founded the first partisan base in the location of Rakijata in the vicinity of Banitsa. It had only one radio.[51] Micho Velikin, with other politically active people from Banitsa, Stavre Kochev, Vangel Kujchev, Todor Kochevski-Viktor, all members of the Lerin regional leadership, started to organize the people's resistance

[51] Ed. note: My uncle Gele Krishe Kochev was a guardian of the radio. Evan Mallin at one time hid the radio under straw in a cart to deliver it back to the partisans.

against the terrorism of the monarcho-fascists and other armed military formations and individuals helping the allied forces stationed in Lerin.

Such militia activity of NOF in the Lerin and Kostur Districts was contrary to the decisions of the 11th Plenum of the CPG Central Committee held from 5 to 10 April 1945 in Athens, when Aris Voluhiotis was convicted of such activity, namely, refusing to surrender weapons, and who along with 100 partisans had continued the guerrilla struggle for liberation. Zahariadis called this action cowardice and desertion and said that the Party mustn't allow any of its members to continue the armed struggle; the actions would be condemned and measures taken. And that's how it was. Aris Valuhiotis was found dead June 25, 1945 on Pindus Mountain. At this 11th Plenum, they also criticized both the Macedonian leadership of the CPG of Greece and the actions of NOF, which were obstructed.

In July 1945, another Plenum of the CPG Central Committee was held, in which Zahariadis gave a report analyzing the reasons for the failure of ELAS, mainly justifying the political line of the party and attributing the mistakes to individuals and to the external factors of British imperialism. From then on, the Party opposed an armed struggle against the monarcho-fascists and instead espoused a political struggle—what a mistake.

The Varkiza agreement had been signed on 12 February 1945, and by July, when this Plenum was held, 10,000 former members and supporters of ELAS and CPG members were in prison, and thousands of armed men were in hiding in the mountains across the country or were in the neighbouring socialist countries trying to avoid arrest by the monarcho-fascists who had issued warrants for their capture. During this period, the former pro-fascist government was brutally restored. A large number of police and governmental forces were deployed, who were not selective about the ways and means of achieving power for their people, mobilizing all suspicious and hated people, collaborators of the occupying forces and pro-fascists, bloody with the blood of the people without regard to ethnicity and religious belief. They accepted into their fold all fleeing war criminals and traitors from the

neighbouring socialist countries (Drazhichevtsi, Lotikjevtsi, Domobrani supporters and Balist supporters) who managed to escape arrest and trial as war criminals in their own countries. During July 1945, in a skirmish in the vicinity of the village of Kotori, Lerin District, Stavre Kochev, a political instructor for EAM in Lerin District, was wounded and transferred to the hospital in Bitola for treatment.

In August 1945, by order and influence of the CPG, the political cadres Dimitar Kochevski and Vangel Kujchev of Banitsa, along with others of the region, left for Bulkes, Vojvodina (in Yugoslavia), and embraced the views of the Communist Party of Greece.

The Activity of the Youth Organization EPON in Banitsa

The activities of EPON in the beginning of 1945 proceeded under normal circumstances until the end of April 1945. Banitsa's youth did the spring planting as volunteers and helped all the households that did not have available workers or oxen. A sense of unity and solidarity could be felt in Banitsa.

During this period the leaders of the organization were the following: Mitse Dzugomanov, president, with members Gele Krishe Kochev, Pavle Tanev, Lena Krishe Robeva, Gele Apchev, Pavle Apchev and Pavle Dimitrov.

With the arrival of police now stationed in Banitsa and the arrest of politically active persons, the youth wing felt uneasy. Members of the youth group were also placed under arrest and of the 160 court summonses, a large number were for members of the youth wing. EPON started to stagnate and to reduce its activities. A large number of young people escaped to Yugoslavia, and others went into the mountains and started an armed resistance against the terrorism of the monarcho-fascist government, and later on joined the partisan units of NOF under the leadership of Lefter Olevski.

Forming NOF in Banitsa

In the beginning of May 1945, after the return of politically-active Macedonians from the neighbouring socialist countries, Banitsa was among the first villages in which the NOF organization was formed. Much of the former leadership of SOF, because of the persecution, was dispersed into the neighbouring countries, in monarcho-fascist prisons, or hiding in the mountains. The entire population responded to the invitation to establish the NOF organization in Banitsa. At the meeting, the goals and the tasks of the organization were set out and accepted. At the end, an election was held for the NOF's local board, with Blazhe Krsten, president, and Risto Vasev, Natse Vasev, Pavle Dzugomanov and Petse Tanev as members.

Taking into consideration the political and military situation, NOF worked under very harsh conditions. However, in spite of this, it displayed great activity and served as a template for organizing the Macedonian population for struggle against the monarcho-fascist government, self-defence, and the struggle for and protection of the legitimate rights of the people. Banitsa's example was followed by other villages of Lerin District. In the period of May to August 1945, active branches of NOF were formed in all villages around Lerin.

According to Tone Lulov, in May 1945, a meeting of the political wing of the party of Lerin was held in the village of Lagen, Lerin District, under the leadership of the secretary of the CPG's regional committee, Todor Eftimjadis, at which the following people of Banitsa were also present: Vangel Kujchev, Kitse Kochev, Micho Velikin, Dimitar Kochevski, Tone Lulov, Sofika Petkova and Natse Janchev.

At the meeting, the political and military situation of the country was reviewed, with a focus on the Lerin region. Activities in the field and the growth of the movement were discussed. A new division of the responsibilities was made for the political party's activists. Vangel Kujchev became responsible for the renewal and connection of the organization to the CPG; Sofika Petkova became responsible for AFZ

and its instructor; Micho Velikin became responsible for ETA, People's Aid.

Due to the poor working conditions on the ground (the repression by the monarcho-fascists), all those elected refused to work there. It was decided that they should go to Bulkes in Yugoslavia. Tone Lulov and Natse Janchev remained in the field locally.

Tone Lulov was offered the responsibility for the renewal and liaising with CPG for Lerin District, but he refused since the conditions were not favourable. However, he remained an instructor in the Banitsa area. On 30 June 1945, while moving through the Banitsa area near Miresh, or Gladno Pole (just west of the village), he was ambushed and sustained two wounds to his leg. The monarcho-fascists captured him, tortured him and transferred him to prison in Lerin. He received medical care for his injuries only from the other prisoners; the authorities did not even look at him. He was released, along with all other detainees, in August 1945, following a general amnesty granted by the Sophoulis government to all arrested ELAS members and political activists of the CPG, EAM, and others. However, this was just an illusion, as the wave of terror and repression immediately resumed with even greater intensity, and most of the detainees were returned to their cells.

The Monarcho-fascists Take Control of the Coalmine

With the restoration of the monarcho-fascist government in Lerin region in May 1945, the former proprietor of the mine, Lefterios Palis, was immediately re-installed. Palis forbade any unsanctioned coal mining in the Banitsa area. Together with the police, he conducted house-to-house searches, and wherever he found coal he filed criminal charges with the Lerin District Public Prosecutor's Office, charging theft of his property. There were over 200 people from Banitsa summoned to court who did not attend; most of them had fled to the Socialist Republic of Macedonia or had gone up into the mountains.

Because of Lefterios Palis' intense persecution of the miners, the NOF organization issued an order for his liquidation. A group of partisans led by Lefter Olevski and Risto Kolentsev was successful in completing the task. Palis opened fire, and the group responded with gunfire and hand grenades, killing him and his granddaughter Athena, who was at home. Likewise, by decision of the NOF, Dimko, the security guard of the mine, was also killed. He had treated the villagers rudely, not allowing them to draw water from mine's pumps. He had been previously warned not to mistreat them, but had continued to menace unprotected villagers by pointing a rifle at them.

After the execution of Palis, in September 1945 the monarcho-fascists began a general offensive to clear the Lerin area of partisans and their sympathizers. Over 10,000 soldiers and policemen participated in widespread terrorism of the villages, and in the mountains, there were casualties on both sides clashes between the partisans and the enemy. Defeated partisan groups, townspeople and villagers who found themselves under attack were forced to flee to the SRM (Socialist Republic of Macedonia).

In one of these actions, at the Banitsa-area site called Aero, a monarcho-fascist group led by the Greek Micho Mihaili, son-in-law of a Banitsa resident, was ambushed and wounded by a partisan group led by Gjorgi Tutundjov. The monarcho-fascists gave a great deal of aid to their fighters, which helped them survive. Every day, they would walk through the village, shooting at villagers, carrying hundreds of them to the police station for interrogation and beating, harassing and killing people under suspicious circumstances both inside the prisons and outside of them.

The partisan detachments continued their activities and actions in the Lerin region.

Celebration of the Anniversary of the Victory of Greece over Italy

On 28 October 1945, a parade took place in Banitsa, organized by the monarcho-fascists in honour of the anniversary of the victory of Greece over Italy. They asked the local population to participate in it, and under duress and coercion, about 100 youth and 50 miners took part. Mitse Dzugomanov, president of the youth wing of EPON, on marching by the grandstand on which all of the tyrants stood, raised his arm made the international proletarian salute with his fist. The young people marching behind followed his cue and did the same. The applause from the grandstand immediately stopped, and on that same day, persecution against the young people began. At the police station, the youths explained that they had been in a state of exultation when they made the proletarian salute; they were unaware of any negative implications of the salute, and that it did not symbolize aggression and malevolence. Despite torture and beatings, they did not betray the action's organizer. The residents of the neighbouring villages were amazed by these young people of Banitsa.

Seventh Congress of the CPG

The Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Greece was held in early October 1945 in Athens, ten years after the previous one. During the intervening time, the CPG had operated according to the strategies and tactics adopted by the Sixth Congress for leading the National Liberation Army during the years of 1941–1945, which proved to be erroneous. They had been changed on a case-by-case basis by the Central Committee or the Politburo of the CPG without coherence and a clear strategy or tactics, with decisions usually made by a small group of members or individuals, decisions that were disastrous and retaliated against the combatants despite their massive participation in the National Liberation Movement during the course of the National Liberation War. The CPG lost the war because of erroneous policy and the short-sightedness of the Party's leadership.

This congress confirmed a program for a people's democracy, adopted at the 12th Plenum of the CPG Central Committee of June 1945 which stated: "power must belong to a united alliance of the workers, peasants, civil servants, liberal professions, and the middle and lower classes of the bourgeoisie". It was established that the realization of this program's tasks and goals was blocked by the armed intervention of foreign military forces in Greece, who handed over power to domestic traitors in the interests of the Greek people. Once they came into power, they started to mistreat pro-democracy Greeks. Generally, there was no criticism of those members of the CPG leadership who had led the country to an vulnerable economic and, above all, military position and left the people at the mercy of the pro-fascist elements, turning the 100 percent victory of ELAS into a defeat. This congress could still have influenced the country because the pro-fascist enemy was not yet well organized in the government. That is to say, the CPG could have called the people to a general uprising against the domestic and foreign aggressors, and with its political and military power, it could have negotiated and dictated conditions.

The congress should have been a turning point, and should have corrected its errors to date. It should have thrown out and punished its inadequate leaders who had permitted the return of the government-in-exile and the British. They needed to establish new strategies and tactics for the continued struggle for the liberation of the country. The CPG did not have the power to do so or was misled by the reports of some members of the Politburo.

Delegates to the congress sought to stop the wave of terror by the right-wing elements of the country. They sought a gradual withdrawal of the foreign enemy and a cessation of their public support for the terrorists, who with their blessing, were continuing to restore a fascist government.

Mass Rallies and Protests in the Country

The year 1945 ended with a massive demonstration held in Athens on 25 December with over 150,000 citizens of the capital city. Comrade Xantos, deputy secretary to Zahariadis, spoke on behalf of the CPG. He called for the withdrawal of the foreign occupation forces from Greece. Among other things, he also said "We won't threaten anybody when talking about the monarcho-fascist terror. However, if the government cannot provide us with security, we will provide our own mass self-defence." What short-sightedness, wanting to achieve a political solution with appeals, instead of using the revolutionary fervour of the population and striking back against force with force, under the slogan once uttered by a Greek revolutionary about the defence of Athens: "*Molon lave!*—Come and get it!"

Large protests continued in the beginning of January 1946, a continuation of the one in Athens. Widespread energy and support of the CPG could be felt. Mass labour protests, strikes and demonstrations demanded a withdrawal of the allied occupying forces and a halt to the terrorism and lawlessness of the organization called the 'Black Front'. They demanded normal conditions for the democratic development of the country as well as a peaceful life; political demands that the CPG should have made.

On 7 January 1946, there were again protests and strikes in Athens and Piraeus, which spread across the country into every town. The police were forcibly dispersing workers and shooting at them, as was the case in Solun where many workers were injured. Meanwhile, the CPG leadership was in parliamentary opposition demanding a peaceful return to power—a big mistake. In the Aegean part of Macedonia, small partisan groups and squads were actively protecting the population, since many others had gone into the neighbouring countries.

The winter of 1945/1946 was extremely cold, with a lot of snow, creating difficult conditions for the partisans' activities. The monarcho-fascists did not give the population any rest, conducting raids in the villages and up in the mountains. In one of the partisan groups that was

active on the mountain Radush in the vicinity of Banitsa was Boris Lazo Dimanin of Banitsa. During February 1946, this unit spent several days battling the monarcho-fascists, staying day and night on the snowy and icy terrain. Boris Dimanin developed frostbite. He was transferred to the partisan hospital in the village of Prekopana, but did not survive. He was buried with full honours in Prekopana. He left behind a wife and two small children.

The CPG Calls for an Uprising and an Election Boycott

At the Seventh Congress of the CPG, resolutions were passed for peaceful action and to resolve the question of CPG's participation, through representatives, in government. However, at the beginning of 1946, it was clear that the government did not respect the agreement and was terrorizing and arresting the progressives, sending them to the deserted Greek islands.

The Politburo of the CPG Central Committee issued a proclamation to all former ELAS soldiers and to the population as a whole, to rise up and join a country-wide armed rebellion, to take up arms against the terrorism of government forces. The proclamation also called on the progressive population to boycott the elections scheduled by the provisional government for 31 March 1946.

In accordance with the appeal, the population did not take part in the elections, especially in the Aegean part of Macedonia, despite the drastic measures and threats that were made. On election day, special units of the government carried out mass arrests of democratic-leaning individuals in every village and town, and also arrested those of their own ranks who were disobedient.

A Large Demonstration in Lerin

As a sign of protest, the CPG Regional Committee for Lerin District organized a mass protest rally in Lerin on 24 March 1946, with the participation of the population of all the villages. Four thousand people listened to speeches from members of the regional committees of the CPG, EAM and NOF. The speakers called on the citizens to boycott the election of 31 March 1946, under the slogan: "No One Must Vote!" Those present accepted the call with applause, shouting out anti-fascist slogans. They called on the government to live up to the signed agreements, to prevent terrorism, disband terrorist organizations, and to oust all collaborators of the occupation and domestic traitors among them. They called for the formation of a provisional democratic government in order to conduct a fair and democratic general election of parliamentary representatives, under conditions favourable for the free expression of the people's will.

During March 1946, the leaders of NOF in Aegean Macedonia sent a memorandum to the Greek government, demanding an end to the terrorism and violence, along with the release of those imprisoned.

In the Banitsa region, there were active partisan groups under the command of Vangel Kujchev and Lefter Olevski, but they were poorly armed. In March 1946, they received a quantity of arms from Banitsa's local NOF committee that had been hidden in the coalmines. They armed the Banitsa partisans and others who were in service in the area of the Radushka Mountain. Some of these people joined the partisan detachments, and some continued to act individually, carrying out disorganized and self-initiated sabotage actions. The regional command of NOF passed a resolution that everyone should either join the partisan units or hand over their weapons and move to the neighbouring socialist countries. And that is what happened. Those who did not want to be partisans gave up their weapons, which were collected by Gjorgi Turundzov. These people were then sent to Bitola. Later, in the autumn of 1946, they voluntarily returned and entered the ranks of the Macedonian partisan units.

Elections in Banitsa

In the general elections of 31 March 1946, only 20% of the citizens in the Lerin region cast ballots, and that is according to the official election reports. The other 80% heeded the proclamation of the CPG and did not go out to vote.

In Banitsa, out of 614 registered voters, only sixty-six cast ballots, that is, 10% of those on the voters' list. Of those, only twenty-two were villagers, with the rest being civil servants or teachers posted to the village. Despite their intimidation and threats, the authorities did not succeed. Among the twenty-two Banicheni who cast votes was the family of Mitse Katin, who had turned away from ELAS because of the execution of his son Ilo Katin. In the spring of 1944, Ilo Katin had been arrested by the partisans for treason and personal profiteering, and after a hearing, was sentenced to death. This family cast some of the votes; other families had household members employed by the municipal government, predisposing them to go out and vote; other voters had Greek sons-in-law in the police.

It should be mentioned that from the government forces stationed in the barracks, an entire battalion was arrested and imprisoned right before the elections, because the government considered them to be democratically inclined and representing a certain danger. This happened across the entire country.

A new wave of Persecution in Banitsa

Because of the boycott of the Greek elections, a law was passed the day after the elections, declaring the CPG illegal and prohibiting its political activities. A stronger campaign of terrorism began, especially against the Macedonian citizens. Banitsa was blockaded many times between 1 April and 22 May 1946 with sixty people arrested and thrown into the Lerin prison, where they were beaten and tortured to within an inch of their lives.

The following were arrested: Kole Tanev, Nune Tanev, Dine Shisharev, Slave Nedelkov, Kitse Apchev, Krishe Kochev[52], Pavle Malinov, Makile Mangov, Ilo Abov, Dore Vasil Malinov, Mitse Mangov, Petse Tanev, Boris Babulov, an invalid veteran of the Greco-Turkish war, Leko Abov, Krishe Gajrev, Risto Popalev, Pavle Apchev, Krishe Pavlev, Slave Katin, Krishe Katin, Stojan Kotronov and others.

They started a hunger strike in prison, demanding to appear before the mayor of Lerin District and be told why they were imprisoned. They shouted slogans for democracy, for NOF, EAM and the CPG, and they sang revolutionary songs. The hunger strike lasted three days and forced the prison administrator and the mayor to meet and to listen to their demands, because they were joined by a hundred other prisoners. The mayor announced to them that they were accused of hostile activity in the service of another country and of undermining of the Greek constitutional regime, and that they would be tried in court.

In the following days, fifty-eight Banicheni were taken to court with this charge and for murders committed during the period of the national liberation struggle of 1941–1945. Mitse Katin appeared as a witness with his sons Janko and Blazhe, charging the prisoners with the death of his son Ilo. He said it happened because his son declared that he was Greek and did not want to cooperate with the bandits. Other witnesses were Stamati and Micho Makile, brothers who were ethnic Greeks (from Evia) but married to women of Banitsa. Stamati declared that there were no partisans in Banitsa, just bandits who were organized simply to extirpate the Greeks. Micho Makile testified that the bandits took him captive and escorted him to Radosh Mountain, but he was released after the intervention of Vangel Kujchev and then attacked again near Banitsa where he was aided by a military unit. He was then wounded.

Ilija Dzovani, a Greek, spoke as a defence witness. He was the son-in-law of Tsile Laev. He declared that the witnesses' testimony was not correct, and that during the entire time of the National Liberation War,

[52]Constantine Mallin's grandfather.

he had lived in Banitsa, and nobody did anything to him; rather, he felt like it was his hometown. Gligor Danev, a lawyer from Banitsa, acted as defence counsel for the accused.

At the conclusion of the trial, all of the accused were convicted and given long prison terms and sent to the deserted islands in the Aegean, where they served between five and fifteen years' hard labour.

A similar process applied to others from Banitsa who were tried in absentia. These people had continued to fight against the new regime during the period of the National Liberation Movement and the time after the Varkiza Agreement. Among those sentenced in absentia were the following: Lefter Olevski, unit commander; Vangel Kujchev, former instructor for the CPG and then for the regional NOF delegation; Dine Robev, CPG instructor; Kitse Kochev, president of NOF in Aegean Macedonia; Dimitar Kochevski, unit commander and EAM instructor; Todor Kochevski-Viktor, instructor for EPON and secretary for the regional board of EPON (NOMS, the National Liberation Youth Union) delegation; Atanas Katinovski-Goche, former instructor for EPON and political instructor and battalion officer of OZNA, stationed in Yugoslavia; Mitse Nedelkov, CPG instructor; Micho Velikin, first president of NOO for the Lerin region, leader for the town of Kukush and responsible for the region's agitprop and press; Sofika Petkova, AFZ instructor; and Kitse Mangov, a political émigré in Bulgaria.

Kitse Mangov was sentenced in absentia to death, and the others were sentenced in absentia to 20 years in prison.

With the exception of Katinovski-Goche in Yugoslavia and Mangov in Bulgaria, all of them were active in the local area, expanding the national liberation movement in opposition to the regime.

On 1 May 1946, the inhabitants of the village of Ekshiso, Lerin District, set out to celebrate Labour Day in a place called Solinar, and they were accompanied by a partisan group under the command of Lazo Popdimitrov of Banitsa. The police were notified of this celebration and set off to ruin the festivities. The partisans had set up scouts and an

ambush, and defeated this group of policemen, killing two policemen and capturing one. The others fled back to the village. After a brief interrogation, the prisoner was sentenced to death for his atrocities and was shot by the partisan unit command. Lazo Popdimitrov took the policeman's rifle and gave it to Mire Babulov a few days later. Babulov had a sheep pen in a place called Osojte. Popdimitrov fell into an ambush on the way back to the village and was captured by the police. They took him to the station where he was beaten and tortured, but he did not admit anything. Alas, at the same time, two couriers under the partisan commander Vangel Kujchev were captured in Tserovo, imprisoned, and tortured. One of them, Trajche Adjiev of the village of Tserovo, severely tortured and unable to bear the pain, told them of the skirmish near the town of Ekshiso. of the execution of the captured policeman, and of the transfer of the rifle from Popdimitrov to Babulov. He did not know that Popdimitrov was also in prison at the same time, and unintentionally betrayed him. A confrontation took place, and Popdimitrov confessed to leaving the rifle in Mitse Babulov's sheepfold in Osojte.

A police squad was dispatched to surround Babulov's sheep pen the next morning. They found Mitse Babulov in a hut with his son Stavre. Mitse was beaten almost to death but did not disclose that he had a rifle on his property. One of policemen grabbed Mitse's son Stavre and threatened to harm him. Stavre, thinking that he could save both his father and himself, gave up the location of the rifle. The police then returned to the half-dead father and killed him. They spared the underage son. They rounded up the sheep and goats, and set the pen on fire, leaving little Stavre beside it.

Lazo Popdimitrov was taken to the Lerin prison, where he was charged with the murder of the policeman and treasonous activities in the service of a foreign nation (Yugoslavia). He was sentenced to death by firing squad, but an appeal to superior court commuted his sentence to 18 years at hard labour in the death camps on the islands. There he remained for 18 years where, according to his story, he worked 15 to 18 hours a day with poor rations and mistreatment. Whippings and solitary confinement were commonly used in the camp for everyone, including

him. He survived because of his relative youth, and was released after serving 18 years. He returned home ill. He sought medical care, but was refused. He crossed the border illegally near Bitola, where he was accepted and sent for medical care.

About the same time, in a single action, Krishe Kochev and Pavle Kitse Apchev were taken into custody and subjected to psychological torture.[53] They did not reveal anything about the partisans of DAG. Krishe Kochev survived the torture and beatings and was released. Because of the persistent mistreatment, he emigrated to Canada to be with his family and died there in 1980 as a severely afflicted invalid veteran of war.

The second prisoner, Pavle Kitse Apchev, survived all of the torture in Banitsa police station and with injuries, was transferred to the Lerin prison without any medical assistance. Bravely enduring all the methods of torture, he told his torturers to their faces, that he if he survived, he would take revenge, and if not, his comrades would do so. He was brutally killed in the Banitsa jail without ever being tried or convicted.

Pavle Apchev was born in 1925 in Banitsa to a working-class family. As a young man he worked in the coal mine. After the occupation in 1941, he became a member of the communist youth movement OKNE and actively participated in the collecting of arms and military equipment. He was accepted as a member of the CPG near the end of 1941 when he joined the Banitsa partisan detachment. He participated in all actions within the ranks of ELAS until the spring of 1945, when he returned to the village and continued his activity until being arrested. The people lost yet another warrior. The Banitsa military battalion and the local police unit started a fight with Banitsa youth. Taken into custody were the underage youths Gjorgi Malinov, Taki Kochev, and others. The police tried, through beatings, to extract

[53]According to Evan Blage Mallin, his father-in-law Krishe Kochev (Harisios Kotsopoulos) was also severely beaten and never completely recovered.

information from them. Despite the torture, the young people remained silent and were released after the intervention of the local authorities.

In June 1946, there were clashes between the partisans and government forces in in the place called Jachevo Field, Lazhani-Armenoro-Lerin, area. Sofika Dzugomanova of Bitola, member and instructor for the regional committee of AFZ, Lerin District, was wounded and captured. Kitse Kochev, less seriously wounded, withdrew with his partisan unit and was sent to Bitola for treatment.

In the Lerin prison, Sofika Dzugomanova was tortured and humiliated to get her to give up her comrades-in-arms, but she did not talk. She was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment and forced labour in the death camps of the Aegean islands. She endured her insufferable imprisonment without begging for mercy.

During the month of June, Banitsa was blockaded and the police arrested Krishe Kochev, Mitra Kocheva, Stavre Babulov, Bogle Boglev, Stavro Lulov, Kole Popdimitrov, Stavro Popdimitrov, and Mile Popdimitrov. These persons were accused of supplying the movement and the partisans with food and other necessities. They were tortured for a long time in the Lerin prison.

As revenge for the killings of three policemen on Kiselar mountain, the monarcho-fascists arrested a large number of villagers in the village of Ekshiso and took them to the Lerin prison. Many people were shot without legal process during July 1946.

Bulkes Meeting[54]

In May 1946 the commander in chief of the CPG held a meeting in Bulkes with all of the political cadres, where the political and military situation in Greece was reviewed, along with the possibility of returning some operatives to Greece to launch political and military activity

[54]Bulkes was a village in northern Yugoslavia taken over by Greek communists and their families after WW II when the German inhabitants were forced out by Tito. The Greek Communists used it until 1949.

against all the more-organized monarcho-faschism. After arriving in Bitola, they contacted the Political Commission for Aegean Macedonia and put themselves at its disposal. The departure from Bulkes was because of opposition to the CPG due to major disagreements between the Macedonian and Greek operatives.

Formation of a Macedonian partisan military headquarters on Vicho Mountain

During August of 1946, the majority of partisan operatives returned from Yugoslavia to their hometowns in order to form bigger partisan units and unite the already-existing partisan units on the ground, in order to protect the population from the terror attacks. The organizing of NOF and other social-political organizations began. The people had to organize themselves and find the most appropriate forms of self-protection from the monarch-fascist government.

During June and July, Macedonian operatives gathered on Vicho Mountain and formed a Military Staff as the highest military body to lead the operational Macedonian military units in the Lerin-Kostur region and Koreshtia.

Members of the Military Staff included Pando Shiperkov as commander and Kendro Strato as political commissar.

The other members were Lefter Olevski of Banitsa, Mihali Graniti of Krchista, Gjorgi Sharini of Bapchor, and Risto Kolentse-Kokinos. The unit commanders were: Vangel Kujchev, commander of the partisan unit for Lerin District; Vangel Mangov, commander of partisan unit for Kostur; and Gjorgi Kalkov, commander of the third Macedonian partisan unit for Koreshtia.

The fourth Macedonian partisan unit was formed later on Sinachko Mountain with the commander Karabera, Barba Kicho.

Vangel Kujchev left for Yugoslavia and the unit was taken over by Lefter Olevski. Risto Kolentse-Kokinos also returned to Yugoslavia.

12

THE ACTIVITY OF THE FIRST MACEDONIAN PARTISAN UNIT OF LERIN DISTRICT

Important Actions under Lefter Olevski

Right after the formation of the unit, they immediately started cleansing the territory of the many monarcho-fascist police units situated in the mountain villages in order to create liberated territory with normal living conditions and shelter for the partisan units.

During June, we attacked the village of Lagen, where there was a police station, and with the help of the local population, we managed to disarm them and chase them off to Lerin.

At the beginning of July, we attacked the police station in the village of Bapchor, where we disarmed the police and chased them from the village.

After disarming the police in these villages on the slopes of Vicho Mountain, the first free territory in Aegean Macedonia was created.

The monarcho-fascists organized an offensive against Vicho in order to exterminate partisan units. However, they came across strong resistance, and the government sustained heavy casualties, including one army major. They retreated to Lerin in a panic.

In September, during the battles in the village of Negovan, Lerin District, Vangel Ziko was killed. He was born in Negovan but was

married and lived in Banitsa. He was a house painter and devoted his entire life to the struggle for the ideals of the working class.

In September 1946, the unit attacked the village of Vrtalom, Lerin District, which was populated by Greek settlers from Asia Minor. The populace had been armed by the monarcho-fascists, but was defeated, and large quantities of weapons and equipment were taken. In this battle, Kostas Kidrikidis-Avgerinos of the village of Pashoshnitsa was killed.

In the same month, we attacked the village of Nevoleni, Lerin District, and after the win, we took the weapons and equipment that had been supplied to the villagers by the government. The commander Hristos Apostolidis-Keravnos of the village of Kleshtina was killed here.

During the autumn of 1946, the First Macedonian Partisan Unit of Lerin District conducted an ambush on Bigla Mountain west of Lerin on the Lerin-Korcha highway, and attacked a government army formation that was moving from Lerin to Kostur. There were casualties on both sides, but the enemy incurred heavy losses of transport vehicles and military equipment.

In this battle, Lazo Gjorgi Rapov was killed. Born in Banitsa, he was a brave and disciplined warrior, a machine gunner with a great will to fight for the freedom of his people.

A Rift Between NOF and CPG and Renewal of Agreement

In September, Lefter Olevski recounts, a rift occurred between the Macedonian and Greek military units, so two groups of partisan units were formed which operated separately and without cooperation in the struggle against the monarcho-fascists.

In November 1946, a new agreement was reached between the Greek and Macedonian cadres, that is, between the leadership of NOF

and the CPG, for the formation of a joint military headquarters on Vicho Mountain with the following leaders: Pando Shiperkov, commander, and Kuzmas Spanos-Amintas, commissar. Other members of the staff were Lefter Olevski, Gjorgi Kalkov, Vangel Mangov and Mihali Graniti.

The partisan units were reorganized and the following partisan detachments were formed:

- to operate on the mountains of Kajmakchalan, Vicho, Bigla and Prespa, a detachment under the command of Lefter Olevski;
- to operate in Koreshija and Dailo, a detachment under the command of Gjorgi Kalkov of the village of Vishina;
- to operate in Malimadi, a detachment under the command of Vangel Mangov-Vangelis of the village of Zhupanishta;
- to operate in Sinachko, a detachment under the command of Karabera Jani from Blatsi.

The detachments operated with this structure up until the formation of the larger military units and the creation of DAG in the summer of 1947, when these units were re-organized into brigades:

- the Vicho unit expanded to become the 18th Brigade;
- the Malimadi unit expanded to become the 14th Brigade;
- the Sinachko and Gramos unit expanded to become the 197th Brigade.

People from Banitsa Return from Yugoslavia and Join the Partisans

During 1946, the following Banitsa villagers returned from Yugoslavia and joined the partisan units: Vangel Zabrtski, Gligor Kjosev, Tane Jovchev, Metodi Apchev, Metodi Gaskov (Mangov), Blazhe Nedelkov, Trifo Malinov, Lazo Rapov, Ziko Mangov, Metodi Vasev, Risto Vasev, Lazo Katronov, Slave Kurtov, Ilo Vasev, Kitse

Vasev, Boris Dimanin, Natse Risto Malinov, Pavle Dajkov, Stojan Katronov, Kitse Apchev, Metodi Katronov, and Natse Rapov.

I recall that all the above-mentioned people were part of the Yugoslav People's Army after the disbandment of the First Aegean Assault Brigade and voluntarily returned to continue the struggle in their homeland.

Likewise, a lot of people returned from Bulkes, Yugoslavia and joined the partisans: Vangel Kujchev, Sofika Dzugomanova (Petkova), Kire Dzugomanov, Dine Robev, Kitse Kochev, Mitse Nedelkov, Fana Dine Robeva, Lazo Popdimitrov, Stojche Genev, Trende Malinov, Mitse Laev, Dika Malinova and Natse Janchev.

In the course of 1946, the following people from Banitsa joined the partisan units: Boris Olev, Andra Oleva, Gjorgi Malinov, Kalipsa Malinova, Goche Nichov, Pando Tanev, Dimo Tanev, Gjorgi Dzugomanov, Vasil Dzugomanov, Dine Janin, Blazhe Pendzov, Petse Malinov, Stojan Robev, Dine Dimanin, Blazhe Ilo Nedelkov, Blazhe Katronov, Ilo Genev, Fana Shishareva, Goche Nichov, Blazhe Ricalov, Mihail Toshev, Stojan Toshev, Tase Veljanov, Trajko Veljanov, Todor Risto Malinov, Ilo Gjonde, Mitse Mangov, Dine Genev, Kocho Jovchev, Leta Vaseva, Kitse Apchev, Harishi Pandev, Kitse Koprin, Kitse Janchev, Kire Gaskov, Slave Nedelkov, Pando Nedelkov, Gele Apchev, Bogle Babulov, Boris Nedelkov, Dine Minchev, Tane Gjergev, Pando Dzugomanov and others. By the end of 1946, around 200 people from Banitsa had joined the partisan units and were fighting against the monarcho-fascists and international imperialism doing various military and political tasks.

During this period, all the other combatants who were in the First Aegean Brigade of the Yugoslav People's Army returned and joined the partisan units of Aegean Macedonia and the rest Greece.

Dine Robev, The First Fighter Killed

In December 1946, a partisan group under the leadership of the first organizer of the movement in Banitsa and more widely in Lerin District, member and instructor of the district commissary of the Communist party for Lerin, Dine Robev, participated in an action to disarm the armed villagers and collaborators of the monarcho-fascists in the village of P'p'zhani, Lerin District. Informed by agents on the ground that on the critical evening everyone would be in a meeting at the school building around 7 p.m., Robev and his group approached and blockaded the school building and, unnoticed, caught and disarmed the guards. He and three other partisans went through the front door with machine-guns in their hands; everyone surrendered except one in the back row, who fatally hit Dine Robev. The next day the monarcho-fascists took Dine Robev's body, tied it by the legs to a truck, and dragged it all the way from P'p'zhani to Lerin, in order to intimidate the revolutionary-minded populace. Such a crime had the opposite effect on the people, for the atrocities and humiliations of the monarcho-fascists were well known to them. Actions like this one drew people closer together and spurred them to greater mobilization for self-protection and for the fight for human dignity and national freedom.[55]

The loss of this champion of the people resonated painfully in Banitsa and the Lerin region because he was well known to everyone.

In a fight between the partisan and the monarcho-fascist units in the village of Kotori, Lerin District, also in December 1946, the fighter and machine gunner Gjorgi Stefo Abov of Banitsa was killed. From an early age, he'd had to cope with life himself, being from large and destitute family. He was forced to herd other people's sheep and to work barely-paid menial jobs in the village just for a crust of bread. When he was a little older, he got a job in the coal mine as a pit worker and did the most difficult physical work. After the occupation, he joined the youth movement and became a member of OKNE in 1941, a member

[55]Vangel Ziskov, another partisan was also killed around the same time. His body was then dragged to the village centre. His daughter was informed of this by the police while she was dancing at a wedding the same day.

of the Party in 1942 and at the end of 1943, he voluntarily joined the ranks of Banitsa's partisan detachment under the command of Lefter Olevski. He travelled a long journey through the maelstrom of the revolution, taking part in all of the battles led by his unit—battles for the liberation of Bitola, Resen, Ohrid, and Struga. After the brigade disbanded in the beginning of May 1945, he voluntarily joined Lefter Olevski and Risto Kolentse's detachment, returned to his hometown and continued the struggle for freedom. During all this time, he was a machine gunner, a great marksman and a master in handling this heavy and dangerous weapon. He rarely shot but never missed. He was disciplined and had a high degree of military and political consciousness, a member of the Party who self-sacrificingly carried out all his assigned tasks.

Large Participation in NOF but Return of Terrorism

Despite the occasional clashes between the leaderships of the CPG and NOF leaderships and fairly serious shortcomings and weaknesses, after the agreement between the two leaderships for a more decisive armed struggle, the uprising in the Aegean part of Macedonia was gaining momentum. By the spring of 1947, whole regions of the Aegean had been liberated, including Prespa with the mountains of Vicho and Gramos. The mountain massifs of Kajmakchalan and Pajak were also free territory under the control of the partisan units. The Karakamen (Vermion) mountain region was also liberated. There were also freed territories created in the eastern part of Aegean Macedonia. The armed uprising was successfully spreading south into all of Greece.

The people of Banitsa en masse joined the ranks of NOF, while in the DAG partisan units, there were over 400 Banitsa combatants and leaders behind the scenes. Because of its mass participation in the resistance, the population of Banitsa was increasingly attacked by government military personnel. The monarcho-fascists made attempts at general mobilization to fill their regular army units, but there was not a great response. The days of enthusiastic enlisting, such as in 1946 when the CPG advised all those called up to join the ranks of

government units and at then to cross with all their weapons into the ranks of DAG partisan units, was in the past.

The position of the Central Committee of the CPG was now clearly and decisively in favour of an armed struggle against monarcho-fascistic and international imperialism to final victory. The people were entering the ranks of the DAG's partisan units.

All of Greece was involved in the civil war at this time. Everywhere, the government's forces were suffering losses and failures from the attacks from the DAG partisan units, which were now well organized and well equipped.

In the spring of 1947, government soldiers and police stationed in Banitsa, Sorovich and Lerin began a campaign to cleanse the area of Banitsa and further afield. They were not successful. They had been well-informed that large partisan detachments under the command of Vangel Kujchev and Lefter Olevski were stationed in the Radosh Mountain area. Their members were mostly from Banitsa. However, the detachments' leaders were tipped off in time by the intelligence service in Banitsa and they managed to escape the encirclement.

The government units based in Banitsa, returning from this action feeling humbled and insulted by the failure, caught some shepherds herding their flock of sheep at the site called Long Furrows (Dolgi Ornitsi) at the Petkov sheep pens. They beat up Stefo Dzugomanov, Gjorgi Nedelkov, and Bogle Boglev and demanded that they admit that they were accomplices of the partisans. On the night of 19 July 1947, there was a house-to-house search conducted with extreme brutality and disrespect towards the population. They wanted to demonstrate their power and intimidate everyone, especially those with family members who were partisans in DAG. Thirty people were arrested, including Lambo Dajkov, Krishe Janchev, Krishe Gajrev, Tole Kochev, Kitse Rudnichki, Blazhe Krapin, Pavle Dzugomanov, Pavle Malinov, Nune Vasev, Janko Malinov, Pando Dzugomanov, Kocho Mangov, Makile Mangov, Lambo Kalpakov, Stojan Rapov, Filip Nedelkov, Gjorgi Nedelkov, Bogle Boglev, Nune Tanev, Petse Olev, Lide Ziskov, Jane

Ziskov, Metodi Katronov, Dore Mitse Janin, Natse Rapov and others. All those arrested, except Dore Janin who was detained in the police station, were loaded onto trucks and taken to the prison in Lerin. The Lerin military court accused them of treasonous activities in the service of a foreign power (Yugoslavia). All were sentenced to long prison terms and shipped off to the concentration camp on Makronisos.

At the police station in Banitsa, Dore Janin, the celebrated former commander in the national militia in Prespa from 1944 to 1945, was subjected to severe and brutal torture and interrogation by various methods that caused the death of this fearless warrior and legendary commander. To cover up this barbarous murder, on the night of 19 June 1947, his body was taken north of the village near the cemetery and dumped into a ditch along the local road. The police declared that the prisoner had escaped, and because he refused to surrender when finally caught outside the village, he was killed. However, his dead body was in such a condition that it was obvious to everyone that the crime had been committed at the police station.

In July 1947, others were arrested: Mitse Dzugomanov, president of the local communist youth wing; Gele Krishe Kochev, Kocho Rapov, both members of the same group; villagers Blazhe Dajkov, Stefo Dajkov, Petse Alushev, Gjorgi Tanev, Kole Malinov, Jane Janchev, Makile Olev, Natse Malinov and Kata Hrisafova, a young girl. They were all sent, without trial, to the infamous concentration camp on Makronisos.[56]

Special War Measures by the Athens Government

The Greek monarcho-fascist government, unable to deal with the armed partisan units of DAG, undertook special measures for warfare taught by the U.S. intelligence service, the CIA. These were specific American strategies also used later in Vietnam. The Minister for

[56]Vangel Ziskov's wife was a neighbour of May Mallinos. A policeman overheard her inviting a neighbour over for coffee by saying "I am making coffee" in Macedonian ("Varam kafe"). She was fined 100 drachmas, which was a very stiff penalty.

Internal Affairs of the government in Athens, Colonel Napoleon Zervas, undertook the following measures: to forcibly evacuate the villages in the troublesome area in order to deprive DAG of reserves and an influx of new fighters; to cut off DAG from food resources in the field, since the villages were the main suppliers of DAG's units; and to cut communications links and break partisan codes.

Tragedy in Banitsa

Banitsa was also hit by these special measures. In the early morning of 8 July 1947, the village was blockaded, and a house-to-house search begun in order to clear out and expel partisan families. In the most brutal manner, the government soldiers stormed the houses, breaking everything in their way and chasing out the naked and thirsty owners, even mothers with new-born babies. They were taken to an improvised camp in the middle of the village, in the churchyard of St. Dimitrija.

The government soldiers took everything that was valuable—books, magazines and ownership documents, and burned them in the middle of a yard so that proof-of-ownership documents would no longer exist.

The village informants, among whom were the brothers Stamati and Mihali, Greeks married to women from Banitsa, pointed out the partisan families. Kole Kolerov and Mitse Katin were also traitors who always collaborated with the monarcho-fascists because of a son killed by the partisans.

This action was led by the infamous Captain Deligianis, commander of the army unit stationed in Banitsa. There were around forty-three families with 165 members taken to the makeshift camp. They separated the boys over 12 years old from their mothers by force, loaded them in trucks and sent them to the concentration camp Aja Strati to brainwash them and set them free 3 months later. They chased the rest away towards the mountains while shooting over their heads. When

they wanted to return home, they were not permitted by the monarcho-fascists. They were forced all the way to the Yugoslav border, constantly exposed to attacks and the roar of enemy explosions. They crossed the border and were met by their compatriots in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, far from home, but safe.

Among the families driven out of the village was the family of Atanas Katinovski-Goche, member of the regional committee and instructor for EPON in western Macedonia, who had joined the ranks of the YNA. His mother, sister, and sister-in-law had legal documents to travel to Canada, where his father Lazar had been living since 1928, but the permits meant nothing to the monarcho-fascists. At rifle point, the family was forced back among the villagers. They sought shelter on the slopes of the local mountain and the same night left for Lerin, staying with friends, and several days later managed to get visas and travel documents and left for Canada via Athens.

Operation "Terminus"

During this period, on Gramos Mountain where the headquarters of DAG was situated, the government forces, helped by Anglo-American military advisers and experts who directly participated, took extensive action to terminate the partisans in a campaign under the name "Crow". This action started on 22 June 1947, and was the third stage of "Operation Terminus" which had begun on 5 April 1947. The first stage, which had taken place in north Rumelia under the name "Eagle," had failed. The second stage under the name "Hawk" began on 1 May and covered the region of Grevena and Western Macedonia, ending with the defeat of the enemies of DAG. In these battles of "Operation Terminus," around 400 people from Banitsa took part in DAG and a substantial number of them had leadership roles.

In campaign "Hawk", the second stage of Operation Terminus, in the battle in Negovan village, Lerin District, Vangel Ziskov was killed. He had married into a Banitsa family and lived there, but was from Negovan. In the same operation in the battles near the village of

Nostimo, Gjorgi Kole Nichov, a messenger of DAG's general staff was killed. Lazo Vasil Lakov also died. He was a unit commander in the battles of Flchato-Kosinets and was buried with military honours in village Lobanitsa, Kostur District.

Epirus Manoeuvre

The third stage of Operation Terminus, called "Crow" took place on Gramos Mountain. Blazhe Marko Pendzov and Kocho Vasil Janin of Banitsa were killed on 8 July 1947 during the battles for Sinachko in the DAG's Epirus Manoeuvre.

General Markos commented on the Epirus Manoeuvre:

"After seven days fighting, things got even hotter. The position of the DAG units deteriorated as the enemy was constantly receiving fresh reinforcements. The partisans had to retreat. Day by day, the pressure was increasing, but our free territory was decreasing. Enemy aircraft destroyed settlements and unit positions on a daily basis and set forests on fire with phosphorus bombs. Our units were under threat of being surrounded. We at General Staff were facing a great challenge. On 8 July, I ordered a six-battalion manoeuvre towards Epirus. It was a forced march. Nonetheless, Greece will at some point be proud of its people such as these without considering the estimation of the fighting of my forces. They were fighters, heirs to the Ancient Greeks (even though most of them were Macedonians). The battalion that was commanded by Barbaljas was surrounded on Zmolikas, the second-highest mountain in Greece."

The battalion managed to break through the barrier, and with an intensified march at night, crossed the river Sarantaporo in the Gramos region and later reunited with the other DAG units. The other five battalions could not break through the barrier, but their actions confused the enemy. Believing that it knew the direction of the partisans moving away from the barrier, the enemy sent a considerable number of soldiers in this direction, and became weaker on the other side of the barrier. The

partisan units immediately seized the moment and attacked with all their might, inflicting considerable damage to the government forces.

It was the night of 12 July that changed the course of military operations. After dark, secretly, in two groups, the west Macedonian and the Epirus battalions broke through the barrier in the region of Konitsa and by morning found themselves behind the government forces in the Zagore. area. We called this operation the "Epirus Manoeuvre" and it gave the other units a chance to attack the enemy in the direction of Janina, the capital of Epirus. The endangered city panicked, and municipal authorities burned the city's archives. Monarcho-fascist members' families fled the city. The partisans were only twenty kilometres from the city."

This turn of events started to worry the King, the advisors to general staff and the American and British authorities. They were desperate. In order to save the honour and reputation of their armies before the world and the general public, they sought justification for the failure. They started rumours that the partisans' successes were aided by external forces from Yugoslavia and Albania, which had sent international brigades to Markos to help DAG.

These fabrications were intended to compromise the DAG units and Yugoslavia, and to protect the prestige of government forces abroad. On 16 July, General Madinakis admitted that there was no objective evidence to indicate the presence of international brigades.

The "Epirus Manoeuvre" was of great importance to the movement."

Crime in the Concentration Camps

At the infamous Aja Strati concentration camp, Dore Vasil Malinov was killed in mysterious circumstances. He was an activist and veteran revolutionary, and an unrelenting warrior for the liberation of Macedonia. He had been arrested in 1946 along with ten other

Banicheni. The Ilinden veteran Filip Nedelkov, snatched on the night of 19 July 1947, was at the same camp. Nedelkov was markedly abused and tortured with special police methods to the brink of death, and not given any medical care even by the other prisoners, who had been banned from doing so. In 1951 he was sent home so he would not die in the prison and cause a scandal for the government.[57]

Special Measures for Banitsa

A curfew was implemented for Banitsa and the surroundings from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. to prevent any contact with the partisans. Measures were also taken to protect government vehicles on the roads: women and children were made to walk in front of government trucks as human shields against DAG attacks, and to ensure the road wouldn't be planted with landmines. Hence the population became the enemy's forced protection against the partisans' sabotage.

Nevertheless, the partisans were successful in mining the Lerin-Kozhani highway near Banitsa in the fall of 1947. This took place at the site of the Velikin hut where they waited in ambush. In the early hours one day, a truck loaded with soldiers rode over a mine and was thrown in the air. A large number of soldiers were killed while those who survived or were wounded were met with a quick shot from the partisans, who then returned to their base.

Military units stationed in Banitsa arrived at the scene immediately. They were led by the notorious Captain Deligianis. Near the scene, two villagers working as roadside guards, Kitse Janchev and Gire Gaskov, were spotted. They were immediately shot in the head in retaliation for the dead men. The perpetrators of this crime went unpunished.

[57]Dore Vasil Malinov was a great-great uncle of C.Mallin. Filip Nedelkov's grandson Paul Kirakou lives in Ontario, Canada.

Partisan units of DAG attacked the Banitsa military garrison many times during the course of 1947, but could not conquer it, as the enemy had built bunkers and other structures, well-barricaded and fortified. After each attack on the garrison, the infamous Captain Deligianis would attack the peaceful citizenry, which consisted only of women, children and frail old men, since the young and the fit were either in DAG or in the monarcho-facists' concentration camps. He and his soldiers would conduct house-to-house searches, looting anything of value and leaving behind beaten-up householders accused of being DAG collaborators.

The Supreme Council of NOF Leads the Battle

During this time, partisan activity was massively dominated by the participation of Aegean Macedonians, and this included "Madzhiri", emigrants from other areas into this region. (Ed. note: This included those exchanged populations from Asia Minor in the 1920's). The Athens monarcho-fascists, in cooperation with the imperialist powers of Britain and America, had with special measures of warfare envisioned and built a military strategy for the physical extermination of the Macedonian people, by settling other nationalities in among the Macedonians to change the ethnographic composition of the area.

In the course of the civil war, Macedonians in the ranks of DAG comprised about half of the effective partisan units. About 6 to 7 percent of the Macedonian population was involved, while only 0.4 percent of the Greeks were in the partisan ranks.[58] In the war's critical period in the course of 1947, the Macedonian partisans sent their own wives, mothers, and children to take part in the construction of fortifications on Vicho and Gramos. This was under the most difficult working conditions in the time of the fiercest military operations and battles of Vicho and Gramos. According to the CPG's General Secretary General Zahariadis, they made this region both a bastion of freedom and a tomb for thousands of monarcho-fascist government soldiers.

[58]Peev, Naum. "Macedonians in the Greek Civil War" INI, Skopje, 1968

The village of Banitsa, at the forefront of the movement's activities and with the largest number of fighters in the ranks of DAG of any village in the Lerin region, now had a high number of cadres in the ranks of leadership. These included: Vangel Kujchev, commander in the Greek National Militia and a member of the general staff of DAG; Kitse Kochev, member of the general staff, also responsible for the rights of nationalities and minorities and president of the board of NOF; Todor Kochevski-Victor, president of NOMS for Aegean Macedonia; Micho Velikin, lieutenant colonel by rank and commissar of the brigade; Lefter Olevski, battalion commander; and Sofika Dzugomanova, member of the AFZ board of Lerin District. Dine Robev, Tone Lulov and Dimitar Kochevski were members and instructors of the regional committee of the CPG for Lerin District. There were many other political and military leaders who were organizers and activists in the national liberation movement in this period of the civil war.

Greek Democratic Decisions

On 10 August 1947, the general staff of DAG passed the first statutory acts for the organization of a people's government, a people's court, agrarian reform, and education.

On 17 August 1947, DAG's radio station broadcast a proclamation of the supreme commander of the Democratic army, General Markos, who declared Greece to be a free and independent republic. The general staff was to take all necessary legal and executive measures, which it would submit for approval to the National Assembly once it was convened.

The General Staff made a decision that can be said to have been of great significance: It laid the foundation for the people's government in the liberated territory. With this decision, the mistakes of the CPG's Central Committee from 1941 to 1945 concerning ethnic minorities were corrected. Namely, in chapter 5 it stated: "Ethnic minorities have an equal political and civil right to nurture and develop their ethnic

culture, language, religion, education, etc." Furthermore, sanctions were laid out to punish any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, race or political persuasion.

Based on the above-mentioned decision, in November 1947, in the village of Gremen, Lerin District, the first Macedonian teacher-training course was begun. In the liberated territory area of Kajmakchalan and Vicho, within just a few months eighty-seven Macedonian schools were opened, with about 10,000 students attending. (More on this may be found in the book, 'General Markos' by Dragan Kljakikj, page 140).

At the DAG headquarters, there was an officers' military school, and training courses for non-commissioned officers were organized towards the end of September 1947. The Macedonian Officers' School trained several Macedonian cadres who were later appointed to various military and political duties.

The following soldiers from Banitsa finished officer training at DAG headquarters: Gele Metodi Apchev, receiving the rank of captain; Boris Natse Olev, receiving the rank of lieutenant; and Lazo Ilo Dafov receiving the rank of lieutenant.

In addition to the above-mentioned people who completed the DAG officers' school, there was a large number of soldiers from Banitsa who held senior military positions, of Banitsa who held senior military positions, who grew up during the revolution and the daily struggle for freedom, and went on to command platoons, troops, battalions and brigades as part of DAG.

During the Civil War those who completed officers' school or held other leadership positions but lost their lives were:

- Dine Tipe Robev—instructor and member of the CPG Regional Committee;
- Gele Metodi Apchev—captain and squad commander;
- Mitse Filip Nedelkov—captain and battalion commissar

- Blazhe Lazo Tashev—lieutenant and squad commander;
- Boris Natse Olev—lieutenant and platoon commander;
- Lazo Ilo Dafov—lieutenant and platoon commander;
- Ilo Natse Mangov—platoon sub-commander;
- Lazo Tsile Lakov—squad commander;
- Blazhe Metodi Katronov—platoon commander;
- Lazo Tane Gjergev—platoon commander.

Formation of the Provisional Government

The Provisional Government of Greece was formed on 23 December 1947 on Gramos. All its functionaries were communists except the Minister of Public Health, Petros Kokalis. General Markos was installed as President of the government.

The government established the following goals and tasks:

- The mobilization of the masses
- The strengthening of the people's government within the liberated territory
- The reorganization of the national liberation councils, people's courts and the state apparatus, and to bring them within the spirit and principles of the People's Liberation Struggle
- The nationalization of foreign enterprises, large banks and heavy industries
- The implementation of agrarian reform

However, the composition of the provisional government did not include other leftist parties belonging to EAM. Nor did it include representatives from NOF, the Macedonian leadership, which represented about 50 percent of the fighting force of DAG.

In retaliation for the measures taken by DAG and the CPG Central Committee in the liberated territory, on 31 December 1947 the monarcho-fascist government in Athens published Law Number 509, detailing measures for security of the state, the state apparatus, and the protection of civil liberties. The CPG, EAM and other democratic parties were dissolved and outlawed.

On 7 January 1948, the Athens government enacted a resolution to purge the state apparatus of DAG members and other suspected democrats and to dismiss them from the civil service. The government banned all democratic newspapers and the CPG newspaper "Rizopatis". They carried out a general action aimed mostly at the Macedonian nation, whose people the government sent to Greece's concentration camps without trial.

The First Congress of NOF

Amid circumstances of serious weaknesses in the movement and in relations between the CPG and NOF and nationwide participation of the Macedonian people, conditions were created for the convening of the first congress of NOF on 13 January 1948, at which the Program and Statue of the organization were adopted. At that moment, there were 10,177 Macedonians in DAG, of whom 9,477 were men and 670 were women.

In the leadership ranks of NOF, there was no gender division between combatants. The organization even printed its own publications: "Defiant," newspaper of the NOF main board; "Victory," the Voden region newspaper; "Dawn," the Lerin region newspaper, and "Unity," the newspaper of the Kostur region.

That first congress of NOF gave a new impetus to the movement and had a great impact on the armed struggle of the Macedonian people in unity with Greek people. Immediately after the congress, new recruits were mobilized as members of NOF into the ranks of DAG. Their number swelled to over 20,000 and that number increased daily.

The Spring Offensive: Operation "The Heights"

After the failure of the government forces in the previous autumn offensive, a new government offensive began in February 1948, named "The Heights". This was aided by American and British military advisors and by the arrival of new weapons and warplanes, the expansion of ports and the construction of new airports, especially in Aegean Macedonia. In this operation, special methods of warfare were used, namely, they rounded up the local citizenry in areas in which the military actions were taking place and sent them to special camps outside of the action, guarded by special police detachments. In this way, the local population was prevented from giving aid and support to the partisan units.

In an additional measure, the National Guard was tasked with the protection from sabotage of larger buildings away from the front lines. There were also special detachments trained for battle in the mountainous regions. These special methods of warfare were the invention of officers of the intelligence service of the CIA, who acted as commanders and led the government military units.

Operation "The Heights" began on 25 February 1948 in the mountain massif of Murana in Epirus. However, the monarcho-fascist government encountered strong resistance and suffered failure, with heavy losses of men and military equipment. They were forced to retreat to their original positions.

Government forces launched a new operation called "Caravan" on 16 July 1948 against the partisans on Gramos Mountain. In scale, this operation was much more comprehensive, both in area and in the participation of larger combat units, which were reorganized under new generals because several generals involved in the failure of Operation "The Heights" were replaced with new officers on the advice of the Americans.

There were about 11,000 DAG troops on Gramos at that time. Between 15 March and 20 August 1948, they dug about 150 km of fortified lines with machine gun nests and bunkers of wood and earth, which were occupied by DAG fighters.

Government forces with artillery and air support set off to engage DAG units along a 250 km front. Fierce fighting went on for five days. The brave men of DAG withstood every enemy attack, and then with counterattacks forced the enemy to return to its starting positions with heavy losses. This was another failure for the government forces.

Over 400 soldiers and officers from Banitsa participated in the battles of the two operations "The Heights" and "The Caravan". From 16 July to 5 August 1948, the following were lost on Gramos: Vane Pando Velikin, Tane Gele Jovchev, Kole Lazo Malinov (father of Dr. Blazhe Mallin), and Dimo Nune Tanev. Lazo Boris Genev perished on Sinachko Mountain.

The renowned warrior and battalion commissar Captain Mitse Filip Nedelkov perished on 21 August 1948 in the action by the DAG Malimadi detachments to break through the enemy's encirclement. Platoon sub-commander Ilo Natse Mangov and platoon commander Lieutenant Lazo Tane Gjergev also perished in the same action. Stojan Tsile Robev was badly wounded and evacuated to a hospital in Korcha where he succumbed to his injuries. Lieutenant Blazhe Lazo Tashev, platoon commander, perished in the village of Smrdesh. Petse Kiro Malinov (father of Jane) was seriously wounded in the battles of the village of Zagorichani, Lerin District. He succumbed to his wounds in the military hospital in Bapchor.

Lazo Blazhe Kirev, a courier in the 28th Brigade of DAG, and a soldier of many years' experience, was taken prisoner near the village of Ekshiso when he fell into an ambush. After interrogation, torture and the use of special methods to force a confession, he was publicly shot in the village of Ekshiso to serve as an example the villagers.[59]

[59]He was executed after a false confession, according to K. Rappos.

Due to the mistaken policies of the CPG, many former party members and former ELAS fighters were mobilized into the ranks of the government forces, including ten from Banitsa. After the general call of the CPG Central Committee for these soldiers to cross over and join the ranks of DAG, many managed to do so, with their military equipment. However, others had no opportunity as they were under surveillance by government officers.

The former ELAS fighters Dine Lazo Dimanin and Leko Mitse Nichov were killed on Gramos while fighting with the government forces against DAG. According to the remembrances of surviving government soldiers, these two men were caught trying to cross over and join the ranks of DAG, and were shot on the spot by their superiors. As front-line soldiers and advance guards, the government side would particularly send soldiers of Macedonian ethnicity, and therefore the number of Macedonian soldiers killed was huge. This was done consciously and maliciously to get rid of the Macedonian population.[60]

Measures for the Protection of Children

The campaign of the government forces for DAG's liberated territory brought into question the safety of the innocent population, especially women and children. Many had come into the liberated territory from government-held areas after their houses had been destroyed and they had been expelled by government forces. There were also many refugees from the Lerin and Kostur districts. They participated in building the fortifications on Vicho and Gramos mountains.

In his memoirs, General Markos said, "Today there are 50,000 people in Greece in jail or in concentration camps. Around 7,000 people have been killed or shot. Over 700,000 people, men, women and

[60]Some of the author's claims need to be viewed with skepticism but Evan Mallin was sent to the front lines on the Bulgarian front because the Greek army believed his father was living in Bulgaria.

children have been forced out of their homes and taken to the cities, where starvation, illness and cold destroy them. The continuous airstrikes on free territory are killing innocent people, especially women and children. The mothers in the liberated territories, unable to come to terms with their children's fate, asked our government to help shelter their children in a safe place. In response to their pleas, we requested help from volunteer organizations, especially the Red Cross in the neighbouring countries, and we found they were receptive to the request. Democratic women's volunteer organizations agreed to care for these innocent victims of the inhuman policies of the Athens regime. Thus 10,000 children of Greek citizenship, at the initiative and with the consent of their parents, were transferred abroad. The mothers themselves escorted their children to the border. In each village, the mothers chose their own guides who would accompany the children. There were cases where the mothers broke through enemy lines and ambushes to get their children to the border".

General Markos is Replaced

On 27 August 1948, the provisional government removed General Markos from the post of commander-in-chief, and formed a supreme military council to lead the DAG forces. On 15 November 1948, Markos was relieved of all duties and excluded from the CPG Politburo. There was a reorganization of the DAG army units and large military formations were created—divisions and armies. Many military and political officers, including Macedonians, were replaced: some made available for reassignment, but others arrested and sent to prison in Albania. This had a negative effect on the ordinary fighters. Not a single Macedonian was selected to join the Supreme Military Council, even though half the fighters were Macedonian.

Towards the end of 1948, the fighting subsided and the partisans rested in anticipation of renewed action in the beginning of 1949.

New Military Tactics

With newly-adopted military tactics, the DAG forces readied themselves for large-scale actions against towns such as Lerin, Voden and Negush.

The government forces attacked the liberated territory on Vicho and the Supreme Military Council ordered the DAG forces to occupy several defensive positions. According to General Markos, "This meant throwing the partisans into the slaughterhouse, especially in the capturing of the elevation of Bukovic, Kostur region. Hundreds of fighters fell for that elevation, and for Lerin, Voden, and Negush. The results were a tragedy for DAG, and we could not hold the captured towns of Negush and Karpenis."

In the liberated towns, DAG activists tried to mobilize new people, but failed due to heavy casualties among the fighters. It was demoralizing, and the new recruits, young and inexperienced, were getting killed en masse.

On 15 January 1949, after many days of battle and many victims, the partisans entered Lerin. Because of their losses, they left the town and withdrew to their bases. The youngest DAG fighter from Banitsa, Fana Dine Robeva, perished there.

The DAG troops who participated in the attack on Negush (Naoussa), not succeeding in capturing it, withdrew towards the Vicho and Kajmakchalan mountains. On the night of 18 January 1949, they fell into to a trap near the villages of Spantsi and Negovan, Lerin District. Their heavy losses included a World War II senior veteran partisan from Banitsa, Pavle Filip Mangov. Despite these heavy losses the central committee of the CPG proclaimed these actions as victories.

Encouraged by their partial successes, the monarcho-fascist forces set out at the beginning of 1949 to clear Rumelia and Thessaly of DAG forces.

Reorganization of the Supreme Military Council and the Provisional Government

Due to the increasingly difficult situation for the partisans, the Politburo of the CPG Central Committee was forced extend a hand to the leadership of the main board of NOF and to reserve a seat for it in the Provisional Democratic Government, DAG General Staff and the Supreme Military Council. In March 1949, important political, party and military positions were given to the senior veteran fighters and NOF members, representatives of the Macedonian people of the Aegean part of Macedonia. The soldier Paskal Mitrevski was named as a government minister, Vangel Kujchev of Banitsa, as a member of the Supreme Military Council and Commander of the People's Militia, Kitse Kochev of Banitsa as Chief Director of the National Minorities Department, and Todor Kochevski-Viktor of Banitsa was responsible for youth of DAG's main staff. This was a special honour for our soldiers. In all units, from private to the general staff, there was a new role introduced: assistant political commissar, selected from the ranks of the Macedonians. Mincho Fotev was assistant political commissar at the General Staff, responsible for the Macedonian soldiers in DAG's units, and Pando Vajen was made commander of the 18th Brigade and later the 18th division. His political commissar was Gjorgi Vasilko. As commander of the 10th division, Lako Popdimitrov was appointed, and the commander of the 103rd Brigade was Ahileja Polijano. Many others, including Atanas Gushevski and Micho Velikin of Banitsa, were political commissars of DAG's brigades.

Commanders of specific military areas were named: Pando Shiperkov commander of DAG Headquarters for the Vicho area; Dzodzo Urdin, member of the DAG General Staff and commander of the western and central part of Aegean Macedonia. Many Macedonian military officers gave their lives for the freedom of their people.

The Second Congress of NOF

At the First Plenum of the main board of NOF, held in August 1948, NOF's President and Secretary were both suspended and replaced. There were misunderstandings between NOF and the CPG, accompanied by accusations about the war and the time afterwards. The CPG felt that it was NOF's fault that the war was lost.

The main board of NOF held the Second Plenum on Vicho, on 3 February 1949. The General Secretary of the CPG, Zahariadis, was present, and said that for participating in the struggle, the Macedonian people would reap their own benefits on national, political, social, cultural and economic grounds. He also proclaimed a People's Democratic State of the Balkan peoples as an achievement after many years of war. This was also broadcast through the radio station "Free Greece", and proclamation was met by resistance by the government in Athens. NOF's main board, in the newspaper "Prost Ti Niki" denied the proclamations of an expansion of a single Macedonian state which would join a third country.

The truth is that the Second Congress of NOF, held towards the end of March 1949, was a military congress for further warfare and the organizing of a democratic society after victory. Over 700 delegates were present from all corners of Aegean Macedonia. CPG Secretary-General Zahariadis was present as well as General Karagiorgis as the representative of the General Staff. In their speeches, both paid high tribute to the Macedonian people for their participation in the struggle. The proclamation from the congress stated: "The Macedonian people, with their struggles and sacrifices, in their achievements have proclaimed their determination to fight for a national and common way of life as they so wish".

The congress was held in a tense atmosphere amid an unfavourable military position of DAG. During this period, the Communist Organization for Aegean Macedonia, KOEM, was formed, which did not lead to the hoped-for results as it was a weapon in the hands of the CPG. The position of NOF Main Board president, Kitse Kochev was

confirmed, as well as that of the Secretary Vangel Kujchev. Both were from Banitsa, and both remained in their appointments until the end of the war and DAG's retreat to The People's Socialist Republic of Albania. They were disbanded there by the leadership of the CPG.

The organization "Ilinden" was later formed amongst the emigrants in Yugoslavia, but only for a short period. The Macedonians who emigrated to eastern European countries were denied their own organizations.

13

THE END OF OPERATIONS AND RETREAT TO ALBANIA

Defence of Vicho

The 132nd Brigade of DAG was involved in the battle for Trakja (Thrace) in eastern Macedonia in July 1949. During the fighting against government forces near the villages Tralkino and Mandradzik, a unit commander and lieutenant from Banitsa, Gele Metodi Apchev, was killed.

On 4 July 1949, government forces, composed of three infantry brigades supported by artillery and air power, began a massive attack on the DAG units on Kajmakchalan. The partisans responded with force; however, due to their previous large losses, after four days they were forced to retreat to Karakamen and Pajak mountains where the ill and wounded soldiers were transferred across the border to Yugoslavia. The tragic demise of DAG had begun.

After occupying this territory, the government forces made preparations for a large-scale attack on the liberated territory of Vicho Mountain and western Macedonia.

On 9 July 1949 at 5 a.m., a general offensive and the decisive battle for Vicho began. It started with an air attack on DAG units all along the mountain range from the Yugoslav border and the village of Buf, all the way to the Sorovich-Kostur highway in the south and the Albanian border in the west. The planes flew in formation in Lerin, Rupishta and Kozhani. The DAG units were separated into different sectors in order

to defend the liberated territory. The first sector was in the area of the Greek-Yugoslav border, from Buf-Pisoder-Bela Voda and was defended by the 14th Brigade.

The second sector, from Lundzer to Lisets, was defended by the 10th Division. Lundzer was defended by one detachment and one battalion of the 14th Brigade and one battalion of the 102nd Brigade. Polenata was defended by one battalion of the 18th Brigade and one battalion at Smora-Kula and Shtrkovo and one battalion at Breza-Glava and Tora. A detachment of the 18th Brigade made up the reserve units.

The sub-sector Boro-Jamata was defended by one stationary battalion, one detachment, three combat vehicles, two infantry cannons, and three anti-tank guns.

Lisets Mountain was defended by one battalion of the 102nd Brigade with two cannons, one anti-tank gun of 75 mm and three anti-aircraft guns.

The third sector, consisting of ten divisions for the area at elevation 1226 from Chuchera to Frankovitsa, was assigned to the 103rd Brigade. The 105th Brigade was stationed from Ribotina to Greka. The officers' training school was in Besfina and two squads were stationed in V'mbel. The reserve artillery consisted of six artillery pieces used on mountains, six field cannons and six anti-tank guns. The headquarters of the commanders of the Vicho detachments and of the Supreme Military Council were situated in the village of Vineni, Prespa.

One battalion of the 18th Brigade, which was defending the hill called Polenata at the elevation of 1685m was attacked by government forces on 10 August 1949. For seventeen hours in a life-or-death battle, the battalion fought bravely and selflessly because this area was an important strategic point. Almost all the warriors were killed trying to protect this important strategic point. Only three soldiers survived to describe this bloody battle. The soldiers fought to the last bullet.

As part of this battalion, two soldiers from the village of Banitsa gave their lives: Mihail Dine Pavlov and Lieutenant Blazhe Metodi Katronov, platoon commander who had finished officer training at the DAG headquarters.

On 11 August 1949, during the battles for the defence of Lisets elevation, Lazo Ilo Dafov, together with many others, was killed. He was a lieutenant and platoon commander, and had finished the officers' training school at DAG headquarters.

During the battles against the monarcho-fascists at the village Rzhbi, Prespa, the soldier Kitse Apchev of Banitsa was killed. Regarding these battles, Captain Vangelis Parahristu-Farmakos, an intelligence officer from General Staff, said:

> "I knew that the time had come for all of us to go to the front line. I was given a unit of 134 battle-hardened partisans, and I led them through Pisoderi and Bela Voda towards the village of German. We fell into a human slaughterhouse. Every modern weapon an army could use except the atomic bomb were thrown at us on the morning of 14 August. We were running out of men, and in the end, only around 40 were left alive. We wanted to reach Afrika, (a territory between Mala and Golema Prespa and the Albanian border) with a quick march. Near a place called Kulata, two tanks blocked our path, one of them ended up in the lake, but the other was wedged on the bridge like a flaming coal bunker. This was a fiery hell for us. We couldn't go forward, and we were behind the other units. I ordered a retreat, which was also a deadly move. We attempted to draw near the Yugoslav border, contrary to the orders of the Supreme Military Council and Zachariadis. This would lead to a charge of "surrender into the hands of the Greek military authorities," however as an intelligence officer, I knew that this was a lie and due to Zachariadis's hatred towards that country.

> In horseshoe formation, we forty-odd surviving partisans went towards the village of German. Those six kilometres were the longest road in my life. The fifteen-hour ordeal and the unbelievable massacre, which went from firearms to bayonets and knives, was a living hell for all of us. It was carnage, a slaughterhouse, a horror that I still carry with me, sights that still leave me no peace even today after 30 years.
>
> We gathered by the reeds on the lakeshore between Golema and Mala Prespa, disorganized and wounded fighters, all of us shocked by the deaths. At the spot called Markova Noga, another 170 fighters and 23 wounded joined us, all from DAG's broken units. The enemy gave us no peace. Douglas airplanes flew over us, releasing around 1,000 paratroopers. We dealt with the paratroopers in a gruesome way. We killed most of them while they were still in the air. When we arrived at the Yugoslav border, we came across a border patrol and a guardhouse. They immediately accepted the wounded and sent them to aid stations"

The government forces' general offensive to destroy DAG's units started on 9 August 1949, on Vicho Mountain, and finished on 17 August with victory for the monarcho-fascists. The last partisan units were chased across the border into Albania. It was the end of the campaign for Vicho. Around 800 partisans were left dead on the battlefield and 600 were captured, in the Prespa region alone.

The other units of DAG (the 10th and 11th Divisions), after the catastrophic defeat on Vicho, were transferred to Gramos Mountain. According to the surviving soldiers and officers, the defining battle took place on 14 August 1949 at Kulata, between the big and small lakes of Prespa, so the government forces could cross the bridge to Mala Prespa.

The Battle for Gramos

After the defeat of DAG's units on Vicho, on 20 August 1949, the Politburo of CPG's Central Committee held a meeting in which it analysed the failure to defend Vicho.

Amid a lot of finger-pointing, the leadership of the 11th Division was specifically accused of deploying the partisans poorly and conducting the battle badly. Some personnel changes were made to the command staff, and it was concluded that the mistakes of Vicho should not be repeated with the defence of Gramos Mountain.

On 23 August 1949, it was clear that the government forces were preparing for an attack. On 24 August 1949, probing sorties were carried out on separate sectors of Gramos Mountain to test the strength and positions of DAG. The full offensive started on 26 August 1949 with attacks from all sides by all possible means that the government forces had, both by land and in the air.

All the partisans in the unit of Lieutenant and Platoon Commander Boris Tase Olev of Banitsa perished in this battle. They selflessly fought for 24 hours, trying at all cost to keep their position on that hill which had strategic importance. However, under the pressure of the government forces supported with aerial bombardment. they did not succeed. Olev fell victim alongside his comrades. The hill of Goritsa was conquered.

Sustaining many casualties, the partisan units were forced to retreat towards the territory of the People's Social Republic of Albania. It was the end of the battle for Gramos and it was the total destruction of DAG's forces. On 29 August 1949 all partisan units retreated, leaving behind thousands of dead or captured partisans.

Communique of the General Staff of DAG

On the evening of 29 August 1949, the General Staff of DAG issued a communique that the units of DAG retreated from Greek territory since they had accomplished their task of inflicting losses on the enemy. It was the end of the Civil War led by the CPG, EAM, NOF, and DAG, the celebrated Democratic Army of Greece.

In October 1949, at the 6th plenum of the CPG Central Committee in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, the current situation and the work of the Politburo of the CPG Central Committee were analysed. The decision to have the DAG units retreat to Albania was assessed as correct and timely.

On 15 October 1949, the provisional democratic government issued a proclamation threatening the monarcho-fascist government.

After DAG's defeat and retreat to Albania, the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia faced a difficult period, with many more trials and tribulations. Thousands of families left their homes from the (formerly) liberated and semi-liberated territories which had been abandoned by DAG's forces. Fleeing for their lives, they crossed into the neighbouring brotherhood socialist countries, especially Yugoslavia. Around 35,000 Macedonians left their homes and stepped over into Yugoslavia, that is to say, into the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.

14

THE STATUS OF BANITSA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Banitsa after the Civil War

The Macedonians who stayed after the maelstrom of the monarcho-fascists were still yet to face new ordeals, court procedures and exile to the uninhabited islands of death in the Aegean Sea. There they were asked to repent and renounce the ideals of the CPG, EAM and NOF, and to promise that in the future they would be loyal citizens and defend the achievements of the monarcho-fascist government.

The people were unable to repair the devastated villages and houses on their own. There was no help of any kind from the government and thus began a state of general famine and disease among the people. People started to migrate in massive numbers to overseas countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia, with a smaller number going to western Europe.

The village of Banitsa, except for the 150 families who moved to Yugoslavia, saw a large-scale migration of thousands of people to Canada and Australia, and from 1950 to 1953 the village almost emptied out. Only a few families from the younger generation remained. The rest of the population was of the generation of those over 60 years old, and either did not want to leave their homeland or had nowhere to go, so they reconciled with their destiny and remained settled there.

The prosecutions and court trials against the people of Banitsa were always exceptionally bitter and cruel.

Every fifth house was closed up and left to the ravages of time, and after a few years, these abandoned houses completely fell apart. Only ruins covered with grass and bushes could be seen of many of the houses.

DAG's Soldiers Evacuated to East European Socialist Countries

The following people retreated from DAG's units, first to the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and later to the East European countries:

To USSR

Lefter Olevski—later returned to Yugoslavia

Gjorgi Zigomanov—returned to Yugoslavia

Tane Gjergev—died in USSR

Sokrati Tane Gjergev—stayed in the USSR and later went to Canada

Lazo Nove—returned home to Greece

Lazo Kalpakov—returned to Yugoslavia

Vancho Giche Katin—died in the USSR

Todor Risto Malinov—left for Canada

Lazo Ricalov—died in a car accident in USSR

Stojche Gjenev—drowned taking a swim in a river in USSR

Ilo Gjenev—returned to Yugoslavia

Fana Shisherova—returned to Yugoslavia

Natse Janchev—returned to Yugoslavia

Slave Dzogov—returned to Yugoslavia

Andra Oleva—returned to Yugoslavia

Nuna Jovcheva—returned to Yugoslavia

Pando Tanev—went to Canada

Gligor Kjosev—returned to Yugoslavia

Lena Gligor Kjoseva—returned to Yugoslavia
Lenche Mitse Mangova—returned to her birth place in Greece

People's Republic of Poland
Metodi Apchev—returned to Macedonia
Dine Ushkata—returned to Macedonia
Dine Minchev—returned to the birth place, Aegean Macedonia
Kiro Dzugomanov—returned to Macedonia
Pande Dzugomanov—returned to Macedonia
Gjorgi Dajkov—returned to Macedonia
Tase Nedelkov—went to Canada
Vangel Kujchev—died in Poland
Marina Kujcheva—returned to Macedonia with her children Kole, Trifko, Gjorgi and Hrisula
Tashko Vangel Kujchev—lives in Poland
Vena Mitse Nedelkova—went to Canada
Metodi Vasev—returned to Macedonia
Marika Popova—returned to Aegean Macedonia
Lazo Vasev—returned to Macedonia
Metodi Katronov—died in Poland
Ilo Filip Mangov—returned to Macedonia
Slave Kostov—returned to Macedonia
Pando Slave Kostov—returned to Macedonia
Dika Trende Malinova—returned to Macedonia
Gjorgi Olev—lives in Poland
Tashko Dore Malinov—returned to Macedonia

People's Republic of Romania
Kitse Filip Kochev—went to Bulgaria
Atanas Dore Malinov—returned to Macedonia

Republic of Czechoslovakia

Todor Natse Kochevski-Viktor—returned to Macedonia
Nune Abov—returned to Macedonia
Slava Kocheva—returned to Macedonia
Mitse Velikin—remained in Czechoslovakia with his family and wife, Sofika
Boris Abov—remained in Czechoslovakia
Boris Ilo Sariev—remained in Czechoslovakia
Risto Vasev—went to Bulgaria

Republic of Hungary

Kocho Hrisafov—returned to Macedonia

Republic of Bulgaria

Kocho Jovcev—remained in Bulgaria
Dine Toshov—remained in Bulgaria
Tashko Altin—remained in Bulgaria

DAG soldiers who managed to avoid the retreat to Albania and went over to Yugoslavia are the following: Vangel Zabrtski, Stojche Gjenev, Mitse Laev, Trendo Malinov, Lazo Abov, Kine Janev-Paparusev, Blazhe Nedelkov and Metodi Gaskov (Mangov).

Other DAG soldiers, after a long time hiding in the mountains, returned to their homes in Banitsa.

Reunions Organized in Banitsa

Over 200 families who lived in many different towns in Macedonia met for the first time on 9 June 1974 and organized a reunion in Banitsa.

People from Banitsa who lived in the countries across the oceans were also invited. A report about the participation in NOF and the Civil War in Greece, as well as the reconstruction of the country was made. The reunion has become a tradition.

Repatriation of the People of Banitsa from the East European Countries

After signing the Belgrade Declaration between Yugoslavia and Russia in 1956, the road was paved for the Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia to return to Macedonia under the leadership of the CPG. All our Macedonians started a process to bring back the other members of their families to the Republic of Macedonia. The first group arrived in 1956 from Tashkent, in the USSR, almost all of them veteran fighters. The rest of the soldiers started to arrive from the other European Countries.

Lefter Olevski's Remembrance about the Transport from Albania to USSR

They put us on freighters in the ports in Albania and we passed through the Mediterranean and Bosporus. We arrived at a port in the USSR, then by train we arrived in Tashkent where they put us in camps maintaining organized army formations as part of DAG. After a quarantine of fifteen days, we started working in factories arranged in a unit or a company. We returned back home in the same manner.

Each worker gave half of one's earnings for the needs of the CPG and the functionaries who did not work. The soldiers of Greek origin were sent to military and political schools, while the Macedonians did not have that privilege. They gained qualifications with practical work at their jobs. The soldier Ilo Gjenev enrolled on his own initiative and qualified as a mechanical engineer. There was a split within the ranks of the CPG after the 20th congress of the Communist Party of USSR in

1955, when the CPG's politburo did not accept the decisions of the USSR and sided with China and Albania, on the positions of Stalinism. There were also bloody clashes between DAG fighters.

The Macedonian soldiers asked for immediate repatriation to Yugoslavia and sought help from the consulate.

After their return, they joined their families or were situated in places where they were given a job according to their qualifications received in the USSR. In Macedonia they were closer to their hometowns and after the liberalization of Greece, they began to visit their villages again.

The tribulations of the Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia continue to this day.

15

FROM THE POETIC WORKS OF ATANAS KATINOVSKI

The young miner Atanas Katinovski-Goche wrote his poems about the difficult life he had in the coalmines, poems that he wrote in the evening hours under a kerosene lamp.

Coalminers

Dear miners around the world
Brothers, rise up against the adder
That merciless bloodthirsty tyrant
With the vigour of youth and steaming sweat
Show your strength!

Coalminers, march forward with raised hands
Sorrow in our burning hearts
Pale faces, disease creeping in to our soul
Who can endure that pitiful fate
Let our troubles stop.

Coalminers, all line up to
Break the heavy chains
No more hungry mouths
No more poor people
No more miserable lives.

Coalminers stand up
Our hot sweat they use
Our bodies are withered by disease
Our strength is torn out
Our days go by in darkness.

Coalminers bravely rise up
Against the adders that poison our lives
Gathering riches for themselves
And drain our souls mercilessly
Martyrs, with all our strength go forth
Let freedom be forever ours.

In honour of my friend and comrade Dimko who died heroically,
I wrote this poem:

Epitaph

Oh mother dear, oh dear parents,
Look what time I have chosen
To be killed on the battlefield,
Now when the grass is growing
Now when the trees blossom,
The violets spread their scent.

Oh, my sister, my friend and comrade.
Look what a time I chose
To fall for our freedom
Now when the mountain flowers are blooming
All of nature is awakening
The roses are blooming and spreading their scent.

Oh, beloved fiancée of mine,
Look what a time I have chosen
To fall in an unequal battle
Now when the snow is melting
When nice dew falls all day long
and flowers of the meadows are spreading their scent.

Oh, mother, sister, beloved fiancée of mine,
Don't cry for me and my youth,
Don't you shed your tears
Tell my faithful friends
I have fallen for my people's freedom
For the freedom of Mother Macedonia.

Dedicated to Pavle Pavlev:

Message

Spring, beautiful quiet evening
A full moon on the evening sky
Lights the earthly path,
While partisan Goche makes haste towards Banitsa.

My dearest quiet village
Fallen in a deep sleep
Do the villagers dream of their troubles
or fields of golden grain.

Even dogs keep quiet in their sleep
Nobody walking in the streets
All of a sudden a knocking is heard,
A gate opens squeaking.
What might it be, what message might be,
Before the rooster crows
Before the dog barks
A message is brought into the house of Pavle.

Did something happen
Did someone look for help
Or is someone is coming from a distance
And to bring us a good message.

Partisan standing at the gate
Carrying a gun on his shoulder
Ammunition on his belt,
Starred hat on his head.

Dark clouds came along
Dark, bloody clouds
My voice, weird and sad
Why a voice like this.

Where do these bloody clouds come from
From Vicho mountain, the village of Prokopana
The bloody battlefield
Where a battle was waged all day.

All of a sudden a shrill cry was heard
Still silence spread in Banitsa
A message was bought to Pavle's family
Pavle Pavlev-Dimko was lost.

On a spring day Dimko was killed
Fighting bloody tyrants
Germans and traitors
Fighting for justice and freedom.
Oh, mother please don't cry,
Don't you shed bloody tears
When it was you who gave birth to a son like this
Who gave his life for Macedonia.

I recited this poem for Lazo Kochev, extraordinary soldier:

Miner

Comrade, you were born in difficult times
You have spent a restless childhood,
Your mother's eyes were always
Filled with unshed tears
You could always feel
Her unbearable motherly sadness.

Comrade, born you were to be a slave
To toil in the mines of Banitsa
The deserted barren hills
Hide in their slopes
Twisted layers of coal
To spend your strength digging the underground.

Comrade, born you were to lead
To lead your comrade miners
To lead a fight for human justice
For freedom and justice for your own people
To set free from the chains of labour
To raise the flag of freedom for eternity.

Comrade, from the mines of Banitsa
Tired miners, sick and old
Exhausted they return to their homes
Youth and health we all lost
We worked until we lost all our strength,
The others reaped the fruits of our toil.

Comrade, you grew up as a miner
You fought as a conscious labourer
In the first bloody battle lines
You led a faithful Macedonian people
To fight bloody fascists
For holy freedom of the people.

Comrade, your fight has been stopped
By domestic traitors and Bulgarian fascists.
Into dark dungeons in Bitola they threw you
The whip lashes your naked back
Strong and firm as a rock, great miner
You feel a bloody unbearable pain.

Comrade, you stare at the filthy ceiling
With a hateful look and dimmed anger
No, you cannot break me
And put me under your fascist yoke
Souless barbarians, angry beasts.

Comrade, the night passes by slowly
For those who love the dawn and the light of the day
With much suffering and bloody pains
With thoughts far away in the comfortable warm homes
You knew what was waiting as soon as it dawns
You did not beg for mercy, nor for help nor salvation.

Comrade, you stand firm before the trial
As our Great Stone, Rock and Mountain.
With your eyes wide open at your execution
The great do not know of this human injustice
The judges decide according to their own will
Do not ask if you are right or wrong
But freedom was your sentence.

Comrade, your tormentors were unhappy
They felt bitter in their hearts
You could see the hatred in their eyes
Did not want to set you free
They wish you death without hiding
And make plans how to do so.

Comrade, as soon as the sun rose
Bulgarian executioners put you in a car
From the warm house of your friend
The fascists cross the border lawlessly
In a green dewy meadow
Beastly they shoot you in the back.

Comrade, in Banitsa, Lerin, in your home
The terrible news spread quickly
Lazo Kochev was killed by the terrible fascists
Oh, people stand in silence for your comrade
He died for freedom and justice for his people
For freedom of Mother Macedonia.

My poem for Olev Leko Natse:

Commemoration

A dark fog set over Ajtos
A band of partisans went into battle
To oppose domestic traitors
To wave the flag for freedom and justice.

A dark fog set over Ajtos
A band of partisans went into battle
After a dark rainy night, a whisper is heard
From person to person a message is carried.

A dark fog set over Ajtos
A band of partisans went into battle
The brave warrior Natse Olin has fallen
For freedom and social justice

A dark fog set over Ajtos
A band of partisans went into battle
Silence, silence my brothers and sisters
Commend your faithful comrade.

A dark fog set over Ajtos
A band of partisans went into battle
Banitsa was in great sorrow and pain
They commemorate him, may he have eternal glory.

I, Atanas Katinovski-Goche, to encourage the younger generation to follow in the footsteps of this fighter, I wrote a poem about my comrade Dine Robev:

Requiem

Silence, silence, my brothers of Banitsa
Villagers, old and young, stop for a moment,
Let us commemorate our comrade,
Today in a heroic battle,
Dine Robev, our dear sweet warrior
Died for the freedom of Macedonia.

Silence, silence, my brothers of Banitsa
Villagers, old and young, stop for a moment,
Brutal enemies carry the body
Through the streets of Lerin
They drag it on the ground
To frighten those who fight for freedom,
To extinguish the struggle of the people.

My brothers of Banitsa, close ranks,
Strike the tyrant, our executioner
Sanctify our Dine Robev
and all others of the town who have fallen
Fifty or more in number
In the struggle for a free Macedonia.

A song by the author about the battle:

A Decisive Battle

The battle is fought up at Kulata
A decisive battle is fought for life and death
Deafening noise and thunder can be heard on all sides
From Besfina to German, all of Prespa thunders
Low flying fighter jets
Everywhere in the field and in the village human death is sown.

The battle is fought up at Kulata
A decisive battle is fought for life and death
Heroes on the battlefield fight bravely
Thunder, machine guns, bombs fall silent,
Only bayonets, sabres and swords shine,
The howls of men are heard on all sides.

The battle is fought up at Kulata
A decisive battle is fought for life and death
Partisans are attacking in the last hope
Eight hundred partisan heroes are killed
They laid down their young lives
For the freedom of their people.

A poem by the author:

Gramos

Heroes famous for fierce battles are getting ready
On the heights of glorious Gramos Mountain
Where the red flag flies freely.

Glorious heroes, close your ranks!
Get to Gramos, our legendary fortress
Defend this land soaked in sweat and blood.

Glorious heroes lead a fierce battle, one against ten
An unequal bloody struggle is waged day and night
The last blow is given to the monarcho-fascists.

Glorious heroes, and heavily wounded partisans
Glorious heroes, partisans seriously wounded and cripples
rush to get weapons and join the fight as quickly as possible.

Glorious heroes selflessly fight
Their young lives, they give in battle
For the freedom of their subjugated people

The monarcho-fascists attack bloodthirstily
For other people's interests are countless numbers are killed on the battlefield
Every captured or wounded partisan is shot

The glorious heroes, exhausted, barefoot and hungry,
With the battle of glorious Vicho and Gramos
The epic of the famous partisans ends.

They could not withstand the onslaught of the wretched tyrants
The river Bistrica flowed with blood.
Glorious heroes, in battle order they retreat

They leave their last strongholds,
They leave behind many of their loved ones,
They bring wounded and sick partisans with them.

Exhausted heroes, barefoot and hungry,
For the tragedy of glorious Gramos Mountain
It is not your fault.

Glorious heroes of Vicho and Gramos Mountains
Against you, fought the imperialist forces
and domestic traitors like a bloody scum.
Glorious heroes of Vicho and Gramos Mountains

Unite your fighting ranks
Keep your brotherhood alive abroad
The cursed monarcho-fascism must fall
In our country a free flag will be flown again.

An overview of those expelled from Banitsa

1. Jane Sariev with the family: wife Lena, son Mile and daughters Niki and Violeta
2. Lazo Malinov-Kapitan
3. Sotir Gaskov
4. Kole Veljanov
5. Gligor Popdimitrov
6. Dore Malinov with family: wife Fima, sons Tashko and Atanas and daughter Trijada
7. Kocho Malinov
8. Blazhe Mangov
9. Mitse Laev with family: wife Menka, son Lefter and daughter Rina
10. Blazhe Toshev with family: wife Frosa, sons Gjorgi and Lecko
11. Kitse Dzogov with his family: wife Tsila, daughters Kalipsa, Frosa, Menka and Vangelitsa
12. Ana Mangova with her daughters: Vasilka, Roza, Kiki, Menka and Tina
13. Lefter Olevski with his family: wife Ljuba, daughter Tula, son Kole and mother Petra
14. Ruse Dzugomanov with his family: wife Sofika Dzugomanova, son Petse, daughter Mare
15. Pando Kujchev with his family: wife Prona, son Leko and daughters Marika and Avgula
16. Dine Toshev with his family: wife Lena, daughter Niki
17. Ilo Dajkov, Ilindenets with his family: wife Bitolka, son Kole, daughters Kalipsa and Tona—wife of Lazo Malinov
18. Dine Kirovski
19. Kole Malinov with his family: daughter Menka, son Pando

with his wife Mitra and their children: son Mile and daughters Niki, Efrula and Nadezhda

20. Mitse Malinov with his family: wife Dola, daughters Lenka and Sika, sons Lambo and Mihali
21. Tsile Hrisafov with his family: wife Kitsa, sons Leko and Hristaki and daughters Fima and Erfi
22. Lazo Malinov
23. Atanas Babulovski
24. Petse Vragov
25. Tane Malinov
26. Gire Janin
27. Gjorgi Kalpakov
28. State Boglev
29. Boris Malinov
30. Filip Pavlev with the family: wife Tanka and son Stojan
31. Gire Babulov with the daughter Kalipsa
32. Mitse Marikin
33. Stefo Dzugomanov
34. Marika Janeva wife of Kine Janev with the family: daughters Lenche, Stefka and Trijada and sons Bule and Vasko
35. Tsile Dzugomanov—went over to DAG 1948
36. Gjorgi Trendo Malinov—escaped DAG 1948
37. Gjorgi Metodi Apchev
38. Janko Tane Malinov
39. Kata Boris Hrisafova
40. Mile Blazhe Tasev
41. Dinka Abova, wife of Lazo Abov with the family: son Pando and daughter Trijada

42. Lazo Popdimitrov after 15 years of prison in the Greek Islands, came to Yugoslavia in 1972
43. Boris Hrisafov with wife Ana
44. Spiro Dzugomanov
45. Slave Dzugomanov

All in all, 112 people

People from Banitsa who left Yugoslavia and went to Canada, Australia or returned to Greece

Canada

1. Metodi Gaskov with his family: wife Evda, daughters Lena and Marika, sons Lazo and Kocho
2. Lazo Malinov
3. Blazhe Ricalov
4. Janko Mitse Pechinov
5. Blazhe Natse Mangov with the family: wife Proshka, son Kole and daughter

Australia

1. Lazo Metodi Gaskov
2. Tane Malinov with the family: wife Levena, sons Janko and Gjorgi
3. Avgula State Boglev
4. Pande Kujchev with his family: wife Prona, son Leko and daughters Marika and Avgula

Greece

1. Stefo Dzugomanov
2. Mitse Marikin

Overview of fighters killed in NOF-ELAS and the civil war in Greece - DAG (1941–1949)

1. Pavle Leko Pavlev-Dimko
2. Natse Leko Olev
3. Mihail Tanas Harishi
4. Andon Tanas Harishi
5. Dine Trifun Robev
6. Boris Lazo Dimanin
7. Lazo Gjorgi Rapov
8. Gjorgi Stefo Abov
9. Vangel Ziko
10. Blazhe Marko Pendzov
11. Kocho Vasil Janin
12. Gjorgi Kole Nichov
13. Vangel Ilo Nedelkov
14. Lazo Vasil Lakov
15. Goche Pande Velikin
16. Tane Gele Jovchev
17. Mitse Filip Nedelkov
18. Blazhe Lazo Tasev
19. Stojan Vasil Robev
20. Ilo Natse Mangov
21. Kole Lazo Malinov
22. Dino Nune Tanev
23. Lazo Boris Genev
24. Petse Pando Malinov

25. Dine Lazo Dimanin
26. Leko Mitse Nichov
27. Lazo Tane Gjergev
28. Lazo Blazhe Kirev
29. Tane Petse Pavlev
30. Pavle Filip Mangov
31. Makile Dine Pavlev
32. Fana Dine Robeva
33. Kitse Apche Apchev
34. Boris Tase Olev
35. Vangel Metodi Apchev
36. Blazhe Metodi Katronov
37. Lazo Ilo Dafov

Overview of the victims of fascism and monarcho-fascist regime

1. Pavle Filip Kochev
2. Dine Vasil Lakov
3. Mijale Pechinov
4. Kotse Veshov
5. Zafe Lambo Abov
6. Menka Mitse Ziskova
7. Vasil-Tsile Gligor Kalpakov
8. Lazo Kole Kochev
9. Dore Mitse Janin
10. Pavle Kitse Apchev

11. Mire Mitse Babulov
12. Gire Mitse Gaskov
13. Kitse Minde Janchev
14. Dore Vasil Malinov
15. Filip Nedelkov
16. Ilo Janin PopRusev
17. Natse Vasev-Tsarot
18. Ilo Janin Poprusev
19. Natse Vasev-Tsarot

Overview of people from Banitsa who were killed in the Greco-Turkish War 1919–1922

1. Metodi Petre Malinov
2. Dimitar N. Lumanov
3. Lazo Leko Boglev
4. Stefo Tego Lumanov
5. Metodi Dafo Dzugomanov
6. Gligor Filip Pechinov
7. Marko Dzole Pendzov
8. Trajan G. Nichev
9. Gele Kochev (another Gele Kochev)
10. Harishi Kole Lumanov
11. Mitse Stefo Dukov
12. Vasil Dzugomanov
13. Stavre F. Vasev
14. Naum P. Pendzov

15. Fote Dine Malinov
16. Sande Shisharev
17. Pande Leko Kurtov
18. Gjorgi Natse Pechinov
19. Tase Filip Popov
20. Pande Vasev

Overview of people from Banitsa who were killed in the Ilinden Epic 1892–1913

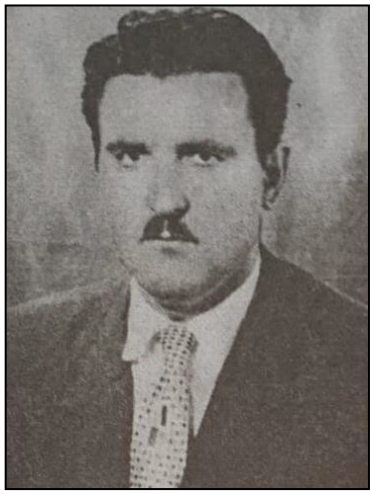
1. Natse Dzole Katin—district vojvoda
2. Dzole Stojche Gjergev—district vojvoda
3. Risto Peo Jovchev—vojvoda
4. Komiti: Gele Alushov, Natse Kurtov, Mitse Sariev, Kire Kachorov, State Stojan Tashev, Filip Shisharev, Risto Jovchev, Done Pavlev, Gjorgi Dzorlev, Dine Nichov, Dzole Dzugomanov, Dine Ruse Pendzov

List of people who broke the oath given to IMRO, and because of collaboration with the Turkish Army and the Greek andartes, were accused and punished with death by the revolutionary organization

Gele Kire Nichov, Trajko Kurtov, Jane Kochev, Father Jovan Dajkov, Trifun Kolerov and Kire Kochev.

Overview of soldiers from the First Macedonian National Liberation Assault Brigade as part of YNA, who after the demobilization stayed in Yugoslavia

1. Atanas Lazar Katinovski-Goche—the author
2. Blazhe Dajkov
3. Kirche Malinov
4. Lazo Rapov
5. Ruse Dzugomanov
6. Dine Toshev, left for Bulkes and then to Bulgaria in 1948
7. Tashko Olev
8. Pavle Dajkov
9. Stojan Katronov
10. Blazhe Toshev
11. Trifo Malinov
12. Stojan Kitse Dzogov—left Macedonia in 1972 and went to Canada
13. Dimitar Kochevski
14. Pandora Kochevska—wife of Dimitar Kochevski



Afterword

Atanas Katinovski-Goche leaves the Macedonian People the monograph "Banitsa Lerinsko in the Maelstrom of the Wars" in order to bring readers closer to understanding the social and political life of his birth place, the village of Banitsa, which is now in Aegean Macedonia.

The content as a whole is constructed on a systematic basis, using research of historic data for the period prior to his birth and authentic data for events in which he participated personally or recorded in interviews with his contemporaries. The authenticity of the information that he has written was checked in many sources, which means that it represents a real historical treasure. As well as the data of the country's Historic Archive of the Republic of Macedonia, he also uses memoirs of the leaders in the Greek Civil War, Zahariadis and Markos.

The book is divided in two sections. The first section is dedicated to the geographic position of the village, demographic structure of the population, the crafts of the village, architecture, church education and cultural activity in the village, which begins toward the end of the nineteenth century and lasts until the Second World War.

The author dedicates the second section to the historic past, i.e., how historical determinism influenced the destiny of the village of Banitsa and its people. With valuable empirical and historic data, the author presents the village in the Turkish period the beginning of the hajduk chetas and the activities of IMRO against all crimes of the Turkish Occupiers and the Greek andarte squads. Without any bias, Atanas Katinovski-Goche presents the internal clashes between the Supremacists and the Centralists among IMRO, as well as the traitors of the Macedonian people who joined the andarte squads. No one was hidden or pardoned with respect to his negative actions aimed against his own people.

The author paid special attention to the village in the period of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the First World War (1914–1918), the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), and the situation of the Macedonians between the two World Wars. He did not forget to mention the Macedonian participants in the Greco-Italian War, who were sacrificed by the existing Greek fascist regime. The events of the Second World War in which Goche took part are portrayed, showing the fervour of enthusiasm at the beginning of the war that shifted and turned into disappointment due to the unfulfilled aspirations of all our Macedonian soldiers who, in the ranks of the anti-fascist movements (EAM, SOF, SNOF) fought for the ethno-national freedom of their people. The betrayals by the CPG were painful for the Macedonians, and yet once again, despite the initial betrayal, division and bitterness, they joined the CPG in the Civil War, hoping not to be played again. However, the consequences of the war are well known. The Macedonian people had accepted every proffered chance for freedom and equality, but unfortunately, there are still tribulations for the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia.

These precious historical facts about this period represent the "colour" of that time and space, in chronological order, with all the activities of the fighters for human rights, about whom the world, that is to say, the great powers, remained deaf and blind. Using simple language and style for the historic text, between the lines, one could feel the author's sorrow for his village, his people from Aegean Macedonia,

and all those who were cast out from the country and spread all around the world. Winners usually present history according to their own personal interests. The great number of names spoken of in the chronicle of these historic events were document to be not forgotten. May they be remembered for their participation in those times, and serve as a reminder of the past. May they be a trigger to correct the unjust record of Macedonian history within the framework of world history.

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ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

AFZ	The Women's Antifascist Front of EAM during the occupation of Greece by Nazi Germany
Bulkes	Village in Northern Yugoslavia used by Tito as a refuge for Greek communists
CPG	The Communist Party of Greece, also referred to as KKE in some texts for the Greek initials
DAG	Democratic Army of Greece during the Greek Civil War; it was dominated by, but not exclusive to, Communists
EAM	The National Liberation Front of Greece in World War II (WWII) dominated by the Communists but involving other leftist and centrist parties
EDES	The Greek Democratic National Army (or National Republican Greek League) was backed by the British and challenged ELAS for control of the resistance movement during the occupation.
ELAS	The National People's Liberation Army of Greece during the occupation in WWII
ETA	An organization formed during the occupation to protect the partisans
EPON	United Pan-Hellenic Organization of Youth

IMRO (VMRO in Macedonian initials)	The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was started in the late nineteenth century to achieve Macedonian independence. They attempted to defeat and expel the Ottomans. After the Ilinden Uprising was suppressed by the Ottomans in 1903, it continued to be active with a pro-Macedonian group but the Vrhovists (Bulgarian supremacists) more-right wing, continued to act for Bulgarian interests.
Caserta (Italy) Agreement	See Lebanon Agreement
KNOY	People's Defence Corps of Yugoslavia
Lebanon Agreement	This agreement brought all partisan factions under the control of the monarchist Greek government-in-exile near the end of WWII
NOF	National Liberation Movement, organized by Macedonians
NOO	Board of the National Liberation Front
NOV	National Liberation Army/National Liberation War
OK	Regional Committee
OKNE	Communist Youth Organization of Greece
OZNA	The Department for People's Protection (The Security Agency of Communist Yugoslavia)

Madzhiri, "Immigrant" in Turkish	One of several terms given to the refugees from Asia Minor (Turkey) in the 1920's. They were part of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece after Greece lost the Greco-Turkish war. They were Christians with long-standing roots in Turkey. Many of them did not know Greek. The ones settled in Banitsa Station in fact came from the Caucasus and spoke a Russian-like language.
SNOF	Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front created by Macedonians in Greece
NOF	National Liberation Front
Varkiza Agreement	An agreement signed by the KKE and the Greek Government in February 1945 after the failed leftist Dekemvriana uprising of late 1944.
YNA, YNRA	Yugoslav People's Army (directed by Tito)

SUGGESTED READINGS

There is a plethora of material available now on Macedonian and Balkan history. The website Pollitecon maintained by Victor Bivell has many good titles available on line including the original Macedonian version of Katinovski's book. I include these publications below as they are interesting and informative. Although one has to be wary of writers on Balkan history with axes to grind, there are many good publications out there. These are just some of those.

- Danforth, L. (2000) How Can a Woman Give Birth to One Greek and One Macedonian? The Construction of National Identity among Immigrants to Australia from Northern Greece. Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference. Jane Cowan ed. London: Pluto Press. Pp. 85–103.
  Loring Danforth writes on how people self-identify. This is just one of his many contributions to the literature.
- Horncastle, J. (2019) The Macedonian Slavs in the Greek Civil War, 1944–1949. London: Lexington Books.

A thorough overview of the involvement and influence of Macedonians in the civil war and the role external forces played in shaping developments.

- Karakasidou, A. N. (1997) Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  Anastasia Karakasidou writes a moving history on the changes of Greek Macedonia.
- Koroloff, L. (2016) Drenoveni, The Life and Demise of a Macedonian Village. Toronto: Canada Self Publishers.
  Larry Koroloff has a good description of local cultural practices.
- Kovras, I. (2014) Truth, Recovery and Transitional Justice: Deferring Human Rights Issues. London: Routledge. Iosif Kovras writes on the difficult barriers to finding the truth in history and on attempts to bring to light misdeeds by all sides in past conflicts.

- Kramer, C., Fraenkel E., (1993) Language Contact—Language Conflict. Peter Lang Inc.
  Professor Christina Kramer has contributed immensely to teaching Macedonian and to education about the Balkans. This is a book on linguistics and nationalism.
- Mazower, M. (2004) Salonica, City of Ghosts. New York: Random House.
  A fascinating history of the peoples of Solun.
- Mojzes, P. (2011) Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.
  The early part of the book details the tragic consequences of unbridled nationalism in the late Ottoman years.
- Rossos, A. (2008) Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.
  An excellent overview of the history of the Macedonian people.

Figure 4: Aerial View from the South-West of Banitsa

Figure 5: The school and the church in the fall

Figure 6: Summertime

Figure 7: Nivja

Figure 8: Vojvoda Dzole Gjergev and his cheta

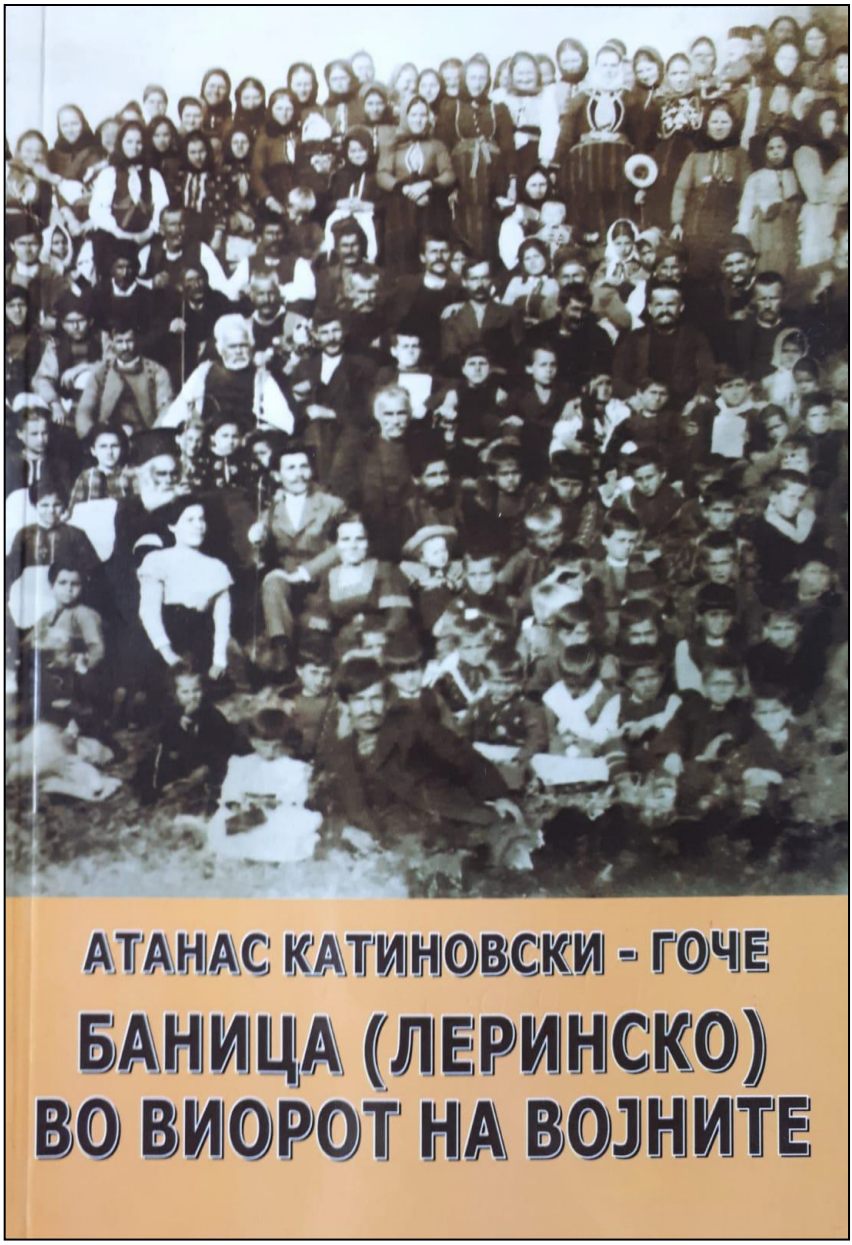

Figure 9: The cover of Katinovski's original book

INDEX

The index excludes the lists of names in Chapters 14 and 15.

A

Abdormanov Dine 27
Abecedar 58
Abov Dine 55
Abov Filip 55
Abov Gjorgi Stefo.....155
Abov Ilo 64, 75, 98, 130, 145
Abov Leko 17, 67, 75, 82, 130, 145
Abov Nunche 55
Abov Zafir 85
Abov, Risto 73
Adjiev Trajche 147
AFZ..92, 105, 123, 128, 136, 146, 149, 165
Agios (Aja) Strati.....66, 67, 130
Albania. 70, 72, 95, 162, 172, 176, 177, 180, 181, 182
Alushev Gjorgi.....111, 133
Alushev Kire 35
Alushev Pande 54
Alushev Pavle Leko.....71
Alushev Petse....98, 111, 133, 158
Alushova Mara.....29
Anchev Metodi 88
Andartes 10, 24, 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 68, 86
Apchev Gele 135, 154
Apchev Gele Metodi.....166, 177
Apchev Kitse64, 82, 84, 128, 145, 148, 154, 179
Apchev Metodi 64, 94, 98, 125, 153
Apchev Pavle 135, 145, 148
Apchija Zhana.....92
Atesh Pasha.....39

B

Babulov Bogle 154
Babulov, Boris 16, 130, 145
Babulov, Gire.....16, 67, 75
Babulov, Kocho 16, 17
Babulov, Mire 84, 147
Babulov, Stavre.....149
Babulovski, Atanas 13, 14, 119
Babunski, Natse (Please see Katin, Natse).27, 28, 29, 30, 37
Balkan war 57
Balkan War4, 5, 10, 12, 53, 56, 86
Battle of Banitsa 34
Boglev, Bogle 149, 157
Boglev, Krste.....35
Boglev, Lazo Leko.....60
Boglev, Mitse.....27
Boglev, State.....41, 42, 62, 63, 66, 91, 128
Boglev, Tego.....27
Boglev, Tipe.....11, 26, 27, 37
Boleva, Vera Foteva.....133
Bucharest Peace Treaty.....53, 57
Bulgarian Exarchate.....11, 12, 26, 28, 44

C

Caserta.....118, 123
Chakalarov.....34, 51, 52
cheta.....31, 34, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 45, 47, 49, 52

chiftlik 22, 24
Chorlinov, Kitse.....54, 64
Chorlinov, Stojche 59, 67
CIA.....158, 169
Coal mining.....17, 62
CPG 59, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 75, 76, 77, 79, 88, 94, 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, 103, 105, 106, 108, 110, 111, 112, 113, 118, 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 148, 149, 152, 153, 156, 157, 164, 165, 166, 168, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 181, 182
CPM 97, 99

D

Dafov, Dafo.....64, 78
Dafov, Filip 55
Dafov, Gone.....101
Dafov, Ilo 82
Dafov, Lazo.....55
Dafov, Lazo Ilo 166, 167, 179
Dafov, Tole 27
Dajkov, Blazhe....93, 98, 111, 158
Dajkov, Dine 43
Dajkov, Gjorgi 80, 90, 95, 96, 111
Dajkov, Gjorgi Ilo.....98
Dajkov, Ilo 31, 42, 50, 67, 82
Dajkov, Ioan.....33, 44
Dajkov, Lambo 157
Dajkov, Minde.....35
Dajkov, Pando.....104, 112
Dajkov, Pavle.....154
Dajkov, Stefo 158
Dajkov, Stefo Leko 71
Dajkov, Tipe 37
Danev, Gligor.....13, 17, 146
Davidis, Giorgios 63
Delchev, Gotse 4
Delev, Gonche..... 98
Delev, Gone Mitse 71
Deligianis, Captain . 159, 163, 164
Democratic Army of Greece ... 25, 93, 182
Depin, Kole 125
Dimanin, Boris 142, 154
Dimanin, Boris Lazo 142
Dimanin, Dine..... 98, 154
Dimanin, Dine Lazo..... 171
Dimitrov, Pavle 77, 90, 95, 96, 135
Dimovski, Ilija..... 102, 116
Drenoveni..... 16
Dukov, Leko..... 59
Dukov, Mitse Stefe..... 60
Dutsev, Boris..... 130
Dzogov, Dine 44
Dzogov, Kalo 82, 83, 111
Dzogov, Kitse..... 67
Dzogov, Nanche..... 93, 111
Dzorlev, Leko.. 27, 28, 35, 36, 40, 41, 49
Dzovani, Ilija..... 145
Dzugomanov, Boris..... 13
Dzugomanov, Gjorgi 91, 131, 154
Dzugomanov, Kire 154
Dzugomanov, Kiro 16, 90, 93, 96, 107
Dzugomanov, Lazo 54
Dzugomanov, Metodi Dafo..... 60
Dzugomanov, Mitse 77, 135, 139, 158
Dzugomanov, Nitse..... 96
Dzugomanov, Pando 93, 154, 157
Dzugomanov, Pavle 136, 157
Dzugomanov, Petko 48
Dzugomanov, Ruse 77, 95, 96, 111, 133

Dzugomanov, Stefo 157
Dzugomanov, Tsile 82
Dzugomanov, Vasil 154
Dzugomanov, Vasil S. 60
Dzugomanova, Lena 13, 14
Dzugomanova, Marina 13
Dzugomanova, Menka 92
Dzugomanova, Sofika 92, 128, 149, 154, 165

E

EAM .. 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 94, 100, 101, 103, 110, 113, 114, 119, 120, 121, 124, 125, 126, 131, 135, 137, 143, 145, 146, 167, 168, 182
EDES 121
Edikule 83
ELAS . 25, 87, 88, 93, 95, 96, 101, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110, 111, 112, 114, 116, 117, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 127, 133, 134, 137, 140, 142, 144, 148, 171
Emshiridis, Vasil 107
EPON 96, 101, 102, 103, 112, 113, 114, 123, 131, 133, 135, 139, 146, 160
Evgin, Makile 64, 78
Exarchate 44, 86

F

Friar Gerasim 11

G

Gajrev, Krishe 145, 157
Gaskov, Gire 163
Gaskov, Kire 154
Gaskov, Metodi 88, 131, 153
Gaskov, Sotir 77, 107
General Markos 161, 165, 166, 167, 171, 172, 173
Genev, Dine 154
Genev, Ilo 154
Genev, Kitse Gele 71
Genev, Lazo Boris 170
Genev, Stojche 62, 154
Gergev, Stefo 92
German Army 81
Gjergev, Dzole . 10, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 54
Gjergev, Lazo ... 80, 90, 93, 95, 98, 111, 133
Gjergev, Lazo Tane 167, 170
Gjergev, Tane 64, 154
Gjonde, Ilo 154
Gjorgi, Palis 62
Gogov, Kitse 54
Gogov, Lazo 54
Gogov, Mitse 55
Golema Prespa 179
Gornichevski, Tane 34
Gramos ... 153, 156, 160, 161, 164, 167, 169, 170, 171, 180, 181
Great Battle of 1912 12
Greco-Italian War 13, 67
Greek First Army 71
Grkomani 54, 68, 119

H

Haralambidis, Harolambos 95
Harishi, Andon 98, 101
Harishi, Atanas 16
Harishi, Mihail 81, 93, 96, 98
Hios 67
Hrisafov, Boris 16
Hrisafov, Delo 35
Hrisafov, Kocho 13
Hrisafov, Leko 13, 112

Hrisafov, Mitse 27, 48, 55, 59
Hrisafov, Petse 17, 55
Hrisafov, Petse Vragov 67
Hrisafov, Tsile.....16, 93
Hrisafova, Kata 158

I

Iliev, Gjorgi.....111
Iliev, Gjorgi Vane 71
Ilinden Uprising12, 14, 32, 35, 42, 43, 55, 57, 86, 109
IMRO ...12, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 50, 55

J

Janchev, Gjorgi 55
Janchev, Jane.....158
Janchev, Kitse 130, 154, 163
Janchev, Krishe ..15, 64, 129, 131, 157
Janchev, Natse....64, 94, 136, 137, 154
Janchev, Petse Minde.....71
Jancheva, Magda.....92
Jancheva, Marika 92
Janev-Miskarot, Mitse (Please see Janin-Miskarot, Mitse) ...34, 50
Janev, Tsile 130
Janin, Davido 16
Janin, Dine 154
Janin, Dore ..16, 87, 107, 112, 158
Janin, Dore Mitse 158
Janin, Gjorgi.....64, 78
Janin, Ilo.....82
Janin, Kire 54, 64
Janin, Kocho Vasil.....161
Janin, Kole ..16, 37, 41, 43, 48, 67
Janin-Miskarot, Mitse (Please see Janev-Miskarot, Mitse).....47
Janin, Tsile..... 35
Jovchev, Kocho 154
Jovchev, Risto 47
Jovchev, Tane..... 93, 98, 112, 153
Jovchev, Tane Gele 170

K

Kachorov, Dine 63, 82
Kachorov, Kire..... 33, 38
Kalajdjiev, Gjorgi..... 104
Kalashev, Pando 34
Kalchev 94, 102, 104
Kalpakov, Dzole..... 98, 125
Kalpakov, Gjorgi..... 64, 93
Kalpakov, Lambo..... 157
Kalpakov, Lazo 112, 133
Kalpakov, Vasil..... 105
Kanchev, Tane..... 29, 41, 42, 47
Katin, Bogle 16, 39
Katin, Dinkata 59
Katin, Dzole 29
Katin, Ilo 84, 144
Katin, Kitse 64
Katin, Kole 16
Katin, Krishe 112, 145
Katin, Lazo..... 19, 38
Katin, Leko..... 59
Katin, Mitse..... 59, 101, 144, 145, 159
Katin, Natse10, 18, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 47
Katin, Natse Dzole 29
Katin, Pande 89, 90
Katin, Slave.... 64, 82, 83, 84, 145
Katin, Vancho .. 98, 107, 112, 133
Katina, Matsa 92
Katinovski, Atanas 37, 68, 76, 80, 84, 90, 93, 95, 96, 101, 112, 116, 146, 160

Katronov, Blazhe ... 81, 93, 95, 96, 154
Katronov, Blazhe Metodi 167, 179
Katronov, Lazo 153
Katronov, Metodi..... 154, 158
Katronov, Stojan . 75, 82, 107, 154
Keramitchiev, Mihail 116
Kirakou, Paul 163
Kirev, Dine 82
Kirev, Lazo 112
Kirev, Lazo Blazhe 170
Kiriakou, Paul 48
Kirov, Petse Kire 71
Kjimov, Trajko 64
Kjosev, Gligor..... 125, 153
Kjosev, Gligor Mitse 71
Klashov, Pando 42
Klechkov, Kitse 101
KNOJ 118, 132
Kochev, Blazhe..... 64
Kochev, Blazhe Vane 71
Kochev, Dine 125
Kochev, Gele 60, 96
Kochev, Gele Krishe.. 60, 90, 119, 133, 135, 158
Kochev, Jane Ruse..... 33
Kochev, Kire..... 35, 41, 44, 48
Kochev, Kitse .. 63, 64, 66, 83, 97, 98, 101, 136, 146, 149, 154, 165, 174, 175
Kochev, Kole 84
Kochev, Krishe 60, 87, 90, 100, 130, 145, 148, 149
Kochev, Lazo ... 64, 75, 79, 80, 89, 90, 98, 100, 105, 106, 107
Kochev, Lazo Kole 105
Kochev, Mitse..... 27
Kochev, Natse..... 61
Kochev, Pavle..... 84, 89, 90
Kochev, Risto 54
Kochev, Ruse Dine 11, 22, 23
Kochev, Stavre..... 126
Kochev, Stavre Dafo..... 44
Kochev, Stavre, Captain 13, 47, 48, 51, 78, 129, 131, 133, 135
Kochev, Stefo..... 45, 46
Kochev, Stefo Dafo..... 51
Kochev, Taki..... 148
Kochev, Tase..... 82
Kochev, Tole..... 59, 157
Kocheva, Mitra 149
Kocheva, Vassa..... 62, 90
Kochev-Kjosata, Dine (Please see Kochev, Dine)..... 22
Kochevska, Pandora Pavlova.... 13
Kochevski, Dimitar 13, 80, 84, 91, 93, 98, 109, 128, 129, 131, 135, 136, 146, 165
Kochevski, Todor..... 68, 96, 101, 114, 129, 131, 133, 146, 165, 174
kodzobashija 11, 23
Kolentsev, Risto..... 118, 133, 138
Kolerov, Bogle..... 52
Kolerov, Gone..... 45
Kolerov, Kole..... 20, 159
Kolerov, Leko 45
Kolerov, Nakile..... 13
Kolerov, Trifun 22, 33, 45
Kolerov, Trifun Mitse 33
komita.... 33, 34, 38, 45, 46, 47, 52
Koprin, Kitse..... 154
Koraveshi, Atanas..... 116
Kostov, Slave..... 67, 93, 125, 131
Kostova, Grozda 92
Kotchev, Kitse..... 83
Kotorkin, Ilo..... 34, 38, 47, 50, 51
Kotronov, Stojan..... 145
Krapin, Blazhe 157
Krsten, Blazhe..... 130, 136
Kujchev, Gjorgi..... 28
Kujchev, Pando..... 16, 67, 82

Kujchev, Vangel 63, 64, 76, 78, 88, 91, 97, 98, 101, 107, 129, 131, 133, 135, 136, 143, 145, 146, 147, 150, 154, 157, 165, 174, 176
Kujcheva, Marija.....92
Kurtov, Natse 45
Kurtov, Pande Leko 60
Kurtov, Slave 153
Kurtov, Trajko.....35, 41, 44, 48

L

Laev, Mitse 16, 82, 94, 98, 101, 128, 154
Lakov, Dine.....82, 83
Lakov, Dzole.....98, 125
Lakov, Lazo 112, 133
Lakov, Lazo Tsile 167
Lakova, Gina.....92
Lazarev, Mitse.....94
Lebanon Agreement 118, 121, 123
London Peace Treaty 53
Lulov, Stavro.....149
Lulov, Tone 62, 63, 64, 88, 94, 95, 101, 136, 137, 165
Lumanov, Dimitar N. 60
Lumanov, Dzole.....47
Lumanov, Harishi Kole.....60
Lumanov, Stefo Tego.....60

M

Macedonian Blood Wedding ..119
Macedonian Church 11, 28, 86
Macedonian National Liberation Army.....104, 119
Macedonian Question 79, 97, 103, 113
Macedonian schools..11, 119, 166
Madzhiri 164
Makronisos.....67, 158
Mala Prespa..... 180
Malinov Gjorgi..... 148, 154
Malinov, Blazhe 13, 111
Malinov, Boris..... 67, 82, 87, 106
Malinov, Dine..... 35, 37, 41, 43
Malinov, Dore ... 16, 67, 106, 130, 131
Malinov, Dore Vasil145, 162, 163
Malinov, Dzole..... 60, 62
Malinov, Fote Dine 60
Malinov, Janko..... 16, 157
Malinov, Kirche 111
Malinov, Kole . 16, 55, 67, 82, 93, 158
Malinov, Kole Lazo 170
Malinov, Krste..... 27
Malinov, Lazo 67
Malinov, Metodi Petre 60
Malinov, Mitse 16
Malinov, Natse .. 90, 98, 112, 154, 158
Malinov, Pando 54
Malinov, Pavle 93, 129, 130, 131, 145, 157
Malinov, Petse..... 64, 82, 93, 154
Malinov, Petse Kiro 170
Malinov, Risto..... 19
Malinov, Todor Risto 154
Malinov, Trende..... 39, 154
Malinov, Trifo..... 13, 111, 153
Malinova, Dika..... 154
Malinova, Kalipsa 154
Malinova, Kata Hrisafova 13
Malinova, Marija..... 38
Malinova, Melisa..... 90
Mallin, Blazhe..... 170
Mallin, Dzole..... 54
Mallin, Evan.... 27, 35, 40, 41, 54, 60, 62, 73, 80, 81, 82, 87, 90, 103, 131, 133, 171
Mallin, Kirche 72

Mallinos, May 93, 158
Mangov, Dine 64
Mangov, Dine Mitse 71
Mangov, Gjorgi 125
Mangov, Ilo 98, 104, 112, 133
Mangov, Ilo Natse . 111, 133, 167, 170
Mangov, Kitse 17, 66, 82, 146
Mangov, Kocho 157
Mangov, Makile 130, 145, 157
Mangov, Mitse 66, 82, 89, 90, 145, 154
Mangov, Pavle 64, 78, 119, 128
Mangov, Pavle Filip 173
Mangov, Petse 112
Mangov, Tole 16, 82
Mangov, Ziko 153
Markov 26, 27, 39
Markov, Dimitar 39, 44
Matsin Kitse 27
Melas, Pavlo 100
Metaxas 12, 15, 64, 65, 66, 68, 80, 86, 126
Mihaili, Micho 101, 138
Mihelis, Mihali 16
Mihelis, Stamati 16
Minchev, Dine 154
Minchev, Gligor Tego 71
Minchev, Kiro Leko 71
Mitrendjo 20, 62

N

National Liberation Struggle ... 25, 86, 98
Naumovski, Tane 133
Nedelkov, Blazhe 91, 153
Nedelkov, Blazhe Ilo 154
Nedelkov, Boris 154
Nedelkov, Dine 31, 50, 51
Nedelkov, Filip . 67, 130, 157, 163
Nedelkov, Gjorgi 157
Nedelkov, Ilo 54
Nedelkov, Kole 48
Nedelkov, Mitse ... 64, 93, 94, 128, 146, 154
Nedelkov, Mitse Filip 166, 170
Nedelkov, Pando 154
Nedelkov, Slave 64, 125, 145, 154
Nedin, Dine 112, 133
Nichev, Dine 47
Nichev, Risto 91
Nichev, Trajan G. 60
Nichov, Goche 154
Nichov, Leko 98
Nichov, Leko Miste 171
Nichov, Pande Gele 40
Nichov, Risto 67
Nichov, Vangel 41, 44
NLF 107
NOF .. 50, 105, 118, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 143, 145, 146, 150, 152, 156, 164, 165, 167, 168, 174, 175, 182
NOO 94, 101, 109, 120, 146

O

Ohrid Patriarchate 26
Ohrid-Prespa Archbishopric 23
OKNE .. 67, 76, 77, 78, 84, 85, 90, 93, 96, 108, 148, 155
Old Church Slavonic 4, 10, 11, 28, 44, 48, 49, 51, 86
Olev, Boris 154
Olev, Boris Natse 166, 167
Olev, Boris Tase 181
Olev, Fote 82, 83
Olev, Kole Depin 64
Olev, Leko Natse 108
Olev, Makile 158
Olev, Natse 84

Olev, Petse 157
Oleva, Andra 154
Olevska, Ljuba 92
Olevski, Lefter .64, 91, 93, 95, 98, 101, 104, 107, 108, 111, 116, 118, 133, 135, 138, 143, 146, 150, 151, 152, 153, 156, 157, 165
Ottoman..6, 10, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 29, 46, 48, 49, 128
Ottoman Empire.6, 19, 20, 24, 25, 46, 48, 49, 128

P

Palis, Lefterios 62, 137, 138
Pandev, Harishi 154
Pandev, Krishe 129
Papakonstantinos.....51
Papandreou.....110, 121
Paparusev, Davido 17
Pasha, Izet 10, 22, 34, 48
Patriarch of the Orthodox Church 26
Patriarchate 10, 11, 12, 26, 28, 44, 86
Pavlev, Done 27
Pavlev, Kole 27
Pavlev, Krishe 64, 145
Pavlev, Leko 16, 102
Pavlev, Milanche.....16, 17, 21
Pavlev, Pavle....68, 77, 81, 84, 90, 96, 101
Pavlev, Petre 102
Pavlev, Stavre 96
Pavlev, Stavro 90, 107, 129
Pavlev, Tane.....84, 95, 107
Pavlov, Dine.....16
Pavlov, Kitse 16
Pavlov, Mihail Dine 179
Pavlov, Tane 76
Pechinov, Gjorgi Natse 60
Pechinov, Mitse Dafo..... 71
Pedev, Risto..... 16
Pendzov, Blazhe..... 154
Pendzov, Blazhe Marko 161
Pendzov, Marko Dzale 60
Pendzov, Naum M..... 60
Perov, Gligor 125
Perov, Pande..... 54
Perov, Risto 48
Petkov, Gele 82
Petkov, Tase Gele..... 71
Petkova, Sofika 136, 146
Petrov, Gjorche 26, 27, 39
Pilaev, Kiro 97, 103
Pilaev, Petar..... 94
Pochinov, Gligor Filip..... 60
Podev, Krisho 15
Pokladi..... 16
Popalev, Risto 16, 82, 130, 145
Popanchev, Gjorgi..... 34
Popdimitrov, Gjorgi 82, 83
Popdimitrov, Gligor 16, 67, 82, 91
Popdimitrov, Kole 149
Popdimitrov, Lazo..... 93, 98, 146, 147, 154
Popdimitrov, Mile 149
Popdimitrov, Stavro 149
Popdinev, Dine..... 44
Popdinev, Kitse..... 35
Popjachev, Risto..... 37
Popjovchev, Risto 43
Popov, Filip 55, 60, 86
Popov, Ilo Risto..... 52
Popov, Kitse 125
Popov, Pero..... 35, 48
Popov, Risto 51, 52
Popov, Tase Filip 60
Poprusev, Kire..... 16
Proskov, Vasil 16

R

Ralov, Kocho 98
Ralov, Stavre..... 16
Rapov, Done 54
Rapov, Dzole 129
Rapov, Gjorgi Stefo 71
Rapov, Kocho 112, 158
Rapov, Krishe 91
Rapov, Krishe Mitse 130
Rapov, Lazo 112, 130, 153
Rapov, Lazo Gjorgi 152
Rapov, Natse 111, 154, 158
Rapov, Risto 83
Rapov, Stojan..... 157
Rebetkin, Ilo 130
Ricalov, Blazhe..... 64, 154
Ricalov, Dzole 119
Ricalov, Tsile..... 119
Risafov, Boris 67
Risafov, Tsile..... 67
Robev, Dine 64, 66, 75, 83, 86, 100, 119, 128, 146, 154, 155, 165
Robev, Dine Tipe..... 166
Robev, Krishe 64, 130, 131
Robev, Mitse..... 17, 52, 59, 101
Robev, Stojan..... 81, 154
Robev, Stojan Tsile..... 170
Robev, Vasil 52
Robeva, Fana Dine..... 154, 173
Robeva, Lena Krishe 135
Rudnichki, Kitse 157

S

Sariev, Boris 16
Sariev, Mitse..... 38
Sariev, Stefo..... 17
Satarntin..... 40
Shiperkov, Pando 150, 153, 174
Shisharev, Dine..... 125, 130, 145
Shishareva, Fana 154
Shisharov, Sande..... 60
Shusharev, Filip 48
Sinan 18, 19, 22, 34
SNOF ... 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 103, 110, 112, 117, 132
Socialist Republic of Macedonia 51, 137, 138, 160, 182
Stamatov, Kole..... 83
Stanboliev, Dine..... 44
Stefov, Risto..... 95
Sugarov, Gjorgi..... 31

T

Tanev, Dimo 154
Tanev, Dimo Nune..... 170
Tanev, Gjorgi 158
Tanev, Kole..... 130, 145
Tanev, Mitse Gligor 71
Tanev, Nune..... 62, 64, 145, 157
Tanev, Pando..... 154
Tanev, Pavle..... 135
Tanev, Petse 136, 145
tapija 18
Tasev, Blazhe..... 84
Tashev, Blazhe Lazo .71, 167, 170
Tashev, Dine 133
Tashev, Mitse..... 13
Tashev, State..... 35, 37
Tashev, State Jovan..... 48
Tashev, State Stojan..... 11, 23, 43
Tasheva, Lena 92
Toshev, Blazhe..... 112, 133
Toshev, Micho 112
Toshev, Mihail 154
Toshev, Stojan..... 154
Treaty of Varkiza ... 100, 121, 123, 124, 134, 146
Trpovski, Lazo 78
Tsinokov, Tsile 64, 67

Turundjev, Gjorgi94, 97, 114, 133
Tutundjov, Gjorgi 138

U

Uzunov, Cvetko 97

V

Vachkov, Gele.....16, 25
Varkiza.....100
Vasev, Dzole.....88
Vasev, Ilo 98, 153
Vasev, Kire Gjorgi 71
Vasev, Kitse 112, 154
Vasev, Lazo.....64, 75
Vasev, Metodi 64, 98, 153
Vasev, Mitse 16, 66, 82
Vasev, Natse 82, 136
Vasev, Nine.....128
Vasev, Nune.....63, 88, 93, 94, 98, 130, 157
Vasev, Pande.....60
Vasev, Risto 128, 136, 153
Vasev, Stavre F. 60
Vaseva, Leta.....154
Vasilitsa.....15
Velikin, Micho 13, 77, 78, 126, 129, 133, 136, 137, 146, 165, 174
Velikin, Mitse 63, 100
Velikin, Nikjo 109
Velikin, Pande.....17, 67
Velikin, Vane Pando 170
Veljanov, Kole 16
Veljanov, Lazo.....98, 111, 133
Veljanov, Tase 154
Veljanov, Trajko 154
Venizelos.....59, 61
Veshov, Kotse 89
Vicho 2, 30, 95, 101, 102, 150, 151, 153, 156, 164, 166, 171, 173, 174, 175, 177, 178, 180, 181
Vodenecot, Vangel..... 16
vojvoda 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 50, 51, 52
Vragov, Petse 17, 67
vrhovisti..... 12, 32
Vukmanovic, Svetozar - Tempo97

Y

YNA 118, 160
Young Turk Revolution 18, 40, 41, 46
Yugoslavia..... 1, 8, 9, 39, 88, 111, 116, 118, 128, 129, 130, 132, 135, 137, 146, 147, 150, 153, 154, 158, 162, 176, 177, 182

Z

Zabrtska, Mitra..... 92
Zabrtski, Blazhe 125, 128
Zabrtski, Vangel.... 63, 78, 94, 97, 153
Zahariadis. 65, 134, 141, 164, 175
Ziskov, Jane..... 158
Ziskov, Lide 64, 157
Ziskov, Mitse..... 50, 51, 105
Ziskov, Natse..... 55
Ziskov, Stojche Natse..... 71
Ziskov, Vangel 155, 158, 160
Ziskov, Vasil 55
Ziskova, Menka..... 105

This book by Atanas Katinovski covers a long, turbulent time of violent change in Aegean Macedonia from the beginnings of the 20th century to the end of the Greek Civil War. It will be of great interest to the many thousands of emigrants from Banitsa and their descendants around the world. At least three generations of the people of the large village of Banitsa were directly affected by the Ilinden Uprising, the Balkan Wars, World War I, the Greco-Turkish War, World War II and the Greek Civil War. The book starts with Banitsa's distant origins but focuses on its dramatic modern history. Individual villagers are portrayed and personal vignettes are presented to enlighten readers about how Banitsa's resilient villagers struggled through discrimination, war and terrorism as they fought for their lives and their rights.